

THE MASONIC JOURNEY

A Quest for Light

THE MASONIC LIFE is symbolically described as a journey from west to east in search of intellectual and spiritual light. For many, this journey appears to require two distinct paths: one moral or spiritual, the other educational or intellectual. This is the result of a common misunderstanding of the ultimate objective—understanding. The objective of both science (the intellectual mechanism) and religion (the spiritual mechanism) is the same: an understanding of the totality of existence; a final definition of reality, the universe, and man's place in it.

In the literature of Assyria (about 1300 B.C.), we find evidence of this spiritual quest. A half millennium later it is obvious in Pythagoras's search for the "meaning of life" through the divine understanding of numbers and their relationships. And two millennia after Pythagoras, Galileo, Pascal, and Leibnitz echo him as they refer to mathematics as the "speech of God." This search for the ultimate answer, the final authorization, had as its strongest impetus the search for the divinity.



In the late seventeenth century, three Englishmen laid the foundations for physics, psychology, and biology in this spiritual quest. Isaac Newton saw God's speech in the great laws of physics and celestial gravitation. John Locke defined the self, theorized that the mind was a blank slate, and that knowledge is obtained logically through the senses and our perceptions of reality. And John Ray, a minister without a pulpit who is

considered the father of English natural history, classified plants according to similarities and differences that emerged from observation, thus advancing scientific empiricism. In this search for natural history, the perfection of the Divine Creator was both obvious and benevolent.

And while most contemporary scientific and spiritual movements tend to make rear looking allusions telling us what has gone wrong and even hinting at some unbounded previous catastrophe, the Masonic quest looks forward. We endeavor to make good men better. We utilize a stability and firmness of principle to fully discover ourselves and the world in which we live.

In the Second or Fellow Craft Degree, the intellectual part of this quest is explained to the Brothers in terms of the liberal arts, the five senses, and the orders of architecture. The liberal arts, often considered synonymous with the introductory courses in the university curriculum, provide us with the foundation necessary to our intellectual quest. The five senses, as Locke noted, provide us with the information essential to the final objective—understanding. And the five orders of architecture speak to the orderliness of the quest as well as to the artistic and creative potential of man.

Anciently, the liberal arts were considered the essential skills required for a free person, a citizen, to participate in public life. These arts made the citizen truly a "free man." In modern times, the term most often refers to the disciplines of literature, language, philosophy, history, and mathematics, as well as to the social and biological sciences.

In the classical world, the liberal arts were divided into the Trivium and the Quadrivium.

The Trivium included grammar, logic (also named dialectic), and rhetoric. The Quadrivium included arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. Arithmetic and geometry, along with trigonometry and other numerically based studies, now fall under the rubric of mathematics, and astronomy, now based on observable, replicable science, was anciently known as astrology and included the auguries of that pseudoscience. Let us take a closer look, however, at the liberal arts and consider them as an experience essential to reaching the Masonic goal of enlightenment. This is the liberal arts experience.

This explanation of the liberal arts experience will not specifically focus on any one or, even, all of the seven steps described in the degree. Instead, we will consider what we, as free men, receive when we utilize the steps to our and society's betterment.

The first goal of the liberal arts is to give the individual the ability to reason well and to recognize when reason and evidence are not enough. The liberal arts give us the ability to be



creative—to connect two previously unconnected concepts in a new and novel way or to find a previously unknown connection between already joined concepts. They encourage in us serendipity and analysis. The key to reason is to recognize fully when more evidence is needed.

The liberal arts enable us to read, write and speak with some level of distinction and style. Reading the words alone is not sufficient to knowledge. And writing simple sentences does not create understanding on the part of the reader because it does not sufficiently express the thoughts of the author. Grammar is the set of structural rules that govern the way in which we speak and write. It is truly the key to understanding human communication.

Rhetoric or dialectic refers to the reasoned utilization of dialogue and the "art" of logical discussion. The purpose of rhetoric is to find the truth. It requires not only that the speaker "speaks well," but that the audience "listens well". One of the oldest manifestations of rhetoric may be found in the Socratic Method which tests beliefs through questions as it examines the structure and reason behind the belief or idea. Rhetoric focuses not on persuasion but on truth seeking and requires that the audience reflect critically on the topic.

