

MASONIC EDUCATION: IT'S RAISON D'ETRE

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The importance of masonic education is a subject that has been overlooked by many lodges. In the interest of forming a lodge of research and education in the Delaware jurisdiction, and hopefully help other lodges do the same. I see it fitting to explain Masonic education's *Raison d'etre*, its purpose and importance. The Modern mason will quickly learn that the craft, in our current era, goes under the name of speculative masonry. It is important to understand why this is the case, that way we will fully appreciate the importance of masonic education.

Our ritual tells us that we work in speculative masonry, but our ancient brethren worked in both speculative and operative masonry. Brother Haywood, regarding the difference between speculative and operative masons, writes that, operative masons were devoted to the actual building activities of erecting temples and magnificent architecture. The majority of operative lodges in his time worked under the immediate control of religious establishments and also came under the arm of craft guilds<sup>1</sup>. The prominence of these operative lodges began to decline in the fifteenth century, primarily because of the protestant reformation in England. In the encyclopedia of the religions of the world, Melton and Baumann attest to the formation of the first grand lodge of England in 1717 by "non-masons", *in the sense of the word*, to gather and speculate regarding metaphysical issues; apart from the theological perspectives of the day<sup>2</sup>.

Brethren, you will agree with me when I say that the matter regarding the history of freemasonry has been studied, debated and exhausted and it is time to advance, by regular and upright steps, to the true meaning of our speculative craft. Thus there is need to justify the importance of speculative philosophy and masonic education to the initiate and brethren since it's been observed that we have far moved from the original objectives of the craft. Wilmshurst rightly stated that Masonry has not fulfilled its original purpose of being the efficient initiating instrument it was designed to be; its energies have been diverted from its true instructional purpose into social and philanthropic channels, excellent in their way but foreign to, and building upon, the primal main intention. He adds that it is absurd to think that a vast organization like Masonry was ordained merely to teach grown men the symbolic meaning of a few simple builders' tools, or to impress upon us such elementary virtues as temperance and justice<sup>3</sup>. On this matter Brother Fletcher, stated that we have drifted far away from the true knowledge within our fraternity and that is very difficult to turn the tide, but it is the very thing we are going to have to do<sup>4</sup>. In a lecture to the Research Lodge of Otago, No. 161, Brother Robertson expressed concern that masonic education seems to cease with the repetition of the ritual; and yet there is a wealth of interesting facts, stories, theories and conjecture concerning the fraternity that are waiting to be explored, and even added to<sup>5</sup>. Brother Bentley echoed the same words found in the masonic chronicle, stating that Masonic education stops too often with mere learning of the required

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<sup>1</sup> H. L. Haywood, "Chapters of masonic history," *The Builder*, 1923

<sup>2</sup> J. G. Melton and M. Baumann, *Religions of the world: A comprehensive encyclopedia of beliefs and practices* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> W. L. Wilmshurst, *The meaning of Masonry* (New York: Bell Pub. Co, 1980)

<sup>4</sup> R. E. Fletcher, "Masonic Education - A Subject Too Often Overlooked,"  
n.d.[http://phoenixmasonry.org/masonic\\_education.htm](http://phoenixmasonry.org/masonic_education.htm).

<sup>5</sup> J. T. Robertson, "The Importance of the Second Degree," last modified July 31, 1963,  
<http://www.masoniclibrary.org.au/research/list-lectures/106-the-importance-of-the-second-degree.html>.

lectures, thus failing to adequately impart upon our initiates the wealth of knowledge, inspiration and masonic light which they are seeking; and to which they are rightly entitled.<sup>6</sup>

What then is the true purpose of this speculative craft? The answer, we are told, is to aid the contemplative to view, with reverence and admiration, the glorious works of creation, and inspire him with the most exalted ideas of the perfection of his divine creator. Speculative philosophy, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is one which professes to be founded upon intuitive or priori insight, especially that which deals with the nature of the absolute or divine.

<sup>7</sup>Masonry teaches its brethren that the craft is interwoven with religion as to compel them to pay rational homage to the deity, inspiring them with the most exalted ideas of the perfection of the divine creator. Let us contemplate on these pregnant words. Let us open our eyes and be able to behold the wonders of our wonderful craft. Let us remember that the great objective of our craft includes the cultivation of an active benevolence and the promotion of the correct knowledge of the duties we owe to God, our neighbors and ourselves. Let our education, as Brother Pike stated begins with the burning of our intellectual and moral idols: our prejudices, notions, conceits, our worthless or ignoble.<sup>8</sup>

As we responded when we were asked where we were first made masons, education must begin with us. In our hearts. Is this not in line with the ancient teachings? *Nosce te ipsum*, Know thyself! Reads the inscription in the pronaos of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup... For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" postulates Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. "... and if again I say that to talk every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me talking and examining myself and others is the greatest good to man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living.." said Socrates to the judges.

Here we see that the first importance of the contemplation of the benign genius of our mystic arts is the knowledge of one's self. It is in education, and therefore learning, that we find ourselves and are able to attain a higher spiritual nature. The Rosicrucian legend of "Parsifal" represents spiritual attainment through a life of purity and service. By overcoming his lower nature and gaining control of his body, the aspirant is able to raise his spiritual being and attain liberation. The legend shows that the feelings and emotions, unchecked by knowledge, are fruitful sources of temptations. The very harmlessness and guilelessness of the initiate make him easy prey. Therefore, it is necessary for self-growth to bring out our weak points, ultimately evolving our conscience. In his *Introduction to Plato's Alcibiades* Taylor firmly states that the pure and genuine knowledge of ourselves, circumscribed in scientific boundaries, must be considered as the most proper principle of all philosophy and of the Platonic doctrine. The author then postulates that the purification and perfection of ourselves is the right place to begin our education and it is indeed whence the Delphic God exhorts us to begin. Plato, in Phaedrus,

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<sup>6</sup> A. H. Bentley, "Masonic education," n.d. [skirret.com/archive/dormer/masonic\\_education.html](http://skirret.com/archive/dormer/masonic_education.html).

