
The Lyceum



A Publication of
The Committee on Masonic Education



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Your Publication Staff & Contributors
Robert H. Johnson - Editor-In-Chief, Darin A. Lahners -
Editor, Chad Lacek, 33°, Bernard Davis, Chairman

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Brethren,

As the blossoming month of May graces us with its warmth and vitality, we extend a heartfelt fraternal greeting to you all. It is a time when nature fully unfolds her beauty, offering us a bounty of inspiration and reflection. We hope this welcome letter finds you in good spirits and eager to delve into the enriching content of this month's edition of "The Lyceum," the official Masonic Education magazine for the Grand Lodge of Illinois.

This May, we proudly embrace the theme of "The Practical Application of Freemasonry's Philosophy." Our journey this month invites you to explore the depths of our ancient craft, encouraging a thoughtful application of Masonic principles in our everyday lives.

We are delighted to present a collection of insightful articles intended to spark introspection and dialogue: Explore the profound significance of the silent construction of the Temple, devoid of iron tools, and its symbolic implications for both our internal and external lives as Masons with Brother Erik Marks of Massachusetts.

A reflection on how temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice shape our Masonic identity and guide our daily actions is laid out by Brother Paul Saltz of Ohio. Then, dive into a thoughtful analysis of our working tools, both as instruments of construction and as metaphors for self-improvement and the challenges posed by our egos by the Education Chair of Nebraska, Matthew N. Parker.

Our featured article this month is one I hope no one skips. As a Mason nearing two decades of reflection, RW:. Brother Chad M. Lacek, 33°, shares valuable life lessons gleaned through Masonic teachings, focusing on charity, self-improvement, and the profound magic of reading. In a personal piece, I hope you can gain insight into prudent decision-making through a thought experiment, encouraging Masons to consciously apply Masonic virtues in everyday choices, called "Making Choices."

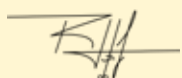
Finally, we'll put a bow on it with a recap of this year's Midwest Conference on Masonic Education! Relive the highlights from a successful Midwest Conference of Masonic Education, exploring the importance of truth in Masonic teachings and the camaraderie of shared experiences.

As you immerse yourself in these thoughtful articles, we encourage you to consider how you might embody and apply these Masonic teachings in your life. May this issue serve as a catalyst for personal growth and mutual understanding.

In closing, we wish you a month of joy, learning, and meaningful interactions. May the insights gained from this edition inspire a renewed commitment to the principles we hold dear in our fraternity. Enjoy the journey through these pages, and may they enrich your path as a Freemason.

Fraternally yours,

Fraternally yours,
R.H. Johnson,



Editor-In-Chief
The Lyceum
The Grand Lodge of Illinois



From the Chairman's Desk

by WB: Dr. Bernard Davis Jr., Chairman- Masonic Education Committee

Masonic Education: Bridging Ancient Wisdom with Everyday Life



As Freemasons, we are entrusted with timeless principles that shape our character, guide our actions, and inspire us to lead with integrity. While the rituals and symbols of Freemasonry are deeply rooted in tradition,

their relevance extends far beyond the lodge room. The true power of Masonic education lies in its ability to transform lives, offering practical wisdom that can be applied in our daily interactions, professional endeavors, and personal growth.

One of the foundational aspects of Masonic education is the study of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences—Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. These disciplines, once considered essential for intellectual development, remain just as relevant today.

Grammar & Rhetoric: Clear communication is vital in both personal and professional settings. Whether drafting an email, delivering a speech, or engaging in meaningful dialogue, the ability to articulate thoughts effectively fosters understanding and strengthens relationships.

Logic & Arithmetic: Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are indispensable in navigating complex challenges. From financial planning to strategic decision-making, these disciplines empower Masons to approach situations with reason and precision.

Geometry & Astronomy: The study of universal truths and celestial order reminds us of the interconnectedness of all things. Whether designing structures or contemplating the mysteries of existence, these principles encourage a deeper appreciation for the world around us.

Freemasonry instills values that shape ethical leadership. The principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth serve as guiding lights in our interactions with others:

Brotherly Love: In a world often divided by differences, the Masonic commitment to fraternity

fosters unity and mutual respect. By practicing empathy and understanding, Masons contribute to a more harmonious society.

Relief: Charity and service are at the heart of Masonic teachings. Whether supporting local communities, mentoring young professionals, or assisting those in need, Masons embody the spirit of generosity and compassion.

Truth: Integrity is the cornerstone of Masonic character. Upholding honesty and moral fortitude in all endeavors ensures that Masons lead by example, inspiring others to act with sincerity and righteousness. The lessons learned within the lodge are not meant to remain confined within its walls. They serve as a blueprint for living a life of purpose and virtue.

Workplace Ethics: Masonic teachings encourage professionalism, fairness, and respect in the workplace. By adhering to ethical standards, Masons foster a culture of trust and collaboration.

Community Engagement: Active participation in civic duties and social initiatives reflects the Masonic commitment to service. Whether volunteering, advocating for justice, or supporting educational programs, Masons contribute to the betterment of society.

Personal Development: The pursuit of knowledge and self-improvement is a lifelong journey. By embracing Masonic education, individuals cultivate wisdom, resilience, and a deeper understanding of their role in the world.

Freemasonry is more than an ancient fraternity—it is a living philosophy that enriches lives and strengthens communities. By applying Masonic principles in real-world scenarios, we honor the legacy of the Craft and ensure its teachings remain relevant for generations to come. As Masons, we are called to be beacons of light, illuminating the path of knowledge, virtue, and service in all that we do.

Fraternally,
WB Bernard Davis Jr,

Bernard Davis Jr

Chairman - Committee on Masonic Education
Grand Lodge of the State of Illinois



NO IRON AT THE BUILDING OF YOUR TEMPLE

by Bro. Erik Marks - Massachusetts



The lesson in lecture that there was no sound of iron tools at the building of the temple has many implications in the application of masonry to everyday life. We are taught in our ritual from Deuteronomy 27:5 *“and there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them (stones).”* Taken literally, we understand there were no iron or metal tools used at the site where the temple was constructed. Though an amazing feat, as masons, we seek and learn more from the symbolic interpretations.

Freemasonry is simultaneously a psychologically strengthening and disarming process. In truth, the two are always correlated; the stronger the psyche, the greater the cognitive flexibility and less need for constant vigilance or a defensive/offensive stance. No, personal disarmament doesn't have to do with amending the United States Constitution, nor the constitutions of Freemasonry. Perhaps a détente of sorts, this process is not militaristic, though fully about easing interpersonal and intra-psychic tensions.

As we are prepared, we recognize one another to be of equal value, thereby being leveled with all others; we are disarmed, psychologically, and choose to make ourselves vulnerable—intentionally. Introduced to a new sense of safety, we find ourselves amongst other men, many of whom we have never before met. At first, this is a symbolic expression of an ideal: when light is revealed, the hoodwink

removed, it is confirmed that we are fully protected by others who care deeply about our well-being and development. We are given the concept through ritual, not so much didactically, as a lecture. As we return to lodge regularly, over time, we come to know one another, and the ideal vision is made manifest through a trust we co-construct. Therefore, I understand in the description that no sounds of metal heard at the worksite has to do with the manner in which we address the brethren and ourselves. These, in turn, a training ground for how to be in the larger world.

In the symbolic edict, we could consider both tools and weapons made of iron specifically, but any weapon, generally. With this interpretation, we are told there were no weapons brought to the building of the temple. It would be in keeping with the idea that the building of a spiritual edifice would be wholly a reverent activity, not combative. At the very least, an expectation that the temple would be built in relative safety, far from the reach of enemies, combat, or the need for arms. This concept is extended in that one leaves weapons at the door of the temple, to be disarmed before the Divine, and others in its presence, to commune. We leave the protection of the lodge to the Tyler.

Consider the following quote:

“Every stone which was touched by iron, even though it was not damaged, is disqualified [for use] in build-

ing the altar..., as it is stated (Shemot 20:25): "By lifting your sword against it, you will have profaned it." (Hilkhot Bet Ha-Bechira 1:14-15).

