

Masonic Wages

(Worshipful. A month after I had talked to you and we had both settled on this topic I found out that Bro. Onur had just submitted his rendition of the exact same subject. With this in mind I decided to continue (I was 2 pages in) but from a much different slant so the topic would still sound fresh.)

To this day few memories are as vivid as when I received my first paycheck. It was 1986, I was sixteen and on the tail end of one of the most awkward phases of my life. No longer a child but not yet a man I was painfully aware that everything in my possession had come to me through the kindness of well-meaning adults. This realization had a profound sinking effect on me, one that was marked by an all pervading melancholy. In short I was lost. Apart from my knack for Academia I had no girlfriend, no transportation and very little direction as to my future.

Little did I know that there was a silver bullet for my condition that would cure my every woe. In fact, from the moment my boss handed me that slender piece of perforated paper, I became instantaneously polarized towards the positive aspects of my life that had thus far been hidden from sight. I felt, nay knew, that my feet no longer stood upon sand but firm bedrock and because of that the sun in my life seemed to shine all the more brighter.

I celebrated this momentous occasion by proceeding to the nearest mall and purchasing something that mentally anchored my new found freedom, my very own CD player. At the time this was cutting edge technology, people still carried pagers to communicate, and VCR's were the pinnacle of home entertainment. The motivation for me was simple, not many people had heard of this invention especially my parents. It was, to me, physical proof that I could move into the future by the sweat of my own brow.

Therefore it wasn't too surprising, the flood of familiarity that enveloped me during my fellow craft initiation, particularly at the mention of Masonic Wages. It is a degree that marks the passing of a candidate from his early youth to the beginning of his self-sufficiency and the only way to arrive there is by a moderate use of one's own volition.

But what are these wages of which we speak? Are they meant to be used in the same manner as cold hard cash or are they assigned a much higher purpose? In Masonry the mention of corn, wine and oil represents nourishment of our spiritual selves and the opportunity to serve humanity thereby obtaining a joy of soul which is beyond price. For example, with enough material wealth you can purchase a house but this is not necessarily what makes it a home. In the same respect a fellow craft may stand in the middle chamber of the temple but without wages, may not have learned the proper morals to cause the spirit to inhabit it.

To facilitate that this does indeed take place the newly made fellow craft is entitled to a portion of corn, wine and oil. From time immemorial they have been viewed as a status symbol of plenty not only

for the value but the state of mind they bestow. Because you'd be surprised what an individual can accomplish when their mind isn't overwhelmed by basic needs.

There's an interesting book upon this topic titled "Guns, germs and steel". As an agriculturalist the author Jordan Diamond points out that it wasn't genetic superiority or even intelligence that caused certain races to prosper over others. Rather it was a chain of opportunity and necessity that gave them the edge. Due to the solar distribution patterns in the area Eurasians had greater access to high protein diets than tropical areas, which led the way from foraging to stable agricultural societies. This brought about an ease of breeding and an eventual immunity to the pestilence that invariably comes with close quartered conditions. So while other societies may have found elephants to be excellent beasts of burden they really didn't breed that well in captivity. When these people came into contact with Eurasians, even though they may have massively outnumbered them the scales usually ended up weighing against them after endemic illness ravaged their population.

In a similar vein, the corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment and the oil of joy, contribute to the optimal efficiency of the fellow craft builder. Now, while these substances have a physical and practical value our masonic wages are most assuredly spiritual. We will start with corn which is as good a place as any because as you will see it is quite possibly the most important. During the initiation for the middle degree the candidate is given a password which they are told was a verbal cue used to identify foreigners. While the definition is true it barely scratches the surface. The Hebrew version of the word translates to a sheaf of corn or a flood of water. Of meritable note the ancients believed it to symbolize resurrection because as it is man's fate to return to the dust from whence he sprang corn was different. Every year it returned, it was cyclical and therefore everlasting but there was something else. Corn was tied to the solstices and by virtue of its golden color, inherently contained the power of the sun.

Wine was revered for an altogether different reason. That being, in a world where things decay and die the fruit of the vine got better and more complex as time marched on. Thus it began to symbolize transformation, the spirit, divinity and love. In more than one tradition such as the Sufi's it was viewed it as an intense fervor that was reminiscent of the Greek god Bacchus. It is perhaps for this reason, in masonry, that a warden, whose duty it is, to see that none convert the purpose of refreshment for intemperance is used.

To put a finer point on it, we forget that a lodge is either open, at refreshment or closed and when we go downstairs to take place in the agape it is still very much open. If you'll recall the midday sun's duty as the Junior Warden is thus. "As the sun in the south is the beauty and glory of the day, so is the Junior Warden in the south. The better to observe the time to call the craft from labor to refreshment and from refreshment to labor again by the order of the Worshipful Master." One of the first things to transpire after we are seated at the dinner table is the Junior Warden will erect his symbol of authority on his pedestal to demonstrate that he is now in control. Then he will appoint two of the newest Entered Apprentices to serve the wine to those who have learned to subdue their passions and improve themselves in masonry. If anybody should get out of line, it is this particular Warden's task to make sure they act accordingly.

During refreshment the three immovable jewels of the lodge sit in their appointed locations and communicate their intent via gavel until by request of the Worshipful, the Senior Warden closes lodge after having seen that every brother has had his due.

Last but not least we have oil, which in its physical form provides ease of movement (lubrication) and light (via lamps). It used in Judaism, Islam and Christianity to symbolize the Holy Spirit and is regularly used as an agent to anoint prophets, priests and kings. In fact the very word Christos means anointed. For masonry the meaning is no different. If you'll remember in the Entered Apprentice trestleboard the center piece is none other than Jacobs Ladder. As the story goes the biblical Patriarch rested his head upon a stone and dreamed of angels ascending and descending the rungs. Upon waking he set up an altar in the very spot and anointed it with oil from a ram or bulls horn to show that it was set apart for divine purpose.

