

Anatomy of the Closing Charge

*A psychological and sociological look at
Masonry's most valuable guide of conduct
and its challenges for today's mason*



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with an excerpt for the Master of the Lodge by Manly P. Hall

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As I begin this commentary of my personal views and insights on what is arguably the most valuable of our landmarks, the closing charge, let me first say thanks to each of you who have, of your own free will and accord, chosen to walk the masonic path to enlightenment and accept the clarion call of the fraternity by striving to become a better man.



VWB John Lawson, Deputy of the Grand Master of The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Washington for District 23 and Past Grand Chaplain

One of the distinctions of our craft is that we do not solicit for members. When petitioners come to our door of their own volition seeking membership, we take great care to examine each man to determine a proper fit for the order *and* for the individual. In the end, no brother within our ranks is without a genuine desire of his own free will nor without due examination by our fraternity.

One of the most rewarding benefits of this strategy in membership scrutiny is that we insure that we attract and retain like-minded men of high standard who have a love for fraternity and although are of diverse worldviews in life, have equal respect for one another and a mutual desire for the same basic values. But having said that, we are all works in progress and are always in need of improvement, chipping away the rough edges of our previously unexamined lives in an attempt to make smooth our own “rough ashlar” in order to find that better man inside of each of us. Nothing is a better reminder of the attributes we strive for than the values set forth in the closing charge that ends our meetings.

Not all masonic ritual is in cipher nor is it intended to be kept from the curious eyes of the world, and that is the case of our beloved charge. It is unapologetically what it implies, a list of final expectations and strong reminders of who we should be as masons and as men and how we should operate throughout our life both in and out of the lodge. It reminds us of the responsibilities we have promised to ourselves, our brothers, the craft, and finally to all of mankind. The charge is simple in its construction and it is straightforward in its expectation, perhaps so much so that we might glaze over its deeper meaning and be tempted to rush through it on a long meeting night. I will go so far as to say that our charge contains the distilled sum of our craft and so its tenets should not only put to memory by *every* mason, (officer or not), but understood as that good and wholesome instruction laid down by the master of the lodge specifically for our civility with one another and our example of genuine manhood to the world.

It may come as a surprise, but not every state nor country around the world present the closing charge to its brethren at the close of their meetings. As an example, England rarely has a closing charge and Scotland, Israel, Brazil and British Columbia, follow suit with England. Ontario, Canada has a short abbreviated version and there are a number of variations from state to state here in the United States including none at all.

The Grand Lodge of Washington upholds the practice of reciting the closing charge. It is typically presented around the altar by the Master of the Lodge just prior to the close. Occasionally it is given by the District Deputy or other lodge member when asked. I would like to take this opportunity to look closely with you, line by line, and explore the charge in detail, sharing thoughts you may or may not have considered through the filter of psychology and sociology. As you examine with me, you may find that you have not always given due thought to its necessity or appreciated why these reminders are so important especially in today's world and the lodges of today. So let's begin.

The Closing Charge of Masonry

“Brethren, we are about to quit this sacred retreat of friendship and virtue to mingle again in the outer world.”

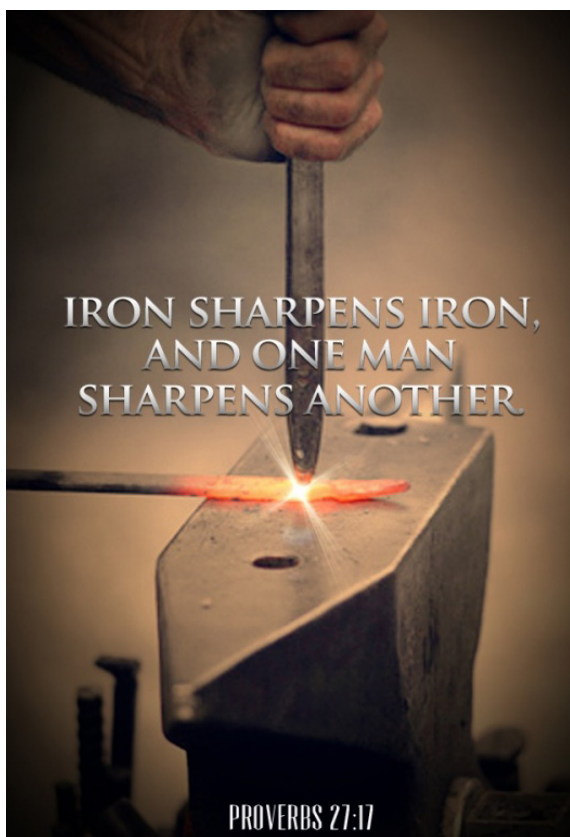
The first word, “brethren” refers to us as more than an individual. We are brothers in the fraternity and as we proudly display our masonic regalia, we are reminded from the beginning that we are representing a unique society of men, something older and larger than ourselves, who together strive for something bigger and better. We are reminded that we are all equal and on the level, serving the craft for the common good. We are like-minded individuals who work for an improved version of ourselves and hope for a better society as a result of our efforts.

This is important because outside the doors of the lodge, the world absorbs us back into sometimes less constructive groups with labels which can divide us rather than bring us together, creating divisions between us that, at the extremes, can create adversaries. We are identified differently from one another based on social, political, racial, sexual orientation, religious affiliations, etc., and we compete against each other for status leading to unproductive conflicts and ill will. But inside our lodges we strive for equality where these divisive labels fade away; we are like-minded men chipping away at our imperfections and superfluities attempting to make our lives suitable as spiritual stones that fit together for the builder’s use, something that the world appears to have little concern over.

In this “*sacred retreat*”, we learn that we have been set apart from the world and that friendship and equality towards one another can be found inside our walls, that one man’s reputation, success or failure affects the whole group, and that by working together, we can accomplish a great deal more than we can alone. That creates genuine affection and cooperation where appreciation for each of our individual strengths is an asset. Tolerance, patience and acceptance shapes and polishes our character and we find that we have truly created a place where we can grow and learn together in an environment of openness and cooperation.

Masonry is a moral and spiritual science designed to improve our character and in so doing, one man at a time, we improve our society. When we recognize that we are a part of a diverse group of men, who all affect this common spiritual building, it causes us to look inwardly towards our own imperfections and motivates us to improve ourselves so that we *all* fit together perfectly, not just for our own personal benefit like the world has programed us to do, but for the benefit

of everyone out of brotherly love. The principle way it accomplishes this work is working with one another in our sacred retreat.



Lets take a look at a few specific words in the opening statement:

Sacred retreat

Sacred: 1. devoted or dedicated to a deity or to some religious purpose; consecrated. 2. entitled to veneration or religious respect by association with divinity or divine things; holy.

Retreat: The act or process of moving back or away, especially from something hazardous, formidable, or unpleasant: "made a retreat

from hectic city life to the country.” Here one of the first questions to ponder as we begin; Is your lodge suitably set aside for this work of *spiritual transformation*?



