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FREEMASONRY AND THE MORAL LAW BY R.W.BRO RABBI DR SHALOM COLEMAN C.B.E., M.A., B.Lit., Ph.D., J.P., P.J.G.W.

I had the privilege of knowing the late R.W. Bro. R.H.D. Hewitt PM., PZ., P.J.G.W., several years before he died. Our paths met when he invited me to write for his journal and subsequently we had many a meeting discussing aspects of Freemasonry when he became a welcome neighbour at No.9 Freedman Road a part of the Freemasons Home Complex in Mount Lawley. He edited the West Australian Craftsman with an articulate pen which stemmed from a clarity of conviction demanding the highest possible standards to be expected from the members, particularly of Freemasons and the Moral Law. He was a forceful man, at times almost dogmatic, but in a closer and more intimate dialogue there was a deeply sensitive soul and the problems as well as the philosophy of Freemasonry weighed heavily within him, it was an unquenchable flame, and in his anxiety to describe it he would become excited. His reading of the subject was intense and his library contained many works which included proceedings from the world of Freemasonry, and what he wrote, therefore, was based on in-depth study of the Craft, its history, its symbolism, its traditional and speculative analyses. It made him critical of prevailing values which did not meet the criterion embodied in the code of Freemasonry, and he was irritated by the lack of sufficient knowledge capable of harmonising the content of a ritual charge with practical application. The dichotomy dividing word and deed some times grew so strong within him that his criticisms of Freemasons and freemasonry bordered almost to the point of rebellion. Yet, his opinions were always objective, and they reflected the voice within him in his enclavours to reach his brother mason, and beyond him, those who were not his, nor anyone else's brother, especially when churchmen, politicians, tub-thumpers and rabble-rousers challenged the validity of Freemasonry's message.

"The West Australian Craftsman", with which "The West Australian Freemason" established in 1903 was incorporated, was not the official organ of Grand Lodge, nor were any of the views it expressed endorsed by any other controlling body. It was privately owned and "published for the purpose of disseminating news of interest to Freemasons." It was Robin Hewitt's adopted child, and although what he had to say in his editorials were not the authoritative statement of Grand Lodge, they were always admired and accepted for they would always provide that kind of food for thought which helps policies crystallize. Robin Hewitt had an intense inward sense of direction as a Freemason of distinction. It made him an outspoken, unafraid proponent of Freemasonry and dissected every word, every phrase of the ritual, making of them living pearls of wisdom strengthening and brightening with rare and beautiful lustre, the necklace which envelops all Freemasons in the world of Freemasonry.

One of Robin Hewitt's more outstanding messages was called "Masonic Punishment". It was an editorial in his issue of April 1971, and inter alia he wrote:

"it is sometimes said by the ill-informed that Freemasons look after one another even to the extent of condoning crimes or mitigating punishment. Lapses among Freemasons are fortunately few, but the occasional case of fraud or misbehaviour is always seriously viewed by Masonic authorities and in the event of a court conviction, the Secretary of a Lodge is required under Regulation 216 of the Constitution to report the details to the Grand Secretary for the consideration of the Board of General Purposes. A Lodge can exclude a brother, the Board of General Purposes may suspend, but only Grand Lodge can expel"

"There are problems enough when such matters are noted, reported, and discussed. In the case of matrimonial offences the difficulties really begin." he continues, "Masonic authorities shrink from intervening in domestic disputes because the truth is hard to come by. There is, however, ample evidence that matrimonial offences are repugnant to Freemasonry, as every Master, when about to be installed has to promise "to be a good man and true and strictly to obey the moral law." R.W. Bro. Hewitt goes on to speak of bankruptcy, insolvency, traffic fines, taxation prosecution, drunkenness and disorderly conduct - they are all part of his message, while conceding that "Generally speaking, Masons are law-abiding men who dislike any imputation that membership of the Craft is an open sesame to dishonour or misdemeanour."

