

Editors Question Box

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Deacons Wands

A Brother from Prince Rupert writes: As a new member I am rather curious to know the significance attached to the rods or wands that are carried by the Deacons. They seem to be so much in the way at times that unless there is some deeper meaning to their origin and use than is apparent the Officers would be less hampered without them."

A great many of our Masonic ceremonies, and the paraphernalia associated with them, have their origins in the distant past, in ancient mystery rites of thousands of years ago, as well as in the customs and practices of the operative building masons of the middle ages.

In the ancient mythologies of Greece and Rome, Mercury (in the Greek, Hermes) was "the winged messenger of Jove" who carried the messages and commands of the chief Deity to the four corners of the heavens. As an emblem of his office and an indication of the purpose of his travel he carried a short rod or wand surmounted by a figure known as the caduceus. It was something like a combination of the serpent and rod or dollar sign and an airman's badge (see well-known advertisement of Mercury hosiery). This rod or wand also acted as a talisman having power to ward off all evil spirits from the pathway, so that nothing might impede Jove's messenger on his heavenly journeys.

In the Ancient Mysteries, the Herald, who conducted the candidates through the ceremonies of Initiation, always carried a wand surmounted by the figure of the caduceus of Mercury, and to it was attributed the power to ward off the spirits of evil which might impede the progress of those in search of the spirit of light and good. Even in the present day some religious denominations carry a crucifix in processions which is presumed to have the same effect.

It was the custom in the mediaeval building age for a selected Craftsman to be entrusted with the task of carrying the messages and instructions of the Master Mason, or Architect of the building, to the various departments of the work and to see that they were correctly and punctually executed. In the ceremonies within the Lodge he carried out similar duties as assigned to him by the Master Mason, and in the period of Transition from Operative to Speculative Freemasonry his duties included the introduction and conducting of candidates who were being "made Masons," and the performance of various acts similar to the work of Deacons today.

In the early Speculative period the Deacon's wand was surmounted by the caduceus, and in some foreign Grand Lodges it is still used as the insignia of the Deacons and the emblem on

their wands. Towards the latter part of the eighteenth century Christian influences were instrumental in substituting the dove, the present emblem, as more appropriate to Biblical concepts of the messenger than the pagan symbol of Mercury.

Even outside the Craft wands are not unusual as British marks of office. Church wardens and sheriffs carry them, as do certain officials in the houses of parliament. They add to the dignity of our ceremonies in the Lodge and have their use in forming the square within which candidates are obligated, and Grand Lodge officers are received and honoured. Our new Brother will note, therefore, that like many other usages and customs associated with the Craft, there is a wealth of ancient symbolism even in such a simple thing as the Deacon's wand. The deeper significance becomes more apparent, too, when we realize that a symbolic sense the Wor. Master in the Lodge represents the G.A.O.T.U. the Light of the East. It will be interesting to note also that in some parts of the British Isles it is still the custom for the Wor. Master to send his Deacon bearing a special message of invitation to the hotel or residence of a visiting Brother for his attendance at Lodge. Many Brethren from British Columbia who visited the Old Land were very appreciative of this rather unusual form of Masonic courtesy.

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Additional

" A Brother from Prince Rupert writes: As a new member I am rather curious to know the significance attached to the rods or wands that are carried by the Deacons." & Bro. Bill gave a response. I would like to add the following from my files, appropriate acknowledgement given:

WHY DO DEACONS CARRY WANDS Bill Douglas PM, Kenilworth Lodge #29 GRA, 2001

Well, we know that they use them to form an arch over a visiting dignitary when escorting him into lodge, but what other uses are there.

It was suggested at one practice that the wands be left behind when conducting a candidate as they just get in the way, and I as D. of C. ,very foolishly, was inclined to agree. But everything in the Masonic ritual has a reason or a hidden meaning that we have to root out so that we understand why we do what we do.

On the south coast of England, in the county of Sussex, near the town of Wilmington, there is carved into a hillside, the figure of a man with arms outstretched and in each hand he holds an asherah or staff. The figure is 70 meters high which is approx. 125 feet. Nobody knows who carved it there, but it is known to be several thousand years old.

The word asherah is the name given to the wooden staff, approx. 6' in length which was carried by the attendants to the high priests in ancient times and was the insignia of their office.

The wooden staffs were named for the Goddess Asherah who was the mother of twins Shachar and Shalem who were respectively the God of Dawn and the God of dusk. That is significant as will become apparent later.

The word deacon is a derivation from a Greek word which in translation means attendant. So two deacons with wands are the equivalent of two attendants with asherahs.

In the J.W. lecture it states that a Masonic lodge is situated due east and west for three reasons. 1st - The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Remember Shachar and Shalem the Gods of dawn and dusk, sunrise/sunset, there is a connection there. 2nd - We'll put that one aside as it has no significance here. 3rd - The tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon were so situated. We'll take the tabernacle of Moses because he and his followers were always on the move, and it provides a great example of the use of the Asherah.

