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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN MYSTERY TEACHINGS IN MASONRY

John Seaman Garns

There has always been a wide difference of opinion and much discussion in Masonic circles with relation to the antiquity of Masonry. As is usual in most arguments, the differences of opinion grow out of our failure to define our terms. If, by the antiquity of Freemasonry, we refer to actual organization of lodges and the perfecting of rituals, as they now stand in both the Blue Lodge, the Scottish Rite, and the York Rite, then the discussion is a matter of presentation of actual facts and evidence as to the earliest existence of such organizations in England, in France, and even earlier in Greek or Egyptian society. If, on the other hand, we do not limit ourselves to legalistic and historical evidence, with relation to the actual existence of such societies, and turn to evidence as to secret groups who TAUGHT A PHILOSOPHY BASICALLY RELATED TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEMASONRY, we have quite a different question to discuss.

Our most conservative authors, such as Mackey, the author of the "History of Freemasonry," admit that, though our records show the existence of certain lodges of Freemasonry in an earlier day, the best authentic records point to about 1717 in England with a good deal of evidence that there had been, anterior to this, many organizations of operative architects and Masons from the Tenth Century up to the Seventeenth. But the revival of 1717 established Masonry in a form recognizable as something like that of today.

These two ways of looking at Masonry might be defined as follows: First, it is A SOCIETY OF SPECULATIVE ARCHITECTS ENGAGED IN CONSTRUCTING THE SPIRITUAL TEMPLE IN MAN, BY MEANS OF THE TEACHING OF CERTAIN LEGENDS AND THE PRESENTATION OF CERTAIN DRAMATIC RITES IN RITUALISTIC FORM, TOGETHER WITH THE PROMOTION OF A PHILOSOPHY OF TRUE FRATERNITY BINDING MEN TOGETHER FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF A MUTUAL SERVICE, AND HELPFUL TRAINING IN THE MORAL LAW. The second idea, under which we may pursue our research as to the antiquity of Masonry, is that the whole of Masonry should be looked at not only as a speculative science based upon an operative art, in dramatic and ritualistic form, but as concerning itself with the SYMBOLIC EXPRESSION OF A RELIGIOUS OR PHILO-

SOPHIC IDEA, a teaching very like that of the Ancient Mysteries, which probably originated in India and was preserved and taught secretly in every civilized country of antiquity, particularly in Syria and in Egypt.

But, granting that one drops the idea of legal evidence as to the actual existence of operative lodges, and bases the evidence of the antiquity of Masonry UPON ITS RITUALISTIC SUBJECT MATTER, particularly the ancient legend which is the heart of the Third Degree and the backbone of the Blue Lodge work, we dare not safely contend that Masonry, in anything like the form in which it now exists, goes any further back than the Roman colleges of artificers in the Middle Ages.

There are those who maintain that the skilled workmen of Solomon's temple formed the first basic organization of speculative Freemasonry, and that in this organization was taught some of the Ancient Mysteries repeated in Greece, Syria, and Egypt; but, so far as I can find, there is absolutely no evidence that modern Masonry has any objective lineage which can be traced back of the Middle Ages themselves.

In this paper, then, we shall be dealing not with the BODY of Masonry but with the SPIRIT and the TEACHING; and I believe that the average Mason would find it extremely interesting and very helpful to fall back upon and study for his own edification and inspiration the ANCIENT MYSTERY TEACHINGS as the central thesis of the Masonic work. If we exclusively consider its spirit and their expressed ideals and symbols, Masonry is indeed as old as the Ancient Mystery Teachings, which go back something like three thousand years before Christ. Dr. R. Swinburne Clymer, a noted authority on ancient Masonry and author of "Ancient Mystical Oriental Masonry," says in this book, "Ninety-nine Masons out of every hundred would laugh at the Occult Science, and yet, were it not for the Occult Fraternities, Masonry could never have existed. The Secret Doctrine was the universally diffused religion of the Ancient and Prehistoric world. Proof of its diffusion, authentic records of its history, a complete chain of documents, showing its character and presence in every land, together with the teaching of all its great Adepts, exist to this day in the secret crypts of libraries belonging to the Occult Fraternities." Yet, once the average

Mason starts to trace the basic teachings of the Masonic philosophy, he will find not only a helpful philosophy for himself but traces of what may seem to him, as it does to me, the ONE FINAL RELIGION. Once having studied and traced these sources, and having saturated himself with the training which they imply, he will find that the assimilation of these ideas and the following through of the training which they contain will quite change not only his philosophy of life but will put him in touch with the Absolute Reality.

