



**A FREEMASONRY LOOK
AT THE MOVIES**

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By: Lon Woodbury
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There have always been storytellers. In ancient times they performed around the campfire, or wherever people gathered in their free time.

A good storyteller entertained, but a great storyteller would also bring the listener into the story, thereby educating the listener about life, and the role each person might be playing.

The ritual in Freemasonry consists of a series of great stories. These stories are concerned with the great issues mankind and storytellers have always been vitally concerned with.

While we still find the old oral storyteller at times, the role of the storyteller in modern society is now most often found in books, television, and the movies, but especially the movies. To a large extent, movies have become a leading art form of story telling in modern times.

Most people attend movies to be entertained, and as an escape from their daily lives. And most seem to accept the assumptions of the producers and writers without much thought. But some think deeper, and compare ideas presented in the movies with their own understandings, and evaluate, using movies to expand their knowledge, which is what a great storyteller wants his listeners to do.

For years I've used movies as an insight to what our society values, and what issues are important to us. Recently I've added another element in my movie viewing. I'm starting to look at movies from the perspective of Freemasonry's Blue Lodge ritual. And I see a lot of parallels. This is not to say that movies are produced with an eye to Masonic ritual, but that the lessons, ideas, and concepts our ritual are concerned with, are to a large extent, the same lessons, ideas, and concepts being explored in contemporary movies.

For example, in our ritual, we travel to the East. Outside Freemasonry, the importance of the East seems to permeate our culture. In Christianity, for example, Moses, in leading his people across the Red Sea toward the Promised Land travelled East. And the Magi, in visiting the Christ child with gifts, blessings and wisdom, came from the East. In modern movies the East often plays a special part. In H.G. Wells novel *The Time Machine*, the traveller to the far future finds an idyllic society and it turns out must travel to the East to learn about the horrible reality that could not be spoken aloud. The Hobbits in the *Lord of the Rings* were in the West of Middle Earth, and had to travel East to find and combat the source of the world's problems, which was the misuse of that world's working tools, the rings that had been crafted in the beginning of time. And of course, Indiana Jones travelled East to acquire the implements of ancient wisdom. His purpose was greater wisdom, fighting the Nazi's who wanted them for raw power. Using these artefacts for power, of course, would have been a misuse of them, like the ruffians' misuse of the working tools of Freemasonry in the third degree.

There are several parallels between the stories in Freemasonry ritual, and the stories told in our everyday world. I will briefly look at five important concepts found in our ritual and interpret where Movies seem to be exploring the same concepts or themes as Freemasonry does. There are of course many other important concepts, but these are the ones suggested to me in some movies I recently viewed.

1. The first idea is of travel, or journey, or search, or sometimes called a quest. The candidate in all three degrees, and especially in the third degree, and all Masons for that matter, are on a journey whereby through study, overcoming challenges and tests, try to obtain that which is sought. What is sought, and referred to as light, might be greater knowledge, increased ability, or something that can be brought back to the community for the common good.

By becoming Masons, we all acknowledged we were on a quest.

2. The second idea is Symbols, a vital part of the language of Freemasonry. While words can adequately describe material things, symbols are seen in Freemasonry as necessary to comprehend that reality which is beyond words, the hidden reality.
3. The third idea is the duality of the world, represented by the West in the lodge room, where things can only be understood in comparison to its opposite. Good and evil is a major duality concept, as is the oriental yin and yang, and masculine and feminine, and each is understood in the world primarily by comparison to its opposite. For example, in the everyday world, it is impossible to understand joy unless you have experienced sorrow. Masculine is understood in comparing it to feminine, and vice versa, and Good is understood by its comparison to evil. This contrasts with the supposed singularity of God represented by the East in the lodge room, where we are told neither duality, nor opposites, nor does evil exist.
4. The fourth idea is the rebirth, or transformation, which is experienced by every Freemasonry candidate, and especially in the drama of the third degree. The most stated goal of becoming a Mason is to become transferred into a better man, in other words, a hope for a rebirth, no matter how small.
5. The fifth idea is the concept of time. In our everyday world, tomorrow will come, whether we are ready or not. There seems to be no way we or the universe can avoid time's ravages. Time seems to be the complete master of us. Yet starting with Einstein's theory of relativity, physicists increasingly in the past century have been saying that time is, well, relative. Many metaphysicians believe time is

something created, to give us a human experience, and that time, as we know it, is only an illusion. In the lecture of the third degree, it talks about the immortal part of man, "which shall live when time shall be no more." All this, including Freemasonry's ritual, implies time is not the absolute we might think it is. That somehow, there might be some flexibility, and conceives of the almost inconceivable possibility of an existence without time. Thus, time might not always have power over us.

So how do these five ideas from Freemasonry ritual play out in some popular movies I have happened to see lately? Some of the parallels I draw might seem to be a stretch, but my main point is to explore a different perspective, and to encourage others to further develop this perspective in more depth.

