

Ashlar Lodge No. 98 Free and Accepted Masons

St. Augustine, FL

Chartered January 18, A.D. 1888, A.L. 5888

904-826-4086



January, 2021



STATED COMMUNICATIONS

Masonic Temple
4 Martin Luther King Blvd.
St. Augustine, FL
1ST & 3RD Thursdays
Meal – 6:30 p.m.
Stated Communication — 7:30 p.m.

DEGREE WORK AND PRACTICE

2nd & 4th Thursdays

CHARITY OF THE QUARTER

St. Augustine Shrine Club

We have much to do this year both Masonically to our minds and consciences as well as physically to our building.

One of my main goals this year is making Masonic education an important part of every meeting.

Installation of officers will be held at a closed (Tyled) communication on Monday Dec 28th at 6:00. I believe that safety is the main concern and as much as I'd like to have a public installation Prudence dictates otherwise.

Fraternally,
David Pierucci
Worshipful Master, 2021

From the East

Brethren,

I wish you all a MERRY CHRISTMAS / HAPPY HANUKKAH and Happy New Year as we leave 2020 behind (thank the Grand Architect!) Let us join together and make 2021 a great year. Hopefully, the new vaccines will relive the tension that Covid has wrought.

January 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 New Year's Day	2
3	4 OES	5	6 RAIN-BOW 7:00 PM	7 STATED COMM. 6:30 PM	8	9
10	11	12 Shrine Club 7:00 pm	13 DIST. INST. Lake No. 72 6:30 pm	14	15	16
17	18 OES	19 York Rite Chapter/Council 6:30 pm	20 Open Books 6-9 pm Pineland 86	21 STAT-ED COMM.	22	23
24/31	25	26 York Rite Commandery 6:30 pm	27 Dist. Assn. Middleburg 107 6:30 pm	28 Lodge Instruction TBD	29 Fried Chicken Shrine Club	30

From the West

Charge at Opening

The ways of virtue are beautiful. Knowledge is attained by degrees. Wisdom dwells with contemplation; therefore, we should seek it. Let us then, Brethren, apply ourselves with becoming Zeal to the practice of the excellent principles inculcated by our Order. Let us ever remember that the great objects of our association are, the restraint of improper desires and passions, the cultivation of an active benevolence and the promotion of a correct knowledge of the duties we owe to God, to our neighbor and to ourselves,

Let us be united, and practice with diligence the sacred tenets of our Order. Let all private animosities, if any unhappily exist, give place to brotherly love and affection. It is useless parade to talk of the subjection of irregular passions within the walls of the Lodge, if we permit them to triumph in our intercourse with each other. Let us cultivate the great moral virtues which are laid down on our Masonic trestle board, and improve in everything that is good, amiable and useful.

Let the benign genius of the mystic art preside over our councils and under her sway let us act with a dignity becoming the high moral character of our venerable Fraternity.

Bro. Jim Carrick, SW

February 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 OES	2	3 RAIN-BOW 7:00 pm	4 STATED COMM 6:30 PM	5	6
7	8	9 SHRINE CLUB 7:00 pm	10 Dist. Instruction Pineland 86 6:30 pm	11	12	13
14	15 OES	16 YORK RITE CHAPTER/ COUNCIL 6:30 PM	17 RAIN-BOW 7 PM Open Books Pineland 86 6-8 pm	18 STATED COMM 6:30 PM	19	20
21	22	23 YORK RITE COMMANDERY 6:30 PM	24 District Assn. Cabul 116 6:30 pm	25 Lodge Instruction TBD	26 Fried Chicken Shrine Club 5 pm	27
28						

FROM THE SOUTH

Thank you for allowing me to serve the lodge as the Junior Warden this year. I want to remind everyone about what we learn in the Entered Apprentice degree. During the EA degree, the Worshipful Master teaches our newly obligated brother the Great Masonic Lesson of Charity, which basically reminds us that we should come to the relief of any person, more especially a brother, as liberally as his necessities may require and our abilities permit. We also learn that Charity unlike Faith and Hope, extend beyond the grave through the boundless realms of eternity.

