

FREEMASONRY'S BLIND EYE CAN WE DO BETTER?

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When we say someone has *turned a blind eye* to a problem or situation, we are saying someone is unwilling to recognize or acknowledge a problem or situation, pretends the problem or situation does not exist, or refuses to face up to unpleasant or awkward realities.

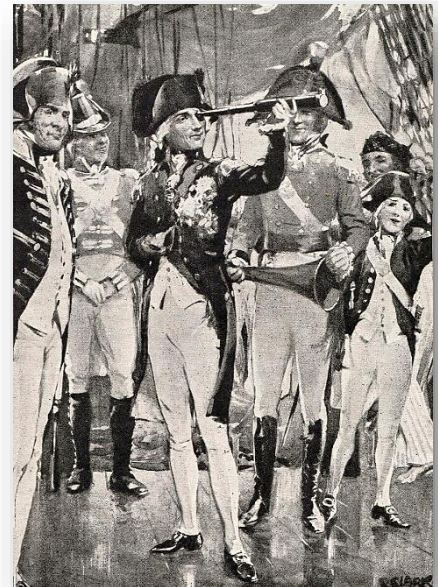
The term has been around for over two-hundred years, and arose from a tale told about Admiral Horatio Nelson of the British Navy, who *was* blind in one eye.

One account tells us that in 1801, during the Battle of Copenhagen, Nelson led the main attack against a fleet of Dutch and Norwegian ships. At the height of battle, Nelson's superior officer, signaled him to withdraw. Informed by his men of the signal, Nelson looked at the Admiral's flag ship, which he too could see in the distance, then, using his blind eye to look through his telescope, he looked, then said, "I really do not see the signal." Nelson then ordered his men to continue fighting.

At that moment was the birth of what is known today as *Nelsonian Knowledge*: the knowing of *what-to-not-know*, where-to-not-look, and *how-not-to-look* at it.

When we hear it said that someone has their head stuck in the sand, we find the expression used to describe those who refuse to face unpleasant or awkward realities.

This expression first appeared in the 1800s. The idea behind it is that ostriches will sometimes put their heads in holes in loose dirt or sand.¹ There was a mistaken belief then that ostriches do that to hide from predators, when in reality, since they are flightless birds, they lay their eggs in holes dug in the ground. Making sure that the eggs are evenly heated, they occasionally stick their heads into the nest to rotate the eggs, which makes it look like they are trying to hide.



¹ From *The Natural History* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855), translated by John Bostock and Henry T. Riley.

Another idiom we often hear is *in one ear and out the other*, which describes what happens when something is essentially ignored, dismissed, or forgotten almost immediately after being heard.²

Now, while it may not surprise you that *turning a blind eye*, *sticking one's head in the sand*, and *in one ear and out the other* all seem related, it might, however, surprise you to learn that many Masons, with troubling consistency over the past two centuries, have commonly suffered from all three maladies.

Now, you may be saying to yourself, “How can this be in our fraternity, where the guard on the West Gate is unfaltering, where all members are properly instructed and understand and practice the profound lessons of Freemasonry, and where all are made members through the unswerving proficient delivery of our ritual? How can this be in our fraternity where all members are well-acquainted with our factual history and the philosophies of our Craft, and where at each of our stated communications the exploration and study of all aspects of Freemasonry is never neglected?”

Is a man a Master of the Craft when he can only describe Freemasonry by using worn-out slogans, taglines, and catchphrases, to explain what Freemasonry is and what Freemasonry is designed to do?

Well, more than three centuries of evidence tell us that believing such things is what adds to the evidence that there remains a serious case of blind eye turning that leads to sticking one's head in the sand, and eventually to a lot of things going in one-ear-and-out-the other in our fraternity.

