

“Why is this night different from all other nights?”

A philosophical and spiritual question brethren, and one that we might well ask our selves every Lodge meeting, and maybe every day. What is unique about this experience today? I’m sure we all have felt this way at times in our lives, that we need to take in the moment and not be focused on the future. Be here now, in other words.

This can also apply to our meals and nourishment brethren. So let us begin with the most basic. When we picture Maslow’s famous Hierarchy of Needs, we see that the bottom rung or most basic is that of our need for Food and Shelter and physical necessities must be satisfied before we are mentally and physically ready to move to the next level upwards on his pyramid. At the height of this we see morality, creativity, spontaneity, spirituality, what he calls Self Actualization. This is also what we as Freemasons would call that most important of studies, the knowledge of self.

Combining these, we can draw a line between Self Actualization, self knowledge and our food, which is a basic need, not for necessity, but for spirituality and camaraderie and brotherly love in our case. Growing up, the family dinner was an important touchstone in our household, and it’s a model my wife and I have tried to emulate for our children too. A half hour or 45 minute touchstone to cap the day, especially on weekends. I was trained to cook professionally in a former career, under mostly German chefs, who were models of organization and ruthless efficiency and discipline in the kitchen! I remember asking one of my German superiors why the French were renowned for their cooking skills, and he replied that it was because a French chef gets up in the morning thinking about what to have for dinner that night! Chef said that with a note of derision and disapproval, because he felt that it should already have been planned. However, it shows how nourishment can be a highly personal and spiritual thing, like cooking and eating for the joy of it, not just for sustenance. We can see the manifestation of this in popular culture as well. Recently I happened to watch a current movie based on a book called “Eat Pray Love,” and within it a woman goes on a spiritual and physical journey to dive into the cultures of several places in the world,

especially focusing on their food and spirituality. There is a scene, fairly long where she is in a Roman café eating pasta, and it looks like the most amazing Italian meal you can imagine. Her audience is being shown (admittedly by Hollywood!) to think that this is the best meal in the world at that time and in that place.

Which brings me back to the central question that began my formulating of this paper and made me think of Templum Fidelis, “Why is this night different from all other nights?”

Brethren, I came across those words in reference to a special meal, called the Passover Seder. This is a Jewish ritual feast that occurs at the beginning of Passover, according to the Hebrew calendar. It usually falls around March or April in our modern calendars. The Seder is a highly ritualized meal involving a retelling of the story of the liberation of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage. The core of this ritual play is the lines from the book of Exodus, that state, ““And you shall tell it to your son on that day, saying, 'Because of this God did for us when He took me out of Egypt.'” (Exodus 13:8) Although many Jewish holidays are central to the synagogue, a Seder takes place around the family table. Public ones in community centres and synagogues also do occur though. It is customary to invite guests, especially strangers and the needy. Therefore, the Seder is an occasion for praise and thanksgiving and for rededication to the idea of liberation. Furthermore, the words and rituals of the Seder are a primary vehicle for the transmission of the Jewish faith from grandparent to child, and from one generation to the next. Attending a Seder and eating matza on Passover is a widespread custom in the Jewish community, even among those who are not religiously observant. We could draw an instant comparison with words we are going to hear this evening brethren, that the genuine tenets of our time honoured institution be transmitted through our Lodge, pure and unimpaired, from generation to generation.

The Seder table is set with the finest place settings, and family members come to the table dressed in their holiday clothes. There is a tradition for the person leading the Seder to wear a white robe. For the first half of the Seder, each participant will only need a plate and a wine glass. At the head of the table is a Seder Plate

containing various symbolic foods that will be eaten or pointed out during the course of the Seder. Placed nearby is a plate with three matzot (wafer like bread similar to the host in a Christian church) and dishes of salt water for dipping.

Each participant receives a copy of the Haggadah, which is an ancient text that contains the complete Seder service. Men and women are equally obligated and eligible to participate in the Seder. In many homes, each participant at the Seder table will recite parts of the Haggadah in the original Hebrew and Aramaic. The leader will often interrupt the reading to discuss different points with his or her children, or to offer a Torah insight into the meaning or interpretation of the words.

Since the retelling of the Exodus to one's child is the object of the Seder experience, much effort is made to arouse the interest and curiosity of the children and keep them awake during the meal. To that end, questions and answers are a central device in the Seder ritual. By encouraging children to ask questions, they will be more open to hearing the answers.

The most famous question which the youngest child asks at the Seder is the *Mah Nishtanah* - "Why is this night different from all other nights?" After the asking of these questions, the main portion of the Seder, *Magid*, gives over the answers in the form of a historical review. Also, at different points in the Seder, the leader of the Seder will cover the matzot and lift his cup of wine; then put down the cup of wine and uncover the matzot—all to elicit questions from the children.

The Seder is also is thought by many to have a connection to that most famous of meals within Christianity, The Last Supper.

The Last Supper

As we know, Christians believe that The Last Supper is the final meal that Jesus shared with his twelve disciples before his death. The events of that evening are recounted in the canonical gospels and by the Paul the Apostle. According to what Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians, at that meal Jesus gave his disciples

bread, saying it was his body, which was broken for them, and gave them wine, saying it was the new covenant in his blood, and told them to do it in his memory.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus institutes a new covenant of his blood and body, the wine and bread. Scholars clearly define the Last Supper as the source of early Christian Eucharist traditions. Others see the account of the Last Supper as derived from 1st-century Eucharistic practice as described as early as the mid-50s of that century (the date of the writing of 1 Corinthians), 20-25 years after the death of Jesus.

