

Know Thyself

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Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777

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Thank you to Right Worshipful Brother Ray Steele for a wonderful year in the East.

Thank you to the installation team today and for Most Worshipful Brother Dungan for being our installing officer.

Thank you to the officers of 2018.

Most of all, thank you to my wife and family.

I'd like to tell you a story of a man born many years ago. He was an intelligent young man, very busy with learning the arts and sciences: math, philosophy, business, and politics. His mother, like many, wanted grandchildren and pressured him into getting married, but he would have none of it. I'm too busy and don't have the time.

One thing that did come easily to him was the natural sciences. He used this to his advantage in options trading, predicting a great harvest and buying all the farm instruments in his part of the country related to certain produce. When the weather was favorable and the harvest abundant, he created great wealth.

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He gained favor with the military and political elites by predicting further weather changes and using geography in such a way as to win battles in defense of his homeland. He even used geometry for landscape and architectural design. He was so engrossed in his studies that he once fell into a well while gazing into the heavens.

When he grew old, finally he determined that family was truly important, but alas, it was too late and he had missed this one great part of life itself, that of having children to be nurtured and taught.

On reflection, he understood the importance of self-knowledge, not only of the sciences, but also of the mind, and spirit, of family and community. He was viewed as a great philosopher until his death, and because of his beliefs he also developed into an influencer. There was another great young man of the age who came to visit this sage as he grew older, to learn, to be mentored, to understand the great mysteries of life from one who had experienced them.

This old man had traveled to one of the greatest centers of influence and learning of his day, journeying there with six other great men of learning. He had carved into the face of this building the words *gnōthi seauton*, meaning Know Thyself.

He was Thales, the father of Western philosophy and the first true mathematician. The building where this is carved is the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, and he was one of the seven sages of ancient Greece. It was young Pythagoras who came to learn from the aging Thales. His ideas in geometry would be further honed and refined even to this day.

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What did he mean by Know Thyself? What would we mean by that? It encompasses all facets of humanity- theological, scientific, philosophical, and humanistic- some examples through history:

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom." — Aristotle

The Bhagavad Gita (Song of God), is a 700-verse Hindu scripture that is part of an ancient Sanskrit epic and chides us to "Wake up! Be thyself!"

Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of English literature wrote "The remedy for pride is humility or true self-knowledge."

Bernard of Clairvaux was a French abbot in the 1100's who told us "In spirit is my true self to be found."

Lewis Carroll who was an author, mathematician, logician, and Anglican deacon opined "Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle."

Thales was able to measure the height of a pyramid, or width of a river by using geometry that later was incorporated into Euclid's 31st problem. Thales postulated that ratios between certain segments of lines would be similar for two different lines if transected by parallel straight lines. Therefore, using the height of a pole and the shadow it cast, and the base of a pyramid and the shadow it cast, he was able to use these ratios to calculate the height of the pyramid itself. One of the great axioms of geometry is that of parallel straight lines. These are lines in the same plane that never intersect and go into infinity.

In Freemasonry, we use the symbol of parallel straight lines to represent St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. It was felt by many that the lines represent the limits of the sun's northern and southern declination, or said another way, the sun reaches the highest position in the sky when standing on the North Pole on June 21st, and the highest

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position in the sky when standing on the South Pole on December 22nd. These days represent the days of St. John the Baptist and Evangelist, respectively.

But what of the point and the circle? We, as individual brothers, men, fathers, community builders, are the point. The circle is a representative of the boundaries beyond which our passions should not cross. This is the commonly taught meaning for this symbolism. But there are many older exoteric and esoteric links to the past.

On early Egyptian monuments have been found images of their god in the center of the circle bordered by 2 upright parallel serpents. According to Albert Mackey, the deities of pagan antiquity were arranged in pairs, sometimes however as a hermaphrodite, representing the sun and the universe, the male and the female, and was symbolized at least 1000 years prior to Solomon as a point within a circle. Mackey postulates that early Masonry used this symbol of a point within a circle to represent the Master and his Wardens as the point, the lodge itself as the circle.

As with so much of masonry, there are meanings within meanings . . .

Going back to the beginning, we need to better understand ourselves, who we are as brothers, how we fit into our communities and families, and with each other. If we don't know who we truly are, and how we fit in this vast universe we live in, then we will continue to remain puzzled as to what to do next, and what we should have done. We can focus on our quality, even when we don't experience the quantity we had hoped for. Saying that, are you thirsty for knowledge?

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The greatest teacher we have ever known reminds us still, in our 21st century that – All things are possible.

When I became a Mason, I heard many times over we are an organization that makes good men better. Our challenge both to myself and those here with me today is to determine what we shall do to make ourselves better than we were yesterday, and then to realize that we are not as good as we will be tomorrow.