

MASONIC MUSINGS

The Masonic Education Newsletter

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Editor: VWBro. Kent Henderson, DipT, GradDipEd, MEd, PGIWkgs

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Welcome to *Issue Eleven*. Following the September 2013 Meeting of Lodge Amalthea, a demonstration of the *Turkish Masonic Wedding Ceremony* was worked at the Savage Club – only the second time in Victoria such has occurred. For those that could not attend, I re-publish below an annotated version of the paper I presented to the *Victorian Lodge of Research* back in July 1993 – over twenty years ago! Thereafter follows a *Question & Answer* on Lodge Dues.

Fraternal regards,
Kent Henderson.

A Masonic Wedding

A wedding, when mentioned in most circles, usually evokes pleasant thoughts, of a son or daughter commencing married life, of children, of grandchildren, the wedding day itself, the preparations, and the happiness. When we add the word Masonic to the occasion, what emotions are then aroused? Incredulity mostly, I'd suggest.

Most Masons, at least in this country, have never heard of such a thing. Indeed, most would immediately think - how could such be possible! Is not a wedding a religious occasion, and as such how can you have a Masonic wedding in our organization which is neither a religion or a substitute for a religion! Surely a wedding is for the church, not for the Masonic Temple?

But is it? Freemasonry is not a religion, but its content is certainly religious in character as are, indeed, many organisations that function outside church doors. Parliamentary proceedings are religious - they open with prayers, but I doubt anybody would consider parliament a religion! In truth, of course, a marriage does not need to be celebrated in a church. Essentially, while clearly derived in our society from the Judeo-Christian tradition, marriage is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as the condition of a man and woman legally united for the purpose of living together etc. Thus, despite the religious connotations many ascribe to it, marriage is but a civil act. All one needs is a legally designated marriage celebrant (who may or may not be affiliated to a religion) to require an unmarried man and unmarried women to sign a legal document binding the signatories to matrimony in law.

Working backwards from the minimalist legal position, many religions have ceremonies to

celebrate marriage, but marriage is not the sole preserve of religion. Many marrying couples, using a marriage celebrant can, and often do, write their own marriage ceremony. Why then, couldn't a Masonic Wedding ceremony be written? The answer is there is no reason at all.

The next question is if one were written, would it be considered regular? If such a ceremony was to be worked by craft lodges under a recognized Masonic Constitution, then it must be tacitly considered as regular at least. Whether ones own jurisdiction allows it to be analogously worked is a different matter, but that is irrelevant in the context of its regularity.

Now, can tell you that a Masonic Wedding Ritual does exist. Not only does it exist, it is officially sanctioned by at least one regular Grand Lodge (The Grand Lodge of Turkey), and is not infrequently used by its craft lodges. This ceremony, or one similar to it is, at least, permitted to be worked in several other European jurisdictions. If you accept my logic as to regularity, all Grand Lodges that recognize the Grand Lodges under which it is worked must consider the Wedding Ceremony a regular Craft ceremony.

In giving an analogous example, in the context of my own Grand Lodge (The United Grand Lodge of Victoria), you would mention our Masonic Funeral Ritual, or our Vacant Chair Ceremony. Be that as it may, it needs to be recognized that the ceremony is also worked under irregular Grand Lodges, notably in France, but that does not *ipso facto* make the ceremony itself irregular. I will refer again to this later.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to a Masonic Wedding Ceremony in Istanbul in 1986, hosted by a Turkish-speaking lodge. The ceremony, replete with bride and groom (indeed, two couples in this instance), took place in a Masonic Temple, followed by a full wedding breakfast in an adjoining banqueting area. Fortunately, there is an English-speaking Turkish lodge in Istanbul (Lodge Freedom No 35) from which I was able to obtain a copy of the ritual in English and to which I will shortly refer. However, prior to launching into a commentary on the ritual, it is useful to consider The Grand Lodge of Turkey and its background.

