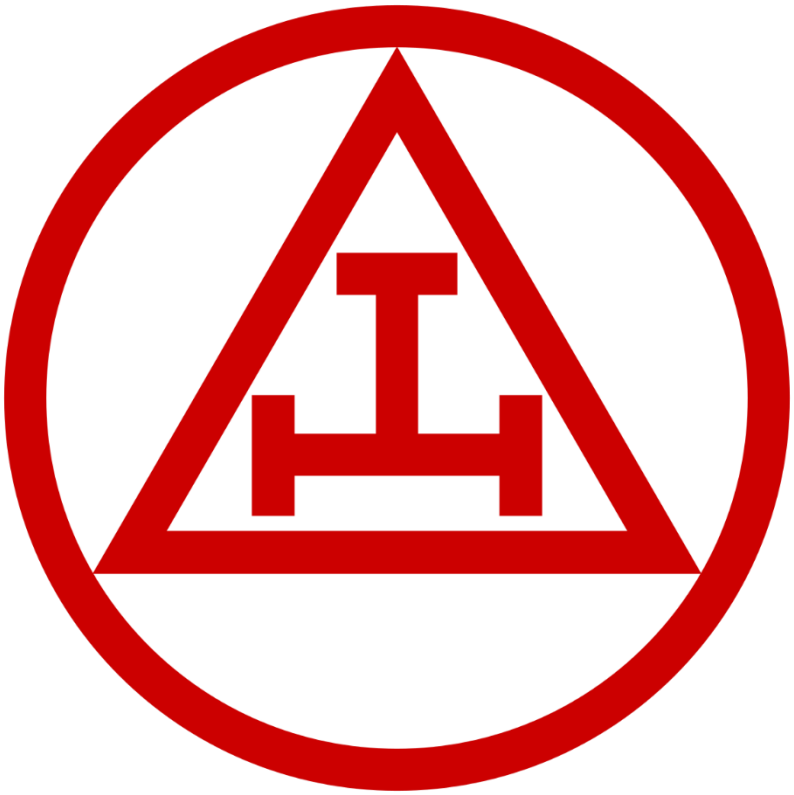


Grand Chapter Address – 2026

Artificial Intelligence and the Path to Enlightenment

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The Digital Trestle Board: The Utility of Artificial Intelligence in Masonic and Esoteric Research

The study of Freemasonry and esoteric traditions often involves navigating a labyrinth of historical records, symbolic lexicons, and fragmented archives. As researchers move further into the twenty-first century, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative "digital trestle board," offering tools that enhance the precision, accessibility, and scope of such scholarship. While the "secrets" of our traditions were once guarded by physical distance and linguistic barriers, AI now facilitates a more rigorous analysis of the "hidden patterns" that define the Western esoteric tradition.

One of the primary benefits of AI in this field is its ability to process vast amounts of digitized historical data. Freemasonry, in particular, possesses a sprawling history of lodge minutes, orations, and correspondence that remains understudied due to its volume. AI-powered Natural Language Processing (NLP) allows scholars to perform sentiment analysis and thematic mapping across centuries of texts in seconds. This capability enables researchers to trace the evolution of specific moral allegories or political shifts within the fraternity that might be invisible to a human reader limited by time and cognitive bandwidth.

Furthermore, AI serves as a powerful bridge for linguistic and paleographic challenges. Many foundational esoteric texts are written in Latin, Greek, or early modern dialects with complex shorthand. Machine learning models, trained on historical manuscripts, can now transcribe and translate these documents with increasing accuracy. For the Masonic researcher, this means that archives from the Grand Orient of France or the German Aufklärung are no longer inaccessible due to language barriers, fostering a more global and comparative understanding of the Craft.

Finally, the use of AI in generating scholarly papers provides a structural advantage. Esoteric topics are notoriously dense and prone to wandering prose. AI assistance can help organize these complex abstract concepts—such as the relationship between Hermeticism and speculative Masonry—into clear, logical frameworks. By leveraging AI as a research partner, scholars can ensure that their arguments are grounded in the extensive data sets now available, preserving the intellectual rigor of the field while embracing the efficiency of the digital age.[1]

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[1] Generated by Google Bard Gemini on February 13, 2026 based on the prompt “generate a one page essay on why AI should be used to research esoteric papers on Freemasonry.”