When we consider the personal temple being constructed and each man a living stone of the larger societal temple, we could say this interpretation implies we must not take up a weapon against any stone in the construction of the spiritual temple. In this reading, stone could refer to the individual brother or brethren as a collective; and as the purpose of masonry is to shine light into the world, it refers, by extension, to our actions in everyday life. The literal meaning is to not be violent towards your brothers. In the course of coming to lodge with increasing regularity as we progress, we get to know one another more deeply and quite naturally drop our defenses. We speak our minds and bond over food and ritual. At times, we may disagree on matters and agitate one another. Here, the call to harmony is literal and interpersonal/psychological: don't act out, physically, relationally, internally. The craft trains us to be fully ourselves, open, and to work to remain non-reactive to each other when conflict happens.

A slightly more interpersonal reading might suggest we watch our words (tyler and inside sentinel are corollaries to psychic and interpersonal guards). We watch for our weaponized words. We guard against passive-aggressive forays into being "right," thereby causing disharmony in the lodge building and the building of each inner temple. We could take this construction further still to be careful with our intentions towards our brothers: Do I harbor resentments? Am I secretly angry at a brother? What weapons do I prepare in the silence of my sanctum against him? Can I set my weapons down? Will I have sufficient strength to relent?

I've heard it said, and have said it myself in the past, until I knew better: "*the road to hell is paved with good intentions.*" Though one interpretation of the seemingly clever "intentions" quip is that remaining in a planning phase leads to a lack of action. However, the quip has the profound negative effect of causing men to devalue their intentionality and not take into account motives and urges we disavow or keep from our conscious selves. By repeating this phrase to ourselves and others, we relinquish our willingness to accept responsibility for the root causes of our actions and all their outcomes, internally and in the world.

The antidote: catechism, our ritual. It is a systematic dialogue with oneself, initially introduced to each man in lodge through ritual. We are taught the procedure in each degree by our officers, who symbolically represent aspects of our psyches in a command relationship with the Divine. We observe the process with each entry, passage, and raising of a stone. Through personal experience, observation, rehearsal, and performance of the exchanges, the desired outcome is that each man has the opportunity to operationalize this internal procedure to question himself and his intentions, urges, and motives in real-time through the tests and trials of daily life.

Not every mason shares this understanding of our work and may choose to not use the education in the intended manner. Some, who are not ready for this level of self-examination, may not engage self in this way because it is mildly to wildly uncomfortable to remain in this level of self-examination for any length of time. Practicing masonry at this depth can evoke a great deal of uncertainty and vulnerability, which is natural and expected. It can feel aversive until we walk the winding stairs repeatedly over the years. Then, a broader familiarity with self allows for greater foundational stability and decreased reactivity.

Taking this interpretation to the lone builder, working day and night on this personal temple, we would inquire as to what weapons he points at himself to his own detriment? Is he rough (The intra-psychic ruffian) with his own mind and demand too much progress or secrets before he is fully prepared? Is he caught in a conflict between the psychological officers of his inner lodge? Is he at odds with himself? The iron as a symbolic weapon takes the form of verbal and linguistic cruelty, meanness, harsh thoughts directed at his Self. Rather than building, the inner assaults tear down progress made. Instead of strengthening, morale and spirit diminish, and the foundation deteriorates.

Do we believe that being harsh, mean, or cruel, towards ourselves, in our own minds makes us stronger? The idea is a lie. Our symbols and ritual have always held the antidotes to the lie in the alchemical blend of beauty (emotion, aesthetics, junior warden, plumb) and strength (rationality, containment, senior warden, level) to produce Wisdom (compassion, mediation, empathic intentionality, master of the lodge, gavel).

The idea that cruelty at self or other is strengthening is a lie on the universal level, because if everything manifest in the world is the divine's attempt to understand or express itself, when one raises a sword against the stone as

self through being cruel, harsh, or mean, one raises that sword at a reflection of the divine and is therefore committing a heinous act against that which one professes to revere most.

Many of us have had this lie instilled in us from before we could talk. It was the air we breathed; handed down over generations or implied by criticism levied against us, often by one or both parents. It is in our collective conscious and unconscious. Like a virus, the lie is adapted to infect humans and is pernicious in the psyche. It is self-reinforcing and challenging to extract: *"If I'm not hard on myself, who will be?"* The implication is that only through punishment, cruelty, harshness, and aggression are we able to progress. Just because this virus is relatively ubiquitous does not mean it is right. I see it far too often in my practice, far more in men than women. It both communicates and hides a deep level of shame we keep from light. If we bring the light, we will see. If we see, we will feel the shame and the pain. However, in the process of coming to light, we heal the shame and pain.

As Masons, we have the opportunity to utilize the content and methods of the fraternity to increase the likelihood that we can remove and retain the iron from the process of perfection; that is, on the deepest levels, perfection can only occur without the use of metal tools in the construction. In our craft, we are encouraged to offer relief and charity to brothers, their families, and our communities. The high regard for self is inherent in the architect's blueprints. We are of no use to others if we hollow out our own structure, psychologically. In the fields of psychotherapy and counseling, Self-compassion training has gained prominence in the past fifteen years for both people being treated and those treating them. Recent research shows that self-compassion training has wide-ranging benefits for everyone, men, and veterans.

The lie damages the psyche and Self because harshness and cruelty never evoke enduring strength, resilience, or determination; it pulls for and builds fear, doubt, resentment, and self-hatred. These ineffectual tactics tear down the work of the temple and defile the inner altars constructed to the divine, like foes engaging us using PsyOps (Psychological Operations, employed by the military to influence motivations or break the morale of an opponent). Further still, adept leaders know positively focused constructive criticism and inspiration—bringing spirit to others or self—are the most effective motivational tools.

As one experiences, then witnesses, and eventually per-

forms the ritual, it works upon the psyche to elevate the idea of harmony, charity, and effective construction rather than using violent language in a vain attempt to move toward self-improvement. Moreover, as men progress through the line, becoming increasingly proficient in each officer's tasks and their psychological corollaries, one has greater capacity to build with efficacy. The education inherent in our ritual and practices allows men to continue their development and move toward the possibility of a more mature masculinity.

Now is the time to test your metaphoric and symbolic metal: leave literal and psychological iron at the door of the temple. Search out the ore of ill intent in heart, mind, and gut. Set down the swords and daggers, the cruelty and mean-spirited reactivity directed at Self and others. As you labor with these ideas, it is my assertion your ability to find and tolerate more exponentially expand. It may bring up a lot of discomfort, even painful memories. This is the sign you are onto something important, you are developing and growing.

As you endure, persist with compassion, and train your psyche not to attack itself, you might find yourself with more energy and ease for the tasks in your life; eventually you may have more patience and tolerance with people with whom you interact towards those you care (though initially, patience may decrease due to the taxing nature of this emotional labor). In what seems like a paradox, your inner officers may also begin to test you more diligently, giving you rougher edges to smooth and, alas, resulting in increased wages. When this task is elusive or challenging to accomplish, talk with your brother builder about it and consult the designs of the Architect.





Victory Masonic Lodge & Cibolo Masonic Lodge present

San Antonio Esoteric Summit

Saturday, June 7th, 2025

8:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. CDT

Speakers

Jeff Bennett . Ben Williams . Frank Zepp . Dirk Hughes
Robert H. Johnson . Rodney McGillvary . T.J. Brumfield

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On the Perfect Points of Our Entrance: An Exploration of the Cardinal Virtues

by Paul D. Saltz - Ohio



When a man enters a room, it could be at his lodge, his place of business, a place of civic engagement, his house of worship, a place of social enrichment, and most importantly, his own home; how does he wish to be perceived? For the sake of argument, we shall hold to the premise that a good man wishes to be known for his positive character and sound behavior. The attributes and desires of evil men shall be laid aside for other authors to contend with. Yet knowing how a man desires to be perceived by the larger community does not ensure that he will be. While strangers may be given the benefit of the doubt, those with history are continuously weighed against the tome of their daily actions.

