

WM, RW Sir, Brethren, I would like to begin by thanking Bro Hogeboom for that introduction. Brethren as many of you are aware; I have been working on a paper of some sorts for many months. Just when I think I have a great theme or an idea, something else pulls my attention away and I get side tracked. One of the most difficult yet rewarding things has been for me to dedicate myself to sitting down and completing this paper. I hope that you enjoy it as much as I have writing it.

A MAN, FREEMASONRY AND KABBALAH

This afternoon I would like to speak to you about some of the lessons contained in the first degree, I would like to delve just briefly into my personal beliefs and filters and finally I would like to leave you with some ideas and thoughts to ponder until we meet again.

Brethren just a brief history on where I come from. With this base knowledge you will better understand the filter through which I viewed my world prior to my initiation. I was raised in a very loving middle-class household, by parents who believed that at the right moment I would decide my own spiritual course. I was not raised under any religious denomination nor do I have formal religious ties. I was taught the fundamental differences between right and wrong, and what would be considered acceptable social behavior. One belief my father instilled in me was that through hard work one could succeed in life. Another one was, that my ticket to financial success would be for me to get a good education, because I was terrible with my hands. In my father's eyes, hard working young men made their own success. It was almost like a false belief that through hard work alone, without consequence of how one interacts with others that this hard work could allow one succeed. I was taught the importance of volunteerism, and participated in many volunteer groups. That was the home I was raised in, situated in Bruce County in the heart of cattle country. I loved farming and believe it or not I loved to work. I worked to obtain possessions mostly, and then ultimately a university degree. That was who I was, a worker.

Somewhere along the way, I became a leader, looking back now, this was probably because I was working harder than others and realized that I could do a better job than they were doing. This was who I was, a worker, who had many material desires but seemed to be somewhat adrift, living off of the hard work and material possessions I obtained. At the time this is what I thought being a man was all about.

So with this my Masonic story begins....

Brethren, one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life was the night I was first initiated into Leeds 201 in Gananoque, ON. It was a cold October evening, and I was quite nervous, as I only knew a few brothers in the lodge that I had chosen to become a part of. I had never seen the inside of a lodge building, I had never researched what I was getting myself into, I just knew a few fine men in my circle of concern were Masons and if they were Masons, well then I thought it was about time I stepped up and found out what this whole thing was about.

The night occurred like a blur, all I really remember was two quite distinctive things.... The overwhelming feeling once the ceremony had completed that I had become part of something that was larger than myself. I remember speaking with my wife when I got home that evening and conveying to her: "that everything was going to be alright. That no matter what happened to me or us in this lifetime that she would be looked after.... That we would have friends, I think they're called brothers I could call on... that we would be alright". Although she was not clear what I meant at the time and I couldn't put it into words, we both agreed that something profound happened to me that evening.

That was my first impression, and it has stuck with me all of these years. Actually my wife and I to this day can remember that evening quite vividly that night of my initiation.... you see at the time, we were just heading into a disastrous cropping season, and we had just completed our first disastrous farm year. Tensions were quite high around our home, financial strain was beginning to take its toll on us physically and emotionally. The stress was palpable. We were beginning part time farmers and we both had other small business we had begun one year earlier. Based upon the ideals I had been brought up on, if I just worked harder, I/we could make our way through the mess. I knew something wasn't just right, but I couldn't put my finger on it. I was a man, how could I ask for help, who could I turn to, was I afraid of failing? Years later as a practicing mason and a Kabbalist, I now know that everything happens for a reason, nothing occurs by accident. Freemasonry has taught me humility, perseverance, reverence for the GATOU and the power of friendship and the bond of fraternity. I don't know what I was looking for from Masonry, let alone from many areas of my life, but that cold October night I think I found a home. That night was a turning point, for my spiritual and personal life.

As far as the ceremony part, and what I remember, there is one passage that begins: "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth, and the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the deep; And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters; And God said, LET THERE BE LIGHT, and there was light". At that moment, when I was restored to the blessing of material light, I believe this had the greatest impact on me. I didn't know it at the time, but this was the only thing I actually remember of the whole degree. The realization that Light is a lesson in this degree is quite profound in my opinion.

