



MASONIC EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario
Committee on Masonic Education
MEMBERSHIP PILLAR

February, 2014

“If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life”
“Plato (also ascribed to Benjamin Franklin)”

Prepared and submitted on behalf of the Committee on Masonic Education by
R.W. Bro. Charles A. Woods, Chairman, CME

BRETHREN, I hope you are all looking forward to a beautiful spring after such a hard winter – mind you, winters used to always be like this! Perhaps we have grown softer?!! I trust that you are proud of the achievements of our Canadian Olympic Team, especially Team Canada’s Curling Skip, Bro. Brad Jacobs, Inner Guard, Keystone Lodge No. 142 in Sault Ste. Marie.

Reflections Newsletter

Brethren, please note that you may send your Reflections subscription request to the new Subscription Manager at:

Mr. Lindsay Reiach
41 Dunrobin Dr.
Caledonia, ON N3W 2N7
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The Sankey Lecture

Will be held on Sunday, March 30, at 3 pm at Brock University, St. Catharines. The guest lecturer, Dr. Renee Lafferty, will speak on the topic “Brothers in Arms: Freemasons and the War of 1812”. Please visit the website www.sankeylectures.ca for more information or contact R.W. Bro. Gareth Taylor at garethtaylor@rogers.com. The lecture is free, but tickets are required. To reserve your tickets, contact the Centre for the Arts Box Office at 905-688-5550x3257 or boxoffice@brocku.ca. A donation to the Sankey Project will be much appreciated in lieu of paying for a ticket.

“Secret Practices of the Sufi Freemasons”

The Islamic Teachings at the Heart of Alchemy

By Baron Rudolf von Sebottendorf

Book Review and Commentary by W. Bro. Robert Lund

This is actually a book within a book. It contains an introductory section that deals with the author and the background to his work, and the second part is Sebottendorf's book itself, which was published in 1924, and is actually called "*The Practice of Ancient Turkish Freemasonry – the Key to the Understanding of Alchemy – A Presentation of the Ritual, Doctrine, and Signs of Recognition among the Oriental Freemasons*".

Firstly, the work Alchemy refers not the art of converting base metals, but to spiritual Alchemy, which is the transformation of the individual soul. Secondly, it is more about certain ritualistic exercises for Sufis of the Bektashi Order to enable self-ennoblement and the acquisition of higher knowledge.

The first part of the published work deals with an introduction to the Sufi order, and the colourful history of the author.

Sufism is the best-known esoteric or mystical dimension within the religion of Islam. Supposedly, members of Mohammad's own entourage were some of the earliest Sufis. Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam that seeks direct and personal knowledge and experience of God, as opposed to the simple acceptance of the Q'uran and obedience to the outward laws of Islamic practice. The Bektashi sect was formed in the thirteenth century.

It is the basic idea of this sect that God reveals himself in the Word, which is made up of sounds, or letters with accompanying numerical values. These are made manifest in the human body through certain exercises that are the essential component of this book.

Freemasons will recognize the signs and grips used in these ritualistic exercises. It is to be understood that these exercises, referred to as The Science of the Key, are meaningless to the non-initiate.

The author indicates that these are of Rosicrucian origin. He also states that Oriental Freemasonry preserves the ancient doctrines of wisdom, which modern Freemasonry has forgotten.

The exercises are characterized by the use of the three signs of recognition, grips, and words. The three signs mentioned are called the I-sign, the A-sign and the O-sign.

The I-sign is a fist with the index finger pointing straight up like the letter I, or a pillar.

The A-sign is made from a flat hand with the thumb at right angles to the fingers, like a square. This, obviously, equates with the second degree.

The O-sign is made by forming a circle with the index finger touching the thumb, like the letter O, or a circle, equating to the third degree.

The Grips are the Neck Grip, the Chest Grip, the Middle Grip, and the Master or Belly Grip. Freemasons will recognize all but one of these Grips. The Neck Grip is made with a flat hand, palm down, with the fingers across the throat and the thumb next to the Carotid Artery on the right of the neck. The fingers are drawn sharply across the throat and dropped down.

The Chest Grip is made by placing the flat right hand, thumb angled at ninety degrees, and the palm on the left breast. The hand is pushed to the right.

The Middle Grip is similar but is formed lower down.

The Master, or Belly, Grip is lower than the Middle Grip, but below the navel.

The words given are all Arabic and not recognizable to modern Freemasons.

The exercises use these signs, grips, and words, and are carried out daily for a period of three to twenty-five months, depending on the success of the practitioner. There is also a sign of distress, which is the same as that of modern Freemasonry.

In the discussion of doctrine, there is repeated reference to origins being from the Rosicrucians and Alchemy.

