



Lessons to encourage contemplation and thought so that you may better apply the tools and lessons of Masonry

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Why You Can't Visit My Lodge

What do you mean, I can't visit your lodge? Isn't a lodge, any lodge, supposed to be a place welcoming all Masons? Sure, it is. You are more than welcome to come to the lodge I belong to.

I'm just saying when you enter the lodge room, you may be experiencing a lodge much different from mine. As well you should be. My lodge and my experience are very personal and I have developed a mindset of Masonry that I assume before I enter. This is why it is so difficult to structure elements of a lodge meeting that will satisfy every Mason's needs.

A proper mindset is what is necessary to change behavior, whether it be trying to just change yourself, or changing an entire organization; such as changing what happens at your lodge. I learned that without a "proper Masonic mindset," attending my lodge will have no meaning for me, and for sure, no meaning for you.

My own personal lodge begins with a "Masonic Mindset" and before I enter the lodge room, I do the following:

- I remove any thoughts from the outside world – I clear my mind of the events of the day
- I assume an attitude of Brotherly Love – I am entering lodge to provide and enjoy lasting fraternal relationships
- I thank my creator – I remember how blessed I am to be able to be here
- I think of giving Masonic charity – to soothe and bring peace to troubled brothers if needed
- I prepare myself to give and receive good counsel
- I prepare myself to learn and to teach others

So, to visit "My Lodge" you need to be thinking exactly like I do. If you are, Great! If you are not, what are you thinking and what is "Your Lodge" like?



The Lessons Learned at a Masonic Funeral

"Last night, I stood at the casket of a friend and prayed, not for him but me."

I awoke as if startled by some loud sound, but the house was quiet as I sat up in bed. The words above immediately just came to me as if my mind had been holding them, waiting for my eyes to open so they could engage. It didn't take me long to realize why they were there, as I had participated in a Masonic funeral service for a friend the previous evening.

I replayed the previous night in my mind, and I can recall praying, but honestly, I can't recall praying for myself.

The Masonic memorial service uses these lines: *"The last offices of respect and love that we pay to the dead are useless forms except as they are lessons to the living."* I had heard this line many times before, but not until this morning did it become so vivid and then sunk so deeply into my thinking.

In another part of the service, the Master offers this admonition; *"Our present gathering will be without profit unless it awakens serious reflections and strengthens us with resolutions for the future. Seeing then my brothers, the uncertainty of life and the unsubstantial nature of all its pursuits, forget not that preparation which is wisdom to make and weakness to defer."*

Like the previous statement, this line is also very familiar but, again, has never had such a profound impact until now. My Masonic brother's funeral service did "awaken serious reflection."

After so many times participating in Masonic funerals and hearing these lessons, I was still trying to understand why this time the experience lingered in my mind and caused such contemplation when I received word of another Brother's death. This time it was someone even closer to me, and I felt compelled to lead the Masonic service. So, the next few days were spent reading and familiarizing myself with the service, and not much thought about "why" we were doing it.



I also didn't give much thought to the fact that I would be conducting the service on my birthday, that is, until now.

Did the words in the service I heard one week and then spoke the following week strengthen me with "resolutions for the future?" Did these instances of mortality cause me to pause and understand that life is very short and that I should, as we also say in the service, "*embrace the present moment*" and prepare for our death? Did I learn those lessons? I hope I did.

So back to the vivid words that startled me that one morning; "last night I stood at the casket of a friend and prayed, not for him but me." I said I didn't recall praying for myself, but I guess without knowing it, I was. I was praying that I learned the lessons my Brother's Masonic service was designed to impart. I was praying those who will someday stand at my casket will also pray, not because I died, but because my death caused them to pause and think.



How You Begin Your Day Will Define Your Day

When I began presenting personal and leadership development programs to the Fraternity some 15 years ago, I quickly realized that if I didn't hold myself to the same process, I was teaching, it would be, well, just not right. I would be a hypocrite. Besides, to be a leader, you must be a learner, so I made myself some promises to be reminded, among other things, always to be learning.

I also recognized as time went on that having a positive mindset was very important. Without one, you can easily get dragged down by the current topics of the day and lose your focus on those things that are important to you.

Here are the five daily promises I made to myself 15 years ago to help me begin my day correctly. I put them on a blue index card that sits below my computer screen, and when I travel, I take it with me.

