

## DO YOU HAVE A DEGREE?

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"Do you have a degree?" I was recently asked at a businessmen's luncheon.

Now I was known as a "runner" in my day. Meaning, I ran as soon as I received my high school diploma. So I was ready to tell my colleague that my parents did not want me to amount to much in life; that I had to support my neighbor's widow and 14 kids; that my dog threatened to leave home-anything not to admit that I did not have a degree.

But then a strange thing happened. As I was ready to respond that I did not have a degree, a reflection of light from my Scottish Rite ring caught my eye. Wistfully thinking, I casually replied: "I have several degrees."

"Oh, what did you major in?" my colleague asked.

"Philosophy," I replied.

"Where did you attend school?"

I thought that my game was over when suddenly I spoke out and said, "It was a self-study course sponsored by the oldest educational institution in the world: S.U."

"S.U.?" he said, as he squinted his eyes in full concentration. "I can't seem to place that."

"Solomon University!" came my confident answer.

Not wanting to appear uninformed, he quickly inquired: "Why did you choose philosophy?"

"Because philosophy is the study of the source and nature of human knowledge," I replied. "It includes the sciences, liberal arts and religions, yet it often transcends human understanding. Sometimes, it is a path to God."

Interested, his questions persisted: "Well, what exactly did you learn while studying at Solomon University?"

I doubt that he expected my lengthy reply: "I learned that man is no idle

phenomenon in the universe; that the universe itself is not dead; that an omniscient Creator oversees and imbues it and everything within it with life.

"I learned that there is nobility to the human drama; that evil appears to get the best of good but that God is just, and truth prevails; that for every thought and action, there is a corresponding reward from a benevolent Creator; and that for hostile acts, there is retribution.

"I learned that man's justice is sometimes a mockery, but that God's justice is swift and supreme.

"I learned that the human race was no mere accident and that God is not an abstract thought, but a Being as alive and vital as the very air that we breathe; that ignorance is darkness and wisdom is light; that tyranny of the mind is an oppression as insidious and destructive as tyranny of the body; that the soul is immortal and beyond man's power to corrupt; that man alone has free choice; that liberty demands tolerance and vigilance; that God is within man and not without; that the true Temple is Man; that God reigns supreme and has no adversaries; that the wise will practice faith, hope and charity; that love is the supreme law but that self-defense is also one of our obligations.

"I learned that throughout time, man has been chained by false priests and political tyrants; that man is free to soar into the sublime heights with the angels.

"I learned that there are those who would rob youth of their manhood to serve their own wicked ends and that there are those agencies at work endeavoring to corrupt the good and glorify the base.

"I learned that God will bless and nourish every laudable undertaking; that materialism has its rightful place in man's life but it should never become the usurper; that despotism has risen in all ages, in all civilizations, and that it must be slashed and destroyed before it attains its odious ends; and that there exists a school of instruction thousands of years old sponsored by God and His adepts.

"I learned that grammar allows us to speak kind words to our fellowmen; that rhetoric enables us to spread God's message of love; that logic teaches man that God is impartial in His dealings with mankind and that He is eminently just; that by arithmetic, we can count our blessings, subtract the faults of our fellows, multiply our good works, and divide our fortunes; that astronomy shows the relationship of man to man, man to the universe, and man to God; that music reveals to us how to blend discord into harmony; and that geometry proves that divine laws laid down by The Great Architect-the macrocosm-can be comprehended and applied by man-the microcosm."

Astonished by my answers, he softly inquired, "Well, how many degrees do you have and how long did it take you to get them?"

Again, looking at my ring and seeing the precepts of fraternity, liberty and equality, I answered, "Thirty-two degrees-in one year."

"Thirty-two!" he exclaimed, which captured everyone's attention at the far end of the table. "I'd give anything to have 32 degrees and to learn all of what you've studied in one year. But how can I do it?"

"You can," I said as I smiled and handed him a petition for the Scottish Rite.

Let's all remember that we have 32 degrees and belong to one of the greatest organizations in the world. MASONRY!

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