

Light and Instruction

The Educational Duties of the Worshipful Master

Shawn Eyer on the traditional concept of the Master of the Lodge as educator and enlightener of the Brethren

ONE OF FREEMASONRY'S most overlooked traditions is also among its oldest: the fundamental responsibility of the Master of the Lodge to educate his fellows. This idea was expressed well before the Grand Lodge era through the mythic Traditional History of the Craft, and after the formation of institutional Freemasonry, the concept was acknowledged in ceremonies of initiation and installation, and within the most fortunate lodges it was fulfilled in practical application through educational lectures offered during tiled communications.

Operative Origins

The oldest surviving document demonstrating this idea is the Halliwell MS, written about 1425. At the beginning of this mythistory of Masonry, sometimes known as *The Regius Poem*, the Craft is created by Euclid as an educational institution in which those with higher knowledge, known as “Masters” and described as “most worshiped,” would teach those with less information, referred to as “fellows.”

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*he þat lernede beſt and were of oneſte
and paſſiud hys felows yn curýſte
ʒef yn þat craft he dede hym paſſe
he ſchulde haue more worſchepe þen þe laſſe
þys grete clerkys name wes clept euclyde
hys name hýt ſpradde ful wondur wýde
ʒet þys grete clerke more ordeýnt he
to hym þt was herre-yn þys degre
þt he ſchulde teche þe ſýmþlýft of [wýtte]
yn þat oneſt craft to be þarfytte
and ſo uchon ſchull techyn opur
and loue togedr as ſýſtr and brþur
fforþr more ʒet þat ordeýnt he
maýſtr ý callud ſo ſchulde he be
ſo þt he were moſt ý worſched
þenne ſc[h]ulde he be ſo ý clepd*

He who learned best and was of respectable rank, and who surpassed his fellows in intellectual rigor—if, in that craft, he surpassed them, then he should have more worship [honor] than the lesser ones—this great scholar’s name was Euclid. His name spread wonderfully afar, yet more this great scholar ordained that he who was higher in this degree [of knowledge] should teach those with the simplest of skill in that honorable craft to become expert. And so, each one should teach the other, and love as sister and brother when together.



Yet furthermore, he ordained that he should be called “Master,” for the one who was worshiped [honored] the most should be so called¹

This idea can be found in most examples of the Old Charges. A similar passage in the Cooke MS (c. 1450) states that the “passing of cunning” were to be called Masters.² The Carmick Manuscript of 1727, one of the “speculative” era copies of the Old Charges, Euclid charges the Craft

that they Should order and Make the wisest and Skilfulest Artist amongst them to be Master of the worke and Not for love[,] fear[,] homage and aney Cause whatsoever Let one that hath but little Skill be Master of the worke and If Such a one takes the worke in hand as Master he is to be Displeac’d from being Master and worke as a Common workeman and the best artist amongst them to be Pleac’d Master in his Room [i.e., stead]³

As these early Masonic teachings make clear, the Master of the Lodge was to be selected based upon his knowledge—whether operative or speculative, depending upon the setting—and should a Master be selected for any other reason, it was the opinion of at least some Freemasons that he ought to be removed from the office in favor of one of superior skill. Skill in the Art and the ability to teach others were represented as the only qualifications for Master in many texts.

The Early Grand Lodge Era

In the Charges included by James Anderson in his seminal *Constitutions* of 1723, these ideas were explicitly carried forward into the institutional phase of Masonry:

All Preferment among *Masons* is grounded upon

real Worth and personal Merit only . . . Therefore no *Master* or *Warden* is chosen by Seniority, but for his Merit. It is impossible to describe these things in writing, and every Brother must attend in his Place, and learn them in a way peculiar to *this Fraternity*⁴

Here, it is stressed that the “personal Merit” required of the Master of a speculative Lodge included to some extent esoteric knowledge—that is, information that was not considered proper to be reduced to writing. This rejection of any progression to the Master’s chair via seniority—now very common in Lodges, if only unofficially—was carried forward in many subsequent editions of the *Constitutions*.⁵

