

“FEAST OF TISHRI - A MASONIC PERSPECTIVE”
An Oration by Dr. Bing Johnson, 32° KCCH
Orator of the Grand Junction Consistory
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The origin of the Feast is described in the Book of Leviticus where it is said that the Lord spoke unto Moses saying that on the fifteenth day of the month of Tishri of the Hebrew civil calendar “ye shall have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD.” The Feast of Tishri is the Hebrew equivalent of Thanksgiving or Harvest festival.

To best understand the significance of the Feast of Tishri and its connection to Masonry it is necessary to have some understanding of the Jewish Holy Days. For this understanding I am going to use the words of Melville H. Nahin, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of California, who is Jewish.

On the first day of the seventh month, the month of Tishri on the Jewish calendar people of the Jewish faith observe the beginning of the New Year, Rosh Hashana. It is a time for introspection and reflection, for it is said that on that day the Creator writes in the Book of Life the story of what shall take place in the coming year.

And on the Day of Atonement which follows ten days later, the Book of Life will be sealed.

The period of ten days is often called the Days of Awe. They are the time for soul searching, for recognizing the sins which one has committed

with respect to his relationship to his God. The forgiveness which is sought during these Days of Awe is a forgiveness from the Creator for sins which we, as humans, have done to Him. We do not believe that he will cleanse the sins that we have committed against our fellowmen. But in turn we must realize and rededicate ourselves to atoning for the sins of man to man by making retribution and dealing fairly with our fellowmen by indeed being brothers to them.

Our own Masonic vows were given only after being assured that they would not interfere with the duty we owe to God, our country, our neighbor and our selves. It is not easy to examine oneself and admit one's errors and to pray for forgiveness of what we know is injurious and harmful to ourselves, our families and our fellowmen, and return to a positive action that will give us satisfaction and gratification.

Rosh Hashana is observed for two days during which time those of the Jewish faith gather in the synagogue and by deep introspection and inspection realize the seriousness and the necessity of doing that which is right to one's fellowmen and in keeping faith with He who rules and guides our lives.

Jews are taught that during the ten days which they call the Ten Days of Penitence, and which take place from the first day of Rosh Hashana to the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, this evaluation must take place and in order to avert the punishment of God, they must repent, pray and do good deeds. They must in effect account for their souls.

On Yom Kippur, Jews fast, having no food or drink from sundown preceding the Holy Day to sundown of the following day. It is a belief, it is a self discipline whereby they as individuals seek to recognize that they are involved in introspection and in rededication. It is a time when all earthly

pursuits are put aside and if no other day in their lives belongs to their Deity, that day certainly does.

Simply put, Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the creation of the world and all its inhabitants are judged anew and given an opportunity to accept the Kingship of God for the year to come.

During the ceremonies of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, a ram's horn known as a shofar is blown to specific notes that our reader, recite. Jews believe that the same Holy notes will herald the final coming of the Messiah.

Primarily the shofar sounding is a call to spiritual awakening and revival. Judaism takes for granted that all humans are prone to sin. Even Moses, the great prophet, was not perfect and because of his imperfection never reached the Holy Land.

But this does not mean that man is burdened with sin from birth. It implies however, that when we fail of do right we must make amends. And we can not make amends simply by turning a new page and starting all over again. In Hebrew there is no word for sin. The word "het" is utilized for the word sin and translates as distance. The word for repentance is "tshuva" which means return.

So, now you have made a major mistake and trespassed the will of God. God still loves you just as parents still love the child who has committed errors. And now how does one bridge the gap, by simply returning to God, by first realizing the error of the error and then endeavoring to improve the harmonization of his deeds with God's will. Erring is part and parcel of human spiritual and physical growth. We recognize also that God does not expect nearly as much from us as we seem to do ourselves.

If, after all this, we still make the same mistakes, we commit the same sins, we recognize still that God among his other attributes is all patient and He will wait for us if only we try, if only we attempt to make amends. If we do not, if we make no attempt to sincerely repent our atonement, is for naught.

The lesson of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is a very simple one. Man is human and commits error. Therefore both God and his fellowmen will forgive him if he seeks to make amends. But these amends must indeed, be with sincere effort to better oneself, to practice the law of his Creator.