<sup>7</sup> Merriam-Webster "Speculative philosophy," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/speculative%20philosophy>.

<sup>8</sup> A. Pike and Freemasons, *Morals and dogma of the Ancient and accepted Scottish rite of freemasonry: Prepared for the Supreme council of the thirty-third degree, for the Southern jurisdiction of the United States, and published by its authority* (Charleston, 1871)

concludes that he has no time to engage in learning myths and allegories because he does not know himself yet, and as long as this ignorance remains it is ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters. Hobbes in his *Leviathan*, states that trying to understand other people without first understanding yourself is to try to decipher without possessing a key<sup>9</sup>. Also, he adds, the man that looks into himself and considers what he does and upon what grounds will read and know the thoughts of other men. Therefore it is futile to try and understand allegories, signs and symbols passed through generations without first understanding oneself. As we give picture books to our children to convey lessons beyond their intellectual grasp, so do the great teachers give infant humanity these pictorial symbols. This, my brothers, is the second importance of masonic education.

Now, we might ask ourselves how learning the language of symbols benefits us. Symbolism, writes Manly P Hall, is the language of the mysteries, by symbols men have sought to communicate to each other thoughts that transcend the limitations of language<sup>10</sup>. In the *Psychology of Transference* Jung notes that Eternal truth needs a human language that varies with the spirit of the times. He adds that the Primordial images undergo ceaseless transformation and, yet, remain ever the same.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is said that the quest for the light through masonic symbols is a journey to a fascinating past, present and future. Mackey in the Preface to his book *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*, states that it is by two modes of instruction that the mason is indebted for all he knows and for all he can know of the philosophic system. These two modes, he posits, are instruction by legends and instruction by symbols although, are not radically different; the symbol is visible and the legend is audible. Both are designed to illustrate the philosophy of speculative masonry.<sup>12</sup> To offer oneself for the study of these symbols, allegories, myths and legends is to remove the veil of ignorance and indifference that have sought to conceal the true Masonic philosophy. Brother Mackey adds that the only way to investigate masonic philosophy is through the study of symbolism since it is the portal of its temple, through which we will gain access to the *sacellum* that conceals its *aporrheta*.<sup>13</sup> Therefore the constant study and continuous repetition of this study will aid the studious mason in yielding not only new truths but old truths long forgotten.

In the ring of the niebelung lesson, the Rosicrucian teacher reminds us that in order to evolve the pabulum of life within us so that it may shine through the material darkness, reiteration of ideas is absolutely essential. Aristotle saw the importance of idea reiteration, stating that it is the

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<sup>9</sup> T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Start Publishing LLC, 1651)

<sup>10</sup> M. P. Hall, *The secret teachings of all ages: An encyclopedic outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic, and Rosicrucian symbolical philosophy : being an interpretation of the secret teachings concealed within the rituals, allegories, and mysteries of the ages* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2003)

<sup>11</sup> C. G. Jung et al., *The collected works of C.G. Jung: Essays on the psychology of the transference and other subjects* (1966)

<sup>12</sup> A. G. Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry* (Luton: Andrews UK Ltd, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> A. G. Mackey, *The Symbolism of Freemasonry*

frequent repetition that produces a natural tendency. Weibell summarized Aristotle's Law of association and frequency as follows:<sup>14</sup>

- Law of similarity - The recall of an object will elicit the recall of things similar to that object
- Law of contrast - The recall of an object will elicit the recall of opposite things
- Law of contiguity – The recall of an object will elicit the recall of things that were originally experienced along with that object.
- Law of frequency - The more frequently two things are experienced together, the more likely it will be that the experience or recall of one will stimulate the recall of the other.

Pavlov was able to condition the reflex to be triggered by repeated conditioned and unconditioned stimuli. Bruner found that the more one practices, the more likely they are to generalize what they have learned into a style of problem solving or inquiry.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the continuous inquiry into the nature of Freemasonry, from whence it came and its symbols, will benefit the masonic student knowledge and, in turn, stimulate his intellect.

Education and study are essential as intellectual sustenance. The examples are endless: Sir Francis Bacon, who proposed a new way to unlock the secrets of nature through the scientific experiment and now considered the father of modern science; Albert Einstein, well known as the most prominent physicist of the twentieth century; Pythagoras of Samos, credited for most modern mathematical theories; Archimedes of Syracuse, Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates, to name but a few. These men, apart from others of their time, paved the way for the modern world. These men were also contemplative students of philosophy and of the ancient mysteries. Do you still doubt, brother, the power of study?

There is much to learn in our craft. By definition it is a regular system of morality veiled in allegory, which will unfold its beauties to the candid and industrious inquirer. As a student of the mystic arts we will learn to first and foremost know ourselves then advance in our study of masonic legends and symbols which, by constant reiteration, will stimulate our intellect. In the words of Manly P Hall, Arise ye, the day of labor is at hand; the Great Work awaits completion, and the days of man's life are few.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> C. J. Weibell, "Principles of learning: 7 principles to guide personalized, student-centered learning in the technology-enhanced, blended learning environment," last modified 2011, <https://principlesoflearning.wordpress.com>.

<sup>15</sup> Weibell, Principles of learning

<sup>16</sup> M. P. Hall, "Rosicrucian and Masonic origins," in Lectures on Ancient Philosophy—An Introduction to the Study and Application of Rational Procedure (Los Angeles, CA: The Hall Publishing Company, 1929)

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