

The Knight Templar Ritual as a Rite of Passage

by **The Reverend Sir Knight Frederick A. Shade**

The following article has been adapted from a paper presented at the Knight Templar Seminar in Melbourne, Australia, on September 29th, 2001 by the Reverend Sir Knight Frederick A. Shade. Significant edits have been made. Please note that many references he makes to the ritual of creating a Knight Templar refer not to the process in the United States but rather to the "Victorian Knight Templar Ritual," so do not be confused when you read about practices with which you are not familiar. It is thought that you might find the differences interesting, and regardless of those differences, I believe that the comparison of the ritual to a "Rite of Passage" you will find to be intriguing.

The Editor

Rites of Passage

Modern anthropologists and psychoanalysts have observed that people see the life cycle as a journey from one stage of experience to another. Each individual passes through the stages of birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Each is a critical phase in life and requires special assistance to achieve a successful transition. These several stages have been described as "rites of passage," and doubtless you can think of other epochs in your own life which may be so described. The assistance one needs at these critical points in life may be of a physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual kind, or more often than not a combination of these.

These several epochs in life affect every aspect of one's make-up, and as Man is a spiritual being, his soul is also involved in these changes and is affected by them. These rites of passage therefore, also involve the non-physical aspects of our nature; emotional, psychic, mental, intellectual, soul, ego, spirit, or higher self. However, the several cycles in man's life on earth and the rites of passage which herald them relate more specifically to the primary stages of Man; birth/infancy, puberty/adolescence, maturity/marriage, and old age/death.

Most societies have developed certain rites which are designed to help the individual's transition to the next stage in his life and also to assist society in its own recognition of this rite of passage, such as the 21st birthday, the engagement party, the wedding, etc. The problem with which we are now faced is that western man has become increasingly alienated from God. He has a general lack of awareness of the sacred in life in general and aspects of his own nature in particular. As a consequence, it has led to an imbalance in the development of his whole being. It has led to an increasing incidence of neurosis, an alienation from aspects of his own identity as a person, and a general lack of meaning in his life. What rites we do have in modern society are often devoid of deep emotional or spiritual significance. They may emphasize the social, cultural, or political dynamics

of an event, but they are often incomplete and lack the power to transform the individual in the way the rites of pre-modern man did.

There are a variety of rites of passage to fit the cultural needs of people, and for Masons, the rites and ceremonies of Craft Masonry provide us with much that can no longer be found in other institutions in our society. Our Lodge has become our "house of meaning" to use Carl Jung's term. It is our modern day equivalent to the "Men's House" of the ancient Aborigines and the American Indians where the adolescent of the tribe is initiated into the mysteries of nature and the tribe's religion and where he becomes transformed into a man, an adult. In many ways, Masonry has become a major source for this transition to maturity, one which provides us with several initiations that reflect on the critical stages of personal existence as well as assist in our preparation for them.

Initiation changes, or ought to change, the behavior of the initiate, his attitude toward life, and the manner in which he relates to other people. Show me one Mason who has not been changed in some basic way by his initiation into our fraternity!

The knowledge of our science which is "the science of living" is conveyed through ritual drama, one in which the candidate plays the principal part. The external features such as the regalia, lighting, furnishings, color, incense, music, and special effects, together with the ritual itself, are designed to induce a psychological state in the candidate in which a deeper experience becomes possible. Information is thus conveyed in a most dramatic and effective manner, and the psycho-spiritual process of personal transformation begins. My own admission into the Knights Templar was such an experience, one of very few I have had at this deep level in Masonry.

When we study the mysteries of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, or modern Freemasonry, we will find that the ritual of initiation also aims to help the candidate answer the five fundamental questions, questions which man has been asking since the dawn of consciousness.

These questions are: Who am I? Where do I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going? How can I transcend the limitations of this physical world so that I may work with the Creator and become more God-like? I leave it to you to decide whether the ceremonies of Masonry are successful in providing answers to these questions.

I have made these observations on the concept of rites of passage in order to show how it is really a synonym for the "rites of initiation," a term we use in Freemasonry. I believe that in our case, these two terms refer to the same experiences of personal transformation and that Freemasonry provides a source for some of them.

When we look at Christianity, we recognize in the story of Jesus a psychodrama which demonstrates a series of necessary initiatory experiences crowned by the triumphant one. From a deeply mystical point of view, the underlying quest is that each Christian disciple, by following the footsteps of the Master Jesus, must also attempt this series of initiations in the course of his spiritual life. What is so significant with the advent of Christianity is that the mystery of this spiritual transmutation of the soul is no longer to

be "hidden" as in the preceding Mystery Religions but is to be proclaimed from the housetops. It is no longer to be confined to a select group of disciples but made available to all.

