

Othello Lodge No.5670

Continuing Masonic Education Course

Volume One

Prepared by

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† Updated on 11 March 2016
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Sadly the author of this excellent educational tool W. Bro Duncan Moore
passed to the Grand Lodge Above in February 2013.
His wise words remain as part of the District of Cyprus Masonic Mentoring
Programme in his memory.

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Introduction

†It is now several years since the District of Cyprus introduced the District Education Scheme later renamed the District Mentoring Programme (DMP) whereby every Craft Lodge appoints a Lodge Mentor, with a view to passing on information from the excellent set of factsheets and other materials which accompany the scheme to Entered Apprentices, Fellowcrafts and Master Masons. When Degrees are being worked which some brethren have yet to attain, the Lodge Mentor can retire with those brethren and try to give them instruction by seeing what they have learnt about the Degree or Degrees which they have taken and introducing Masonic topics for discussion.

My experience in both Othello and Phoenix Lodges is that these sessions prove useful to new and newish Masons. In addition to the Lodge Mentor there are also the Candidate's Personal Mentor who should try to answer their questions and generally guide them towards sources of further information. The Lodge Mentor and Authorised Master Masons have access to the District website and also to the District Grand Mentor to acquire that information, either from what has already been produced and is on the website or from external sources.' †

Fine, but should it end there? A brother takes his Third Degree, receives the final set of factsheets and then what? There are further leaflets available on the Royal Arch (aka the Chapter), on the Mark and Royal Ark Mariners and on the Rose Croix. But before considering other Degrees, excellent though these undoubtedly are, is there nothing more to be learnt about the Craft? The answer is yes, a considerable amount.

There is a danger here that our brother, with his final set of factsheets, will find himself cast before long on to the floor of his lodge as an officer climbing up the ladder. Before he knows where he is he will be hurtling towards the Chair and finding himself too busy with ritual to continue to make that 'daily advancement in Masonic knowledge'. Now we all know that ritual is pivotal to Masonry, but so is the understanding of it and what it is trying to teach us. Many people decry the Scottish Rite Lodges on the continent of Europe for reading, rather than learning their ritual. The flip side of that though is that they are expected to read it because that's the way they do it and they are also expected to understand what lies behind it. When I was a Senior Warden in France I was obliged to set various topics of a quite complex spiritual nature for Fellowcrafts to write essays on. When the brother concerned presented himself to take his Third Degree (or as the Scottish Rite terms it 'to apply for an increase in wages'), he was obliged to sit in the Lodge and read his essay to the assembled brethren who would comment on it and decide on his fitness for promotion.

So it is with this objective of promoting understanding of Craft Masonry that I have prepared this short course. The miracles of modern technology will allow it to be transmitted to most brethren by email and stored on a brother's hard disk for future reference.

Why I became a Freemason and why I stay one

Having spent most of my adult life in Freemasonry it is now difficult to imagine what that life would have been like without it. Each of us has a different Masonic journey and you will have your own story to tell but why me and why you ?

Why me ?

For a start I have always been a 'joiner'. I came into Freemasonry at the age of 24, which is young for these days, when the average age of initiation is well in the forties, and it was then, back in 1971 when I first put on an apron. Before that time I had been involved in various youth organisations, church groups etc., so because I knew Masonry to be a 'good' organisation, I felt I wanted to join it.

My father wasn't a Mason. He was a total workaholic and his life revolved round his small motor business and his home. It wouldn't have been his cup of tea either because he wasn't a socialiser, but he didn't really discourage me. Both his father and father-in-law were very active Freemasons, the latter quite a senior one, and they wanted him to join but – well we always want to be different from our parents, don't we ?

Both my grandfathers were dead and gone by the time I came of lodge-joining age, although I am sure they would both be delighted if they could see the amount of pleasure and satisfaction I have derived from my Masonic membership.

Why you ?

Well only you can answer that but I will guess that perhaps you had a friend or friends who were Masons and recommended it to you or maybe you were a 'Lewis' (the uninitiated son of a Mason) or had an uncle or cousin who was a member. I had a friend and I approached him because that was the way you did it in those days – our transatlantic brethren had not yet started putting stickers on their car bumpers (or fenders) saying '*If U want to be 1 ask 1*'. No, the potential candidate had to make the approach, I did so and my friend was very receptive – and then he died. I knew another Mason, a rather fearsome character who didn't suffer fools gladly, and eventually I plucked up the courage to ask him. He gave me a withering look and said 'Are you prepared to wait two years ?'. I said I was and was initiated twelve months later. The rest as they say is history. Something impelled me to want to join Masonry at a time when I should have been more interested in nightclubs, and I'm glad it did.

