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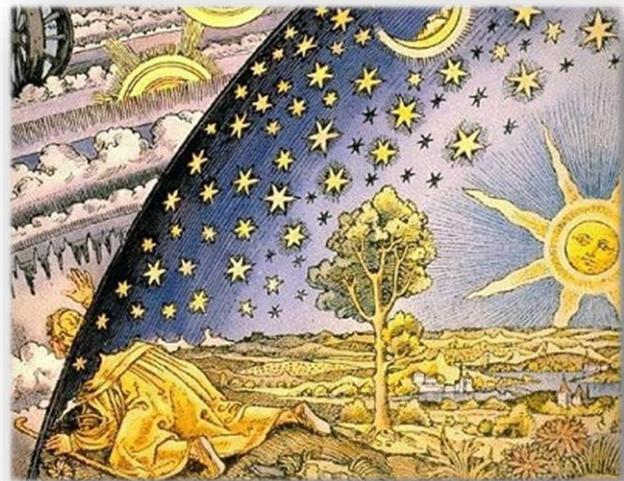
# Traveling Beyond the Horizon

## *Esotericism and Freemasonry*

**E**soteric Masonry is the personal exploration to some of the less mainstream areas of the fraternal society. Some of these aspects include personal development, spiritualism, mysticism, and so forth. It can include aspects of its history not commonly looked at by mainstream historians or participants. The esoteric side of Masonry seeks find additional sources of wisdom and understanding.<sup>1</sup>

The term itself carries with it some mystery, but usually it is because of unawareness or misinformation about not only the term, but what exoteric studies involve. There are books, papers, presentations, sources and references, along with general conversation about esoteric considerations that may seem to make no sense to one who is not seeking to explore beyond the mainstream. To many the mainstream is enough to contemplate. All Masons seeking Light do not always follow the same path.

As with the many other areas of Masonic philosophies, there's always more to examine, explore and interpret.



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<sup>1</sup> What is Esoteric Freemasonry?, Regular Grand Lodge of Romania, <http://www.mlmar.ro/en/freemasonry/what-is-esoteric-masonry>.

# Esotericism

## Frequently Asked Questions

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***To understand the term 'esoteric' we have to understand that it is one side of a coin the other being 'exoteric'. The exoteric nature of anything (including Freemasonry) is there for anybody who looks at a thing, it can be summed up as the "face value" of it. In Freemasonry the exoteric might be considered the surface layer of teachings and rites taken at face value - and face value of Masonic ideologies is a weighty topic in itself.***

***Esoteric Freemasonry means digging a bit deeper to see if there is a possible further understanding of the ritual and practices that lies beyond the surface. It is that which is not revealed until one has been taught how to find it and then one delves deeper into the meaning and significance of the words and actions.***

This is in no way a reflection upon the character or works of Masons who for various reasons find themselves disinclined to pursue the esoteric path. Unfortunately, there are many Masons who pronounce that there simply is no esoteric content at all to be had in Freemasonry, even though Masonic Ritual is ripe with evidence to the contrary.<sup>4</sup>

**T**he body of Freemasonry is comprised of many types of individuals whose Masonic pursuits vary according to that individual's personality and interests. Freemasonry has been very aptly been compared to a complex tapestry composed of many colorful overlapping individual threads which taken as a whole form a larger picture. Brother Mason Pratt developed[1] a list of different "Brands" of Freemasons based upon behavioral characteristics which included: "Socialite", "Historian", "Ritualist", "Philosopher", "Masonic Law", "Symbolism", and "Collector". I would add to this list the brands "Charitable" and "Fiduciary". I suspect that most of us can think of Brothers in our own Lodge who fit one of these diverse profiles.<sup>2</sup>

Esoteric Freemasons usually fit into one or more of these "Brand" categories, although "Historian", "Ritualist", "Symbolism", and "Philosopher" are the most common. Every initiated Freemason however is a potential Esoteric Mason, since all Freemasons seek illumination (light) through the initiation process. It is this quest for light revealed through the comprehension of hidden spiritual knowledge which distinguishes the Esoteric Freemason and defines Esoteric Masonry.<sup>3</sup>

Esoteric Freemasonry is not for everyone, not even for everyone who receives the gift of illumination.

