



THE GUARDIAN

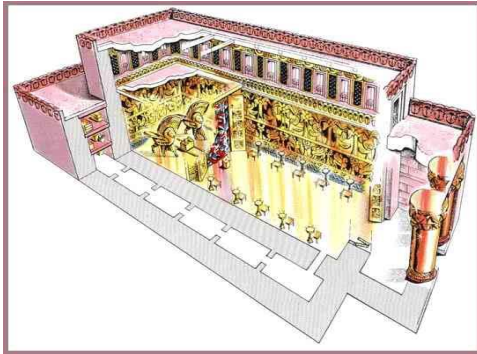


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National Bodies of York Rite Masonry

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- * General Conference Grand Royal and Select Masters
- * Grand Encampment of Knights Templar U.S.A.
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Message from the Director:

On the 8th of May 2008, I attended the world conference of Masonic Grand Lodges in Washington, D.C. There were a colossal amount of information discuss between the Grandmasters from all around the world. My intent is to bring some of the information for your pleasure and review in the upcoming articles. I hope you enjoy the articles as much as I have.

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First session

"DARKNESS AND FRATERNITY"

Most Worshipful Grand Masters,

The great mediaeval mystic Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that the time when he lived "had its nights and they were not a few". He meant - in spite of the strength and hope of his unshakeable faith - that darkness, in *his* world, was real, operating, and disquieting. If we jump a few centuries forward, we find the same concern in Kant, but expressed in a different language. Darkness, in this case, is not represented by subtle seductions of the "world", but "the incapacity of man to use his intellect as a guide", with the risk to fall a prey of any kind of illusions: first the very insidious illusion of not using personal critical and rational capabilities, yielding to dogmatism, intolerance, and overwhelming desire.

The red thread uniting Bernard and Kant reaches us.

So much darkness obscures us and the force of dogmatism, intolerance, and overwhelming is always alive and active. At any time of the day, men, women, children, communities, and entire nations suffer and die. They suffer because they have no freedom, because they cannot express themselves, because they cannot rely on criticism and reason. They cannot fully be themselves. However, they also die of starvation, and lack of water, or healthcare. This happens when man, any man, is not allowed to express his own and not conformist ideas; when man is not allowed to practice his religion; when an ideology is imposed on man; and when he is supposed to be blind executor of other people's will.

The ancient darkness has not disappeared. It has a different name, but it recalls old fanaticism, old intolerance, old overwhelming, old superstition, and old desire to subjugate man. In spite of the efforts made for centuries, they have not been removed from the Light of culture, progress, democracy, and freedom. They eternally reappear to prevent human progress, and wring the "right words" from humankind: as his wicked murderers did with Hiram. Guiltily, we do not realize that. Guiltily, we think of something else.

A man and a Freemason cannot forget that their essence is Light, and this Light – in which the Great Architect of the Universe expresses himself – shall dissolve darkness and restore the dawn of real progress. “Sunlight” sings the chorus at the end of *The Magic Flute* by our brother Mozart “has driven away the night, / destroyed the power seized by hypocrites”. Hope animated and motivated the revolutionaries who – in 1789, on behalf of the Light of reason – dared destroy the dark Bastille jail, for the triumph of the Light of Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood.

The darkness of intolerance, fanaticism, tyranny, overwhelming, and contempt of man sometimes takes the contours of culture, borrows the words of religion, and uses science, politics, and economy. However, in reality, they are opposed to real culture, real religion, real science, real politics, and real economy. With this background, it is evident that one of the historical tasks of Freemasonry is to fight against darkness. A Freemason can do it, because he knows darkness, its power, its subtle charm, and seductive force, because he tries darkness in his initiatory path, or when he sinks in the depth of earth in the Meditation Room before he goes back up to the Light. By contrast, he also knows them by comparing life and Lodge work – the greatest school of living – with the darkness that permeates the profane world.