Daily I will:

- **Know myself** - by reflection on what I believe and what is important; by properly evaluating what is presented to me; and by pursuing knowledge by continual learning.
- **Know others** - by recognizing that we all are children of God, and that building relationships is a worthwhile and valuable exercise.
- **Assume an attitude of service** - always look for ways to help and add value to others.
- **Practice the Golden Rule** - a duty a Mason assumes when he enters the Fraternity. Always show respect.
- **Lead with Masonic Values** - as I assume leadership roles in the Fraternity, remember those I lead are the same as I am, and lead with Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

This is how I begin my day and it truly helps me to define my day. What might you promise yourself to begin each day on a positive note? If it helps you get started, please use mine.



The Practice of Circumspection

As Masons, we are reminded of the lessons of silence and circumspection which are to make us, as we have learned, *"watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words and actions..."* Circumspection is about being watchful and discreet. It's about thinking before we act by surveying all the possible consequences of what could happen and being alert to the potential for unwanted consequences.

I have mentioned before what I call, a Masonic lens. Meaning that our actions are filtered and scrubbed by the values, tools and lessons of Masonry. To develop this lens requires that we as Masons, study, understand and practice our tenets so they become automatic, and thus causing us to act in a circumspect manner.

Dr. John Maxwell outlines in the Law of Process, the 5 phases of leadership growth. We can apply these phases to Masonry to help us develop of mindset of circumspection.

1. **I don't know what I don't know.** - Just going through the degrees and not studying the meaning of the lessons will not allow you to grow as a Mason
2. **I know that I need to know** - by study you become aware of the many tools and lessons imparted in the degrees
3. **I know what I don't know** - by establishing a habit of the study of Masonry, you being to understand what more there is to learn
4. **I know and grow and it starts to show** - as you gain understanding and apply Masonry's principles you begin to change and your outlook on life changes
5. **I simply go because of what I know** - because you are continually studying, contemplating and applying Masonry, you have put yourself on Masonic autopilot. You act always as a Mason and view people and situations with a Masonic lens.

Your Masonic lens automatically triggers circumspection which allows you to be watchful and guarded in your thoughts, words and actions.

Circumspection, an important practice of a Mason.



Building Your Masonic Legacy

As we begin a new week and strive to live our lives by Masonic principles, please think about these quotes.

"Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you." —Shannon L. Alder, Inspirational Author

"Someday someone will describe your life in a single sentence, pick it now." - Dr. John Maxwell

"Practice civility toward one another. Admire and emulate ethical behavior wherever you find it. Apply a rigid standard of morality to your lives, and if, periodically, you fail as you surely will, adjust your lives, not the standards." -Ted Koppel

Each one of these quotes suggests that we should be keenly aware of our treatment of others because we are taught to *"act upon the square."* As we perform this Masonic duty, it will define how each person will remember us and we build our Masonic legacy.

So, this week, when you fail by reacting poorly with another person, remember your actions should be that of a Mason. Then take Ted Koppel's advice and adjust your life, not your standards.



The Bridge Builder - by Will Allen Dromgoole

An old man going a lone highway,
Came, at the evening cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.
Through which was flowing a sullen tide
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.
"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim near,
"You are wasting your strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way;
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build this bridge at evening tide?"
The builder lifted his old gray head;
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followed after me to-day
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!"

We are builders, not for just ourselves, but others.



I Just Don't Have the Time

It's Monday, my lodge meets tonight, I should go...I can't, I just don't have the time

I wonder how they're doing; I wonder if my old buddy Gene still comes, I should call him...I can't, I just don't have the time

I was Master in 1991, I put in my time, I should volunteer to coach someone... I can't, I just don't have the time

I enjoyed doing ritual, I thought I was pretty good, probably couldn't do it now unless I practiced... I can't, I just don't have the time

Who was that Brother, the one who did the good food, I wonder if he still does that, I should go and find out... I can't, I just don't have the time

We use to have the sidelines full; I wonder how it is now, maybe I should go and find out... I wish I could, but I can't. I just don't have the time.

The Master of the lodge called, he told me they were surrendering the charter and closing the lodge. I told him I couldn't believe it and asked what happened. He said it was a long story, too many things to explain... Maybe someday he would tell me, but right now, he didn't have time.

Do you make time to think about the value of Masonry? This week make some time.



Finding Meaning

John Gardner, who was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson, said this about your life's meaning:

"Meaning is not something you stumble across, like the answer to a riddle or the prize in a treasure hunt. Meaning is something you build into your life.

You build it out of your own past, out of your affections and loyalties, out of the experience of humankind as it is passed on to you, out of your own talent and understanding, out of the things you believe in, out of the things and people you love, out of the values for which you are willing to sacrifice something.

The ingredients are there. You are the only one who can put them together into that unique pattern that will be your life. Let it be a life that has dignity and meaning for you. If it does, then the particular balance of success or failure is of less account."