There is documented reference to the existence of lodges in Turkey in 1738, which appear to have emanated from various European sources. A Supreme Council of the Ottoman Empire was erected in 1861, probably under the patronage of the Grand Orient of France. The expansion of the Craft was slow in this era, with various Ottoman Sultans issuing edicts suppressing Freemasonry. The suppression became particularly harsh during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) and many Turkish Masons were forced to flee the country.

However, this repression did not appear to extend to lodges warranted from foreign countries. An English lodge – Oriental No 687 – was formed in Turkey in 1856, and ten further English lodges were established between 1860 and 1870. Ireland, Scotland, and the Grand Orient of Italy and France also had lodges in Turkey in this period. Most English-speaking lodges had expired by the First World War. However, Oriental Lodge worked on into the 1930s. It did not survive the Second World War, and was formally erased in 1949.

Upon the coming of constitutional government to Turkey in 1909, Turkish Masonry revived and it is from this year that the current Grand Lodge dates its origin. The revival was in the form of a Supreme Council warranted from Egypt. In turn, the Supreme Council sponsored a National Grand Orient of Turkey that was constituted by fourteen lodges then holding charters from France, Italy, Belgium, or Spain. Expansion was sustained, and by 1935 it possessed sixty-five lodges.

However, the political climate in the pre-war years deteriorated, and the Grand Orient of Turkey was dormant by 1935 and remained so until after the Second World War. The Turkish Supreme Council revived in 1948, and it controlled Turkish Craft lodges until 1956, when they were divested to a new Grand Lodge of Turkey founded on a regular basis. The Grand

Lodge suffered a small split in 1966, when a Grand Orient of Turkey was formed. This body, endorsed by the irregular Grand Orient of France, still exists with about thirty lodges.

The United Grand Lodge of England recognized the regular Grand Lodge in 1970. Virtually all regular Grand Lodges in world have long since been in fraternal relations with The Grand Lodge of Turkey. In 2000, it reported 150 lodges, and a membership of nearly 11,000.

Having looked very briefly at Turkish Masonic history the question is, in the current context, why a Turkish Masonic Wedding Ritual? Where did this ritual come? Indeed, is it used elsewhere in Masonry? In order to gain at least some clues a look at the ceremony itself is a prerequisite.

As a beginning, let us consider the layout of the Temple for the Wedding Ceremony. The wardens sit in the places with which we are familiar - WJW (Worshipful Junior Warden) in the South, and the WSW (Worshipful Senior Warden) in the west. The difference is the WSW sits well forward of the west wall of the temple on the edge of the squared pavement flanked by the two great pillars (J and B) which dominate the lodge – reaching nearly to the ceiling. The use of the pillars thus is a quite typical continental-type practice. The RWM (Right Worshipful Master) is in the East. You will note that the designations of the principal officers are the same as those of the Scottish Constitution, and some European Grand Lodges. Indeed, Turkish Craft Ritual is in some ways similar to that practised under the Grand Lodge of Scotland, although Scotland was not its direct source.

The other main feature is an altar in the centre of the Temple (in the middle of the squared pavement) – again, a continental-type feature, but also common in both Irish and American Masonry. As will be appreciated the large cross-fertilization of Masonic ritual across the world in the last few hundred years makes any study of ritual origins and influences a massive jigsaw, and well outside the scope of this paper.

In preparation for the ceremony the temple, officer's pedestals, and the East, are decorated with flowers. Brethren wear flowers in their lapels. Lodge officers wear two flowers, and the RWM wears three flowers, preferably with a red and white ribbon. Lodge Officers only wear their collars. Brethren do not wear their aprons but white gloves only. Sisters (as females are designated) when admitted sit in the South, while brethren sit in the North.

A small table and two chairs are placed in front of the altar, facing the RWM, on which are a silver platter with the wedding rings, a glass of red wine, a glass of water, an empty glass, a glass rod and a blue ribbon long enough to encircle the newly weds. The table is decorated with flowers, and an incense burner is on the Secretary's table.

The lodge officers, members, and visiting brethren take their places in the Temple, and what is effectively an occasional lodge is opened by a single knock by the RWM, repeated by the WSW and WJW. The Director of Ceremonies (DC) retires with staff in hand, and admits the Sisters into the Lodge. The bride and groom wait outside.