The Gospel of John recounts, instead of the institution of this new covenant with wine and bread, Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, and also depicts Jesus as speaking at length in his farewell address about his divinity and the necessity of his preordained role. These elements are pointed to by many to support their conclusions that the last supper may have in fact been a Seder.

Eucharist:

The Eucharist, also called Holy Communion, Sacrament of the Altar, or The Lord's Supper, and other names, is a Christian sacrament or ordinance, generally considered to be a re-enactment of the Last Supper, the final meal that Jesus Christ shared with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion, during which he gave them bread, saying, "This is my body", and wine, saying, "This is my blood".

There are different interpretations of the significance of the Eucharist, but "there is more of a consensus among Christians about the meaning of the Eucharist than would appear from the confessional debates over the sacramental presence, the effects of the Eucharist, and the proper auspices under which it may be celebrated."

The phrase "the Eucharist" may refer not only to the rite but also to the consecrated bread (leavened or unleavened) and wine or, (in some Protestant denominations), unfermented grape juice or (in Mormonism) water, used in the rite, and, in this sense,

communicants may speak of "receiving the Eucharist", as well as "celebrating the Eucharist".

Possible relation with Passover Seder to the Eucharist

Even though during the Jewish Seder the first cup of wine is drunk before the eating of the (unleavened) bread, but it occurs after in Christian rituals. This may indicate that the Last Supper event was not the disciple's ritual Seder for that year, although the meal could easily have been altered during the Last Supper for symbolic/religious purposes. The comparison is nonetheless an interesting one to examine.

Now, that brings us to our humble version, the Traditional Observance Agape. While I don't suggest that the TO Agape is or should be viewed in the same light as the Eucharist or the Seder, it is interesting to explore the parallels. First a history of the word Agape:

The Agape

Agape feast or Love feast was a religious meal that seems to have been in use among early Christians and to have been closely related to the Eucharist. It is referred to in Corinthians, and more particularly in a letter to Trajan, who was a Roman Emperor from 98-117 which reports that the Christians, after having met "on a stated day" in the early morning to "address a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity", later in the day would "reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal", which is thought to be the Agape. There are possible references to the Agape also in the writings of Roman historians as well. Its connection with the Eucharist was over by 258 AD, when the Eucharist was celebrated by fasting in the morning and the agape, increasingly a charity supper, in the evening. Eventually The Council of Laodicea of about 363-364 which was a Roman Council, forbade churches of celebrating the Agape. This council was essentially a tightening of regulations around Jews and Early Christians, and an attempt to reassert Roman liturgical authority. Though still mentioned later, the Agape finally fell into disuse.

The Agape was re-introduced among certain eighteenth-century groups, like the Methodists and has been revived more recently among other groups, including North American Anglicanism.

All these are ritual meals brethren, as you have no doubt guessed, and I'm trying to point out the parallels and comparisons between what we have created here within the TO Agape, and these rituals. Let's face it, our agape is a stylized ritualized meal, in which we follow a fairly strict course of events. We begin with an invocation, start with traditional toasts to her majesty, the Royal anthem, and a salute to the Ancient and Gentle Craft. Then a recognition of our visitors, a response from them giving thanks, a toast to our governing body and then a keynote address, a recognition of absent brethren, and a parting toast to all our brethren around the world "Whithersoever dispersed." This is capped by a closing of the Masters own choosing and our National Anthem. Interspersed is our discussions, our dining and open forum of the free flow of opinions. Interestingly, this is the part that most visitors to TF comment on. (Comments) Not the actual Lodge meeting as much. Why?

Why is this night different? How is this Lodge experience different? Well it occurs to me that the Agape makes it unique, as much as our work within the Lodge does, outside of and in - between the knocks. The Chain of Union both closes the Lodge and also I believe sets the stage for an intimate meal that we are about to share. One item of note is that in Eat Pray Love, that scene I referred to is a scene in which the main character is alone. A somewhat selfish experience, in one view of it. As the story continues we also see that the main character starts to enjoy those meals abroad with her new friends, and eventually her new family. There is a feeling of togetherness within our family dinners as well, in that a meal alone is sometimes a good one, but not the same. My wife reminds me that when the two of us watched this movie, and that scene occurred, I turned to her and said "We have to go!" Not you have to go or I have to go. The Seder is a meal that combines the Jewish faith and family, and I'm reminded of the saying that you can pick your friends and not your family. Jesus also picked his disciples, not the other way around, even though he had a family, the 12 did not choose him, and their relationship culminated in the Last Supper. We do not choose who we celebrate Eucharist with, beyond

choosing our church and our faith exactly. I would point out that at our Agapes brethren we have picked each other, we have chosen to be here not through blood or familial obligation or a sense of obligation to our church, but through the desire for togetherness. Veterans tell us that they were never fighting for their country or for their faith, but more for each other, they guy beside them, which is why regiments were typically raised in one small town or area.

I have said these words 5 times now as the WM opening the Agape, but I wanted to recite them again to you, as I think I for one have overlooked their significance until now. Our Agape opens with the following:

WM: My brethren, let us remember that each at this consecrated board has been selected through witness of his silence, the faith of his integrity, and the loyalty of his friendship. Each of us bears the honourable rank style and title of Freemason because we strive always towards justice and have broken bread, honestly earned with our brothers and fellows. Let us approach our labours with gratitude for the material and spiritual sequence which we each have been privileged to receive as our Masonic birthright.

Brethren, this evening, I encourage us to recognize the deep significance of our Agape, and relish in the togetherness and joy of it, of breaking bread with each other. I have tried to point out here through this research paper of its significance is on many levels, both from nourishment, a feeling of family, to be here now in a forum of non judgmental acceptance of our personal opinions, faiths and foibles, and the joy of it, which is the essence of spirituality.

Closing remarks.