

Builders Wanted

"Freemasonry: Making the World a Better Place One Man at a Time"

A while back I posted a piece called Temple Building. In it I was thinking about the allegory of the Temple and the ramifications and challenges the parable presents to us a Masons.

Upon reflection I realize the brilliance of our forebears in selecting the Building of Solomon's Temple as our central theme. Everything in nature and in the works of man is produced by building. Nature builds atom by atom, cell by cell. Man builds by one brick, board or beam at a time. It in effect reduces the ultimate work of Freemasonry to be the work of the individual Mason. It answers the question, "What is Freemasonry?"

Everything we see, including ourselves, started small, simple and singular to be built into a complex unity towards a particular end or purpose.

For the Mason this takes on a twofold meaning, the Building of the Body of Freemasonry, and the Building up of the individual Mason. The former relies entirely on the quality of the latter. For there is no Body of Freemasonry without Freemasons.

We as individual Masons are building that "...spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal..."

The bricks of this building we are told are our "minds" or our Thoughts. Character is built by thoughts. The Character of men is the aggregate of their thoughts, their thinking. "Solomon" tells us in Proverbs 23:7 "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he:" It takes millions of thoughts to produce Character, good or bad and everything in between.

We are given a hint that the production of Good thoughts is not the easiest of things to do and takes concerted effort. This is demonstrated in one of the tools we are give to deal with it, the common Gavel. We are told of a violent process we must undertake on ourselves, that of breaking away the "rough and superfluous" parts of the stones (our bricks or thoughts). The meaning of "superfluous" is "UNNECESSARY", "Obsolete" and "Wasteful". "Rough" is

defined as "crude", "harsh" and "violent". Both have other meanings that the Mason should muse over sometime.

These thoughts of ours define us, and we had better be very careful as to the selection of the bricks we put into our edifice. Because once these are mortared into place they become very hard to remove and replace should they prove defective. We ultimately become these thoughts and they stay with us for good or ill and the ridding of the ill ones can be very painful and difficult.

Temperance is a big player in this, we are told it relates to the "guttural" region. This is fitting because this is the region where we ingest and where we speak. It is itself an allegory of what we take in and what give out. It typifies the raw material taken in and the resulting "thought" going out.

If we are not careful we can damage or scar our minds and the result is a poor building setting a poor example, poor intake, bad output. This is the result of hate, spite and willful ignorance.

In I Timothy 4:2 we read, "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;" That is a very interesting statement, "having their conscience seared with a hot iron". Neurological science has confirmed a couple things along these lines, first that the folds and ripples of our brains are our the results of our thoughts.

Second, for this "seared with a hot iron" we get the image of a brand or scar, like when we sear a calf to brand him. Medical science has learned that traumatic experiences and certain deeply held thoughts of a fearful or hateful nature actually scar or brand the brain. This makes getting our thinking well ordered an imperative, after all brands and scars are pretty permanent things. Though the surgeons scalpel can remove these things it is far better never to create them to begin with, and remember we are the ones who create them.

Before this gets too long, here's where I'm going with it.

All the good and great things Freemasonry is known for is the result of single individuals and the aggregate of their thoughts, their good Character.

All of the ills of Freemasonry, the issues of membership, the quality of the same, recognition issues and the shortcomings on all sides are also the result of single individuals and the aggregate of their thoughts, their Character.

There are no answers outside of ourselves as the problems are not outside us, individually or collectively. The "good" or the "bad" is first built inside each and everyone of us and as we then take our place in this larger Masonic edifice called Freemasonry, the good and the bad is built right into this building.

My hopes are that we begin again to look into our own hearts and minds as individuals, to chip away the rough and superfluous, to cut away the brands and the scars so that we can begin to see clearly the work that is before us. That we can refrain from force and threats and remember supplication and a good example. That we not look on our peers as "un-worthy" but as a work in progress, that we not look at our shortcomings as failure, but as simply more road to travel.

That spirit of cooperation that starts with "me" is the one that Will solve our problems.

Temple Building

Reflecting on the legends of Solomon's Temple, it's conception, the builders and the materials, the ornamentation, I see that there is a lot that goes into building a Temple.

You must have a concept.

You must devise a plan.

You must find a suitable location to build.

You must find the right time to build.

You must prepare the ground for a foundation.

You must select suitable materials for a foundation.

You must select capable workers to prepare your foundation.

You must make certain the foundation sure and sound.

You must select the materials to build with.

You must see that those materials are gathered through all of the cutting, chopping, digging and hewing.

You must get those materials delivered to the job site.

You must have suitable and skilled workers to build your Temple, from the rough carpentry to the fine finish work.

Fail in any one of these areas and your Temple will not stand and if by miracle it does it will look like hell.

We are building a Temple, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. It is the Temple of ourselves.

We are the surveyors, we are the weather watchers, we are the ones who dig the foundation, we are the ones who select the materials, we are the ones who haul the materials, we are the builders.

You are all roles from Solomon and the Hiram's to the workers, the shippers and the haulers. You are all materials and all the labor to make it happen.

This is no easy task that you have resolved yourself to. You must learn to think in new ways and you must learn new skills. You will discover muscles you never thought you had in your labors, and not because they feel good for being exercised.

You have to learn to deal with searing heat, rain and mud, labor disputes and legal challenges. You must learn to coordinate schedules, devise transportation, and where something does not exist to get a job done create it yourself.

