

MASONIC ORIGIN IN THE MYSTERIES

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The Mysteries were secret religious assemblies that grew up in the Ancient Greek culture and later became very popular in the Roman Civilization. They originated in a very early period and were selective in the membership. No uninitiated person was allowed to take part in their ceremonies. The mysteries seemed to have a double object. First they handed down the traditions which were connected with the gods in whose honour they were organized. Secondly they taught how certain rites should be performed and trained their members to carry out those rites correctly. The time value of the Mysteries did not lie in dogmatic religious teaching but in the moral improvement apparent in the membership, in the inspiration and comfort that the performance of the rites brought and in the hope that they inspired for the future life.

Although the mysteries had their greatest popularity in the cultures of Greece and Rome yet they had their origins in the mists of great antiquity. China, India, Persia, Egypt and many other ancient civilizations had their own forms of the Mysteries. Those of which we know the most are from Greece and Rome yet these, too, have their connections with other cultures and ages.

The first thing that we even notice about these Mystery Religions as we study Masonry is that the membership of these religions rested on the voluntary choice of the individual. No one was invited to belong to a Mystery Religion. The individual had to volunteer to become a member. And then another thing was that these Mystery Religions had initiation rites and the initiation was supposed to provide an emotional experience for the individual, who was supposed when he went into the Mystery Religion, to enter into a new fellowship, a fellowship of regenerated individuals. Then too, the ultimate goal of this Mystery Religion was to connect the individual who was being initiated to a god so that the relationship between the individual and the god would become an intimate type of thing, would bring to this individual a type of divine help. The initiation rites were supposed to bring the individual, no matter what his age, from what they thought of as childbirth, into maturity. This was the job of the initiation. As he was transformed from childhood, regardless of his chronological age, he was brought from childhood into maturity, he became a sharer in the social duties of the religion, certain things, certain duties in connection with the social affairs of the day, the moral affairs of the day became his

responsibility after his initiation. He was supposed to be born into a larger life, he was supposed to break with the past and to enter into a new type of existence. The most important part of a Mystery Religion was instruction. The individual went through a series of lessons - he was taught how he should act and what he should do and how he should think and the reason why we know so little about the Mystery Religion is that the initiation rites and the instruction was never written down. It was handed on orally, from group to group, from person to person, never written down. Therefore we know very little about what just exactly went on in this period of initiation, but the total effect of the Mystery Religion was to weld a chain of cultural continuity through the centuries.

Now I have said that these Mystery Religions were connected with a god. The ancient peoples, of course, as you know, worshipped many types of gods, but every Mystery Religion had one certain god that it worshipped and paid loyalty to. These gods were usually connected with some type of belief in fertility and growth.

The ancient peoples always lived on the edge of starvation and the long period of winter when nothing grew was a great source of wonder. Even greater awe was the arrival of Spring when the earth seemed to come to life again. For them, however, there was no certainty that Spring would inevitably follow winter and that there would be a time of growth and a time for harvest. This routine was entirely at the disposal of the whim of the gods. It was necessary for the ancients to keep the gods of fertility in good humour so that the return of springtime was assured. Much of the ancient religious rituals and practises were directed toward this end.

Because the ancient world was so concerned about Spring, Summer and Winter, their great legends had to do with this subject and the mysteries of which we are speaking were tied into the legends. The Earth, usually, is the great goddess of Fertility, who in Autumn grew old and feeble and was in danger of death. If the goddess died that would mean starvation for the primitive man and the idea filled him with terror. Therefore, some magical rite needed to be performed to assist the goddess over the dangerous period of winter. Thus the goddess who was in danger of dying would be brought to life again possessing a younger and more vigorous body.

The Adonis myth probably originated in Babylon, but is best known to us in its Greek version. Adonis was the youthful lover of the great Mother Goddess, Ishtar, who embodied all the reproductive energies of nature. Each year Adonis died and passed into the world of the Shadows. Every year his Mistress, Ishtar, would seek after him because with Adonis gone the period of reproduction would cease. So desperate was the situation that

messengers were sent to the Queen of the Underworld demanding the return of Adonis. Meantime, Ishtar herself went to the underworld in search of her lover. She passed through the seven gates of the underworld and each time she had to pay a fee which was one of her garments. At length naked and alone, she appears before the Queen of the Underworld. The Queen refuses to release Adonis until the messengers of the gods arrive and sprinkle the Water of Life on both Adonis and Ishtar. Then they return to the upper world and the world of nature is revived.

In another version Adonis is a beautiful child whom Aphrodite loves. Not to be deprived of this love Aphrodite hides Adonis in a chest and leaves the chest in charge of Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld. When Persephone sees the lovely child she refuses to give him back to Aphrodite. Aphrodite then descends herself into the underworld in a desperate effort to recover the child. At length Zeus intervenes in the dispute and rules that the child must remain with Aphrodite for half the year and with Persephone the other half of the year. The half of the year that Adonis is with Aphrodite is the warm period of reproduction and growth. The half that he is with Persephone is the cold, bleak, unproductive period.

