

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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GEOMETRY IN MASONRY

by

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Being such a venerable Craft, steeped in history and tradition, I find it difficult to prepare a talk that will not induce stentorian slumbers. It would have been totally impossible without my faithful word-processor and I would have long since found an escape route. For your consolation, I'm not too happy with the final result either. I intend to prod, poke and coerce for, to mangle Shakespeare, "I come not to praise Caesar nor to bury him."

"You are not yet a Freemason nor do I know that you ever will become one."

If these words truly reflect a full understanding of the ideals of Freemasonry by the speaker, it demonstrates a basic truth embodied in our rituals.

To lay the foundation for this talk, I show you a plumb line representing a straight line to the gravitational centre of the earth. By placing the square against it, we have an arm that is tangentially level to the curvature of the earth on the idea of those levels depicted in our Lodges. Then there are the dividers, or as we say, compasses, depicting limits of error from that point at the centre, while ritually the compasses belong to the Grand Master in particular and the square to the Craft in general. It is a simple geometric operation to delineate a circle by using two nails and an ordinary framing square; you may even locate the all-important center by vertically bisecting two chords.

The point I would like to make is that these working tools borrowed from operative workmen are only symbols; or if you prefer, a code which can be translated into written or oral words and demonstrated by thoughts, words and actions. Those of you with any experience with Morse Code will recognize this: dit-dah-dit-dit dit dit-dit~dit-dah dit dit-dah-dit-dit
Sent by key through electrical impulses and read by sound or light flashes by an efficient operator, not as letters but as whole words and phrases, as you would read a printed page.

How well Brethren, do you read your Masonic Symbols, interpret and practice them? Do we adequately practice within the Lodge those tenets and fundamental principles we are encouraged to practice out of it? Do we pay due regard to the Charges and Obligations? Regretfully, I am afraid we do not. After three introductory lessons would you expect a student of the piano to perform at a public recital? But let me point out here what appears to have been an accumulative effect over the years that has produced crests and hollows as a result of social and political changes clearly indicated by a general drop in interest and attendance.

Today, we appear to be more interested in the Cash Flow of candidates than in the quality of our Gross Masonic Product. Do the candidates put out a months wages to join the Craft or two days wages for annual dues and even contribute two days wages to the Benevolent fund as was the case prior to World War II? Considering the present purchasing power of our dollar, cost is not keeping candidates away. Reflect on how our Lodges were virtual degree mills during the

forty's Neither do we lose members for this same reason. I suggest that we ourselves have failed to turn good men into happy and dedicated Freemasons.

1.
LET US PAUSE AND CONSIDER THE APPLICANT,

Was it really "of his own free will and accord" that he made his request and was he and his wife, fully aware that he was making a commitment to the Lodge, or was he coaxed or coerced by family or friends? Two brethren committed themselves in proposing him as a good man and a good citizen. Three more investigated and assured themselves that he possessed the qualities we look for in a member and provided an opportunity for any objection to be privately noted before the report was submitted and the ballot taken, (To me, the ballot like the traditional penalties, is another of our important symbols and should not be subject to petty abuse.) Finally, after several months he is the focus of a great deal of attention, receives a series of confusing though impressive ritual experiences, and required to regurgitate some of the material by rote. Often the sponsors appear to feel that they have no commitment beyond providing the Lodge with a new member, indeed, some do not even attend the degrees and sometimes coaches are too inexperienced to offer any help beyond the required memorization. The cherished certificate is eventually placed in his hand and he may be prematurely pressed into an office or allowed to fade into the woodwork.

Now Brethren, is the time for you to ask of me the same question I answered some 52 years ago, "What came you here to do?"

I come tonight to appeal to you, who obviously are interested and experienced Freemasons, to consider carefully the situation of Freemasonry in general and your own Lodges in particular; to suggest you plan an educational program of improvement. Most Lodges have a Director of Masonic Education, but interesting periodic talks are not what I have in mind. I find myself concerned with a more practical approach, though this officer could well be involved in its co-ordination. I am really thinking particularly of some form of Mentor Program to assist new members to adapt to their new surroundings, understand their very real commitment and the general functioning of the routine of a Lodge. A coach could well carry on in this capacity or his sponsors, if knowledgeable. The candidate must be protected from embarrassment resulting out of ignorance yet encouraged to participate where able. Visiting should be actively encouraged and adequate instruction provided on how to present himself and undergo a visitor's examination. All this could be handled on a person-to-person basis with a skilled brother capable of dispelling his natural reluctance or in small classes of instruction being held from time to time. The onus is on us, brethren to assure ourselves that he progresses as an active Masonic Brother and not left to vegetate in the roll of another dues-paying member. This still leaves us with our real failures; I refer to those who, though able and often active in the past, are rarely seen in Lodge. Dare I mention demitted Brethren? Certainly, there is a real opportunity here for serious research.

Probably the most obvious indicator of the current state of Freemasonry is the annual scramble to fill the various stations of a Lodge and the failure of most to have all officers present for their installation. We will never improve our situation by shrugging our shoulders and noting that most organizations are in the same situation. Keeping in mind that the Craft Lodge is the foundation of the entire Masonic family, on its survival rests the entire building. It will be difficult unless we improve our product. The practice of 'recycling' is a band-aid approach that produces negative results over the long term. Nor should we be using accomplished and elderly brethren to carry the lodge on their own shoulders when their talents could be put to better use. I visualize a

situation where every secretary has his own apprentice. Where, with the co-operation of the Director of Ceremonies, every Past Master adopts an officer, particularly those with weaknesses, to help him develop and progress through the chairs with confidence. This is far more rewarding and does not deprive the Lodge of another future Past Master.

The Lodge of Masonic Education and Research, comprised of serious Brethren collectively represents a vast amount of experience and knowledge. It is a unique position to make a contribution to our beloved Craft and help to insure that it will not be interred with us. Group studies and research into

2.
the causes of the problems we are currently experiencing could produce ideas for constructive remedial adjustments. Available to all Lodges, they may be able to remove the band-aids and proceed with adequate medical treatment.

Finally let me emphasize that I have been speaking in generalities only. Many Lodges show their concern and are making good moves to overcome their Problems. The Worshipful Masters are dedicated and capable in nearly every instance. Among their supporting officers can be seen many potentially bright stars. It is important that we reinforce, without unnecessarily replacing, weak links in the chain between the applicant and Worshipful Master.

I thank you for your kind attention.
