The Free Gardener

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Wisdom of Falling Leaves

Autumn, the Soul, and the Quiet Lessons of Free Gardening

The Universe Within

A Conversation With Sam Torode

The 1st Symposium

St. Fiacre #11

Beyond Lodge Walls:
Exploring Virtual Lodges

Pulling Weeds with
Mabon R. Finch

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THE WISDOM OF FALLING LEAVES

Autumn, the Soul, and the Quiet Lessons of the Free Gardener

By The Free Gardener Editorial Committee

There is something wonderfully strange about autumn. Every year, the trees put on their finest colors, give us one last spectacular performance, and then casually drop everything they have spent months creating. No hesitation. No apparent regret. Not even a farewell party. And somehow, we call this beautiful.

Have you ever wondered why we admire this process in nature but resist it so fiercely in ourselves. We celebrate the changing leaves, yet struggle with the changes in our own lives. We admire the tree that stands bare against the November sky, but fear the vulnerability of standing without the things that once defined us.

Perhaps autumn has something to teach us. And perhaps, as Free Gardeners, we are especially well-equipped to understand its lessons.



The Garden Beyond the Garden

Within the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners, the garden has a meaning far greater than the cultivation of flowers, fruits, and vegetables. It represents the human condition itself. The soil is our character, the seeds are our thoughts and intentions, and the harvest is the result of how we have lived.

We are, in a sense, both the garden and the gardener.

This understanding invites us into the realm of metaphysics: the exploration of existence, reality, and the deeper nature of life. It asks us to look beyond what the eyes can see and consider what the visible world might reveal about the invisible one.

A tree, after all, is more than wood, bark, and leaves. It is a living record of seasons endured, storms survived, and growth accomplished. Could the same not be said of mankind? Autumn presents an especially fascinating chapter in this great book of nature.

The Harvest of Our Actions

For operative gardeners, autumn is traditionally a season of gathering. What was planted in spring and nurtured throughout summer has finally reached its conclusion. Some crops have flourished, while others may have failed to grow.

There is a certain honesty in the harvest. The garden does not flatter its keeper. In the metaphorical garden of life, our harvest is found in our actions, relationships, decisions, and accomplishments. Have we cultivated patience?

Have we extended kindness? Have we strengthened our friendships and supported our communities? Have we allowed wisdom to grow where ignorance once took root?

Of course, life is not always fair enough to reward every good deed with an immediate good result. Even the most careful gardener must contend with drought, storms, and the occasional rabbit with expensive tastes. Nevertheless, autumn encourages us to examine what we have cultivated and what we might do differently in the seasons ahead.

For the Free Gardener, this reflection is not an exercise in self-criticism. It is an opportunity for moral improvement.

The Sacred Art of Letting Go

Perhaps autumn's greatest lesson is that growth sometimes requires release. A tree does not cling to its leaves simply because they were once useful. As daylight decreases and temperatures fall, it gradually withdraws resources from them and prepares for winter. What appears to be a loss is also part of its survival.

Metaphysically, this process offers a powerful image of personal transformation.

We carry many things through life: old grudges, outdated beliefs, unhealthy attachments, and expectations that no longer serve us. Some were once necessary. Others may never have been very useful, but we became attached to them anyway.

Like a gardener clearing dead plants from a bed, we must occasionally make room for something new. This is not always comfortable. The familiar, even when harmful, can feel safer than the unknown. Yet autumn reminds us that letting go is not necessarily a defeat. Sometimes it is an act of growth.

There is a quiet courage in knowing when a season has ended.

A Season for Fellowship

Autumn also reminds us that no garden thrives through isolation. The natural world exists through countless relationships. Trees shelter wildlife. Fallen leaves enrich the earth. Fungi help break down organic matter, while insects and other creatures contribute to the continuing cycle of life.

Nature is interconnected, even if its inhabitants do not always behave like the most agreeable lodge members. Human communities are much the same. Within Free Gardening, fellowship offers more than companionship. It creates opportunities for mutual encouragement, shared learning, and service. We grow through our relationships with others, just as a healthy garden depends upon the balance of its living parts.

As the days shorten and people gather indoors, autumn invites us to renew these connections. It is an ideal season to extend a helping hand, reconnect with an old friend, or offer warmth to someone experiencing a difficult chapter of life. After all, what value is there in cultivating our own character if its fruits are never shared?

The Beauty of Change

There is one final lesson autumn seems determined to teach us, whether we welcome it or not: nothing in the natural world remains exactly as it is. The brilliant maple leaf will fade. The last rose will fall. The warm afternoon will surrender to a cold evening. And yet, we do not consider autumn a failure of nature.

We recognize its beauty precisely because it is temporary. This thought has occupied philosophers and spiritual thinkers for centuries. If all things change, perhaps wisdom lies not in resisting change but in learning to live meaningfully within it.

For the Free Gardener, the lesson is both simple and profound. Our task is not to preserve every season indefinitely, but to tend faithfully to the season entrusted to us.

We plant when it is time to plant, harvest when it is time to harvest, and rest when the work requires rest.

And when the leaves begin to fall, we remember that the garden is not finished. It is merely entering another stage of its existence.

The Mystery Beneath the Soil

One of the most interesting things about autumn is that so much of its work happens out of sight.

While the landscape appears to be winding down, the earth remains active. Fallen leaves begin to decompose, returning nutrients to the soil. Roots continue their hidden work. Seeds and bulbs wait beneath the ground for conditions that will eventually encourage new growth. To the casual observer, the garden may appear lifeless. To the gardener, it is preparing. Here we encounter one of nature's most intriguing metaphysical lessons: *not everything that is meaningful is immediately visible.*

Human development often follows a similar pattern. We may experience periods when our progress seems slow, our direction uncertain, or our efforts unrecognized. Yet reflection, study, patience, and quiet perseverance may be preparing us for something we cannot yet see. The Free Gardener understands that cultivation is not limited to the moments when flowers bloom. Much of the gardener's most important work takes place before the first blossom appears.

