

## **FROM THE MIDDLE CHAMBER TO THE DIVINE REALM**

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*To the glory of the Great Architect Of The Universe.*

A fellowcraft ode from Macoy's Masonic Manual,

See Order and Beauty rise gently to view,

Each Brother a column, so perfect and true!

When Order shall cease, and when temple decay,

May each, fairer columns, immortal, survey.

From ancient times man has pondered the "otherworld," the place where the gods reside. Holy men and philosophers have discoursed and written volumes on aspects of this divine realm. In speculative masonry, Masons philosophically attend a cosmic or celestial lodge when they participate in the ideals and do the work. As fellows of the craft, we pass through the globes representing the earthly realm and the celestial realm, and ascend the winding stairs to the middle chamber. When passing through these globes, we are called to stay in the center, balancing our spiritual and material natures. We know the dangers of walking the material path in the dark, but what of its extreme counterpart, staring too intensely into the light? The middle ground we must strive towards in life, is represented by the middle chamber of the fellowcraft ritual, and thus one may only reach the divine realm by passing through the middle chamber.

"In the Fellow Craft degree, the senior deacon leads the candidate from the outer porch and up the Winding Staircase of knowledge, showing him firsthand the path by which his less-noble passions are transcended."-Candidate Guide

The ascent to the middle chamber between the two globes is essentially our journey through life. An upwards climb is a perfect symbol for progress, and to rise above one's lower nature is what we aspire to do as Entered Apprentices. Upon being passed to fellowcraft, the mason is inspired to get to work building his inner temple. And although the fellowcraft symbolically reaches the middle chamber, he is called to continually aspire to this middle chamber by walking the middle path. By stepping off center, either too close to the earthly globe or too close to the celestial globe, one will never reach the middle chamber. In his 1882 work, *Symbolism of Freemasonry*, Albert Mackey discusses the ascent of the Mason.

He writes,

"He cannot stand still, if he would be worthy of his vocation; his destiny as an immortal being requires him to ascend, step by step, until he has reached the summit, where the treasures of knowledge await him."

This knowledge Mackey speaks of is represented in the wages the fellowcraft receives in the middle chamber, and these wages are only given if rightly earned. This knowledge must be applied to life in order for it to become wisdom. The corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment, and the oil of joy are given to us as rewards for living justly.

In his 1933 work, *The Ceremony of Passing*, Brother Walter Leslie Wilmshurst offers,

"On his journey from the realm of the senses to that of the ultimate spirit he must pass through an intermediate region, that of the soul or mind, which is the half-way house between the sensible and the spiritual."

This journey that spirals upwards is, philosophically, a journey inward, from the outer to the inner self and inspires self analysis.

"Philo -" comes from the Greek word *philein*, meaning to love, and "- sophy" comes from *Sophia*,

or wisdom. It is this love of wisdom that all masons share, and this spirit is what draws us closer to the Great Geometrician. Thus all masons are philosophers, but it would be hard to proclaim that all philosophers are masons. Never the less, it is often very beneficial to study different philosophical works through the lens of freemasonry. One such work is *Phaedo*, one of Plato's great dialogues. The *Phaedo* centers around the last hours of Socrates' life, and the conversation he has with his friends before he is sentenced to death by drinking hemlock. The main topics of their discussion are the immortality of the soul and Plato's theory of Forms.

Plato's theory of Forms or ideas revolves around the thought that there is a non physical realm or world where entities or ideals such as beauty, equality, and harmony exist. In the material world, particulars merely participate in these forms, because they are ever changing. A beautiful building or a divinely proportioned nautilus shell are as such because of their participation in the Form of Beauty. Plato proposes that the world of Forms is unseen and unchanging and likens it to the soul whereas the physical objects that are perceived by the senses are imperfect and akin to the body.

Phaedo-

"She(the soul) passes into the other world, the region of purity and eternity and immortality and unchangeableness...and this state of the soul is called wisdom."

