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Paper 36/2007

Title **The 47th Proposition of Euclid - What does it tell.**

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Masonry is a journey of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated with symbols. All the Masonic papers I have read on the 47th proposition tell us of mathematics, algebra and how to make a right angle triangle. What we want to find is the veiled allegory! What is it trying to tell us that will be of use in our peculiar system of morality?

We know from school that “The Square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides” and Pythagoras worked this out. We also know he was a philosopher, geometrician and teacher. What we were not told at school is that these three things were part of his journey to GOD. Of Masonic interest, he journeyed to the East in search of knowledge and returned to the West to teach, it is also possible he was in Babylon at the time of Nebuchadnezzar - of interest to those who move on to join Royal Arch. We were not taught that he was a preacher of mystic doctrines, on a spiritual and philosophic journey to GOD. At Kroton in southern Italy he founded a religious community and school of science. What he taught was so far from the comprehension of the ordinary man that he protected and veiled it from the profane world through a system of initiation. It’s still necessary to learn and understand to comprehend the next lesson. Interestingly the community excited jealousy and mistrust leading to many struggles from which he eventually had to flee. There is a Masonic thought there!

So, what of Euclid? He wrote thirteen books called the “Elements” on plane geometry, geometric and abstract algebra, number theory and he was a teacher. As Pythagoras wrote nothing down and gave no proofs, we learn via Euclid’s propositions, axioms and theorems, how and why. He expresses this using algebra - the most basic form of abstract thought. Ptolemy the first once asked him if there was a shorter way to study geometry than the Elements, to which he replied that there was no royal road to geometry. In Masonry we remember his 47th proposition from the first book expressing the right angle triangle - most important to builders - Masonry, the 4th part of a circle and our square teaching morality. It is in this context we must remember we search for, not the mysteries, but the “Hidden mysteries of Nature and Science”.

In conclusion, Euclid’s “Book of Fallacies” tells us that beginners are taught reason, discipline of thought and avoidance of seduction to errors. Lastly we’re told that Euclid “belongs to the persuasion of Plato”, who shares with Pythagoras a search for the hidden mysteries. In our Charge,“ the preservation of your corporeal and mental faculties to their fullest energy” conjoined with “Hidden Mysteries” teaches us that rational, clear, abstract thought is aided by the study of geometry, is part of the Spiritual journey and the development of this faculty is necessary to our journey to understand GOD.

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