

Recommended Reading & Study for the Inquiring Freemason ©

By Bro. Victor G. Popow

To be sure our world is filled with all manner of sources for inquiry and study. While the internet may be filled with wondrous websites its also true that all kinds of quacks, self professed renegades and conspiracy fanatics also share space on the world wide web. For the new Freemasons there is much to discover and for the older Freemason's who have only regarded Freemasonry as typically an organization that dispenses charity and is largely a social club, these are likely the weakest of Freemasons for they truly "don't know that they don't know", and likely never will and can't be of much service directing a new Freemason in looking further. Freemasonry first and foremost is inspired by ancient wisdom and is largely concerned with the improvement of humanity inspiring each brother to find his or her secret, the true secret of Freemasonry may be found within each of its adherents, "Know ye not that ye are the Temple and the Temple lies within you" is the essential transcendental secret of the Craft. That we are all admonished to make a daily advancement in our knowledge and perhaps consciousness says to each one of us, don't waste your time exploring material reality (being a materialist¹) for you must learn to die before you die to know of the great secrets that lie inside us and all around us- a principally transcendental activity. Heavy thoughts indeed, but where to look and how to find? I'm convinced that no one person on our planet has the quintessential answer that we are seeking (if any of us are willing to seek at all) for each one of us is different in our natures and thus in our own enquiries. The search for truth, your own truth, in whatever form it may be, is a long arduous and often "two steps forward" and "one back" kind of adventure. No one book, no one person and no one Temple has the answer that we need but if we are willing to look with an open and reasoning mind, we will see more and find more. One just has to be of the conviction that they will take the first step and commit to themselves to seek inner truth. The true lover of wisdom or philosopher will walk as Pythagoras, or Melchizedek, Solomon, or Thumosis III, Plato, Plotinus, Heraclitus and any number of initiated did, in the path of light towards inner wisdom which includes, but also lies beyond, any material knowledge that is coveted in todays society.

A path must be suitable and inspiring for the inquirer and thus the approach to truth will be based upon a persons interests and preferences. Authors too will have their own ideas and approaches, with biases and technical details. Some may be more entrenched in only what they can see, while others will be inspired to speculate more based on what they 'feel' or are convinced of, so the seeker has to be discriminating themselves. There are so many good paths to start upon, so many good authors and interesting fields of study, especially today, that if one starts down a tributary one may join with a river that links to an ocean and in this way, if one is patient and determined, one *can* find a larger treasure indeed. However seeking a larger truth, like anything, working out in a gymnasium for a better body, pursuing a education in a particular field, building wealth towards independence, its all the same really, the search for meaning, your own spirituality requires the same discipline and just plain hard work in putting the separate pieces together. It is up to each one of us to 'find the right', to find the 'numinous' or spiritual as psychologist Carl Jung stated. Each of us must voluntarily descend into the bowels of the earth and travel to hades, the place of the dead and to come back having transcended ourselves. This is the hero's journey, having sacrificed ourselves that mythographer Dr. Joseph Campbell spoke of and to die and to rise up once more in true Gnosis, "to know" and not just simply dogmatically believe.

If we begin our quest through Freemasonry we certainly want to find out about its rituals and how they have evolved but also how they have changed. It is known that in and around 1717 large amounts of

¹ See *The Science Delusion -Freeing the Spirit of Inquiry* by Dr. Rupert Sheldrake. The modern materialist [scientist for example] is under the delusion that science already understands the nature of reality and the 'fundamental questions' have been all been answered however even Sheldrake one of the worlds most innovative scientists states that science itself is constricted by a dogmatic belief system that labels reality as only what is material or physical, that nature is purposeless, and consciousness lies only within a chemical biological soup within the brain.

