

The Chamber of Reflection

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Introduction

The *Chamber of Reflection* is one of Freemasonry's most alluring, provoking, and truly esoteric of symbols. From simple to more complex variations on the theme, the *Chamber of Reflection* forces each candidate to recognize that they are mortal, and from this moment forward, a new life awaits them, if they so chose it.

The Chamber of Reflection

"In the French and Scottish Rites, a small room adjoining the Lodge, in which, preparatory to initiation, the candidate is enclosed for the purpose of indulging in those serious meditations which its somber appearance and gloomy emblems with which it is furnished are calculated to produce. It is also used in some high degrees for a similar purpose. Its employment is very appropriate, for, as Gaedicke well observes, "It is only in solitude that we can deeply reflect upon our present or future undertakings, and blackness, darkness, or solitariness, is ever a symbol of death. A man who has undertaken a thing after mature reflection seldom turns back." (*Masonic Encyclopedia*, p.141)

This is the starting point for each Mason on their journey into the symbolic and dramatic realm of Freemasonry. It is a kind of twilight, in which the Candidate may turn back if they desire, but from which they will always be forever changed. Even if they chose, or in some instances fail, to progress through the Work of the remaining Blue Lodge degrees, they will be changed by their experiences in the outer chamber which forces them to reflect upon their reason for wishing to become a Mason, and as such, for all their actions in life.

For the Hermetic Qabalist, the *Chamber of Reflection* resides upon the 32nd Path of the Tree of Life, and its symbolism is rich in the metaphors of death, time, transition, and illusion.

Qabalists claim that through his mastery of this Path, King David, the father of King Solomon, one of the three the principle figures in modern (post 1717AD) Freemasonry, meditated nightly under his covers, as such, the idea of having a small room or corner of a room, set aside for meditation and prayer has held a special place in Judaism. With this in mind, one can read the *Psalms of David* and see that many express meditative states of consciousness that can only be understood by people who have experienced similar states either through ritual, prayer, and meditation, or spontaneously.

After the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, the role of meditation declined and was relegated to special schools that became the source of the mystical teachings within Judaism, and later Western Europe during the Renaissance.

In an attempt to resurrect these old schools of practice, the Pharasees, or *Secluded Ones*, evolved, who during their formative years would haunt deserted places, caves, ruins, or even seclude themselves in their own homes in an attempt to converse with God as had their ancient forbearers.

A Personal Chamber of Reflection

Just as each candidate for Masonry must enter into a world of isolation, to be alone with their own thoughts, and to contemplate the effects of their actions on themselves and others, each of us has the right and obligation to create for ourselves a personal *Chamber of Reflection*, into which

we can retire daily for contemplation and meditation. In all spiritual, esoteric, mystical, and religious traditions, it is common and encouraged for practitioners, or ‘laborers’ in Masonic terms, to have a personal place for meditation, prayer, and ritual – the three tools the Apprentice must learn if they are to commune with the Master Within.

There, isolated from the profane world, alone with our thoughts, our conscience, and our consciousness, we can enter into a twilight land between self and Self for communication with our “Inner Master”. This ‘Master’ is nothing other than the spark of the Divine within us that thoughtfully and carefully has laid out a plan for our Return to Unity from which we came. Under its watchful omniscient vision we can go through life as one of the many who unconsciously learn through the hard means of trial and error, or we can seek inner dialogue and communication with it, and listen to the wisdom that it has to offer. In doing so, we can learn, albeit see, the effects of our actions on our immortal consciousness, and in doing so, avoid that which is painful and delays our return, and speed up our elevation to that status of a true Master Builder in the Temple of the Divine Architect of the Universe.

This personal chamber will in many ways be a small version, or microcosm, of the archetypal *Chamber* we experienced upon our entry into the Path of Freemasonry. Just as our soul – our veritable consciousness – is a perfect reflection of the Cosmos, but in miniature – so too will our *Chamber of Reflection* be a perfect model of the ideal we saw and experienced.

