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The Entered Apprentice Degree

Was what I learned all I needed to learn?

The Question has been asked, was all that I needed to learn about Freemasonry taught to me in the Entered Apprentice Degree. At first thought the answer was and should be a resounding no. You didn't even come close to learning all you needed after one degree. Brothers go their whole lives, traveling every hallway that is connected to the Blue Lodge trying to learn all they can, and still never accomplishing that task. You would be a fool to think that you would never need to learn anymore than that one degree. Then after the 2nd, 3rd, even 10th thought on the subject you start to look at the question in a different light. You start to go over the Three main degrees and everything associated with them in your head. What does each one teach? The Entered Apprentice teaches us to walk and act as such. The Fellow Craft teaches us how we should improve our minds with knowledge. The Master Mason teaches us the all important symbols of life and that all important lesson of Mortality. Each one advancing us along in our journey to becoming that better man that we all want to be. Then it occurred to me that there is only one degree that tells us what we must do to be proper masons, and that is in the Entered Apprentice Degree where when we are standing in the North East Corner and the Master tell us that he is pleased to say that we stand as a just and up right "Mason" and instructs us to ever act and walk as such. The Fellow Craft degree only recommends to us that we should enrich our minds with knowledge, and the Master Mason Degree only reminds us of our own Mortality, and that we will all one day Die, which was introduced to us in the Entered Apprentice degree.

I then sat back and really asked the question to myself. Could it really be possible that I learned all i really "needed to know" was taught in the Entered Apprentice degree. Lets break it down and find out.

The first lesson that we are taught, without being told, was taught to us in the preparation room when we had to strip ourselves of all our worldly possession and be clothed in what some would call rags. This tells us that it is not what is on the outside that matters, but what is on the inside of a man that counts. This in a simple way lets us know that within these walls every man is equal. No man is more important than another.

The next thing we are taught is when we enter the lodge and are asked in whom we put our trust. We are then told that every man in Freemasonry believes in some sort of God. Something greater than himself, because if we do not believe in something greater than ourselves then we may try to elevate ourselves above others and look down upon them as less of a man than we are, thereby losing the first lesson that we are all equals.

The next thing we are taught is what the Badge of a Mason is when we receive our apron. We are taught that it is an emblem of innocence. Here we are taught our first lesson of mortality, and how we should keep our lives as pure and innocent as the apron for when we die and arrive in the great hereafter.

We are then taught the lesson of charity, and not in the sense of just throwing money at whatever, but the real charity of helping our fellow man and brother because we can, and we should, in his hour of need.

We are then informed of how a lodge operates. That it takes a certain number of Brethren along with the Holy Writings and permission from a Grand lodge in the form of a Charter or Dispensation.

We are then taught of the Three supporting pillars of our Fraternity, what each is and how each is represented by a certain officer in a certain place in the lodge.

Then we are once again reminded that we must have faith in a God and charity for all mankind, but that charity is the Greatest of these as masons because what we do in life will echo throughout eternity.

We are then informed of what the coverings of the lodge are and what they represent within or life. The Furniture of the Lodge, what they are, where it is located, and what they represent. We are informed as to why there are three lights in the lodge and what they represent. We are also told of three other or Greater lights, whose light can only be seen within ourselves.

We are then told of the 6 Jewels of the lodge, why they are placed where they are, which ones move and which ones don't, and what they mean, and what they are suppose to do when they are applied to ourselves.

We are told though out the degree why our lodges are laid out the way they are, and why certain officers are placed in certain spots within the lodge. We are also informed of the relationship between Freemasonry, our Lodge, and King Solomon's Temple. To who Lodges used to be dedicated to and who the two patron saints of our fraternity now are.

Then we are informed of what the 3 great tenets of our fraternity are, Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. That we treat our neighbor as ourself, aid those in distress, and to set our moral compass for that honest path that builds men up instead of tearing them down.

We are instructed in the 4 Cardinal Virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. What each teaches us, and how and why we must apply them to our daily lives.

Lastly we are taught of our mother earth, how great and beautiful she is, why we must care for her, and how ultimately we must be returned to her.

When we look at all of these together we can then see why the Master instructs us to act and walk as such. Through the Entered Apprentice degree a Foundation is built for each of us to stand on, and by that Foundation if we fail to follow the guidelines set forth to us by not following the moral teachings, or not understanding or caring how the lodge system is set up, that foundation will start to crumble. Now we can rebuild it to a point if we loose our way, but if we error to severely our fellow brethren will come and finish the job for us and not allow us to rebuild that foundation. Thereby no longer recognizing us a Freemason.

The Entered Apprentice Degree, as earlier stated, is the only one that tells us that if we want to be recognized as Freemasons, we must do certain things to be able to act and walk as such. The Fellow Craft Degree, as important as it is to our improvement and advancement in becoming that better man we all long to be, only recommends that we should enrich our mind with knowledge, it does not require it. Even though if we did require it, we may see greater advancement in all its members in obtaining that ultimate goal, we were told why it is not required that first time we knocked at the door of Freemasonry and were asked if this was of our own free will and accord. This is the same as in Life, you must want to learn and want to improve, no one else can do it for you, but we can tell you how you must act if you want to be called a Freemason.

In conclusion to the question, after all the points given, i would have to answer yes, that i did learn all i really needed to know of Freemasonry in the first degree. With those lessons i could travel any where in the world and conduct myself properly in a lodge and among my brethren. I may not know all the signs and tokens of the other 2 degrees, but with my foundation that was built in the Entered Apprentice degree, i can still have the privilege of calling myself a Freemason, and be respected as such from my Brethren. This makes me wonder if that is why after the first degree we are called “brother” and no greater title is ever given to us after. Is this because we built that foundation together with the membership, and everything we add to it after is by what we do as individuals. I don't know, but when we contemplate the Entered Apprentice Degree like we are doing here we can see the beauty and genius of it, and we can start to see how every other Degree we take in this Fraternity will always lead back to it. It is that Rough Ashlar that with every degree we take and every new lesson we learn, it keeps improving to eventually become that Perfect Ashlar that we all desire.

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