

≥THE ANTEROOM OR CHAMBER OF REFLECTION≤

AN OMITTED INDISPENSABLE PART OF OUR RITUAL

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ä After being told a few words of warning calling for the reconsideration on the steps he is about to take, mysterious words bearing a contrasting and intimidating message of discouragement, the young man, compelled by either Conviction or Curiosity, decides to ignore said ≥warnings≤, and valiantly enters that ≥cavern-like room≤ on the day of his initiation into the Craft. He immediately finds himself in the middle of a gloomy and obscure scenario - a small table with a skull and crossed tibias, a lit candle, a sand clock about to stop, and a few suggestive wall inscriptions complementary of everything he was forewarned, prior to stepping into such a perturbing enclosure.

He cannot help feeling like an unfortunate detainee of ancient times, locked in a dungeon awaiting his sentence. On the small table there are also a cup of water, a small piece of bread, and some salt, which, seem to be the only food that he is entitled to ingest for being imprisoned. He instinctively asks himself ≥Am I a Prisoner?≤ ≥I have not done anything≤; ≥I came here of my own free will and they throw me in here≤; ≥How long will they keep me?≤ ≥I have no idea, but, I want to get out, I want to throw down the towel and surrender in the second round≤; ≥I give up≤; I can't stand it any longer≤; ≥What is this about?≤; ≥Why did they lock me up?≤; ≥Is this how they make Good Men better?≤; ≥Is this what they mean by Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth?≤; ≥They are probably just having fun with me!≤; ≥They have me in such a ridiculous and hopeless state!≤ ≥One of my hands is tied, I'm barefooted, almost naked, without my belongings, and partially blind-folded!≤; ≥My God, what's next?≤ ≥A ransom?≤; ≥Am I being kidnapped?≤; ≥Are all those sinister rumors about the Masons true?≤ä

ä The young neophyte then recovers his briefly lost sanity, and focus his attention on some of the fluorescent phrases posted on the dark walls: ≥IF YOU ARE AFRAID, LEAVE≤, ≥IF YOU ARE NOT CERTAIN, WITHDRAW≤, ≥IF YOU CANNOT COPE, RENOUNCE≤. All of the sudden, however, these intimidating and daring clauses give him the encouragement to continue on, to test himself, to confront and overcome his own fears, to subdue his vices, and to begin to truly know himself.

Suddenly, a man wearing a black robe hands him a paper with four (4) questions that he has to answer in one (1) minute. At that moment, the novice thinks - ≥Who, in my present state and condition, is going to answer this questionnaire correctly in one (1) minute?≤ – While reading the questions, he feels like a bucket of cold water has fallen upon him, slightly refreshing his already warm and confused mind. There are four (4) questions he must reflect upon. What is Man's duty to God? Again, he thinks – ≥What, didn't they say that, here, Religion is never discussed?≤ – He thinks for a moment and answers what he thinks is right. What is Man's duty to Himself? ≥Dignity≤, he replies. But, again, he cannot help to think – ≥What type of Dignity can I have or talk about, after being treated like a dirty rag?≤. What is Man's duty to his Fellow Beings? Without

hesitation he replies – ≥Respect≤. If your last hour arrived, what would be your Testament? This time, the young man's face frowns and he thinks aloud – ≥A last will? ≥What are they going to do to me now?≤ ≥I'm locked away in a room, I know nobody in this place, and I'm in the presence of human remains≤ ≥Now, I truly feel uncomfortable!≤ – He stops, thinks again for a few seconds, and replies – ≥I'd give half to my loved-ones, and the other half to people in need≤.

He was given sixty (60) seconds, but, he feels as twenty (20) minutes have gone by; his anxiety begins to feel like asphyxia with an unmistakable sensation of claustrophobia. Suddenly, there is a distinct knock at the door, two or three different voices from without order him not to turn around, and, once more, he is completely blind-folded.

As he is taken away, he remembers reading a particular word with three points between each letter: V:I:T:R:I:O:L:. At that time, our young Initiate did not know its meaning, he probably even assumed that it was an unknown reference to God; But, in due time, he will encounter the latin phrase: ≥VISITA INTERIORA TERRAE RECTIFICANDO INVENIES OCCULTUM LAPIDEM≤, which, semi-translated into English means: ≥VISIT THE INTERIOR OF THE EARTH, THROUGH RECTIFICATION YOU SHALL FIND THE HIDDEN STONE≤, and, then, he will realize that such word went hand in hand with everything he saw and read in that ≥cavern-like room≤. Studying and analyzing further, he will find its significance, that of visiting and knowing his Inner Side/Nature, and submitting to a Self-Examination of Conscience with which he must reflect over his actions and deeds, and, thus, discover his Internal Self or Hidden Stone, the Philosophers Stone of the Alchemists, the Rough Ashlar of the Free-Mason.

