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Lessons of the degrees

by Thomas Sherrard Roy

The Entered Apprentice

One of the things that has both amazed and gratified me as I have thought about Freemasonry is the high quality of the ritual of the three degrees. The probability is that those outside our ranks who think of our degrees think of them as involving a ritual that was created for the purpose of impressing the candidate at the time of his initiation, but with no particular relevance to the life situations he must face when the initiatory rites are over. They think of them as having a purely local and contemporary interest; a ritual designed to meet a particular situation at a particular time, and then conveniently left behind and forgotten as we pass to a new interest.

To dismiss the ritual of the degrees in this fashion would be a serious mistake. There is the wisdom of life in that ritual, and to relegate it to the area of forgotten things would be like kicking the ladder down after

you have climbed a tree. It is like claiming to be a freemason and then forgetting that which gives great significance to Freemasonry. The ritual of the degrees expresses high ideals and proclaims great principles. In its own way it says, “this is the life.” In the words of the Great Light in Freemasonry, it says: “this is the way, walk ye in it.”

In the Entered Apprentice degree there are fundamentals which we must accept, not only in Freemasonry, but in life.

The first fundamental is a belief in God. Freemasonry puts a profession of a belief in God right where it belongs, at the very beginning of the masonic journey. This is not because of the fact that without a belief in God no obligation would be considered binding upon the candidate, but because such a belief is fundamental to life. In a real sense it places the hand of the candidate in the hand of God and bids him proceed with confidence.



G.H. Harlow

Remembered for his persecution by the Inquisition and his subsequent rescue by English brethren “who got him under the protection of the British flag,” and as author of *History of the Dionysian Artificers*, published posthumously in 1820, Bro. Hippolyto Joseph Da Costa attempted to draw parallels between masonic initiation and those of the Orphic mysteries of Eleusis.

I was calling one day upon an old gentleman who was ill. Life had been hard on him He had lost one of his legs, and now was bedfast. As we talked about the providence of God I repeated the first line of one of William Cowper’s great hymns: “God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.”

To my surprise the old man picked up the next line, and

then repeated the hymn to the end. I was greatly stirred to hear the conviction in his weakened voice as he quoted the last lines: “Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain; God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.” It is faith in God at the beginning that will enable us to believe that there is a plan for the rest

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Lessons
from page one

of the journey that will one day become plain to us as we fulfill His purpose. All of the moral teaching of Freemasonry that follows those first few steps is bedded deep in faith in God.

In the Entered Apprentice degree there is found the fundamental quest of life. We are searchers for truth. In whatever form we express it, and however qualified, this is our lifelong quest. Nor can there be any greater quest. It compels life's most desirable quality, sincerity. The completely honest man is the man whose first and last interest is in knowing the truth. We have our own particular interests in life, either inherited or acquired. We are inclined to bend all of our efforts to that which is in agreement with, and will support, those interests. Sir Isaac Newton, the great scientist and philosopher wrote that "when a man takes a position that he believes to be true, he is liable to see only what he wants to see, only what he needs to support his position. He will seize all that fits into his preconceived notions. He will be blind to essential conditions that do not fit." Ernest Renan, the noted French writer, is described as "a writer who had a charming genius for neglecting all facts that disturb the artistic arrangement of his subject." Such men will find the truth only by accident. A great religious teacher has said that "with what measure ye measure it shall be measured to you again." The measuring rod that we use in giving to life is precisely the measuring rod that life will use in measuring back to us. If we measure our truth, then truth will be measured back to us.

When there is sincerity in the search for truth, there is no finality in the quest, for we never come to the end of the road. There is a story to the

effect that in the colonial days in New England the selectmen of Cambridge, Massachusetts, commissioned a road to be built from Cambridge to Watertown. When the builders reached Watertown they did not stop, but continued the road to Newtown, the present city of Newton. They were asked, with some asperity, why they exceeded their instructions. Their reply was that they thought that, while they were at it, they might as well continue the road as far to the west as it would ever be needed. That road today, of course, ends at the Pacific coast. But those men were neither the first nor the last to conclude that the point they had reached was the ultimate. Was there not a point in the west coast of Europe that was called *Ultima Thule*? And did not some countries on the Western edge of Europe have on their coins the inscription, *ne plus ultra*, meaning "nothing more beyond?" But they were less naïve than the philosophers, the religious and political leaders who have insisted that they have reached finality in their theories, their creeds, and their political systems. Truth knows no boundaries, nor does it ever come to the point where it says that there is nothing more beyond. Sincerity and progressiveness mark the seeker after truth.