Fighting for Light against darkness is the greatest challenge in the future for Universal Freemasonry, if it wants to be at the level of great battles that Freemasons have always undertaken in the past. From Benjamin Franklin to Simon Bolivar, from Garibaldi to Allende to the many glorious Brethren who opposed dictatorships and tyrannies in any part of the world.

In a world where religions, ideologies, and philosophies are in crisis, Freemasonry must bring its own message. It must have the courage of being equal to its centuries-old history, and translating the wisdom contents originating from its History, Tradition, Symbols and Rituals into a modern and effective language. It must proclaim to all that man is its centre and that the implementation of the will of the Great Architect of the Universe to the Glory of whom we all work is found in the renewal of this man, in his freedom and his happiness.

We must be proud of being what we are, without false modesty, but trying to be equal to this task. Following this direction means undertaking a strong, virile, noble, and chivalrous commitment.

In this spirit, the fight against tyranny, intolerance, dogmatism, and ignorance must actually become our password. It must become the word that links the chain uniting Freemasons all

over the world. This is what expresses the authentically and nobly revolutionary content of the Trinomial "Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood" at the highest level: revolutionary because it wants to defeat darkness, anywhere it is.

Therefore, it would be desirable to continue the great work already done by our dear Brother Jackson and further strengthen all what is useful to stigmatize fanaticism, oppose tyrannies, and support "the damned of earth": poor, outcast, humble, and despised people, and those whose words are not heard. The institution of a World Freemasonry Day against any fanaticism may be an opportunity to make our continuous commitment for freedom and progress of man clear and evident at a world level.

Most Worshipful Grand Masters,

Freemasonry cannot avoid undertaking the challenge of modernity, otherwise its meaning, consistency, and future would be affected. We must be aware that we are the upholders of an ancient dream: constructing – or reconstructing, if you prefer – different and better man, a man who can look into another man's eyes – no matter his ethnic group, geographical origin, ideas, or religion – and say "You are my brother". For this dream – which contains the essence of esoteric message – we are here in Washington, with our common passion for man and desire for better man. Our wish is to take man out – as Michelangelo's Moses – of the block of marble where he his prisoner.

Being the upholders of a dream is a huge responsibility, but also a destiny leading us towards the Light, provided that we bring it to all those who share our same experience of being in the world: in this world.

This experience is summarized in one great word. It is a word expressing Hope, Light, and Life: it is "Brotherhood". Brotherhood alone is not able to defeat fanaticism, intolerance, and tyranny: i.e. darkness.

In Brotherhood, there is the completion of our Initiation, the completion of an Esoteric Project coming from far away and looking ahead of us. It is the construction of Man's Temple. And dream upholders have always been great constructors.

First Session

G.L. of India

9th World Conference of Masonic Grand Lodges

Standing Up to Darkness:

Ethics: Cultivating Ethical Behavior in a civil Society

By M. W. Bro. Justice Devinder Gupta, O. S. M., M.W the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of India

Dear Brethren,

On 11th September 1893, a great Freemason of India Bro. Narendra Dutt, who subsequently renounced the world and became a "Monk", what we call a "Sanyasi" and known to the world as Swami Vivekananda addressed the World Conference of Religions at Chicago, and took the audience by storm, by addressing them as "Sisters and Brothers of America". Today standing before you, I would like to recall what he said then, as it has some relevance to the subject matter of today's discussion viz., 'Standing up to Darkness' He said:

"Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come now; and I fervently hope that

the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be death-knell of all fanaticism, of all prosecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal"

He also quoted on the occasion the following lines which is a translation from a well known Indian hymn:

"As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O lord, the different paths, which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee"

He further added:

"The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is itself a vindication, a declaration to the world the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: "Whosoever comes to Me though whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me"

