

Judaism and Freemasonry

By Barry Albin

In order to fully understand the relationship of Freemasonry and those who are Jews one must first understand something about the origins of Freemasonry. There is little doubt that the community that lived at Qumran was an Essene community. However, modern scholarship is increasingly recognizing that the Essenes were a leadership group, may be best described as the Third Degree, of the Nazorean Movement within Judaism of the First Century of the modern era. Professor Israel Finklestein is clear on the subject when he says that the Nazorean Movement and the Essenes are one group.

The Nazorean Movement had three degrees of increasing commitment to their order just as do the Freemasons. They admitted men and had a separate organization for women, keeping the two separate. They would admit no one who was not of age as a Jew, who was not sober in his personal life, who was not an able-bodied worker, or who was too old. They professed a profound belief in G-d and understood Him in a way that was proto-gnostic in its commitment to the concept of Light and Darkness. The Nazorean Movement left behind books which were hidden both in the Temple in Jerusalem and in caves near their Qumran headquarters. The Nazorean Movement disagreed strongly with the rest of Judaism on the importance of the Temple. For the Nazoreans, the Temple was not a physical building, but a spiritual building composed of the true believers of the House of Israel. The Nazoreans were more liberal in their rules for conversion, allowing Gentiles full participation once they had converted. The Nazoreans awaited the coming of the Messiah and knew that the Temple would descend from Heaven fully made at the time of the Messianic age. The Nazoreans wrote the three principle books of the Kabbalah: Sefer Yetzirah, Ha Bahir, and Ha Zohar.

The Nazorean books were found by the Knights Templar and the ideas that they expressed seriously challenged the beliefs of the day. It was for that reason that the Popes limited the knowledge they possessed to only the highest members of the order, the full Knights. When the Templar order was pushed underground, the priestly members of the

order and the Templar Corps of Engineers were amalgamated into the Guild of Stone Masons in England and Scotland and their teachings as chaplains of the amalgamated Guild became the basis of Freemasonry. It was these teachings that attracted non-operatives into the Guild and from the Guild Lodges eventually Freemasonry appeared in England.

Jews were actively involved in the beginnings of Freemasonry in America. There is evidence they were among those who established Masonry in seven of the original thirteen states: Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia.

There were three Jews involved among the 10 men that formed the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in Charleston, South Carolina in 1801. There were several other Jews who held the masonic titles in the late 1700's: Solomon Bush in Pennsylvania, Joseph Myers in Maryland and later in South Carolina, and Abraham Forst of Philadelphia in Virginia in 1781. Another Jewish Grand Master was Moses Seixas in Rhode Island from 1791 until 1800. There were many other American Jewish Masons in early American history, including one in George Washington's original Fredericksburg Lodge.

There is evidence that Jews, including rabbis, continued to be involved in the Masonic movement in the United States. There have been at least 51 Jewish American Grand Masters. Today there are many Jews active in Masonry in America and other countries. Israel has about 60 Masonic lodges with 3,000 members.

Jews had also been involved to a small extent in the formation of modern Freemasonry in the early 1700's in England. Until then Jews were not permitted to participate in many of the ordinary activities of life. Then the Enlightenment concept of the universality of all people brought about a society where people's religious beliefs did not affect their rights as citizens. Jews were gradually permitted to exercise the rights of citizenship and to pursue their lives as they wished.

Many Jews viewed joining Freemasonry as part of their "emancipation" from the old legal and social exclusions. Modern Masonry was as much a product of the

Enlightenment as the emancipation of Jews. Many society leaders were Freemasons and if Jews could join this fraternity that would prove they were being accepted. They could also use the opportunities presented by their participation in a social organization with Christians to prove the two could prosper by their association. Freemasonry's philosophy of the brotherhood of all people indicated Masonry would accept Jews as members.

