



UGLE Oration

With the Centre

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An exploration of the phrase '*With the Centre*' - '*a point from which a Master Mason cannot err*'.

Summary

This is a crucial and significant revelation to all Freemasons is that the journey we are on is an interior one. We are travelling towards the centre, our centre, that still point which lies deep within ourselves.

Keywords

Third-Degree, Centre, Interior, Journey

With the Centre - The Stillness at the Heart of Now

When the Master opens the lodge in the Third-Degree, he and the Wardens have a short dialogue, one which firmly establishes that all Freemasons are truly on an important journey of discovery: a quest to find the 'genuine secrets' of Freemasonry.

The Master asks, where might these be found? The Senior Warden answers, '*With the Centre*', adding that this centre is 'a point from which a Master Mason cannot err'. This is a crucial and significant revelation to all Freemasons for, as we shall see, use of this symbol reveals that the journey we are on is an interior one. We are travelling in search of the very origin of morality, truth and spirituality. We are ambitiously seeking no less than the source of all life and in order to reach that gateway which opens into this knowledge we are travelling towards the centre, our centre, that still point which lies deep within ourselves.

All spiritual traditions point out the importance of finding and touching, this still centre of the Self, for it is here, at that centre, that each of us can touch the very source of life. We can call this centre the soul, but to become tied to words can trap us into thinking that one term is better than another. All of us know that the sacred resides beyond words, for words are but symbols for a greater reality which does not easily allow itself to be confined by images or names. And, of course, there is the danger is that the name itself might, in confusion, be identified with the truth which lies beyond. And how much bloodshed has that error caused over the centuries?

All sacred traditions have techniques by which this journey inwards to the centre might take place: by silent prayer, by still contemplation, by meditation, even by rhythmic movement, dance or ritual. In some of the great cathedrals of Europe there are, marked out on the floor of the nave, great mazes which can be walked and which, by means of a tortuous path with many twists and turns, eventually lead the pilgrim to the centre.

This symbolic journey inside the cathedral is very similar to that which we find in Masonic ritual: we traverse around the sacred space in the temple until, after using the correct steps, we make our way to the source of knowledge: to the east, to the middle chamber, and into the grave of the architect himself. Behind the symbolic journey lies the allegory of the building of the Temple of Solomon, and behind this allegory is a profound message about our reality and how we might learn, and then live by, its secrets. By steadfast and faithful progress, by honest cunning, and by the persistence of one who knows that where the name of God is invoked, no danger can ensue, we can find our way back to the centre.

We need to discover some technique by which the mind might cease its labour and go to refreshment within the eternally flowing stream of life. Freemasonry has always held this knowledge which is a measure of the antiquity of our tradition, however later it might have been drawn together in the form that we know it today. It has long taught this knowledge using symbols and allegories drawn from the story of the building of the Temple of Jerusalem. For we build a great interior temple which, within its Holy of Holies, lies that still centre where we can enter into the presence of the Divine just as the High Priest - a symbol of our perfected Self - did so long ago.

But what does the ritual mean when it speaks of the ‘genuine secrets’ of a Master Mason? Why not just ‘secrets’? This is important for us to consider: the word *genuine* comes from the Latin word for ‘innate’, and links to the word meaning ‘to be born’.

Thus, the ritual is referring not to secrets brought into Freemasonry such as the grip, token or word, but secrets which are at the very birth of the Craft itself; secrets which gave birth to Freemasonry, those secrets of which Freemasonry is both the child and the adult. Secrets which are the very source and origin of all we do. Secrets which, we are told, are to be found at the centre.

And what does the ritual mean when it states that this centre is the point from which a Master Mason cannot err? Here it is alluding to another symbol, that of the Masonic compasses which, with one point stabilised upon the centre, can be used to inscribe the geometric design of the circle which, for Freemasonry, symbolises the bounds of good and evil. This depicts an important truth: that morality depends upon a clear knowledge of the boundaries needed out in the world, boundaries determined and validated by their connection with the centre, which reveals, along the way, that morality emerges from this still and silent place of divinity. When acting from the sacred point within we truly cannot err for we are acting with the Great Architect himself as our partner. When we act from the centre we cannot but reveal those Masonic virtues of brotherly love, relief and truth.

Correct action, the means of living on this earth with satisfaction and productivity, is mentioned in the Charge to the Candidate in the Third-Degree: *‘Be careful to perform your allotted task while it is yet day’*. And how can we be sure to do this task correctly? By listening to the ‘Voice of Nature’ which speaks truth from this still and silent centre within ourselves, and by acting within the bounds of morality.

This, Brethren, is asking that we act in harmony with ourselves and our world. To follow such a path, we need to seek out those still moments when the ‘Voice of Nature’ is not drowned out by the rough and tumble of modern life; by the willful disregard modern life seems to have of the inner stillness and silence. We need to seek these moments out, put time aside for them, to trust and to follow our heart.

It is this still centre from which emanates the voice of Nature, that *‘which bears witness that even in this perishable frame resides a vital and immortal principle’*: in other words, this small still voice bears witness to our own immortality. About that we can be confident. As we can also be confident that we can defeat the terror born of ignorance and allow the divine light to dawn within.

##END##

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Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*.
Rudyard Kipling

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