

The Lost Keys of Freemasonry

by Manly P. Hall

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INTRODUCTION

Freemasonry, though not a religion, is essentially religious. Most of its legends and allegories are of a sacred nature; much of it is woven into the structure of Christianity. We have learned to consider our own religion as the only inspired one, and this probably accounts for much of the misunderstanding in the world today concerning the place occupied by Freemasonry in the spiritual ethics of our race. A religion is a divinely inspired code of morals. A religious person is one inspired to nobler living by this code. He is identified by the code which is his source of illumination. Thus we may say that a Christian is one who receives his spiritual ideals of right and wrong from the message of the Christ, while a Buddhist is one who molds his life into the archetype of morality given by the great Gautama, or one of the other Buddhas. All doctrines which seek to unfold and preserve that invisible spark in

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man named Spirit, are said to be spiritual. Those which ignore this invisible element and concentrate entirely upon the visible are said to be material. There is in religion a wonderful point of balance, where the materialist and spiritist meet on the plane of logic and reason. Science and theology are two ends of a single truth, but the world will never receive the full benefit of their investigations until they have made peace with each other, and labor hand in hand for the accomplishment of the great work – the liberation of spirit and intelligence from the three-dimensional prison-house of ignorance, superstition, and fear. That which gives man a knowledge of himself can be inspired only by the Self – and God is the Self in all things. In truth, He is the inspiration and the thing inspired. It has been stated in Scripture that God was the Word and that the Word was made flesh. Man's task now is to make flesh reflect the glory of that Word, which is within the soul of himself. It is this task which has created

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the need of religion – not one faith alone but many creeds, each searching in its own way, each meeting the needs of individual people, each emphasizing one point above all the others.

Twelve Fellow Craftsmen are exploring the four points of the compass. Are not these twelve the twelve great world religions, each seeking in its own way for that which was lost in the ages past, and the quest of which is the birthright of man? Is not the quest for Reality in a world of illusions the task for which each comes into the world? We are here to gain balance in a sphere of unbalance; to find rest in a restless thing; to unveil illusion; and to slay the dragon of our own animal natures. As David, King of Israel, gave to the hands of his son Solomon the task he could not accomplish, so each generation gives to the next the work of building the temple, or rather, rebuilding the dwelling of the Lord, which is on Mount Moriah.

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Truth is not lost, yet it must be sought for and found. Reality is ever-present – dimensionless yet all-prevailing. Man – creature of attitudes and desires, and servant of impressions and opinions – cannot, with the wavering unbalance of an untutored mind, learn to know that which he himself does not possess. As man attains a quality, he discovers that quality, and recognizes about him the thing newborn within himself. Man is born with eyes, yet only after long years of sorrow does he learn to see clearly and in harmony with the Plan. He is born with senses, but only after long experience and fruitless strivings does he bring these senses to the temple and lays them as offerings upon the altar of the great Father, who alone does all things well and with understanding. Man is, in truth, born in the sin of ignorance, but with a capacity for understanding. He has a mind capable of wisdom, a heart capable of feeling, and a hand strong for the great work in life –

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truing the rough ashlar into the perfect stone.

What more can any creature ask than the opportunity to prove the thing he is, the dream that inspires him, the vision that leads him on? We have no right to ask for wisdom. In whose name do we beg for understanding? By what authority do we demand happiness? None of these things is the birthright of any creature; yet all may have them, if they will cultivate within themselves the thing that they desire. There is no need of asking, nor does any Deity bow down to give man these things that he desires. Man is given by Nature, a gift, and that gift is the privilege of labor. Through labor he learns all things.

Religions are groups of people, gathered together in the labor of learning. The world is a school. We are here to learn, and our presence here proves our need of instruction. Every living creature is struggling to break the strangling bonds of limitation – that pressing narrowness which

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inhabits vision and leaves the life without an ideal. Every soul is engaged in a great work – the labor of personal liberation from the state of ignorance. The world is a great prison; its bars are the Unknown. And each is a prisoner until, at last, he earns the right to tear these bars from their moldering sockets, and pass, illuminated and inspired, into the darkness, which becomes lighted by that presence. All peoples seek the temple where God dwells, where the spirit of the great Truth illuminates the shadows of human ignorance, but they know not which way to turn nor where this temple is. The mist of dogma surrounds them. Ages of thoughtlessness bind them in. Limitation weakens them and retards their footsteps. They wander in darkness seeking light, failing to realize that the Eight is in the heart of the darkness.

To the few who have found Him, God is revealed. These, in turn, reveal Him to man, striving to tell ignorance the message of wisdom. But seldom does man understand