While charity is one of the first lessons we learn, we have to remember that Freemasonry isn't a charitable organization by definition, and Ashlar Lodge hasn't been giving large amounts of money to charity for very long. Up until 2016, we were giving about \$3,000 or less each year to charity. From 2017-2019, we gave away approximately \$6,000, \$10,000 and \$30,000 respectively. As we all know, 2020 was a very unusual year in many ways, due to COVID-19 and we saw the lodge giving well above what will most likely be the norm going forward.

If you want to make a charitable request, the Charity Request form should be completed and forwarded to the Junior Warden (ashlarlodge98.jw@gmail.com), so it can be presented to the Charity Committee for a recommendation before being presented to the brethren in open lodge. Most charitable gifts will be in the \$500 - \$2,000 range, and our annual budget will dictate how many charitable gifts can be given and the amounts that are acceptable. Over time, the number and amounts given to charitable causes may increase, but we also have to keep in mind that we will need to put resources into our lodge building and the Temple to keep it functioning properly and serving us well.

We are blessed to be in the financial situation we are in. Let's remember to be grateful and be ready to help those in need as best we can.

Fraternally, Bro Tom Torretta, JW

LODGE OFFICERS 2020

Worshipful Master	David Pierucci	904-460-9477
Senior Warden	James Carrick	904-501-4348
Junior Warden	Dwight Wilkes	904-501-5528
Secretary	George Maultsby	703-956-0228
Treasurer	Oscar Patterson III	904-955-9175
Chaplain	William Roberts	904-501-1567
Tyler	Ron DeRoco	904-599-1584

FRATERNAL NOTICES AND DATES

O.E.S. Chapter #12.....1st & 3rd Mon-
days
Rainbow Assembly #42.....1st & 3rd
Wednesdays
York Rite Bodies.....3rd & 4th Tues-
days

**OTHER 11th MASONIC
DISTRICT LODGES**

Palatka No. 34
Palatka—2nd & 4th Mondays

Lake No. 72
Crescent City—1st & 3rd Mondays

Pineland No. 86
Peniel—1st & 3rd Thursdays

Melrose No 89
Keystone Heights—2nd & 4th Tuesdays

Middleburg No. 107
Middleburg—1st & 3rd Tuesdays

Cabul No. 116
Green Cove Springs—2nd & 4th Thursdays

Hastings No. 183
Hastings—2nd & 4th Tuesdays

Bunnell No. 200
Bunnell—1st and 3rd Tuesdays

Experience and Meaning

Ritual is a dynamic cultural experience that has been central to research in religion and society for at least one hundred and fifty years. Ritual is not just a tool for understanding social occurrences and dramatizations, it is also a window into the human experience. Ritual impacts upon both social cohesion and equilibrium, and contributes directly to understanding through experience. It enables the integration of belief and behavior; tradition and change; the real and the ideal. Ritual is a form of consecrated behavior which, through moods and motivations utilizing symbols, encourages men to formulate an order of existence.

All humans and many animal species engage in ritualistic behavior from how we dress or undress to courting practices, how we greet each other, and, even, how we fight. A great deal of human behavior can be explained and comprehended in terms of ritual because ritual is an essential part of communication, meaning, and understanding. At the same time, all animals are dominated by feeling, especially humans, but human feeling is special. Human feeling embraces conceptual processes which involve symbols, language, and, through them, ritual.

At issue in any consideration of ritual is its role and purpose in society, and its place in our social institutions. Ritual, notes Emile Durkheim, is the method whereby individuals are brought together to “strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member.” Ritual shapes our perception of both the human and the divine as it serves a socializing function. The very structure of the ritual, notes Taylor, Robertson, Smith, and Frazer, is intrinsic to how the ritual functions in society. Rituals facilitate the means by which human beings live together in an orderly social relationship by maintaining the unity of the group. Ritual also transmits through generations the basic sentiments of a society thus serving to reduce anxiety, distress, fear, doubt, and, even, sorrow. But Huxley notes that the modern world fails to ritualize effectively which leads to a high propensity toward flawed communication as well as a weakening of personal and social bonds. The question arises, then, how does ritual communicate.

