

# The Five Senses

That Freemasonry has a body, mind and soul, like the human beings who compose it, is obvious to all students. The body is the physical structure; grand lodges, lodges, laws, rules, edicts, *Proceedings*, temples, dues, etc. The mind of Freemasonry is that indicated in its most popular definition — “a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” The mind of Freemasonry is its ritual, its symbolism, its morality, its character building.

What is its soul? It is that which is hidden behind its symbols and its ritual teachings; its inner meanings and its aspirations, its touch with that part of man that is immortal.

In the Fellowcraft Degree, on the whole a symbol of manhood and a call to learning, much is made of the “flight of winding stairs.” Its second section of five steps refers to the five orders of architecture and also to the five senses of human nature. Of these, the first three — “hearing, seeing and feeling, are deemed most important” — for rather obvious reasons expressed in the ritual. This relative importance is obvious, for it hardly needs explanation that a candidate needs neither the organs of taste nor of smell to understand the degrees, which he could do with difficulty, if at all, without hearing, seeing and feeling.

Those who pursue Freemasonry only as far as its body and mind are concerned often look upon this portion of the degree with certain measure of contempt, as being so elementary and childish as not to be worthy of the attention of a grown man. From the standpoint of such thinkers it appears obvious that no one needs to be instructed that he has five senses and that three are more important than the other two.

There is much in the ritual of Freemasonry that is open to the same criticism; it seems puerile if taken only at face value. But if the examiner looks for the third factor, the soul of Freemasonry, behind its mind and body, he discovers that what, taken literally, is puerile, is actually profound; what seems obvious is really deeply hidden and important; what strikes the ear as more or less a childish recitation of the obvious is really a call to the deepest thought.

The “beasts of the field” share with man the possession of sight, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting. In many these senses are developed to a far greater extent than those possessed by man. Dogs have a sense of smell far more sensitive than that possessed by any human being. The eagle can see more plainly at greater distances than can man. Some animals have a far more selective sense of hearing than the keenest human ear.

Yet the animal kingdom has done nothing with its senses but use them to keep out of danger, to secure food, to keep alive.

Man has made instruments that are far more sensitive in their fields than any of his senses. He has cameras that see what his eyes cannot distinguish. He has microscopes that enable him

to picture what he cannot see at all. His telephone and his dictating machine both hear better than he does and his chemical tests are far more sensitive than the most refined sense of taste. He has made scales that register the weight of a speck of dust that he cannot see or feel. Yet a collection of such instrumentalities put together by themselves accomplish nothing.

Everything that man has accomplished has been done not just because he possesses five senses, but because he has learned to use them. Beasts use them only to preserve and continue their lives; man uses them to build a civilization.

Freemasonry does not, in its Fellowcraft Degree, mention the means by which the five senses — a part of the mind of Freemasonry — have produced its soul. That means, of course, is the human mind, the intellect, the power of thought, which distinguishes man from the rest of the animal kingdom. From mind and its powers have come the integers of mans soul; his charity, love, benevolence; his mathematics, music and literature; his government, his laws and his civilization.

Without his five senses man would not really be alive, even if his body possessed life. His five senses are his sole and only contacts with the world. A man with no senses could know nothing, be told nothing, communicate nothing. A man lacking one or even two senses has been known to make those remaining take the place of those not possessed. Helen Keller, without sight or hearing, is a well-educated and competent human being, but she is a marvelous exception to the common rule, in her ability to make feeling take the place of both sight and hearing. All that any man is, comes to be because of his five senses; all that man has learned and accomplished is because of his five senses.

Hence, all that Freemasonry is, all that it teaches, all that is within it that is valuable, has come through five senses.

Come through them — to what? To mind, the “sixth sense” not mentioned in words in the ritual but obviously the whole point of connecting the five steps in the flight of winding stairs with a man’s means of contact with the world.