esoteric knowledge of the Ancients or Antient Freemasons were stripped by the 'Modern' English Freemasons. Some basic reading, very general to any Freemason should be *The Hiram Key* by Knight and Lomas. Not terribly accurate but will cause the fresh Freemason to think and to look further (I really can't encourage any of the Knight and Lomas books but i admit to having read most of them, they're a good effort, but just not terribly accurate). The history, functions of a Lodge and its symbols are well covered pictorially and informatively by *Symbols of Freemasonry* by Barnes & Noble, or a more detailed analysis may be garnered through English Freemason Bro. Kirk W. McNulty's book *Freemasonry, - Symbols, Secrets and Significance*. Bro. McNulty also does a detailed study of the degrees in his *The Way of the Craftsman-A Search for the Spiritual Significance of Freemasonry*. *Symbolism in Craft Freemasonry* by Colin Dyer is also a great book. If one is a lover of Freemasonic ritual then *The Early Masonic Catechisms* by Knoop, Jones and Hamer are worth study (more academic) as is *The Early French Exposures 1737-1751* which a very curious study into early 18th century ritual by Bro. Harry Carr. A really great book, that i picked up at the United Grand Lodge of England years ago was an older book *The Making of Mason* (1978) by Bro. George Draffen that really speaks to the rights and privileges of a Freemason as well as the degrees. A great book to lend or purchase for the new Freemason.

From a more esoteric standpoint, when i started in the Craft i was told to stay away from esoterist Manly P. Hall as his work was seen by the more 'basic' and 'materialist' Freemasons as fringe, exotic and nonsensical. But Hall's books *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, *Lectures of Ancient Philosophy* and his occult opus *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* all have value in terms that they are detailed studies on all aspects of esotericism. As well, though somewhat dated and written in more early 20th century prose, *The Meaning of Masonry* by W. L. Wilmshurst speaks deeply about the purpose of the Craft and its three degrees including the Fourth Degree or the Degree of the Holy Royal Arch Freemasonry. *The Masonic Letter G* by Paul Foster Case who was a Freemason but also founded The Builders of the Adytum (BOTA) is also worth reading. I would also recommend the book *The Inner West- An Introduction to the Hidden Wisdom of the West* by Jay Kinney who was the founder and editor of the esoteric spiritual magazine Gnosis. This book introduces the reader to the Western Hermetic Tradition- Hemiticism, Neoplatonism, secret teachings, esoteric brotherhoods and mystics and teachers. For the esoterist as well there is the classic *Morals and Dogmas* by Albert Pike, somewhat dated now, but certainly worth a study as is the *Kybalion*. *The Master Game* by Graham Hancock & Robert Bauval (2011) is also very comprehensive.

If one wishes to explore more of the history and influences of the Craft then this path will lead one into the so called 'higher degrees' of the Craft or the more esoteric ("eso" from the Greek meaning 'hidden') and such books as *The Temple and the Lodge* by Bro. Michael Baigent, and the books by Bro. Rev F. de P. Castells (early 20th century and hard to find but essential in terms of understanding the evolution or perhaps devolution of the Craft from 1600 onwards) *The Genuine Secrets of Freemasonry Prior to AD 1717* and *English Freemasonry in its Period of Transition 1600-1700* are fundamental and connect the Antient or Ancient Freemasons to early Holy Royal Arch Freemasonry, the Rosicrucians and early Kabbalists. As well a very great book by Prof. David Stevenson is *The Origins of Freemasonry- Scotlands Century 1590-1710* which is a distinctly more Scottish historical perspective on early Freemasonry. Dr. Stevenson's *The First Freemasons, Scotland's Early Lodges and their Members* is also recommended. *The Golden Builders- Alchemist, Rosicrucians and the First Freemasons* by Bro. Tobias Churton is also well written, historically accurate and presents a very interesting perspective. Churton also wrote *The Magus of Freemasonry- the Mysterious Life of Elias Ashmole-Scientist, Alchemist, and the Founder of the Royal Society* that i would also recommend. One would also do well to study any of the books by Dame Francis Yates PhD- *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* and her *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*. *The Byrom Collection-Renaissance Thought, the Royal Society and the Building of the Globe Theatre* by Joy Hancox is a must read that explores remarkable and diverse influences of those who were at the crossroads of the Rosicrucians, Freemasonry, mysticism, Kabbalistic philosophy, numerology, cosmology, amazing stuff and very revealing. As well a little older but really great is *The Treasure of Montseguer* which studies the Cathar heresy and the nature of the Cathar Secret by Walter Birks and Bro. R.A. Gilbert.

