

EMERALD TABLET



A Straightforward Approach to Masonic Esotericism

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Note: This article references the Preston/Webb family of ritual in Masonry, and most specifically that of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M. Some details may therefore seem somewhat parochial. However,

given the consistency of Masonry's teachings across jurisdictional and ritualistic lines, it is believed the observations, arguments, and conclusions of this article should be applicable to any experience of regular Masonry.

Before we can speak meaningfully of Masonic esotericism, we must first establish a meaning for the word "esoteric." In some Masonic jurisdictions, it is customary to use this term primarily to denote the parts of our work that are officially secret, those things that are performed in a tiled lodge or communicated by mouth to ear between brethren. However, the core meaning of this word more broadly references the inner (eso-) nature of things, those actualities and potentialities that are not immediately apparent or commonly understood. Contrary to a common misunderstanding both in and outside of Masonry, the esoteric is not limited to secret teachings about metaphysics, whether models of divine hierarchies, planes of manifestation, levels of consciousness, or practical methods of working with subtle energy. The effort to delve into such matters actually comes from our deeper, more essential, and even instinctive desire to unveil the unknown and grasp the mysteries of existence. It is this very rudimentary human desire to make the unknown known that is the essence of esotericism.

A Masonic form of esotericism would therefore have things in common with the more esoteric pursuits in other fields of endeavor. Quantum physicists qualify as the esotericists of physical science because they are concerned with aspects of matter and energy that are not directly observable and

instead discernible only through mathematics. Depth psychologists are the esotericists of psychology because they seek to understand the inner workings of the human mind that are not immediately observable through physical behavior, neural activity, or ordinary cognition. Mystics are the esotericists of religion because they dive into the ecstatic and ineffable dimensions of devotion to Deity. Likewise, Masonic esotericists are Masons who seek to understand the inner or hidden side of Masonry, which includes not only deeper interpretations of its symbolism and ritual, but the internal psychological challenges of actually following its principles and tenets. In other words, in its most basic sense, Masonic esotericism is the perception that there are mysterious depths within Masonry coupled with the effort to plumb those depths in our own lives.

Beginning with this definition, it can easily be shown that an esoteric approach in Masonry is not only possible, but that it is actually intended to be part of the Masonic experience. Masonry's own words consistently encourage such perceptions, desires, and efforts through repeated attention to that which is "internal," through the use of the term "speculative" to define our Craft, through symbolism and allegory as teaching methods, and through its encouragement for Masons to be studious, prayerful, contemplative, and virtuous. Furthermore, among our central allegorical allusions are the symbolic quests for light and the Lost Word. To argue that there is nothing inherently esoteric about Masonry would thus require a more narrow definition of "esoteric." Terms like "esoteric Masonry," "Masonic esotericism," or "Masonic esotericist" are therefore somewhat redundant, although they are presently useful in emphasizing that special attention is being given to the internal dimensions recommended by our ritual and monitorial teachings.

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Masonic Esotericism

What, then, would characterize a straightforward approach to Masonic esotericism? First, by “straightforward,” we mean an approach that stems directly from our traditional rituals and teachings and requires neither familiarity with other traditions nor starting with a focus on metaphysics. Of course, we are free to explore such possibilities, and some have personally found it worthwhile to do so, but it is presumptive to say they are necessarily parts of anyone’s approach to Masonic esotericism. Second, a straightforward approach would make use of resources and human faculties commonly employed in any esoteric pursuit; no unusual abilities would be needed, although the work might lead one to develop certain faculties in new ways. Whether in the sciences, such as physics or psychology, or in the domain of religion, the esotericists are those who not only study and work with that which is superficially obvious, they also penetrate into that which is hidden by employing abstract reasoning, exercising their imaginations, attending to their intuitions, and opening their hearts and minds to inspiration. It should be clear to every Mason that our ritual teachings actually encourage such an approach to Masonry, and thereby to every aspect of our lives as social, moral, intellectual, and spiritual beings.

It is one thing to grasp the philosophical basis of an esoteric approach to Masonry, but, as with other esoteric pursuits, there should also be a practical dimension. In other words, in order to fully engage Masonic esotericism we should include actual practices, or inner work, especially fitting in the Masonic milieu. It is therefore interesting, and perhaps frustrating to some of us, that our tradition encourages such things without offering much explicit technical guidance. This fact has undoubtedly contributed to the somewhat popular notion that Masonry is meant to lead to another system of esoteric thought and practice. However, it can be argued that there are elements of our ritual and its teachings that strongly suggest actual practices, ones that require no special knowledge of other traditions or specific systems of inner work. The following paragraphs make that argument by highlighting some relevant elements of our tradition and corresponding methods of inner work that fit within a straightforward approach to Masonic esotericism.

Speculative Thinking—Our tradition teaches that we are engaged in Speculative Masonry rather than Operative Masonry. While we have ritual instructions on this distinction, it is also worthwhile to simply consider the meaning of “speculative.”

