

DISPENSE ASSISTANCE LIGHT AND KNOWLEDGE

Recently, I attended a Rose Croix Scottish Rite fall reunion. After I took some time to speak with a few of the candidates about how things were going and what their future plans were with respect to Freemasonry. The candidates indicated that they had joined Freemasonry in the last year and planned to continue on to attain their 32nd degree at the earliest opportunity. I pointed out that there sure was a lot to digest, especially when attending a reunion, and how important it would be to come back and to study to fully appreciate and understand the ritual. I was surprised by the candidates' reaction – they asked me what I meant and how this might be done. I thought to myself, is there any wonder that when these candidates get their 32nd degree, that we probably won't see them again. It's not that they didn't enjoy the degrees or didn't get anything out of it, but they just don't realize what they missed, what they don't yet know, that they have only taken the first step in their Masonic journey.

They appeared to me to be destitute and uninformed brethren.

Portraying good ritual is extremely important – it is the first impression that we make on a candidate and our effort is an accurate example of how we ourselves feel about our fraternity.

For some candidates this is enough – to trigger an interest to pursue further researches, I believe that for most it's not enough. Perhaps part of the reason of this lack of understanding rests with the degree advancement process in our Masonic bodies. Perhaps we make things too easy for our candidates by not requiring any learning and proving of their proficiency in order to advance.

We seem to be in so much of a rush to get new members that we end up losing them in the long run because we haven't done a good enough job with their Masonic development. The Chapter ritual contains examination questions for the MMM and MEM degrees, but we don't use them.

Perhaps too we are promising or highlighting the wrong things. In the Chapter Fervency & Zeal presentation for example we promote the Chapter by stating that "the true word and secrets are given in the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch and in that Degree only".

I propose that recovering the 'genuine secrets' or finding the 'lost word' or pronouncing the 'ineffable name' should not be the most important reward that we offer to our new members – this is not going to give them strength or power or stimulate them to pursue further researches.

The MEM degree addresses this issue. In the obligation the candidate swears that he will dispense assistance light and knowledge to all destitute and uninformed brethren.

And the final Charge reiterates to the candidate that it is one of his great duties as a MEM to dispense that light and knowledge to all uninformed Ms. Then the Charge gives us an interesting 'key' or 'hint' as to how this can be done – we must be completely conversant in all the degrees heretofore conferred upon us.

Brethren, it is therefore our imperative duty to thoroughly study the preceding degrees in order to effectively dispense light and knowledge to our new members. And having this light and knowledge, we must take time to dispense it to our new members in order for them to gain the confidence needed to effectively fulfill the duties imposed upon them.

And remember, there are two ways of imparting knowledge: by precept and by example. It is perfectly proper for us to teach and instruct, to tell others what they could or should do, but our responsibility to 'dispense assistance, light and knowledge' implies a more serious undertaking, that we ourselves develop our own characters, and live our daily lives as to be a shining example to all destitute and uninformed brethren. We must continue to nourish the Temple that we are building within ourselves. Living our Masonry is our surest form of teaching and our surest way of expressing our belief in the principles we profess.

The final Charge in the Craft Lodge EA Degree directs us to consider ourselves called upon to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge. Daily advancement implies that we should make advancement in Masonic knowledge a habit. If I may quote the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle: "Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit".

Brethren, when we think about it, there is no greater gift that we can bestow on our brethren than to dispense knowledge. Let us discharge with propriety the various duties incumbent on us so that we truly are a Most Excellent Master.

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August 21, 2020