This William Preston, “father of the ritual,” well knew. In his *Illustrations of Masonry* he follows his ritual of the five senses with a quaint but reverent eulogy of the human mind. He does not, in so many words, denominate it as the reason for the emphasis he puts on the five senses, but the connection is obvious.

Prestons “Some Thoughts on the Human Mind” are here given in full:

To understand and analyze the operations of the mind is an attempt in which the most judicious may fail. All we know is, that the senses are the channels of communication to the mind which is ultimately affected by their operation — and when the mind is diseased, every sense loses its virtue. The fabric of the mind, as well as that of the body, is curious and wonderful; the faculties of the one are adapted to their several ends with equal wisdom, and no less propriety, than the organs of the other. The inconceivable wisdom of an Almighty

Being is displayed in the structure of the mind, which extends its power over every branch of science and is therefore a theme peculiarly worthy of attention. In the arts and sciences that have least connection with the mind, its faculties are still the engines that we must employ; and the better we understand their nature and use, their defects and disorders, we shall apply them with the greater success. In the noblest arts, the mind is the subject upon which we operate.

Wise men agree, that there is but one way to the knowledge of Nature's works — the way of observation and experiment. By our constitution we have a strong propensity to trace particular facts and observations to general rules, and to apply those rules to account for other effects, or to direct us in the production of them. This procedure of the understanding is familiar in the common affairs of life, and is the means by which every real discovery in philosophy is made.

On the mind all our knowledge must depend; it therefore constitutes a proper subject for the investigation of Masons. Although by anatomical dissection and observation we may become acquainted with the body, it is by the anatomy of the mind alone we can discover its powers and principles.

To sum up the whole of this transcendent measure of God's bounty to man, we may add, that memory, imagination, taste, reasoning, moral perception, and all the active powers of the soul, present such a vast and boundless field for philosophical disquisition, as far exceeds human inquiry, and are peculiar mysteries, known only to Nature and to Nature's God, to whom all are indebted for their creation, preservation, and every blessing they enjoy.

The ritual reference to the five senses of human nature lists them in this order: hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling and tasting, and specifies that the first three are "deemed most important by Masons."

Dr. Albert Gallatin Mackey is generally revered as the greatest and best-informed Mason that the world has known. It is therefore, curious to find his statement, in his *Encyclopedia* that feeling is "esteemed by Freemasons above all others."

This is, with due respect to a great teacher, nonsense. In the process of making a man a Mason it is most important that he hear; next important that he see; next — which is third not first — that he feel. Blind men have been made Masons; so have men with artificial hands, but it is impossible to initiate a man totally deaf.

The five senses of human nature are so much a matter of course that we pay no attention to them except if they are injured, or when they fade or are lost. And few of us stop to reflect that they are five unsolved mysteries of life and nature.

What, for instance, is the sense of hearing? In a man's head, two open canals end in tightly stretched membranes behind which are some delicate bones. Through these open canals waves in the air strike upon the membranes — the ear drums. Then, through some totally

unknown way, a sensation is caused — we say “in our ears” but actually in our brains — which we denominate sound.

In the absence of air there is no sound. If the air does not vibrate in waves, there is no sound. When the ear drum, or the bones behind it, or the nerves involved, become weakened or too old, we “become deaf” and hear little or nothing. But *how* the vibrations of air cause *what* reaction in the nerves that result in the sensation we call *hearing* is a sealed mystery.

This is even more true of sight. At least in hearing we know how the vibrations are transmitted from source to ear and of what they are composed: the atmosphere in which we live and breathe. But sight is much more mysterious. A man has two eyes, which are essentially lenses that, like a camera lens, form an inverted image of what is illuminated; this inverted image appears upon a sensitive bit of human flesh we call the retina. Then in some way we know no more about than we do of what happens between ear and brain, we have the sensation we call sight; we become conscious of objects, their colors, and their distances.

