

**Freemasonry as a Western Variant of Yoga:
Parallels Between Indo-European Culture and Freemasonry**

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It is often said that one of the greatest secrets of Freemasonry is its origins, and with those words I must agree. I have spent many long years investigating this topic, and I'd like to take this opportunity to share some of my discoveries and opinions with you.

The approach I have taken in this paper is to present an overview of some of the philosophical doctrines that may be gleaned from our early masonic craft rituals and compare them to the philosophical and mythological core of the ancient Indo-European culture, with a more specific emphasis on the doctrines of Vedic Yoga, based on the oldest known Indo-European philosophical texts: the Rig Veda (the bulk of which was orally composed no later than 2000 BCE), the Atharva Veda (composed no later than 1200 BCE), and the oldest layer of the Upanishads (composed ~1200-600 BCE).

I'd like to begin with the central Doctrine of the 3 Pillars. In masonry these are called Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty (Beauty representing a synthesis, or a balance, of Wisdom and Strength). The Vedas also speak of 3 grand pillars, known as Jnana (meaning wisdom, related to the Greek term Gnosis), Karma (meaning action/strength), and Rupa (meaning beauty/form; and relating to our word 'labor');

Yoga also speaks of these 3 Pillars, known as Pingala, Ida, and Sushumna. Pingala, which means 'red', is on the right, and is associated with Surya (the Sun). Ida, which means 'white', is on the left, and is associated with Chandra (the Moon). The third pillar, Sushumna, sits in the middle, between Ida and Pingala, and represents the Spine, or Great Backbone, and is associated with the color black; we will revisit this Red, White and Black symbolism later, let's just say for now it is significant to the later Alchemical process. Ida and Pingala wind or spiral around Sushumna, and at their crossings there are 7 Steps, today commonly known as Chakras, which is commonly translated as "wheel" but may be better understood as a 'spiraling vortex' of sorts. These 7 Steps also connected what were referred to as The 3 Worlds. In very old masonic rituals we learn that at the Grave of Noah, his 3 sons, seeking his lost wisdom, found only his Backbone. The Djed Pillar of Egypt was referred to as the Backbone of Osiris. These 3 Pillars of Yoga originate at the base of the Spine, and spiral upwards into the Skull (kapala), from which they are Liberated by a priestly instrument one may liken to a Setting Maul. The Ida and Pingala Pillars winding around the Central Pillar were spoken of as 2 serpents winding up the backbone, at the top of which the Sun and Moon united and the Great Bird, known as Hamsa (meaning "swan or gander") took flight into the Heavens, that is, the Terrestrial Serpent is ultimately transmuted into the Bird of Heaven. In other terms, it could be said that the Serpent was Raised to a sublime degree. This symbol is reminiscent of the Caduceus Staff (which the psychopomp Hermes ever carried), the Staff of Asclepius, and the Bronze Serpent of Moses.

The 7-step Yoga process, whose foundation is the Virtues (yamas and niyamas), is taught in 3 stages or degrees and includes a 3-pillar/7-step ascension process with both microcosmic and macrocosmic correspondences; this system also includes correspondences to 3 qualities, 5 elements, and 5 senses; one of the goals of yoga is to subdue the passions, and this is accomplished via a willful psychophysical mastery over the body (including the autonomic nervous system, which regulates such functions as heart rate, blood pressure, etc.), the mind (including the thoughts and emotions), and the endocrine system (the body's alchemical system);

The 7 Steps of the Yoga Process are:

1. Yamas (abstentions)
2. Niyamas (observances)
3. Asana (postures)
4. Pranayama (breath control)
5. Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal)
6. Dharana (concentration)
7. Dhyana (meditation)

which lead to the transcendent state of:

8. Samadhi (union/gnosis; a non-dual state of communion with the Monad (i.e., the all-pervading consciousness))

The Yamas and Niyamas correspond to the Virtues; each virtue in yoga has an exact equivalent in Masonry; these virtues are the moral commandments, the do's and don'ts of behavior. Each one implies its opposite, therefore to 'harm none' also means to 'love all'. These are not hard and fast rules, but rather principles, as a principle leaves freedom to act, whereas a rule does not.