Perhaps you haven't thought of our meetings in this way. Have you witnessed a ritual or an initiation where thoughtless chatter or side comments caused chuckles from the sideline and became a distraction in what should have been thought of as a *solemn* undertaking? Have you noticed how it can take away from the focus of what the ritual is meant to accomplish? The contrast can be stark. On the one hand, a beautiful liturgy written long ago by insightful men in whom we venerate and admire, who's words have been carefully chosen to instill into our minds the most sublime virtues exemplified through its catechism, is repeatedly disturbed as the world creeps into our sacred space distracting us from our purpose, robbing the light intended to illuminate our hearts and minds and stealing the solemnity and power of the craft's mystic art? Our minds are distracted and our efforts are lost. We begin to behave and function like the profane and mundane world we came from outside our doors.

In contrast, have you been to a lodge meeting where everything went smoothly and everyone's minds were focused on the purpose of the craft, the words of the ritual were clearly understood, carefully and purposefully recited by an instructive tongue and received by attentive ears? Something mystical happens if we allow ourselves to be elevated by its virtues, a kind of mental-spiritual alchemy, the strange but powerful nature of the craft unfolds and in those moments the lodge literally becomes a "*sacred* retreat of friendship and virtue" where everyone feels whole, renewed; a unique space, where the maelstrom of the outer world is far away.

“To mingle again in the outer world among its concerns and employments.”

This is an unfortunate reminder that the world is waiting for us with far less peace than we have discovered within. Never before have our lives been so full of stress and distraction and ironically much of that is self-induced. We have our smart phone at the ready to know exactly where we are expected to be next but often end up making everyone else happy at the expense of ourselves or family by spreading our time and attitudes thin. That can make civility difficult to achieve. The concerns and employments of the world are endless and like a dog chasing its tail, we find ourselves running in circles. This booklet will demonstrate how the world has evolved over the last hundred years and how masonry’s teachings provides valuable answers to today’s delimas.

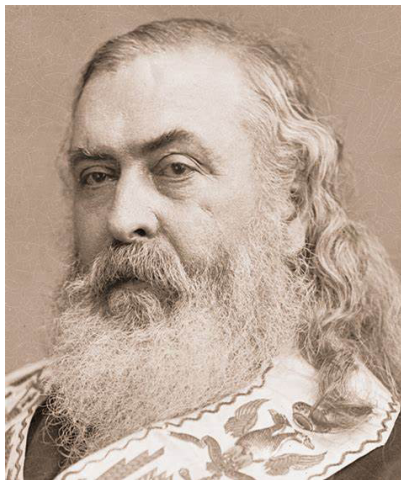
In today’s household, half are blended families through divorce creating complex inter-personal relationships. Other social changes such as political, cultural and economic stresses effect each of us at every turn. A large number of us are living longer without the financial means to support ourselves into old age. Concerns such as the opioid crisis visits homes that we would have never imagined regardless of our upbringing or social status. Washington Masonic Charities’ phones never stop ringing with need for assistance from those who through unforeseen circumstances find themselves in need of help. We might be an 18 year old living out on the street, a parent with a wayward child or aging parent, or be dealing with financial concerns. We are immersed in these challenges and responsibilities every day.



But the lodge is purposely *not* of the world. The lodge is a *retreat*, set aside from the world's concerns. It is designed by its very structure to be an incubator where we can take a breath, learn to become better able to interact with one another productively and find sympathy with one another's difficulties.

For much of the history of the lodge it was referred to as a “masonic temple” but that description has lost popularity over the years as society continues to secularize itself. However the old word *temple* remains an insightful description of the lodge. Old English *templ*, *tempel*, reinforced in Middle English by Old French *temple*, both from Latin *templum* ‘open or consecrated space’ and that matches our charges’ definition of a “sacred retreat” very well. Always, the temple is oriented east to heavenly bodies that demonstrate the perfect patterns and trusted movements of the heavenly luminaries as if to give us opportunity within our walls to read it's trestle board directing our course. Albert Pike mixes no words on the subject of our actions inside and outside of our lodge....

*“A man may be a good sort of man in general, and yet a very bad man in particular: good in the Lodge and bad in the world; good in public, and bad in his family; good at home, and bad on a journey or in a strange city. Many a man earnestly desires to be a good Mason. He says so, and is sincere. But if you require him to resist a certain passion, to sacrifice a certain indulgence, to control his appetite at a particular feast, or to keep his temper in a dispute, you will find that he does not wish to be a good Mason, in that particular case; or, wishing, is not able to resist his worse impulses” (Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma*, 1871, p. 151).*



Such is our struggle between the challenges we face and the solutions we need. As the words of the charge continue, we are reminded to....

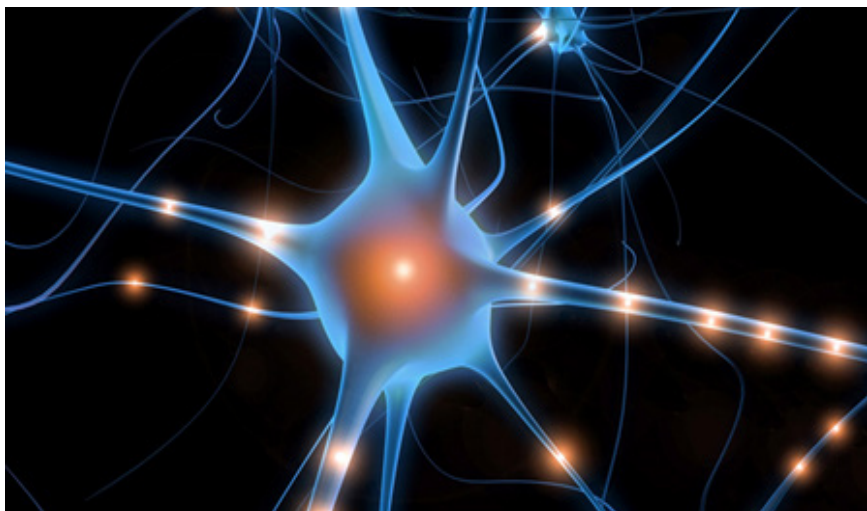
“Forget not those duties that have been so frequently inculcated and so forcefully recommended in this lodge”

The charge reflects that the world’s influence requires forceful recommendations of our duties and are needed as we leave the lodge room and return to that “outer” world. Brotherly love, relief and truth can be hard attributes to find outside our doors, so we are reminded *to forget not*. We also learn that we have a duty that lays claim to us and asks more than what might otherwise be expected prior to our obligation as a brother.

WHY do we struggle so hard that we must be reminded in this way?

