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Academia 847
2/2019

Entered Apprentice Mason Paper: Hoodwinked

There I stood in the lobby of temple, erected to God and dedicated to the Holy Saints John. I found myself dealing with array of emotions and feelings, curious, excited, anxious and even hungry. Yet I was able to maintain my posture while holding a smile upon the sight of a friend, whom I after gained the privilege of calling a brother. I knew in my heart that was mentally, psychically, and most importantly spiritually prepared to travel on this path that many brother and fellows have gone before. After waiting some time, the friend informed me that in order to begin with the ceremonies of the evening, I was to be hoodwinked for parts of the ritual. Immediately my excitement simmered, my smile faded, and my nervousness shot to a level that caused my body to have a moment of profuse sweating. With the condition of darkness for an unknown amount of time on hand, I understood that I must be willing to trust my fellow man as my guide. I was slightly troubled, but confident in my decision to proceed. The thought then occurred to me that this condition of darkness shouldn't necessarily be viewed as a burden. Being hoodwinked could be a good thing, man may be able to observe the light, but the nature of its power will remain unknown without first experiencing the depths of darkness. Thus, a blindfold was fit snug around my eyes, and I was hoodwinked. Prepared for a journey that I understood would last a lifetime. Being in this condition of darkness I began pondering the journey that brought me to this point in my life. I was quickly taken back to an experience during my recent trip to India.

After spending a few days visiting in the city of Mumbai, we traveled to Northern India with a personal guide, a family friend named Yashwant. Along with affording us the safety and security of having a local person, Yashwant shared with us his wealth of knowledge relating to Indian history and Hindu mysticism. I must admit that I was sad to be leaving the city. Although I was excited from the idea of seeing the holy cities and countless ashrams, when it came down to it, I cared more to indulge the benefits of vacation. But that was my M.O. I would always pick a short-sided fun time over anything that had to do with growth in the areas of spirituality or religion. The nature of our trip to Northern India was that of spiritual growth. If afforded the opportunity Hindus will travel to a place where the Ganges river flows, in order to bath in the holy river. It is believed that bathing in the Ganges clears a person of their sins, this practice helps one in their journey towards Moksha. Moksha can be understood in two different schools, one of which refers to finality. Here moksha is the liberation, emancipation, or release from the cycle of life and death. The other perspective of Moksha flows with the daily existence of life. It is that of an epistemological or psychological view where the person is able to reach a state of self-actualization, or freedom from ignorance. We traveled to the holy city of Rishikesh, it was far enough North that the water at this point of the Ganges was all ice run off. The water held a beautiful rich sky blue/turquoise color. My brother, girlfriend and I proceeded to bathe in the ice-cold holy river. Afterwards we spent some time meditating alongside of it and participated in a small pooja(ritual) in honor of our ancestors. We visited several Ashrams that were on the embankment of the river. Then we went slightly off the main path where we stopped at an Ashram that was a home and it was not open to the public. To our luck our family friend Yashwant knew the right people and we were permitted to enter the grounds. We were caused to

sit in their main prayer room where Yashwant suggested that we clear our minds and meditate, we were informed that we would be able to absorb the positive energy of the grounds. I sat on the floor in the room, closed my eyes, and focused solely on my breathing. What happened next is something that I to this day have no logical explanation for. Approximately 5 minutes went by of the meditation and I found myself uncontrollably shedding tears, I distinctly remember having no thoughts of sadness at the time, nor was I in an emotional state that would bring upon such tears. My focus on the breathing immediately broke as embarrassment took over my conscience, there I was sitting in a room crying for no apparent reason. I opened my eyes to see if anyone was aware of my current state, I looked to my left where Crystal was sitting, then to my right where my brother Nach was. To my surprise they too had silent tears running down their cheeks. We inquired to Yashwant about this experience and we were given an answer that sufficed for the time, yet left us with many questions. Although I did not have a clear answer as to what I had experienced in that room, I knew it had a lasting effect on my conscience. In that short meditation I felt as though a veil of darkness had been lifted from within me, as though my soul was going through a phenomenon of experiencing freedom. I felt that I could stay in that space for eternity, that nothing mattered outside of the pure sensation of existence that I was feeling. There was no accomplishment, no accolades, nor was there a salary that could ever bring me the sense of peace that I was feeling in that moment in time. Upon my return to the states I sat with my mother whom I consider to be my spiritual guide and asked her what her explanation was for what we all three had experienced. My mother gave me a beautiful analogy to understand the experience. She explained by giving an example of a candle burning in a glass holder. Our soul is represented by the flame of the candle resting inside the glass holder. The glass holder represents our body, the vessel which carries the flame. As the candle burns the glass holder will begin to darken over time, from the smoke and soot, this becomes visibly apparent on the glass. Through our lives we develop karma, both good and bad, this karma can cloud our perspective of the observed world if not properly maintained. Maintenance for the glass would be cleaning it with proper chemicals which would remove the darkness that has formed overtime. Similarly our vessel which can be polluted with negative karma, actions and thoughts can be cleansed. This was the phenomenon we had experienced, a 'spiritual cleansing of the soul' for lack of better words. Going into this trip I knew that I was searching for something that would aid me on my path to spiritual growth. Regardless of what happened in the room of that ashram, whether it be deemed spiritual or logical, what occurred there showed me exactly what I was looking for. I did not see God, I did not see the light, the darkness was not subdued in an observable way. Yet in my heart of hearts I could feel the light glowing brighter from within me, as it had overcome shades of darkness. I knew then that I was duly and truly prepared to move forward on this path of personal and spiritual growth, and that I must continue to ask questions and seek the truth of knowledge. We went on that trip for spiritual growth, I came back with an awakening. This awakening was the precursor to my ability to gain something significant from my initiation into the brotherhood.

