



## Abou Ben Adhem — An Acceptable Candidate?

VWBro Les Champ

Condensed from a paper presented to Fiat Lux Lodge of Research No. 1980 on 11 April 2015.

One of the lesser or minor Romantic era poets, Leigh Hunt [1784–1859], is best remembered for *Abou Ben Adhem* which passes from anthology to anthology.

*Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
An angel writing in a book of gold: —  
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
And to the presence in the room he said,  
“What writest thou?” — The vision raised its head,  
And with a look made of all sweet accord,  
Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”  
“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”  
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerily still; and said, “I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.”*

*The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,  
And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.<sup>1</sup>*

As in all poetry, there are several interpretations to be found, either with the immediate reading of a poem, or later with an in-depth, analytical interpretation. I am choosing to interpret and analyse this poem based on Masonic values with the premise that if there was an application by Abou Ben Adhem to join Freemasonry, could I and would I advance his application to the Brethren for consideration of membership.

My immediate impression of Ben Adhem’s being informed that his name is not listed as one who loves the Lord but rather of one who loves his fellow man is not to say that he denies the existence of a Divine Creator. It is that his spirituality is focused on brotherly love. His dialogue with an angel demonstrates that he is not denying the presence of a messenger from God by claiming that he is only dreaming or suffering from a hallucination and by such denying God.

The angel holds the poem’s most revealing symbol: the book of gold containing a list of people who love the Lord. Symbolically this means that those who love the Lord are worthy and valuable enough to belong in a book of richness, or as put into perspective by the simile, “*like a lily in bloom.*” People who love the Lord are alive, in bloom, flourishing, to say the least, in richness. But, how does one obtain this status?

Originally Abou Ben Adhem wasn’t on this list. His response to finding this out was to pray. Many devout believers may take

<sup>1</sup> Rittenhouse, Charles, ed. *Words on Wings: an anthology of poetry for junior students in high school.* New York: Nelson & Sons (Harper-Collins Publishers, 1962, p 71.



“*Abou Ben Adhem and the Angel*” lithograph by Edmund Joseph Sullivan (1869–1933) from *Bibby’s Annual* published in 1917.

this poem too fast and too lightly arriving at the conclusion that prayer, which shows one’s dedication and love of the Lord, is the way to heaven or the book of gold. Two words throw this conclusion out: “*fellow men.*” Instead of praying to the Lord “*write me down as one that loves his Lord,*” Hunt makes the diction choice “*fellow men*” to problematize blind faith in a deity.

The space between Abou’s prayer and the vanishing angel could easily serve to represent the day in which one can prove through their actions that they truly do love their fellow people on the planet. This is why the next night Abou’s name is at the top. Instead of God, he loves his fellow people. This love of fellow people leads to God’s blessing. The angel carries not only the message of Abou’s placement on the list in the golden book, but the message that people worthy of God’s

love, blessing, and pathway to heaven are the ones who don't have superficial faith in a deity, but a faith that proves a perpetual kindness to people.

Prospective applicants are to be provided with a copy of the Grand Lodge of Alberta's *Declaration of Principles and Information for Applicants: Aims and Principles* which state clearly the Masonic values of charity as being devoted to the welfare and happiness of mankind. It follows that benevolence teaches the good of others is a primary concern. A strong message regarding communal values that instills the belief and action of a society being composed of individuals and the need to impress the principles of personal righteousness and responsibility in order to enlighten them in those things which make for the good of human welfare. These are the messages that we should be taking to applicants and following up with questions and dialogue regarding how the applicant incorporates these values in his daily life.

Does our poetic applicant meet these criteria? The last stanza of the poem emphatically states that Abou Ben Adhem's name led all others in receiving the Supreme Creator's blessing based on his statement of loving his fellow men. What we do know, and hope to achieve in our dialogue with our applicants to have an understanding of, is by having a strong conviction of brotherly love, Abou Ben Adhem demonstrates the personal righteousness and responsibility by his devotion to the welfare and happiness of mankind.