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To be speculative is to ask and try to answer questions such as these:

- What might a particular thing symbolize or mean other than what is superficially or literally apparent.
- If we consider something to have a particular meaning or explanation, how might that affect the possible meanings or explanations of other things.
- Where are there gaps in our explanations, knowledge, and understanding, and what possibilities might fill in the gaps.
- What other explanations are possible for the way things are.

Our tradition illustrates that for centuries Speculative Masons have applied these kinds of questions to the tools, methods, and customs of stonemasonry. Our ritual clearly engages this process by regarding almost everything we experience or do in the lodge as emblematic, symbolic, or allegorical of something related to virtuous and moral living. Masonic esotericism does not assume that all the speculative thinking in Masonry has already been done for us by the early ritualists, or that our only duties are to learn and perpetuate what they found. In fact, the ritual and monitorial instructions of many jurisdictions encourage us to always seek more light. Masonic esotericism therefore takes the ritual's explanations as a common foundation while also answering its call to attain new insight, understanding, and wisdom. In support of this approach, consider these very explicit statements from the Monitor of the Lodge (Grand Lodge of Texas A.F. & A.M., 1982):

“Masonry does not expound the truths concealed in her emblems. It displays the symbols and may give a hint here and there concerning some characteristic of its several meanings, but it must remain for the Neophyte to search out for himself the more hidden significations.” (p. xvi)

“It [the Lodge] is said to be opened on, and not in, a certain degree (which latter expression is often incorrectly used), in reference rather to the speculative, than to the legal character, of the meeting; to indicate, not that the members are to be circumscribed in the limits of a particular degree, but that they are met together to unite in contemplation on the symbolic teachings and divine lessons, to inculcate which is the peculiar object of that degree.” (p. 4) (In this and all subsequent quotes,

italics are in the original cited text.)

“An Illustrious Masonic Scholar [Albert Pike] has well said, ‘He who would become an accomplished Mason must not be content merely to hear or even to understand the lectures, but must, aided by them and then having as it were the way marked out for him, study, interpret, and develop these symbols for himself.’” (p. 23)

To summarize, an important task of Masonic initiates, as individuals and together in their lodges, is to engage in speculative thinking about the symbolism of our tradition. This aspect of esotericism is not something grafted onto Masonry by brothers with special interests, but rather it is an essential aspect of Masonry itself. Speculative thinking is therefore offered in this article as the first and most common method for Masons to pursue the inner work of our Craft.

Discourse—In the previous citations from the Texas Monitor, it is stated that one of the purposes of opening a lodge is for brethren to join together in our speculative thinking. The significance of sharing our questions and insights with each other is further addressed by the following monitorial instructions for each of the three Craft degrees, respectively:

“At your leisure hours, that you may improve in Masonic knowledge, you are to converse with well informed brethren, who will always be as ready to give, as you are to receive instruction.” (Ibid, p. 28)

“The wise and beneficent Author of Nature intended, by the formation of this sense [hearing], that we should be social creatures, and to receive the greatest and most important part of our knowledge by intercourse with each other. For these purposes we are endowed with hearing, that, by a proper exertion of our rational powers, our happiness may be complete.” (Ibid, p. 53)

“Thus was man formed for social and active life; the noblest part of the work of God; and he that will so demean himself as not to be endeavoring to add to the common stock of knowledge and understanding, may be deemed a drone in the hive of nature, a useless member of society, and unworthy of our protection as Masons.” (Ibid, p. 81) (Note the admonition to be active and add to knowledge and understanding.

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Obviously this calls for more than memorizing and regurgitating the words of those who came before us.)

Educated in classical philosophy, learned Masons of the 17th and 18th centuries were well familiar with time-tested methods of discourse, such as lecture and response and the dialectics of various philosophers. Discourse was then, and still is, an indispensable method of refining the skills of logic and rhetoric, which are among the liberal arts earnestly recommended by our ritual to polish and adorn the minds of Masons. By their own experience, our ancient brethren would have known that the various forms of discourse not only provide opportunities to give and receive ideas and information, but also to enjoy these benefits:

- Evaluation of the evidence and logi in each other's thinking.
- Exposure of errors and superfluities.
- Comparison, contrast and assimilation with other ideas and information.
- Eliciting previously unseen possibilities.
- Stimulation for the discovery of new and more meaningful ideas and information.

While the study of classical philosophy can certainly enhance one's potentials with discourse, it is not necessary. Discourse is a common element of our contemporary educational methods and social lives; many of us first learn these methods without being aware that we are doing so. In the ordinary functions of any Masonic lodge, the exchange of questions and answers among officers sometimes actually models the practice of discourse, as does the performance of questions and answers in which Masons are tested for proficiency in a degree. Yet, if we only parrot the words we have inherited, failing to learn and apply the actual processes they illustrate, we are shortchanging our experience and practice of Masonry. The traditional forms in lodge constantly provide occasions for brothers to ask speculative questions, or to share ideas and information about their understandings and applications of Masonry's symbols and allegories. Many lodges set aside time in their regular meetings, or call special meetings, specifically for the presentation and discussion of such things. Furthermore, prior to the closing of every duly opened

lodge, the Worshipful Master always asks if anyone has anything to offer for the good of the Craft. So it is that in both word and deed Masonry encourages us to join in discourse as an element of Masonic inner work.

