

Truth Unknown

It is an odd fact that Freemasonry's direct teaching in regard to Truth is less important than her indirect teaching.

In the entered Apprentice's Lecture we learn of Truth as "the foundation of every virtue. To be good Men and True is the first lesson." etc. But these teachings regarding the third Principal Tenet are of Truth in its narrower and more restricted sense – that use of the word as a synonym for sincerity, right dealing, absence of deceit, straight forwardness.

Philosophers distinguish several verities of Truth – logical truth, the conformity of reasoning to premises; ontological, metaphysical or transcendental truth – the doctrine that the existence of Deity is proved by the very idea of his existence; absolute truth – the reality behind the appearance or idea.

These conceptions of Truth have led to the more common use of the word, as that which is believed to be so, as distinct from that which is known to be opposite of the fact. The witness who swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth indicates no more than his intention to state that which is known to him, believed by him; that he will not intentionally deceive. A witness may testify to something which is not a fact and be unperjured, provided it is a fact to "him." A man, ignorant of astronomy may truthfully testify that the sun moves from east to west between morning and night. His testimony is the truth as he knows it. That actually the earth moves beneath the sun, while the sun stands still, does not make him untruthful.

The truth is not always easy to define. Some questions have several answers, all correct. Other questions cannot be answered, "as asked," correctly. For instance, "how many feet in a mile?" has only one true answer: 5,280. But "what two whole numbers added together make 5,280" has 2640, answers, "all" correct! "What are the "only" two numbers, added together, that result in 5,280" cannot be answered correctly, "in the terms in which it is asked," because there are not "only two" numbers, the addition of which so result.

In mathematics are many conceptions which have no actual truth behind them. By the very laws of mathematics, we cannot imagine a square root of "minus one." A root, multiplied by itself, must give the number of which it is a root. No number, plus or minus, multiplied by itself produces a minus quantity. Yet this very conception of the square root of minus one is

constantly in use in mathematics, though it has no objective existence and no mathematical answer.

The Entered Apprentice Lecture teaches of truth as opposed to deceit, truth as a foundation of character, truth in the moral sense. In this sense Truth really is the foundation of every virtue. There is no justice without truth; there is no philanthropy without truth; there can be no self-sacrifice, no bravery, no rectitude – no virtue of any kind – without a foundation in that which is sincere and honest, as opposed to that which is lying and deceitful.

This aspect of truth is only part of the Third Principal Tenet. It is vitally important, it must be learned, pondered and observed, but it compares with the absolute Masonic Truth as compares the moon to the sun.

To grasp the idea of Absolute Truth is not given to many, All abstract ideas require real mental labor to formulate. The thought of fundamental, unchangeable, inescapable verities behind the form, substance and phenomena of life, is not easy. Yet difficulty but makes the idea the more precious when it does become a part of a Freemason's mental concepts.

A manufacturer is to make a table. Before he puts pencil to paper he forms an idea of what a table looks like. He reduces this idea to a drawing and specification; it then becomes an idea made manifest, so that others can understand it. But it is not yet a table. When the wood-worker constructs the table from materials, cutting and fitting them from the plans, the idea becomes embodied. The table is now all three – idea, idea manifest, and idea embodied. To the observer it is possessed of form and substance. is hard, varnished, throws a shadow, and can support other objects – in fact, a table.

The Absolute Truth of the table is probably quite different. For all its seeming solidity and weight, we know that it is far more space than matter. We know that its atoms are composed of electrons, whirling at inconceivable speeds about a central proton, and that if we could see it as it “really” is, not as it appears to the human senses, it would be a collection of bounding, moving, swinging, revolving particles of electricity, the force of which, if all were suddenly let loose, would be sufficient to wreck a city.

But not a single scientist can yet even imagine what an electron “really” is – the Absolute Truth of it escapes the laboratory.

Freemasonry is not all concerned with proving the verity of Deity. She accepts a Great Architect as Truth. But as we have seen, Truth has more than one classification. The Absolute Truth of Deity can no more be known to man on earth than the Absolute Reality of the table can be realized by those who use it. Our perception of the world and life is sense bound. From seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling; we reason, think and believe. Many aspects of physical things do not touch our five senses – for instance, the speed of the electron, the size of the atom. And unimaginable aspects of Deity cannot enter our minds, because a finite mind can never comprehend that which is infinite.

Freemasonry teaches that the True Word was lost. She offers a substitute. To search for That Which Was Lost is the reason for Masonic life. While we know that the search must be as fruitless as it must be endless, we find joy and usefulness in the effort, not in the results. Important to the Freemason is not the comprehension of the idea of the Absolute, but that he seeks it in his conception of the Most High.