Brethren, I am sure you will agree with me that there could not have been a better description of what we are passing through in the world today and a more appropriate emphasis of what we ourselves, as Freemasons believe - 'The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man' and the need for overcoming the evil of confrontation between people of different faiths. Since then several World Conferences of Religions have been held including a centenary of the Chicago convention in 1993 and later. In fact in one of the later conferences, a declaration - 'Towards a Global Ethic' was also passed. Yet as we know, things have not changed and we are here discussing the same subject, from the perspective of the principles and tenets of Freemasonry. In a sense it is not surprising that nothing tangible emerged from the earlier efforts, because it was drawn up on what they then considered to be a consensus emerging from the thoughts and concerns of people, belonging to different faiths, who did not have any common bond otherwise. Here is where we as Freemasons are different. We already believe in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, and are united by the common bond of Freemasonry and its excellent principle of Universal Brotherhood.

A recent study on behalf of the United Nations has revealed that among the most destructive forces on the Earth today is the hatred between followers of different faith traditions. Of the almost 50 armed conflicts identified at that time, the vast majority were said to have been motivated to a significant extent, due to hatred by the followers of one faith, for the followers of another faith. The arms industry, the largest industry in the world, larger even than illegal drugs and oil- is said to be supported to a significant extent by the hatred of the followers of one faith for the followers of another faith. Examples of the destructiveness of inter faith hatred are found daily in all major news papers and the media and almost all faiths appear to be involved not only in the spread of intolerance amongst them, but also, in acts of hatred and violence, in one or more of the ethnic and religious wars currently in progress, in different parts of the world.

It is said that when one person speaks of injustice, it is a whisper; when two speak, it becomes a talk, or a dialogue, but when many join, it becomes a force and a movement. If therefore our intention is to make Freemasonry a moving force, towards influencing and cultivating Ethics in Civil Society, we have I think to move rather carefully, because often Freemasonry is

accused of conspiring for the establishment of a World Order. As Freemasons, all of us are well aware that we have no such intentions, because we have always believed in the importance of the individual and his rights and duties, in fact more on his duties to society, than his rights as a member of it. At least I for one, am quite clear in my mind that while discussing this subject, we must carefully define our role as Freemasons in society, particularly since the guidelines for presentation of the papers for discussion indicates that the paper must address practical and action oriented steps and recommendations, not theoretical concepts.

However before proceeding further, it is desirable to understand what we mean by Civil Society, in the context of our discussion. There are, I find, myriads of definitions of Civil Society, but the London School of Centre for Civil Society's working definition, is some what illustrative and apt in the context of our discussions.

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the

boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.

More recently, it has been argued in certain quarters that even non-political organizations in civil society are vital for democracy. This is because they build social capital, trust and shared values, which are transferred into the political sphere and help to hold society together, facilitating an understanding of the interconnectedness of society and the interests within it. I feel that our role as Freemasons will lie somewhat in this context of what has been referred to as 'Social Capital', which is defined as "those tangible and intangible ideas and concepts, which count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a

social unit"...The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself....If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient for the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole, will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations, the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship, of his neighbors.

Since Freemasonry is defined as a system of morality and is also recognized as a moral science, it will be appropriate to pause for a while to understand the two terms "morals' and 'ethics' The word Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos* - moral character or custom. Morality comes from the Latin word *moralis* - custom or manner. Thus both these deal with the customs or the manner in which people do things. Their modern meanings relate to the way people act - either for good or bad. In a sense therefore Ethics and morals are two sides of the same coin. Webster's dictionary says that morality means -of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior; expressing or teaching a conception of right behavior; conforming

to a standard of right behavior, sanctioned by or operative on one's conscience or ethical judgment.

