

ON
THE
GREAT
MASONIC
APRON

REVIVING AND CELEBRATING
AN ANCIENT MASONIC EMBLEM



SYMBOLISMS, TRADITION, ANCIENT AND RECENT
ASSOCIATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCES

The Ancient Free Moorish Rite

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Preface

On a calm Sunday morning, late winter of 1999, I was fortunate to make the acquaintance of Ill. Bro. Clifford E. Hazel Bey 33/96° at his Maryland, suburban home. Recessed from busy service roads, the colonial style house cradled midway in the slope of quarter-mile stretch of block, where colorful framed houses sporting scissor trimmed lawns leaned over clean pavements in orderly rank. An unarmed stillness abound induced an aura of early Sunday morning, quiet and serene with an anticipation of church bells resounding in the atmosphere.

In the home state of Benjamin Banneker, the great 18th century American scientist and Freemason, I found myself amongst a moderate gathering of Freemasons traveling from various parts of the country to fellowship with a contemporary scientist and a significant Freemason in his own right. Standing in a modest vestibule to greet us, his affability no less conspicuous than his tall stature, Hazel Bey shook the hand and exchanged embraces with every guest who entered, offering each a genuine smile as well. When I shook his hand and we embraced, we instantaneously shared a saliently pleasant recognition. Although not recalling a previous encounter, I joyfully discerned a familiarity of spirit; his presence was warm and impressive, we hugged and rocked like old comrades.

Immediately, the bracing sense of cautionary defense I instinctively affect when I meet a new person, totally surrendered in me. This was unusual, because, being a conscious Moor—and a Freemason *to boot*, I have learned to stockpile an array of social defenses. Nevertheless, never before had I been totally disarmed with one handshake. Here was a *Kodak* moment in my life, very special and extra celebratory. Some events occur only once in a lifetime and you know it intuitively when they do. This was such an event.

I confess that, on the way to Maryland, I had expected just a another routine meeting with a yet another “deep” Freemason. Having worked with and met a handful of “lettered” Freemasons, I was sure that I had engaged the best of the lot. And some had been veritable mentors to me in the “craft.” But being sort of an un-impressionable fellow anyway, I didn't think anybody was capable of dilating my stubborn pupils. But I was at once, spiritually captivated by a man greeting me for the first time as if he knew me *his* entire life, and without hesitation or mental reservation, I immediately trusted him with *mine*. It was *dilatatively* clear to me that Clifford E. Hazel Bey, the Most Puissant Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry of the Southern and Western Hemisphere, was an extraordinary individual.

Here was a tall, slender elder, stately and handsome with a rich bronze complexion and a distinctively peaceful aura. Stored in the lofts of arched rubicund cheekbones, mature and buoyantly sensitive almond cut eyes revealed the soul of a sage. His square humility was spiritedly wedded to a spartan confidence, becoming of one who by day calmly herded sheep in green pastures and who by night, wrathfully slaughtered armies on a grey battlefield. Here was a leader in the mold of generals, prophets and Presidents; he had a Lincolnesque quality and persona about him, for sure.

As we all settled in before a sun filled picture window in his sitting room, lounging on couches, chairs, bean bags, the floor etc., Clifford E. Hazel Bey comfortably manned a red leathered upholstered chair, which more resembled a miniature throne—you know, the “man of the house” chair which no but him dare approach. As he began to speak to his private audience, all of us eagerly leaning forward and hanging on his preliminary gestures, I noted that a natural virility flowed in his features as a spring gushes forth from generously watered ground. With stentorian authority, he unselfishly imparted

“jewels” of information and wholesome instruction. The vitality of his discussion was as pulsating as a racing heartbeat. My ears, pacing to capture and nurture every word he uttered, seemed to vibrate as drums under a drummer’s roll. This was as good as it gets!

