

Reflections

Masonic Articles by Ontario Masons



Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of Canada
in the Province of Ontario

Masonic Education & Reflections Committee

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M.W. Bro. Paul C. Todd

The Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of Canada
in the Province of Ontario

Welcome to [Reflections](#):

September represents the beginning of yet another Masonic year and a new presentation of Reflections.

As a former Chairman of Reflections (which had a different name back then), I am aware that each issue satisfies the Charge to the Entered Apprentice, that of “being called on to make a daily advancement in Masonic Knowledge”.

The quality of [Reflections](#) is directly related to the quantity & quality of its submissions, so after reading this edition please reflect on that special paper you wrote and delivered as DDGM, or perhaps on one you will deliver this year at your Lodge. Please send it along to the Editor and share your Masonic Knowledge and opinion with your Brothers.

Now sit back in that comfortable chair and enjoy [Reflections](#).

M.W. Bro. Paul E. Todd, Grand Master

My Brethren,

As Chairman, Masonic Education and Reflections Committee, I welcome you to [Reflections](#) 2017-2018 edition. We have made some changes to the publication including the cover page to make it more attractive and ready for reading. We will solicit articles written by Ontario Masons who have made presentations in their own Lodges, prepared articles that have or have not been published, or from DDGMs at official visits, etc.

One of my objectives this year is to generate discussions on any of the published articles. I feel that opening up discussion will reach the audience we are not currently making contact with.

As the Grand Master said in his message “Sit back in that comfortable chair and enjoy [Reflections](#)”.

R.W. Bro. Leyland A. Muss
Chairman, Masonic Education and Reflections Committee



A Message from the Editor

Brethren,

Thank you for taking the time to get to know [Reflections](#) again. We on the committee will endeavour to bring you thought provoking, entertaining and enlightening articles. We will do this knowing the legacy of Reflections and strive to maintain the high standards set out by previous committees.

Please enjoy this next edition of the new [Reflections](#).

R.W. Bro. Gerald J. Newall
Editor Reflections



Readers & Contributors:

Authors are responsible for the factual accuracy of the articles submitted and it is expected that proper acknowledgement be given to information and research sources. Articles will be received in Microsoft Word format and published based on a 1,200-word limit, however longer articles of special merit may be printed at the discretion of Reflections. Use of the information in this publication is strongly encouraged and the Brethren may reprint this material so long as acknowledged credits are included.

Please forward all articles for consideration to the following brethren.

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GET KNOWLEDGE – GET WISDOM – GET UNDERSTANDING





Freemasonry and The Crisis of Masculinity

By Bro. Chris Coome

Placed 3rd in College's 2017 Essay competition

When a young man joins Freemasonry, what is one of the first things that he learns? It's not the passwords or handshakes, nor the experience of the degrees. Sorry to say, his very first lesson comes from the grumblings of old Past Masters, huddled in groups outside of the Lodge room, conversing about the state of Freemasonry today. Loss of members is on their mind, and I've heard many Brethren describe the future with worry. But you can't really blame them, can you? It would certainly seem that our numbers are declining and our members are aging; Lodges are amalgamating, and our historic buildings are sold off because there are not enough members to sustain them. According to some American sources, younger members, and the newly initiated are disappearing at an increasing rate. The talk-of-the-town seems to be on how to fix this, but what would a young member have to say about all this?

It can certainly be disconcerting for younger members, to join and to hear that what they have just decided to invest their time in is on the decline. It's not exactly Freemasonry putting its best-foot-forward, considering that it might take a younger member a substantial bit of courage to join something where he is usually 20, if not 60 years the junior of everyone else around him. The age gap has often led to some interesting conversations. "Why young brother, what were you doing this weekend?" "Oh, not much, out for a few drinks with the friends at a local pub, met a really cute girl and...oh, sorry? Your granddaughter was at the local pub? But, she's not the one with the red hair and green...oh my."