So the principles of right and wrong behavior, define out morals. Inculcation of Masonic Principles therefore determines our morals and by the inculcation of these principles, we improve our moral, or rather reinforce our morals and become better men, because to become a Freemason, we must already be good upright men. Initiation into Freemasonry, simply so to say re -teaches us, those great moral principles that we have already learnt from our parents and from, hopefully, society itself. Freemasons are, or should therefore be, by definition moral people, who meet on the level, act on the plumb and part on the square, and walk uprightly before God and man, circumscribing their desires, and keeping their passions within due bounds. From morals must proceed ethics. Webster's dictionary defines ethics as - the discipline of dealing with what is good and with moral duty and obligation; a set of moral principles; a theory of system of moral values; the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group; a guiding philosophy; a consciousness of moral importance; a set of moral issues or aspects. We thus see that from

principles proceed morals and from morals proceed ethics and that each is dependent on the other as none can stand-alone. The principles of Freemasonry are also the same. No one principle stands alone, but works in conjunction, each supporting the other, into a pleasing unified whole. An inference can therefore be easily made that acting on the principles of Freemasonry, in all our lawful activities, we will be moral and upright men, acting with ethics that none can reproach.

All of us present here have voluntarily offered ourselves as candidates for the mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry, after having seriously declared on our honour that we are doing so, of our own free will and accord, un-biased by improper solicitations of friends against our own inclinations and un-influenced by Mercenary or other unworthy motives. Further, we have pledged ourselves that we have been prompted to solicit these privileges, by a favourable opinion pre-conceived of the Institution, a general desire for knowledge, and a sincere wish to render ourselves more extensively serviceable to our fellow creatures. The vows we took are also such that there is nothing in them hurtful to our feelings as men of honour,

nothing at variance with our religions beliefs, political opinion, or the allegiance we owe to the rulers of the State to which we belong.

Further, as Freemasons we are informed in no uncertain terms, that no other institution can boast of a more solid foundation, than that on which Freemasonry rests, namely the practice of every moral and social virtue. As we have already seen, it is this practice, which constitutes the ethics of a Freemason, both as an individual and Freemasonry as an Organization. I am sure that not only every Freemason present here, but also the civil society at large, will readily agree with the importance of the very first recommendations made to us as Freemasons, asking for our most serious contemplation, the Volumes Of the Sacred Law, charging us to consider them, as the unerring standard of truth and justice, and to regulate our actions by the divine precepts they contain. We are thereby taught, what can be considered as the golden principles of ethical behaviour viz., the duties we owe to God, our neighbour and to our self. To God- by never mentioning His name but with that awe and reverence, which are due from the creature, to His Creator, by imploring His aid in all our lawful undertakings, and by looking up to Him in every emergency for comfort and

support. To our neighbour - by acting with him on the square; by rendering him every kind office which justice or mercy may require; by relieving his necessities and soothing his afflictions; and by doing unto him as, in similar cases, we would wish, he should do unto us, and finally to ourselves - by such a prudent and well regulated course of discipline, as may best conduce to the preservation of our corporeal and mental faculties, in their fullest energy, thereby enabling us to exert those talents, wherewith God has blessed us, as well to His glory, as to the welfare of our fellow-creatures. We are also reminded of our duties as a citizen of the world, enjoining us to be exemplary in the discharge of our civic duties, by paying due obedience to the laws of any State, which may for a time, become the place of our residence, or afford us its protection, while at the same time not losing sight of the allegiance we owe to our native land. As an individual, we are recommended the practice of every domestic and public virtue, so that Prudence may direct us, Temperance chasten us, Fortitude support us and Justice be the guide of all our actions. The virtues of Benevolence and Charity are also recommended for our serious consideration, along with other excellences of character, such as Secrecy, Fidelity and Obedience. Later in the final charge given to us when we become full fledged

Freemasons, we are informed that to improve the morals and correct the manners of men in society must be our constant care, along with the excellent principles of recommending to inferiors, obedience and submission to equals, courtesy and affability and to superiors, kindness and condescension. We are told elsewhere that our aim is to be happy and communicate happiness. We are also informed that the principles and tenets of our profession, which are founded on the basis of Religious Truth and Virtue, teach us to measure our action by the rule of rectitude, square our conduct by the principles of morality, guide our inclinations and even our thoughts within the Compass of propriety.

