

15 Degree Essay “Engaging the Brethren to eliminate ignorance, intolerance, fanaticism, superstition, and un-charitableness”

By

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As good and true Scottish Rite Masons, we are taught the importance of instructing our Brethren in a quest to eliminate the ruffians of ignorance, intolerance, fanaticism, superstition, and un-charitableness. This sounds fairly a straight forward process, in theory, but in practice, it is not always so easy to accomplish.

Before becoming a Freemason, let alone a Scottish Rite Freemason, we are in darkness. Although we come here as good men seeking to be even better men, we come with our own experiences, and beliefs about the world; organizational and political biases. These, of course, have no place in the Lodge, and I would argue that we must not allow ourselves to be rigid in our beliefs; at least not to the point of closing off our mind to all aspects of varying differences. In fact, it is a closed mind that is fertile ground for ignorance, intolerance, superstitions, et al, to take root and grow. Before we can enlighten our Brethren, we must get our own “Lodge” within ourselves in order.

I write this from my own personal experience. Before entering on my journey for Light, I would classify myself as a fairly staunch conservative. In my limited exposure to Freemasonry, I saw it as a haven for moral, conservative thinkers; seeing any liberal concepts as having no place in Freemasonry, or in our society as a whole. I applied this reasoning to Freemasonry organizationally, as well as politically. Upon attaining my Master Mason Degree, my views did not change and were seemingly supported by the other Brethren in my Lodge. In word, I could state that all of mankind are my Brothers, but within my heart, those words did not take form. I was so focused on the righteousness that I could not see the forest for the trees.

This kind of mindset gave me such a tunnel vision of what Brethren should be to the extent that any Brother not fitting the mold were Freemasons in name only. Yes, I was always cordial to those I saw as not fitting the mold of what I understood to be true Freemasonry, but I would not discuss philosophical aspects of Freemasonry. No, that was reserved for what I saw as the true keepers of the faith, so to speak.

Fast forward a few years when I joined the Scottish Rite. I was excited at joining the College of Freemasonry, and looked eagerly to receiving even further Light. This was the place for serious minded Freemasons to expand the teachings of the Craft Degrees. For some reason, I decided to totally open my mind to these teachings, and not go in with some pre-conceived notion of what a Scottish Rite Freemason is or should be.

Of course, going through the Scottish Rite Degrees were such a blur that I did not fully comprehend the content during the Reunion. However, I did take notice that these teachings taught understanding, tolerance of thought, and most of all, love for all of mankind. Indeed, and in fact, this was a new kind of Freemasonry. I could feel the rigidness of the walls of my mind begin to give way to new concepts, and ways of thinking. Slowly, I started to see my own internal ignorance, and intolerance; deciding that if I were to truly become the Freemason that I sought to be, that I had to open my mind, and heart to the lessons of the Scottish Rite Degrees. At that point, I began not only reading the Degrees, but started studying in depth.

These courses of action lead me to start reading on other religions, cultures, and belief systems. Through educating myself using the Scottish Rite teachings, I grew intellectually, spiritually, and my horizon was so much broader. I was now interested in having philosophical discussions with those Freemasons I had found lacking previously. I had a thirst for discourse so that I might learn something from them, and they from me. I could no longer be the closed book that I was. I didn't have to agree with them, and it was not about trying to convert each other to our way of thinking. It was about exchanging ideas so that we could understand each other more fully. I also learned how ego gets in our way and causes us to close ourselves off. It mattered not, any more, whether a Brother was conservative or liberal in his thinking. Love and acceptance reigned; the good man had truly become an even better, if not wiser man.

Those coming into the Rite, and even those that are existing members, can learn so much from the teaching found in our Degrees. Unfortunately, many Vallies give token acknowledgement to the philosophical content, and are nothing more than glorified Craft Lodges with reading of the minutes, and other administrative matters that they no longer resemble the College of Freemasonry. It is hard enough having Masonic Education classes in the Craft Lodge, let alone in a Scottish Rite Valley. You can see their eyes roll back into their heads upon the very mention of Masonic Education or philosophical discourse. So how do we go about enlightening the Brethren about those ruffians, and truly enlightening them?

Organizationally, we must make our Vallies havens of education. Help them to understand that whatever biases they brought in to the Scottish Rite that they need to leave them at the door, and open their minds. Be open to new concepts and ideas; to embrace change as a process of deeper enlightenment and understanding. We must get them to take inventory of their own biases that stand in their way to enlightenment as if divesting themselves of their vestitures as they did in the preparation room of the Craft Lodge. It is imperative that they come to know themselves first, and their place within the Scottish Rite.

The more enlightened Brethren must be living examples of what the Scottish Rite teaches. If we only talk but fail to live what we teach, then we fail. How can we teach about the dangers of ignorance, intolerance, fanaticism, superstitions, and un-charitableness if we don't set the example of living out what we teach? Do as I say, not as I do become the order of the day without any real change intellectually or spiritually within the Brethren.

Our reunions are the perfect backdrop to explain what the Scottish Rite is, what we seek, and even the path to seek out knowledge. Let them know what, as Scottish Rite Freemasons, we came here to do! Set the stage and engage these Brethren. Two years ago, I visited the Spring Reunion at Guthrie; I have made it a point to return each year. They do a wonderful job at creating an experience that touches not only the candidates, but also all those in attendance. Before the Degree work even begins, Illustrious Brother Jim Tresner sits casually in his chair before the candidates and explains the Scottish Rite as an organization, and as a system of Masonic teachings. In the evenings, he and Illustrious Brother Robert Davis hold discussions sessions so that these candidates can ask questions regarding the Degrees.

To further support the philosophical aspects, breakout sessions take place during the day taught by the more enlightened Brethren. No question receives ridicule, and all aspects receive attentive discussion. It is an open give and take between lecturer and those receiving the lecture. Freedom of thought and speech are alive and well within the walls of the Temple.

I have made many friends, nay Brothers, attending the Guthrie Reunion; invigorating myself to engage my Brethren of my own Valley. If every Valley conducted their Reunion in the format of Guthrie, albeit perhaps on a not so grand scale, we would go far in getting Brethren to initiate their own quest to eliminate ignorance, intolerance, fanaticism from our midst.

Getting the Brethren involved in Masonic Education Courses like the Master Craftsman Program, or College of the Consistory goes a long way in educating the Brethren in the vices of our above listed enemies. They courses are excellent opportunities for groups to gather, such as at a Festive Board, or classroom environment, to go over the material and discuss the lessons. This venue provides for illuminating discourse opening up new vistas for all involved. Education is a key element in any Scottish Rite Freemason's development. Instill a thirst for knowledge, and provide avenues to obtaining study material for these hungering minds.

No one single path will cause the Brethren to become engaged in defeating the enemies of a well governed, and just society. It takes overcoming self-biases held by each individual. It takes opening up their minds to differing concepts, ideas, and even emotions so that those enumerated enemies are not part of their internal workings. We must include Masonic Education to inculcate the important lessons found within the Scottish Rite Degrees so that the recipient takes them to heart and to soul. Not only that, we must allow frank, and open discussion of these lessons; ourselves being as willing to educate as well as being educated. Only then can we engage our Brethren in the cause of eliminating ignorance, intolerance, superstitions, and un-charitableness.