The ancient Egyptian, Persian and Greek Sages adopted the custom of surrounding their teachings with enigmas that could only be contemplated in silence, and, which, expressed invariable and uniform principles that formed a perfect and harmonious ensemble that, at the same time, defined a ceremony of religious and secret nature needed for the Initiation and Training of all Priests and Priestesses who desired to unravel these enigmas. These enigmas comprise all that relates to the developing possibilities of the human state, that culminate with that which has been called ≥Restoration of Primeval State≤, and these are nothing more than a preparation for The Great Mysteries, which, appertain to the realization of the super-human states, and conduct the Initiate toward states of spiritual order until reaching the Supreme Identity. Thus, the new adept is brought closer to the hidden truths of the divine.

All the Philosophers of antiquity were disciples of an Initiation, being Progress and the Foundation of the Mysteries what enabled them to liberate themselves from the chaos of superstition in those times. Only the Mysteries could liberate man from barbarousness. From these mysteries were derived the doctrines of Confucius, Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus. Such were the timeless characteristics of the Ancient Mysteries, that fragments of these teachings have reached Modern Freemasonry. These influences are found in the various different Rites of the Order. In all these mysteries we find a common factor indicating a same origin, the ceremonies of initiation were all funereal in character featuring a mystical death and resurrection, and the trials were conducted in the darkness

of the night - the aspirant had to be examined, tried and purified in order to attain Wisdom and Light.

In the Mithraic-Zoroastrian mysteries, the neophyte was subject to a rigorous fasting and to a series of tests and trials, where the methods of exciting awe and fear varied ingeniously; all types of sounds and noises were simulated, the roaring of ferocious animals, the explosion of thunder, lightning, lashings with sticks, lamentations, screams of horror or pain, and the sensations of heat or cold were also implemented, by having him/her swim in rivers of strong current and walk through blazing areas. All these tests and trials lasted between twenty-four and eighty days, at the end of which the candidate was introduced in an real cavern. These initiation caverns were small in size, their walls and ceilings were painted with astral signs, and represented the world, the dual movement of the planets, and the passage of the souls through the celestial spheres. Once inside, the candidate was caused to walk through a ladder or bridge along which there were seven doors, each made of a different metal symbolizing the respective attributes of every planet. This Ladder was posteriorly adopted by the Jews and featured in the mythical dream of Jacob, and, presently, it is an indispensable symbol in a number of our Masonic Degrees. As the climax of the ceremony was nearing, the new adept was conducted to a larger room where he/she underwent some type of Baptism, and was finally prepared to receive the Seven Lessons that would constitute the completion of his/her Initiation. In due time, this particular ceremony began to be implemented by almost every Mystery School, until it made its way into Masonic Rituals in the form of ≥The Ante-Room≤ or ≥Chamber of Reflections≤.

In the Higher Mysteries, celebrated in Eleusis during the month of September, these ceremonies lasted nine days, and were held in honor of the Goddesses Demeter and Persephone. The Temple was divided in three parts: the ≥Megaron≤ or Sanctuary (corresponding to the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Temple of Solomon), the ≥Anactoron≤ or Main Hall (equivalent to the place of collective prayer), and the Underground Chamber located right below the temple. The Infernal Regions and/or Punishment for the uninitiated impious one was symbolically represented by this Underground Chamber, and it was reminiscent of an episode in the drama of Demeter, Persephone and Pluto. Within the walls of this temple, the beliefs and teachings of a celestial life after death were earnestly imparted to their ≥Adoptae≤ or Accepted, and thus expanded to the more profound studies of Cosmogony and Anthropogenesis.

In the Druid Mysteries, almost entirely native to the regions of Britain and Gaul, their rituals, brought from Greece by Scandinavian route, required the Initiate to undergo much physical purification and mental preparation; their First Degree was conferred by inflicting a symbolical death on the aspirant, which, culminated in his/her attainment of the Third Degree or regeneration, at which point he/she was placed on a boat symbolizing his/her readiness to sail-off on life's journey.

