

The Secret of the Monad

By Michael McKeown

What makes me a Speculative Freemason is I wonder and speculate on the hidden mysteries embedded in our good Craft's symbols and rituals. I believe the answers to the world's most enduring mysteries are vouchsafed within the bosom of Freemasonry. The first and foremost secret is that humanity exists in a sleep like state because no one is teaching us how to finish waking up and realize our True nature. Indeed it could be that there are powerful forces in the world, powerful ancient forces, perhaps non-human forces who may even be the progenitors of mankind, that endeavor to keep humanity ignorant of our True nature. This secret is however encoded in some of Freemasonry's symbolism.

The plaque commemorating the dedication of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania is etched: "Masonry has secrets which are not to be made manifest till the time for declaring all things". I think you can safely assume, my brothers, that we, as the collective body of Freemasonry, are preserving for humanity the most treasured secrets of our ancient and more technologically advanced past. If not in actual knowledge held by three men at any one time (as I suspect is the case), at least in the preservation of the forms, ceremonies, and art, which have carried the secrets through the ages until such time as enlightened men can look with understanding. We are the beginning of that enlightened age.

We are taught from our first admission into a lodge of Free and Accepted Masons that lodges are dedicated to the Holy Saints John: St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. These are represented in the lodge by two parallel lines on either side of a point within a circle.

If it might be that Masonic history goes back as far as the knightly orders of the Crusades, then it is an interesting note that one of the charges of heresy brought against the Templars was that they had become followers of Gnostic Christianity. Gnostic theology largely comes from the Gospel and Epistles of St. John the Evangelist. Apocryphon Iohannis, or the Apocryphon of St. John (apocryphon means secret teaching or secret revelation) is considered to be the most important text of the Gnostic spiritual system. St. John the Evangelist, and the Gnostic system, taught that through direct internal inquiry one could attain knowledge of God. Basically, the crimes against the Church that the Templars were accused of were primarily that they believed more in the theology of St. John the Evangelist than that of St.s Peter and Paul.

While little survives about St. John the Evangelist, St. John the Baptist is mentioned in each of the four gospels of the canonical bible. He was called Baptist because as he preached he baptized believers in the River Jordan. He preached that righteous living would lead one to an experience of God. He taught that one must live in a holy manner and to never deviate from such behaviors in order to attain the kingdom of heaven. His was quite vocally the teaching that to achieve the same goal of gnosis (direct knowledge) about which St. John the Evangelist wrote and taught, one had to behave in a consistent, particular manner. St. John the Baptist was an outspoken figure in the gnostic movement. He was eventually imprisoned and beheaded by Herod for refusing to change his message.

Gnosticism taught that either through direct inquiry or directed behaviors one could experience immediate knowledge of God while alive. Two parallel paths, one secret. So the two St.s John taught two different methods of attaining the same goal and that goal parallels Roman Christianity's in a most fascinating way. While early Roman Christian belief systems taught (and still do teach) an 'outer' teaching focused on the parables and actions of Jesus, Jesus himself was really teaching the same Gnostic truths that the Holy St. Johns preached, but couched in a different way. Catholic Christianity teaches the outer teaching of a thing of which Gnostic theology speaks to the inner teaching of.

Now we get to the crux of it. Just as the two parallel lines symbolize the two parallel paths of the inner and the outer teaching of two early Christian belief systems, Masonry itself has an outer and an inner teaching. The outer teaching is the one where we borrow elements from Biblical history and tradition to create a framework whereby we do the "taking good men and making them better" thing. But I'm here to tell you my brothers that there is an extraordinarily exciting "inner teaching" in this same Masonic historical tradition.

I ask you, what is at the root of all mankind's distress? What pain do all humans endure while traveling through this veil of tears? You might rightly answer 'the fear of death' or 'the desire for an intimate connection with God'. There is a hole in all of us that we endeavor to fill with things of the world, none of which are ultimately very satisfying because what we really want, what we really need, is awareness of the Supreme Being and to lose the fear of death. The distress caused by ignorance of our True Nature follows us through life.

Which brings us to Truth, the divine attribute at the root of all virtue. Truth refers to a condition of observation that occurs before labeling of experience by the ego, the thinking mind. By awareness of what's ultimately true in our experience, we know from an interior experiential level that we are all indeed one family. All distress immediately vanishes in realization that it was caused by the illusion of separateness. We experience that indeed, Truth is a divine attribute, for in the recognition of what is True in our experience we recognize the divinity of the Supreme Being in all that can be experienced.

