



Making Darkness Visible – Part 1

A look at the teachings of Walter Leslie Wilmshurst

Presented in Open Lodge to the Brethren of Oracle Lodge 1003

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by Bro. Tony Ennis

Introduction:

Worshipful Master, Brethren; tonight's lecture is partly about a personal journey, partly about inspiration I found on that journey and a call for us to not hide our light under the proverbial bushel, not to be afraid of our Masonic inheritance, and to act as beacons for other Brethren who may be drawn to us through a thirst for knowledge.

From humble beginnings and, some would say, against all odds, I have been successful in my sporting life, personal life and business life. Even in these difficult times, I have managed to avoid the serious dips that others face. I attribute my "luck" to a number of key things.

1. I constantly learn from every experience that I have and I am hungry for knowledge. I am humble enough to learn from anyone, if they have a nugget of wisdom that I can use;
2. I never tire of self improvement. Not in some cheesy, superficial, pop culture 'self help' way. But through education, experience, reading, and most of all listening to others, and applying those lessons in a *continuous series of small incremental steps*;
3. I apply myself to everything in a focused and concentrated way and I take massive action to achieve my goals, which I always set clearly in advance;
4. I focus the business of success on every part of my life and I am happy to learn from sport or through my relationships with others and apply those lessons to business or Freemasonry etc.

In a nutshell, my "good fortune" is down to hard work, long hours and application. In the words of Gary player: "*the harder I work the luckier I get*". So why am I telling you all this? What bearing does it have on a Masonic lecture?

Well I chose to explain and disclose publically, (if a tyled lodge can be called public) this personal information because Freemasonry has had a direct positive impact on my life. It is an ancient system of, amongst other things, self improvement and making good men better.

Quite often, even in Lodge, Ignorance can triumph over Wisdom. Frank open discussions about Freemasonry are shunned in many lodges and many brethren's needs are unmet. They fail to grow, except maybe weary of the lack of stimulating discussion, open debate and Masonic inquiry. I have been openly told not to discuss matters of a philosophic and esoteric nature and to stick to the orthodox history without question. But I love to explore these things... to be curious... to question.

Thankfully, being the obviously motivated sort of person that I am, I have sought out good and bad books on Freemasonry and also those kindred spirits who will discuss, "*what it's all about*", in an open manner. This has helped me grow as a person and I have benefited in many different ways from being a Freemason. There are huge correlations in modern sports psychology and business performance management with our ancient system. How did they know?

I am not satisfied to be just a Mason in name only. Whilst some might see our order as a club for the lads, boy scouts for men and I have even heard the limits of the English language stretched to a deluded breaking point, by calling our beloved order a...“a gentleman’s dining club”!

In every Lodge there are Brethren who are seeking and asking for something more than superficial, who know that the Craft was designed for wider and better ends; who are earnest seekers of Wisdom and Light and whose thirst for knowledge from the first day here has remained bright and strong. From knowing you Brethren, I know I am amongst those of a similar ilk. There are many who entered the Order in the hope of finding such things, but they are often repelled, some continue searching, many lose interest.

It is in the special interest of this worthy Mason that I direct my comments this evening.

Through my own personal Masonic investigations, I came across a man that helped make much sense of Freemasonry for me in the early days, and I want to share that with you tonight. I have read as much as I can about this man, I have sought out his lodge (Lodge of Living Stones in Leeds), visited it and the library dedicated to his memory. The Brother I refer to is ‘Walter Leslie Wilmshurst’, who wrote many books on Freemasonry. Tonight I will focus on a particular aspect and interpretation and hopefully make that relevant to today’s world.

Once in a while a person is born whose thoughts live on long after their death. Wilmshurst, who lived from 1867 to 1939, left an incredible legacy from his fifty years as a Freemason and has been a large influence in my own personal wanderings.

He was a cautious and private man, who took as his motto “*govern the lips, they are the palace doors, and the king is within*”. He thought deeply about Freemasonry and published books, which were essentially his lectures that he’d delivered to his lodge. He created private teaching materials to help his junior brethren, he held discussions in Lodge, much as we do here in Oracle and kept detailed notebooks of his thoughts. I have been a student of Wilmshurst for over five years, since I read his book ‘*The Meaning of Masonry*’. I found that book interesting but difficult to follow in its old English language style of the day. It is made up of five disparate lectures, originally given as talks in lodges, and did not seem to have been edited into a coherent narrative. Yet it was clear that Bro. Wilmshurst knew much more than he was prepared to write down.

His analysis of a deeper meaning in our ritual is based on his extensive research of worldwide mystery cults and initiation ceremonies. Tonight’s lecture is really the tip of the iceberg and if it is found to be favourable, then I will continue with my research and “*modernisation*” of his teachings. Tonight I will attempt to shine some light and make the darkness visible. I will address the first half of the 1st degree ritual from Wilmshurst’s point of view.

