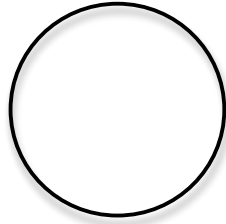


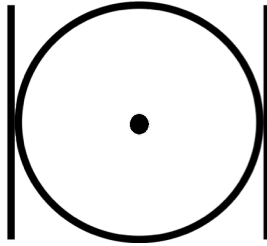
**The Middle Path**  
**Finding the Centre of a Circle**



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**Submitted By:** Kristopher Stevens

## We are Taught to Walk the Middle Path in Freemasonry



*“What is a centre?*

*A point within a circle, from which all parts of the circumference are equidistant.*

*Why on the centre?*

*Because that is a point from which a Master Mason cannot err.”*

- The Degree of a Master Mason (The Modern<sup>1</sup> Ritual Association, 1973)

In days long past those who applied our principles not only carried a diploma (now a dues card) but applied themselves to the challenges of their daily lives as well as those of society, through both intellectual and active pursuits. Masons often stood on opposing sides of debates around various issues such as slavery, sexism, human rights, forms of government and other volatile subjects.

Some Brothers and Sisters continue to challenge the status quo around religious intolerance, human rights, sexism, racism and rankism, both inside and outside the fraternity (often with ever increasing frustration and disillusionment).

This paper examines the middle path, the path of equilibrium that all Master Masons, if they truly live the Craft's philosophy, attempt to walk within the Lodge and in their lives. It does so in three steps. First, it provides a brief overview of some of the current trends in the Craft. Secondly it seeks to identify those universal landmarks that characterize Freemasonry throughout history and geographically. Finally, the paper finishes with an application of some of these landmarks to an issue relevant to modern society, the concept of sustainability. All of this is done to demonstrate that Freemasonry is relevant to today's society and that it is a path open to all those willing to walk it, if they are willing to live up to its high ideals.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that the Modern Ritual Association and the “Modern ritual” itself do not refer to the Moderns Grand Lodge which existed prior to amalgamation with the Antients in 1813 in the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England. Both the Association and ritual refer to one of the most commonly used Scottish Ritual books. In Scotland, Lodges have complete autonomy over the ritual they choose to use.

## Trends in our Craft

*“I have missed Masonry. But I did become tired of ‘crusading.’ I became tired of hearing, ‘It can’t be done,’ from those who should know better. I decided it was useless to fight those who felt that the ritual was the beginning and end of Masonry – not caring anything about the meaning behind the ritual.”*

- Allen E Roberts (1969)

Something is happening in our dear Craft and it does not have to do with recruitment or the race to complete a ceremony letter perfect and get members into the officer chairs of the Lodge.

The issue is not recruitment, it is retention, it is our failure to retain those who have the potential to learn from and apply our Craft’s principles for their own betterment and the betterment of society.

It is also about destructive retention. The retention of those who have not (and perhaps will not) learn from our principles who are corrupting the high ideals that our forefathers established.

In 2007 Peter Renzland of the Toronto Society of Masonic Research performed an analysis of the membership trends within the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario. In 1990 there were 82,000 members of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario. By 2005 31,000 members had passed away and 19,000 new Masons had been made. Yet by the end of 2005 there were only 50,000 members (Renzland, 2007a).

During the 15 year period 20,000 members quit.<sup>2</sup>

Why?

### ***The Waves are Crashing***

The brief summary above of membership trends in Ontario is not an isolated incident. Freemasonry throughout anglo-jurisdictions, North America, the United Kingdom, Oceania, are experiencing a similar state of decline despite radical

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<sup>2</sup> 20,000 is a significant number of untracked departures from Freemasonry in Ontario. Whether they left due to dissatisfaction, family reason, or some other cause, it is worth pursuing an answer in an objective and independent way.

efforts such as one day classes and advertising campaigns to recruit (Belton, 2001).

The signs of disruption and unrest are increasing close to home.

A number of “Bright Lights” within North American Freemasonry who have been working inside the corporate structures of their Grand Lodges to address wrongs and divergences from societal and Masonic norms have been expelled, erased and censored:

- Bro. Frank Haas, PGM, West Virginia (Expelled and erased by extrajudicial GM edict)
- Bro. Jeff Peace, Georgia (Erased)
- Bro. Tim Bryce, Florida (Censored)

A number of Lodges have declared themselves independent from the “established” Grand Lodges returning to the roots of the Craft prior to the innovation of Grand Lodges:

- Halcyon Lodge, Ohio
- Euclid Lodge, Michigan
- Vulcan, Alabama
- Sirius, Georgia
- Sons of Light, Georgia
- Regulus, Alabama

In addition to this challenge, another threat to the status quo is arising in North America, the formation of the Grand Orient of the United States of America (GOUSA)<sup>3</sup>, allied with the Grand Orient of France.

This masculine obedience has established amity with mixed-gender and feminine obediences and has, with its clearly defined principles, begun to address the concerns and disillusionment held by some ex and current members of “mainstream” Freemasonry:

“Our cause is the intellectual, spiritual and social advancement of humanity. To accomplish these aims we have established the following guiding principles for Free-Masonry:

- 1. We believe in the freedom of conscience of all people, and that it is an essential component of liberty, equality and fraternity.**
- 2. We believe in and support the separation of religion and government, and promote religious and spiritual tolerance among all people.**

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<sup>3</sup> The Grand Orient of the United States of America can be found at [www.grandorientusa.org](http://www.grandorientusa.org).

