

Living the Journey: What Comes after “Better”?

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PREFACE

This is the third article of what has grown to become a three-part series. First, in “Winds of Change”ⁱ I examined the current generational urge to “change” masonry. In the second paper, “Living the Journey: When Do We Get to Make Good Men Better?”ⁱⁱ I examined the concept of our fraternal motto “making good men better”. Finally, in this paper I finish the series with a look at what comes after “better”? If masonry makes men better, what can a man, what can we expect after going through the common initiatic experience of the first three degrees?

This discussion is intended to examine the function(s) of our craft system of making men better and how it continues beyond his initiation in the first three degrees of masonry. It is *not* a judgement or examination of decisions by brothers who make other, individual decisions that may not necessarily follow the long path, continuously seeking ever-more light. Each brother must and will make individual decisions based on personal desires and circumstances known and valued perhaps only to him.

DECISION POINT



There comes a common point in masonry where we all stand equal and on the level. We have finished our three blue lodge degrees and the work required by our respective grand lodges to be recognized and hailed a “Master Mason” among brothers. Let us consider the question of what comes next for the now-better man and the decisions that will confront him as he finds himself on his own and on the level with master masons around the world. Freemasonry provides the new

mason *many* tools and choices in shaping his personal and spiritual growth and his unique journey through masonry.

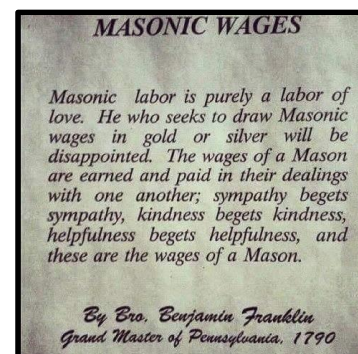
Up to this point in our masonic lives, our brothers and the process that took us from the West Gate through the first three degrees dictated every detail of what we had to do, how long we had to do it, and how we had to demonstrate we were in deed following the prescribed steps and progression through our masonic lessons. Now, the restraints are off and it becomes exclusively our own responsibility, the responsibility of each and every new master mason to take the principles of faith, hope, charity (love), fraternity, brotherly love, humility, self-discipline, dedication, along with the desire, and a heightened ability to learn and apply new concepts and venture out on our own, according to our *own* timelines and desires, on an uncharted course of our own design.

First, a new master mason will be confronted with the needs of his lodge and his brethren. Can and will he learn degree roles? Is he prepared to be an instructor for other men, new masons coming along behind him? I have previously observed that the hope of his lodge brethren is that he now joins the line of brothers ahead of him in taking on these important roles to make new masons, and to show them the way, along the path he himself has just traveled. Fundamentally, masonry depends on “capital reinvestment” by a new brother of his time and energies back into his lodge. This is, as I described in a previous paperⁱⁱⁱ, a critical link in the chain of masonic generations. The new mason is asked to consider the needs of his lodge as a whole which depends on the life-sustaining flow of new, good men through the West Gate and making it all the way through their three degrees. The new mason in this position becomes the center link in the historic chain of masonry, linking masonic generations together forever in time from past to current and current to future.

Next, perhaps simultaneously, the new mason may be curious and want to learn more about the degrees, their meaning(s), their relation and value to and within his own life. He might desire time to ponder his recent lessons on how masonry and, indeed, his entire life are constructed on biblical underpinnings, a concept new to many men who may have been true to their faith and the bible but now face a new desire to weave those biblical principles into their lives using the means and working tools provided through their masonic lessons.

The fastest way to integrate a new mason into the life of his lodge and provide him an “ownership stake” and sense of belonging in the lodge is through lodge committees. A lodge depends on its committees to operate, raise money for the cost of maintaining the lodge, making new masons, supporting their local neighbors through charitable efforts such as scholarships and disaster relief. The new mason will be asked to serve on such committees that constitute the actual bio systems of a lodge and mimic life itself in our communities. Through his efforts the new mason learns and applies his lessons in serving the greater good, sacrifice, and charity. And it is here that he learns or maybe increases his experience in organizational skills, the art of compromise, meeting deadlines, managing budgets and funds, and making (and accepting) decisions affecting his committee and his lodge. Our new mason becomes more prepared now to increase and improve critical life skills gained through collaborative work and problem solving, and to practice his early masonic lessons regarding dividing his time according to his twenty-four inch gage and minding the length of his cable tow.