Things Needed

- 1) Table or desk
- 2) Chair
- 3) Mirror
- 4) Hourglass
- 5) Three Candles and Candle Snuffer
- 6) Small Image of the “Grim Reaper” such as is traditionally shown on the Tarot Card – Death (Marseilles Deck)
- 7) Notebook to record our Inner Revelations
- 8) Equilateral triangle of black cloth or cardboard
- 9) Small model of a human skull if possible, or a drawing that includes the crossed thigh bones.
- 10) Symbols of the Elements used in Alchemy and Qabala.
- 11) A small container of salt, fresh sea salt is preferred
- 12) A small container or glass of water
- 13) A small piece of bread
- 14) A small piece of Sulphur
- 15) A cockerel, with the words – vigilance and perseverance written above and below it.
- 16) A sign that reads VITRIOL

If one so chooses, many of the above images may be compiled into a single image, similar to the trestle boards. However, the more actual material pieces one has present before them, the more concrete and significant the experience will be in the beginning stages.

Not all of the pieces will be used at once, and a small box or container should be maintained for their protection. Wrap them in silk, or some fine blue fabric, fringed in gold if you like, when not using them.

The Symbols and Their Meaning

The symbols used in the *Chamber of Reflection*, like all of those in Freemasonry, can be found in the various Hermetic, Alchemical, and Qabalistic texts which are its source and inspiration. The *Chamber* itself is a modern convention made and perfected by human hands and ideals that utilize the ancient symbolic connection between the images of life and death, the womb and the tomb, that constantly reappear in the initiatic traditions. Caves, huts, isolated and desolate temples, or even tents set up for this experience, have all be used in the past to simultaneously represent both the tomb where we die to one world or phase of life, and the womb that gives birth to another.

The following symbols are taken from the French Rite. Some systems use only the skull, candle, and writing implements for the crafting of one's Masonic Will. The more images you work with over time, the more you will get out of the experience. Feel free to start simply and to progress through as many symbols as you like at your own pace.

Things Needed

Table or **desk** will act as our altar or place of work, where we remove the rough edges of our personality to allow the inner light to shine through.

Mirror, while not present in all *Chambers of Reflection*, act as our mechanism for triggering inner 'reflections' or meditative states. It represents duality, as well as the presence of the Inner Master from whom we can never hide, lie, nor deceive, and from whom all truths are revealed for the Apprentice in the form of 'reflections' or symbols. The mirror is a traditional tool for communicating with various levels of consciousness, experiencing interior states of being, and entering into the twilight land between this world and the next.

Hourglass represents the passing and marking of time, as well as the ability of the human consciousness, or soul, to experience 'timelessness' or genuine immortality despite the passing of earthly things. Only when 'time stops', or as the Old Testament magician Daniel (Lit. 'Fear of God') describes it making 'the sun stand still', can we experience our true nature, our past, and future, as our Creator intended it to be. This is the meaning of the All Seeing eye. For if the eye were to close for a second, as Eastern lore tells us, Creation would cease to be. In becoming Illumined, filled with Light, we also become 'awake' to the true nature of ourselves, creation, and the Cosmos.

The story of Daniel is linked to the spiritual significance of the sun as both symbol of physical and spiritual light. Daniel was cast into the 'Lion's Den' or House of the Lion, (the Sign of Leo), which through the royal image of the lion is associated with the sun. One can say, that at this time of the year, in or near the Sign of Leo, it is possible to neutralize our 'animal' or physical instincts long enough to have an experience of our inner, solar or spiritual nature, to such a degree, that we venture near an experience of 'Eternity' if we too enter into prayer in our 'upper chamber' as did Daniel before us.

A Scythe, or small image of the "Grim Reaper," such as is traditionally shown on the Tarot Card Death represents the fragility and mortality of human life and the need to be awake and alert to the reality of change and transformation that is constantly going on around and inside of us. Death on one place give rebirth on another. It is also a symbol of Universal Justice, for "as we sow so shall we reap".