Masonry has supplied some of the necessary ingredients to build meaning in your life.

Masons are builders; work this week on building a life of meaning.



Should I Make Some New Year's Resolutions?

I've had trouble deciding the message for this week. The problem began when I realized the message would go out four days before starting a new year. I searched my documents and found I had written several times about using the days before a new year for reflection and then making resolutions for the new year.

I'll be honest; my initial thought is that maybe it's a waste of your time. I'm not referring to the reflection part, but the New Year's Resolution part. Let me explain.

Seeing the year drawing to a close, many people begin to think of some bad habits they want to correct. They then say to themselves, "OK, on January 1, I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I'm going to, for once in my life, get in shape." They then, after enduring the pain as long as they can stand it, abandon the effort.

I have a friend who exercises at a workout facility regularly. He says he hates the first part of the year because all the people who made resolutions crowd the gym. After a few months, though, he says they disappear.

Most resolutions made are without a long-term game plan. I believe some men approach Masonry in the same way.

Some Masons receive the degrees, show up at meetings for a while, and are immensely enthusiastic. Then somewhere along the line, their enthusiasm wanes, and you don't see them anymore. Maybe their "game plan" for Masonry centered around becoming a Mason, displaying the symbols on their lapel and car, participating for a while, and then they stopped when all the immediate glamour wore off. Maybe they didn't stop to think of Masonry as a lifelong plan, or their lodge didn't correctly teach this purpose.

Famed UCLA Coach John Wooden in one of his books, talks extensively of his father being his first mentor. He relates not only what his father said to him, but how deeply he was impacted by how his father lived his life. Coach Wooden told this about his father,

"He showed me love, kindness, gentleness, responsibility, and peace of mind. He mentored me with lessons, with actions, and with words so that long before I ever set foot in my first classroom, I already knew both how to learn and how to teach."

Coach Wooden's father had a "game plan" that wasn't for just a short time but his whole life. When each of his sons completed grade school, he gave them a two-dollar bill and a card that on one side he wrote his seven rules for living:

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Make each day your masterpiece.
3. Help others.
4. Drink deeply from good books.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build a shelter against a rainy day.
7. Pray for guidance and give thanks for your blessings every day.

As we each endeavor to become better Masonic Men, we should first stop and think about our own "Masonic Game Plan." Is it short-lived, like a few months at the gym, or is it like Coach Wooden's father, whose game plan covered his entire life?

It would be best if you didn't wait until January 1 to begin your Masonic Game Plan. Think about starting right now.



Learn, Practice, and Train

First, I received many comments from last week's message. Thanks for letting me know Coach Wooden's father's game plan provided meaning for you. No doubt, sometime this coming year, you will hear another story from the coach.

On December 31, I finished a book I have been reading all year. It didn't take a year because of its length, but because it was 365 daily lessons based on Stoicism's ancient philosophy. I discovered Stoicism a couple of years ago and found these ancient Greek philosophers provide some practical advice. They commented on what it took to live a virtuous life; courage, self-control, justice, and wisdom.

One of the stoics, Marcus Aurelius, wrote, *"if at some point in your life you should come across anything better than justice, truth, self-control, courage – it must be an extraordinary thing indeed."* In Masonry, when we speak of courage, we use the word fortitude; self-control is temperance; justice is justice, and wisdom is displayed by being prudent.

Some other thoughts from the stoics give rise to the practice of Masonry:

- *"Don't explain your philosophy, embody it." - Epictetus*
- *"If it is not right, do not do it, if it is not true, do not say it." - Marcus Aurelius*
- *"You become what you give your attention to...If you yourself don't choose what thoughts and images you expose yourself to, someone else will." – Epictetus*
- *"Be tolerant with others and strict with yourself." — Marcus Aurelius*
- *"If anyone can refute me—show me I'm making a mistake or looking at things from the wrong perspective—I'll gladly change. It's the truth I'm after, and the truth never harmed anyone." — Marcus Aurelius*
- *"Waste no more time arguing what a good man should be. Be One." — Marcus Aurelius*
- *"First say to yourself what you would be, and then do what you have to do." — Epictetus*

I'm going to re-read the book for another year – learn, practice and train



Epictetus said this, ***"That's why the philosophers warn us not to be satisfied with mere learning, but to add practice and then training. For as time passes, we forget what we learned and end up doing the opposite, and hold opinions the opposite of what we should."***

If you want the book, here is a link to Amazon. <http://bit.ly/stoicbook> You can buy the Kindle version for \$1.99. You also can subscribe to a daily stoic message here <https://dailystoic.com/>

Begin your practice and training in Masonry – live the degrees.

