

My Ideal Masonic Lodge

Written by Bro. Raymond Sean Walters to be presented to the Ohio Lodge of Research

It was first suggested to me several years ago that I should consider writing a book about my experiences and travels as a Freemason. From then until now, I have actually been uncertain what exactly I should write a book about. I have written a number of papers and even presented them, but to write a book sounds pretty involved. This will be another attempt at a written paper, and since this one is based on personal thoughts and opinions, I will give it a go.

I was first informed by W Bro. Chad Simpson that the subject of this paper should be my thoughts as to what would be the ideal masonic lodge --- a paper that affords any writer to offer opinions based on their own thoughts, perspectives, and personal understanding. I found the idea to be so drastically different that I agreed to consider writing a paper and submitting it.

My Masonic journey has been filled with a considerable amount of personal anguish, though I will readily admit that I have met a number of Freemasons that seem to have gained some understanding of Freemasonry's teachings and have become better at applying those teachings to their own daily living. Those Freemasons have helped me by teaching me or showing me a different perspective on many things, helping to keep me in due bounds by reminding me to use the tools of my craft, or any other tools at my disposal.

Freemasonry and the lessons it conveys are NOT rocket science. If the stated purpose of taking a good man and showing him how to become a better man are taken at face value, then becoming that better man should be an attainable objective for all who enter Freemasonry's doors. One such reminder is that Freemasonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. It has become apparent to me after 24 years of travel as a Freemason, that the lessons taught as well as lessons learned are not apparent to all claiming the title Freemason. If the lessons are readily apparent, it must be the application thereof that becomes the challenge for some.

I will begin with the qualification requirements of one seeking admission to our order. I will be referencing a ritual called More Light, written by H.W. Sanders. The More Light ritual parallels another ritual called Ecce Orienti, which is a coded version of the exposure by H.W. Sanders.

A candidate is asked a series of questions about qualifications to become a member and if it is of his own volition that he seek to be admitted into the lodge and order. The same candidate is conducted through his ceremony of initiation, with no member present expecting him to actually remember the lessons and symbolism taught during the ceremony.

This same process is repeated until the candidate is eventually pronounced a Master Mason and in many cases having only had to learn what could be considered rudimentary lessons to be deemed proficient. It is now that the application of those lessons is expected, and required.

With this being said, my first question is, and always has been was the candidate actually taught? It is stressed during these ceremonies that the candidate be instructed and proves himself as all brothers and fellows who have gone this way before him. Has he proven himself? If so, how?

My ideal here would be that the candidate actually be taught lessons of substance, not just lessons of ritual. Teach him lessons that may cause him to re-think all that he knew in the outside world prior to coming into the oblong-square. If Freemasonry is to be a transformation, transforming requires work. Work can be physical or intellectual --- but it is work that is required.

This work should begin in the EA degree, and no candidate should be simply passed through without being given a true education --- lessons that will impact his thinking, and guide him toward making a transformation within him first, thereby enabling him to effect positive change in the outside world he must live, work and even struggle in on a daily basis.

It is an especial duty of the lodge as a whole to TEACH and shouldn't fall to only one particular instructor that the Master may have assigned. Learning experience can often be better through a series of lectures and lessons with more than one instructor, so that over time many things can be learned, and later applied.

My second ideal situation for any lodge is that what I have indicated makes for a good candidate was hopefully applied previously to all the brothers and fellows who had gone before him. Training and preparation is required before advancement in any field of endeavor, and should be as equally important in this speculative science we have freely obligated ourselves to work and study at.

Even though one may be titled an MM, are they capable and truly qualified? It would appear that their journey is NOT over, but having only begun. Having a title, and showing that one is worthy of such title are two different ends of a spectrum.

It is the work of each individual in a collective effort that makes a Lodge effective at building its members into our stated purpose of “making good men better”. I was taught that Freemasons meet as a Lodge, not in one. Remembering that ritual teaches that ancient lodges met on high hills or low valleys indicates that there wasn’t always a fixed location for such meetings as there is now.

Despite the lack of a fixed location, those Masons came prepared to “work” as Masons, and prepared to teach the Craft to younger members, and each other. It would appear that the bonds of brotherly love grew stronger under that system, a system that served well for many years.

I have asked myself what changed. In all my years of reading and study of Freemasonry, it appears to this writer that what changed was one thing we all vowed to never do. Innovation or change can have positive effects on any institution, or individual. It can equally be observed that innovation can have negative impact as well, which in an ideal situation would be spotted quickly and corrected, yet that hasn’t always been the case as Masonic and world history has clearly shown those of us who actually read and study.

In this paper I have shared my opinion. I do not expect anyone to agree with me, or my thoughts. I have always strived to keep things as simple as I could so that anyone could grasp some understanding from my words. My final analysis is that we all strive to learn what we can, and be willing to teach it to others.

Freely sharing is something that makes humans distinct, and sharing is what allowed individuals to become unified in common purpose as tribes. We Freemasons are a tribe of sorts, a tribe that becomes family --- a family of Brothers.

References:

More Light by H.W. Sanders

An Inconvenient Truth about Freemasonry by Nelson King

Experience of Masonry as a Transformational Art by Robert G. Davis

Anatomy of the Spirit by Caroline Myss, Ph.D.