



The Overy Papers

Number 46 - **Let there be (Masonic) Light**

Fraternal Greetings Brethren

At the conclusion of each degree, we ask that a Brother demonstrates proficiency in the preceding degree before he may progress to the next.

This practice relates back to the operative masons who were responsible for the quality in the art of building. It could be a large cathedral or even a small house but whatever they did, quality was paramount.

Many workers would have started as labourers, then, if he showed aptitude or keenness to advance, he would be taken on as an apprentice.

This apprenticeship took at least 7 years. If he was a satisfactory worker he would be asked to join or enter a lodge and would then become an Entered Apprentice.

On completion of his apprenticeship and had demonstrated proficiency in his work, he would become a Fellow of the craft or as we call it a Fellowcraft.

This system in England was controlled by the City and Guilds of London and as a Fellowcraft you were now fit to travel to other work as required.

Today the City and Guilds still control the Guild examinations under the Universities of Cambridge or Oxford and although the apprenticeship system still exists the City and Guilds often runs parallel.

The position of a Master Mason was a Fellowcraft who holds a managerial position in charge of a project. He would be the person who drew up the plans and passed the instructions to the workers.

Our Speculative Craft should be no different from the practices and education used by our Operative forefathers. But sadly in many cases our fraternity has slowly removed the determining factors of Masonic education, and turned it into something like learning a nursery rhyme, without explaining what it represents.

Knowing each of the Obligations of the three degrees as a memory exercise without learning the importance of what is actually being said, defeats the education benefits that are so important. The lectures of the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft are treated in a like fashion. Too often they are read to the candidate who, at that time in the degree, is running in an overload situation.

A good deal of Masonic education that is offered today consists only of a ten minute time filler and is hardly informative, and definitely not enlightening.

If a lodge does not provide its new members with the Masonic Knowledge to see the True Masonic Light we cannot expect the lodge to last forever.

Simple memorization of the catechism is not enough. As I said a young child can memorize a nursery rhyme and still not comprehend what the nursery rhyme really means.

Masonic Mentors often face some of these same pitfalls and challenges, with their charges. However, the Mentor must insist that patience and a pathway towards learning remain THE central theme.

In Masonic life, the trials and lessons of our learning process should prepare us for the challenges we will face as the degrees are conferred. Often it is the difficult material that is the most valuable to learn. Also, remember the rituals were written down up to 300 years ago and we should learn and review them carefully.

To learn the Work, we must first understand the Work.

Thus, a solid knowledge of the language used and the true meaning of the unusual words is often the most important. Many unusual words that are used in our lectures are often the most important words he needs understand!

Our three Rituals that take our candidate to a Master Mason should serve as the primary guide or a blueprint, if you will, of the new masons Masonic education.

So I suggest it is up to the Director of Education to take the lecture of the Entered Apprentice and the Fellowcraft degree and continue the candidate's education by explaining what they mean especially as the words that often are veiled in allegory are trying to tell him.

This will be a way to improve the personal growth of each individual Mason and point him the way to the True Masonic Light.

By the way, the True Masonic Light is not an all encompassing phenomenon. Each one of us has his own journey to Masonic Light.

While it is true that Masonry is a progressive and group activity, it is at times, a solitary journey and every stone we lay down in our Masonic edifice must rest upon something strong. Even the foundation must rest and become anchored to a solid surface.

So a mastery of the basic knowledge of the three degrees and what each one stands for will provide our new mason with the knowledge for everything else and will allow him to build in strength and so lead him to his own True Masonic Light.

Putting this into Practice

Tonight I will hopefully become the new boy on the block, if get a successful Ballot, as a member of Dogwood Lodge Number 192 in Langley. The Worshipful Master must be a trifle confident as he has asked to be the new Director of Masonic Education for the Lodge. In addition I have been asked to serve another year as a Member of the Education Committee of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon and I am honoured to do both.

So to start I will discuss what I feel needs to be done to improve the education of our new Brothers.

