

K. Tyler Curtis
College of the Consistory
The Mythic Journey

öDegrees of Understandingö

öEducational psychology.ö The very mention of these words recall to my mind a series of (what seemed like endless) lectures and reading assignments both as an undergraduate and graduate-level student pursuing degrees in secondary education and educational administration. Though *required*, öed psychö classes have actually been one of the more interesting and practical courses of my student career. Although I am sure that I have not retained nearly all of the information from these courses, one theory that has stuck with me is Bloom's taxonomy of learning. According to his model, the first step, or *degree* if you will, of the learning process is the *knowledge* level. At this stage, the learner is able to recall facts that are presented, defining terms and regurgitating information he has heard, read, or seen. Next, learners begin to *comprehend* this information and should be able to make some connections to past information that has been learned. After comprehension occurs, learners can *apply* these facts, which makes the information they have learned more ingrained into their long-term memories. At the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy are *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation*. When we are able to analyze information, we can dissect concepts and discern reasons for success or failure. After that we begin to synthesize and generalize the information, taking large amounts of input and storing them in smaller chunks that can be retained for longer periods of time. Finally, we can offer judgments on this information, taking all that we have learned and drawing conclusions relative to the information's usefulness. Through these *degrees of understanding*, we become well-rounded, informed experts on the topics we study.

For me, the most interesting part of Bloom's model is that öas we advance in knowledge,ö more and more is required of us in terms of independent thinking. If we look at the topic of *Freemasonry* and apply Bloom's learning model, we begin to realize that the lessons being conveyed throughout the degrees require all six areas of Bloom's taxonomy to fully grasp the teachings of our great art. The Scottish Rite certainly serves as a way to reach the upper levels of learning regarding the fascinating topic of *Freemasonry*. As a Mason, my quest is to become a better, wiser individual, one who knows myself more intimately and the world more deeply. The object of my quest is a pearl of great value, and I only hope I am courageous enough to stay on the path of understanding in order to obtain it. Like all quests, drawbacks occur as obstacles arise; however, as said in the 30th Degree, Knight Kadosh, we must remember that we öwish to proceed.ö Each of the degrees of the Scottish Rite provide us with ödegrees of understanding.ö In order to fully grasp the lessons of each degree, we must know, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the lessons contained in their allegory and symbolism. This is a daunting task, and one that may never be fully realized; however, that is the quest, that is the challenge.

At this point in the study of the College of the Consistory, it is time to begin synthesizing and evaluating the lessons that have been presented in the Lodge of Perfection and the Chapter of Rose Croix. In the paragraphs that follow, I offer only a brief overview of the lessons contained in each degree. Though brief, the lessons are fundamental to the deeper understandings of Freemasonry offered in the degrees of the Scottish Rite. Through our degrees, we strive to attain the mission of our quest.

In the 4th Degree, or Secret Master, we learn that Hiram Abiff is dead and the Craft is in mourning. Through Hiram's example, we are taught the values of duty, silence, fidelity, and obedience. However, much is left to the individual in the learning and application of these concepts to his own life. Is it our duty to be everything to everyone? Are we to constantly be silent subjects of authority? Shall we be obedient to laws and rules that undermine individuals and take away our liberties? In short, of

course not. The point is that we must define what our duty is, remaining silent when words are not needed and exercising obedience to upright causes and authority figures. As in all the degrees that follow, lessons are taught that must be analyzed and evaluated in order to obtain a clearer understanding.

The lessons of the 4th degree carry over to the 5th Degree, Perfect Master. Again, the Craft is in mourning as they bury their Grand Master Hiram Abiff, but his presence lives on as an example of proper character. In this degree, we are taught industry and honesty. Like our Grand Master, we are to remain loyal to our sense of morality and virtue, never deceiving others or ourselves. If we are constantly at work erecting a temple that will please the Great Architect of the Universe, we need not worry about gaining admittance into the celestial lodge above.

In the 6th Degree, or Intimate Secretary, we are introduced to Zabud, one of King Solomon's loyal companions. Zabud finds himself in the same room as Hiram, King of Tyre, and King Solomon during an argument between the two rulers. Hiram believes that Zabud is spying, but King Solomon praises him for staying behind to assist his King if needed. Zabud's actions teach us to be zealous and faithful while those of King Solomon teach the lessons of disinterestedness and benevolence. Overall, we learn to act as the peacemaker, never allowing assumptions to cloud our judgments and convictions.

Again, the lessons of one degree bring us to the next. In the 7th Degree, Provost and Judge, Zabud finds himself in the role of a judge. In the dispute brought before him, he exercises impartiality and rules in favor of no one. In this manner, we are reminded of the great injunction to "judge not, lest ye be judged yourself." Here, we see the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy directly applied by Zabud's character. He has had to evaluate the information brought before him, and though his analysis, has decided to pass no judgment since judgment of any kind would render equally poor outcomes.

As work on the temple resumes, we find ourselves in the 8th Degree, Intendant of the Building. Here, we see workers of all backgrounds working together despite cultural differences and language barriers. Hence, we are taught benevolence and charity, or love, to all mankind; we learn to value the knowledge of different cultures while maintaining our own beliefs, customs, and traditions. The degree praises open-mindedness and humility

In the 9th Degree, Elu of the Nine, one of the assassins of our Grand Master Hiram Abiff is caught and punished. In this degree we learn the values of enlightenment and the duty of the enlightened to teach that knowledge to others. Also, we learn to be patriotic supporters of just and upright causes and governments.