The stress on morality in Freemasonry takes its roots from the Volume of the Sacred Law. This is the definition which declares in answer to the question "What is Freemasonry?" - "A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." As the system of morality is enacted in every Lodge room throughout the world, a great voice, laying no claim to superiority of intellect, even originality of concept, inspires the Freemason to live a moral and upright life with an all-embracing universal brotherhood under a universal Father who is Creator and Architect of the Universe. In all the rituals, and the charges, the lesson is to be just, fair, honest, tolerant, compassionate and loyal, in short "to render every kind office which justice or mercy may require, by relieving the necessities of our neighbour, by soothing his afflictions and doing to him as in similar cases you would wish that he should do unto you."

The tremendous contribution which is original to Freemasonry is its teaching method. It is aural and also visual demonstrating all aspects of the Moral Law. Concepts drawn from the Volume of the Sacred Law are given a novel and refreshing personal experience translating the structures and the working tools of the operative mason used in the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, the Temple of Solomon, into a series of moral principles derived from their contemplation. It is through this teaching process that every Freemason is able to perceive, know and implement in a practical form, a way of life which must lead to the harmony of mankind as a whole in act as well as in word. Freemasonry speaks to the heart and soul of every individual Freemason, from the time the door is open to him as an initiate, to make him an example, a living light and guide in the world of the masses, how to regulate human conduct, temper judgments, control inward thoughts, and, above all, how to restrain or withdraw as the cascading floodwaters of impious and insidious physical and material instincts tend to overwhelm him in the climate of our society.

The Moral Law is deep in the heart of Freemasonry and with it the Freemason becomes a better man to meet life's many challenges. Above all it makes him equipped to help all those floundering in the darkness of ignorance and despair. With every good deed, like a candle, he shows the way they should take and with many good deeds the light shines stronger. He fulfils what the writer of Proverbs declares: "For a candle is a precept and the Moral Law is light" (6:23). What he means of course is the more precepts a man performs the greater the light to penetrate the darkest corners, so that all men can see the way in which they are going on the uphill path of life, and at the apex, where all men shall meet, they will find judgment in accordance with their life and actions.

It is worth recording here that it is a great pity this self-seeking light, which every Freemason researches within him as the Moral law unfolds in the course of his sojourn in Freemasonry, quietly and humbly, has been misinterpreted by the uninitiated to be something secret and sinister. The stress of secrecy is the stress of humility, for the Freemason is taught to improve himself with the Moral Law, without fuss and without bother, nor is he encouraged to evangelise what he learns, only to do his best by God and man, and in so doing will attract others to his ways, to live as he

lives, work as he works, and do all things as he does them, with sobriety and earnestness for himself, his family, his community and his nation. Those who condemn Freemasonry do not realise intelligently that in reality they condemn the fundamental source and philosophy of life in the work of the Scriptures, to learn and to teach, to observe and to do and fulfil all the commandments of the Moral Law which recognizes the unity of G-d and the unity of mankind in a brotherhood of all-embracing universalism. Freemasonry does not address itself to any one religious order. The belief of the Freemason manifests itself in all religions which bring the human being into a relationship with G-d. Nor does its philosophy confine itself in a plethora of arbitrary definitions of the Moral Law which sets up another parochial group. It addresses itself only to the Moral Law, the Volume of the Sacred Law, from which he derives his duties to G-d, to his neighbour and to himself.

To the Freemason, then, as symbol and ritual unfold for him the lessons to be learned from a serious contemplation of the Moral Law, he becomes what may be termed "universal man". What the Moral Law teaches him to perform in this world also finds its parallel in the spiritual world. As he builds his structure here and now on moral foundations he simultaneously builds a heavenly structure to vouchsafe for him his immortality. The work may not be complete, for as a sage put it "it is not thy duty to complete the work", "nor," he continues "are you free to neglect it. The work must go on while life lasts, and in direct proportion to the work performed in this world will his work be determined in the hereafter., To put it as Samuel Butler (1600-1680) "*..look before you ere you leap, for as you sow, ye are like to reap.*"