Humans are complex creatures, stubborn in nature and free-spirited making it difficult to transform good intentions into right behavior. Repetition and reminders using allegories and symbols are tools of the mysteries. To “*inculcate*” is to teach an attitude, idea, or habit by *persistent instruction*. As much as we would like to think that our intentions can be easily converted into actions, the reality is that they have been hardwired together making intentions difficult. *“Whatever a man thinketh, so is he”*, the Volume of Sacred Law says and goes further to say, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”*

It helps to see this “*renewal of your mind*” in the psychological sense. First, we are “*teleological*” creatures, meaning we move towards the things we think about the most. We exercise and repeat our thoughts creating larger and stronger neuropathways in the brain. Gliocytes on the cerebral cortex fill with our dominant thoughts and these become our gut reactions. Just as when we go to the gym to exercise our physical bodies to build up our muscles, we come to lodge to exercise right thinking, “renewing” our thoughts and by doing so, our actions begin to follow. As we conform to these inculcations, our



gliocytes actually increase in size and begin to replace previous ones. We do this first out of our will to change but soon, after *frequent inculcation*, our thinking and behavior conforms and we act with the new values that “*have been so forcefully recommended in this lodge*”. Our brain literally renews and our mind conforms to thoughts of virtue and noble ideals which leads us to better choices and a better life. This happens *both* physically and mentally.

Albert Pike offers these insights about *thought*....

“What is that Thought? It is not Matter, nor Spirit. It is not a Thing; but a Power and Force. I make upon a paper certain conventional marks, that represent that Thought. There is no Power or Virtue in the marks I write, but only in the Thought which they tell to others. I die, but the Thought still lives. It is a Power. It acts on men, excites them to enthusiasm, inspires patriotism, governs their conduct, controls their destinies, disposes of life and death. The words I speak are but a certain succession of particular sounds, that by conventional arrangement communicate to others the Immaterial, Intangible, Eternal Thought. The fact that Thought continues to exist an instant, after it makes its appearance in the soul, proves it immortal: for there is nothing conceivable that can destroy it. The spoken words, being

mere sounds, may vanish into thin air, and the written ones, mere marks, be burned, erased, destroyed: but the THOUGHT itself lives still, and must live on forever. A Human Thought, then, is an actual EXISTENCE, and a FORCE and POWER, capable of acting upon and controlling matter as well as mind. Is not the existence of a God, who is the immaterial soul of the Universe, and whose THOUGHT, embodied or not embodied in His WORD, is an Infinite Power, of Creation and production, destruction and preservation, quite as comprehensible as the existence of a Soul, of a Thought separated from the Soul, of the Power of that Thought to mold the fate and influence the Destinies of Humanity”
(Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma*, 1871, p. 573)



We have now looked at the opening reminders that set the stage for the charge as a whole; we are not just individuals but are a fraternity that has specific expectations placed on us through our obligations, including interaction outside the doors of our lodge. We are to be mindful of our reputation wherever we go. Now the charge breaks our obligations into four specific attributes to strive for:

“be temperate, prudent, diligent and discrete.”

Be temperate....

So what is it to “*be temperate*”? The dictionary defines the word as showing moderation or self-restraint. As masons we think of

“squaring our actions or keeping our passions within due bounds” as another way of defining a “temperate” behavior. Self-control should be a fundamental desire in our effort for spiritual improvement and our aspirations reveals much about who we are and what we understand about ourselves and one other. We may say we are *“on the level”* but our actions sometimes show us to be more child-like and out of balance. Each of us knows our secret Achilles’ heel in areas of our lives and we need additional reminders and guardrails on occasion to stay within that place of temperance in ourselves. We may well be able to perform respectably in public to satisfy the judgments of our peers, harboring less civil feelings but, if we *truly* wish to grow further and become better men and not just *appear* to be better, letting our passions drive our unbridled ego, we must apply effort towards that allegorical *“truing of our stone”* if we can ever hope to become a *“perfect ashlar”* suited for *“that spiritual house not made with hands”*. That can be hard to achieve without repeated effort.



We sometimes think of intemperance as the over indulgence of food or drink, but temperance crosses more subtle aspects of our lives beyond just the outward and we can't always anticipate where our temperament may reveal itself. In the context of the closing charge, being temperate is more about our interactions with others. For instance, we may show more self-restraint with our personal

opinions in the lodge out of a sense of decorum or even our concern about how we look in public, rather than how we actually feel or act if we were to confront our truer nature. A dispute or difference of opinion may come about during the course of lodge business and we handle it with decorum and courtesy *appearing* to be in control of our feelings. Eventually however, we find ourselves with one or two like-minded brothers and after a meeting with coffee in hand, or in the hallway of the lodge or parking lot or typing a text, we begin to reveal our intemperance by letting loose our tongue and saying those darker comments behind the backs of our brothers in whom we disagree. We would never want to reveal this attitude to them or the lodge in general for fear it may cause them to think less of our otherwise well disguised character. We may even indulge in making fun or having a good laugh at the expense of someone in their absence. The contrast between our disguised self and our true selves is an example of why we are reminded to be temperate. What we say in regard to one another in private reveals more about our true character than what we say and do in the light of open lodge. Those dark edges of our rough ashlar reveal the work in need of improvement to make us worthy of the title of a brother mason. Changing that nature takes humility and conscious work on our part and must first become a genuine desire in our hearts. Only then can our stubborn mind begin to improve.

Be Prudent...

Prudence, simply put, is acting with or showing care and thought for the future, to ask the question, “is this in our best interest?” “How might this impact my lodge or my brothers or my life in the future?” Prudence is marked by wisdom or judiciousness and on being shrewd in the management of practical affairs and marked by circumspection. According to Webster, it is what we call *forward thinking and anticipating circumstances*. Being able to clearly see a probable outcome is yet another important attribute that each mason should strive for and is essential in leadership. When we are away from the lodge, prudence in all our actions is an equally essential attribute. We should be known for clear thinking and fair judgment in our circle in our everyday dealings.

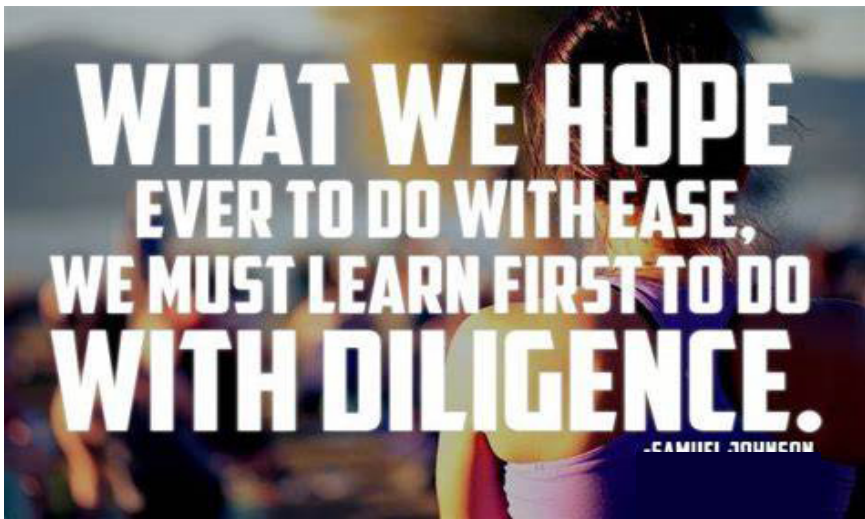
Here again, a helpful commentary on the subject from Pike:

“Those who are invested with the power of judgment should judge the causes of all persons uprightly and impartially, without any personal consideration of the power of the mighty, or the bribe of the rich, or the needs of the poor. That is the cardinal rule, which no one will dispute; though many fail to observe it. But they must do more. They must divest themselves of prejudice and preconception. They must hear patiently, remember accurately, and weigh carefully the facts and the arguments offered before them.”