That instruction was an intended part of meetings during the early Grand Lodge era is indisputable. The two earliest preserved Masonic orations both refer to this educational activity:

I am credibly inform’d, that in most Lodges in *London*, and several other Parts of this Kingdom, a Lecture on some Point of Geometry or Architecture is given at every Meeting⁶

. . . it is highly necessary for the Improvement of the Members of a Lodge . . . that proper lectures be constantly read in such of the Sciences, as shall be thought to be most agreeable to the Society, and to the Honour and Instruction of the Craft.⁷

The records of one of London’s oldest lodges demonstrate this commitment. Its 1736 bylaws specify that educational content—ranging from original talks and debates, to recitations from the *Constitutions*, to the catechetical lectures—was required, and the lodge could punish its leaders

who failed to deliver. The catechisms were to be taught by the Master “on ev’ry Lodge night, or y[e] person in ye Chair so neglecting shall forfeit a Bottle of Wine to be drank by ye Brethren, after the Lodge is clos’d, to make them some part of Amends for ye Omission.”⁸ It is clear from the by-laws and minutes of that lodge that their Master’s constant duty was to arrange lodge communications in which ideas were shared and traditional Masonic lore was articulated and contemplated. Selections from Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry*, Palladio’s *I Quattro Libri dell’Architettura*, Anderson’s *Constitutions*, the 1730 *Defence of Masonry* (likely written by one of that lodge’s Masters), and other works were read and discussed.⁹ Although surely not all lodges maintained such a high educational standard, evidence shows this lodge was not alone in providing not just food at the festive board, but food for thought within the tiled meeting itself.

Calcott’s Charge to the Master

In 1767, Wellins Calcott crafted a beautiful Charge for the installation of William Winston, the new Master of the Palladian Lodge (Nº 290, Moderns), which met at the Green Dragon in Hereford. This Charge (reproduced on page 143) contains language that is familiar to most American Freemasons.¹⁰ This charge eloquently reinforces the three essential duties of the Master: to be moral (illustrated by his “ensign,” the Square, and by his devotion to “the sacred volume”), to be just in following the laws of Masonry, and to educate the brethren (illustrated by his symbolic identification with the Sun). All three of these points, examined closely, are really reflective of an instructional mandate.

Calcott describes the Square as the particular symbol of the Master in terms rooted in the Masonic literature of the founding generation: “be it ever

in your thoughts, that the ancients particularly held this symbol to be a just, a striking emblem of the divinity. They said, the GODS, who are the authors of every thing established in wisdom, strength, and beauty, were properly represented by this figure,” which ought to “ever remind you of your duty both to God and MAN.”¹¹ This spiritual interpretation of the Square is accompanied by a reference to an ancient document, a commentary on Euclid’s *Geometry* by Proclus, an important Neoplatonist philosopher of the fifth century CE. This reveals the ongoing influence of the 1730 *Defence* (which was included in the second edition of Anderson’s *Constitutions*), wherein Proclus is cited to explain what Masons mean by using the Square. It also illustrates the efforts of the first two generations of early Grand Lodge Freemasons to ground their symbolism meaningfully, not just romantically, in ancient Pythagorean and Platonic tradition.

Proclus preserved the idea that the Pythagoreans promoted the idea that “right angles indeed are immaculate, both in the divine order of the universe and in relation to specific powers, as being responsible for the Divine Providence that inflexibly governs secondary things—for that which is upright, and not inclined toward lesser things, and not susceptible to change, that indeed is appropriate for divine beings.”¹² Proclus also taught that “the Square is a symbolic image of perfection, of energy undiverted, of an intellectual landmark or boundary, and of similar things . . .”¹³ It is notable that Calcott chose to invoke these ancient concepts in his Installation Charge.