Now fast-forward 5 years, I have become an active member of my mother lodge, and a reasonably active mason throughout Frontenac District. I take to heart that I should practice freemasonry in my daily life and actions. I wear Masonry right out there on my sleeve. I don't back down from difficult questions people have about the fraternity, in fact I welcome them. I am more than pleased to share knowledge with people, as far as my obligations will allow me to. Freemasonry has become ingrained into the person I have become. I practice Charity and slowly but surely I'm delving much more into my own spirituality and a greater purpose for my being. In 2007, while researching different things Masonic in nature, and reading different books I stumbled across the Kabbalah Centre online.

Why would this be relevant to any paper presented in a Masonic lodge? Kabbalah is according to WL Whilmhurst "that marvelous system of secret, oral tradition of the Hebrews, a strong element of which has been introduced into our Masonic system." Brethren the references are too

numerous to mention, but I think we have all heard and read enough to admit that Kabbalah is touched upon in many of the lessons we take from our beloved fraternity. This brings me to the second part, which is my brief introduction to Kabbalah.

Kabbalah can be defined as a discipline and school of thought concerned with the mystical aspect of Judaism. It is a set of esoteric teachings meant to explain the relationship between an infinite, eternal and mysterious Creator and the finite and mortal universe of His creation. Kabbalah seeks to define the nature of the universe and the human being, the nature and purpose of existence. It also presents methods to aid understanding of these concepts and to thereby attain spiritual realization. Kabbalah originally developed entirely within the realm of Jewish thought and constantly uses classical Jewish sources to explain and demonstrate its esoteric teachings.

Kabbalah is an ancient teaching based upon the Zohar. Zohar is a Hebrew word that means *splendor*. In its simplest form, the Zohar is a commentary on the Bible, structured as conversations among a group of friends, scholars, and spiritual masters. Although the wisdom available in its pages is older than Creation itself, the text of the Zohar was composed approximately 2000 years ago. It was then that the great Kabbalist Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai revealed the Zohar to his student, Rabbi Abba who transcribed it in the ancient language of Aramaic. In the centuries that followed, the Zohar was often suppressed by religious and secular authorities who feared its power to transform the lives of those who gained access to the sacred writings. The sages of Kabbalah, too, realized that the Zohar must wait until humankind was ready to receive it. In the past decade there has been explosion of people looking into and following the Zohar. I believe the recent popularity of Kabbalah can be timed with the advent of the Internet and open communication. This was all predicted over 2000 years ago by Rabbi Shimon bar Yoccai. Maybe this coincides with the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, but I digress.

So we have come some distance, and I would just like to briefly recap: I have given you my journey up to the point of finding Freemasonry, The Lesson gleamed from my initiation and my new found accompanying spiritual guidepost. Beyond a definition of Kabbalah, and the ancient teachings it is based upon, I would like to concentrate on three kabalistic concepts, the Vessel, Light and Fulfillment and then hopefully tie this all together.

The Vessel for purposes of this paper this afternoon should be considered our souls. Our souls have an inherent nature. They are very difficult to change; in fact I would argue your soul at its essence cannot be changed at all. Each of our vessel's have different capacity for receiving and for sharing. This capacity in its simplest sense is what makes each of us different. It is what we see in a newborn baby as its own personality. It is how twin siblings can be so different. It's what makes each of us unique. Now as a side bar, I know that many of you would like to get into the more esoteric discussion about the vessel or soul but for today please let's assume that this vessel is predetermined and is constant.

The next concept I would like to introduce is something called the Ego. The Ego has been described by many terms including: The Opponent, the Dark Side, Lucifer, and Satan. Suffice to

say that the Ego is another key term. The Ego by my definition is an extension of five key reactions that we can have when faced with any situation: Anger, Hatred, Judgment, Control and Pride. The way to combat the Ego is by exposing the light in the moment of choice. Light is the second concept I would like you to ponder.

It is interesting to note here, that we each have the individual choice to expose light in any situation. This choice is at the essence of what makes men Freemasons and what I'm finding is at the essence of all Kabbalistic teachings. When I was taking that obligation, my previous self was blinded by EGO, I wasn't aware of it at the time, but when I requested the Light, I was asking for it on a much deeper level.

Another concept with regards to the Light is that there is no coercion. We must choose the Light. Brethren, we all have choices, every day, every minute. It's our choice to be reactive to situations and people. It's also our choice to be proactive and to listen, to give of our time and of ourselves; to be charitable and benevolent, it's this proactive behaviour that I consider connecting with the Light.