Of course it's not for everyone. There were the guys who thought if they joined the Masons they'd be running the factory in six months' time. There were the ones who thought they would make so many contacts they would double the turnover of their business. They joined for the wrong reasons; I'm sorry they wasted their time. There were the ones who left disenchanting when

the novelty wore off. That goes back to what I said about being a 'joiner' – an 'organisation person'. I bet they didn't stick with anything else either.

Of course, there were also genuine leavers, who went because of pressure of business or family commitments. We look forward to welcoming them back.

Trends in Masonic membership

Masonic historians often wonder why there was an exponential growth in Masonic membership right after the First World War. It really was phenomenal. It doesn't seem to have happened in Cyprus because after St. George's Lodge was consecrated in 1906 there was nothing (as far as I am aware) until Othello came along in 1938 (Lord Kitchener was in Egypt in those days). But in the rest of the English Constitution somewhere around 2000 lodges were founded between 1919 and 1939. Sadly many of these are now folding because it's no longer fashionable to be a 'joiner'.

If we think about what caused this growth between the world wars it is difficult to pin it down to any one factor. Some say that men missed the camaraderie of the wartime trenches and so sought male company. Masonry in England has always been a big thing in the Police Service because Police Officers have to be careful with whom they associate socially and in Masonry they should be on reasonable safe ground. Because of certain, largely unfounded, accusations made in the 1980s some Chief Constables are no longer keen to encourage their officers to become Masons and some actively discourage it. In certain large companies it was the 'in thing' to be in Masonry; that led to allegations from some disaffected employees that you had to be a mason to get on. I very much doubt if this was really so anywhere but I do think British companies were much more efficiently run in those days before political correctness caused some appointments to be made for the wrong reasons.

But really we don't know the reason for that massive upsurge then and the circumstances of that boom period are unlikely to be repeated, so that today we have to look at other means of recruitment and retention. If such a thing is possible we probably got too many members and formed too many lodges in that period. In 1949 the then Provincial Grand Master of Cheshire referred to the growth period as 'an unseemly scramble' to join Masonry. He must have been glad that it was only partially repeated in the years after World War II.

Nowadays Cyprus seems to be bucking the trend again. Whereas the Grand Lodge Communications make depressing reading when we see lodges in England returning their warrants either to disband completely or to amalgamate with one or more other small lodges to 'put off the evil day'. In Cyprus every lodge is getting candidates and we are even consecrating new ones. Long may that continue from our point of view.

So why do we keep doing it ?

Just as we can't explain what happened in England in the 20s and 30s so it is difficult to understand why Cyprus should be having a boom time at the moment. Not everyone will stay with Masonry, of course although I think we probably have a lower drop-out rate than other places. There is a lot to Masonry and there are always new things to stimulate our interest. Whether your

particular forté is ritual, charity, organising social events, historical research or whatever. The enjoyment derived is of course proportionate to the effort put in. Bro Churchill said 'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat' and Masonry can be hard work but there is immense satisfaction to be derived from it – not just in terms of promotions, although it is nice when they come, but from the knowledge of a job well done, a piece of ritual well-delivered, a decent contribution made to one of the local charities, a well-run social which has given the lodge a boost to its funds and, more importantly, has improved the social bond between the brethren and their wives. I get a kick out of research and I recently had the pleasure of finding another St.George's Lodge which existed in Larnaca from 1891 until 1904 when it folded, and the remaining brethren decided to start again with the present St.George's Lodge, consecrated in Nicosia in 1906.

All these sorts of things are there for everyone in Masonry if they just take the trouble to achieve them. Most of all there is friendship, like nowhere else. I don't deny that amongst ourselves we have our differences from time to time but by a positive mental attitude to what we are trying to achieve in Masonry we can overcome these and we stay in the movement for just that reason.

