

PRINCE OF JERUSALEM

16th Degree

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In *A Bridge to Light*, Dr. Rex Hutchens, 33°, G.C., offers this question for reflection: Will you leave a noble heritage to those who follow you in this world? Discuss that question. What is a noble heritage? How can you leave something behind? What is your obligation to the future?

Pike's approach to the 16th degree insists that Masonry is work and that labor when rightly understood is both noble and ennobling. It is intended to develop man's moral and spiritual nature. To me this is also the opportunity to leave behind a noble heritage; that by practicing the principles of Masonry and encouraging others to learn its history and applications, I am leaving something behind that they in turn can pass on to future generations. That being the case, the nature of work and its value is in allowing a progression of knowledge to occur for succeeding generations. Pike asserts that it is not sufficient to explore and uncover knowledge in the mines of wisdom. It is only when we practice the virtues we discover that we are prepared to climb the heights provided by their meaning.

The importance of transmitting acquired knowledge to subsequent generations is of the utmost importance. Civilization is based upon human progress which, in turn, is dependent upon one generation acquiring knowledge and passing it on to the next. Hiram Abiff was aware of this need and passed his knowledge on to five younger understudies who became his replacements.

We are creatures of a loving and caring God. What would be gained by the study and practice of brotherly love, relief, and truth if the human condition was not improved over time? If there was only a ruling, privileged class of man, and the rest only servants and slaves, how would we presume to meet upon the level? Then it would indeed be debasing to the dignity of those chosen few to patronize our assemblies and extend our privileges to all.

In this particular degree Pike expounds that Masonry teaches us that the everyday occurrences of our daily life are all spiritual. He says that the very implements of our toil are designed for spiritual ends; that in so believing, our daily lot may be to us a sphere for the noblest improvements. He further asserts that we make our own fortunes, either good or bad. We are responsible for our own actions, and our own destinies. We are to make the most of this world and this life. Death occurs, but mankind continues and hopefully prospers as time marches on. We cannot know the divine purpose for ourselves as the children of his creation, but it becomes our duty to strive to improve our world and the lives of those around us.

I am presently teaching the Entered Apprentice catechism to Garrett, a young man of 19 years. Once raised, he will be the youngest member in our Lodge. However, he recently brought his 23 year old friend along with a petition to join our Lodge. Also another young man of 19 has given the Lodge his petition. Assuming they are accepted into our Lodge, I will be working with all of them. Garrett has had very limited exposure to any organized church, and seems to need some adult male guidance. My oldest daughter recently saw him in his place of work where he told her, "I really love your Dad." I find all of this to be the most important mission ever placed before me. The responsibility is awesome.

My task is to truly be a candle burning in the darkness dispelling ignorance. This is the noble heritage that I can leave behind. Fortunately for me, the Entered Apprentice degree gives me ample opportunities to begin my task. What better place to begin by emphasizing the need to believe in a loving creator ready to provide guidance from the Book of Holy Scriptures? This degree allows me to stress the importance of being trustworthy and able to keep one's promises. Here I can show how important it is to keep in confidence any private information shared by another.

In our Entered Apprentice catechism, I can once again inform our new young candidates how we first ask for the blessing of Deity before undertaking any great or important task. That we must put our trust in God, and only then can we arise and fear no danger. I once again get to offer the assurance that Masonry has nothing that would conflict with any moral, civil, or religious privilege, but only gives further direction in the proper way to live one's life.

Although our catechism doesn't get into the principle tenets of Freemasonry, or go into depth with an explanation of the perfect points of entrance, because I also deliver all the lectures, I do go into a deeper explanation of these areas while teaching the catechism. By discussing the concepts of brotherly love, relief and truth, I get to put some personal perspective coming from my own experiences and relating it to what will now be expected of them as they live their lives.

Here in Florida, the Grand Lodge has not chosen to recognize Prince Hall Affiliated lodges yet. For this reason I make it my personal mission to discuss brotherly love in terms of how racism would seem to be impossible if the concept of brotherly love is embraced. I talk about the duty incurred by Masons to relieve the distressed and how we form our friendships and establish our connections based on the assumption that charity and caring for the needy are a common goal. Also, that our first lesson stresses that we should be good men and true, and that our conduct is regulated by this concept.

By touching on fortitude, prudence, temperance, and justice, I'm given the chance to get into personal discussions concerning situations that have been part of my life, and asking if similar things have occurred to them.

