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## The Winding Stairs and Masonic Education

The second degree of Symbolic Masonry is often treated as a second class entity. To so many Masons, the Fellow Craft Degree is only a thoroughfare through which one must pass in order to attain the greatest secrets Freemasonry has to offer, those taught within the allegories of the Third Degree. Albert Pike Stresses within *Morals and Dogma* that knowledge is useless unless it adds wisdom and greater understanding to the individual. If a man who is truly dedicated to the teachings of Masonry takes any of the degrees for granted, more especially those of the foundational Blue Lodge, "it is wasted, like water poured on the sands" (Pike, p. 27). The Fellow Craft Degree holds teachings that are detrimental to the furtherance of Masonic growth. There is a great need to take time to explore the importance of Masonic Education as it is taught within the Second Degree of Freemasonry.

Just as the Fellow Craft Degree is viewed by many to be inferior to the whole of the Order, the discipline of Masonic Education has always taken the back burner to the more charismatic ritualists (Howell, Jan. 2003; Leazer, June, 2002). It is not debatable that the Fellow Craft Degree instructs its initiates to improve themselves in Masonry and life through a continuous search for more light and greater knowledge. It is ironic that the blue degree with the greatest emphasis on Masonic Education contains some of the most beautiful floor work within all the degrees of the Craft.

The portion of the Fellow Craft degree that is most emblematical of the need and importance of Masonic Education is the passage taken to arrive at the Middle Chamber of King Solomon's Temple. It is the ascension of these steps that leads the Mason to knowledge of how to attain a Mason's wages. Countless volumes of works could be written solely upon the sacred number of the steps themselves; however, for the purpose at hand, literary license will be taken to allude to the steps' significance of and guidance to Masonic Education.

The most superfluous teaching of the first three steps of the winding staircase is the presentation of three separate allegorical systems representing the three stages of man's life. Each step is said to represent one of the three stationed officers as well as one of the three Symbolic Degrees. The Entered Apprentice represents youth. The Fellow Craft represents the strong man in his prime, and the Master represents the man grown wise with experience and knowledge and searching for spiritual illumination (Duncan, 1976). Each of these three degrees provides the initiate with tools to use in the endeavor for Masonic growth.

The Entered Apprentice Degree instructs the man who is just beginning to journey down the path to enlightenment. The primary teaching to the prostyete is to divest his mind of the worries and troubles of the world and approach Masonry with a pure heart, mind, and conscience. It is only with these that growth and knowledge may be gained within the veiled allegories of the Craft. The teachings Freemasonry has to offer are so far estranged from the normalcy of the world that a man without a purged and clear heart and mind would be unable to understand or grasp the richness of the hidden gems the Order has to offer (Haywood, 1986). The first step in Masonic Education and growth is to approach it with an open mind and objective heart.

The Fellow Craft Degree signifies the importance of man to grow in knowledge and understanding of the things that reside around him. If it can be said that the degree represents a man in his prime and readiest state, then it can be asserted that it is the Fellow Craft, who is able to take the heart that is purified through the teachings of the Entered Apprentice Degree and use it for the good of the Order. The Fellow Craft uses the tools granted him by the Great Architect of the Universe to grow in usefulness and understanding. Here the greatest lengths in Masonic Education can be made, symbolized by the ascension made within the degree.

The Master Mason Degree is the culmination of the whole. It is here that man is taught about the glorious revelation and the immortality of the soul. The third and final degree of the Blue Lodge signifies the conclusion of a life but the beginning of true knowledge and illumination. It is the Fellow Craft who intellectually becomes a Master Mason that uses the tools provided him that will reach the absolute pinnacle of attaining the true secrets of the Craft and fully understand the power and greatness of the knowledge Freemasonry has to offer, the combination of carnal and mental knowledge with pure spirituality.

