

APPLYING MASONRY

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During a recent lodge education, our facilitator, Brother Dan Kemble, spoke about the life of a man pursuing Masonry. Brother Kemble stated that living as a Mason was a dual path. The first path has been firmly established in my head; that the primary purpose of lodge meetings is to provide men lessons and opportunities to LEARN Masonry. Yet it was the second part of this dual path of Masonry mentioned that helps man pave that smoother course. As Masons, we must apply these lessons and construct better character. In other words, to become a Mason, we must achieve what our votaries are supposed to accomplish, to become better, wiser, and consequently happier men. Thus, to learn and not to put action behind said learning, is not Masonry. In fact, upon further study this application within Masonry is what separates it from the billion-dollar self-help industry and our standard educational systems. It seems these systems lend only mere curiosity or interest about learning, yet no plan or better said purpose for how a man plans to put forth the knowledge gained.

Unless we seek game shows out such as Jeopardy or participate in “trivia nights,” general knowledge rarely awards man anything. Knowledge is in fact only potential power and doesn’t gain man anything “unless it is organized, and intelligently directed, through practical plans of action.”¹ Americans are taught we must acquire knowledge by seeking out systems of education; the problem is these systems of education have consistently failed to teach man how we should organize those lessons into our deeds. As a public education teacher with a master’s degree in special education, I witnessed daily this lack during my decade of service. It is sad to know that more than half a century since Nightingale coined the phrase “the strangest secret,” our education system refuses to teach “how to think” and the power within those thoughts. Thus, within the self-help industry and our education systems, any attainment of knowledge gained is useless, because rarely are we taught how to bring this knowledge forward and our potential is lost. How can any knowledge be applied? That second part of the dual path was either never explained and most likely never created.

In our First Degree the tool given to lift us beyond our current blind condition is a simple time management tool, our twenty-four-inch gauge. Because without such a tool, as described within those systems above, we might be filling up our knowledge cups but without any thought of fertilizing within our minds a better path forward. Again, only potential power at work. In simple

¹ Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich*, Page 50.

terms, true Masonry distinguishes itself with this dual path and teaching its votaries to be active participants in the learning application. We teach not just to knock, but to patiently wait till the door of the mind is opened and a better path revealed; a path that teaches man the basics of living in harmony and how to better serve humanity. Because, if man cannot provide useful services for others how valuable can he become? If man cannot develop an attentive ear, and a careful tongue how can he grow? So, we must set plans of the why we want to learn to fulfill the purpose within Masonry to become a man who is better, wiser, and consequently happier (from that very fertilization of a more thoughtful path forward). Without this consistent purpose, we most likely will fall into that trap of our self-help industry and school system and become learners or graduates in name only. According to research published on February 22, 2024 fifty-two percent of college graduates are underemployed a year after they graduate.² So, more than half of students come to learn, yet never knew there to be that dual path of applying what they were learning.

Like our school systems, Masonry is quite broken and has had to make choices on how to handle the dwindling membership. Brother John Bizzack highlights “The Broken Windows Theory” in his work, *For The Good of The Order*, as he dissects this paradigm our Order faces. He states, “Our windows are broken, in the sense that the mechanics of how we practice, instruct and pass on Freemasonry have decayed along with our level of fundamental and ongoing educational work.”³ Brother Bizzack sites a paper delivered in 2012 by the late Thomas Jackson that addresses this decline of interest in American Masonry. Jackson poses this question, “How can we possibly expect there to be an interest in an organization in which so few of the membership itself even knows what we are or our purpose?”

Andrew Hammer’s work, *Observing the Craft*, is intended for Masons who value the Craft and seek methods of restoring that original intent of Masonry. Like me, men come to Masonry looking for deeper meaning and order among a chaotic world. Yet, what far too many men find is what Hammer describes as “an old boys’ club like any other, with nothing distinguishable about it except the fact that it has claim to a name and legacy it has no intention of living up to. Because we have lost ourselves.”⁴ Along the same lines, sadly, I think my reading from Chapter one of the book, *Freakonomics*, brings this very point forward with its title “What do schoolteachers and sumo wrestlers have in common?” They both cheat. Thus, teachers, like me, were called to spend valuable learning time giving answers and not establishing thought patterns that “the young learners” can use to find the right answers for themselves.

It appears that Masonry has adopted the philosophy of public education laws on No Child Left Behind. Like our schools we dumb down our curriculum and Masonry makes it easier with “One-Day Classes. These, and other “simplified methods” diminish our Craft’s legacy and simply cheat men out “deeper meaning” we sought. Because the way man starts anything is the same. As James Allen said in *As A Man Thinketh*, “the greatest achievement was at first and for a time a dream. The oak sleeps in the acorn, and in the highest vision of the soul a waking angel stirs.” Because regardless of a man’s circumstances, man does change for the better when he applies nobler ideals

² Insidehighered.com.

