

Unity Lodge #58, A.F. & A.M.

Thorndike, Maine



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October 16, 2020

To the Brethren of Unity Lodge #58, AF & AM:

I'll start this letter with a short story. When I was young Masonry meant nothing to me. Some Saturday evenings were spent at my grandparent's house. A lot of those evenings when my parents and I got there Grandfather would be in the living room with a small book which I now realize was his cipher. When we arrived he put the book away and not a word was said of what he was reading. As I got older I noticed the ring on Grandfather's finger bearing the square and compasses along with the letter G. My Grandfather's name was George Overlock and I took it for granted that the G stood for George. It wasn't until I was 30 years old and became initiated in Masonry that I learned about the letter G.

I asked my Grandfather to assist in my raising, but his years didn't allow him. If my Grandfather had been a little more open about Masonry, I would have joined several years earlier.

It's going on 35 years since I joined and while on this journey I have found many family members who are or were Masons. From Grandmasters to Masters to members of Lodges all proud to call themselves Masons.

There point I am trying to make is talk to your children, grandchildren, nephews and others about Masonry. You have heard time and time again that Masonry is not a secret society. The only thing that I know is secret is our initiation rites, and these are kept that way to insure that it is truly in the heart of the individual to become a Mason.

One more note, there is a DeMolay Chapter in Waterville open to young men ages 12 through 21. If you have any interest in getting a young man on the path to Masonry, give me a call: 437-2655. I am not involved in DeMolay at this time, but would gladly steer you in the right direction.

Fraternally,

Worshipful Mayo Cookson, Jr.

Remember: A gem is not polished without rubbing nor is man made perfect without trials.

Stated meeting are on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:30 with a 6:30 supper

Bruce Hutchins, Secretary, 1053 Halldale Rd, Montville ME 04941. tel/fax 382-6226, email bruce@hutchinsbrothers.com

District Calendar <http://east.our.calendars.net/glme/glmedist12>

Why Ritual

In an earlier post, we considered the question of how Masonic ritual teaches, and imparts lessons. In this post, I want to take a look at what ritual actually is, and why we do it.

We should take nothing for granted. Many Freemasons haven't even approached the question of "why ritual". It is simply what we have always done, but this is fully not enough, and there are some beautiful things to be learned along the way. Time's wasting, let's go.

What is Ritual?

Rituals are sequences of gestures and events, performed in a set-aside or sequestered space, in a particular sequence. But beyond technical definitions, rituals are things that have certain hallmarks we have to spot in order to understand why they operate as they do. The hallmarks of ritual work as follows:

Ritual is fixed: because they don't change, or at least not drastically or quickly, they can assume an air of timelessness, because they are timeless. Because they're fixed, they can be organized in groups of people, practiced, and repeated with high degrees of quality, which wouldn't be the case if they changed weekly.

Ritual follows rules: there are general rules on the flow of how things go, and specific rules about what to do in key instances. These boundaries help us identify what is right and what is wrong, relative to those rules.

Rituals are performed: this helps shape participant's experiences by taking them out of themselves and putting them into a role. Not only is seeing believing, but doing is believing.

Rituals involve sacrifice or sacred objects: sacrifice isn't the key concept, but the idea of investing objects, actions, or people with a form of sacred meaning is core to ritual. Reverently handling a national flag turns a piece of cloth into a sacred symbol of sacrifice, and so on.

Why Ritual for Freemasonry?

By taking regular things (assemblies of men, words, actions) and making them sacred, we hold them up and invest attention and recognition in them that they might not regularly receive. It is one thing to say that helping people is important. It is quite another thing to go through a rite of destitution, which arguably conveys the same lesson in a ritual form.

Sacred Ritual Underlines the Important

Have you ever felt that something was so important, you wanted to grab a person by the lapels and make sure you had their attention before you said it? As in, you needed them to understand how important information was? That is the kind of information you convey with ritual.

The seclusion of the ritual – namely that it occurs in a tyled lodge apart from the rest of the world, is also key here. Before a knock comes at the door, everyone knows that they are in a special place, apart from the rest of the world.

Ritual Integrates the Senses

Through performance, we recruit our actual bodies and voices to participate in teaching lessons to other members, or learning them ourselves. We know from child psychology that when we integrate the use of multiple senses, we improve learning. And so when you have important information to convey, and I mean really important information, you want to get a person moving. And speaking. And acting, and copying what they learn – because it is itself a vital part of learning.

Ritual Removes Uncertainty

The fact that it is so prescriptive and rule-bound establishes clear guard rails for all participants, even the candidate. It creates a strong shared experience where expectations are clear, and brothers can help one another in

simple ways. Each time a correct move is made, one can almost feel the approval of the lodge. All jokes about prompting past masters aside, in most practiced lodges most things go right most of the time.

And every little word, and move, when something goes right – reinforces Masonic identity and the meaning of the ritual itself. This allows its participants to relax into it and focus on the meaning.

Ritual Tunes the Candidate In

In the post about the Radio Station Game, we talked about how people's attention can be tuned into a certain frequency of sorts. Ritual has this same effect: it wants the participant's thoughts tuned into the content of the Masonic lessons at hand. By engaging with what's being said and done in the ritual, the mind gets drawn into a particular pattern so to speak.

When we think about the structure and sections of Masonic degrees then, this particular point is no wonder, but for a public forum I have to be circumspect with some of the details. Suffice to say that in some of the degrees, there are teaching moments and formalities which must be covered, and then there are experiences which should be felt. And before you get into an experience intended to be deeply felt, it would be important to prepare the mind.

Summary

I often think of Masonic degrees as a series of lessons, or information that brothers from centuries ago are passing down to us, so that we could apply and benefit from them. This important information, put simply, is so important that it was worth millions of masons spending portions of their lifetimes to preserve it and send it down through the centuries.

Meditate on that for just a moment. It is no small thing.

Why then ritual? Because it is the delivery method for this information. It speaks to something deeply human, and grabs us in a way that understands how our brains work. Ritual then:

- Tunes us into the right station

- Imparts the important information in a way that we move & feel

- Involves the participation of the lodge, and

- Removes anxiety, creates a sense of safety and proper place for each motion

What is a Mason?

What is a Mason? It is he

Who builds upon the Square,

Whose heart beats true to God and you

And all that's good and fair,

Who builds, as can, to Heaven's plan

Andrew Sommerville MacBride (c.1845-1914)