The Landmarks of Freemasonry

At his installation, every Master-Elect is told that he should be '*well-skilled in the Ancient Charges, Regulations and Landmarks of the Order*'. He is about to have the Ancient Charges and Regulations read to him by the Secretary (or a précis of them because there is a lot more to the Ancient Charges but that must be the subject of another essay), but what of the Landmarks ? In ordinary English usage the term 'landmark' means something by which we can find something else. For instance if I tell you that such and such an address is near a certain church or restaurant then that church or restaurant becomes a landmark by which you will find what you are looking for.

In Masonry the word means something rather different. They are not written down. Listing them gets us on to controversial ground for a number of reasons. In that respect they are similar to the Conventions of the British Parliament, described by Bagehot as '*not enshrined in Common Law or Statute but hardly less sacred*', which include things like the Prime Minister must be a member of the House of Commons (the last one to sit in the House of Lords was the Marquis of Salisbury in 1902). These are rigorously adhered to and so are our Landmarks. But what are they ?

The late Bro. Harry Carr describes the Landmarks in his book *The Freemason at Work* as '*principles that have existed from time immemorial and without which Freemasonry would not be Freemasonry*'. In this respect the Landmarks are even more important than the parliamentary conventions mentioned above; Parliament would still be Parliament if the Prime Minister did not sit in the House of Commons, it would just make the task of the government more difficult. Carr makes some suggestions of his own as to what the Landmarks might be:

1. Belief in a Supreme Being
2. That the VSL should always be open when the Lodge is at labour
3. That a Mason should be male, free born and of mature age
4. That he owes allegiance to his head of state and to the Craft
5. That he believes in the immortality of the soul

You won't find this list, or any other, in your Book of Constitutions we are just presumed to know what the Landmarks are. Some Grand Lodges have tried to list their Landmarks and have found themselves criticised, mainly because what they are claiming to be a landmark has not existed from time immemorial. So what is time immemorial ?

In law, time immemorial is deemed to be the first year of the reign of the English King, Richard 1 – who of course had more than a passing acquaintance with Cyprus – which was 1189 AD. Of course there is nobody around who remembers that far back now and so a customary right can be established if a thing has been done for so long that nobody can point to a time in living memory when it wasn't done. This was successfully established by some fishermen in Essex who acquired a prescriptive right to dry their fishing nets on a certain beach because nobody could remember them not doing it.

In Masonic terms, time immemorial is 1717 when four pre-existing London lodges came together at the Goose and Gridiron tavern in St. Paul's Churchyard in London to form the Premier Grand Lodge of England, and indeed of the

world. We know there was Masonry in existence before that time but we don't know much about it. From 1717 we have recorded history and so are on safer ground.

So when an American Grand Lodge tried to claim as a Landmark 'the power to make a Mason on sight', the English response was to say this right did not exist in 1717 and so it cannot be a Landmark. Though I can't see the point of bringing someone, however busy he is, into Masonry without a ceremony (and this is what this is), it has been claimed that US President Theodore Roosevelt was made a Mason in this way.

The great American Masonic author, Albert Mackey, claimed as many as 25 Landmarks but a lot of these either a) had not existed since time immemorial or b) did not fit in to the definition of a Landmark as something without which Masonry would not be Masonry. A couple of examples will suffice: Mackey claims the government of a lodge by a Master and two Wardens to be a Landmark. There was a time, however when lodges only had one Warden. He also cites the tri-gradal system of degrees but there is no evidence of the Third Degree being worked until around 1725.

Somebody else suggested that our symbolism is a Landmark. Some of our symbols did not exist in 1717, notably the Skirret which only came in after the Union of 1813 and was probably acquired from the Order of Free Gardeners. But also symbols are incidental and are open to different interpretations. Look at the chequered pavement on the floor of our lodges. Some will draw a parallel with the yin-yang principle of the Ancient Chinese and say that it represents the dualities of our chequered existence – light and darkness, good and bad, joy and sorrow etc. Others will draw a simple historical line back to the first tabernacle erected by Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel in the Wilderness of Sinai, which had a chequered floor, as did the Sanctum Sanctorum of King Solomon's Temple. Still others will claim that proves a positive link between Freemasonry and the Knights Templar, whose Beauceant standard was black and white in equal proportions.

No, symbols are tools to teach moral lessons, not landmarks.

So, to sum up, nobody knows what the Landmarks really are, where they came from or who invented them but everyone seems to know when they have been infringed, as you will see in the next section. If I may I would like to add something of my own which I consider a Landmark and that is our refusal to allow discussion of religion or politics in lodge. That is in the Book of Constitutions but I believe it to be a Landmark because we have never permitted such discussions and, if we did, Masonry would not be Masonry as we know it.