All holy or sacred buildings at that time were situated due east and west and the tabernacle of Moses was no different except that Moses and his followers were on the move for 40 years. So the tabernacle, which was of course a tent, had to be dismantled and re-erected every time they moved, and at the rebuilding it had to be situated due east and west..

So Moses and his two attendants, complete with asherahs, would go to the chosen site where the tabernacle was to be erected just before dawn, accompanied by the heavy gang who were going to do the erecting. Moses would then choose the spot where the altar was to be and instruct one of the attendants to place his asherah on that spot. When the sun rose above the horizon, the rays from the sun would strike the asherah and send a long thin shadow towards the west. The other attendant would then place his asherah on the other end of the shadow and that would designate the centre line of the proposed tabernacle. The heavy gang would then move in and erect the tabernacle with the altar at the east end and the entrance at the west end.

Just as an aside, that is the way that all lodges were set out, with the altar in the east directly in front of the W.M.. The idea of having the altar in the centre of the lodge is a fairly recent one and I think is peculiar to North America. However, that's by the way and is of no importance here.

Obviously, the magnetic compass had not been invented at that time so all holy and sacred buildings had to be set out with the aid of two asherahs and K.S. temple was no different.

And so, the asherah, being the very first tool or implement to be made use of at the building of the temple makes them of extreme importance from a Masonic historical point of view, and as such should be carried at all times as the insignia of the office of the deacons and in particular when conducting a candidate.

And that brethren is why the deacons carry wands.

DISCOVERY IS THE WORD

What are some of the thoughts that go through a newly installed WM's mind? Without a doubt most of his thoughts will be of the same complexity as those who have gone before him, and not many of them will be really new.

Regardless of all the problems, especially those of attendance, the new WM can count on one thing he has only one year in which to do his best, there will be no repeats, no encores, no refills. He will probably ask himself 'why', with all the raisings taking place each year, at the year end the brethren sitting in lodge never seem to increase?

Masonic philosophy

By the same token that membership is voluntary, equally so is a willingness to participate in the work. Someone once said, 'We have to get more Freemasonry in men, rather than men in Freemasonry.'

In the meantime, how do we keep Freemasonry on ice?

Whatever happened to that thrill when we learned our application was accepted and pronounce clear? Does non-attendance mean that we are not losing anything, that we are not selling ourselves short? It seems rather sad to have qualified for the wealth of wisdom that Freemasonry has to offer and not to grasp the opportunity. It can be likened to eating the peel and throwing away the fruit inside.

So how does the new Master recreate and stimulate interest in getting more brethren to attend? This is something that will take more than one year, but a start can be made by making each meeting more meaningful, by ordinary explanations of the 'why' we do it as well as its representation in the dozens of items we use. Such an introduction might help to stimulate an inquisitive interest that could grow into a genuine concern.

Each new Master hopes he will have enough brethren at each meeting to form a quorum during his term, and his Lodge will only be as great as the support he gets from the membership.

One thing is for sure, he will not miss a meeting. He will also finish his year, older and wiser, and with that same enthusiasm for Freemasonry as he had on the day he learned his application had been accepted.

Becoming a MM is only the exciting beginning of Freemasonry. For until we are a MM we cannot partake in its fascinating discovery. Lodges of MMs can only be as great as the support they get from their membership.

To take an active part in the participation of the work will surely show a just reward, as it is not until we have to speak on a Masonic subject that one really learns to interpret its meanings and fully appreciate the knowledge of knowing just what we mean by what we are saying.

Many meanings.

Freemasonry's many meanings are there to be discovered by us all if we take the time to find out. This is the exciting part about Freemasonry. Not to do so means that we have graduated and qualified only to cheat ourselves of the prize.

Today's social life, with its many distractions, will continue to lure and have its affect on Lodges everywhere, attendance wise. But Freemasonry, its secrets and meanings, will remain there as they have done for centuries for those who wish to pry open its treasure-chest.

Taken from the Masonic Record, London, England;
Charles Connoly, W.M.; Kitimat Lodge No. 169, Kitimat, BC
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Submitted by D. Roy Murray
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THE DUE GUARD

By W. Bro. Arthur Graves Western Gate. Lodge, No. 48

The "Due Guard" of an E.A. is a symbol of which little is known, outside the districts where it is still in use, yet it is well worth enquir-ing into, as to its origin, antiquity and meaning, and will be of interest to many Brethren.

The symbol is still in use in most Lodges holding of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and although allowed to drop out for a long period in America, we now find many Grand Lodges in that vast country using this symbol to inculcate some beautiful thoughts.