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<sup>2</sup> A GUIDE FOR THE NEW ESOTERIC FREEMASON, Bro. William Steve Burkle KT, 32°, KCRBE, Alpha Lodge No. 116, Grand Lodge of New Jersey, Philo Lodge No. 243, South River, New Jersey, Scioto Lodge No. 6, Chillicothe, Ohio, PIETRE-STONES REVIEW OF FREEMASONRY, [http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/esoteric\\_freemason.html](http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/esoteric_freemason.html).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

# A Balanced Understanding about Masonic Esoteric Study

*Masonicinfo.com* is a web site devoted to exploding the myths created by anti-Masons about the Craft. Brother Ed King, the creator of the site, posted the following information on his site which was prepared by a Texas Mason who sought no credit for his work, but offered it to present a balanced understanding about Masonic esoteric study and what it is really all about.

As King points out, the material is a very fair and objective treatment of this area which so very often causes contention, confusion, and concern - even amongst members of the Fraternity. Masons and the detractors of the fraternity would find far fewer objections to esoteric matters if they took the time to understand what the anonymous Texas Mason prepared.

The following is a reprint of that material.

## 1. What is esotericism, and how does it differ from the "esoteric work" of Masonic ritual?

a. Here is the entry for "esoteric" from Miriam-Webster:

Etymology: Late Latin *esotericus*, from Greek *esOterikos*, from *esOterO*, comparative of *eisO*, *esO* within, from *eis* into; akin to Greek *en* in.

1 a : designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone <a body of esoteric legal doctrine -- B. N. Cardozo> b : requiring or exhibiting knowledge that is restricted to a small group <esoteric terminology> <esoteric strategies>; broadly : difficult to understand <esoteric subjects>

2 a : limited to a small circle <engaging in esoteric pursuits> b : PRIVATE, CONFIDENTIAL <an esoteric purpose>

3 a: of special, rare, or unusual interest <esoteric building materials. b. In Masonry, "esoteric work" refers to the elements of Masonic ritual and teaching that are to be communicated only to a properly qualified member and are unlawful to write or publish. Esotericism is a broader field of studies and practices. c. For a good summary of what esotericism means in a scholarly context, we refer to Antoine Faivre, Professor of Esoteric and Mystical Currents

***"Esoteric" is a term which literally means "hidden". Although it is synonymous with the term "occult" it is currently the preferred term used when discussing the arcane meanings present in Masonic ritual and symbolism. This is in large part because of the negative connotations which the word "occult" has acquired in connection with scary Hollywood movies and inept journalistic reporting of gruesome pseudo-occult crimes which could more properly be characterized as "bizarre" or "deranged" than as truly "occult". That which the truly occult hides is knowledge; usually knowledge considered sacred or knowledge maintained secret because it could result in the persecution of those who possess it.***

***Consequently, we generally consider the esoteric aspects of Freemasonry to be those hidden elements of our exoteric (open) practices which allude to deeper and usually mystical meanings. In the course of discovering and interpreting these deeper meanings, we engage in educated speculation (i.e. we formulate a thesis). For a single given esoteric element, we may legitimately find several different meanings, or find similarities between the meanings of several apparently unrelated esoteric elements. It is important to understand that "speculation" is not the same as "conjecture". Speculation is often exhausting and frustrating work; but it is also a labor of love which we willingly undertake in the search for "illumination".***

Source: A GUIDE FOR THE NEW ESOTERIC FREEMASON, Bro. William Steve Burkle.

in Modern and Contemporary Europe at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sorbonne), in Paris. Perhaps his most notable works are his contributions to the SUNY series in Western Esoteric Traditions.

