



## Paper

# The Blessing of Light

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Being Restored to Light - Explained.

### **Summary**

An exploration of the the words and symbolism contained with the Masonic phrase 'restored to light' used in the Initiation of a Candidate into the First-Degree.

### **Keywords**

First-Degree, Initiation, Obligation, Hoodwink, Light

## The Blessing of Light

*'Let that blessing be restored to the Candidate'*, a phrase we have all heard, and some of us may have responded to it as Junior Deacon, or uttered it as Master of the Lodge. The candidate has been in the Lodge Room for quite a while and has been hoodwinked so that he should not be able to see a thing, and so he has had to put his trust entirely in the Junior Deacon to lead him on his way; though he has been told that he may *'safely rise and follow'*. In this connection it is interesting to note that the word 'hoodwink' first appears in English in 1562, and then meant a hood or blindfold to ensure a person could see nothing. It did not then mean trickery or falsehood. So, in Freemasonry today we still use the word in its original sense to mean that nothing can be seen by the candidate, and maybe in early times the cover actually took the form of an all-over cover or hood.

After what seems like a great and winding journey the candidate takes his Obligation and is asked *'what is the predominant wish of his heart'*. *'Light'* should be the reply; though sometimes it has to be prompted! The hoodwink is then removed and the candidate, maybe blinking a little, can look around and see where he is. *Question: Is that all there is to the restoration of light?*

Let's go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In those days Lodges usually met in the upper rooms of inns and taverns, and these would have been lit by candles, which were expensive and, if made from tallow, were also pretty rank in smell. Only a few wealthy Lodges would have been able to meet in rooms with many chandeliers and reflective wall sconces to increase the power of candlelight. So, when the hoodwink was removed in those days the candidate would not have been greeted by the glare of modern illumination, but by quite subdued lighting. Even well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Lodge Room would have been lit by older, dimmer forms of lighting such as oil lamps or gas light, so even then the amount of illumination would have been limited. With our modern bright lights have we lost something of the meaning of the restoration of the blessing of light?

We need to remember that Freemasonry is a *'peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'*. All our ceremonies are morality plays in which truth is taught symbolically. The 'light' which the candidate requests at his Initiation is therefore not the mere removal of the hoodwink and the glare of light bulbs, but rather it is the 'enlightenment' of Masonic knowledge. His former state of darkness is not just the condition in which he was led into the Lodge Room, but also refers to his life up to that point when he has been unaware of the great moral truths which Freemasonry teaches, and the friendship and Fellowship which bind the order together. That would have been quite obvious to our Brethren in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They lived in an age in which allegory and symbolism were accepted features of life. What is more they would have inherited a moral and philosophical tradition going back to Ancient Greece which considered light to be symbolical of learning, moral and social improvement and goodness. The great philosopher Plato taught that humanity lives in darkness and ignorance in what he considered to be a kind of cave. To rise from this darkened state humanity needs to strive towards the light of knowledge and goodness which lies at the mouth of the cave. Plato argued that there have to be leaders in this journey towards the light of truth and goodness.

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18<sup>th</sup> century Freemasonry saw itself as being such a leader, and we must remember that from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards there was for a very long time a close connection between Freemasonry and The Royal Society, the great Institution for the development of scientific knowledge and experiment with many men being both leading Freemasons and Fellows of the Society. Indeed, we may point to a Leicestershire man as someone who typified that. The 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Ferrers who lived at Staunton Harold Hall was Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1762, having been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1761 for his astronomical work. To our forebears the 'light' they wished for was the enlightenment of education and goodness — the two to them would have gone hand in hand.

We today still argue that the task of Freemasonry is to make good men better men. To achieve that, learning, instruction, thought and reflection are required of all of us. Let us consider that whenever the light is restored to a candidate, he is not asking for the electricity to be switched on; he is joining us in the great journey of striving for that light which is the symbolic essence of truth and goodness. That is why the restoration of light is indeed a blessing.

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##END##

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- Read at home for private study
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- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
  - Followed by 'any questions'
  - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
  - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*.  
Rudyard Kipling

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