

Briefing Notes

This Discussion Point focuses on the idea of 'What Remains Hidden', a theme which appears in several different guises during the Degree.

Hidden things are often lost – a lesson we learn in many of the Degrees, for lost things can always be found if we possess the right knowledge, the right tools, and the right attitude. The basic story of the Mark Degree remains common around the world, but there are some interesting variations. For example, in our ritual GMHA is lost to the Craft before the completion of the Temple, and his handiwork – the keystone – is first discarded then found again. In the English ritual it is actually the Mark Mason who sees the plan for the Keystone, and it is the plan which then goes missing. The Mark Mason then carves the Keystone from memory and presents it to the overseers, only to have it rejected, until the original plan is rediscovered and the Overseers realize they discarded the most important stone in the edifice. So the pattern is lost in both rituals: in the United States the pattern and example for how we should live is GMHA; while in the United Kingdom the pattern is the plan upon the trestleboard, which teaches us the work we should accomplish in our lives to earn the approbation of heaven.

Incidentally, in the English ritual it is suggested that the newly-made Mark Mason forms his mark using his initials written in Masonic cipher. Thus, the mark becomes a series of lines and dots, well known to those who have already been exalted to the Holy Royal Arch Degree.

In this degree we have a chisel mark inflicted upon our flesh. We are marked, just as our ancient operative forebears used to place their mark upon the stones they had carved. We are living stones ourselves, and our Maker marks us as well to remind us that we were created by Him. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that in the Blue Lodge we are marked with the point of a compass – a dot; in the Third degree we are marked by the two points of the extended compass: now in the Mark Degree we are marked with a chisel – a line, or what links the two points.

Later in the ritual we are told that we are given a new name upon a white stone, and that none but he who receives the stone shall know the name written on it. We should remember that the cathedrals we see now are not how they *were* intended. There is much evidence to suggest that they were very colorfully painted, which is a far cry from the austere forests of stone we are used to seeing. Also, the moment a stonemason's work had been cemented in place, it was covered with plaster, which would have hidden the name or mark written upon it. Thus the maker, having named his stone, hides it from the eyes of the profane. The name or mark upon the stone is known to none save the creator and he who received it as 'good work, square work, true work'.

The concept of precious things being right before our eyes, yet veiled from our sight, is a frequent theme of alchemy. Alchemy is the art of turning base metal into gold (or physical alchemy); but it is also about the transmutation of ourselves from something base into something refined and perfect (spiritual alchemy). As we are categorically told the purpose of Masonry is to make us into better human beings, it is hardly surprising that the theme of spiritual alchemy pervades almost all our rituals. In this case we are identified with the white stone, which is also the Stone of the Philosophers, or the goal of perfection

in alchemy. This is said to be made from a base substance which is both common and to be found everywhere – yet ignored by most of mankind. What a potent symbol, then is the image of the rejected stone being found amongst the rubble!

Discussion Points

1. A study of the ancient marks left by stonemasons in the great cathedrals and edifices in Europe show that in almost every case, only straight lines were used. Why do you think this was? What would be the practical explanation for this practice? Also, applying what you know of Masonic ritual, what symbolic reason might exist for this?

From a practical point of view, it is much easier to chisel straight lines rather than curved ones. It is also believed that it was a common practice for a triangle to be used to show the work had been accepted. This is why the shape and the mark upon the keystone, both containing curves, aroused the suspicion of the Overseers. Symbolically, we are taught that Masonry bases much of its teachings upon horizontal and perpendicular lines – the former to remind us of our equality, and the latter that we are also linked to the divine, and they should act uprightly in all our undertakings. Both of these images are particularly appropriate to cathedrals, which are places which link us to God, while reminding us that, as the stones are bound together into a common edifice, so all humanity is linked by many common bonds.

2. If we consider the development of the dimensions through the Degree, we are reminded that the point represents a single dimension, a line is formed of two points and the connection between them. The triangle is formed from three points, and the square from two triangles or four points. Is there any evidence that our Degrees build on this idea?

One might consider the mark imposed on our flesh in the first degree represents God (the still point within the circle), while the two points of the third degree represent our duality. If so, then the line of the Mark Degree represents the link between the two natures and the importance of reconciling them. The triangle is very evident in the Capitular degrees, the number three, representing the three points, is evident throughout the rituals. It certainly seems that it was a calculated action on the part of our forebears to trace a developing theme as the degrees progress, to lead us from unity, through duality, to reconciliation. The triangle has long been a sign of reconciliation between two opposites, just as the arch joins and reconciles the two pillars of duality which we see in all our Lodge rooms.

3. What lessons can be taken from the ideas of What Remains hidden to apply to our daily lives and practice, so as to make the 'daily advance' we have sworn to do?

We should be aware that some things are not always as they seems, and that it is worth a little effort to try to 'get beneath the skin' in order to see the truth. We should not act rashly, but should take our time in reaching a decision, basing our conclusions on 'evidence not seen', as well as what is clearly before us. This way we will be less likely to reject something of value based on its immediate appearance. We are also reminded that we possess two natures, that we are both 'living temples' as

individuals, yet we also partake of a common nature with our fellow men, which make us living stones within an even greater edifice. This means we owe a double duty to God and to our fellow man, and to concentrate on one to the detriment of the other is unbalanced and not good. Only by reconciling our nature as an individual and our nature as a part of the great body of mankind can we become a keystone ourselves and provide an example of that link between god and man in our daily lives.