

THE ORIGIN OF MASONIC EDUCATION

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An essay by Rabbi Jonathon Sachs entitled "The Far Horizon" gave an amazing insight to the commencement of the realization that Masonic education is necessary if we are to continue as a growing and viable brotherhood.

Unfortunately, the only growth statistic applicable to Freemasonry is the increase in the number of Fifty Year members. Early on, it was common for fathers to bring their sons into the fraternity. This membership source has diminished in recent years. Young men today are busy with mounting needs for their families. In today's economy it is getting increasingly difficult to earn a sufficient living for the support of the family. I must state that in the two Masonic lodges to which I am a member, I am seeing a rising number of brethren that are not only young in age, but largely diverse in ethnicity, country of birth, and religion. Hopefully, this upsurge in membership will continue to expand.

How, then, can this potential increase in membership be fostered. The answer is to develop a well-rounded and excellent program of Masonic education. In order for the brethren of the lodge to cultivate such a program it is necessary to search the beginning of the idea that education is important for survival.

A study of the Old Testament Book of Exodus, which tells the story of the Hebrews' journey from the slavery of Egypt to the Promised Land, will give us the tools of survival. There is a saying that, "We can't truly know ourselves until we know our history".

As the Hebrews were preparing to leave Egypt and start their trek, Moses addressed the assembled people. Moses spoke of the future of those leaving for the Promised Land. Moses said that three things were necessary to consider in order insuring the survival of the Hebrews. These three things were, children, education, and the consideration of what would guarantee their future. Moses did not speak of today or tomorrow. He told of what would be necessary for the Hebrew people to grow and survive.

The Hebrews became the first assemblage of what were to become the citizens of the Promised Land to predicate their future on education. Rabbi Sachs stated in his essay that the Hebrews and their successors the Jewish people became the group whose religion, Judaism, whose idols were teachers and whose passion was study and the life of the mind. That is why all of the great civilizations of the ancient world only the Jewish people survive and continue to be strong. Rabbi Sachs declared that education was the only way to change the world.

As stated above, the only way to continuously survive was to learn from the errors of ones predecessors that is to emphasize the study and learn from the history of the nation. It is only because of this speech of Moses, that the Jewish people have survived to the present day.

Let us now relate how the teaching of Moses applies to Freemasonry. It is from the year 1717 that organized Freemasonry has existed. If we consider operative Freemasonry we go back hundreds of years.

In the operative lodges there was an apprentice system to teach brethren the tools of their trade. At that time education in the form of book learning was the province of the churches. When taught the builders craft, the

apprentice had to learn the basics of mathematics, as well as how to read those plans that were on the trestle board. The teachings of the church mingled with the teaching of the Freemasons' lodge.

The apprentice mason gave himself to seven years of study and on the job experience. The lodge brother assigned to educate the mason was the Intender. This was usually a past master of the lodge and one who was thoroughly versed in the knowledge of what it takes to become a master mason.

In our lodges today, there is often a problem of inducing a new brother to continue to attend lodge and, hopefully to desire to become a member of the line of officers, and then ascend to the Master's chair. Lodges serve many important functions. First of all there is the brotherhood and friendship that is inherent in the lodge. Next is the fact that the Masonic lodge is a place where brethren meet and join together in a social atmosphere. This is particularly important in the smaller towns where social amenities are not available. Last, and by far the most important function of the lodge is to make good men better. It is the place where the lessons of a meaningful life is taught,

Thus enters the necessity of the education of our new Master Masons. If lodge meetings were only a litany of the finances of the lodge and other business functions, it will soon be found that attendance wanes and there is a minimal number of brethren on the sidelines.

When favorable balloting brings a potential brother into the lodge, the Master appoints a knowledgeable brother to be the Intender for the candidate. It is, first of all, the job of the Intender to teach the candidate the ritual and catechism pertaining to the degree just completed. When the Intender meets with his Intendee, he also answers the item of Masonic knowledge contained in the individual degree guide books. This information includes the history, philosophy of Freemasonry and the symbolism of the items contained in the ritual and lectures of the degree presentation.

Unfortunately, many Intenders feel that their job of education of the new brother ends when the Master Mason degree is conferred. This could not be further from the truth.

The Intender should continue to meet with the new brother, and guide him in his Masonic studies. The Intender must convey a love of learning and nurture an interest in acquiring more expertise in what it takes to become the better man that is the goal of Freemasonry.

In the many years that Freemasonry has existed, our ritual has acquired much from what had gone before. The lessons taught by Moses were also learned by those who made our fraternity blossom into what it is today.

Yes, there are parallels of Freemasonry and the teaching of Moses. When Moses said that three things are important, we must apply those lessons to our brotherhood. Remember that the first and most element of success is to bear many children. In fact, the first commandment that was spoken by the Grand Architect of the Universe in the Old Testament Book of Genesis was, "Be fruitful and multiply". This should also be the most important mandate for the continued growth of the lodge.

The next element in the lessons of Moses was the importance of education. It goes without saying that it is the education of the candidate and future brother that the love of the study of Freemasonry and the knowledge of

the history, philosophy, and symbolism of the lectures will encourage him to become an active member of the lodge. By inspiring the brother he, indeed, will become a better man and an important part of the lodge.

Moses final lesson was for the Hebrews to look to the future for the attainment of long life. This lesson is necessary for the continued life, not only of the lodge, but for Freemasonry. The teachings of the past and the philosophy they teach will engender the interest necessary for a brother to become a Mason in more than name only.

The wisdom of our forebears and our predecessors brought to the present time will make Freemasonry grow and become, once again, a prominent organization. It was these lessons that inspired the likes of our Masonic presidents, our founding fathers, the elite thinkers of society, musicians, and others of renown, to become Freemasons. The three necessities for longevity, children, education, and a look to the future are what Freemasonry is all about.

If Freemasonry educates its brethren, then the first, and most important commandment handed down by the Grand Architect of the Universe in the Old Testament Book of Genesis will be fulfilled. Freemasonry will certainly be fruitful and will multiply.