

15° Knight of the East (or of the Sword or of the Eagle)

The Spiritual Values of the 15° (Syllabus Item 7).

by Yasha Beresiner 32°

Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words.

Keep your words positive because your words become your behaviour.

Keep your behaviour positive because your behaviour becomes your habit.

Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values.

Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

The spiritual values to be found in the 15° may be considered under three separate perceptions: that of the individual characters mentioned, most prominently Zerubbabel, Prince of Jerusalem and Cyrus, King of Persia; that of the events in the legend, namely Cyrus's dream; the captivity and freedom of the Jewish brethren, the victorious crossing of the bridge over the Euphrates and similar incidents and finally, the spiritual perception of the candidate experiencing the conferment of the degree on his person.

SPIRITUALITY

The definition of spirituality will differ from person to person. It is generally accepted, however, to be an awareness of the undefined and inexplicable 'something' that lies beyond the grasp of our limited minds and of our five (or nine) physical senses. How can it be otherwise, when even normal events that go on daily around us are so often misunderstood or ignored? Ordinary earthly events, selfishly disregarded, simply because they are outside the immediate comprehension of our normal intelligence.

Every one of us can bring himself to a spiritual level of well being. It needs no more than a stage of awareness that elevates us just above the daily and familiar comfort zone of our lives and from which we are so reluctant to separate. Clearly, spirituality is not to be confused with religion, no matter how closely the two may be related.

CYRUS, ZERUBBABEL & MITHRAS

The values of spirituality of love and non-violence are manifest in the good that man can do in the brief period of his life on this earth. In this context, Zerubbabel is an especially well qualified individual to represent spirituality at its best. Of direct Royal descent, a Prince of the House of David, he has the dignity and human qualities of character that enable him to achieve such important and great historical events of timeless consequence, namely the

leading of the Jews from 70 years of Babylonian captivity and the laying of the foundation of the second Temple in Jerusalem, *inter alia*. He embodies all the high qualities that a leader of a nation needs. He is honourable, dutiful and courageous and his total adherence to honesty and truth are recognised by King Cyrus, who identifies him as a righteous man who loves peace and is dedicated to the welfare of his people.

Cyrus' actions and the part he plays in Zerubbabel's success are as emblematic of spiritual values as can be expected. Known as Cyrus the Great, he is recognized for his achievements in human rights, in positive politics and an acumen in military strategy. His influence on Eastern as well as Western civilizations has lasted to this day. He was the founder of the greatest empire the world has ever known, covering most of Asia and the Caucasus. His beneficial rule remained a successful model for centralized administration in other empires, establishing a government working to the advantage of its subjects.

It is because of his friendship with Zerubbabel that Cyrus is referred to, in Jewish biblical sources, as 'Messiah' or 'the anointed one' (Isaiah 44:24). The only gentile to be so called. The friendship between Cyrus and Zerubbabel can be traced, in the story told to us in the 15°, to their mutual initiation into and the study of the Mysteries of Mithrasⁱ.

FIFTEENTH DEGREE

The action-filled 15° affords a multitude of symbolic events that are interspersed with spiritual values. The varied titles attributed to the degree: *Knight of the East, Knight of the Sword* or *Knight of the Eagle*, are a reflection of the complex and long and changing history of the legend associated with the numerous degrees of the Order and the development of the Rite.

The degree is already found in the 25° system of the A&AR created by Stephen Morin in the 1760s, which was brought to Albany, New York in 1767 by Henry Andrew Francken. Francken had created several manuscript copies of the original text. The system was finally absorbed into the Scottish Rite in 1801. The manuscripts by Francken (extant today in the libraries of the Northern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite in America (1783), the United Grand Lodge of England (no date), the Ancient and Accepted Rite for England and Wales (1781) and one, also undated in Lahore, Pakistan), include complete rituals of the period, namely from 4° Secret Master, to 25° Prince of the Royal Secret. The title attributed to the 15° in the 1781 manuscript is curious and interestingⁱⁱ. It reads:

15th Degree Masonry renew'd, or the Sword Rectified, such as is practised in the Grand Lodge of Prussia and France, the Islands of Hispaniola, Jamaica and in the Province of New York, viz. Bordeaux, Marseilles, Toulon, Cape Francois, Cayes de Fonds, St. Mark, Port au Prince, Kingston in Jamaica and Albany in the Province of

New York established by the Most Illu. Bro Steph en Morin Prince of the R. Secret &c &c &c grand Inspr. genl. and Revived by H.A. Francken Prce. of R. Sret. Depy Inspr. general of all Superior Lodges over the 2 Hemispheres.