The work of the Freemason is a duty to be carried beyond the Lodge room, beyond the doors behind which he has acquired it. In the lessons he has learned he has so much to offer to the world outside. The sage Simon son of Gamliel said almost two thousand years ago "*Not learning but doing is the chief thing*" (Avot 1: 17). He was speaking of the Moral Law, and in Freemasonry lies the moral purpose every Freemason is bound to carry into effect in the world in which he lives, the code of scruples he has learned, and implement them with a conviction and concern capable of lending a hand to all others who are endeavouring to turn the tide of material demand back on to the road of moral need an#, human survival. The opportunities are as boundless as work itself. It was the realisation of such quality bequeathed to Freemasonry by many generations of pioneering forbears that enabled the Freemason to speak w1th authority during the renaissance. With so much bigotry rampant, he was in a position to speak effectively, and with the Moral Law on his side, he can still do so in the face of every immoral challenge. It enabled him also to meet his attacker head-on when the vile forces of abuse, hatred and discrimination hurled against him under the pretense of some so-called hallowed design which was, and still is, nothing more than a disgusting display of unholy arrogance. "One lesson, and only one," writes that great British historian of the last century James Anthony-Froude (1818-1894), "*history may be said to repeat with distinctness, that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that in the long run it is will with the good; in the long run it is ill with the wicked.*" Froude wrote nobly, and the following passage is particularly ennobling. "*History*", he tells us "*is a voice forever sounding across the centuries the laws of right and wrong. Opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall, but the Moral Law is written on the tablets of eternity. For every false word or unrighteous deed, for cruelty and oppression, for lust or vanity, the price has to be paid at last; not always by the chief offenders, but paid by someone. Justice and truth alone endure and live.*" And so Freemasonry commanded respect then as it does now, and the forces which had outlawed Freemasonry were themselves overwhelmed. The Moral Law is its own defence and need not be vindicated, and so as Freemasonry developed the Grand Lodge of England was formed in 1717. Freemasonry had become a consolidated moral force and carried the brethren through the 18th. and 19th. centuries with its penetrating lessons. It inspired our American cousins in their colonial and revolutionary history. It brought comfort and consolation when privation and suffering gnawed at men's physical and mental capacities of endurance. It was the Moral Law which gave the Freemason his real voice, and it is one that can speak to every echelon of the social strata. Hence monarchs have been promoters of the art, have patronised our mysteries and joined in our assemblies.

But, just as the Moral Law tell us that "*man cannot live by bread alone,*" so the Freemason cannot live by ritual alone. In its appeal to all that is noble in the heart and soul of man, the ritual itself, no matter how eloquent the charge, and sincere the Freemason who delivers it, unless and until it is carried to its logical conclusion, is like a sublime but unfinished symphony. The concepts embodied in the ritual are capable to harmonise and restore faith and trust. They are powerful in the overall

effort to renew a well-balanced and responsible society. In their practical application they teach for all mankind what is meant by brotherly love, relief and truth, also charity in its fullest splendour. They help mankind find its self restraint which comes from prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. It would do well for such concepts as these to be carried out with the same earnest and assiduous effort with which the charges are learned. There are still many who would treat the charge with the seriousness upon which almost life and death depend. This too is good, but still better is the level of meticulous concentration designed to make them a habit in their daily avocations and leisure.

The Freemason is taught to be moral man. This must not be confused with any restrictive definition. It is a deep all embracing morality which makes the good man because he knows how to live with his fellow man, who is without prejudice, without temper, always living with the sort of dignity which enables him to understand his fellow and his opinions with mature discussion and not overheated argument. Above all to be readily available to assist, or advise, to the best of his ability, any person within reach of his cable-tow, never to irritate others by forcing his views on them, but by an honest and humble attitude of mind and action which attract respect and admiration. It is with humility that the Freemason best reflects the Craft in his home, his work-place, his community and in his duties and responsibilities to his nation.

The Moral Law as it is applied to Freemasonry provides the Freemason with a self-discipline to live and work by its standards. The secrecy which is so much a part of his training, I must repeat, is not intended to hide the beauty of the concepts he learns, the word or the symbol, as much as it intends to emphasise and ensure that he conducts his life quietly, without displaying an overbearing character which by its performance reflects a desire to tell people how good he is. It is the sort of life which makes the most impression. It is, in fact, the strength of the Freemason.