Having thus given a comprehensive definition of Civil Society and after having dealt with at some length, on the meaning and definition, as also the connection between morality and ethics, in the context of what we believe and conform in Freemasonry, it will be appropriate for me now, to come to the practical aspect, as to how what I have stated so far can be taken further after discussion in this august gathering. I must also hasten to add that without understanding and appreciating the theoretical aspects, I feel that it will be difficult to spell out any practical approach, to this rather

abstract concept. In this context I would like to draw your attention to the Declaration of Human Rights, by the United Nations as far back as December 1948, consisting of 30 articles of basic faith for being adopted universally. In the year 2008, we are now in the 60th year after the declaration. The practical shape I feel that can emerge from the discussions we are having today, is to come out with what we may come out with a similar declaration emerging out of the 9th World Conference of Grand Lodges on what Freemasonry is and what Freemasonry stands for, called the 'Washington Masonic Declaration' on Cultivation of Ethical Behaviour in Civil Society.

No doubt, all Grand Lodge Jurisdictions, whether presently gathered here or not, are in their own way practicing the principles and tenets of Freemasonry and trying to spread its message, in their own fashion, within the conditions prevailing in their own respective jurisdictions, but now that we have gathered here as a group, such a Universal Declaration, can I feel help to take the movement forward, all over the world. I would like to take this opportunity of indicating what I feel could be the broad outline of such a declaration as follows, though not necessarily in any particular order of importance.:-

- We as Freemasons affirm that:
 - Freemasonry teaches a common set of core values, which can form the basis of global ethic, for adoption by individuals, as a way of life, to enable good men to become better members of society and thereby make the world a better place to live.
 - The Universal Motto of Freemasonry "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth" and the Masonic principle of the 'Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man', are best suited for adoption by all men, irrespective of the communities, races, nationalities and religions to which they may belong.
- We declare that:
 - We believe in the golden rule of "Doing unto others, as in similar circumstances we would wish that they should do unto us".
- We as Freemasons commit ourselves to:
 - A culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace and that we shall not oppress, injure torture or kill other human beings, or knowingly suffer others to do so if in our power to prevent it and conscientiously, forsake violence, as a means of settling the differences.

- A just social and economic order in which everyone has equal chance as an individual to reach his full potential as a human being.
- A global ethic of understanding one and another and to adopt Freemasonry as a socially beneficial, peace fostering and mature and friendly way of life.
- We as Freemasons collectively affirm:
 - That the global situation today needs a vision for people living together in peace, love and harmony by a global ethic we do not mean a world order by any single group, but confirm that the principles and tenets of Freemasonry, stretch across the world, overcoming, let alone geographical barriers, but also the artificial barriers of race, caste, colour, creed and religion
 - That global ethic is a fundamental consequence of binding values, irrevocable standards and personal attitudes and behaviour, as exemplified by the universal principles and tenets of Freemasonry.
- We also assert:
 - That every form of egoism, in the form of class, creed, religion, racism or narrow parochialism should be rejected, and that human beings should be united by strong ties of fellowship and universal brotherhood.
- We also believe:

- That what a global society needs is an inclusive philosophy as propagated by Freemasonry, which cuts across the artificial barriers that divide human beings and prevents them from becoming a global family which our Hindu Vedas call "Vasudeva Kutumbakam" - Family of God!

At the beginning of my presentation I had quoted a great Indian Freemason. By way of conclusion of my presentation, I would now like to quote another great and well known Indian, Mahatma Gandhi, an apostle of peace and non - violence, who advocated that "...we shall behave towards one another as children of the same parents, that we shall have no differences, that the sorrows of each will be the sorrows of the other and that each will help the other in removing them. We shall respect each other's religion and religious feelings and shall not stand in the way of our respective religious practices. We shall always refrain from violence to each other, in the name of religion". What he said in a certain Indian context, more than 60 years ago, I am sure you will all agree, applies equally, to what we see today, in various parts of the world.