There remains one doubt regarding the meeting of the criteria by applicants which is somewhat ignored or downplayed. The Grand Lodge of Alberta's pamphlet *Declaration of Principles* states that applicants must acknowledge a one and caring Deity. Reinforced by the Grand Lodge of Alberta's pamphlet *Aims of Freemasonry* we learn that all applicants need to express belief and acceptance in promoting "the Brotherhood of man under the Supreme Being"

and "to render practical aid and assistance to the less fortunate members of the community."

To these statements and by reflecting upon the poem, one could agree that Abou Ben Adhem does meet the criteria of becoming a Freemason. By asking if his name is included on the list of those who love the Lord, Ben Adhem demonstrates his belief and faith in a Supreme Creator. If he was a non-believer, why would he ask and why would he even be curious? What Ben Adhem does not know is whether his name has been included on the list of the Elects. He accepts the presence of the angel and therefore does not deny the messenger of God.

As we examine the application of those indicating an interest in joining the Fraternity, the need to become more cognizant of the connection between a stated belief in a Supreme Being and the willingness to act on brotherly love should become the focus of the interview. As the numerous attributes of God include being All Good, All Knowing, and All Powerful, then a person like Ben Adhem would be known unto God for his love of fellow men and not for any participation in a particular mode of religion or type of denomination.

As we are mortal, the task falls upon us during interviews of applicants, to understand better their stated belief

in a Supreme Being and their commitment and dedication to the values of Freemasonry — in particular to that of brotherly love.

Upon reflection, after an initial dialogue, we then need to make the best decision for Freemasonry prior to casting our ballot to accept or reject for the good of Masonry.

This fictional applicant, Abou Ben Adhem, is presented in a positive view by the external actions of the Angel; appearing, speaking to him, and then returning to report with God's verdict on the importance of actions conducted by his belief in brotherly love. This poem is an exercise I imposed upon myself to better understand applicants prior to reporting to the Worshipful Master of a favourable or non-favourable report. The poem itself, and the statements made by the protagonist lends itself to additional exercises on the compatibility of Freemasonry to definitions of spirituality and what constitutes belief in a Supreme Being or even a discussion on the search for a belief in a Supreme Being by an agnostic who is honest in his statement about God when asking to join our fraternity.

[Although the complete paper was never published before *Fiat Lux Lodge* went dark, you may request an emailed copy by contacting the editor at [editor@freemasons.ab.ca](mailto:editor@freemasons.ab.ca)]

## Conflict of Interest

RWBro Richard Ashby, RPP

Conflict of interest can be a difficult and troublesome subject. Accusations of conflict of interest have caused the downfall of good organizations and individuals. Just the appearance of a conflict of interest can bring about devastation which is why even the appearance of a conflict of interest needs to be addressed with great seriousness.

A conflict of interest is possibly present if there is a potential for the personal interests of an individual to clash with their duties as an officer of an

organization. No member should vote on a question in which he has a direct personal or financial interest not common to other members of the organization. An officer of an organization, no matter how elected or appointed, has a duty to act primarily in the best interests of the organization and with a view to advancing its welfare; to avoid interest conflicts (potential, actual, or apparent conflicts of interest) or otherwise manage them in order to neutralize them.

Officers of an organization have a

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fiduciary duty to put the good of the organization above their own personal interests. Thus “conflict of interest” is a conflict between the official responsibilities of an officer of the organization and that individual’s private interests. The term is used to describe a situation in which an officer of an organization exploits the relationship for personal benefit, typically being financial, thus there being a conflict between putting the organization first and personal gain.

For example: if an organization is considering ordering jackets for members from a specific company, and an officer of the organization is an employee of that company, they are possibly in a position of conflict of interest. Depending upon their position of employment, it may be a perceived conflict or an actual conflict. If the officer is a shareholder owner, or in the sales department, the conflict is credible, if the officer works in the shipping department, the conflict would likely be just perceived.