Perhaps our own quiet seasons deserve more respect.

The Gardener's Autumn Reflection

As we watch the leaves collect along the paths and the trees gradually reveal their bare branches, we may find ourselves reconsidering what it means to grow. Perhaps maturity is not simply the accumulation of knowledge, possessions, or accomplishments. Perhaps it is also the ability to recognize what must be released, what deserves to be preserved, and what should be planted for the future.

Autumn teaches us that endings and beginnings are not always opposites. Very often, they are parts of the same process. ***The falling leaf nourishes the soil.*** The quiet earth prepares for spring. And the thoughtful gardener understands that even in apparent decline, nature continues its work.

So, as the season changes, we offer a small challenge to our fellow Free Gardeners: examine your personal garden. Celebrate what has grown. Gather the wisdom of your experiences. Remove what no longer serves a good purpose. And consider what seeds of virtue you wish to plant when the next season arrives.

For the deepest lesson of autumn may be this:

The wise gardener does not mourn every falling leaf. They understand that what we release today may help nourish what we become tomorrow.


ANCIENT ORDER OF FREE GARDENERS
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Beyond

LODGE WALLS:

EXPLORING VIRTUAL LODGES

As the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners embraces the digital age with Eight-Winds Lodge No. 15, we discover that preserving tradition and welcoming change may be the perfect ingredients for a flourishing fraternity.

For centuries, fraternal organizations have gathered behind lodge doors to share knowledge, build friendships, and work toward the improvement of themselves and their communities. But what happens when someone seeking that fellowship lives hundreds of miles from the nearest lodge? What about the individual for whom long-distance travel is simply not financially practical? Or the member who has relocated to an area where a lodge does not exist (yet)?

Should geography determine one's opportunity to belong?

For the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners Inc. (AOFG), the answer is becoming increasingly clear: the spirit of fraternity does not have to be confined by the walls of a building. With the commissioning of Eight-Winds Lodge No. 15, a virtual lodge designed to connect members across geographical boundaries, the Order is embracing the idea that modern technology and centuries-old traditions can not only coexist but help one another flourish.

Old Roots, New Branches

I must admit, there is something amusing about a centuries-old fraternity embracing video conferences, digital libraries, online meetings, and... (brace yourselves) ... virtual degrees! (Cues ominous music and the collective gasp of traditionalists.)

Yet adaptation has always been part of our history. Free Gardening began in seventeenth-century Scotland, where working gardeners established societies for mutual assistance, fellowship, and the sharing of knowledge. Over time, the fraternity developed beyond its occupational origins, transforming gardening into a beautiful metaphor for cultivating character, wisdom, and virtue.

Technology provides the meeting place. The members must provide the spirit.

From One Seed, Many Lodges

I remember when Bro. Simeon Queen and I traveled from different regions of the United States to Alberta, Canada, to receive our degrees. I was fortunate enough to make that journey without placing a burden on my family. Others were not so fortunate.

Some interested seekers postponed joining because of distance and family obligations. Others abandoned the idea altogether, while some found their way into other fraternal organizations. But what if we could eliminate those barriers?

The seeds of this approach were planted through Red Oak Lodge No. 4, inspired by its Canadian mother lodge, Mount of Olives Lodge No. 1 (formerly No. 30/3), which used a hybrid setting to confer degrees upon its initial members.



[Members of Mount of Olives Lodge No. 30/3 (now No.1) in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada]

When Red Oak later introduced virtual degrees for seekers unable to travel to New Jersey, it helped open the gate to remarkable growth. The AOFG in the United States grew from three lodges to twelve, including a research lodge, St. Fiacre Lodge No. 11. This growth happened over the course of one year. In many instances, that growth began with a single seeker who received the degrees, shared the experience with others, and eventually helped establish a lodge in their own community. Eight-Winds Lodge seeks to build upon that experience and contribute to the growth of our Order and the individuals who join.

The virtual lodge is not intended to replace traditional constituent lodges. Instead, it can serve as a nursery for future lodges, providing members with education, mentorship, leadership experience, and support necessary to establish Free Gardener lodges closer to home. Today's distant member may become tomorrow's founding Worthy Master.