I do hope my idea of a declaration emerging from this conference, somewhat on the lines indicated by me, as a practical outcome of our discussions, will find favor. I once again thank the organizers, for the opportunity given to me for presenting this paper. I convey to you all, hearty and Fraternal Greetings, both on my own behalf and on behalf of the members of the Grand Lodge of India. I also thank you for your patient hearing.

Masonic Integrity2nd Session**Images and Mirrors in Freemasonry.**

When man discovered the mirror he gradually lost his soul. He started to be more troubled with his image than with himself. Is this what happened to freemasonry in our different cultures? If society is our mirror did we, over three centuries of regular freemasonry, lose our souls and by this the spirit of masonry?

Did our ongoing effort to support ethical behaviour in civil society, to counterbalance fanaticism, intolerance and tyranny actually blind us for the duties and responsibilities we have within our Lodges and Grand lodges towards our own brethren? These questions I started to wonder about when I read the list of topics for this conference. I would like to address some issues that refer to masonry itself. From the mirror to the one who stands before it. What issues come from the mirror of the 21st century about our brotherhood? I only mention a few, often-heard, statements. Freemasonry is about:

- Conspiracy and danger
- Immature and naïve boy scouts
- Old men filling their empty hearts with funny rituals
- Guardians of non-existing secrets
- Elite with extreme right-wing tendencies
- Revolutionaries sabotaging governments
- Outdated old-boys network
- Minority organisation without any social relevance
- A secret society with unquestionable dogma's

And last but not least it is an organisation that doesn't meet the requirements of current social values like transparency and equality between man and women and therefore a suspicious organisation. The decline in membership worldwide, with a few exceptions, might be caused by the lack of attraction that comes from an organisation, which is perceived as such.

It could also be the other way around. Maybe the very existence of freemasonry allows society to become aware of the loss of its own soul? Is there a hidden force manipulating society, disguised as democracy? Is the free world facing a manic mood disorder disguised as growth by its blind tendency to expand (economic) territory to control and maintain power? Is the free world on its way to forget that brotherhood of men and appreciation of differences is at the core of human dignity?

"The answer my friend, is blowing in the wind", good old Bob Dylan would probably sing to us as a response to these questions. So when it comes to the future of freemasonry I recommend another lyric, by the former Cat Stevens. "I listen to wind, to the wind of my Soul, I don't know where I'll end up, only God really knows".

Out of the Past

So let's hold the question in our heart about who we are and who we want to become and continue listening to the wind that blows in and between our hearts. Let the future reveal itself and let's for a while turn our attention towards the past. Three centuries of freemasonry in the free world. Before we, as we man are so used to, go for the action I would like to reflect a little bit on the past with you. The future depends on asking the right questions, while the past provides us with answers that once were given. What answers did the past of freemasonry provide us with? As with my questions, I only mention a few:





- Hardly any and maybe no organisation in the world managed to survive for such a long time. The 252 years old Grand East of the Netherlands, that I represent here today, is older than any political party in our country and is even older than our Monarchy;
- During these centuries Masonic Lodges have been "safe" places for men of dignity and integrity because they remained truthful to their basic principles;
- The autonomous way masonry is organised has been an and still is an "Ideal Image" for how the world could be;
- Autonomy and individual responsibility of members in Lodges, of Lodges within Grand Lodges and among Grand Lodges all over the world without any controlling power over anybody is up to our days a unique management formula;
- Men of different times and cultures have proved to be able to be both supporters of their time in their responsibilities in society and at the same time managed to express Masonic values beyond time;
- By standing apart from politics and sectarianism the Masonic Lodge has always been a background for inspiration and support for its members. A background that stimulates every individual member to take moral responsibility for their membership in the world to the best of their understanding. This background is based on values and believes that are symbolically shared in our rituals, without imposing any particular time-bound action or particular body of knowledge onto any member;
- Through ritual, also known as "symbolic action", freemasons learn to value their inner world, they learn how important it is to use their insights in themselves to support their fellowmen and finally they learn to invest the best of who they are into the world without asking for reward;
- The Masonic ritual teaches us to take part in building a better world in an ambitious way without any attachment to perfection.