Study—study is actually one of the most overtly and specifically touted activities in our tradition. Our ritual or monitorial instructions encourage learning in general, while specifically recommending study of the teachings and symbols of the Craft, of the Great Light in Masonry, of nature, and of various arts and sciences. Masonic esotericists have often pursued studies not only in these traditionally suggested areas, but also in others such as philosophy, psychology, religion, and history, each of which has its own broad range of specialties. Such studies are very appropriate, and it is in this context that some Masonic esotericists find great value in studying other esoteric traditions and delving into metaphysics.

By becoming more informed through their studies, Masons can enhance their practice of speculative thinking and better prepare themselves for discourse. As we engage in study, we have opportunities to not merely take in information, but to actually enter into a type of internal discourse with the thoughts of the author or authors of the material. In following our particular interests more deeply, more esoterically, we become increasingly knowledgeable in the subtleties, complexities, and diversities of a particular field as well as its interconnectedness with others. Thus many of the benefits previously noted for the practice of discourse can come to us through the performance of research and reflection in our studies.

Meditation

“Initiation is to be attained only after real labor, deep study, profound meditation, extensive research and a constant practice of those virtues which will open a true path to moral, intellectual and spiritual illumination.” (Ibid, p. xv)

This quote may be unique to the Texas Monitor, but it does capture much of what we have already considered while also highlighting ‘profound meditation’ as another part of Masonry's inner work. The glossary of the Texas Monitor then draws attention to the connection between meditation and contemplation in the entries for “Contemplative” on page 213, and

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“Meditating” on page 227. These entries allude to the practice of thoughtful, deliberative consideration. The terms are commonly interchangeable, yet, in Masonry and also in non-Masonic usage, the term “contemplation” tends to describe the kinds of meditation practiced for prayerful, reverential, and inspirational purposes. “Meditation” may thus be considered a more inclusive term in this context. While our ritual does not directly mention meditation, it does speak of contemplation in a number of places, as do the monitorial instructions.

“It is, of course, impracticable, and inexpedient, in a monitorial work, to give a full explanation of the various symbols and ceremonies of our important rites; but an allusion ... will be sufficient to lead the observant and contemplative Mason to make further examination into their more concealed and important import.” (Ibid, p. 12)

“On this theme [of Truth] we contemplate...” (Ibid, p. 34)

“The second section * * * * and treats of Masonry under two denominations, Operative and Speculative. It also details some interesting features relative to the Temple of Solomon, and the usages of our Ancient Brethren, in the course of which the mind is drawn to the contemplation of themes of science and philosophy.” (Ibid, p. 44)

“It {Speculative Masonry} leads the contemplative to view, with reverence and admiration, the glorious works of creation, and inspires him with the most exalted ideas of the perfection of his Divine Creator.” (Ibid, p. 45)

“Contemplating these bodies [the two globes], we are inspired with due reverence for the Deity and his works, and are induced to encourage the studies of Geometry, Astronomy, Geography, and Navigation, and the arts and sciences dependent upon them...” (Ibid, p. 48)

“They [the ninth or last class of emblems on the Master’s Carpet] afford subjects of serious and solemn reflection to the rational and contemplative mind...” (Ibid, p. 86)

Many philosophical and spiritual traditions have formal methods of meditative practice, yet Masonry provides no explicit instructions on its actual performance. Here is where we must look more

carefully at what our tradition has us do in the course of ritual, rather than reflect only upon its words and images, for the actions of ritual are often as symbolic as the words and images. It is therefore now suggested that the ritual experience of divestiture and hoodwinking is relevant to the practice of meditation. When our degree candidates are being prepared for entry into the lodge, they must strip away all things that identify them with the profane world and be deprived of the sight of external things. In Duncan’s *Ritual and Monitor* (3rd ed., Malcom C. Duncan, 1976) one of the most popular and accurate exposures of contemporary Masonic ritual, this moment of hoodwinking is footnoted with a reference to the entry on “Darkness” in Albert Mackey’s *Lexicon of Freemasonry*, which says:

“DARKNESS among Freemasons is emblematical of ignorance; for as our science has technically been called ‘LUX,’ or light, the absence of light must be the absence of knowledge. Hence the rule that the eye should not see until the heart has conceived the true nature of those beauties which constitute the mysteries of our Order. Freemasonry has restored Darkness to its proper place, as a state of preparation.” (Duncan’s, p. 48)