Many modern writers, if they re-fer to the "Due Guard" at all give little or no explanation of its mean-ing, contenting themselves by saying that it is merely a mode of recog-nition, and taking its name from its purpose, which is to "duly guard" that which we have received in honour.

The E.A., while taking his OB, has the L.H.. under, and the R.H. upon the V.S.L. This has to be noted in order to understand why a loyal Scottish Brother when first called to order at the due constitu-tion of an E.A. Lodge, stands at the "due guard" instead of at the P.S. as is the custom in many jurisdictions.

One good reason for this may be that it seems quite improper to come up to the principal S. of the degree before the final instruction from the presiding officer, "and while at work this shall be your S." which, as the Lodge is not duly con-stituted until that instruction is given, seems to PRECLUDE the use of the P.S. until that point is reached. Another good reason for its re-tention, and a beautiful lesson, lies in its symbolism. Being taught to stand to order in this way, the E.A. is ever reminded that in tak-ing his OB, he held the Moral Law between his hands, thus taking to him-self all that the V.S.L. contains for the guarding of his Truth, Honour and Virtue.

Dr. Mackay in his encyclopedia says the term "Due Guard" is an Americanism and therefore of recent origin, although he refers to a ritual of 1757 in which it is used. It is presumed he meant to say was re-adopted in America. An American writer, Bro. Weldey E. Atchison of Iowa, deals with this subject in No.1 of "The Build-er," published by the National Ma-sonic Research Society," Anamosa, Iowa, claiming the "Due Guard" goes back to a time long prior to 1757 or to 1727, or to 1717 and it came from a phrase which was the name of a town in France, whereby hangs a long tale and too long for the telling at this time, however to relate briefly:- Those who have read anything of the history of book and paper mak-ing know that these two trades were in the very van of those enlightened ones which led the great movement against the papacy which resulted at last in the Reformation and Renaissance and that these "Re-formers before the Reformation" had to work in secret by means of signs and watchwords, lest they be detected by the authorities and therefore suffer grievous evils, for in the beginning of the 13th century the movement became formidable which led the Pope to issue Bulls of Destruction, the

carrying out of which left on the pages of history the reddest and angriest scars; what has this to do with Free-masonry? This, that it seems very reasonable to suppose that among the various institutions the mem-bers of which in those days had completely outgrown the puerile superstitions enforced by the papacy must have been the Masonic Lodges and it is believed will some day be proved by documentary evidence.

Now it happens that one of the towns in the centre of the French paper making trades was called "Dieu Ie Garde" which in our familiar speech means "God guard it," in after years it was changed to Dulegard and Daulegard, but it is evident that community never forgot the origin of the unusual name.

The Albigensian paper makers hit upon this name as an excellent device to use in their watermarks. Many such exist. One of them carries an elaborate symbolism in which one may detect the emblems of Light, of Brotherly Love, of the Bright and Morning Star, of the Spirit of Truth, etc., with a band across the bottom in which are the letters "Daulegard".

A watermark was very often a call across the dark by one Brother to another to carry a word of hope, recognition and encouragement. Among these devices, symbols or emblems thus inherited, was this favourite "Dieu Ie garde." This hypotheses seems reasonable, it has a host of facts behind it and it gives to the expression as we have it, a meaning and some significance.

My readers will agree that it would be a pity to see the "Due Guard" become obsolete, and will hope that it may again become uni-versal; it would be a fine beginning if our great ones would take note HOW the Brethren on the floor STAND to order at the first time of asking?

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This information may be freely given to Masons, however the following recognition is requested. The information contained in this educational paper was taken from the following books: 3-5-7 minute talks on Freemasonry by Elbert Bede Dreams by Edgar Casey Poetry for the 20th Century. It was compiled and edited by Bro. Barry D. Thom P.M. Lodge Mackay #1129

ECCLESIASTES

This scripture in the third degree, which is recited to the candidate, is perhaps one of the most intriguing of all. Unless it is studied, there are many parts which do not seem to make any sense at all. It starts out with a picture of approaching old age and many references are to parts of the body. While the author is unknown some think that it was written by King Solomon in his old age.

We will start by reading each line along with *an explanation*.

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,"

Emphasis is on now; remember Him now, not tomorrow, not next week, but now.

"while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them:"

This is a warning to youth of approaching old age.

"while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened,"

This refers to failing eyesight, or that darkening of the heavenly bodies foreboding evil or disaster.

"nor the clouds return after the rain:"

As soon as one storm ceases another follows; trouble follows trouble in old age; tears are dried only to be followed by more, as sorrows and partings increase.

"in the day, when the keepers of the house shall tremble,"

In dream analysis the house represents the body and the keepers refer to the legs and arms which provide mobility as well as to feed and look after the body.

"and the strong men shall bow themselves"

Even the strongest man can no longer stand up straight in his old age

"and the grinders cease because they are few,"

This can be interpreted as loss of teeth.