The Entered Apprentice degree reveals also a fundamental relationship, that of brotherhood. In Freemasonry a man finds his fellow men as brothers, and discovers that he has certain obligations to them. What we call the rite of destitution brings home to him in the strongest manner this fact of brotherhood and its obligations. A freemason's first duty is to his home, and those who are dependent upon him. This means, whatever else, that a man must be a freemason in his own home. If a freemason will not practice the principles

of Freemasonry in his own home, where will he practice them? After that his obligation to help his fellow man goes out in ever widening circles, for brotherhood knows no limits.

This degree states rather definitely that brotherhood was not created nor discovered by Freemasonry, but is a fundamental relationship among all men. For we proclaim that "by the exercise of brotherly love we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family – the high and low, rich and poor; who, as created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support, and protect each other."

This is what I mean when I say that the Entered Apprentice degree introduces us to a fundamental relationship.

This degree presents to us a fundamental law, namely, that you cannot achieve a desirable end without adequate means. For we are presented with working tools—those fundamental tools of the builder's trade, the gauge and gavel.

There are two great futilities in life. One is to have great means, and no great end for which to use them. A young man I knew, not long out of college, told me that he wanted to write. He had had a brilliant career in college, and had a facility in the written world beyond the best that many could produce; but he has never found anything to write about. He had great means but no end to serve. A greater futility is to have a great goal or end in life, and to have no means with which to reach the goal or serve the end. No matter what the area in which we are working, whether the achievement of production in industry, or skill in a profession, or such socially desirable ends as the abolition of poverty, the assurance of racial justice, or the realization of world peace, it is no use wishing for these

ends until we are ready to will the means to attain them.

I keep repeating the fact that the two great ends in Freemasonry are character and brotherhood. We are trying to build better men, and we are trying to establish the collective life of mankind in brotherhood. The working tools of an Entered Apprentice remind us that it is no use wishing for these ends, until we are ready to will the means to attain them. By the common gavel, which is used to break off the rough and superfluous parts of stones, we are taught that we are to divest our hearts and consciences of the vices and superfluities of life if we are to build the spiritual character worthy of heaven itself. There is something that we must do about these characters of ours to improve them. It is no use wishing for high character if we insist upon engaging in low acts. This part of the Entered Apprentice degree fairly shouts at us that we must will the conditions of worthwhile character if we would achieve it.

The twenty-four inch gauge, which is ordinarily used to make measurements in the erection of a building and is therefore indispensable to the worker, teaches us to divide our time. If this means anything it is that we organize our lives. There is a time for everything in life – a time for work, for service, and for recreation and rest. It would be difficult to improve upon this division as we think of the effort we should make to establish brotherhood among men. It is not enough to organize our lives around the necessity of our usual vocations. Doing this will make for efficiency in our vocation. But a definite time must be set aside for the service we owe to God to keep in communication with Him, and the service we owe our brethren. Brotherhood is not going to be established on this earth by the brotherly action of

other men, but by our brotherly acts. My service to mankind is to prove myself a brother. There is nothing that surpasses this in importance.

These then are the fundamentals of the Entered Apprentice degree. They are not the idealistic dreamings of men who live with their heads in the clouds. They are the realities, and the vitalities, by which we are going to prove to the Craft, and the world that we have been made freemasons. ■

Excerpted from Dare We Be Masons & Other Addresses. Boston : Anthoensen Press, 1966.

Inspiration

by Dr. F. L. Reese

No man is sufficient unto himself. Our most important endeavors and their successes result from the inspiration gained by contact with our fellow men.

Inspiration is the spark that ignites as well as the fuel that must be constantly replenished. Perhaps it is the vision of fulfillment that inspires. Perhaps the dregs of another's failure or of our own, from whose ashes like the phoenix we arise, spurred on to ever increasing endeavor. The way may be lighted by a touch, a word, a picture, a sermon or from sources bizarre and unbelievable.

Thus are we hurried on our way. Whether by commendation or condemnation the effort alone is important. Man is but a traveler along the highway of life, and inspiration the springs from which he must refresh himself. This it is that revitalizes his ego and enables him like the camel to travel from oasis to oasis. This it is, which withheld may cause him to drop by the wayside.