We are taught in the lecture of the Entered Apprentice degree that we are to be known by the perfect points of our entrance. The four points allude to the cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice. By having our entrance to every room ornamented by the adherence to these virtues, a man may increase the probability of a warm welcome. For this reason, a deeper understanding of these virtues is of great importance.

Before the dissection of these virtues commences, please permit me to discuss virtue as a moral habit. Now, much has been written and debated in the realm of human development as to how we learn and how habits become part of our behavioral repertoire. So, for this discussion, we shall rest on the premise that consistent practice shall demonstrably lead to the

formation of habit. As Manual Velasquez, et al stated:

"Virtues are developed through learning and through practice... Just as the ability to run a marathon develops through much training and practice, so too does our capacity to be fair, to be courageous, or to be compassionate... Virtues are habits. That is, once they are acquired, they become characteristic of a person." (Manual Velasquez, et al, web)

Our observed habits speak volumes about who we are as men and Masons. Like a fanfare of trumpets, they precede our entrance into any room. So just as we are to use our working tools to rid our rough ashlar of superfluities, it should become our daily practice to use them in the development of our moral habits, and of the cardinal virtues especially.

The lecture as prescribed by the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio, defines temperance as: *"that due restraint upon the affections and passions which renders the body submissive and frees the mind from the allurements of vice."* (Entered Apprentice degree)

Such a definition can read quite constrictive to the modern ear. Aristotle did not view the temperate person as one who completely despised life's pleasures. Rather, they hold such enjoyments within the context of human life as a whole, not permitting overindulgence to undermine other aspects of their existence (Summers, web). Temperance can be viewed as a process of reflection upon our wants and desires to understand why we

feel we want them and to what extent the fulfillment of them affects other aspects of our lives, including our relationships with others. Having this self-knowledge allows us to set priorities and create balance based on what we truly value. As Paul Bloomfield wrote in *“Some Intellectual Aspects of the Cardinal Virtues”*:

“Know Thyself and Be Temperate can be seen as the same thing due to the self-knowledge required for sound decision making... It is within our own consciences where we must examine the effects of how we judge ourselves, our self-conceptions, and our views about the world around us. This is why temperance is the hardest to master.” (Bloomfield, 301, 303)

This kind of reflection can be very uncomfortable if not downright unsettling. We may not like what we see when it comes to why we are passionate about one thing over another, or why we throw caution to the wind to overindulge in one activity at the expense of something or someone else. In the end, it is not about stripping our lives of everything that gives us even the tiniest amount of enjoyment. Rather, the goal is to keep all of our passions within due bounds so that we remain faithful to our obligations and live a balanced life in line with our values, the foundation of our plumbline.

The Entered Apprentice Degree closes its section on temperance by aligning it with the guttural. The explanation given is that by being overindulged, such a state could lead to the disclosure of secrets, which is in direct connection with the historic penalty of the obligation. While many of life's pleasures are certainly enjoyed through the guttural and that altered states of euphoria can make men say all kinds of things, it can be speculated that its position between head and heart signifies the focus of our reflection in our efforts to be truly temperate Masons. It is also through the guttural that we communicate our needs and wants to those we hold most dear to us. This positive usage, while in contrast to the lecture, does promote the healthy relationships needed to have a balanced life.

Various lists of the cardinal virtues interchange fortitude and courage. The reasoning is because:

“People who have fortitude are described in an admiring way for their courage and this word comes from the Latin fortitudo, meaning ‘strength’.” (Vocabulary.com)

Under the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons

of Ohio, the word fortitude is used. In its Entered Apprentice lecture fortitude is defined as:

“that noble and steady purpose of mind whereby we are enabled to undergo pain, peril or danger, when deemed expedient.” (Entered Apprentice degree)

In one sense, fortitude can be seen as the polar opposite of temperance because where temperance guides us in regards to what is pleasing, fortitude moves us forward in those situations that we wish to avoid. Yet they can be more similar than it would appear at first glance. Both of these virtues aid us in striking a balance in life. Temperance guides us in preventing life's pleasures from becoming all-consuming. Fortitude assists us in evaluating situations so that we do not take risks for *“trivial ends.”* (Bloomfield, 295) Instead, fortitude provides the courage to act boldly for those ideals and goals worth risking for. Thus, temperance and fortitude both require us to examine what we value most and, as a consequence, where we set our plumbline.

It has been fortitude that has shaped human history. Every innovative idea ever presented, every new technology utilized to ease the human workload, and every great societal shift brought about by war or peaceful protest, all required fortitude to carry them out. From world-changing events to those that change a family unit (marriage, having children, changing jobs, etc.), we rely on fortitude to help us strike the balance between *“excessive timidity and excessive boldness.”* (Summers, web) We can't become paralyzed by fear or ruined by recklessness. Rather, fortitude allows us to move forward, eyes open, and with full understanding of the costs and potential benefits of an action.

The Entered Apprentice lecture connects fortitude with the pectoral due to our being received on the point of a sharp instrument. While fortitude is certainly required to knock on the door, be received, and proceed with the initiatory ritual, there is more to it than that. Fortitude and courage have long been associated with the heart. A popular culture example would be the cowardly lion from the Wizard of Oz (originally featured in the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum in 1900, followed by film adaptations in 1914, 1925, and the classic version in 1939 where Bert Lehr was cast as the lion). Towards the end of the story the lion is presented with a heart by the wizard, acknowledging the courage he already possessed. This longstanding association makes a natural connection between the pectoral and fortitude.

Prudence is described in the Entered Apprentice lecture as that which:

“...teaches us to regulate our lives and actions according to the dictates of reason and is that habit by which we wisely judge and prudentially determine upon all things relative to our present as well as our future happiness.” (Entered Apprentice degree)

Prudence can be seen as practical wisdom, guiding our choices as we determine what is good in the present moment. Learning prudence is primarily through lived experience. We gain situational wisdom by broadening our experiences and learning from them, both the positive and the negative. We also learn through shared wisdom from those of both lengthier life and of different paths than our own. As Henry Summers writes in “What Were Aristotle’s Four Cardinal Virtues”:

“Aristotle’s moral framework thus emphasizes the role of mentors in the ethical life. We must learn how to judge rightly from those who have experienced more than we have and who have gained insight over the course of their lives. Moral education, then, is key.”

Brethren in Freemasonry are uniquely positioned through both formal programming and informal gatherings, to share wisdom gained with each other. One does not need to be an official Master Craftsman to a candidate in order to impart knowledge gained during the course of his life. Neither does a new brother need to wait until he has sat in the east or received a twenty-year service pin to share his thoughts. Every man comes to Freemasonry with life experiences and wisdom that can be shared for the improvement of all. In the spirit of brotherly love, even the shyest Entered Apprentice can be encouraged to share their own wisdom, thus allowing the lodge to benefit from the strength of every living stone within it.

The lecture of the Entered Apprentice degree assigns prudence to the manual, for how we hold the volume of sacred law. Every man can gain wisdom through the study of their faith’s sacred texts. Yet independent study of limited perspectives only takes us so far. Humans are social animals who need interaction. As Freemasons, we have the benefit of learning from the collective of our diverse brotherhood. The process of becoming prudent is enhanced and even expedited through our experiences with shared knowledge. Who better to learn and share with than one in whom we share a grip?

Justice is defined in the Entered Apprentice lecture as:

“...that standard or boundary of right which enables us to render to every man his just due without distinction. This virtue is not only consistent with divine and human laws, but is the very cement and support of civil society.” (Entered Apprentice degree)

As temperance and fortitude are connected to where we set our plumbline, justice demands strict adherence to the level. In matters of justice, how we view our own place in the world and our relation to others is just as important as how we view a situation where a person(s) claims wrongdoing and insists on restitution. To hold mankind on the level ensures that we hold the concerns and needs of all men as valid and do not dismiss them because the other is viewed as less than. The philosopher John Rawls once wrote that *“justice is the elimination of arbitrary differences.”* (Bloomfield, 306) This definition can be seen as the foundation of every social justice movement through history, from rights for aboriginal peoples, women, to more current struggles for racial equity, and over sexual orientation and gender identity. While differences have created a beautiful spectrum of diversity across the human family that is to be celebrated, our interactions and decision making as it relates to other individuals and our relationships with them require us to see all people as individuals whose lives are just as valuable and deserving of respect as our own. As Albert Pike wrote in his essay on the 16th Degree – Prince of Jerusalem in *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*:

“...the work of justice shall be peace, and the effect of justice, quiet and security, and wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of the times. Walk ye righteously and speak uprightly; despise the gains of oppression, shake from your hands the contamination of bribes; stop not your ears from the cries of the oppressed...” (Pike, *Freemasoninformation.com*)

The level is our tool against oppression and discrimination in all forms, for it demands that we see each person on earth by their character and not by which they are different from ourselves. This is the foundation of a just society.