I confess that exchange is only *half* true, but the fact is that there are hurdles which young men have to overcome within Freemasonry. However, having been a young Mason for almost six years now, I can say that despite some difficulties, the Craft has unequivocally stolen my heart. If we want to understand what Freemasonry can mean to a young man, I think we need to look at the issue in two ways; the type of world young men face, and what exactly Freemasonry offers them. I believe the foremost way to do this is to look at the crisis of Freemasonry as mirrored by the much larger crisis of masculinity in general.

As Freemasonry is a fraternity, it is dependent upon men for members, and the quality of both the Order and the men who join it are shaped by what we understand a man to be. Right now, I can tell you that as a young man, and on behalf of my generation, we are not entirely sure anymore. This may seem like an odd thing to say, but it is becoming an increasing problem. Anxiety and depression are becoming more and more prevalent among young men, and we are rapidly falling behind in academia. Society has made some young men so unsure of their basic nature, that they either reject any form of masculinity altogether, or take the opposite route, by becoming hyper aggressive and resentful.



My generation is bombarded by media, be it Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Every day we are exposed to millions of dissenting opinions. Gender theorists, which are becoming increasingly popular in academia, have even decided that the notion of a “man” and “masculinity” are inherently offensive and should be destroyed. What’s a young man to do? Do we look back to the men who stormed the beaches of Normandy, or do we forget all that? How can a male society like Freemasonry grow when society doesn’t even know what a man is anymore?

The truth is always in the middle, something I think Masonic philosophers have always understood. Men need a way forward. In an increasingly digitized and specialized society, young men need to develop the sophistication needed to handle it, but we should never forget the simple virtue of being a man. Freemasonry can be that way forward. Freemasonry is a cultural institution that instills all the values necessary for a healthy masculinity; courage, fortitude, charity, service, and the quest to constantly improve oneself. My generation needs to remember these values.

My generation is starving for mentorship and masculine bonding; something that forms the bedrock of the Masonic experience. If you want young men to flock once again to the Lodge doors, we need to remember that we are a *fraternity*. We cannot afford to forget about our newly initiated brethren, especially the young ones. Meeting once a month is often not enough to create the bonds of brotherhood we so clearly espouse. When a new Mason is initiated, they should be bombarded by so many calls to grab a coffee or a beer, that they won’t ever think for a second that they aren’t valued in our fraternity. And what of our philosophy and history? In such a materialist age, young men crave mystery and mysticism. Even the single most enchanting aspect of human existence, the reverence for the divine, is utterly and completely frowned upon. Masonry makes life more enchanting. The esotericism and legends that surround our order offer more fascinating topics to explore than any one Mason will ever master, and our mature brethren should be meeting with newer members to impart their knowledge. Even if you don’t like the legendary foundations of Freemasonry, would any of us really object to grabbing a few drinks and hearing about the heroic Knights Templar, or the wisdom of Pythagoras? I know a young man certainly wouldn’t, he would love it. We don’t have to believe in our legends to actually enjoy them, nor to acknowledge that they are an appealing part of the Craft.

Think of it this way: the very question “is Freemasonry *evolved* enough to be relevant for young men,” is entirely misplaced. We don’t need to evolve; young men have enough of the modern world as it is. What we need to do is get better at *what we already offer*. We need to be better at turning Masons into true brothers, teaching Masons to learn our histories, and to better understand the philosophy of our degrees. If we offer a place of friendship and learning to young men, then we can truly help them grow.

Why should Freemasonry not be on the doorstep of a very bright future? Our order becomes more relevant with every new piece of technology that is introduced, every gadget that takes us away from the human experience, and we should capitalize on what we can offer aspiring young men; real experiences, and a healthy environment for them to develop into the type of men the world needs. If society and universities no longer want to turn young men into *men*, then I say, we step in and fill that gap.





