

Sages, Seers And Spooks

By Stewart W. Miner

Brother Miner (PGM, Virginia and present Grand Secretary of the District of Columbia) has brought us an interesting analogy between the gathering of useful information and using it positively within the Fraternity. Formerly with the U.S. Government, Brother Miner brings an excellent insight into the subject of both information and Freemasonry.

The collection, analysis, and use of information has been fundamental to success, personal and institutional, throughout the course of history. In all generations leaders have recognized a need for the timely acquisition of essential data, obtained sometimes openly and sometimes clandestinely, in order to promote and protect their interests. Never before, however, has this effort been so pronounced as it has been in the past quarter-century, a period in which men and women everywhere have sought to benefit from a truly unparalleled informational revolution. Mankind now realizes, perhaps as never before, that ignorance is a luxury that no one can afford!

In coping with ignorance, which is really nothing more than the temporary lack of essential knowledge, most information seeking institutions rely on special-purpose personnel, differentiated by mission and function into sage, seer, and spook groups. Sages, by virtue of age, understanding, and experience, are responsible for shaping policy and establishing goals; seers, occupying a mid-position in the hierarchy, analyze and plan data-gathering operations; and spooks – the organizations spies or spokesmen – gather information as directed by competent authority. Working together, in unity and harmony, these groups are able to perceive and appreciate fact that might otherwise remain perpetually obscure.

Some Biblical scholars speculate that it was just such an organization, operating through and for the Sanhedrin, the great council or court of the ancient Jews, that was responsible for the recruitment and use of Judas as a spy. That speculation is conjectural, of course, because the scriptural accounts are inconclusive on this score. They do attest, however, to the intent of Sanhedrin officials to take and kill Jesus (Matthew 26:4) and to the intent of Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, to betray his leader (Mark 14:10). Whether or not a staff of sages, seers, and spooks was organized within the Sanhedrin to attain these ends is of less importance than is the

fact that the ends sought – the acquisition of information essential to the interruption of Christ's work and influence – was achieved, at least temporarily, in accordance with plan.

But the collection of information had already become a fact of life thousands of years before the time of Christ, when the Israelites, out of necessity, spied on both their enemies and each other. One of the earliest mentions of such activity occurs in the book of Genesis (Chapters 42-44), wherein we read an account of the reception by Joseph of his brothers, who had come to Egypt to purchase grain. After making their plea for food to Joseph, whom they failed to recognize, the latter scathingly reproved them with these words: "Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come (Genesis 42:9)" Thereupon Joseph manipulated this charge to elicit information about the family from which he had long been separated. Alternately and skillfully playing sage, seer, and spook roles, he then adroitly obtained the information he sought.

Even more specific are the Biblical accounts of the programs that Moses and Joshua launched to gain information about the promised land. We read in Numbers 12 that Moses, responding to Divine dictate, dispatched leaders of the twelve tribes to spy out Canaan. Specifically, he instructed his men to see the land for what it was; to determine whether it be good or bad, fat or lean; and to sample the crops produced thereon. He further directed them to assess the people of Canaan; to determine whether they be few or many, strong or weak; to evaluate their modes of living; and to appraise the strength and defensibility of their settlements.

Upon their return to Paran the leaders-turned spies reported their findings. Canaan was a land that literally flowed with milk and honey, they all agreed, but ten of the twelve expressed grave doubt that it could be taken. The Canaanites are big and strong, they stated, and they live in large and well defended cities. We are but as grasshoppers to them, they averred, concluding that it would be foolhardy to go up against such strength. Caleb and Joshua disagreed, their assessment being that the men of Canaan had lost the will to defend themselves (Numbers 14:9). In the ensuing debate the views of the majority, although subsequently proven erroneous, prevailed, and in consequence the entrance of the children of Israel into the promised land was unnecessarily delayed.

What had gone wrong? Hadn't Moses given crystal-clear directions? Hadn't he selected men of good report? And had not these men all observed the same things? The answer to each of these questions is obviously "yes." Why then were the spies unable to submit a report on which they could all agree? Frankly, the Scriptures do not specifically address this point, but from what is written we may assume that only Caleb and Joshua of the twelve had proven their suitability for the assignment by talking to enlightened people, asking leading questions, observing significant phenomena, and arriving at rational conclusions. The rest, unfortunately, falling far short of these standards, were rendered incapable of distinguishing between the ephemeral and the significant. In consequence the mission was a failure.