The Entered Apprentice lecture connects justice to the pedal, by way of the time we stood squarely in the northeast corner of the lodge. It was in this position where each Mason was to begin laying the cornerstone of their own temple not made with hands. While it can be spec-

ulated that the spiritual cornerstone should consist of all of the virtues, it must be leveled with justice. Otherwise, the stones laid upon it will not stand. Likewise, a society without true justice is doomed to crumble into anarchy. Thus, every Mason must stand as an embodiment of justice for the larger world.

The old adage “*actions speak louder than words*” brings our exploration of the cardinal virtues into pristine focus. As with all lessons within Freemasonry, it is in their practical application that we improve our lives and it is by our actions that we are known by the world around us. A man can want to be greeted and welcomed as a good and upright individual but do the actions he is known by warrant it? We are all called to deep reflection; to honestly face our rough ashlar and submit our lives to the painful strikes of the gavel, to rid ourselves of negative thought processes and behaviors. Are our lives in balance? Do we act with courage for the right reasons? Do we let practical wisdom guide our decision-making, and are we willing to learn from and mentor others? Do we see every human being as valued and beloved children of our creator, and do we stand for taking actions that maintain the worth of each individual? How do you truly enter a room?



The Four Cardinal Virtues depicted in stained glass.



An image personifying the four virtues (Ballet Comique de la Reine, 1582)



MASONIC RESTORATION FOUNDATION

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM • AUGUST 15-17, 2025 • HAMILTON, ONTARIO

Welcome to the Fourteenth Annual MRF Symposium!

The Masonic Restoration Foundation Symposium is the largest gathering of Masons in North America who are expressly committed to observing the highest standards of excellence in the Craft. This year, for only the second time, we are returning to Canada, to one of the most majestic Masonic locations in Canada: the Hamilton Scottish Rite Temple, in Hamilton, Ontario.

The Symposium will take place from August 15-17, 2025, and will be hosted by Templum Lucis Lodge No. 747.

As usual, the event will begin with a Harmony [Festive Board] held in the Lower Level Dining Room on Friday evening, conducted by the MRF Board, and featuring comments from our Keynote Speaker, WB Ric Berman, Past Master of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076 in London, England. Along with our usual lineup of interesting speakers, brothers will have the opportunity to witness a Fellow Craft Degree conferred by Heredom Lodge No. 749 on Saturday afternoon. Registration for the Symposium is \$125.00 USD/\$175.00 CAD, and \$75.00 USD/\$100 CAD for the Saturday session only.

We are hoping that this year's Symposium will be an opportunity for an exchange of different perspectives and methods of Masonic practice in North America, and one that will especially bring in brothers from across Canada. All the information you need to participate is found here on this web site. We look forward to seeing you at the Symposium!

Andrew Hammer
President, MRF

What is the MRF Symposium?

The MRF Symposium is a meeting place for Masons who are seeking the highest form of Masonic experience they can attain within their lodges, while strictly conforming to the laws, resolutions, and edicts of their respective grand lodges. It is a gathering for those who pursue quality in the Craft to share ideas and discuss their work. The Symposium begins on Friday evening at 7:30 PM, with a Harmony in the Lower Level Dining Room, and concludes before noon on Sunday. As always, we have assembled an excellent program of speakers and presenters to share their light with you.

Who May Attend the Symposium?

Any Mason in good standing may register for the Symposium, provided he is a member of a Grand Lodge which is a member of, or is recognized by any one of the Grand Lodges which are members of, the Conference of Grand Masters of North America, or the United Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodge of Ireland, or the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Full Registration for the Symposium is \$175 CAD/\$125 USD.

Topics and Panels

- Origins, Allegory, and Enlightenment: From the Horn Tavern to Solomon's Temple
- Why Do We Bother?
- Dealing With Diversity in the Lodge
- Tragedies and Triumphs in a New Observant Lodge
- Living Life as an Observant Mason
- Victory Through Harmony: Transforming an Existing Lodge
- The Observant Lodge In Canada
- Happiness: The Chief Aim of Masonry
- Kipling, Burns, and Observant Masonry

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Ric Berman . Ed Burridge . David Cameron
Donald Carducci . Jean-Frédéric Dicaire Philip
Durell Dan Graham . Andrew Hammer
Chad M. Lacey

WORKING TOOLS IN THE HANDS OF THE EGO

by Matthew N. Parker - Nebraska



Freemasonry provides metaphorical working tools that we are encouraged to use to better ourselves and the world around us to create beauty and perfection. We speak about the working tools in glowing terms and view them as implements for shaping the perfect stone or ashlar, for forming perfect right angles, and for smoothing the rough surface. Working tools vary from Grand Lodge to Grand Lodge, whether it be the common gavel, twenty-four-inch gauge, square, compasses, level, plumb, skirret, pencil, or even the wagon wheel. Each is given a flowery and almost infallible description in our rituals and lectures, but has anyone pointed out the dark side of the working tools, the destructive nature inherent within each one of them, and within us?

Duality is a part of all aspects of life and is especially pronounced in Masonry. For every positive, there is a negative. Extremes that seem diametrically opposed but cannot exist without one another. Good and evil, light and dark, hot and cold, up and down, the juxtapositions are endless but necessary for our understanding of existence. So too is it with our working tools; the instruments we so venerate as tools for creating perfection can, in the wrong hands, be instruments of utter destruction and harm to ourselves and those around us.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines ego as "*the self, especially as contrasted with another self or the world.*" We hear the word Ego bandied about often in a negative way: "*Oh, that dude has a massive Ego,*"

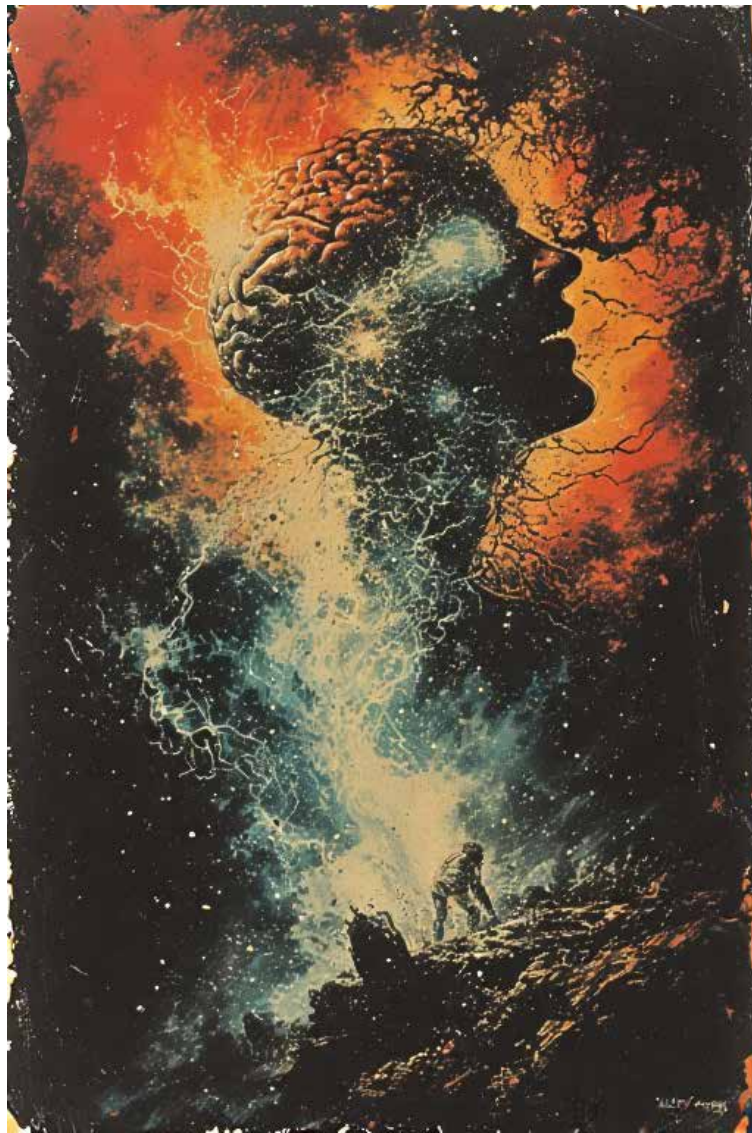
denoting an inflated sense of self-importance or arrogance. However, the Ego is not a bad thing at all if it is understood and controlled. We were given the Ego for a reason; it serves to do two things. First, the Ego is a wall that we put up to protect ourselves from things that we perceive as harmful to us or our beliefs, such as differing political or religious views. Secondly, the Ego provides the self-confidence or internal encouragement we need. Neither of these is necessarily bad, but they can certainly lead to unfortunate and sometimes catastrophic results. The fallacy is to ignore the Ego and to let it take control. Look no further than the Entered Apprentice Degree. We are to learn to subdue our passions, control our emotions, and control our baser instincts.