What is recognised and what is not

We looked in the last section at Landmarks and concluded that everyone is aware (or thinks they are) when Landmarks have been infringed, although nobody really knows what they are.

Some Grand Lodges around the world are deemed to be irregular by the United Grand Lodge of England, as a result of which we may not visit them or allow their members to visit us. This is obviously sad and one might be tempted to reflect 'aren't we all supposed to be kicking at the same goal of doing good in

the world and improving ourselves in moral terms ?' Well this it true and every Grand Lodge has the right to regulate its own affairs but there have to be limits.

I once spent a very pleasant day in Normandy with members of the Grand Orient of France. They were very nice people who showed my son and grandson and I great hospitality and kindness. But I can't sit in lodge with them, for very good reasons.

The Grand Orient of France had existed since 1773 and survived the French Revolution, the 'Terror' and the Napoleonic era always maintaining good relations with England. Then in 1877, for reasons best known to themselves, they decided to remove the requirement for a belief in a Supreme Being from their Constitution. This brought them into conflict with most Grand Lodges in the world and they were de-recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England. Since that time matters have got worse because they discuss political issues in their meetings such as social security and whether or not Corsica should have independence. This has only made them even more irregular.

There are two other obediences in France that we cannot touch either. The Grande Loge de France, which would be regular but it permits inter-visiting with the Grand Orient, and the Droit-Humaine (Human Right) or L'Ordre Maçonique Mixte which has men and women meeting together and so is obviously irregular.

The only French Grand Lodge that is regular is the Grande Loge Nationale Française, which was established in 1913 and meets the recognised criteria for recognition from London.

Belgium is an interesting country with a busy Masonic history. Before it was established as an independent kingdom in 1830, English lodges had existed there since 1765. In 1786, when Belgium was part of the Austrian Netherlands, the Emperor of Austria ordered the closure of all Masonic lodges in his domains and so there was no Masonry until 1795, by which time the area was under French control and the Grand Orient started to warrant lodges again. The Belgian Grand Orient came into existence but eventually strayed in the same way as the Grand Orient of France with political and anti-clerical activity and eventually removing the Volume of the Sacred Law.

In 1959 a group of Belgian Masons got together and decided they wanted to meet the principles for English recognition, which was granted. Sadly the then Grand Master stumbled back into Grand Orient practices and, in 1979, that recognition was withdrawn. Since then a Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium has been established which is once again in accordance with English practices, as is their Royal Arch and their Mark (which comes directly under England) but not their Rose Croix, which remains closed to us.

Please don't run away with the idea that lack of recognition means that people don't talk to each other. Belgium, as I've said, is an interesting country with lodges working in French, Flemish, English and German. I belong to a lodge of the RER (Rectified Scottish Rite) in Ostend and we meet in the one Masonic Temple that exists in that town. My good friend Willy, our barman and caterer, is a member of the Grand Orient and female lodges, mixed lodges, as well as regular lodges all meet in that same building.

The situation in Italy is also confusing. The largest obedience there is the Grand Orient of Italy but that is no longer recognised. Masonry has been in Italy since early in the 18th century and indeed the English Grand Lodge appointed Provincial Grand Masters for Italy and for Piedmont. Eventually, after the unification of the country, Bro Garibaldi co-ordinated Masonic activity under the Grand Orient in 1873.

Freemasonry was suppressed under Mussolini and when World War 2 was over the situation became a little confused. By the 1980's the world had become aware of an organisation called Propaganda Due (P2), which was engaged in criminal activities. As soon as Grand Lodge in London heard of it they made it quite clear that this organisation might be calling itself a Masonic lodge but it was not acknowledged as such. They could have called themselves the P2 Brownie Pack but they would not have been recognised by the world's Brownie authorities either. The Grand Orient of Italy also distanced itself from P2.

Then, because of certain complained of irregularities, our Grand Lodge withdrew recognition from the Grand Orient and recognised the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy in 1993. This has absorbed many members and lodges from the Grand Orient but the latter remains the larger obedience. Sadly, though, the Grand Orient of Italy has now wandered a little more from the path and has had dealings with the Grand Orient of France, so that its re-recognition now seems unlikely.