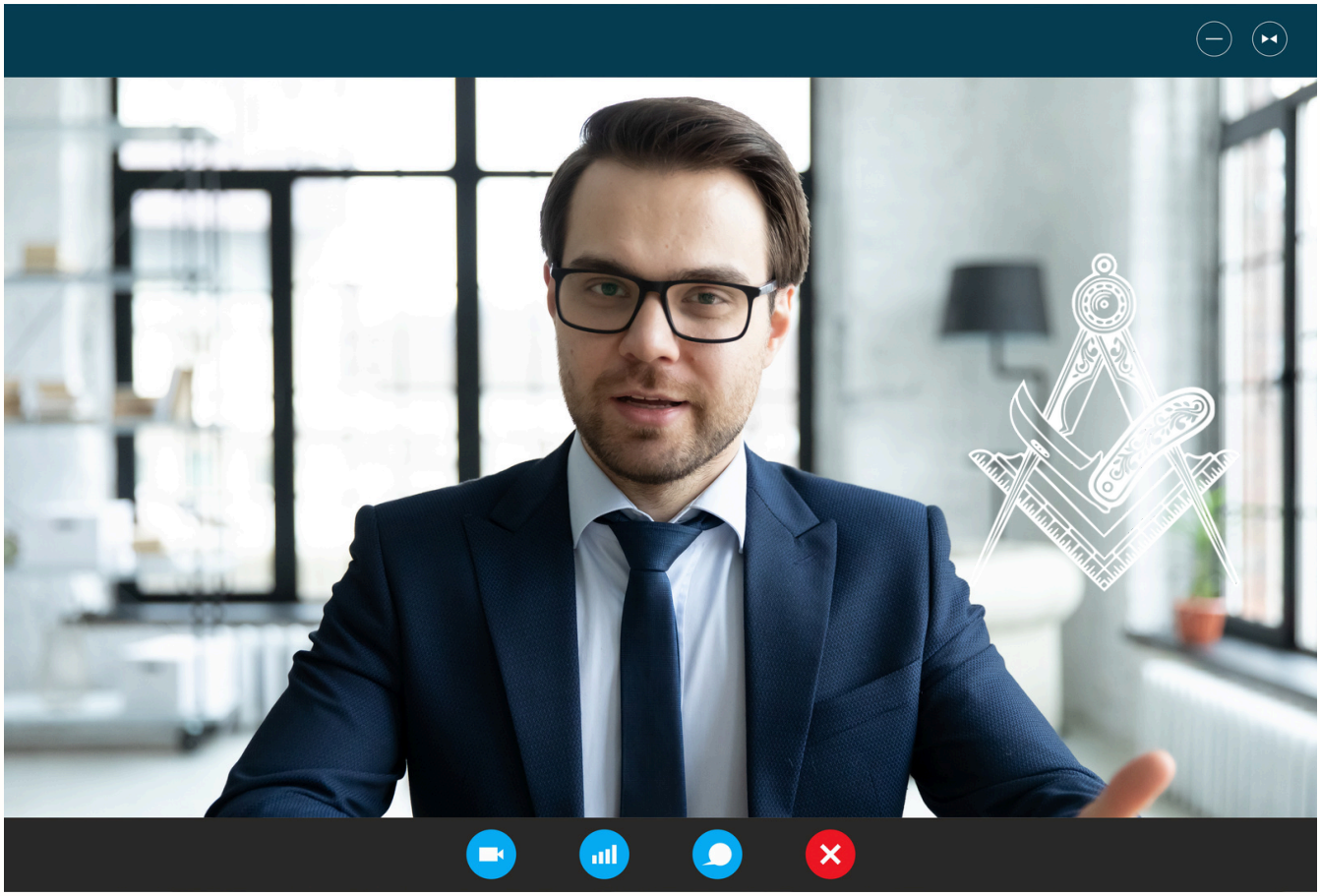
Preserving Tradition Without Fear of Change

Naturally, technology raises some fair questions. Can solemn ceremonies retain their meaning online? Can genuine fraternal bonds form across a screen? Are we sacrificing something important in the name of convenience?

These concerns deserve consideration. There are experiences technology cannot fully reproduce: the atmosphere of a ceremonial lodge, the symbolism of its surroundings, and the simple pleasure of shaking a fellow member's hand. Those traditions deserve preservation. But preservation should not be confused with resistance to every new idea. If our predecessors had refused to adapt, Free Gardening might never have evolved beyond its original occupational roots.

The distinction lies in understanding what must remain unchanged and what may evolve.
Love, Wisdom, Harmony, and Truth do not lose their meaning because they are discussed through a computer screen. Encouragement is no less sincere when offered during a video call. Knowledge is no less valuable when shared through an online lecture.

Our responsibility is not to modernize simply for the sake of being modern or for numbers, but to ensure that innovation strengthens our purpose rather than diluting it, while remaining true to the idea of quality over quantity.



Fraternity Has Already Gone Digital

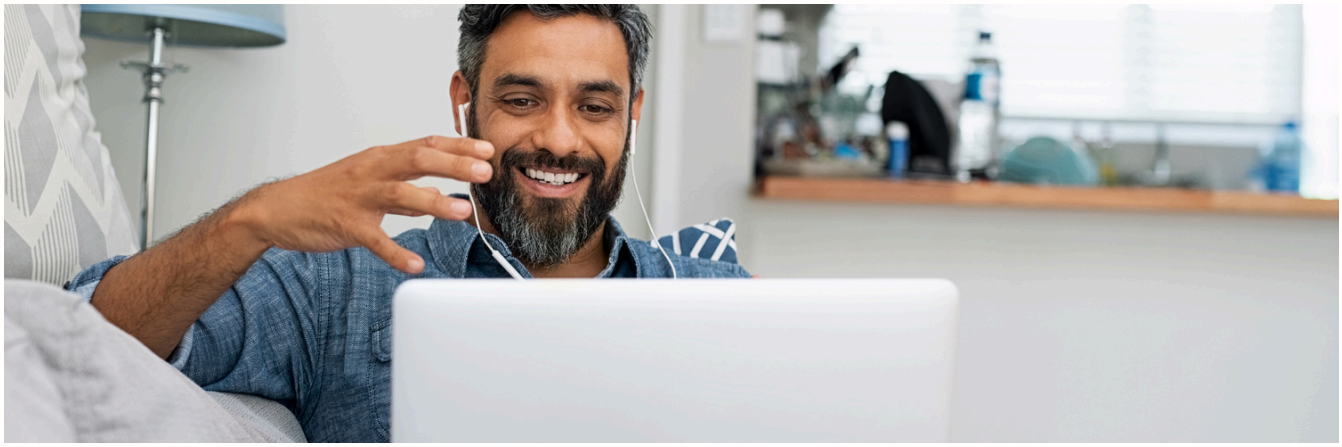
The idea of an internet-based lodge is hardly new. Several respected fraternal organizations have already found ways to use technology without abandoning their traditions.

In 1998, Internet Lodge No. 9659 was established under the United Grand Lodge of England. Its members use digital communication to exchange knowledge and strengthen international fellowship while continuing to gather in person for formal lodge meetings three times a year.

The Danish Sisterhood of America provides another example through Tivoli Lodge No. 300, established in 2002 for members living far from existing lodges. Its virtual activities have included educational presentations, cultural programs, and online fellowship.

Similarly, the Sons of Norway offers a virtual membership option through Spirit of the New Century Lodge No. 999, connecting individuals who may not have access to a nearby physical lodge.

These organizations remind us that the method of gathering can change without changing the meaning of gathering.



A Garden for Tomorrow

At its core, Free Gardening reminds us that personal growth requires patience, cooperation, and care. A flourishing garden benefits from many elements, just as a lodge benefits from the diverse talents and experiences of its members.