Under the umbrella title of "Freemasonry," the Knight Templar ritual is an example par excellence of a rite of passage, and I will try to convince you that this is so. Another ritual which has similar success is that of the Rose Croix Degree. When viewed superficially, Knight Templary is a ritual and a tradition which exhorts the candidate to lead a more Godly life, but it does more than this. It is a ritual which points to and prepares the candidate for important stages in the life of a Christian Knight in Christ's service. It can properly be called a rite of passage as it outlines the transformation of the soul. The journey on the spiritual path begins when the soul thirsts for God; he is then presented with opportunities for service to the Master. The Knight Templar ritual then leads him to the point when the Divine Name, the Word of Life, is revealed, and the candidate becomes more closely identified with Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

It seems to me that the Knight Templar ritual has telescoped these several stages of our journey through life into one ceremony, and as a consequence, much of the spiritual teaching and esoteric knowledge which the novice requires is not given to him in this ceremony. However, the candidate is directed to the one true source of divine wisdom, the Book of Gospels. As in the Craft, the rest is up to the new member! If the Ritual does nothing else, it provides him with both a foundation and a framework by which personal transformation and growth may be pursued in safety.

The ceremony of making a Knight is an excellent example of a rite of initiation. This view is supported by none other than G. E. W. Bridge who is quoted in the booklet published by Great Priory in London. He writes: "It is quite unlike any ritual of any order anywhere else in the world. Analysis of the degree shows that it embodies almost all the features of a complete rite of initiation viz: tiling, proper preparation, ritual garments, pilgrimage, warfare, penance, death, rest and refreshment, a new name, rebirth, enthronement and proclamation, and the long journey "home" across the mystical "middle sea." This is symbolism of a very high order, and it has survived the storms of over 175 years." Of course, Bridge was referring specifically to the English ritual.

The Victorian Ritual

I will now refer to the main sections of the Templar ritual and suggest how they relate to the several stages or rites of passage in our own life.

Pilgrim

The candidate arrives as a pilgrim on his travels, weary and fatigued. He seeks refuge. He comes dressed in the pilgrim's habit which is of brown material. Brown is the color of humility and of the earth. The pilgrim is admitted with caution. He is given protection from the elements and from the enemy and is provided with refreshment in the form of

bread and water. Knightly courtesy and hospitality are the hallmarks of a true Knight, and these are displayed to the stranger in full measure.

The pilgrim seeks not only protection and food but also admission into the order. Proof of his Christian faith and of his sincerity are then demanded, and the pilgrim is willing to prove his sincerity and devotion to our Lord.

Pilgrimage

The candidate undergoes seven years of pilgrimage. It is a trial of his faith and humility. This stage represents the pilgrimage of life as the ritual explains. It is also the candidate's opportunity to display his zeal for the order as well as his fidelity and complete trust in the Christ.

Obligation

Having successfully completed his pilgrimage, he is invited to kneel at the holy sepulchre which is representative of the sepulchre in which our Lord was laid to rest in Jerusalem and to take the solemn obligation of a novice of the order.

Investiture

During the reading of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (Chapter 6, verses 10-17), the candidate is tested as a soldier of the cross. As a crusader, he makes three solemn professions with sword and shield. He embarks on his quest for salvation.

Warfare

The Crusader undergoes a period of seven years of warfare. This campaign is successful also. This period is a trial of his courage and constancy and represents the constant warfare we undertake against the lying vanities and deceits of this world.

As a reward for his valour, the candidate is now brought to Mt. Calvary, to the cross of our Lord, and he is invited to assist the marshal in unveiling it. He then beholds the inscription, that declaration and title which was placed over our Lord at His crucifixion. It is an inscription which is central to the Christian degrees and orders in Masonry.

Penance

In accordance with the traditions of the ancient church, an act of penance was very much part of the life of a Christian. Making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the Middle Ages as an act of penance was considered a most desirable thing to do, and the pilgrim received many spiritual rewards for undertaking it and arriving at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Muslims of today have a similar tradition in regard to their holy places such as Mecca.

In our ritual, the crusader is directed to undertake a year of penance with the emblems of life and mortality always before him. All this is designed to improve not only his spiritual

life here and now but also to ensure that he will arrive safely in the heavenly mansions in the life to come.

Then follows the imprecations or oaths which have very serious consequence for the crusader if he should wilfully violate them or ignore his commitments to his Lord, his church, or the order.