We Masons must have a belief in a supreme being that is eternal and unchanging as well as a belief in the immortality of the soul. Whether one believes in reincarnation or an everlasting afterlife, with the jewel of the faithful breast we can rest assured there is a divine realm that we participate in, in some way or another. There is much talk of our soul reaching that "undiscovered country" after death, but there are moments in life that our soul attends the cosmic lodge whether it be through meditation or other non physical means. We can even say that the soul can dwell in the Spiritual Palace when it isn't anchored in the body such as in altered states or dreaming. Even when engaging in philosophical thought, our soul basks in the glory of the cosmic lodge. Our

immortal soul has tasted this light of truth in between incarnations and we can access this knowledge while in this life.

The love of wisdom is what helps connect our souls to the realm of Forms while in the physical body. We need not wait and dwell on death to be released of the body in order to experience the celestial lodge. Getting our glimpses of the perfect world comes about when we detach from our senses and connect with the divine. This brings up a paradox however. How is it that we are supposed to experience life in all its glory without the senses? Plato repeatedly suggests that the body keeps the soul from the realm of purity, but it can be argued that the senses help inform us of God's creations. Without the sense of smell, how can we enjoy the rose, and without hearing, how can we appreciate the songs of the birds? The middle path of Masonry helps solve this conflict. One must not be so immersed in the pleasures of the flesh that they do not know the divine realms, and just the same, one cannot chastize themselves so much as to miss out on being human.

Plato emphasizes a negative view of the body and the senses. We masons rectify this train of thought by referring to the senses as "gifts of nature." From Macoy's Masonic Manual,

"The proper use of these five senses enables us to form just and accurate notions of the operations of nature; and when we reflect on the objects with which our senses are gratified, we become conscious of them, and are enabled to attend to them, till they become familiar objects of thought."

I find it hard because at times it is agreeable to believe that this material world is all an illusion, but yet we cannot come closer to God by simply thought alone. We must see the beautiful landscape and hear to lovely music, right?

Phaedo-

“That soul, I say, herself invisible, departs to the invisible world to the divine and immortal and

rational: thither arriving, she lives in bliss and is released from the error and folly of men, their fears and wild passions and all other human ills, and forever dwells, as they say of the initiated, in company with the gods.”

Plato is not the only philosopher to speak of the body as a prison. Proponents of ancient gnosticism, speak of the non-material world as good and the material world as evil. They believe in a being called the Demiurge, the fashioner of the material world, and that this creator is flawed. It may be easy to simply say that the material world is imperfect compared to the divine realm, but that gets us nowhere.

Having one foot out the door in a form of escapism, being overly spiritual can be almost as bad as being too materialistic and claiming the only truth is experienced with the 5 senses. The danger of thinking that the world is imperfect in the comparison with the divine can make one feel that life isn't good enough so he can't wait to be in heaven, or he constantly seeks ways of escaping the body. In his book, *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry*, C.W. Leadbeater urges us to "walk in that Middle Way which Lord Buddha has described as the path of safety." Many of the world's wisdom traditions emphasize a balance between our spiritual nature and our connection with the earth. In the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel to interpret a dream for him. In the dream the King sees a tree in the middle of the land, and its top touched the sky and it was visible to the ends of the earth. Daniel tells him, "...you, O king, are that tree!" And thus, we humans are symbolic trees, we are the connection between all things in the heavens and the earth. With temperance we can walk the middle path, which is our duty. We were told as entered apprentices that "Temperance renders the body tame and governable, and frees the mind from the allurements of vice." We can live a life in which our body can serve us, and not hinder us from uniting with the divine.

The fellowcraft receives the wages of corn, wine, and oil which symbolically represent plenty, health, and peace. These can be the ideals or forms that we must participate in, or masonically,

do the work. Embodying, or participating in the virtues and tenets of freemasonry is what Plato was calling those to do by embodying the forms or ideals of justice and beauty and so on. We are called to subdue our passions, and as we seek further light we must not forget that we still need to be grounded on this earth and in our body. We must find balance and harmony with our participation in both realms. We cannot simply perceive the works of God with our mind, we have to stop and actually smell the flowers. The mason, the builder, the soul, stands in the middle of the celestial and terrestrial globes ever traveling East.