When we are not connected to the light, we let the forces of chaos or the forces of our Ego take over. This reactive nature hides our light. Examples of this reactive nature is when we speak first and listen second, when we judge others, when we gossip or speak ill of others, when we stop taking care of our bodies, stop exercising or continue to eat unhealthy foods. You see, this is a never-ending spiral; one reactive response is easy to follow with another. It takes effort to see the light, it takes effort to portray light or emanate light to others. This is proactive; this is the difference between men and brethren. This is the difference between many lodges in my opinion and our very own Templum Fidelis lodge. We choose to see the light, we choose to portray the light, we filter our daily decision based upon this Light.

The third and last concept is that termed: fulfillment. Fulfillment is finally what this world is all about. It is the reason we are here. It is desire. People of all walks of life choose fulfillment in varying degrees. One's level of fulfillment is strictly restricted by the size of one's desires. Desires can be of two natures. We can have desire for the self alone or we can have desire so that we may share with others. Examples of desires for the self alone are many compulsive or addictive behaviours such as smoking or gambling. Other less obvious selfish desires are dishonesty, achievement and material wealth. However, we can take many of these same desires and turn them around, turn them into something for good, something for the greater good, that is receiving for the sake of sharing.

A Kabbalistic discussion would be nothing without a story. There once was a great Kabbalist named the Baal Shem Tov, who arrived in a small Ukrainian village with his entourage of students. Upon their arrival, they met a farmer tending his cow along the roadside. After some discussion the Baal Shem Tov and his students were invited to this man's house for dinner. The Baal Shem Tov agreed, but with one condition. He would only come for dinner if the farmer served a 5 course beef dinner large enough for himself and all of his students. The students could not understand why the Baal Shem Tov would ask for such an extravagant request from

such a meager farmer, but they knew the Baal Shem Tov was a teacher at heart and there must be a lesson in this request.

In the day, this was one of the highest honours that could happen to an individual or to a family, was to have someone of a divine nature for dinner at ones residence. The farmer quickly agreed to the request and asked that the Baal Shem Tov join him and his family that evening. The farmer took his cow into the village and had it slaughtered. He sold his home and used the proceeds to purchase enough food for the feast. The time finally arrived and the Baal Shem Tov arrived with his students for dinner. The feast was carefully brought out by the farmers family and was placed in front of the Baal Shem Tov. At this point the Baal Shem Tov then devoured the entire meal himself, got up quite abruptly and left the farmer. The students were in amazement at what they had just witnessed, but they to got up and followed the Baal Shem Tov out of the house and back on to the road.

The farmer was in disbelieve, in fact the farmer the next day upon awakening, realized that the magnitude of what he had done! He had slaughtered the cow, who was providing sustenance for the family. He had sold the family's dwelling, and would have to move out today. At this point it was too much, and the farmer went into the woods alone. The farmer sat down and wept, and prayed to god for some assistance. After a long time, after seeing or feeling nothing, the farmer got up and began to make his way back to his family. It was at this point that the farmer found a large bag of gold that was left behind in the forest. He had become a wealthy man.

The point of this parable is that sometimes, our limiting desires (i.e. operating out of interest for the self alone) prevent of us from becoming who we truly are meant to be. The farmer in this parable did not even realize that he had limiting desires. It was not until some sort of divine intervention, that his desires were awoken. It also shows that our true desires can only be awoken, when we share unconditionally with people. When we take the Charity lecture taught in the 1st Degree and combine it with my Kabbalistic principle of receiving for the sake of sharing, the end result will always be to create something much more satisfying and much larger then we could ever imagine. Brethren, needless to say, pre-Masonry, my heart's desire was to receive for the self alone. I couldn't serve others, truly. Today, in the moment of choice, I try my best to expose the Light and share the most of myself with others.

Brethren thank you for bearing with me so far, and if you have made it this far I congratulate you. For the lessons I hope are slowly becoming apparent. Brethren, we are all initiated into freemasonry. We are all brothers. We all have a vessel that was formed in the image of god. We have been given the basic tools, those moral lessons derived from the Sacred Writings and from our fraternal instruction. With these rules, we know and understand the consequences of our actions. We are taught that Charity is the fundamental principle that we should all strive for. Brethren, we are taught in the first Degree that exposing the Light with the sole desire to share should be the constant aim of any Freemason.

So if we cannot choose the size or shape of our vessel, and we all have light as an end goal, then the only real way to reach this enlightenment is through our daily toils, through our daily actions. Please heed those lessons in our Work.

In the moment when we have choices to make, when we filter these choices through our Masonic lessons, we will eventually reach enlightenment or that fulfillment that we are all toiling in the quarries in search of.

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