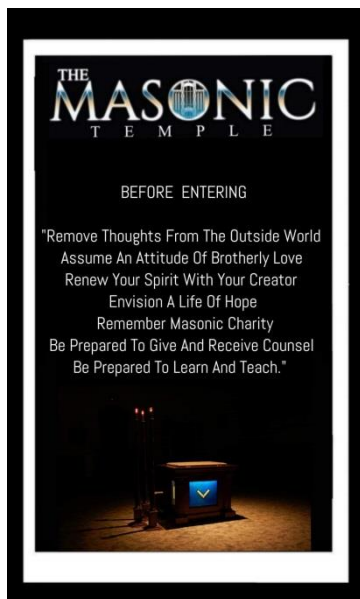
I offer a word of caution to lodges that, for the best of intentions or sometimes out of necessity, will elect a brand new mason into an officer role as high as a Deacon as a way to get a new brother involved and invested in his lodge. I implore you to get to know your new brother and his expectations and abilities. Some new brothers may want or need time to acclimate to his new lodge family and to understand the lodge’s expectation of him and his time. The potential to frustrate a new mason is enormous and the risk is high that he will opt out or give up if demands and expectations on him exceed his available time and abilities. Some new brothers will want to ease into their journey and learn about the requirements and commitments before they are obligated to them. Exercise patience, and learn



about these brothers as they learn about masonry the lodge. There is nothing wrong with a year or two on the side, or starting at a more-junior position *inside the door* such as Master of Ceremony or Marshall to observe the lodge at labor and learn.

What of the other masonic orders? Does our new mason, do we take the degrees of the York and/or Scottish Rites and enjoy the continuation of the lessons of the first three degrees? We may continue forward, experiment with other masonic orders, and find we have an affinity for learning the stories, meanings, and biblical foundation of the various degrees and that we enjoy studying and conferring these many degrees for the benefit of our many travelling brothers. It is important to know that the Scottish Rite and the York Rite are masonic bodies that confer masonic degrees and constitute vital parts of the whole of masonry. It is vital to the survival of masonry that these bodies also survive to continue conferring their degrees and lessons and allowing today's and future brother's access to the full range of masonic allegories and parables which continue the lessons learned in the first three degrees.

These orders, like our lodges, need new brothers and members to survive and they need a cadre of brothers to commit their time and energies to the larger good of the order and fellow travelers. They also offer a traveling brother the opportunity for study, for research, and even to preside and lead, just as he might in his craft lodge, but in these instances he is learning to balance the needs of the order against the demands placed on men from many lodges, each with competing priorities and interests. It is in these bodies where journeys intersect, where travelers come together to pursue both individual and common goals while taking on new obligations and commitments to even more brothers, testing their knowledge of their personal cable tows, twenty-four inch gages, and their word as a mason.



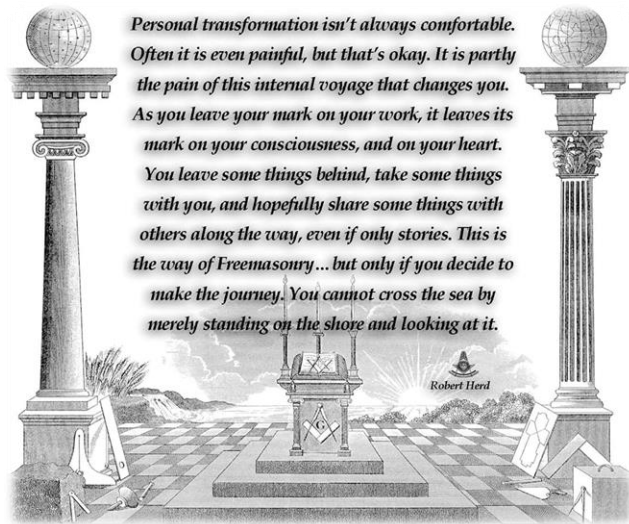
It is here, at this first decision point in the path of a masonic journey that we must begin to grasp and apply the lessons symbolized by the twenty-four inch gage and the cable tow. The challenge for our lodge brothers is to deftly engage our new brothers without demanding more of them and their time than they may currently be prepared to give. Show them the rewards of their labors in helping and mentoring our new candidates, and ensure the time that they devote to the lodge's needs is productive, educational, and appreciated. Productivity, value, and simple appreciation are food for the soul of a good and charitable man. This challenge itself reinforces lessons for all involved regarding patience, commitment, service to our fraternity, and support for our brothers. Effectively managing these relationships can, in the end, improve our ties with our brothers, teach us even more about ourselves and our brothers, prepare us for our journeys, and ultimately strengthen our fraternity.

WHAT LIES BEYOND?

What lies beyond the initiatic experience? The deceptively simple answer to that question is that "traveling" is what lies beyond. What exactly is traveling? How far do we travel? How many good

brothers will we meet along the way and how many will we help, aid, and assist in the course of our travels?

