

GRAND ELECT, PERFECT AND SUBLIME MASON (14°)

THE INFLUENCE OF PERFECTION ON SCOTTISH RITE FREEMASONRY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ah, perfection. Many of us seek it, but few of us actually attain it. Perhaps none of us ever fully attains it, if we are honest. But the pursuit of perfection can offer its own rewards: "Excellence is only achieved through a pursuit of perfection, very few reach perfection but the adventure, the excitement, and even the glory of pursuit is its own reward."¹ It is a goal that remains important, no matter how elusive ultimate perfection may seem: "It is because intellect is peculiar to man that the pursuit of its perfection in truth is seen as the most distinctively human good."²

Perfection is a special human pursuit. Among all of Deity's creation, we humans are made aware of our divine potential to be like unto Deity, which is the highest good (*summum bonum*) we may achieve. We are called upon to be perfected, even as our Heavenly Father is already perfect.³

Perfection is not only a religious or theological concept. It is also an inherently Masonic principle. The Fourteenth Degree signals that a candidate may attain perfection if he is honest and sincere in his sojourn through the Ineffable Degrees. At this point, the candidate hopefully reaches a "point of reflection, of consideration, and of analysis"⁴ which is at once both reflective and prospective. The candidate is given an opportunity to reflect upon his past life, and to ponder how his past achievements, disappointments and lessons learned have helped to guide him along the path of perfection. He is also given an opportunity to reaffirm his goals of gaining deeper understanding, continued self-improvement and ultimate unity with Deity, and to understand where he still needs to travel on the remainder of the path.

The path is a continuing spectrum that is commensurate with life itself. With his new title of Perfect Élu, the candidate now learns both what the pursuit of perfection entails

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¹ Shah Giriraj, *Management Planning for the Twenty-first Century*, vol. I (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1999), p. 17.

² Ralph M. McInerney, *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, rev. ed. 1997), p. 33.

³ *The Holy Bible* (KJV, 1979), Matthew 5:48.

⁴ Henry C. Clausen, *Clausen's Commentaries on Morals and Dogma* (Washington, D.C.: The Supreme Council, 33°, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, 1974), p. 71.

and what its future benefits might be. This path is possible, however, insofar as the candidate remains faithful to his Scottish Rite journey. The journey entails passing from the Symbolic Lodge degrees through the Ineffable Degrees to this capstone, the Fourteenth Degree. This Degree is sometimes called the Degree of Perfection because it represents the perfection, or completion, of all the religious and philosophical lessons that are proffered in the Fourth through Fourteenth Degrees.⁵ What are those lessons and how do they help us become more perfected?

II. THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

The first lesson is that a Perfect Élu is not perfect in every respect ó at least not yet. There is always more work to be done, because the pursuit of perfection is an ongoing, life-long commitment.⁶ Indeed, every Freemason is bound to the Fellowcraft obligation to always progress in Masonry.⁷

Another lesson is that the pursuit of perfection includes a pursuit of truth.⁸ Fear not: this is not a theoretical discussion reserved only to those who are esoteric at heart. It also has a very practical application for those who are engaged in daily pursuits and necessary worldly activities.⁹

A further lesson is that striving for perfection is an invitation to adopt a mindset of perfectionism. Perfectionism is often maligned because of its extreme proclivities, but it can be a beneficial quality if it promotes our ability to become perfect.¹⁰ Perfectionism is

⁵ Rex R. Hutchens, *A Bridge to Light* (Washington, D.C., The Supreme Council, 33°, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, 2nd ed. 1995), p. 96.

⁶ Zaid Ahmad, *The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldūn* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 120; Michael F. Mascolo, Kurt W. Fischer and Jin Li, "Dynamic Development of Component Systems of Emotions: Pride, Shame and Guilt in China and the United States," *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, ed. Richard J. Davidson, Klaus R. Scherer and H. Hill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 384.

⁷ John L. Cooper, III, "A Progressive Moral Science," *California Freemason*, vol. 58, no. 5 (June/July 2010): 10, 11.

⁸ Samuel Bailey, *Essays on the Pursuit of Truth and on the Progress of Knowledge* (London: Longman, Brown, Green: & Longman, 2nd ed. rev. 1844), p. 82. Truth, objectivity and perfection are known by philosophers as "regulatory ideas" ó they are goals no one can reasonably expect to attain, yet they are thought to have value in directing and sustaining desirable kinds of action.ö Carl Bereiter, *Education and Mind in the Knowledge Age* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2002), pp. 131-32. This principle is contrary to Marxism, which encourages the pursuit of positive thought instead of so-called illusory idealism. D.R. Kelly, "The Metaphysics of Law: An Essay on the Very Young Marx" in *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, ed. Bob Jessop with Russell Wheatley (New York: Routledge, 2nd series 1999), p. 70.