Faivre says that since its first use in 1828, the term "esotericism" has generally referred to three different areas of interest:

i. Secret knowledge or secret science preserved as arcana and passed on to only a select few. Masonic ritual is performed in secret, and it may be thought of as a science by which Masons become more educated in the principles, virtues and obligations of the fraternity. Drama, symbolism, and allegory are key methods in this science. In the field of education, these methods are widely understood to have instructive value, yet nowhere are they practiced and preserved as they are in Masonry.



ii. Paths or techniques addressed to the truths hidden or secluded within Nature or Man, the knowledge of which is attained by only those who have achieved or received a gnostic or transformative experience. Our own ritual teaches us that Speculative Masonry "leads the contemplative to view with reverence and admiration the glorious works of creation and inspires him with the most exalted ideas of the perfections of his Divine Creator." "By it [Geometry] we discover the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of the Grand Artificer of the Universe, and view with delight the proportions which connect this vast machine." Clearly these statements are not limited to the issue of morality, but neither do they specify practices or doctrines peculiar to any one religion.

iii. Groups of works and currents dealing with perennial philosophy, Hermeticism, alchemy, astrology, Kabbalah, Christian theosophy, and so on, which can be subjected to historical studies. Although our

Craft ritual does not refer directly to such traditions and teachings, rightly or wrongly many esotericists believe that there are allusions to them throughout the teachings and symbolism of our rituals. Some historians, both Masonic and non-Masonic, hypothesize that various esoteric traditions and ideas influenced the founding and/or development of Speculative Masonry, especially when considering the plethora of rites and degrees with overt references to such traditions that began within a few decades after the founding of the Grand Lodge of England. Such references continue to exist today in certain degrees of the appendant rites, but they do not require Masons to accept the doctrines or practices of any specific religion.

## 2. What are Masonic esotericists and what do they do?

a. In all other respects they are usually ordinary Masons, and typically are serving the fraternity in every jurisdiction, appendant body, and official capacity. They pursue esotericism because it is a personal interest, and not because they believe it is a requirement of Masonry. To many people, Albert Pike is the epitome of a Masonic esotericist.

b. They are men trying to improve themselves in Masonry by:

i. Examining the great questions of life. - Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is the essential nature of reality? What is wisdom, truth, or beauty? Etc.

ii. Practicing introspection ("Know thyself"). - What do I really believe and value? What are my virtues and vices? What are the secret hopes and fears that influence how I think, feel and act? How do I need or want to change? Etc.

c. They are historians researching esoteric influences on the ritual, symbols, and philosophies of Masonry. They ask questions such as: To what extent were early Masons interested in such things as? Why were they interested in them? How did those interests affect the principles, values and ideals of Masonry as we know it today?

d. They are scholars performing comparative studies of ritual, symbolism and teachings among Masonry and other fraternal, philosophical and spiritual traditions. They ask questions such as: What are the parallels and differences between Masonry and other traditions? How might those parallels and differences shed more light on the meanings of our ritual, symbols, and myth?

e. They are students of life pursuing more light through studies in psychology, sociology, anthropology, mythology, philosophy, religion, history, languages, etc. Masonry teaches us to polish and adorn our minds, to advance ourselves in learning, to improve our relationships with others, to always seek more light, and to search for that which has been lost. Each of these noble pursuits is advanced by studies in the humanities, the liberal arts and sciences that address the individual human being, society, and culture, all of which are Masonic concerns.

f. They are contemplatives practicing various disciplines of meditation, including prayer. The most revered saints and respected sages of history have practiced meditation and extolled its virtues, as have a considerable number of modern psychologists and clergy. Meditation has been identified as the key that opens the door to spiritual enlightenment, and lauded as an indispensable means to attain the fullest measures of peace, joy, health, artistic creativity, personal productivity, philosophical insight, and understanding and compassion for our fellow

***“To heighten one’s understanding of the basis for Esoteric Masonry, it is helpful to have a general knowledge of the history, traditions, and philosophies which formed the broader current of the mystery tradition upon which Masonic Esotericism is based.”***

Source: A GUIDE FOR THE NEW

human beings. In short, meditation is understood to be a valuable working tool in achieving everything that Masonry values.

