

THE INVISIBLE LODGE

This 'Short Talk Bulletin', published by the Masonic Service Association, was written by Worshipful Brother Walter J. (Jerry) Harmon, Past Master of Richmond Lodge No. 10, A.F. & A.M. of Virginia. He is a professional magician (King Karnak) and has held membership in the International Brotherhood of Magicians since 1951. He is also an active member of "The Invisible Lodge", a society for professional magicians and those interested in magic who are also Freemasons. He is a recipient of the "Excalibur" award, and the 'Harvey Award' for distinguished service, of which only five have been awarded in the history of the organization. This bulletin was originally published in February of 1980, and updated in August of 2001. (DM)

The expression, "the magic of Freemasonry," takes on a different meaning when one realizes the great number of professional and amateur magicians who are and have been members of the Ancient Craft. It was only natural that these skilled performers of the art of producing baffling effects and illusions should band together to share their interests with the Fraternity.

In the strictest sense of the word, Lodge, "the Invisible Lodge" is not a Lodge. It is an international organization of Freemasons who also have as their vocation or avocation - MAGIC. The Invisible Lodge was formed in 1953 by Sir Felix Korim of England, who served as the organization's first President. Membership in The Invisible Lodge has been accorded to more than 800 selected Masons throughout the world, including such notable and well-known figures in the world of magic as Harry Blackstone, Okito, Ballentine, Levanto, McDonald Hirsch and Jack Gwynne.

Joined by the common bond of magic, these Brethren who may be or have been professional entertainers, hobbyists, collectors or students of both magic and Freemasonry, combine those interests to produce the organization known as "The Invisible Lodge."

Just as the roots of Freemasonry are entrenched in antiquity, so are those of Magic. Magic is a word referring to the craft of the magi. The magi were the priests of the ancient Medes and Persians. After the rise of Zoroaster, they became the priests of the Zoroastrian religion. The ancient Greeks and Hebrews knew them as Astrologers, Interpreters of Dreams, and givers of Omens. The reign of the priests was more than eight thousand years ago. Zoroaster is believed to have lived about five thousand years before our era. He is said to have been an unusual child who was gifted to have visions at an early age. Born in Azerbaijan in Northern Persia, he taught a belief in one God, the existence of the devil, and the doctrine of immortality. It is alleged that these priests (the magi) predicted the birth of the Christ Child and were the ones who brought him the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. As ruling monarchs, the priests were referred to as "Kings of the Orient" and "the wise men."

There are certain similarities between the order of the Magi and Freemasonry which should be noted. The word, "Dao" is Persian in origin. It signifies Light and Wisdom and is the forerunner of the word Deity (Bright One). Fire or light was used in the rituals of the magi to symbolize intelligence, knowledge and wisdom. It is recorded that during the initiation, the Arch Magus sat upon a throne of gold in the East.

The established dates of the reign of the Magi was five thousand years before the Trojan War, which took place in 1200 B.C. King Solomon began his temple in 966 B.C. This gives room for interesting speculation.

The Magi were Kings, Priests, Lawyers, Engineers, etc. In essence, they embodied most of the knowledge of their time, earning the respect of the people. It is the hypothesis of some historians that the Magi even possessed knowledge that has since been lost to man and that they possessed powers that would seem awesome to us even today.

Always in history there have been those who sought knowledge for knowledge's sake and those who sought to use it to manipulate and enslave the less informed. As the knowledge of those ancient wise ones became the specializations of medicine, law, astronomy, and philosophy, there were those who specialized in those little known principles of the miracle worker and became just that. These individuals, whether in quest for power or riches, formed a special priesthood that manipulated the ignorant and robbed the credulous.

Magic has passed through many forms and many lands until today it is deception for the purpose of entertainment with the trappings and refinements of those lands.

Masonry, in its language and ritual, retains much of the various sects and institutions it passed through before arriving at its present state.

In Masonry, as in Magic, we meet with Chaldean, Indian, Egyptian, Jewish and Christian symbols and ideas. It is little wonder then that at some time in history a group of men with an interest in both Magic and Masonry would form an organization that would embody the two as its focus.

Many Masons are surprised to find that many of the Great Magicians, whose names are familiar, and many others were active Masons and active in the various appendant bodies. Many could and did tell interesting anecdotes about their Masonic experiences. One of those deals with Brother Harry Keller, famous for the floating lady illusion that he introduced in this country. Brother Keller was shipwrecked in the Bay of Biscay and his Blue Lodge diploma went to the bottom of the sea. Divers who brought up baggage from the sunken steamer later recovered it. He later remarked it had been viewed by Grand Master Neptune and returned.

Membership in the Invisible Lodge is limited to those persons interested in Magic, who have been raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. The publication of the Invisible Lodge is called the "Trestle Board" and is published quarterly, giving information on the Masonic and Magical activities of the members.

The annual stated meeting of the Invisible Lodge is held in conjunction with the Columbus, Ohio Magic Fest. The date and time are announced annually. Additional meetings are held at the National Conventions of the International Brotherhood of Magicians and The Society of American Magicians as well as recognized Regional Conventions.

The Invisible Lodge publishes Bert Douglas' book, "Masonic Magic," which is the sole work devoted to presentation of Magic with a Masonic interpretation.

Members are encouraged to participate in Masonic education programs by using their Magic abilities and skills to illustrate the under-lying principles of Masonic philosophy, as well as providing entertainment within the Fraternity. They are further urged to labor in the non-magical areas by the Invisible Lodge's award system.

The first of these, the ZB Award, so named after the second president of the Invisible Lodge, Dr. Zina Bennett, is a certificate presented to any member who gives a total of five certified gratis performances for the residents of a Masonic Orphanage, Masonic Home for the Aged, or the patients of a Shrine Hospital. Another award of the Invisible Lodge is the Masters Award, consisting of a certificate and wand presented to a Brother who has received the coveted 33 degree of the Scottish Rite. Another award is presented annually, known as the Harvey Award, based on the traditional invisible rabbit, to a Brother who has served the Invisible Lodge or Masonry with distinction. Membership in the Invisible Lodge is not necessary to be a recipient.

The meetings of the Invisible Lodge are held at midnight, with a special ritual prepared for it that combines the elements of Masonry and Magic. At these meetings, honors are given to both the oldest and youngest members present.

Probably the most singular important lesson to be learned by the average Mason from the Invisible Lodge is that all of the great Magicians saw fit to give a certain amount of their time to Masonry and with their travel and exposure to the blandishments of the world felt that this brotherhood was of value.

Another lesson lies in the origins of both Masonry and Magic. Rooted and entwined in antiquity as both are, the mystical qualities of both manifest themselves in our inner feelings and convince us of the lasting value of both.

In our hurried view of the history, we made mention of knowledge that was lost. Of course this came about as the result of persecution of both the thinking individual and the organizations to which they belonged, by those who would bend mankind to a life of superstitious slavery. The individual Mason cannot and should not lose sight of the sacrifices of our predecessors and our debt to them to preserve our ways and customs in their entirety and guard them against exploitation by the politically ambitious.

Introduction by Douglas Messimer, PM
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