

The Chamber of Reflection

Impressions of a neophyte

It is the first place that the neophyte discovers on the D-day of the Initiation. I learn from the Master who prepares me that it is the test of the EARTH. The expert Brother leads me there blindfolded. I went down in the dark, only to find myself stripped of my metals, i.e. watch, purse, in this small room painted in black, lit by a candle. I especially remember that it was cold. The expert brother asked me to write a philosophical will by answering 3 questions. He will come to get it in due time. I am left alone in a deadly silence confronted with symbols that I will try to understand. This morbid-looking room with the appearance of a crypt takes on the meaning of a Chamber of Reflection when it comes to writing this will. But before filling it in, I explore the place in all its details!

Each of us has experienced this ordeal differently and has been able to give an account of it during his or her impressions of initiations. It was for me the most striking. This long wait facing myself at a moment that one knows is very important in one's life as a man creates the ideal conditions to take stock of what brought me to this place of my own free will. My intimate reflections, my anguish too, and a vague perception of a profound change participate in a metamorphosis of my being that I do not perceive at the time as being part of my initiation. I will become aware of it much later. Nevertheless I ask myself questions.

Why did I really knock on the door of the Temple? Am I ready to experience a profound change in my relationship with others and with myself? What will happen to me? I have a good feeling that the Initiation and my life afterwards will be different. But I have no idea what it will be. So in the face of uncertainty (*do I really belong?*), doubt overwhelms me. Fortunately, I pulled myself together by thinking back to my voluntary path towards masonry, to the steps I took, to the inquiries I answered in all sincerity, to the passage under the banner that impressed me. I got here by my own will. I know that this moment is unique. I want to live it fully and consciously.

The neophyte that I still am finds himself more in a chamber of curiosities than in a Chamber of Reflection, surrounded by symbols that appear as enigmas to which I try to make sense.

Some are understandable, others remain mysterious and disturbing like this word VITRIOL which reminds me more of an acid that burns the flesh than an acrostic whose meaning will remain unknown to me for a long time "visit the interior of the earth and by rectifying, you will find the hidden stone. This alchemist enigma leaves me perplexed. Yet it sums up the long work of the Brother Mason throughout his life!

And not knowing how to read or write, I only perceive the literal meaning of;

V::I::T::R::I::O::L::

This work on oneself is long and difficult. Learning helped me to measure the difficulty of this work that I must do on myself to progress. I must work rigorously to consolidate my knowledge of symbols, to give them a meaning that participates in my construction. What I understand in this sentence is "go down into yourself and by improving yourself you will find Wisdom". Learn to be yourself by refocusing on the heart of your being and by putting yourself in harmony with the outside world. The formula invites the neophyte to penetrate the dark world of the earth and to discover his deepest being. It is the work of a lifetime! Of course, it is a question of "rectifying", of making straight in the strict sense. The rectification is done in an upward movement: from the earth to the Light. It is done after the descent to the heart of this same earth, in the Chamber of Reflection after the symbolic death. To begin this long work, the mallet and the apprentice's chisel will help me to roughen my rough stone. And to guide me in this work, I also need the support of the Brothers of the Lodge! It is also a collective work.

Visit, Rectify and Find are the 3 verbs that make up the VITRIOL formula.

3 verbs for 3 stages.

At the stage of Apprentice, I visit the Temple as the interior of the earth, I observe the rites, the ritual, I listen to the boards of my Brothers. I also visit my own inner temple by observing my functioning, my defects and qualities. This stage corresponds to the symbolism of the plumb line,

the decoration of the 2nd Supervisor. The one who guides the work of the apprentices. We find there this notion of verticality.

Do the tools of the Journeyman allow for the rectification of the work begun? The level is the symbolic tool of this stage. And do the Master's tools help to finally find Wisdom? The square is the symbol. I hope to discover these steps in my future Masonic life.

The tools alone do not allow for progress. Regular and continuous work as well as the will of the Freemason are indispensable. "Vigilance and Perseverance" written on the banner near the rooster on the wall of the Chamber of Reflection echo this necessary personal work.

The mirror placed on the table is also a tool that helps to accomplish this descent into oneself. It is the revealer of my soul. To see myself differently, I must be able to rectify myself after having seen myself in my naked truth. The verb "*to reflect*" applies both to the light that reflects my image in the mirror and to my mind.

Sulfur, Mercury and Salt also remain mysterious to me. It is well after the Initiation that I will discover by a reading the meaning of these alchemical symbols. The opposite energies (Feminine / Mercury and masculine / sulfur) that the Salt crystallizes in a point of balance. This Salt is me, these energies are in me (the Salt of Life) I must first work to appropriate these symbols and to work to understand in my personality what is the responsibility of the Feminine and the Masculine, the Yin and the Yang. This analysis "*at the center of Me*" is done in stages, progressively, with the help of the symbols and by being able to be also my object of study.

But at the time of the earth test, this symbol remained for me a source of interrogation.

The symbols that appear as riddles that make sense are the skull, the mirror, the rooster, the bread and water, the hourglass and the prophecies written on the walls.