The RWM asks everyone to be seated, and then introduces the proceedings thus:

Sisters and Brethren, we are gathered here today to celebrate and Masonically re-confirm the marriage of Sister and Brother, whose marriage was performed in accordance with the civil laws of our country.

Here we now see that the ceremony is not for the purposes of legal marriage, but a re-confirmation ceremony. Upon reflection, of course, it could not be used *per se* to create a legal marriage unless the presiding officer, in this case the RWM, was in fact a legally designated civil marriage celebrant.

The RWM continues:

As you well know, Masons strive to gather men and women around an ideal of peace and to awaken in their hearts mutual love and affection.

Celebrating the union of two people who have decided to unite their lives in order to establish a family, and reaffirming this union in the pure atmosphere created by our efforts for love and peace, will surely give this marriage a better meaning, and create further understanding and harmony.

We, therefore, consider today's meeting to be unusually important and valuable, because we are today reaffirming a contract which helps to ensure the survival of humanity, to unite two people who love one another on the road to happiness and understanding, and because we thus have the opportunity to give voice to the spiritual uplift and moral satisfaction derived from our

participation in celebrating their union.

That grand force directing the universe in an eternal order has put in the hearts of men and women created in this earth, the fire of love, the will and desire to unite and multiply.

The JD (Junior Deacon) then moves the Secretary's table, lights incense, and stands adjacent to the RWM.

The RWM continues:

Let the pleasant odour rising from the burning incense fill our hearts and the hearts of those who today honour us with their presence, with love for humanity, with love for the family, with affection and protection for the children. Short Pause.

Bro. JD please see whether the bride and groom have arrived, and if so bring them to the Temple.

The JD then leaves the lodge and after a short pause knocks four times. Thereafter follows a very familiar pattern of Masonic admission, as follows:

WJW *RWM, there is a knock at the door.*

RWM *Investigate who seeks admission.*

WJW *Bro. Inner Guard, see who seeks admission. (After investigating). WJW: Bro. JD is at the door, accompanied by Sister and Bro who have been married in accordance with our civil laws and who now desire to celebrate and reaffirm their union in this Worshipful Lodge.*

The WJW then makes the same report to the RWM, who continues:

Brethren, form the dome of steel.

An equal number of Brethren appointed in advance form the dome with their swords down the North side of the lodge. You will note that the use of swords in this manner shows a distinct continental Masonic influence. There are others in the ritual, as we will see later. When they are in place the RWM then continues:

Bro. JD. lead the bride and groom to their places.

While this is happening, the Brethren forming the dome of steel knock the tips of their swords and the WSW and WJW rapidly hit their gavels. The organist plays the Wedding March. When the couple reach their places the RWM knocks once and all noise stops.

The ceremony continues as follows:

RWM *Brother and Sister what is your wish?*

Groom: *Having fulfilled the requirements imposed upon us by the laws of our country, we wish our marriage to be celebrated and Masonically reaffirmed by our brethren.*

RWM *Bro., the brotherly feelings which prompt you to desire this ceremony are a source of pride to us. Family love is not only one of the basic principles of Masonry, but also a source of hope. We thank you for giving us the opportunity to live those sweet feelings once again. Please all be seated.*

At this point the RWM then proceeds to give a short address about the duties and sacrifices required by couples for a happy marriage. No ritual is prescribed. Interestingly, if this were to occur in an English-type lodge, one would imagine that such an address would be ceded to the lodge chaplain. In Turkish lodges, there is no office of chaplain. Of course, a Chaplain has Christian connotations that would not be compatible with Turkish Masonry wherein most members are Moslem. That stated, the office of Chaplain is rare in continental jurisdictions generally.