#### General guidelines

An officer or director who has a conflict of interest:

- is to be counted in the quorum for a meeting at which the individual attends notwithstanding that the

individual is absented while any matter is considered in respect of which a conflict of interest exists;

- must not participate in the discussion of or vote on any questions concerning such matter at the meeting;
- must be absented from any discussions or vote concerning such matter at the meeting; and
- even if otherwise excluded from participation or temporary attendance due to the conflict may be specifically called upon by the presiding officer to attend and answer questions put in debate through the presiding officer before once again withdrawing.

The individual’s temporary absence from the meeting does not “break” quorum, and the individual’s retirement from the meeting, and re-entry should be recorded in the minutes for the protection of both the officer and the organization.

The presence of a conflict of interest is independent of the occurrence of impropriety. Therefore, a conflict of interest can be discovered and voluntarily defused before any corruption occurs. A conflict of interest exists if the circumstances are reasonably believed (on the basis of past experience and

objective evidence) to create a risk that a decision may be unduly influenced by other, secondary interests outside of the organization, and not on whether a particular individual is actually influenced by a secondary interest.

Just of note—conflict of interest does not apply when it comes to elections. You can vote for yourself! It is not considered to be a conflict of interest. So, individuals do not have to be excused from a meeting when a ballot vote is being taken for a position. If the vote is by show of hands, that’s a different story as other issues must be considered.

*Please note: The preceding information is provided in good faith as **basic** information and does not cover all situations. The author accepts no responsibility for anything which occurs directly or indirectly as a result of using any of the suggestions or procedures addressed in this article. All suggestions and procedures are provided in good faith as general guidelines only as not all circumstances and situations can be covered and suggestions above should be used in conjunction with relevant legislation, constitutions, rules, laws, bylaws, and with reasonable judgment.*

## Taking Good Photos for *The Alberta Freemason*

VWBro Garth Cochran

*The Alberta Freemason* can always use stories and photos of the Brethren or their activities. Unfortunately, many of the photos that come to our inbox are barely usable. Some are out of focus. Some are poorly composed leaving the subject too small in the picture to use. They may also be of too little resolution to be enlargeable. Following are a few tips on taking photos that will aid us to illustrate your magazine. These tips apply whether using an actual camera or your phone.

**1. Resolution** is a product of size and the number of dots per inch (DPI). The trade-off is the number of pictures that may be stored on your device. For our purposes, the higher the resolution, the better. A six by four picture at 72 DPI just doesn’t cut it, especially when the subject is small and must be blown up. On the other hand, a 22 by 15 picture at the same DPI is much better as it should produce a high enough resolution picture at publication size. Setting your camera to a higher resolution may necessitate downloading your images to

your computer more often, but it gives you (and us) more options for cropping and printing a great photo.

**2. Framing** your picture properly. Care taken when framing your picture will improve your results dramatically. When taking a picture of one person, never use landscape mode unless the person is only part of the story you are telling with your shot — for example, a Brother showing off something he has built. In any case, get close enough to fill the frame with your subject. This means less cropping later on. Group shots of more than two people should probably be shot in landscape mode, but remember that the faces are most important, not the feet.

**3. Focus** is important, even with a fixed lens camera. Point and shoot cameras and phones have a sweet spot where the sharpness is adequate. Pay attention to where yours is. Sharpening an image can only do so much. On other cameras, make sure the focus is as sharp as you can make it on the main subject of the image. With portraits, focus on the eyes.

**4. Take multiple shots** to avoid the disaster of having the only shot you took being unuseable. This gives you more options to pick the best shot for your purposes. Unusable shots can be deleted from the camera to restore some capacity.

**5. Document** your photos whenever possible. Who is in the photo, where and when taken? What is the story here that makes the shot important or interesting? Who is a contact person for more information? A note or audio file on your phone is one way to preserve the data, or keep a small notebook with you to record the information. Failing that, write it down as soon as possible afterwards while it is still fresh in your mind.