Salt is the symbol of all life and purity. It represents the most fundamental matrix of physical life. It is also the symbol of the 'Elect', or those who by free will and choice elect to serve deity and to become craftsman in the building of the Divine Temple on Earth.

Water the source of life and is connected to the symbol of salt in that salt comes from sea water, and is necessary for the retention of water by living organisms. It is the vehicle for psychic or emotional life, as is seen in our tears, our blood, and sexual fluids.

Bread is the transformation of the vegetable world, through the use of the scythe and fire (the candle) into a processed form of energy and life sustaining product. Through the proper use of our skills we can create life sustaining, and therefore consciousness sustaining, products that advance human life and well being. It is the symbol of work, but also in some ways of the Great Work, in that each is paid according to his labor. “Man does not live by bread alone – but by the Word of the Living God (Shaddi El Chai)”.

Sulphur is the alchemical symbol for consciousness, and is seen as the soul of the mineral world. Native, unprocessed sulphur is preferred.

Cockerel is the symbol for the coming dawn after the darkness of ignorance and fear. It is also the omen foretelling spiritual trial and testing. It was Peter who acknowledged the Light of Christ when among his peers, but denied him three times when confronted by enemies before the crowing of the cock. Just as we need vigilance and perseverance to seek truth and the light of our Inner Master, we must also have the courage to acknowledge it when our social standing, ego, and perception from others challenge it. If we accept the inner light when it is safe and deny it when it is dangerous then we are unworthy to sit at the table of the Inner Master and eat his spiritual bread.

VITRIOL – An alchemical anagram instructing us that all truth is found within our own consciousness, but while we are still within human form. That through its ‘rectification’ or making straight, true, and right, we can discover this Philosophic Stone, and place it the edifice that is the Temple of Solomon. V.I.T.R.I.O.L. “Visita Interiora Terrae Rectifando Invenies Occultum Lapidem - Visit the interior of the earth, in purifying you discover the hidden Stone.”

Black Equilateral Triangle this is the symbol of manifestation, of matter, Saturn and all things concrete, and yet passing. It points towards us, as energy moves from the lower to the higher, and we are but Dwellers in the Outer Darkness seeking the Light, but before we can be found worthy, our Inner Master (our pure spark of Divine Consciousness) will test us and force us to die to all that is lowly and beneath our station as Builders of the Inner Temple.

Human Skull and Crossed Thigh Bones – Symbols of mortality, but also strength and virility. They are crossed just as the ancient symbol of this Path on the Tree of Life was also an ‘X’ cross, and the scythe of Saturn, reaping its Children back to the Light. We must be willing to sacrifice all for our Brothers, as well as humanity, if we are to achieve our goal of illumination on this Path. The thighbones represent strength, as well as sexual power, and placing the head between them shows the relationship between life and death. The French phrase, ‘petite morte’ or ‘little death’ to suggest the loss of life force through sexual acts, acts that in themselves are designed to create new avenues of life, gives us some thoughts to consider when thinking about the circle of life.

The Elements are the composite parts of which all things are made. They are the building blocks of life as understood by the ancient philosophers, and through their harmonization and bringing together in proper proportion the “Royal Art” or creation of the Philosophic Stone is competed. By balancing our Elements we bring harmony into our lives and the world.

The Written Will symbolizes our hearts desire, the true inner expression of our human personality as we seek to transcend it and enter into the Divine world. It is read before us during the initiation and before all present, as we can hide nothing from our Inner Self, those who have gone before us on the Path and achieve the Illumination we seek, or Deity. In the end, all things are revealed to us for what they are. As part of our ongoing journey, the notebook symbolizes this form of inner revelation and communication between the many levels of our consciousness as we journey on the Path of the Mysteries.

Entering the Chamber

Reflect upon what you were told upon your entering the *Chamber* prior to your admission into the mysteries. Remember the words of your guide, seek meaning from them, something that lies beneath the surface, that suggests other worldly values and concerns.