While Masonry clearly hides this most enduring human secret in many of its symbols and allegories, it does not provide instruction. There is an opportunity for enlightenment to occur (a term that refers to being brought from darkness to light) which Master Masons will remember when a travel they took involved a tolling bell. Contemplation of what was occurring at that moment, combined with the stark clarity of the ringing bell can thrust one's awareness to the sublime. That is a rare and fleeting moment of opportunity however, and few are prepared in their hearts to allow their soul to make the necessary leap of awareness at that moment.

So let's look at the circle and the point. We're taught the point represents an individual, and the circle the boundary of his conduct (actions), but we can assume that this is an outer teaching, so the inner teaching we discover must reflect the outer teaching we all know or else the inner teaching we infer must be incorrect. We know the two parallel lines represent the two holy Saints John, who taught about a secret Gnostic knowledge, one by an outer teaching, and the other by an inner teaching.

The basic symbol of a point within a circle is called a circumpunct. It has been used by many cultures as a symbol for the sun, and while the sun does figure prominently in a Masonic lodge over each of the stations, I'm not sure that's where we're really headed.

There was an ancient use of a circumpunct called the Monad. The Monad was used by the Pythagoreans to represent Divinity or the First Being. The Monad refers to the Source or the One, meaning without division. To the Pythagoreans, the point and circle represented eternity, whose "center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere". Now I think we're onto something! The teachings of Pythagoras were influential in the Gnostic movement. We know the parallel lines refer to two figures in Gnostic Christianity, and we know Pythagoras figures prominently in Masonic lore! And here we have a symbol that ties them all together around a common theme of unity. Unity: one; without division. You might say "not two", or better: "non-dual".

That's the secret! In fact it refers to the world's most prevalent, most ancient secret, so we should not be surprised that Masonry might also speak to it.

Robert Frost's poem "The Secret Sits" is apropos here:
We dance around in a ring and suppose
But the secret sits in the middle and knows.

The symbol of the Monad shows us an inner truth to human existence that is not possible to express in language because anything one uses language to describe utilizes dualisms. Language can not be used to say anything that is non-dual. A thing is because of this other thing it is not. Here we have a symbol speaking of a condition where there is only 'Being' with no division. Standing in the middle. Existing at one's center from which observation of and action upon the world occurs, before labeling of experience separates it into dualisms. This ultimate Truth can only be conveyed through symbols, allegory, and examples of what it is not, since it can not be said what this Truth is. For by saying what it is, we're already wrong.

The non-dual aspect the point within the circle speaks to has to do with how we observe the world. Most of us, indeed I dare say all of us, are not fully awake. There are three states of awareness available to humans: the sleep state, the awake state, and the self aware state. We're all familiar with the sleep and awake states; they're easy to tell apart. Sometimes if you're having a bad dream while asleep you try to wake yourself up because even when asleep you know there's another state of awareness called 'awake'. They can be differentiated from one another. On the other hand though the Self aware state is just like the awake state. There is no difference. There is no way that you can say "I am awake and I want to be in this other state of awareness called Self Aware", it is the same state; you are already that, but you're ignoring something that's going on that's keeping you from being aware of the fully awake condition. You ignore this thing I'm talking about because there is never any time when it doesn't exist, nor any time when it exists differently, so that you can differentiate it. Since it goes on all the time without change and

without cessation, it gets completely ignored by nearly all of humanity except those few who spontaneously awaken, or those that hear this message and set about making it happen. This ignorance to how things really are is the root of all suffering, and it is this hidden truth of the human condition that is conveyed by the symbol of the Monad.

This self aware condition I'm talking about goes by a number of different names, most with a capital first letter to identify it for what it is referring too: Truth, Reality, Absolute, God, Atman, and many more. It is the originating state of awareness. It is the 'I' feeling that exists before all other feelings and observations occur. It is the ground state of observation before choosing a path for the energy to take, before labeling occurs. It is who you really are before you label yourself and your experience. It is the sense of awakensness, awareness, of attention.

