

Masonic Education

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R.W. Bro D.J. Walker District Grand Master, Carpentaria, U.G.L.Q. delivered this paper at the last meeting.

Masonic education is a hot topic at the moment and there are many opinions about what constitutes Masonic education.

Education, by its very definition, encompasses a wide field of information and it is necessary to divide the information available into categories so that the student or, in Masonic terms the candidate, is given the information in packets to allow ease of assimilation.

At the moment the only formal structure of education in this jurisdiction are the three basic established degrees of Freemasonry. It is arguable whether or not the instruction given is progressive or ad hoc.

Our problems then are:

1. How much should a freemason know,
2. And about what,
3. And when should he know it.

In setting a Masonic curriculum we must take into account that every Freemason is an individual and has his own expectations of what the craft can give him and what it means to him.

I know many masons to have no interest in Masonic knowledge outside that which is contained the ritual of the three degrees and the installed Masters' ritual. They hardly ever miss a meeting and thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to practise the ritual and the socialising at the festive board. They also enjoy the occasional mixed social events that a Lodge organises and are happy to participate in any benevolent activities undertaken by their Lodge. They have hobbies and interests outside Freemasonry and resent any attempt by Freemasonry to intrude upon the time set aside for those other hobbies and interests.

On the other hand there are brethren whose thirst for Masonic knowledge will never be satisfied. They live, eat and breathe Freemasonry and cannot understand the attitude of the brother who I just described above.

I'm sure that we would all agree that they are both good men and good Freemasons. If we pointed out to the first variety of Freemason that there were other aspects of Freemasonry that he should know and we offered him the opportunity to learn those aspects I am sure we could structure the further education through lodge meetings.

For the second variety of Freemason we should offer the opportunity to acquire the knowledge he seeks through organisations such as this Lodge of Research.

Therefore, I would like to see Masonic education formally structured into categories of:

1. Must know.
2. Should know.
3. Could know.

I believe that the 'must knows' and 'should knows' can be imparted to the brethren through their Lodge. The 'could knows' should be available through organisations such as your Lodge.

My idea of what constitutes the 'must knows' depends on what the brother is doing or intends to do in Masonic terms.

Obviously a brother *must know* the secrets of each degree because that is fundamental to our system. It would be difficult for any brother to participate in our ceremonies, if he did not know the signs of the degrees. Similarly, if a brother takes office, then he must learn the work attached to that office. I don't think I need to convince anyone here of those requirements. The system is already in place to allow him to learn or be taught the skills necessary to participate in our ceremonies.

As a brother approaches mastership of his Lodge he *must know* how to manage that Lodge. As there is no leadership or management pre-requisite to becoming a Master then I believe that we must conduct masters

and wardens courses outside the Lodge. I know these courses have been run in the past but they have not been supported by the brethren. As such, the conveners have become disillusioned and given up. I say this from personal experience when I attempted to conduct a Lodge of Instruction. The brethren of my own Lodge were the only ones who attended and that attendance finally tailed off because of other commitments.

However, it is about time that we looked again at this question and seriously promoted this course to the brethren of this district and even encouraged the recycled masters to attend. You never know-, they might learn something. Planning is fundamental to leadership but have seen very few instances where a Lodge can produce a written plan for the next 12 months following an installation. How can we hope to succeed without that written plan?

Those are some examples of what I consider to be 'must knows'. Some are suitable to be acquired within the Lodge, particularly the ceremonial skills which most directors of ceremony are capable of teaching. However, we would need to establish an appropriate faculty within the district to instruct in leadership skills and planning.

I have covered the some of the things I think a brother *must know* and how he can acquire that knowledge. I would now like to address those things a brother *should know*.

A brother *should know* the history of Freemasonry generally and certainly within this district and the United Grand Lodge Queensland, which is a very important part of our organization for the philosophies behind Freemasonry.

The basic concepts of these philosophies are referred to in the ritual but this is very seldom expanded upon. Most brethren understand that benevolence and charity are encouraged but there's no further information delivered to a brother on the work done by our boards of benevolence. The work done by Masonic charities in the United Kingdom and the United States of America would really surprise some brethren.

I don't believe that it is ever explained to a candidate what constitutes brotherly love, relief and truth or is he given any practical examples. We need to give our brethren this information

Lectures on these topics, and others connected with the philosophical principles of Freemasonry, should be passed on the brethren through their Lodges preferably by inviting an appropriate speaker to attend their festive board. I would like to see three lodge meetings every year devoted to passing on the 'should knows' to brethren.

We always hand a copy of the Constitution and by laws to a brother on the night of his initiation. Why don't we hand him a booklet on Masonic benevolence and another on our history?

It would be nice to have a panel of speakers to attend lodge meetings for the purpose of passing on the 'should knows'.

What then do we do about the 'could knows'?

Personally, I think that after we have educated a brother in the 'must knows' and 'should knows' we have probably used up the time that most brethren have allotted to Freemasonry.

I return to what I said at the start of these deliberations and that is there will always be some brethren for whom the Lodge does not provide sufficient information regardless of their best efforts. Therefore, this Lodge should continue its efforts to recruit those brethren who seek the depth of knowledge offered by this Lodge and others like it.

I look forward now to your comments and queries if you have any.

The Members of this Lodge and any other readers who were not able to hear our District Grand Master in November are invited to contribute their thoughts on masonic education to the forum of this publication.

It may be appropriate to complete this issue with a little education from the late George Helmer F.P.S. P.M. of Norwood Lodge No. 90, Edmonton, G.L. of Alberta, Canada.

The Oath and the Obligation

Few words are more wrongly used, at least in Masonic circles, than "oath".

A candidate takes upon himself a solemn obligation to do certain things and to refrain from certain actions. The word "obligation" is from the Latin - of (to) and ligare (to bind). It is a tie, a bond, an agreement, a profession of intention, a responsibility, a duty agreed upon, a constraint of action, a pledge, an acknowledgement of promises made.

In no such definitions can be found any similarity to the meaning of the word "oath", which is the concluding phrase by which the assumer of the OBLIGATION calls upon that which he holds sacred to witness his vow.

In a court of law the witness swears to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That is an assumed obligation. He ends "So help me, God" which is the oath, attesting to the sincerity of his obligation. In taking both obligation and attesting it by the oath, the witness is required to raise his right hand, a curious throwback to ancient days in which a man offered his right hand to be cut off if his oath was broke,. still more an oddity is the small boy's attestation "by golly" made without knowing that he is offering the ancient "gol"(hand) if he tells not the truth!

The Masonic obligations are high-minded duties voluntarily assumed by candidates as their part in becoming brethren of the Ancient Craft. The oath which they take is their attestation of the validity of the covenants they thus make. To speak of the whole as a Masonic "oath" is to name the whole for a minor part.