As an example, the author mentions the ancient secret knowledge: that the universe consists of a primeval substance which the ancients called Ether, and that matter is only an apparent form of the Ether. I can confirm that this is still taught by Rosicrucians, and also by the Theosophical society. Modern science is catching up with this ancient knowledge by determining that all forms of matter are of a vibratory nature that consist of different vibratory rates.

Further discussion in the book is related to Alchemy, and a further explanation of the exercises.

I found this book to be of great interest. It shows that the roots of Freemasonry go back a long time. It also confirms my own conclusion that the authors of modern Craft Masonry ritual were Rosicrucians. I can also say that they did not forget the ancient teachings but just concealed them, planting signposts to be discovered by those who seek.

Speech by R.W. Bro. Scott Kubota, DDGM Wilson North District

Oak Branch No. 261

Worshipful Master, Distinguished East, Brethren.

As I was sitting at my computer thinking of a speech for tonight, I came to realize the changes I have gone through since becoming a Mason. I will be the first to admit ten years ago, I would have thought you off your rocker telling me I would be speaking in front of a group of people of this calibre and number. The phrase, "Masonry takes good men and makes them better" came to mind as I recalled reading a piece of literature in a Masonic book called "Pillars and Steps"

This piece, titled "What Does Masonry Do?" was presented by M.W. Bro. David C Bradley. It will take me about 8 minutes to go through it and then I will add some personal thoughts.

A man moves through the Masonic Portals as a "man of the world" and is referred to as "Mister" until, at one point in his initiation, his status is changed to that of "Brother". It is a significant change because it means that he has become a member of a worldwide fraternity. Each Member is encouraged to participate in any sphere of activity. The mere fact, however, of becoming a Master Mason does not guarantee that a man will be better than he was before. Neither does a man become a Mason simply by paying a fee and taking three degrees. He is gradually made a Mason through his association with others of like mind. It is often stated that it takes a lifetime to travel from the Rough to the perfect Ashlar, but the fact that it actually takes a daily effort is glossed over. It is not easy to maintain the required effort. Members are much like mountaineers. They cannot climb the highest mountain in one bound, it has to be climbed one step at a time.

Masonry is a fraternity of ethical and moral, like - minded - men. The usual explanation to the question “What does Masonry Do?” is that Masonry takes good men and makes them better. It is assumed that this is a profound and meaningful statement, on its own, and without emphasis on any one part of it. It is believed to be truth simply because it is said with such conviction. It has become a belief without any corresponding necessity to take supportive action. The essential word is overlooked, the important verb “make”, which indicates action and leadership. It suggests that Masons teach or train a candidate, friendship is offered to him, that all sit together in harmony, that all work happily together on committees and take part WITH the candidate in the performance of ritual. Masonry therefore combines the efforts of the new members with those of the older members, and ensures that all members are working in harmony to a common goal.

In the fraternal aspect of Masonry and in its use of high moral and ethical values, one life touches upon another, drawing each together in mutual respect, with due regard for the goodness in human nature. Masonry, therefore, places individuals in a position of trust and honest co-operation. It promises much, but it offers no guarantees. Each Member must work to achieve the benefits from the Masonic cornucopia. Involvement in Masonic affairs breeds knowledge of human nature, of fraternity, of co-operation and of tolerance. Members learn of moral and ethical philosophy, their knowledge expands to history, to legislation and to a discussion of such terms as freedom, justice, truth, and honour, among many others. Horizons are extended by charity and benevolence from selfish personal wants to the needs of others. The tenets of brotherly love, relief, and truth, are laid out for all members to adapt and use. It is self evident that a good society cannot exist without good individuals as part of it. These good people affect the attitudes of others until decent and honourable behaviour patterns have been created and become acceptable to all. The Lodge is thus, an environment in which a just society can be built on the solid foundation on which Masonry rests: The practice of social and moral virtue.

At the same time, personal abilities and capabilities are stretched to the breaking point. Members do things which they never thought possible. They give toasts and replies. Their minds are tested to the limit by learning ritual. Members learn how to chair a meeting, how to plan, how to conduct seminars and how to be a leader. The whole experience of Masonry teaches the values necessary to survival as a human being. Masonry challenges its members and forces them to seek excellence by providing high standards of conduct. Even though Masonry has had to fight for its existence, men of each generation have felt it worthwhile to face those challenges, the difficulties and the detractors. The future of Masonry, therefore, rests upon the willingness of its Members to fight and struggle. All this is done, however, with good will, joy, and delight in their hearts.