⁹ See, e.g., John Mackey, "Creating a New Paradigm for Business," *Be the Solution: How Entrepreneurs and Conscious Capitalists Can Solve All the World's Problems*, ed. Michael Strong (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009), p. 81.

¹⁰ "A consequential perfectionalism tells us first to desire that state in which human nature is developed to the highest degree and then, assuming we are rational, to promote it." Thomas Hurka,

ideally a means by which we can become perfect: ÷it directs us to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science and culture.÷¹¹ Perfectionism÷s greatest strength can also be its greatest weakness ÷ a high sense of expectation that at times can become quite unrealistic in practice.¹² True perfectionists can teach us by their example the importance they attach to attaining perfection by never being completely satisfied with their progress and always demanding yet more improvement.¹³ None of us should, therefore, ever consider ourselves completely perfect in knowledge, free from limitations, or above the thrills of temptation. May we always endeavor to strive for perfection by purifying ourselves from our pride and allowing ourselves to be teachable.¹⁴

III. MASONIC NOTIONS OF PERFECTION

Another lesson is that Masonic notions of perfection may differ significantly from some of the world÷s notions of perfection. Contrary to the world÷s idea that ÷he who dies with the most toys wins,÷ the Masonic idea of perfection is not premised on a proud compilation of achievements, recognitions and possessions. Instead, Freemasons believe that we can become better men by subtracting whatever is superfluous in our thoughts and actions. Through humble acts of systematically purifying our lives of harmful addictions, uncontrolled passions, mistaken thinking and selfish narcissism, we hope to reconnect with the pristine simplicity whose potential has lain inchoate within us since

Perfectionism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 58. Compulsive perfectionism can result from a history of childhood rejections and criticisms ÷ inner anxieties and pains that need to be soothed by a need to be perfect so as to be accepted and praised ÷ but it should not to be confused with obsessive compulsive personality disorder. Judith G. Arndell, *Secret Pains: Identifying and Overcoming Unresolved Inner Pains and Anger from Parental Abandonment* (Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2008), pp. 40-41.

¹¹ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, pp. 3, 4. Perfectionism can suggest giftedness in the right person. See, e.g., Patricia A. Schuler, *Voices of Perfectionism: Perfectionistic Gifted Adolescents in a Rural Middle School* (Storrs, Conn.: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, 1999). It can also empower women to transcend the glass ceiling. See, e.g., Kimberly A. Yuracko, *Perfectionism and Contemporary Feminist Values* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2003). Unfortunately, perfectionism is like cholesterol; there are both healthy and unhealthy types. James T. Webb, Janet L. Gore and Edward R. Amend, *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children* (Scottsdale, Ariz.: Great Potential Press, Inc., 2007), p. 124. There is a dark side to perfectionism, however, if we find ourselves living in a constant state of anxiety about avoiding errors, whether actual or imagined. Miriam Adderholt and Jan Goldberg, *Perfectionism: What÷s Bad About Being Too Good?* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Free Spirit Publishing, 1987), pp. 4-5. Perfectionism can lead to unhappiness, depression, interference with functioning, generalized anxiety and worry, anger, and obsessive-compulsive behavior. Martin M. Anthony and Richard P. Swinson, *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough: Strategies for Coping with Perfectionism* (Oakland, Calif.: New Harbinger Publications, rev. ed. 2009), pp. 23-38.

¹² Anthony and Swinson, *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough*, pp. 10-22. Perfectionists can also be excellent procrastinators, if they decline to undertake any project until its success is guaranteed. Sark, *Make Your Own Creative Dreams Real: A Plan for Procrastinators, Perfectionists, Busy People, and People Who Would Really Rather Sleep All Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), p. 48.

¹³ Kellye M. Garrett, ÷Give Perfectionism the Boot,÷ *Black Enterprise*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Nov. 1998): 181.

¹⁴ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (New York: G. Lane & P.P. Sandford, 1844), pp. 4-9.

birth.¹⁵ As paradoxical as it might seem, we might learn to advance along the path of perfection by becoming less imperfect.¹⁶ Harmful addictions are replaced with healthy vitality; uncontrolled passions are replaced with mature decision-making; mistaken thinking is replaced with open-minded understanding; and selfish narcissism is replaced with selfless service.