The formidable Egyptians, Mayans and Incas used to leave the Initiate alone, locked inside the actual funereal chamber of a pyramid, lying inside a coffin and surrounded by mummies and other lugubrious emblems, so that he/she could reflect on the steps about

to be taken – that unless emerging triumphant, such failure could cost him/her the permanent loss of his/her freedom.

Following these ancient initiatic customs and traditions, divesting the candidate of all personal clothing and removing all minerals and metals from him, the Profane is caused to find himself alone with his own values before a first symbolical approximation that invites him to meditate over the vanities of existence, and warns him of mere curiosity as he seeks membership in our Order.

In modern Free-Masonry, the chamber of reflections is equivalent to the alchemical siphon, where the Recipient shall experience transmutation by means of the conjugation and regulating of his/her recondite energies. The Profane \geq descends to the Infernos \leq , he must die first, in order to \geq resuscitate \leq and attain the light of Initiation. There he shall leave the dealings of the exterior world, there will be an interior abstraction, like the original matrix, so that he can emerge from the depths of the earth (the chaotic dense matter) to the subtleness of the spirit.

This place is also representative of both Macrocosm and Microcosm, in other words, of the Universe and Man. In it, there are manifested four levels or superposed planes where the basic elements of Alchemy are found – earth, fire, water and air. The first level belongs to that of Fire, the primordial element for the work of transmutation; the second and third levels belong to those of Water and Earth – the transforming substances, and the fourth level belongs to the element of Air, the subtlety of gases related with transcendence.

It is particularly important to underline the use of certain phrases inscribed upon this chamber's walls; these phrases bore messages such as: \geq IF MERE CURIOSITY HAS BROUGHT YOU HERE, LEAVE! \leq , \geq KNOW THYSELF! \leq , \geq DUST YOU ARE AND, AGAIN, DUST YOU SHALL BECOME! \leq , \geq TO DIE, YOU WERE BORN! \leq , \geq TO BETTER EMPLOY YOUR LIFE, THINK OF DEATH! \leq , \geq IF AVARICE GUIDES YOU, GO AWAY! \leq , \geq IF YOU PAY HOMAGE TO HUMAN DISTINCTIONS, LEAVE, FOR HERE WE KNOW THEM NOT! \leq , \geq IF YOU FEAR TO BE REPRIMENDED OVER YOUR DEFECTS, DO NOT PROCEED! \leq , \geq IF YOU LIE, YOU SHALL BE EXPOSED! \leq , \geq IF YOU ARE AFRAID, WITHDRAW! \leq . These inscriptions are precisely inviting us to \geq visit the entrails of the earth \leq , in other words, to effectuate an introspection of our personalities, by being capable to \geq rectify \leq , to separate the dense from the subtle, and, thus, to find the \geq hidden stone \leq of the Philosophers, the True Philosophers Stone where the Profane's real capacity for transmutation resides. For the Free-Mason, the transformation of Led or Rough Ashlar into Gold or Cubical Stone; the manner by which Man and Woman become the object of \geq The Great Work \leq .

The disorder and obscurity that prevail in the Chamber of Reflections, giving the appearance of a sepulchral cave, furnished with symbols of death and destruction, a skull and bones, is equivalent to being submerged in the center of the earth, from whence we came and ultimately shall return. Of all four elements that reign in Nature (Earth, Water, Air and Fire), Earth is the first that we must \geq overcome \leq during our Masonic Initiation.

Our momentary stay in the Chamber of Reflections makes us remember the State of Ignorance in which we humans find ourselves, before knowing one fundamental principle of the Masonic Order: ≥YOU MUST DIE IN VICES, TO BE BORN IN VIRTUES!≤; Or, like Joshua Ben Joseph, alias: ≥The Christ≤, allegedly stated: ≥HE/SHE WHO IS NOT REBORN, WILL NOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN!≤.

Just before stepping into the Ante-Room, we deposit our material valuables with our Bro.: Exp.: , in order to symbolically enter in a State of Original Purity, making effectual solely our True Values – Moral and Spiritual, glimpsing a new path-way, and disappearing our exterior bonds and considerations to be indefectibly open for a New State of Conscience. This, is the place where two worlds separate, the Profane and the Sacred; This is the critical point where Palingeness (Rebirth and/or Transformation) begins; The return to Life, by finding ourselves and self-divesting of our old personalities (egos and masks), recuperating our authentic being, which, in turn, shall conduct us to the True Initiation, to the Progressive Realization of our being, subjecting to examination our Will and Purpose of Advancement.