Communicating Instruction by Symbols

Suzanne Langer notes that a symbol enables people to think about, understand, and react to something apart from its immediate presence. A symbol is “an instrumental thought.” We assign to the symbol meaning which results in an emotional response to the object. However, that meaning, and response may differ and, even, change from society to society, age to age, and person to person. The swastika—a cross with four bent arms—is common to many ancient civilizations especially those of the Indus valley where it represents auspiciousness. The word “swastika” is literally translated as “to be good.” Consider how much that changed during the 20th century when the swastika was appropriated by the Nazi movement in Germany. The assigned meaning of the symbol and our emotional response to it underwent a radical and drastic reversal.

The meaning of symbols is transmitted through discourse with meaning being the complex relationship among symbols, objects, and the person. In discourse, it is not the words alone that create meaning, but rather how the words are grouped together through grammatical structure that enables us to learn and transmit meaning. In this sense, language truly makes us human. In order for language to function successfully, however, there must be some level of shared meaning. We must agree upon “what we are talking about.” When we use the word “dog,” the listener creates a mental image of the object and that mental image may vary in detail—a German shepherd in one person’s mind, a poodle in another’s. What is critical to communication, though, is shared meaning: that we agree upon the proposition—dog, a domestic animal with four legs, a tail, a head—not necessarily the details.

A great deal of human behavior meets symbolic needs and symbolic acts (speech for verbal symbolization and action for nonverbal symbolization) result in ritual. Ritual not only enhances the quality of meaning and facilitates our understanding of objects, events, and people; it also serves to generate more penetrating questions about the meanings of the symbols involved.

The foundation of symbolic interaction (communication) is found in the work of George Herbert Mead primarily in his book *Mind Self and Society*. In order for humans to cooperate, they must first come to an agreed upon understanding of each other’s intentions. Symbol-using interaction serves that function. Humans are biological creatures possessing a brain capable of rational processing who, by mental processes, plan and rehearse their symbolic behavior so as to better prepare themselves for social interaction. And while Kenneth Burke is noted for his explanation of the use of dramatic metaphor in communication, he also noted how individuals present themselves to others through ritual and role-playing. Finally, Hugh Duncan stresses the importance of the symbol in transmitting meaning. He also stresses the roles people assume noting that “Social order is created and sustained in social dramas through intensive and frequent communal presentations.”

Symbols function to synthesize the tone, character, and quality of human life giving it a moral and aesthetic style and mood. They provide a picture of how things should be. Symbols represent sets of acts; establish powerful and long-lasting moods and motivations; formulate conceptions in general; clothe perceptions with an aura of factuality; and establish moods and motivations that seem uniquely realistic.

Symbols are used as vehicles for conception—meaning—and are abstractions fixed in perceptible form with concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgements, longings, and beliefs. They are the key to understanding culture and cultural activity. A symbol is a plan for a house, not the actual house. It is the drawing, not the structure. Symbols provide templates for a process external to themselves, but which lead to a definite form. In man, his genes do not speak to his ability to engage in the building trade, that needs a conception of what is to be built and that conception is done in symbolic form. Symbols are blueprints or textbooks not buildings. The proper manipulation of significant symbols gives them graphic power and enables man to attain his destiny.

In Freemasonry, symbols are intertransportable. They mean different things at different times and on different levels. And while they do shape our ritual into a distinctive set of tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, and proneness, they give character to the flow of our activity and the quality of our experience. The legend is learned by heart with the moods the symbols induce ranging from melancholy to joy; from confidence to pity; from exalted to bland. Communication, then, is a complex process that utilizes symbols to transmit meaning and to socialize the individual. A primary form of this transmission and socialization is ritual.