Next, Calcott’s charge reminds the Master that he must live by and enforce the laws and regulations of Masonry. The questions put to the Master prior to installation reflect this important duty. A Master who secretly does not support the

Landmarks of Masonry or the regulations of the Craft in general will not be able to properly teach or lead others.

Finally, Calcott illustrates the Master's educational responsibility by comparing it to the sun's purpose to diffuse light:

For a pattern of imitation, consider the great luminary of nature, which, rising in the *east*, regularly diffuses light and lustre to all within its circle. In like manner it is your province, with due decorum, to spread and communicate light and instruction to the brethren of the lodge.¹⁴

The association of the Master with the symbol of the rising Sun is among the most universal Masonic traditions.¹⁵ As the candidate seeks Light, it is generously bestowed by the Master. In fact, the three principal officers are all associated with positions of stations of the Sun, and are Masonic symbols unto themselves. From the first generation of the Grand Lodge era, the stations of the Sun were indicated by the "fix'd Lights."¹⁶ These artificial windows depicting the stations of the sun (retained in many modern lodges without most being aware of their antiquity) go back to at least the 1720s. Their exact form was revealed by Brother John Coustos when he was tortured by the Portuguese Inquisition: "In the same Lodge are *three pieces of glass painted to represent three windows*, one in the East, one in the West, and the other in the South, *all of which signify the hours*, and the care with which the officers and apprentices go to, carry out, and return from their work."¹⁷ The rising Sun in the East, the Sun at meridian in the South, and the Sun setting in the West were all considered symbolically important.

That the associations between the three prin-

cipal officers and the stations of the sun are deeply embedded within the ritualistic praxis of Ancient Craft Masonry is easily demonstrated. They are referenced at the opening and closing of every communication. In the symbolic northeast corner of the Lodge, the new initiate stands in proximity to the Master in order to receive instruction. The north represents low twelve and the near absence of light. The East represents the dawn and the first fiery darts of light, followed by the glorious sunrise. Between these two points, with his back to the north and his face to the east, the initiate stands ready to receive Masonic Light and instruction from the Master.¹⁸

The incipit of William Preston's original catechism of the first degree is an exposition of the Master's position in the East, his purpose to instruct, and the candidate's responsibility to seek knowledge there:

What is the Groundplan of Masonry?

Instruction.

Why?

Because no man living is too wise to learn.

What will the wise man do?

He will diligently seek knowledge.

What will the Mason do?

He will do more, he will travel to find it.

Whence will he travel?

From the farthest extent of the West.

Whither will he travel?

To the farthest extremity of the East.

What is the object of his travels?

To seek the Master *that through him he may acquire knowledge*.

May he not be disappointed in his travels?

There is the stimulus that he may never be disappointed.

Where does he expect to find the Master?

A Short CHARGE,
delivered to Brother WILLIAM WINSTON,
on his being invested and installed Right Worshipful Master
of the PALLADIAN Lodge of Free and accepted Masons,
in the CITY of HEREFORD, on the Festival of St. JOHN the Evangelist,
A.L. 5767, A.D. 1767.

By Bro. WELLINS CALCOTT, P.M.

Right Worshipful Sir,

By the unanimous voice of the members of this lodge, you are elected to the mastership thereof for the ensuing half-year; and I have the happiness of being deputed to invest you with this ensign of your office; be it ever in your thoughts, that the ancients particularly held this symbol to be a just, a striking emblem of the divinity. They said, the GODS, who are the authors of every thing established in wisdom, strength, and beauty, were properly represented by this figure.* May you, worthy brother, not only consider it as a mark of honour in this assembly, but also, let it ever remind you of your duty both to God and MAN. And as you profess the sacred volume to be your spiritual tressel board, may you make it your particular care to square your life and conversation according to the rules and designs laid down therein.

You have been of two long standing, and are too good a member of our community, to require now any information in the duty of your office. What you have seen praise-worthy in others, we doubt not you will imitate; and what you have seen defective, you will yourself amend.