Nearer home, Greece also has a long Masonic history. The first lodge was established on Corfu in 1809 by the (then recognized) Grand Orient of France after application by Count Dionyssios de Roma, whose portrait hangs on the wall of the Masonic Hall in Jerusalem Street, Limassol. In 1815 the Ionian Islands became a British Protectorate and an English lodge was formed there in 1837, which lasted until 1894. In 1861 Star of the East Lodge was formed on Zakynthos, which is of course still in existence.

In 1864 the Ionian Islands were returned to Greece and eight lodges throughout Greece formed a Province of the Grand Orient of Italy in 1866, two years later forming the Grand Orient of Greece. After the Second World War this was reconstituted as the Grand Lodge of Greece. Sadly recognition of this body by England was withdrawn in 1993 in what was a very painful period for Cyprus and recognition was granted to the National Grand Lodge of Greece. This situation was reversed by England (but not by Scotland and Ireland) in the early years of this century and so the Grand Lodge of Greece is again recognised by London.

There is also a body called the Grand Lodge of Cyprus, which is now recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England, and so inter-visiting is allowable.

As you can see inter Grand Lodge relationships can be tricky which is why our Grand Lodge created the office of Grand Chancellor quite recently. RW Bro Alan Englefield, the current holder of that office, is a regular visitor to Cyprus.

So the point is if you are travelling abroad don't take chances and leave yourself open to Masonic censure. Check with Grand Lodge, via our District Grand Secretary, that Masonry in the country you are about to visit is regular.

The Influence of Plato on Freemasonry

The actual sources of our ritual is a subject for another paper but perhaps we should look behind the words and ask 'where did the idea come from?'. The idea that is of a system of morality to be later 'veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'.

Many concepts in Craft Masonry originally appeared in Plato's work or that of other ancient philosophers. The virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice, the concept of seven liberal arts and sciences and the four elements of the Universe are examples. His work places great stress on the virtues, which we will look at in the next section.

What may be a little puzzling is that something having its formal roots in eighteenth-century England should be based on the philosophy of pre-Christian Greece.

This is a very big subject, which we can only really pay lip service to here but let's start with a brief analysis.

Plato was born in around 428 BC. He lived for around eighty years – a long life for those days – during which he travelled widely. He was a big man originally named Aristocles after his grandfather but dubbed 'Platon' (meaning 'broad') by his wrestling coach.

Plato was originally a student of Pythagorus, who was born in around 580BC, and may well have studied in the community Pythagorus set up at Crotona in Italy. When he returned to Athens he set up his Academy, which taught mathematics and the physical sciences.

But the greatest influence on Plato's philosophy was undoubtedly Socrates who was an Athenian born in 469 BC. It has been suggested that he followed his father's trade of stonemasonry and that he may have sculpted the statue of the Three Graces, which stood near the Acropolis in ancient times. Socrates' brand of philosophy is in dialogue form with him asking the questions and encouraging others to search their hearts for the appropriate answer. Socrates never wrote anything down and was eventually accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and forced to commit suicide by drinking hemlock. He could have avoided this by bribing his guards but as a man of principle (and also a man of seventy who considered he had lived a long life and had no fear of death) he refused to do so.

Plato set out Socrates' thoughts in much of his work, particularly in his later work in things like *The Republic*, *The Timaeus* and *The Symposium*. Socrates had very firm views on many things. He mocked men who spent exorbitant fees on tutors and trainers for their sons, and repeatedly ventured the idea that good character is a gift from the gods. He believed the best way for people to live was to focus on self-development rather than the pursuit of material wealth. He always invited others to try to concentrate more on friendships and a sense of true community because he felt this was the best way for people to grow together as a populace.

So here we have character-building and the sharing of a community (or lodge) which is very much at the root of modern Freemasonry. To show what I mean by

character-building look at the analysis of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* by Bro. Steven B. Vitale:

The Cave, which is actually an Allegory referring to Human Nature begins by describing a Dark scene. A group of people have lived in a deep cave since birth, never seeing the Light of Day. These people are bound so that they cannot look to either side or behind them, but only straight ahead. Behind them is a partial wall, and behind the wall is a Fire. On top of the wall are various statues, which are manipulated by another group of unseen people, lying out of sight behind the partial wall. Because of the Fire, the statues cast shadows across the wall that the prisoners are facing. The prisoners watch the stories that these shadows play out, and because these shadows are all they ever get to see, they believe them to be the most real things in the world. When they talk to one another about "men", "women", "trees" or "horses", they are referring to these shadows. One day a prisoner finds that he is freed from his bonds, and although he is scared he forces himself to turn around and see what is behind him. I consider this stage of the simile to correspond with the Masonic Virtue of Faith. Faith is what the Masonic candidate must have when he first knocks on the door of the Lodge without knowing what lies ahead of him.