The candidate is thus allegorically stripped of both the material and intellectual possessions by which all humans tend to identify themselves, and is thereby left in a state of preparation for something more meaningful. Ask people who they are and they may tell of their occupations, the things they own, who they know and love, or perhaps describe their beliefs and values. But ask them to strip away these things and speak to who they are, and most will pause to turn silently inward in search of something more meaningful, more profound, more mysterious, more esoteric. They may or may not realize it, but in that moment their silence is an admission of ignorance about the deeper and more essential aspects of being, an ignorance that even the most illuminated sages have confessed always remains with them to some degree. Our ritual and monitorial instructions draw attention to these deeper aspects of our being in countless ways, including these more obvious statements:

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“It has also been said that the word ‘Masonry,’ in addition to the significations already named, and others which cannot be properly specified here, signifies a vast and comprehensive body of Knowledge, teachings, traditions, and principles, concerning the visible universe . . . as well as the operations and sublime moral principles and processes of the human mind.” (Texas Monitor, p. xii)
“To sum up the whole of this transcendent measure of God’s bounty to man, we shall add that memory, imagination, reasoning, moral perception, and all the active powers of the soul, including its senses, present a vast and boundless field for study and investigation, and are peculiar mysteries, known only to nature and nature’s God, to Whom we are all indebted for creation, preservation, and every blessing we enjoy.” (Ibid, p. 55)

Returning to reflection upon the actual events of our rituals, we know that candidates prepared to enter the lodge are both destitute and in a state of darkness. In many lodges, it is customary for them to then sit alone, silently, for some period of time before they are guided in their next steps. In addition to the previously stated allegorical explanations, it should be noted that this condition parallels the most basic and universal technique of formal meditation, which is simply to close one’s eyes and be silent. Silent sitting meditation is therefore offered as a most fitting practice for Masonic inner work, and even an indispensable practice for anyone wanting to receive all the light their Masonic experience can bestow.

The benefits of silent sitting are significant, and in them we find many reasons that this simple form of meditation has been practiced in many cultures and all ages, and why it should be recommended to Masons. When the eyes are closed and attention is turned inward, a relaxation of the body and calming of the mind naturally begins. Many traditions teach that focusing upon the flow of the breath further enhances the shift to a more peaceful and centered state of consciousness. Respiration becomes more efficient, the pulse and blood pressure typically lower, and the mind grows quieter. This state may itself be the primary aim of a person’s practice, and there is a growing body of research that provides evidence of its benefits to physical, psychological, and social wellbeing, including

an improved ability to focus attention. In that regard, silent sitting is often practiced as “state of preparation” for meditation upon something in particular, such as a word, image, or event, with the intention of gaining deeper insight and understanding about it. Thus silent sitting is also excellent preparation for other aspects of Masonic inner work. Privately, it can serve as a transition into study or the opening of an internal lodge for our moments of solitary speculation. When done together with other Masons, it can help establish both an internal and external atmosphere that is more conducive to discourse and the performance of ritual. Before leaving this consideration of silent sitting, we should consider a very typical experience that arises in its practice. When eyes are closed, perceptions of the external world are gradually released, and attention is turned inward. In this state, the mind has nothing to observe other than its own content and processes: “memory, imagination, reasoning, moral perception, and all the active powers of the soul, including its senses.” In these moments of profound self-awareness, we are directly grasping the most essential working tool of Masonry, which is consciousness itself. If Masonry concerns itself first with the internal qualities of its members, then surely there is no internal Masonic labor more appropriate than this. We find that it does indeed “present a vast and boundless field for study and investigation.” As people begin meditating upon their own consciousness, it is quite normal for them to realize how little they have understood and mastered this tool that enables them to use all other tools. A common part of this process is the frustration that can arise when one tries to make the mind become more still and quiet. The very effort of doing so can actually stir mental activity, and thereby set in motion a self-defeating feedback loop. While some people mistakenly conclude that this means they don’t have the ability to meditate, others take it as one among many clues that the soul is filled with “peculiar mysteries” that they have just entered as apprentices.

Finally, no discussion of meditation and contemplation would be complete without addressing prayer, which is certainly a ubiquitous element of Masonic work. Masonry teaches us that all important undertakings

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should start with an invocation of Deity, and that all our work should be performed in honor of the Great Architect of the Universe. Our traditional prayers for lodge meetings and ceremonies serve not only these purposes, but are also short meditations intended to draw our attention to particular attitudes, principles, and aims that are conducive to our Masonic labors. We can also benefit from prayer performed in these ways at the beginning and ending all our moments of private study and meditation. Furthermore, because personal private prayer often starts by turning attention inward and then becomes a spontaneous outpouring of one's fears, desires, hopes, and thanks, it can be a form of meditation that offers an excellent opportunity to observe and evaluate the content and workings of one's own soul. Additionally, the prayer of silence, of simply being attentive and receptive to the presence of the Divine, is highly esteemed in a variety of contemplative traditions, where it is regarded as the unveiling of the Sanctum Sanctorum within the temple (con-templum) of one's own consciousness. In summary, any Mason who earnestly engages in prayer is doing a key part of the inner, or esoteric, work in our tradition.