Health, maturity, open-mindedness and altruism are all divine attributes of perfection long associated with Deity. We tend to fashion Deity in our own image and likeness, and a model of Deity is, in all honesty, often an *imago homo*. We no longer venerate the vengeful, vindictive gods of Olympus and Valhalla because we know that we can be better than them. We have come to fashion a more exacting image of divine perfection in Deity because we want to venerate One who is better than ourselves. That is not to say that Deity is an artificial construct of our vain hopes and desires. We know in our minds and hearts that One does exist, One who continues to reveal more to us according to our ever-expanding capacity for understanding and relating. Deity is not One to be feared, but One to be loved and imitated.

In order to become like unto Deity, we are called upon to ever improve ourselves. We can do so by striving to return to the original pristine states in which we were created. We may acquire the tasty heart of palm by peeling away tasteless leaves. Likewise, we might ascertain the purity of gold by burning off impurities in a refining fire. So too, we encounter our truest selves ó and experience hints of divine perfection ó as we unlearn what truly does not matter in life. We regain an understanding of the Lost Name of Deity, which is tied to our personal Lost Names as well. The ancient substitute for the Divine Name reminds us, if only phonetically, that a committed relationship with Deity will assure us of health in the navel and *marrow in the bone*.¹⁷ Bone marrow is critical to healthy living, as it creates red and white blood cells.¹⁸ We cannot get closer to what is truly essential in life than to promote the building blocks of the blood that runs through our bodies.

This same sense of stripping away external imperfections in order to find internal perfection is echoed in Freemasonry by the sound caused by chipping away at the iconic ashlar. We are required to ðknock away the unwanted stoneð and polish the malleable good character that existed in a hidden way before we ever became Entered

¹⁵ *Bruce Lee: Artist of Life*, ed. John Little (Boston, Mass: Tuttle Publishing, 2001), p. 195; ðA Wax Medium and Process for the Permanent Coloring of Photographs,ð *The Photographic Journal of America*, ed. Thomas Coke Watkins, vol. LX (Philadelphia, Penn.: Edward L. Wilson Co., Inc., 1918), p. 516.

¹⁶ Oswald J. Rankin, ðSigns That Are Given Us,ð *Rosicrucian Digest*, vol. 38, no. 5 (May 1960): 188; Lindsay Murray, *An English Grammar: Comprehending the Principles and Rules of the Language; Illustrated by Appropriate Exercises, and a Key to the Exercises*, vol. 1 (New York: Collins & Co., 1829), p. 167.

¹⁷ *The Holy Bible*, Proverbs 3:8.

¹⁸ *American Medical Association Concise Medical Encyclopedia*, ed. Martin S. Lipsky (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 113.

Apprentices.¹⁹ We start with a final goal in mind, one that has lain dormant since the beginning of our personal time, and re-discover something that seems new but is truly ancient. May we say that we are seeking our own Lost Word ó a Word that invokes our truest identity? What do we seek within ourselves that assures us of health in the navel and *marrow in the bone*? This rendering away of superfluities and redundancies to recapture that which is pure and pristine, is analogous to the masterpiece of which every stone sculptor dreams:

The Perfect Ashlar, if it exists at all in any stone, is there all the time; to get at it requires but patient work. So, indeed, may there be many objects inside a stone; the most beautiful statue is already in the rough piece of marble from which it is carved. All the workman needs to do is knock away the marble which is not a part of the statue, and there it is! Yet how few artists who can do the work!²⁰

Operative masons work with hammers and chisels, while we speculative Masons engage in the refining process through an open exchange of ideas, featuring an elegant and honest use of symbols and creative imagery:

The history of Freemasonry is a history of the attempts to annex or manipulate it by every sort of political or religious orthodoxy, by every sort of party that preaches an ideology, and by every sort of pressure group. To understand how Freemasonry works, it is necessary to explore different modes of thought, imagination, reason, intuition, intellectual logic and dream logic all participate in the creation of practical metaphors. The symbolism of tools is basically about the act of becoming. In this context, the intelligence of the brain and the intelligence of the heart feed each other.²¹

We are authentically human, and true to our pristine roots, to the extent we allow our minds and hearts to feed each other. Our intellects distinguish us from the plant and animal kingdoms. We humans are embodied eternal spirits that are sent here to reflect Deity's perfect plan for Earth. We are unique creations who are appointed to work together harmoniously in performing a mutual task of perfecting the entire world:

The practical object of Masonry is the physical and moral amelioration and the intellectual and spiritual improvement of individuals and society. Neither can be effected, except by the dissemination of truth. It is

¹⁹ Carl H. Claudy, *Foreign Countries: A Gateway to the Interpretation and Development of Certain Symbols of Freemasonry* (Richmond, Va.: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Inc. 1971), pp. 61-62.