The great Freemason, Lessing, said: “Pure Truth is for God alone” – phrasing in six words both the impossibility of mortals ever finding it, and the reason we should seek it! Cicero, too, knew why we must seek. When he said; “our minds possess by nature an insatiable desire to know the truth” he uttered a truism, no matter what aspect of Truth is considered. Chesterfield capped them both with his famous “Every man seeks for truth – God, only, knows who finds it.”

“Our ancient friend and brother, the great Pythagoras” was poet, philosopher and scientist when he stated “Truth is so great a perfection that if God would render himself visible to man, he would choose light for him body and truth for his soul.”

Few men are able to tell others of the eternal verities, even if, at long last, they win them. To “Tell The Truth,” meaning to state the fact or belief as known, is easy. But to tell the Truth unto men is like singing music to the tone deaf, teaching differential calculus to six year old child, speaking in a language the hearer does not understand. He who even thinks he knows the Lost word may never tell it – no syllables formed by mortal tongue may speak it. Listen to John Ruskin, sage of sages: “Childhood often holds a truth with its feeble fingers which the grasp of manhood cannot retain – which it is the pride of utmost age to recover.” the very young and the very old know that which they cannot tell to us of the middle years. As Freemasons, we know a Truth we cannot tell even to the initiate, who must find it for himself in the midst of our symbols and our teachings.

The great light holds a thousands truths – and one great Truth. Alas, that some are so blinded to the latter that, finding an apparent failure of conformity between page and page, they see not the Truth behind. Such men cannot see the water for the waves, or find the forest because there are too many trees! A collection of books, the Bible has been translated and retranslated. Our Bible has come down to us through the hands of thousands of willing, devout workers, each with the faults and frailties of mankind. Some copied well, some copied ill; some historians were accurate, others allowed play to their imaginations. “Of course” in this mighty literature are self contradictions; “of course” different prophets, historians, singers and inspired leaders saw different aspects of the truths they taught, and so taught differently. Recall the story of the two knights of old who fought to exhaustion over the color of a shield, one saying it was black, the other white. When the contest was over they examined the shield together and found one side white and the other black. So with these different manners of teaching in the Great Light – each teaches the Truth as its writer saw it. The “real” truth, the “whole” truth – the “Absolute Truth,” is to be found in no verse, chapter or book, but in the Book of Books as a whole!

From the beginning of time man has attempted to visualize that which he cannot imagine! He would put into words, write upon paper, limn on canvas, shout to the housetops, that which he cannot conceive. What is the conventional idea of heaven? Place of Golden Streets, flowing with Milk and Honey! Why? Because gold is precious and beautiful, and milk and honey good; and hard for the lowly and poor to get. Injustice oppressed man for centuries; justice became a hope. A just judge, no matter how severe, was far better than an unjust judge. Hence we have an early conception of God as a strict, stern, implacable judge. Later on – much later – came the idea of a merciful judge, a loving, kindly, compassionate father.

As man has grown and learned, so has his conception of Truth of the Great Architect of the Universe grown more beautiful. Will any contend that man is perfect? Nay, man humble or exalted, man learned or ignorant, man wise or foolish, can not conceive the unthinkable majesty and beauty, the stupendous power and glory, the unphraseable marvel, which must be the Absolute Truth of the Great Architect.

The dearest hope of all mankind since the first man cried the birth cry, was agonized down the centuries by Job: “If a man die, shall he live again?” And the centuries have given a hundred answers. Immortality in men’s minds is as different as the men! To some it is rest; to others opportunity to do all that life denied them; to some it is pleasure; to others it is knowledge; to yet others it is formless, ageless, boundless contemplation, the Nirvana of the Buddhist. But no thinking man believes that his most glorious conception of immortality can compare to whatever may be the Absolute Truth of that Magnificent belief.

Concrete truths are all relative; Absolute Truth is unchanging. We think of men as good or bad, moral or unethical, wise or ignorant only as compared to others. Absolute goodness, morality and wisdom we cannot know here; we cannot know the Absolute Truth of anything.

“But we may search for it.” We may so order our lives, so read the Great Light, so follow the teachings of the ancient Craft that our quest of “That Which Was Lost” brings us one step nearer to the barrier which forever separates mortal eyes from Immortal Truth.

That he who quests earnestly and seeks sincerely will, at long last, pass that barrier and with his own eyes see that the Absolute is the magnificent Truth of Freemasonry.

“SO MOTE IT BE!”

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