

Coming Into the Light

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My Brother, on being brought to the light in this degree, you behold the Three Great Lights in Masonry, as in the proceeding degree, with this difference; both points of the compass are above the square, which is to teach that you have received, and are entitled to receive, all the light that can be conferred upon or communicated to you in a Master Mason's Lodge.

And with these words we, as Master Masons are once more brought into the light; greeted there by the Worshipful Master approaching us from the East as he has done in the past. Yet this time is different, this time we are almost completed. We have almost entered fully into that initial light we all sought when first asking about Masonry and its mysteries. The lights of truth, the lights of hope, the lights of knowledge and the lights of betterment. Betterment not just of ourselves as men but of our communities as a reflection of our devotion to ourselves, our brethren and that which is larger than all of us, the Grand Architect. But what does it mean to be brought to the light?

Have we never seen light before? Have we never stepped into the light whence departing a darkened theatre or upon the opening of our eyes as we are greeted by each new day. Certainly we all have; so why then is being brought to light Masonically so different? Perhaps because it is a testament not only to ourselves and others like us but also to our fellow human beings that we are daring to be more and do more as men. We know the undertaking we have taken upon ourselves and we understand the commitment it asks of us and yet we all take it fully and eagerly.

Not all men take this oath, not all men are worthy and even many of those who are worthy do not know they seek the light. They do not know the light is there for them to bask in if only they ask for it. They do not know they can be better than average

man, to be more and give more. To belong to a brotherhood that has stood the test of time and weathered some of the worst storms in human history; storms not always of the natural and meteorological kind but also of men, vanity, war, disease, death and more. Whenever a Brother has been in need, distressed, lost, searching or simply ready to go to his place in the grandest lodge of them all you can be assured that his Brother Masons have been there to aid him, to guide him and to comfort him. A Mason knows that no matter what differences he may have with another Brother that should he ever be in need that same Brother Mason will be there to bring him back into the light as it were, at least metaphorically; he also knows that this is his obligation as well and from that he should never waiver or fail. Nowhere is there a finer example of this than on the hallowed grounds of Gettysburg Pennsylvania etched forever in the monument to a Mason's brotherly love and commitment. This monument is known as the Friend to Friend Memorial.

The Friend to Friend memorial is a testament to Masonic Brotherhood overall but also to two men in particular; Confederate Brigadier General Lewis Addison Armistead and Union Captain Henry Harrison Bingham. These two men, both brother masons, had know each other for years and were good friends for much of their adult lives. In time, political differences and the suffering of a country split the two men apart as they each chose a side in this countries great Civil War. Both men fought valiantly and led their men well for the following 27 months, gaining the recognition of their superiors and promotions to high ranks of importance from their respective armies until one fateful day they were reunited on the bloody field of Gettysburg.

The story has it that General Armistead, on the 3rd day of battle at Gettysburg, formed the second wave of the attacking division hoping to strike the center of the Union Army. During the conflict, as he was leading his Virginians in the assault, he was mortally wounded. Hitting the ground hard and certainly knowing he was near death, General Armistead raised his hands and shouted as loud as he could the words of any Master Mason in distress. A union officer hearing the words over the turmoil and recognizing the gesture knew only that a Brother Mason was in distress and cared little for what uniform he wore or what beliefs he held about the politics of the day. Rushing to the aid of the fallen General was no other than his former friend and Masonic Brother, Captain Bingham. Bingham, also severely wounded in the attempt to rescue his fallen Masonic Brother, would spend months of his life in the hospital recovering from his efforts that day. General Armistead would die three days later in the field hospital at Gettysburg with his friend and Masonic Brother, Captain Bingham, by his side. He would die an honored man, a friend and a brother not a traitor or an enemy.

These two men, in what many consider this country's darkest days, brought one another into the light of Masonic Love and Brotherhood once more. Despite their differences, despite their feelings or prejudices and despite their wounds; they embraced their Masonic pledge above all other things and only saw a Brother Mason in need. Lending aid and comfort they were able to both be brought to the field hospital at Gettysburg where they reflected no doubt on their days of ole and their pledges of brotherhood to one another and to so many others like them. The Confederate General passed on his personal belongings to his friend and brother the Union Captain, entrusted

him to look in on his wife, give her these last possessions of his earthly self and then died.

So what then is so great about being brought into this proverbial light that would allow embroiled enemies actively engaged on the field of battle to completely forget their differences simply to lend aid to one another because they were Masonic Brothers above all else? Is it the knowledge contained therein? Is it some promise of hope or attainment? Is it some magical secret known only to the highest of Masonry? Or is it simply a way of being, not so much contained in the light as symbolized by it and by those who seek it. A way to look upon like minded men and see them equally, trust them whole heartedly and find comfort in them in your worst hour.

When first being raised to the Master Mason degree I reflected heavily on what I would say when asked if I had any comments to share with my new brethren. Not knowing what to expect or the importance of being brought into the light once more I actually had found myself reflecting on times when I had passed what I considered to be milestones in my life. Milestones which were, in their own right, a way of being brought into the light once more; or at least the light which represented the various stages of life for me along my path to adulthood and its unpredictable future.

As a young boy I was brought into the light of the world and cared for during those times by my parents. As a young man in my 20's and a US Army Ranger, I was brought into the light of adulthood, leadership, bravery, character and responsibility and cared for by my leaders and men who knew the same trials and tribulations I was facing. Then just after reaching my 40th year milestone I was brought into the light of mature adulthood by my brother Masons who I now trust will care for me during these years like

I will care for those who come after me. I also reflected upon my desire to be a member of this brotherhood for as far back as I can remember. I don't really know why other than to say it was as if I was being called to it by some ingrained part of myself. I knew I needed to go seek the light I was just unsure of how to do it. I feel that light is always calling us home, we simply need to learn how to listen and then act upon what we already know to be right.

I knew, and know, I was in the right place, with the right people and on the right path to being a better me. I was in the light and I wanted more of it. The beauty of all this now is that I am in the right place, with the right people who will help me find that light. Who will help me seek more light in Masonry through their tolerance, their benevolence, their kindness, their faith and their love. I have heard the light calling me home and I have accepted.