Members are given the opportunity to learn and to act, so that Masonry will be seen in its true perspective as a force for good within society. They are also urged to be creative, to face and solve problems, to be optimistic and confident in knowledge. A Mason, in order to be a Mason, must be free. Freedom of action, thought and deed are essential to the health of Masonry. All members for example have a right to their own religious beliefs and are allowed to serve God according to their own conscience, as long as each affirms a belief in a Supreme Being. The Mason must be free to exercise his abilities to overcome the challenges in Masonry. He must believe Masonry is a superior organization. He must believe that it is possible for any Mason, regardless of his background, to become Worshipful Master and successfully govern the lodge. The Mason must believe that solutions can be found to lodge problems and that by effort and work, members can switch on the light of Masonry. A light will not shine until a switch is pressed and, similarly, Masonry lacks sparkle, until action, creativity, fellowship and teamwork press the switch to make it burst into brightness.

It is not sufficient to know what Masonry does for the good of mankind, but rather what it does for the Mason and thereby for the good of mankind. It is true that Masonry leads men to knowledge of the duties that each owes to his god, to his country, to his neighbour and to his family. Masonry offers the climate for a self improvement through the study of philosophy, history, literature, fraternity and individual achievement and as a consequence the improvement of society. It reminds, rather than teaches, them of the beauty of life that can be achieved. Masonry places the tools of the operative trade into the hands of its members, which they can either take up eagerly or let them lie unused. Each member has this choice. If he takes them up, he builds and develops his character. In so doing he helps make a better and safer society.

As each member comes to understand what Masonry does, he can say without fear that he is a Mason and proud to be one. And, as he speaks those wonderful words, he can feel exhilaration pulsing through his veins with new found enthusiasm, an uplifting of his mind and a stirring of his heart and soul.

“It takes a lifetime to travel from the Rough to the perfect Ashlar” This is a perfect parallel to life in that it is not a destination, it is a journey. It’s not about where you end up, it’s how you got there. The experiences you had, the people you touched and those who touched you.

“Masons take good men and makes them better” The word “better” is being used in the most appropriate manner - it shows that it is an ongoing journey not a destination.

“At the same time that personal abilities are stretched to the breaking point, members accomplish that, which they never thought possible.” As I stated in the beginning, I used to be terrified, speaking to a crowd. The thought of any type of public display would send me to tears and profuse perspiration. I have toughed it through, and set my ego aside -telling myself, often, that it is more important to do my duty and fulfill my responsibilities in delivering the message, than to cower in fear of embarrassment in front of an audience and quitting.

“It is true that Masonry leads men to knowledge of the duties that each owes to his god, to his country, to his neighbour and to his family. Masonry offers the climate for self-improvement” and I doubt that there is anyone in this room that can say they have not improved in at least one aspect of this statement.

In closing, Brethren, I ask you to consider these words and to appreciate the fact that it is not the deeds done in the lodge that attracts new men to the Craft, but rather, their observance of the development that occurs in us, as we become Masons. Use every day to become just a little better than you were yesterday. That is Freemasonry!

I thank you for your kindness and attention.

Master’s Summons Message to Oakville Lodge No. 400

By W. Bro. David Bambury

Before I joined Masonry, I thought my father was just being evasive when I asked him what he found so appealing about the Craft. I realize now that some things cannot be described, they need to be experienced.

A Masonic Lodge is a perfect example of the “whole being greater than the sum of its parts”. On the surface, it appears to be a building with some good men, a few good books and some implements of architecture, but there is a lot more to it than that. The lessons, benefits and appeal of Masonry are gradually revealed to us over time.

An event that I find appealing occurs quite frequently at our meetings but is also difficult to describe. I am referring to the positive energy and the “vibe” that result from a group of people sharing a collective thought and a common goal of self improvement and encouragement. Although it cannot be observed and measured, it is no less real. I have felt it many times and had the goose bumps to prove it.

It may happen when a Degree is running particularly smoothly or when a candidate's hard work pays off, or when a presentation spreads inspiration around the room, like “the wave” at a hockey game. These are the times that recharge our batteries and remind us of why we keep coming out to Lodge. In these moments, it feels that we are all on the same team and part of something greater and good.

In a world full of fine print, hidden fees and rip-offs, it's important to have a place to refresh our trust in our fellow man and know that you are around like-minded individuals that wish you well. Hopefully, this feeling of goodwill rubs off on us and we take it, with us, out of the Lodge and spread it around.

Whether this positive energy is derived from the power of our collective thoughts, the spirit of Masonry or it's just in our imaginations, is still undecided. But it exists!

Perhaps one of our senior members and past GL officers said it best when I asked him why he keeps coming out to Lodge after all these years and having seen it all so many times. He stopped and thought for awhile and said, "I don't really know why..... I just know I feel better after a meeting than I did before ".

That explanation is good enough for me!

May the GAOTU inspire and motivate us all to continue to do good work.

“The highest result of education is tolerance”

Helen Keller