³ John W. Bizzack, *For the Good of the Order*, Page 51.

⁴ Andrew Hammer, *Observing the Craft*, Page 12.

and better constructed thoughts which is our true legacy within Masonry. Because, as Allen states, and a Mason with purpose knows in his heart, “you cannot travel within and stand still without.”⁵ Let’s distinguish, however, that this is not a man who has a mere curiosity or an idle wish. This man has a vision within his heart of bringing forth a better path, and he intends to create a character that possesses square conduct with those he passes. With an understanding of the purpose of Masonry, our mission and path within becomes crystal clear and our actions naturally come forward. As Allen describes, “he conceives of, mentally builds up, an ideal condition of life; the vision of a wider liberty and larger scope takes possession of him; unrest urges him to action, and he utilizes all his spare time and means, small though they are, to the development of this latent powers and resources.”⁶

Then the true prerequisite for a man coming to Masonry would be he must come with a dream of constructing a better version of himself. He possesses very little: he is a man, free born, lawful age, sound of mind and member, and coming under the tongue of a good report. Nothing stated above distinguishes this man, other than perhaps that impression he might or might not make on the brothers of the lodge. The brothers of the lodge’s true purpose within this report need to confirm a couple of major items. It should confirm that a candidate will, in fact, dedicate his life to HIS service and become a true and faithful brother. All symbols of Masonry point to man becoming more faithful in serving his GOD. In its most general terms, the purpose of Masonry is along that same path of bringing man closer to his GOD. Napoleon Hill states within any path, “the way of success is the way of continuous pursuit of knowledge.”⁷ Whether as Masons we check a candidate’s prerequisites or are reflecting on our own progress, it takes us back to that dual path we want to stay on. Are we continuous participants applying a specific purpose within our lives?

Masons on the pursuit of the true path of Masonry will know that obtaining any Degree doesn’t mean we have mastered anything. After receiving the Degree, we find ourselves duly and truly prepared to learn and improve ourselves through Masonry. As Brother Hammer would say, “true Masonry is when a man is always acting as that apprentice.” Yet what most Americans believe is that they pursue a Degree and upon completion they strike gold like the Beverly Hillbillies did; that society owes them something without ever putting into practice anything that they learned. Why doesn’t this work? Most likely because regardless of their Degree, nothing changed within. Nothing was developed that stirs thoughts which create larger visions. Masonry should never be thought of as an all-inclusive “no man left behind” practice. This was always intended to be a distinguished group of men that desire to find common ground and pursue their dreams without creating disharmony for others.

At the beginning of this work, it was written that to become a Mason its votaries should become better, wiser, and consequently lead happier lives. Yet, I didn’t recognize the word votaries is synonymous with a follower or disciple. Perhaps intentionally, it did not say all members but only those that, as Brother Bizzack would say, “for Masonry to mean anything to man he must spend time with it.” Although men can be curious and have passing hobbies, Masonry wasn’t meant to be

⁵ James Allen, *As A Man Thinketh*, Page 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Hill, *Think and Grow Rich*, Page 54.

the “old boys club” that satisfies such passing cravings a man might need to fill his time with. No, a follower of anything wants to see something through. As Hill would state, “every person who wins in any undertaking must be willing to burn his ships and cut all sources of retreat. Only by so doing can one be sure of maintaining that state of mind known as a BURNING DESIRE to win, essential to success.”⁸ So, without a burning desire or becoming this votary or follower described, can a Mason truly achieve this ideal of achieving a better, wiser, and happier life?

In conclusion, Masonry has tools that men need study and apply to their lives to reap its rewards. God might give man a shovel, but he must dig his own holes. We know that we must give to receive, and that giving becomes our source of blessedness. Masonry has no finish, as we surely leave better paths for future generations to follow, and perhaps much more. “Calmness of mind is one of the beautiful jewels of wisdom. It is the result of long and patient effort of self-control.”⁹ When looking for a man that will achieve such a state of mind, look for the Mason on the mission. Look for the man who not just cares about good fellowship but reveres the gaining of knowledge. With a thoughtful mind and burning desire in a Mason’s heart, as Allen said, “he cannot travel within and stand still without.” This is the application of Masonry and much more than an event. Because to know, and not to do, is not to know.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Page 20.

⁹ Allen, *As A Man Thinketh*, Page 43.