Esotericism in Ritual

The practice of the indirect communication of information through symbols is neither unorthodox nor relegated to any one age, civilization, or organization. “The world,” says Sherlock Holmes in chapter three of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, “is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.” Ancient philosophers had double doctrines; one external or exoteric the other internal or esoteric; one vulgar, the other secret. The esoteric was that which was suitable only for those who were serious seekers of knowledge and truth. Esoteric writing served to preserve this knowledge for a select audience with the “wits of such sharpness as can pierce

veil.” Esoteric writing was also employed as a restraint to avoid political and religious persecution with Thomas Aquinas noting in 1258 that “certain things can be explained in private which we should keep silent about in public” and Maimonides, writing about a century later, reiterates Aquinas by stating that “these matters [he is referring to theology] are only for a few solitary individuals of a very special sort.” In the tenth-century Arabic philosopher Abu Nasor al-Farabi comments on Plato “he followed the practice of using symbols, riddles, obscurity, and difficulty, so that science would not fall into the hands of those who do not deserve it and are deformed, or into the hands of one who does not know its worth or who used it improperly.”

Freemasonry is a complex and, even, contradictory marvel which has stood for different things at different times in different places. Throughout its history there are noted among its members many serious thinkers of each period who were dedicated to the use of the fraternity to advance progressive ideas and to counterbalance the institutions of church and state and, later, universities. Freemasonry was integral to the spread of the Enlightenment and the development of social order out of the chaos of the various revolutions that plagued Europe. In what was to become the United States, a number of the nation’s founders were Freemasons and according to Reinhart Koselleck there were two social structures what left a “decisive imprint” on the Age of Enlightenment, “the Republic of Letters and the Masonic Lodge.” The use of esoteric writing and practice to transmit “enlightenment” in these lodges is found in the vast literature associated with the organization which used pseudonyms and anonymity as it illuminated the character of modern philosophy. The very creation of our modern open society required many changes in Europe and North America, the success of which also required esoteric secrecy.

Of the four forms of esoteric writing—defensive esotericism, protective esotericism, pedagogical esotericism and political esotericism—protective esotericism comes closest to describing the Freemasonic motivation to protect its mysteries. It is also the most profound and meets the most resistance. Essentially, it is assumed that some truths may be harmful or dangerous if in the hands of the initiated. “A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing” goes the old adage. Ancient writings are filled with stories which enable the reader to reflect upon how humans have reacted when they came into possession of information they were not prepared to understand or utilize. The Tree of Knowledge, the Tower of Babel, the myth of Prometheus or the Sirens, as well as Plato’s *Republic* and the Ernst and Faulk dialogues of Lessing dramatize the dangers of the acquisition by the unprepared of certain forms of knowledge. Truth does not always turn out to match our hopes and dreams, nor does reality always conform to the demands of the human heart or psyche. Seeing the truth, suggests some philosophers (and these stories), is often exalted above the capacity of the common man and requires special initiation and instruction.

The Jewish Kabbalistic tradition makes no secret of its use of esotericism. It is open about its secretiveness. The assumption that some knowledge may confuse some people is not rare. The Talmud, the primary text of Judaism after the Torah, requires that certain information be not “expounded” before other than “a Sage,” and Maimonides writes that ancient sages “enjoined us to discuss these subjects privately . . . and then only if he be wise and capable of independent reasoning” finishing the paragraph by stating that “[i]t is left to him to develop the conclusions for himself and to penetrate the depths of that subject.”

Christianity has a similar tradition of protective esotericism or “the discipline of the secret.” An entire article is devoted to it in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. This tradition is molded on the parables and words of Jesus who, in Matthew 13:10-17, states that he would speak plainly to them (the disciples) but in parables to others. Thus Aquinas, commenting on Boethius, supports Paul’s comment in I Corinthians 3: 1-2 that he could not give them the highest wisdom concerning God because it is only for the truly spiritual man to understand. Aquinas then explicitly states that “certain things can be explained to the wise in private which we should keep silent about in public.” Science, profane and divine, is hidden in riddles and parables.