But seldom does man travel in a desert land. More often are the crystal bubbling springs accessible. At times he must but stop to quaff his fill; at others, the byways must be searched. Perhaps barbed

obstructions threaten his flesh or raiment, but the gain is always worth the effort.

Corporal man requires rest after feasting, but not so in this journey. To tarry after his stimulating draught invites disaster. Each hour of delay but sees a flagging of his powers, while each mile traversed only seems to sustain his energy the more. Toward the end of his vision is sharpened. The little streamlets, which had been passed by unheeded, are now readily discerned; and new inspiration is gained from sources, before unknown or unrecognized. ■

Thoughts on Inspiration by Dr. F. L. Reese. (circa 1945)

Lodge notes

This past autumn, the brethren of **Cumberland Lodge No. 26** welcomed a full lodge of visitors to confer the Fellowcraft degree on four brothers from four different lodges: their own, **Doric Lodge No. 18, Barclay Lodge No. 90, and Euclid Lodge No. 158**. This bringing together of the brethren of four lodges was also an opportunity for the Euclid Lodge travelling gavel to make its first foray outside District 5. The fellowship enjoyed that evening was a fine example to the newly-passed brethren. ■

Online

Brethren are cautioned that just because an email claims to come from a freemason, this may not be the case.

We all like to think that we are good at recognizing when we are being conned, but the internet, with its casual informality, has allowed a new generation of confidence swindlers to find a new market.

The obvious self-serving offer to transfer funds from an unknown benefactor's estate into your bank account is easily

recognized. But the innocuous request from a "brother" for information on when your lodge meets, or the phone number of a lodge member, is less easily dealt with. We all want to be helpful, especially to a brother; but how can you really be certain that the request came from a brother?

Secrecy is not our watchword, as it was to an earlier generation of freemasons. But privacy remains a major concern. Caution, not paranoia, should be our guide.

Freemasonry long ago developed a mechanism to deal with this issue; something the internet—with its ease of access—has made it easy for us to forget.

All masonic communication should first proceed through your lodge secretary and Grand Secretary's office. This is not an attempt on the part of either to stifle discussion or control communication. This is intended to allow for the confirmation that people claiming to be freemasons are in fact such.

Only the Grand Secretary's office has the resources to confirm that someone from outside the jurisdiction is a freemason. Allow it to do its job. Please direct enquiries from outside our jurisdiction to the Grand Secretary's office. ■

Masonic labour

by Bro. Allyn F Davies

Our fraternity throughout the ages has revered labour and charges its members to labour to build spiritual temples throughout their masonic lives. Labour is a central focusing of all our degrees and activities. It is easy to define labour as the act of performing specific duties or the exertion of physical or mental effort.

Time, and time again our fraternity explains that the operative mason laboured to build a building, physically or



Grand Lodge of BC & Yukon 138th Annual Communication

June 18-20, 2009
Prince George

Online registration
will open in the new year
freemasonry.bcy.ca/gl2009



Vacancy in Grand Lodge Office

Expressions of interest are invited from qualified persons for the position of office manager for the Grand Lodge Office, to be received by close of business on 10 February 2009.

Duties will include assisting the Grand Secretary in the performance of the duties outlined in Section R2 in the *Book of Constitutions* and *Regulations* of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon.

Please forward under confidential cover to the Grand Master:
R. Glenn Allen
6600 Chelmsford St.
Richmond BC
V7C 4H9

James C. Gordon PGM
Grand Secretary

materially, while the speculative freemason labours to build a temple mentally or spiritually. The ancient masons physically worked while the more recent freemasons mentally worked, so what is to be learned?

Firstly, we should understand that when a lodge is between its opening and closing, it is "at labour" or "at refreshment". The time when the lodge is "at work" is when it is engaged in the initiation of candidates into its various degrees, for these initiations constitute masonic labour and it is through these that men become freemasons.

Secondly, labour involves more than merely exertion or effort. It expects the exertion to involve difficulty, challenge, or compulsory activities. For the ancient apprentices, there were compulsory tasks, which tested them, both physically and mentally. Moving great stones, breaking off the rough portions to obtain smooth blocks, and having the patience to earn the right to higher wages were placed before all apprentices to determine those who earned the right to advance. Not all were expected to travel this rough road, only those willing to labour with patience and fortitude, and prove they were worthy to advance.