After an initial period of pain and confusion because of direct exposure of his eyes to the Light of the Fire, the prisoner realizes that what he sees now are things more real than the shadows he has always taken for reality. He understands now how the Fire and the statues together cause the shadows, which are copies of these more real things. He has made contact with real things but as he walks past the Fire and towards the Cave entrance he is not aware that there are things of greater reality, a world beyond his cave. I consider this stage to correspond with the Masonic Virtue of Hope. Hope that the Fellow Craft who has witnessed some of the truths and lessons of Freemasonry will persevere and continue his path towards the East or the "Light".

Next the prisoner forces himself to walk past the Fire and upwards towards the Greater Light at the mouth of the Cave. At first he is so dazzled by the Light up there that he can only look at the shadows cast by the Sun on the floor, than at the reflections in the water, then finally at the real objects – real trees, flowers and so on. He sees that these things are even more real than the statues were, and that those were only copies of these. He has now reached the cognitive stage of thought. Plato comments that it is the goal of Education to drag every Man as far out of the Cave as possible. "Education should not aim at putting knowledge into the Soul, but at turning the Soul toward right desires". Once the prisoner has achieved Understanding he turns away from the Light to return to the Shadows to help the other prisoners. This in my opinion corresponds to the Masonic Virtue of Charity. Charity is what the Master Mason shows when he turns to help those behind him find their own path towards the Light.

Vitale goes on to point to the following parallels between the *Allegory of the Cave* and Freemasonry:

In this Allegory Plato uses the Cave to symbolize the Human Condition. If you will note the number three figures greatly in both the Allegory and Freemasonry. There are three stages to the Cave, which correlate to the three different worlds Plato speaks of which I propose relate to our Three Degrees. The first stage is

the lowest level of the cave where the people are imprisoned not so much by chains but by the Shadows they believe to be reality which entrances them. What do these Shadows symbolize to me but our uncontrolled lusts, passions and desires? Although I was not sure what I was looking for I think at the time I had Faith/Hope that I would find something within Masonry to answer my questions. I had Faith that there was something more to me and my Life so I took a chance and walked into this very Lodge room very nervous and alone in order to be initiated.

I believe the First Degree is meant to be a Paradigm shift in our perception of ourselves and our reality. Like the Prisoner who is freed and turns around to see what is there I believe the 1st Degree initiation process is supposed to help "wake you up". It is meant to help you break free from the chains of external forces that may be driving your life and cause you to turn around and face the "Light".

In the Allegory when the freed prisoner turns around he sees a Lesser Light symbolized by the Fire, which he then perceives as his new reality. In Freemasonry the three lesser lights are the Sun, the Moon and the Worshipful Master. As the Sun rules the day and the Moon governs the night so should the Worshipful Master rule and govern the Lodge. I interpret that statement as follows: the Sun represents Man's passionate, creative, masculine, outgoing side. The Moon represents Man's intellectual, compassionate and empathic side. As the Master of the Lodge (which represents you) you are to master both sides of your mind before you can achieve true Enlightenment. So as the freed prisoner recognizes and understands what the lesser light means he is then able to look up, see the greater Light at the mouth of the tunnel and walk towards it. Plato says "The state of the prisoner is merely "opinion" which can be transformed into knowledge by a gradual critical process leading from the concrete to the ideal". In Plato's dialogue his mentor Socrates specifically references the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences as the method of Education that will help a Man become a Philosopher or Seeker of Enlightenment. The 2nd Degree of Freemasonry encourages the Fellow Craft to expand his mind by using the Seven Liberal Arts while he works in the "Middle Chamber". It is through this expansion of the Mind that we as Human Being can begin to perceive that there is more to this Reality than what we see with our Eyes. The ardent Mason will recall that the Fellow Craft Tracing Board used in the 2nd Degree shows the Mason walking up a stairway that is divided into sections of 3, 5 and 7. These steps that are divided into sections of 3 (three worlds), 5 (five senses that we use to perceive the physical world) and 7 (seven liberal arts that allow us to see Plato's Intelligible World of High Ideas) leads to the Master Mason's Sanctum Sanctorum. Plato compares this upward path or process to Jacobs Ladder which some of you will note also figures prominently in our EA tracing boards. Jacobs Ladder symbolizes a way for Man to access Heaven or the Divine. In our Tracing Board I interpret this to mean that the Masonic way or the way to the East is a Divine path.