"and those that look out of the windows be darkened,"

This refers to failing eyesight. The eyes look out below the lids that open and shut like the casement of a window.

"and the doors shall be shut in the streets:"

This means the lips or ears, or both. With teeth gone and the gums shrunken, the lips are closed tightly to keep the food from dropping out; or the ears are closed to sound, referring to deafness.

"when the sound of the grinding is low,"

Grinding of family flour was a noisy proceeding; loss of hearing in old age would result in this being heard faintly; or, with the teeth gone and the mouth tightly closed, the sound of mastication would be scarcely heard.

"and he shall rise up at the sound of the bird,"

The fitful slumber of age that is disturbed by so slight a noise as the song of a bird, or reference may have been to the crowing of the cock.

"and all the daughters of music shall be brought low:"

The vocal cords lose their timber and the ears are no longer attuned to catch the strains of music.

"also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way,"

This means loss of courage to ascend high places, loss of courage to attempt to overcome difficulties, fearful imagination and failing initiative.

"and the almond tree shall flourish,"

This refers to the white hair of age. The almond tree, first to bloom in the spring, blooms on bare limbs; its pink blossoms soon turn to white and the tree has the appearance of the head of an old man.

"and the grasshopper shall be a burden,"

So light a thing as a grasshopper becomes a burden. Things lightly considered in youth become a burden in old age; there is no longer the sprightly agility of youth. Another interpretation is that in old age man has the appearance of a grasshopper; shriveled, backbone sticking out, knees forward, arms backward, head down.

"and desire shall fail;"

The caper-berry, which was eaten before meals to stimulate appetite, shall fail to take effect on a man whose powers are exhausted. The old have no desire for the pleasures of youth. The old no longer enjoy transitory pleasures. The goals set in youth may not have been reached, but one weighted down with years feels it is useless to strive after them.

"because man goeth to his long home."

This refers to the grave.

"and the mourners go about the streets."

In those days mourners were paid to wail. The more money you had, the more mourners were present at a funeral.

"Or ever the silver cord be loosed; or the golden bowl be broken; or the pitcher be broken at the fountain; or the wheel broken at the cistern."

One interpretation of the silver cord is that it is that luminous line which connects the soul to the body as the umbilical cord does the baby to its mother; the golden bowl represents the head, or brain.; the pitcher represents the blood vessels; the wheel is the heart. Another interpretation, and probably a better one, is that termination of life is signified by the breaking of a lamp, a pitcher and a wheel. The silver cord by which the lamp is suspended is loosed; the golden bowl or reservoir of oil is shattered; the oil, representing the spirit of life, is scattered and lost; the pitcher, long used to bring water from the fountain, is shattered, and the same for the wheel which so long drew water from the well. With the pitcher and the wheel useless, no more water may be drawn; the vital energies are gone; circulation of the blood ceases.

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

After a doleful picture of old age, the allegory concludes with the beautiful and cheering promise of life beyond the grave; with the promise that death is not annihilation. It is fitting that a Masonic lesson thus should be concluded.

EMULATION LODGE OF IMPROVEMENT 1823-1973

"Ritual will be better done for being done properly"

Emulation Lodge of Improvement first met in London on 2nd October, 1823. It has since met every Friday for 150 years, every month for nearly half that time and thereafter with a three-month summer break. Its sole purpose was to rehearse ritual and it has given its name to that ritual. 'Emulation' ritual is worked by more lodges all over the world than any other single form of ritual. Many of those lodges including No. 125 in B.C., have themselves adopted the name 'Emulation lodge'.

When the two rival Grand Lodges of the eighteenth century, the 'Modern' and the 'Ancients,' finally resolved to settle their differences and join to form the United Grand Lodge of England, the unified body immediately set up the Lodge of Reconciliation comprised of equal numbers of brethren from each of the uniting Grand Lodges. It was charged to "promulgate and enjoin the pure and unsullied system, that perfect reconciliation, unity of obligation, law, working, language and dress may be happily restored to the English Craft." It revised all the degrees and ceremonies, including the openings and closings, and carried out a vast amount of instruction. However it broke up in 1816 without having fully completed its work.

In the aftermath came several Lodges of Instruction each under the sanction of a warranted lodge. Emulation Lodge of Improvement was one of these and was first established under the sanction of the Lodge of Hope No. 7 (now defunct). As this Lodge had only ten members, of whom three were inactive, a new sponsoring lodge was sought and, since 1830, it has existed under the sanction of the Lodge of Unions No. 256 E.C. Although it has never enjoyed any higher status than as a Lodge of Instruction it has nevertheless earned for itself a world-wide reputation as the best-known authority on Masonic ritual. In this role it has been consulted by lodges throughout the world. On occasion it was consulted even by Grand Lodge Officers on the matter of a resolution concerning ritual about to be introduced to Grand Lodge. On one occasion it was consulted by United Grand Lodge itself which borrowed its Tracing Boards to have them copied for use in Freemasons' Hall.

