

The Winding Staircase

The winding stairs contain profound symbolism. They are in sets of 3 (symbolic of Deity), 5 (symbolic of man), and 7 (symbolic of time/timelessness). The first three steps represent the officers of the Lodge and therefore the three stages of human life - youth, manhood, and old age or, possibly, manhood, old age, and transfiguration. They also represent the ways in which we should approach knowledge or information - with a willingness to hear and learn, a willingness to share what we have learned, and the ability to keep confidential those things which should be confidential.

The five steps represent the five human senses and also the five orders of classical architecture. The five senses represent the physical ways in which knowledge and information come into our minds - we hear it, see it, smell it, taste it, or touch it. The five orders of architecture not only review the Greek tradition that architecture is a reflection of man, but we are told that the 3 Greek and not the 2 Roman orders are significant to Masons. This may be a suggestion that, when it comes to knowledge and learning, we are to follow the Greek and not the Roman model. The Greeks believed that knowledge was a goal and a good in and of itself. Knowledge was important to have, just because it was knowledge. The Romans only wanted to know something if it had an immediate, practical application.

The seven steps represent the seven 'liberal arts.' 'Liberal' is not a political term. It comes from the Latin word meaning 'free.' The liberal arts were those it was considered important for a free man (as opposed to slave) to know.

Thus the three steps tell us the mental attitudes or equipment necessary for knowledge, the five steps show us the means by which knowledge reaches the mind, and the seven steps tell how we should evaluate knowledge, for they are 'tools' of thinking.

From *Further Light... Helpful Information for New Master Masons*

By Jim Tresner

Published by The Masonic Service Association of North America, 2008

www.msana.com

Our Grand Lodge is associated with The Masonic Service Association of North America which publishes many resources for the Craft. Most are very American in outlook and details, but with a little discrimination, the Ontario Mason can sort out what applies to us. For instance, there is at least one part of the above which doesn't apply to us. Can you tell which it is?

Contrast this with what one of our own publications has to say on this subject:

The winding staircase is mentioned only in passing and any conception of its importance must be gleaned from the candidate climbing a winding staircase. At one stage the candidate is made to simulate the ascent of a winding staircase by moving from north to east, whereas on the tracing board the staircase is shown as rising from south to west. It points out that the way to knowledge and to the better things in life is neither straight, direct, nor effortless. Self-improvement is the object as the candidate proceeds through the pillars toward the winding staircase. As he moves upward he attempts to reach wisdom and an improvement in character. Having reached this point, the candidate is poised for the final step into the third degree. To the fellowcraft it indicates that he has reached the mid-point of life wherein he has shouldered certain responsibilities of family, business and society. He is now enjoined to acquire wisdom. King Solomon's Temple was entered through a porchway. The workers then ascended a winding staircase to reach a middle chamber to receive their wages. To the candidate, however, it signifies attainment of a stage of enlightenment, which entitles him to continue his journey to even greater knowledge.

Historical evidence regarding King Solomon's Temple is confined to 1 Kings: 6. The original Hebrew presents great difficulties in translation and this, added to corrections and additions, leaves the subject of a winding

staircase in some doubt. Ritual wordings have come down to the present day over several centuries. The actual wording of any ceremonies of the operative trade, that might have been available to non-operatives of the seventeenth century, are unknown to members of today. From occasional clues religion played an important part in the life of the operative mason. The men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were quite often astronomers. It is, therefore, not hard to believe that the circular motion of the universe and the corresponding orbiting of stars and planets would induce their minds to accept that a winding symbol could signify the creative force of God. Another reason for this belief is perhaps that, in ancient times, most major religions contained a central truth that proclaimed the journey of a neophyte from ignorance to an awareness of his spirituality was a path fraught full of dangers, twists and turns. Perhaps the ritual is referring to this when it is said that nature 'has conducted you through the intricate windings of this your mortal state . . .'. Perhaps in this can be found the explanation of the symbolism of the winding staircase.

From *Penetrating The Veil*

By David C. Bradley, PGM

Published by Masonic Holdings, Hamilton, 1977

Both of these excellent books, and many others, are available through the Grand Lodge Office and the book table at the annual communication.

Do go ahead and read books and articles from other Grand Jurisdictions; just remember to use your "tools of thinking" to evaluate the knowledge you gain.

by R.W. Bro. David Cameron FCF

for The Committee on Masonic Education

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Please share this Bulletin with the members of your Lodge, District and any other Masons you wish.

Notice: the address for sending in assignments for the Correspondence Courses has changed to:

Dale Graham FCF

c/o College of Freemasonry

658 2nd Ave. West

Owen Sound, ON N4K 4M3

Please let anyone that is taking the course know this. The old address will no longer work!

Information about applying for the courses can be found at <http://www.grandlodge.on.ca/framesgleducation.htm>