If one chooses to look deeper into the building roots of the Craft, the Christian confraternities or monastic orders possessed much in the way of obscure information, classical knowledge of the Romans and Greeks. Knowledge of building, science, astronomy, astrology, chemistry, mathematics and geometry came via the Arabian culture who inherited this knowledge after the fall of the Roman Empire and flowed through into the Crusaders who brought this knowledge back to Western Europe. The building guilds of the Monastic orders and the Knights Templar involve topics of sacred geometry, sacred number and divine proportion as well as many other esoteric thoughts and should be a field of study for an inquiring Freemason. To this end, I highly recommend Bro. Paul Nadon's *The Secret History of Freemasonry-Its Origins and Connections to the Knights Templar*. Secondly, an important book *The Templars Legacy in Montreal, The New Jerusalem* offers a wealth of new information of the importation of Western occult thought to the new world. *First Templar Nation* is newly published (2013) by Author Freddy Silva and points to a far more knowledgeable and esoteric spiritual Knights Templar than is generally understood. *The Temple- Meeting Place of Heaven and Earth* by John Lundquist and *Sacred Geometry-philosophy and practice* by Robert Lawlor are classics. *Chartres-Sacred Geometry, Sacred Space* by Gordon Strachan and *The Mysteries of Chartres Cathedral* by Louis Charpentier are also must reads regards to sacred geometry and cathedral building. *The Secrets of Solomon's Temple-Discover the Truth That Lies at the Heart of Freemasonry* by Bro. Kevin Gest is also filled with numerical philosophy and transcendental truth's. *Talisman-Sacred Cities, Secret Faith* by Graham Hancock & Robert Bauval also cover wider aspects of the meaning of the Craft, and how sacred knowledge has passed through generations and other cultures to influence us today. *The Secret Zodiac's of Washington DC- was the City of Stars Planned by Masons* by David Ovason is also a must read if one wishes to have a wider understanding of many aspects of sacred building and sacred knowledge. *Sacred Architecture* by A.T Mann, *A Beginners Guide to Constructing the Universe* by Michael S. Schneider, *The Return of Sacred Architecture* by American Bro. and Architect Herbert Bangs are all worth reading. If one wants to look a little deeper *Sacred Geography of the Ancient Greeks- Astrological Symbolism in Art, Architecture, and Landscape* by Jean Richer is older but gives one a larger perspective of how ancient man had manipulated the very landscape to bring heaven and earth closer together. Not to forget *Heavens Mirror* by Graham Hancock, a wonderfully illustrated text that takes the reader around the world to different civilizations and explains in detail its connections to the sacred and how and why the ancients built to inspire humanity. And lastly the reader must seek out *The Divine Blueprint- Temples, Power Places and the Global Plan to Shape the Human Soul* (new 2012) by Freddy Silva that explains the techniques, the science and motivations of the ancients in their construction of their unique temples and sacred spaces around the planet which were built to influence our consciousness. A truly great book.

