

LIGHT – MORE LIGHT – FURTHER LIGHT A MASONIC JOURNEY

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With the success of Dan Brown's new book *The Lost Symbol* there seems to be an increase in interest with more people inquiring about our Masonic fraternity. The book is about the symbols of Freemasonry. One would only hope that there would be a similar resurgence of interest by our brethren in making the journey of studying about our fraternity, its philosophy, its history, and the meaning of the symbols that make up our ritual.

When a candidate first knocks upon the door separating the preparation room from the lodge hall he starts upon this journey of enlightenment about our brotherhood. The candidate is introduced as having been in darkness and now seeks light by being brought into the fraternity of Freemasonry. In the first section of the Entered Apprentice degree the candidate is asked what he most desires. The response elicited is "light". In the first section of the Fellowcraft degree his response to a similar query is "more light". In the first section of the Master Mason degree ritual, the appropriate response is "further light". This seems to imply that the authors of our Illinois ritual indicated that the achievement of the Master Mason degree is not an end to our Masonic education, but there is much more. There is nowhere in the ritual of symbolic or blue lodge Freemasonry where a brother is given the "most light" or a completion of the quest to find light in masonry.

Attendance has fallen drastically at lodge meetings. The number of new petitions has also diminished in recent years. Why is it that Freemasonry has fallen in popularity? Why is it that even when new masons are brought into the lodge that they are no longer active after being raised to the degree of Master Mason? Many blame the current situation with our economy. People are having a hard enough time making ends meet and having to spend time with their occupations and their families. Freemasonry no longer occupies a prominent place in our culture.

In the volume 14, 2005 edition the Transactions of the Illinois Lodge of Research, Brother Edward A. Rund authored an article entitled, *We Are Failing Our Masonic Educators*. Brother Rund stated that statistics indicate that over 95% of the new Master Masons felt no need to return to lodge and take an active interest in our fraternity. Of those that do return to lodge they only do so sporadically. Few of our new Master Masons take on the obligation of becoming officers in their lodge. Brother Rund places the reason for this fall off in Masonic feeling on the lack of a focus on Masonic education.

In volume 16, 2007 of the Transactions of the Illinois Lodge of Research, Brother Neil Neddermeyer, Past Grand Master of Minnesota, postulated that there are three groups of Masons. There are those that feel that Freemasonry is a social club. A second category consists of those that feel that the main function of Freemasonry is to support charities and philanthropic institutions. Finally, there are those Masons that are in the fraternity to receive Masonic light and

learn as much as possible of Masonic symbolism, history and philosophy. While all of these reasons for becoming Masons are important, it is this latter group of brethren that this article is trying to reach.

Rollin C. Blackmer, in his book, *The Lodge and the Craft*, states that at the writing of the book in 1976, there were more than 100,000 brethren who held memberships in Masonic lodges in the state of Missouri. Of this number he postulated that perhaps 75 were sufficiently interested in the brotherhood to undertake further study of the fraternity to which they belonged. This is a most lamentable state of affairs, which, I submit, continues to this day. Perhaps if more of our brethren took on the task of learning about our fraternity we could greatly increase attendance at lodge and bring along a cadre of brethren who would take on the roles of leaders in their lodge. Ritual is important. It is the ritual that is the first exposure that a candidate has to the philosophy of masonry. The ritual consists of the lessons that freemasonry teaches so that a brother can lead a life that is rich and fulfilling. As Blackmer states, "The ritual is the vehicle which the principles of Freemasonry ride into the hearts and minds of men." However, the words of the ritual are not enough. It is the meaning of the words that lead men to live up to our teaching. These words are capable of interpretation that is nuanced by the historical background of those who wrote them. A study of the history and symbolism of the ritual is essential to understanding the meaning behind the words. There is much research to indicate that it is easier to learn ritual when one understands the meaning of the words that are being memorized.

There are many areas of Masonic research that can be undertaken depending on the inclinations of each individual brother. Some brethren may become interested in the history of the craft. Others will take an interest in the philosophy of Freemasonry. Those with a legal bent may become interested in Masonic jurisprudence. There is also the symbolism inherent in the words of our ritual. The bottom line is that there is something for everyone in our fraternity. The full meaning of Freemasonry becomes a lifelong study of the various aspects of our brotherhood. This study can be rewarding and give the Masonic brother a meaning for life and, as our ritual tells us, "There stands a just and upright Mason".

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