Is this not also the teaching of our Masonic fraternity? As we think of each others holidays and customs, we appreciate all the more how universal the philosophy of Freemasonry really is. We are indeed Brothers, the children of the ever loving Father.

No other occasion epitomizes the character and purpose of the Rite more wholly than our historic celebration, held in conjunction with the dedication of King Solomon's temple. To marshal the meanings of the feast is to summarize the principle ideals and traditions of our Fraternity.

The statutes of the Supreme Council, enacted in 1866, consider the feast an obligatory observance. Freemasons have always revered order since we recognize that there is a Supreme Order that structures all creation. Masonic law emulates this divine order, and we serve the purposes of the Great Architect Of The Universe when we meet in the bonds of brotherhood, intent on making contributions to humanity.

The rich legendry of the Temple's dedication, held in connection with the Feast of Tishri furnish symbolic details of the Temple's position, design, construction, furnishings and decoration carry special meaning as they

apply to the metaphorical Temple of Freemasonry built in the heart of every Brother. Through the symbols of the Temple we learn to rededicate ourselves to building Freemasonry “in the hearts of men and among nations.”

God forbade David, a warrior and man of blood, to construct the Temple and, instead delivered this responsibility to Solomon, whose name derives from the Hebrew word, shalom meaning peace . Thus in observing the Feast of Tishri, we reaffirm our dedication to human accord and brotherhood of all men in a world of peace. As individuals and as Brothers in the Rite, we resolve to build, as Solomon did, through harmony and cooperation, ever seeking peace for all mankind.

The consecration of the Temple must also be observed at the Feast of Tishri because it teaches the equality and unity of all members of the Rite.

Yet another reason to keep the Feast of Tishri is that such observance fosters the warm spirit of fraternal fellowship. With in the context of the Feast of Tishri, we realize more deeply the value of our fellowmen, without which the individual is lost in a self-imposed prison of human isolation.

Lastly, the law, legendry, peace, equality, unyity and fellowship of the Feast of Tishri combine to make this the most Masonic feast of feasts. In a common voice of thanksgiving where every man can share his attitude and express his sincere thanks to Him who made all things, the Deity has given us life, the strength to live it fully, and the joy of sharing the beauty and goodness of His creation with our fellowmen. Most of all, He has given us freedom. The Feast of Tishri celebrates this freedom which the Israelites

won with the guidance of Providence, despite the shackles of Egypt and the armies of the Philistines.

This ancient victory celebrated in dedication of Solomon's Temple is kept forever fresh through our keeping of the Feast of Tishri. It promises to all men that the burdens of tyranny are temporary, that the darkness will yield to light, that knowledge will conquer ignorance, and that the Creator intended men to be free.

The first Feast of Tishri was the culmination of the most significant architectural achievements of the ancient world. It was the fulfillment of the Lord's direct command to King David.

So it came to Solomon to build the first Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem. He laid the cornerstone with his own hands following the vision which the Temple's true builder, the Supreme Architect of the Universe, gave him. He sketched its symbolic dimensions and planned its impressive decorations. He set its famous pillars, Jachin and Boaz, as magnificent independent columns at the Temple entrance, and he saw to it that the interior was heavily overlaid with an abundance of glistening gold. Though modest in overall size, the Temple's massive substructure, formed about a mountain, tilted it high above all the surrounding buildings and temples, making it the focal point of ancient Jerusalem.

Temple and faith became one and the Lord's will was made manifest. Today Scottish Rite Freemasons need only recall this great Temple of Solomon to realize that the Almighty will never forsake men of good will and that we, too, can build mighty temples of spirit and stone to the Lord.

The dedication of the Temple of Solomon is a celebration of freedom. It marks the birth of Abraham, whose spirit of independence sustained Israel during generations of bondage. This great feast remembered the

Exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery. It recalled the sojourn in the wilderness and celebrated the Freedom of the Promised Land.

It is from that moment of mystic communication, nearly three thousand years ago, that the Scottish Rite derives its traditional impetus the quest for freedoms of conscience which began in the dim reaches of time. Our dedication today is as firm as those heirs of Solomon in the magnificent Temple on that historic Feast of Tishri nearly three millennia ago. Let us remain worthy of this inheritance of freedom.

So now may I say to you, as those of the Jewish faith say to one another in this Holy season, "May you be inscribed for a happy new year."

sources:

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