Eight-Winds Lodge No. 15 provides an opportunity for individuals separated by distance to contribute to a shared mission. One member may offer historical knowledge, another leadership experience, and another a fresh perspective on the challenges facing modern society. Together, they cultivate something greater than themselves.

As the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners continues to grow, our future depends not only on protecting the traditions entrusted to us but also on finding meaningful ways to share them with those who follow. The future of fraternalism does not have be a choice between the old ways and the new. It can be an intentional union of both. Our forebears did not plant gardens merely to admire the seeds. They planted them so that others might enjoy their beauty and benefit from their fruits.

And if the eight winds can carry our seeds to distant soil, imagine how much larger and more beautiful our garden might become.

Submitted by Bro. Wilbert Lemuel

Sources and Further Reading

Ancient Order of Free Gardeners, Inc. (n.d.). Our history. https://www.thefreegardeners.org/history

Danish Sisterhood of America. (n.d.). Lodge No. 300, Tivoli (virtual option).

https://www.danishsisterhood.org/newpage022d46ee

Internet Lodge No. 9659. (n.d.). About us. https://internet.lodge.org.uk/index.php/about-us

Sons of Norway. (n.d.). Join a lodge. https://www.sofn.com/join-a-lodge/

First Flower of Los Angeles

ANCIENT ORDER OF FREE GARDENERS

Presented By: Gabriel Iglesias, WM

Our Mission

The mission of First Flower of Los Angeles Lodge is to build and strengthen the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners through fellowship, horticulture, conservation, education, and service to our community.

As Free Gardeners, we believe there is purpose in tending what has been neglected. We labor alongside local conservation organizations and our neighboring communities to protect native plants, carefully prune invasive species, restore healthy ecosystems, and return beauty and purpose to gardens and public green spaces.

Through this work, we seek not only to cultivate the land, but also to cultivate fellowship. By working beside others, sharing the traditions and values of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners, and inviting those who share our principles to join us, we hope to grow a strong and lasting Lodge rooted in service.

Our labor reaches beyond the soil. As we cultivate the garden outside, we are reminded to cultivate the garden within. The patience required to plant, the discipline required to prune, and the care required to nurture the earth reflect the same work we undertake within ourselves.

Through stewardship, education, fellowship, and service, we strive to leave both the land and one another better than we found them—planting seeds today that may flourish for generations to come.

Our Goals

1. **BUILD THE LODGE**
   Strengthen First Flower of Los Angeles by developing an active membership united through fellowship, service, horticulture, and the traditions of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners.
2. **BUILD CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS**
   Develop lasting relationships with local conservation groups, horticultural organizations, public gardens, parks, and community organizations by volunteering and laboring alongside them.
3. **SERVE THROUGH HORTICULTURE**
   Participate in hands-on projects involving native plants, gardening, restoration, beautification, and the responsible pruning of invasive species.
4. **INTRODUCE OTHERS TO THE AOFG**
   Use our community service and conservation work as an opportunity to introduce people to the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners and encourage those who share our values to learn more and consider joining.
5. **ESTABLISH OUR OWN GARDEN**
   Work toward securing and establishing a permanent Lodge garden—a place where members can practice horticulture, preserve native plants, educate the community, gather in fellowship, and put the principles of Free Gardening into practice.
6. **ESTABLISH A LASTING LODGE**
   Build the membership, partnerships, resources, traditions, and community presence necessary for First Flower of Los Angeles to become a strong, recognized, and enduring Lodge for future generations.

The Long-Term Vision

Labor in the garden. Serve the community. Build fellowship. Grow the Lodge.

Our ultimate goal is to establish a permanent home and garden for First Flower of Los Angeles—a place where the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners can take root, grow, and continue its work for generations to come.

Pulling Weeds

A LESSON FROM THE GARDEN WITHIN

Wilbert Lemuel: A Conversation with Mabon Rhys Finch

Sometimes the most interesting conversations begin unexpectedly. In my case, it was an old Facebook post about pulling weeds.

While researching metaphorical gardening, an important part of the philosophy of Free Gardeners, I came across a post by Mabon Rhys Finch describing his experience gardening at Hildegard House, a Catholic Worker community. Finch described how ordinary tasks like pulling weeds and preparing garden beds could become spiritual experiences. He ended his reflection by suggesting that Peter Maurin would be pleased.

Naturally, I had to find out who Peter Maurin was. One historical rabbit hole later, I reached out to Finch, who graciously agreed to share his experiences.
A Movement Rooted in Service

During our conversation, Finch introduced me to the Catholic Worker Movement, founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.
As Finch explained, Day emphasized houses of hospitality that assist people in need, while Maurin encouraged a return to the land through farming, meaningful labor, and community living.

At Hildegard House, where Finch works, the focus is on supporting immigrants and asylum seekers. Daily responsibilities include cooking, cleaning, providing transportation, and maintaining a garden during the warmer months. I found the movement's emphasis on community and service particularly interesting, especially considering the benevolent principles of Free Gardening.

The Importance of Pulling Weeds
Finch explained that while others generally plant vegetables, his main responsibility is removing weeds. He described the work as something of a love-hate relationship. Getting covered in dirt and repeatedly pulling weeds is not particularly enjoyable, but the longer he works, the more fulfilling it becomes. That observation brought our conversation directly to the heart of metaphorical gardening.

Within the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners, we compare the human character to a garden. Our virtues represent the plants we wish to cultivate, while our vices, negative habits, and harmful influences are the weeds that threaten their growth. Resentment can prevent us from finding peace. Envy can keep us from appreciating what we have. Pride may stop us from accepting good advice, while fear and self-doubt can prevent us from pursuing opportunities.

Like weeds, these things can quietly take root and occupy more space than we realize.
Sometimes making room for personal growth means first letting go of something that has been holding us back. And just as weeds often return, personal growth requires ongoing attention.

Finding Purpose in Simple Things

Our conversation also touched on how technology can distance us from nature and one another. Finch suggested that simple outdoor activities, like pulling weeds, can provide a sense of peace that we may not find while endlessly scrolling through social media.
I had to agree, although I appreciated the irony that Facebook was responsible for our conversation in the first place!

