

The Moon to Rule the Night

*Observe his flame,
That placid dame,
The moon's Celestial Highness;
There's not a trace
Upon her face
Of diffidence or shyness:
She borrows light
That, through the night,
Mankind may all acclaim her!
And truth to tell,
She lights up well,
So I, for one, don't blame her!*

These lines sung by Yum-Yum at the beginning of the second act in the well-known comic opera 'The Mikado' by Bros. Gilbert and Sullivan epitomize our romantic relationship with and sentimental view of the Moon.

From time immemorial, the Moon has fascinated mankind. It takes second place only to the Sun in its influence on daily life. The Moon is closest to us in the Solar System, and is our constant companion as we travel round the Sun. It is useful as a source of light during the night, and as a timekeeper marked by the regular changes in a twenty-eight day cycle (28.3 days to be exact). "Could it be a god?" the ancients asked, "or the home of a god?" The two great lamps of Heaven were deified as the Moon Goddess, the Bride, and Sun God, the Bridegroom. Moon-worship was common in ancient times and the lunar god was one of the principal deities. The Moon Goddess controlled the tides, the weather, rainfall, crop growth, and the seasons. Archaeologists have unearthed ruins of lunar temples. Legends and myths abound in many cultures to explain the Moon and its changing shape. Men, women, and animals, all found their way to the Moon in these pseudo-scientific fables. British Druids paid homage to the Moon as late as the 8th century.

Astronomy is one of the seven liberal arts recommended for study by all Freemasons, and our Ritual has many direct and indirect references to the celestial bodies – Sun, Moon, and Stars. The Lesser Lights – "*The Sun to rule the day, the Moon to rule the night, and the Master to rule and direct his lodge.*" When the Working Tools are presented in the Third Degree, our earthly situation is described by the word 'Sublunary' (Latin *sublunaris sub* – under; *luna* – the moon), below the moon, earthly, mundane.

He appointed the moon for seasons. Psalm 104: 19

The Moon waxes, wanes, and disappears for three days, "the dark of the Moon." It is a symbol of life-rhythms, an ever-recurring cycle perpetually returning to its beginning, of periodical change, a cosmic image of growth and renewal, of resurrection and immortality – the cyclical nature of all things. The universal measuring gauge, its successive and regular phases measure passing time and were the basis of the first known calendars. As the Moon has no light of its own, but reflects the light of the Sun, it is seen by philosophers to be a symbol of knowledge acquired through reflection – theoretical, conceptual, and rational. As such, it is a meaningful symbol for Speculative Freemasonry.

... *the Moon,*
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen unveil'd her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silvery mantle threw.
– John Milton : Paradise Lost

Freemasonry has adopted and adapted many symbols from the hidden mysteries of nature and science. We enjoy common origins and shared traditions with our forebears of ancient time. Even in modern society, the Harvest Moon in September heralds a time celebrated in song.

Several lodges in the Grand Jurisdiction bear names with astronomical allusion: Rising Sun No. 129, Aurora (Toronto York District); Star in the East Lodge No. 164, Picton (Prince Edward District); Seven Star No. 285, Alliston (Georgian South); Morning Star Lodge No. 301, Carlow (South Huron District); Astra Lodge No. 682, Toronto (Toronto Humber Valley District)

If one peruses the recorded history of our early lodges, invariably the regular meeting will held on a certain day “*on or before the Full Moon*” holding thirteen meetings during the year. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the population in Upper Canada was mainly rural, the natural illumination provided by the Full Moon guided members over rough country roads on their way to and from lodge. One also wonders if there may have been symbolic, esoteric significance in meeting ‘on or before the Full Moon’ as well?

There are three ‘Moon Lodges’ remaining in Ontario that retain the tradition: **Rising Sun Lodge No. 85**, Athens (St. Lawrence District) 1857 – Thursday on or before the Full Moon; **Plattsville Lodge No. 178**, Washington (Wilson North District) 1866 – Friday, on or before the Full Moon; and **Lancaster Lodge No. 207**, Lancaster (Eastern District) 1868 – Tuesday, on or before the Full Moon.

The ancient Hebrews computed time by the appearance of the Moon. Months in the Jewish calendar commence with the Full Moon, and the first month of the year – Tisri – began with the Full Moon in September. There is a vestige of this tradition still to be found in Section 382 of the Book of Constitution that states: “*No higher degree in Masonry shall be conferred on any brother at a shorter interval than four weeks from the date of receiving a previous degree, except under dispensation from the Grand Master.*” Four weeks, or twenty-eight days is the Lunar Month. In Western culture, the Christian Festival of Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday following the Full Moon on or after the Vernal Equinox.

The first landing on the Moon was achieved by Apollo II on 20 July 1969, and Astronaut Neil Armstrong uttered the memorable phrase, “*That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.*” There was a Masonic presence: Col. Edwin ‘Buzz’ Aldrin, the second man to walk on the Moon, is a member of Montclair Lodge No. 144, New Jersey, and is a 33rd Degree Mason in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. The Scottish Rite flag carried on the Moon and back by Bro. Aldrin is now deposited at the House of the Temple in Washington. John H. Glenn Jr., the first American to orbit the Earth, was also a Freemason, a member of Concord Lodge No. 688, Ohio.

The spacious firmament on high, With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame, Their great Original proclaim. – Joseph Addison

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