



**It's a Secret!**

### The decline and Fall of Masonic Education

How many times have you heard: "My Grandfather was a high up in the Masons, but he never told me anything about Masonry"; or "My Dad was a Mason. I asked him about it, but he said, 'It's a Secret', you have to join before you can be told, so I never joined."

## IT'S A SECRET! - The decline and Fall of Masonic Education

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What a loss to Masonry. Family members who did not tell their children, brothers or grandchildren, what Masonry was about? Each time, another potential member lost. This does not include the broader spectrum of friends and associates in the general public who would ask those same people and receive the same answer. "It's a secret". "If I told ye I'd hae tae kill ye!"

No wonder the ranks of Masonry shrunk so severely in recent years. In my case, I have no one before me that was in the Craft. I had an uncle who was "high up" in the Buffs and a grandfather who was in the Gardeners and he was also a Horseman. So, nobody to tell me tell me anything about our Gentle Craft. I asked to join when I was 39 years old, because I was nosey, and I became a Past Masters of two different Lodges.

Going through the Chair it was RITUAL, RITUAL, RITUAL, social events, comradeship, and nothing much else. But somewhere along that journey I began to feel there was still something really lacking. What difference does it make if you could give all the lectures from memory, if you did not really know what they meant?

It was then that I began to search for explanations of the ritual. I began to study different Masonic writings. I began to give the odd speech and talk in the Lodge and Chapter. Then, after more study, I started giving talks in other Lodges, even abroad!

I was hooked. I was a Masonic junkie and proud of it. The different layers of meaning of the ritual began to show themselves. I saw the ritual as signposts pointing to a Masonic path to enlightenment.

At this point no degree seemed complete to me unless I fully understood the Charges and their meaning, or at least tried to fully understand them. I actively sought out learned Brethren to pick their brains and, of course, online research was invaluable, albeit there is lot rubbish out there. Even when I went to degrees at other Lodges, they seemed disappointingly incomplete.

I now write, and collect articles and lectures more, if I can get the time, and try to dig deeper, so that can be shared too. I am happy to see that some of the ideas I talk about are well received and encourage others to share their thoughts as well.

The young men who knock on the door of Masonry today are interested in the historical, philosophical, and spiritual aspects of the Craft, as well as in the social and community involvement aspects.

We need to be there to point the way. I only wish that I had been told about the deeper aspects when I was younger, and could have joined then, but what happened with me and others was endemic, and a product of ignorance.

In the 1920s and 1930s education was a larger part of Masonry. Many publications on the esoteric meanings of the ritual, history and philosophy of Masonry were available. In fact, those customs had been in effect since the early days of Masonry.

Then came W.W. II.

During and after W.W. II, Masonic lodges rapidly became "degree mills", cranking out masons like mad. The membership grew. Grand Lodges were ecstatic. Their per capita cup ran over. But they paid no attention to a very important fact – there was no time in a degree mill to teach Masonry. Education went by the board, and the lack of it produced uninformed Masons who did not know what they could talk about to the public and what was a secret. Don't get me wrong, they were fine men, and good masons by their lights, they just were not interested in education. The ritual was all important, and it was necessary to be able to parrot each and every word.

Get the word right. Oh, he's such a good Mason; he gets all the words exactly right! You should have heard so-and-so last night – he didn't miss a word! But rarely did the speaker know what the words really meant!

Mind you, some became interested anyway and sought education, but, when asked for instruction, the average lodge member would tell that inquiring mind that "you have to teach yourself, that's your job" [Loose translation: "I don't know, please don't ask me.".]

More's the pity!

It takes a stubborn person to persevere and study for himself.

The Masonic libraries of the Lodges I went to, (if I could find any at all), had little to learn from, and there was nobody to ask what to read and study to "improve" myself in Masonry.

Thanks goodness, for Google and a discerning mind able to sort out the rubbish!

Indeed, if you go by the topics in the Short Talk Bulletins publish in the USA after W.W.II, by the 1990s less and less was written about the esoteric and philosophical side of the Craft, and more and more about great Masons of the past, and other light reading. Low calorie dessert, but no meat and potatoes.