Dr. J. D. Buck, in his book "Mystic Masonry," constantly stresses the fact that true knowledge can only come by ASSIMILATION of the truths which we hear; that true wisdom is not of the head alone, but of the heart, and that man will NOT CHANGE HIMSELF merely by intellectual attainments, but only when he has made his knowledge ORGANIC—and by this I mean, has sunk it down into the very depths of his being so that it loosens his bondage to the body and to the outer world and identifies him with the Supreme Artificer. Let me quote a paragraph from Dr. Buck's book:

"We do not KNOW a thing because we are TOLD so. Let the gods shout the Truth of all ages into the ears of a fool forever, and still forever the fool would be joined to his folly. HERE LIES THE CONCEPTION AND THE PRINCIPAL OF ALL INITIATIONS. It is knowledge UNFOLDED BY DEGREES IN AN ORDERLY, SYSTEMATIC MANNER, STEP BY STEP, AS THE CAPACITY TO APPREHEND OPENS IN THE NEOPHYTE. The result is not a POSSESSION, but a GROWTH, an EVOLUTION. Knowledge is not a mere sum in addition; something added to something that already exists; but rather such a progressive CHANGE or TRANSFORMATION of the original structure as to make it, at every step, a New Being. Real Knowledge, or the growth of Wisdom IN man, is an Eternal Becoming; a progressive transformation into the likeness of the Supernal Goodness and the Supreme Power."

The great wisdom shown by those who have planned and developed the degree work of Masonry lies in the fact that the obvious teaching which the uninitiated would get from these dramas is a teaching of morals, of ethics, and of human brotherhood. It has in it only suggestions of the spiritual, which leaves the initiate free to follow them up, if he so desires; or if his own growth has not reached the level at which he is hungry for and so capable of receiving spiritual instruction, instruction which has to do with his soul's life with relation to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, he may let it pass, and yet be benefiting by the more obvious moral teaching. One of our great commentators on Masonry has defined the whole system of teaching thus, "Masonry is a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." The "veil" will be lifted only to him who is ready for the truth.

It is for this reason that in "Morals and Dogma" our revered "Brother General" Albert Pike comments on page 328:

"We use the old allegories, based on occurrences detailed in the Hebrew and Christian books, and drawn from the Ancient Mysteries of Egypt, Persia, India, Greece, the Druids and the Essenes, as vehicles to communicate the Great Masonic Truths; as it has used the legends of the Crusades, and the ceremonies of orders of Knighthood.

"The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Masonry has now become what Masonry was at first meant to be, a teacher of Great Truths, inspired by an upright and enlightened reason, a firm and constant wisdom, and an affectionate and liberal philanthropy.

"We teach the truth of none of the legends we recite. They are to us but parables and allegories, involving and enveloping Masonic instruction; and vehicles of useful and interesting information. They represent the phases of the human mind, its efforts and struggles to comprehend nature, God, the government of the universe, the permitted existence of sorrow and evil. To teach us wisdom, and the folly of endeavoring to explain to ourselves that which we are not capable of understanding, we reproduce the speculations of the Philosophers, the Kabalists, the Mystagogues and the Gnostics. Everyone being at liberty to apply our symbols and emblems as he thinks most consistent with truth and reason, and with his own faith. We give them such interpretation only as may be accepted by all. Our degrees may be conferred in France, or Turkey, at Pekin, Ispahan, Rome, or Geneva, in the city of Penn, or in Catholic Louisiana, upon the subjects of an absolute government or the citizens of a free State, upon sectarian or theist. To honor the Deity, to regard all men as our brethren, as children, equally dear to him, of the Supreme Creator of the Universe, and to make himself useful to society and himself by his labors, are its teachings to its initiates in all of the degrees.

"Preacher of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality, it desires them to be attained by making men fit to receive them, and by the moral power of an intelligent and enlightened people. It lays no plots and conspiracies . . . but recognizing the great truth that freedom follows fitness for freedom, as the corollary follows the axiom, it strives to PREPARE men to govern themselves."