Virtue —At the beginning of the previous section, the monitorial quote highlighted the importance of virtue as a Masonic practice. In fact, nearly everything previously cited makes it clear that our pursuit of light is intended to improve us in virtue. Furthermore, every working tool, jewel, emblem, furnishing of the lodge, and legend is useful to us in terms of developing virtuous thought and action. Our tradition teaches that, through an active commitment to understanding and living these lessons, we make ourselves of greater benefit to ourselves, our fellow human beings and, as may be one's religious faith and hope, thereby become more pleasing to the Great Architect of the Universe. Of all the proposed elements of inner work, none is more obviously spelled out for us than the practice of virtue. Even so, a mere cursory reading or recitation of our lessons can easily fail to grasp their profundity and the implications for how to actually apply them. The work of virtue, as external or exoteric as it may seem, has significant esoteric depths.

One of our most basic and broadly applicable lessons on the development of virtue as inner work is found in the Entered Apprentice degree's instructions on the

gavel and the ashlar. It expressly draws an analogy between the ashlar and "the mind and conscience" of the individual Mason; the ashlar is thus an emblem of the soul. The word "conscience" also reminds us that there is a reciprocal relationship between the internal operations of the soul and our external behavior in this world, and thus provides a key to how one performs the work of the gavel. The gavel serves as an emblem of the force of will intelligently and carefully guided to chip away thoughts and behaviors that might distract us from being more virtuous. The operation of the gavel is therefore not just an external modification of behavior, but involves one's whole being. Anyone who has sincerely attempted to let go of the thought patterns and behaviors of a deeply ingrained vice knows this work is also, if not mostly, internal in nature. Aside from the difficulty in overcoming the sheer momentum of habitual thoughts and actions, most vices have emotional payoffs that we continue to desire and that tempt us to relapse. Additionally, we can be so crafty at creating excuses and justifications for our vices that we can even fool ourselves into regarding them as necessities if not masking them as virtues. So it is that, while the work of the gavel may seem to be more letting go of vice than building of virtue, in order for it to be effective one must exercise the virtue of self-awareness.

Masonry's lessons teach that the inner work of virtue benefits greatly from the practice of mindfulness, which is being as present, attentive, and careful as possible in both the internal and external dimensions of one's experiences as they are happening. Likewise, reflection upon our actions, or meditatively studying them in hindsight, is also revealed as highly valuable, especially introspective reflections in which we evaluate our own thoughts, feelings, and actions. These practices of mindfulness and reflection are alluded to by the many testing and measuring devices we symbolically employ; the rule, plumb, level, and square are instruments that must constantly be applied in the proper construction and inspection of any edifice. Mindfulness and reflection are therefore the keys to the fundamental virtue of self-awareness, and are thus complimentary to the practice of meditation. Without them, the raw force of will, even with the best of intentions, can too easily be wasted or do actual

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harm rather than good. An excellent starting place for the application of the force of will is thus in the commitment to continually and more thoroughly integrate the practices of mindfulness and reflection in all aspects of our lives.

With all the virtues taught by Masonry, it is reasonable to ask if there is some particular virtue that reigns supreme, one that can serve as a constant guide and test for all that we think and do. Self-awareness may be the foundational virtue for the development of others, but what virtue most inspires the heart to conceive of the beauties possible for one's conduct and relationships? While each of us is free to reach his own conclusions in this matter, for now it is suggested that we consider love as the answer Masonry most often provides to such questions. Love is so central to our tradition that we repeatedly find it touched upon throughout our degrees.

We begin our consideration of love as the guiding virtue with the most obvious references to it in the Entered Apprentice degree: the Principle Tenets, the northeast corner, and the third of the Theological Virtues. Among the Principle Tenets, Brotherly Love obviously relates to the present theme, yet we can further discern that Relief does as well. What is Relief if not the caring and compassionate effort to reduce or eliminate the burden of another? Relief of a "distressed worthy brother" is so revered that on the 24-inch gauge it is even accorded to the same section as the service of God! Likewise, the traditional explanation of Truth is not merely an intellectual abstraction about discernment and honesty; instead, it is an exhortation to replace hypocrisy and deceit with sincerity and forthrightness in both our hearts and our words, and thereby promote and rejoice in each other's wellbeing. Charity, which is the lesson of the northeast corner and the third rung of the theological ladder, clearly connects with love. Indeed, the Latin source of this word, *caritas*, specifically refers to selfless, unconditional, and generous love, or universal benevolence.

