

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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MASONIC EDUCATION in the 1980s

by

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Masonic Education in the 1980's

Masonic education has been defined as the means by which a Mason may learn what he needs to know to understand and appreciate Freemasonry, so he can take a worthy part in it. It is therefore an important part of our Masonic system of Instruction.

The secrets of Freemasonry are taught by a system of rituals, symbols, emblems, legends and allegories and not in plain everyday language. While this conceals our secrets from the uninitiated, it does make it harder for Masons to understand the teachings of the order. This secrecy, however, is not intended to keep the membership in the dark but rather to encourage them to seek for themselves the Masonic Light which is available to us all. Under our system a Mason must study and learn for himself. He must search out the truth so that the act of learning is itself of educational value. The object of our system of Masonic Education should therefore be to acquaint our members with what information is available, where it can be found, and to encourage them to dig it out for themselves. This is different to the school system of regular classes, lectures, textbooks, and instructive lessons, all couched in plain words.

Let us look at this system of education which we use for a few moments. There are actually 3 facets, or types, of teaching used in this system which are, INSTRUCTION, PROBLEM SOLVING AND STUDY.

INSTRUCTION This covers the mechanics of properly operating a Masonic Lodge. Each officer should be instructed every year in the duties and responsibilities of the office he holds so that by the time he reaches the East he is fully conversant with all aspects of Lodge operation. This includes the correct floorwork and conferral of the three degrees, including the proper delivery of the ritual in an interesting and meaningful manner; the opening and closing ceremonies; reception of visitors; balloting; etc.. Every Master should be taught the rules of order and of conducting business; how to control and run a meeting; how to program his meetings; Masonic Law; etc.. It is his responsibility to see that his officers are properly instructed in their duties. It should be the duty of the senior officer in the District, the D.D.G.M., to see that the W.M's are properly trained themselves and are carrying out their duties properly, including the instruction of their officers and brethren. Therefore this whole facet of education is the sole responsibility of the D.D.G.M. of each District. It is obviously not possible for him to do it all

himself, but he should appoint skilled workmen to assist him.

PROBLEM SOLVING. Many unresolved problems face all Masons today, every Lodge and every Grand Lodge. Such things as poor attendance in the Lodges, declining membership, apathy among the members, poor public relations, invisibility of the Craft, Appending Bodies, the Ladies (God bless them) , finances, Lodgerooms, etc. worry us all and never seem to go away and their solution is itself a pressing problem. There are several standard methods of solving problems such as appointing a committee, or group of members, to study some problem and to propose a solution. Another method which has been used in industry with considerable success is that of Brainstorming. A group of people of similar interests meets under the guidance of a moderator, who outlines the problem. The participants then suggest all the solutions they can think of and no matter how far fetched or impractical the ideas are, they are faithfully recorded on a blackboard, or a large sheet of paper - The solutions proposed can then be analyzed and no matter how wild some ideas are, from them may spring the germ of an idea which will eventually generate a solution to the problem.

The workshop method, similar to this meeting today, has often been used for problem solving, rather than for listening to and discussing speeches. Our Grand Secretary has a very effective program for this type of meeting which he has demonstrated in many Lodges.

Perhaps the most important part of the drill for problem solving is to set up the machinery to carry out the solution after it has been found, and so often good solutions are proposed and then never carried out, and the problem is perpetuated.

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These discussions can be very complex and in working out answers the participants invariably learn a great deal about Freemasonry and how and why it works. In other words they are educational as well as useful.

The third facet is the STUDY of what Freemasonry is all about. This is the attempt to understand the teachings of Freemasonry by learning about its backgrounds, how it started, its history, its symbols, allegories, etc.. This facet of Freemasonry does not interest all Freemasons and many of the Brethren are quite uninterested in this aspect of the Craft. It is possible to be an active, busy and good Mason without any knowledge of what it actually means. However, I expect that most of those here today are interested in obtaining more light on the Speculative side of Free-masonry. This is good because a nucleus of well informed Brethren can only strengthen the Craft and you should be definitely encouraged to extend your knowledge.

As I have said, it must be realized that Masonic study is not for all Masons. Many of our members are wonderful people and very faithful and good members, but they do not have the ability or desire to inquire just what it all means. Masonic study must be on a volunteer basis and be directed towards those to whom it is of interest.

Masonic speeches in Lodges must be short and interesting and not too profound, (I must remember that today), or the largest part of the audience will be thoroughly bored. However, certain educational tools and methods are available to assist students. These are:-

(a) MASONIC LITERATURE. There is an extensive Masonic Literature available to any Masonic Student in the Grand Lodge Library, Lodge Libraries, Private Libraries, and in many book stores. All aspects of the Fraternity have been

written about, must of them from several viewpoints. The books are there for anyone interested enough to ask for them. It amazes me how little is known by the general membership about the books which are available to them and where they can obtain them. Anything which can be done to encourage the members to buy suitable books for themselves should have notable results.