This is the main outline of the legends of fertility and growth, of death and resurrection. A myriad of differing versions are told. Basically, the legends are all the same. A god dies and the earth becomes unproductive. The god is resurrected and warmth and growth is restored to the earth. The Mysteries of all cultures have their legends, their rites and ceremonies. Only the initiates know the legend and only the skilled can perform the ceremonies that will ensure the resurrection of the dead god. Each mystery has its own signs and symbols as well as its own legends.

Osiris was the son of the earth god Seb, and of the sky goddess Nut. He had two brothers, Horus, the elder and Set, and two sisters Isis and Metphthys. Osiris taught the Egyptians how to grow corn but Set, the God of Evil, was jealous of the popularity of Osiris and conspired with 72 others to murder him. He made a chest and persuaded Osiris to get into it. Then the conspirators nailed the chest down and flung it into the Nile. When Isis discovered what had happened she cut her hair, put on mourning clothes, and went out in search of the body. In the meantime the chest floated down to Byblos in Syria and was stranded. An Erica tree sprang up and enclosed the chest completely in its trunk. The King of Syria decided to cut down the tree to use as a column in his palace. Isis arrives at the Palace, begs for the pillar, cuts it open and finds the body. She throws herself upon the body and brings it back to life and Osiris is raised up to continue to teach the Egyptians how to make their fertile soil produce crops to feed the people.

Perhaps as I have been telling of these ancient legends you will have noted the similarities to the legend of Hiram Abiff. Decidedly the legend as we know it did not come from the Bible. The story in the V.S.L. says that Hiram, King of Tyre, sent Hiram Abiff to help Solomon build the temple (1 Chron: 2:13 and 1 Kings 7:13). From the accounts he appears to have been, not so much an architect, as a skillful worker in brass, stone and purple. Chronicles says that Hiram's mother was "of the Daughters of Dan" while his father was a man of Tyre. Tyre, by the way, was one of the centres of the cult of Adonis. Beyond this the Bible tells nothing. There is no record of the murder of Hiram or even of his death although it is evident that he had dropped out of the picture by the time that the temple was dedicated.

Where the complete legend came from we do not know. It is quite feasible to imagine that it did have its origin in some form of a legend from the Mysteries. We have all the ingredients even to the murder of the productive god, the disposal of the body and the discovery and raising of the body. We have the signs and the symbols. We have the journey of those dedicated to the discovery of the body. We have the joy and the lessons that are taught in the restoration of the erstwhile productive person.

Yet we must note, too, that the legend of Hiram has been refined and very aptly adapted to teach the lessons that need to be taught:

- (1) Hiram, in our legend, is not restored to life as are the gods in the Mysteries. To the modern person it would be a jarring note to have life restored. It is most appropriate that he is properly interred and remains in memory as a noble example of a man who would rather suffer death than betray a sacred trust imposed upon him.
- (2) The raising of Hiram symbolizes the entrance of the human soul into a new and better stage of existence and points out that all men should prepare themselves for the transition to the new life by a God-fearing and upright life.
- (3) The legend as we know it has none of the magical elements that are common in the legends of the Mysteries. In one of the versions of the Osiris legend, Isis throws herself on the dead body of Osiris and immediately conceives and later becomes the mother of Horus. The reason for the raising of the body is so that it may be properly interred in consecrated ground. Certain signs are learned but these are not the genuine secrets. We are taught that the quest does not end with the raising of the body but that we

must go on in the unending search for eternal truth. It is only by a constant struggle to attain this elusive truth that we can live the life triumphant.

- (4) The legend does not end in the crass materialism of the ancients whereby they assure themselves of the material gain of food for the coming winter season. The lesson we learn is that there is another world open to us and another life, happier than this one when our present transitory existence is ended. Until that time of promotion arrives we must hold fast to our faith, we must be faithful to our obligations and to our duties and we must ever strive to attain a fuller understanding of the Mysteries that surround us.

It is not possible to say exactly where the legend of Hiram Abiff originated or whether it has any direct relationship to the Mysteries. It is possible to say that it is a part of the great human quest for the meaning of life and death that originated with the advent of man to this earth. Knowing that the legend is a part of the ongoing stream of human thought.

This conception of the Legend of Hiram Abiff enriches it tremendously and greatly enhances its meaning. No longer is Hiram only a man of honour who was willing to sacrifice his life rather than to betray a sacred trust. He stands for something vaster than that. He is a part of humanity reaching out towards an unknown power, seeking for some assurance of permanency and love. Man has always thought that if he could make the corn to grow, if he could build granaries, pull them down then build bigger ones he would have attained something that could not be destroyed - wealth and power. The history of mankind has proven this theory to be false. A long line of Prophets, Priests and Kings, including Hiram Abiff, have been sacrificed on the altar of crass materialism. Even in death these men have not been silenced but have lived on in the lives of their followers to proclaim that beyond the world of material things is the world of the spirit. It is this latter world that holds the true secrets not only of the Master Mason but of all Mankind.

Hiram was not the first builder to be slain nor was he the last. Even today the eternal temple will not be built without sacrifice and blood, and sweat and tears.

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