### **3. Why haven't I seen or heard more about Masonic esotericists?**

a. They may not want to force their views on others. Many esotericists have learned that the insights and inspirations that come through the study and practice of esotericism are often very personal and not easily communicated to others, especially those who have not done the same kinds of work.

b. They may not want to fuel anti-Masonic attacks. While Masonic esotericists know that no single person or sub-group of the fraternity speaks for the whole, they are well aware that anti-Masons have often based their intolerant criticisms of the fraternity on the opinions and beliefs of a few Masonic esotericists. Of course, these attacks are always based upon very narrow religious views, which almost automatically rule out the generally open-minded willingness of esotericists to investigate different beliefs and practices.

c. They may want to avoid conflict with anti-esoteric brothers. It is unfortunately the case that some Masons have significant prejudice of their own, and thus esoteric brothers who have spoken up have too often been ridiculed as misguided zealots, incompetent scholars, ignorant dupes, deluded crackpots, or even malicious phonies.

### **4. Why would anyone object to esotericism in Masonry?**

a. Some people may misunderstand esotericism as un-Masonic. Most Masons who consider themselves esotericists are individuals practicing "regular" Masonry in duly constituted lodges in accordance with the ancient charges and landmarks. Masonic esotericists are not making a religion of Masonry, though they are often exploring its spiritual implications. Some of these regular Masonic esotericists may also belong to unofficial Masonic clubs or groups based upon their shared interest in esotericism. However, there are a number of unrecognized, spurious, or clandestine organizations claiming the right to make Masons and emphasizing esotericism as central to their teaching and aims. Being a Masonic esotericist does not mean that one belongs to any such organization.

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b. Some people may be concerned that esotericism is incompatible with the "Abrahamic" faiths, or even "satanic". Masonic esotericists believe in the same principles, virtues, and ideals that unite all Masons, no matter what their specific religious preferences. From a radically conservative or fundamentalist point of view it may be impossible to think of esotericism as anything but heresy and even evil, but the same is true of Masonry. From such a perspective it is almost always the

case that one's own beliefs are the only ones that are good or true while everything else is evil or false. The fact is that there have been and are now esoteric traditions in all three of the great Western religions. In Christianity there are the contemplative practices of monastic orders like the Jesuits, as well as apostolic denominations and churches that are Gnostic in orientation. In Judaism there are a number of esoteric currents, including the orthodox Chabad Kabbalists of the Chasidim. In Islam there are the Sufi orders.

c. Masonic esotericists have not always exercised the highest standards in their historical research of Masonry and, as a result, have made claims about the fraternity's origins that are easily discredited. Often this pattern has been more about incomplete research, unreliable or discredited sources, and overconfidence in speculations than it has been about any intention to mislead anyone. The most scholarly of Masonic esotericists know the difference between speculations and substantive conclusions, and they are comfortable in acknowledging which kinds of thoughts they are voicing.

d. Some Masons have publicly accused Masonic esotericists of intellectual conceit and elitism. In their enthusiasm for what they have personally discovered in their esoteric studies and practices, some Masons have been overzealous in presenting them as the secret or true meanings of Masonic ritual and symbolism. Such authors are at times offensive in their claims that a "real" Mason must be an esotericist who thinks just as they do. Intolerance and narrow-mindedness is no more acceptable from esotericists than it is from any other Mason. Conscientious Masonic esotericists understand that no single Mason or group of Masons speaks for the entire fraternity. They also warmly acknowledge that there are many different interests that men can explore in Masonry, that we are all equal in our obligations to one another, and that our fraternity is united in its dedication to God and by the cement of brotherly love and affection.

