

## ***Meditation and Masonry***

Paper by Brother W.M. Joseph MacDonald IV°

Connecticut College MSRICF

I have been struggling to find a subject matter for a paper for part a long time. I thought about a wide range of subjects but nothing could pass the blank page. The ideas came constantly, but as soon as they came the reason not to write came too. I became frustrated with myself, my indecisiveness and total lack of action. The constant ebb and flow of life, of family and careers, failures, stress, success and rewards, emails trying to sell me everything under the sun, was like a broken window pane I was trying to look through. I could see what was there, but the details were out of place. I had become a 21<sup>st</sup> century modern man. Just like the computer and “smart phone” I feel so attached to, I was constantly devoting part of my energy to this task or that problem, without ever focusing wholly on anything. One night, as I “sat in” as Junior Warden a position with a lot of time to think, I thought, “there must be some way I could focus my mind and find some clarity,” and it hit me all at once, meditate.

Every culture has a form of meditation. It is often linked to a religion or spirituality but the goals, and the basic methods are always the same. There are beautiful religious aspects to meditation that span the globe, and spectrum of experience from mundane to truly life altering, but for the purpose of this paper meditation is simply an attempt to quiet the mind with a goal of self improvement. Allen Ginsberg, the “Beat Poet” wrote a song, “Do The Meditation Rock” that explain meditation in a very clear way, he says, “If you can’t think straight & you don’t know who to call/ it’s never too late to do nothing at all.” His method of meditation comes from Zen Buddhism. Zen is a very straight forward approach to meditation. It’s philosophy attempts to strip away all unnecessary methods and philosophies to move directly towards enlightenment, or for our purposes, a moment when an individual finds his true self. Ginsberg’s advice was obviously over simplified, but in practice it can be overwhelming. What he means and goes on to explain in the song is to truly sit quietly, both physically and mentally. The mental aspect is the trick. It is simple enough to sit and do nothing, but to sit and think

nothing can become very complicated. Minds, like Masons, are travelers, and wonder by nature. A meditator sits down, with the intention of thinking nothing, but that intention is a thought, and thinking is doing something and quickly the cycle starts and the mediation starts to break down. The meditator of course realizes he's moving away from his goal and attempts to focus his mind harder, which becomes a more intense action and moves him farther away from his goal. This is the dichotomy of Zen, to do nothing, is in itself an action, and therefore not "nothing," but something. Therefore, to meditate on doing nothing in order to clear the mind only clouds it further. Even having the initial intention of clearing the mind is a "something" and therefore a step away from the goal.

Why do you want a clear or Zen mind? There are as many reasons as there are minds. My goal, and the sort of basic, baseline goal of meditation is to free the mind from those "vices and superfluities of life." Vices in my case are mainly my vices of multitasking everything, all the time. When a meditator gets past those superfluities the mind is free, at least momentarily, to be calm and simply exist. Essentially, to return to a completely natural present. This can relieve stress, aid in creative endeavors, and recharge a mind so it is better equipped to deal with the inevitable aspects of the human condition. Also, I believe that human beings are born to be positive, and getting away from all those aspects of life and the mind that create and drive negativity can help us get back to our natural, and positive existence.

Zen, realizing that any intention, thought, or action is a step in the opposite direction has come up with some methods to trick the mind into a Zen experience. The most common method is the koan. This is a simple idea often a riddle to contemplate to keep the conscience mind busy so that the mind is allowed to slip into a quieted state almost by accident. The most famous koan, is "what is the sound of one hand clapping?" Another one which Zen has adopted is "what came first, the chicken or the egg?" These two work very well for a hyperactive mind because there is no definitive answer so the line of thought is infinite. Another method is the moving meditation. The idea of a moving meditation would seem to contradict the whole principal of Zen, but again by occupying the mind and body in this case can trick the mind into a Zen experience. Yoga and Tai Chi are structured moving meditations. The practitioners

know the movements, so their minds are occupied just enough and eventually become quiet and present.

Approaching Masonry with a Zen like mind, or truly open mind, can change your whole experience. Performing or witnessing a degree can be thought of as an moving meditation with a whole group. All of the rituals and movements are predetermined like yoga or Tia Chi so the participants' conscience minds are just occupied enough to strip away those superfluities of life and exist only in the moment. The Lodge is opened and the action of the Marshal "organizing the Lodge" could be thought of a preparation for meditation. Doors are shut to the outside world, and the space is visually inspected for out of place items, or in the case Cowan who could represent things unnecessary or negative to the goal. The officers explain their various duties re-enforcing many of the simple but very positive aspects of Masonry. This could be seen as considering what a clear or Zen mind might become before actually pursuing it. This opening also helps to focus the energy of the Lodge and helps each Officer and Brother align with the work of the evening.

A candidate enters the Lodge, both physically and on a conscience level. He is blindfolded for a couple of the reasons we already know. By being blindfolded, he is also forced to listen in order to understand what is happening around him. This automatically quiets his mind. The Officers guide him through Lodge where predetermined questions and answers are recited, again alluding to the positive morality of Masonry. The entire Lodge is able to contemplate both the moral lessons of Free Masonry as they are explained and performed in front of it, as well as whatever else might come up in an individual mind, while the Lodge, like a single conscience mind continues to move through the degree. The Officers form a "hollowed square" around the candidate, Worshipful Master, his volume of sacred laws, where he solemnly swears to abide by simple moral guides which help Brothers be positive contributing members of society. At that moment, the entire attention and energy of the Lodge is focused towards the candidate and he becomes a part of the Lodge. The Lodge and the candidate, like the conscience mind and the rest of existence in a Zen mind become one.