In response to the question which offers alternatives to Freemasonry in their concern for society's needs, and there is no denying that community service today reaches out to a wide cross-section of the duties which stem from the Moral Law, Freemasonry's concern turns inward first and performs through the person of the Freemason. The implementation of the acts of charity, welfare, or any other important concept now become more efficient because it is based on the knowledge a Freemason has of himself in relation to the concept. All other organisations with the same noble aims, perform outward with the assumption that the person performing is sufficiently acquainted with it. It may be sufficient, but it cannot satisfactorily grasp the inward meaning the concept gives to the Freemason who has experienced it either in an individual personal experience "*poor and penniless*", or in a collective drama in which he experiences that "*the dust returns to the earth as it was*" (Eccles.12:7). This personal experience heightens the awareness of the Freemason when he looks outward to the pressing needs of his fellow human-beings.

A word also for the Freemason who complains of too much repetition in the Lodge room would not be out of place. Learning of every kind is a process. It has to grow slowly before it makes its impact. When dealing with the Moral Law there is really so much to be derived from it that the points which filter through the ritual become endless. A wise sage put it this way "*Turn it and turn it over again, for everything is in it, and contemplate it, and wax grey and old over it, and stir not from it, for thou canst have no better rule than this*" (Avot 5:25). Freemasonry is a philosophy. It is not an entertainment, and with the passing of time and observance of the ritual in the ceremony becomes more interesting, more meaningful.

With the Moral Law the Freemason acquires, there emerges an extraordinary sense of solidarity, and unity of purpose, among all the brethren of the Craft. They number many thousands in this State alone. It is a powerful team and every brother can do so much to alleviate the pressures and the anxieties materialism is exerting on the moral system of society. Freemasons everywhere can no longer afford to keep their moral principles behind closed doors. There is a voice calling out there in the wilderness, to use Isaiah's phrase: "*Clear ye the way of the Lord. Make straight a highway for our G-d*" (40:3). That is the task of the Freemason today. It does not require anything more than a will, a motivation, to do it simply in the course of his daily routine, to develop the ideal character described by David in Psalm 15 "*who walketh blamelessly, worketh righteousness, and speaketh truth in his heart, who slanders not with his tongue nor does evil to his neighbour, in whose eyes a vile person is despised and honours them that fear the Lord, who is highly principled and not lent to usury.*" With such quality so much can be done to give society the uplift essential to

re-establish moral discipline, and so make the world a more secure place in which to live, and mankind relief and happiness.

It is interesting to recall a public lecture delivered by Professor Sir Mark Oliphant, the Nobel Laureate, entitled "Science and Mankind", before the 8th. New Zealand Science Congress held in November 1954. Inter alia he said: *"I can find no evidence whatsoever that the morality of mankind has improved in the 5000 years of recorded history ... Few men have the courage to abide by the teachings of Christianity which preaches the universal brotherhood of mankind, compromise may be the wisest course at present but the truth alone will save us."*

Sir Mark's views are well known. The question is whether the position has changed during the last thirty years. To believe in a fellow human being is the first step towards helping him. This is the spirit which will provide the evidence of which Sir Mark speaks. It is one which reaches out to the masses, Freemasonry has no dual code which some people with explosive emotions or obsessions see in the Freemason, one for his brother and another for all others. Yet, it is only when the Freemason projects what he has learned to unravel a confused society and its dilemmas that the fact is a convincing one.