(b) There are three LODGES OF EDUCATION and RESEARCH now operating in B.C., in Victoria, Vancouver and Nanaimo. These provide a valuable source of Masonic knowledge in their areas where Masonic students may meet and exchange viewpoints, hear excellent speeches on Masonic subjects and add greatly to their knowledge. It is my hope that more of these Lodges will be developed in other areas of the Province. There are also many outstanding Lodges of Education in many parts of the world which have correspondence circles which publish an impressive number of good books and articles each year. These Lodges are relatively easy and cheap to join. If you are interested, I can give you the addresses of several.

(c) The holding of District and area seminars or workshops, such as this one, is gradually increasing in B.C., and should be further encouraged. While many of those attending are already Masonic Students, there are a few more attenders each time and some of these will be encouraged to proceed further to extend their studies. These seminars can be purely educational or a mixture of Education and Problem Solving. The ultimate would be for each District to hold at least one seminar every year. This will never be accomplished, until the members are pushing their D.D.G.M's to organize an Educational Program for their District.

(d) Every Lodge should have an active Educational Program to acquaint its members with the tenets of the Fraternity. This can include speeches both in Lodge and at refreshment, but they must be short and interesting and not too deep. Also useful, are slide or movie presentations, debates, quizzes, plays, visitations and many other things. A good system is to have short 5 minute topics either in Lodge or at refreshment, explaining some part of the ritual which has just been worked and to have such a topic at every meeting. More advanced topics can be aired at a seminar or Education Lodge.

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(e) If your Lodge does not have a Study Group, talk to your Master about starting one where interested members can meet informally and ask each other questions. This is an excellent place to try out that new speech you have worked up before you try to give it to a larger group. Lodge programs can be worked up and practised before being used. Books can be reviewed and discussed.

The subject which we have been considering today is usually called Masonic Education. Now, think about this term. What impression does this phrase Masonic Education make on you? I suspect that it frightens many of our members by making them feel that they will be subjected to the rigors of the classroom, which for many of us has an unhappy memory. Really what we are talking about is the first request which each of us made the day we were initiated into Freemasonry. The request for LIGHT. What we are trying to do is not to lecture to the Brethren but to enlighten them and thereby increase their knowledge of Freemasonry and what it all means. It is my belief that the term Masonic Education should be dropped and the phrase MASONIC ENLIGHTENMENT be substituted. You will note how I have printed this word, to emphasise the word LIGHT which is contained therein. As a matter of interest, how many present prefer the term Masonic Education (show of hands) , and how many prefer Masonic En-LIGHT-enment (give count).

LIGHT is a most important word in the Masonic system as it conveys a meaning far more wide spread than is believed by the majority of the members. It is in fact the first of all symbols presented to the Candidate, as I have already mentioned, on his first appearance in a Lodge and it continues to be given to him in various forms throughout his Masonic career. It does not mean simply Truth or Wisdom, but it contains within itself a far more abstruse allusion to the very essence of speculative Masonry and embraces with its immense signification all the symbols of the Order. For this reason, Masons are often called "The sons of light.", as they are entitled to be in possession of the true meaning of the symbol, while the uninitiated who have not received this knowledge, are said to be in darkness.

The role of the Grand Lodge of B.C in Masonic Enlightenment is a relatively minor one at present, as Grand Lodge is primarily an administrative body. One of the Standing Committees appointed each year is however, the Committee on Education and Research. Its mandate is given in section 92 of the Book of Constitutions. It has no power to order anyone to do anything, but it can and does suggest that certain programs be encouraged. It stands ready to assist any Mason, or group of Masons, who may ask for help in organizing any enlightenment courses, or meetings, anywhere in the Povince. I am hoping in the next few years to develop the role of this committee in our affairs, as the subject of Masonic Ehlightenment should have a higher standingi in our affairs.

I now come to the best part of my speech, the conclusion. Much has been written about the DUTIES, RIGHTS and PRIVILEGES of a Master Mason. There is, however, one region in which they are all mixed up together and this is the case in the area of Masonic Enlightenment, its ritual, history, symbols, laws, philosophy and literature. Every Master Mason has a DUTY to be faithful to them, so he has a RIGHT to be taught our Art in its completeness, so he can enjoy the PRIVILEGES it gives to his spirit, mind and heart. All that Freemasonry is and means, all that it has to offer and give, belongs to every Freemason in the same way, and not to any special group of them. I ask you Brethren to realize this, and to know that no matter how long the road, or how crooked the path, or how burdensome your duties, although at times your rights appear to be over-regulated, this is insignificant in comparison with the one priviledge which is yours, that Freemasonry, in all its height, and breadth, and length and richness, belongs to YOU and to ME TO enjoy