Upon completing his address, the ceremony continues:

RWM *Bro do you feel that you have the strength to perform these duties?*

Groom *Yes, RWM.*

RWM *Sister....., do you also feel you possess this strength?*

Bride: *Yes, RWM.*

RWM *Sister do you promise to love and honour your husband, and be tied to him with bonds of respect, fidelity and trust?*

Bride *I do, RWM.*

RWM *Bro do you engage yourself to love and honour your wife and remain tied to her with bonds of fidelity and confidence?*

Groom *I do, RWM.*

RWM *Bro JD, burn more incense. (A short pause follows).*

May these promises, which form the foundation of your happiness, rise to eternity like the pleasant smelling smoke rising from this burning incense. May this pleasant smell penetrate into your hearts and awaken in you feelings of sincerity and purity, and may mutual love and affection join you forever, without differences, of thought, of body and of property.

Brother and Sister give each other your hands. Your holding hands are a sweet symbol of your desire to walk the path of life together. Even if on that road of togetherness something causes pain to one of you. If one somehow hurts the other, let a smile, an apology, an embrace make your differences remain superficial and never have time to reach your hearts and bruise them.

RWM *Bro and Sister, please rise. Bro. JD. please tie the newly weds with the ribbon of unity.*

The JD ties the blue ribbon over the left shoulder of the groom and around the waist of the bride.

RWM *Make the dome of steel.*

A number of brethren rise and form a semi-circle around the back of the newly weds, and form a dome with their swords, points touching.

RWM *Bro. put your ring on your wife's finger. Sister you to put your ring on the finger of your husband. These rings have always symbolized eternal togetherness.*

Bro. JD give the magic rod to the newly weds.

The JD gives the glass rod to the bride and groom saying: Hold this magic rod each at either end.

RWM *This rod symbolically tells us that mutual love should be clear and pure, and that carelessness can break it quickly. Let this rod always remind you that love, like a*

rare flower, must be cultivated and requires constant attention and care. See that it never breaks.

Bro. JD give the glass of wine to Bro and the glass of water to Sister

The JD does this and standing opposite the couple, holds the empty glass in his hand.

RWM *Bro and Sister empty your glasses into the one held by Bro. JD.*

As the wine and water unite in this glass, may your different characters and qualities combine to provide harmony, happiness and prosperity for your family. Please drink from the same glass.

The JD offers the glass first to the bride, then to the groom.

Bro. JD untie the newly weds. (Done). Brethren, please rise and form the chain of unity.

All brethren present form the Chain of Unity. The chain is broken between the WSW and WJW in the west. The bride and groom take position in the centre of the circle. The RWM is in centre East.

The Chain of Unity is very continental in character and found in many European degree ceremonies. When complete all the brethren link hands. The symbolism, in Masonic terms, is quite obvious. The Chain of Unity is not to be detected in any English-form Craft ritual of which I am aware, and indeed, in English Masonry it is only found as such in the Masonic Rosicrucian Society (SRIA), although echoes exist in The Royal and Select Masters, and the Ancient and Accepted Rite.

The ceremony continues:

WSW *RWM, our chain is incomplete. A link is missing. Bro (the groom) has remained near his wife. Please ask him to join us to complete the chain.*

RWM *WSW, your wish will be fulfilled. Sister please bring your husband to his place amongst us. This will symbolise that a Mason's wife will always support her husband's Masonic work.*

Bro. JD remain with our Sister to show her that a Mason's wife is never alone, never without our assistance and protection.

The JD leaves the Chain, and leads the couple to the groom's place in the chain, and returns to the centre with the bride.

WSW *RWM, our chain is now complete and perfect.*

RWM *As women, over the ages, through their understanding, love and help, have eased the burden carried by men and as women have understood our legends, profound symbols and aims, making it easier for us to reach our goals, so has this chain been formed with the help of a new sister. Brethren, return to your places and be seated.*

The JD now returns the couple to their places before the altar, telling them to remain standing. The RWM stands before them, facing them. He now "Masonically marries" them, as follows:

RWM *Brother and Sister bow your heads in the presence of absolute truth. (The RWM places his hands on the couple's heads), and says:*

In the name of TGAOTU, and being vested with authority by the MW Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Turkey, and as RWM of this Worshipful Lodge No, I hereby Masonically reaffirm your marriage. May your union be happy and your promises sacred. I congratulate you and on behalf of all my brethren wish you every happiness. (The RWM returns to his place).

