

THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES

27th Degree Essay

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The intent in this essay is to assemble my understanding of the Ancient Mysteries and to share an application of them in contemporary life which is considered to have been a life-changing experience. At first glance this would seem to be a daunting task. On closer inspection it would seem to be an impossible task. It would be impossible to begin with the large scale overarching content of the Ancient Mysteries and attempt to reach downward toward an application in contemporary life. In the parlance of computer programming of years ago: one would be faced with building a near infinite number of nested do-loops. The approach then will be to proceed in reverse, addressing how a relatively small and brief recent experience in contemporary life relates to the Ancient Mysteries. The example may be viewed as hardly life-changing, and so it must be for those who have already grown older and are not likely to have, and should not expect to have, very many more life-changing experiences.

The Ancient Mysteries are spread throughout the rituals and lectures of the Scottish Rite Degrees. The example to be discussed here relates to the 7th Degree. Readers need to recall the golden key and ebony box (symbolic of the human heart) which contains, according to Albert G. Mackey, "the secret designs and motives of our conduct by which we propose to erect the spiritual temple of our lives." (Hutchens, 2006, p.39) The 7th Degree example serves well and is in keeping with the statement by Hutchens (2006, p.39) that: "justice and uprightness alone can unlock for us the mysteries contained in the higher degrees and enable us to advance to perfection."

It seem prudent at this point to provide some relief to the reader by producing evidence that this essay might actually connect with a short and recent personal experience, and with matters relating to the Ancient Mysteries and a life-changing experience. This can be accomplished by presenting some conclusions first; at the beginning.

Masonry teaches life lessons which have been distilled from, and are evidenced by, the written record of man. These lessons deal with philosophy and religion, God, man himself, the natural (material) universe including our world and the moral avenues we should follow through life. The written record, expressing human thought on these matters, has been constructed in pieces by representatives of all the old and ancient civilizations. The thoughts stem from faith and reason and some from pure revelation. These written constructions were prepared independently, in the main; but also include many serious efforts towards integration. Beyond the written record, Pike (1871, p.371) also reminds us of the universal language of symbolism, which contributed to the expression of the ancient mysticism before the advent of writing.

The Ancient Mysteries are these very constructions; and therefore, the content of Masonry and the content of the Ancient Mysteries are very similar. The Ancient Mysteries are drawn from the ancient mysteries, the mysteries and the Mystery Religions, as well as from the more formal structured beliefs existent today. The "mystery" involved in all of them concerns matters of which we have little if any true understanding.

More specifically, the authors of the mysteries did not fully understand what they were writing about; which is not to imply that we today have this understanding either. On

some matters we of course know much more than the ancients did; but not of the most basic matters such as concern God, human existence, time and space, the origins of energy and matter and so forth.

That the Ancient Mysteries are spread throughout the teachings of the Scottish rite is evidenced by the fact that the word "mystery" fills four pages of the digest of *Morals and Dogma* (Hugo, 1909). Hutchens (2006) also cites the ancient mysteries throughout his text, including references to the opinions of other Masonic authors. Hutchens (2006, p.182) reminds us, too, that in Masonry we undergo a "symbolic initiation into the mysteries practiced by the ancients." There is of course more to this statement than the inferred entrance to a ceremonial.

The personal experience gained of late which is cited here relates to motives of conduct and justice. The experience took place last week when I was seated, for the first time, in the County Circuit Courtroom as a potential member of a jury. The jury was to try a case which held forth a possible life sentence. We learn from Pike (1871, p.391) that the practice of justice is a great moral lesson of the Ancient Mysteries. Although I cannot say I recalled this while in the Courtroom, I will say that I recalled the teachings of the 7th Degree.

While seated on the hard wooded benches listening to the Clerk and the Judge giving instructions, I examined the four men seated at two tables in the front. All but one was dressed in suit and tie, and was white. The black man, at the table to the right was dressed more casually. As it turned out, he was the defendant; and I consciously cautioned myself to remain objective and unprejudiced.