I believe any true Freemason who wishes to see the *real* reason for our initiatory three degrees and their significance must study the rituals and beliefs of far earlier times. Though Freemasonry is not the lineal descendent it was certainly influenced or inspired by the ancient Mystery Dramas that were conducted in ancient Greece, Egypt and Asia Minor. To deny these early influences and their similarities is irresponsible in my humble view. The ancient Lesser and Greater Mysteries were transcendental in purpose and were meant to cause human psychological growth and inquiry and this is still today, a central aspect to our Craft and the meaning of its degrees in the 'basic' and 'higher degrees'. Our own Third Degree York Rite ritual states: "To the man whose mind has been moulded to virtue and science, nature presents one great and useful lesson more, the nature of himself" and in the Scottish Jurisdiction's ritual: "Let the emblems of mortality which lie before you, lead you to contemplate your inevitable destiny, and guide your reflections to that most important of all human studies, the inner meaning of life, the knowledge of yourself." Indeed if we even reflect upon early Christian customs and writings we find an entire corpus of rituals relating to the Mysteries which I believe influenced early Christianity; "The kingdom of God cometh not by observation: Neither shall they say, lo here! Or lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." And in the Nag Hammadi Gnostic Gospel of Thomas we find: "Jesus said, "If those who lead you say, 'See, the Kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty

and it is you who are that poverty." An inquirer will want to read *The Jesus Mysteries* and *Jesus and the Lost Goddess - The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians* by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy. Entirely central to the meaning of our Craft. As well i would recommend a study of *The Gnostic Gospels* by Elaine Pagels PhD, for through this study you will see the transcendental thread that has come to us from distant times and what was once symbolic has become dogmatic, institutionalized and literalist. A "materialist" or religious fundamentalist or fanatic will completely deny these books, but if you have an open mind and are ready to understand that our ancient brethren partook of ceremonies that relayed sacred information through allegory and myth, then a Freemason's eyes and mind will be opened. After all, do we not read that Pythagoras travelled for twenty two years and studied the Mysteries found in Greece, Egypt, the Middle East and Asia Minor. He was a lover of wisdom and studied and was initiated into many Mystery schools. We also read that Moses was introduced into the wisdom of Egypt by the temple priests for they were the keepers of transcendental or divine knowledge. Additionally, Canadian Author and Anglican Minister Tom Harpur writes of the symbolic (not literal) truth's of Christianity and a practicing Freemason will be startled to read *The Pagan Christ* (as well as Dr. Harpur's other offerings) and see how early symbolic Pagan Mysteries were the crux of thought, inquiry and the influence upon Hermetic initiatic groups through Western Europe into modern times. *The Jesus Papers* by Bro. Michael Baigent presents unique and new perspectives into beliefs, illumination, and transcendence that will tie the Craft to early pagan and pre-Christian mysticism. Anyone who has the discipline to explore this path will find that studies of ancient history, symbolism, sacred building, initiatory societies, Hermetic philosophy all serve to teach us about a transformative knowledge that is not lost but ever present, that is within each of us and all around us.

I also believe that any study of Freemasonry cannot be properly done without a review and an understanding of the religion and initiatic rites of ancient Egypt. This is the parent, the major influence of Freemasonry from Hermeticism which began with Hermes, the mythical god-man who brought knowledge from the gods to humans whose parallel is Enoch (as related in the higher degrees of the Cryptic Rite in York Rite Freemasonry). It is from Hermes that we learn of the maxim "that which above is so below" and this was the major impetus of sacred builders who wished to direct humanity's attention to the heavens with sacred structures that would affect consciousness on the earth- from the Giza pyramids to the Neolithic Newgrange, to medieval Chartres Cathedral, to the Beau Arts architecture of the Manitoba Legislature. Sacred structures and their symbolism are meant to direct the human psyche and this knowledge was embraced by and perpetuated through Hermeticism. *Serpent in the Sky- the High Wisdom of Ancient Egypt* by John Anthony West is a must read (for the more serious reader i recommend the writings of R. A. Schwaller De Lubicz), as is *The Hermetica - the Lost Wisdom of the Pharaohs* by Freke and Gandy, as well *The Egyptian Hermes* by Garth Folwer, *The Temple of the Cosmos- The Ancient Experience of the Sacred* by Anthropologist Jeremy Naydler PhD and his *Shamanic Wisdom in the Pyramid Texts- The Mystical Tradition of Ancient Egypt* brings us closer to ceremonies and beliefs that Freemasons will readily understand. Inquiring Freemasons will be startled by the fact that over 4,500 years ago living Pharaohs were initiated by the Priesthood of Horus to intentionally bring the Pharaoh's closer to the divine through their death resurrection dramas or ceremonies. After which the King was considered the living arbiter between heaven and earth. This rising and dying god-man enactment is found in all ancient cultures and finds a direct link to Freemasonry through the slain architect Hiram Abiff.