All this is caused by “vibrations” or “waves” in we don’t know what! For many years physicists had a comfortable theory that all space was filled with “something” called ether in which vibrations caused waves, which brought us light and heat from the sun and caused the pictures upon the retina of the eye that we call sight. Now delicate experiments have proved there is no such stuff as ether, and we have the puzzle of “vibrations” or “waves” which are actual, and measurable, although they occur in nothing we can prove exists!

The *New Standard Bible Dictionary* distinguishes several different meanings to references to eyes and ears, as follows:

*The eye is of priceless value:*

Psalms 17:8 — Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.

*It is the avenue through which allurements reach the soul and sensation is born:*

Ezekiel 6:9 — And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a-whoring after their idols: and they shall lothe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.

John 2:16 — For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of the life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Peter 2:14 — Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

*It is the eye which spares or withholds pity:*

Isaiah 13:18 — Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children.

Ezekiel 16:5 — None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born.

*It is the eye which mocks:*

Proverbs 30:17 — The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.

*The eye is never satisfied:*

Proverbs 27:20 — Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

*The eye is the light of the body:*

Matthew 6:22 — The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

*The ear was often made the symbol of willingness to obey God's law. In the ceremony of the consecration of the priest the tip of the ear was anointed with oil in token of readiness to listen to the voice of God.*

Leviticus 8:23 — And he slew it; and Moses took of the blood of it, and put it upon the tip of Aaron's right ear, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot.

*Unwillingness to receive God's will is the "uncircumcised ear":*

Jeremiah 6:10 — To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.

Acts 7:51 — Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

*Or it is the "heavy ear":*

Isaiah 6:10 — Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

*The ear may show a favorable disposition to attention:*

Psalms 17:6 — I have called upon Thee, for Thou wilt hear me, o God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech.

Psalms 31:2 — Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock for a house of defense to save me.

Feeling is the response our bodies give to anything that touches any part of it. Anatomical experts are inclined to believe that the sensations we call feeling are electrical impulses that are caused by pressure and that travel from source to brain along nerves but this, like the explanations of sight and hearing, is an explanation that does not explain.

Tasting and smelling are equally inexplicable, except that tasting does not have “action at a distance” to make it more mysterious; the “taste buds” in the mouth require contact with some substance to respond and send to our brains a sensation that we find pleasant or neutral or unpleasant.

All our five senses can be educated to do better than they are born to do. We can learn to see, hear, feel, taste, smell, more — and more accurately — by practice. Science has invented many mechanisms to aid in these processes; telescopes to bring the far distant object apparently close; microscopes to make the tiny invisible object large enough for us to see its details; apparatus so sensitive that the slightest touch of moving air will register on a scale; apparatus more sensitive to taste and to smell than the most acute human sense.

We have learned to use our senses — and yet we do not in any real meaning of the words, know what they *are!*

Still less do we know what the all-important sixth sense, the mind that translates the sensations of the five senses into knowledge of the world in which we live, maybe.

It is here that we must look for the soul behind the words in the Fellowcraft Degree, and find the point at which apparently puerility ends and a real symbolism emerges. That five steps in a stair should remind us of five senses of human nature seems childish. But if behind is the thought that the stairs are an emblem of life and that passage through it makes mind, the sixth sense, important, then we are faced with a great truth which is anything but puerile, silly or childish.

The whole Fellowcraft Degree is one of learning, education, the cultivation and importance of the mind. Its five steps in the winding stairs have a real and a great meaning. Everything man is now, or ever may be, which is good, important, vital, impressive, comes from the mind. The beasts of the field, with the same five senses (all of them in some living organism more acute and sensitive than ours), contribute nothing to any life except their own. Only man makes his five doorways to the universe useful to other men, to nations, to races, to progress.

It is for these reasons that Freemasonry puts emphasis upon the five senses. It is for these reasons that the five steps in the winding stairs are worthy of silent and lengthy

contemplation by the Mason who can find the thought behind the symbol, the concealed soul of Freemasonry behind her words.

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