3. We believe in and support the freedom of the press as a necessary component of maintaining the inalienable rights of all human beings, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
4. We believe in and support the need for higher education and life-long learning.
5. We believe in and support an impartial judiciary system as essential to guaranteeing the preservation of human rights.
6. We believe in and support the arts and sciences as essential elements in the progress and evolution of humanity.
7. We believe in and support efforts that work towards global environmental and ecological sustainability as essential to the survival of the human species.” (GOUSA, 2007)

Examples of change and evolution are becoming increasingly abundant. More are coming. Why is this happening?

### ***The Tides are Shifting***

Like a strong current pulling the largest of men out to sea, the tide is forcing the entrenched interests in our corporate Masonic structures to address issues they have long dismissed. Long standing wrongs are beginning to be righted, while others are being worsened. Some members and some Masons are working to change things. Even some Grand Lodges are realigning their path to the ideals of the past, to become relevant in the present. The following subsections provide examples that are worthy of further exploration.

### **Grassroots**

Grassroots initiatives designed to build Masons rather than just members such as the European Concept Lodges<sup>4</sup> originating in Australia and the Traditional Observance Lodges<sup>5</sup> of the USA are gaining support. Those becoming involved in these movements appear to be interested in returning to smaller more exclusive Lodges centred on Masonry rather than institutional charity and service club activities. The focus of this retro-Masonry is the establishment of strong

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<sup>4</sup> To learn more about European Concept Lodges visit <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/mecfr.html>. For information about the G15's adaptation of the education manuals used please contact [kwstevens@gmail.com](mailto:kwstevens@gmail.com).

<sup>5</sup> To learn more about Traditional Observance Lodges visit <http://www.masonicrestoration.com/>. In January of 2008 the first Traditional Observance Lodge in Canada was announced under the GLCPO, Templum Fidelis in Bath, Ontario.

fraternal bonds and gradual progress through an initiatic experience based on the pursuit of knowledge, critical thinking and the active application of the moral philosophy of Freemasonry.

### **Prince Hall Recognition**

The broad recognition of Prince Hall Freemasons as “regular” has become widespread after years of discrimination, though not yet universal (Bessel, 2008). Leaders and members calling themselves Masons have failed to align their prejudices with their duty, and have even gone so far as to state that recognition of primarily black Lodges would constitute racism. We here in Ontario have unfortunately failed to recognize our Brethren, while the majority of Canadian Grand Lodges have done so, as have our mother constitutions in all of Ireland, Scotland and England (Renzland, 2007b).

### **The Acknowledgement of Women Freemasons’ Parallel Path**

In the southern English town of Lewes in Sussex, UGLE Brethren who manage a Masonic Temple that is more than 200 years old, have recently agreed to share the facilities with members of the Honorable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons (HFAF)<sup>6</sup>, which is a feminine obedience (HFAF, 2008). The existence of this feminine Grand Lodge, of lady/women Freemasons and of their parallel path is acknowledged by the UGLE:

“There exist in England and Wales at least two Grand Lodges solely for women. Except that these bodies admit women, they are, so far as can be ascertained, otherwise regular in their practice. There is also one which admits both men and women to membership. They are not recognized by this Grand Lodge and inter-visitation may not take place. There are, however, discussions from time to time with the women's Grand Lodges on matters of mutual concern. Brethren are therefore free to explain to non-Masons, if asked, that Freemasonry is not confined to men (even though this Grand Lodge does not itself admit women). Further information about these bodies may be obtained by writing to the Grand Secretary.

The Board is also aware that there exist other bodies not directly imitative of pure antient Masonry, but which by implication introduce Freemasonry, such as the Order of the Eastern Star. Membership of such bodies, attendance at their meetings, or participation in their ceremonies is incompatible with membership of this Grand Lodge.” (UGLE, 1999)

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<sup>6</sup> To learn more about the HFAF visit <http://www.hfaf.org/>.

## Transparency and a Public Face

There has also been an increase in transparency within some jurisdictions. Two examples include:

The Grand Lodge of California with its professional online magazine<sup>7</sup>, new education program, Masonic retreats, endorsement of Traditional Observance Lodges, management certification program and extensive website.

Secondly, the recent decision by the UGLE to merge its Masonic Quarterly magazine<sup>8</sup> with the “independent voice” of Freemasonry, Freemasonry Today<sup>9</sup>. Freemasonry Today has historically covered issues and topics taboo within the mainstream. The UGLE’s statements that this independence will continue is a true sign that things are indeed changing (Jackson, 2007; Baigent, 2007).

## Increasing Academic Research and Objectivity

An increasing number of academic authors and institutions, both Masonic and independent are exploring questions about our Craft (Gilbert, 2004).

More and more individuals are also raising questions about the fraternity’s future such as: What is/should be the Grand Lodge’s role? What was/is the Craft’s relationship to society? Can antiquated documents and ceremonies hold relevance in society today? Is discrimination acceptable in the Craft?

The disillusioned, the wise and the visionaries of our generation are speaking out. Are we listening? Are we seeking the truth?

The following is a list of publications that are making waves:

- Dwight L. Smith (1964) – **Whither are we Traveling?**
- Trevor Stewart (2004) – **English Speculative Freemasonry**
- Lord Northampton, UGLE’s Pro-GM (2005) – **Whither Directing our Course?**
- Stephen Dafoe (2005) – **Reading, Writing and Apathy: The Rise and Fall of Masonic Education**
- Tim Bryce (2006) – **The Masonic Manifesto**
- Knights of the North (2006) – **Laudable Pursuit**
- Phillip Carter (2006) – **Freemasonry’s Nonsensical ‘No Women’ Landmark**

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<sup>7</sup> To view the excellent publication produced by the Grand Lodge of California visit [http://www.freemason.org/freemason\\_online.php](http://www.freemason.org/freemason_online.php).