As Master Masons, we learn that our special working tool is the trowel, an instrument actually used to spread cement or mortar, but that Speculative Masons use "for the more noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection." While we are taught this cement should unite us as a

harmonious and productive fraternity, it is important to understand that our fraternal relationships are not the only place for the trowel. Masonry often encourages us to extend its lessons into every facet of our lives. For example, consider the 3rd degree's lesson on the bee hive:

"...as we came into the world endowed as rational and intelligent beings, so we should ever be industrious ones; never sitting down contented while our fellow creatures around us are in want, when it is in our power to relieve them..." (Ibid, p. 81)

In keeping with Masonry's commitment to the betterment of human society at large, we should strive to wield the trowel everywhere, at all times, with all people. In effect, the lesson of the trowel brings us full-circle to rediscover the very thing that made it possible for us to enter the lodge as candidates. We asked, sought, and knocked, and we were answered with love. Midway through our journey in the Craft degrees, we find the following declaration:

"Geometry, or Masonry (originally synonymous terms), being of divine and moral nature, is enriched with the most useful knowledge; while it proves the wonderful properties of nature, it demonstrates the more important truths of morality." (Ibid, p. 63)

Relationship is the common principle that makes the analogy between (1) the properties of nature and (2) the truths of morality; the first is about the physical relationships between the various dimensions of objects in space, and the second is about the social and spiritual relationships between human souls. Masonry teaches us that the geometry of human relationships should be moral, by which we understand that it should be characterized by virtues such as equity, benevolence, and conscientiousness, or, in a word, love. Thus we can discern that Masonry itself is the craft of being and becoming ever more loving brothers to all our fellow human beings. Every part of our ritual and symbolism is intended to guide and support us in developing the more specific virtues, each of which constitutes some particular way of thinking and acting in service of love. It is therefore most fitting for us to keep love as the constant reference point of our mindfulness and reflections in the practice of virtue.

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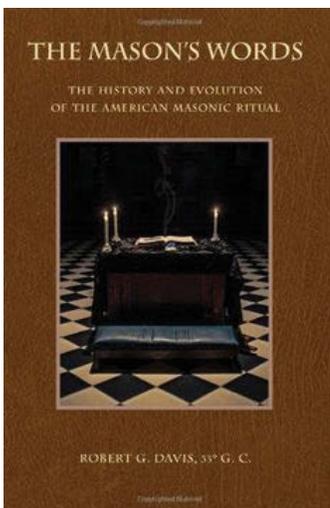
Conclusion

In reviewing the main points of this article, it might occur to the reader that a straightforward summary of this straightforward approach to Masonic esotericism amounts to this: Take all that Masonry offers and do these things with it:

- Speculate about it.
- Talk with your brothers about it.
- Carefully study it and relevant subjects that interest you.
- Meditate upon it.
- Practice its virtues mindfully, reflectively and, most of all, lovingly.

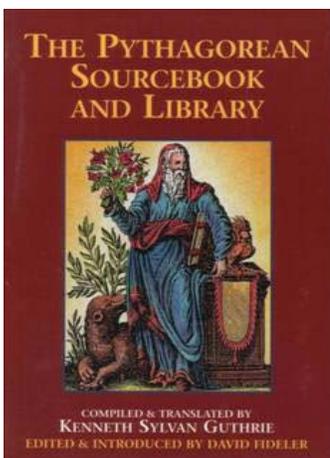
To complete this summary it should be noted that while the practice of each point has its own value, each also supports and enhances the others. They are therefore not steps in a sequential process, but together form a more comprehensive way of diving into explorations and applications of Masonry in our lives. In this way, Masonic esotericism is immediately accessible to every Mason and is not merely the specialty of brothers interested in metaphysics or the esotericism of other philosophical and spiritual traditions. The inner work of Masonry already is, and seems to have always been, an indispensable part of actually living our tradition to the fullest. ◇

Books



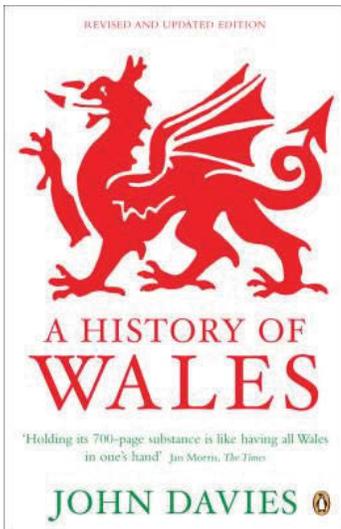
The Mason's Words—Robert G Davis. Freemasonry is entirely built around traditions. From time immemorial, those who have belonged to the world's oldest and largest fraternal order have metaphorically passed between the pillars of Solomon's Temple to nurture within themselves a harmonious bond between tradition and modernity. This is the story of the Masonic ritual, the language and ceremonial forms that have evolved into the present structure of American Freemasonry, defined its lodge space, and offered its members the same stabilizing influence of instruction that has prevailed on every continent for nearly 400 years. The reader will discover that the language of the world's oldest fraternal society has also made its own interesting journey, and been tested by the most powerful and the most humbling of men. The result is, that, in Masonic lodges across America, and, indeed, the world, men from every walk of life, of all ages, every social category and every spiritual and philosophical conviction are able to find a basis for reflection on who they are, why they are here, and what has meaning to them. By its common language delivered

in a common culture of fraternal relationship, Freemasonry is enabled to exemplify a universal brotherhood of man. This is the story of the Mason's words; the history and evolution of the American Masonic ritual. It is an interesting bit of history that is perhaps all the more fascinating because it is so rarely known. —*Amazon*