Obviously, we were *shoulder to shoulder* with a profoundly learned brother, some affectionately referring to him as “Brother Hazel,” “Dad,” “Pop,” “Grand Master,” and “Puissant.” But before we would depart his company that day, I would know beyond any uncertainty that we were all at the *feet* of the Master, for the breadth of his learning was beyond measure, and his conviction to his cause (uplifting humanity in the universal crusade for freedom and justice) was unquestionable, un-reproachable. “I have been fighting on the front line for justice all of my life,” he said. His sincerity was piercing. He continued, “I am in God’s hands! And as long as I’m in His hands, I fear nothing.” Solemnity and silently rejoicing, I sensed that something big was to come of this meeting. Something really big—and extra special. I could feel it in my bones!

My hunches were correct, as “Dad” began to talk about Moorish Masons, and pre-Columbian Moorish lodges in America, linking Freemasonry and Moors to ancient American history and ancient Egyptian history. He spoke *ex cathedra* on issues about Moorish culture, early American Moorish organizations, Islam, Christianity, Judaism and other religions and Spiritual things. He highlighting Masonic expressions in all of these. Moreover, he thematically introduced the Masonic significances of Vienna Austria and Angelo Soliman; the first Moor recognized as a Freemason in the Occident, as well as, the first Moor to serve as a Masonic Grand Master in such a lodge. He also spoke much about Hannibal; the great pre-Christian African general.

Speaking of a universal brotherhood (inclusive of all humanity, regardless of nationality, race, creed, or religion, etc.), “Puissant” cautioned Moors about ethnocentrism, insisting that the universal doctrine of brotherhood underlying all religions and Freemasonry, had no place for it. Furthermore, he admonished us to readdress our religious, fraternal, economic, and cultural priorities. He insisted that Moorish Masons especially, become spiritually centered, religiously astute, socially prudent, economically creative and industrially productive. (By the term Moorish here, we mean Individuals who consciously assume a social, political and religious identity as Moors, being the proper historical and global appellation for the African phenotype—this as opposed to the more conventional and strictly American markers of *African American*, *Black*, and the almost obsolete *Negro*.) We would produce our own Masonic lodges, regalia, books, rituals, etc. Moreover he insisted the we must also become internationally allied. He pointed our compasses beyond the frontiers of restrictive traditionalism. In a nutshell, he was speaking of establishing “Moorish Rite Freemasonry” and carefully promoting its outgrowth from an established Freemasonic body. Whoa! That concept caught up in my spirit like a wild bonfire on a Saturday night in Vermont.

Suddenly, like an enthusiastic grade-schooler, I raised my hand and said, “Can we...can we do that...can we write our own rituals and establish our own rite?!”

He answered calmly, “Of course, you can. Why can't you...others have done it...why can't you? You are human beings; you're Americans with as much a right to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness as any one else. Of course you can. I wish you would. I wish somebody would.”

The “Master” spoke passionately (almost imploringly) about Moors developing and establishing a contra-distinctive Masonic identity. He carefully illustrated how we, as Moors, by celebrating and emphasizing Moorish culture and history through a familiar Masonic praxis, would distinguish ourselves within the institution at home and abroad. We would erect Moorish symbolic lodges to that

end, because we would better appreciate and embrace Freemasonry in a form specific to our culture and history. Prominent in the literature and symbolism, would be Moorish expression and motif. Moorish Rite Freemasonry would not be *new* Freemasonry, per se, but rather a timely consequence of traditional Freemasonry. He explained, “You don’t have to plant a new tree, you just become a necessary extension or branch of an old one, because Freemasonry is an African phenomenon, not an indigenous European science. Freemasonry is Moorish!”

Suddenly, my ship came in! The jog trot element of Freemasonry I knew, had run its course and I wondered if others heard the same as I. For me, it was at once a euphoniously liberating sermon and a divine command to weigh anchor and sail in the coordinates issued by this wise navigator. I was afraid that others were listening to, and maybe even “feeling” Bro. Hazel Bey, but not *hearing* him, because I was in the amen corner and I heard no hallelujahs. Later, on the road home, however, my traveling companion gloated, “Man, I feel like clicking my heels!” Too late, Bro; my brain cylinders were already clicking at an impressive pace. Amen.