NUMBER 70

The seventy year captivity of the Jews in Babylon has repetitive numeric significance with spiritual overtones. Seventy is made up of two elements seen as two numbers, namely the perfect seven and the ten which represents God's law. Thus 70 symbolizes perfect spiritual order. The Torah, or Old Testament, was translated from Aramaic into Greek by 70 scholars and it was 70 Elders who accompanied Moses to Mount Sinai; the Sanhedrin of Israel's Great Tribunal consisted of seventy elders, excluding the High Priest.

The return of the Jewish people to the Holy land is a spiritual achievement manifest still today in the existence of the State of Israel established in 1948.

THE BRIDGE

Notwithstanding the heavy spiritual symbolism of crossing of the bridge over the river Gadara after a victorious battle, the struggle and victory over the ruffians shows that spiritual determination and faith will forever allow justice to prevail. True spirituality will only be achieved by the strength of our minds, overcoming our weaknesses and struggling against temptation and malice, a concept inherent in the three letters on the bridge: 'LDP' (*Liberté de Penser* or *Passer*)

We need to identify the good that is in each one of us and draw it out and overcome the personal obstacles that prevent us from practising the spiritual values to be found in us all. Kabbalah refer to this as discarding or penetrating the 'Clipa' that engulfs our being. Every action has a reaction and bad actions may have good reactions. The attempted robbery from Zerubbabel of the riches and treasures for the Temple and the loss of the signet ring symbolising the honour of his appointment as a Noble of Medea and Persia, granted him by Cyrus, has repercussions that may be seen as positive. His loss of the presentation made to him by Cyrus induces Zerubbabel to create this 15° *Knight of the East*, which may otherwise not have seen the light of day.

THE CANDIDATE

The most blatant manifestation of the spiritual value in this 15°, however, is the experience that the candidate enjoys, participating in the events that are disclosed to him. The candidate emulates Zerubbabel until he is conferred the degree and every effort is made to generate an ambiance of spirituality within the confines of which the story unfolds. The purple, crimson and blue hangings in the Hall of the West reflect the sad scene of Jerusalem destroyed, from the ashes of which the spiritual rising of its people is due to occur. The candidate

cannot but be impressed and led to a state of contemplation by the saddening dullness of the light emitted from 70 candles, a reminder of the years of captivity and suffering, when only spiritual dedication ensured survival.

The contrast with the brilliantly lit and plush Council of Chamber of Cyrus is intended to keep the candidate aware of the contrast between captivity and freedom, earthliness and spirituality. The depicted reminder of Cyrus' dream is the most important of the spiritual elements which led Cyrus to quickly concede freedom to the Jewish people and which the candidate now experiences first hand. Kabbalah recognises the human eyes as the windows to our souls and dreams as our souls leaving our bodies when we are asleep, observing and guiding from a distance.

In this state of mind of spiritual preparedness the candidate reaches the bridge which he will readily identify as the symbolic struggle to allow the emergence of his spiritual well being liberated from the confines of earthly materialism.

Every degree from the fourth to the fourteenth in the Lodge of Perfection has elements of spirituality readily identifiable: the loss of Hiram Abif and its repercussions (4° to 8°), the capture and punishment of the three Ruffians (9° and 10°) and the destruction of the first Temple by Nebuchadnezzar (14°). They are by way of preparation for the experience that is to be encountered when the story is resumed and Masonry is now renewed with the 15°. Here the Mason candidate is elevated unto a new plane of experience of symbolism and, more importantly, spirituality and its very special values.

ⁱ It should be noted that the Mithraic Mysteries, although based on the Persian god Mithras, were a mystery religion and 'Order' practised only by the Romans from the 1st to 4th centuries AD. It is referred to by Roman writers as 'Mysteries of Mithras' or 'Mysteries of the Persians' and today it is known as 'Roman Mithraism'. There is no evidence that the Mysteries were in existence as a functional entity at the time of Cyrus and Zerubbabel in c BC550.

ⁱⁱ Maybe not coincidentally (but at a spiritual level for us yet to understand), the writing of this paper coincides with the recent World Conference on Fraternalism, Freemasonry & History which took place in Paris, France 27 to 30 May 2015 under the auspices of The Policy Studies Organisation. Directly preceding the conference a workshop was held, led by Bro Dr Brent Morris and Bro Prof Paul Rich, when four of the original Francken Manuscripts were brought together for display and analysis. These had never previously been on public display together.