

The Ashlar

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Worshipful Master, Dear Brethren

I'm hoodwinked in the middle of God knows where, surrounded by people I don't know . I've been overcome by a strange disorientation resulting from wandering around in the dark. It's kind of strange how subtle this feeling was , it crept up slowly almost unnoticeable at first but there was no mistaking that I was now firmly in its grip. My body was trembling in anticipation and even though I tried to calm myself my body would not obey my brain . To add on top of this it seemed that my body was about to give in . My legs were fatigued from holding myself in the kneeling position for what seemed like an eternity another moment like this and I feared I might fall over. At that moment the voice of the Worshipful Master broke through my confusion . He asked me that being in a state of darkness what I desired most . I readily answered "Light " not knowing if it was the correct answer but sensing it was the truth . Catching me off guard with an unshakable authority and sureness he commanded " LET THERE BE LIGHT " At that moment the hoodwink was removed , what my eyes beheld was powerful and majestic. It literally blew away my preconceived notions and expectations . The darkness had truly fled leaving me filled with light and hope.

For two weeks after my initiation I was a juggernaut I mean completely unstoppable. I was surrounded by an incredible luck and a feeling of surety that was unlike anything I had ever felt before . It was almost as if the very conviction of the Worshipful Masters words reverberated within me now. To me it was a bright new beginning , I had walked into that Lodge alone and left with 12 new Brothers. to them a new ashlar had been plucked from the quarry of life and now the real work would begin .

In my time as an Entered Apprentice no symbol has been more intriguing to me and prevalent as the ashlar. Webster's dictionary defines the noun Ashlar as "A hewn or squared stone". The expanded definition reads "In Freemasonry the ashlar comes in two forms . The rough ashlar represents a rough, unprepared or undressed stone, and is an allegory of the uninitiated Freemason prior to his discovering enlightenment; The smooth ashlar represents the dressed stone as used by the experienced stonemason and is an allegory of the Freemason that through education and diligence has achieved enlightenment and who lives an upstanding life" .

Once the ashlar is removed from the quarry the process by which The Craft employs its tools begins. For each member the process aforementioned is different . It is specially crafted to remove the excess unwanted material. Only a smooth stone may be placed upon another for if it were attempted to build a temple out of rough ashlar's this temple would not be a temple at all but just a pile of rocks unfit to be the abode of a King .Each Mason from every walk of life is inherently special. There are dimensions and qualities expressed in each that are exceedingly rare in the general populace . Even though they are all distinctly different they all share a common bond in that they are all good men embarking on a quest to be made better .

John T . Lawrence in *The perfect ashlar and other Masonic symbols* , writes " The Craft can do much in the transformation of character but it cannot transform material. It will take the rough and make it perfect but it cannot turn base material into good."That every Mason has a story unique unto him of how circumstances brought them to their Lodge is a testimony of how the Great architect takes great pains to weave our new destinies into the fabric of the universe. Each situation is a gavel upon the chisel that would liberate the candidate and send them on their path . After being liberated from the cosmic quarry how exactly will the ashlar be shaped ? In my experience Life is itself the greatest tool . John T Lawrence writes in *The perfect ashlar and other Masonic symbols* writes . " The incidents of our daily life , our occupations , our intercourse with the world oftentimes accompanied with friction sometimes unpleasant".

Every day is a new chance to build on who you are, and after pulling through the situations the week or month has had in store for you I find it's important to reflect upon them and get the input of a personal mentor to make sure that you can appreciate what life is trying to teach you . Your experiences seen through the eyes of a mentor gives you an unbiased interpretation of what the universe is trying to teach you. for this reason every entered apprentice should establish a network of open dialogue with the Master Masons in their lodge .

When you enter a Lodge and talk to its members you may readily notice that what generally differentiates the Entered apprentices the Fellowcrafts and the Master Masons is a degree of perception . This perception comes from life instances and experience giving them the expert opinion to show the student the fallibility or strength of his own devices, and in this fashion the the apprentice builds frame upon frame attempting to define the universe around him . Each degree of Masonry brings with it more more information and understanding which has to be assimilated in order to grow. And so the Master Mason is the perfect teacher for the newly initiated because there is no terrain the initiate will encounter that has not already been traversed by a lodge of Master Masons. By working in conjunction with an experienced mentor I have found that the learning process is much gentler than going it on your own, which is exactly the mistake I made in my first year in Masonry.