If you were admitted to a lodge that did not use the *Chamber of Reflection* take the extra time to meditate on the symbols presented and their meaning in your life.

Sit before your symbols, and relax. Breathe deep several times, hold your breath for as long as is comfortable, and exhale slowly out your nose. Do this several times, for two or three minutes, with your eyes closed, or relaxed, gazing gently at the lit candle before you, and then being.

Offer a personal prayer to the Grand Architect of the Universe, the God of Creation, with whom you seek a better understanding of in your heart, or consciousness. Ask that you may be a better student of the Masonic Mysteries and a worthy Worker in the Creation of the Heavenly Temple on earth for all humans to enjoy. Ask that all living creatures be free from needless suffering and be guided into perfectly expressing the light of the divine that created them. Make this a regular part of your practice.

Pick a symbol. Write or draw it in your notebook. Imagine it, meditate upon it, using the total powers of your consciousness and senses, and allow meaning to unfold for you.

Write down what ever you experience. You may switch symbols daily for a week, or simply stay with one for a week to ten days. Rotate through the symbols several times if you change them daily, so as to get allow them to sink deeply into your consciousness.

Just as we must work unceasingly to learn outer skills and techniques for achievements in the material world, we must labor equally hard, if not harder, to manifest our labors in our inner worlds – the true labor of the Mason – the Temple build not with human hands but in which the Divine Architect dwells Eternally.

If your dreams change, and you find yourself dreaming more often, intensely, or with dreams that contain Masonic symbols, write them down. This is a good sign and means you are impressing the images upon your consciousness, and the language of symbols is speaking back to you from deeper regions of the soul. Dreams are the beginning of the journey to upper stories of the Inner Temple.

After you have spent some time meditating on all of the symbols present in the *Chamber of Reflection*, usually between three to six months, you may begin to work with the symbolism of the Mirror in a practical manner. There are two principle methods to use, one develops the concentration of each student's and has general uses with a variety of symbols, and the other which is an attempt at direct communication with our 'Master of the Inner Temple'.

Method One

Prepare your oratory, or 'Chamber of Reflection' as instructed previously. Obtain a mirror of sufficient size to allow you to see your upper body, from the level of the heart upward, and head in a comfortable manner. Limit your light to one or two candles, and no electrical light, placed at the sides of the mirror so as not to cast a reflection. When one candle is used, it is placed in front of the mirror and lit, then moved off to the side. In some instance the candle can be placed above the center of the mirror, or directly behind where you are sitting. The single candle represents Unity. When it is moved towards the Pillar of Severity – Boaz, it represents the essential limiting and form producing aspects of primitive Divinity. When it is moved towards the Pillar of Joachim it represents the primitive forces of expansion in Deity. When left in place, it is the primordial and essential Unity of creation seeking to Become, or evolve, as stated in its Divine Name – Ehieh – or 'Becoming' which Moses heard when he saw the 'Burning Bush'.

In this case, we seek to balance the energies within, so two candles are used, one towards each side of the mirror.

Sit before the mirror with your back straight, feet flat on the floor, in comfortable clothes, or a loose fitting robe. Hands should be in your lap, palms down, close to your hips to avoid strain on your elbows and shoulders. Breathe deeply, hold it gently, exhale slowly, and hold out as long as is comfortable. All breathing should be done through your nose, and is carried on for 3 to 4 minutes. Feel and imagine that the energy of the breath fills your being, all tension, illness, and disturbances are expelled, and you are at peace. Your eyes should be closed, or half-closed and gazing gently into the mirror or at its top edge.

Allow your vision to defocus. Relax your eyes. Focus on the bridge of your nose, and continue breathing in a relaxed and natural manner. You may notice after several attempts that the edges of the mirror appear to shimmer and darkness grows inward over the glass. This is good and shows that your inner energies are being balanced and the unconscious, or psychic part is raising to the surface.

If the entire surface of the mirror goes black, move your gaze slowly to your heart.