You will get hot, tired, sweaty, stinky, smelly, dirty, cut, bruised and callused before you are through. Providing you are willing to see it through.

And that Gold that will ornament your Temple is rarely found on the surface, you must dig and dig to get at it. Then you must refine it before you can apply it. This suggests the last part of the work can be as hard as the start, in other words, it will not always be easy.

But each step of the way will make you better, stronger and wiser, if you can just see it through, and when you are finished you will have a Temple that is eternal.

Temple Building: Part 2

The Unsparing Ravages of Barbarous Force

We read in the lecture of the Fellow Craft degree (Webb) that, “even the Temple of Solomon, so spacious and magnificent, and constructed by so many celebrated artists, escaped not the unsparing ravages of barbarous force”.

This lesson is more about maintenance than it is about building. (In Emulation though the above is not present, we are reminded to continually recall those lessons of the first degree. We are told that the former charge should never be erased from your memory. You’ll see how it fits here...)

You may recall in the First Degree we get the lesson of Foundation. That properly prepared foundation is the result of subdued passions.

A definition.

Passion

4 a (1) : emotion (2) plural : the emotions as distinguished from reason b : intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction c : an outbreak of anger

5 a : ardent affection : love b : a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept c : sexual desire d : an object of desire or deep interest

Those areas of our life that are “reactionary” instead of “right action oriented”. Or, areas in which we have an unreasonable drive or affection for.

Quite often I hear or read a remark that suggests that all Freemasonry really is, is about being good to your brother and neighbor. When you look only to the end of the game though you miss the plays that make it happen. The excitement of any sports event, for example, is not reading the stats the next day in the newspaper but in watching the players play the game (or playing the game yourself). Watching the play by play as the method or “system” of moves gets executed. For us as Masons we are the players, we are the ones executing this “beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols”.

The system of Freemasonry was designed to work a long certain lines of emotional, mental and spiritual development, in a systematic way. The system is vital and very important.

The methods and ritual differ from place to place but the core elements to get to the end-game, the play by play, are preserved and taught in each. It is a “system” and that is part of what sets Freemasonry apart from other clubs and organizations.

But first let’s look at a couple more definitions:

Barbarous

b : lacking culture or refinement :

2 : characterized by the occurrence of barbarism 3 : mercilessly harsh or cruel

barbarism

1 a : a social or intellectual condition : b : the practice or display of barbarian acts, attitudes, or ideas

2 : an idea, act, or expression that in form or use offends against contemporary standards of good taste or acceptability

barbarian

2 : lacking refinement, learning, or artistic or literary culture

What I believe is being said in the second-degree lecture is simply this, that if our passions are not subdued we have not the right foundation for the learning that is to take place in the second degree. The learning is possible but most likely will be misapplied as when a barbarous rogue of history would get a hold of gun powder or the latest steel or automatic weapons.

Because he is a “brute” he knows not how or rather will not properly apply his knowledge but will instead use his learning to harm, subdue and conquer others. His passions, being for himself, are now fueled by the ability to have more for himself with the use his newfound knowledge.

If lessons of the first degree are not fully ingrained and in full practice, tainted thinking skews the lessons in the second degree. A person is now reactionary with greater ability to do harm both to themselves and to others; it is passion with power.

Remember, a passion can be as subtle as a romance with ones own intellect or in thinking that something we have done has somehow elevated us above our peers. I think we often err in assuming that passions out of hand are simply or only displays of anger or other forms of emotional outbursts, no they can be much harder to detect.

In the long run the more subtle they are the more difficult to overcome. You might liken it to how improvement is measured in piano playing. To a child just learning to play improvement is marked and easy to see. In a fully trained concert pianist, improvement is not so noticeable and to the untrained ear it is nonexistent. But of course it is there.

As the Temple is but an allegory of ourselves, these un-subdued passions are our “barbarous forces”. These are the things that if we are unwilling to take stock of ourselves, do our own inventory, and overcome them will erode our foundation and bring our temple tumbling down.

We are being reminded that the “unsparing ravages of barbarous force” are continually chipping away at our Temples and that we must learn not just to subdue, but also to maintain. Like a building superintendent we must continually be checking the foundation for cracks, erosion, wear and tear and other forms of damage. It’s not once done and now it’s complete, it’s once done and continue to do.

As this is “Barbarous Force” we must also pay attention to the “Force” part: Force

1 a (1) : strength or energy exerted or brought to bear : cause of motion or change : active power

It is not something once done and it is over. These forces are continual, just as is alluded to in the lecture these things work over time.

The work of the Mason is individual. Though we may stand shoulder to shoulder with our fellow Masons, the work we do is on ourselves and very singular. The result, if properly worked through is a person who can and will go out into the world and make a real difference, and not merely in his lodge (or in his cyber lodge) as the house he builds, that Temple, becomes that “House for All peoples”.

But you must never forget the maintenance; it takes work not only to build, but also to keep your temple in tact. Simply look at all of the crumbling temples of antiquity that are with us today. Had they been maintained they would still be beautiful and probably in use today, but such is not the case. They are mute testimony to a lack of maintenance and the ravages of time.

The lesson is simple; prepare a proper foundation before you start to erect your columns and pilasters. And, keep up on the maintenance as the “unsparing ravages of barbarous force” are ever with us.

(All definitions barrowed from Mirriam-Webster Online)