**Note:** Visit [Masonicinfo.com](http://Masonicinfo.com) where you will find a thorough overview of topics like anti-Masonry points of view, objections to Freemasonry - including New World Order, conspiracies, claims that Freemasonry is a religion, Masonic history, information about irregular lodges, Masonic charities, books about Masonry and much more for the Mason seeking Light.

# Books about Esoteric Freemasonry

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**F**or Master Masons seeking more light, the below listed books are rich with insight, though the concepts can be more dense and esoteric than those explored in more mainstream titles.<sup>5</sup>

The esoteric ideas in Masonry can often be controversial. The author may just be putting forward some of the writing that others had published, and in other cases esoteric writings may be found that have few if any citations, references or sources other than the opinion or perspective of the author. The decision to accept or reject what might be discovered in these, and many other works written with an esoteric slant rest with the reader.



The Builders – Joseph Fort Newton

The Meaning of Masonry – W.L. Wilmshurst

The Masonic Initiation – W.L. Wilmshurst

Ceremony of Passing - W.L. Wilmshurst

The Key to Solomon's Key – Lou Milo Duquette

The Lost Keys of Freemasonry – Manly P. Hall

The Secrets of Hiram Abiff – John R. Heisner

Written in Stone - Richard Cassaro

The Esoteric Heart of Freemasonry - Michael R. Poll

The Stone of the Philosophers: An Alchemical Handbook - Michael R. Poll

The Alchemical Keys to Masonic Ritual  
- Timothy Hogan

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## Perspective

# The Struggles of an Esoterically Inclined Freemason

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I'm sure many of my Brethren know exactly what it is I'm talking about when I say that it is a struggle to be an Esoterically inclined Freemason. You have probably read "*The Secret Teachings of All Ages*" along with other works by Hall, along with Pike and Wilmshurst and any other esoteric book on or related to Freemasonry or anything else esoteric. You have probably combed through Internet Sacred Text Archive and studied and discovered new jewels of thought and philosophy that sent a chill up your spine or just "lit" your mind like never before. Perhaps, like me, as you pour over this information you dutifully highlight phrases and passages that speak to you, ever preparing for that time when you will be able to exchange these pieces of light with someone of a like mind.

You spend your days and nights pondering, thinking, and brooding over higher thought. The deeper you get the farther away you are from most of the people you know because they are not there with you.

One definition of Esoteric is: understood by or meant for only the select few who have special knowledge or interest. I think there are two key words in that definition. Only a *few* actually have the *interest*. So, in no way are we elitist or exclusionary, we are just a small group of people that want to know about the arcane.

Freemasonry draws more men who have this particular interest than other groups because of the secret/private nature of our order. The symbols and ritual are like a beacon drawing the esoterically inclined to the West Gate of the craft. Unfortunately, for the few who's interest lies in the esoteric they are just that, *a few*. Far more men are drawn to the fraternity out of family history, comradeship, or simple curiosity than a yearning for a deeper meaning in life.

So, we enter the West Gate expecting a group of enlightened sages and usually wind up in a sort of fancy Rotary Club. When we went through the 3 degrees and we reveled in the drama and symbolism while some of the Brethren just wanted it to be over so they could go home. We quickly took charge of our membership and learned the ritual and helped out as much as we could and even became officers of the lodge in response to that deeper yearning, ever searching for that *mystic tie*. It is often not found but we keep searching because that is our nature, *us few*.



I recently had the tremendous pleasure of raising my dear friend to the sublime degree. As my lodge somewhat stumbled their way through that great drama, many with that deer in the headlights look on their faces as they played it out, I came to the realization that I would always be in the minority. Maybe someday I will find that group of enlightened sages or even organize one myself but for now I must remain on the periphery watching and waiting for more of the *few* like myself.

Source: The North East Corner,  
<http://thenortheasterncorner.c>

