

The Sun

Temple Lodge No. 649 – October 18, 2011

Have you ever wondered why the Sun has such a central role in the ritual of our Craft?

The sun has appeared on many Masonic Aprons in the past. In our jurisdiction our Past and Present Grand Masters have the sun in splendor embroidered in gold metallic in the centre of their lambskin aprons. At one time the sun and on occasion the moon was present in the centre of the square and compasses our well know symbol of Masonry.

The light from the sun provides the light and energy which is a basic requirement for the survival of our plants and animals. We know that without the sun we would be into permanent cold and darkness. Light of the sun on a clear day gives humans a positive feeling about life. We tend to feel better as the days lengthen and tend to become depressed as the length of daylight shortens. In ancient times the length of day was measured and the first day that could be proven to be longer was December 25, 4 days after the Winter Solstice and so great celebrations took place as they then knew that summer was on its way.

The energy of the sun seems unlimited. We often awe at the power of water coming down a river or over a water fall. This kinetic energy was a result of the suns energy to evaporate the water and raise it into the sky to fall as precipitation. More recently we have observed how electrical energy can be produced from the light of the sun.

Mammals, bird and reptiles migrate to feeding grounds at the right time of the year based on the increasing length of daylight. Similarly they return to more protected areas as the length of daylight is decreasing. For the survival of most species it is important that the young be born at a time for best weather conditions and feeding opportunities. The change in length of daylight triggers the estrous cycle in the female and mating occurs. Birds are very responsive to the changing length of day. Birds will start to lay eggs as the day lengthens and hens will continue to lay eggs as long as the length of daylight is not shortened.

The exposure to the sun has many positive effects on our health including the conversion of a precursor to Vitamin D. However we also know that excess exposure to the sun can cause sunburns, trigger photosensitive diseases, aging of the skin and cancer. Too much of a good thing can be dangerous.

Most, if not all cultures throughout the world recognized the importance of the sun. Temples and other ancient structures, in Egypt, British Isles, Mexico, South America, etc. have been found oriented to the sun at the time of either the Equinox or one of the Solstices. The Canaanites and later the early Jews carried a wand called an "asherah" which they would stand straight upright on the ground to measure the angle of the shadow from the sun at the time of the sunrise and sunset. They were to indentify the direction of the shadow, which would indicate to them the approximate day of the year. By observing the extreme angles that the shadow would reach at the Winter and Summer Solstices and the direction obtained at the Equinoxes they were able to accurately determine east and

west. This would give them the precise measurement of east and west. Similar measurements were probably made by various cultures throughout the world as we have identified many ancient structures that have a sun orientation.

To-day we question their accuracy however we have reason to believe that they were in fact very accurate. Of interest is the Abu Simbel Temple in Egypt which was carved out of a mountain in approximately 1230 BCE and moved in the mid 1960s to protect it from flooding as the Aswan High Dam was being constructed to form Lake Nasser. Originally the sun's rays, on October 21st and Feb. 21st which was 61 days before and after the Winter Solstice, shone down the main corridor to light up, at the far end the statue of Pharaoh Rameses II and his favourite Queen Nefertari. These dates were apparently his birthday and his coronation. After the move of the temple this lighting event occurred on October 22 and Feb. 20. Engineers with modern measurements appeared to have lacked the ability to locate the temple as accurately as the ancient Egyptians had some 3,000+ years ago.

We are told that the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of King Solomon were oriented due east and west. The orientation of the temple was so important that the altar in King Solomon's Temple was placed so that a shadow from the north east corner would pass directly over the altar at the time of the Winter Solstice. Similarly at the time of the Summer Solstice the shadow of the south east corner would also cross directly over the altar.

In our ancient ritual we also recognize the importance that the sun played throughout the ages. "As the sun rises in the east to open and enliven the day so is the Worshipful Master placed in the east, etc." They recognized the phenomenal importance of the sun to survival of life on earth and drew a comparison with the importance of the position of the Worshipful Master with his lodge.

We know that all good things come to pass. In Masonry the duty of closing the lodge is delegated by the Worshipful Master to his Senior Warden the one who is second in command. "As the sun sets in the west to close the day, so is the Senior Warden placed in the west to close the lodge, etc."

Consequently, when you consider the many effects that the sun has on our earth, on us and on the many species of animals and plants that exist on this planet, it is not surprising that the existence of the sun for our ancient cultures was extremely important. It is equally important to us to-day, however our living conditions have changed significantly. We now live in comfortable structures with central heat and air conditioning well protected from the elements. At night the street lights substitute for the light from the sun. To-day we do not feel that direct impact of the sun and are further removed from its daily importance.

The sun is the star of our universe. It provides the planets rotating around it with heat, light and energy. The importance of the sun to mankind and the survival of humans are reflected in our ritual as we open and close the lodge.

Masonry reminds us of the movement of the celestial bodies and the importance of the sun for our very existence.

Book of Constitution, Grand Lodge page 137

Twice Told Tales

Wikipedia

The Work

Uriel's Machine – Christopher Knight & Robert Lomas, page 465

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