As work on the temple continues and the other two assassins remain at large, we arrive at the 10th Degree, or the Elu of the Fifteen. In this degree, the remaining assassins are caught. This degree teaches many lessons, including tolerance and the value of a liberal education. It is only through education that we are freed from the tyranny, fanaticism, and persecution. Thus, we are taught that free thought, free speech, and free conscience lead to liberty.

The lessons of the 9th and 10th degrees are summarized in the 11th Degree, Elu of the Twelve. Here, we learn that Hiram Abiff represented intelligence, liberty, and truth; his assassins represented the opposite: ignorance, tyranny, and intolerant fanaticism. Again, through the example of our Grand Master, we are taught to be earnest, true, and reliable champions for the people.

In the 12 Degree, or Master Architect, we learn to seek wisdom through knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom are not synonymous terms. Knowledge refers to the learning of information or, from Bloom's model, the stages of knowledge, comprehension, application, and analyzing. However, wisdom involves the latter two stages of Bloom's taxonomy, synthesizing and evaluating. Only the wise can take what they have learned and studied and form it into tangible lessons that govern future decisions and practice.

Most Scottish Rite Masons revere the 13th Degree, Royal Arch of Solomon. Here, we see Adoniram and two other Master Architects descend into the famed vault of Enoch where they discover the true word. Through their efforts, we are taught that when duty and honor motivate us to seek

knowledge, the reward is truly grand.

The 14th Degree, Perfect Elu, is the capstone degree of the Scottish Rite Lodge of Perfection. In the degree, the cubical stone that conceals the true word is placed in King Solomon's vault. Adoniram and the other two are elevated to the degree of Perfect Elu. Here, the ultimate quest of the Scottish Rite's Lodge of Perfection is revealed. We are taught that if all of the lessons heretofore are inculcated into our thoughts and actions, we will have reached a truly perfect character, one that displays itself as the absolute example of a man dedicated to the principles of brotherly love, relief, and truth. The goal of the 4th Degree through the 14th Degree is to arm its candidates with the tools of human perfection, tools that will create an honorable character and noble individual.

Next, we move into the degrees of the Chapter of Rose Croix. Here, we learn to apply the great lessons taught in the Lodge of Perfection and use them as a daily guide of conduct. In the 15th and 16th degrees, our time in history has changed. The first temple is in ruins. After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews are able to return to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel plans to lead his people in the rebuilding of the temple. When he appears before Cyrus in the 15th Degree, Knight of the East, Sword, or Eagle, he is tempted to divulge the secrets of his art. However, Zerubbabel refuses. For his integrity, Zerubbabel is rewarded and receives permission to rebuild the temple. In this manner, we are taught to constantly build temples of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

In the 16th Degree, Prince of Jerusalem, we find that work on the temple has been impeded for the past 17 years. However, Zerubbabel and the workers overcome these setbacks and recommence progress on the temple. Here we are taught to direct and assist noble works, to display equitability and fairness, and to never lose hope that good will prevail in the end.

At this point, the Scottish Rite degrees begin to take on a more philosophical tone. In the 17th Degree, Knight of the East and West, we move into the book of Revelation from the Great Light of Masonry. Here, we see the famed Book of the Seven Seals. We are taught to work, reflect, and pray; hope, trust, and believe; and to teach truth. As the seven colors of the rainbow form a white light, we must learn to use the knowledge of all cultures and societies to lead us to the one, true knowledge, the lesson of love.

Again, we arrive at a capstone degree, the 18th Degree or Knight Rose Croix. In this degree, a new law, the law of love, is taught and praised. Again, the true quest of the Chapter of Rose Croix is revealed in its capstone degree as we learn that a *combination of faith and reason* are needed to discern Divine Truth. Initiates are reminded to practice all of those noble virtues inculcated in the degrees of the Lodge of Perfection, and special attention is paid to the lessons of toleration and the elimination of all vices in the quest for purity. Here we learn that every one of us has an element of the divine contained within us. When we chisel our rough ashlar into one of perfection, we reveal a hidden cross of faith.

In *Morals and Dogma*, Albert Pike defines the Scottish Rite as "a teacher of Great Truths, inspired by an upright and enlightened reason, a firm and constant wisdom, and an affectionate and liberal philanthropy... (a) preacher of liberty, fraternity, and equality" (328-29). The degrees of the Lodge of Perfection and the Chapter of Rose Croix teach practical and spiritual lessons; we learn to perfect our character, and in so doing, to reveal our inner spirit, which at last brings us closer to the Divine. At this point, we are only halfway through the lessons of the Scottish Rite and already have been beset with numerous challenges and overwhelming obstacles. We've been taught the lessons of perfection and how it is our duty to convey those lessons to all the world in the spirit of brotherly love. As the old adage says, this is easier said than done. But that is the challenge! That is the great obstacle we face on our quest for certainty and wisdom! Symbol by symbol and allegory by allegory, each of our degrees offers a degree of understanding, a degree of truth. By knowing, comprehending, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the great lessons contained in our degrees, the object of our quest will be discovered. We are forever traveling from the West and to the East. Lucky for us, the degrees of the Scottish Rite bring us one step closer to the ultimate Light we seek.

Works Reviewed

Clausen, Henry. *Clausen's Commentary on Morals and Dogma*. San Diego: Neyenesch, 1985.

De Hoyos, Arturo. *Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide*. Washington, DC: Supreme Council, 33°, Southern Jurisdiction, 2007.

Hutchens, Rex R. *A Bridge to Light*. Williamston, S.C.: Electric City, 1995.

Mackey, Albert. *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences*. Chicago, Masonic History Company, 1924.

Pike, Albert. *Morals and Dogma*. Richmond: J.H. Jenkins, 1945.