<sup>8</sup> To read back issues of the UGLE’s Masonic Quarterly visit [www.mqmagazine.co.uk](http://www.mqmagazine.co.uk).

<sup>9</sup> To read Freemasonry Today visit [www.freemasonrytoday.com](http://www.freemasonrytoday.com). Please note that all back issues are now free to view.

- Masonic Information Centre (2006) – **It's About Time**
- Julian Rees (2006) – **It Doesn't Have to be Like This**
- Lord Northampton, UGLE's Pro-GM (2007) – **Guardians of Regularity**
- The Invisible College (2007) – **Treatise regarding the Governing Body of the Freemasons of Ontario: Saving the Craft from Grand Lodge**
- Burning Taper (2007) – **Ancient Charges in Modern Times**
- Fred Milliken (2007) – **What Really Makes a Successful Lodge?**
- David Sheen (2007) – **The New Breed of Freemasons**
- Alex Davidson (2007) – **The Masonic Concept of Liberty: Freemasonry and the Enlightenment**
- Richard Graeter (2007) – **Reform Freemasonry! A Vision for the Future of Freemasonry**
- Fred Milliken (2007) – **Of Reforms and Revolution**
- Athena Stafyla (2007) – **The Masonic Landmarks**
- Mark Stavish (2007) – **Freemasonry: Rituals, Symbols and History of the Secret Society**
- Brian Chaput, William Goodwell, Kevin Main and JJ Miller (2007) - **Morals and Dogma for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

## The End is Nigh.... Or is it?

The Grand Lodges affected by these acts of resistance, those Lodges that are feeling the pinch of decline, and many Masons who are becoming aware of the issues, are likely to be progressing through what Kubler-Ross described as the "stages of grief."<sup>10</sup> These stages of grief adapted to the current Masonic context could be as follows:

- **Denial** that there is anything wrong...
- **Anger** that there are those willing to stand up and address the issues...
- **Bargaining** to try and keep the numbers up with tricks and treats...
- **Depression** about the hopelessness of the situation....
- **Acceptance** that perhaps we have strayed from the centre path...

Those going through any traumatic experience normally undergo at least two of these stages.

What stages do those around you seem to be going through?

The good news is that Freemasonry like any complex organism or organization is constantly evolving and incredibly resilient. This concept of adaptation and

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<sup>10</sup> The stages developed by Kubler-Ross (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance) originally applied to any form of catastrophic personal event. The steps do not necessarily happen in order and are not all always experienced by the impacted individual, though normally at least two of the stages are experienced (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

resilience which will always keep Masonry far from collapse (despite the illusions some may have) will be discussed further in the following sub-sections.

### ***The Sun is Always at Its Meridian***

*“The earth constantly rotating on its own axis in its orbit around the sun, the centre of our system, and Freemasonry being universally spread over its surface, it necessarily follows, that the sun must always be at its meridian with respect to Freemasonry.”*

- Fellowcraft Questions (Modern Ritual Association, 1973)

In systems theory the concept of emergent properties is used to explain how cooperating parts of a whole, create characteristics that do not exist when the parts are not working together. A common example is that of a bicycle: peddles, wheels, gears, the frame, etc. do not create a vehicle if not assembled and organized in the right way. Interestingly there are many types of cycles: racing, mountain, touring, folding, recumbent, etc. All of these are considered to be bicycles because they have certain core principles or characteristics.

Freemasonry is the same. It is defined by its core principles, but exists in many forms.

Though the common definition that, “Freemasonry is a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols,” is accurate it does not really explain what Freemasonry is. This ambiguity largely stems from the fact that Masons are left to determine their own interpretation and application of what they learn (Despite the efforts of some to dogmatize our teachings).

Though Freemasonry is experiencing decline in some jurisdictions, it is growing in others and sometimes growing within the same jurisdiction, but in the form of a new obedience.

Based on personal experience in Lodges and with Brethren from other territories<sup>11</sup>, online discussion and writings by well respected authors such as Jackson (2008) and MacNulty (2006) I propose that Masonry around the world can be grouped into approximately seven groupings:

1. **Canada, Australia and New Zealand** – Characterized by a focus on the operational business of running the organization, word perfect ritual, rapid progression through the degrees and officers’ chairs, low participation and large institutionalized charity

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<sup>11</sup> The term territory is used here rather than jurisdiction since entities properly belonging to a governing body in a jurisdiction may have a territorial limit. This does not however imply exclusive monopoly.

2. **The United States of America** – Characterized by religious zealotry, militant patriotism, rapid progression, large lodges, low participation and large institutional charity
3. **Mexico** – Characterized by its focus on philosophical and spiritual enlightenment through critical thought, education and application, and political engagement in civil society
4. **United Kingdom** – Characterized by its focus on the operational business of running the organization, fraternalism in the form of social activities and specialty Lodges and networking
5. **France (Grand Orient)** – Characterized by an emphasis on freedom of thought, personal psychological and moral refinement and a humanistic approach to relief in the form of social reform
6. **Continental Europe** – Characterized by slow progression, small Lodges, small scale charity and intellectual, spiritual and philosophical enlightenment through critical thought, education and application
7. **Central and South America** – Characterized by its idealism, its focus on philosophical and societal development through education and application of Masonic philosophy

### ***Mono-cultures Versus Multi-Cultures***

Freemasonry at the global scale is diverse.