Freemasonry offers a system of training the soul. Whether or not you believe in the concept of a soul, the Masonic system works and improves your life. To benefit from Masonic Initiation you must be prepared to accept that you can train your soul (whatever that might be) and that if you do so you will benefit.

W.L.Wilmshurst

1. The Admission:

From the place of preparation the Candidate is led to the door of the Lodge. This he finds closed or 'tyled'. He **'meets with opposition'** and cannot gain admission, except in a prescribed way, familiar to us all here.

In other words, on turning from the world without to the world within, his first discovery is to find his way blocked by an intervening barrier. What is that barrier? What does the door of the Lodge symbolise?

Wilmshurst believed that it symbolises some obstructive element within the candidate. He is made to recognise that any opposition to his own advancement, spiritual, personal etc, comes from within himself and must be overcome by his own efforts.

The knocks are then stated to be interpreted in the light of the Scriptural direction, **"Ask and ye shall have; Seek and ye shall find; Knock and it shall be opened to you."**

This threefold direction, not only corresponds with the triple knocks, but also with the triple faculties of the Candidate himself. He should "ask" with the aspirations of his heart; he should "seek" with the intellectual activities of his mind; he should "knock" with the force of his bodily energies. He who hopes to find the Light within must devote the **whole** of his attention. This lesson is so true in our modern World, where many are guilty of employing too few of these faculties to relationships, business, civic responsibilities, to name but a few.

How true to life and to psychology is this '*symbolic opposition*' at the door of the Lodge! We all erect our mental barriers to everyday things. The habitual thought-methods, the prejudices, preconceptions and "*fixed ideas*" in which we live life in the outer world, become obstructions to the perception of things of the world within.

We create mental barriers which condense and harden, until they obscure the wider, deeper, clearer vision we might have but for our own self-created limitations. We tyle our own doors and block our own light and potential.

Those seeking to turn to the Light, to success in all aspects of life, often find themselves confronted by darkness of their own creating. It is these barriers that must be broken down by our own efforts and the force of our own persistent '*knocks*.'

All this is signified by the simple incident of the Candidate meeting with opposition at the door of the Lodge and gaining admission as the result of his own symbolic knocks.

2. The Prayer of Dedication:

The initial act of the ritual is appropriately a prayer by the assembled Brethren:

(1) That the Candidate (who has already been elected to formal membership of Freemasonry) may now become spiritually incorporated into Freemasonry, and

(2) For his endowment with an influx of wisdom and by virtue of that, will give him power to manifest the beauty of holiness.

Wilmshurst believed that the brevity and simplicity of this prayer are liable to obscure its deep implications. He believed that it is a reference to the trinity of Wisdom, Strength and Beauty of which the Candidate will hear later on, and of which it is prayed that he may become a living manifestation.

It is also not a prayer **by** the Candidate (who is required only to '*kneel and listen*'), but one for him and for the Craft itself; it is a prayer that the spiritual efficiency of the whole Fraternity may become better by his new arrival to it.

Later on, the candidate should make the prayer his own, remembering throughout his life that it was once offered over him in his darkness and helplessness on behalf of the whole Craft, and that it falls to himself to justify increasingly the prayer so solemnly made on his behalf. He has to do the work, nothing will occur if nothing is acted upon. It is a wish from the Order that he acts, not procrastinates or ignores.

Worshipful Master, I wonder how many of us have truly revisited this following our initiation, or just let it flow over us and then forget it forever as just another step in the process?

3. The Perambulation or Mystical Journeying:

Next follows the walk about the lodge. But this is preceded by an inquiry to the Candidate; "*Where does he put his trust in circumstances of danger and difficulty?*"

What are the dangers and difficulties he is about to be exposed to? In our Ceremony they are, of course, merely theoretic and symbolic. But in the Initiation Rites of the Ancient Mysteries (of which ours are a faint echo) they were extremely exacting, realistic and frightening, and put Candidates to severe tests of mental stability and moral fitness.

The journey round the Lodge is a symbolic representation of the Candidate's own life-journey in this world prior to his request for Initiation into the world within. The dangers and difficulties referred to are the issues encountered *in his own* personal life journey.

In the course of his symbolic journey he is led to the Junior Warden, who, by a particular gesture, he arouses from silence. The gesture itself is in fact a repetition of the knocks previously given at the door of the Lodge. But whereas those knocks were first addressed to inert material (the door), they are now applied to a living being (the Warden). What does this imply? Wilmshurst believed it signifies that in our efforts to turn away from the outer world and penetrate to the Light of the inner one, we not only overcome our own self-created opposition, but we awaken and stimulate into activity certain living energies within ourselves and our lives. Will he (we) be brave enough to act on this awakening of aptitude?