Hearing the Master speak that day, recalled for me a time early in my Masonic career when brothers seriously pondered the conditions and future of the institution—and our place in it. In a youthful atmosphere of flourishing opinions, we generally complained that most of the Masonic incumbents, old-fashioned elders embedded in their ways, clenched the reins on a sluggish animal and were unwilling or incapable of bringing it to gallop. As a younger generation of Freemasons, were convinced that these elders, preoccupied with women, titles and status, were eurocentric oriented and out of social touch with younger Masons. Moreover, they were stubbornly unwilling to make room for new Freemasons expressing “Afrocentric” concerns and advancing progressive ideas. We young titans sought an *illustrious* Mason with real “Power”, not pomp, to champion our cause.

Meanwhile, we were convinced that these pompous *old-timers*, while anchored in their Masonic positions, were set adrift in senseless carnal pursuits, trumpery shindigs, and lacked understanding about *Moorish Science*, history, Islam, etc. Moreover, they didn't quite understand Freemasonry, as Freemasonry was actually a component of Moorish Science. And so *pretentiously* Christianized were they, that they were blatantly dispassionate towards non-Christian Masons and even ostracized them. Again, we yearned for an illustrious potentate of profound learning, capable of affecting this dynamic and effectuating change and fraternal progress.

Intuitively, we were all looking for the true Master: an adept of the *Mason's trowel*, capable of mixing and liberally spreading the mortar of love. Without love; all of our decorated regalia, rings, pendants and other jewelry, as well as our fashionable clothing, all assumed to be reflective of the light and affluence of Freemasonry (not that jewels and ermine make us Freemasons), simply lacked luster and held no real value. All were now simply cheap items of fancy and pretentious display. Caveat emptor!

Love is the true *light* of Freemasonry - in its absence nothing shines. We had all come into the craft searching for light. But we found it refracted through the filters of selfishness, greed, and ignorance. In a profound sense, we were like that venerable search party that went looking for the Master builder, only to find his lifeless body concealed under displaced soil. So, we were all calling on a torchbearer, someone who *could*, and *would*, bring *that* light.

Clifford E. Hazel Bey is answering the calls. He unquestionably is *that* torchbearer, *that* Potentate, *that* champion, *that* adept! He knew that the sprig of acacia, though not rooted in the soil, was a sure sign of life. Where our streams intersect, his is the ready vessel leading us to the precipice of true fraternity, from whence falls the rich waters of prosperity, culture, and brotherhood.

That Sunday, while studying and weighing his words, I continuously thought, “This is him; this is the man!” He was all of the things we said we needed and more. It was too good to be true. And it gets even better.

Since that fateful meeting with Clifford E. Hazel Bey, we have become friends and brothers. In a profound capacity, he is my father. Today, by his guidance, I am instrumental in establishing Moorish Rite Freemasonry. In fact, he strongly suggested that I write this book and he has supported me with information and encouragement. For this vote of confidence in me, I am extremely grateful to him. Indeed, he has been my benefactor in more ways than can be intimated at this time. Perhaps that is for another book. Nonetheless, I thank God for intersecting our paths.

For this undertaking on the Moorish Masonic apron, I am eternally grateful to the following:

Of course, Clifford E. Hazel Bey: as this service is necessarily rendered through his vision and encouragement. I thank him, his lovely wife Sister Bessie Hazel Bey, and his family.

I express a solemn gratitude to my family: to my wife for *being* my *wife*, proofreading all of my work, and being patient while I work. To my children for inspiring me every time I look at them and they at me. Because of you, I have the fortitude to stand and work on this sacred ground. Thank you for your love, support, and patience.

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Bro. Donnie Jackson: whose brotherly love, kind and encouraging words, and spiritual supplementations are always an uplift for me.

The Supreme Council Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of the Southern and Western Hemisphere of Freemasonry: Long live the Supreme Council!

Last but not least, the Moorish Rite Masons: whose presence in the Masonic universe will change the course of its history, and produce generations of uplifted, upright, and enlightened Moorish Masons. To this, God’s legion of angels will sing a chorus of praise and gratitude to Him.

I humbly thank the Supreme Navigator of the Universe for all of you. May he keep us all, and guide our Common vessel to the waters upon which his face eternally moves. So must it be.

Aalim Bey Al Dey
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