Vandana Shiva (1993), a world renowned environmental activist focused on biodiversity and indigenous ethno-science introduced the concept of monocultures and their inherent instability in the 1990s.

Monocultures both in nature and society are rigid, centralized, focused/specialized monopolies whose lack of balance results in short-term benefits and long term fragility and instability. Examples of monocultures include: modern agriculture where one crop is grown on a large scale and thus is hyper-sensitive to infection, drought or disease; isolated ethnic societies that are similarly sensitive; centralized electricity production that can be knocked out by a failure in the system; and corporate structures that are so inter-related and reliant that failures in leadership, management, product design and finances can lead to the collapse of the business.

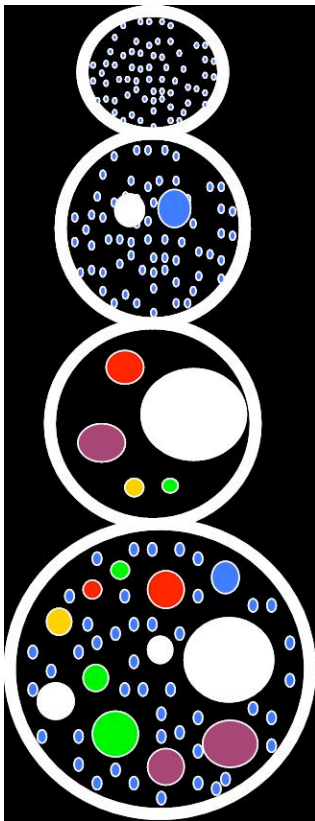
Multicultures contrastingly are diverse, self-managing, adaptable, creative and stable systems existing in a state of dynamic equilibrium<sup>12</sup>. Examples of multi-cultures include natural forests, bodies of water, ethnically-diverse cultures/societies and any other system where there is bio-diversity and/or cultural diversity.

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<sup>12</sup> Dynamic equilibrium or dynamic stability refers to a system's ability to use resources and strategies to self-correct. Dynamically stable systems are always at the edge of stability but due to their diversity and complexity are able to self-correct (Jacobs, 2000).

It has been recognized that higher levels of diversity may provide greater value than monocultures or less diverse systems (Tilman and Poasky, 2005). Shiva (1993) argues that greater diversity provides any system, whether ecological, economical, or even cultural, with increased resources with which to adapt to adverse situations when they arise. Shiva also advocates a move away from mono-culture specialization, which is usually motivated by growth maximization, because of the inherent instability and risk it represents.

Diverse organizations such as Freemasonry are like natural ecological systems in that they have the resilience to experience wide ranging change and still function and maintain integrity (Holling, Gunderson and Ludwig, 2002a). A



**Figure 1. Freemasonry Evolving**

system's robustness comes from its many component functional diversity, the process of inheritance<sup>13</sup> and spatial heterogeneity. It is a mixture of distinctiveness and overlap at a large scale which creates a state of dynamic equilibrium capable of maintaining itself unless external disturbances become so extreme and/or persistent that they cause an irreversible shift (Holling, Gunderson and Ludwig, 2002b; Westley, Carpenter, Brock, Holling and Gunderson, 2002; Daly and Farley, 2004). Reducing diversity and variability can produce conditions that put systems at risk of "flipping" to new irreversible, usually degraded states controlled by unfamiliar processes (Holling, Gunderson and Ludwig, 2002a).

Freemasonry at the global scale is a multi-culture with many observances, rituals, governance structures and other unique characteristics. The majority of mainstream Grand Lodges however have become monocultures controlling all aspects in their jurisdiction stamping out creativity or divergence from the status quo. Interestingly Freemasonry traditionally was not focused on centralized control, but rather individual Lodge autonomy and independence where decisions about ritual, recognition, regalia and other decisions were the purview of the Master and his Wardens (Please refer to Figure 1 and

footnote<sup>14</sup>).

<sup>13</sup> Inheritance or transmission is the process of replication through reproduction or copying (imitation) of components within systems, one of the factors that contributes to increased system durability (van der Berg, 2005). In Freemasonry this idea could be applied to the creation of Lodges, Masons and the spread of Masonic philosophy and its core principles.

<sup>14</sup> Figure 1. provides a visual representation of the Lodge "multi-culture" prior to 1717 (circle 1). Circle 2 represents the innovation of the two competing Grand Lodges prior to amalgamation while many Lodges remained autonomous. Circle 3 represents the accepted status quo up until recently with its limited number of obediences without independent Lodges. The final circle represents what may be coming to

## ***The Landmarks aren't Landmarks***

Most of us have heard of "The Ancient Landmarks" and many assume that the list(s) they have read in their Grand Lodge's Constitutions and those by Albert Mackey and/or Albert Pike are in fact "certain", "absolute", "dogmatic," and "universal".

The fact is however, that this is not the case.