Pythagorean Sourcebook—Kenneth Guthrie. Pythagoras (fl. 500 B.C.), the first man to call himself a philosopher or lover of wisdom, was both a brilliant mathematician and spiritual teacher. This anthology, the largest collection of Pythagorean writings ever to appear in the English language, contains the four ancient biographies of Pythagoras and over 25 Pythagorean and Neopythagorean writings from the Classical and Hellenistic periods. The Pythagorean ethical and political tractates are especially interesting for they are based on the premise that the universal principles of Harmony, Proportion, and Justice govern the physical cosmos, and these writings show how individuals and societies alike attain their peak of excellence when informed by these same principles. Indexed, illustrated, with appendices and an extensive bibliography, this acclaimed anthology also contains a foreword by Joscelyn Godwin and an introductory essay by the editor, David Fideler.—*Wikipedia*

Books



A History of Wales—John Davies. Davies was born in the Rhondda, Wales, and studied at both University College, Cardiff, and Trinity College, Cambridge. He is married with four children. After teaching Welsh history at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, he retired to Cardiff, and appears frequently as a presenter and contributor to history programmes on television and radio.

In the mid-eighties, Davies was commissioned to write a concise history of Wales by Penguin Books to add to its Pelican series of the histories of nations. The decision by Penguin to commission the volume in Welsh was “unexpected and highly commendable,” wrote Davies.

“I seized the opportunity to write of Wales and the Welsh. When I had finished, I had a typescript which was almost three times larger than the original commission,” wrote Davies. The original voluminous typescript was first published in hardback under the Allen Lane imprint. Davies took a sabbatical from his post at the University College of Wales and wrote most of the chapters while touring Europe.

Davies dedicated *Hanes Cymru* to his wife, Janet Mackenzie Davies.

Hanes Cymru was translated into English and published in 1993, as there was “a demand among English-speakers to read what was already available to Welsh-speakers,” wrote Davies. A revised edition was published in both languages) in 2007.

With the continued growth of Welsh institutions and the growth in the number of Welsh speakers, Davies wrote in 1992 “it is more stimulating to be a member of the Welsh nation in the last decade of the twentieth century than it has ever been before.”

In 2005 Davies received the Glyndŵr Award for an Outstanding Contribution to the Arts in Wales during the Machynlleth Festival. He won the 2010 Wales Book of the Year for *Cymru: Y 100 lle i'w gweld cyn marw*.

Davies currently lives in Grangetown, Cardiff. To mark his 75th birthday in 2013 the Welsh language television channel S4C broadcast a programme, *Gwirionedd y Galon: Dr John Davies*, about his life and his home.

—*Wikipedia*

Coming in the March issue of Emerald Tablet

Feature Article:

Hermetic Influence on Freemasonry—originally published in *Heredom* Volume 17
—by Brother Timothy Hogan, Author of *The Alchemical Keys to Masonic Ritual*

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Priestess of Delphi by John Collier

Priestess of Delphi

The Pythia, commonly known as the Oracle of Delphi, was the priestess at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, located on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, beneath the Castalian Spring. The Pythia was widely credited for her prophecies inspired by Apollo. The Delphic oracle was established in the 8th century BC, although it may have been present in some form in Late Mycenaean times, from 1400 BC and was abandoned, and there is evidence that Apollo took over the shrine from an earlier dedication to Gaia. The last recorded response was given about 395 A.D. to Emperor Theodosius I, after he had ordered pagan temples to cease operation. During this period the Delphic Oracle was the most prestigious and authoritative oracle among the Greeks. The oracle is one of the best-documented religious institutions of the classical Greeks. Authors who mention the oracle include Aeschylus, Aristotle, Clement of Alexandria, Diodorus, Diogenes, Euripides, Herodotus, Julian, Justin, Livy, Lucan, Ovid, Pausanias, Pindar, Plato, Plutarch, Sophocles, Strabo, Thucydides, and Xenophon.

