

4th Degree Essay

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Essay Question #3: Progress.

The idea of progress and the thought that within the teaching and philosophy of Freemasonry one would find a systematic process or program for becoming the man I desired to be is my WHY for becoming a Mason. The thought that here within Masonry Lies a way that I can enter this necessary path of self-improvement and work to become better is the conception of my Masonic life.

My decision to become a Mason was the natural progression of a process that began 3 years prior when I picked up the book Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill for the 4th time in my life and for the first time I got it. I finally got that what was behind what Hill was speaking to was **NOT** Money or Wealth in the material sense (primarily) but on becoming a man who has understanding of the Order and Process of both the Natural World and the Divine. Another way of saying that the ultimate goal being the understanding of Truth and how things work, or where we as humans find ourselves.

That understanding begins with the introspection of ones self. The idea that God or the a part of the Divine resides within me and all mankind. Something Hill calls the Science of Personal Achievement and something that the Jewish Master Jesus called “entering at the narrow gate”, and we in Masonry allude to by allegory in our story of Solomon and Hiram building the Temple. This was my key. This taught me that the search for truth starts within and that the law of being is “as within so without.” That the outer is changed by the inner. And while my initial grasp for this Truth was toward a book titled such that one would assume the goal of material wealth, it started me on the Path to true Understanding and Wisdom. The idea that stuck with me was that there is ultimate truth and order, and that understanding and success comes by looking within and working within. Our 4th degree jewel suggests this to us as it rests against us. The Key is each of us individually. You are the Key, I AM, is the Key.

From this start my path led me to the writings of men such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emmet Fox, Ralph Waldo Trine, and finally through the influence of a Masonic brother, the writings of W.L. Wilmshurst. Through Wilmshurst I came to see that this philosophy labeled New Thought by Fox and others, The Science of Personal Achievement by Hill, Enlightenment by Emerson, Self Help by Samuel Smiles, and “seeking first the kingdom of God” by Jesus was a look at

the very same path. That path that is the search for Truth. And as the New Testament Master informs us “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Jn 8:32,33 NIV. Knowing even this initial truth begins to set us free. But free from what? And free to be ^{Page 2}or do what?

And so we come to a seeming contradiction. My personal quest started from a blended desire for truth but also out of selfish desire to be and to HAVE more. How is it that by focusing on ourselves and improving ourselves can we become of greater service to man? How is it that by improving ourselves, we can improve our Fraternity and our world? Isn't this the problem with our world? Focusing on Self. Isn't this what I had been led to believe by religion, that I am the problem? That I am stained with Sin? That something outside me must save me? If I am to focus on myself or the I AM of me as the solution would that not lead to a character like “Q” on Star-Trek who is all powerful but also does only for self and operates only in self interest?

The 4th Degree gives us part of that answer. Duty. While we seek the change within and we focus our effort on improving the self. We are instructed that the results of this work are not ours alone. Among our rewards are freedom, the evidence of the virtues of Masonry coming alive in our lives, the recognition of the Pillars of Strength, Beauty and Wisdom being part of our new Character. I would dare to venture in most cases this also includes a more satisfying and abundant material existence as outlined by Hill. However; our Duty mandates that we live and teach, or as we speak of in Masonry to learn and to do. To him whom more is given more is to be expected, this is true of our new understanding and existence. That begins with our families and extends to our brethren and resides truly with all mankind.

As we change within we begin to see that our desires change. As we internalize the teaching of our degrees through processes such as this course, our degree work, and our service in our lodges and Valleys, we come to see that our true happiness lies in living to our higher nature. That our true self is one with the One God and with all Mankind. We find ourselves motivated by the parts of our nature that we have focused on in our degree work, we begin to live our teaching. And we ultimately come to understand the Oneness of God and Brotherhood of Man. We understand that to be good to our Brother is to be good to ourselves, and that by being good to ourselves we cannot be ignorant of being good to our brothers. We ultimately become the fulfillment of the Golden Rule and our degrees ultimately show us what that means within the complexities of human existence. They show us the virtues that must be evident and part of our character and actions. And remind us always of our Duty and Obligation and interpret for us just what the nature of this¹ progress should be.