The following passage taken from *Duncan's Ritual of Freemasonry* clearly and concisely illustrates in ritual the assertions of the afore written paragraphs. "The first three (steps) allude to the three principal stages of human life, youth, manhood, and old age. In youth, as Entered Apprentices, we ought industriously to occupy our minds in the attainment of useful knowledge; in manhood, as Fellow Crafts, we should apply our knowledge to the discharge of our respective duties to God, our neighbors, and ourselves; so that in old age, as Master Masons, we may enjoy the happy reflections consequent on a well-spent life, and die in the hope of a glorious immortality" (1976, p. 74). The spiritual perfection sought after by the true hearted Mason can only be obtained through Masonic Education; fore, it is too "obscured from the Mason who is content to be a Mason by virtue of membership rather than a Mason 'in fact,' by virtue of his knowledge" for him to find its glorious meaning (Steinmetz, 1976, p.115).

The next series of steps are five in number. They are said to represent the five orders of architecture: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite (Duncan, 1976; Driber, 2004). The five steps are also representative of the five human senses: tasting, feeling, hearing, seeing, and smelling (Duncan, 1976; Driber, 2004). In both cases, three are set apart as being more especially peculiar to Masonry, Corinthian, Doric, and Ionic and hearing, feeling, and seeing respectfully. Attention will first be shown to the orders of architecture.

The Corinthian order of architecture is the most ornate and light of the three said to have Masonic significance (Mackey, 1927). It is attributed the Masonic tenant of beauty. The pillar of this order as well as beauty is symbolic of the Junior Warden in the South. As before alluded to, the three stationed officers are also representatives of the three Symbolic Degrees (Mackey, 1927). The Junior Warden is symbolic of the Entered Apprentice. There is an old American adage that states, ignorance is bliss. This is supported by the rituals of Freemasonry; fore, with each obligation that is assumed the responsibilities and duties are increased. There is a simple beauty to one that has little knowledge but, like the Entered Apprentice, expresses a desire to travel towards the light and obtain knowledge. It is truly an image of beauty to see one who has a desire to dispel his ignorance and grow in usefulness.

The Doric order of architecture is the strongest and oldest of the orders. It is placed under the charge of the Senior Warden, and it is denoted the principle of strength. This is most

appropriate; for, the second stationed officer is a representation of the second degree, and thusly it is a representation of a man in his strongest state. It is during the age of strength and ability that man is obligated to grow and be industrious. It is during this age that knowledge is obtained, and at this time that that knowledge is initially put into use for Masonic growth.

It is only after the effects of time and experience that knowledge is perfected into wisdom. This latter stage is represented by the Worshipful Master, the Master Masons Degree, and the Ionic order of architecture. The Ionic order is "more delicate and graceful than the Doric, and more simply majestic than the Corinthian. The judgment and skill displayed in its construction, as combining the strength of the former with the beauty of the latter, has created it to be adopted in Masonry as the symbol of Wisdom, and placed" under the auspice of the Worshipful Master in the East (Mackey, 1927, p. 415). It is only after the Fellow Craft has improved himself in knowledge that the Master Mason is able to grow in wisdom and true understanding. Therefore, the path to wisdom and ultimate understanding is through the processes taught within the Fellow Craft's Degree.

It was afore stated that the five steps are also representative of the five human senses. It is through the proper application of these senses that man grows in usefulness and knowledge. The intellect is continually enhanced through the use of these senses. Through the senses of hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, and tasting the understanding of the world by a child is broadened. Hearing, seeing, and feeling are deemed tools used by the Mason to improve and prove himself as a Mason. It is by these three senses that men are guided through the lessons taught within the Masonic degrees. It is also through these sense that the scholar grows in colligate worth. The same is true of the Masonic scholar. It is through the sense of hearing that Masons listen to well-informed brethren. It is through the sense of seeing that Masons are enabled to use his intellect to read Masonic writings and study the mystic symbols of the Craft. It is through the sense of feeling or touch that man is enabled through the use of his intellect and training to carefully write about the history, mysticism, humor, philosophy, and philanthropy of the Order.