(Albert Pike, Morals and Dogma, 1871, p. 126).

Be Diligent...

Diligence is characterized by steady, earnest, and energetic effort. When we “join” the lodge, we obligate ourselves to the goals and objectives of that lodge. We learn that we wear an apron because masonry is *work*. It gives us pride to wear the emblems of our craft with our jewelry, license plates and clothing, but more than this, we have taken an irrevocable obligation at the alter to engage ourselves as fully as our cable tow allows in the works and efforts of the lodge



and we must make sure we have earned the right to wear those emblems. The old saying “if you are going to wear the jersey then get into the game” comes to mind and the bench is only meant for a very short rest. Your attendance is expected as well as your talents which is added to the successful outcome of programs and projects that everyone has chosen to accomplish.

We need to give our all when we share in an assignment, ensuring that we get there early and leave late. When we see an issue or challenge, don't wait for “someone else” to seek out a solution, diligence is doing what needs to be done until it's done. It doesn't matter if its not your immediate responsibility or your favorite thing to do.



Masonry provides us opportunities to take on many different responsibilities and to get to know ourselves better as we move from committee to committee and chair to chair. The wisdom of its structure convinces us through experience that we are more capable than we have imagined. As we graduate from smaller to larger tasks, we gain more confidence and discover, through steady and earnest efforts, that there is little we can't accomplish. From the day we cheerfully serve refreshments, to the day we stand as Worshipful Master fully responsible for the daily operations of the lodge, the

graduated structure and responsibilities that masonry provides, creates steady personal growth so that we gain confidence in our own abilities.

Be Discreet...

Being discreet is one of the principle attributes we consider when we think of a mason; where we show discernment or good judgment in conduct and especially in speech, capable of preserving silence. In addition, a mason should never be quick to judgment and should ever be the peacemaker in disputes using his keen powers of logic, reason and rhetoric. He should be concise and weigh his words with economy making them clear and understood. Above all else, his words should be civil, courteous and to the point.



Simply “passing on” information as gossip can be damaging. We need to check ourselves that salacious pieces of nonproductive information overheard is not unnecessarily repeated. Some gossip, even seemingly innocent, can work negatively towards a brother with unintended consequences. Maintain discretion in your conversations and keep your tongue when it serves no purpose or worse has potential negative outcomes. *Be discreet in your communications with others.*

We are warned in regard to indiscriminate speech by this:

“Wherever there is strife and hatred among the brethren, there is no Masonry; for Masonry is Peace, and Brotherly Love, and Concord”

(Albert Pike, Morals and Dogma, 1871, p. 124).

Discretion in our communications has a form of perfection that appeals to the hearts and minds of those in whom we intend to reach with our messages, our tongue is our most powerful muscle. We should never use that gift to gain advantage.

“Discretion is the perfection of reason, and a guide to us in all the duties of life”

and, “Nothing is more dangerous than a friend without discretion; even a prudent enemy is preferable.”

16th century author and french freemason, Jean De La Fontaine

In this next part of the masonic charge, we look at just one line;

“Remember that at this alter, you have promised to befriend and relieve every brother that shall have need of your assistance.”

It seems like we shouldn't have to be reminded to befriend and relieve our brother but as with any transformation, there is a natural tendency to return to old habits that can work against our new desires. Being reminded and *inculcated* many times is not just being thorough but necessary as we change from a good man to a better one. We only need look to nature and the laws of physics to observe this truth. Take the master sword builders; free elements are forged together with extremely hot fire then the pressure of repeated hammer blows force the metal to combine, causing it to submit to its new useful combination and shape. It is the nature of the elements to return to their former state without firm and deliberate



force to permanently change them. In the same way, even a willing mind must be forged to shape new thoughts. We begin with good intentions to befriend and relieve but often find ourselves stepping around our new obligations with excuses, leaving those requests unanswered or for others, so we must be reminded again and again.



In order to understand this process better, let's look again at the actual function of the human brain in detail: All across the cerebral cortex are millions of gliocytes as mentioned earlier. These are sensors whose literal meaning is “seen and heard”. These gliocytes are connected by a complex network that we refer to as our *neuronet* where neurotransmitters carry thoughts from origin to destination, connecting them with the help of neuropeptides which is a chemical delivery system, bringing chemicals such as Dopamine,

Serotonin, Histamine, Oxytocin, Adrenaline, etc. These combinations collectively determine our “attitude or mood”. If we think of the surface of the brain as a map of interconnecting roadways of various sizes connecting these gliocyte storage areas, then we have a basic understanding of what our mind and our access to it looks like. This simplified explanation of the brain’s complex organization of cells, electronic nerve impulses, chemistry, gliocytes and the combination of them is what determines our self-image and world view. There may be no greater nor amazing process of the human body than thought transforming to matter as we collect what is “seen and heard” into decisions that determine our own self-image and world view.

Inside each of us, there is also a subconscious that operates quietly but powerfully in the background using this information. The subconscious is like a thermostat at your house. It takes in all the stored memory in the gliocytes connected by the neuronet, combined with peptides in order to maintain “sanity” based on what we have collected



and believes is our truth. The subconscious is a “gate keeper” that lets only thoughts in that agree with our self-image. When we move out of our comfort zone by some thought that is “*not like us*”, according to this decision process, neuropeptides manifest physical symptoms such as nervousness, anxiety, a sour stomach, sweaty palms, etc. The subconscious says, “*Get back to where you belong*” and uses these chemicals to convince us to comply. We have been told to listen to the voice of our conscience and it will keep you from doing something wrong and there is a partial truth to that but unfortunately the

whole truth of the matter isn't that simple. In the pages of the book of Sacred Law we are reminded that "*whatever a man thinketh, so is he*". In other words, our self-image, is made up of all our thoughts (both good and bad), recorded collectively in all the gliocytes on the cerebral cortex of the brain and adjusted by the chemistry that effects our behavior. It causes us to respond to and filter who we believe we are and to "see" the world in that way. We are motivated to move in the direction in which the subconscious claims as our truth whether behaving outside of that image is good for us or not and that makes changing that image, *even for the better*, difficult.

So, what do we do, knowing that we are operating on millions of memories that make up our behavior with our subconscious directing the course of our decisions and "keeping us comfortable" with habits that we no longer want? How do we forge our elements into the hard steel blade of a useful implement that improves us so we can honor our obligations to befriend and relieve every brother who shall have need of our assistance?