In the Matrix, the hero is approached by a mysterious stranger, and goes on a Quest, which promises to teach him the real truth about the world

1. The travel for hidden meaning). He finds that in reality, humanity's true function in the world are to serve as batteries for the evil machines 3. the duality of the clash between good and evil), and what we consider normal life is just Symbols in computer language 2. A part of reality can only be described through use of symbols). His consciousness is transformed into his real body 4. A rebirth to his true self), and he successfully gives humanity a rebirth back into the real world 4. The illusion is un-plugged, and we have a rebirth of true reality).

In the Time Machine, the 1996 movie version of H. G. Wells early 20th century book, the hero develops a time machine (5. That time can be mastered) and explores the future (1. Travels for greater knowledge), where he finds a world controlled by evil (3. The fight between the good-evil duality). He fights the evil and transforms the world (4. Rebirth into a better world without the old evil), into one with hope and without terror, as well as transforming his own life by finding the love of a woman (4. His

finds what he is searching for and transforms his life into something better.)

The Star Wars series features Luke Skywalker who journeys to find his heritage as a Jedi Knight (1. An internal journey of self-discovery, as well as an external journey), fighting the dark side of the force (could this be the light Masons are searching for?) as represented by Darth Vader (3. In this play of the duality of good and evil, good is appreciated by how purely negative Darth Vader is), and with study and work transforms himself into a full fledged and recognized Jedi Knight with superior skills, insights, and abilities (4. His personal transformation). As an aside, the Jedi Knights are warriors with spiritual insights and abilities, a kind of warrior monks very much like the Knights Templars of the Middle Ages who some say were a forerunner of Freemasonry. Symbols reminiscent of the Middle Ages are throughout the scenes (2. Symbols are automatically accepted as important).

Groundhog Day has been popular for years. In this movie, time becomes a continuous loop (5. Time becomes flexible) taking the cynical reporter on a continuous journey of self-exploration (1. An internal Quest), through repeating a single day over and over until he transforms himself (4. Rebirth through growing up) into a decent guy that gets the girl honestly in the end.

In the Harry Potter series, a young boy heads off to a school to study the hidden sciences (sound familiar?), and in his adventures there he is brought face to face with good and evil (3. Duality clashes through good and evil) in his journey to maturity (1. Growing up is a Quest). Characters in the movie transform themselves (4. Transformations, which are change) many times for better and for worse, as well as we watch Harry himself transform (4. Transformation through growing up) from an unsure, awkward pre-adolescent towards an increasingly skilled and knowledgeable person. The symbolism (2. Symbols are assumed to be important) is throughout the movies, suggestive of Middle Ages life.

The Lord of the Rings touches the essence of Freemasonry very deeply in many places, though not necessarily directly or obviously. The Hobbits travel from the West to the East (1. A Journey of travellers) to return the ring to its source (2. The ring as a symbol of the structure of the world) so as to defeat the misuse of the power of the rings by evil forces (3. Good vs. Evil duality again). In it, all are transformed by the experience (4. Change is rebirth), but none so much as the wizard Gandolf, who falls into the bowels of the earth fighting an evil monster (in a sense dies), and returns to the group later in the nick of time in a glowing of light rebirth (4. A successful rebirth) that comes about from that experience of his desperate struggle with death, and also as a result of his many years of study and trials leading up to that final transformation.

Dr. Who is a kind of alternative, cultist type of movie and TV series that combines dry British humour, with slapstick, and science fiction. To me, this is an irresistible combination that my kids could never understand. The Doctor, as he prefers to be called, is a Time Lord, a master of time (5. Time has no power over him). He journeys (1. The Quest again) through time and space fighting evil (3. Standard good vs. evil duality) wherever it turns up, especially against his power-hungry antagonist who calls himself the Master (a little anti-Masonic concept here perhaps?). His overall Quest has never been adequately explained so far as I know, but there seems to be a grand purpose in the quest of this Time Lord. Odd symbols abound (2. Assumed to be important) each with special powers and meanings. He says he has 13 lives, so that when severely injured, he transforms (4. Literally a rebirth in this case) to a new body. This is also a convenient way of changing actors when the old one wants to leave the series.

My point is that there are universal issues that modern society is still exploring, and these are the same ones Freemasonry explores in our ritual. Thus, what we have in our Craft is

something that is relevant to the modern world since we are exploring and talking about the same universal issues. But very few of us seem to be aware of that. Too often, Freemasonry is something we set aside from our daily lives, as a quaint oddity. Perhaps we should make a point of pointing out to prospective members that in our ritual, we are addressing all the same issues as the outside world is doing, with the added benefit we are building on the knowledge of past generations of Masonic thought, that was built on the wisdom and mysteries of the ages. Our ritual combines knowledge from the ancient past, with issues of vital contemporary interest, and tries to prepare for the future. It is compatible with present knowledge, and is there for us to benefit, if we will just see.

This is not a definitive study, but I have just been playing with a new perspective to provide an introduction. My hope in presenting this is to encourage those much more knowledgeable in Freemasonry to further explore this perspective. By comparing the lessons, concepts and themes contained in the Freemasonry ritual with those being explored in the outside world, both members and prospective candidates can learn that Freemasonry is as relevant and as vital today as it has ever been. Maybe even coaches can refer the candidate to contemporary movies to show how relevant the ritual is and use them as a tool for better contemporary understanding of what Freemasonry is about.

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