

Published by the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of New Zealand.

16 February 2015

Underneath the Arches

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I have named this address 'Underneath the Arches', so depending upon your age 'Underneath the Arches' may bring to mind the popular song of the 1930s by Reg Connelly and Bud Flanagan; or if you are under say 30 years of age, perhaps it is the Golden Arches of McDonalds that spring to mind! However the Arches I wish to refer to are those of the Royal Arch and what exactly do we find underneath them? Secrets and symbols and it are these that I wish to discuss today.

In the Royal Arch we tend to think that we have the genuine secrets that were lost with the untimely death of our master Hiram Abiff; but what exactly are these secrets?

I believe they are many and meaningful and I want to explore a number today...

Before I begin you may have heard of the 80/20 rule, also known as the **Pareto Principle**, or the **law of the vital few** that holds in effect that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes, speaking organisationally 80% of the work is done by 20% of the effort; and speaking masonically only 20% of freemasons are Royal Arch masons – therefore 80% of freemasons are missing out on the genuine secrets of a master mason. As Royal Arch masons we owe it to our brethren to present them with the opportunity to discover those secrets.

Indeed are not all Master Masons informed that 'It is thus, my brother, that all Master Masons are restored from a figurative death with the **COMPANIONS** of their former toil...'

Before the delving in to the symbolism of the Royal Arch workings, I would briefly like to consider why the Royal Arch workings hold such fascination for the companions. To my mind I wonder if the fact that the Excellent Master and Royal Arch degrees in particular, along with most of the Cryptic Council degrees, concern a time when the oral traditions of the Hebrews were beginning to become codified, or written down; this being the time when the Western Spiritual journey may have said to have begun its metamorphosis into what we have today?

Now on to the secrets themselves...

Within Antient Freemasonry we are taught how to be born, to live and to die as both a man and then, perhaps, as a spiritual being, as a Royal Arch mason we are given the opportunity to consider the life beyond this material one. It could be said that the three degrees of Antient Freemasonry deals with our relationship man to man; whereas the Royal Arch degrees if considered accordingly deal with our relationship Man to his God...

On to the degrees themselves let us begin at the beginning of the Royal Arch journey – the Mark Degree...

The **Mark Master** degree is concerned with the building of the first temple around 974BC, in which the candidate represents a fellow craft mason who constructs and discovers a key part of the building of the Arch in King Solomon's temple. In this degree the candidate devises his own "mark" for each stone he fashions – hence the name of the degree.

It should be remembered that whereas in NZ this degree forms the first step in the Red degrees towards the Royal Arch, in England the degree is stand alone having its own Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons. If you look at the degree as it relates to the Excellent and Royal Arch degrees you will see it doesn't. The latter two degrees are centred on the rebuilding of the temple, not the building of KST.

This degree essentially completes the fellow craft degree, and along with the Operative degrees dramatise the actual working in the quarries.

It is worth remembering that the Mark Master degree is, in fact, two degrees; firstly that of the Mark Man, where you learn to make your mark; and secondly that of Mark Master Mason being more in line with the development of the Fellowcraft degree and its officers.

An essential lesson of this degree is that just because something is discarded (the Keystone) it does not necessarily become less valuable. The keystone was deliberately tossed into the rubble by the workmen

under the instructions of expert Master Overseer, the head of the Overseers. Whereas it is the craftsman who executed the design on the stone who then discovers it amongst the rubble.

This is a shining example of how a man needs to pursue his direction if it is the correct direction, regardless of the opinions of the experts. This does not mean disobeying the instructions of those in a place of instruction over you, but maintaining faith in executing the designs in the knowledge that right will win out. Remembering that the Mark Man did obey the Overseers and discarded the stone, however it was he who then located it amongst the rubble.

The need to maintain ones belief in the face of adversary and the suppression of superiors is dramatised. In this circumstance the craftsman had the intuitive knowledge of the stone and its location in the face of the ignorance of the Master Overseer.

Another lesson contained within this degree is that all men are entitled and will receive equal reward. This is demonstrated in the degree in the fact that all men line up to receive their reward, be it a penny or a peppermint! In essence this reward is a spiritual reward, whereby the diligent application of hard labour will be rewarded by spiritual growth.

A further lesson is that of accuracy – the accurate completion of the keystone to the design ensured that it is fit for the job.

