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Watch out for the little ones
While driving

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Triestleboard

Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty

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Triads are groups of three ideas or objects. Triads appear in nature, politics, and religion. To early man, the cosmos consisted of the sun, the moon, and the stars. He called the natural elements earth, wind, and fire. He could see triads in the three-leaf clover. He knew he lived in a three-dimensional world. In politics, the US Constitution established three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. And in religion, most faiths teach fealty to God, your neighbor, and yourself. All are arranged in intriguing triads of ideas. Let us endeavor to understand some of the power in triads both historically and for us as Masons.

Before we become aware of triads, we think in opposites or dual concepts. Developmental learning theorists easily prove that infants learn through simple stimulus and response events. Touch a newborn baby's cheek, her instinctive reflex will be to turn her head in that direction. She quickly learns to identify her Mother's voice from all others. As language is acquired, knowledge can be gathered by asking, "why?" After a child asks a question she is rewarded with an answer. The pattern engages a pair of concepts or dyads. Even as we advance in learning, we make decisions using dyads by giving reasons for and against an action. A straightforward method for determining a course of action involves drawing a vertical line on paper and arranging the pro and con arguments on either side.

Furthermore, Socratic teaching methods train students by asking questions. The students must provide the answer or else the teacher must supply it. Catechisms are similarly simple teaching devices for youth. The first question in the Westminster Confession asks, "What is the chief end of man?" The student replies, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." The question is neat; the answer is clean. This is an uncomplicated style of learning for the young.

But as men, we become more complex. Answers tend to include modifiers such as on the one hand this, but on the other hand that. Dualistic thinking is insufficient for more advanced analysis. Socratic

methods tend to give way to Hegelian philosophy that was based on threes: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Inspired by Christian insights and grounded in his mastery of a fund of knowledge, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel attempted to answer all questions--natural, human, and divine--using dialectical reasoning that swung from thesis to antithesis and back again to a richer synthesis. Two opposing forces resolve into a creature wholly different, like the cross-fertilization of two different rose bushes producing a more perfect hybrid.

Rhetoric is similarly infused with triads. "A rhetorical comment," is a phrase meaning tangential or unnecessary words. Yet expert rhetoricians reveal much about the persuasive power of words and ideas in orderly lists. In Latin, word order doesn't matter. In English, "man bites dog," demonstrates that word order matters. We remember the three things that abide which are faith, hope, and charity. The order matters. The Bible did not say charity, faith, and hope. We remember from the French Revolution: equality, liberty, and fraternity – a triad. Providing citizens with equality and liberty produces the ideal of fraternity. Rhetoricians argue that the ear wants to hear the most complex at the end of the list as it finishes or completes the first two thoughts.

Triads appear in many ancient systems of thought. In numerology, triads are seen as the combination of odd (1) and even (2) that sums to three. Three becomes a symbol of perfection in many ancient cultures and mystic philosophies. Threes also appear very early in geography and in geometry. We can find any location on a plane by reference to three points. Even anthropological artifacts reflect triads. From the union of marriage comes a child. The complication of three elements is needed to provide sufficient complexity to achieve an idealized perfection.

Triads are also prominently employed in Lodges and Masonic writings. Why triads dominate over dyads or quartets of ideas may not inclusively be known, but speculative Masonry permits us ample opportunity to reflect on the reasons.

Threes appear prominently in the lecture of the winding stairs as we are shown the first three steps. They remind Fellowcrafts of the three degrees of Masonry and the three principal officers of the Worshipful Master, Senior, and Junior Wardens. We learn that a Lodge is not singular. A Lodge is not dual. It is plural with a minimum of three. milarly, displaying of the three Greater Lights and the three lesser lights are central rituals for the opening and closing of the Lodge.

As the furniture of the Lodge, they separately are symbols with meanings and lessons, but the fact that they are grouped into threes is not accidental.

The three lesser lights are named wisdom, strength, and beauty. They are said to help make Masons better men. Naturally, we could have added other virtues to the list: patience, fortitude, or peace making, but the fact that there is but three draws your attention.

The three Greater Lights parallel the three lesser lights. First displayed on the altar is the Holy Bible or scriptures from other religions. The Holy Bible is a collection of writings, histories, and moral teachings that provide guidance in our actions. They are sometimes known as wisdom literature; indeed, one of the books in the Apocrypha during the inter-testamental period is the Book of Wisdom. King Solomon is recalled as a wise king whose wisdom was demonstrated by the story of two women claimants for a baby. Furthermore that wisdom is symbolized atop the Worshipful Master by his hat, the crown of the ruler who is wise.

The square is the second Great Light. A right angle is key to forming a strong wall or a proper column--a wall that will withstand the vicissitudes of weather and seasons. Being on the square is commended to all Master Masons. We are charged to follow the rules and regulations of the Craft and of the country in which we live. We see the square as a symbol of right living in our own lives as well as order in society. The Senior Warden represents strength: he is the strong supporter of the Worshipful Master. Yet it is intriguing that the symbol of strength, the square, is worn as the jewel of the Worshipful Master.

The third symbol placed on the altar is the compasses. We use a compass to draw an arc or a perfect circle. There is beauty and perfection in structures built with arches and celestial windows. Cathedrals featured rose windows over the altar, which were circular stained-glass windows beautifully adorned for the contemplation of the glory of God. We are further taught a message hidden in the compasses to keep our actions within due bounds. Beauty is orderly, balanced, and under control. So too, the Junior Warden talks of the arc of the sun as it rises to Meridian height as being the beauty and glory of the day.

Hence we repeat patterns of wisdom, strength, and beauty in the three officers as well as the Greater and Lesser Lights. The rhetoric of listing wisdom, strength, and beauty in this order places importance on beauty. Beauty is an odd ideal for a fraternity. Yet beauty is seen as the

resolution of a life that is brimming with wisdom and strength. Men who exhibit wisdom and strength create harmony. Harmony is itself a characteristic of beauty in social settings as it is in aesthetics. In the Aurora Lodge (a German-speaking lodge in Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin), the German word for beauty is Schönheit, which involves balance and symmetry, as in the beauty of a well-built structure. Perhaps we can visualize that a Lodge of filled with wise and strong men will produce better men in a manly sense of symmetry, strength, and beauty.

The three degrees emphasize three stages of life. Our youth and adolescence are emphasized in our training as Entered Apprentices; our manhood and useful work are keys to the Fellowcraft degree; and contemplating our own mortality is vividly illustrated in the Hiram story for Master Masons.

The posting monitors used by all three degrees today begin with three grand principles of brotherly love, relief and truth. Meetings in Lodge are designed to reinforce these three principles as we practice fraternity, charity, and virtue – three moral guides.

Triads are used by Lodges to train our minds. As we grow in understanding we will tend to use more and richer triads. Intelligence, force, and harmony provide elegant synonyms used today for wisdom, strength, and beauty. Likewise, religion, law, and morals are pillars of Masonic teaching. By religious study and contemplation we search out wisdom. By the force and rule of law, we establish a strong and orderly society. And by inculcation of personal morality, we strive for beauty in our private and public lives.

The lesson for us is that the triads used in our rituals and in our lectures are purposeful and helpful to us. Let us strive for perfection by becoming better men in wisdom, strength, and beauty.