The candidates' desire for Light awakens real but as yet slumbering potential within himself, which from now onwards will become stimulated and promote his spiritual advancement.

The individual can't wait and hope to be hit with a bolt of lightening, this is time for action, for learning, for testing the potential in the knowledge that he is supported by a Fraternity who have been there, done that and have the t-shirts to prove it.

4. The Pledge:

Before the Master accepts the Candidate, he is required to pledge himself to two requirements :

(1) That he seeks the Light voluntarily, for its own sake, and from no unworthy or material motive; and

(2) That his reasons two-fold; (a) knowledge for himself, and (b) a desire to make himself of more extensive service to humanity.

These questions involve definite personal commitments of a far-reaching character to which no one should pledge lightly.

Now no one can truly serve humanity until he knows how to do so; a good deal of activity is displayed nowadays that passes by the name of service... but is it?

Knowledge is not to be for selfish purposes but to be put to *selfless service* which is the price that we pay for the privilege of self enlightenment. The enlightenment of Initiation is not to be for his private benefit only; it must become of importance to the general good. *Peace of mind comes when your life is in harmony with true principals and values and in no other way.*

Every real Initiate by the mere fact of his enlightenment is called upon not to hide his light but to use it and let it shine before men that they may see in him as an example worth following in his daily life. Influence, not recognition, becomes the motive.

But let him never forget that, at the threshold of his Masonic life, he pledged himself to become a servant of humanity.

5. The Advance from West to East:

This is a small episode, yet one of far-reaching significance says Wilmshurst.

The Candidate has just completed symbolically his journeying around the Lodge, which represents his life wanderings since he was born in the "**West**".

During his life he has passed blindly, yet never without unseen guidance, through regions and experiences sometimes of darkness (the "*North*"), sometimes of less or greater enlightenment (the "*South*," "*West*" and "*East*"), yet ignorant of where he was going or what the purpose was, or whether at a given moment he was near to or far from his true goal.

This is true to human life in our fast paced world of today, as we go bumbling about at times, with so many people living in a confused and unhappy state? Until one's eyes eventually are opened to the whole plan of it, who shall say whether this or that event

in our personal life-experience drew us nearer to or farther from the goal we are all unwittingly seeking?

But these ignorant wanderings in a circle, these buffetings of fortune and the tests of character, which many never give up, technically end, and the moment comes when the candidate heads away from the West to the East. His steps may still continue to be irregular; but no matter, they are in the right direction. Intellectually and emotionally he may still wobble from side to side before he attains stability and he who is bent on finding the way to the **East** at all costs will arrive there.

6. The Obligation:

Following the traditional practice of the Mysteries and of all secret and monastic Orders, a vow of silence and secrecy is next required from the Candidate as a further conferment of Initiation and the entrustment with any secret information.

This Obligation is often thought of as merely perpetuating the usual covenant of secrecy required by new members of the old Trade Guilds as a guard to the privileges of the Guild and the protection of technical trade secrets. But whilst the Speculative Craft certainly follows the Operatives in this and other respects, the reasons for secrecy and for being solemnly obligated to it, run much deeper than the need for silence about the formal secrets of the Order.

The main purpose of our Obligation is to impress the beginner upon the path of Light and self-knowledge with a sense of the extreme value of silence about the new perceptions that will come to him, the new ideas and experiences he will encounter, and the mental reactions he will experience as the result of them. As we grow as individuals and challenge ourselves, we often challenge societal norms, orthodoxy of process, the way things are, just because they've always been that way. It is part of growing.

It must be emphasised that silence and secrecy are imposed not so much in the interest of the Fraternity at large (which could suffer little from his indiscretions about signs and tokens).

But he will find that Light and Wisdom are acquired not from anything that can be shown or orally imparted to him, but from the gradual assembly of new ideas and their gradual digestion into his life.

In the world, appalling waste of human energy occurs daily, which could be re-directed to better things. The way of the inner life, upon which one symbolically enters on passing the door of the Lodge, is the reverse. It remembers one's moral accountability. If these points are contemplated, it leads by deep and still waters of knowledge. The idiom – **know thyself** starts to make sense here: self improvement in academic matters, personal development and spiritual contemplation.

