

## Ideas for Masonic Education

By Brian Kremer

This paper<sup>1</sup> is in response to the suggestion that Blue Lodges in Kansas are not doing an adequate job of inculcating the lessons of the Masonic order. One purpose of this paper is to enumerate, especially to a new Mason, some of the ways a Mason can improve himself in Masonic knowledge. Another purpose is to suggest topics for Masonic education, and effective ways to communicate the lessons of the Order, in stated Lodge meetings.

My first suggestion is inspired by the first pieces of ritual heard by a candidate in his first degree ceremony in the interrogatories: "Masonry consists of a course of hieroglyphical and moral instruction, taught agreeably to ancient custom by types, emblems, and allegorical figures."

This "course of instruction" should be understood as a program of study, like in school. And types, emblems, and allegorical figures all have one thing in common: they are symbols<sup>2</sup>: things that represent other things. While it is true that Masonry's system of hieroglyphical instruction *conceals* information from those who do not understand it, it is important to understand that the symbols<sup>3</sup> are intended to *reveal* a great deal of information when studied. So, the first suggestion for improving yourself in Masonic knowledge is to learn about these symbols.<sup>4</sup> In early speculative Masonic lodges the symbols were written with chalk on the tavern room floor, then explained. Later the symbols were displayed on pieces of cloth as the explanations were given. Later still, tracing boards became the visual aids of the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is available online at: [http://innerquest456.org/essays/Ideas\\_For\\_Masonic\\_Education.pdf](http://innerquest456.org/essays/Ideas_For_Masonic_Education.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Masonry is veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.

<sup>3</sup> In *The secret power of Masonic symbols*, Robert Lomas writes that, "Using symbology, Freemasonry has been able to communicate its ideas by means of a unique and universal language. Once an idea has been formulated using symbols, it can be transmitted without corruption. This guarantees a continuity of tradition...The Mason of today faces the same fundamental problems in his quest for Truth that a Mason living in the fifteenth century had to face, and the symbols provide the same answers." (Lomas, 11)

<sup>4</sup> In *A guide to Masonic symbolism*, Duncan Moore writes, "To illustrate means to throw light on, and so what Masonry is really about is the meanings behind those symbols." (Moore, 11) He explains that the symbols of Masonry are borrowed from previous societies like that of ancient Egypt, Pythagoras, Eleusis, the Dionysian Artificers, the Essenes, the Knights Templar, and Operative Masonry.

lectures. In many modern lodges, slide shows are commonly used to embellish the lectures of the three blue lodge degrees. I would submit for your consideration three initial methods for learning more about the symbols as they are described in the lectures: 1) Attend degree work as often as possible so you can hear the lectures repeatedly. 2) Read the lectures at home with special attention to understanding the information presented. 3) Start to memorize them.

Some Masons are often dumbfounded after hearing the first degree lectures for the first time. I've heard several new brothers say they can't imagine that they would ever be able to memorize lectures like that. Some lecturers are amazing to watch. If you are discouraged, understand that even if you've never memorized anything longer than the pledge of allegiance, it does not mean that you are incapables. Start small. Remember that not too long ago, as recently as the 15<sup>th</sup> century before books were widespread, it was normal among educated classes to memorize *much* more than most people do today. Clearly modern humans still possess that ability, but for many it is a latent skill and it must be purposefully developed over time. Memorization plays a large role in the program of study laid out in Masonic ritual. As an Entered Apprentice, you learn at least the first degree obligation before being allowed to advance to the Second Degree, then the Fellowcraft's obligation before being advanced to the Degree of a Master Mason. That is just the beginning. With regards to memory work, a course of study is laid out by the Grand Lodge of Kansas in their various ritualist proficiency awards.<sup>5</sup>

As you learn the ritual, participate in the delivery of degree work. At least attend. The degrees of Craft Masonry serve an important sacramental initiatory function not only for the candidate, but also for the brothers who relive their own initiation each time they participate in the performance of degree work, and even when they sit on the sidelines and watch.

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<sup>5</sup> As evidence of the importance of ritual study, review the Grand Lodge's website to learn about the different courses of memory work required to achieve Ritualist, Advanced ritualist, Senior Ritualist, and Master Ritualist proficiency awards.

If hearing the lectures repeatedly is a start, and memorizing and delivering them yourself is even better, what is the next step? In receiving the three Ancient Craft degrees we are introduced to six working tools<sup>6</sup> and taught their uses. Practice using the working tools in everyday life. This is “experiential learning”.