The good news is that masonry offers a spiritual science to aid the mind through various types of mnemonics, a method employed from ancient times to improve and assist us in our quest. Great and noble philosophical ideals were written in symbol and are taught through allegory, two forms of mnemonics for the subconscious to digest and then reinforce through ritual by repetition until the conscious mind finds new pathways that lead our thoughts to those nobler destinations. This is part of what is called the mystic art and why the charge implores us to "*remember*".

That sounds terribly complex but in reality, you are performing this kind of "mental magic" subconsciously and with ease many millions of times per second without even realizing it. Masonry and its noble arts, through the science of moral and spiritual teachings, speaks to the mind and penetrates the mind's physiology using its "*peculiar system of morality, taught by allegory and illustrated by symbol*" as if to etch these important ideals onto our minds.

This next admonition of the charge is equally pregnant with meaning but often overlooked. This line should be looked at very carefully especially in light of our obligations to civility compared to the graceless age we find ourselves living in at the present time.

“You have been enjoined to remind a brother in the most friendly manner of his faults, to aid in his reformation and to defend his character”.

First, let's look at the word “**enjoined**” for a moment. The definition is to “*instruct or urge (someone) to do something.*” In other words it is more than just a simple recommendation but emphasizes a **deeper** responsibility to take action. Its not just a suggestion, you are being urged.

We have evolved through society, especially since the 1960-70s, as the “Me generation” and there have been repercussions from these ideals that have morphed and rippled since then having direct impact on our ability to respond to this urging in the charge. It has become more difficult to feel personal accountability in doing things for the good and the wellbeing of others. I.e., “Am I my brother's keeper? or “Should I get involved?” We are paralyzed by inaction often because we are ill equipt to know how to begin. This makes “reminding a brother” more difficult than in previous generations.

Today's men appear be the unhappiest they've ever been. Many causes have been cited for a recent slide in male satisfaction, evident in a number of social science data sets, everything from the 24-hour news cycle, to the economy, to the decline of sex, marriage, family, and religion respectively.



“The current focus on toxic masculinity has many men feeling consciously and unconsciously that they are toxic as individuals,” psychotherapist Carla Manly explains. *“This results in a sense of wariness and constant fear. This fear — much of it unprocessed — can lead to detachment from relationships. This, of course, can lead to a sense of loneliness that feeds a general sense of unhappiness.”*

So what’s going on? How did we end up here? In order to answer that question, it will be important to take a closer look at how our society has brought today’s men to find it more difficult to follow masonic obligations by looking at how architecture reveals that change over the decades. You might ask, architecture? What possible indicators could there be between architecture and how we went from a confident, outgoing society of men to a fearful “me first” society and what it possibly has to do with this part of the closing charge? Read on...

In the late 1800s houses were built with, manual labor with great dependency on one another. We built common wells, common buildings, and common farms, all with manual tools that took manpower and required our neighbor’s assistance.



Out of necessity, many of our homes were built with the aid and support of the entire community, most notably we recall the term “barn raising” as an example. Everyone banded together to help one another and the most basic ways as labor were primarily by hand. We were a society that had a much greater appreciation on cooperation out of necessity and that necessity forged friendships effecting our entire social order. We built our homes with large front porches as a result. Most evenings we would share the rest

and rewards of a hard day's work and the front porch became a place where everything was discussed, planned, and shared from the work of the day to personal hopes and concerns. It was a society that worked and grew together, helping one another in most aspects of each other's lives.



By the time two world wars had ended in the 1940s, our country had begun building an incredible “good life”. Many new inventions had already begun to make life simpler, automating tasks, giving everyone more free time away from the labors that had before taken up the majority of daily life. Our Brother Henry Ford's implementation of the assembly lines for automobiles, mass production and implementation such as telephones, radio and television, became common in everyday life. They were no longer luxuries and had become “necessities”. Movies and record players replaced live performances, and a national highway system propelled us anywhere we wanted to go in our own private cars eliminating the need of most mass transit. Massive power grids with lock and dam systems brought needed electricity with transport and irrigation to the far reaches of the west, helping to bring about the amazing world we live in today. At the same time, progress inadvertently affected the way we interacted with one another more profoundly

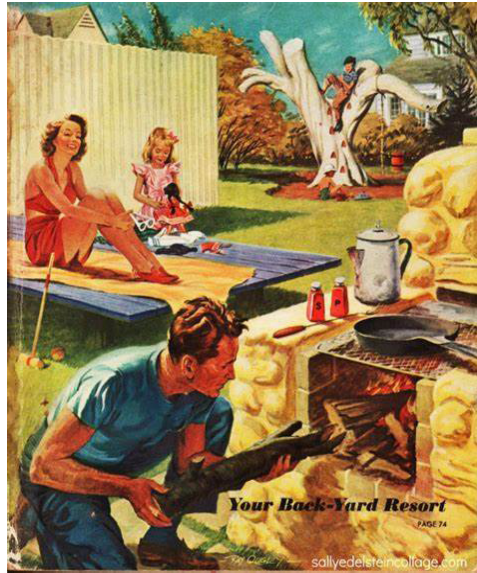


than we could have ever anticipated and our social order changed.

As a result, architecture revealed these changes again giving us clues about our changing society.

Houses evolved for “baby boom” families no longer desiring a large front porch that previously welcomed the helpful hands of the neighbors. Eventually, the porch was drafted out of modern house designs in favor of larger private back

patios. Our new society began focusing less and less on cooperation and more and more on the isolation of the individual, where help from the neighbors became unnecessary and eventually even unwanted.



But it didn't stop there. By the late 1950's it was clear to sociologists that children within their own family unit had not only separate values from the previous generation but from their own parents. Before the 1960s, family's social structure was for the most part a culturally cohesive unit, i.e., same movies, same music, and same books, but with newer and newer inventions and diverse choices, this change in values within the family widened and became known as “the generation gap”. Youth developed values of their own particularly in entertainment clearly different from their parents. The need for social cooperation between the 1800s and the 1960s was now clearly evident. The common values and ideals of that earlier age were now gone.

We are now living in the aftermath of this evolution of modern society where traditional models of marriage and family have changed many times over. Today's homes seldom have a front porch unless it is for ornamentation and the larger backyards and patios

are often surrounded with large 5 and 6 foot fences with security gates to keep the neighbors out. Many of our homes have become fortresses with warning signs reminding all who approach that they are



being watched. We have come a very long way from barn raising and front porch chats to internet blogs, Facebook trolls, and Instagram with 24-7 security, all bringing with it their own social and personal implications.