Today's candidate faces similar expectations in memory and proficiency, without the physical aspects. There are challenges to proof of proficiency, and some time constraints, but years have been replaced by months, and polished stone by words. Herein lies an interesting contrast between the operative freemason and the speculative freemason. The operative freemason produces a visible creation, open to judgment. A building is built and the wages paid. His labour is clear and he knows it is done.

On the other hand, what of the speculative freemason and his labour? How does he, or we, know the building is

complete, or even being built? The answer to this question must lie in the eyes of the brethren and within the brother's own conscience. The brothers must understand and appreciate his labour for the Craft, and know that his labour is well done. The brother must appreciate the importance of the internal aspect of his temple and how important his conformity to the moral law is to the fraternity. Spreading the cement of brotherly love, affection, and happiness must be a constant goal of his labour, as it is for the fraternity.

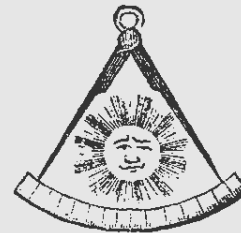
When faced with a moral choice or a choice of conscience, the true freemason must choose well, regardless of the temptations of short term gain. Integrity, honesty, and honour are not idle words within the fraternity. We work in our lodges to make ourselves as pure as the lambskin we wear and as deserving of the acceptance of the Great Architect as we may possibly be. Let us never forget that masonic labour alone will yield the recognition, "Well done". ■

Fees

In 1871, when this jurisdiction adopted its first *Book of Constitutions* it prohibited any lodge from conferring the three degrees for less than \$50. What did that expense mean to a potential candidate living in what at the time was a frontier society?

Using the Consumer Price Index as a rough guide to compute the present value, joining Freemasonry today should cost a candidate almost \$900. A computation based on the nominal Gross Domestic Product per capita arrives at an initiation fee in excess of \$12,000.

Today our *Book of Constitutions* requires the fee be no less than \$150 and it is the rare lodge that charges more than \$400. Just saying. ■



GRAND MASTER'S ITINERARY FEBRUARY 2009

2	Mon	District 9	Kalamalka Lodge No. 160	Vernon
4	Wed	District 4S	Centre Lodge No. 113	Williams Lake
11	Wed		Board of General Purposes	Vancouver
11	Wed	District 16	Alliance Lodge No. 193	Vancouver
14	Sat	District 24	Hollyburn Lodge No. 135	West Vancouver
21	Sat	District 10	Summerland Lodge No. 56	Summerland
24	Tue	District 3	Mount St. Paul Lodge No. 109	Kamloops

Knowledge

by Thomas Sherrard Roy

William Preston wrote that "On the mind all our knowledge must depend; what, therefore, can be a more proper subject of investigation of freemasons?" There can be no better illustration of this than in the second degree.

One of the great ends of knowledge, or education, is the development of the faculty of discrimination. Life is reduced to drift without the ability to discriminate, without a proper sense of values.

Everywhere in life we are confronted with the necessity of a proper sense of values. The artist must have a proper sense of proportion, and of colour values. If he fails in either particular, then no matter what his training, or the ambition that drives him, he cannot succeed as an artist. The musician must have a proper sense of tone values. The poet must have a fastidious sense of word values if he would be more than just a rhymist.

Most important, one must have a proper sense of life values. No other single thing in life is more responsible for individual failure, nor for international conflict, than the lack of a proper sense of values. Men give primary

importance to secondary things, and secondary importance to primary things, and thus create the conditions that make for confused action and frustrated ends.

The Fellowcraft degree indicates one of the factors that will help us keep our values properly related in its emphasis upon knowledge. It is impossible for us to make an honest judgment in any area without a knowledge of the facts. Our emphasis upon knowledge is not for the sake of attaining a higher degree of sophistication, but for the sake of coming to a better understanding of life, and a more brotherly relationship with all mankind.

Without knowledge we come to wrong conclusions about events in our country, or in the world in which we live.

If Freemasonry is interested in building a better world, then freemasons, of all men, must be interested in the spread of knowledge. The kind of world we desire waits upon a better understanding among men. A better understanding among men waits upon the knowledge that will give to men the facts upon which all judgment should rest, and help to develop the intelligence that will enable men to work wisely towards the making of a better world. ■