You may notice that as your heart beats, a small pulse starts in the center of the mirror and moves outward. Suddenly the mirror will appear to 'open up' as a shining surface of silver, white, or simply opaque appears. This state is very fragile and is easily lost if concentration is broken wither through strain or laxness.

Hold this for several seconds. Once you are able to hold it for a second or two, imagine one of the symbols of the Chamber in the mirror, or on the surface of the mirror, as if it were a television or something that is projecting an image and not just reflecting it.

These images can also be fixed in your mind even if the black stage is not obtained or held, through visualizing them projected on, or in, the mirror surface.

This exercise is difficult and should be done often in the evening, and especially near the full and waxing moon cycles.

If this exercise is continued for several weeks or even a month or so, your dream life will pick up significantly.

When done, breath deep again. Know that you are done for the evening, and snuff out your candles. Never blow out your candles as it is considered disrespectful.

Method Two

The following method involves a series of statements designed to trigger an interior response. It constitutes in its own way a form of self-initiation and can be very powerful in its effects. Carefully record your responses.

Prepare your *Chamber of Reflection* in your usual manner.

After having performed the preliminary breathing and relaxation techniques, gaze into the mirror at the level of your eyebrows and repeat the following softly to yourself. If you have the small hourglass with you, turn it sideways after reading each question so the sand stops running, leaving some sand in both halves of the glass. This may help to trigger a response, or transition, between the inner and outer aspects of awareness. Pause, and look into the mirror for a minute or two, focusing gently at the nape of your nose, between your eyes:

- 1) "Body you are just flesh and as such mortal. All things of this earth are but dust, covering the Light within, that is the immortal consciousness that I am." (pause)
- 2) "All creation is but a reflection of the Divine image. As builders of our life, we create as the Cosmos has created. I am but an image of my own creation." (pause)
- 3) "Life and death, energy and matter, these are but one thing. To awaken to the spiritual world I must die to the physical one. In doing so, I fear not death, but a life not lived in accordance with my highest virtues." (pause)
- 4) "Matter is form, spirit is the ideal. As Master Craftsman of my life, I make form into ideal, and the ideal into form." (pause)
- 5) "In the mirror of my soul, my immortal consciousness, is recorded the actions of my life. It is there, in the Chamber of my heart, I answer to my conscience daily, or at the end of my days. It is there that I see myself for what I am, and what I am becoming." (pause)
- 6) "Time is only of this world. I am a Child of the Cosmos, born of the womb of Eternity, kissed by the lips of Silence, fed by the bosom of Peace Profound." (pause)
- 7) "In the beginning there was Nothingness, and the Nothingness was God. God created, and all things came into being through the Becoming of God. All things are of God, from God, and can only be God. I am created in the Divine image of God, and as such, I am God." (pause)

"Oh Inner Master, Builder of the Temple, reveal to me myself as I have made myself. Reveal myself as the Cosmos (Grand Architect) sees me! Self unto self will speak, self unto Self will speak."

Sit for five or six minutes gazing softly at your image in the mirror, focusing on the nape of the nose. Pay careful attention to what you will see.

Allow your gaze to be relaxed as you do this.

Record the date and time in which you first undertake this exercise in your notebook. If possible, perform it on a Monday evening, near or on a full moon, although this is not essential.

The Temple

Once we have spent some time working with the symbols of the *Chamber of Reflection*, we can transform our personal Chamber into a working Temple and delve deeper into our personal understanding of the Masonic mysteries.

For this we will need:

- 1) Pillars of the Temple
- 2) Three Candles and Candle Snuffer
- 3) Volume of the Sacred Law
- 4) Notebook to record our Inner Revelations
- 5) Masonic Apron if so chosen.
- 6) Triangle and Compass
- 7) Small drawing of the Three Luminaries – Sun, Moon, and Seven Stars
- 8) Small 10x10 inch checkerboard of black and white squares.
- 9) Small gavel or rapper.

This will be discussed in the next paper in this series.

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