Thankfully the overarching world-view of masonry's ageless values and timeless ideals are far greater than the unintended consequences of 100 years of social changes. There is still a



fundamental desire for friendship and fraternity and men still knock on our doors looking for answers. There is no other organization in the world that has the antidote to today's challenges with deeper, more penetrating answers than Freemasonry. Our immovable tenets and understanding of the human mind reminds us at the most fundamental levels of human behavior the importance of becoming the best version of ourselves. Being responsible for one another and supporting and defending each another as we once did naturally in the days of barn raising a century ago is part of that teaching. What came easily to society then must be reclaimed in today's disconnected and isolated world regardless of all its wonderful improvements.

No individual can achieve better what we can accomplish collectively and in order to relearn that important benefit, we must retrain ourselves in how to cooperate once again on the simplest level as we did so long ago. This part of the charge binds us together and urges us to remember that we are not isolated behind walls nor can we live that way.

We lament over why our numbers have declined so I offer this tour through the architecture of society of the last century to demonstrate what has brought us to this challenging place. The society of today finds it difficult to work together. This is not just a masonic issue. Many of our civic organizations including churches are in decline as well. One of America's early symbols was the greek fasces borrowed from a well known Aesope's Fable. "An old man had a set of quarrelsome sons, always fighting with one another. On the point of death, summoned his sons around him to give them some parting advice. He ordered his servants to bring in a bundle of sticks wrapped together. To his eldest son, he commanded, "Break it." The son strained and strained, but with all his efforts was unable to break the bundle. Each son in turn tried, but none of them was successful. "Untie the bundle," said the father, "and each of you take a stick." When they had done so, he called out to them: "Now, break," and each stick was easily broken."



Although maligned by world war 2, in modern times and updated on the back of the dime as shown, the fasces remains as a symbol of the power of unity around the world and is demonstrated on a number of our own state flags. Another reminder appears on the dime as well as the walls of the U.S. Senate building; "*E pluribus unum*", our nations motto, appearing on the Great Seal of the United States; Latin for "*Out of many, one*." Perhaps this symbol was offered to remind us of how important it is to work together and support one another.



Now comes the rub, as Shakespeare would say, to *remind a brother in the most friendly manner of his faults* because that is an art in itself. No one wants their shortcomings handed to them. Yet we are counseled in the charge to take on this sometimes difficult task when necessary. Masonry holds us accountable, not just to ourselves but for one another and we are reminded that although our first responsibility may be for our own actions, our collective behavior has consequences that can effect everyone and needs to stay in check. The actions of only one individual can effect the peace and harmony of the entire fraternity. Knowing when to step in and counsel a brother is an important skill and something every mason should be willing to learn and undertake when it becomes necessary.

There is risk in how we choose our words with our brother when a mistake is being discussed. It can even lead to additional problems. Thoughtful care needs to be taken by using the most friendly manner possible. It helps to not work alone. It is a good rule of thumb to have at least one other brother present when counseling and the master of the lodge should be informed. Especially when you can anticipate a defensive attitude on the receiving end but it is equally important not to let wrongdoing or error go unchecked. The slippery slope of complacency begins by doing nothing for fear of doing something wrong or out of timidness. Plato, in his work *“The Republic”* reminds us in a simple line why we must remain vigilant, “An apathetic society is destined to be ruled by those inferior to themselves.” Doing nothing has the potential to make the problem worse, or give the impression that the error doesn’t

matter. As Edmond Burke, Jerusalem Lodge 44, famously stated, *“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”* For the sake of the integrity of the fraternity, we must step in to protect it and the values it represents to mankind.

Over the last few generations in our society, we have morphed into people of “situation ethics” making lines blurred between what is right and wrong so much that terms like “what difference does it make” or “let this play out” have become commonplace. Masonry in contrast, holds us to a higher standard of values beyond mere group opinion or circumstance. It is clear and concise, built on firm values that have endured the ages and should be implemented with love, holding fast to what we know are immovable truths, proven over time and based on logic and reason even when we anticipate that a brother may not agree. Martin Luther King put it this way, *“A genuine leader is not a searcher of consensus but a molder of consensus.”*

Checking ourselves to insure that our motives are pure and dispassionate, speaking with civility about the circumstances being addressed is paramount. Let the truth speak for itself calmly and clearly. Truth is not made clearer when spoken with a loud voice. It is always good to ask the question: “If everyone in the lodge were doing what this brother is doing, would it be a better lodge or a worse lodge?” The answer will help you to know when it is appropriate to speak with a brother instead of letting passions, ego or “pack mentality” drive your decision. If you decide to speak to them, inform the master of the lodge, bring someone with you and reassure the brother that we are all working together for the common good. Maintain confidences, agreeing on an acceptable resolution with measurable expectation of improvement, offering help if possible and making plans for a follow up.

The last line of this part of the charge admonishes us to defend our brother’s character. In this hurtful age of name-calling, accusation and innuendo in faceless emails, text messages and whispers in the



hallway, we need to pay special attention to this admonishment. We must to be careful that we are not sending more brothers out the back door than we have coming through the front by ignoring our loose tongues or clumsy comments. We have come a long way from the social order of interdependency and unfortunately the natural appreciation and respect we once enjoyed has suffered as a result.

As society moves forward, we have become fragmented and often lonely creatures leaving ourselves vulnerable to selfishness and short sightedness. Naturally it makes it easier to speak ill of one another, sharing potentially embarrassing comments and passing on hurtful gossip out of thoughtlessness. But we as masons have an obligation *not* to do that and as you read this, we can all remember both what has come into our ears that we know should not have and those things that have rolled off our tongues that should have remained unsaid, leaving us with regret.

Defending your brother's character is recognizing that we are all works in progress and not yet perfect on our journey east. Doing to others as we would have them do to us is simple and clear and needs no further illumination. We can either choose to improve our craft by our kind and supportive words and work as brothers to aid in the improvement of our fraternity, families and society, or invite into our sacred retreat the unbridled nature of the profane outside our doors.

If we are to make a difference in this world and truly become the men and masons we desire, it will start and end in the simple and loving ways we choose to treat one another, not just in the lodge room, where our good nature is on display for everyone to see, but in dim hallways and parking lots where we are more tempted to speak unnecessarily and thoughtlessly.



We want to surround ourselves with those who build us up and give us strength and encouragement, avoiding any conversations or comments that tear others down. Not only should we reject those kind of conversations when confronted by them, but we are being admonished in the charge to call out those who *make such comments* and defend the brother's character, reminding the one making the comment of their obligation to uphold and defend their brother's character. If we will commit to ourselves these higher standards and *truly live them*, we will strengthen and improve the fraternity as a whole and be the example to the world outside our doors of what the character of man can truly become.

Up to now, the charge has focused on the obligations and civility we have to our brothers but in this next and critical sentence, we are asked to focus outside of our tiled doors. We are reminded that although we are fraternal brothers helping one another, there are expectations for our services in the world around us as well.

“These Generous principles extend further, for every human being has a claim upon your kind office.”

