

## **The Missing Working Tools** **and the Inspiration for Masonic Education**

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As I was reading the March 2006 Short Talk Bulletin<sup>1</sup> titled “The Other Working Tools,” I began to think about the things that motivate an interest in Masonic education.

The basic subject of that particular Short Talk Bulletin was that the working tools of a Master Mason are all of the implements of Masonry indiscriminately, but it seems that in America, we have lost a few with the passage of time.

First, the author points out that it is common to find items in groups of three in our ritual and symbolism. This includes the three degrees, the three stationed officers, the three great lights, the three lesser lights, and the three movable jewels. But this pattern is not followed by our working tools, where we are presented with two as an Entered Apprentice, three as a Fellowcraft, and essentially one as a Master Mason.

Freemasons under the United Grand Lodge of England, as well as in other English-speaking countries, predominantly use the Emulation Ritual, and that ritual refers to three working tools for each of the three degrees.

The Entered Apprentice is presented with the Chisel, in addition to the 24 inch gauge and common gavel;

The Fellowcraft receives the same working tools that we do;

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<sup>1</sup> Publication of the Masonic Service Association of North America, [www.msana.com](http://www.msana.com)

The Master Mason is presented with the Skirret, Pencil, and Compasses.

While the teaching related to the 24 inch gauge is typically the same, the gavel in Scotland teaches that “Skill without Exertion is of little avail, and that the Hand must be prompt to execute the Design.” In other words, our work must be timely and well-executed to be of value.

The Chisel teaches the advantages of education, smoothing off the rough areas of our minds, by which means we are rendered fit members of a regularly organized society.

For the Master Mason, the Compasses teach a similar lesson to our Entered Apprentice ritual, since it refers to God’s unerring and impartial justice, and that he has defined the limits of good and evil for us to follow.

The Skirret is a reel holding a string line, which is used to lay out foundations and straight walls. The Master Mason is taught that it points out the straight and undeviating line of conduct laid down for us in the Volume of Sacred Law.

The Pencil teaches that our words and actions are not only observed, but also recorded by the Great Architect of the Universe, to whom we will one day have to render an account of our conduct through our life.

In addition to the differences in the working tools between England and the United States, there were also differences between the various U.S. Grand Lodges. The Baltimore Convention held in 1832, was an effort to establish uniformity in ritual practices throughout the United States after numerous changes had been inspired as a result of the anti-Masonic attitudes following the Morgan Affair. However, the recommendations of the

Convention were not fully implemented, and so explanations of the working tool symbolism in other Grand Jurisdictions may be different than ours here in Virginia.

I hope you find some of this interesting, and if so, I would note that this Short Talk Bulletin goes into further detail, and I encourage you to read it.

My purpose in bringing up this Short Talk Bulletin was less to educate you about the symbolism of the working tools, and more to demonstrate how what you see in Lodge, or what you read about in a Short Talk Bulletin, or in a Masonic article in the *Masonic Herald*, the *Scottish Rite Journal*, and other similar publications, can assist your Masonic education beyond the narrow content of the article itself.

As part of our own personal Masonic education, we should first challenge ourselves to be alert for topics that inspire our curiosity and look for the meaning behind what we hear and see in our Lodges. Second, we should read Masonic publications carefully for aspects of Freemasonry that lie outside of our personal experiences. In this regard, I hope that the material presented in the Short Talk Bulletin on the Working Tools helps you to think about lessons and instructions of other Grand Lodges, as these can be a way for you to gain a broader perspective on the symbolic teachings of Freemasonry and can expand your search for Light in Masonry.

For example, if you never heard about the Baltimore Convention or the Morgan Affair, and you are curious about what they represent, I encourage you to look into them on the Internet or in your Lodge library, and then make a short presentation to your Lodge.

If you wonder why the English Grand Lodge is known as the United Grand Lodge of England, do some research into its history or ask your Education Officer why it is called United.

If you want to know more about the Emulation Ritual, do some searching on the Internet for information about the different rituals used around the world.

As you cultivate this habit of looking for a deeper understanding of Masonic topics and grow in Masonic knowledge, you should seek ways to share that light and knowledge with your Brethren to improve their understanding and enjoyment of Freemasonry.

If you cultivate this mindset, when you become an elected or appointed officer in your Lodge, a coordinator of activities or committees in your Lodge, or a Mentor to your Brethren, you will take advantage of the increased opportunities you will have, both to seek more Light in Masonry for yourself, and then, like a mirror, to reflect that Light to the Brethren around you.

In sum, I would ask you to remember the three goals that should drive your pursuit of Masonic education and in turn your journey toward greater Masonic light:

- First, seek a deeper understanding of the symbols, history and philosophy of the Speculative Freemasonry that we practice;
- Second, develop a curiosity about aspects of Freemasonry that may be outside of your personal experience; and

- Third, share your Masonic insights with others, particularly as you assume positions of leadership in your Lodge.

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