



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
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Short Papers Competition 2007

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Title
Author

The Morality of Freemasonry
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When the Entered Apprentice is asked “What is Freemasonry?” the appropriate response is “a peculiar or beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols”. Further developing this definition by more closely inspecting that morality, and those underlying beliefs that provide its foundation we shall arrive at better understanding of what Freemasonry truly is.

However, it is essential first to define morals. In modern days, morals are defined as the principles or rules of right conduct – the distinction between right and wrong. Whilst this is true, originally the word did not pertain to values, but rather to the character or temperament of the subject. In other words, morals did not represent actions, but rather truths. Contemplate now the necessity to veil this morality in allegory and illustrate it with symbols? What is allegory? Simply put, an allegory is a story composed of metaphors that are intended to represent abstract concepts or ideas. This indicates meaning that is deeper than the obvious. Likewise with the symbol. A symbol is a sign or mark, carving or engraving that has meaning. This is an important notion to understand – a symbol, much like a metaphor does not merely represent itself, but represents something other than just itself. A symbol is much more than merely the sum of its parts. Therefore, in the context of Freemasonry, morality is dialectic in that it is not simply a set of principles or rules of right conduct, and at the same time it is. In other words, it is a synthesis of both assertions.

In Freemasonry, morality serves as a guide to good, just and upright behaviour, but it also serves to illustrate certain truths. This pattern of thought is pervasive in Masonic philosophy – it is what it is but also something more. Nowhere is this concept best illustrated than in the philosophy of Hinduism; outlined within the oldest bodies of written scripture known to man. There exist two principal Gods of the Hindu pantheon – Shiva, the Fearful and Destructive One, and Vishnu, The Good, The Preserver. Upon first glance, the one appears to be the antithesis of the other. It is true that Shiva’s primary attribute is destruction and also true that Vishnu’s primary attribute is protection. However, the relationship between the two is best represented as harmony and discord. Together, they form the foundation of existence itself. This concept is not unfamiliar to Freemasonry as it is embodied within the symbol of the Mosaic pavement found on the floor of every Masonic lodge, before the altar. The black and white tiles are a dichotomy between positive and negative influences in life, but both exist in parallel and represent a universal truth of life. “Today we may tread in the flowery meads of prosperity; tomorrow we may totter on the uneven paths of weakness, temptation and adversity” Such is the cycle of life that is described by this lecture of the first degree. In the words of the philosopher, Heraclitus: “By cosmic rule, as day yields night, so winter, summer, war, peace, plenty, famine. All things change. Air penetrates the lump of myrrh, until the joining bodies die and rise again in smoke called incense”. All things change. This belief in the principle of change is also inherent in the philosophy of Freemasonry.

Take for instance, the lesser lights of Freemasonry found above the Junior and Senior Warden’s stations and symbolized by the Sun and the Moon. The Sun is to rule the day, and the Moon to rule the night. As the Sun sets in the west, the Moon rises in the east. It is for this reason that we circumambulate clockwise about the lodge – to illustrate that perpetual quality of life; change. Change is also embodied in the symbols of the Rough and Perfect Ashlars found in the East. We are all rough ashlar, imperfect by nature and susceptible to the sins and excesses of life. We all aspire to perfection through change.

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In fact, Freemasonry is change. Freemasonry is a tradition of initiation. Initiation cannot be understood through cognitive means alone. Initiation cannot be adequately described nor understood through the use of language alone. It is transcendent. Comprehensive understanding can only be achieved through experience. Experiences transform the soul.

What then is morality? – a set of principles or rules of right conduct. It is the implement that we apply to our souls to effectuate change towards perfection. To be moral, is to have experienced that transformation between two states of being and to have chosen the better path. Morality is change. Change is universal. Universality is the inherent quality of truth for all things. Therefore, morality is a universal truth.

The Morality of Freemasonry is expressed in these three basic terms: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Brotherly Love in that all men are equal in the eyes of the Supreme Being; equally imperfect by nature and all born into the same state of discord – all born into darkness; disoriented, dazed and confused. Relief serves to rectify discord into harmony, to begin that transformation of the soul towards perfection aided by the principles of right conduct. Truth is that universal and transcendent state of being to which we all aspire.

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