This great wisdom on the part of those who have given form to the teaching of Masonry guarantees that people on two levels of consciousness may receive instruction with great benefit. In both the ancient Egyptian teaching and the schools of Pythagoras, there were always two levels of teaching—one for those who are always objectively minded, that is, whose interest is exclusively in the concrete world of things and values here in the world in front of them; and a second level of teaching which appeals to the inner nature, satisfies the hunger for reasons, for a philosophy of life, and eventually teaches the "Secret Doctrine," so-called, which in all ages has shown the relationship of man to his Creator. May I quote a paragraph from a two-volume text on "Egypt the Cradle of Ancient Masonry," by Norman de Clifford:

"Our very learned and ancient Brother Pythagoras divided his schools into two classes, to whom he gave instruction, both day and night. To those attending his day class, his lectures or teachings were to admonish his pupils as to the path they should follow, in order to acquire a knowledge of morality, virtue and truth, as well as continually warning them of their lower nature, and instructing them how to kill the animal within themselves, so as to allow the higher spiritual to dominate and guide them. Those who attended his night class were selected from the pupils who had proved themselves by earnest study and profound meditation, to be worthy and well qualified to live in union with a community who enjoyed a common property. These he instructed by allegories and symbols. The emblems used were taken from geometrical and numerical figures, believing that, 'Number lies at the root of manifest universe . . .'

"After the pupil had thoroughly mastered and comprehended the primary instructions, he was then advanced to another plane of thought, and instructed in the profound, sublime teachings of the Secret Doctrine, that fountain of Ancient Wisdom, wherein he learned that man is not the highest being in Nature's evolutionary process; but that he has within him the potentiality of becoming so.

"We learn from Clement of Alexandria that—'The Egyptians neither entrusted their mysteries to everyone, nor degraded the secrets of divine matters by disclosing them to the profane, reserving them for the heir apparent of the throne, and for such of the priests as excelled in virtue and wisdom.'

"Wilkinson, commenting on this, in 'Ancient Egyptians,' Vol. I, page 174, says: 'From all we can learn of the subject, it appears that the Mysteries consisted of two degrees, denominated the greater and the less, and in order to become qualified for admission into the higher class, it was necessary to have passed through those of the inferior degree, as each of them were probably divided into ten different grades . . .'

"Ambrosius, Bishop of Milan, who compelled the Emperor Theodosius to do penance for the murder of the people of Thessalonica, tells us in his 'DE OFFICIS' that 'All the mystery should be kept concealed, guarded by faithful silence, lest it should be inconsiderately divulged to the ears of the profane . . . He sins against God who divulges to the unworthy the mysteries confided to him. The danger is not merely in violating TRUTH, but in telling truth, if he allows himself to give hints of them to those from whom they ought to be concealed . . . Beware of casting pearls before swine! . . .'

One may see from this that the purpose of burying the deep truths of the ancient wisdom in allegory and in symbols is not alone to conceal it from all but the favored few, but is in order to guarantee that, in the words of Master Jesus, we shall not cast pearls before swine.

The greatest teaching of Masonry is the truth of immortality revealed in the Third Degree of the Blue Lodge and developed here and there throughout the Masonic teaching. Assurance of this truth is symbolically made clear to us in a drama which is almost identical with the rites administered by the priests of ancient Egypt to the initiates. When the initiate is enclosed in a coffin, words very similar to those used in some of our own Third Degree work gave the candidate assurance of resurrection and of immortality. Here was sounded the note of that assurance for which every soul hungers; the answer to the cry of Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?" There are many such flashes of teaching given in modern Masonry that are reminiscent of the methods used in ancient Egypt in teaching the initiates the Secret Mysteries. It is this fact that has deceived so many of our scholars into believing that there was a direct line of descent between the secret rites administered in ancient Egypt and the ritual and symbolism of the Masonry of our own day. The tie is, as I have said before, **NOT A CONNECTION THROUGH THE BODY BUT THROUGH SPIRIT AND TEACHING.**

We might summarize the thought of this paper by saying:

FIRST, that the antiquity of Masonry is twofold,—one of the body, which does not far antedate the Seventeenth Century; and another of the spirit, which traces its ancestry back to the secret rites of ancient Egypt and, perhaps back of these, to the monastery teachings of ancient India.

THE SECOND IDEA which I have tried to develop is that the real reason for keeping the teaching of Masonry secret is not that it has in it anything which might not be taught to any human being, but that the founders were wise enough to see that **NO MAN RECEIVES FROM THE UNIVERSE ABOUT HIM ANY TRUTH WHICH HE IS NOT READY TO RECEIVE;** and, for this reason, to give him direct teaching for which he is **NOT HUNGRY** is not only unpsychological—it insults the truth we would exalt. Jesus put this idea very aptly when He stated the necessary attitude that must govern the mind of every human before he can acquire ANY new truth: "ASK, and it shall be given you; SEEK, and ye shall find; KNOCK, and it shall be opened unto you," (Matt., 7:7), which makes clear that always the HUNGER and the EFFORT on the part of the seeker must be first.