These questions get to the essence of “traveling” itself. Continuing our journey, learning, improving, leading, and most importantly, recognizing a true brother who is also traveling and assisting him in his own journey if and when we are able. We must now be prepared to employ our working tools so generously provided by our brethren through our first three lessons as we advance in our physical and masonic years.



We will encounter occasional constraints in our travels. We all have to manage expectations, sometimes finding the need to subdue or temper our desires and occasionally even delaying or sacrificing a personal goal in the cause of helping a brother in need of our time and attention, whether that is learning a catechism, receiving a degree, or in dire personal need of aid for himself and his family. Yes, it is our journey, it is a path we are creating but, we will face tests that remind us of those around us and challenge us to remember and be true to our obligations, to serve a cause or need that is larger than our

personal journey, and to help a worthy brother, his widow, or orphans when we find them in need. We must, in the course of our travels remember, adhere to, and apply our lessons and obligations provided and faithfully sworn to in our three degrees common among true brothers.

In every case and through every challenge, our character is strengthened, our principles are reinforced, and we are reminded of the occasional need to sacrifice for a greater good. Confronting these challenges and reaffirming our obligations and principles, and demonstrating charity will publicly show us to any who see that we are good men, while it is our unique, internal knowledge of self that tells us privately if we are better men than we were days, weeks, or maybe months before. It is often said “character is doing the right thing when no one is looking”. The importance and the centrality of our character, once understood and internalized, becomes a very powerful force in our life, visible to masons and non-masons alike who may be called upon one day to remember and provide testimonial to our lives as men who would gladly give the shirts off our backs and the shoes off our feet in aid of fellow travelers, friends, or complete strangers in need or distress.

I offer a suggestion as a way to know and evaluate if you are indeed better today, than yesterday. As you better yourself in masonry, opportunities to assist others will *seem* to come along more and more frequently, however, I would suggest the improving man *actually* is merely becoming more *aware* of these distressing circumstances surrounding us in life. My brother, these tests are placed in our path by the guiding hand of The Supreme Architect not to grade us, rather these tests provide *us* a method to measure and grade *ourselves* as we travel. It is up to *us* to recognize the challenges, evaluate our cable

tow, and act accordingly. It is through masonry and our masonic tools that we learn to examine and strengthen our charitable qualities to the benefit of our brothers, mankind, and of our own immortal souls.

Through these tests and experiences we further gain in our understanding of ourselves, the craft, of the fraternity, of the very principles and tenets of masonry. The mind becomes curious and receptive, and the soul is thirsty, ready to seek, absorb, learn, and experience more of the spiritual side of life, its meaning, and value. We may study and enjoy the writings of the deep thinkers and great philosophers; gaining still deeper appreciation of the mysteries portrayed through our masonic allegories and how they apply to our lives. We may become speakers, or writers, sharing our studies and knowledge with our brothers through informative programs and publications, and we may even find these heightened and continuously-improving skills helping us in our career vocations as we move up through our respective corporate or office chains.

TRAVELING BETWEEN THE GATES

I like to say that *“we travel between the gates”*. Our masonic travels, our own unique journeys which all began identically at the same symbolic West Gate, will take us each eventually to another gate, arriving this time on a day *not* of our own choosing. After passing through the West Gate and going our own separate and unique ways, traveling the respective paths of our masonic and physical lives, we will ultimately arrive at that next gate, that final gate where the books of our lives will be reviewed and we will again be challenged and judged on our worthiness to enter. Instead of waiting to hear those forceful words *“...let him enter and be received...”* it is the mason’s hope, the mason’s dream to instead hear these words: *“well done, my good and faithful servant, enter...”*



We *are* traveling. We *are* better men than we were the day we knocked upon the West Gate, and with continued discipline, self-awareness, and internal drive to grow and learn, we will be better tomorrow, and next week, next month, and ultimately at the end of our journey. Masonry, together with all of its parts is a “...system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols.” However, I would offer you this version, my version, slightly modified for clarity: “Masonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols, producing in men the traits and means of teaching themselves to live well-led lives exemplifying the principle virtues of faith, hope, and charity”.

CLOSING ARGUMENT

My brethren, this concludes an accidental series of papers^{iv} examining the questions of how and why Masonry is structured to “make good men better” and what it might mean to change or shorten that

structure. My goal is not necessarily to change the minds of those who seek or recommend change(s); rather merely to provide context and factors to consider for those advocating such changes to Freemasonry simply to accommodate changes in our culture and society.

