

Masonic Secrets

By

Jacques Domenge

Doing a search for "Masonic Ritual" in Google will conveniently refer you to a series of web pages with various resources outlining variations of each Masonic degree. Some even come in easy to print PDF documents. Similarly, you can find the meanings of Masonic symbols and Masonic grips with just a few keystroke entries. Why should such a fuss about keeping Masonic secrets be made in light of the already existing public disclosure of so many of them? Or would it be better to just forget about keeping Masonic secrets?

Initially, Masonic secrets were the grips, meanings of symbols, and the rituals. It would seem that most or all of these are now part of the public domain. So what "secrets" are left to actually keep secret? I would argue that the content that outsiders seek, believing to be secrets, are actually revelations and insights that are attained through Masonic experience. While one of the greatest features of Freemasonry is our truth seeking, an equally significant feature of Freemasonry is that it eschews all dogmatic and universal assertions regarding the contents of truth in any of its forms. Freemasonry also eschews seeking to secretize any truth realized through reflection, study or Masonic conversation or debate.

For the past three centuries each Mason is given carte blanche freedom to pursue and glean his own truths. Thus, the Masonic style of truth seeking does not incorporate the blind adoption of correct beliefs, but rather the individual Mason is encouraged to subjectively determine for himself what is truth to him based upon his own participation in self-directed study, reflection, meditation, conversation and debate. Hence, the greatest secrets of Freemasonry consist of what truths each Mason himself has gleaned through revelation and insight. These are truths or secrets of the individual mental property of each Mason and cannot be reduced to writing in any kind of format intended to become blindly accepted Masonic creed.

Accordingly, the experience of becoming a mason, and working through the degrees to become a better man ultimately, one can find truth. And I believe that the truths we individually and subjectively glean or discover constitute the core of Freemasonry, and this process of obtaining truths is in fact, our greatest secret. This is what many critics of Freemasonry seek to understand, and similarly, many fear because they do not understand it. It should be noted that being a Mason does not automatically mean one has cultivated truth. It merely gives one tools to gain access to it. So what truths does one sense as a mason? Only each individual mason will know, and, no Mason could ever fully and completely describe either the truths gleaned or the process utilized in pursuing such truths to an outsider. Consider this quote:

"We know that even the elementary and superficial secrets of the Order must not be communicated to unqualified persons, and the reason for this injunction is not so much because those secrets have any special value, but because that silence is intended to be typical of that which applies to the greater, deeper secrets, some of which, for appropriate reasons, must not be communicated, and some of which indeed are not communicable at all, because they transcend the power of communication." (Wilmshurst 2007)

Take the example of the music of Mozart. Imagine you meet someone that has never heard *Così fan tutte*, *La Nozze Di Figaro*, or the *Requiem*. How do you describe this music to someone ignorant of Mozart's works? You could say his music is calculated, mathematical, rich, sorrowful, gentle, severe, awe-inspiring, soothing, cheerful, amusing, devastating, playful...etc. You could go on for hours explaining in great detail the experience of hearing Mozart, and the person to whom you are communicating this would still remain ignorant as to what precisely you are referring. Even if your audience had read many books and Wikipedia entries on Mozart's life and works, if they had not experienced his music for themselves through listening to it, they would still not benefit from your efforts. So the question follows, "how do you fully communicate the truth gleaned experience of being a mason?" The answer: You cannot.

I have been to many weddings in my life. So many, that I think I can recite the general proceedings of a Christian wedding with little difficulty. This being said, I never understood what it meant to get married until the day I stood in front of an altar and married my wife. Let us consider for a moment that an outsider has copies of every single degree ritual, knowledge of the grips, and interpretations of Masonic symbols. This person is still missing the most important ingredient, which is Masonic experience.

It may be that all of Freemasonry's initial "secrets" have been made public, both by well meaning masons as well as conspiracy theorists and others who consider themselves adversaries of the craft. So then, why keep any secrets at all? Why take an oath? A long time ago, a famous carpenter said "Do not cast your pearls before swine". Many people would agree that this quote means "do not share something of value to you with someone who cannot or will not appreciate it". This, I believe is the essential reason of why a Mason keeps an oath not to share Masonic secrets with outsiders. While the craft is tolerant and accepting of all men that believe in a God, it does not welcome just anyone. One must show that they seek to acquire virtue, moral nourishment, and the ability to improve the world around them. As such, there is a scope of people that would benefit from and appreciate the teachings of the craft, as well as a scope that would not. Because of this, a Mason must guard the secrets imparted to him along with the Masonic truths he gleans up on his own. While a Mason cannot control what people are seeing on the internet or reading in Dan Brown novels, a Mason can control what he shares with others. This mechanism minimizes the number of "impostors" in the craft.

Another aspect of the experiential method of acquiring these insights is the fact that on the flipside of seeking out these truths, there is another component that is just as essential. Most notably, the fellow mason who seeks this light, will only receive it if his brethren willfully impart it to him in a just and legally constituted lodge. The tools necessary to uncover the "secrets" of the craft are only obtained as a gift from other well meaning masons.

Often we are told that the content of the rituals are never revealed until solemn oaths are pledged at the outset of these ceremonies. Another reason the rituals are never intended to be disclosed to a Mason until he is in the midst of the degree ceremonies, is because without the context provided by the ritual, that is the experience, the value of the messages therein will be lost. Similarly, an outsider without a proper frame of reference will not understand many aspects of the ritual, signs, and grips, and may even find them to be a bit alarming. Because the experience cannot be communicated verbally, and because outsiders will not have a frame of reference, it would be unwise for a mason to try to explain any of this to them, even if they were not bound by the blood oath. We as masons have a responsibility to present Freemasonry in the best possible light. This would prove to be exceedingly difficult if we were to try to communicate the lessons Freemasonry has to teach us in any other fashion than the way in which we currently do.

Having experienced the degrees as a Mason in a legally constituted lodge, know that the insights you may have found through the craft will be kept secret from any onlookers. And just the same, as a non-Mason, know that in order to truly know and understand the core "secrets" of Freemasonry, you will need to experience them for yourself.

References

Wilmshurst, W. L. (2007). *Meaning of Masonry*. Nu Vision Publications LLC.