

## The Long Way Around...

When the poet Dante lost his way in the forest (“gone from the direct path”) he looked to see the first light of dawn resting on a hill. With the goal in sight, the normal thing for Dante to do was to make a direct assault on the hill towards the sun. Dante’s actions are understandable. He was lost. There was the sun, who leads all wanderers safe through every way, and a hill. Go for it...nothing could be simpler. But, as Dante discovered, nothing could be more false.

His path was immediately blocked by three beasts, a panther, a lion, and a she-wolf, symbolic of the sins and evils of the world, the epitome of that which confuses and diverts a man from his goal. Driven into the dark, Dante met Virgil, who promised to show him the punishment of Hell and purgatory before he would come into the final presence of Light and Paradise. The point of the narrative is that all things of greatest concern to man, the long way around is the best way home.

In the “Divine Comedy” Dante produced an allegory of human experience, a history of man’s soul struggling through sin toward a beautiful land. And these parables, written 700 years ago, teaches man, if he will seek mortal understanding he must be willing to go the long way around. This is a difficult road to follow for the typical Man. We are the beneficiaries of the scientific know-how age, where the mechanical short-cuts are to be rewarded and treasured and where geometry has long taught that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. The light bulb is better than the kerosene lantern, the calculator quicker than the abacus, the jet plane faster than the train, and the satellite superior to the telegraph. Despite the advances of the scientific age, there is no easy route to true understanding and no care package for intuition and insight. Automation may be fine for dispensing instant cash and soft drinks, but intelligence, perception, and understanding only come to the modern Dante when he is willing to take the long road home; study, learning, and experience and trial by error. In other words...Education.

In Masonic membership, by whatever art or skill he may pursue, a man will only gain an intimate knowledge and awareness of Masonry by following a long and demanding road. Oh, yes, he who takes the shortcut may pay dues and wear a Masonic pin, but he will miss the rich reward that comes from an exploration and study of Masonic philosophy and history...in other words Masonic Education.

By the time a man receives the Master Mason Degree he should have learned the important role Masons have played in the founding of this country, the antiquity of Masonry, how it moved from operative to speculative, and the care and concern Masons show for the distressed and deprived. He should be taught that Masonry offers a great and important opportunity for self-improvement, that it has the aura of romance, the enchantment of history, and the cornucopia of philosophy. And these are only the beginning. There is no short-cut to education. The doctor of medicine studies and interns for years before a human life is placed in his hands. The pilot of a jet passenger plane receives thousands of hours of instruction and practice; millions of words are read by the law student, before he tries his first case in court.

Dante went through Hell and Purgatory to find Beatrice in Paradise. So man must find patience and perseverance in learning to love his fellow man and in practicing the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. The journey may cover a million miles. Instead of meeting Dante’s panther, lion and she-wolf, he will be confronted with bigotry, prejudice dogmatism, and jealousy.

Notwithstanding the almost endless obstacles and obstructions along the way, like Dante, man will discover that, the long way around is the best way home. For Masons, travelling toward the light in the East, learning and serious study about Freemasonry is a journey that takes a lifetime.