Think of the Ego as your apprentice. You, as the craftsman, wield the gavel, and as a dedicated and skilled artisan, you use it judiciously, using just the right amount of force to accomplish the job and create a masterpiece. Now you hand your gavel to a novice, your apprentice, and walk away expecting that he will use the same care and precision that you would use. It is human nature to allow the Ego to take over at times, but when we surrender all control to the Ego, things go off the rails, and often in a spectacular way. Unsupervised in the Ego's hands, the same gavel used to break off the corners of rough stones and form the perfect ashlar can also be used to destroy the very same stone. The Ego tells us we don't need the level or plumb--the wall looks straight enough; we don't need the twenty-four-inch gauge, the length looks about right; we don't

need the designs upon the trestle board, we'll just make it up as we go along - what's the worst that can happen?

The same analogy can be applied to any of the working tools in Masonry. If a wall is built without adequately applying the plumb, there is a higher likelihood that it will fall. If a wall is built without adequately applying the level, it will slope. If we built a temple on a faulty foundation or an uneven one, no matter how much effort and precision we put into building the rest of the structure, it cannot be stable. There are extremes, polar opposites, and a dark side to everything that is light. The flame from a single candle will cast shadows; there's no way around it.

The Lodge or the Temple is a metaphor for ourselves. We strive to shape the ashlar and form the Temple perfectly. Suppose we hand our working tools over to the Ego and leave it unsupervised. In that case, the animal instinct and arrogance of our baser selves will only bring about imperfection, which risks the entire structure's integrity. You are the craftsman, and the Ego is your apprentice. It can be beneficial, but must never be left unsupervised, no matter how noble the intentions. We are not forming one, but thousands of perfect ashlar throughout our lives. No temple is built from just one stone. Our Masonic Temple is built from countless stones carefully hewn over a lifetime. And when at last we lay down our metaphorical working tools, we hope to look upon our Temple and see an edifice of beauty and perfection. By supervising the Ego, we are mindful of the destructive force within the working tools, and we are better enabled to control the chaos and form the perfect ashlar.



Artistic representation of the Ego taking over the mind - 1970



Artistic representation of the war between mind and Ego - 1970

APPLIED FREEMASONRY

by Chad M. Lacek, 33°



As I approach my 18th year as a Freemason, I pause to consider what I have learned that might be useful and applicable in our day-to-day lives. I hope you find some value in these few discoveries, presented in no particular order:

I've learned that the word charity is interchangeable with love. Whenever you hear the word charity in our ritual, replace it with love and discover that the meaning is exactly the same. The belief that charity is measured in dollars and cents is mistaken. It has very little to do with money. Charity is providing what is needed, not necessarily what is being asked for. Have you ever met a Brother that talks so much you feel the need to escape? You know the person who seems oblivious to your body language, and keeps talking to you even when your shoulders are turned away, your hand is on the bathroom door, and your facial expression shows you are eager to enter? We all know that Brother. I know a few of them. What do you do when you see him? Do you give him a wide berth and avoid eye contact? Everyone does. This makes their situation even worse. They are obviously in need of some human contact, some attentive ear, someone to see them and acknowledge their existence. When they finally get a victim in their grasp, they cling tightly because they know they won't get many chances. Our avoiding them reinforces that tendency. One form of charity is willingly approaching them, with the foreknowledge that you're going to be there a while, and listening with a smile on your face. It's easier to give \$20. You know it is. But that's not what this Brother needs. He needs a little love and attention, and you and I both have

some we can spare.

The Cable tow functions automatically. Unlike the other working tools, which need to be selected and applied often, the Cable tow works on Autopilot. After spending several years in Lodge, listening to repetitive reminders of duty and obligation, our subconscious takes note. I realized this six years ago during a winter storm. I had just finished shoveling snow for over an hour and was about to relax with a mug of hot tea. Just then, I heard a noise outside which drew my attention to the window. I saw my elderly neighbor futilely chipping away at a huge mound of ice. I felt a sense of dread. I did not want to help her. I had just removed my wet clothes and put on some warm flannel pajamas. I had just sat down in my favorite reading chair. I tried to find excuses to remain in warmth and comfort. After a few moments, I stood up, got dressed, grabbed my shovel, and headed across the street. I didn't decide to do the right thing. I didn't decide anything at all. I knew, instinctively, that I did not have a choice. What I did was against my will, but in accordance with my newly formed character. We are becoming better men, as Freemasonry promised, whether we like it or not.

I discovered the tremendous value of reading. As a child, my relationship with books was reluctant at best. We would occasionally be assigned a book report in school, which would require the briefest possible skimming of the text in hopes of getting a C on the exam. Freemasonry introduced me to the idea of reading for personal growth, as well as pleasure. Reading books

on Masonic subjects quickly led to the foundational works of Plato and Aristotle. Reading is nothing short of magic and time travel. Want proof? How many Roman emperors do you know? Same here, zero. Yet, we have free access to the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, the personal diary and reflections of the most powerful man in the world during 161-180 AD. We get to sit next to him in his most private chambers, listen to his intimate thoughts about life, what it means to be a good man, and our place in the universe. All the best minds in history are available to us. We have the potential to be the smartest generation in human history, only to be outdone by the next generation, who will benefit from our contributions. What we learn in school, besides how to pass tests, is how to learn. The accumulation of knowledge does not end at graduation; it begins. I spent over a decade walking around with what little I knew and trying to pass that off as wisdom. A love of reading and my library card are the greatest gifts I've ever received.

I've learned that people budget their time and money for the things that truly matter to them. We tell a lot of lies when it comes to time and money. We even lie to ourselves. When we say, "I don't have time," what we're actually saying is, "That activity is not valuable enough for me to prioritize it above the existing demands on my time." Don't bother inhaling to load up a disagreement. It's true, and you don't owe anyone an apology for it. Each of us has precious little time in our days, and precious few days in our lifetime. Spend your time however you see fit, but don't kid yourself. You have all the time you need for the things you truly want. If you don't feel that way now, you should examine your true motivations. Everyone has a job. Everyone has bills to pay. Everyone has people in their life who lay claim to some of their time. If you let those things decide how much of your time they get, that's you deciding to let that happen. The same holds true for money. "I can't afford it" means, "I choose to allocate my limited funds to expenses other than this one." The notion of affording something is absurd. It suggests helplessness, that the situation is out of your control. Whatever money you have, be it a nickel or a fortune, is completely in your power. Yes, if you don't pay the mortgage, you may face eviction. You chose to buy that house or rent that apartment. You could live in a larger one, or a smaller one, or a van 'down by the river.' If the big house is a priority, then that's what you'll spend your money on. Since you spent the money on the big house, you might not have enough for the big boat. You can afford the big boat, if you're willing to sacrifice the big house. It's a choice, your choice. You have the time, and you can afford it. So can I. Continue to lie to others if you think it helps preserve their feelings, but let's not lie to ourselves.