RWM *All Please rise. Sisters and Brethren, Masonry today is happy to celebrate the union of two people who have promised each other fidelity, love, affection, and mutual assistance as long as they live. Their promises are honourable and bear great value. Happy are those who fulfil their promises fully and with courage. Please be seated.*

RWM *Bro. JD take Bro. and Sister first to the WSW and then to the WJW so they can congratulate them on behalf of their respective pillars, and bring them between the two columns. (This is done).*

WSW, the marriage of Bro. and Sister :..... now having been reaffirmed by this Worshipful Lodge , please announce it.

WSW *From the East to the West and from the North to the South, I hereby announce to all men and Freemasons throughout the*

world that Bro. and Sister are lawfully married and their marriage is reaffirmed by this Worshipful Lodge. (Applause).

RWM *Let us be seated.* (The JD returns the bride and groom their seats).

WSW, *what is marriage?*

WSW *Marriage is the union of a man and a woman, into which both enter of their own free will and accord, to ensure the happiness and continuation of humanity. It is the union of two people who join their destinies to carry the burden of life more easily and to help each other on the road of life, RWM.*

RWM *WJW, how is happiness and strength created in marriage?*

WJW *Since both parties enter into this union willingly to form a unified family and because it is this freedom of choice which makes their love to continue, the harvest of this can be nothing but happiness and strength, RWM.*

RWM *WSW, what should be done to ensure eternal happiness in marriage?*

WSW *Keep marriage pure and noble without searching for material benefits. It is only then that hearts beat with such pure feelings that the chain of love remains a permanent and unbroken entity, RWM.*

RWM *Bro. Orator, do you have anything to add to these?*

The Orator then makes a short speech not exceeding ten minutes. In Turkish lodges, as in many continental lodges, the Orator is the lecture master of the lodge, invariably a senior and learned past master.

RWM *Dear Sisters, the execution of good deeds is one of the virtues loved and practiced by masons. We never leave any of our meetings without giving thought to the unfortunate. For this purpose a bag will now be circulated into which every brother can leave whatever amount of money he wishes, or from which any brother can take any amount he desires. The money collected is spent for philanthropic purposes. The reason why we make this collection discreetly is not to render the giver proud nor the receiver*

ashamed. Any sister who wishes to join us can do so as if she too was a Mason. Bro. Almoner please circulate the charity bag. Bro. JD please assist Bro. Almoner.

When this is done sweets or candy are circulated.

RWM *Please all rise. Dear Sisters, thank you again for joining us today for this ceremony. Such ceremonies of joy and happiness bring men and women together and permit all to bask in mutual love and respect. We hope that your impressions of this ceremony will make you support us in our work more than before. Bro. JD accompany our Sister and Bro first, and then our Sisters, out of the Temple. We will join them in a short while. (This is done).*

RWM *Brethren, I declare our labours closed.*

He knocks once, followed by the WSW and WJW. The DC then leads the RWM, and his Wardens, out of the Temple.

It now only remains to delve into the origins of the Wedding Ritual. Inquiries in Istanbul reveal that the ritual has been used by Turkish Lodges since the revival of Turkish Masonry in 1909. The ritual came to Turkish Masonry from Belgium about this time – almost certainly from the Grand Orient of Belgium. In turn, Belgian Masonry obtained the ceremony from the French. Whether the ceremony is still worked within irregular Belgian Masonry is not clear, though information to hand suggests it is not worked (at least officially) under the Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium.

The ritual itself appears to have been born in pre-revolutionary France and it has always been a part of irregular French Masonry, particularly under the Grand Orient of France. Be that as it may, as I alluded earlier, the ceremony itself is nor *ipso facto* irregular. The Grand Orient of France did not sink into irregularity until the second half of the 19th Century, long after the Wedding Ceremonial first appeared.

Before, during and after the French Revolution (1789) there was certainly a movement in France to replace religious ceremonies with civil ceremonies. This probably explains how, in Continental Freemasonry, a number of ceremonies were added over the years relating to family events.