Finch also shared that while walking in nature can help him during difficult moments, gardening offers something slightly different: a sense of fulfillment.
I found that distinction meaningful. Not everything worthwhile brings immediate happiness. Sometimes satisfaction comes from knowing we have accomplished something useful, even when the work is uncomfortable.

The Garden Is Never Finished

What I appreciated most about speaking with Finch was discovering the common ground between his experiences and the philosophy of Free Gardening. The Catholic Worker commitment to hospitality, service, and meaningful labor reminds us that our efforts should benefit more than ourselves. A well-tended garden produces something useful for others. Likewise, the virtues we cultivate within ourselves should positively influence the people around us.

As our conversation ended, Finch explained that although the crops may change each year, his responsibility for removing weeds remains much the same. I thought that was a fitting reminder of our own lives. We may overcome one bad habit only to discover another that needs attention. The work of cultivating our inner garden is never truly finished.

I am grateful to Mabon Rhys Finch for sharing his experiences and introducing me to the philosophy of Peter Maurin. What began as a simple Facebook post became a meaningful reminder that wisdom can be found in the most ordinary experiences.

Cultivating Knowledge, Preserving Tradition

The Inaugural Symposium of St. Fiacre Lodge No. 11

Every garden begins with a seed, but its true significance emerges through the patience, dedication, and wisdom of those entrusted with its cultivation. On September 19, 2026, St. Fiacre Lodge No. 11, the Research Lodge of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners, planted such a seed through its inaugural symposium, uniting brethren across geographical boundaries in a shared pursuit of historical knowledge, philosophical understanding, and fraternal enlightenment.

This gathering represented more than the commencement of another lodge activity. It marked the beginning of a deliberate undertaking to preserve our historical inheritance, examine the deeper meanings of our symbolism, and contribute to the intellectual advancement of Free Gardening.

Named in honor of St. Fiacre, the patron saint of gardeners, our lodge embraces the understanding that cultivation extends beyond the physical garden. Just as the gardener prepares the soil, nourishes its roots, and removes what obstructs growth, we are likewise called to cultivate knowledge, character, wisdom, and virtue within ourselves.

It was within this spirit that we had the distinguished honor of welcoming Worthy Brother Giovanni Grippo, author, translator, publisher, and devoted researcher of Masonic and Free Gardener history, as our inaugural guest lecturer.

Worthy Brother Grippo delivered an illuminating presentation tracing the historical development of Free Gardening, beginning with the surviving records of Haddington, Scotland, in 1676 and following the tradition's development across nations and generations. Particular attention was devoted to the German Free Gardeners, their efforts to reconstruct historical ceremonial traditions, and the international relationships that have contributed to the preservation and continuation of our Order.

Beyond the historical account, his presentation invited us to examine the philosophical and symbolic foundations of Free Gardening. Through the four degrees, their corresponding elements of earth, water, air, and fire, and the biblical archetypes of Adam, Noah, Solomon, and Yehoshua, we explored how the garden serves as an allegory for human development and spiritual cultivation.

Of particular significance was his examination of the virtues of love, wisdom, harmony, and truth. These principles remind us that our work cannot remain confined to ceremonial instruction or intellectual contemplation; it must find expression in our conduct, relationships, and responsibilities toward humanity.

The discussion that followed demonstrated the value of establishing a space for scholarly exchange. Brethren representing different countries, traditions, and experiences contributed questions and reflections, reminding us that knowledge grows when it is shared, examined, and approached with humility.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Worthy Brother Grippo for his generosity, scholarly contributions, and fraternal spirit. His presentation established a meaningful foundation for the future intellectual work of our Research Lodge. We likewise thank every participant who joined us, including those connecting across considerable distances and time zones.

As we continue our journey, St. Fiacre Lodge No. 11 remains committed to preserving historical documentation, encouraging original research, examining symbolism and philosophy, and exploring the practical arts of horticulture. Our purpose is not simply to preserve what has been inherited, but to understand it responsibly and transmit it with integrity.

The Cultivation of Knowledge Continues!

We cordially invite you to join us for our **second symposium, A Mysterious Garden, on Saturday, December 19, 2026, at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (U.S.).**

Our distinguished guest speaker, **Worthy Brother Robert L. D. Cooper**, will guide participants through the fascinating history and origins of the Free Gardeners, exploring the historical roots of a fraternity whose symbolism, traditions, and philosophical teachings continue to inspire inquiry.

To learn more about our guest speaker, visit www.robertldcooper.com.
Registration: www.thefreegardeners.org/events