My dear Companions – the preceding four paragraphs were generated by the Google Bard Gemini generative AI engine in a matter of seconds.

In the several roles I play in Masonry, I am frequently called upon to review, advise, and mentor fellow Masonic scholars in developing their work. In the past year, I've noticed something that I find a bit concerning: a rising instance of Brothers coming to me with work possessing a tone and character that diverges from what I've observed in their prior works. Oftentimes, this is quite subtle and manifests simply in perfect grammar and sentence structure. I'm not suggesting that the Florida public school system does not provide a solid basis for English composition. Far from it, but what I'm seeing is grammatical perfection – not only in elements such as punctuation and sentence structure, but also in such things as citations and formatting; additionally, the tone and rhythm of the piece are usually different from a person's natural style of writing as well -- Although the introductory portion of this talk did align well with my usual writing style, and I have heard that Pax's wife can't distinguish AI writing from his own.

It is true that a top goal of the many Masonic research organizations that I participate in is the generation of scholarly material for the consumption, enjoyment, and enlightenment of our Brothers, which AI is bountifully capable of compiling, but on the other side of the coin, the very act of researching and writing a piece of work, not only develops skills within the crafter, but almost invariably leads to an "ah-ha!" moment – a moment where the writer catches a glimmer of Light that they had not previously seen. This "ah-ha" moment, at least for me, many times opens up a new page and leads to gaining further knowledge, understanding, and Light in Masonry… and in life.

Then, Now, and Tomorrow

Indeed, our digital age has streamlined the entire process of research and has made the job far easier than it had been in the past. Not long ago, a researcher might have to visit a number of book stores or libraries in search of reference material – perhaps to even make pilgrimages to some of the legendary Meccas of rare and obscure esoteric tomes such as the library at the House of the Temple in Washington DC or the Scottish Rite Supreme Council in Lexington, MA. Nowadays, the internet and the extensive availability of online book sellers have alleviated that challenge and while the proliferation and availability of books have led to a general increase in publicly available esoteric knowledge, ***digitally*** available content in the form of searchable PDFs or webpages has introduced a new hazard. You see, my observation is that by reading an actual, physical book in search of a particular nugget of knowledge, the researcher is likely to come across a number of other unexpected pearls that might contribute directly to their present work – ***or*** perhaps even open them up to a new page of learning, however with digital search engines that allow us

to precisely extract a targeted segment, those **pearls** often remain "**shellfish-ly**" embedded in their hosts, never to see the light of day.

Our Companion and soon to be Most Excellent Grand High Priest, Garry Paxinos, in an article published in the Lodge of Research's issue 13 of Further Light, writes that large language models essentially "learn" about the foundational content that comprises its "mind" through repetitive iterations as a means to develop context and increase "understanding" or "synapses," so to speak. AI ingests massive volumes of essentially **all** of the electronically formatted data available from the internet or privately sourced networks, and that whole of information becomes integrated into the "mind" of AI. That foundation naturally includes Masonic knowledge. So, much like our Masonic initiates will study, memorize, and exemplify our successive degrees, each iteration performed by an AI engine similarly results in a refinement and greater "understanding" of the content. Like all digital technologies, AI Large language models benefit from Moore's Law which basically states that computing power doubles annually. An AI research resource known as the Model Evaluation & Threat Research (METR) report[2] suggests that AI's ability to complete complex tasks has been doubling even more rapidly, at approximately every seven months as of early 2026 – and it is likely to keep up this pace for some time into the future.

Currently, we have reached a point with this rapidly advancing generative artificial intelligence capability where even rudimentary, targeted research by AI's biological counterparts (us) – beyond just crafting an instructional prompt for the AI engine, has become an optional point for producing a paper or even performing QA validation on works created by the tool. AI has given us the ability to create wonderful and rich content, simply by asking a large language model a few questions in the form of those AI prompts with only our imagination being the limit to what can be produced. The content that is delivered contains the vast published wisdom of the ages translated from myriad languages, arranged in a logical and clear manner conforming to whatever research paper format you might wish.[3]

How Do We Compete? Or Should We?

