



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and
Accepted Masons of Virginia**



Committee on Masonic Education

DEO Presentation Program Paper

THE ASHLARS

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Division Provost for Region XI

We know what an Ashlar is. For the Operative Mason, a rough Ashlar is a stone fresh cut from the quarry; a perfect Ashlar is a stone that has been shaped and polished and ready for the builder's use.

We know where the Ashlars are found in the Lodge. Every Masonic Lodge is supposed to have two Ashlars: a rough Ashlar which is located at the base of the East on the side of the Senior Deacon and a perfect Ashlar which is located at the base of the East on the side of the Chaplain.

But, the Ashlars, as is the case with virtually everything in a Lodge, have a deeper meaning that goes beyond its physical description - and it is this symbolic meaning that is most important.

The two Ashlars taken together represent progress from darkness to light (from the North East to the South East), from ignorance

to knowledge, from wickedness to virtue. When a candidate first enters a Masonic Lodge, he is said to resemble a Rough Ashlar. We are confident, relying on the recommendation of his vouchers and the report of the Investigating Committee, that he is a good and moral man. But he knows little about our Fraternity, its history and philosophy, its protocol and traditions, and so from a Masonic perspective, he is as yet unprepared for the builder's use.

Each Masonic degree has a theme and is an allegory about life itself which teaches a lesson that helps to transform the candidate, so he becomes worthy of the title "Master Mason." As he progresses through the degrees and internalizes its lessons, his moral character is polished and perfected. And, as he reflects on the obligations, he shapes his conduct and behavior in accordance with Masonic values. It is through this process that each of us metaphorically moves from a rough Ashlar to a perfect Ashlar. It is in this way that the Fraternity begins the process of taking good men and making them better.

Just as the Operative Mason shaped the stones from the quarry to build a physical edifice, so as Speculative Masons, we take the symbolic stones, which are the teachings of Freemasonry, to build our moral edifice and spiritual Temple.

We live in a rapidly changing world. In order to keep up and be

successful one requires continuous learning. Freemasonry believes in universal and unchanging values, but we also know that perfecting our character also requires continuous learning. We are taught to make a concerted effort to improve ourselves and advance in Masonic knowledge. Thus, we never stop our search for truth; we take seriously the teachings of brotherhood and brotherly love, and we seek to be mentors and role models.

I would like to conclude with a short poem written in 1924 by Mary Brooks Picken in a book entitled "Thimblefuls of Friendliness."

"STEPPING STONES"

 "Isn't it strange that Princes and Kings
and clowns that caper in sawdust rings,
 And just plain folks like you and me,
 Are builders for eternity?
 To each is given a bag of tools,
 A shapeless mass and book of rules,
 And each must make ere life is flown,
 A stumbling block or a stepping stone."

It is clear which way we are inclined as Masons to use our bag of tools. We see as our duty not just to improve ourselves, but also to improve our communities and in some small way to try to improve the world. We seek to build not to destroy, to raise up not to tear down, in short, to make things better not worse.