

Degree Work, a Pedagogical Process

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The landmarks and tenets of Masonry are ideological in composition and nature. Being spiritual and moral in origin and general in adaptability, they will forever remain true for all time. The transmission of these tenets and landmarks in all degree work follow the pattern of pedagogy most useful and impressive, thus all kinds of aids are used. Visual aids, in the form of symbols; audio, in sound effects; spiritual and moral by religious and moral implements; are all taken advantage of in the degree work to leave lasting impressions in the mind and soul of the neophyte, each aid being used at the proper time and calculated to emphasize each detail. All instructions are done in all solemnity to tune the mind and soul to the lessons thus imparted, to leave impressions unforgettable.

Fremasonry, therefore, has established customs which are to be held intact, and we are enjoined never to deviate from them. Deviation from our established customs would result in deviation from our tenets and landmarks, hence all efforts must be centered on the proper impression on the minds and souls of the learners the principles of Freemasonry can be ingrained and become their second nature. Our rituals, instruments for the establishment of such customs, are universal in com-

position and acceptability hence their fundamentals should not be deviated from, yet being pedagogical instruments they may be enriched as dictated by time and circumstance. But enriched as they are, the fundamentals must ever be present and clearly defined to be clearly understandable in all languages and where ever found, for being universal in acceptance and used in examinations for proficiency, deviations from the fundamentals will produce confusion. Thus is the ritual is closely followed, not because the rituals teach the established customs or tenets, but because their universality is proof of proficiency and identity of masons.

Even our own rituals have enriched certain fundamentals in the form of optionals if time permits and prevailing condition necessitates. The apron being an emblem of innocence and a badge among masons can never be understood as such unless the enriched portion is thus recited and at that particular instance when the candidate is in the mood to receive it. Or the ballot box being inviolably secret and the casting being equivalent to that sacred promise to cast it in accordance with the obligation can never be understood as such unless explained and explained in a manner and time when the brother is in that mood and setting to understand

it. Enriching them that way would never be deviating from our established customs, rather hastens and makes lasting the learning of our customs to live cleanly and vote broadly, forgetting and relegating self for the good of our God, Country, and Mankind. Even in appendant bodies of Masonry, we either communicate these customs and tenets or enrich the transmission by full form and insertion of beautiful phraseology in degree work to make impressions more lasting.

Sticking to the exact wordings of the ritual on delivery when not thoroughly memorized is sacrilegious to our beautiful and meaningful tenets. The candidate will be jarred out of the ethical and psychical condition into which the work has placed him to receive a particular lesson if a brother fumbles for words inadvertently lost, delivery becoming more of a mockery because of promptings from all sides causing confusion to the brother delivering it and making him an object of pity by all the brethren including the candidate to whom said lesson is to be imparted.

In all degree work, the central point, the element to be most considered is the candidate. Is he receiving the lessons that degree work desires him to learn? Has the work given him impressively the kind of reactions to conditions, in short, the customs to habituate? Is he getting the tenets and landmarks of the fraternity so that he should never deviate from them? Or, are we sacrificing him to show our ability in being able to memorize the rituals or go through the floor work with perfection? Or still, is the degree work done in a matter-of-fact way as if it

has got to be done to boost the candidate to that degree without regard to spiritual and moral integration desired in the personality of the candidate?

In education, the learner is the most important element, so is the candidate the most important consideration in all kinds of degree work. The fundamentals of the rituals should never be changed nor deviated from because these are universally accepted, but surely they should be enriched if necessary in order to have effect on the candidate so desired by the rituals. Sticking to the ritual even how poorly delivered or preventing enrichment thereof to better impart learning of established customs and way of life of a mason, are formalisms bordering on dogmatism and regimentation which we should trample underfoot wheresoever found.

Such is the pedagogical order in our degree work, our ritualistic ceremonies as instruments of learning to teach customs, tenets and landmarks from which we should never deviate and the utmost effort at producing the moral and spiritual integration within the candidate so desired by our rituals and so aimed at by our ceremonies. The candidate must learn the lessons at all cost, to make him a better man; not that the formality of teaching be the be-all and end-all as if the ritual is far above the soul of man. For did not the Scriptures say, "The Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath?" In the same manner, the ritual is made for the Mason and not the Mason for the ritual.