Turn now to the V.S.L. It declares "*There is a time to be silent and a time to speak,*" (*Ecc. III., 7*). Note that the time for '**silence**' comes first in order; for indeed it is not possible to "*speak*" at all in the high sense (here implied) until by a previous discipline of silence one has acquired the wisdom to know what to say, how, when, and to whom

to say it. We are all familiar with “communications” courses, how to present ourselves, win friends and influence people. There are very few so called ‘communications guru’s’ out there who have caught up with Freemasonry in this regard and teach us about listening as the primary form of communication. Today, all too often I find that many people are only listening so they know when it’s their turn to speak! How refreshing would it be if they learned to truly listen first?

But danger attaches to unwise speech no less than to more flagrant violations of secrecy; a danger pointed to in the penalty of the Obligation. That penalty implies that he who is unfaithful to his duty of silence (to himself) and secrecy may come to lose the power of effective speech altogether, because people will not listen to what he has to say – it will be just more noise. How true that is in our modern world.

The ritual also implies that, before the aspirant can attain a new regenerate self, his old selfhood must become broken down, its pride humbled, its attachment to external possessions and ingrained mental prejudices severed. All which is not the work of a moment, but a gradual process. He is, therefore, not called upon to do anything beyond his immediate powers, but to follow the principle of “precept upon precept; line upon line; here a little and there a little”. These are the incremental and continuous improvements to oneself I alluded to in my introduction.

7. The Restoration to Light.

The Candidate is next reminded that for a considerable time he has been in a state of **darkness**.

Let no one be so literally-minded as to imagine that this naïve and simple phrase alludes merely to the few minutes during which the Candidate's sight has been shut off for symbolic reasons. Remember that the whole ceremony is allegory, a parable of the persons life; it dramatises, “the entry of all men upon this their mortal existence”; and that the entirety of that existence has been spent in a state of darkness and blindness and will so continue to be spent until that spiritual consciousness is regained which we call “Light.” – being a Freemason in name does not grant this right, you’ve got to work at it, not just say it.

In every Candidate that wish is presumed to have become a definite conscious urge, and because it has he is without peace until he finds what he has been blindly seeking, he is entitled to have his prayer answered, to have the door opened to his own knocking, and to hear spoken over him the words of his own re-creation, “**Let there be Light.**”

Throughout our Ritual by ‘Light’ we must understand ‘consciousness’. “**Let there be Light**” implies, therefore, “let there be a quickening, heightening and expansion of consciousness in that which has been of limitedly consciousness.”

Our First Degree according to Wilmshurst, therefore, implies the first stage of an expansion of consciousness beyond that of the normal mentality, an awakening, the beginning of the journey to knowing yourself, to growth.

It's not expected that an actual epiphany of spiritual consciousness hits the Candidate between the eyes, or comes about instantly and simultaneously with the symbolic act of restoration to light. Usually new consciousness emerges slowly through the darkness of our clouded understanding as we read, learn, explore and *listen*. We must make the effort now the door is open. But for some, Freemasonry will always remain a parody of a dining club.

To use Masonic analogy, the Sun is at the centre of our personal system; there is first a dawn and a gradual rising and a scattering of the darkness before its light manifests in fullness and strength at high noon.

Summary

Worshipful Master, the Restoration to Light, the climax and peak-point of the Ceremony, concludes the first part of this paper, that series of seven ascending steps which are associated with a candidates *'state of darkness'*.

The remainder of the Ceremony, a series of seven descending steps, occurs in the newly won *'state of light'*, and is devoted to imparting information and instruction in regard to conserving, nourishing and developing that Light within oneself, now that it has once been glimpsed.

I would hope that the Brethren would be interested in hearing Wilmshurst's (modernised) further analysis of the first degree and indeed the same sort of analysis of the second and third degrees. If it is their wish Worshipful Master, I will continue with this work.

This is not all that the Degree means. It means many things to many people and is only an opinion and interpretation as proffered by a wise and learned Mason.

However, if the Ceremony does not mean any of this and more, then it means nothing worthy of pursuing and is but a vain tradition and formality.

If it means all this, but is performed without understanding and without imparting its implications into our life-conduct, we profane it, increase our own darkness, and that of others to whom we allegedly *"teach"*.

But if the dispersion of our natural darkness and the rising into consciousness above it of that **Light** which glows at the centre of every man's personal system is what we look for, then in our Ceremony surely we have in our hands a means of grace of the first value and something well worth preserving.

For me Worshipful Master, Freemasonry is not just a boys club, it is about self development and the true secrets are to be found within. It is about successful private victories, success in friendship, relationships, business, hobbies and personal development. It is about being a better person and not being afraid to show that to the world. Let me conclude with a quote from Nelson Mandela:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?

Playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Thank you Worshipful Master and Brethren.

Br. Tony Ennis.

Sources: *Masonic Initiation – W.L. Wilmshurst*
The Meaning of Masonry – W.L. Wilmshurst
Secret Science of Masonic Initiation – R. Lomas