Now back to the 3 pillars. The 2 side pillars spiral around the spinal column, that central staircase of 7 chakras; these chakras are at once energy centers, sounds/vibrations, virtues, and psychophysical techniques; physically, they are meditative focus points corresponding to the 7 glands of the endocrine system; each chakra is associated with a siddhi ("power"), which correspond to the conquering of a vice;

The 7 Chakras ("wheels, circles") from Top to Bottom:

1. Sahasrara; Crown; pituitary gland; top of head; violet/white; bridal chamber; 32; the transcendent chakra; the white drop; deals with consciousness, gnosis, body death; the other chakras emanate from this; corresponds to Kether; spiritual
2. Ajna ("command, summoning"); brow; Third Eye; pineal gland; indigo/purple; deals with intuition; correspond to Chokmah and Binah; the upper dantian that converts spirit to void; perception; place where the serpents unite and duality becomes unity;
3. Vishuddha; Throat; thyroid; blue; deals with communication and dreams; element akasha/aether; assoc. with sense of hearing and speaking/mouth; corresponds to daath, chesed and geburah; associated with morality (yamas and niyamas); expression; air into aether;
4. Anahata ("unstruck sound"); Heart; thymus; green; hexagram; the red and white drop; deals with emotion; element is vayu (air); sense is touch/hands; assoc. with charity; corresponds to Tiphereth; the middle dantian (furnace) that converts prana to spirit energy; love; fire into air;
5. Manipura ("city of jewels"); navel; Solar Plexus; adrenal cortex and pancreas; yellow; the

red drop; deals with expansion, growth, digestion; element is fire; sense is sight; assoc. with feet; lower dantian that converts sexual energy to prana; corresponds to Hod and Netzach; power; water into fire;

6. Swadhisthana ("one's own abode"); Sacral; coccyx; sacrum; orange; testes/genitals; deals with pleasure and reproduction; element is water; sense of taste/tongue; corresponds to Yesod; sex; earth into water;

7. Muladhara; Base/Root; prostate; coccygeal; perineum; red; deals with instinct and sexuality; cave of the serpent; element is earth; sense is smell; the foundation of the 3 pillars; corresponds to Malkuth; survival

A particular and quite peculiar group of Vedic Yogins described in the Atharva Veda were known as the Vratya, translated as "mystical fraternity of wanderers", which may be taken as a possible PIE root word related to Brati (brother), Frati (fraternity), etc. This group is difficult to describe properly, but I will make an attempt. The Vratya were seen to be a type of wandering mystical brotherhood displaying extremely archaic shamanistic traits (primarily derived from the Northern Eurasian traditions) that were often the first to arrive in a new region just prior to a more intensive occupation by large semi-nomadic warrior bands looking to acquire new territories and secure new trading partners. These Vratyas were bonded together by an oath, certain vows, and penalties. They are said to be the lesser sons of Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (warrior-princes). They were organized as Confederated Republics (gana) sharing numerous features and technical terminology with our later Guilds and Law Courts long before such things were known in Greece and Rome. Their most important holy days were the Solstice days (in June and December; our St. John's days), on which they installed new officers, initiated new members, and decided matters of jurisprudence. The Chiefs (acharya) sat on special tripod 'seats' (gadi), the 'chair' or 'stool' itself conveying some special authoritative significance, and their assemblies were ruled by a series of knocks from a large hammer. They tended to be the first IE settlers of a new region, establishing a "center of civilization", so to speak, and then retreating back to the margins of society, the forests, deserts, etc., where they lived as disciplined but loosely organized bands who came together when needed, almost like a modern Project Team. They were known to be habitually intoxicated on hemp, and made ritual use of certain hallucinogenic mushrooms, and there is coded reference to both these substances in certain French documents written in the 1520's that bear a strong relationship to Freemasonry. George Washington was positively known to smoke Hemp for medicinal purposes. But I digress. Actually, that reminds me that these Vratyas wore very funny red wizard hats, known today as Liberty Caps, but known in ancient times as Phrygian Caps, which looked like a certain type of Hallucinogenic Mushroom, which was used by the Vratyas to "raise the dead man and liberate his spirit through a hole in his skull". The American Revolutionaries liked the symbolism of the Mithraic, or Liberty Cap, as did the revolutionaries of France and several other countries, and Peyo, creator of the Smurfs, seemed also to like them. These Vratyas were known to be exceptional Musicians, Healers, Metallurgists, Engineers, etc. and could perhaps be likened to certain groups of Medieval Tinkers and Gypsy types. It seems that William Sinclair who designed Roslin Chapel had a bit of a thing for the Gypsies, who actually originated in Northern Pakistan around the Hindu Kush region, which happens also to be the early Vedic heartland. These Vratyas had a special ritual piece of clothing, much like a girdle or apron, that was invariably made of animal flesh, though the animal varies from Sheep to Cow to Dear. These leather girdles of the priests would be easily recognized by a brother from perhaps just 300 years ago. The Vratyas cared very little for Dogma and tended to Universalize and assimilate

