

# William O. Ware Lodge of Research

## Papers Night – May 31, 2023

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### A QUARTER FOR YOUR THOUGHTS!

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Remember the old saying, “A penny for your thoughts”? Well, today, with inflation, I would proffer a quarter for your thoughts, or, rather, ask you to think of the quarter. Have you ever stood one on its edge and spun it? The physics of a spinning quarter make quite an interesting story.

When a quarter is stood upon its edge and flicked, it starts spinning rapidly around the point of its axis. At first there is plenty of energy to overcome the various forces acting upon the quarter. The drag from the surface on which it spins, the air that resists its own surfaces, even the gravity pulling at its mass is kept at bay, and the quarter travels on. It merrily spins around the same point of its axis in tight, pretty circles.

At some point, however, all things must end. At first, the quarter starts to dip. A wobble begins. At this point, the quarter starts to be pulled into the surface on which it travels by gravity. The sheer weight of its mass is starting to end the movement of the quarter. As the surface of the quarter gets closer to the plane on which it is traveling, it actually picks up speed, as now it must travel around its circumference, instead of its axis. At this point in its travel, the quarter is no longer able to right itself with anything inside the quarter. Unless acted upon by an outside force, there is only one conclusion. Faster and faster it spins, closer and closer to the surface on which it rests, until, finally, there is no more energy to overcome gravity, friction, or air resistance. The quarter now is pulled to a stop on the surface on which it was placed, lifeless, dead, expended of all its energy.

I tell the story of the spinning quarter to address a point. Recently, I attended a lecture whereby a very respected and cordial brother, M. W. Robert G. Davis of Oklahoma, explained that in the next 30 years Freemasonry will be dead if nothing is done now to save it. Further, I have attended numerous lodges across the State where others have stated that in the future, Freemasonry will be more of a regional thing; with many less lodges, and those spread further out.

This is only my opinion, but I believe that both are entirely overly optimistic. You see, to me, Freemasonry is in the same state as the quarter. For 80 some-odd years we’ve spun upon the point of our axis, blissfully ignoring the forces trying to pull us down. All the while we have continued to do the things that would eventually grind our motion to a halt. Now we find ourselves millimeters from the surface, spinning ever faster, and pulled down by the very mass of our institution. We are all frantically looking for something within our institution that can right us, to once again spin upon our axis, but like that quarter, nothing within our institution can right us.

Gentlemen, the quarter is speeding up. The majority of our membership is well into their 50s, 60s, or 70s. Its is an unfortunate truth that at some point we all lay down our working tools. The average life expectancy in the U. S. in 2020 was 77.28 years. What this means for us is that many of the brothers currently holding this institution up will not be here in the near future. Just like that quarter, as they leave and their energy is expended, we will speed up to our demise. You see, as these men move on, the lodges they supported will fold. As the number of places Freemasonry is practiced dwindles, fewer men will be exposed to the beauty of the craft. The few remaining lodges, with despair in their hearts, will no longer have the ability to continue.

Brothers, like the quarter, we are now on our side. We are accelerated to the point at which we have expended almost all of our energy. Our institutions, once proud, have pulled us off our axis and are pulling us to a stop. And nothing, *nothing* from within us can right us again.

For years, perhaps decades, we've allowed our fraternity to be a mere social club. The west gate was thrown open, and it was more a social rite of passage that a man joined the lodge. Our numbers swelled, our coffers flowed with money, the quarter was started spinning with immense energy. As Masonry became more about the social aspect, we started neglecting our purpose. Ritual, along with exposure to Masonic thought and education, were thrown aside while men worried more about having a good time with their friends. You can still see this today. Watch The Andy Griffith Show or The Flintstones, or any other show from that era, and you will see a very light-hearted and social portrayal of Freemasonry.

These men were neglecting the foundation of what Masonry is, and thus could not pass that along to those who followed them. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the quality of our Fraternity was greatly eroded. I remember being a young man and asking Freemasons whom I knew what Masonry was. I remember the answers given: "It's a secret, I can't talk about it, You're too young to understand, and One day I'll tell you." I used to really believe the secret society idea. As I have come to experience Masonry, though, I realize that those answers were given by men who themselves didn't know what Freemasonry was, although they were part of the club. They were Masons in name only. I don't fault them, though. They were brought into an organization that cared about numbers and social experiences, not one dedicated to making them better.