Another example of its prestige in the Craft is that, since about 1903, Emulation Lodge of Improvement introduced a system of formal recognition of other Lodges of Instruction throughout the country teaching Emulation work. "A Lodge of Instruction seeking to be 'recognized' has first to ensure that its by-laws contain the necessary conditions and then submits its Preceptor-in-Charge to approval, if necessary by test, by the Emulation Committee as to its ability to teach 'Emulation' work." When such a lodge finds it necessary to appoint a new Preceptor continued recognition depends on the approval of the appointment by the Emulation Committee. At present there are no less than 111 'recognized' Lodges of Instruction throughout the country and, in addition, 16 'affiliated' lodges overseas for whom 'recognition' is impracticable.

The brethren who do the work are volunteers recommended by Preceptors of other Lodges of Instruction. They must be capable of performing the work of Master in any one ceremony with not more than about five words in error. In addition, signs and movements must be made accurately. A volunteer begins as candidate and, in successive weeks, proceeds through the chairs of Inner Guard, Deacons, Wardens and finally that of Master. In this capacity he must perform all the Master's work himself. This includes the Charge after Initiation and the Tracing Boards in the 2nd and 3rd Degrees. The 1st Degree Tracing Board and the 2nd and 3rd Degree Charges, commonly worked in B.C., are not recognized Emulation work. A suitably inscribed silver matchbox is presented to a brother who performs the whole of the Master's work in any one of the four ceremonies (including Installation) without a single error. A further inscription is added in respect of any similar performance of any one of the other ceremonies. 101 brethren have each worked all four ceremonies without a single error in 75 years.

In its earliest years United Grand Lodge forbade the printing of ritual and this prohibition was respected by Emulation Lodge of Improvement. This left the way open for commercial interest to supply the inevitable demand. The best known of these ritual books was "The Perfect Ceremonies as taught in the Emulation Lodge of Improvement" which first appeared in 1870 - unofficial, unapproved and quite inaccurate. About thirty years ago, the so-called 'Nigerian Ritual' appeared - also unofficial and unapproved but quite accurate and much superior to 'The Perfect Ceremonies'. After nearly 150 years, Emulation Lodge of Improvement finally decided to sponsor its own ritual book on condition that the publisher, A. Lewis (Masonic Publisher) Ltd., would withdraw both the unofficial publications. This official ritual book first appeared at the end of 1969, as reprinted in 1970 and again in 1972.

Emulation ritual has been translated into Portuguese, Spanish and French and possibly also into Turkish - all unofficially. There is an edition for those of poor eyesight and it has also been transcribed into Braille.

Emulation Lodge began its one-and-a-half centuries of working Masonic ritual with the Lectures of the three Degrees and not with the Degree Ceremonies themselves. These Lectures, or catechisms, are now rarely worked by Masonic lodges although Emulation Lodge of Improvement has never ceased to do so. It seemed very appropriate that Victoria Lodge of Education and Research should demonstrate the First Degree Lecture in observance of the 150th Anniversary of Emulation Lodge of Improvement. This mammoth undertaking was accomplished by the combined efforts of teams of brethren, nearly all members of Victoria Lodge of Education and Research, drawn from all the lodges in Districts Nos. 1 and 21. It was presented at Confederation Lodge No. 116 on 26th September.

Author Unknown; Published in MASONIC BULLETIN, B.C.R.; December, 1973.

Submitted by D. Roy Murray

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ENTERED APPRENTICE

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In the days of the handcrafts of the middle ages in order to learn a trade a youth was bound by indentures as an apprentice to a Master Craftsman for a period of seven years. Usually he would be about fourteen years of age so that the time of his qualifying as a fully -fledged craftsman should coincide with his coming to the legal age of twenty-one years. During the intervening period he received no wages for his labour, and in some cases his parents were required to pay a stipulated fee for his tuition, but the Master was bound by the indenture to furnish food, clothing, shelter, and the necessities of life. When he qualified in his trade he became eligible for membership in the city, town, or local Gild, which controlled his particular craft along the lines of the modern trade union.

In the craft of the Freemasons, however, a different procedure was observed. When the youth and his parents had subscribed to the indenture he was taken into the Ma-sons' lodge where he was required to take an oath or obligation to preserve those trade secrets which would be communicated to him, and to keep secure the modes of recog-nition-the signs, grips and words.

There was also imparted to him a charge or instruction concerning his duties to God and the Church', to his Master and the Craft, and to his Brethren and Fellows from what were known as the Antient Charges of a Freemason.

His name and other particulars were then entered on the books and rolls of the Lodge in accordance with the civil requirements governing the charter which granted special privileges to the Freemasons apart from other trades.

