

The Unspeakable Masonic Word

When we speak of "Masonic education," we are needlessly redundant.

Freemasonry is education, simultaneously moral instruction, spiritual enlightenment and intellectual growth so that a man may come to know - and improve - himself. But this isn't supposed to be a solitary activity; Freemasonry also is a brotherhood. The Master Mason Lecture explains the symbolism of the Beehive: "He who will not endeavor to add to the common stock of knowledge may be deemed a drone in the hive of nature, a useless member of society, and unworthy of the care and protection of Masons." Together the brethren seek "that which was lost." What was lost? Truth. It is that search after Truth that makes Freemasonry philosophical, and where there is a love of wisdom, education is the act of courtship.

Because Freemasonry's teachings intentionally address the fundamental and perpetual curiosities of man, it can accurately be said that it is education without limit in both appeal and scope.

Truly any wholesome field of study or discipline intersects somewhere along Freemasonry's path of learning and much of Masonic teaching coincides with the Humanities. Masonry reveals itself through ritual. These centuries-old ceremonies are a framework, or more accurately, a map that each Freemason may follow in his search for Truth. To summarize just one aspect of this process, as an Apprentice, the newly initiated Mason is taught to subdue his passions while letting the Four Cardinal Virtues guide him toward candid self-awareness. From this ceremony one finds commonality with Plato and Aquinas. The former saw these virtues as a recipe for a perfect society; the latter adapted the virtues for the betterment of an individual's attitudes, values and behavior. Next, as a more experienced Mason called a Fellowcraft, he is shown the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy guide the Masonic student as they had the thinkers who gave Western civilization its Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment, with all the culture contained therein. A proper understanding of the Arts and Sciences empowers Masonic man to make his mind the rational master of his primal Five Senses of hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling and tasting, and so this progress builds upon the Platonic-Thomist foundation. In the Third Degree of Freemasonry, the Master Mason is sufficiently aware of his place in the universe so as to fear no danger, not even death itself. Ultimately, upon exiting the Holy of Holies for the final time, the Master Mason goes gamely "into that good night" knowing that there is no sting of death and no victory of the grave, but only eternal life.

We've dubbed Education "The Unspeakable Masonic Word" because it seems like no one ever talks about it. The various research lodges, study groups and the like are treated like red light districts where only the furtive venture in search of the forbidden. So at first you're pretty much on your own. To get started, think about what you most desire to know about Freemasonry, and then go find the answers. Easy? No, but it shouldn't be. Depending on the subject, a researcher can spend months looking for a long out-of-print book; even years can pass before inadvertently coming across a needed factoid in an unexpected source. Naturally the internet delivers limitless information, but - even as with books - one must exercise discriminating choice. Again, let the ritual be your map. Choose an unfamiliar word, an odd phrase, a seemingly antiquated idea. Then define it. Identify its Masonic significance and apply that meaning to a broader context of how it could benefit

others; and then translate that idea into your own words so that you take possession and internalize it. Once it is yours, it is there as a tool for use in your growth, and it's there for good. Repeat the process, as needed, for life.

That education is interwoven in Freemasonry is a reality that predates modern Masonry itself. In the *Old Charges* - the dozens of manuscripts penned over the course of more than three centuries prior to the start in 1717 of the Masonic Order we know today - are found clear procedures on how new members of the building trade were to be schooled in their craft over long spans of time. In the *Halliwel Manuscript*, believed written in the 14th century and the earliest of these documents, are found the "Fifteen Articles for the Master Mason," including:

3. He must take apprentices for seven years, his craft to learn.
11. He must be both fair and free and teach by his might.
12. He shall not disparage his fellow's work.
13. He must teach his apprentice.

Nor is there anything extraneous about the grave consequence awaiting the unskilled, untested, and unlucky operative builder in the ancient world. The pre-Biblical Babylonian ruler Hammurabi set down a legal code that included:

If a builder has built a house for a man and has not made his work sound, so that the house he has made falls down and causes the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death. If it causes the death of the son of the owner of the house, they shall kill the son of that builder.

Clearly the importance of education in the building arts is indisputable.

(Remember that the funny-looking cap you wore at graduation is called a mortarboard.) Today Freemasonry's instruction is all presented in allegory and symbolism, but the education is no less crucial to the Speculative Mason's life. Tragically few seem to understand or want to understand, and this power goes neglected in the quotidian realities of contemporary Masonry. Why? Because it is hard work! In mastering his Craft, Masonic Man spends his life relentlessly scrutinizing himself, the condition of his fellow man and of the world, and the role of the Great Architect of the Universe in it all. It is not by accident that the hard labor of constructing in stone is the metaphor through which Masonry's instruction is imparted. Nor is it by chance that the seeker of the degrees of Freemasonry is repeatedly tested for his willingness to proceed further. While the teachings of Freemasonry are universal - "Every human being has a claim upon your kind offices." - it was never intended for every human being to enter its temples, and yet its doors have been flung open for many years allowing practically any man to enter. Consequently, the libraries that once were busy beehives have been converted to other, more simple purposes, their books locked away in storage, forgotten. (Indeed the word "temple" itself, as in a place for conTEMPLation, has been abandoned for the monotonous "Masonic center.") Simultaneously, the discussions that once compelled Masons to reconsider their opinions, to re-examine their very lives, and to improve their world have been replaced by charity walk-a-thons and other activities that, while helpful, should be entrusted to our neighbors in the Lions, Kiwanis and Elks organizations. While organizing and staging a charity fundraiser is a big job, it is child's play compared to the vital challenge of metabolizing Masonic thought, and achieving that state of

being where the heart of Jerusalem meets the mind of Athens.

In the fundamental duty of educating oneself and one's fellow Masons, we today are not negligent. We are uninformed, and the craziest thing about it is that the ritual tells us what to do. Remember the advice imparted to you upon your first knocks on the Inner Door: "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." One's search is a personal endeavor, but there are friends to help you along the way. When enough of us start speaking aloud about Masonic education we can restore to its rightful place the paramount purpose of Freemasonry: to labor together in replenishing the "common stock of knowledge" in our pursuit of Truth.

Source: Knights of the North Masonic Dictionary