

It's Really Quite Simple....

In my ongoing research for the 'Living Stones' that I prepare each month, I correspond with many Brethren from around the world. I begin with a true story a brother from California shared with me...he said it's true because he was present the night this happened in his lodge.

His name was Eddie, probably only 22 or 23 years old, he had wild hair, wore a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. This was pretty much his wardrobe for Eddie his entire four years of college, where he ended up near the top of his physics and plasma science class...he was rather esoteric, but very bright. He became a Mason during his junior year at UCLA. After moving to a small coastal town where his first job was located, he discovered that just two blocks from his apartment is a very old, well-respected, and very conservative Masonic Lodge. One day Eddie decides to go there right after work. He walks in wearing jeans, open collar sport shirt, work shoes, and his ever present long hair.

The meeting has already started, and after being examined, the Tiler announces (with somewhat raised eyebrows) that he is indeed a sojourning brother, and admits him. The lodge is completely packed and Eddie can't find a seat. By now the rest of the Brethren are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Eddie walks closer to the East and, after he realizes there are no empty seats, he just sits down right on the carpet near the Secretary's desk. Although perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, trust me, this had never happened in this Lodge before! By now the Brethren of this very conservative Lodge are rather uptight, you can hear the buzz from the sidelines, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the Secretary notices that from the far end of the Lodge, a Past Master is slowly making his way toward Eddie.

Now this Brother is in his late eighties, has silver-gray hair, and always wears a three-piece suit. A good man; well respected, very elegant, and dignified. He walks with a cane and, and he starts shuffling toward this young man. Everyone is thinking to themselves that you really can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid being in the Lodge? It takes a while for the old man to reach the spot where Eddie is sitting. The Lodge room has become absolutely silent except for the clicking of the old man's cane.

All eyes are focused on him. It's so quiet you could hear a pin drop...even on the carpet. The Master can't continue with the business of the Lodge until the old Past Master does what he has to do. And now the Lodge watches as this elderly man drops his cane to the floor, and with great difficulty, lowers himself and sits down next to Eddie offers his hand of Brotherhood, and welcomes him so he won't be alone.

When the Master finally regains his composure, he says "Brethren, what I'm about to say, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget. Brethren, be careful how you live. You may be the only Mason some people will ever meet."

It has been said that the actions and character of a Mason speak more eloquently about our fraternity than all the books and pamphlets written about our organization. Brother Woodrow Wilson once said....

***"If you think about what you ought to do for other people,
your character will take care of itself."***

Perhaps it's true that all institutions ultimately move away from their roots, or if you will, their orthodoxy.....after all, times do change. As people move through their organizations; some will greatly affect the organization, and others won't. And over the long haul, it's sometimes very difficult to keep the institution's original definition and the member's purpose for joining in focus.

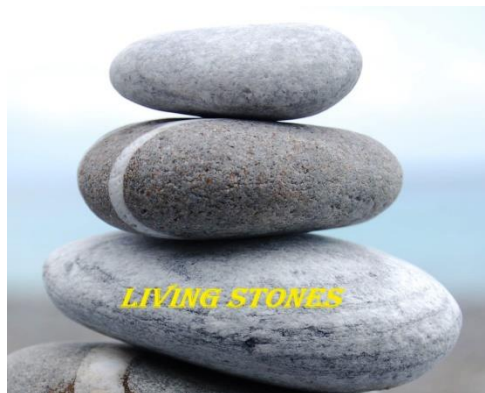
I'm still idealistic enough to believe that most people form their own opinions about an organization regardless of what they might read about it. I hold to the ideal that thoughtful people will generally give little credence to information that appears biased in its content. And, while I have never met a thoughtful anti-Mason, I expect the reason they pay so little heed to all the education we try to give them is that they assume we're just as biased as they are! It really makes little difference.

But what does make a real difference to everyone is that we hold on to our orthodoxy. The *character* of an individual Mason is what the world sees. In short, the character of a Freemason does indeed speak more eloquently than all the books and pamphlets written about our gentle Craft! This means that in the community where Masons are known as such, and are men of high integrity, the Fraternity generally stands in high regard.

It's just that simple. It is within your power, within the power of every member to glorify or diminish the fraternity. The bottom line is that the Mason who lives up to our teachings and the obligations he took of his own free will and accord, will be a man without reproach in all his dealings - not only with his Brethren, but also among his neighbors, family, friends, his fellow church members, and within his community.

Masonry to them is what they "read" in the temperament and behavior of its members. Of course, this places an awesome responsibility on every Mason. The fact is that one bad example can do us a lot of harm. When a Mason is caught up in some public scandal, or unethical business dealing or an immoral act, the public takes it for granted that Masonry either condones such lapses, or is too weak to be of enough influence to prevent such behavior from within its ranks.

I guess it boils down to this....in a practical, public sense; we are what other people say we are. Thus, the best argument for Freemasonry is a 'good Mason'. Just as the best example of humanity is a good human. You see, you and I really do have a heavy burden, an obligation if you will, to be the very best example of our fraternity that we can be. *It's really quite simple...*recall the obligations you took at the altar, and do your very best to live up to them. It all comes down to character.



Living Stones - Masonic Thoughts for Today's Mason
Douglas M. Messimer, LEO Fraternal Lodge No.53