Stepping into the Light

by Brother John Mooney, 13 December 2014

A Paper Presented to the Brethren of Templum

Fidelis Lodge #746

Worshipful Master, Right Worshipful the District Deputy Grand Master and Brethren, I came to Freemasonry through my friendship with a Mason. This friendship developed outside of Masonry, and in fact I think it was some time before I even realized he was a Mason. As our friendship developed, my interest in Freemasonry grew. For a time, I consciously avoided asking too many questions about Masonry out of a concern that “prying” might damage our friendship. Over time however, I became acquainted with more Masons and eventually heard the tag line, “making good men, better.” Finally, my own curiosity got the better of me and I began to ask questions, soon realizing that I wanted to know more. While I was living in a state of darkness with respect to Freemasonry, I could sense a glow and was drawn toward it. More than that however, I believe that I had truly reached a point of reflection in my own life that was spurring me on to look for more from life. Simply put, I believe I was ready to become a Freemason.

It is certainly a fair observation that I was truly in a state of darkness with respect to knowledge of Freemasonry. I was not biased in any fashion by solicitations from either my sponsors or the investigation committee, but believe I really did come to Freemasonry of my own free will and based on a favourable opinion preconceived of the institution as the work prescribes. At my initiation, the Worshipful Master asked me to declare on my honour that I was prompted to seek admittance to the mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry through a general desire for knowledge, and a sincere wish to render myself more extensively serviceable to my fellow creatures. This question was posed early in my initiation and for some time was buried in the totality of my initiation experience. However, as I have been reviewing the work it has increasingly come to the forefront of my thoughts as one of the key components of Freemasonry, and I believe a component of the “more from life” that has been knocking about in the back of my mind. I believe these assertions speak to the very notion of making good men better, and will circle back to them to explain the fullness of this statement in due course.

At this point, I would like to return to the idea that candidates to Freemasonry solicit entry from a state of darkness both literally and figuratively, being both hoodwinked during the initiation process and not having had any of the secrets or mysteries of Freemasonry revealed until after the obligation has been sworn. The effects on me of being literally placed in a state of darkness through hoodwinking were profound. Having one’s sight taken away and having to rely on brother Junior Deacon to guide me, did much to produce in my mind a state of humility as well as a little anxiety.



I believe however, that it is important to note that anxiety and humility were not fear. My sponsor, in response to the question of what I should do to prepare for the initiation, had given me simple instructions – someone will take good care of you and try to take in the whole experience. Truer words and better advice could not have been given, for they helped establish the state of “perfect freedom of inclination” within my mind that the work calls for as candidates seek out the mysteries of Freemasonry. Being hoodwinked and guided, served to clear my mind of the physical world around me while focusing my attention clearly on what was being asked of me and the instructions I was receiving.

The return to a state of material light after the obligation was equally important. The return to material light is sudden, and given that light by its nature travels in all directions at once, almost overwhelming. I say this in the sense that my surroundings being completely unfamiliar to me, I was trying to take in everything at once and make sense of it, when in reality I had virtually no context upon which to construct my understanding. In the literal sense, it takes time for your eyes to adjust to the light and for your mind to place what you are observing into context. At first exposure I saw everything, but understood nothing.

In a figurative sense, exactly the same can be said of my understanding of Freemasonry. During my initiation, the allegorical veil covering Freemasonry was pulled back for the first time as I was guided through my floor work and instructed in the first degree of Freemasonry. But like the return to material light after having been hoodwinked, the totality of what I experienced was overwhelming and lacking in context. This made it very difficult to understand what it was that I was experiencing. I really did not know where to look or what to think. In a sense, I was blinded by the very light that I so desired. In retrospect, I am sure that this is very much the intended impact, however at the time it can be quite unnerving. The task ahead; trying to make meaning of what I was seeing and experiencing, trying to learning the work and frankly just participating in regular Lodge seem daunting as everyone around me is so well versed – it does feel odd to be in the position of being an apprentice at the age of 52. At the same time, I cannot deny that being in this position has been invigorating, because it does feel like I am beginning a very important journey that I believe will help bring greater fulfilment to my life.