other doctrines not at variance to their own, which they would, under no circumstances, compromise, they being spoken of as the Guardians of Truth and the Protectors of Dharma (which means Duty). They were distinguished by clothing with frills, braids, or tessellated borders. They were forbidden to take a razor to their hair or beards, which they grew out and matted into what we now refer to as 'Dreadlocks' (jati). They were known as talented singers and were known to have sang while they worked, using song as an ordering principle, reminiscent of the pythagoreans and the later singing masons and blacksmiths. A special branch of these Vratyas were trained as Warrior-Monks, expert martial artists who protected the travelling mystics, acting as a kind of bodyguard, the behaviors of this bunch being quite familiar to those of you were have read old Celtic and Germanic mythology.

Yoga also has what are known as Mudras (gestures) and Asanas (postures), and there are certain due-guards, signs, salutes and postures that correspond exactly between masonry and ancient Yogic types.

During the Vedic initiation ceremonies they would light 3 fires, one in the E, S, and W; a noose was used during the initiation, and a leather girdle was presented. The Guru took the initiate and together they made a certain Posture in which certain 'magnetic passes' were made up the backbone of the initiate, and a Word (mantra) was whispered to the initiate. He circumambulated the ritual space in a clockwise direction. The ceremony had 6 priests corresponding in function to our WM, SW, JW, SD, JD, and Tyler, who carried a wavy serpentine sword and remained outside the ritual space as guardian. During these ceremonies the priests traced various sacred geometrical shapes and symbols (yantras) in sand on the ground, which the initiate swept up after use. Some of the symbols they made use of are the Pentagram, which they likened to both the Goddess and the Cosmic Man, and the Hexagram (sadkona), which they likened to the Union of the Sun and Moon. They also made use of a Point within a Circle and said that this was not the Sun, but the Sun behind the Sun. This Point within a Circle was taken to be a Single God with 3 aspects, as the Circle has a Point, a Circumference, and a Radius which spans the space from the Center to the Circumference, and the Universal Process has 3 parts being Creation, Maintenance, and Destruction, and that it is necessary to have all these 3 things to have a complete wholeness or a complete cycle.

In 110 BCE, the Greek traveller Heliiodorus erected a stone pillar in Central India. On this pillar he wrote that he was a Bhagavata, then meaning a Vedic initiate, and he states that "3 immortal steps, when practiced, lead to Heaven: Self-restraint, Perserverence, and Charity". I believe this Vedic doctrine is very familiar to the Masons, who must first and foremost 'subdue their passions'.

You may be asking yourself how it is possible that Vedic philosophy could have influenced the Western traditions from which mainstream scholarship believes it to have derived. To oversimplify matters immensely I will say this: the nation of the Hittites, who are referred to in the oldest parts of the Old Testament, had invaded Anatolia (today's Turkey) no later than 2500 BCE, and they have left us written records both archaeologically and linguistically dated to no later than 2000 BCE. These records record some of their early core myths and theology, and I have one in my possession that our Tyler's and Junior Deacon's would recognize almost word for word. The Hittites were considered on par with if not greater builders than the Egyptians, and actually competed with the Egyptians head to head for over 500 years. It is obvious today that the Hittites had a large influence on the Greek and

Phoenician builders, and later the Etruscan and Roman builders via the Greeks. By 1600 BCE these Hittites were being influenced by their Eastern cousins the Mitanni, who spoke a language extremely similar but more archaic than Sanskrit. These Mitanni married into the Dynasties of Egypt, as did the Hittites, and both the Mitanni and Hittites had a good deal of influence over the dynasties directly leading up to the Heretic Pharaoh Akhnaten. It may be that the Father-in-law of Moses, who taught him many things, was also related to the Mitanni tribes. It is now also clear that the early Priests of the Medes, known as Magi, passed Indian and Persian doctrines to the Ionian Greek philosophers, including Pythagoras, who may have learned his famous theorem from the Shulba Sutra (~1400 BCE) of India rather than the priests of Egypt. It is known that the Emperor Ashoka of India sent Buddhist missionaries to Greece and the Levant no later than 250 BCE, and doctrines similar to their own may be found throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls and the later Gnostic, Hermetic and Alchemical texts. It is known that the Muslims had been influenced by Persian and Indian mystics no later than 720 CE, and they were actively translating not only Greek but also many Sanskrit documents by 750 CE. These Indian and Persian doctrines had a relatively large effect on the Shia Islamic communities, who may have passed much of this information on to early Crusading Knights such as the Knights Templar. The Quest for the Holy Grail also has its parallel in the ancient Persian documents of Iran and the ancient Sanskrit documents of India, as does the Epic literature of Greece such as the Iliad and Odyssey.