It is true that we enjoy a unique masonic environment where ritual, discipline and order affords us a structured framework unlike the world around us. We enjoy the comfort of like minds and common purpose and what an amazing and wonderful environment it is. However, we can clearly see that the values of masonry are an example for an improved social structure outside its doors as well, so it is of little value if we keep these ideals hidden and not share our many benefits to those who struggle around us. You may respond to the idea of sharing our “kind offices” freely to a sometimes ungrateful world who does not appreciate our fraternity and refer to us as some kind of cult as an unmerited favor and you might be right. But, I find the way Kahlil Gibran in his book , *The Prophet* expresses unmerited favor towards the world around us beautifully written in the section entitled;

“On Giving”-

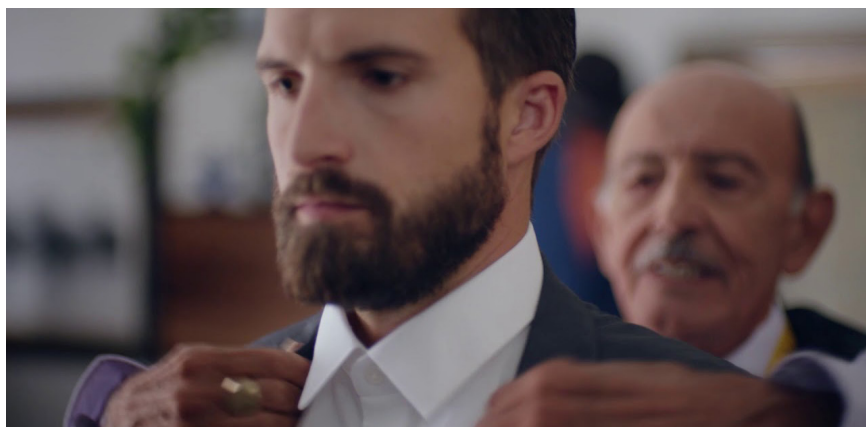
You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give. For what are your possessions but things you keep and guard for fear you may need them tomorrow? And tomorrow, what shall tomorrow bring to the over-prudent dog burying bones in the trackless sand as he follows the pilgrims to the holy city? And what is fear of need but need itself? Is not dread of thirst when your well is full, the thirst that is unquenchable?

There are those who give little of the much which they have—and they give it for recognition and their hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome. And there are those who have little and give it all. These are the believers in life and the bounty of life, and their coffer is never empty. There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward. And there are those who give with pain, and that pain is their baptism. And there are those who give and know not pain in giving, nor do they seek joy, nor give with mindfulness of virtue; They give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space. Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes He smiles upon the earth. It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through

understanding; and to the open-handed the search for one who shall receive is joy greater than giving. And is there aught you would withhold? All you have shall someday be given; therefore give now, that the season of giving may be yours and not your inheritors’.

You often say, “I would give, but only to the deserving.” The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture. They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish. Surely he who is worthy to receive his days and his nights, is worthy of all else from you. And he who has deserved to drink from the ocean of life deserves to fill his cup from your little stream. ...See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving. For in truth it is life that gives unto life while you, who deem yourself a giver, are but a witness.”

All our self-talk and our world view should be uplifting and healthy. We must discipline ourselves and avoid hurtful thoughts and unproductive comments and be worthy of the title that Kings and Potentates over many ages have claimed as the greatest that can be bestowed upon a man in this life and realize that all of our efforts for self-improvement is for a purpose greater than ourselves. We are all equal in the eyes of God and all worthy of his boundless generosity. We are His instruments in a world that desperately needs our example of tolerance, generosity, and sympathy more than ever before. We are the Great Architect’s eyes, ears, hands and feet and He has given us the power to change the world and bring about the ancient hope of a perfect society.



The charge reminds us that we should not neglect those souls outside the door any more than our brothers within. We are being reminded that our work is one of an ancient priesthood, that by our example will lead the world to a better way of living.

As our brother Albert Pike wrote:

“The great distinguishing characteristic of a Mason is a sympathy with his kind, He recognizes in the human race one great family, all connected with himself by those invisible links, and that mighty network of circumstance, forged and woven by God.”

Perhaps Albert Pike puts it best in his most memorable quote: *“What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.”* We have an incredible opportunity to help one another and bring about a better world simply by supporting and uplifting one another.

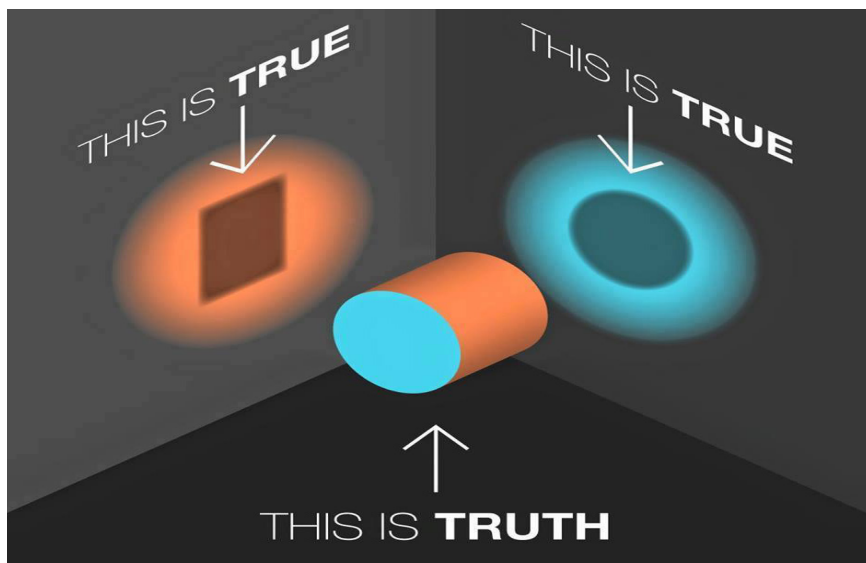
Now in this final admonition, our focus is directed upward to our larger collective self and to the Great Architect in whom great and important undertaking here below is of little consequence without His inspiration and blessings.

“... Finally brethren, be ye all of one mind. Live in peace and may the God of love and peace delight to dwell with you and bless you.”

A society of individuals cannot stand strong and like the Roman fasces mentioned earlier. Each of us are easily broken when separated but when working together, we become an unbreakable bond, so we are given the reminder to *“be ye all of one mind”*, not that we are to think the same thoughts. We are not robots. We are not being asked to give up our individuality but to bind our thoughts together for the common good so that our valuable perspectives and individual experiences can strengthen the whole when combined. Masonry is an art that teaches us how to work as one and yet its design allows our own personal worldviews.

As Albert Pike elaborated,

“Masonry propagates no creed except its own most simple and Sublime One; that universal religion, taught by Nature and by Reason. It reiterates the precepts of morality of all religions. It venerates the character and commends the teachings of the great and good of all ages and of all countries. It extracts the good and not the evil, the truth, and not the error, from all creeds; and acknowledges that there is much that is good and true in all.” This certainly aids us in becoming “one mind”.