We look forward to receiving any photos or stories from the Brethren. Don’t hesitate to send them in. We’ll look after the cropping, editing, etc., but without the raw material, we cannot provide you with news and pictures of all the interesting things you and your Brethren are doing in Alberta.

## Part One

# To Await A Time With Patience: Explaining The Chamber of Reflection

WBro Andrew Hammer, Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22

Revised in part from unpublished notes for 'Observing the Craft'

As one observes the increasing interest among Masons in the history and meaning of the various ceremonies of the Craft, one notices that one of the most popular objects of that interest is the Chamber of Reflection, a room meant to be used for the placement of a candidate before the commencement of his initiation. The purpose of such a room is to give the candidate a period of time to meditate and reflect on what he is about to undertake. As this idea has recently become more intriguing to Brethren, it behooves us to seek some kind of clarification amongst ourselves as to what this procedure is, and why it might be considered important to the initiation of a man into Freemasonry.

This kind of ceremony — of preparation for initiation by means of a period of isolation — has been with us since the beginning of recorded history in any number of basic initiatic rites. It is not anything strange or alien to the human experience. It is, however, incredibly transformative in the sense that it allows the candidate to put away the everyday world he left behind when he entered the temple, and focus his mind properly for what he is about to experience. That is what we ask of the postulant in any case.

We ask him to reflect on what he is about to do and why, so that he knows he does it of his own free will and accord, and therefore the Lodge can know that as well. Truly, in a world where so many people do things senselessly, without thinking, we need reflection and contemplation before our actions.

But the idea of such a contemplative space is rooted not only in the practices of most initiatic ceremonies; it is also rooted in the earliest days of the Craft.

The Masonic exposé *Jachin and Boaz*, published in London in 1762, describes the use of what clearly appears to be a chamber in those Lodges working under the Premier Grand Lodge of England, as follows (bold text added for emphasis):

*Soon after the Master asks, if the Gentleman proposed last Lodge-Night, is ready to be made; and on being answered in the Affirmative, he orders the Wardens to go out and prepare the Person, who is generally waiting*

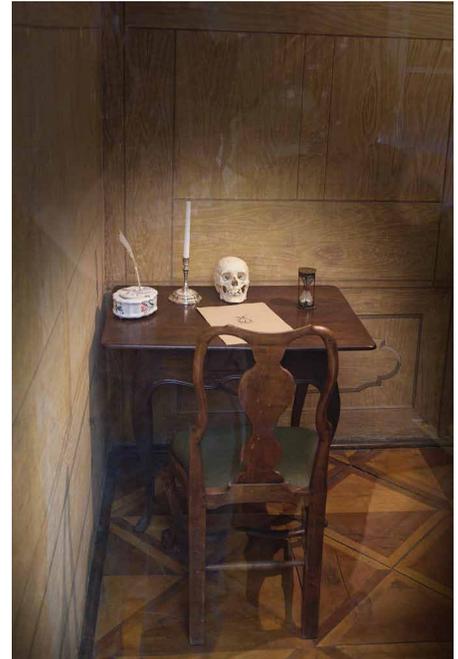
*in a Room at some Distance from the Lodge-Room, by himself, being left there by his Friend who proposed him. He is conducted into another Room, which is totally dark; and then asked, whether he is conscious of having the Vocation necessary to be received? On answering Yes, he is asked his Name, Surname, and Profession. When he has answered these Questions, whatever he has about him made of Metal is off, as Buckles, Buttons, Rings, Boxes, and even the Money in his Pocket taken away. Then they make him uncover his Right Knee and put his Left Foot with his Shoe on in to a Slipper; hoodwink him with a Handkerchief, and leave him to his Reflection for about half an Hour. The Chamber is also guarded within and without, by some of the Brethren, who have drawn Swords in their hands, to keep o all Strangers, in case any should dare approach. The Person who proposed the Candidate, stays in the Room with him; but they are not permitted to ask any Questions, or converse together. During this Silence, and while the Candidate is preparing, the Brethren in the Lodge are putting everything in Order for his Reception there...*

This text would seem to indicate that the room is a simply appointed one, 'which is totally dark', and where the Brethren 'leave [the candidate] to his reflections for about half an hour'. More important, it indicates that a chamber of this type, employed ceremonially, was likely well-known to the London Brethren of William Preston's day, which might have inspired that prime mover of the Craft to write those words so well-known in many jurisdictions:

*Wisdom seeks the secret shade, the lonely cell designed for contemplation...*

Such a phrase might be obscure to Masons today, its meaning unclear. However, it would not have been so to our Masonic forefathers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Brethren who would have known instantly what one form of that 'lonely cell' alluded to.