The skull, to remind us of our destiny: death, and the mirror that reflects my face next to this skull barely lit by a candle. I am in my grave, painted in black and I can only wonder about my own end: my death, my ultimate destiny.

This perspective paradoxically highlights the Life I must lead and the passing of time. Besides, the hourglass symbolizes this precious time that passes so quickly! And at the time of my Testament, I cannot escape this terrible question: what have I done with my life? What would be left of me if I died now?

These symbols that ask morbid questions are reinforced by these explicit sentences about the fate of the curious, the dishonest who might have a case of conscience here. They are addressed to me personally, beginning with:

- *"If you fear to be enlightened about your faults, you will be unwelcome among us".*
- *"If you are capable of concealment, tremble, you will be penetrated".*
- *"If your soul has felt fear, go no further.*
- *"Great sacrifices may be demanded of you, even the sacrifice of your life. Are you resigned to this?"*

I am not quoting all of them. There are seven of them. Another symbol.

Without really frightening me, these sentences force me to take stock of my real motivation and test my willingness to commit, up to the ultimate sacrifice eventually. I remember well my hesitation when during my initiation the Worshipful Master asked me at the time of the oath if I was ready to die to defend Freemasonry. Doubt is also part of my journey. My courage and my will must be stronger.

Through this questioning, the profane is dying, the new man is beginning to sprout.

But other symbols bring life and hope: this pitcher of water and this dry bread: basic and essential foods of our diet. It is enough to survive or be reborn. These symbols remind me of my essence: my body is made of water. The bread, fruit of man and wheat nourishes him.

This majestic and proud rooster brings hope in this closed and macabre space: it sings at dawn: it symbolizes the return to life. Thus, after having plunged into my own death, I can keep the hope of being reborn, as a new man.

Nevertheless, this new man is not born all at once and by magic after the initiation. I did not emerge from the trials transmuted. But something happened.

This something is the very definition of initiation:

Initiation = mutation / change of consciousness "going through death".

Dying to become / dying to the vulgar to become a free man / dying to the profane through initiation. Passage from a state considered inferior of the being to a superior state which incites us to work on ourselves. The Chamber of Reflection acts as a matrix in the depth of my being. It is the starting and ending point of my new life. The symbols act far beyond the chamber, little by little. I have left the Earth, I will inevitably return to it after my physical death. All these symbols observed separately in the Chamber of Reflection are coherent as a whole and participate in the transformation of the Profane.

All this progress, this questioning in front of these exposed symbols takes place because another symbol, not written, invades the chamber: the SILENCE. This silence which calms me far from the external agitation and allows a real meditation and descent in oneself. It is then the moment to turn to the writing of the philosophical will.

The philosophical testament: the questions asked concern the duties of Man towards himself, society and the Universe and force me to reflect on what I have done or not done in my life as a man before arriving here. This questioning was not simple. At first I found it presumptuous and tedious. I saw nothing to write about but impersonal banalities. Then I became aware of the mediocrity and narrowness of my lay life. These questions did not speak to me. Deep down, I was convinced that I had done nothing worth mentioning here. And the duty of Man, and therefore of myself, towards the Universe left me quite perplexed. What do I have to bequeath to the world to this day? What to write that does not seem presumptuous or too banal.

A brief aside:

I remember being relieved at my Initiation when the will was burned by the Worshipful Master. But it was during the Initiation of our Gerald that I saw with some uneasiness that the will was read to all the B Present before being burned!

Beyond the words and definitions, there is first of all an awareness that is maturing little by little: that really, my life, my personality will be different from this day on. I don't know how it will happen, but I have voluntarily started a process of mutation. I also have the impression that something is germinating in me. Maybe simply of myself: my new being, in the making. And this impression is symbolized by the rise to the surface when the Brother Expert comes to get me: From under the earth to the surface, I rise like a seed that sprouts. He holds my hand like a tutor. The fruit in the earth has rotted and in its core, the seed has been nourished by this same earth to germinate a new plant.

I appear as a Postulant for the Brothers of the Lodge, blindfolded, knees uncovered and shoulder bare.

I ascend to Life. I experience the verticality of my work as an apprentice. I will be qualified of neophyte when I will see the Light. Then received Apprentice at the end of the tests of the air, water and fire. All these stages constitute the process of the Initiation which begins with the Death. The death of the Profane that I was. I became aware of this symbolic death after several outfits and a progressive work of reflection on me. The consciousness of the change operated begins by a return in me of what I lived. It is a work of observation and analysis, of distancing myself from myself. The first step of VITRIOL: "*Visita Interiorem*"

Today I wonder a lot about my relationship with the world, with others:

I try to act as well as possible in conscience in all circumstances in the profane world. I "visit" myself to "rectify" my behavior.

Can I claim to participate in the construction of a better and fraternal world by being sometimes superficial and light? My progress is immense! I am also working on it with your fraternal support.

The work of mutation that began when I was in the Chamber of Reflection continues through listening in the Attire, and my work as an apprentice. I am aware without measuring the amplitude of the work that awaits me in my inner temple, in the Lodge and in the profane world.

I have Spoken W.:M.:

Bro.: R.: H.:

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