Thus he became an Entered Apprentice Freemason, hence the origin and meaning of the term as we use it in our Symbolic or Speculative Lodges of today.

THE FAITH OF THE GURMAT

By Dan Daniels

'The drop is in the ocean and the ocean in the drop.

Who can understand this mystery?

He who knows the ways of the Lord.

The One who created the world, He Himself knows the meaning.

He who mediates on this Knowledge attains the perfect state through liberation.'

Rag Ramkali, Adi Granth.

It is the end of the fifteenth century. A Hindu of the relatively well-to-do Kshatriya caste removes his outer clothing and enters the Kei River at Sultanpur. It is early morning and he is performing his daily ablutions as a devout Hindu. His servant remains on the bank to watch over his master's belongings. The young gentleman, in his early thirties, strides easily and deliberately into the slowly moving water until he is completely submerged. When, after some minutes, he does not reappear, his servant becomes alarmed. By nightfall they are dragging the river for his body.

Three days later he returns home without an explanation, assembles all his wealth, arranges to give it all away, leaves his wife and children and sets forth to teach the Truth. His first public announcement is calculated to touch the raw nerve of his community: "There is no Hindu and no Muslim."

His name is Nanak. He is the first of the ten Gurus, or religious teachers, who would shape the religion known to the West as Sikhism, named after its followers, the Sikhs or disciples. The Sikhs themselves refer to their faith as the Gurmat, or the doctrine of the Gurus. Considered not as a doctrine but as a community of fervent believers, the religion also may be properly called the Khalsa, or the brotherhood.

When Guru Nanak began his ministry, India was beginning its third century under Muslim domination. Except for isolated reigns of patronizing toleration, these Muslim rulers despised and relentlessly persecuted the Hindu population.

The persecution was religious. It is difficult to imagine a religion other than Hinduism that could be more antithetical to Islam. The Muslims were at once baffled and angered by the Hindus' stubborn worship of literally thousands of deities, sub-deities, half-deities and avatars. The Muslims had even less patience for the endlessly intricate subtleties of Vedic mysticism. Early attempts to reconcile Islam and Hinduism were suppressed with a special ruthlessness. Islam was not a religion to be absorbed and diluted as Buddhism had been.

Many later commentators on religion give Sikhism scant attention, dismissing over nine million Sikhs as members of a "syncretic" sect which combines "certain elements" of Islam and Hinduism. Sikhism, in this view, is something of a salad of borrowed beliefs and rituals, tossed

up and served a something original. Guru Nanak's pronouncement, "There is no Hindu and no Muslim," is seen to mean that Hinduism and Islam are the same. There is little support for this interpretation.

In the context of Sikh scriptures and traditions, it is clear that Guru Nanak's intention was not to affirm the identity of the two faiths but rather to stress the unity of mankind, irrespective of any particular faith. That the Sikhs, like the Muslims, believed in a single God with whom each man could form his own relationship would not mitigate, in the mind of the Muslim, the Sikh's rejection of Islam itself. Further, if the Mogul rulers were suspicious of this new religion, the leaders of the Hindu community also had reason for concern, for it was to become increasingly evident that the Sikhs abominated the one set of beliefs which all Indians of the day held sacred: the caste system. Preaching a doctrine of brotherly love, the Sikhs would have few friends in the centuries to come.

A familiarity with the traditions of Islam would certainly be helpful in understanding Sikhism, but a familiarity with the traditions of Hinduism is absolutely indispensable. Sikhism's roots in the ancient, all-encompassing view of the universe have never been denied. Even Nanak's three-day disappearance into the waters of the Kei is suggestive of Vishnu's descent into the waters of the universal deluge to bring forth the newly-created world.

Smoldering for centuries in the Vedas and the Puranas is the notion of a Force or underlying Principle of Reality which is accessible to individual men. Indeed, this Principal is mystically identical to each man's personal soul. Such notions, however, were jealously guarded by the Brahmin caste. Those not so fortuitously born had to content themselves with ever more complicated sacrificial rites. The purpose of these rites was somehow to manipulate Reality in the hopes of improving one's fortunes. In this, the Brahmins were not entirely aloof and, for a fee, were happy to share their advice on the precise manner in which these rituals were to be performed.

Gradually, however, the concept of a transcendent yet immanent "God-of gods" filtered down into the general population and merged with a revolutionary new idea unknown to the Brahmins. This new idea was called 'bhakti' or devotion.

No one seems to know exactly when the bhakti movement began. Many nineteenth-century scholars felt certain that they could trace the movement's devotional and moral precepts directly to Bethlehem; but it is known now that the principle scriptures, the 'Bhagavad-Gita', could not have been composed later than the second century B.C. At any rate, the movement meandered for a long time, remaining a minority view until the time of Nanak when it suddenly gained considerable momentum.