For a deeper study of the meanings portrayed in the symbols of Masonry, you must go beyond<sup>7</sup> the ritual, so, the next suggestion of this paper is for you to read from *outside* the ritual. Living in the Information Age, we all have a level of access to esoteric texts that is unprecedented in human history. Search google for Masonic symbolism. Search Amazon.com for Masonic Books. In *The bridge builder's guide* Kyle Ferlemann demands that we Masons *read*: “Seek and consume the texts and ideas of those fine scholars or tragic fools who came before you and learn from both their triumph and their folly. Strive to understand what they knew and build upon their lifetimes of knowledge.” (Ferlemann, 3)

As you set out upon that journey, remember one thing: The domain<sup>8</sup> of a Mason's learning encompasses all of the world's spiritual history<sup>9</sup>. From Christianity to Kabalism. From Islam to the orders of Chivalry. Esoteric spirituality from the Rosicrucians and spiritual alchemists<sup>10</sup>. Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism,

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<sup>6</sup> In the “G” lecture of the second degree we learn that “Masonry uses tools and implements of architecture to impart wise and serious truths, and thereby the mysteries of the order are transmitted, unimpaired, thru out the ages.

<sup>7</sup> In *The meaning of Masonry*, W.L. Wilmhurst explains than anyone can understand the base meaning of Masonic symbols. “It is absurd to think that a vast organization like Masonry was ordained merely to teach to grown-up men of the world the symbolical meaning of a few simple builders' tools”. (Wilmhurst, 21)

<sup>8</sup> Wilmhurst states that Masonry exists “...for the purpose of teaching what are called ‘the Mysteries’: for imparting to suitable and prepared minds certain truths of human life, certain instructions about divine things... which it was undesirable to publish to the multitudes; since the ultimate truth the Mysteries aim at teaching is always one and the same, there has always been taught, and can only be taught, one and the same doctrine... What is extremely ancient in Freemasonry is the spiritual doctrine concealed within the architectural phraseology; for this doctrine is an elementary form of the doctrine that has been taught in all ages, no matter in what garb it has been expressed.” He goes on to say that Craft members, “should make some effort to realize the meaning of their own institution, and should display symptoms of earnest desire to treat it less as a system of archaic and perfunctory rites, and more as a vital reality capable of entering into and dominating their lives; less as a merely pleasant social order, and more as a sacred and serious method of initiation into the profoundest truths of life.”

<sup>9</sup> In *Lecture on Masonic symbolism*, Albert Pike says that symbolism in Masonry “...may be traced back, through the Hermetic Philosophers... and through Plutarch and the Kabalah, to Pythagoras and the Magi of Media...” (Hutchens, I.7)

<sup>10</sup> In *The alchemical keys to Masonic ritual*, Timothy Hogan shows that “all the signs, symbols, titles, and lectures of Masonic ritual owe their origin to the alchemical tradition, and that through a better understanding of these alchemical keys, a new science is open to the Master Craftsmen which can operate on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels of man's being”. (Hogan, 8)

Confucianism, Hermeticism, and every other religious tradition you can think of.<sup>11</sup> Study these spiritual systems and you will be improving yourself in Masonic knowledge.

The next suggestion in this paper for advancing your Masonic knowledge is to join Masonic appendant bodies. Scottish Rite Masonry may be a good choice. It claims to be the University of Free Masonry. It is an extension and continuation of the first three degrees, who's esoteric studies consist of "...the individual search for truth in the Hermetic traditions, the study of religions, myth, alchemy, and the Kabbalah." (Ferleman, 10) Also consider joining a Traditional Observance Lodge, or a Lodge of research.

The final suggestion of this paper is to work toward enhancing the Masonic education in your own Blue Lodge. Every lodge in the state of Kansas is required to appoint a committee on Masonic Education. Volunteer to be on that committee. If you are the Master of your Lodge, consider whether you can better utilize that committee to prepare and present Masonic Education in your regular stated meetings. While talks on many of the topics described in this paper may be difficult to formulate for open meetings at some Blue Lodges, they are a worthwhile goal. While it may be difficult to hold the brothers' attention for lengthier presentations, consider presenting a *brief* paper in your lodge on a single symbol or related group of symbols, with a short explanation of how they are related to one or more esoteric traditions.

Beyond that, as a Mason, you need to take responsibility for your own Masonic education. Read. Visit other Lodges. Learn the degree work and participate. Host or attend a study club for memory work and ritual work. If you feel compelled to seek out more light, join a Traditional Observance Lodge, a Lodge of research, or an appendant body where Masonic education is commonplace, and where lectures and discussions are a highly valued part of the Masonic experience.

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<sup>11</sup> In *The lost keys of Freemasonry*, Manly P. Hall states that "Masonry is a university, teaching the liberal arts and sciences of the soul to all who will attend to its works. It is a shadow of the great Atlantean Mystery School... Upon its trestleboards are inscribed the sacred truths of all nations and of all peoples... in truth, Masonry is that long-lost thing which all peoples have sought in all ages." (Hall, 17)

## References

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