The Landmarks "compiled," or more accurately "invented", by Mackey in 1858 (141 years after the innovation of Grand Lodge) of which our own Grand Lodge bases its own, are far from universal, not existing in many jurisdictions around the world. The Grand Lodge of British Columbia (GLBC) provides a historical list of 25 "landmarks" that were invented by Mackey:

1. The modes of RECOGNITION.
2. THE DIVISION OF SYMBOLIC MASONRY INTO THREE DEGREES.
3. The Legend of the THIRD DEGREE.
4. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FRATERNITY BY A PRESIDING OFFICER called a Grand Master.
5. The prerogative of the Grand Master to preside over every assembly of the craft.
6. The prerogative of the Grand Master to grant Dispensations for conferring degrees at irregular times.
7. The prerogative of the Grand Master to give dispensations for opening and holding Lodges.
8. The prerogative of the Grand Master to make Masons at sight.
9. The necessity of masons to congregate in lodges.
10. The government of the craft, when so congregated in a Lodge by a Master and two Wardens.
11. The necessity that every lodge, when congregated, should be duly tiled.
12. The right of every mason to be represented in all general meetings of the craft and to instruct his representatives.
13. The Right of every mason to appeal from the decision of his brethren in Lodge convened, to the Grand Lodge or General Assembly of Masons.
14. THE RIGHT OF EVERY MASON TO VISIT and sit in every regular Lodge.
15. No visitor, unknown as a Mason, can enter a Lodge without first passing an examination according to ancient usage
16. No Lodge can interfere in the business of another Lodge, nor give degrees to brethren who are members of other Lodges

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Freemasonry, a mixture of Grand Lodges/Orients, obediences (masculine, feminine and co-Masonic) and individual autonomous Lodges working in dynamic equilibrium around core universal principles.

17. Every freemason is Amenable to the Laws and Regulations of the Masonic jurisdiction in which he resides.
18. Qualifications of a candidate: that he shall be a man, un mutilated, free born, and of mature age.
19. A belief in the existence of God.
20. Subsidiary to this belief in God, is the belief in a resurrection to a future life.
21. A "Book of the Law" shall constitute an indispensable part of the furniture of every Lodge.
22. THE EQUALITY OF ALL MASONS.
23. The secrecy of the institution.
24. The foundation of a Speculative Science, for purposes of religious or moral teaching.
25. These Landmarks can never be changed. (GLBC, 2007)

Stafyla (2007) provides a shorter list:

1. Freemasonic degrees, initiations and the administrative proceedings of the Craft are secret. The Freemasonic institution uses the well-established rules of recognition. The office of Tiler ensures the profane are kept outside the entrance of the Lodge.
2. The belief in a Supreme Being and the immortality of souls is an unalterable and incontestable theosophical cornerstone of the Craft; therefore it cannot be abolished. A Book of Divine Law must be open in the Lodge when it is at work.
3. The ritual of the Third Degree is unalterable and it must be accomplished in three elementary psychological steps of initiation, two of introductory and preparatory nature and a third during which the rite of rebirth must be performed.
4. In all Masonic degrees a speculative science can be founded upon the operative art and coexist with it. The ritualistic character of Freemasonry must be inviolable.
5. The Lodge as an institution must be governed according to the ancient accepted rules and traditions of the craft, according to which a Grand Master is ultimately responsible for the government of the fraternity. His prerogatives to make Freemasons at sight, to grant dispensations for conferring degrees, to establish "Lodges under dispensation" and to preside over every assembly of the Craft, are inviolable. The equality between the Brothers is an unalterable principle.
6. Freemasonry is based on a dogma of altruistic and humanistic philosophy founded on the respect of human rights and a philanthropic moralistic dogma.
7. These rules cannot be changed.

Interestingly both of these lists can never be changed...

Neither of these lists or any other compilation of “Landmarks” can be confirmed to be the unalterable and “universal” Landmarks of Freemasonry (GLBC, 2007a). The problem with ‘The Ancient Landmarks’ arises out of a statement in Anderson’s Constitutions of 1723 (Peace, 2007a):

“Every Annual Grand Lodge has an inherent power and Authority to make new Regulations or to alter these, for the real benefits of this Ancient Fraternity; provided always that the old Land-Marks be carefully preserved.” (Anderson, 1723)

Unfortunately, the “Land-Marks” to which Anderson refers were never listed, which has resulted in ongoing confusion and debate about what they really are.

Peace (2007a) points out that despite the ninety-one page length of the 1723 document (and the later revised version in 1734) there is strangely no list.

He goes on to pose two possible scenarios:

1. “The Ancient Landmarks” were secret?
2. “The Ancient Landmarks” were universally known by all Fellows and Masters of the Craft?

If they were secret, then they were never written because it would have resulted in the violation of an oath and obligation. If so they are lost.

If they were already well known by Masons then there would have been no reason to put them into print. If this is the case it should be possible to deduce them.

No matter the reason for the Landmarks not being recorded, wherever they have been declared as “absolute” they are not in fact universal or permanent. The following are a few examples that demonstrate this lack of universality:

1. The third degree did not exist at the time of formation of the first Grand Lodge
2. The prerogative of the Grand Master to make masons on sight does not exist in all jurisdictions
3. The right to visit and sit in every regular Lodge is not always a right in every jurisdiction
4. The belief in the resurrection to a future life raises theological questions and is not used in every jurisdiction
5. The modes of recognition, Grand Hailing Sign and words are in fact different in many jurisdictions such as Ireland, Scotland, France and

Germany with numerous variations of the Master's word, passwords and word order switched between degrees<sup>15</sup>

6. Being free by birth (as all humanity is if you accept Jean-Jacques Rousseau's premise<sup>16</sup>) versus being a "free man" has resulted in many disputes, specifically when racism is being veiled with "reason" and "fact"<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these discrepancies there are many other characteristics that are not universal in our dear Craft, some of which include:

1. The ritual ceremonies used around the world are far from standardized ranging from the alchemical Scottish and Rectified rites to the "York" style Webb rituals
2. The symbols, tracing boards, working tools and furniture are different around the world, with differences such as actual tools being arranged on the floor for tracing boards for each of the degrees as opposed to the commonly used paintings hung in Lodges around Ontario (Haunch, 1963)
3. The Hiram legend is not universal with some jurisdictions in continental European Lodges referring to Adoniram in the third degree
4. Some jurisdictions such as Scotland include the Mark degree as part of the working done within the three degrees
5. Many jurisdictions in Continental Europe and South America do not require memorization of the ritual beyond the modes of recognition but do require candidates to complete pieces of architecture<sup>18</sup>
6. Regalia differs in various jurisdictions with some even allowing the individual Lodges to decide their regalia's appearance such as Scottish Lodges (Crowe, 2007)
7. Officers, titles and honorifics vary (ie. Scottish Lodges use the title Right Worshipful for the Master and Worshipful for the Wardens and no title except that of Brother is used when the individual is not acting in their official capacity)
8. The layout of Lodges vary throughout the world
9. Governance structures vary greatly as do the powers of the various officers
10. The role of Grand Lodge is different around the world ranging from a service provider to an autocratic dictatorship in others

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of differences can be found in the Modern ritual used by some Scottish Lodges which demonstrates alternative wording and signs of distress from other jurisdictions, the use of the due guard in some jurisdiction, Lodges from continental Europe which use passwords and words in different orders.

<sup>16</sup> All men are born free, but everywhere they are in chains (Rousseau, 1762).

<sup>17</sup> Though in most slavery systems children are born into slavery or serfdom, it can be argued that their "spirit" or "soul" is born free and then enslaved by their slaver master, society, their own desires, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Pieces of "architecture" refer to original academic research papers, presentations, experiential writings, art work and other creations by the Mason to demonstrate their application of the Craft in their lives. Only after producing such works and regular attendance, can a Brother be considered for progression to a more advanced degree. Even after completing the third degree, Masons are expected to continue creating pieces of architecture to contribute to their growth, that of the Brethren of the Lodge and to society.

11. The level of Lodge autonomy differs in various jurisdictions (ie. Scottish Lodges have the ability to select their own regalia, the ritual(s) they wish to use, etc.)
12. Recognition criteria differs among various Grand Lodges and some Grand Lodges recognize Grand Lodges and Orients which others do not
13. The level of discrimination (of candidates) based on character/merit, race, sex, politics, religion, spiritual beliefs, age, physical conditions, education, culture, etc. is different around the world

### ***In Search of Universal Landmarks***

Prior to the formation of the premier Grand Lodge and the later schism between the Ancients and Modern when the idea of “recognition” was introduced, Masons were Masons, and despite a lack of structure they were known by certain signs, tokens, grips and knowledge.

To be truly universal Landmarks need to exist in all jurisdictions throughout time and space from time immemorial. They should in essence be guiding principles which can be traced back beyond the formation of the premier Grand Lodge.

Peace (2007b) proposes that the “Ancient Land-Marks” were based around the common definition of Freemasonry from the early eighteenth century:

1. Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols
2. Freemasonry is dedicated to the brotherhood of man under the All-Seeing Eye of deity
3. Freemasonry is a progressive science
4. Freemasonry is a natural philosophy, or system of natural philosophy

All of these are valid. In addition I would add:

1. Freemasonry is an applied philosophy
2. That the principles of Brotherly Love/Fraternity, Relief/Equality and Truth/Liberty are core to Freemasonry
3. That the search for equilibrium/balance is also core
4. That the study of the liberal arts and sciences, and the self are components of the progressive science referred to
5. That cosmopolitanism and tolerance are hallmarks of Freemasonry
6. The importance of the Lodge in making new Masons
7. The use of initiatic ritual ceremonies in making Masons
8. The use of King Solomon’s Temple and the 3 pillars (Boaz, Jachin and the Mason)
9. The use of signs, grips, tokens, words and symbols for recognition and instruction

10. The lambskin apron
11. The exclusive/inclusive nature of membership based on high character/merit

### ***What is it all for and Who Cares?***

*“The moment a word or phrase begins to rise in public value, a variety of interest groups seek either to destroy its reputation or, more often, to co-opt it. In this latter case they don’t necessarily adopt the meaning of the word or phrase. They simply want control of it in order to apply a different meaning that suits their own purposes.”*

- John Ralston Saul (1994)

Members of the fraternity from various obediences (and even within obediences) are pointing at one another yelling “imposters” and “co-opters”. Some of those members are indeed Masons while others fall considerably short of the ideals historically promoted by a society which claims to be built on a moral and virtuous foundation more solid than any other institution.

What is Freemasonry then? What is the purpose of Freemasonry? What should Freemasonry be doing?

During a salon held in the summer of 2007 where Masons and non-Masons participated in a dialogue about the type of system(s) Masonry is, a number of interesting ideas arose. Below is a sample of what insiders and outsiders perceive about Freemasonry.

