

MUSINGS FROM THE DEEP SOUTH

THE PILLAR OF BEAUTY

In Masonry we are reminded of the three great pillars that support our craft, Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. Beauty as we all know was represented in the person of our ancient Grand Master from whom we take so much of our teachings. It was his responsibility to improve the majestic edifice for both strength and ornament, to make the structure more beautiful.

We also learn of the two physical pillars representing wisdom and strength, but where is the physical representation of beauty? The answer is this resides in each Mason. It is our responsibility to improve our celestial structure for strength and ornament to make ourselves more beautiful. The strength and ornament in this context are not represented in our outward physical appearances but in our strength of character, morality and fraternity and the ornaments we “wear” are the way we speak and the truth and compassion of our actions.

When I think of the beauty as represented by this pillar of Masonry I am always reminded of the Navajo chant:

Beauty is before me and Beauty behind me.
Above me and below me hovers the beautiful.
I am surrounded by it, I am immersed in it.
In my youth I am aware of it, and, in old age,
I shall walk quietly the beautiful trail.
In beauty, it is begun,
In beauty, it is ended.

May the beauty you discover and create as Masons surround you and those you touch.

MARK THE TIME:

In the days of the building of the temple time was “marked” by an overseer placing a stick in the ground and “marking” the shadow at dawn and sunset. By doing this the overseer could then judge the time of “high twelve” and subsequently call the workers to their noon refreshments and then back again after a suitable time had passed. It is up to each of us as the overseer of our own lives to “mark” the time and to see that we have created the proper balance for our priorities. To make sure we have reserved time for our families, our vocation, our devotions and for the craft. No one task should overwhelm us and usurp the time we need to devote to the other priorities of our life. But, make sure you have marked the time well and know what you can give to each of your priorities. As brothers Franklin, Thoreau and King said:

"One today is worth two tomorrows.

Lost time is never found again.

Time is money.

Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff that life is made of.

You may delay, but time will not."

- Benjamin Franklin

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"It is not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about?"

- **Henry David Thoreau**

"The time is always right to do what is right."

- **Martin Luther King**

I encourage each brother to look to his "marking" stick and find time for all of these endeavors.

TRESTLEBOARD:

In ancient times there was only one Architect, The Great Architect. The design of the building was created by the Master Mason. There were no blue prints only the concepts each Master had in their own minds as regards the style and details of the building. However, the Fellowcraft and Apprentices needed a plan to guide their work. This is the origin of the trestleboard. A trestleboard was displayed each day with that day's designs to be completed by the workers. Each set of workers had their own trestleboards to work from, it was not usual to accomplish all of the tasks on the boards in one day and therefore the boards stood for many days some times with only small changes as the work progressed and the building was slowly completed.

As speculative Masons each degree has their own trestleboards with the work they are to accomplish, this work may take many years to complete. Even as we progress through the degrees we still need to keep in mind the work on the trestleboards of the preceding degrees as that work is truly never completed.

As brothers Washington, Jobs and Truman said:

"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."

- **Steve Jobs**

"It is wonderful what we can do if we are always doing."

- **George Washington**

"I always remember an epitaph which is in the cemetery at Tombstone, Arizona. It says: 'Here lies Jack Williams. He done his damndest.' I think that is the greatest epitaph a man can have - When he gives everything that is in him to do the job he has before him. That is all you can ask of him and that is what I have tried to do."

- **Harry S. Truman**

I encourage each brother to look to the trestleboard he is working on and make progress each and every day.

CHANGING:

Fall is fast approaching; I can feel it in the air. This is my favorite time of year. I grew up in the Mid-West on a farm and always marveled at the ripening crops and the changing leaves. It always seemed a very busy time, but defiantly a time of change. As a boy I had to change to the next grade and that was both exciting and scary. During this time I went off to college and that was a big change in both life and location. As I have grown older I have considered this time a good time to reflect on what I need to do to change either in myself or in my actions.

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As Masons we need to be open to change, especially within ourselves. Masonry is all about change. Whether we are changing to a new degree or changing our priorities or changing the way we think and act, Masonry is about changing. Let us each look to this time to think about what we most need to change in ourselves to be better men and better Masons. Don't be scared of the change embrace it and know that it is for the good of ourselves and our craft.

As brothers Franklin and Bacon said:

“When you're finished changing, you're finished.”

- **Benjamin Franklin**

“Things alter for the worse spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly.”

- **Francis Bacon**

And author Herbert said

“Without change, something sleeps inside us, and seldom awakens. The sleeper must awaken.”

- **Frank Herbert**

It is a time to change and only each brother can say what that means to him.

WALK UPRIGHTLY:

The Plumb is the symbol of the south. As we all know it admonishes us to walk uprightly in our several stations before God and man. But what does this mean for men and Masons? For me it means to be a man that your father, mother, religious leader, and brother would be proud of. It means to speak truly, act honestly and decide fairly in all your dealings with God and man, whether the men are brothers or not. It means to stand upright and be counted as one who sides with justice against inequity, freedom against the oppressor, knowledge against ignorance and light against the darkness. Remember that we do not build short lighthouses, but tall upright structures that shine their lights as far as possible. Therefore, stand upright and let your example, your light, shine for all to see and emulate.

Many have admonished us to be upright men. The following are some of my favorite quotes about being an upright man:

“For this is the mark of a wise and upright man, not to rail against the gods in misfortune.”

- **Aeschylus**

“Stand upright, speak thy thoughts, declare the truth thou hast, that all may share; Be bold, proclaim it everywhere: They only live who dare.”

- **Voltaire**

“Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.” (Psalms 112:4)

- **Bible**

“And they were not enjoined anything except that they should serve Allah, being sincere to Him in obedience, upright ... and that is the right religion.” (The Clear Evidence 98.5)

- **Quran**

Our Brother Masons also had much to say regarding this very important part of being a Mason.

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“The man of life upright has a guiltless heart, free from all dishonest deeds or thought of vanity.”

- **Thomas Carlyle**

“Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable for, not the rightness, but the uprightness of the decision.”

- **Thomas Jefferson**

“Good luck is the willing handmaid of an upright and energetic character, and conscientious observance of duty.”

- **James Russell Lowell**

“It is hard for an empty bag to stand upright.”

- **Benjamin Franklin**

So good luck to you all in the coming year and remember to fill your bag with those just, righteous, compassionate, gracious and wise deeds that will show the world that there stands an upright Mason.

FRATERNALLY,

JAMES L. RITTER, P.M.