

The Light of Wisdom

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While blindfolded and kneeling in an awkward and off-balance position, I clearly recall the Worshipful Master demanding of me what I desired most. With a dry throat, I repeated a lengthy series of obligations, each involving an “also-” clause or a “furthermore” that mandated additional obligations that I had willingly agreed to discharge. Hopefully, now I might get something in return.

I was about to foolishly blurt out *a drink of water might be nice, and I would like to stand up and stretch my legs a bit* when a voice whispered, “Light!” While this was not a response I had anticipated, I followed the prompting and soon agreed that since light was what I most desired, I would receive it. While Light was not what I *really* desired at that particular moment, it proved to be the wiser response to the question at hand.

This somewhat strange question was asked of me several other times, but it never really occurred to me that it would be anything more than the physical transition of being blindfolded, then being able to see again once it was removed. I never considered the more esoteric aspects of actually *being brought to Light*.

Light and the search for Light is a reoccurring theme in Freemasonry, although its true meaning and how a Mason should go about finding it are not precisely defined. The significance of Light did not occur to me until I discovered a passage in a ritual of another Masonic text that referenced what it called a search for “Pure Light.”

Pure Light? If we accept that concept, then it follows that Light exists in adulterated forms, a hybrid of light being mixed with something else. If Pure Light truly exists, there’s some sort of scale measuring the quality of Light.

Pure Light would be one end of this scale and darkness, the total absence of all light, on the other.

On the surface, this sounds like something that can be proven and even measured through metaphysics or mathematical formulas.

However, I have been led down that primrose path before, only to discover that very little about Masonry has a singular, precise meaning. Even rarer are Masonic allegories that can be proven with any certainty. In reality, it is far more likely that “Light” is simply another Masonic metaphor that is an allegory substituted for something else, its true meaning left for each Brother to discover.

I asked around and posed the question: “Just what *is* Light and what does it represent?” Almost universally, the answer most often given was that *light* is a substitute for the word *knowledge*. That certainly seemed to make sense. We are “brought to Light.” Once the blindfold of darkness has been removed, new knowledge is shared regarding certain signs, words and methods of recognition. From the Masonic neophyte’s perspective, he notes that the other portions of our rituals are all performed with the lights on, or with some form of light present. In this Light, knowledge is conveyed to the newly-admitted Brother. Therefore, from his perspective, *light* begets *knowledge*, and the two become intertwined as being the same experience.

A man with an exceptionally enlightened mind once said:

"But it is vital to remember that information — in the sense of raw data — is not knowledge; that knowledge is not wisdom; and that wisdom is not foresight. But information is the first essential step to all of these."

These words were penned by a Mason who was renowned as an academic intellectual as well as a Masonic scholar. He studied and became well versed in the traditional sciences, as well as sciences often considered esoteric and

occult. I am, of course, speaking of Arthur C. Clarke, a visionary, who among other things had the foresight to comprehend the concept of a communications satellite over 20 years before the first spacecraft ever left the Earth.

If an intellectual thinker like Arthur C. Clarke says that knowledge is not the same as wisdom, then that is good enough for me. It also opens a new realm of possibility that one's being *brought to Light* is not merely the process of being *brought to knowledge*, but that it also is the process of *achieving wisdom*.

Freemasonry teaches an allegory that there are three stages in man's life: youth, manhood, and age. In the traditional setting, most knowledge is attained primarily in his youth and perhaps then reinforced somewhat during early manhood. While it is not a scientific absolute that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, most of us will agree that it is considerably easier to memorize the "stair lecture" at age 25 than it is at 55 — so there is something to that old adage.

The allegory of youth, manhood, and age is later further equated to the three Masonic Degrees, as it being supposed that the Entered Apprentice is representative of a man in his early age being presented with knowledge. The Fellow Craft receives further knowledge, which he applies in the form of service and useful labor as a productive member of the Craft. Upon being made a Master Mason, he then possesses the knowledge regarding all aspects of the operative Craft, and he then has the wisdom to impart knowledge to others as he oversees the necessary work.