So if we know that this kind of pro-



*The Chamber of Reflection at the Masonic Museum in Rosenau Castle, Austria.*

cedure was with us from the early days of speculative Masonry, what happened to it? How did it disappear from our organisational memory? Where did the room go? Putting aside the usurpation of the procedure by any appendant or concordant bodies, one can find a rather uneventful, if speculative, explanation of the loss. We can find it right within our Lodges.

Note that in the description of the chamber above, all of the other aspects of preparation for the initiation take place in that same room. What we are talking about, then, is what we now know as the candidate preparation room. It has been lazily degraded over time in both its purpose and appearance, thus making it totally unrecognizable to the Brethren as a chamber of reflection, and therefore forgotten entirely for what it was intended to be.

Far from being a mere dressing room, an ancillary storage space, or a chat room for the officers, this space is meant to be for the candidate. It exists to literally prepare him in exactly the manner suggested above, and our neglect of this more spiritual and psychological

preparation has gone so far off course now that some Brethren find themselves looking for other physical spaces in our temples to create this important period of time for the prospective initiate.

But what is in this space? What should be in this space? The proper restoration of this practice requires consideration of those questions. In some obediences of European Masonry, whose elements have been imported by a handful of North American Lodges, the concept of the chamber has been expanded into an over-worked assemblage which can end up having more cryptic items in it than the Lodge room itself. This is not as it should be.

A chamber of reflection is not just someplace where one puts everything that one thinks is mystical, to the extent that the room is dressed up like a Hallowe'en display. It is meant to be dark, and minimally appointed, so that the candidate may be caused to reflect upon himself, not other items in the room. Of course, that is not to say that nothing should be in the room. If we are to be consistent with our ritual, however, then nothing should be placed

in a chamber of reflection that is not in some sense explained to the candidate as he receives the degrees.

One method would be to have a simple wooden table and chair, on which is placed a single candle, an hourglass, and an emblem of mortality. The candle symbolises life as well as light, the emblem of mortality death, and the hourglass the interval between them, in both a literal and symbolic sense. All of these things will be explained to the candidate in due time through our rituals, and in one sense, he has before him all of the lessons of Freemasonry, in a way that neither confounds nor reveals, but simply and significantly educes.

This admittedly minimalistic approach is important because the true force of a chamber of reflection is not in what is in the room, but what is in the individual. The chamber is intended to confront you with you, not to distract you with an array of curious implements, which, while they may have genuine validity at some point in a person's contemplative path, do not necessarily belong in the particular place and time allotted to a chamber of reflection.

Also important is the individual's ability to leave the room of his own free will and accord, in the same way that he would enter the Lodge. The use of a chamber of reflection is perhaps the only accommodation we make to a profane, not only to provide him his full freedom of choice in the situation, but to emphasise the fact that his Masonic journey is in the truest sense, an internal one that ultimately, he alone must control. He is given those few minutes before the initiation to reaffirm—to himself—the choice he has made to join the Craft. The decision should not be taken lightly, and therefore, he should have one final chance to privately, silently, and solemnly confirm that decision.

*[Ed. In part two, WBro Hammer discusses the role of the Lodge and the Brethren in the preparation of the candidate for initiation. WBro Hammer's book, Observing the Craft: The Pursuit of Excellence in Masonic Labour and Observance, is available from [observingthecraft.com](http://observingthecraft.com), and [mindhivebooks.com](http://mindhivebooks.com) ]*