As the world saw that Masonry was just another club, and denied from seeing its true purpose, people began to lose interest. Why go hang out with the old guys, in their old building, while they enjoyed the social aspect of fraternity, but neglected to invest in the generations yet to come. For all its great works, Masonry, for the most part, was just another smoke-filled room with men hazing each other. The quarter was now off its axis and starting to wobble.

Gentlemen, I have traveled this state and sat in lodges from one end to the other. I have endured endless business meetings, endless meals, and endless stories of how things used to be. I have watched as this quarter has sped up into its own demise. I have seen the results of this social club era and it is a dismal thing to observe.

In many lodges you no longer have enough people qualified to put on a degree. They read from the monitor, or cheat sheets, the very words and obligations we expect the new member to memorize. All this is done with the excuse, "well, it's been awhile". Once the candidate has his blindfold removed, it is easy to see why they become disillusioned. In time, when the activities are supposed to be about and for them, they see brothers winging their degrees, or constantly burying their noses in their phones instead of giving their due attention to the newest of brothers. Some are even greeted by the vision of a brother sleeping during their degree. Maybe they think, "oh, this will get better as I go on," but many leave after the EA. The ones who do continue have unfortunately been greeted by the same things in their further degrees. Once raised, they are then pushed through the chairs. After all this, they are finally clued that the biggest secret in Masonry is its endless business meetings. This is the weight of our institutions. Decades of being something we are not meant to be have left us with generations of men who are unable to fully understand what being a Mason truly is. This weight has pulled us to a near stop.

Lastly, just as the quarter cannot be righted by anything within it, we require energy from the outside. This doesn't mean we need to ask men to join, nor does it mean we need to turn our backs on our old charges. I have heard men say, "You cannot ask a man to join, as a Freemason we don't advertise, they have to come to us." The first of that sentence is true. But, I would contend, a part of our duties as a Mason is to advertise. By

displaying those peculiar morals and values, by holding ourselves to those higher standards, others should see the value Freemasonry has provided us. After all how does one ask to be a Freemason if they don't know who to ask? Or why should they ask to be a Freemason if they see no reason to do so?

The solution to our state is to focus on ourselves. Today we have more "fun" degrees than we seem to have Masons. We have Hillbilly, Water Buffalo, Horse Trader, Alleycat, and cave degrees. We have barn degrees, night raisings, bib nights, all the way to storming the state. Are these events fun? Yes. Are they effective? No. Our institution's attempts to right itself are misguided. These fun degrees, storming the state, and other initiatives only move Masons from one geographic point to another. They increase the involvement of a few brothers who are already Masons. They do nothing to bring in the members we need. We must pass Masonry on to new brothers; we cannot help it thrive by only catering to those already in it. The quarter must be righted by outside forces.

Brothers, we need to once again offer the world what Freemasonry has – the morals, the values, the pure beauty brotherhood has to offer. With all the bad I seemingly pointed out, I will admit that within this fraternity, in spite of our problems, are the best people I have known. I would say men, but I've seen your wives helping pass out food, tirelessly cleaning up after, and providing support in so many other ways. We may be brothers, but we are all in this family. We must do all we can to show the world who we are, what we are, why we are. Not in an attempt to lure them or woo them, but in an attempt to show them that we really do have something that they are looking for.

Brothers, you are without a doubt some of the best men I have met. Though its delivery over the past 80 years may have been flawed, many of you have still heard the message. Though it is grim, and the spinning is almost over, I have FAITH that together we can draw the energy we need to right this quarter. I HOPE that we are willing, as painful as change can be, to do away with the social club and endless business meeting drudgery Masonry has become. When we do that CHARITY that was originally defined as brotherly love, Masonry can once again lift mere men to the lofty heights of true brothers.

Again, I stress these ideas are my own, merely intended to invoke thought, and action. No Grand Lodge, lodge, or any group are responsible for, nor do they endorse, this message. These are my own thoughts, and opinions. And, also, I would like to point out that, while I disagree with his timeline, I fully agree with the content of Brother Davis's speech.