I have already mentioned Simon son of Gamliel. His grandson of the same name says *"By three things the world is preserved"*, or better, *"endures by truth, by judgment, and by peace."* (Avot 1:18). In a comment on this adage the Talmud says *"The three are really one: if judgment is executed truth is vindicated and peace results."* Justice is truth in action in contrast to lawless might, and Truth, say the Rabbis, is "the seal of G-d". *"Let thy yea be yea,"* they continue, *"and thy nay, nay."* *They conclude with the words: "Have thy dealings with thy fellowmen been in truthfulness? For this will be the first question to be asked on Judgment Day."* There is a wealth of significance in this question for the Freemason. In his answer lies his real identity with the Craft which teaches him the Moral Law. As we look back across the centuries it does not require much stretch of imagination to realise that it is in the realm of moral ideas, and not in technical or material ones, that progress is made. Impressed as we all must be by the staggering achievements of modern science such achievements must not be mistaken for the heart of the civilization we are seeking to defend. We have only to look at the tremendous advance of technical ability to conquer outer space, but it has not given us any guarantee of survival. We have only to remember that a Nazi super war machine begot a holocaust unparalleled in the darkest days of human history, but a more sophisticated technology had destroyed it in twelve years. It was only with the Moral Law that right remained triumphant and gave the remnant of the holocaust a new lease in life.

Professor K.D. White of my home town Liverpool, teaching classics at Cambridge, tells us that present day society owes much to the Hebrews, the Greeks and the Romans. This may well be true, but what a difference in the values of the human being practised by all three. In ancient Greece a slave was but an 'animated tool' who could claim no more rights in his relationship with his master than a beast of burden. Agricultural labourers were chained, and if at any time it was felt there were too many slaves then they were simply exterminated as wild beasts. The grandeur which was Rome was even more detestable. The slave had no rights and was sent to horrible mutilations, even crucifixion at the whim of his master. Sick slaves were exposed to die of starvation, and Tacitus records that 400 slaves in one household were all put to death because they were under their master's roof when he was murdered.

In the Hebrew version, kidnapping a man or selling him as a slave was a capital offence. Cruelty of a master resulting in injury of a limb or organ, secured his freedom. The Moral Law teaches *"but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"* (Leviticus 19:18) extended to home-born and stranger alike (verse 34). Perhaps Rabbinic literature sums up the position best with these words: Rome is the language of war, Greece of beauty, and the Hebrews of prayer, and so the Hebrews outlived both Greece and Rome. It is a lesson to be learned in every generation, every age which tampers with the notion that physical strength and material possessions lead to enduring fulfilment. Hebrew is the language of the Volume of the Sacred Law and the Moral Law which is derived from it. Of course it is for every Freemason to learn the Moral Law for himself each understanding in accordance with his capacity, and yet, bound as he is to his brother by the "mystic tie" he finds renewed vigour in the knowledge that what he is learning is shared by others with a common concern for moral re-armament. He must know that material possessions are transitory, and they are left behind when *"man goeth to his long home"*. What he does take with him, however, is a

good name and good deeds. In these he will find his eternal home, and through them consummate his heavenly abode.

I have already referred to the universality Freemasonry expresses from the Moral Law. It is only left for me to make one more observation as we contemplate its source. To the Freemason this source is called the Volume of the Sacred Law. It is an open Bible on the Master's pillar. However, to a Mohammedan it symbolises the Koran, to the Hindu the Shastras, and to a Parsee the code of Zoroaster. Yet whatever name he wishes to associate with it the sublime message of the Moral Law is contained in all of them, and whatever name he calls it is really secondary to what he does with it. Every Freemason must judge for himself whether the VSL. is simply a book open on an altar, or an open book out of which he finds the ultimate truth in his search for meaning in his life as a Craftsman. Freemasonry and the Moral Law is a subject which directs attention to the question "*Where are our values*"? It is a corollary of the wider question "*Where are we heading as members of the family of humanity*?" If Freemasonry is designed to restore a sense of moral balance in the individual Freemason, it does so because its philosophy makes him an instrument in the service of mankind. In the quality of that service lies his success or failure in his attempts to find his real sense of direction. For in the final analysis, the recognition of a Freemason that he has a brother in the Lodge room is but a step forward to the recognition that there are millions of brothers and sisters in the outside world, and they form the great brotherhood of man. Added to this recognition is the answer to the initial question "In whom do you put your trust?" We all know that answer. It is in a universal Fatherhood of G-d. Freemasonry and the Moral Law as his constant companions, every Freemason has the opportunity to achieve both, and if not now - when?

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