



## “The Chisel”

### ***Lodge Presentation:***

*The following short article is written with the intention to be read within an open Lodge, or in fellowship, to all the Masons in attendance. This article is appropriate to be presented to all Masons. Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Masons should be invited to participate when this topic is presented. Following this article is a list of discussion questions which should be presented immediately following the presentation of the article.*

### **The Chisel**

In our ritual for the Entered Apprentice Degree there is a lot of emphasis placed on the “rough ashlar” as the symbol of our “rude and imperfect state by nature”, and rightly so. The symbol of the rough ashlar and its never-ending transition to the perfect ashlar accurately illustrates the self-improvement nature of Freemasonry. These symbols clearly describes the transition that each of us are continually engaged in within our individual natures; engaging the working tools of a Mason so that each of us can become a better man.

In the ritual of the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, the Entered Apprentice is introduced to two working tools that can be described as “tools of action” or “tools for measuring and preparation”: the 24 inch gauge and the common gavel. These two working tools are explained as being useful to begin shaping our rough ashlar. In some Grand Jurisdictions, specifically those of England and Canada, a third working tool is introduced to the Entered Apprentice at this time, the chisel. While there is much to be said about the first two tools, this paper will focus on the chisel.

Operatively, the chisel is described as a small tool of iron or steel, harder and more durable than the stone so that when used properly, it will make a mark on or remove excess material from all but the hardest materials. It is easy to imagine an operative mason using a chisel at the quarry or on the worksite, along with his common gavel, slowly but steadily chipping away at the stone before him, removing the excess material and shaping for use by the builder. It enables the operative workman to precisely remove the bits of the stone that are not needed to obtain the finished product.

Speculatively, the chisel complements the gavel by reinforcing its symbolism in assisting to symbolically chip away at our imperfections. It is said to symbolize the effect of education on the mind. The chisel helps give form and regularity to the stone, so does education give form and regularity to our character by cultivating the ideas and by polishing our rude thoughts. William Preston, in “Illustrations of Masonry” elaborates its symbolism as one of the implements of Freemasonry: “The chisel demonstrates the advantages of discipline and education. The mind,



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like the diamond in its original state, is unpolished; but as the effects of the chisel on the external coat soon present to view the latent beauties of the diamond, so education discovers the latent virtues of the mind and draws them forth to range the large field of matter and space, in order to display the summit of human knowledge, our duty to God and man."

The chisel also demonstrates the advantages of discipline and perseverance. If you agree that the common gavel represents our conscience, breaking off the rough parts of our character enabling us to tell in an instant between the right and wrong course of action, then the chisel also teaches us that through discipline and perseverance we can make the fine adjustments to our character. In our efforts, we work towards perfecting our characters by slowly and steadily chipping away at our imperfections. It is not an easy transition, but one that takes countless hours of tireless labor.

It is these adjustments to our character that, as Masons, are necessary that we may recognize and correct our own individual faults so that we may better perform our duty to God and man. We are never satisfied with what we have attained to the point that we would admire our attainments rather than continue to smooth the sides of our character.

In practical terms, the symbolic intention of the chisel is to motivate each new candidate to devote himself to the continual process of learning, to know, to understand and to appreciate the many and complex elements that constitute modern society; in particular the contemporary environment in which he lives and is now obligated to make a useful contribution.<sup>1</sup>

Let us act as working tools of the Great Architect of the Universe and by chipping away the little pieces of the problem, transform the rough ashlar of our character and persevere it as perfect ashlar made perfect by our Fraternal efforts.

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Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of Wisconsin

<sup>1</sup> Extracted from "The Apprentice's Tools" on [www.masons.org.au](http://www.masons.org.au)



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### Discussion Questions

*The following discussion questions are written to be presented following the presentation of the topic above. The questions are designed to promote thought and engage all the members that are present in conversation. Take care that the presentation of the topic and the discussion questions does not exceed 30 minutes. The presenter can present any part of the questions below, or any additional questions, he feels is appropriate.*

- By the Masonic definition, what is the difference between a working tool and a symbol?
- How are the working tools of an Entered Apprentice used in conjunction with the other symbols he is exposed to in this degree?
- If a working tool or symbol is not explained in the ritual of the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, is it acceptable to discuss its operative or speculative use?
- Are there other working tools used in other jurisdictions that are not in Wisconsin’s ritual?
- How have you applied the speculative use of the chisel to your life?
- How would education help a Mason to smooth his character?
- Besides the chisel, are there other working tools or symbols in the Entered Apprentice degree we are encouraged to apply to our faults?
- Will a Mason ever obtain a perfect ashlar?
- Why, as men and Masons, should we never be content with the work we have made on our character, always working to improve it?