Our thoughts inform our actions. I grew up an only child of divorced parents. This resulted in me spending a lot of time alone. My imagination was constantly employed for my amusement and soon grew to limitless proportions. I discovered that I could create any fantasy in my mind, and there was no way for anyone to catch me or discipline me for whatever I did there. The most daring and exciting thing my young mind could conceive of was robbing a bank. I was the scourge of the American banking industry and law enforcement in those days. I would barge into the bank brandishing whatever weapon de jour took my fancy, then grab the bags of money, you know the ones, with the dollar signs printed on the outside. Sometimes I would go so far as to imagine how I would spend all that money. I never gave a single thought to the terrified bank tellers, the traumatized patrons, the police I shot during my daring escape, or their grieving families. After all, this wasn't real. I couldn't get caught, and no actual crime was committed. I thought that whatever happened in my mind had nothing to do with the real world outside. It wasn't until I studied the Emblems lecture in our third degree that I realized our subconscious mind doesn't know it's make-believe. The book of constitutions guarded by the Tyler's sword reminds us that we should be ever watchful and guarded in our thoughts, words and actions. My subconscious mind was repeatedly trained that I am the kind of person that commits armed robbery and murder. I am pleased to report that I have not robbed any banks (yet), nor have I shot anyone. Nevertheless, I was poisoning my mind with criminality and violence. We are what we concentrate on and surround ourselves with. That voice in our head is part of our identity. I used to be very hard on myself when I made mistakes. I would call myself an idiot, or worse. Sometimes much worse. I now realize that every time I did that, I was educating my subconscious mind that I was stupid and useless. When we talk to ourselves like that, our subconscious believes us completely. Think well, feel well, do well. Be kind to your inner voice. Encourage him. Forgive him. Tell him you're proud of him, even when he doesn't fully deserve it. Post a Tyler in your mind and direct him to let no thought pass or repass but such as are duly helpful and have your permission.

Freemasonry has lots of enigmatic phrases like, "As Above, So Below" and "As Without, So Within." They sound neat, but it took me ages to begin to understand what we are supposed to learn from

them. We are a fragment of the universe, and the universe exists within each of us. The elements that make up everything we see were forged in stars. All the elements heavier (by atomic weight) than iron were made during supernova explosions. The calcium in your bones, the iron in your blood, the carbon in your muscles, and the oxygen in your lungs were all made deep within the raging furnace of countless stars. All matter and all life obeys the same laws in every corner of the endless universe. We are an inseparable part of that unimaginably complex plan. I can think of no better name for the maker of that plan, or perhaps even the plan itself, as God. I think the single greatest acronym in all of Freemasonry is G.A.O.T.U. which stands for Grand Architect Of The Universe. Can you think of a more perfect way to sum all the world's religions to their essence? No matter where or when you were born or what language you speak, you offer your thankful prayers and mournful pleas to the Grand Architect Of The Universe. Call Him by any other name if you please, but His title is unchanged. You will find Him everywhere you look. Every leaf, every grain of sand, every drop of water. More important to our purposes, you will find Him inside you. When you close your eyes and calm your mind, you will be in the center of your own fragment of the universe. Everything that exists out there exists in each of us. You are a small fragment of the universe, inseparable from God. It's deep stuff, I know, but it's unavoidably true. The observable, measurable laws insist that it can't be any other way. We are all chips from the only stone.

The working tools are reminders. Have you heard the phrase, "What gets measured gets managed?" We can only change what we are aware of and pay attention to. Becoming a Freemason does not make someone better. Freemasonry doesn't change anything. It does give us tools to bring our awareness to places that are frequently overlooked. The working tools point out which things we should be measuring. When you hang a picture, do you step back and look to see if it's done properly? You might use a level if you're not sure. What about our actions? Do we ever step back to view them through the eyes of others? The working tools are a reminder to take a moment and make sure that we are satisfied with our work.

Freemasons are people, and many people are stupid. They are also frequently disappointing. Do you ever feel like everyone around you is an idiot, and you can't figure out how they managed to get this far in life without setting fire to themselves? Have you ever observed

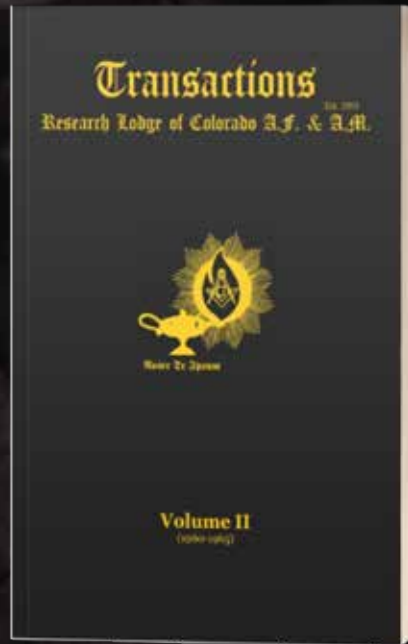
someone's behavior with an open mouth, speechlessly wondering how they could possibly think that what they are doing is acceptable? I experience this most often while driving in traffic. The bizarre reality is that they look at us the same way. We all think we're the smart one in a sea of dullards. It can be frustrating to live in a world with people who aggravate us, but it's useful to remember that we aggravate them. It's easier to forgive a Brother Mason, since he is supposedly trying to be a better version of himself. It's much harder with the population at large. My wife bought me a singing bowl as a gift many years ago. This small brass bowl is shaped so that when you circle a wooden shaft around the outside rim, the vibrations cause it to ring in a pleasing, relaxing tone. There is a large Hindu symbol emblazoned inside the bottom of the bowl which I was curious to understand. It is the Om (or Aum), a sacred symbol in Hinduism. An exploration of this symbol introduced me to the phrase, "Namaste." One translation of this word is, "The divine in me bows to the divine in you." It is one of the most beautiful concepts I've ever known. Please consider that for a moment. The DIVINE in me bows to the DIVINE in you. You will remember that each of us contains a fragment of that divine spark, or plan of the universe (whether we like it or not). It is not "The imperfect, foolish, idiot in me" bowing to the "Inconsiderate, unreliable, cheapskate in you." There might only be this one good thing in me, and you may only have that singular virtue in you...but that's more than enough for both of us to love and respect each other.

The Secrets of Freemasonry. Every organization has secrets. Your family has secrets. Freemasonry has secrets; the easiest of them to communicate are published all over the internet. There are deeper secrets, the kind that are difficult to tell. It's like trying to explain in words what Love is to someone who has never felt it. The practical value of superficial secrets is greatly diminished today. There were times when membership in Freemasonry was dangerous, and concealing your involvement was necessary. There are still places where that is true to some extent, but fortunately for us in America, we can proudly admit our membership. There is one important function I have found for these secrets, even the ones that are now common knowledge. It's a test. Are you the kind of person that can be trusted with a secret? Even if that 'secret' is published on 1,200 websites--the question is will YOU disclose it? You promised not to. Are you the kind of person that keeps his promises? When you make a vow before God, are you bound by honor and duty? It is particu-

larly important for you to know that answer.

Subduing our Passions. It's what we said we came here to do. I've learned that subduing them is misleading. It sounds like we are supposed to keep a lid on them, control them, limit them to an acceptable extent. We don't eliminate them; we keep them in a cage or place them on a leash. How are we supposed to do that? I guessed that we're expected to employ our willpower. I was wrong. Willpower is, at the best of times, a band-aid with very little stickiness. It will fall off, and soon. The only way I know to permanently change a behavior is to consciously change your identity. If you're trying to lose weight and you're walking past the box of doughnuts someone brought to the Lodge meeting week after week, one of these days you're going to have powdered sugar on your fingers. With willpower, you must fight the desire for something, and win, every single time. It's inevitable that it will fail. If you roll the dice long enough you will get every possible combination. Wanting something and denying it to yourself does not work. What you can do is decide that you're the kind of person who eats a healthy diet. You don't eat fatty, sugary foods. It's not that you do or don't want to, it's that you're the kind of person that couldn't care less about it. This does not happen overnight, of course. But it will happen faster than you think. At first you will need to tell yourself what kind of person you are. After a while you will start to believe it. Eventually you will become it. Start telling yourself that you are the kind of person you want to be. You will be amazed how quickly you can transform your will, without the need for willpower.





