

The Light of Wisdom

Richard D. Carver

1
2
3
4 While blindfolded and kneeling in an awkward and off-balance
5 situation, I clearly recall the Worshipful Master demanding of me what
6 I most desired. Given the preceding predicament, I noted that I had a
7 dry throat after repeating a lengthy series of obligations. It had seemed
8 as if each of these commitments involved some sort of an “also-”
9 clause or contained a “furthermore” that mandated additional
10 obligations that I had willingly agreed to discharge. Now, and not a
11 moment too soon, it seemed that it might be my opportunity to receive
12 something in return.

13 As I was about to foolishly blurt out something like *a drink of water*
14 *might be nice, and I would like to stand up and stretch my legs a bit*, a
15 voice whispered, “Light!” While this was not a response I had
16 considered, I followed the prompting and an agreement was soon
17 struck that since light was what I most desired, I would receive it. I
18 could yet argue the assertion of it being what I *most* desired at that
19 particular moment, yet it proved to be the wise response to the
20 question at hand.

21 This somewhat strange question and response was repeated to me
22 at several other times. During these events, it never really occurred to
23 me that being brought to Light was intended to be anything more than
24 the physical transition of being in the state of darkness behind the
25 blindfolded and then being able to see again once it was removed. I
26 was satisfied to accept Light as being that physical presence of matter
27 and energy in the form of luminescence without considering the more
28 esoteric aspects of the actual act of being brought to Light.

29 Light and the search *for* Light is a reoccurring theme in
30 Freemasonry, although the meaning of Light and how a Mason should
31 come to find it are not defined. The significance of Light did not
32 register into my consciousness until I discovered a passage in a ritual
33 of another Masonic body that makes reference to what it called a
34 search for “Pure Light.”

35 *Pure Light?* If we accept the existence of Light in its pure form, then
36 it is logical that Light exists in forms that are less than pure — they
37 being impure, adulterated, or a compound or hybrid of light being
38 mixed with something else. If Pure Light exists, this could substantiate
39 the existence of some sort of scale permitting the measure of the
40 concentration of Light. Pure Light would be one end of this scale and
41 darkness, or the total absence of all light, on the other.

42 On the surface, this all sounded like some type of exacting science;
43 something that could be proven and even measured through the
44 application of physics or a mathematical process.

45 No, I have been led down that primrose path before, only to
46 discover that little about Masonry has a singular or precise meaning.
47 Even more rare are Masonic allegories that can be proven with any
48 certainty. In reality, it is far more likely that “Light” is simply another
49 Masonic metaphor that is an allegory substituted for something else,
50 and its true meaning left for each Brother to discover.

51 I asked around, and posed the question: “Just what *is* Light and
52 what does it represent?” Almost universally, the answer most often
53 given was that “light’ is used as a substitute for the word “knowledge.”
54 That certainly seemed to make sense. We are “brought to Light.” Once
55 the blindfold of darkness has been removed, new knowledge is shared
56 regarding certain signs, words and methods of recognition. From a

57 Masonic neophyte's perspective, the other portions of our rituals are
58 all performed with the lights on, or with some form of light present. In
59 this Light, a great deal of knowledge is conveyed to the newly-admitted
60 Brother. Therefore, from his perspective, "light" begets "knowledge,"
61 and the two become entwined as being the same experience.

62 A man with an exceptionally enlightened mind once said:

63 *"But it is vital to remember that information — in the sense of raw*
64 *data — is not knowledge; that knowledge is not wisdom; and that*
65 *wisdom is not foresight. But information is the first essential step to*
66 *all of these."*

67 These words were penned by a Mason, who was renowned as an
68 academic intellectual as well as being a Masonic scholar. He studied
69 and became well-versed in the traditional sciences, as well as sciences
70 often held to be esoteric and occult. I am of course speaking of Arthur
71 C. Clarke, the visionary who, among other things, had the foresight to
72 comprehend the concept of the electronic communications satellite 20
73 years before the first spacecraft ever left the Earth.

74 If an intellectual thinker like Arthur C. Clarke says that knowledge
75 is not the same as wisdom, then that is good enough for me! But it
76 also opens a new realm of possibility that one's being "brought to
77 Light" is not merely the process of being brought to *knowledge*, and
78 that it also is the process of *achieving wisdom*.

79 Freemasonry teaches an allegory that there are three stages in
80 man's life: youth, manhood and age. In the traditional setting, most
81 knowledge is attained primarily in his youth and perhaps then
82 reinforced somewhat during his early portions of manhood. While it is
83 not a scientific absolute that you can't teach an old dog new tricks,

84 most of us will agree that it considerably easier to memorize the “stair
85 lecture” at age 25 than it is at 55 — so there is something to that
86 expression.