Failure or betrayal on his part means eternal darkness of a spiritual kind.

Cup of Memory

Upon readmission, the new companion-in-arms, as he is now called, is invited to participate in a series of toasts. They are seven in number and refer to the major epochs in Masonic history and its leaders and also to the Knights of the Temple and their patron saints. By taking part in this ceremony, the brother is now irrevocably linked to the history and transmission of the secret tradition, a tradition and wisdom which culminated in the incarnation of our Lord and which has been transmitted down the centuries in the secret work of our order.

Cubic Stone

Throughout the history of mankind, the cubic stone has been used as a symbol to represent both physical things as well as spiritual realities. Ancient man sacrificed on a stone altar to his god. (cf. Old Testament - Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac). It is also the stone which was later changed into the mystic rose of the hermeticists and alchemists and so on.

The significance of the stone presented to the candidate in this order is that there is contained within it the name of God, the title which is given to Jesus of Nazareth, for he is the very presence of God among us.

This large stone is also the one referred to in I Peter 2:6, and also in Revelations 2:17. A New Name is written thereon (or therein) which is known only to the person who receives it in this manner. The candidate participates in this mystic rite, because the stone itself is really a spiritual one representing the soul of the individual. He himself is a living stone which will shortly be incorporated into the living temple (I Pet.2:5) which is in fact the mystical body of Christ and which encompasses and embodies all things. ("I will bear you on eagles wings and bring you unto myself." Exod. 19:14)

To emphasize again, although this part of our ritual is taking place in this world, this little ceremony is really anticipating the mystical experience of becoming one with Christ in his temple in the heavenly Jerusalem, a temple "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Masons are, above all, optimists; they always look ahead to the anticipated joys and blessings which they believe they will receive, as is their due, in the world to come. They believe that their faith and their good works will assure them of these eternal blessings!

The companion-in-arms writes his name upon the mystical stone on the northeast corner; it becomes his stone; it becomes himself. I recommend to you the references to the mystical stone which are found in scripture, especially in the New Testament.

In reference to the cubic stone and its memorial, the following scriptural references and explanations may be of some interest. Our Lord Christ is often referred to as the chief corner-stone (I Pet.2:6). In developing this symbolism, He is described as the stone which was rejected possessing merits unknown to others and becoming the head of the corner (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10). As disciples of the Christ, we are also described as living stones in the temple of God (I Pet 2:5).

To conclude this ceremony, there is a memorial presented to the candidate, and this part of the ceremonial is not without its interest. The use of the sword in this unique manner is suggestive of the dangers which will always be with the recipient of that stone should he fail us.

Our brother has received the Sacred Name itself, and he has written his own name on the stone which will be part of God's temple. The sword, which is sharp and quick, is often used as a symbol of the Word of God. The mystical stone, the Sacred Word, the sword, and the candidate himself are now bound together forever in a solemn and sacred bond.

I refer also to the use of the sword as a symbol of the Word of God. At his investiture as a soldier of the cross, the candidate hears the words of St. Paul who describes the Knight's sword as the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God. (Eph.6:17)

In Hebrews 4:12, we have a significant reference to the power of God's word: "The Word of God is quick (living), and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The Bible Concordance provides us with other references to these concepts:

- That the word of God is quick (living): Isa 49:2; Jer 23:29; 2 Cor 10:4,5; I Pet 1:23.
- Is sharper than any two-edged sword: Prov 5:4; Eph 6:17; Rev 1:16, 2:16.
- A discernor of thoughts: I Cor 14:24,25.

It is also interesting to read of the mouth being likened to a sword e.g. Isa 49:2 or a sword issuing from or held by the mouth. In Rev. 1:16 we have an obvious allusion to the Word of God and the power and majesty of Him, the Lord of light and truth, who wields the sword both in heaven and on earth.

Accolade

The accolade of knighthood is the reward, in this world, of the Knight's valour, faith, and constancy. It is but a pale reflection of the eternal reward he will receive from God the Father when he passes within the veil. At this point in the ceremony of Installation, I am always reminded of the beautiful words which are used by the celebrant at the conclusion of the Holy Eucharist in my church (Liberal Catholic Church): "Under the veil of earthly things now have we communion with our Lord Jesus Christ. Soon with open face shall

we behold him and, rejoicing in his glory, be made like unto him. Then shall his true disciples be brought by him with exceeding joy before the presence of his Father's glory."

The concept of a disciple of Christ being a fellow-soldier is found in Philippians 2:25. In the Liberal Catholic Church service of Confirmation, the candidate kneels before the bishop and asks to be received as a "Knight in Christ's service."