²⁰ Claudy, *Foreign Countries*, p. 61. See also, e.g., Arthur Edward Waite, *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, vol. 1 (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970), pp. 45-46.

²¹ Daniel Beresniak, *Symbols of Freemasonry* (Singapore: Assouline Publishing, 2000), p. 108.

falsehood in doctrine and fallacy in principles, to which most of the miseries of men and the misfortunes of nations are owing. Public opinion is rarely right on any point; and there are and always will be important truths to be substituted in that opinion of many errors and absurd and injurious prejudices. There are few truths that public opinion has not at some time hated and persecuted as heresies; and few errors that have not at some time seemed to it truths radiant from the immediate presence of God.²²

In the final analysis, Freemasons are called upon to become perfect because we can be enabled to improve not only ourselves but the entire world as well. We are invited to work in concert with Deity as we listen to our hearts and the divine messages whispered therein. What matters ultimately are not our collections of degrees, titles, regalia, experiences, or even our highly valued fraternal ties. Deity desires simply that we rediscover the reason for our place on Earth, and then for us to act decisively upon that sure knowledge. Such activity might result in degrees, titles, regalia, experiences and fraternal ties, but the reverse is not necessarily true. They can actually block and interfere with our deepening awareness, if we become distracted into thinking erroneously that they are a proper goal in themselves, which they are not. The lowliest Entered Apprentice might be the worthiest Freemason in our midst, if he simply has a humbled heart and a contrite spirit that are receptive to Deity's call.

IV. LESSONS FROM THE FOURTEENTH DEGREE

More lessons about perfection are offered to us as we delve into the ritual and lecture of the Fourteenth Degree. Beginning with the ritual work, the drama is set in a sacred vault located beneath the Holy of Holies in King Solomon's Temple, and which is made accessible only by a series of horizontal vaults that begin beneath the royal residence. The location of both ends of the tunnel is instructive. By placing the last vault directly below the *Sanctum Sanctorum* is to render the room that houses the cube of agate bearing the Tetragrammaton²³ into a foundation for the squared (i.e., cubed) sacred room where the divine presence of Deity manifested in its *Shekinah*²⁴ whenever the Jewish Chief

²² *Vested in Glory: The Aprons, Cords, Collars, Caps, and Jewels of the Degrees of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, ed. Jim Tressner (Washington, D.C.: The Supreme Council, 33°, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, 2000), p. 44.

²³ Albert Pike, *Magnum Opus or The Great Work of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing Co., 2004), p. XIV . . . 1. The Ineffable Name on the triangle represents Deity. *Ibid*, p. XIV . . . 3. Legend has it that Jewish leaders secreted many sacred treasures, including possibly the Ark of the Covenant, underneath the Temple as it neared its destruction in the 6th Century BCE, in anticipation of the contents being unearthed when the Messiah arrives to rebuild the Temple. *Hours at Home: A Popular Monthly Devoted to Religious and Useful Literature*, ed. J.M. Sherwood, vol. 5 (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1867), p. 31; David Hatcher Childress, *Lost Cities and Ancient Mysteries of Africa and Arabia* (Kempton, Ill.: Adventures Unlimited Press, 2002), p. 64.

²⁴ *Shekinah* is not a term found in the Bible but is used in Jewish commentaries to emphasize a spiritualized concept of Deity and to dissuade believers from ascribing unduly anthropomorphic qualities to Deity. Michael Wheeler, *Rushkin's God* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 29.

Priest entered there on *Yom Kippur* to pronounce the Tetragrammaton aloud.²⁵ Just as the Chief Priest must be worthy to pronounce the Sacred Name,²⁶ so too the Freemason who ponders the Tetragrammaton in the privacy of his spirit must be worthy enough to invoke the Sacred Name of Deity while performing his service for the world. Worthiness in this sense is simply a synonym for perfection. Personal perfection in this sense is simply a means to helping the world obtain its own perfection.