Now that we have an idea of the symbolism of the wages let's move into their usage. Together they are most commonly found in the ceremonial consecration of a new Lodge. A dedication, or free will offering by pouring out the wealth of the land or the strength of the tribe upon the foundation. The Grandmaster carries a golden container filled with corn and says, "I pour this corn the emblem of nourishment and consecrate this lodge to charity." The Senior Warden follows with a container of silver and replies, "I pour this wine the emblem of refreshment and consecrate this lodge to hope." The Junior Warden then tips his container and continues, "I pour this emblem of joy and consecrate this lodge to faith."

A profoundly beautiful ceremony if ever there was one, especially when you consider that these substances which King David referred to as, "wine that maketh glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and corn which strengthen a man's heart are being sprinkled upon a structure that symbolically represents the Ark of the Covenant.

But outside of ceremony what other significance do they hold? For this W.L. Wilmhurst writes. "The Mason himself is likened to an ear of corn nourished by a fall of water of life. In virtue of the animal element of his own nature he is himself the ox that treadeth out the corn separating the golden grain from the stalk that bore it. He treads his own wine press alone; in singleness of effort and in the solitude of his own thought, distilling his own vintage until the cup of his own mind runs over with a new intelligence. He is his own oil-press and out of his own experience and self-realization extracts wisdom that oil that which anoints him with a joy and an ability above his fellows and runs down to the "skirts of his clothing" manifesting itself in his personality and in all of his activities." Does that sound familiar or strike a chord? It should, the opening was in reference to the pass of the fellow craft except Wilmhurst takes it a step further and reveals that the candidate is likened unto the corn. The other parts are core tenets of most mystic traditions and for that Wilmhurst says. "In their higher symbolism corn (or bread) and wine relate to those of the altar and were Eucharistic elements in the mysteries long before the Christian master in a certain upper room took over and gave new application to the wheat of Ceres and the wine of Bacchus. While oil, the crushed, refined products of the olive refers to that wisdom which is the ultimate essence of experience and knowledge, and which has been associated in the different mystery teachings with Minerva, Solomon and the Mt of Olives.

I can attest to this myself, because before I ever set foot within a lodge, I had travelled from one end of the spiritual spectrum to the other. After a decade with a Christian group called the Pentecostals I began to research world religions. This led me to a group that specializes in the re-enactment of the highest ancient mysteries. I have actually drank the fabled kykeon brew of the Eleusinian mysteries, written of, in Homer's "The Odyssey". While the candidates are always sworn to secrecy as to what is revealed, it is a well published fact that the wages that are due a mason are some of the core symbols.

Now, you might be wondering why I'm reaching for correlations within other systems. When I began researching this paper I had started with fairly high hopes. I hate to say it but they were dashed fairly quickly. Nearly every article on the internet was quite literally a carbon copy of the first, as if somebody had copied and pasted the body with a new title. In all, I read approximately twenty and they rarely contained more than a minutes worth of content. Surprisingly enough, Albert Pike's "Morals and Dogma" doesn't even weigh in on the topic. I'll admit I was starting to get worried. Was it possible that the mention of wages was just an obscure reference that made up a few lines in a script? Intent on getting down to the bottom of it I went to my own bookshelves and pulled volumes that I hadn't read in years. Inside of a week my faith was restored and in fact I actually felt that each line within the fellow crafts script was merely the tip to a gargantuan iceberg. Starting with Jewish Gematria I found that the words, "Corn, Wine, Oil," have the exact same numerical value as, "Father, Son, Holy Spirit."

In fact I found references to the craft in the most unlikely of places. Within an old manuscript on Chinese Taoism was a diagram that hinted at the origin of the masonic apron. Which begs the question, could corn, wine and oil have an equivalent value with the elements of water, air and fire? Or what about alchemy or the sephiroth in the kabbalah. I bring this up because there is a treasure trove of information out there for those who earnestly seek and also because it is written, "Only in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. To receive the Masonic equivalent of the ancient corn, wine and oil a brother must labor. He must till the fields of his own heart or build the temple of his own house not made with hands. He must give labor to his neighbor or carry stones for his brother's temple."

Which brings me to my final question. Are the wages of a mason, be they spiritual or otherwise, meant to be consumed daily and then replenished regularly? Or is the change within, meant, like the initiation that mentions them, intended to last a lifetime. For a glimpse at the possible answer I will take everybody back to their very first initiation.

After the trauma of your birth, as you lay safe in the embrace of your mother. Family members from near and far crowded around the hospital bed to see the living embodiment of potential that had been 9 months in the making. In the hours that followed there wasn't an ounce of discord. Whatever struggles or issues these people had between the world or each other was laid aside. Only adoration and hope reigned. For this is the right of every child born under the vault of heaven, a wish or desire imparted from each relative. It differs among region but some wish for strength, others that you never walk alone. Your grandparents may have hoped that you would become learned and walk with wisdom. But paramount to all of these was the prime directive of nature itself and was the very hope of your parents. That you would one day rise up and succeed where so many before had fallen. That no matter what life threw in front of you, you would not yield but instead become the master of your destiny. And here we are today my illustrious brethren, Masons one and all. A congratulations is in order, for crafting your own vessel and navigating the waters of life no matter how choppy but before you do it would only be

right to first give thanks to your ancestors because it was their emotions on that very special day of your birth that may have fashioned the rudder.