A place described as such is bound to be highly attractive. My brethren, I ask you: Can we say this is still true for our Lodges today? Especially in our time with its virtual realities on the screen of our computers, we see a tremendous increase of longing for authentic companionship, meaning and spiritual values. Do the real spiritual seekers come to our lodges or do they prefer to enter the world of Google to find what they are looking for, sitting behind the mirror of a computer screen. And when we manage to get them away from their screens and initiate them, do they find in the Lodge what they were initiated for? Is the Lodge a mirror that responds to this deep longing? Is the Masonic lodge really prepared for the young seekers of the 21st century? I don't think so, to be honest.

False gold and real gold

Three centuries of freemasonry has created a lot of false gold. We've build temples of stone, schools and hospitals. We impressed the world with famous persons who once were masons; we have spent a fortune on charity in our different societies. We practise our rituals in the way they were transferred to us. O yes, our ancestors really practised their understanding of masonry: Good men making the world a better place. We now live with the fruits of their endeavour in stone and in good manner, wondering what to do next. But where is the real gold of our time? For, "where there is false gold, there is real gold". Asclepius (III 25) once gave Egypt this warning:





"O Egypt, Egypt! Of thy religious rites nothing will survive but fables, which your children's children will not believe. Nothing telling of your piety will survive, other than words incised on stone."

Rather than to move on blindly, hang on to and exaggerate the past I strongly suggest that it is up to us to reconnect to the essence of masonry and it's spiritual nature. It is my strong believe that we have to counterbalance the dangers of the time in our lodges by mobilizing the forces of renewal in every individual member before the fate of Egypt becomes the fate of masonry and our names end up as words incised on stone. I'm sure that every individual mason is concerned with particular aspects of the current world situation. Yet, masonry itself doesn't aim to influence the world situation. I full heartedly agree with the *Pro Grandmaster of the United Grand Lodge of England*, who said in his address to the *European Grandmasters meeting in November 2007*, that "the only influence masonry should be seeking is over itself and its members". We need to use this influence in such a way that membership of a Masonic lodge contributes to the quality of life of it's members with their particular personal and professional responsibilities.

Core business and Masonic education

First of all, we need to accept that today freemasonry is a minority organisation without any social relevance, step back from the mirror called society and step in front of the mirror called Masonic ritual. After all, initiation is our "core business". We don't only need to learn to practice our rituals but we also need to learn to see and to hear how our ritual is mirroring the essence of who we are and who we may become in our hearts and lives. Most of all, we need to learn to share our individual insights with each other in the Lodge. The Masonic Lodge of the 21st century needs to become the place where modern men support each other to reveal and practice this essence in their individual lives *outside* the Lodge and for the benefit of the world and its inhabitants. We can make this happen by making internal Masonic education in all its different aspects our highest priority for the next decade. Masonic education needs to become the key in our Lodges and between Lodges, in our Grand Lodges and between Grand Lodges. Being a member of a Lodge and going from labour to refreshment a few times a year is not sufficient any more. We have to create space in our Lodges for serious reflection and sharing. A space where we can deepen our understanding of what freemasonry offers with those who share the experience of initiation.

The modern mason wants to talk about what is meaningful for him in relation to his Masonic experience and the significance of this experience for his daily life. Not only in a virtual reality but also in the physical reality. The Lodge needs to become such a physical reality. And let's not forget the other way around: masonry needs modern men to keep an ancient tradition alive in an ongoing changing world. We have never been with that many in the world but we already are in the world for a very long time.

Finally I would like to remind you that we are not human beings on a spiritual path but that we are spiritual beings on a human path.

The mirror of freemasonry reminds you of both.

Order of Freemasons under the Grand East of the Netherlands,

Diederik van Rossum,
Grand Master.