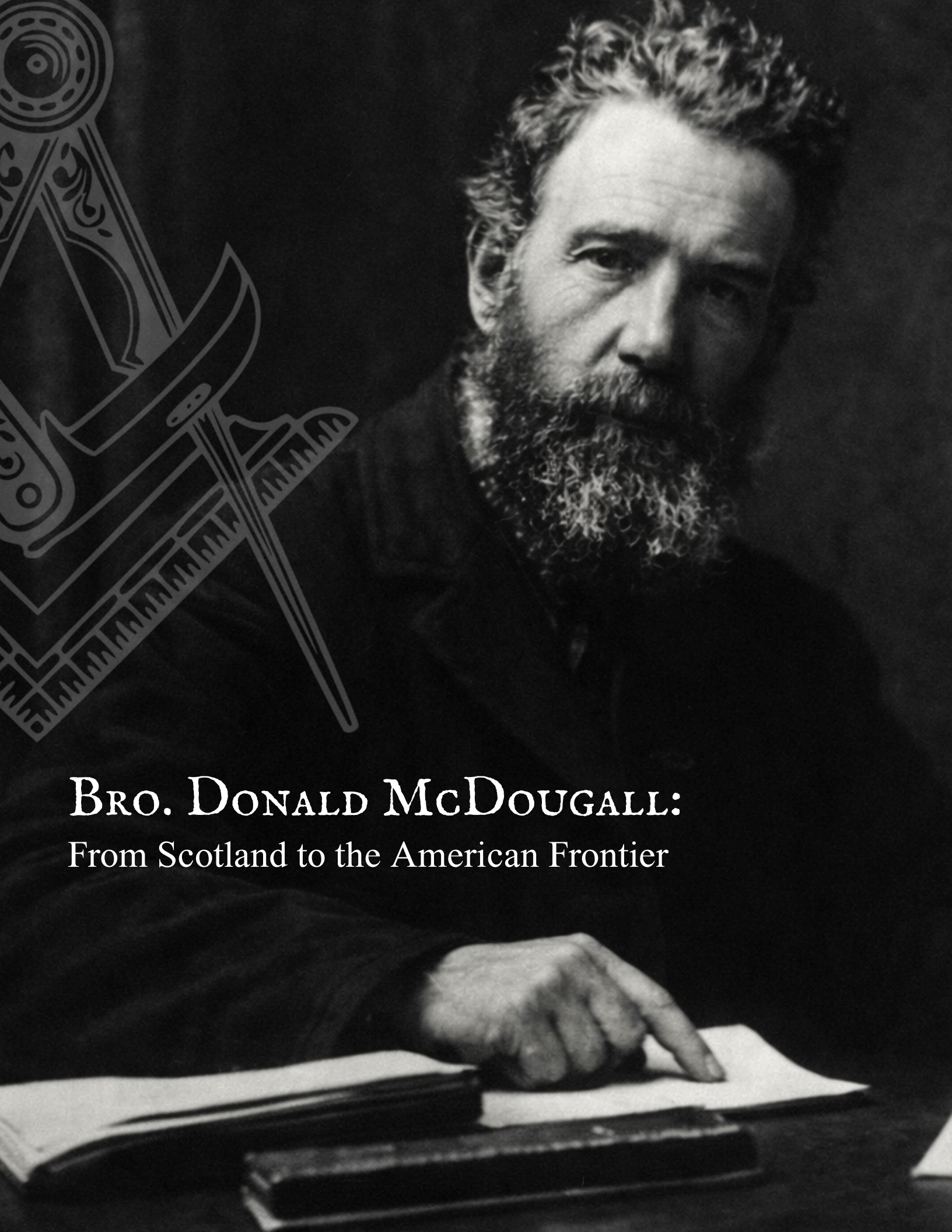
We welcome all who seek to explore the historical and philosophical dimensions of Free Gardening to join us for this continuing journey of discovery.

For the work of the gardener is never truly finished. Each season brings another opportunity to cultivate the soil, nourish the roots, and discover what wisdom may yet blossom.

The Garden remains open, and the work continues.

W.B. Michael Cupeles
Worthy Master
St. Fiacre Lodge No. 11 - A Research Lodge
Ancient Order of Free Gardeners, Inc.
P::G::H::E::
www.thefreegardeners.org





Bro. Donald McDougall:

From Scotland to the American Frontier

Among the many forgotten Free Gardeners who carried the traditions of the Craft beyond Scotland's shores, the life of Brother Donald McDougall stands as a remarkable example of perseverance, industry, and intellectual curiosity. Though only brief references to his membership survive, the historical record paints the picture of a man whose life reflected many of the virtues long associated with Free Gardenery: labor, self-improvement, stewardship of the land, and devotion to knowledge.

Donald Campbell McDougall was born on March 22, 1829, in the village of Comrie, Perthshire, Scotland. Comrie was known for its unusual geological activity, with local tradition claiming that earthquakes often occurred there whenever Mount Vesuvius erupted in Italy. During his youth in Scotland, McDougall learned the trade of gardening and joined to the Free Gardeners before emigrating to the United States. This small detail is historically significant, as it confirms the presence of operative and fraternal Free Gardeners among Scottish working men who later carried their traditions abroad.

In 1851, shortly after marrying Jessie Patterson, McDougall and his wife crossed the Atlantic to begin a new life in America. Like many immigrants of the period, they first settled briefly on Long Island, New York, before moving westward in search of greater opportunity. McDougall eventually settled in Winnebago County, Illinois, where he worked both as a farmer and a schoolteacher in order to earn enough money to purchase land.