This failure, coupled with an additional 40-year sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness, set the stage for a later and successful attempt to spy out Canaan, this time under the direction of Joshua, the son of Nun, and Moses' minister. In response to Divine instruction to take his people across the Jordan, Joshua sent two men to spy secretly, saying to them: "Go view the land, even Jericho (Joshua 2:1)" They went and we are informed that there they lodged in the house of Rahab, a harlot, who protected them. Moreover, Rahab told them all they needed to know, i.e., that although the land was well fortified and the defense forces strong, both could be taken because the people of Canaan were afraid.

On their return the two spies, who remain nameless to this day, reported to Joshua in these words: "Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us (Joshua 2:24)." The accuracy of their assessment is attested by the subsequent siege and destruction of Jericho. Joshua's spies, it seems, unlike those of Moses, were successful because they talked to informed people, asked the right questions, and reported their findings discreetly, thereby enabling Joshua to formulate his nation's plans without being burdened by the encumbrance of uninformed public opinion.

It is out of such humble beginnings, initiated in the antiquity of time, that the informational systems of the world developed, age by age and clime by clime, always in accord with and promoted by a constantly advancing technology. Hence today enlightened leaders in every major sector of life, national or international, political, economic, social, or spiritual, focus due attention on the acquisition and use of information that is absolutely essential to institutional health and growth. Like their Biblical predecessors, they recognize that personal and institutional well being, in a world that is growing competitively more complex, demands state-of-the-art knowledge. They also recognize that the attainment of this knowledge still depends on the timely initiation of coordinated efforts, in which adequate complements of personnel, by whatever designation or title, are assigned policy setting, planning and analysis, or operational duties. This is the price of success, and it is as applicable to Freemasonry as it is to any other institution.

The Masonic effort, however, stands in contrast to those of most other organizations, largely because of its customs, traditions, and sense of propriety. Therefore its focus of attention tends to be internal rather than external, private rather than public. This is unfortunate, for Masons, somewhat like Moses and his people so long ago, now stand in a figurative wilderness, in need of information on which to base a plan that will afford entrance into a fraternal promised land. That information, if it exists at all, is most likely to be found outside and not inside the Craft. That fact notwithstanding, Masons, holding high the banner of achievements past, all too often opt for introversion, a policy which suggests that in the future fewer and fewer Masons may spend more and more time together. The likelihood of that eventuality now seems particularly strong in view of the current propensity of the Craft to restrict its information effort to the

accumulation of essential housekeeping data, centering attention on such issues as membership trends, investments, and cash flow at all levels of administration.

Masonry's resources, human and material, are of unquestioned consequence, of course, and they should be afforded the consideration that is their due. On that point everyone is or should be agreed. But everyone should also be agreed that internal records alone, regardless of their thoroughness and accuracy, do not supply the kind of information that is necessary for the solution of a basic and fundamental issue – how to convince the uninitiated of the virtues of the Masonic Order. Those outside the Craft know little of us, and we, in turn, know far too little of them; perhaps we both stand guilty of trying to enjoy the luxury of ignorance.

At any rate it now seems time for those of us who are truly concerned about the future of the Craft to expand the horizons of our interests. There are Masonic promised lands awaiting development in every community, and it is high time that we make appropriate approaches to them. As we do we should be mindful that we have a responsibility, even as we strive to preserve the past, which we do very well, to cope with the present and to prepare, as well as we can, for an uncertain future.

It is therefore incumbent upon us to make a concerted effort to develop that special set of mind which is so essential to scouting out and winning over the unknown. Let us therefore move ahead, encouraged and sustained by that passage of Scripture in which we read that "it is to the glory of God to conceal a thing: but to the honor of kings to search out a matter (Proverbs 25:2)." My brethren, as each of us has the potential to wear a crown of the Craft, it is my prayer that we will strive to be deserving of it!

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