We have there for the greatest reason to expect

you will be constant and regular in your attendance on the lodge, faithful and diligent in the discharge of your duty: and that you will make the honour of the supreme architect of the universe, and the good of the craft, chief objects of your regard.

We likewise trust that you will pay a punctual attention to the laws and regulations of this society, as more particularly becoming your present station; and that you will at the same time require a due obedience to them, from every other member, well knowing that without this the best of laws become useless.

For a pattern of imitation, consider the great luminary of nature, which, rising in the east, regularly diffuses light and lustre to all within its circle. In like manner it is your province, with due decorum, to spread and communicate light and instruction to the brethren of the lodge.

From the knowledge we already have of your zeal and abilities, we rest assured you will discharge the duties of this important station in such a manner, as will greatly redound to the honours of yourself, as well as of those members over whom you are elected to preside.

* Vide Proclus in EUCLID, Lib. XI. Def. 2 and 34.

In the East.

Why?

Because it ever has been, it still continues to be, and always shall be the situation of the Master *when he acts in that capacity*.

Why is Instruction delivered from the East?

To commemorate three grand events: first, that man, the image of his maker, compounded of matter and spirit, was formed in the East; secondly, when spirit and matter had begun to act in unison, and man gradually advanced to maturity, it was in the East the first rudiments of knowledge and learning were impressed on the juvenile mind; thirdly, when man had arrived at the state of virility and strength, to adorn the work of the Creator, it was in the East arts and sciences embellished the tree of life.¹⁹



Preston later explains the solar symbolism:

What is the purpose of your visit?

To rule and direct the passions, and make a progress in the art of Masonry.

How do you hope to do that?

By the aid of Heaven, the instructions of the Master, and by my own industry.

When entering the Lodge, what was the first grand natural object that struck your attention?

It is the sun emerging through darkness, rising in the East opening the day and

diffusing light, life, and nourishment to all within its circle.

Through what medium did you behold this luminary?

*Through the medium of the Master, who placed in the East opens the Lodge and conveys light to the understanding knowledge and instruction to all who are under his direction.*²⁰

Here the Master's role is fully consonant with the Calcott's Installation Charge. To Preston, Freemasonry's "Groundplan" is instruction, and

the Freemason is characterized as someone who will literally go to lengths to find wisdom. This lecture even posits that the candidate's journey to the East is specifically to seek the Master of the Lodge, so that "through him he

may acquire knowledge." The Master is said to occupy the symbolic East because it is the immortal station "when he acts in [the] capacity" of an instructor. And finally, traditional and mystical reasons are offered for why Masonic instruction is offered from the East: reasons that hearken to the Traditional History of the Craft as related in Anderson's *Constitutions* and other early sources. The position of these concepts at the very beginning of Preston's Apprentice lecture implies their primary importance. It is also worth pointing out Terrence O. Haunch's observation that the most common motto on Masonic certificates in the eighteenth century was "In the East a Place of Light where reigneth Silence and Peace."²¹ Paul Revere used it on his certificate design.²²

The beautiful language of Calcott's Charge had a lasting influence, especially in North America. An American edition of *A Candid Disquisition* appeared in Boston in 1772, boasting prominent subscribers, including many who would soon be leading figures in the American Revolution.²³ It is likely that Calcott visited America between 1772 and 1774.²⁴ In 1792, Thaddeus Mason Harris included in the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts' *Constitutions* a "Charge to a Master, at his Installation," which was adapted with credit from Calcott's text.²⁵ Soon, it appeared in the manuals of other states, including Maryland (1797), South Carolina (1807), and Pennsylvania (1825).²⁶ By at least 1818, it was included in Thomas Smith Webb's *Freemason's Monitor*, and shortly afterward appeared in Jeremy Ladd Cross' influential *True Masonic Chart*.²⁷ Thus it became a part of the common American working, and other texts reveal that it enjoyed some general use in England as well.²⁸