As my eyes have adjusted to the light around me, I have been repeatedly drawn back to the questions that will be put to me by the Worshipful Master before I am passed to the second degree, as I believe they cut to the heart of my understanding of Freemasonry in the first degree. The very first question seeks to affirm one’s motivation for seeking to become a Mason. I believe that I can now fully see the importance of first being prepared to become a Freemason in the heart. It is from the heart that we draw inspiration and motivation. Feelings derived from the heart are the purest, most sustained and these feelings have served to draw me fully into Masonry in a manner which I still cannot fully comprehend, but which I fully embrace. The simplest description seems to be that my in heart there was a desire to find and experience more meaning in life, as well as a belief that there was more than I could comprehend on my own. In my heart, I feel that Freemasonry can help me construct that greater meaning.



The next several questions require the recollection of the physical preparation for initiation. These questions are important I believe because the physical elements of my initiation played a major role in establishing the necessary state of mind needed for me to enter Freemasonry. The Chamber of Reflection, a convenient room next to Lodge, was so much more than just a room. While I did not realize it at the time, the nature of my surroundings and the questions put to me therein served to strip the outside world from my mind and really cause me to reflect on many of the core beliefs concerning my place and responsibilities within the world, both physically and spiritually. The task of answering the questions put to me was much more difficult than I first imagined, because I don't believe that I have ever been asked to articulate them in a coherent stream of thought before. More importantly, they brought forward in my mind the very clear feeling that I could not really "answer" these questions completely, because I did not have the "answers" - only a partially formed set of beliefs that in many ways felt less complete the longer I thought about them. The experience served to affirm in my mind that I lacked the knowledge to truly answer these questions.

The mode of preparation – being deprived of all metal, and hoodwinked, with my right arm, left breast, and left knee made bare, and my right heel slipshod with a cable tow around my neck, served to strip away the security of station and identity, which I believe all of us stand behind. We present an image of ourselves to the world and consciously, or unconsciously, expect people to draw conclusions about us based on that image. The outward physical appearance of success and confidence can mask many of our insecurities, and at times lead us to believe that we are different, dare I say better than others. The mode of our preparation to enter Freemasonry, strips all of that away, exposing our hearts, leaving us neither naked nor clothed, depriving our senses, and putting in us in a most physically and psychologically vulnerable position. While quite unsettling at the time, I believe the mode of preparation served to bring about in me the state of humility needed to enter Freemasonry, understanding that at my core I am a man, simply a man, no different or in any way more powerful, entitled or gifted than any other. The trappings of society can create a false sense of power, security and entitlement that can quickly be stripped from any of us. It is important to recall that physically, we are all essentially the same and live within the same basic physical bounds that define humanity.

That we understand that we are made Freemasons when the sun is at its meridian, and that the sun is always at its meridian with respect to Masonry is to me the first step towards knowing that the light of Masonry is a constant – always there, always at its full strength, no matter where we find ourselves, either physically or literally. I am learning to draw comfort from the idea that I will have the privileges and mysteries of Freemasonry, as well as the support of my fraternal brothers and Masonry available to me at all times to draw upon. Equally important, the omnipresent light of Freemasonry means that there will be no place to hide from the obligations I have sworn or the responsibilities I have undertaken to myself, my fraternal brothers or Freemasonry as a whole. Early on in my initiation I was asked to declare my sincere wish to render myself more extensively serviceable to my fellow creatures, and I was cautioned to take heed upon what I had entered into. The clear corollary being, that with the revelation of the mysteries and the granting of the privileges of Freemasonry comes equally important and serious moral obligations.



For these reasons, I early on made a commitment to use the light to explore and experience all that I could within Freemasonry by being an active Mason. In fact, I believe it is my responsibility to do so, as I was the one who sought admission to the secrets and mysteries. The revelation of those secrets and mysteries requires effort on my part, and I am quite confident that they are not simply handed over, and should not be bestowed for simply showing up or by simply memorizing the work. Although the notion borders on cliché, nothing worthwhile is derived without sustained effort and serious reflection. The work certainly supports these ideas. The rough ashlar, which is for the Entered Apprentice to work, mark and indent on, has an irregular surface can represent the peaks and valleys of my own Masonic knowledge, which requires regular application effort and perseverance to continue to smooth and fashion so that the “rude material” receives its finish. Even then, the perfect ashlar remains for the “more expert” workman to try and adjust his jewels on. I find the idea that a Mason’s development is never complete, that one never becomes fully accomplished, but only more expert, an important idea as it means that there will always be more to learn and discover in Freemasonry. While it would certainly be possible to take the negative view - my work will never be complete, I much prefer the more positive perspective of seeing the unending opportunity to learn, improve and to continue to have an impact for the better on the world around me. I am further inspired in this by the idea that through Freemasonry, this journey and these opportunities will not be undertaken alone, but rather as part of this fraternal organization. An organization that recognizes that we will all have times of plenty and times of need, and one whose membership has made a commitment to share in all those times.