In ancient "operative" masonry, the Entered Apprentice was indentured to a Master Mason for an extended period, usually 7 years. During the apprenticeship, the young man gathered rudimentary knowledge of the Craft and learned how to perform basic tasks under the direct and constant supervision of the Master Mason.

Once the Entered Apprentice proved his competency through a test of proficiency, he could then be elevated, or ‘passed’, to the grade of a Fellow Craft. A Fellow of the Craft was essentially a journeyman worker who now put the knowledge he had learned into practice while learning additional skills and interacting in a more advanced way with the Master Masons. A Fellow Craft worker required little direct supervision but remained under the direction of the Master Masons. Many Fellow Craft remained at this grade for their entire lifetime. Only a select few — those who demonstrated wisdom and the ability to lead and direct the Craft — were ever raised to the rank and grade of Master Mason.

In speculative Masonry, almost every Mason is raised to the grade of a Master Mason, with only rare exceptions. If a Brother is not raised as a Master Mason, it is likely that he became disinterested and simply dropped out by his own choice. Other than some simple memorization of certain texts, the achievement of wisdom is no longer a prerequisite for a Mason’s advancement. Yet I would assert that this is essential if he is to be successful in Masonic leadership roles and in other positions in life.

At age 50-something-or-other, I consider myself privileged to be the Past Master of a Lodge of Masons. I also find myself in the unenviable position of being the patriarch of the family name. The testing of my Masonic wisdom has generally been limited to simple decisions, such as the dinner destination, and simple responsibilities, such as the obligation to maintain some semblance of order in the opening and closing of the Lodge. Mistakes in judgment (which have been known to occur) have had relatively inconsequential results and have rarely caused me to lose sleep. Meeting the expectations placed on the senior living family member has proven to be less painless.

Despite rumors to the contrary, wisdom does not automatically come with age, and there is no modern equivalent to the apprenticeships and journeyman

postings of older days. The accumulation of wisdom has become a more challenging process. This fact is not fully appreciated until you actually sit in that Oriental Chair of Authority; whether in the East of the Lodge or at the head of the family dining room table, people are restlessly expecting you to act in a profound and wise manner. Much of what passes as “knowledge” is really based on experience, but that’s not *wisdom*.

Solomon is heralded as a king with exceptional wisdom, but was he instinctively wise or was this a learned characteristic? J. Robert Oppenheimer possessed an amazing ability to comprehend complicated concepts of theoretical physics, yet he struggled with basic mathematics because as a child he never memorized multiplication tables. Garner Ted Armstrong eventually went into the radio ministry of his father, Herbert W. Armstrong, and became one of the most accomplished motivational speakers of his day. He did so after overcoming several severe childhood learning disabilities and a demoralizing stuttering problem. By the Grace of G-d, the human spirit can prevail over any obstacles placed in our path.

Circumstance, situation, and often necessity can dictate what a man can or cannot do. There was a time when I would have sworn that I could never memorize all the lines for a major part in a play, but would that really be any different than learning one of the Masonic rituals? There was a time when I would have told you that I could never dare speak in front of a large audience, but would that really be any different than standing up in a Masonic Lodge or in Grand Lodge and making a proposal? There was a time when I would have shunned any of the responsibilities of leadership, yet I have now sat in the East of a Lodge and am quite comfortable serving in a variety of capacities in other Masonic bodies. Finally, there was a time when I would look upon the quiet wisdom and strength that my father exuded naturally, and say to myself, *I*

could never do that. Yet the duty has fallen upon me and it is one that I must now accept, albeit reluctantly.

Time will tell whether I lead my family with wisdom. I suspect that much of this responsibility will be well-served through the application of things I learned through Masonry and by a generous application of Masonic Light and Wisdom. Freemasonry teaches us the importance of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Those lessons provide an ideal way to deal with family, as well as with all mankind. It's unlikely that the precepts of Freemasonry are intended to only be practiced inside the walls of a Lodge. In reality, Pure Light illuminates all things in all places.