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Making Choices - A Thought Experiment

by RWB.: R.H. Johnson, FILOR

People make choices countless times a day. Well, not exactly countless. What if I told you that the average human makes around 35,000 semi-conscious decisions each day? Not bad for not being a machined computer. These decisions, for the most part, are simple. Notice I said, semi-conscious. The majority of these choices are very passive and are based on experiences that have embedded visualized outcomes within the subconscious mind. It's like a computer's Random Access Memory (RAM). Frequent things that your mind uses all the time are stored in a way that makes them easily accessible. This makes making the decision easy.

In our day-to-day lives, while just moving through our day, how many times would you say you stop and think about the outcome of a choice you're about to make? Perhaps the big decisions--sure, you think about them. But those everyday choices, the ones that don't seem so big--the ones that add up and have outcomes that seem to be just a part of daily living. Are we giving those decisions the thought and foresight we would when making other decisions?

When we think about the big decisions, we often think about how those outcomes will impact our lives first, and if we're extra mindful, we take the extra step of thinking about how those choices impact our friends and family. It's kind of like Chess. In Chess, you're always thinking about the next move. The best players think about the next several moves and the outcomes. I love Chess, but I'm terrible at it.

What makes choices easy? When we think about whatever choice we're going to make, we immediately process the previous occasions we made similar choices. Our brains determine the probability that things will go the way they did previously. This gives us comfort in our decision. "This is just like last time. I'll make the same decision, and the outcome will be the same." A warm, fuzzy blanket. Emotional complacency is born.

Rather than think about each choice we make and deal with the emotional and sometimes headache-inducing internal debate, we develop an easy road--scratch that--a lazy road. The lazy road allows us to develop an unwillingness to rationalize sce-



narios and outcomes and instead, always rely on similar situations we've experienced ourselves, or within our peer circles.

Not every choice needs this deep dive. But some of them, we may benefit from taking the time to calculate the outcomes. "I should water my plant. Well, maybe not. I didn't water it yesterday, and it's fine." We know where this leads. Get up and water the plant. "Extra tablespoon of sugar in my coffee today. Well, I'm supposed to watch the sugar. Nope. Just one tablespoon today." These are small decisions. However, they have a measurable impact when we consider their long-term or cumulative effect.

What does Freemasonry say about making choices? Well, it gives us a few virtues that give us some good insight. Fortitude allows us to stick to our guns once we've made a choice. In the classical sense, justice will enable us to weigh in on an outcome's equity—selfishness versus selflessness. Temperance allows us to remain moderate in our decisions. But Prudence--prudence is what we're talking about here. Prudence is deliberation. It means to take into account all possible perceived outcomes of a situation and make your choice based on the aim of the person making the decision. Do you want to affect the most people? The least people? The questions are innumerable.

My charge to you is to attempt to bring prudence back into your life by taking small pauses when you recognize that you're about to make a decision. Think about the outcomes. Maybe you do the thing you always do. Maybe, you change your mind. Remember, not every single thing needs a panic-inducing brain cloud. Just be mindful and try this out when you can.



The Midwest Conference on Masonic Education: Recap!

The Midwest Conference of Masonic Education 2025 was a smash. We've advertised this conference in this magazine for the last several months, and every time I placed the ad in the issue, I became more and more excited as the time approached.

First of all, you might be asking what the MCME is, and why I even care. Well, here's what I can say. The Midwest Conference on Masonic Education began in 1949 and was a conference that was brought together, not unlike the Conference of Grand Masters, to collaborate, share ideas, and extend fraternalism with the jurisdictions that attended.

At various points in time, different regional Masonic Educational conferences existed; however, today, only the Midwest Conference remains. We're fortunate to have our conference still going strong. While MCME has in the past dwindled in numbers and attendance (with just twenty-two of us in Iowa pre-pandemic), it has experienced a surge in attendance and membership.

What does membership in the conference mean? It means that you support Masonic Education from a Grand Lodge or Grand Jurisdictional level. That is what your Jurisdiction does with Masonic Education, which is compiled in the various jurisdictional reports for study and reference by all other member jurisdictions. It means that when the leaders of Masonic Education in your jurisdiction attend, they're sharing their ideas and comparing notes with our other members. It means that the headwinds of one jurisdiction may be solved by another jurisdiction who's faced a similar issue. There's a lot of collaboration. It also means that what happens with Masonic Education in your jurisdiction is likely influenced by what happens at the MCME each year.

"But, RJ, how many member jurisdictions are there?" Well, as of today, twelve (12) Grand Jurisdictions are members—including Texas! Yep, Texas's Grand Lodge saw the conference and attended, then they said, "We have got to be a part of this." So, who are these jurisdictions?

- Illinois (45,774)
- Indiana (40,801)

- Iowa (12,318)
- Kansas (12,176)
- Michigan (21,545)
- Minnesota (8,866)
- Missouri (25,886)
- Nebraska (7,150)
- Ohio (61,746)
- North Dakota (2,439)
- South Dakota (4,115)
- Texas (67,553)

Above, also listed next to the respective states, are the latest membership numbers for those states (2023 MSA). That's a lot of Freemasons who are represented by this conference. You might wonder how that stacks up overall? 310,369 Freemasons out of a total of 869,429 in the United States (Regular Freemasonry). With these new numbers, it means that about 36% of all Freemasons in the U.S. are represented by the conference.

This year's theme was a return to what matters in Masonic Education. Specifically, the importance of Truth in teaching. From ensuring you're conveying a truth rather than a repeated story, to exploring the tools at your disposal so that YOU can do research. It was truly a great event. Below are a few words on each of the presentations and the timeline from the weekend.

Friday, May 2nd

First, I carpooled to Indianapolis with my current WM, and Past DEO for the 1st NE District, RW Spencer A. Hamann. I also had RW Adam Rigden from Wautoma, WI, a brand-new Master Mason from Oshkosh, WI—Brother Mike Marone, and Past AEO, and Edu Committee Member, Darin A. Lahners. It was five hours of great conversation and hilarity. We solved most of Freemasonry's problems—you know how it goes.

When we arrived in downtown Indianapolis, we met up with others from our jurisdiction, like our Chairman of the Edu Committee, WB, Dr. Bernard Davis



WB. Dr. Bernard Davis Jr., Chairman of Masonic Edu. Illinois

Jr., and WB James E. Frey, the current Illinois Lodge of Research Master. Of course, the usual suspects from surrounding jurisdictions were there as well, like the Missouri contingent...troublemakers... JK.



WB: James E. Frey, WM Illinois Lodge of Research

That night, we went to the historic Rathskeller restaurant for dinner and opening remarks by the MCME president for 2025, James A. Buckhorn. James did a great job with this year's conference planning, and it showed in the passion and number of attendees. After dinner, we were treated to a special presentation, a sort of "fireside chat" with Dr. S. Brent Morris and Chris Hodapp. They titled the talk, "An Idiot and a Dummy Talk About Freemasonry." This was a play on words since they both released books related to the Idiot's Guide and Dummy's Guide franchises. The two were funny and informative. After dinner, we enjoyed some refreshments, and then all retired to our rooms for the evening.



WB Lahners, Edu. Committee Member catching a well-deserved break.

Saturday, May 3rd

The day started with additional thanks and remarks about the conference this year and its theme. James Buckhorn spoke passionately about this year's theme and how he hand-picked each speaker in order to convey the importance of the theme, but also to drive home the legitimacy of Masonic Education.