The name "Pythia" derived from Pytho, which in myth was the original name of Delphi. The Greeks derived this place name from the verb, *pythein* "to rot", which refers to the decomposition of the body of the monstrous Python after she was slain by Apollo. The usual theory has been that the Pythia delivered oracles in a frenzied state induced by vapors rising from a chasm in the rock, and that she spoke gibberish which priests interpreted as the enigmatic prophecies preserved in Greek literature. Recent geological investigations have shown that gas emissions from a geologic chasm in the earth could have inspired the Delphic Oracle to "connect with the divine." Some researchers suggest the possibility that ethylene gas caused the Pythia's state of inspiration. However, Lehoux argues that ethylene is "impossible" and benzene is "crucially underdetermined." Others argue instead that methane might have been the gas emitted from the chasm, or CO₂ and H₂S, arguing that the chasm itself might have been a seismic ground rupture. The idea that the Pythia spoke gibberish which was interpreted by the priests and turned into poetic iambic pentameter has

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Priestess of Delphi

been challenged by scholars such as Joseph Fontenrose and Lisa Maurizio, who argue that the ancient sources uniformly represent the Pythia speaking intelligibly, and giving prophecies in her own voice.

Origins of the Oracle—The 8th century reformulation of the Oracle at Delphi as a shrine to Apollo seems associated with the rise in importance of the city of Corinth and the importance of sites in the Corinthian Gulf.

The earliest account of the origin of the Delphic oracle is provided in the Homeric Hymn to Delphic Apollo, which recent scholarship dates within a narrow range, ca. 580-570 BC. It describes in detail how Apollo chose his first priests, whom he selected in their “swift ship”; they were “Cretans from Minos’ city of Knossos” who were voyaging to sandy Pylos. But Apollo, who had Delphinios as one of his cult epithets, leapt into the ship in the form of a dolphin (delphys”, gen. “delphinos). Dolphin-Apollo revealed himself to the terrified Cretans, and bade them follow him up to the “place where you will have rich offerings”. The Cretans “danced in time and followed, singing Iē Paiēon, like the paeans of the Cretans in whose breasts the divine Muse has placed “honey-voiced singing”. “Paeon” seems to have been the name by which Apollo was known in Mycenaean times.

G.L. Huxley observes, “If the hymn to (Delphic) Apollo conveys a historical message, it is above all that there were once Cretan priests at Delphi.” Robin Lane Fox notes that Cretan bronzes are found at Delphi from the eighth century onwards, and Cretan sculptures are dedicated as late as ca 620-600 BC: “Dedications at the site cannot establish the identity of its priesthood,” he observes, “but for once we have an explicit text to set beside the archaeological evidence.” An early visitor to these “dells of Parnassus”, at the end of the eighth century, was Hesiod, who was shown the omphalos.

There are also many later stories of the origins of the Delphic Oracle. One late explanation, which is first related by the 1st century BC writer, Diodorus Siculus, tells of a goat herder named Coretas, who noticed one day that one of his goats, who fell into a crack in the earth, was behaving strangely. On entering the chasm, he found himself filled with a divine presence and could see outside of the present into the past and the future. Excited by his discovery he shared it with nearby villagers. Many started visiting the site to experience the convulsions and inspirational

trances, though some were said to disappear into the cleft due to their frenzied state. A shrine was erected at the site, where people began worshiping in the late Bronze Age, by 1600 BC. The villagers chose a single young woman as the liaison for the divine inspirations. Eventually she spoke on behalf of gods.

According to earlier myths, the office of the oracle was initially possessed by the goddesses Themis and Phoebe, and the site was initially sacred to Gaia. Subsequently it was believed to be sacred to Poseidon, the “Earth-shaker” god of earthquakes. During the Greek Dark Age, from the 11th to the 9th century BC, a new god of prophecy, Apollo, allegedly seized the temple and expelled the twin guardian serpents of Gaia. Later myths stated that Phoebe or Themis had “given” the site to Apollo, rationalizing its seizure by priests of the new god, but presumably, having to retain the priestesses of the original oracle because of the long tradition. Apparently Poseidon was mollified by the gift of a new site in Troizen.

Diodorus also explained how, initially, the Pythia was an appropriately clad young virgin, for great emphasis was placed on the Oracle’s chastity and purity to be reserved for union with the god Apollo. But one consultant notes,

“Echecrates the Thessalian, having arrived at the shrine and beheld the virgin who uttered the oracle, became enamoured of her because of her beauty, carried her away and violated her; and that the Delphians because of this deplorable occurrence passed a law that in the future a virgin should no longer prophesy but that an elderly woman of fifty would declare the Oracles and that she would be dressed in the costume of a virgin, as a sort of reminder of the prophetess of olden times.”

The scholar Martin Litchfield West writes that the Pythia shows many traits of shamanistic practices, likely inherited or influenced from Central Asian practices, although there is no evidence of any Central Asian association at this time. He cites the Pythia sitting in a cauldron on a tripod, while making her prophecies in an ecstatic trance state, like shamans, and her unintelligible utterings.

The tripod was perforated with holes; and as she inhaled the vapors, her figure would seem to enlarge, her hair stood on end, her complexion changed, her heart panted, her bosom swelled and her voice became seemingly more than human.

—Wikipedia

