

THE CORNERSTONE

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I've a big problem. Let me take you into my confidence. You see I normally speak without notes; today, because of the importance of this great occasion, I have a full script. Because I need a record of what I've actually said just in case I am asked questions. Therefore, I'll need my reading glasses. My mother advised me many years ago, when I first started public speaking, to look round the audience, find a friendly face and just speak to that one person. Looking round, I have decided to put my faith in my reading glasses. However I am honoured, and delighted to address you. My main aim is to enlighten, create discussion, but above all to set you all thinking.

Brethren, though it's not a topic that I have knowledge of nor am I qualified to speak on the subject, it is PIGS! I remind those present of their childhood and of the nursery rhyme, of the Three Little Pigs. You will recollect even with the passage of time, I trust, that the PIGS built their structures of various materials, which the Big Bad Wolf 'Huffed, and he Puffed and he blew them all down' save for the one built of brick. It raises the question - Why?

It is obvious that the strength of any structure is dependent upon at the materials used - how it was erected - and the thought and care involved. When foundations are prepared, they have to be capable of ensuring that with the passage of time, they will stand the test of time. A key part of the foundations is the cornerstone. This must be level in the horizontal and upright in the vertical planes. The elements of masonic consecration, corn, wine and oil, are sometime poured on to it to signify nourishment, refreshment and joy, for the whole of any edifice relies on this, the cornerstone.

The Northeast Corner is traditionally the place where the cornerstone (the first stone) of a building is laid. The Apprentice is thus placed, because from here he will erect his own temple by the principles of Freemasonry. Other considerations of the northeast corner are that the north in Masonry is attributed to darkness; and the east to light. It therefore, follows that the northeast is a place midway between darkness and light. Being midway, it is also symbolic of equilibrium.

The northeast corner is the proper place for laying the cornerstone in an edifice. Symbolically this corner represents the beginning of the laying of the cornerstone of the spiritual superstructure that every true Mason must build. Here, in the northeast corner, ceremonies and instructions for the initiates commence. They are the start of the moral and intellectual task of erecting a spiritual temple in his heart. The cornerstone is emblematic of a 'well-trying, true, and trusty' masonic character, which he begins now to build.

The squareness of its surface is representative of morality. Its cubic form is emblematic of firmness and stability of character. The particular finish and fineness of the material is symbolic of virtue and holiness. In masonic terms, the newly admitted Apprentice is instructed in a life of integrity; of stability of conduct; and of truthfulness.

The cornerstone is normally of a more permanent and durable quality than other parts of the building, sometimes lasting beyond the decay and ruin of the building. This is to remind Masons that when their earthly Tabernacle shall have passed away, that he has within him a sure foundation of eternal life.

A proper setting of the stone by the implements of the operative Mason, the Square, the Level, and the Plumb Rule, reminds the Mason that his virtues must be tested by temptation and trial and by suffering and adversity. He is then declared to be a well-formed, true and trusty, Mason.

The expression built on firm foundations springs to mind. A foundation stone is indeed the cornerstone of most buildings, though one would find it difficult to associate this with people being the cornerstone of any association.

One would be hard pressed to prove that King John was the foundation of the British Judicial system, but the Magna Carta that he signed is just that. Equally George Washington cannot be said to be the foundation of the Constitution of the United States of America, though his Declaration of Independence certainly is. It is not people that are the foundation or cornerstone of any organization but it is their aims and their objects.

The same criterion must also be said about Freemasonry. In Freemasonry we refer to this as the northeast corner. It is in this corner of the lodge that candidates stand for initiation into Freemasonry, figuratively to represent that stone.

