

The Word  
By Brent N. Martin

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [John 1:1]

From the Royal Arch degree we learn, "The Word or Name is expressive of self existence and eternity, and is applicable only to that great Being who was, is, and shall be; to Him who created all things; to Him whose hands are open to supply our every want, and to Him alone who is the source of every mason's hope. It is considered by Masons as the symbol of Truth. It is the perfection of Divine Truth, which every good mason is seeking to advance, whether it be by the aid of the theological ladder, or passing between the pillars of strength and establishment, or wandering in darkness in the unfinished Sanctum Sanctorum, beset on every side, with dangers, or traveling on rough and rugged road, weary and worn- whatever be the direction of our journey, or how accomplished, light and truth are the ultimate objects of our search and our labor."

In ancient times, the names of God were undoubtedly intended originally to be a means of communicating the knowledge of God himself. The name was, from its construction and its literal powers, used to give some idea, however scanty, of the true nature and essence of the Deity. The Ineffable Degrees, from the Fourth to the Fourteen inclusive, of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, are called so because they are principally engaged in the investigation and contemplation of the Ineffable Name. A Grand Elect Mason is taught that the Name of God is the character of God. The ineffable name was the symbol of the unutterable sublimity and perfection of truth which emanate from the Supreme God.

A significant word is a sign-making word, or a word that is equivalent to a sign; so the secret words used in the different degrees of Masonry, the knowledge of which becomes a sign of the possession of the degree. The significant words of the Masonic system, which describe the names of God wherever they are found, are not intended merely as words of recognition, but as indices, pointing- like the symbolic ladder of Jacob of the First Degree, or the winding stairs of the Second Degree, or the three gates of the Third Degree- the way of progress from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from the lowest to the highest conceptions of Divine. And this is, after all, the real object of all Masonic science.

The real object of Freemasonry, in a philosophical and religious sense, is the search for truth. This truth is, therefore, symbolized by a Word. This idea of truth is not the same as that expressed in the lecture of the First Degree, where Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth are there said to be the "three great Tenets of a Mason's profession". The higher idea of truth which pervades the whole Masonic system, and which is symbolized by the Word, is that which is properly expressed as a knowledge of God.

The Substitute Word is an expression of very significant suggestion to the thoughtful Master Mason. If the Word is a symbol of Divine Truth; if the search for the Word is a symbol of the search for that Truth; if the Lost Word symbolizes the idea that Divine Truth has not been found; then the Substitute Word is a symbol of the unsuccessful search after Divine Truth and the attainment in this life, of which the first Temple is a type, of what is only an approximation to it.

The Lost Word in the mythical history of Freemasonry informs us that there once existed a Word of surpassing value, and claiming a profound veneration; that this Word was known to but few; that it was at length lost; and that a temporary substitute for it was adopted. But as the very philosophy of Masonry teaches us that there can be no death without a resurrection- no decay without a subsequent restoration- on the same principle it follows that the loss of the Word must suppose-its eventual recovery.

Now, this it is, precisely, that constitutes the myth of the Lost Word and the search for it. No matter what was the word, no matter how it was lost, nor why a substitute was provided, nor when or where it was recovered. These are all points of subsidiary importance, necessary, it is true, for knowing the legendary history, but not necessary for understanding the symbolism. The only term of the myth that is to be regarded in the study of its interpretation, is the abstract idea of a word lost and afterward recovered.

The Word , therefore, may be conceived to be the symbol of Divine Truth; and all its modifications- the loss, the substitution, and the recovery- are components of the mythical symbol which represents a search after truth. In a general sense, the WORD itself being then, the symbol of Divine Truth, the narrative of its loss and the search for its recovery becomes a mythical symbol of the decay and loss of the true religion among the ancient nations, at and after the dispersion on the plains of Shinar, and of the attempt of wise men, the philosophers, and priests, to find and retain it in their secret mysteries incantations, which have hence been designated as the Spurious Freemasonry of Antiquity.

But there is a special or individual, as well as a general interpretation, and in this special or individual interpretation the Word, with its accompanying myth of a loss, a substitute, and a recovery, becomes a symbol of the personal progress of a candidate from his first initiation to the completion of his course, when he receives a full development of the mysteries.

The True Word is used in contradistinction to the Lost Word and the Substitute Word. To find it is the object of all Masonic search and labor. For as the Lost Word is the symbol of death, the True Word is the symbol of life eternal. It indicates the change that is always occurring- truth after error, light after darkness, life after death.

Of all the symbolism of Speculative Masonry, that of the True Word is the most philosophic and sublime. Mason's labor is the search for the Word, the search after Divine Truth. This and this only is the Mason's work, and the Word is the Mason's reward.