The location of the other end of the tunnel is also instructive. Its entrance lies beneath the royal apartment, not in some public building or other easily accessible place. Hence, only royalty, or those who possess the royal secret, may know where to enter the tunnel and have permission to do so. This is not to suggest that only a royal few, or possibly a Gnostic elect, are allowed to imitate King Solomon's footsteps along the subterranean path. The privilege of descending into the sacred vault is not restricted for all time to only King Solomon and the other Grand Masters who have already demonstrated their worthiness. Indeed, all of Israel is intended to be a royal priesthood, set apart to perform this sacred work.²⁷ The path to perfection which ends in a divine embrace is open to all persons who sincerely desire to be worthy.

Perfection is a theme that is repeated throughout the Fourteenth Degree ritual. The Thrice Puissant Grand Master of the degree, representing King Solomon, wears a collar depicting a five-point star. Inscribed on the star is the Phoenician word for perfection.²⁸ When asked by the Thrice Puissant Grand Master what are the characteristics of a Perfect Élu, the Senior Grand Warden states that he frees himself from the dominion of iniquity, injustice, revenge, envy and jealousy; that he is active in doing good; and speaks of his

²⁵ The Chief Priest was considered among observant Jews to be the holiest person on earth. He spoke the holiest word in human language on the holiest day of the year while he was in the holiest place ever built. This combination of four holinesses created what ancient Israel considered the ultimate sacred event for the entire world. Angela Wood, John Logan and Jenny Rose, *Dimensions in Religion: Teacher's Resource Book* (Walton-on-Thames, Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1997), p. 180.

²⁶ Dire divine punishment awaited any Chief Priest who was not adequately prepared for this sacred task. Randy Clark, *Authority from God: How and Why You Can Kick the Devil Out of Your Life* (Longwood, Fla: Xulon Press, 2006), p. 94. "But if his thoughts were focused, his intentions pure and his performance flawless, he and the people of Israel would be forgiven their sins." Nina Beth Cardin, *The Tapestry of Jewish Time: A Spiritual Guide to Holidays and Life-Cycle Events* (Springfield, N.J.: Behrman House, Inc., 2000), p. 78. In a poignant Talmudic story, Deity was so impressed with one Chief Priest during their annual meeting that Deity sought his blessing, not the other way around. The moral of the lesson would seem to be that Deity needs humanity as much as humanity needs Deity and also perhaps that Deity desires the Temple as much as we do. Howard Schwartz, *Gabriel's Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 284.

²⁷ *The Holy Bible*, Exodus 12:6; 1 Peter 2:9.

²⁸ Tressner, *Vested in Glory*, p. 43. This is a double entendre, because Phoenicia is credited with perfecting written language and introducing it to the Western World. Many Near Eastern language groups, including Semitic and Greek, trace their linguistic roots, and the shift from hieroglyphics to guttural characters, to Phoenician literary efforts. William S. Welsh, *Handy-Book of Literary Curiosities* (Philadelphia, Penn.: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1909), p. 41; *Chambers's Encyclopædia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge* (Philadelphia, Penn.: J.B. Lippincott Co., new ed. 1901), p. 185.

brethren, only to praise them.²⁹ Perfection is thus attained by a two-fold process: freeing one's self from negative qualities, and actively doing good to confer benefits upon others. Perfection is achieved through a series of purgative processes and charitable service. It is made possible by an intricate combination of probative introspection³⁰ and outreach.³¹

In previous degrees, the candidate was accompanied by a guide who spoke for him. He now must give the requisite password himself in order to gain access to the sacred vault. Once admitted, he is invested with the battery, additional password and sign of admiration that are needed to advance further,³² thereby signaling that his Masonic education to date is acceptable but not yet complete. He is perfect enough to enter the Lodge, but he is not perfect enough to say that his Masonic work is complete. This lesson reinforces the principle that perfection is a progressive moral science.

Upon receiving the Degree of Perfection, the candidate finds himself in the immediate presence of Deity, the first time such an opportunity is presented in Scottish Rite Freemasonry.³³ He washes his hands in a brazen laver as a token both of the purity of his intentions and the sincerity of his purposes.³⁴ He is anointed with oil after being

²⁹ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 3. The praise awaiting a Perfect Élu is knowledge of Deity, a faint but true appreciation of His nature and infinite attributes; a confidence in His wisdom and justice; His benevolence and love for his feeble creatures; securing me against skepticism and despair. *Ibid*, pp. XIV . . . 3-4.

³⁰ Introspection reveals to every individual his spirit in a process, and as he examines nature from the lowest passive form up on through plant life and animal life, he discovers in himself the characteristics of determiner and determined, and that he is in a movement toward a state in which every potentiality will be realized. Howard Sandison, "A Study of Psychological Foundations of Education" by Dr. W.T. Harris, *The Educator-Journal*, vol. III, no. 9 (May 1903): 365, 367.