The Foundation Stone of the human race is situated on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, in the Dome of the Rock. It was originally in the Holy of Holies of both the First and Second Temples. At the time of the creation God fashioned Adam on some stones on Mount Moriah. On these very same stones Cain and Abel made their sacrifice to God. On these very same stones Noah made his thanksgiving to God for his deliverance from the deluge. On these very same stones Abraham took his only beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice, but God provided a more fitting sacrifice in the form of a ram. On these very same stones

Jacob lay down to rest and surrounded his head with 12 stones to prevent an attack from any wild animals. It was here that he dreamed of the ladder, which foretold the destruction of both Temples, the building of the Third Temple, which we still await, and the exile of the Jewish People. On waking he found that all the 12 stones had fused into one large stone. This also foretold the foundation of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In lodge rooms throughout the world, we see a representation of Jacob's ladder, usually on the first-degree tracing boards, with the words 'Faith Hope and Charity' spaced out on the rungs. Faith is a belief in God. Hope is that we should live in peace and look forward to a messianic age. Charity I am sure everyone understands. These equate to Truth, Brotherly Love and Relief, the Grand Principles of Freemasonry.

Truth is a belief in a Supreme Being. By definition truth is constant and consistent. It runs through everything at all times, like the middle beam in the Tabernacle, which ran from one end to the other end. Since in Hebrew Emet is Truth, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the Aleph, the middle letter is Mem and the last letter is Tav; this spells out Emet, Truth.

For God said, 'I am the First - the Last,
The Alpha - the Omega,
The Beginning - and the End'.
This is all fully explained in the Royal Arch.

Brotherly Love, is love thy neighbour, and this is a step to help bring Peace to the world. Relief is undoubtedly Charity. Yes the Principles of Freemasonry, though very high, are based on firm foundations.

The entrance to the Temple's Holy Place was in the East - and the Holy of Holies was situated in the West - so that people praying faced West. We are all aware that the Holy Place had two great columns at its entrance. The one on the left or in the south called Boaz. The one on the right or in the North called Jachin. Jachin, which means to establish, was erected as a monument to King Solomon. Boaz, which means in Strength, was similarly erected as a monument to King David.

It was King Solomon who established the building of the Temple, King David whose strength created the climate in which it could be built. He received the plans to build the temple from the Prophet Samuel, which were originally given to Moses on Mount Sinai, at the same time as the tablets that contained the Ten Commandments, and had been passed down through the Elders of Israel.

He bought the piece of land on Mount Moriah where the Temple had to be built. He defeated all the enemies of the Jewish people, thus the world was at peace. The King's coffers were full from the spoils of war, so the people did not have to be taxed to run the country. All the taxes went towards building the Temple. King David was not allowed to build the Temple because he was a man of war. Though there is a case to be made that the Temple should have been called King David's Temple. Not only did he create the climate, but also after the completion of the building by King Solomon and its dedication to God's service, the doors would not open until King Solomon invoked the name of his illustrious father. According to Maimonides, the greatest codifier and commentator of the Talmud, the Jewish Oral Law, King David was the First Messiah, to which the Prophet Balaam refers in Numbers, on account of his bringing Peace to the world.

We also use the words 'Wisdom Strength and Beauty', to describe our three Grand Masters. We all appreciate the Wisdom of King Solomon, - the Strength of King David in his battles, defeating all the Israelites enemies, and thus providing the perfect climate for the beautiful Temple to be built. My local Rabbi informs me, that Beauty in the Kabala, a mystic part of the Jewish religion, means Prayer. In the spheres, Strength is always on the left, Wisdom is on the right, Beauty is in the middle. A comparison would be Parliament with some to the left of the party others to the right; a combination of the two, should give a balanced view. In the spheres a combination of Strength and Wisdom gives Beauty. This can be compared to a choir with strong voices to the Left and sweet voices to the Right, which when combined make a Beautiful sound. These words can also be found on the top triangle of the Star of David that dominates the Royal Arch jewel.

I am a great believer that every Freemason should join the Royal Arch and if possible pass through the three Chairs, though I do not subscribe to the belief the Royal Arch is the completion of the third degree, or that the genuine secrets are a word. In my opinion the Royal Arch is a separate order with its fable and its own message. When we join the Craft we have to declare our belief in a Supreme Being. The Royal Arch reminds us all to put those beliefs into practice and reaffirm our covenant with our Maker. Ezra, one of the world's great religious leaders, formed during the Second Temple era the men of the Great Assembly, 120 leaders from every Jewish settlement throughout the known world. These men served on the Assembly until they died and were never replaced. The last survivor of this Assembly was

Simon the Righteous. One of his famous sayings was the world was built on three pillars. On Prayer, the Law and Kind Deeds. These form a triangle; people, praying, studying the Law, which are the Torah or Bible, and people carrying out kind deeds or more commonly Charity.