When I first joined the order I was under the illusion that I was already nearing perfection . I had just finished a five year plan and I had just battled my way up the company ladder at work seizing the highest paying position outside of management. . I was rapidly finishing my degree for a new career and I was looking to buy a house now to add to that I had joined a discretely selective fraternity , not bad all in all things were shaping up nicely . However my idea of perfect and the Great Architects idea of perfect were quite different . If I wasn't so proud and vain I might have seen this .but I was blinded by a hoodwink of another nature . these impurities have been with me my entire life., and no matter where I've gone no matter what I've done they've always been the seeds of my imminent destruction. Each time life tried to teach me my lessons I would eagerly turn my back on the situation walking away with my hoodwink intact. Would I make the same mistake with Masonry ? I'd try .

Masonry was a sudden thing for me . I'd never given it much consideration before but a year before I joined I began having dreams on the topic. I asked a few friends and the general consensus was that initiation may be inevitable. As fate would have it my next girlfriends father was a Mason her mother was a member of Eastern star and she herself was in Jobs daughters before we met. After a while I was introduced to the Worshipful Master of Liberty Lodge 299 . I was blown away by how friendly everybody was . They were a tight knit group and there wasn't a bad apple among them but just to make sure I was making the right decision I went to an Academia 847 agape in Oakland . They blew my expectations out of the water as well. Academia was only taking 2 candidates at the time and there were 10 potential candidates that night . It was a slim chance I'd get in so I was at a dead 50 /50 between the two Lodges. After long deliberation and not being able to decide between the two I decided to go have dinner with my roommate at Roundtable pizza . I had ordered in advance and when we walked in the manager handed me my order and said I made this one especially for you. Written on the side of the box was my name and the order number which just so happened to be 847. I applied and after the interviews and a few months I received the decision that would change my life forever and take me down the path to initiation. . In my first six months at my lodge I had high hopes that I would turn the world of Masonry on its ear or blaze the fast track to my 33rd degree. these fantasies were all brought to a screeching halt when my

best friend of 15 years took his own life . It was the end of a hard road for him a road that I had mostly been there for. I introduced him to his wife through a blind date and I had been there when his children were born . The whole event plunged me into a dark phase causing me to question what the point of life really was. After months of soul searching I attempted to make it back into Lodge and after two months my Grandmother was diagnosed with terminal Cancer so I stepped away from Masonry yet again . After she passed away I took time to mourn ., for me it was a little too close to losing my best friend and even though I had closure my nerves were still pretty raw but I came back to Lodge all the same and no sooner was I two months in my good friend and coworker Brian Stowe was beaten into a coma at a Giants baseball game. At this point I felt like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. I had just bought a house and the same week I closed escrow there was a meeting at work to brief workers that we had just lost several key contracts and in this economy it wouldn't be long before there were job cuts. With all the bad occurrences I began to distance myself from Lodge and instead of viewing it as a privilege I began to see it as a burden . Coming in to Lodge was a constant reminder that I was no closer to my next degree as I was the first day I stepped into Lodge .When I looked at what little I'd accomplished in the time I'd been at Academia it kind of hurt my pride because other Entered apprentices that had stated with me were now Master Masons .

And

so I decided to come up with a new five year plan to get my life back on track and if Masonry was weighing me down then I would have to cut ballast in order to make it over the obstacles in my head and keep my pride intact. But while I was writing the new five year plan I remembered many things and when I did the cosmic hoodwink was removed and I received that which I most desired which was light because at that moment it had dawned upon me that far greater than my selfish pride was my pride of belonging to something bigger than me through Academia, especially after I realized that it was the symbols of the craft that had released me from a repetitive cycle of failure

The one thing about the Masonic symbols is that everybody can relate to them but at the same time it holds a unique interpretation for each practitioner. I'll admit when I saw the ashlar for the first time I had no idea how rich the symbology was beyond just rough and smooth. I now know that there is a trip that needs to be taken to get from the quarry to its final resting place, there are preparations that must be taken to chisel and smooth that stone and believe me you don't want to miss this because its life in the making . My path from initiation has been interesting to say the least I've been built up and knocked back down . I've experienced extreme spiritual joy and great emotional duress like I've never known before but I made it through and I'll do it again if I have to. W.L. Wilmhurst in The meaning of Masonry writes " It cannot be too strongly emphasized that no one can learn the spiritual science wether as taught by Masonry or any other system inculcating it without submitting himself to its processes and living them out in practical experience. "

You may have asked yourself what I actually remembered while writing the five year plan that caused me to reconsider. I remembered that times indeed were tough but I couldn't just leave after being initiated and this is why , I was called just like everybody in this room was , the Great Architect brought us all here through twists of fate and circumstance , From the foundations of this age nothing short of destiny has brought us together into the here and now . It is my ardent hope that all Masons young and old will always remember the great trust that was placed upon us at initiation .

We as Masons are special people , master builders in the art of becoming , building tomorrow today and in a world where our economy is in ruins and morality is broken builders are exactly what is needed.

Thank You