

Buchanan Lodge No. 550
December 5th, 2013

“Freemasonry; A 12 Step Program.”

I must admit, but I write my Official Visit Addresses only a day or two before they are to be presented. I have pretty much dealt with all writing assignments in the same manner for as long as I can remember. Leading up to a speaking engagement or due date, I formulate ideas and concepts and loosely connect the dots in my mind prior to my pen ever hitting the paper. Have you ever had an idea, a concept or something that wakes you in the middle of the night? In a deep sleep, the ideas race past your mind's eye like the horses on a carousel. You take note of all the details and colour and when you wake....nothing. You *feel* like you won the lottery, but you lost the ticket.

My presentation tonight has been a writing challenge. The concept sounds great between my ears, but I hope what I verbalize is comprehensible, interesting and enjoyable.

I started to give some thought to officer progression within a lodge and when I added up the steps, I was surprised to find there were 12. Of course anyone can make an argument to support a conclusion and you may find there are 11 or 13, but this is my presentation and I will argue there are 12. Besides, 12 is an absolutely fascinating number as far as numerologists are concerned and it supports my conclusions.

For just a taste of its significance, we may first turn to the Bible and note the following:

- The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ
- The 12 Tribes of Judah
- The 12 Great Priests of Chronicles
- The 12 Administrators of Solomon for all of Israel.

All in all, reference to the number 12 occurs 189 times in the King James Version of the Bible.

If we explore other sources, we find:

- The 12 Works of Hercules
- The 12 animals of the Chinese Horoscope
- There are 12 Principal divinities in Greek Mythology
- 12 hours in the Ante Meridiem and 12 hours in the Post meridiem of a day.
- 12 months in a year.
- The Omni Presence of the Holy Trinity spread over the four corners of the globe; $3 \times 4 = 12$.

And finally, according to Geoff, the 12 venerable steps in Freemasonry.

When we enter the Craft, we soon learn that it is the internal and not external qualifications that recommend a man to be a mason. It is the light that shines from within oneself and not the cosmetics of their external being that is their true value.

At the same time, a lesson often intimated but less observed is the length of time a man has been a mason and the application of that time.

Only the Great Architect knows for sure the extent of our mortal existence, but I am referring to the time you spend during the earlier years of your Masonic Development. It is this time that is the most important and crucial and should be attended to with great care.

In the early stages a newly admitted Mason may feel he has little control over his progress as the lodge encourages him to take the next step and ultimately join in the line that is known as Officer Progression. The sometimes zealous and honourable intentions of current lodge officers can be misguided because although the brother may 'progress', he is missing part of the lesson that can only be taught over time. Perhaps more accurately, absorbed over time. And for this to happen, he needs the time.

I mentioned in my address to The Electric Lodge a couple of weeks ago about the concept of 'To Know and Not to Do, is still not to Know'. I think this is also applicable in this scenario. Much knowledge is imparted from our Ritual, but unless the mason has actually experienced and 'done', then much value has been lost. First we learn, then we do and finally we understand. The first two steps are relatively easy, but it is the last stage, the stage of understanding that requires diligent study and thought provoking examination, both in solitude and with the assistance of more experienced brethren. Again this takes time.

And now for a non sequitur..

I love to sail. I could tell you many stories, vivid and colourful stories about sailing. Your mind will have you sailing the high seas with the wind in your hair, but you haven't actually experienced the thrill until a wave breaks over the bow and splashes you straight in the face. There is no substitute for hands-on experience or knowledge gained through osmosis.

There is a reason why our beautiful system is more than a system veiled in allegory. It is a system all right, and a system that works beautifully. The 12 steps as I will explain them are necessary and when properly administered, the Mason is developed and prepared to assume greater levels of responsibility with confidence and competency.

First, Second and Third Degrees are a journey of enlightenment from ignorance to one's inevitable destiny. The JS, SS and IG are lessons of service to your fellow man, preparation and guardianship. The JD and SD own the responsibility for guiding and establishing trust, but not yet leading. The JW assimilates beautifying and the refinement of Character. The SW is relied upon for strength and support and then all the proceeding experience culminates as the WM to lead, direct and rule his Lodge. The IPM is the last and final step, an office by right and worthy of our acknowledgement for service to our Craft. These essential steps of progression my brethren are the 12 steps I am referring to.

If we assume a candidate may receive his three degrees within a 12-month period, then the remaining steps should by right take a minimum of 9 years.

I think we are doing the craft and our brethren a disservice if we hasten and not chasten.

Imagine for a moment if you had to give up one of your limbs every time you skipped one of the steps. If your sole purpose were to race to the East and bypass a few Chairs along the way, you would be nothing more than a head on a stick by the time you sat in the chair of King Solomon.

It is not a race...Freemasonry is a slow, patient and nurturing journey. These lessons of our Craft may not be readily apparent at the time they are received, but be assured, the day will come when you are either glad you had the experience or regret the lack thereof.

In the movie the 'Karate Kid', the instructor Mr. Miyagi gives instruction to his young apprentice to wax an old car. Not once, but a thousand times, over and over again in semi circular motions, alternating between each hand.

To the apprentice, he finds no connection between waxing a car and learning Karate. The lesson is not yet apparent. To demonstrate its instructive lesson, Mr. Miyagi throws a punch in the direction of his apprentice who without hesitation sweeps it aside with the same motion he has previously used to wax the car. Lesson learned, value perceived and experience gained.

Everything we do in our craft is connected and has a purpose. As the WM of the lodge you will know the candidate is properly prepared because you served the offices of JS and SS and not because you memorized that particular portion of the ritual.

For example, you will be comfortable with balloting procedures because you served the offices of JD and SD and not because the Secretary placed a script on the pedestal. You are very familiar with every aspect of the lodge furniture, jewels and ornaments because you spent endless hours learning the JW lecture. You become familiar with the idiosyncrasies that exist within the district and this only can come from travelling, visiting and a lot of contact amongst your brethren. These are a few of the rewards for time well spent.

It is not my intent to cast aspersions, because I have no need to do so. My intent is not to profess something new, but perhaps to shed some new light on an old subject.

Was my presentation this evening really about the number 12? Certainly not. I thought it was an interesting segue-way into a topic of patience and moderation with respect to Masonic development and Officer Progression.

Just so you don't think I have entirely lost my mind, there is some foundation for my choosing the number 12.

According to philosophers, 'Twelve' is the number of what is completed, which forms a whole, a perfect and harmonious unit. Sounds like the ideal of a Mason who has methodically progressed and not a head on a stick, doesn't it?

In ancient civilizations, the number 'Twelve' corresponds to the plentitude, the completion and the integral contribution of a thing.

I hope this is one 'Twelve Step Program' you will happily become addicted to. Brethren, I wish you the very best of health and happiness for the Holiday Season and by the way, may you enjoy the '12 Days of Christmas'.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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