

A Masonic Minute

The Lodge

The term '*lodge*' has several meanings in Masonic parlance – a building, a room, a body of men. In operative days, from whence we derive the term, it was a simple lean-to structure on the building site where the workmen took their break, stored their tools, and received instructions in the execution of the architect's plans and designs. In the Ancient Charges of a Freemason we learn that "*A Lodge is a place where Freemasons assemble to work and to instruct and to improve themselves in the mysteries of their ancient science.*" We still use the word in this sense of a building or meeting place when we say we are going to lodge

However, Freemasonry is men and a Lodge is a living organism, a creative body of like-minded men, working together in peace, love and harmony, fellow travellers joined in a common cause, as M.W. Bro. David C. Bradley observed in his Grand Master's Address in 1990: "*men with a common purpose, governed by a common idea, believing in a common ideal.*" A Lodge is a body of men who have done great things in the past and hope to do great things in the future.

Today, as in former times, the Lodge is a place for instruction and self-improvement, where we study and learn from the ideals enshrined in the exemplary charges and lectures of our rites and ceremonies. Properly considered, the Lodge is a schoolroom and every meeting provides a learning opportunity. Freemasonry is, and always was intended to be an educational institution for "*the cultivation and improvement of the human mind.*" It is the oldest and largest institution devoted to adult education in the civilized world. It lays the world of human knowledge and the accumulated wisdom of the ages open at one's feet.

We must ever be mindful that Freemasonry lives moves and has its being in our constituent lodges. At the opening of every meeting the Worshipful Master is reminded that it is his stated duty to "*employ and instruct the brethren in Masonry.*" Success or failure depends entirely on the leadership ability of the Worshipful Master and the support of the Officer Team. William Pollard might have been writing a manual for Lodge Officers when he wrote: "*It is the responsibility of leadership to provide opportunity, and the responsibility of individuals to contribute.*"

A lodge meeting should have more to offer than a friendly get together at the local Tim Horton's coffee shop, as friendly, cheerful and pleasant as that may be. First and foremost, Freemasonry is an initiatory order based in and sharing the common purpose of the ancient mystery schools of early civilizations: Egyptian and Greek philosophy, in particular. This inheritance provides a further dimension. There is rather more to Freemasonry than sociability and philanthropy, important as those aspects are

to the fraternity. We are in the business of changing men's lives; taking in good men and assisting them to make themselves better men.

How do we achieve this lofty goal? As Speculative Masons, we are charged to think seriously about the meaning of life: Where have we come from? What is our purpose here? Where are we going from here? These questions can only be answered by an intense study of our inner selves. "KNOW THYSELF" was engraved over the entrance to the ancient temples of initiation. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) penned this admonition:

*Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.*

In this context, the Lodge becomes a research laboratory of self-discovery – "a mutually supporting network of men joined on such a quest." There are five stages in the process:

1. Self-examination
2. Self-discovery
3. Self-analysis
4. Self-realization
5. Self-fulfilment

Freemasonry uses the metaphor of light to symbolize "progression from ignorance to understanding, the process described as passing from *darkness to light*. Freemasons were at one time known as "*the Sons of Light*." Marcel Proust (1871-1922), the French novelist wrote: "*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.*" To quote the American pamphleteer, Thomas Paine (1737-1809), writing of the Enlightenment: "*We see with other eyes; we hear with other ears; and think with other thoughts, than those we formerly used. The mind once enlightened cannot again become dark.*" In the 'light' of Freemasonry, we are given new eyes to see natural Beauty and keener minds to comprehend divine Truth.