There are many common themes and ideals in Masonic and Jewish rituals, symbols, and words:

1. Belief in G-d, prayer, immortality of the soul, charity, and acting respectfully to all people are essential elements of Freemasonry as well as Judaism, and of course other religions too.
2. Masonry and Judaism, as well as other religions and statements of ethical standards, teach that we must discipline ourselves and keep our passions in check. Jewish masons follow rituals in synagogues and in Masonic lodges to help them develop this ability.
3. Judaism and Masonry give the greatest respect and support for freedom of individuals. Judaism teaches that everyone is capable of good or evil and attempts to help us use our free will to choose the righteous path. Masonry teaches that those who are morally fit can find "light" in Masonry if they desire it of their own free will. The concept of exercising free will to accept the law and atone for past transgressions is what Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are about.
4. Light is an important symbol in both Freemasonry and Judaism. Contrast the holiday of Chanukah with the use of light in Masonry, where it represents the Divine spirit, religious freedom, and rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem and of the spiritual Temple within us all.
5. One of the fundamental symbols of Masonry is the Temple of Solomon and the Second Temple, which also figured as the central part of the Jewish religion. King Solomon, one of the greatest figures in Jewish history, is also one of the most important figures in Masonic rituals.

While there are many common aspects of Judaism and Freemasonry, it also should be recognized that because of the history of attempts to force Jews to convert they can be uncomfortable about being asked to say Christian prayers or otherwise indicate non-Jewish beliefs. Some parts of Masonry use New Testament prayers, references to Saints, the cross as a religious symbol (although it is stated that the cross is being used as a symbol of religion in general rather than the Christian religion), and one Masonic organization requires aspiring members to swear to support the Christian faith. Jews must deal with these references to other religions by remaining quiet or not participating in those parts of Masonry.

Did Masonry always welcome Jews? No. Although a Jew, Edward Rose, became a Mason in a London lodge in 1732, this event apparently excited attention and led to other lodges debating whether they should permit Jewish members. Eventually, significant numbers of Jews joined English Masonry where they were apparently welcomed. French Masonic lodges, and those in different countries affiliated with the French Grand Orient during the Napoleonic occupations, admitted Jews without restrictions. In 1869 a Jew was Grand Master of the Scottish Rite in Paris. However, later in the 1800's French society became more anti-Semitic, culminating in the Dreyfus affair where a French army officer was unjustly accused of treason mainly because he was a Jew, and French Masonry unfortunately also became more anti-Jewish. Today, some parts of French Masonry are officially neutral about religion and do not even require a belief in G-d. In Scandinavia, according to some sources, Masonry is officially Christian and does not accept Jewish members.

It is probably not surprising that the country with the longest history of anti-Semitic prejudice in Freemasonry as well as in society is Germany. Most lodges there did not permit Jews to be members, and they even questioned visiting Masonic brethren about their religion at the doors of their lodges and barred Jews even if they were Masons in good standing in other lodges. This caused lodges in England, the Netherlands, and the United States to protest but they did not retaliate against visiting German Masons.

German officials feared secret societies as potential sources of subversion, so the Prussian government became involved in Masonry as a means to watch and control it. The future Kaiser Wilhelm I was the patron of the three Berlin Grand Lodges for many years, and he decided that Jews would only be permitted if there was unanimous agreement. Since one of the Grand Lodges was known to be adamant against accepting Jews, this forced the others who wanted to be more tolerant to maintain anti-Jewish policies.

In Russia, Freemasonry was also suppressed because of the belief it might be used to support political activity against the Czarist regime, at the same time that Jews were prevented from obtaining rights of citizenship in that country.

Various claims were made by those who wanted to keep Jews out of Masonry. Some said Masonry was a Christian institution and Jews could not become members unless they converted. Some said only Christians could possess the good character necessary to achieve Masonic ideals.

Others said Masonry has Christian symbols and prayers but Jews could become Masons if they simply complied with requirements such as swearing on the Christian Gospels and eating pork at Masonic meals (both violations of halacha), without having to convert. However, there was also an argument that if a Jew voluntarily complied with Christian practices he showed he was contemptuous of his own religion and had a bad character, and was thus unworthy to be a Mason.

Another argument was that Jews preferred to be in their own social groups. It was said they should not try to push their way into Masonic lodges where they were not wanted, would be uncomfortable, and would make others uncomfortable by their presence. Some Jews did join lodges that were primarily Jewish and the B'nai B'rith organization in its early days had a ritual parallel to Freemasonry.

