

## **Out of the Cave**

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Why is it hard to be a just and upright Mason; ever to walk and act as such? This is the question I have asked myself over and over again since being raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason. I never experienced a magical transformation or some new found ancient knowledge about the craft entrusted to only a few. What I did find was a stark reminder that I am human and still have a difficult path to travel. For me, Masonry became harder and harder with each degree, not in the esoteric memorization, but in the moral and character building challenges of each degree. I believe Masonry is much more than just a bi-monthly business meeting, crock pot dinners, pancake breakfasts, and occasional participants. Masonry has purpose and direction, which I respect greatly, but felt powerless to understand. I felt that I was letting my lodge and the fraternity down, because I wanted something more.

Not long ago, while sitting in lodge all I could think of was my High School Civilization class and how accurate Plato's Allegory of the Cave seemed to fit my understanding of Masonry. All the pieces seemed to fit flawlessly. I felt very proud of myself for solving the complex puzzle of Masonic truth. I had finally found a starting point that I could interpret. My small sense of pride in figuring this groundbreaking idea was soon dashed by a quick search of the internet the next morning. Others have come to the same parallels as I have.

Plato's allegory of the cave is part of the great work, Plato's Republic, in which Socrates is conversing with Plato's older brother, about a cave in which the inhabitants are bound in such a fashion that they cannot move their heads or legs. A fire burns

behind them producing shadows on the wall in front of them. Behind the fire, attendants hold various items that produce distinctive shadows. The attendants call out the names of these shadows, and since the bound inhabitants know only what they are told, believe this to be the truth. After many years, the inhabitants are taken from the cave one at a time. Once in the bright daylight they experience blinding pain, but eventually are able to see clearly. Upon which they discover what they thought was truth was not. On being brought to light, some returned to the safety and order of the cave. For them, the safety and serenity of the cave was easier live with than the painful truth of the world outside.

As Freemasons we are all asked where we were first prepared to be made a mason. Do we really understand what that means or are we just blindly repeating what we were told? Were we really prepared in our hearts? We are received into the lodge in due form for each degree, and I believe it is to remind us that it takes a good heart to make a good man better. To seek light is to seek that knowledge about ourselves, to make ourselves better, to think and act as honorable men. On being brought to light we are blinded by the glow, but after a short time we can see our faults and imperfections when measured by the lectures of our working tools. Only men who want to learn, to subdue their passions, and improve themselves in Masonry will incorporate the moral lessons of our working tools and change their hearts.

Unfortunately, some men find it easier to retreat back into the safety and order of the cave, never understanding or willing to meet their full potential. Our Craft is suffering from a lack of distinction between what we saw in the cave to what we know is right. If we believe that the cave is good enough then we are doomed as an institution. Making

changes to become better men is a difficult lifelong process that cannot be accomplished without first being blinded by the light. We are human, there is no special magic, no ancient knowledge passed down from generation to generation. The tenets of our institution, friendship, morality, and brotherly love will guide us on our journey from the dark cave of ignorance to the light of knowledge and understanding. At times this journey will cause pain in our hearts, but we can always count on the wise counsel and support of our brothers, who travel with us.

Although I have not been a Master Mason very long I understand what Freemasonry has to offer me and those who have come before me. We are taught to explain to others that it is a system of morality, veiled in allegory, illustrated with symbols. At face value this is a simple concept, but it is the process that requires lifelong learning and internal change. The hidden mysteries of Freemasonry are within each of us. No one will force any of us to make this journey, nor will anyone know if we have begun. Masonry will challenge your character and morals, and along the way may hurt your feelings. Sometimes you need to get knocked down to see things for what they are. I for one do not wish to retreat back to the cave. I have lived my life in the cave long enough and am eager to change my heart regardless of the pain or discomfort, to stand as a just and upright Mason, ever to walk and act as such.