The first guest speaker of the day was Brother Steven L. Harrison, 33°, FMLOR. Steve talked about how he did the research for his latest Masonic Bestseller, *The Imperfect Storm*. *The Imperfect Storm* is essentially the untold story, featuring new evidence and never-before-seen information regarding the William Morgan Affair. It is fantastic. You can get a copy (tinyurl.com/morgan-book). Steve walked us through his process, which began the day with the essential steps. Not surprisingly, they started like this: Step One – Get a crazy idea. Step Two – Run with it. And as crazy as this sounds, it tied in perfectly with the overarching theme of the day.



Steve Harrison, 33°, FMLOR

Following Steve was Dr. Heather K. Calloway, who has spoken at MCME on at least two other occasions. Her presentations are always worth attending because we truly learn something new every time. Heather's passion is in the preservation of Fraternalism and the various things associated with it. From pins to books to silly hats—she's rescued them all. She runs the Indiana University Center for Fraternal Collections and Research. Her presentation this time focused on identifying items for preservation and how to initiate preservation in a best practices manner. How to do it without breaking the bank, so to speak.

After this, we had lunch while we conducted our annual MCME business meeting. We elected the new officers for the year, which was exciting. Our own Education Chairman, Bro. Daivs was elected 2nd VP—which means we'll be hosting MCME in 2028 in Illinois! After this, Chris Hodapp, 33°, spoke about Dwight L. Smith, the prolific Indiana titan of Freemasonry. It was truly a remarkable talk, exposing the intensity with which this man, Dwight L. Smith, viewed and worked in Freemasonry.

After lunch, we settled in for a joint presentation with Dr. Calloway and RW: Daniel Gardiner, the Grand Secretary of Montana. They had some fantastic items to share with



Dr. Heather K. Calloway & Dan Gardiner, Grand Secretary, MT

us and discussed the importance of preserving Masonic artifacts. Dan Gardiner had in his possession an original arrest warrant for William Morgan. It was framed and just...sitting there. Truly amazing. Other things were there for show and tell as well, like original printings of Anderson's Constitutions. All I can say is that it was amazing to be in the presence of those kinds of items.

After a short break, Dan continued with his talk, titled "Anyone Can Do Research." It was a great talk, blending both the idea that truly, anyone can do Masonic Research, and giving us some highlights of a project he recently completed, showcasing work he'd done and which had been used and cited in a recently released history book, *"Big Skys, White Hoods: The 1920s Klan and a History of Hate in*

Montana.” In it, Gardiner assisted with uncovering a lot of fascinating and pertinent information, including the Grand Lodge of Montana and, at that time, connections to the Klan by men who were both Freemasons and Klan members.



RWB: Dan Gardiner, Grand Secretary, MT

It was striking. But the real message of the presentation was that anyone could do the research. It was as easy as reading and taking some notes, and then telling the story. It was, to me, one of the best presentations I’ve seen to date.

After this, we had a virtual presentation by Brother Adam Kendal of California. He spoke on the concept of fraternal experience and context. He discussed the impact fraternities had on the world in which they were a part. He showcased tools available to all Freemasons who want to research.

We then broke out for fellowship. After an hour or so, we went to dinner on the 2nd floor of the Grand Lodge Building in Indiana. The dinner was a festive board-style meal, complete with toasts. Over dinner, Dr. S. Brent Morris spoke about Masonic Membership Numbers and some of the interesting or “funny” things that they seem to have discovered along the way while conducting Masonic members surveys and the like. After this, they awarded the annual Ed Rund Masonic Educators Award. For those who are unfamiliar, Ed Rund was a renowned Illinois Masonic Educator. He was instrumental in the planning of MCME every year. After his passing, MCME decided to establish an award in his honor. In 2024, the award was given to an entire Jurisdiction, that being Ohio, for their hard work and dedication to Masonic Education. This year, it went to Brad Phelps of MI. When they read how much Bro. Brad was doing in his jurisdiction, we all had a look of shock. It was intense. This guy never sleeps. It was clear he deserved that award.



Dr. S. Brent Morris, 33°

And then...I guess that’s about it. We shared more fellowship, walked back to our rooms, and fell out for the evening. We all travelled home the next morning and lived happily ever after.

Next year, the conference will be hosted by Nebraska and held at the Omaha Scottish Rite building. Something

interesting about this is that an Illinois Freemason who recently moved to Omaha, NE, just became the Executive Secretary of that Scottish Rite—RW:. David Greenberg, who was also a DDGM of mine. So the world is small, and Dave Greenberg likes Masonic Education, and he’s going to assist in making Mathew N. Parker’s (the President of MCME for 2026) vision come true.

So, when is the next conference? Clear your schedule! April 24-26, Omaha, NE!

We’ll see you there!



Chris Hodapp, 33° addresses the room with a history of Dwight L. Smith.



(Left to Right) Past Edu Chairman for IL. Scott S. Dueball, PDEO 1st NE District, RWB: Spencer A. Hamann, Edu Committee Member on Edu. RW: R.H. Johnson



Dr. Heather K. Calloway



Mike Hambrecht, PM and Emeritus Co-Host of The Masonic Roundtable Podcast



Matthew N. Parker, NBPRESIDENT MCME for 2026



MCME President, James A. Buckhorn, Edu. Chairman for IN.



Masonic Educational Conferences

San Antonio Esoteric Summit - Saturday, June 7th, 2025

San Antonio, TX, Alzafar Shrine - Director's Staff Building

Tickets are for sale! - www.EsotericTexas.com

Northern Illinois All-State Spring AMD In-Gathering - June 21st, Medinah Shrine

Open to all members of the Allied Masonic Degrees

South Pasadena Masonic Con (SPML) – July 25th, 2025 – California

www.MasonicCon.com

Central Illinois All-State Fall AMD In-Gathering - October 18th, 2025 - Bloomington-Normal Masonic Lodge

Open to all members of the Allied Masonic Degrees

Masonic Con South – October 18 & 19th, 2025 – North Carolina

www.MasonicConSouth.com

Midwest Conference on Masonic Education – April 24-26 - 2026, Omaha, NE,

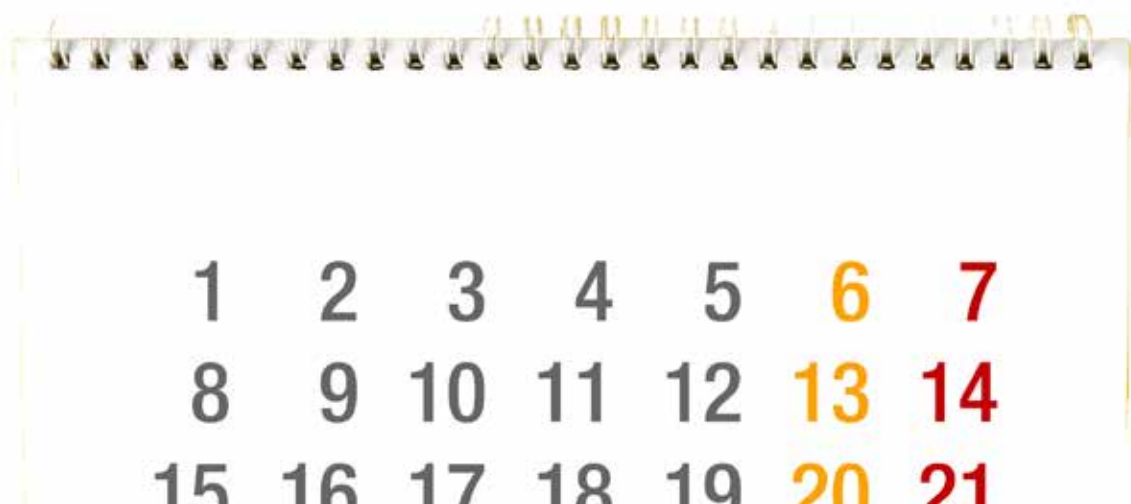
www.MCME1949.org

Yes! Masonic Con Chicago will be back in September of 2026.

For more visit, MasonicConferences.com

If your lodge or organization is having an Educational Event (not related to instruction or charities), please let us know. Email the details to: Admin@wcypodcast.com

Please give us at least a month notice so that we can ensure it is added.





The Lyceum