The final ascension is composed of seven steps. Seven being a mystic number representing, among other things, completeness, the seven Sabbatical years, seven years of the building of the temple, seven golden candlesticks, and the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences (Duncan, 1976; Driber, 2004). The latter of these are vaguely elaborated upon within the Fellow Craft Degree. There is perhaps no other gem of purpose within the Three Symbolic Degrees that is more mystical and calling yet readily overlooked than the teachings of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. Even today, an individual who wishes to advance in the arena of education attends a liberal arts college. Seven is a mystical number representing completeness; thusly, the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences are all encompassing (Worrel, 1997). It was believed during the Middle Ages that all knowledge worth knowing and learning could be labeled under one of the liberal arts and sciences.

The true wages of a Mason is knowledge. The growth from a lad to a man has long been deemed the greatest accomplishment of the vulgar secular world, but for the enlightened individual true growth does not originate through strength and brawn. Instead, the Mason is taught to measure the esteem and stature of a man through his knowledge and understanding of the Craft and the enlightened thought. The emphasis placed on the Arts and Sciences within the Lodge ritual is not a coincidence or misshapen occurrence. The growth in knowledge is essential to the true Mason.

The interpretations of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences are almost as numerous as the stars. The interpretations range from simple and obvious to extreme and mystical (Worrel, 1997). A reasonable interpretation of the Arts and Sciences is to be found in the moderation of the plumb line. It is obvious and not debatable that the seven steps teach the prostylite to improve himself through the attainment and support of a liberal education. It is through the attainment of knowledge that man grows closer to God and the great miracles He has bestowed within the natural world for all to behold. Freemasonry, as practiced today, is an institution representative of Renaissance thought, and it is well known and accepted that individuals of the Enlightenment believed and practiced that a man who desired an esteemed education would seek out one of an interdisciplinary nature, a liberal one. This follows suit with the meaning of the word liberal. As Worrel (1997) related, when the Seven Arts and Sciences were originated the word liberal was in relation to the curricula a man of free status would need to succeed in life. As the disciplines of education developed over the course of civilization's maturation, the encompassing nature of the Arts and Science grew. It is suffice for the purpose of this paper to state that the seven steps represent the consistent search of a Mason for knowledge and the proper implementation of that knowledge as an instrument to grow closer to the divine Creator. It does behoove all Craftsmen who have a desire to grow in usefulness to study, reflect upon, and glean the massive amount of writings concerning the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences.

After the individual ascends the flight of three, five, and seven steps he is rewarded for his diligence. The Fellow Craft is rewarded by being taught the wages of his status. Corn, wine, and oil also have resonance of growth in knowledge and education. Corn or wheat is a substance of nourishment. Before a craftsman can engage in work, he must have a nourished body that allows the workman to accomplish the work set before him. Nourishment to a true hearted Mason is a greater knowledge and application of the principles and teachings of Freemasonry. Wine is a great tranquilizer to the cares and worries of the world. When used in moderation it is an instrument to induce relaxation and refreshment of the soul and body. Masonic education is the same to the soul and body of a Mason. Education is refreshing and causes a rejuvenation of the excitement in the Craft. Lastly, Masonic education is without doubt a bringer of joy to life of those who pursue it, just as oil is to the ancient man.

In closing this article, it is sufficient to stress that without a furtherance of knowledge and understanding the true spiritual lesson of the Master Masons Degree cannot be completely or adequately realized. It is a growth in knowledge and usefulness that proves a man a Mason, and the only way one can truly show himself approved is the accumulation and proper application of Masonic knowledge. The many mysteries and "secret teachings" of the Lodge are so latently interwoven into the ritual and far removed from the modern era or level of learning that they can only be comprehended or viewed after one has studied and pondered them at great lengths and with great resources. It is because of this that the primary emphasis in the Fellow Craft Degree is placed upon the importance of knowledge and the discipline of Masonic education. It is only after one has taken the teachings of the Fellow Craft Degree to heart that the whole of the Masonic story might be fractionally understood.

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