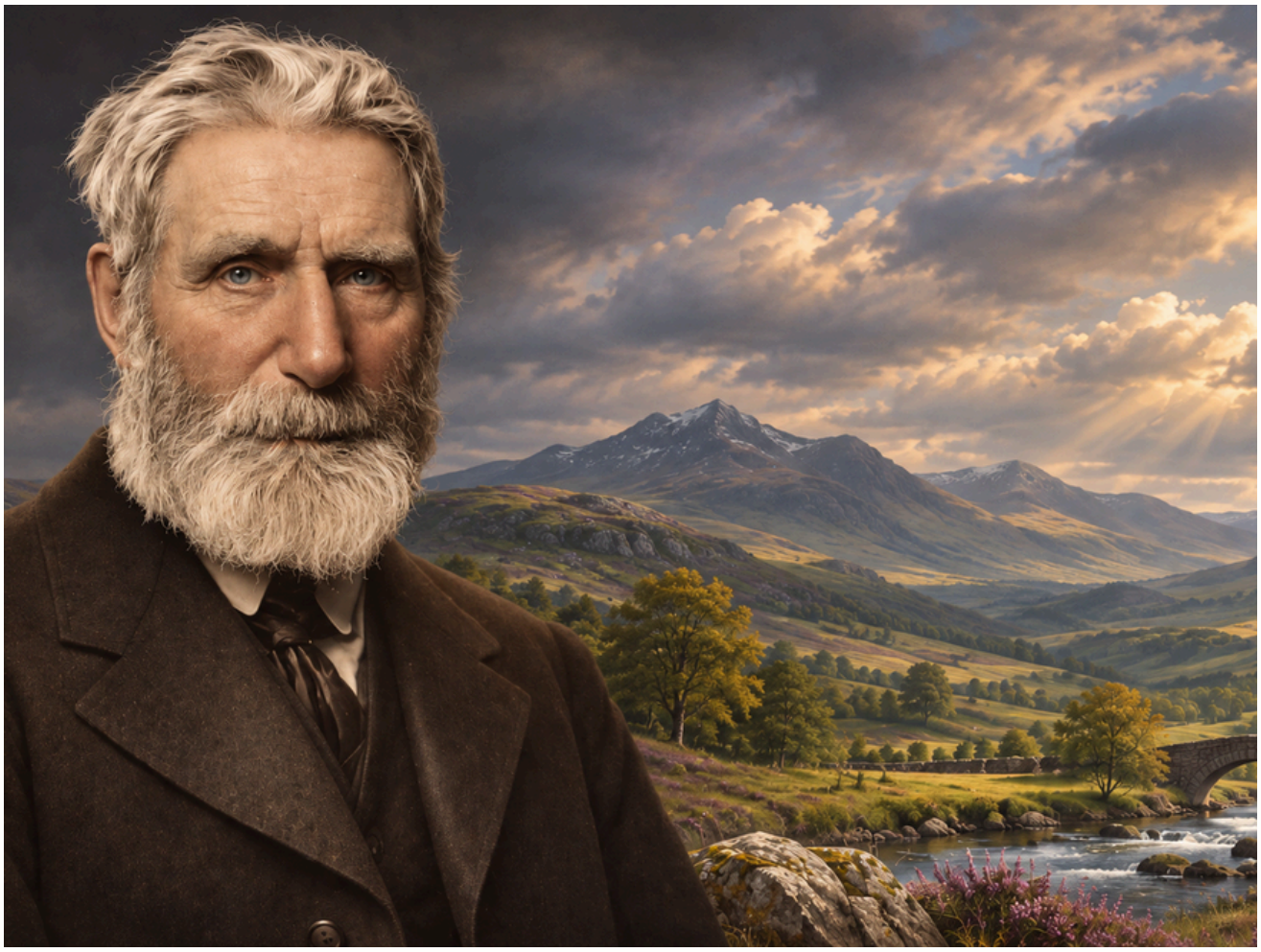
Through years of hard work and determination, McDougall gradually transformed himself from an immigrant laborer into a successful landowner. Beginning with eighty acres in Burritt Townshipe, he steadily expanded his holdings until he owned nearly three hundred acres of farmland.

His story mirrors that of many nineteenth-century Scottish immigrants who brought agricultural skill, discipline, and ambition to the American frontier. By 1904, after decades of labor, he retired to Rockford, Illinois, having established both a prosperous farm and a respected place within his community.

Brother McDougall's life, however, was not defined solely by agriculture. He was deeply engaged in civic and intellectual pursuits throughout his lifetime. Historical accounts note that he held nearly every political office within his township except assessor and was regarded as a faithful public official. Though generally aligned with the Republican Party, he was described as a man who valued character over party loyalty, often supporting "the man rather than the party."

His intellectual interests were equally extensive. McDougall maintained a personal library of more than five hundred scientific volumes, considered notable for the era and region in which he lived. He was an early student of phrenology and spiritualism, studying under the influence of prominent nineteenth-century thinkers such as George Combe and Dr. Franz Gall. By his later years, he remained firmly devoted to these studies, believing deeply in the idea that "the universe is governed by Law, and man's soul is no exception."

While some of McDougall's philosophical interests reflect the intellectual trends of his era rather than modern scientific understanding, they nonetheless reveal a man committed to inquiry, reflection, and the pursuit of deeper truths. Such qualities were often encouraged within fraternal societies of the nineteenth century, where members gathered not only for fellowship and mutual aid, but also for education, moral discussion, and personal growth.



For modern Free Gardeners, Brother Donald McDougall's life offers a fascinating glimpse into the broader world of nineteenth-century Scottish Free Gardeners who emigrated abroad while carrying the traditions of the Craft with them. Though separated by oceans and continents from the lodges of Scotland, men like McDougall continued to embody the virtues associated with Free Gardenery: diligence, cultivation, improvement of self, and stewardship of both land and community.

His journey from the village of Comrie to the farmlands of Illinois reflects the larger story of many Free Gardeners who planted new roots across the world while remaining shaped by the lessons first learned in the gardens of Scotland. Though history preserves only fragments of his connection to the Order, those fragments remind us that the influence of Free Gardenery extended far beyond lodge rooms alone. It lived through the character, labor, and lives of the men who carried its principles into the wider world.

Today, the memory of Brother Donald McDougall stands as part of the enduring heritage of Free Gardenery in North America — a reminder that wherever Free Gardeners traveled, they sought not merely to cultivate the soil, but to cultivate themselves.

UNITED COUNCIL SCHEDULE

12PM - 1PM EST	Q4 Meeting Saturday, October 10, 2026 Board Meeting
12PM - 1PM EST	Q1 Meeting Saturday, January 9, 2027 Board Meeting
12PM - 1PM EST	Q2 Meeting Saturday, April 10, 2027 Board Meeting
12PM - 1PM EST	Q3 Meeting Saturday, July 10, 2027 Board Meeting
12PM - 1PM EST	Q4 Meeting Saturday, October 9, 2027 Board Meeting

Any 2nd or 3rd degree member may submit a proposal for consideration.
Proposals must be sent to the Secretary-General a week before the Board Meeting.



The Universe Within:

a conversation with Sam Torode

Submitted By Wilbert Lemuel

I recently had the pleasure of speaking with author Sam Torode about his book, Living from the Soul: The 7 Spiritual Principles of Ralph Waldo Emerson. This conversation was particularly meaningful because the book has played an important role in my own journey of self-discovery. It is one of the few books I regularly recommend to others and one I revisit at least twice a year. Each time, I seem to discover something new. Perhaps the book hasn't changed, but I certainly have.

Learning to Trust Yourself

Torode first encountered Emerson in high school, where he admired the beauty of his writing but did not connect with his ideas. Raised in a conservative Baptist tradition, he initially disagreed with Emerson's encouragement to question tradition and develop a personal relationship with God. However, as Torode grew older, his views began to change.