As the jury selection process got underway (I was number 35 in the pool of 65.) I considered my potential obligation to listen carefully, retain and analyze the factual information and make a determination on the facts. I pictured a circle containing alleged fact which I was to constrict by evicting falsehood and then determine truth from the residue left within the circle.

Then I noticed something about the defendant. It was striking; he wore glasses. The glasses and frames were so shiny ó more than "like new" they made me suspect that the lenses had been formed from optically clear, non-refracting glass. The frames too, must have been new. At this moment the defendant and attorneys were told to approach the bench. When the defendant stood I observed that he was quite tall, well built and about thirty five years of age. He could have passed for an athlete ó except for the eye glasses, which made him appear quite meek and otherwise unimportant to his surroundings. I immediately considered the possibility that his defense attorney had "dressed" him for the occasion.

By now we had been told of the alleged crimes (drug sales, possession and masterminding illegal drug organizations) and seen pictures of the witnesses that were to be called during the trial. I could definitely "see" that the defendant could "fill-the-bill" of

a drug-lord or associate drug-lord, and that his makeup actually softened that look quite nicely.

Biting my tongue, I convinced myself of the need to be fair and objective. I recalled the teachings of the 7th Degree and my responsibility to be open-minded and unprejudiced, to be attentive, objective and impartial; but, if I had to make a wager at that point ó he was guilty.

As it turned out, all of the Jury members to be seated were selected from the first 33 members of the pool. I didn't make it. But, two days later I read in the newspaper that the jury had been dismissed by the Judge and a guilty plea (with plea bargaining) had been put forth by the defendant. So, I was right with my mental bet. More importantly, I had overcome the basic instinct of making a final judgment based on incomplete evidence.

The teaching from the Ancient Mysteries, the moral lessons that account for justice, had been placed before me. For the first time I had actually tasted the possibility of helping to determine an outcome that could potentially imprison a person for the rest of his life. Now I know the feeling of having this responsibility, and now I know why this lesson had so influenced the ancients. This marked the only instance I can recall for myself of being able to clearly understand something that had been experienced equally by the ancients so long, long ago. An experience that brings forth a willingness to force yourself to be fair and objective, when there is no apparent reason why you should worry about such matters. What is it within us that makes us give a damn about someone who is even so much as alleged to be associated with evil; and we get to define what's evil?

Another value of being a Mason, a Scottish Rite Mason had been realized through the Courtroom experience. But, an overarching question remains. Do others who may not be familiar with Masonry or the lessons of the Ancient Mysteries have any knowledge or belief to support their decision-making? Do they have alternative materials to rely upon? Or, would the instructions from the Judge have been sufficient for them? I suspect that the instructions would have been sufficient. The instructions from the Judge were clear and concise and actually had a flavor of the early American writings of Albert Pike.

The spectrum covered by the essay is broad and has not provided space for a brief remark concerning the Ancient Mysteries which needs to be told. The Ancient Mysteries were mysterious to those at the time. And many of the same mysteries remain today; as Albert Pike would say - still shrouded in darkness. On the other hand some of the mysteries have been successfully dealt with as a result of serious study. The luminaries are no longer believed to be possessed by spirits and they are known now to be places and not mere objects. We can predict the locations and motions of the luminaries so precisely that spacecraft can be projected to them; yet we still do not understand gravity ó the name we give to the force that appears to attract the spacecraft to the luminary, and we really must be vague in defining a force. This example from the sciences and mathematics and can be readily understood.

Even more interesting are those questions concerning God and the Ancient Mysteries. This is so because there is no way to resolve matters of faith through reason; we don't know the answers and will never be able to, regardless of our collective study. Mankind seems to have been content with developing a small hand-full of religions for use in any particular age. Between the ages there may have been more, but most of these were largely experimental and short lived, or so it appears from our perspective. The most interesting aspect of these religions that have survived for a thousand or two years is that they are based on revelation. Certainly this is true for Christianity and Islam. How can this be?

References

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