You can read the ritual – but, as a candidate, you experience the degrees. And that is Hiram's key. The secrets are learned through a process of experiencing understanding. You have to seek within yourself for a path to enlightenment and to seek the understanding of Deity. That is the great object of Masonic study. And, if you attain it, no description can be adequately placed in words – because is experiential only. It is a process of becoming through a spiritual journey on your own path – not that of another. You have to search within yourself to find the understanding of your relationship to God and Man.

In the words of the ancient mystery schools, "Know Thyself, and Thou Shall Know the Universe and God."

So, what are the "secrets" that we cannot tell our spouses, children and friends and acquaintances? It can't be the degree work or words of the ritual, because you can find those in any good public library, and now on the internet. Get a copy of Duncan's Monitor – everything is in plain English, and it shows the grips and signs, as well as the words given in full. It can't be the history or philosophy of Masonry, as those are the subject of many, many books available to the general public. Much has been the subject programs for the viewing public.

So, what is left to be a "secret"? The secrets that you cannot communicate are those which are beyond speech. We can only allude to them and attempt to illustrate them by use of symbols – such as the implements of architecture, most expressive, or sacred

geometry. For the real secrets are secrets of the heart and spirit that only take place when you begin to follow and understand the spiritual path that Masonry attempts to point to through our ritual and mythology, and emphasized by the way in which we confer the degrees.

Remember when we promised not to reveal the “secrets and mysteries” of the Craft? Well keeping the “secrets” secret is easy. We were told what they were during a particular charge and we made a promise not to reveal them. As I alluded to earlier, however, these “secrets” are readily available to the public in nearly every library in the land, but we, as individuals, can’t reveal them because we made that promise not to, and Freemasons don’t break promises! Right? The “mysteries”, however, are a different thing. These are the things we learn as we dig deeper. The revelations we experience in our Masonic journey. These are the personal things that we unveil to ourselves during our research. Very often they just can’t be explained, only alluded to. Perhaps we can try and explain those feelings, but that isn’t as easy as it sounds, and may only be you that gets that “feeling”. It may be sufficient to indicate that there is “something” that can’t be explained, per se, but it’s worth the effort!

The trouble is that too many Freemason are simply too impatient, they don’t want to put in the effort, or simply want to be told what these “mysteries” are, without realising that the mystery of Freemasonry is completely personal.

The underlying teachings of the degrees are a spiritual path – first, by discipline of the material aspect of your nature, secondly by the discipline of the psyche through aspiration to knowledge and virtue, and lastly by participation in the ritual of the Hiramic myth...that symbolic death to your material aspect and rebirth as a spiritual being. We learn that time is encompassed by the eternal.

As recorded in the Gospel of Thomas – Jesus said heaven all around us, we just cannot see it. We must learn to step to one side and find it.

I urge you to study, to question, to learn and to teach. We are brothers of the light – the light of understanding, tolerance, and compassion. We are the seekers on the journey toward light, and

seek knowledge in order to better understand the meaning of the oldest known prayer for initiation:

Lead me from the unreal to the real.

Lead me from darkness to light,

Lead me from death to immortality.

---- From the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, circa 800 B.C.

We are spiritual beings on a human journey of discovery, rather than human beings on a spiritual journey. We are seeking to discover that spark of Deity within each of us which is a microcosmic reflection of that Great Creator which spoke us into being. That spark which is the point within the circle – the deathless, immortal part within us, which only may be discovered by a transcendent understanding for which there are no words – only glimpses of the divine through the dark glass of our material senses – those are the secrets which we cannot express, but which are the goal of every Mason, and our passport to travel in the foreign lands of the GAOTU.

So to those who have an ear, let them hear -- anything that you can tell them about Masonry – educate yourself in order that you can be an ambassador for the Craft and disseminate information, especially true Masonic light – so that when a good man whose questions you have tried to answer knocks on the door of Freemasonry, it will be because he has conceived a favourable opinion of our venerable Institution, has a desire for knowledge, and has a sincere wish to be serviceable to their fellow creatures.

Be both a student and a teacher of the Craft.

Remember:

“Teachers Open the Door. You Enter by Yourself.”