Bhakti is really several movements - by belief and region - but there are similarities enough to generalize. There is a belief in a single, personal God who created and who sustains the world. This God loves those who worship him and has compassion for their suffering. He has many

aspects, each of which can be recognized in the various gods and demi-gods of the Hindu pantheon. The human soul (Atman) is ultimately identical to the divine soul (Brahman) and salvation consists in this identity becoming manifest. Salvation is available to all men, regardless of caste, who believe in and love the Lord. In place of the Brahmin priest there is the guru. Worship is conducted in the vernacular instead of in Sanskrit. A mantra, or secret mediational word, is often the token of one's initiation. Finally, there is usually a sacramental meal for the congregation at regular intervals.

For all this, while all castes may participate in bhakti observances, the taboos and rules regarding relations between the castes remain. Not until the teachings of Ramananda do we find anyone seriously challenging the caste system as such. Ramananda, who lived in the period overlapping the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, is notable not only for his rejection of caste observances but also for his rejection of dietary ritualism. He stressed that God is within each man and that He is the True Teacher (sat-guru). Human gurus teaching the Truth are but manifestations (not incarnations or avatars) of God's aspect as Teacher.

Ramananda's disciple, Kabir, took these ideas further with yet more fervent eloquence. Although born a Hindu, Kabir was raised by foster parents as a devout Muslim. While he rejected many of the important tenets of Islam, his teachings have a mood of urgency and danger characteristic of the Koran. He taught that: God is one, God is one with each man, ritual is futile, there is no heaven and no hell, the soul is reborn according to its deeds, and yogic practices are worthless. A passage from a hymn ascribed to him in the Sikh scriptures brings some of these views into focus:

Sacrifice, the rosary, pilgrimage, fasting and alms are cloaks of falsehood.

Why perform so many ceremonies! Of what avail to Hindus to bathe, or to Muslims to pray at the mosque?

Some pride themselves on the practice of yoga.

Put away suspension of breath and all the attitudinal of devotion.

Worship God thou fool!

Renounce family, caste and lineage, lest thou think the Maker thus distinguishes men.

Kabir, whose own sect survives to this day, was a contemporary of Nanak, and it is almost certain that the two men met. But whether they met or not, his influence is unmistakable. Kabir's hymns, as well as those of his master, Ramananda, are today included in the Sikh's most holy book, 'Guru Granth Sahib', or roughly "The Lord and Teacher Scriptures."

Nanak, Sikhism's first Guru, lived to a ripe old age. During the fifty years of his ministry, he traveled not only throughout India but also to places as scattered as Tibet, Ceylon and Mecca, preaching this new doctrine and accumulating a community of followers. He died in 1539.

His successor, Guru Angad (1504-1552), took over a thriving religion as its second Guru. Sikh communities were to be found not only throughout the Punjab but also in many other parts of

India. As Guru Angad traveled from place to place, it became quickly evident that these communities needed some kind of scriptural document to consider in his absence. He therefore ordered that Nanak's hymns be written down and distributed. To this purpose, an alphabet had to be invented as Punjabi was not a written language. Called 'Gurmukhi,' it is the alphabet in use today.

The third Guru, Amar Das (1479-1574), was seventy-three years old when he accepted leadership of the Gurmat. His principle achievement was to introduce a discipline which would effectively frustrate caste observances at Sikh meetings. Henceforth, those wishing to visit the Guru must first share a meal together. This new rule was all the more remarkable when you consider that even members of the exalted Brahmin caste were forbidden to dine with certain other Brahmins.

Before his death, Guru Amar Das designated his son-in-law Ram Das (1534-1581), as his successor. Guru Ram Das is most honored today as the founder of the famous Sikh city of Amritsar.

The fifth Guru, Arjan (1563-1606), was a man of incredible energy. Three achievements mark his life. It was Gury Arjan who built the first major meeting hall, the Har Mandir or Abode of the Lord. It was destroyed during a Muslim rain in 1761, but was rebuilt according to the original plan. Today it stands in the middle of a five-acre sheet of water at Amristsar. Known popularly as The Golden Temple, it is Sikhdom's most important shrine.

The second achievement of Guru Arjan was the compilation of what was to become known as the 'Adi Granth' or the "First Collection." To the collected hymns of Guru Anak, he added the works of other religious thinkers (including Ramananda and Kabir) whose ideas coincided with those of the Sikhs.

Guru Arjan's third achievement probably was unnoticed at the time, but it contained profound religious and political implications. He made it unequivocally explicit that the Gurmat considered itself neither Hindu nor Muslim but rather a third independent religion. Hereafter, there could be no turning back.

Having given refuge to members of the losing side in an attempt to overthrow the current Mogul ruler, Jahangir, Guru Arjan was arrested and put to death. He is Sikhism's first martyr. There would be others.

