ALL THE LIGHT

October 6, 2008

My Brothers,

Deep in the back woods, a hillbilly's wife went into labor in the middle of the night and the doctor was called to assist in the delivery. As there was no electricity, the doctor handed the father-to-be a lantern and said, "Here. You hold this high so I can see what I am doing!" Soon, a baby boy was brought into the world. "Whoa there", said the doctor, "Don't be in such a rush to put that lantern down - I think there's another one coming." Sure enough, within minutes he had delivered a baby girl. "Hold that lantern up high - don't set it down, there's another one!', said the doctor. Within a few minutes he had delivered a third baby. "'Now, don't be in a hurry to put that lantern down, it seems there's yet another one coming!", cried the doctor. The redneck scratched his head in bewilderment, and asked the doctor, "You reckon it might be the light that's attractin' ‘em?"

Let's begin the meat of this session with one of the most misunderstood statements in Masonry, "You are now about to receive all the light that can be conferred upon you in a Lodge of Master Masons." With those words ringing in the Candidate's ears, he completes the degree ceremonies and begins his labors as a Master Mason. But, right from the start, he labors under a false conception: that is not all the light there is to be found in Masonry, just all the light that a Lodge can confer upon a Mason by ceremony.

Unfortunately, we reinforce the impression that he has received "all the light" with every warm handshake and heartfelt, "Congratulations!". What we don't see is an unintended message in this celebration, a message that, upon later reflection, can be troubling to our new Mason. It is almost as though we have said, "There you go, Brother, we've conferred upon you the outline of moral philosophy, the components for intellectual betterment, and the promise of spiritual fulfillment. That's the program, we make Masons!, and you're done. Welcome to the Lodge, and let's have some cake.”

Think back to your own degree work. Did your received Masonic light live up to your expectations? Did you feel empowered with moral philosophy, emboldened with newfound intellectual prowess, and warmed by the bliss of spiritual fulfillment? In truth, didn’t you think there should be something more? Did you think you measured up to the Lodge Brothers who had conferred the degrees upon you? I know I saw something in them that I didn’t think I had. It was obvious to me that I lacked strength, wisdom, and a confidence that they all had. And, yet, I had been told that I'd received all the light I could get. Maybe there was something wrong with me. Maybe it was a mistake to have brought me into Masonry. Handshakes and congratulations aside, I did not feel very worthy at all. That bothered me a lot.

If our Candidate has any of these feelings, he may be troubled in much the same way. To him, there are many unanswered questions and because we haven't really emphasized that there is further light to find, or how to find it, he can become disillusioned.

This disillusionment is unintended, but it is the message we seem to be locked into giving by our degree structure. The ceremonies and words of the degrees are landmarks - we can't change them. The Candidate Degree Education Programs are handed down to us from Grand Lodge - we can't change them very easily, and remember, they're only study guides for the degree work, not for the pursuit of further light beyond the degrees.

And, if we as a Lodge even see the need for study in the pursuit of further light, we aren't very good at organizing further education or making available the materials for that further study, or participating in it, are we? And, if we're not set up to do that, we're not likely to be able to tell him much about the finding of further light, are we? So, we don’t have much to tell the Candidate about further light even though it is, perhaps, the most important thing we can tell him at the end of the degrees. Hey Brother!, here's your Monitor for further reading; there's some neat stuff in it; let's eat cake.

In general, maybe the problem in continuing the pursuit of Masonic light is that we're looking outside for the source of further light. No one is conferring or giving us further light even though we may want more, even if we think there should be, must be, more. And, you know what?, no one is going to hand it to us, either.

Further light in Masonry is not something that is conferred from outside, or handed to us, it is something that is discovered within ourselves. The Lodge has conferred light upon us, like a lamp touching another lamp. The Masonic degrees are the pilot lights that touch off the lamp of our inner light. This is where we must clear up the original misunderstanding. Stop looking for further light to come to us from somewhere else. It is actually within us; it is for us to see to the grand illumination of our hearts and minds and spirits, it is for us to tend our lamps. Masonry's degrees show us the tools we need to find more light. We then have to take the initiative in the pursuit of it. Further light is there, waiting for us to look for it. Further light is to be found in nature, in science, in society, in religion, but most of all, in ourselves. Further light is found where we look for it. Further light is found when we look for it. Further light is found IF we look for it.

That's what we have to tell our new Master Mason. We have to tell him that the thoughts of inadequacy that he may experience are his first steps in gaining further light in Masonry. Those first troubling questions are no more than Masonry's mysteries beginning to work in him. Those first troubling questions are products of the Masonic tools which the Lodge has given him. Seeking the answers is the beginning of self-illumination; light begets light.

So, my Brothers, if we're done with our cake, let's lift our lamps and see what we can see. Let's ALL see what our light attracts.

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