Much of what we do in these sacred rites in Masonry are but intimations of what is to come, of what we hope to experience internally either in this life or in the life to come.

Investiture

The new Knight is vested with the rest of the regalia and jewels, each having a particular significance and meaning, some of which is made known to him when he is vested with them.

Entrusted

In line with the ancient formula of initiation, the new member is entrusted with the secrets of the order, in our case certain sign and words, each of which are related to his Christian faith and to the traditions and teachings of our order. More especially, they show a deep reverence for the life of sacrifice of our Lord the Christ whose sign we wear and whose Name we revere.

Installation and Proclamation

The new Knight is placed in his stall in the West and is proclaimed by the Heralds. He is saluted by all the Knights present with the Templar war cry "a Beauceant!" The salutation is given three times in honour of the Trinity.

Symbols

Some of the symbols on the sepulchre are then explained to the new Knight. This is a straight-forward explanation and contains very little that can be described as esoteric. However, one or two aspects are worthy of comment.

The lighting of the candle by the new Knight is a particularly significant and symbolic act on his part. You will recall that our Lord Christ described himself as the Light of the World (Jn 8:12). So, implicit in this act of relighting the candle, the new Knight is committing himself to accepting a place at the sacred table as a disciple of our Master. He also commits himself to spreading the Lord's light to the rest of the world. (Matt 5:14-16).

The relics are presented to us in the third degree and in several other degrees in Masonry. What can be said here is that the inner recognition of their meaning, i.e. the awareness of our own physical mortality, is an important initiation rite of passage into maturity.

Status of the Candidate

The status, name, and title of the candidate for installation as a Knight changes throughout the ceremony, and these are worth reflecting on for a moment. In a sense, they reflect the different stages of his progress. The first title is that of pilgrim. In this guise he is admitted with caution as a stranger into our midst and is then offered hospitality as a guest of the Preceptory [Commandery]. The next stage is when he is given the title of Novice of the Order, during which period of apprenticeship he is variously described as a soldier of the cross, a crusader, and our new companion-in-arms, different titles which the Preceptor has to memorize and in the correct sequence!

Finally, he reaches his desired goal and is installed a Knight of the Temple and Holy Sepulchre. These four stages - Pilgrim, Novice, Crusader, and Knight are the signposts of his rite of passage as a Christian Knight.

Conclusion

My journey through the ceremony of making a Knight of the Temple has been very brief, and I have tried to avoid repeating what is already in the ritual; you can read that for yourself. As with all rituals and degrees of Masonry, the Knight Templar has suffered from the hands of ignorant and foolish men. For example, there have been changes and emasculations of the ritual; there are elements in the continental and American versions of the Templar ritual which give sharper focus to the personal preparation and transformation of the candidate in particular. Other rites, such as the Rite of Strict Observance and its successors and the Swedish Rite seem to provide esoteric knowledge which they claim was part of the original teachings of the order.

On balance, I do agree with G. E. W. Bridge that however abbreviated some sections of our ritual may be today, it does embody most of the features of a complete rite of initiation or rite of passage and that its symbolism is of a very high order.

What I also wish to say in conclusion, is that the ritual of the Knight Templar order is superior in many ways to that of the Craft. I hold the view expressed by A. E. Waite in his writings on Masonry that the Craft ritual is primarily one which is a "Rite of Death," whereas the Templar ritual is perhaps the best example of what we can call a "Rite of Life."

Knightly Courtesy

Geoffrey Chaucer (c 1340-1400), in the Prologue to his Knight's Tale, describes knightly courtesy in these words:

A knight there was, and that a worthy man,
That from the time that he first began
To ridden out he loved chivalry,
Truth and honour, freedom and courtesy.
Full worthy was he in his lord's war
And thereto had he ridden, no man farther;
As well in Christendom as in heatheness,

And ever honoured for his worthiness.
And evermore he had a sovereign price,
And though that he was worthy, he was wise
And of his port as meek as is a maid.
He never yet no villainy not said
In all his life unto no manner wight,
He was a very perfect, gentle knight.

Sir Knight Fred Shade is a member of the order in Victoria, Australia. He has been Chaplain of his Preceptory (Metropolitan No. 2) for many years and holds the rank of Past Great 2nd Constable. He was the founding Secretary of the Victorian Knight Templar Study Circle and its second president. He can be contacted on email: fredshade@westnet.com.au

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Knight Templar Magazine Index - ARCHIVE of ARTICLES

HOME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

[Top](#)