

## THE MASONIC CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

by

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For the material presented, as well as the title of this article, I am indebted to the pre-eminent Masonic author, H. L. Haywood. Education is the cornerstone of our fraternity. Our ritual emphasizes the fact that a brother enters our brotherhood while long being in darkness. As he goes through the ritual he professes that he is seeking light, more light, and further light. But nowhere in the ritual or in Freemasonry in general, does it say that the new Mason has achieved all the light that is to be had regarding our brotherhood.

I have read that in order to understand the history of Freemasonry, one has also to understand the history of the times that existed when Freemasonry had its start. Freemasonry grew out of the guilds that were the trade organizations in England and Scotland during medieval times. At this time in the chronicles of England and Scotland there were no schools such as we know them today.

Most of the populace was uneducated. What learning there was usually came from the religious schools that taught the priesthood or the clergy. This education was centered on the monasteries and nunneries and a few lay organizations. There were no schools as there are during the last 200-300 years. There were no newspapers, or libraries where the general population could get reading materials. Indeed, few people could actually have any reading skills. Even finding books to read which were usually kept in the libraries of the monasteries and convents.

However, there had to be some type of education, otherwise we would not have seen the magnificent structures of the gothic cathedrals and castles, there would have been no art work or sculpture, such as what amazes us today. To create such works requires an intelligence that can only be gained through what we call education.

From whence does this system of education arise. The answer can be found in the system of apprenticeship which was utilized by the trade guilds that trained skilled workmen. Instead of attending a public school a youth entered a guild where he learned his trade from a master in his guild.

To build the magnificent cathedrals you needed to have a craftsman who could read plans and knew the principals of geometry and had to have the skills necessary to direct the workmen. The trade secrets taught to these youths were so valuable that a system of secrecy that bound these workmen together was devised. The person who was in charge of this secrecy is similar to the Tyler in our lodges today. The ritual states that the job of the Tyler is to guard against the approach of cowans and eavesdroppers. The definition of a cowan is one who is uninitiated in the secrets of the trade.

The guilds also taught its brethren that those who live together in close unity must also be trained in morality, for to live in close proximity with others, a level of trust must exist. Since most building was of religious edifices, religion was also a part of the brother's education.

As operative Freemasonry slowly transitioned to speculative Freemasonry, education became an integral part in the core of the transition. Thus, it can be said that when operative Freemasonry transitioned to speculative Freemasonry, the fraternal guilds changed their emphasis from the building of structures to the building of manhood and brotherhood.

Just who was the guiding light in the aforementioned transition? The person who guided this evolution from a brother being uneducated to educated was spearheaded by Brother William Preston. Brother Preston had an interest in education and decided to make the lodge hall into a class room.

The lectures in the three degree rituals were designed educate and teach the new brethren. For an example of this emphasis one only has to look to the lectures in the second, or Fellowcraft degree.

From its earliest beginnings, the lectures were designed to encourage the brother to seek more and more light or knowledge. H. L. Haywood emphasized that education should be a passion and inseparable from the beliefs of Freemasonry. He stated that a baby comes into this world without knowledge. He is a tabula rasa, or a blank slate. Education teaches the baby to develop into a functioning adult. So, in similar fashion, Masonic education and learning the symbolism and meaning, philosophy, and history of the ritual teach a new brother to develop his sense of belonging and fellowship in society.

As H. L. Haywood stated, “Anything is good education that enables us to be happy in our environment.” Education prepares a man to live with his fellow man, to understand him, and to get on well with him. Haywood went on to state that “The temple which our craft is building is nothing other than the human family living happily together.” It teaches that all men are brethren living together in harmony.

All of this education does not come easily. “Those who would become real Masons must work to that end – the light does not come miraculously, but at the end of a toilsome way.” There is a lot to Freemasonry. Haywood states that there is far more than most men dream of. There is knowledge that is hidden away in our traditions, history, customs, and above all, in our ritual.

However, a man can nor more become possessed of that treasure than he can understand Greek without studying this language. Haywood specified that “Masonic education does not mean delving into the dust bins of antiquity for rare lore – it means digging out of Masonry that which there is now in it for truth and for light”.

A statement that embodies our fraternity is, “Not more men in Masonry, but more masonry in men.