Finally, there were the rawest antisemitic arguments. Some of those who wanted to keep Jews out of Masonry said the Jewish religion was inherently evil, or that Jews were

racially and genetically evil and could never be permitted in Masonry even if they converted.

In general, Freemasonry's attitudes toward Jews mirrors those of the rest of society. Jews became more acceptable from the late 1700's until the 1870's. From that time on, anti-Semitism increased in many countries. This also occurred in Freemasonry, but by then Judaism and Masonry were being jointly attacked.

Freemasons and Jews always had critics. Eventually the bigots realized they could promote their ideas by tying Masons and Jews together as objects of hatred.

Critics said Freemasonry and Judaism were dedicated to undermining the institutions of existing society, including Christianity and the State, and pointed to the secrecy associated with both as proof of their evil intentions. Masons and Jews were said to be involved in, or benefited from, radical efforts such as the American, French, and Russian revolutions. Masonry and Judaism promoted free will of men, contrary to efforts of those who sought to insure that people had the "correct" thoughts. (This may explain why the Roman Catholic Papacy has expressed its antagonism toward Freemasonry so frequently and strongly since 1738, and why extreme conservatives in other religions also oppose Freemasonry.) Gradually the charge was made that Freemasons and Jews were both evil and they were purposely supporting each others' radical schemes.

Ironically, Masons and Jews were also sometimes accused of being too reactionary. Aristocrats often belonged to Masonic lodges, and some German Masons promoted the return of the Kaiser after World War I brought about a republic. Also, some Jews still dressed and acted in the same conservative ways as their ancestors in the middle ages and thus kept themselves apart from modern society.

Increasingly Jews and Freemasons were accused of being disloyal to their countries, keeping strange secrets, and designing to take over the world.

The ultimate form of this hatred was the sinister "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", which originated in Russia and received wide circulation after it was translated into German in

the 1920's. Some bigots claimed this document was a transcript of a meeting of Jewish leaders plotting world domination, in partnership with Freemasons. Although this document was not even a clever hoax, its influence was unbelievably widespread and long-lasting in whipping up hatred against Jews and Masons by many, including Henry Ford in the United States during his long anti-Jewish campaign in the 1920's and 1930's.

It was a short step from this to the ideology of the Nazis. Hitler attacked Masons as well as Jews, and after taking control of Germany and other European countries Nazis used the slogan "All Masons Jews--all Jews Masons", and persecuted Masons, Jews, and others. The Soviet Union and other totalitarian regimes have consistently attacked Freemasonry, because they cannot tolerate an organization whose basic beliefs are freedom of individuals and tolerance and generosity toward all people.

Dictatorships have regularly attacked and persecuted Masons and Jews, and these attacks on Masons and Jews together are not all in the past. Last year a group called the "Islamic Resistance Movement--Palestine" said that Freemasonry and other "Zionist-affiliated" organizations are about to be liquidated." The parts of this paper in quotations was taken from an earlier paper authored by R.:W.: Paul Bessell, Past Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of District of Columbia.

Many Masons in Kansas have been interested in my membership in the Knights Templar and why other Jews have not been members. As I explained earlier, most scholars now believe that Christianity was a product of a movement within the Nazorean Movement. I am a Nazorean Rabbi and as such believe in the teachings of Yeshua (Jesus). Our sect believes that Yeshua was the Meshiach or Anointed High Priest Melchizedek returned and that he performed all the prophecies surrounding that return. I believe that He ascended into Heaven and is now the High Priest and King of Heaven and functions as the Highest of the Archangels, the one we call Metatron. As such, I believe that Nazorean Judaism is the true Christian faith and that the other so-called Christian groups do not fully follow the teachings of Yeshua (Jesus). As the Templars are required to promise that they will defend the Christian faith in preference to all others, I had no problem as I

already had dedicated my life to spreading the news that Nazorean Judaism was the True Christian Faith, that is, were the true followers of Jesus.

I hope that this short paper will explain the relationship of Jews to Freemasonry and will further explain why most Jews cannot be Knights Templar, members of the Knight Templar Priests, members of the Royal Order of Scotland, or other organizations requiring belief in the Trinity.

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