It was in this era in which the Wedding Ceremony appeared, and which also fostered what were

known as “Adoptive Lodges” in France and elsewhere in Europe, as well as several other diversions such as androgynous Masonry. The “Ceremony of Adoption of Children of the Lodge” was general only held on the request of a brother, and then usually only every three to five years. Hence, an adoption ceremony would be for a group of children usually about twelve years of age.

Of course, there exist today a large number of “Family Orders” associated with Freemasonry, particularly in the USA, such as The Order of the Eastern Star, DeMolay, Job’s Daughters, etc. None of these can be considered as Masonic, as such, although this view is not universally held. For example, while The Grand Lodge of Scotland does not object to the Order of the Eastern Star, its English counterpart does not permit its members to be associated with it.

In the *Dictionnaire de la Franc Maconnerie* (Daniel Ligou), under the heading *Reconnaissance Conjugale*, the Wedding Ceremony is described as *tenue blanche* – i.e.: “holding to the purity”, where spouses, bound by string, share bread and wine. Ligou claims the Wedding Ritual springs from the French *Le Droit Humain* (Co-Masonry). This is likely.

Nonetheless, some suggest that the use of the term “sisters” in the ritual indicates a strong Co-Masonic link and that this alone is ground enough to call the ritual *irregular*. This is erroneous as Co-Masonry uses the term “brother” to describe all its members, both male and female. In any

case, as we have just seen, available evidence suggests the ceremony has no historical links with Co-Masonry but in fact substantially pre-dates it. One body that does use the term “sister” is The Order of the Eastern Star, but that organization certainly has no connection with the Wedding Ritual.

Returning to the Wedding Ceremony itself, it seems that various although similar rituals are used in varying locations. Given the history of the divergences of Craft ritual, this will astound nobody. Evidence to hand suggests that a Wedding Ceremony is worked intermittently under the irregular French Grand Lodges. It is certainly worked under the regular Grand Lodges of Greece and Turkey and has been worked at least once in The Netherlands (see the Appendix below). It would come as no surprise to find it worked elsewhere in Europe.

In conclusion, the Wedding Ceremony is used to varying extents across a section of regular Freemasonry, and must therefore be judged as such, as indeed it clearly is. Regardless of its origins and position in the Masonic framework, it is difficult to escape the fact that the Wedding Ritual itself is one of very great beauty. Its symbolism, such as that of the glass rod, the mixing of water and wine, and the chain of unity, hold great meaning. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ceremony holds a cherished place within the realm of the Grand Lodge of Turkey and, one assumes, within other Grand Lodges under which it is worked.

Question & Answer

How are Lodge Dues dealt with in our Lodges, and in other places?

In Victoria, each member’s lodge dues become payable as of 1st July (we work on the financial year, like most). However, while most members pay their dues promptly, they don’t necessarily have to. Technically, a member has twelve months in which to pay his dues. There are few who leave it that long, of course. If a member becomes twelve months in arrears, then he is liable to be excluded from Freemasonry. It is rare that this occurs, but it is far from unknown...

If a member wishes to leave his lodge, he simply resigns. Provided his dues are up to date, he resigns in “good standing”, and receives a *Clearance Certificate*. With this Certificate he can join any other lodge, as he may wish. Conversely, if he resigns with his current dues unpaid, he cannot join another lodge (ever) until the owed dues are paid. If a brother fails to resign,

and owes dues past 12 months, he is excluded, and if he ever wants to join again he must pay up the owed dues, as at the date he was excluded, in order to have the exclusion revoked.

If you are visiting lodges in the USA (and indeed, elsewhere) it is important you can state and prove – in your case with your *Letter of Introduction* (available through your lodge secretary) – that you are a financial member.

All American lodges, when a member pays his dues, gives that member what they call a “Dues Card” – stating he is a financial member for that year. An American mason, when visiting, will produce this card. Most lodges in Australia do not do this, it is not part of our Masonic *tradition*, if you will. Your *Letter of Introduction* is the equivalent of the US *Dues Card*, of course.