

The Very Basics

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In our first years of school we learned the basics. You make an “H” by drawing two straight lines and putting another line in the middle to connect them. Take the “H” you just made and add the letters “A” and “T” and it spells “HAT”, the thing you wear on your head. Change the letter “H” to the curved letter “C” and it means the small animal “CAT.” We learned to add more letters and make more words. Our one word “HAT” became the key to a whole world of language. That one word would eventually lay the thoughts of people who have changed the world at our feet as easily as it allowed us to see the thoughts of a child. It would allow us to navigate the world and enable us to read the word of God.

We learned that two plus two equals four and that four plus four equals eight. As we went on we learned that four times four is sixteen and twelve divided by three is four. We kept adding to those figures and the way we compute them until eventually they became one of our most useful tools. With them we would know how much we made at the end of the week and if the amount we had was enough to cover the amount we needed. We would know if the change the clerk gave is back should be ten dollars or two, and how much we could spend for gas that week.

Some of us were content to stop when we knew enough to balance a checkbook, but others didn’t feel complete until they knew enough to put a man upon the moon. Some of us were happy with enough to get by, but others went on to learn medicine and physics and law.

Now, what has all this got to do with Masonry?

It is often said that the main reason for Masonry is to improve one’s life. Yet, unfortunately, for most Masonry is no more than a pleasant club.

We hear people talking about declines and NPDs and poor attendance, but take a look, a long, hard, honest, look. Do people walk away from things that improve their lives? Does a man walk away from something that makes him a better man, a better husband, a better member of the community? No. But for most people, for most Masons, Masonry hasn’t done much to make him a better anything.

Try thinking back to that September morning so many years ago when your teacher first said “two plus two equals four.” What was the next thing she did? Most likely she drew two items on the board and counted one, two. Then she drew two more and counted one, two. Then she counted all of them, one, two, three, four. She showed you what “two plus two” means. She showed you how it worked and how you could use it. She kept doing until everyone in the class understood. Do we do that with our new candidates?

In the First Degree we tell him not to do things, but do we tell him why? Just saying we want to keep secrets means absolutely nothing. We haven’t defined why. Is it a secret that “there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house.” How can it be a secret? These words appear in the Bhanson’s Manual which almost every Mason has and in the most published

book in history, the Bible. It is not a secret. How much time would it take to tell a candidate that the real secret of Masonry is the care and concern we should have for each other, and not a few words borrowed from the Bible.

In the Second Degree we go into architecture, the senses, and the arts and sciences. Are these a secret? If they are it's a poor secret because every seventh grader has been told about every one of them. Heaven forbid if we tell the candidate that if he is ever to gain from Masonry he must study well beyond what he hears in the degrees.

Unfortunately, so many believe the Third Degree is something that really happened that they miss the entire purpose and design. Hiram was never Grand Architect and Solomon was never a Mason. It is a story written in England sometime between 1717 and 1725, the moral of which crossed the world. It is an allegory to teach integrity, morality and loyalty. The man Hiram in our play never existed, but his message is real. This is what we should be telling the candidate, not simply clarifying and rehashing the details of an imaginary event that never happened.

Too many times we are telling our candidate that "two plus two equals four" and never showing him what it means. Just knowing the five words "two plus two equals four" means nothing, but to understand it and build upon it can lead to most of mankind's greatest achievements.

Too often those people who are leaving Masonry, those who aren't paying their dues, and those who will stay home almost every meeting night, understand Masonry as something we need to keep secret and very little more. They have never experienced the bond between brothers who are concerned for each other and their lives. They will never know sharing a thought with a brother you know you can trust. They will never know the reward of working beside someone whose main desire is for you to be your best. Masonry to them will be keeping some "secret" that the world already knows. The Masonic writer Mackey said over a hundred years ago that Masons don't read. Maybe the best kept secret of Masonry is that if you stop at the three degrees you may be a Mason, but all you really know is that two plus two equals four.