What a wonderful opportunity! What an awesome responsibility. But even as I'm given this chance to spread the light of Masonry by working with these young men, exhorting them to be examples of good men among their peers and families, I'm aware that I must apply these same lessons into my own everyday life, giving me the charge to also indeed be a candle in the darkness providing light where there is often only ignorance.

Life itself is sweet. This lesson was taught to me a few years ago while sitting in the waiting room while my wife was undergoing an elective surgery. Even though her particular surgery was not uncommon and there were seldom any life threatening consequences of it, she was frightened by the prospect of undergoing anesthesia and suffering the circumstance of her flesh being cut by the surgeon's

scalpel. She had made me and her mother aware of her concern, and the two of us were waiting impatiently in the hospital waiting area for her operation to be completed and the results relayed to us.

This occasion resulted in my mother-in-law telling me the situation leading up to her own mother's death from cancer. She said her mother had always maintained that should she be diagnosed with any serious cancer, that she did not intend to undergo the radiation and chemotherapy that often accompanies this disease. But when she was in fact diagnosed with a life-threatening type cancer, she changed her mind and did in fact undergo both the radiation and chemotherapy prescribed to help prolong her life.

Ultimately she died from her condition, but during the process my mother-in-law inquired why she had changed her mind. My mother-in-law, Ruth, was told, "Ruthie, life is sweet." I'll never forget that story, or the lesson this woman had passed on to her daughter, then to me. By this simple statement she left behind a noble heritage that I could begin to comprehend, and I have frequently told this story to others.

In "A Bridge to Light" we are informed that one of the more subtle lessons taught in the degrees is the importance of the transmission of knowledge. What a man knows dies with him unless he passes it on to others. Our civilization is based on human progress over the ages. This progress is dependent on knowledge gained by one generation being passed on to subsequent generations. Hiram Abiff knew this and taught his acquired skills and knowledge to those qualified to receive them.

In the 8th degree we are informed that Grand Master Hiram was "fond of the young who were eager to learn, and communicated to them the arts and sciences which he had studied in the east and in Egypt." He said that when he was dead, they would be able to take his place. This in fact happened after his untimely murder, and these young men were appointed intendants of the building.

In my personal experience, those who have gone before me in Masonry gave me the words, the thoughts, and the perspective to find a desire to finally build my

life on ideals and philosophies I can truly embrace. They are the Masons who took pen to hand and wrote the rituals, lectures, and charges of Freemasonry that have become such an important part of my life directions and goals. I read and commit to memory the words of Thomas Webb, William Preston, and others unknown to me, as I find them in the official work of the Grand Lodge of Florida. I study them and try to gather understanding of the allegory and symbolism used in the three degrees of Master Masonry.

I grapple with the degrees of Scottish-Rite Masonry and attempt to comprehend the lessons Albert Pike saw and encouraged when he compiled *Morals and Dogma*. I use *The Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide* and *A Bridge to Light* to help comprehend the words that often have little meaning to me without an explanation. The Masons who have gone before me are the great builders to whom I look for my guidance as I attempt to build a bridge for those who come after me. Freemasonry has planted the trees that provide shade for me to study under as I attempt to plant the trees that will provide shade for future seekers of light. More so than any one teacher, scientist, doctor, artist, spiritual leader, etc., what Masonry has freely given to me has provided me with an urgency to get my own conduct and thoughts into order, and do the work that gives purpose to my existence.

In the blue lodge, I have become proficient in giving the three lectures as well as the charges and spend much of my free time teaching the catechisms to our new Brothers as they progress through the first three degrees. I have encouraged them as they gain the confidence and insight that this system of education provides. Some of them are men who originally asked me about Freemasonry and subsequently petitioned the Lodge for initiation. This is the most fulfilling accomplishment I can lay claim to. That and coming to terms with my own progress in gaining a deeper understanding of man's relationship to his creator, and the heart-felt belief that immortality is indeed achievable and to be looked forward to once the proper working tools are supplied and their use taught.

I'm only a novice in the great world of Masonic teaching, but I am gaining mental satisfaction in understanding that my life does have a purpose and that death is

not final. I have been placed in this reality for a purpose and by doing the work placed in front of me, I'm accomplishing exactly that which was always intended for me to do. I owe this feeling of accomplishment to Masonry. There was truly a sturdy, trustworthy bridge constructed by those Masons who went before me. I can only hope that as I strengthen and perhaps even extend that bridge, my efforts will provide the comfort that comes with insight to those who come after me.

Death and loss occur, but life is good and has a purpose. We are not here for ourselves alone, but for all of mankind. Let us hope, that as Masons and men, we can leave behind a noble heritage for those who follow.