I still recall a stirring moment in a 1984 movie when my dear Auntie Sarah Connor was informed:

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[2] Model Evaluation & Threat Research, or METR conducts research and evaluations to improve public understanding of the capabilities and risks of frontier AI systems. METR.org

[3] The AI engine can even be asked to conform to the Quarry Project Style of formatting for a collegiate-level research paper – and it will do it dutifully. Quarry Project Style, by the way, is a derivative of Kate Turabian's Chicago style of research paper formatting dictated in *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 8th ed,* which style is a universally requested format for Masonic publications.

> Listen, and understand! That Terminator is out there. It can't be bargained with. It can't be reasoned with. It doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear! And it absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead![4]

This example may be a little extreme – but from a more practical viewpoint, how can a mere human being compete with this kind of opponent, and what does a reliance on AI do to our Craft overall? I'm pretty sure that my poor brain is not doubling in capacity every seven months. More likely, I've ***lost*** computing power at some level over the years, and without regularly exercising my cognitive skills, I would likely experience a more rapid decline going forward.

Think about this on a more global Masonic scale and imagine what might happen if our infamous ruffians were granted the Master's Word prior to being found worthy of being deemed masterful in our Craft. What might happen if those unskilled ruffians were given the charter to build the finest cathedrals dedicated to our Supreme High Priest of Heaven and Earth? Those cathedrals might very well collapse for a lack of a proper knowledge of architecture – or even the skill of crafting a perfect ashlar or keystone. Maybe those temples would never be built at all.

Does AI have an Achilles Heel?

Putting aside the potential effect of a reliance on AI for Masonic scholarly work, it can be argued that AI generated content is certainly of good quality and vastly suited for presentation to our Brothers who thirst for Masonic Light. In my experience, however, I've observed that it cannot provide a substitute for certain essential elements that make Masonry what it has been for untold ages. I assert that AI is missing the human element. The story. Emotion. I'm not alone in the opinion that AI generated Masonic works is informative, but flat. I think I can fairly say that AI is missing the essence of God.

Conclusion

Moving forward, we need to realize that AI is here, and unavoidable. There is tremendous opportunity inherent in its access to previously inaccessible knowledge – but it is a double-edged sword. It represents a unique and invaluable tool that can help us create outstanding content with little more than an inquisitive mind to ask the proper questions. It literally has the collective knowledge of all ages and all cultures integrated within it.

Many good-intentioned Craftsmen will undoubtedly succumb to the temptation to sit down on the brow of a hill to rest and refresh themselves while they watch AI write papers for them, but at what cost does that extract from our cadre of scholars, and our living

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[4] Quoted from *The Terminator*, Orion Pictures, 1984

storehouses of esoteric wisdom? I assert that we should be cautious to NOT pursue leisure over labor, as this does little or nothing to sharpen the saw of our intellect. Benedictine monks of antiquity would assert "laborare est orare," or to "work is to pray,"[5] and as an Illustrious Brother and friend of mine once said, "man does not learn from joy."

AI directed content creation is inevitable; it is also arguably immensely beneficial, but as stewards of our Craft, we should see that we use these tools judiciously and not allow ourselves to become lazy in our craft, lest our skills decay and we become unable to instruct future generations to craft that singular, peculiar stone so essentially necessary for completing that temple dedicated to the Supreme High Priest of Heaven and Earth.

[5] Pike, Albert, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, 2nd annotated edition, 2nd printing, (Supreme Council, AASR SMJ, Washington, DC, 2016), p 417-418

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We may have one point of salvation: AI can only base its product on documented material, and Masons have historically been considered a tight-lipped bunch, unwilling to cut, carve, write, print, etc. This suggests that with an AI tool that is hoodwinked to the true beauty of the lodge room, so to speak, it will never have been exposed to the Master's Word. But that, in itself becomes a risk, with good-intending Masons short-cutting their way to mastery may lose their connection with what makes us not only the world's oldest memorization club, but also without our unimpaired traditions and landmarks, our Word may indeed become lost to posterity.