I will leave you with this final thought. It has been shown by some linguists that the word Mason can be derived from more ancient terms meaning such things as "Maker" and "Mechanic", but it can also be shown that from a Proto-Indo-Iranian base, it is also related to words like "Magi", which is the root of later terms such as "Magic", "Magnetism", and "Maya" (which means "Illusion").

Addendum 1: Some Additional Correspondences between Freemasonry and Buddhism:

Buddhism has its ancient roots in the Vratya/Sramana tradition described above. It also displays many parallels with Freemasonry.

The 3 ruffians in the Master Mason degree can be seen as representing old age, disease, and death; Hiram Abif sought to evade the first ruffian at the East Gate, in the same way that Buddha tried to escape by the E Gate, and the same is the case for the second (South) and third (West) ruffian and their directions; the Buddha ends his journey in the North;

You were first made a Mason in your heart; the Buddha said "the way is not in the sky, the way is in the heart";

The masonic lodge layout shares many similarities with the mandala;

Most associate symbolically the GAOTU with the Monad, but others may look beyond the the Monad to what many Buddhists call 'Sunyata' (emptiness/voidness), which is the 0 existing before the 1; in an ancient Indian context. the zero did not refer to nothingness but to emptiness suggestive of potentiality; the zero concurs with the emptiness of "prajna" (intuition); the point within the circle is representative of the zero;

Pike, in M&D, claims that "the first Masonic Legislator whose memory is preserved to us by history, was Buddha"; he also claims that when the Brahmins were attempting to exterminate Buddhism, many Buddhists fled to Ireland, and there erected the round towers;

Freemasonry has 3 Jewels: the VSL (God/Dharma/the teachings), the Square (the Master/the Buddha/the teacher), and the Compasses (the Members/the Sangha/the taught);

Dorje (square/earth/action) and bell (compasses/sky/wisdom) have parallel meaning with the Square & Compasses;

a Theraveda monk is known as a Lok-sang; Lok = master/lord; Sang = community, builder; Loksang can be translated as either 'lord of the community' or 'master builder';

The sangha has 3 monastic initiations; when a loksang receives the third degree he is put through a ritualistic symbolic death, his hair is cut, nails clipped, clothes taken off, these all being placed in a coffin, a funeral is held, and the coffin is buried; the loksang is then given an orange (the color of the sunset) robe symbolizing that he is now dead to the outside world and reborn into the sangha;

If we square a circle into four equal parts we end up with 4 right angles or 4 squares, these correspond to the 4 Noble Truths; if we further square the circle, bisecting the 90 degree angles we end up with a circle with 8 spokes (the Wheel of Dharma); each angle is at 45 degrees, which is the measure of the opened compasses; the 8 spokes symbolize the way to end suffering called the 8 noble paths;

The 7 laws of Cambodian Theraveda Buddhism are similar to the Noachide Laws: (1) don't murder, (2) don't steal, (3) don't lie, (4) don't commit adultery, (5) don't drink alcohol, (6) worship your mother as god, (7) love others as yourself, and relieve their sufferings;

Freemasonry has been interpreted by many of our scholars to teach both Karma and Reincarnation;

Buddhist Trinity = Buddha (God), Dharma/Prajna (Sophia/Wisdom), and Sangha (Union); the Sangha is the union of matter and spirit;

The hexagram (satkona yantra) is a mandala found on Hindu temples; it symbolizes the perfect meditative state of balance between Man and God, and if maintained results in Moksha/Nirvana; in Buddhism, it is especially connected with Vajrayogini;

Our AASR Knight Kadosh degree employs drinking from a kapala/skull cup;

There are also possible links between the soma, mushrooms, and Masonry; this is explored further in some of my other lectures...