In the reading of Freemasonic history and philosophy one should keep their eyes open with the annual transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society or *Heredom* which is serious in its scope with well written and researched papers. In Canada we have the Transactions of the Fat Lux Lodge of Research #1980 produced by a dedicated Bro. Garth Cochran out of Calgary Alberta which is consistently laden with good quality papers from submitting brethren from all over Canada and further afield.

There are indeed many, many other books, books and websites that can offer a Freemasonic seeker a solid path. As i have mentioned there is also lodes of conspiracy nuts who espouse their theories, most i would have to comment are completely misguided or deluded and i would advise people to not go down that rabbit hole otherwise things could become very clouded. While i think there are other dimensions and conscious beings outside of normal waking consciousness, i don't think alien species are involved

with governments and Trilateral commissions in secret plans, backed by the British Monarchy, and the sinister 33d degree Freemasons to alter our genetic makeup, or reduce the populations of the world. It gets pretty strange. There are many genuine other topics to discover- from *The Sufis* by Idris Shah (an excellent read) to Shamanism (the underlying spirituality that likely gave rise to all known religions 40,000 years ago- read *Supernatural* by Graham Hancock or *The Cosmic Serpent* by Jeremy Narby PhD), i highly recommend any book by author Daniel Pinchbeck, to science, new physics and the study of consciousness, a great read is *The Way of the Explorer* by Apollo astronaut Dr. Edgar Mitchell and *Science and the Akashic Field- an Integral Theory of Everything* by Dr. Ervin Laszlo. All of these will begin to shape your mind in terms of what may constitute consciousness and what consciousness may be a part of. These kinds of explorations are real mind bending leading edge perspectives on who we might be and what we all may truly be a part of but *this is* the seekers path. This to me brings together science and spirituality towards a new reality. By reading the new science and matters concerned with consciousness we begin to see what the ancients may have been speaking to. Thus, not only do we link science and spirituality, but this aligns us to the enlightened ancients and perhaps our inevitable future. For Freemasonry to exist and proliferate in our future it is necessary to promote reading and study which will give us new thinking and encourage real dialogue in our organization. Unlike modern materialism telling us there is no purpose in things, that consciousness is a function of a chemical or biological soup restricted to our bodies, that there is no consciousness in nature, that nature is purely mechanical, purposeless with no goal or direction, that unexplained phenomena is illusionary well i believe that Freemasonry and its ancient influences as well as new science tells us differently. If one is *really willing* to explore Freemasonry and indeed life more properly, in its entirety, i think we find a much different, complex and wondrous life all about us. This is a true path validated by science and spirituality that tells us that there is intentional purpose, consciousness exists inside and outside of us, our minds and souls are very much more powerful than we can imagine, we are all connected to each other and much, much more. I believe each one of us is a piece of God itself, that we are all capable of Gnosis or a direct knowledge of God whatever that Force, Consciousness, or Singularity may be and this is what mysticism, the sacred Mystery dramas of the ancients, and new science conveys and Freemasonry gives to us. Given the chance, i believe that books are a great start and may support your own path but at the same time, books can only take us so far in our explorations because sooner or later the intellect only takes us so far and the toe must be dipped into the stream, and the initiate must have the courage and the willingness, to sooner or later experience life itself through sacred ritual and experience.

“The best life is spent preparing for death”. Plato

“Know yourself” Inscription at the Temple of Delphi, Greece

“The nature of God is a circle of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere. Empedocles 5th century BCE

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