In the Allegory the freed prisoner having seen and understood the implications of the Lesser Lights is now able to walk towards the greater Light. In Freemasonry the three great Lights are the Holy Bible (or Book of Sacred Law), Square and Compasses. Plato continually makes reference to the prisoner's journey from the sensible or physical world to that of the intelligible or world of

ideas. Always he is guided by the Light, which he sees with his eyes but is not a part of either world. Plato uses this Great Light to represent his "Form of the Good" or Divine Unchanging Truths which in the case of the great lights of Freemasonry help rule and guide us, help us square our actions and circumscribe our passions in due bounds. I interpret the three great Lights of Masonry the way Plato discusses Light in the Allegory. Its purpose and that of Education is not to deposit knowledge into the soul but rather to turn the soul towards right living. So Freemasonry looks to point us towards the East which I would say represents Plato's world of Divine unchanging truths. What path we take and the resulting experiences/ wisdom we obtain will be up to us and the rational decisions we make.

To sum up then, Vitale has identified several concepts, which are familiar to us. He is saying that the progress through the three degrees represents acquiring the virtues of faith, hope and charity and passing from the world of materialism into the spiritual world, through education and enlightenment. He is also talking about the concepts of Body (First Degree), Soul (Second Degree) and Spirit (Third Degree) and of the relation of them to the Three Lesser Lights – the Sun, the Moon and the Master of the Lodge.

You may recall that, at the beginning of this essay I asked why something which came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century should be influenced by the philosophy of the ancient Greeks ? Plato had a pupil, a brilliant one called Aristotle who lived from 384 BC to 322 BC and was himself the tutor of Alexander the Great. His approach differed from Plato's in that he tended to interpret things in terms of the biological sciences whereas Plato looked at them by the use of mathematics. An example of this is the concept of the four elements – earth, fire, water and air. Plato represents these as being built of triangles and if you are in the Chapter you should be familiar with the five regular Platonic bodies and that is what these are – the fifth one being the sphere of the universe. Aristotle, on the other hand, explains them as being based on qualities perceived by the senses: these four substances were defined as various combinations of 'hot', 'cold', 'wet' and 'dry'.

In the Middle Ages, Aristotle's philosophy was studied at European Universities and people like St. Thomas Aquinas tried to reconcile it with Christianity. Plato's work arrived somewhat later with the Renaissance of the fifteenth century via people like Cosimo de Medici and Marcilio Ficino and great interest was stimulated in Platonic philosophy. At university young men studied the Trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy) prior to going on to study theology, law or medicine.

There had also been Arabic influence. We can see this from the numbering system we use and also from Arabic words which have come into astronomy: *azimuth, zenith, nadir*, into mathematics: *algebra, cipher, zero* and into alchemy: *alcohol, alkali, alembic, realgar*. This came into, and influenced, the system of education in Europe via the Moors of Spain.

Given all these factors: the rise of interest in Platonism, the study of the liberal arts and sciences and the concept of the five regular Platonic Bodies, it is hardly surprising that our forebears should have integrated that philosophy with the practical features of their operative predecessors.

Masonic Virtues

Virtues could be described as aiming points or targets to which we, as Freemasons, should seek to attain. We are after all in a quest to become better men and, whilst we are all fallible, erring mortals, that does not stop us trying to do so.

In the lecture on the First Degree Tracing Board, we are taught that the tassels at the four corners of the lodge represent the cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice. Temperance means moderation and as Socrates said 'Moderation is best' or, if you like, moderation in all things. Fortitude is a quality consistently called for in our journey through the Three Degrees and indeed in life itself. We are urged to be prudent in all things and even when we are reminded of our duty to practice benevolence we are taught that 'A Mason's charity should know no bounds, save those of prudence'. Justice implies fair dealing, dropping a tear of sympathy for the failings of a brother and honesty within and without the Craft.

These virtues may well be cardinal, but we come across other virtues, which are equally important.