That the educational mandate expressed in Calcott's Charge was understood by American Freemasons is evidenced by the regulations of South Carolina's *Ahiman Rezon* of 1807, which stated that "It is not alone sufficient" for lodge Masters to be "honest, good men; but they must be well acquainted with the principles and doctrines of the craft, and be able to teach them . . ." ²⁹ The 1822 edition of the same work puts it concisely: "He will, in short, speak upon literary and scientific subjects as a MASTER."³⁰

A Return to Tradition

These longstanding traditions of the Master as a provider of instruction and of the Lodge as a setting for the pursuit of Light and wisdom are experiencing something of a resurgence in recent years. Although during the twentieth century it

was not uncommon for the Master to be re-conceptualized as a corporate "chief executive" who was by definition too busy to deal with the task of educating his brethren, this model went against the grain of Calcott's Charge to the Master and resulted in the denigration and neglect of Masonic education within the majority of lodges.

Today, lodges wishing to return to the traditional design of the Craft may rely upon the symbolism associated with the Master's office—namely, the emblem of the Square and his identification with the rising Sun—to restore the educational mandate of the Master and to *re-orient* the instructional activities of the Lodge. The Square is used "to bring rude matter into form."³¹ The Apprentice Mason, symbolized by the Rough Ashlar, is brought to the Master to receive knowledge. In relative darkness, he beholds the Light of the symbolic Sun through the medium of the Master, and hears his words of luminous instruction. This pedagogical relationship lies at the heart of the Masonic tradition. The Master will be most effective in this role if he commits himself to an ongoing exploration of the symbolism and teachings of Craft Freemasonry. As Albert G. Mackey sagely observed in the 1865 edition of his *Text Book on Masonic Jurisprudence*:

An educated man, however well skilled in general literature and science, will make an incompetent Master of a Lodge, if he does not devote his attention to the peculiar science of our Order. [. . .] It is evident that a successful teacher—and the Master is, in an emphatic sense, a teacher—must qualify himself by a diligent investigation of these symbols and allegories—the myths and legends of Freemasonry—their mystical application, and the whole design of the Institution in this, its most important feature, must constitute his study.³²

