



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

the **c**ement
Which binds.

Are you a trowel?

The operative mason uses a trowel to spread the cement or mortar in the proper proportions, to bind the bricks of a building into a structure, perfect in its parts and honourable to the builder.

As Speculative Masons we do not use a trowel to spread cement and mortar in a literal sense, we consider its symbolical use is to spread the binding agent of brotherly love and affection; it is no coincidence that the trowel has been suggested as a working tool of a Master Mason or that it is linked to the central purpose which Freemasonry has always proclaimed.

Now I am not suggesting we as Freemasons should have a trowel in our regalia cases, even less a bag of pre-prepared mortar; the trowel I wish to consider is best described as figurative and symbolic, representing behaviour and the conduct which every Master Mason is charged to practice. Metaphorically I am suggesting that every Freemason is himself a trowel, able to distribute in proper proportion the special bonding materials of brotherly love and affection. That same 'brotherly love and affection' which ever distinguishes us as men and as Masons.

As an individual the newly made Freemason is exhorted to the 'practice of every domestic as well as public virtue.....and he is reminded to 'be especially careful to maintain in their fullest splendour those truly Masonic ornaments which have already been amply illustrated – Benevolence and Charity. Kindness, gentleness, helpfulness are expressed by way of a benevolently disciplined character and displayed to the world through brotherly love.

Therefore I suggest that we view each individual Mason as a builder; moreover, he is in possession of both the trowel and the cement which bring together disparate units of society into a cohesive whole. The brotherly love extended to others is the trowel; the affection he creates is the cement which helps to bind men closer to each other.

I am often led to ask how many Masons really understand the idea of using the trowel of brotherly love to spread the cement of appreciation and understanding?

Masonic brotherly love is not simple sentimentality, put on like our regalia when one attends the Lodge. Brotherly love does not begin and end with a Brother Mason. Brotherly love is so much more and we discover this through a close study of our ritual, particularly those less common parts. The Charge after Initiation leaves no room for challenge. 'As a Freemason, let me recommend to your most serious contemplation the Volume of the Sacred law' - what a way to grab the attention of the newly made Freemason, but the exhortation is not yet complete, it continues 'charging you to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice and to regulate your actions by the divine precepts it contains'. One of those precepts is mentioned a little later - 'by doing to him as in similar cases you would wish he would do to you'

Brotherly love is much more than offering 'a handshake' which all too frequently reveals itself in a demonstration of false bonhomie, and lacks any sense of genuine concern or interest for the well being of those greeted.

Brotherly love is not about 'doing someone a favour' it must of necessity be much more than that. The mortar of brotherly love needs a better mix; the trowel must distribute the cement in better proportions.

Brotherly love is not just about courtesy, either. To listen politely, to answer respectfully, to avoid giving offence may be the marks of a gentleman; but they are not always the purposeful acts of a builder who is consciously using the trowel of brotherly love and affection. Acknowledging a Brother is not the same as responding to them, just as listening is no guarantee you have heard what was said. It is often said that a true friend is one who recognises and accepts another's faults and their prejudices as well as their virtues, and accepts them for what they are in the here and now. To reject them, no matter how carefully it is done, is still a rejection, an ingredient which can never ever be part of brotherly love and affection.

The great problem of our age is that of indifference. The number of trowels , that is to say Freemasons, lying idle is a cause for concern.

One of the widest held and most dangerous errors of our time is that a man is too busy to do something to help others. Whereas we often say that if you want something done give the job to a busy man. It seems the busier a man is, the more opportunities he has available to use the trowel of brotherly love and affection.

We go through life seemingly unaware, some might say 'oblivious' to the many opportunities available to practice the practise of brotherly love. Sometimes we obsess about the need to 'make a statement' and worse to leave a legacy, which often leaves us blind to the little tasks which lie close at hand and are well within our ability to perform. How sad it is that we miss the opportunity to spread the mortar of understanding and good will in the situation right in front of us.

And in this indifference may lie the greatest cause of the issues which are troubling Lodges today. In a distant, some will say simpler age, when Brethren knew each other and lived with each other's needs, successes and failures, Masonic charity and benevolence were the concern of almost every Freemason. They seemed to know when and how to use the trowel of brotherly love and understanding.

However, our society today has changed in that it has become less caring, less interested, less sociable and this has affected even our Masonic institutions. Sadly our Masonic Charities have become more corporatist, more clinical, more impersonal, box ticking machines, claiming the need to become more attuned to the times, seeking to justify change in the name of efficiency and ignoring the reality of effectiveness.

Every Freemason is an individual trowel but it/he needs to be employed. In our fragmented society the greatest need of our time is for men who understand friendship, morality, and brotherly love, the loss of individuality because of the need to conform makes Freemasons ideally suited to fill the need and to overcome the danger. But the trowel of every Master Mason must be prepared to go to work each day!

Just as operative masons use special tools for particular situations, so modern day Freemasons could learn to use specialised trowels for spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection. Operative crafts persons use corner trowels, curbing trowels, guttering trowels, brick trowels, pointing trowels, suitably designed, shaped and fashioned for a particular operation.

Freemasons may wish to use the trowels of appreciation, compliment, and congratulation to spread the mortar of esteem which community life requires, or to use the trowel of patience to spread the cement of respect and confidence without which democracy cannot function.

And how can a Freemason not use the trowel of respect for the dignity of every individual, to ensure personal freedom?

Finally, speculative Master Masons should consider using the trowels of kindness and gentleness, of compassion and service to all men, if they would spread the cement of genuine love and understanding.

Surely this is the great objective of Masonic education, to instruct Freemasons how to use their tools properly, especially the trowel. Just as an operative worker learns to use each trowel for a particular need or situation, so every Freemason must always use the trowel which symbolise the power of brotherly love and friendship.