

A Cause to Live For¹

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There are similarities in all degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry: each has an entry, reception, circumambulation, obligation, and a bringing to light. Each also provide certain symbols to communicate moral principles to the initiate and gives him the key to their meanings.

In its Second Section, the Sublime Master Mason's Degree departs from the familiar. The First Degree is concerned with moral principles and exhortations; the Second Degree is concerned with architecture and learning. But, the Master Mason's Degree answers the cry of Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?"² It delves into the deepest recesses of a man's nature; it probes the Holy of Holies of his heart. The drama of the Second Section is ritualistic and symbolical of that old-age wisdom of which "we may enjoy the happy reflections consequent on a well-spent life, and die in the hope of a glorious immortality."³

Men in all ages have elaborated upon the meaning of human life—Youth, Manhood, and Old Age. *A Cause to Live For* evolved from an appreciation of the principles inferred in the Master Mason's Degree. Unfortunately, as Americans and Masons, we find that the world of our generation has become smaller, more crowded, more complex, more dangerous, and more impersonal. We live in a world of change and challenge, an era of stress and strain, a time when the society of our aspirations seems strangely out of joint.

Nevertheless, it is within this environment of struggle that we must search out our Masonic mission – the opportunity to build a stately mansion within ourselves for God's use. This was the cause for which Hiram Abif died. Surely this is the cause for which we live, namely the perfection of self by mastery of life's most fundamental dimensions, which are of a spirit.

The Spiritual Dimension

Few are those who would fail to comprehend the spiritual significance of the Master Mason's degree, for it is designed to teach the candidate that if he is to find his place in life, he must lose himself in interests, causes, and ideals that are more enduring than he is. This he does, in the Second Section of the Master Mason Degree, by setting out on a journey that leads to a higher

¹ This is a precise of a paper written by Most Worshipful Master Stewart Wilson Miner in July 20, 2012; the footnotes are mine.

² Job 14:14-15, NIV

³ Presentation Volume, Grand of Lodge of Ancient, Free & Accept Masons of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1996, pp. 93-94

truth, a truth that is made known only after he has adequately prepared to receive it. No one can learn this truth for another, and no one can teach it. Indeed, it is a reward for those of persistent faith and service.

Let us consider how the Master Mason's degree emphasizes the importance of the spiritual dimension of life. As the candidate makes his approach in the Lodge, he is exhorted to exemplary behavior by that familiar passage taken from the 12th Chapter of Ecclesiastes, wherein he is called upon to remember his Creator in the days of his youth, "while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh."⁴ The message is clear, worship of the Creator is a lifelong obligation.

The spiritual dimension of life for the candidate is strengthened further in the Second Section as he assumes the role of Hiram Abif. At this point he is caused to kneel at the altar, amid his brethren, and personally offer up his devotions, a prayer of dedication and promise. Since it is, no one may offer it for another, for it is the individual's personal compact with his Creator, known only to him and his God.

The spiritual dimension of life is brought to a climax in the third and last prayer of the degree.

“Thou, O God! Knowest our downsitteing and our uprising, and understand our thoughts afar off. Shield and defend us from the evil intentions of our enemies, and support us under the trials and afflictions we are destined to endure while travelling through tis vale of tears. Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower and is cut down; he fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee; thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass: turn from him that he may rest, till he shall accomplish as a hireling his day. For there is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up, so man lieth down, and riseth not up again till the heavens shall be no more. Yet, O Lord! have compassion on the children of thy creation; administer them comfort in the time of trouble, and save them with an everlasting salvation. So mote it be – Amen.”⁵

This is a prayer of intercession and supplication, a plea for compassion and salvation, which is shared by the whole brotherhood. By it, and by the incidents preceding and following its recitation, the astute brethren learn to appreciate the rewards of a well spent life.

⁴ Ecclesiastes 12:1, KIV

⁵ Presentation Volume, Grand of Lodge of Ancient, F. A. & A. M., 1996, p. 91

Brother Carl Claudy once observed the whole Hiram Legend “is designed to delve into the inner recesses of man's nature and leads the candidate into the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Temple to probe the Holy of Holies of his heart.”⁶ Thus, it is that in this life and in this fraternity, each of us is obligated to strengthen our spiritual dimensions, even as we travel dangerous and difficult paths.

The Secular Dimension

But life is not a one-dimensional drama; it also has a secular dimension, wherein every man's spiritual resolve, his conceptions of right and wrong, are tested daily as he strives to quench his materialistic thirst.