We can't easily use words to describe this thing. Language is based on dualisms, so it is impossible to speak directly of something that is non-dual. The point within a circle is a beautiful symbol that conveys the message in it's entirety, but I will here have to use a bunch of words to describe something that is wordless. In fact it takes so many words that I won't get much more in this article than a hint of it. But many that have an open mind, a willing heart, and truly listen to this message can immediately awaken to their True Nature. It is an inversion of awareness. You currently think you are an individual who experiences the world 'out there', but you make the mistake your finger were to make if one day it were to say "I can touch the world, therefore I am unique and separate", but it would be wrong; it's part of a whole body. In the same way we say we are the "seer who sees the seen thing". This is the triune nature of God: we separate our experience into these three pieces: the observer who observes the observed thing. The hearer who hears the heard thing. The thinker who thinks the thought. But we make the mistake a stream of water might if it were to say "I am the streamer who streams the stream". It would be deluding itself; it's just water. In the same way there is just observation. I.e., and this sounds kinda weird, you are what you see. It is all one. Not two. Non-dual.

So how can you learn to recognize something that is in your constant experience, something that is never different from what it is, that you have heretofore completely ignored? How can you learn to experience something that can't be talked about because the minute you use words you're wrong? Here's an example of how there can be something in your constant experience that you thought felt different but you were wrong: Do this exercise for two weeks: every time you feel emotion get excited and ask yourself "what did it feel like a moment before I labeled my experience?" You do something nice for someone on the road and you feel a 'feel good for humanity' emotion. You see your loved one, something that irritates you, a beautiful plant or art that moves you; music; pride. Every time you feel emotion get excited and say "hey it just happened again, what did it feel like a moment before I labeled the experience?" It takes most people about two weeks to realize that the movement of energy within the body for emotion is the same for each experience, and you only thought it felt different because of the label you gave the stimuli that caused the energy movement to occur. So then there's an 'ah ha' moment where you realize there's something that you always thought felt different but it did not! In the same way there is an undercurrent of energy for all observation, all experience, that you pretend feels different but is actually the same!

The experiences of emotion that you might call 'love' 'irritation' 'pride' 'beauty' 'disappointment', etc. are 'energy-feelings'. They are the base energy occurring within the body with a label applied to it (the 'feeling'), the label based on the stimulating event that caused the energy to occur. Prior to doing the above experiment you focused on the label and thought the experiences felt different. Now you focus on the energy and recognize all emotion to have the same root.

Another exercise by which you might recognize your True Nature and become fully awake: Look for the observing I within you. Who thinks these thoughts I'm thinking? Who chooses what to think? I must not be my thoughts because I can watch them and chose them. Who 'has' this body? I can command it, and if I lose an arm I am not somehow 1/5th less me, so I must not be the body, so where is this I who has this body? Where inside me is the seer? Who tastes this food? You might answer to all of these questions: "why me of course, I do". But where is this I? Can you find it? 'I' think these thoughts, 'I' have this body, I am this woman's husband, I am a businessman, I am this boy's father, I am 53 years old; all wrong beliefs because anything I can point to and say "that's me" I'm wrong because who then is the me doing the pointing? If I turn my attention around I can't find the me. All I find are the things I say I have and that I am and that I see.

Here's the trick: you can't actually 'look' for this I because if 'you' are looking for the 'I' that is doing the looking, you're stuck in a loop. So you can't look for the I; you'll never find it that way. Another way to say it is there is no I to be found. There is an I, but you can't 'find' it. It's there all the time without cessation, so it can't be found because it's already there. But you can sense the I. It has an energy feeling. It is in fact all energy, all feeling, all observation.

One technique is to look for the sameness quality in your experience; there is a sameness quality to how it feels to see, how it feels to hear, how it feels to think. Another technique is to set aside all things that are 'me' and 'mine', indeed all things that can be said about you. What remains is the ever-present I. Latch onto the feeling of the I, latch onto the sameness quality that exists for all observation. In a flash awareness will occur and an inversion of how you experience the world happens and you will awaken to your True Nature. I assure you it will not be the 'you' that goes by a name, that has a job, that is a Mason. If you can point to it and say "that's me, I'm a Mason; that's me, I'm Michael", then you have to go back to the question: who is doing the pointing? Who is saying I am this, I am that? By repeatedly saying "I am not this thing I can point at because how can I be something I am pointing at?" By consistently recognizing all the things you are not, what remains is the real you.

If your friend were having a bad dream wouldn't you shake him awake? Do you feel me shaking you now?

The symbol of the Monad conveys this wordlessly. The earliest Masons must have wanted this knowledge to be an intimate part of Masonry, perhaps held in repository for all humanity, but I suspect the Truth it conveys was quickly forgotten and all that survived was the symbol itself. Nonetheless every Entered Apprentice learns the outer teaching of the symbol, while the symbol waited through the centuries for its real meaning to be discovered.