Notes

- 1 Halliwell M s, lines 31–46, with author's translation.
- 2 Cooke M s, fol. 18, line 4.
- 3 Carmick M s., folio 6, lines 16–24.
- 4 James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons, Containing the History, Charges, Regulations, &c. of that Most Antient and Right Worshipful Fraternity* (London: William Hunter, 1723), 51.
- 5 James Anderson, *The New Book of Constitutions of the ... Free and Accepted Masons* (London: Cæsar Ward & Richard Chandler, 1738), 145; Laurence Dermott, *Ahiman Rezon* (London: James Bedford, 1756), 28.
- 6 [Francis Drake], *A Speech Deliver'd to the Worshipful and Ancient Society of Free and Accepted Masons* (York: Thomas Gent, [1727]), 15.
- 7 Edward Oakley, *A Speech Deliver'd To the Worshipful Society Of Free and Accepted Masons*. In [Francis Drake], *A Speech Deliver'd ... on St. John's Day, December the 27th, 1726* (London, 1729), 32–33.
- 8 C.D. Rotch, *History of the Lodge of Friendship No. 6* (London: W.J. Parrett, 1947), 36.
- 9 Rotch, *History*, 47, 49, 50, 64.
- 10 Wellins Calcott, *A Candid Disquisition of the Principles and Practices of the Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons* (London: James Dixwell, 1769), 157–59.
- 11 Calcott, *A Candid Disquisition*, 157–58.
- 12 διὰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ τῶν θείων διακόσμων καὶ τῶν μερικωτέρων δυνάμεων τὰς μὲν ὀρθὰς γωνίας εἰς τοὺς ἀχράντους ἀναπέμπουσιν ὡς τῆς ἀκλίτου προνοίας τῶν δευτέρων αἰτίους—τὸ γὰρ ὀρθὸν καὶ τὸ ἀκλινὲς πρὸς τὰ χεῖρονα καὶ ἄτρεπτον ἐκείνοις προσήκει τοῖς θείοις. Gottfried Friedlein (ed.), *Procli Diadochi in Primum Euclidis Elementorum Librum Commentarii* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1873), 131.17–22.
- 13 τελειότητος ἄρα καὶ ἀκλινοῦς ἐνεργείας καὶ ὅρου νοεροῦ καὶ πέρατος καὶ τῶν τούτοις ὁμοίων εἰκόνα θησόμεθα τὴν ὀρθότητα τῶν εὐθυγράμμων γωνιῶν. Friedlein, *Procli Diadochi in Primum Euclidis*, 134.2–4.
- 14 Calcott, *A Candid Disquisition*, 159.
- 15 Anon., *The Grand Mystery of the Free-Masons Discover'd* (London: T. Payne, 1724), 8; Prichard, *Masonry Dissected*, 15.
- 16 Prichard, *Masonry Dissected*, 14.
- 17 The Fixed Lights are described in John Coustos' confessions dated March, 21, 1743, and June 21, 1744. S. Vatcher, "John Coustos and the Portuguese Inquisition." *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 81(1968): 49, 71.
- 18 For a typical treatment of this symbolism, see H.L. Haywood, *Symbolical Masonry: An Interpretation of the Three Degrees* (Washington, D.C.: Masonic Service Association, 1923), 152. For a valuable history of this symbol, see Alex Horne, *Sources of Masonic Symbolism* (Richmond, Va.: Macoy, 1981), 42–46.
- 19 Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work* (Shepperton, UK: Lewis Masonic, 1987), 170–71.
- 20 Dyer, *William Preston and His Work*, 173–74.
- 21 T.O. Haunch, "English Craft Certificates." *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 82(1969), 182.
- 22 American Antiquarian Society catalog record #520967.
- 23 Wellins Calcott, *A Candid Disquisition* (Boston: Wiliam M'Alpine, 1772), 157–59.
- 24 See Wallace McLeod, "Introduction." In Wellins Calcott, *A Candid Disquisition* (Bloomington, IL: The Masonic Book Club, 1989), 15–16.
- 25 Thaddeus Mason Harris, *Constitutions of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons: Containing their History, Charges, Addresses, &c.* (Worcester, Ma.: Isaiah Thomas, 1792), 184–85.
- 26 *The Maryland Ahiman Rezon* (Baltimore: W. Pechin, 1797), 195–96; Frederick Dalcho, *An Ahiman Rezon, for the Use of the Grand Lodge of South-Carolina, Ancient York-Masons* (Charleston, S.C.: Marchant, Willington, & Co, 1807), 160–61; *The Ahiman Rezon: Containing a View of the History and Polity of Free Masonry: Together with the Rules and Regulations of the Grand Lodge and of the Grand Holy Royal Arch Chapter of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, 1825), 186–88.
- 27 Thomas Smith Webb, *The Freemason's Monitor: Or Illustrations of Masonry: in Two Parts* (Salem, Mass.: Cushing & Appleton, 1818), 101–103; J.L. Cross, *The True Masonic Chart, or Hieroglyphic Monitor* (New Haven, Conn.: Flagg & Gray, 1819), 67–68.
- 28 Anon., *The Principles and Practice of the Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons* ([London], 1786), 135–37; William Hutchinson, *The Spirit of Masonry in Moral and Elucidatory Lectures*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, England: F. Jollie, 1795), 198–99.
- 29 Dalcho, *An Ahiman Rezon*, 44.
- 30 Frederick Dalcho, *An Ahiman Rezon*, 2nd ed. (Charleston, S.C.: C.C. Sebring & E. Thayer, 1822), 16.
- 31 Dyer, *William Preston and His Work*, 199.
- 32 Albert G. Mackey, *A Text Book of Masonic Jurisprudence* (New York: Macoy & Sickels, 1865), 363.