The significance of the secular dimension of life is at least inferred in the Hiram Legend⁷ and is explicitly proclaimed in Scriptural passages dealing with the planning and construction of Solomon's Temple.⁸ Our ritual informs us there was a significant effort in the material building of Temple: “in addition to the first three Most Excellent Grand Masters, there were 3,300 Overseers, 80,000 Fellow Crafts, and 70,000 Entered Apprentices, and they were all so classed and arranged, or in other words, so organized, that neither envy, discord, nor confusion was permitted to interrupt that universal peace and harmony which pervaded the world at that important period.”⁹

The availability of so massive a workforce and its utilization for this purpose suggests the presence of a well-structured, powerful, and widely supported government, in the absence of which the venture could not have been launched or completed. History tells us that this was the case. Solomon being keenly aware of the foundations upon which vibrant nationhood stands, remolded the realm of his father, David, from top to bottom, placing stress on the institutionalization of the government and the economy. In consequence his reign became a paragon of strength and efficiency, and Israel quickly rose to a position of dominance in that part of the world.

The fruits of strong and popularly supported institutions were abundant indeed, and during Solomon's lifetime they were wisely employed to the benefit of the nation and its populace.

⁶ *Introduction to Freemasonry: Master Mason*, Carl H. Claudy, The Temple Publishers, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/claudy4.html>

⁷ *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia*, Henry Wilson Coil, 33^o, Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Company, Inc., New York, pp 308-309

⁸ I Kings 7:1-51, NIV

⁹ Presentation Volume, Grand of Lodge of Ancient, Free & Accept Masons of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1996, p. 93

With the death of Solomon, the cohesiveness of the structure was materially weakened, and in a remarkably brief time, the nation was overrun by its adversaries.

The contemporary Freemason, looking pragmatically at these developments, can ill-afford to ignore the lessons taught by the Solomonic regime or by the Hiramic Legend of our fraternity. Both emphasize the reality and the necessity of the secular dimension in life, in both one may perceive the consequences of inattention to that which is engraved on the Trestleboard of those who would perfect temples for the Deity that asks: "Where is the house that you build for me?" Freemasons should be able to respond without hesitation, and at the same time point with pride to the institutional framework within which they labor -- confident that they are properly structured to achieve their stated goals.

Unfortunately, the fraternity now finds itself in a position wherein its secular foundation appears to be shaking, perhaps even crumbling. Organizational and operational harmony, such as that which prevailed at the construction of Solomon's Temple, at least until the demise of Hiram Abif, is all too often illusory. Despite obligatory promises to the contrary, serious challenges are being levied against the laws, rules and regulations of Lodges, against the laws, resolutions and edicts of Grand Lodges, and against the interpretation of all these regulatory measures by duly constituted leaders, supreme and subordinate. We would be well advised to appreciate the fundamental truth that "no house, divided against itself, can long stand."

There are too many Masons, despite their promise to "keep and perform without hesitation, mental reservation, or secret evasion of mind", have chosen to selectively adhere only to those rules and regulations that they personally favor. Clearly there is a need for us to tidy up the secular dimension of the Craft.

The Social Dimension

This brings us to a consideration of the third and last of life's dimensions for the Master Mason. It is social in character and vital in nature. Just as man is called upon to regulate his relationships to God and duly constituted authority, he is also called upon to live in peace and harmony with others, regardless of station or place in society, and regardless of such factors as race, color, religion, or nationality. Masons, in fact, are required by oath to help, aid, and assist the needy; to treat others as they would themselves elect to be treated; to abide the Golden Rule; revere womanhood and family; and, in general, to establish relationships, in and out of the Craft, that are above reproach.

Our standards are high indeed, and in the context of the troubled present, it is sometimes with great difficulty that we maintain them. We are imperfect men in an imperfect society, within which the advance to perfection is by no means orderly. It seems inevitable that within every

social group there are those who seek unfair advantage; those who strive for that to which they are not entitled; those who would sacrifice the common good for the sake of personal gain. We simply must live in peace and harmony with our fellow Masons, with mankind, and we must be ever alert to the ruffians of life who would subjugate right by force. We as Freemasons must be especially attentive to the social dimension of life.

In the Master Mason's Degree, we are reminded that although the Great Creator of Heaven and earth might well have made man independent of his fellow man, he did not. Instead He made men interdependent for assorted reasons in order that all could enjoy better opportunities to fulfill the duties of reciprocal love and friendship. Thus, man was created for a social and active life, the noblest part of the work of God.

This concept was beautifully expressed by the late George Bernard Shaw, who once wrote: "I am convinced that my life belongs to the whole community; as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before turning it over to future generations."¹⁰

In conclusion, the cause for which we live as Master Masons is the cause for which Hiram Abif died. This cause is nothing more and certainly nothing less than the perfection of human character through the mastery of life's most fundamental dimensions -- spiritual, secular, and social. This is the lesson of the Master Mason's Degree. It is a lesson that cannot be adequately learned by simply memorizing ritual; rather it is one whose mastery requires much more, and certainly no less than a completely disciplined approach to life in all its facets. We have bound ourselves to befriend and relieve each other, to respond to legitimate appeal, and to do good unto all, more especially "to the household of the faithful." This then is our real challenge, and if we, as Master Masons, will accept it, cope with it, and endeavor to master it, then we will be truly deserving of the promise that the God of peace and love will dwell with and bless us.



¹⁰ George Bernard Shaw, https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/5217.George_Bernard_Shaw