

## FREEDOM AND FREEMASONRY

Oration delivered to Kirby Lodge, 2 February 2002

© Michael Baigent

When each of us came to be initiated we were first asked whether we were 'free'. And we answered that we were. But did we really understand what we were saying? For this challenge, and our assertion, is supremely important. Yet it is little explored in the complications of the ritual which followed. Nevertheless, it underpins our entire masonic journey, both then – with us – and now – with our newly made brother, and that yet to come.

In freemasonry, truths are veiled in imagery; not so much to hide them – although that is a popular understanding – but, paradoxically, to communicate them. This needs some explanation: they are hidden because they are not seen – like a face cleverly concealed by an artist in a painting ostensibly of rocks, or of a landscape. They are not seen because they entail a shift of perspective; such a shift of conscious awareness that, in its absence, these truths effectively do not exist. Such describes the secular world inhabited by ideologies and shallow social philosophies where answers are sought in focus groups or statistics; where theories masquerade as realities; where a well-shined form counts for more than integrity of purpose.

So how might we approach, perhaps find these truths? By recognising that in our hearts we already know them. Which makes the task one of remembering: remembering who we really are; where we really come from; why we are here. To do this we need prompting. We need catalysts which can evade the rational scepticism of our minds which have long been trained by the logical structure of our language into viewing reality in a rational and logical manner. Of course, this is very useful in our daily life, but not so useful in the search for meaning. It is difficult to prod such a mind into allowing thought patterns which are markedly different to emerge and grow. We need help in this task. And Freemasonry, with its symbols and rituals, exists for that very purpose.

While truth remains veiled in symbols, these provide a regulated and well-mapped set of paths into this unknown and apparently hidden destination which we seek. For symbols can be understood without rationality and logic which makes it easier to pass through those secular pillars in order that we may journey from ignorance to knowledge. Brother Clive: you long knew, but you now know, that Freemasonry is a journey. In your case, not a new one, but a variation on an ancient theme with which you are very familiar. Nevertheless, I hope that you have touched some of the depth which seeks expression in Freemasonry, especially so in this ritual of Initiation, where even the symbols are veiling a more hidden imagery, in layer upon layer of patterns of meaning in order that each Freemason can move ahead on his journey at his own speed, confident in the knowledge that, 'Where the name of God is invoked, no harm can ensue'. A line which can long be pondered upon for its layers of meaning.

You entered the temple. You attested to your freedom to choose and to journey ahead. You travelled a path, simultaneously actual and symbolic, where your self-concept was rocked and humiliated. But you passed the test and you were, in our temple, amongst our brethren, accepted into our fraternity; and into this lodge of freemasons, as a brother. This acceptance began when you were first presented to the Wardens as a candidate recommended for admission.

'Enter, Free and of Good Report' the Junior Warden said to you. Enter: Enter into our lodge as an equal. But further, enter on the journey of a freemason: that which travels from darkness to light, from the rough to the smooth. A journey where, instead of treading the rocky ground alone, you have kin to help you.

Of good report: your reputation as a man has preceded you. Your conduct in the temple has become you, and the Warden has confidence in the future success of your endeavours.

But free? Here is the heart of the matter; freedom sits at the heart of freemasonry. You had to be free to enter through the doors of our temple. You had to be unencumbered by social, political, or ideological baggage. Historically, in the days of travelling masons, you had to be free to work. But we are not now concerned with politics or history; we are concerned with meaning and with the timeless now. And here, talk of freedom means much more. It allows us to travel on the greatest journey a human being can make: towards that Light which is eternally present, absolutely beneficent and the very source of meaning and truth. Divine, we can call it, but it demands no names or explanations. For names too often get themselves lost and take us with them into their divided confusion.

Each man's journey is unique, yet, in order to begin it, and to make it, he needs to be free; for he must choose for himself, to begin: 'Step off with the left foot'; 'The first regular step in freemasonry'; 'Advance to the east in due form'; our Craft has all the symbolism if we but recognise it.

Freemasonry is based upon the realisation that once the journey has begun our faith and our hope can be transmuted within the crucible of compassion, tolerance, and a humble charity, into a living knowledge of the True – which, as masons, we speak of symbolically as the G. A. O. T. U.

Brother, welcome.

We are honoured to have you beside us as we too walk on that journey.