The Keystone that the craftsman has diligently worked on contains further symbolism. The stone has an angle of 30°, or the 12th part of a circle and as such would represent one of the signs of the zodiac – currently we are leaving the sign of Pisces (the fish representing Jesus – the “fisher of men”); two thousand years ago we were leaving the sign of Aries (the lamb again Jesus the “lamb of god”); we are now entering Aquarius (perhaps we will adapt the Christian Church to a water symbol – however this would be a massive turnaround given that water is a feminine symbol; however Aquarius is a very new age symbol).

The overall lesson being that we ought to use our mental faculties to test the validity of the task at hand, and having decided on the course of action, the necessity of seeing it through to completion, in spite of adversity, to the best of our skill and ability.

Thus we can see that as well as being a very entertaining and interactive degree the Mark degree is both deeply symbolic and contains many morals to reflect upon.

Next we have the **Excellent Master Degree**

In the **Excellent** Master degree we move ahead in time from the Mark Master Degree 450 years to 537BC and we hear of the preparations surrounding the return from captivity by the chosen people (in the intervening years KST has been destroyed and the survivors taken away to Babylon). Where the candidate represents one who will return to Jerusalem with the passwords and signs gained in Babylon, the land of captivity, after the decree of Cyrus was given effect by Darius.

In passing, it is worth noting that this degree is not often practiced in England, where it is known as the “Passing of the Veils”

The central theme within this degree is the passing through three of the Four veils and understanding their symbolism. In the degree the veils in order are Blue, Purple, Scarlet and White with their assigned symbols being – Blue: Air, Purple: Water, Scarlet: Fire and White: Earth. This symbolism needs not be elaborated on as the degree explains why these colours are chosen; however it is useful to note that these four elements were once believed to be all the elements in existence, with everything else being derived from these.

Depending on what you read there is other symbolisms to be derived from these veils –

Old Testament sensibilities hold that the Blue veil would be the tribe of Dan; the Purple the tribe of Reuben; the Scarlet the tribe of Ephraim and the White the tribe of Judah.

Represented by Blue: Eagle; Purple: Man; Scarlet: Bull and White: Lion; this is borne out by the banners used by our Royal Arch Chapters.

These representations lead on to astrological symbols as follows: Blue: Scorpio (an astrological equivalent of the Eagle); Purple: Aquarius (The water carrier – man); Scarlet: Taurus (the bull); and White: Leo (the Lion)

Whereas a New Testament scholar would represent the four gospels thus – Blue: John; Purple: Matthew; Scarlet: Luke and White: Mark.

All of these varied interpretations of the veils all have one thing in common; they represent a journey, a spiritual journey either that of a Jew, a Christian, a mystic, or an alchemist. In fact they all have the same destination – that of a Philosophers Stone, the growth and actualization of the spiritual being. Whether the journey is that of an inward spiritual journey or a real life sojourn there is a need for patience and determination in order to see it through.

Finally in this initial analysis we have the **Royal Arch Degree**

In the **Holy Royal Arch** degree the candidate, a sojourner from Babylon, takes part in clearing the debris from the destruction to start building the second temple, in so doing an Arch is discovered leading to the discovery of the Word that was lost by the untimely death of our master Hiram Abiff in the Master Masons degree.

This degree is a degree of threes – a number often thought of the “total”; being the sum of the odd and even, the masculine and feminine etc. The number three is throughout the degree – we have three principals, the three parts of the Grand Word; the three sojourners, etc.

If we look at the three principals we see that Zerubbabel represents the Body, Haggai the Mind and Jeshua the Spirit.

This representation is further illustrated if we look at the journey of the sojourners; they are returning from the land of Babylon to Jerusalem. Babylon was a place of excess and of plenty, very much a place of the flesh and the material world. Jerusalem, however, is their spiritual home. Thus we see their journey as a spiritual quest. Indeed the sufferings of those travelling from Babylon to Jerusalem on their spiritual quest is further illustrated in the “Red Cross of Babylon/Babylonish Pass” side degree.

This degree is also, perhaps, a degree of rebirth or a new cycle in that we are entering into the place of demise of the old temple in our quest to build a new spiritual temple.

A major theme of this degree is the clearing away of the debris in order to begin the rebuilding of the temple. Are we in effect clearing away the intellectual clutter of our minds in order to discover the altar within the crypt. In order to see the light we must first remove that which stops us from seeing.

This is indeed a degree of completion – it is both a completion of the travel through the veils into the Sanhedrin, the completion of the Holy Royal Arch but also, larger than that it is the completion of the three degrees of Antient Freemasonry with the discovery of the genuine secrets that supplant those substituted secrets of the third degree. Further to this it is the completion of the journey that began in the first degree with the birth of the man, the second degree is the growth of that man, the third degree is the death of that man in the hope of a spiritual resurrection; in the Royal Arch degree with the genuine secrets of a mason that man is assured of that resurrection with the discovery that the three fold name of God indicating the trinity.