THE THIRD IDEA which I have attempted to suggest is that those who are seeking a teaching—an absolute teaching—that will show them the relationship between their own selfhood and the Great SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE, will find it not only helpful but very inspiring to study some of the occult mystery teachings which have been preserved for us by the ancient mystery schools, truths which have of late been rediscovered and are now being taught by numbers of metaphysical groups here and there the world over. Make a sincere mental demand for an appropriate school or teacher,

and you will find him. But you must ASK, SEEK, KNOCK. Just so today, in our Masonic rituals and symbols, there lie suggestions here and there of the very Truth of Truths, but only he who honestly seeks shall find.

THE FOURTH and last idea of this discussion is a brief presentation of the story of the first of the seven degrees, of that which the best tradition reports to us, is a fairly accurate reproduction of the Ancient Egyptian Mystery Initiations. While they differ widely from the first degrees of Masonry of our day, there is enough resemblance in ritual, in symbolism, and in inner meaning to give a strong suggestion that these secret rituals of Ancient Egypt may well be said to be the 3,000-year-old ancestors of our own Ancient and Accepted Masonry.

These facts are taken from the detailed account of the Ancient and Mysterious Society of Crata Repoa, as outlined by Manley Hall in his book called, "Free Masonry of the Ancient Egyptians." The original manuscript of Crata Repoa was translated from the German and published in France in 1778. It was evidently the property of an earlier German Secret Society which had drawn its ritual and symbolism from the researches of Cagliostro in preparation for his book of Egyptian Rites. Lenvir, a French author of 1814, argues that, in all likelihood, while these degrees were never performed by the early groups of Masonry, they were preserved by the early 18th Century lodges and that their teaching and symbols did influence early Masonry.

Preparation of Candidate

Here is a brief sketch of the preparation of the candidate for the First Grade or Degree. In preparation, the disciple who is desiring initiation, after careful questioning, is, if accepted, led into a large circular chamber supported by huge pillars, representing the Universe supported by the laws of life. The Thesmophores, or Keeper of the Gate, carries a whip of cords. He represents the hidden laws of Nature, "Kind to the wise, and cruel to the foolish." He leads the disciple into a small room, where he is left in utter silence, representing a man's going inward to the inner chamber of his own heart, there to meditate in silence. His eyes are blindfolded that he may look for inward wisdom, and not be deceived by the outer.

The disciple is then bound and hoodwinked, to suggest to him how he is limited in his earthly state of existence, till he learns the Inner Wisdom. After meditation, he is led forward and his foot placed on the lowest rung of a ladder, symbolizing the divine mysteries, the discovery of which will lead him from darkness into the lighted Kingdom of the Wise.

First Degree

The Keeper of the Gate, which is called "The Gate of Men," is himself an apprentice who must teach those just below him—showing the first important lesson, that "Each one must teach one." The Keeper knocks, which is always a symbol of deep desire to know the next great truth. A voice within demands to know why the disciple has come. If he answers the questions properly, they are both admitted—signifying that the disciple,

now becoming neophyte, is to be admitted into the real secrets of the Universe.

The neophyte is then led around the room, pausing before terrifying instruments, and through secret forces which represent to him the hell of Ignorance from which he is, by this teaching, to escape.

He is then made to kneel, with the Sword of Karma against his throat, representing the Universe. Here he takes the oath of obedience asking the Sun, Moon, and Stars to witness his integrity.

The bandages are then removed and he finds himself standing between the two pillars between which he is to sustain his equilibrium. They represent that which, in Masonry, Jachin and Boaz do, Mind and Heart, Philosophy and Religion, Occultism and Mysticism. Between them is the ladder he has previously put his foot upon; it has seven steps and eight doors or openings between. This he must mount keeping his equilibrium. Each step represents an outer attainment; each door or space between, an inner spiritual realization.

He is now given much instruction as to the names of the gods, which represent the creative principles, the uses of healing drugs, and the secret names of God; and then is given the password of the degree, which is "to be discreet," warning him to moderations in all things, and not to cast pearls before swine, nor to reveal his inner teaching. He is then taught the secret grip of the degree, and has placed on him the apron, signifying purification, as well as robes and garments of high color representing a complete change of mental attitude.

Robed in these, he himself now becomes the next Keeper of the Gate for some other incoming disciple.

Second and Third Degrees

The Second Grade or Degree in this Secret Ritual opens by having a live serpent thrown upon him which at once coils around his neck. He is then taught, by various typical acts, how difficult it is to control and make self-less the great Serpent Power, the Power of Life, of Sex and the creative act.

The Third Grade or Degree centers about the idea of Man's immortality and contains many suggestive likenesses to the Blue Lodge ritual.

All in all, there is much evidence, in Crata Repoa, that our own Masonic teaching has an ancient and honorable ancestry in Egypt.



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