

# BOOK REVIEW

## WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

### THE MYSTIC TIE AND THE WAY OF ONENESS

C. R. DUNNING, JR.

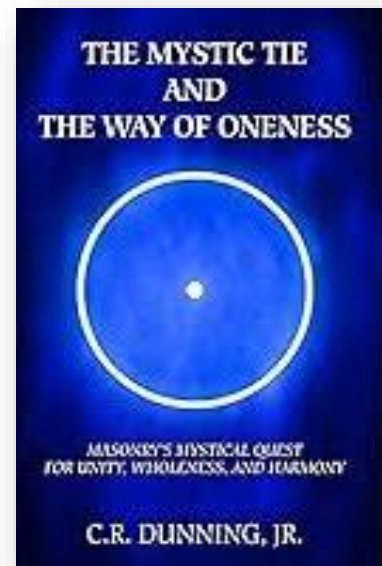
Reviewed by Keith W. Gunkel, Past Master, Orion Lodge No. 222  
Junior Warden, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, April 2025

W. B. Chuck Dunning, Jr. is one of contemporary Freemasonry's most popular writers and a frequently sought-after speaker. Reading and reviewing his latest book, *The Mystic Tie and the Way on Oneness* was a challenging experience. Somehow, I believe that W. B. Dunning would be pleased to know that. The challenge involved my willingness to open my mind in ways to embrace and promote contemplative practices in meditation and reflection.

In his *Kentucky Monitor*, W. B. Henry Pirtle included the following phrase, "Wisdom dwells with contemplation. There we must seek her." Whether or not W. B. Dunning is familiar with this passage, it is clear that he has adopted a similar belief. *The Mystic Tie and the Way on Oneness* is an exploration of the idea of mysticism and the desire for oneness that exists in all men and to which a path is provided through Freemasonry.

The book has eight chapters and is divided into two sections. Chapters one through four are dedicated to focusing on individual reflection and the way of oneness. A couple of explanatory points are in order. The poet Robert Burns referred to Freemasons as "Brothers of the Mystic Tie." That phrase was frequently repeated by Kentucky's Rob Morris, whose only similarity to Burns is that they were both hailed as "poet laureate" of Freemasonry. Morris, described by H. L. Haywood as a poetaster, is remarkable chiefly for the extent to which his poetry is largely forgotten. W. B. Dunning writes of mysticism as being man's spiritual search for meaning (certainly a feature of Freemasonry). He defines oneness as the union of man's mind (soul?) with that of his Creator, the Great Architect of the Universe.

Chapters five through eight shed light on the principal tenets and mystical potentialities of the virtues, rituals, and perspectives of Masonry.



Reflecting the extent to which Freemasonry, in its philosophies, and through its symbols, draws on many of the world's varying religions and moral traditions, there is a collection of poems and meditations, and practices, used by Judaism, Christianity, Islam, the Navajo, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Neoplatonism. My favorite poem is on page 119 and is titled: "Deep Within the Well of this Heart." I found a wonderful prayer for a Lodge on page 143 to open with and reflect upon to unite a Lodge of like-minded brothers. It is the same prayer that Pirtle included in the *Kentucky Monitor*. Its inclusion in W. B. Dunning's book illustrates the extent to which the underlying concepts of mysticism and oneness have been present in Masonic rituals since they were first recorded.

As a Mason, my favorite chapter was chapter five and pages 136 through 138 which give a detailed explanation of what should be provided to all who successfully knock on our door. That is, quite simply, conceptual learning, deep contemplation and lessons about how to integrate the principles of Freemasonry into our daily lives. W. B. Dunning writes,

"It should be clear that conceptual learning about the tenets and virtues is not enough to instill them in our lives. We must also deeply contemplate them and practice mindfulness of them daily, fully integrating them into the way we live every moment."

In other words, knowledge, without the action of implementation, is ultimately of little value.

W. B. Dunning's work is well presented and the contents challenge the reader to open his mind to various methods of oneness, a state or condition of unity. Oneness includes a way to reflect, focus on wisdom, measure wholeness and reinforce virtue into our lives.

Mysticism is not a concept that Freemasons need either fear or shun. To ignore the spiritual aspects of Freemasonry is to miss its point altogether. A frequent (and accurate) criticism of institutional Freemasonry is that it has little inclination toward introspection. Introspection, though, is the byproduct of contemplation. Contemporary American Freemasonry is indebted to W. B. Dunning for bringing the idea of contemplation to the forefront of the conversation.

W. B. Chuck Dunning's *The Mystic Tie and the Way of Oneness* is recently published and is available from online booksellers.