Freemasonry is a system (Stevens, 2007b):

- To make bad individuals worse by bolstering their egos with titles, self importance and power
- To generate ex-Masons
- To help other members as an exclusive extended family
- To promote cronyism and elitism
- To teach obedience and promote hierarchy
- To justify immoral/criminal behavior for “Brothers”
- To take money, collect dues and pay the bills
- To memorize ritual, entertain and have monthly dinners
- To train leaders
- To do large scale service work/ charity
- To teach antiquated forms of governance
- To learn/practice civics
- Of applied philosophy
- Of self discovery through a theatrical initiatic experience

- To promote a meritocracy
- To positively influence society by leveraging a broad and diverse group of people and the best that humanity has to offer
- To break down social/ economic/ class/ race/ sexual/ religious barriers
- To profess individual thinking and freedom of thought
- To refine, develop and strengthen peoples principles and beliefs
- To capture the divine essence
- To make good individuals better by:
  - triggering/supporting spiritual transformation
  - reinforcing reflection on the human journey through life
  - supporting a journey of individual growth and development
  - triggering internal revolution/growth spiritually, psychologically and physically
  - communicating the best values, ideals and teachings of humanity
  - teaching critical thinking
  - teaching the use of symbols and allegory
  - teaching morality through allegory and symbols
  - teaching tools to effectively communicate and interact with humanity
  - teaching how to perceive reality from alternative perspectives

The negative and positive responses to Freemasonry were quite intriguing and led to a discussion about what Freemasonry is to those that follow its philosophy and core ideals. From this discussion arose the following definitions of the core principles Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth and a definition of Freemasonry (Stevens, 2007):

**Brotherly Love** – It is a “Mythical” initiatic tradition to unite all those of honor, virtue, truth and honesty in a fraternal union of diversity for the betterment of humanity.

**Relief** – It is an organization where Masons and Lodges apply the best humanity and the fraternity has identified and developed, solving problems, righting wrongs and alleviating burdens of distress while ensuring a holistic, progressive, cosmopolitan way of life.

**Truth** – It is a life long process of reflection, learning and improvement to identify, acknowledge and address contradictions internally (spiritually, psychologically and physically), in our various communities (ie. Families, fraternities, professions, etc.) and in our relationship with the larger eco-system of which we are all a part.

**Freemasonry is a system** owned by Masons and operated by Masons which attracts and transforms individuals through life long reflection, learning and improvement into **Champions of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth** ensuring a holistic, progressive, cosmopolitan way of life.

## ***Are We Champions or are We Laggards?***

*"[Masonry] ... is founded on the purest principles of piety and virtue and possesses many great and valuable privileges. In order to secure these privileges, however, to worthy men, and we trust worthy men only, vows of fidelity are required, but let me assure you that these vows are in no way incompatible with your moral, civil or religious duties."*

- Entered Apprentice Ritual (Modern Ritual Association, 1973)

Freemasonry happens inside the individual and outside the Lodge through the active and critical application of Masonic principles and tools. A true Brother works the Craft as an applied philosophy. He is not a Freemason first before his other responsibilities. He is also not a Mason by convenience choosing to follow the path when he has time or it suits him. A Mason is a Mason always. He walks the middle path in his life as a husband, an employee, in his faith, as a citizen, in every aspect of his life, all of the time.

A Mason may stray from the path being pulled by his prejudices, being drawn away from the centre by avarice and profusion. He will however always seek to return to the path and take responsibility for his failings, learning from them and moving forward.

If we are a fraternity of Freemasons, individuals following the middle path, should we not as Champions of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, all be addressing the world's big questions? Are we ensuring a holistic, progressive, cosmopolitan way of life for ourselves and the rest of society?

Is Freemasonry playing this role for its members and society?

## **Finding Relevance: A Modern Application of the Middle Path**

Relevance comes from application, not from simple study, rote memorization and blind floor work. Freemasonry and its Masons were in the past Freethinkers who explored the issues of the day and took part in experiments and intrigues.

Isolation from the real world, from our communities, from the issues of the day does our forefathers and our fraternity a disservice. The choice to exclude discussion of party politics and religious debate over the nature of God and which faith is better or worse, does not prevent us from studying ourselves, spirituality, the commonalities of faith, our ecological system and other issues of relevance. In fact it calls on us to develop respectful and dignified tools to communicate with one another and with society to demonstrate a better path forward that serves us all.

Below in Table 1 some issues of current significance to individuals and society are listed which could easily be explored with the use of the principles in Freemasonry.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>Ecological</b></li> <li>–Climate Change/Disruption</li> <li>–Environmental degradation</li> <li>–Energy production and its supply chain</li> <li>–People vs. automotive centric design</li> <li>–Cradle to Cradle/Closed loop vs. Designed obsolescence<sup>19</sup></li> <li>•<b>Sociological</b></li> <li>–Human Rights</li> <li>–Access to education</li> <li>–Conflict resolution</li> <li>–Good governance</li> <li>–Inter-faith dialogue</li> <li>–Multicultures vs. Monocultures</li> <li>–Info-toxins<sup>20</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>Economic</b></li> <li>–The shift to ecological economics</li> <li>–Peak oil/uranium</li> <li>–Poverty</li> <li>–Consumerism</li> <li>•<b>Science and Technology</b></li> <li>–Quantum physics</li> <li>–Genetics</li> <li>•<b>Individual</b></li> <li>–Critical thinking</li> <li>–Reductionism vs. holism (systems thinking)</li> <li>–Physical, psychological and spiritual health</li> <li>–Dynamic equilibrium</li> </ul>
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**Table 1. Issues of Current Significance to Individuals and Society**

The fact is that I do not hear from our ranks (except in a few rare instances), the consideration and application of our principles to these issues or to the all encompassing challenge facing humanity, the sustainability of our species.

### ***Defining Sustainability***

<sup>19</sup> In nature there is no such thing as garbage. The cycle of birth, growth and death are a never ending. Like nature whose motto could be waste from food and food from waste, the idea of a closed loop design is a new paradigm taking root among designers and thought leaders. To learn more about this idea pick up a copy of Cradle to Cradle by William McDonough and Michael Braungart and Natural Capitalism by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins.