I could relate. Growing up in a small North Carolina community, there were certain expectations about religion, careers, and how life should be lived. Questioning those expectations was not always encouraged. Eventually, I began to understand that asking questions was not necessarily an act of rebellion. Sometimes, it was simply the beginning of understanding.

When I asked Torode how we might discover our true selves beneath the influences of family and society, he spoke about listening to our conscience, trusting our intuition, and recognizing our individual talents.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Choosing your own path can feel lonely, especially when it differs from what others expect. Yet, as I shared with Torode, that journey often leads us toward others who are also searching for meaning and purpose.

Sometimes, Wisdom Requires a Little Silence

One of the more practical lessons from our conversation was the importance of spending time alone with our thoughts. Torode enjoys walking in nature, reading, and taking time away from everyday distractions. He also reminded me that no single book or author holds every answer. There is always more to learn.

This reminded me of something familiar within the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners. We often speak of cultivating our inner garden, using nature as a guide for developing character, wisdom, and spiritual understanding.

For me, walking outdoors, reading, or simply stepping away from the noise of daily life has often helped me find clarity. Torode admitted that even podcasts and audiobooks can sometimes become overwhelming. Eventually, we have to stop taking in information and give ourselves time to think.

In a world where nearly every quiet moment can be filled with something playing through our headphones, perhaps silence is becoming a rather underrated luxury.

The Universe Is Inside You

Our conversation eventually turned toward one of the book's most interesting principles: The Universe Is Inside You. Admittedly, this is where things get a little deeper.

Torode explained that we are not separate from nature or the universe. We come from the same natural world that surrounds us, and the life force that exists throughout nature also exists within us.

"I am a child of the universe, and I belong here," he reflected. That simple statement carries a powerful message. I shared my experience of growing up feeling that there was more to life than the expectations of my community. It wasn't about rejecting the lives others had chosen, but realizing that their path did not necessarily have to become mine.

Torode explained that although we are not individually the whole of the divine, we are expressions of something much greater than ourselves. However, recognizing that connection should encourage humility rather than arrogance.

He also pointed out that Emerson's teachings on self-reliance must be balanced with our need for community. Trusting ourselves is important, but so is recognizing that we need one another.

Finding Oneness in a Divided World

As our conversation came to a close, I asked Torode why Emerson's philosophy still matters today. He described Emerson as a great unifier who encouraged people to recognize what connects us rather than what separates us. Emerson's idea of the Oversoul suggests that beneath our individual identities, we are all connected to a greater spiritual whole.

In a world often divided by politics, religion, and culture, this message feels especially important. Torode suggested that despite our differences, people often share many of the same basic values and hopes. For me, this was one of the most meaningful points of our discussion. We can have different beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences while still recognizing shared values.

Forever Students in the Garden of Life

Near the end of our conversation, Torode shared something that stayed with me. Despite writing about Emerson's philosophy, he does not consider himself someone who has mastered these teachings.

"I'm a student. That's why I write about it."
That simple admission reflects something we learn as Free Gardeners: no matter how much we learn, we remain seekers.

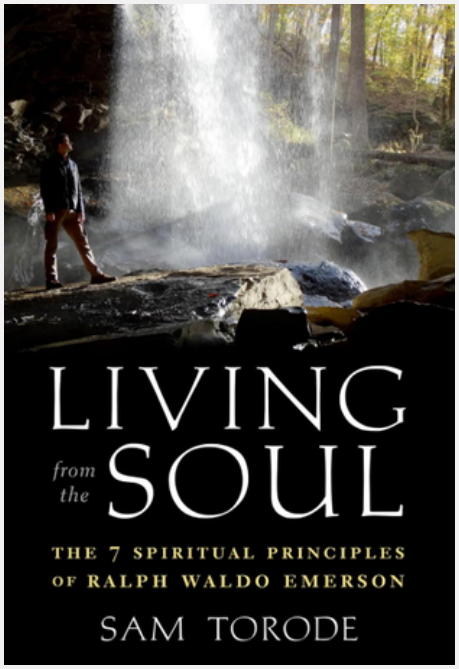
Our understanding changes as we grow, experience life, and discover new ways of seeing the world. Perhaps that is why Emerson's philosophy continues to speak to people today. It encourages us to remain curious, trust ourselves, appreciate our connection to nature, and seek understanding in others.

***For the Free Gardener**, the connection is clear. Just as a garden requires patience, attention, and care, so does the growth of the human spirit. And perhaps the greatest discovery along that journey is not how much of the universe remains a mystery, but how much of ourselves we have yet to discover.*

Want to Learn More?

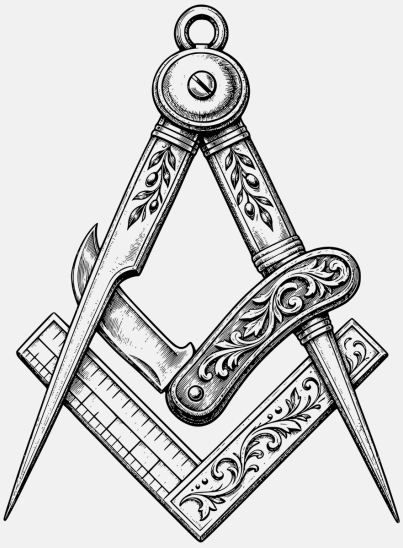


Sam Torode; Authour of "Living From the Soul: 7 Principles of Ralph Waldo Emerson"



SamTorode.com

Available on Amazon



AN OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

One Year Anniversary?

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Does your lodge have a member who has been actively involved in fulfilling the mission and demonstrating the values of the Order? You should recommend that member for the

Past Master Gardener Degree.

This is a merit-based honor, conferred upon the recommendation of a member and the lodge's vote of confidence.

Further information to follow.

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WINTER 2027

SUBMISSIONS

If you would like to submit a piece for consideration in the Winter 2027 edition you can submit a draft of your article at info.freegardeners@gmail.com

Deadline: January 16th, 2027