The Masonic Craft has undergone a long, gradual development both in its doctrine and its ritual, but it is only recently that scholars have become interested in those initiatory societies which utilize esotericism to transmit information and mysteries. Much of Western esotericism has been transmitted through rituals of initiation which are, those scholars suggest, the sum total of ancient religious practices. The candidate in these ceremonies is between an old and a new state. The mystery or sacred knowledge is intended to transform the candidate at an internal level into a new person. The candidate usually acts in a passive and humble manner, obeying their conductors and instructors, and fearing no danger. These initiation rituals are intended to develop intense fellowship or comradeship as well as egalitarianism or equality.

Freemasonry is generally described not as a secret society but as a society with secrets and ritual is the manner in which Freemasonry, and other societies, transmits those secrets from generation to generation. Treating secrecy ritually removes it from the ordinary and implies a spiritual dimension. In Freemasonic ritual, the veil constitutes the message. A ritual (and a symbol) always has more than one meaning—a primary or immediate one, and an allusive or hidden one. The idea that the veil constitutes the message is considered by many ritualist as of utmost importance. And though esoteric rituals do not appear to have entered the world of Freemasonry until the mid-eighteenth century through the high degrees and the evidence suggests that early Craft masonry was moral rather than ritualistic in character, the link between ritual, esotericism, and Freemasonry was well established by the 1650s.

Ritual and Meaning

For humans, the meanings of symbols are often elusive, vague, and convoluted, but that meaning is capable of being discovered and understood through investigation and explanation. And just as language is constituted of units—phonemes, morphemes, words—so too is ritual constituted of discrete symbolic acts. And the meaning of both the symbols and the ritual are grasped only through cultural transformation or initiation. Yet while ritual may appear to exalt the outward or the contrived, when fully understood, it become an inward expression of an external reality.

Humans are cultural animals and prefer to live in societies. From the beginning there has been a communal conception of the right way to live and a shared view of morality and the sacred. The basic concept was that we needed to join together. People are, Aquinas wrote in *City of God*, bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love.” The flaw in human reasoning, though, is that while the lowest levels of life described in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as physiological and safety (air, water, food, personal security, and health) are self-evident, higher requirements such as love, esteem, and self-actualization, because they are elevated, are less clear and less understood. At these upper levels there is a weakened sense of certainty and stability, a condition feared by many. In the modern world, communities or societies of common interest serve to ameliorate that concern by bringing into harmony through philosophic interchange questions about higher certainties. And while authority is often rooted in tradition and custom, reason and custom may also provide guidance for human thought and action.

Humans are complex entities with a variety of illusions, beliefs, perceptions, questions, faculties, and desires. Most of the questions humans have about life and the world are practical and not of an academic nature. They do not require an abstract or complex answer.

Instinct, habit, custom, laws, traditions, and mores generally suffice to address most of our issues. But a crucial element of human interaction is our moral commitment to each other's welfare as well as that of the community. And while traditional virtues may vary from the austerity of Spartan society to the openness of modern America, their intent is to create cohesiveness within the society or institution.

In *Laws*, considered Plato's most political writing, he tells the parable of the Athenian stranger with the stranger saying, "let our race be something that is not lowly, then, if that is what you cherish, but worth of a certain seriousness." Many, however, using a Platonic metaphor, can only "stare reality in the face [and] the truth is too strong for most eyes." A natural response to this has been through the use of esotericism and ritual. Ritual, which is natural in form and content, is often highly elaborate and filled with symbolism and allegory. Ritual tends to be celebratory in nature and is experienced at various levels through different senses. It can be a therapeutic and cathartic tool. It can be a formula that enables us to interpret our drives and motivations in terms of brotherly love and respect for tradition and others. It is not necessarily to be understood, however, but to be felt and experienced. Ritual is a celebration of life and its experiences as well as of human striving and motivation. It may well be a higher route to the understanding of the human and the divine.