Having investigated much of the symbolism of the degree let us consider the **Royal Arch** degree as Myth...

Myths are important legends that are more than stories as they contribute more than just entertainment value – they add to the commonality and make the community richer for the information they impart.

According to one Masonic writer myth is “an ancient and effective way of conveying truths about life to the receptive and properly prepared mind” (Lomas P58).

Myths contain important communal information and the allegories contain hidden knowledge for those that wish to scratch deeper beneath the very entertaining surface.

As man has developed and evolved he has placed great importance on ritual and ceremonies. But when man entered the scientific age he has largely done away with ritual, and I believe that, whether he knows it or not, he has lost something important as a result. Whereas traditionally there would be a coming of age initiation ritual amongst men, there is very little these days to mark the growth and development of a man. This is an

area where masonry fills a noticeable void. Each important step we take in our Masonic career, from the 1st degree to the Royal Arch degree and beyond, is marked with an impressive and memorable ceremony or ritual. While being a pleasant memory I wonder if it also serves a sub conscious need we have as a species.

Joseph Campbell, a world renowned researcher and author on the power of the myth states that myths serve four purposes:

Firstly the 'Mystical' function, which serves to awaken and maintain in the individual a sense of awe and gratitude in relation to the mystery dimension of the universe, so that he recognizes and participates in it

The second function of a living mythology is to offer an image of the universe that will be in accord with the knowledge of the time, the science and the fields of action of the folk to whom the mythology is addressed

The third function is to validate, support and imprint the norms of a given, specific moral order, that, namely, of the society in which the individual is to live.

The fourth is to guide him, stage by stage, in health, strength, and harmony of spirit, through the whole foreseeable course of a useful life.

Taking each of these functions in order we see that the Roayl Arch degree satisfies these requirements as follows -

Firstly – the mystical function is amply illustrated by the recovery of the three fold word of the degree – both this and Jehovah referring to the divinity.

The second function, of contextual setting, sees the working of the Royal Arch degree firmly affixed in the Old Testament framework – and is of its time – firstly in its setting in 500BC, but also as an 18th Century re-enactment of Old testament stories in order to reinforce morals of the day.

Thirdly – social norms. The norms that we aspire to live by are demonstrated by the dedication of the sojourners in sticking to the task at hand, in accepting the lowest work in the Lords service, and other such virtues are rewarded by the recovery of that which was lost.

The fourth function, that of providing a guide for the participant and the observer to live by are greatly illustrated both in the earlier degrees – for example, the keystone making the Arch whole in the Mark Master degree; and the Royal Arch degree, for instance re-establishing the book of the law, and the lost word in the Royal Arch degree give all thinking and feeling men a guide to life this life by and beyond.

This mythical interpretation is further illustrated if we look at the journey of the sojourners; they are returning from the land of Babylon to Jerusalem. As previously illustrated the journey from a land of excess to our spiritual home is very much a spiritual quest. The mythical purpose of norms to live by and a guide for our development are amply portrayed here.

The proliferation of threes within the degree is perhaps an ingenious way of tying the setting of this Old Testament working with the Trinity of the New Testament. Giving a little extra for those of the Christian faith to contemplate on, not at the expense of other belief systems, however. Indeed it is not a coincidence that in former times the opening of a Royal Arch chapter was with the words from John 1:1 "In the beginning was the word..."

Myths have become sidelined as we become increasingly secular and scientifically driven, a move which has seen our society becoming increasingly alienated and fragmented. This highlights a gap in our societies make up, an indication that something is missing and that we need something more. A spiritual something.

And that is where the Royal Arch working comes in. The Royal Arch working is indeed a mystic and spiritual quest, based on all that is best in myth, leading to the way back from whence we have come – i.e. union with our maker.

Taking that journey of the sojourners' one step further; a sojourner is one who reside temporarily in a place, a stranger in a strange land, if you will. Does that describe our time here on earth? Are we not just sojourning here, sampling the material delights of this world for a small time a sojourn away from our real journey, the spiritual journey back home?

As Royal Arch masons are we human beings on a spiritual journey, or spiritual beings on a human journey...