Being within that confinement, isolated between those dark walls, the Free-Mason-To-Be completes the strengthening and maturity of his soul, aided by the reflection upon that which surrounds him – the first symbols open to a Candidate's view.

The ability to ≥reflect≤ is most necessary in a Free-Mason's life! Reflection, per Philosophical Tenets, is the faculty of the human spirit by which the individual retreats and concentrates on him/herself to examine the phenomena subjected to his/her observation. Reflection is so important, that everyone who lacks the capacity of it, is totally incapable of comprehending the mission entrusted to him/her; he/she becomes toy and/or victim of his/her errors and/or passions – giving, instead, to the one who has developed it, an extraordinary superiority in intellectual and moral concepts. Reflection is a complex faculty, by which the active conscience illustrates and completes the Knowledge that the state of spontaneity had left in darkness and confusion.

The Man or Woman who reflects, bothers him/herself solely with matters that take place in the interior of his thoughts, finding him/herself forced to self-isolate from all exterior occurrences that besiege him/her, and to impede their access by suspending the function of the organs which perceive them. The Free-Mason who reflects, needs the retreat, the quietude, the darkness and the silence – to comprehend the phenomena of the spirit, and to clearly distinguish those invisible and impalpable objects concealed by light, and, which, only the silence of the night can reveal.

By proper use of Reflection, the Free-Mason is capable of perfectly distinguishing his thoughts, his ideas of Liberty, of Merit or Demerit. By aide of Reflection, the Free-Mason examines and judges his own actions, weights the consequences of the same, appreciates his moral character, and rejoices in discovering those noble qualities of the soul which, place him above all other creatures. Reflection teaches the Free-Mason the objective for which his glorious attributes call for, and lifts up the veil that concealed his destiny.

While in the Chamber of Reflections, the neophyte symbolically descends to the utmost dense and inferior; he finds himself in the darkness; he is in conflict with the duality of personalities – on one side, the material, composed of a physical body, and, on the other, the ethereal body, mind and emotions that he has constructed with his birth and with his particular circumstances; and, at a higher level, he faces the Elevated Personality, the Superior Individuality where he finds his true being, and shining right above it, is The Great Architect Of The Universe - so that before leaving the Ante Room, on his way to the Lodge Room, he can finally attain the Perfect Expression of the Spirit in the Physical Body.

Through the Ages, the Chamber of Reflection has represented the Initiates descend to the Infernos, the apparent death which precedes reincarnation, the re-encounter with a new life, and the Sun defeating the Autumnal Equinox, and rising victorious from its battle against darkness in the Equinox of Spring.

Brothers, a revision and additional embellishment of our English-styled ritual, is most necessary, and way over-due. Our new Brethren must experience what some of us, unfortunately, did not. Our more philosophically and esoterically-inclined ≥New Breed≤ of members will cherish the experience of reflecting before seeing the Light. They will treasure the instant when called upon to reflect on their duties to God, to their fellow beings, and to themselves, just like our fore-brothers did, ages before there was even any grouping of four ≥Non-Operative Masonic Lodges≤ and their controversial merger into another ≥Grand Lodge≤ in England.

The ritualistic lessons of our Craft must be as vivid as possible. Our neophytes must go through the experience of being locked in that room, so that they may confront their own fears and demons. Fears and Demons that, perhaps, they are not aware of. The appreciation, skill, and habit of Reflection must be inculcated in the New Free-Mason beginning on the day of his Initiation. He must be taught to know himself better, to pay more attention to his vices and virtues, and to know the ≥true secret≤ on how to successfully polish his ≥rough ashlar≤.

Now is the time for us to pause and ≥reflect! ä Many times, man fails to use the virtue of Reflection, and even goes through life without ever using it, until his final moment arrives; and, finally, he remembers that he has conscience, and meditates on what has been of his life up to that instant. We, as Free-Masons, should not make that mistake with the same frequency. Unlike the uncultivated and/or indifferent Profane and Mason alike, we must look into ourselves, see through our Third Eyes, and think before acting.

Thanks to this ≥catacomb≤, feebly omitted from our present rituals, we, Free-Masons, are what we are, and will be what we will be. In the Chamber of Reflections we are all reborn, and thus we learn to apply to our lives that wise adage that exhorts: ≥NEVER SAY WHAT YOU THINK, ALWAYS THINK WHAT YOU SAY!≤