The insightful mason understands that truth can be observed and shared but not possessed. Each observer views truth from their own perspective and we must respect one another's viewpoints, learning what we can about truth collectively. As each of us contribute to that truth, we create “one mind”. Blending our opinions and finding consensus with peace, harmony, logic and reason, exemplified in love and exercised in civility for one another and that is key to our success and what it means to be of one mind.

Living in peace is not just a hope, we are being *instructed* to “live in peace” and it is a decision each of us must make. The late Wayne

Dyer, made a poignant statement about the choices we have in regard to our individual world-view. He said, *“Loving people live in a loving world. Hostile people live in a hostile world. Same world.”* In other words, attitude isn’t just an important thing; it’s a conscious and determining decision. When each of us **decide** we live in lodge filled with potential, opportunity, and purpose, it will become a lodge with potential, opportunity and purpose. ***We create the lodge we decide we are members of and we are the sum of all our decisions collectively.***

Life isn’t always easy and there are plenty of opportunities for disagreements, unhappiness, even sadness but doing the everyday work in the quarry of the lodge should never be a drudgery. It shouldn’t include quarreling, blaming nor should we be a party to any unhappiness brought unnecessarily to any brother or faction within our ranks.

Civility plays a major factor not only in the peace of the lodge but also within our own hearts. We must stay vigilant and keep our behavior in check not just for our own peace of mind but for the peace and happiness of the lodges as a whole. Tolerance, long suffering, understanding, are all part of our masonic tenets. When we control our behavior and bridle our tongue, we are doing our part to live in peace, avoiding unnecessary and unproductive quarrels, and when we do, the lodges benefit and so does the fraternity as a whole. When we remind a brother in the most friendly manner to do the same, we raise a guardrail of standards that aids us in keeping our passion in due bounds reminding ourselves and one another of our high and kind office.

We are also reminded by Pike,

“We must do justice to all, and demand it of all; it is a universal human debt, a universal human claim.”

“And now, may the blessings of Heaven rest upon us and all regular masons, may brotherly love prevail and may the moral and social virtues cement us.”

In these last words we hear the blessing of God being placed upon us and our work as we prepare to leave the lodge room. Each man in his own heart and mind sees God in his own way and providing that freedom of thought and vision is one of the unique benefits of the craft that makes it the needed bridge and example for living in our diverse world today. If only we could gain the world's attention long enough for it to see masonry's reasonable, logical and simple truth...

“That God is One, immutable, unchangeable, infinitely just and good; that Light will finally overcome Darkness, — Good conquer Evil, and Truth be victor over Error; — these, rejecting all the wild and useless speculations of the Zend-Avesta, the Kabbalah, the Gnostics. and the Schools, are the religion and Philosophy of Masonry.” – Albert Pike.



“Freemasonry has endured not because of its antiquity, its influence, or its social standing, but because there have been so many who have lived it. The effectiveness of Masonic teachings will always be the measure by which the outside world judges Freemasonry; the proof of Freemasonry is in our deeds and it is in our deeds that Freemasonry is made known to non-Masons. The only way that the Craft can be judged is by its product. The prestige of Freemasonry lies squarely on the shoulders of each of us.”

– G. Wilbur Best



“In a civilization primarily concerned with the accomplishment of the extremes of temporal activity, the philosopher represents an equilibrating intellect capable of estimating and guiding the cultural growth. The establishment of the *philosophic rhythm* in the nature of an individual ordinarily requires from fifteen to twenty years. During that entire period the disciples of old were constantly subjected to the most severe discipline. Every activity of life was gradually disengaged from other interests and focalized upon the reasoning part. In the ancient world there was another and most vital factor which entered into the production of rational intellects and which is entirely beyond the comprehension of modern thinkers: namely, *initiation* into the philosophic mysteries. A man who had demonstrated his peculiar mental and spiritual fitness was accepted into the *body of the learned* and to him was revealed that priceless heritage of arcane lore preserved from generation to generation. This heritage of philosophic truth is the matchless treasure of all ages, and each disciple admitted into these *brotherhoods of the wise* made, in turn, his individual contribution to this store of classified knowledge.”

– Manly P. Hall

With a smile of paternal Indulgence the Venerable Master, who senses the true dignity of the mystic tie, should gravely incline the minds of the Brethren towards the sublimer issues of the Craft. The officer who would serve his lodge most effectively must realize that he is of an order apart from other men, that he is the keeper of an awful secret, that the chair upon which he sits is the seat of Immortals, and that if he would be a worthy successor to those Master Masons of other ages, his thoughts must be measured by the profundity of Pythagoras and the Lucidity of Plato. Enthroned in the radiant East, the Worshipful Master is the light of his lodge- the representative of the Gods, one of that long line of hierophants who, through the blending of their rational powers with the reason of the ineffable, have been accepted into the Great School. This high priest after an Ancient Order must realize that those before him are not merely a gathering of properly tested men, but the custodians of an eternal lore, the Guardians of a sacred truth, the perpetuators of an ageless wisdom, the consecrated servants of a living God, the wardens of a Supreme Mystery.

A new day is dawning for Freemasonry. From the insufficiency of theology and the hopelessness of materialism, men are turning to seek the god of philosophy. In this new era, where in the old order of things is breaking down and the individual is rising triumphant above the monotony of the masses, there is much work to be accomplished. The "Temple Builder" is needed as never before. A great reconstruction period is at hand; the debris of a fallen culture must be cleared away; the old footings must be found again that a new Temple significant of a new revelation of the Law may be raised thereon. This is the peculiar work of the Builder; this is the high duty for which he was called out of the world; this is the noble enterprise for which he was raised and given the tools of his Craft. By this, doing his part in the reorganization of society the workmen may earn his wages as all good Masons should. A new light is breaking in the East, a more glorious day is at hand. The rule of the philosophic elect- the dream of the ages- will yet be realized and is not far distant. To her loyal sons, Freemasonry, sense this Clarion call: "arise ye, the day of labor is at hand; the great work awaits completion, and the days of man's life are few." Like the singing

guildsmen of bygone days, the Craft of the Builders marches victoriously down the broad Avenues of time. Their song is of labor and glorious endeavor; their anthem is of toil and Industry; they rejoice in their noble destiny, for they are the Builders of cities, the Hewers of worlds, the Master Craftsman of the universe.

Lectures on Ancient Philosophy-
An Introduction to the Study and Application
of Rational Procedure First Edition 1929,
Rosicrucian and Masonic Origins pp417



'The Apotheosis of Washington' in the rotunda of the United States capital. More specifically, the apotheosis means the deification or perfection of a person through a series of steps or degrees.

THE MASONIC

T E M P L E



BEFORE ENTERING

**"Remove Thoughts From the Outside World
Assume An Attitude of Brotherly Love
Renew your Spirit With Your Creator
Envision A Life of Hope
Remember Masonic Charity
Be Prepared to Give and Receive Counsel
Be Prepared to Learn and Teach."**