Mysticism

The degrees of Antient Freemasonry can be seen as being preparatory in nature, preparing the candidate for the mystical journey to be undertaken in the Royal Arch degrees. In freemasonry we were instructed to seek out the 'hidden mysteries of nature and science', which are 'veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'. These are clear road signs that we ought to be taking a mystical quest. And in what direction is the quest? I believe the clearest hint is given in the Grand or Royal sign – is that not the sign of an Arch and seeing that it is a Royal sign we ought to be looking in the direction of the Royal Arch.

There are other indications that a Royal Arch mason is of a greater preparedness for this journey; for instance in the early antient degrees after the candidate has been given the word of the degree he is immediately tested – not so with the Royal Arch words; likewise in the former degrees he is formally presented with the working tools in the Royal Arch degrees he sets to and uses the working tools.

I have more than once mentioned mysticism; in this context mysticism being an inward journey the destination of which is unity with the divine. The Royal Arch workings themselves cannot do this for the candidate or for the companion. The Royal Arch chapter can, however, provide a path or a map for the mystic journey. However, given its very nature the mystical journey must be that of an individual journey; as it is the journey of the individual's soul towards its originator.

The mystical learning is obtained by osmosis if you will. The Royal Arch workings present to our conscious mind intellectual principals and learning's, and at the same time, to our subconscious mind symbols; to both of which we may, in accordance with intellectual understanding and subconscious intuitiveness, apply a self discipline in order to rule and govern our passions and ourselves. Thus by precept and example we are exposed to a disciplined path back to from whence we came.

It may be that the combined energy of the companions present may provide a 'jump start' for that journey and raise the consciousness of the candidate towards its mystical quest.

In this manner the spark that can start the mystical fire does not diminish for the companion should he ignite such a reaction in the candidate. A flame shared doesn't diminish, whether it be a candle light or an inner light.

Kabbalah

In certain respects the Royal Arch degree workings are a mystery school for modern man, based on an older mystery school – that of the Kabbalah. Given the Old Testament settings of the ritual the Jewish Kabbalah is exceedingly relevant.

One of the central tenets of the Kabbalah being the Tree of Life a model of man in relation to the deity – a road map from and toward or deity briefly illustrated thus:

INCLUDEPICTURE "http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/k/Tree_of_Life.jpg" *
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Where the sepheriah numerical values are named as follows:

HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Keter.html" Kether, the Divine Crown

Ch HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Hokhmah.html" okhmah, Wisdom

HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Binah.html" Binah, Understanding

Ch HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Hesed.html" esed, Mercy

Geburah HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Din.html" Justice

HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Tiferet.html" Tiphareth, Beauty

HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Nezah.html" Netzach, Eternity

HYPERLINK "http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Hod.html" Hod, Glory

HYPERLINK "<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Yesod.html>" Yesod, Foundation

Malkuth, Material World

With the earlier numbers being more etheriel and the greater numbers being denser and closer to this everyday world.

Although the tree of life is a vast topic in itself you may catatch a glimpse of its subtle resonances if we use it as a blue print for Royal Arch officers thus...

We could therefore use this framework and place the officers of the Royal Arch upon it as follows:

Zerubbabel

Haggai

Jeshua

Scribe Ezra

Scribe Nehemiah

The Altar

1st Sojourner

2nd Sojourner

3rd Sojourner

Candidate

Or perhaps taking the six degrees as a whole

Zerubbabel

Haggai

Jeshua

Senior Warden

Junior Warden

Worshipful Master

Senior Deacon

Junior Deacon

Inner Guard

Tyler & Candidate

Indeed we could place the 10 spheres (or sepherioth as thye are called) upon the Royal Arch tracing board:

Of particular interest using this glyph we would see a correspondence between

1 The crown with Zerrubabel the highest office

6 Beauty, Christ Consciousnees and The Altar, or the WM

10 The Material World and the candidate

Among the other correspondances that would come to light if meditated upon...

Such as the form of the tracing board being that of an Arch in itself – that being the case then the place of 1 The Crown would be that of the Keystone – or in Christian religion God, in Jewish the tragrammaton we intpret as Yahweh or Jehovah; that which holds or foundation together and without which the rest of the structure crumbles into ruins.

It is worth remembering that there were two trees in the Garden of Eden and Adam took an apple from the tree of knowledge and not from the tree of life – consequently are we then perhaps to interested in knowledge and not life; in our effort to know everything are we forgetting how to live, more especially how to live spiritually?

Finally, my companions, I hope that this paper has given you something to ruminate upon and will encourage you to discover for yourself the secrets and symbols that may be found 'Underneath the Arches'.

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