In the last section we looked at faith, hope and charity, which are symbolized on some First Degree tracing boards by the VSL denoting faith, an anchor representing hope and a woman or perhaps a woman and child personifying our need to support those less fortunate than ourselves, in other words, charity. These are, of course, Christian virtues and are sometimes called the Three Theological Virtues but they probably now have less prominence since the Craft was de-Christianized following the Union of the two Grand Lodges in 1813. But as we saw when considering Plato's influence in the last section these three virtues are inextricably linked with our three degrees: that faith which enables us to turn from darkness towards the light, the hope in salvation and belief in the after-life and finally the charity which is the hallmark of our profession.

The Grand Principles on which the order is founded are brotherly love, relief and truth. These are fairly self-explanatory: we consider all men equal and we should protect our Masonic brethren and solicit their welfare. Relief means charity, practised by Freemasonry since its inception. Truth means not only telling the truth but fair dealing with our brethren and with the world outside.

The First Tracing Board Lecture ends with the words '*The characteristics of a good Freemason are virtue, honour and mercy and may they ever be found in a Freemasons breast*'.

This implies that virtue is itself a virtue and, indeed, many of the qualities identified above overlap to some extent. Honour can be equated with justice and truth. Mercy also covers charity and relief.

Why Should We Join the Royal Arch ?

Royal Arch Masonry (or the Chapter as it is more popularly known) has been around since early in the eighteenth century and made its appearance not long after the Third Degree. For the first ten or twelve years of the Premier Grand Lodge there were only two degrees and the highest stage that could be reached was that of Fellowcraft.

As we all know, the story of Hiram Abif (or Abiv) is a legend. The man existed and indeed was the principle architect of King Solomon's Temple, but he was not murdered and probably returned to his native Tyre in present-day Lebanon, where he may well have died of old age.

The story about his being murdered does pre-date Grand Lodge, which was founded in 1717, so the question is not who devised the legend because that is before the time when organised Masonry as we know it existed, but rather why was it incorporated into the Third Degree in the first place ?

It has been argued that the Third Degree was produced to facilitate a losing of the genuine secrets of a Master Mason, so that they could be found again in the Royal Arch. This is a fairly convincing argument and anyone considering joining the Royal Arch might well think 'having come this far, I might as well complete the journey and discover the real secrets'. That might be one, or indeed the only, inducement necessary to prompt one to join.

But there is a lot more to the Royal Arch than that. In recent years we have given up calling the Royal Arch the 'completion' of the Third Degree and we now refer to it as 'the ultimate step'.

A Royal Arch chapter is set up somewhat differently from a Craft lodge. There are nine principal officers – three principals, two scribes, three sojourners and a janitor. The three principals (called perhaps unsurprisingly the First, Second and Third Principals) rule the chapter jointly but the First Principal (or MEZ standing for Most Excellent Zerubbabel) is a sort of first among equals. Of the two scribes, one performs the secretarial duties and the other is a sort of inner guard. The three sojourners have a role, which is explained in the degree and the janitor is just another name for the tyler. There are also other officers like the Treasurer and the DC, whose roles are not dissimilar to the Craft.

There are also differences in naming conventions: we call each other 'Companion', rather than brother. We have a 'Charter', rather than a warrant and we have 'Convocations', rather than meetings.

Every Royal Arch chapter must be attached to a Craft lodge and must bear the same number (it can have a different name). You may find that most of the members of your lodge belong to the same chapter. There is a fiction that one should not join a chapter attached to your own lodge. This we can stamp on firmly – you go where your pals are by all means.

Another load of nonsense frequently bandied about is that you shouldn't join the chapter until you have gone through the chair in the Craft. This pointless fiction dates from the time (before 1830 believe it or not) when one had to be an installed master to join the Royal Arch and it is unbelievable that some people still say it today.

No, by the time you reach the position of Junior Deacon you should have taken this ultimate and crucial step in your Masonic career.

So what else does the Chapter have to offer.? Well, it will create a new dimension in your Masonry because it shows things in a very different light, it is very rich in symbolism and it has a beautiful ritual, which these days we are encouraged to split up and give everybody a go.

Chapters meet less frequently than lodges so you would not be doubling your time commitment either.

If you want further information, speak to anyone in your lodge who is wearing a Royal Arch jewel. These come with three types of ribbon: white for ordinary companions, red for principals or past principals and tricolour for Grand and Provincial or District Grand officers.