This should create a perfect world and is amply dealt with in Craft Masonry as 'Love thy Neighbour.' It is also commented upon that the world exists or turns round on three things; Truth, Justice and Peace, which also form a triangle.

The Temple represented a great place of worship and a seat of learning, where people from any nationality or religion could offer prayer to their Supreme Being. Sacrifices were carried out there. Boaz and Jachin were removed or destroyed at the destruction of the Temples. The only piece left of the original Temple is the Stone, which is now situated in Israel in the Dome of the Rock. Though many people believe that the Western Wall was part of the Temple, the Wall was part of the division that separated the Temple from the rest of Mount Moriah. It follows that every Freemason is placed in the northeast corner of the lodge figuratively to represent that stone.

People today cannot understand sacrifice. Every one of us would be horrified at this kind of worship. It should however be noted that all animals were slaughtered in a painless manner, the same method that is used to create Kosher meat. Freemasons are the first to complain if outsiders criticize their ritual. Now that is exactly what sacrifice is, ritual. Who are we to complain because we don't practice or understand its concept? Sacrifice was forbidden outside the Temple during its era, or since, and has been replaced by Charity.

Everyone has his or her own definition of what charity is- or what it does – or what it should do. I well remember my father and mother taking my blood brother, Phillip and myself to Switzerland on holiday shortly after my Barmitzvah, my thirteenth birthday. I was a man, well according to Jewish Law. Dad became rather bored with the holiday and our antics - so he went walking in the mountains alone. As he hadn't returned for tea or dinner a search party was organised. The members of the search party began to shout his name; 'Mr. Patnick; Mr. Patnick. Mr. Patnick, it's the Red Cross', a voice came back 'I've given already'.

This simple word charity has many definitions. They range from: -

An activity or gift that benefits the public at large

A timely and lenient attitude toward people

An institution set up to provide help to the needy

A foundation created to promote the public good (not for assistance to any particular individual).

A name given to a female, now rare, though one of our soap characters has this as her first name, but it is more common in the USA and there is also used as a surname.

The fact is that even the welfare state does not have the resources to look after everyone. Other organizations are therefore necessary to assist. One of these is Freemasonry and we as individuals and collectively must do our share. A Freemason is a person who will help anyone when asked. But a good Freemason will help anyone without being asked. Charity doesn't just mean giving money. Time is the most precious merit that we receive from our Maker and yet we all waste it. No matter if we are rich or poor, there are only 24 hours in a day and only seven-days in a week.

In the First-degree tools we are reminded by the 24-inch gauge that the day is divided into 24 equal parts and to apportion them to their proper objects, namely Prayer, Labour and Refreshment, and service to others. Time Management springs to mind. We should not waste one second of this valuable commodity - but utilise some of our time to attend to those that are less fortunate than we are. There are many ways to give assistance; by word action or deed. Such actions are just as important if not more important than money. We should also remember not to give food and drink to others and forget our own families.

According to the Talmud, 'In the merit of Charity "Tzedakah", we will have the Redemption'. With all the conflicts in the world, especially in the Middle East, we should remember that in Hebrew the word for charity is 'Tzedakah' which means righteousness. Similarly in Arabic, "Zedak" has the same meaning. Why it is that righteous people in any religion carry out killing in the name of their Maker is beyond my comprehension.

The Cornerstone or Foundation Stone is a constant reminder to every Freemason to practice the Grand Principles of Freemasonry, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, and the Northeast Corner, particularly Charity. We should also practice outside the Lodge those Principles that are taught within. By highlighting our own upright standards in an unjust world, one day Freemasons will merit seeing everyone adopt our ways and principles.