



The Supreme Being

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There was a great debate on the internet a short while ago concerning the belief in a Supreme Being, which caused a lot of anguish between different parties. As you may be aware there are some Grand Lodges that do not require such a belief.

This caused me to think about this subject and I did a wee bit of research to find out what other parts of the world were up to and how well this requirement was being upheld.

And one or two of the things that I found, might be of interest to the Brethren that perhaps don' have access to the internet or Masonic News on a worldwide scale.

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From a historical point of view, in 1885 there was a Masonic Trial of a Bro. John Harrison, King Solomon's Lodge No. 22, Richmond Hill, of the Grand Lodge of Ontario. Bro. Harrison was tried and expelled from his Lodge for, (and I quote!) "Un-Masonic Conduct for being an Agnostic, a Secularist and a Freethinker, and being such, that he held religious views and opinions not consistent with the doctrines and principles of Freemasonry".

Now..... thinking about this nowadays, I wonder what would happen if a similar situation occurred today in a Craft Lodge. Would the outcome of that Masonic Trial be different if it happened today? This made me stop and consider whether the Ancient Landmarks of Masonry were really changing, or being eroded, or perhaps not at all?

From time to time during conversation, we all comment on how slowly things change in Masonry. Is this Landmark one that has changed?

Maybe it is changing so slowly as not to be noticed. If so, has it changed so dramatically that a candidate or a member of a Masonic Lodge could possibly not believe in the Supreme Being?

As Masons today, we are rightly proud that our Order practices universal tolerance regarding others, so that any man may sit in a Masonic Lodge, whether he be Moslem, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or of other religious persuasions, which believe in the teachings of the Supreme Being as set out in those three questions asked of the candidate seeking admission. The Belief in the Supreme Being is an Ancient Landmark not to be trifled with. However, Freemasonry, from its origin to the present time, in all its different guises, has undergone some interesting and significant changes regarding the question of religion in Masonic Life.

In the centuries prior to the establishment of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, Masonic Lodges seem to have been governed in accordance with the Old Charges. Under the Old Charges, a candidate for admission into Freemasonry was required to be of a Christian Religion and to declare a specific belief in the Trinity. This practice

continued until 1723, when Anderson wrote his new Book of Constitutions. This version contained several significant changes which caused considerable concern and discussion among the Brethren of the time. One of the principle changes was that Freemasonry, as a purely Christian character, was abolished, and was replaced with one based on a Deistic approach. When the Grand Lodge of Scotland was formed in 1736 it followed that model.

In 1813 with the Union of the so called Ancients and Moderns in England, the Entered Apprentice degree was again changed so that Masonry definitely ceased to be a strictly Christian Order. For now a candidate was not asked about his own particular religion; from that time forward, the only question asked of the candidate of a religious nature was to be asked at the commencement of his Initiation: " In whom do you put your trust ?" with the reply being "In God". Thus, as a Mason, he was "Free" to interpret Masonic symbols, allegory and actions according to his own conception of their spiritual meaning, whether he be Christian, Hindu, Moslem, Jew, Buddhist, or other religious persuasion.

Since 1813, the concepts and practices adopted by the United Grand Lodge of England, and disseminated throughout the Regular Masonic World, have not changed significantly and, while the chiefly Christian basis of the Order some 200 years earlier, ceased; nevertheless, a fundamental belief in the Supreme Being has changed only for the better, in order to encompass all like minded men and to show the Universality of the Science, and the Universal Nature of the Masonic Order.

So back to the original question!

Do you believe that in today's Masonic Lodge that a Brother would be expelled from this Order because his religious beliefs were not consistent with those of the Masonic Order: - That of course being the belief in the Supreme Being, who will punish vice and reward virtue, and who has revealed his will to man.

Back in 1885 then, Brother John Harrison appealed against his expulsion from his Lodge to the Grand Lodge Board of General Purposes, and ultimately it was referred to the Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Hugh Murray, for his decision. After reviewing all the evidence given at the trial in the Lodge, during the appeal to the Board of General Purposes, and finally after a personal interview with Bro. John Harrison, M. W. Bro. Hugh Murray came to a decision which he declared was "one of the most important decisions ever considered by this Grand Lodge. " In his address to the Grand Lodge Communication in 1886, The Grand Master defended a brother's right to believe in a God of his choosing, and that he "would be among the first to defend" a brother, or man "from intolerant persecution".

Then the Grand Master expressed his views with regard to the decision which he had reached, in part as: "Masonry has been, and continues, to be tolerant of a man's religion, or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the Order, provided he believes in the Great Architect of the Universe, and practice the sacred duties of morality." In Masonry, "there are certain landmarks which cannot be changed, the most important being the belief in God, and the immortality of the soul. There can be no doubt upon this question, for this Grand Lodge has over and over shown its adherence to this landmark." He therefore declined to interfere with the action of the Lodge which had suspended the Brother, and Grand Lodge concurred in his finding.

That, my brethren, was over 100 years ago. Would this Grand Body still hold to this principle? I don't know if any of you have any special knowledge of any man being excluded from Masonry because of his religious beliefs. But there is a Lodge in abroad which recently had an applicant, who after being balloted for and accepted, was asked what VSL he wished to be obligated on. His response was the Book of Odin, a God in the Norse Mythologies. This request caused great concern with several members of the Lodge. The Lodge referred this request to the Grand Lodge, who sought advice from the United Grand Lodges of England and of Norway. It was concluded that Odin was one of several minor gods in the Norse Mythologies; and therefore not the Supreme Being. On this basis the applicant was advised that his religious beliefs were not consistent with those of this Grand Lodge, and therefore he was not admitted to the secrets and mysteries of ancient Freemasonry.

Based on this event, it seems apparent to me that the Ancient Landmark which refers to the Belief in the Supreme Being is still being maintained, upheld and is secure from encroachment by that Grand Lodge, and I'm equally certain by the Grand Lodge of Scotland as well.

So, my Brethren, I am confident of the answer that I would receive if asked anyone in this Lodge,

“In whom do you put your trust?”