Within all the points of light in the first degree, the brightest for me shines on the response to the question, “What is Freemasonry?” and the question’s corresponding answer, “A Beautiful system of morality. . . “. It is this straight-forward statement that for me defines the most important elements of learning in the first degree. Our Lodges, which represent the beautiful system of morality, are built upon the base of our three grand principles namely: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Brotherly love comes about through common experience – all Masons pass through the same degrees and complete the same work. In addition, we share the same obligations and privileges. We are bound together by common experience and beliefs as men and brothers in the same unique family. Relief recognizes that we must all labour and bear our share of the load in building the system, but none should bear more than he can. When we approach that point, our brothers will offer assistance so that no Mason is overcome, thus maintaining the foundation of our system. Finally, the principle of truth. Truth endures all trials and without it, our system of morality would be fatally flawed. It keeps our focus on doing what is right, rather than on being right. These principles promote harmony and the betterment of the individual and Freemasonry in particular, as well as all mankind in general.

On the foundation of our grand principles stand the three great pillars of Freemasonry: wisdom, strength and beauty. Freemasonry helps us develop the moral wisdom we need to conduct ourselves in a morally correct manner. The working tools instruct us on apportioning out our days to their proper measures of prayer, labour, refreshment and sleep; reaffirm that labour is the lot of man, and that little will be accomplished without focused effort; and finally, that we must persevere and be indefatigable in our pursuit of moral betterment.



To support us under the weight of all our moral difficulties, we have the pillar of strength. Our strength is derived from the men and material which compose our lodge. The strength of our men is represented in the movable Jewels which are worn by our Master and his Wardens, their installation in these positions being based on their demonstrated merit and ability to lead the Lodge. The immovable Jewels are fixed and ever present that we may moralize and recall that all Masons move from the rough to the perfect ashlar, and that our moral tools, regardless of how polished, always require adjustment. The material of our lodge is composed of ornaments and furniture: ornaments to remind us of the uncertainty of all things in our material life and furniture to govern our faith, regulate our lives and actions and to keep us within due bounds with all mankind for we are after all just men. Our strength lies in recognizing the uncertainty which pervades our material lives and challenges our morality while having constructed a system of morality which overcomes these circumstances without separating us from the rest of humanity.

The inward moral adornment of each Mason comes about through our desire and efforts to arrive at the summit of Masonry by climbing on the staves of faith, hope, and charity on our moral ladder. Our moral adornment being inspired as we ascend each stave. Within the work, I believe we are given guidance to help us along the path through pursuit of the four cardinal virtues represented by the four tassels pendent to the four corners of the Lodge: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice, as well as by the distinguishing characteristics of every Freemason, namely: Virtue, Honour and Mercy.

Taken in total, the three Grand Principles upon which our system of morality is based and the three Great Pillars of Free Masonry which support it speak undeniably to its beauty. The beauty of the Masonic system of morality for me is derived from the fact that it exists within the bounds of humanity, and seeks to raise up all of humanity through moral lives lived by Masons and the example that provides. By striving to live our lives within this system of morality, and by dedicating our hearts and minds to becoming better Masons, we help create a better society. We do this without public fanfare or the desire for public recognition. As a Mason, I believe that we do this because we have come to believe and understand through our work that it is the right thing to do and the right way to live our lives. I look forward with great anticipation to taking the next step in my Masonic journey, to seeing and understanding what the light of Freemasonry may next reveal to me so that I may become a more expert Mason and thus render myself more extensively serviceable to my fellow creatures.