I know each Lodge will have their own ideas and I also know my ideas are not perfect, but as the future, hopefully, Director of Masonic Education for Dogwood Lodge Number 192 and a Member of the Education Committee of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, I feel I should be allowed to put my four penny worth into the pot, to use that well know English saying.

First let me say I feel that the six steps to initiation is an excellent programme that lets the prospective Candidate know what our Fraternity is all about. It also lets him know what is expected of him and also what he should expect from us. At least it gives him enough information to decide if Freemasonry is for him and also it lets us know if he is the sort of person we would want in the fraternity.

So for those who have accepted us and been accepted by us, we now have a new candidate starting on his journey through the three degrees to become a Master Mason. This is the best time for the Director of Education of the Lodge to step up and to help him understand what his journey is all about.

As he completes each degree most of what he hears and sees will go right over his head but I feel it is important he fully understands all that he went through and the meaning of degree he has just taken.

To look after him he should be given a mentor usually a knowledgeable member of the lodge whose main purpose will be to prepare him for his Prove up.

In addition I am suggesting he has a "Masonic Buddy," a member that will look after him on a more personal level as he travels through his new life and becomes a Master Mason and maybe for another year after that. By that time he should be fully integrated into the lodge membership.

During the hours of darkness I took on the task of being a Masonic Buddy of four new members of Dogwood Lodge #192 to put this idea to the test.

It involved being in close contact with them and I started by phoning them asking if they had any questions and I would be happy to accept even stupid ones.

I told them that the only really stupid ones were those that were not asked.

I was quite surprised at the response. 95% of the questions were simple to answer and I was surprised that they did not know the answers. But then I realized many of the small issues that they had, were ones they did not want to ask and felt uncomfortable about not knowing.

Examples such as "should I give a Masonic handshake every time we meet at the start of lodge or can I just give a normal friendly handshake?" "When we all move to go into Lodge can I just go in or do I have to be invited?" "How much can I tell my wife?" That one took a bit longer but by this time I felt I had their confidence and we had a good laugh about it.

I realised that what they really needed was a comfort level that would allow them to enter lodge with confidence and not be worrying about making a fool of themselves.

I told them not to worry, in fact I would join them in the North East to answer any questions. It would also mean they could make the signs, stand up and sit down as I did and generally not worry about making a mistake. Let's face it we all do make mistakes occasionally and myself probably more often than most.

Even when I become the Director of Masonic Education, I feel I should sit with them as it is my duty to support these new brethren that today consist of 2 EA's and one FC.

I took on the task of preparing a hard copy of the lecture appropriate to their degree for them read and inwardly digest. It was then I discovered that the written word they had listened to was not as enlightening as I feel it should be.

So I decided to change the title to "The explanation to the Entered Apprentice of the Degree and its Lectures". It is in two parts part 1 is the degree and 2 is the Lecture. I intend this to be a hand out hand out and hope this will assist them to understand what the words mean and what we are trying to teach. At this time it is in the approval stage. The Fellowcraft will follow later. I also introduced them to the Correspondence Course "Solomon's Tracing Board" and all have started and most are, as far as they can go at this time. They have all enjoyed it.

The Master Mason on the team took one of the "Letters to a new Brother" titled, "Who is Who in Lodge" and together we changed it to match the Lodge layout of Dogwood. At this meeting he handed out the letter and got the small group to prepare the chairs in lodge with the correct collars before the lodge meeting. Not only do they learn who sits where, it also makes them feel they are a useful and active part of the lodge.

Their comfort in lodge is my aim and hope I can keep it going as they pass through the three degrees plus an additional year as Master Mason.

Apart from that I have left the main work of their "prove up" to their mentor and hopefully when we come out of darkness we can get together to ensure we are doing OK.

I have tried not to overload them, with work. They each can take their own time to learn. Mind you one of the members is now so confident he wants to carry out his prove up early. It is still early days but I do feel we must be on the right track.

Thank you and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

Bro. Bill Overy

Member of the Education Committee of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon.