

A GOLDEN AGE
BY
IRA GILBERT, PM, PDDGM

The early 1700s were, indeed, a golden age for Freemasonry. It was on June 24, 1717, St. John the Baptist day, that four lodges of speculative Masons joined together to form the Grand Lodge of England.

It was during this time period that a famous rabbi, Israel ben Eliezer, also known as the Baal Shem Tov lived, from 1698 to 1760. The term Baal Shem Tov may be translated from the Hebrew language. The Hebrew word Baal means Master. The Hebrew word Shem means Name. The Hebrew word Tov means Good. Thus the Baal Shem Tov was widely known as the Master of the Good Name. There were several interpretations of this name. If one looks at the term Good Name as the good reputation of the Rabbi, he was, certainly, the bearer of a good reputation. If you see the term Good Name as the name of the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, the Baal Shem Tov was a Master of his belief in GOD.

The Baal Shem Tov founded a religious movement known as CHABAD. This term is an acronym for the Hebrew words, Chochma, Binah, and Da'at. These words may be translated as Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge.

The Baal Shem Tov saw these three attributes as the basis for leading a religious life. We may also see these three qualities as the foundation of leading a Masonic life.

It is a requirement of becoming a brother of our fraternity that one must have a belief in a Supreme Being. It is this belief that leads an individual to becoming a valued member of the community. It is the belief in a Supreme Being that give a brother the conviction that all men are created equal.

This, then, leads to the question of, how does a new member of our brotherhood gain the beliefs that make Freemasonry as the longest surviving fraternal organization in the world.

Chochma, or, wisdom is a long sought after quality of life. The term Wisdom does not mean an inborn high IQ. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines Wisdom as "the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment, the quality of being wise". Binah, or, understanding. Is a quality of life that comes from a study what makes up the qualities of life that lead to a satisfying existence and one that is of benefit to the community. Da'at, or knowledge, only is gained from the seeking out and researching, and then analyzing the knowledge gained from the research and study of what Freemasonry means.

The Masonic student needs help and guidance in gaining an understanding and knowledge of the symbolism and meaning of the ritual of the three degrees that he has undertaken in his acquisition of the title "Master Mason". He needs a mentor to influence and teach the new brother what it truly means to be a Mason. It is the Intender that becomes the mentor needed to insure that the new brother becomes a Mason in more than name only. This will insure that our fraternity will continue to survive long into the future.

As the noted Masonic author, H. L. Haywood, said, "Not more men in Masonry, but more Masonry in men".