³¹ Albert Schweitzer thought that altruism inherently led to perfection, but some modern critics think Schweitzer's appeal is cyclical and unpersuasive because it was based on notions of social duty that are less prevalent today than in his day. Stan van Hooft, *Life, Death and Subjectivity: Moral Sources in Bioethics* (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2004), p. 110. There is also a cynical view that altruism is spurred on by a religious mandate that good acts are rewarded and bad acts are punished; hence altruism is dismissed as the antithesis of perfection because it is forced and not voluntary. R. de Villiers, "Altruism on Trial," *The University Magazine and Free Review*, vol. X, no. 2 (May 1898): 123, 124-125. Ideally, perfect altruism should lead to perfect egoism and artificial divisions would disappear, as a perfect lover is matched with a perfect beloved. Daniel Pomeroy Rhodes, *The Philosophy of Change* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1909), p. 56. "Compassion" is perhaps a better term than "altruism," for love of others ("altruism") has historically implied that one cannot also simultaneously love self ("egoism"). As we approach more closely the ideal stage of perfection, the perception of a forced choice between egoism and altruism should hopefully fade. Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion: Uniting Mystical Awareness with Social Justice* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions International, 1999), p. 33.

³² Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 5.

³³ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 7. Later, in the degree catechism, the candidate is said to witness a dazzling brilliant light which reveals the Tetragrammaton on the cube of agate. *Ibid*, p. XIV . . . 15.

³⁴ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 7. Ritualistic hand-washing ablution was a ceremonial purification found within the Ancient Mysteries, Mosaic Law and primitive Christianity. H.L. Haywood, *Great Teaching of Masonry and the History of Freemasonry* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), p.

obligated,³⁵ which is a further sign of his joint regal-sacerdotal status.³⁶ All of these acts are reminders of the necessity and importance of personal worthiness (i.e., perfection).

We turn now to the lessons inculcated by lecture of the degree. We learn that through the three-fold path of purification, initiation and illumination, we may grow ever closer to our goal of perfection.³⁷ The Perfect Élu has undergone all necessary tests and trials to reach this point.³⁸ Perfection is described as the "full and harmonious development of all our faculties, corporeal and mental, intellectual and moral."³⁹ Pike then recaps the seriatim lessons gained from the earlier degrees in the Lodge of Perfection which can aid a Freemason in his return back to primal perfection:

- **4TH DEGREE: SECRET MASTER**

A Secret Master has seen the Grand Master Hiram Abif's tomb and sheds tears thereon in company with his brethren. The lessons learned in the Fourth Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include secrecy, obedience and fidelity.⁴⁰

28; Albert G. Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences: Comprising the Whole Range of Arts, Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution*, vol. 1 (New York: The Masonic History Co., 1913), p. 5. This ablution also invokes the memory of Pharisaic law, which mandated hand-washing before partaking of any meal. *Holy Bible* (KJV, 1979), Mark 7:3; Steve Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2009), p. 347.

³⁵ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 8.

³⁶ Ancient Judaism viewed anointing with oil, apart from medicinal reasons, as a divinely-appointed emblem of sanctification that was reserved for kings, prophets and chief priests. It was common to refer to them ceremoniously as the "Lord's anointed" once this ritual had occurred. The custom may have been borrowed from the Egyptians, who practiced it before the Israelite peoples left Egypt under Moses' guidance. John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895), p. 239.

³⁷ Clausen, *Clausen's Commentaries*, p. 74. The candidate for the higher degrees of Scottish Rite Freemasonry passes from the square to the compass as he begins with the Fourth Degree and proceeds from there. Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 5; Robert G. Davis, "From the Square to the Compasses," *Scottish Rite Journal*, vol. 118, no. 3 (May/June 2010): 10-11.

³⁸ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 3.

³⁹ Hurka, *Perfectionism*, p. 4. This may be why Pike described the Fourteenth Degree as "the last degree in Ancient Masonry." Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 20.

⁴⁰ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, pp. XIV . . . 5-6. "A good Mason is one that can look upon death, and see its face with the same countenance with which he hears its story." Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Charleston, S.C.: The Supreme Council, 33^o, Southern Jurisdiction, 1871), p. 219. The candidate must demonstrate secrecy, obedience and fidelity in order to prove his worthiness to proceed in Masonry. James Perkins Richardson, "The Fourteenth Degree," *The New Age Magazine*, vol. 28, no. 12 (December 1920): 557.