- Does the fact that a man is hastily ushered through the first degree, and then is advanced to the next with as little, or less, instruction than he received in the first, and then repeats that process and is raised to, and awarded, the title of *Master*, *not beg the legitimate question of what, exactly, is it that he has actually Mastered?*
- Is a man a Master of the Craft when he can only describe Freemasonry by using worn-out slogans, taglines, and catchphrases, to explain what Freemasonry is and what Freemasonry is designed to do?
- Should we be alarmed at a shotgun style approach of producing members when 56% of our membership have never meaningfully participated in the activities of their lodge since having received their most recent degree - and that only 6% of members are actively engaged in the life and care of their respective lodges?³
- Should we be alarmed that many of the same issues and problems facing American Freemasonry today are the same issues and problems that faced American Freemasonry since the early 1800s, and that those problems were quite clearly identified by the 1840s, but little consistently and effectively addressing them has been accomplished?

² The expression *in one ear and out the other* is first found in English in 1385, in Geoffrey Chaucer's poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*. However, the idea dates back at least to the Roman orator Quintilian, who worked in first century C.E. and said: “The things he says flow right through the ears.”

³ *Characteristics of an Ideal Lodge*, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, KY, 2018.

- Should we be alarmed that Masons in Kentucky rank that having a functional library in their lodge is at the very bottom on a list of things that most commonly agreed to be important to a Lodge?

Now, since the fraternity has struggled with these and other similar problems for generations, are we at least not moderately alarmed that they still exist, and, for the most part, go unsuccessfully addressed? Have we gotten so used to them that the Nelsonian Knowledge that created them has superseded the Masonic knowledge designed and available to confront these things?

American Freemasonry, and a lot of its members, may be commended for many good works. Make no mistake about that. The story of the unfolding of American Freemasonry is a rich history, and confirms that good men have indeed found that through Freemasonry's philosophies and principles, they can become better men. How to ensure that happens for all admitted into the ranks, however, has always been as much of a struggle as ensuring that the West Gate is never taken off the hinges.

The use of a library is an excellent yardstick for determining many things about those to whom it is accessible.

We have known for a long time, Brothers, that Freemasonry has always been, and will always become, what the great majority of the members think it is or want it to become. We already know what many members think it is, so asking what we want it to become in the future, is a timely question.

Effective solutions that help to prevent Freemasonry from becoming what it was not historically designed to be are waiting to be put to work, and are accessible to all members in rooms like the one across the hall from this Lodge room. There are rooms like the one across the hall in many jurisdictions, but as our own records prove, they have been largely undisturbed for generations, by far too many members.

Those who do discover these rooms find archived our factual *and* romantic history, valid research about the Craft, commentaries and other studies, and information extending back centuries. They find Masonic records and Proceedings that address inquiries about how and why Freemasonry unfolded the way it did in America, and the reasons that we do what we do, or do not do what we have been designed to do as Masons, and as a fraternity.

These rooms are Masonic Libraries, and they offer knowledge and a breadth of perspective that provides context about what every man in this room once declared they came to Freemasonry to do: to learn.

We also know from these underutilized repositories that not all Masons (nor of all their leaders) over the years are known for their appetite to rely on their content to explore aspects of Freemasonry beyond that to which they were exposed when hastily ushered through the ritual of the three degrees, or learn from the mere observation of other processes in the fraternity. As a result, Masonry in America has, since the early 1800s, continued to focus on making members rather than on making Freemasons.

Libraries give us chance to get something that we might have missed, or that someone else might have missed, who could not possibly pass on what they may not have known, or did not know, about any aspect of Freemasonry. Libraries also offer a feeling of depth and life, and unarguably provide knowledge, creative

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power, satisfaction, and further cultivate our thinking by stimulating the exercise of our mental faculties. We cannot count on the sense or belief that we are somehow above the need to read the words of others, or always trust only what we are told, or observe, or which comes to us in dreams in any field. Why would Freemasonry be different?

The use of a library is an excellent yardstick for determining many things about those to whom it is accessible.

Our factual history shows that we can do better. Research, over the past few decades alone, shows the same. In fact, valid research and writings by Masons in the early years of the 1900s, also show the same.

Masonic libraries will be available decades from now. In fact, they will have an even larger inventory of knowledge for future generations. Whether members in coming generations will take advantage of the resources is a question that can only be speculated upon, unless there is more effective emphasis placed

today on their regular use and value. Or, whether more Lodges do those things that inspire men to learn more about the Craft in which they asked to become a member.

Placing such an emphasis is yet another thing upon which we can do better and certainly an unarguable value that is for the good of the order.