<sup>20</sup> Infotoxins refer to the use of disinformation, cynicism and truth stretching to manipulate society. Kalle Lasn (2008) explains, “Say that an overwhelming majority of respected scientists believe that human actions are causing potentially catastrophic climate change. As an automaker, we stand to lose out. So let’s manipulate popular opinion by funding a handful of contrarians who believe otherwise. Then we launch a campaign to suggest that any threat to the car is an attack on personal freedoms. We fund “grassroots” groups to defend the right to drive. We portray anti-car activists as prudes who long for the days of the horse and buggy. We allow our disinformation to accumulate in the public imagination, just like mercury in an ecosystem. Once we’ve circulated enough of the toxin, the balance of public opinion will shift to our side. We sit back, watch our infotoxins spread – and get ready to sell bigger, badder cars for years to come.

Sustainability<sup>21</sup> in its modern form originated in 1987 with the release of the Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future*. It defines sustainability as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable development acknowledges that the economic system(s) and our socio-cultural system(s) are a subsystem(s) of the greater ecological whole and that proper planning and development involves a holistic cross-disciplinary approach to analyzing humanity and its interactions as a part of a bigger system when taking action.

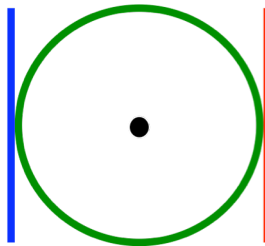
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<sup>21</sup> An expanded definition: Sustainable development if it is truly sustainable should be systemic (affect the system as a whole), permeating all learning, reflection, decision making and action. It should be about making the best decision possible in a systematic (methodical, step-by-step) manner, in order to improve and enhance inter and intra generational equity, while meeting our own needs and improving the quality of our lives. It should be holistic rather than reductionist, acknowledging the integrated and complex nature of the world. It is not about being more efficient or less bad, but about being more effective (Stevens, 2006).

## Three Pillars



As in our Craft, sustainability contains three pillars (Table 2): A social/cultural pillar, an economic pillar and an ecological pillar and like the Corinthian pillar that represents beauty (containing the characteristics of both the Doric [strength] and Ionic [wisdom] columns) the Ecological pillar contains both the economic and social systems.



Doric	Corinthian	Ionic
Senior Ward	Junior Warden	Worshipful Master
Hiram King of Tyre	Hiram Abif	Solomon
Strength	Beauty	Wisdom
Relief	Truth	Brotherly Love
Fraternity	Equality	Liberty
Economic	Ecological	Social/Cultural

Table 2. The Three Pillars of Masonry and Sustainability

I challenge you to contemplate on this idea, that Freemasonry and sustainability, the holistic or “middle path,” have the potential to become synonymous within the minds of modern Freemasons. Freemasons no matter their political, religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds should be open to discussion and be willing to take action to maintain and improve these three pillars of the Temple. The economy and society are fully owned subsidiaries of the ecological system, the earth, our home, our Temple.

Adapting the words of Herman Daly (2004), an ecological economist, the maintenance of that Temple, the ecological life-support system, as far from the edge of collapse and as healthy as possible along with the satisfying of the human population should be our goal, so that we can all be free to work together in the pursuit and clarification of a still vague ultimate end -- for a long, long, long time.

## **“The Way” Cannot be Described, It can Only be Lived**

The waves are crashing and the tide is tugging at us.

Many are struggling against the current.

Those who have learned their lessons have learned to keep to the centre.

Those who choose the middle path follow the universal teachings of the Craft, its core principles, flowing past those who claim to know the exclusive Way, though they have never found it.

There are issues at hand that we as Freemasons should be addressing and championing. Sustainability is one which should be explored further and acted upon. There are many other issues beyond those listed in this paper that are significant to modern individuals and society. If we choose not to become relevant dismissing these issues, the Craft will not die. It is however likely that “established” Grand Lodges, their Lodges and members will simply be displaced and replaced as a system of Freemasonry more relevant evolves around them that will engage society and individuals seeking to follow and act upon the centre.

Going forward Freemasons today should remember:

- There are **significant issues** in our lives, our fraternity and society that can benefit from actively engaged Freemasons
- **No one knows** what Anderson meant by “landmarks”
- The **universal and emergent properties** of Freemasonry can be identified
- The Craft is always **evolving while maintaining its core principles**
- **Multi-cultures and diversity** make for a healthy, creative, stable and resilient system
- Freemasonry is an **applied philosophy** and has parallels and applications in today’s world
- **Sustainability** may be seen to be a modern synonym for Freemasonry

To ensure our obedience maintains its relevance we need to:

- Assess our **core principles and what is unique** about Freemasonry (universally)
- **Objectively and independently audit** what we say we do, what we do (at all levels) and how we are perceived inside and outside our Craft
- **Address contradictions** by aligning our policies, programs and behavior to our core principles and enabling diversity within the Craft
- **Identify the most significant issues** and **best practices** inside and outside our Craft
- **Identify and provide resources and support** (not dictatorial control) to enable the Lodges and Masons to become relevant, autonomous and engaged (based on our core principles), not simply another service club or institutionalized charity

I joined the Craft to be a Craftsman, to walk the middle path, to apply the philosophy of Freemasonry. Did you join to work in the quarries too?

*“When a stream comes to some stones in its path, it doesn’t struggle to remove them, or fight against them, or think about them. It just goes around them. And as it does, it sings.”*

- Hoff, The Te of Piglet (1992)

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