87 The allegory of youth, manhood and age are later further equated to
88 the three Masonic Degrees, it being supposed that the Entered
89 Apprentice is representative of a man in his early age being presented
90 with knowledge. The Fellow Craft receives further knowledge, which he
91 applies in the form of service and useful labor as a productive member
92 of the Craft. Upon being made a Master Mason, he then possesses the
93 knowledge regarding all aspects of the operative Craft, and he then has
94 the wisdom to impart knowledge to others as he oversees the
95 necessary work.

96 In ancient operative masonry, the Entered Apprentice was
97 indentured to a Master Mason for an extended period, usually 7 years.
98 During the apprenticeship, the young man gathered the rudimentary
99 knowledge of the Craft and learned how to perform basic tasks under
100 direct and constant supervision of the Master Mason.

101 By proving his competency, and having passed a test of his
102 proficiency showing that he could perform the work, an Entered
103 Apprentice could then be elevated, or ‘passed’ to the grade of a Fellow
104 Craft. As a Fellow of the Craft, he was essentially a journeyman worker
105 that put the knowledge he had learned thus far into practice while he
106 also learned additional skills and had more advanced dealings with the
107 Master Masons. A Fellow Craft worker required little direct
108 supervision, yet he remained under the overall direction of the Master
109 Masons. Many Fellow Craft remained at this grade for their entire
110 lifetime, and they never advanced beyond this point. Only a select few
111 — they who proved they possessed wisdom and the ability to lead and
112 direct the Craft — were ever raised to the ranks of a Master Mason.

113 In speculative Masonry, almost every Mason is raised to the grade
114 of a Master Mason, and it is a rare exception that it is not so. If a
115 Brother is not raised as a Master Mason, it is likely that he became
116 disinterested and simply dropped out by his own choice. Other than
117 some simple memorization of certain texts, the achievement of wisdom
118 is no longer a direct consideration for a Mason's advancement. Yet I
119 would assert that this is nonetheless essential if he is to be successful
120 in the other various aspects of Masonic leadership and in other
121 positions in life.

122 At age 50-something-or-other, I consider myself privileged to be the
123 Past Master of a Traditional Observance Lodge. I also find myself in
124 the unenviable position of being the patriarch of the family name. The
125 testing of my Masonic wisdom has generally been limited to simple
126 decisions, such as where we are going to eat dinner, and the making of
127 an effort to open and close the Lodge in some semblance of Due Form.
128 Mistakes in judgment, which have been know to occur, have relatively
129 inconsequential results and they rarely cause me to loose much sleep.
130 Living up to the expectations placed on the senior living family
131 member has not been as easy.

132 Despite rumors to the contrary, wisdom does not automatically
133 accompany age. There are no means by which a man can achieve life-
134 wisdom through an apprenticeship or by a journeyman's passage
135 through life. This fact is not fully appreciated until you actually sit in
136 that Oriental Chair of Authority — be it in the East or at the head of
137 the family dining room table — and people are restlessly waiting for
138 you to act in a profound and wise manner. Much of what passes as
139 "knowledge" is in reality based on past experience; but is that not a
140 form of *wisdom*?

141 Solomon is heralded as a king with exceptional wisdom, but was he
142 intuitively wise or was it a learned characteristic? J. Robert
143 Oppenheimer had an amazing ability to comprehend theoretical
144 physics, yet he struggled with basic mathematics because he had
145 never memorized the multiplication tables as a child. Garner Ted
146 Armstrong eventually followed into the radio ministry of his father,
147 Herbert W. Armstrong, and became one of the most accomplished
148 motivational speakers of his day. He did so after overcoming several
149 severe childhood learning disabilities and a demoralizing stuttering
150 problem.

151 Circumstance, situation and even necessity often dictate what a
152 man can, and cannot do. There was a time when I would have told you
153 that I could never memorize all the lines for a major part in a play, but
154 would that really be any different than learning one of the major parts
155 of Masonic ritual? There was a time when I might have told you that I
156 could never speak in front of a large audience, but would that really be
157 any different than standing up in a Masonic Lodge or Grand Lodge and
158 making a proposal? There was a time when I would have shunned the
159 responsibility of leadership, yet I have now sat in the East of one Lodge
160 and serve in a variety of positions in other Masonic bodies. Finally,
161 there was a time when I would look upon the quiet leadership,
162 strength and wisdom that my father seemed to naturally encompass
163 and say to myself, 'I can never do *that*.' Yet, that duty has fallen to me
164 and it is one that I reluctantly must now accept.

165 Time will tell whether or not I lead my family with wisdom. I
166 suspect that much of this responsibility will be well-served through
167 application of the Masonic lessons and with a generous application of
168 Masonic Light and Wisdom. Freemasonry teaches us the value of
169 Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Those seem like an ideal way to deal

170 with family as well, if not all mankind. It was never intended that they
171 only be practiced inside the Lodge. In reality, Pure Light illuminates all
172 things and in all places.