- **5TH DEGREE: PERFECT MASTER**

A Perfect Master has seen the three circles enclosing the square, upon the two crossed columns. The lessons learned in the Fifth Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include honesty, sincerity, straightforward-ness and good faith.⁴¹

- **6TH DEGREE: CONFIDENTIAL SECRETARY**

A Confidential Secretary's zeal is mistaken for curiosity, and for a time his life is in danger. The lessons of the Sixth Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include being zealous, faithful, disinterested and benevolent, and to act always as a peacemaker.⁴²

- **7TH DEGREE: PROVOST AND JUDGE**

A Provost and Judge dispenses impartial justice to needy workers. The lessons of the Seventh Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include deciding justly and impartially, doing justice to all, seeking no undue advantage of any, and not endeavoring to enrich or elevate self at the expense of another's fortune, happiness or reputation.⁴³

- **8TH DEGREE: INTENDANT OF THE BUILDING**

An Intendant of the Building is a pupil of the Grand Master Hiram Abif, and is thought worthy enough to take his place alongside others in temple work. The lessons of the Eighth Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include benevolence, charity, and brotherly sympathy for those in our employ.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. Honesty, straightforwardness and good faith are all synonyms for the same positive quality of sincerity, which is a synonym for simplicity. Elizabeth Jewell, *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 778.

⁴² Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. Benevolent peacemakers are by nature zealous for perfection. M. Hammon and Anne R. Bennett, *Meditations for All the Days of the Year, for the Use of Priests, Religious, and the Faithful*, vol. V. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 3rd ed. 1894), p. 326. See also, e.g., Samuel Glower, "An Obituary of the Late Mr. German Woodhead, of Holmfirth, *A Monopolygraph* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1841), p. 112.

⁴³ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. Judicial impartiality and fairness are the prevailing perfection criteria when settling conflicts. Michael Forsé and Maxine Parodi, *The Priority of Justice: Elements for a Sociology of Moral Choices* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2005), p. 235.

⁴⁴ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. "It is inherent in man's natural goodness . . . to do good to others." Gustaaf Van Cromphout, *Emerson's Ethics* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 95, ellipses in original.

- **9TH DEGREE: ÉLU OF THE NINE**

An Élu of the Nine explores the secrets hidden in the cave, is given light by a lamp, and is refreshed by a fountain. The lessons of the Ninth Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include protecting the oppressed against the oppressor, combined with free thought, free conscience and free speech against usurpation and invasion.⁴⁵

- **10TH DEGREE: ÉLU OF THE FIFTEEN**

An Élu of the Fifteen's zeal and indefatigable exertions procure him great honor far above any entitlement that might be obtained through his own efforts. The lessons of the Tenth Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include contending against tyranny, fanaticism and ignorance.⁴⁶

- **11TH DEGREE: SUBLIME ÉLU OF THE TWELVE**

A Sublime Élu of the Twelve is an *Ameth*, or true man, which signifies both his name and his profession. The duties learned in the Eleventh Degree that can help us return to a state of perfection include being earnest, true, reliable and sincere, and being the advocate and champion of the rights of the people.⁴⁷

- **12TH DEGREE: GRAND MASTER ARCHITECT**

A Grand Master Architect has studied mathematics and is familiar with the instruments used to build a great edifice. The North Star is a symbol in the Twelfth Degree of truth and right, the polestars that guide every Freemason over the stormy seas of time as he strives to return to a state of perfection.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. Scottish Rite Freemasonry has long been considered an apostle of free thought, free speech and free conscience. Edwin Allen Sherman, *New Edition of the Brief History of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite* (Oakland, Calif.: Carruth & Carruth, 1890), p. 24. These are the surest paths to encountering Deity. Isaac M. Wise, *Judaism and Christianity, Their Agreements and Disagreements* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Bloch & Co., 1883), p. 103.

⁴⁶ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. The pursuit of perfection necessarily eliminates tyranny, fanaticism and ignorance. Richardson, "The Fourteenth Degree," *The New Age Magazine*: 557.

⁴⁷ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. Earnest men and true philosophers strive for ultimate wisdom. Osvald Sirén, "A Remarkable Philosopher of the Renaissance," *The Theosophical Path*, ed. Katherine Tingley, vol. III (July-Dec. 1912): 378. Nineteenth century advocates of a well-regulated society regarded the welfare of the people as the supreme law. William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, N. Car: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 45.