Guru Arjan's son, Har Gobind (1595-1644), succeeded him in 1606, declaring at his investiture as the sixth Guru that henceforth Sikhs would not suffer persecution meekly. To make his point, he then put on two swords, saying that one represented temporal power and the other spiritual power. To his turban he affixed an aigrette to indicate that he was from that day forth a temporal leader as well as a religious leader.

Guru Har Gobind urged his followers to deal in horses and to take their sport in the martial arts, especially archery. He formed the first Sikh army, a force of three hundred horsemen. The Moguls found this offensive, but it was with great difficulty that they were able to drive the Guru's forces into the Himalayan foothills - even from there the skirmishes continued. In the end, after several years of leading his men into battle, the old man died quietly in bed.

A period of consolidation marked the guruship of Har Rai (1630-1661). Although actual military ventures were infrequent, the seventh Guru was to make the same mistake as the fifth - he gave refuge to members of the losing side in an attempt to seize the Mogul throne. Fortunately, he was able to elude arrest.

Guru Har Gobind's son Tegh Bahadur (1721-1675), next ascended the Sikh throne. As can be imagined, the death of a child-guru left the succession open to contention, and Guru Tegh Bahadur found his most pressing task was to reestablish unity. In this the Mogul ruler was his unwitting accomplice as he initiated a policy of systematic persecution. Sikh resistance was growing. However, in the midst of these events, the Moguls succeeding in capturing Guru Tegh Bahadur and, when he refused to convert to Islam, had him beheaded.

Guru Gobind Rai (1666-1708) was nine years old when his father was executed. It must have been fearsome when this beardless child at his investiture as the tenth Guru announced to his followers: "You know, my friends, that my father has been murdered at Delhi. I am left alone, but as long as I live, I will never cease to avenge his death; should I die in the attempt, it matters not."

Later, as a young man, he took the name of Singh, or lion, and instructed his followers to do the same. Guru Gobind Singh changed the initiation rite: No longer would the Guru touch his toe to the surface of the ceremonial nectar (amrit) before it was passed among the congregation; hereafter, the nectar would be stirred with a two-edged sword. From that day forward, they were to be known collectively as the Khalsa.

He father decreed that all members of the Khalsa were not to cut their hair (kesh) or their beards, thus all Sikhs would resemble their gurus. All members were to take care in their grooming and, unlike ascetics, were to keep their long hair in place with a comb (khangha). All members were to carry a sword (kirpan) at all times to show their readiness to oppose persecution. All members were to wear short trousers (kachha) to permit more freedom of movement in battle. Finally, all members were to wear a bracelet (kara) of base metal (usually steel) to symbolize the unity and eternity of God.

It was at this time, too, that Guru Gobind Singh instituted the wearing of the turban as a symbol of authority. To this day most of these requirements are observed - although the sword is now frequently symbolic as a piece of metal imbedded in the comb.

Guru Gobind Singh's most important contribution concerns the Sikh scriptures. Adding hymns written by his father to the Adi Granth, he then declared the Sikh canon complete and closed. Further, these scriptures were to be known from that day forward as Guru Granth Sahib and were to succeed Gobind Singh as Guru. The line of human gurus was to end; the scriptures themselves were to hold that office and would occupy the central place - indeed, the only place - in the imageless worship hall of the Sikh temple.

Today, two major trends can be discerned in Sikhism. One concerns the nature of God and the other the nature of man.

In Sikh theology, God is formless and thus cannot be represented in an image. He is eternal and thus not subject to the changes of time or matter. He is ineffable and thus while words may indicate his nature, they cannot encompass Him. Most importantly, in the Sikh view, God is gracious, it is His wish that men be saved. God communicates His revelation by means of the 'sabad' or word. It is the guru who utters his word. The guru who utters the word is not a man but the voice of God within the human heart.

Man, to the Sikh, is willful in his ignorance and deludes himself that rituals or external exercises can save him - nor will piety alone save him. Only true devotion can free a man from the otherwise endless cycle of rebirth, death and suffering. True devotion arises only when one has heard the word spoken in one's heart.

There have been changes over the centuries, certainly. The missionary zeal of the early days is now quiet. Converts are not actively sought, and those wishing to join the Khalsa are welcome but not quickly accepted. Some scholars are sure that the early religion advocated a meditation discipline involving the repetition of God's name as a mantra; but today, meditation, especially transect medication, is avoided as being a bit ritualistic or yogic. The notion of karma is still there in the sense of good resulting in good and evil resulting in evil, but not in the sense of accumulated merit or demerit.

Now, in the second half of the twentieth century, a man sits cross-legged on the floor of his temple, listening to the Reader recite from the scriptures. The man's turban and his untrimmed beard are reminders to others and to himself that his heritage is unique and important. Yet his God is every man's God. Always, for those who will listen, God provides a teacher.

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