The liberal arts also help us understand and utilize numerical data. They give us the ability to grasp and analyze the information presented. Much in the modern world is expressed in mathematical terms, and, without the ability to understand and analyze the propositions presented, we are unable to determine if the conclusions (or answers) are valid. There is a common saying in mathematics: "Anything can be proven by the manipulation of numbers" - especially when the public lacks the basic computational skills implied in this part of the liberal arts.

As humans, we must understand our history and the consequences of past actions as well as the uncertainty of human society. George Santayana wrote: "A man is morally free when, in full possession of his living humanity, he judges the world, and judges other men, with uncompromising sincerity." He also wrote: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." An understanding of our history - not just names, dates and events, but outcomes and longterm consequences is essential to the full and productive public life of a free man.

The liberal arts imply, but do not explicitly state, that an understanding of the scientific method is essential to the individual's understanding of the reality of the world in which he exists. The use of the scientific method enables the individual to explain what he observes. It uses a system of techniques for investigating phenomena, acquiring new knowledge, correcting previous knowledge and integrating new observations with those previously made. It is based on empirical and measurable evidence, and is subject to repetition and confirmation. It has characterized the study of natural science since the 17th century. An individual using the scientific method seeks to let reality speak for itself and allows it to either support or disprove the proposition.

Inherent to the liberal arts experience is the ability to make ethical choices and to assume responsibility for those choices. Ethical choices, for our purposes, are defined as those choices that enable us to live together as one family regardless of race, creed, national origin, or political persuasion. Ethics involves a methodical procedure for developing, systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of correct behavior. Ethical decision making is essential to the survival of any society.

Inherent to ethical decision making is the ability to assume responsibility for one's actions, behaviors, and choices. In a world where a common excuse is "the devil made me do it," the strength of character exhibited assuming responsibility is paramount to our success, both in our individual lives as well as in our Masonic journey.

"Art" describes a wide range of human activity to include the visual arts - painting, and architecture, for example - as well as music, theatre, and dance. In the 17th century, "art" referred to any skill or mastery and was not differentiated from crafts or sciences. One essential of art is its ability to have a direct impact on our psychological as well as physiological responses as is so eloquently described in the lecture of the Fellow Craft Degree's description of the science of music. Through art

we are enabled to hear more, see more and experience more, and to do all at a significantly deeper level.

The liberal arts encourage sequential learning. As we learn to read beginning with simple three- and four-word sentences then progressing to more complex expression, so all learning is sequential and based on the firm foundation of the liberal arts. Sequential learning is essential to the great leaps of imagination that generate new and great discoveries from the structure of DNA to the complexities of the atom to the modern iPhone.

Along with sequential learning, we must also develop a grasp of the technological developments that so rapidly overtake us. At the same time, we must understand how these developments are to be applied in terms of their capabilities and limitations. The modern computer, for example, is a marvelous machine, but it still requires a degree of human input and imaginations to function.

The totality of the liberal arts experience may be expressed in three related statements:

1. To create insights and understanding not only of our world but of the rest of the world as well;
2. To develop the ability to see the world as it really exists and to understand what we see; and
3. To understand that change comes not necessarily through innovation, but through new

ways of seeing.

The liberal arts give us the ability to see in new ways.

The Masonic journey or quest for light (enlightenment) is often described as a trek that culminates when the traveler reaches the "top of the mountain" and attains a significant degree of self-knowledge. It may, however, be better to describe it as the exploration of a dense and entangled forest where it is easy to walk at some levels and on some paths, and difficult at others. The traveler's problem is how to shift for himself. He is searching for direction rather than height. In this forest many paths are tangled thickets, some overgrown from disuse, some fashionably clear and easy, and many interwoven. The challenge is created by the complexity and divergence.

Masonry, though its utilization of the liberal arts experience and its spiritual foundation, provides the guiding light essential to successful progress being made in the journey. It removes the earplugs and blinders. It enables the traveler to grasp and utilize the complexity and diversity to one's benefit. In that sense the forest and the mountain are one. We all travel in the same land; the terrain is difficult, the routes varied, but the goal is common to all mankind, especially Masons.

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