I try to be careful in differentiating between changing for improvement and changing for expediency. I am an advocate of changes that will improve our work and our understanding of the important lessons of masonry. I am steadfastly against changes that shorten the work in the name of convenience. It is my view that every step, every script, every floor movement, every symbol, and every action to learn and convey those steps, scripts, symbols, and floor movements are themselves critical parts of the bodies of the masonic lessons themselves and constitute the actual “homework” of masonry, improving the man, strengthening his character, and imbuing in him the principle virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

It is through the experience(s) of learning, reciting, instructing, applying, and repeating that we grow and strengthen these desirable traits and characteristics in our lives, creating more virtuous habits and nurturing our charitable nature. The Mason is the sum of all of a man’s masonic lessons, experiences and actions. Who then is served by shortening, skipping, or even eliminating some of the important attributes of our masonic soul and the body of masonry itself?

Thank you my brothers for indulging my seemingly endless thoughts! I hope I have provided food for your thought as we all travel through this life and our individual journeys, necessarily pondering the future of our craft and fraternity as we go. I pray we take our future decisions seriously and with fully informed beliefs and opinions and I hope my thoughts are of some value to your deliberations.

EPILOGUE

Brethren, please join me on one last imaginary trip to the future. This time, the year is 2029, the place, a major car dealer in San Antonio. Brother Driver is looking for a new SUV and has visited lots for two other major manufacturers already.

BD: Interesting. I’ve looked online and today I visited two other lots and all the SUV’s in this class seem to go for \$25,000 to \$40,000, but yours is listed at \$8,000. How is that possible?

Salesman: I can let you in on a secret, our production line workers found ways to produce cars much faster and much more conveniently than the other major auto makers.

BD: How in the world did they improve the process enough to get the price down that low?

Salesman: Well, for one thing, the other manufacturers have to shut down their plants to re-tool their lines and program their computers for each new model year. We cut that out. We give everyone on the line a little book with all the necessary specs and they keep those books in their pockets and use those as they do their work. We eliminated the need to spend a month at the beginning of every year programming computers, plus we can move a technician around to work anywhere on the line at any time regardless of their experience because they all have the same book.

BD: I'm not sure that sounds safe. Where are the tires?

Salesman: We let the buyer find tires they like and buy them themselves after market. And on the third Saturday every month, we have a tire store here with a truck load of tires so customers who have bought cars from us can come up in a group and pick through the various displays of tires. Our customers have found this very convenient.

BD (peeking in the driver's window): And the visors, sound systems, and head rests?

Salesman: Not everyone needs them, and some buyers prefer to spend their time and money on more important things, like the brakes.

BD: Brakes?

Salesman: Yeah. We saved two days on the production line for each chassis by letting the buyers find the brakes that they prefer. Thanks to our saving days up front, the new driver has time now to shop around to find those things that we've dropped out of our assembly line and they can really hone in on the things that are really important to them; very convenient.

BD: So, I'm really just buying a stripped down version of the SUV, which may or may not match the design specifications, and may or may not provide me things I need to drive it off the lot?

Salesman: Yeah, but we rolled the SUV off the assembly line in 2.5 hours!

BD: Thanks. I'm looking for more of a "whole package" that is assembled in the traditional, logical, and orderly process by people who understand their jobs, specialize in their skills, and don't need to read their specs out of a book while they're building the car. I feel like I want an SUV that provides me all of the important parts I need to drive it out of the showroom and will get me from the gate of your lot to my front gate at home. I'm just not sure this convenience thing works for me.

Fade out.

Thank you my brothers, travel safely!

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

Brethren, this paper, as I have noted (and end-noted), draws together the themes and ideas from the first two papers in this series into this paper to represent my collected thoughts on the serious question of changing the fraternity through changes to the way we operate. I think I have successfully captured my ideas and fears in these three papers, but in doing so, I have actually also touched on and restated other ideas I have presented in other papers. I would like to provide you here a list of related papers I've published, all of which can be found on my website at this URL listed under "Papers":

www.amasonsjourney.com

(NOTE: it is not necessary, but may be beneficial to read these in the order listed)

Living the Journey: In Defense of Appendant Organizations, October 5, 2020

Living the Journey: Mentoring in Masonry, June 15, 2021

The Winds of Change, September 3, 2021

Living the Journey: When Do We Get to Make Good Men Better?, September 25, 2021

Sincerely, Fraternally, and Humbly,

Bro. Bill Boyd, PM

ⁱ Found on www.amasonsjourney.com

ⁱⁱ Found on www.amasonsjourney.com

ⁱⁱⁱ Living the Journey: When Do We Get to Make Good Men Better”?

^{iv} “Winds of Change”; “Living the Journey: When Do We Get to Make Good Men Better?”; “Living the Journey: What Comes After “Better”?