Being hoodwinked and lead through the temple in the darkness by a friend was difficult, I was lost, disoriented, afraid to fall and get hurt. Fighting the feeling of darkness was useless. Instead I was able to find bliss in accepting the darkness. I allowed myself to fully trust the senses that I did have available to me. I could recognize the different voices of my guides, there was sincere solace in this, I knew that I was safe, I knew these men would not intentionally allow me to be seriously hurt. I was in a state of full trust in myself and submission to my guide in

hopes that I would be led towards the light. The blindfold was first removed at the entrance of the chamber of reflection. In front of me was a station where I was caused to sit and answer questions presented by the lodge. The station was dimly lit and I continued to feel as though I was in the darkness. I reviewed the questions and pondered a time before beginning to write my response. The deep metaphysical questions asked sent me on a whirlwind of thought. When facing death what is it that man finds most important, what is it that I find most important? I found myself staring intently into my own eyes through the mirror. At first, all that came to mind was achieving great levels of excellence in my passions, so that I would be remembered by all of man when I was gone. I envisioned statues erected in my honor. I continued to stare at myself, nearly disgusted at the thoughts present in my mind, at the time of death all I could think about was myself and my imaginary achievements. Reflecting on this moment and my initial reaction to the questions, brought me to the understanding that I was allowing the yearning for my desires and passions control my thought. This was problematic for me, for those thoughts would inevitably lead to a course of action. I asked myself why I chose to be here tonight, in this temple, when I knew that I could be out with my girlfriend enjoying a lovely dinner or with my buddies sharing a laugh. Presenting this question to my mind allowed me to snap out of the thoughts that were derived from my desires and passions. Thus, allowing me to have a clear mode of thought where I could honestly confront my own mortality.

After the exercise in the room of reflection I was hoodwinked once again and led to the lodge to continue with the ceremonies of the degree. Thus far the trust I had put in the brethren had not lead me astray. In the room where the ritual occurred, I felt oddly at peace being in a condition of darkness, for my faith was in state of exponential growth towards the fellows present in the lodge. Progressing through the ceremony I was made an Entered Apprentice Mason in due form. This is when the most impactful part of the ritual occurred for me. I was asked being in a condition of darkness, what I most desire, my answer being, light. At which point the hoodwink was removed and I was no longer a poor blind candidate desiring to be brought from the darkness to light. I was experiencing the light in its full might. I was flooded with the sensation of being one with the Lodge. This was no longer about me, it was about the journey I have embarked on, and all the pieces that are involved, which will help shape my growth in this space. Upon further reflection of this moment I understood this moment to hold the same power of enlightenment that a prisoner trapped in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" would feel upon breaching the surface and escaping their observed reality of the cave. Plato describes the "Allegory of the cave" in book VII of the work titled "The Republic". Plato describes a cave in which prisoners are bonded by chain to the wall at the bottom of the cave. There is light from a fire above them and in front of that light figures pass by. As these figures pass by the fire they create shadows on the wall which the prisoners can observe. As the shadows are the only thing these prisoners chained to the wall can observe, the shadows are understood by the prisoners as the real figures. The figures passing the flames make sound, in the shadow the prisoners can see a part of the figures jaw open, which is followed by a sound. The prisoner, restrained in this condition believes that the shadow is making this noise, as they have no conception of what lies above. In the dialectic, Plato, through the mouth of Socrates says to Glaucon *"So now, I replied, watch the process whereby the prisoners are set free from their chains and, along with that, cured of their lack of insight, and likewise consider what kind of lack of insight must be if the following were to happen to those who were chained"* (Plato, *The Republic VII part II*).

In being freed from the bondage of the chains and experiencing the world in a state that a free person would. The freed prisoners experience a paradigm shift. It becomes so apparent that they held a false understanding of the nature of reality that they must walk back all their gained knowledge from the senses to comprehend what the nature of reality truly means. Plato describes this scenario to illustrate that knowledge gained from the senses alone is that of human perception and is no more than relative opinions. These objects observed in the physical world are only imitations of the actual essences of the 'Ideas' or 'Forms' as described in the 'Theory of Forms'. Plato holds that true knowledge must be gained through philosophical reasoning and not from observation alone.

The significance of being hoodwinked resonated with me greatly. In general, I would say that the majority of the information I gain through the senses begins with being able to see and observe something with my eyes. When stripped of this tool one is left to put trust in their ability to perceive their reality in modes they are unaccustomed to. I found myself creating the room around me in my imagination as I was conducted around the Lodge. I was not distracted by the constant visual stimulation our minds are bombarded with, I was able to be in the moment. The ritual experienced in the Lodge lead my conscience to endure various paradigm shifts. These shifts in my thought process would not have been possible if it were not for my time spent in India. With the guidance provided by our family friend, my experience in Rishikesh thrust me into an awakening which allowed the ritual to carry a much deeper meaning. The first major shift in my thought came in the room of reflection when the hoodwink was first removed. I found myself face to face with my greatest enemy staring right back at me and into my soul. Here I learned to subdue my passions and allow for improvement throughout my life. The second shift came when the hoodwink was removed for good and I became one with Academia Lodge 847. My fellow guides reciprocated the trust I had put in them, by aiding me on my journey from darkness to light. These paradigm shifts cause growth in understanding forcing us to see something from a perspective we may have been unaware of before. They bring forth what I believe is the greatest good that any person can experience, growth of the self.