The Monad admonishes us to remain centered as the observer, the witness, of our thoughts and actions. Our thoughts don't define us, nor are they us, rather they are a continual internal noise which instead of identifying with we can watch dispassionately as an observer and remain unaffected by. From this position we can choose our actions and behaviors rather than behaving from learned response.

Emotional responses always arise from identifying with the thinking mind instead of being the dispassionate observer. Any time such a feeling overcomes us it is an immediate personal notification that we have identified with the thinking mind and forgotten to stand in the center as the witness, the observer. The observer never experiences 'feelings'. It watches from a position of love and compassion. It experiences the movement of energy in the body without labeling it and causing it to become emotion. As Masons we are taught to rise above the ego generated thinking mind and to love and respect each other equally.

I said at the beginning of our look at the symbol of the point within a circle that if the outer teaching and the inner teaching were in alignment with each other then that would be a signpost that we were on the correct path. Truly this is what we have learned. The Monad is one of the first symbols we are exposed to as Masons (and one of the most ancient), and it speaks most eloquently to one of the most basic tenants, nay secrets, of Freemasonry: to stand in the middle as the dispassionate observer, treating every one equally with love and compassion, and in doing so, realizing our True nature by achieving awareness of our original state, the self realized state, that lies as the foundation of all experience.

So what is this thing we keep talking about? It is the 'I' feeling. Not the thinking mind. The thinking mind is the internal voice which never shuts up, in fact it's afraid of shutting up because that would be its death, and it's afraid of dying, yet the thinking mind is what most humans identify with and believe to be 'them'. The existence of the thinking mind is what makes us say irrational things like "I'm so proud of myself", as if there are two of you. One of those two is not real, but there is 'another' you. It is the REAL you, the you that observes the thinking mind and mistakenly identifies with it.

You can't look for this observing I because it is the one that's doing the looking. You can't compare the observing I to any other condition because the observing I exists all the time without cessation and without differentiation. So if you can't look for it, all you can do is sense it. It has an energy feeling. How can you sense this real I? One way is to look in the mirror. "Wow", you might say. "I sure look older than I used to, but I feel the same inside". That's the 'I' feeling. A way to make the 'I' feeling become more obvious is to experience the eternal 'now' moment. The thinking mind only exists because of what has been and what will be. The thinking mind never exists in the now moment.

Masonic symbols point the way to an inner teaching which, once recognized, one must study extra-masonic sources to learn more about. Albert Pike knew of these mysteries and traveled far in search of the answers, but he missed the mark by a wide margin. More than a century later we now have a large body of literature from many modern enlightened sages to help us understand how to achieve what Masonry points the way to.

All humans will be self aware one day; it is nothing more than our original state, our most natural way of being. Everything we do that clouds Truth are complications. Who we really are is the easy thing to do. Rudolf Steiner, in 'Theosophy', says: "Everyone, who has patience and endurance reaches this goal, for although not every physical eye can be operated on, every spiritual eye can be opened. When it will be opened is only a question of time."

The most valuable enlightened sage of the modern era was Ramana Maharshi. He gave us a tool by which anyone can awaken. This technique is called 'direct inquiry'. By direct inquiry we merely ask ourselves 'who am I?'. Well that's easy, you say. Like Descartes (the "I think therefor I am" fellow), you might answer: "I'm the one who thinks". Descartes recognized the false self of the thinking mind. The thinking mind is not really you, for 'you' can choose what to think. You watch your thoughts. You become addicted to a line of thought and can't stop thinking about it, mulling it over and over until finally you tell yourself "enough of thinking about this thing, I'm going to think about something else".

'You' tell 'yourself' to stop thinking about something? Are there two of you? Yes, there are, and one of them is false. The 'self' you are 'telling' is the false self, the thinking mind self. The real you is the observing self. The thinking mind is a useful tool to manipulate the world with, but we make the mistake of identifying with it. We believe it to be us and become slave to all the incorrect and inaccurate things it tells us about the world and ourselves.

Direct inquiry culminates by identifying all the things you can point at as being 'not you' and what remains is the eternal Real you. The real you is the 'I' thought before all other thoughts arise. Jesus speaks of it most succinctly by saying "I am".