⁴⁸ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. The study of mathematics, astronomy and architecture have been basic philosophical requirements since the earliest Greek cosmologists, including Thales of Miletus. *A History of All Nations, From the Earliest Periods to the Present Time; or, Universal History: In Which the History of Every Nation, Ancient and Modern, is Separately Given*, ed. S.G. Goodrich, vol. II (Auburn, N.Y.: The Auburn Publishing Company, rev. ed. 1859), p. 715.

• 13TH DEGREE: ROYAL ARCH MASON

A Royal Arch Mason has descended through the nine arches into the subterranean vault erected by the ancient patriarch Enoch, and he has seen the luminous pedestal, the cube of agate, and the Great Word. In an effort to return to a state of perfection, he has pledged himself to be ever guided and directed by honor and duty.⁴⁹

V. CONCLUSION

Pike's lecture of the Fourteenth Degree ends with a cautionary tale. He takes liberties in amplifying the Biblical account that King Solomon did not remain faithful to his covenants, and that the Jewish people eventually followed Solomon in adopting idolatrous lifestyles. The nation was soon divided and weakened by civil war, which left it exposed to conquests by its neighbors.⁵⁰ Some Perfect Élus reportedly lost their lives in trying to protect the Temple and its sacred secrets when the invading hordes entered Jerusalem. The surviving Élus continued to preserve the Tetragrammaton, even after the Temple was destroyed, by gathering in a solemn circle every year thereafter and ritually pronouncing the Sacred Name in each other's presence, even when they were scattered around the world in the Diaspora.⁵¹ Their influence was reportedly felt in early Christianity, European chivalric orders, and the founding of the fledgling United States.⁵²

⁴⁹ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 6. Duty and honor were the hallmarks of medieval chivalry. D.S. Gregory, *Christian Ethics; or, True Moral Manhood and Life of Duty* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Eldredge & Brother, 1883), p. 99.

⁵⁰ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 12-15. *The Holy Bible*, Lamentations 52:12-14. The looting and eventual destruction of Solomon's temple were associated with the demise of the Davidic dynasty, because the temple was the example par excellence of Jewish greatness during that era. Menachem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 43-44. The destruction of Solomon's temple has profound symbolic significance for Freemasonry. See, e.g., Christopher Kelly, *Solomon's Temple Spiritualized Setting Forth the Divine Mysteries of the Temple With an Account of its Destruction* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2006).

⁵¹ Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 13. As pious and sentimental as this may seem, it hints of revisionist history, to put it mildly. Devout Jews, of course, consistently refused to utter the Sacred Name aloud during the Diaspora, but used substitute names instead. F. Legge, "The Names of Demons in The Magic Papyri," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, London (Feb. 13, 1901), vol. XXIII: 49. The use of substitutes, or *escomatages*, were used during the Diaspora to protect the Tetragrammaton by hiding Deity's true name from gentiles, and preventing it from being manipulated in magical and blasphemous ways by unbelievers. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, "The So-Called Elohist Psalter: A New Solution For An Old Problem," *A God So Near: Essays in Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), p. 38. This practice is documented as beginning in the 3rd Century BCE with the influence of Hellenism and likely no later than with publication of the Septuagint. Kristin De Toyer, "The Choice is Yours! On Names of God," *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 14 (2006): 53-66.

⁵² Pike, *Magnum Opus*, p. XIV . . . 13-15. Mackey exhorts us to consider the Masonic significance of the Tetragrammaton's journey throughout the Diaspora as more symbolic than literal. Albert G. Mackey, *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, vol. I, p. 401.

This story, however fanciful in part, serves to close the Scottish Rite's focus on King Solomon following the death of the Grand Master Hiram Abif. The remaining degrees comprising the Chapter Rose Croix, Council of Kadosh and Consistory pick up the story in other places and later times in history. All of them acknowledge that the physical Temple is seemingly lost now that it has been destroyed, along with its treasures, secrets and the certainty associated with temple work, until such future distant time as the Temple might be re-built. Until that time, the lessons of the Temple must reside in our hearts as a kind of spiritual temple, including the right and responsibility that we be worthy enough to invoke the Sacred Name of Deity when performing service to others. Everything going forward from the Fourteenth Degree may seem less certain and at times even perilous. But it is no less important. Indeed, it becomes even more important as the world grows ever more distant from the protections that the Temple offered.

The lessons of the Fourteenth Degree may serve as a valuable warning that we should remain ever vigilant and never slacken our diligence in pursuing perfection. We may never rest confident that our quest for perfection is complete. We must work together continually to preserve our simple natures, remain faithful to our covenants, and strive to be like unto Deity. Worthiness and perfection may seem elusive goals, but they are worth protecting at all times, especially in the face of daily adversity.