

**Illinois
Masonic
Education
Themes
*December***

**Grand Lodge Committee
on Masonic Education**

December- The Common Gavel

Review the working tool explanation of the Common Gavel.

Discussion Questions

1. What do the Rough Ashlar and the Common Gavel represent?
2. To shape a stone properly, one must remove unnecessary material and smooth over rough edges. So too, with men. What habits/behaviors must be removed on the path toward self-mastery? What rough areas must be made smooth?
3. What does the perfect Ashlar represent? If perfection is unattainable, why aim for it?
4. The Self-made man is an interesting idea, but no one is entirely self-made. What are the cultural, religious, and traditional beliefs that have made you the person you are? How do you expect Masonry to help you progress?

Notes and Guided Answers

1. Break off rough and superfluous parts of stone. Rough Ashlar represents the Mason beginning as an imperfect man and working on a path toward perfection.
2. Many examples.
3. A perfected being
4. Think about what is important to you. Where did you learn to value those elements.

December Supplements

Gavel. The common gavel is one of the working tools of an Entered Apprentice. It is made use of by the Operative Mason to break off the corners of the rough ashlar, and thus fit it the better for the builder's use, and is therefore adopted as a symbol in Speculative Masonry, to admonish us of the duty of divesting our minds and consciences of all the vices and impurities of life, thereby fitting our bodies as living stones for that spiritual building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

It borrows its name from its shape, being that of the *gable* or *gavel* end of a house; and this word again comes from the German *gipfel*, a summit, top, or peak, — the idea of a pointed extremity being common to all.

The true form of the gavel is that of the stone-mason's hammer. It is to be made with a cutting edge, as in the annexed engraving, that it may be used "to break

off the corners of rough stones," an operation which could never be effected by the common hammer or mallet. The gavel thus shaped will give, when looked at in front, the exact representation of the *gavel* or *gable* end of a house, whence, as I have already said, the name is derived.



Gavel. A stonemason's hammer which has one flat face opposite the sharp peen, so that from the top, it bears resemblance to a simple gabled roof and house, from which appearance, it takes its name, thus, *gable* from the German, *Gipfel* becomes *gavel*. It is used directly on the stone to make a rough shaping or rough dressing, and the finishing is done with chisel and mallet or maul, the latter being of wood and entirely different from the gavel. The gavel has been generally adopted by Masonic bodies and by many parliamentary bodies as a hammer to call the meeting to order, keep order, announce the result of a vote, the recordation of a resolution, etc. Some lodges use the setting maul or mallet. In German lodges the instrument is called "the Hammer."

The gavel, actually the iron axe, or pick, having a steel edge, or point, with which the quarryman roughly trims the stone, represents the force of conscience. The form of gavel adopted for the speculative's convenience is a wooden mallet, itself a small form of the maul (*maul-ette*). A chairman's mallet, as well as the Master's gavel, is a wooden hammer whose outline suggests that of the operative's axe, but also resembles the end-wall of a gabled house, for which latter reason it is said—but whether truthfully or not we do not know—it derives its name of gavel, a name apparently of American origin, and not known in England before the nineteenth century.

The uses of gavel and maul are frequently confused. The gavel, the implement of both the Master and his Wardens, is an emblem of power, by means of which they preserve order in the lodge; but the maul is the heavy wooden hammer with which the mason drives his chisel. Being the weapon with which the Master was traditionally slain, it is an emblem of violent death and assassination. In Proverbs xxv, 18, we find this curious figure of speech: "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow." In many lodges the gavel is used by the Master at a significant point in the third ceremony.