Everything exists because it is the thing it knows about. Our ego separates experience into the knower and the known. The ego is a trickster. It tells you "I don't want to take out the garbage", "I hate my job", "I'm dissatisfied with my life". It tells me: "I'd rather be fishing". The mistake we make is in identifying with the voice of the ego. Rather than comically watching the ego go through it's machinations to try to prove to us how important it is (and thereby not give it any energy), instead we fulfill it's desire and believe that is who we are. We believe we are the one that would rather be fishing instead of recognizing the pure pleasure that exists in this very moment. If I expect fishing to make me happy, then I won't be happy doing what's keeping me from that happiness. If I go fishing and don't get any fish, I'm not happy then either. The ego likes it when we're not happy, that's something the ego can really work with.

Stop reading for a few minutes and observe thoughts as they occur. As you sit quietly and watch your thoughts for a few minutes you find out they're a quite a jumble. They jump from snatches of songs to bits of phrases to a daydream. To actually think about something for a minute or two takes a supreme effort.

Not only have you discovered you are not your thinking mind, the mind has revealed itself to not really be very good at it's job. You can't get it to do your bidding for more than a few seconds and on it's own it jumps all over the place. Here's an amazing fact: Psychologists with the proper brain wave reading equipment can tell when you make your decision on something before you think you made the decision. That's because the thinking mind takes the decision as it actualizes, and says, "whoa, here's a path actualizing, I better claim ownership to it real quick". Dr. David Hawkins reports the time lag is 1/10,000 of a second; small, but measurable. So all those times you 'think' you're making a decision, 'you' as a separate individual self are not making those decisions. Decisions happen as part of the continual explosion of creation, and your little self, the ego, says "I did it".

It is a useful exercise to practice stopping thoughts by casting the full ray of your attention on thoughts as they occur. They become 'struck dumb' by the force of your attention on them. As if they've been caught doing bad and stand mute for a minute. But they will come back the moment attention is removed, so while that's a great exercise to help demonstrate the unreality of thoughts and to break the habit of identifying with them, that won't lead to enlightenment. The ego will finally give up of it's own accord only if you stop giving it the energy of identification with it's ceaselessly babbling incessant self. Trying to control it just gives it more juice.

The small self, the ego, likes to have everything polarized. In fact, everything you experience you experience through the diffracting nature of the egoic lens which separates everything into three pieces: the observer, the thing observed, and the act of observing, and polarizes everything based on what it's not. Everything at the level of the ego is one way or the other. As you increasingly note that everything has two sides, and stand dispassionately in the middle, the ego will become more observable as a little pain in the butt trying to get you to believe and behave

certain ways. The intention becomes one of loving compassion: “My silly little ego, there it goes again, trying to make me believe things are one way”.

Here’s an example: your loved one does something irritating and you put on frustrated energy. But the irritating thing could equally have been seen by someone else in a different frame of mind as adorably cute and feel love energy. The event is the same and the energy that occurs is the same. The definition is different and the behavior that results is different. You will not have much luck choosing a different behavior path because if you find the situation frustrating, irritated is going happen. The exercise is to recognize that you are being a victim of the ego’s labeling of the event and the resulting behavior that results. By constantly de-polarizing everything that occurs, every single minute in fact, the ego runs out of a job to do.

Many people, when they first wake up, are quite struck by the profound beauty and serenity and perfection of everything just as it is, in this very moment, and tend to giggle and laugh at the obviousness of it. In very short order the old way of viewing is forgotten. It becomes like a dream memory. It seems impossible that you could have allowed yourself to remain in that previous state of ignorance for so long when what’s Real is so simple and obvious.

The Monad, that most elegant of all geometric Masonic symbols, teaches us to circumscribe our emotions by standing in the center, and by this constant exercise the grace of the Supreme Being will expose itself.

I’d like to close with a piece of free verse that came from contemplation while writing this article:

The witness exposed,
revealed by grace,
thinks not, knows not;
Is.

The fall from grace
is to descend to thought;
to think is not to know:
I Am.

Grace alone can save me;
speak to my soul,
unleash awareness.
Dispel differentiation!

Article and poem © Michael McKeown 2014. All rights reserved. No use allowed without permission of the author.

Bibliography

Steiner, Rudolf. *Theosophy*. Spring Valley, New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., 1971

Godman, David. *Be As You Are The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. New York, New York: Penquin Books, 1985

Osborne, Arthur. *The Teachings of Rama Maharshi*. York Beach, ME, Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1996

Hutchens, Rex. *Albert Pike’s Lecgture on Masonic Symbolism*. Washington DC: The Scottish Rite Research Society, 2006

Hawkins, David R. M.D., Ph.D. *The Eye of the I*. W. Sedona, AZ, Veritas Publishing, 2001