Brethren,

Freemasonry is a fraternal organization based on some very simple ideas, namely, belief in a higher power, belief in a universal brotherhood of Man, and a belief in an afterlife. The internet puts into our hands a vast reservoir of information and perspectives. I had a chance to look at your website and have lifted some of the language there; combined it with an actual testimonial, my own thoughts and perspective.

Ultimately, I want to leave you with a perspective, lesson and a challenge.

The following is from [http://www.ancientlandmarks654.com](http://www.ancientlandmarks654.com/)

“As a fraternity, Freemasonry provides an opportunity for men to meet and enjoy friendly companionship. In the spirit of helpfulness and brotherly love and guided by strict moral principles it encourages goodwill toward all mankind. Freemasonry is of a personal nature in its private ceremonies. Its ritual dramatizes a philosophy of life based on morality. It promotes self improvement. The tools of operative masons are used to symbolize and teach the basic principles of brotherly love, charity, and truth which Masons are encouraged to practice in their daily lives. Charity is a tangible way in which Masons help those whose circumstances in life fairly warrant it.”

Brethren, the group congregated here believe those words, and that can be a challenge. In the book **Thriving on Chaos, Tom Peters** talks about the need for vision and understanding of the “Customer Perspective” in it he states:

“Each of us carries around a crippling disadvantage; we know and probably cherish our product. After all we live with it day in and day out. But that blinds us to why the customer may hate it –or love it. Our customers see the product through an entirely different set of lenses. Education is not the answer; listening and adapting is.”

I found a blog about freemasonry “**My Masonic Journey or Why I left**.” It provides that different perspective that I want to explore tonight.  
  
“All of these Masonic authors painted Freemasonry as a universal brotherhood, dedicated to all that is good and just in the world. And the occult Masonic authors also voiced their belief that Freemasonry was in possession of esoteric and arcane wisdom that would lead one closer to God, and allow him to become a benefactor in service to mankind. So naturally, I was very excited when I was informed that I had been elected for initiation and membership. I was looking very forward to the journey that lied ahead, and becoming part of this order that recognized all men as brothers, regardless of race, color, or creed, and all under the benevolent fatherhood of God.  
  
I paid my initiation fees, and anxiously awaited the night that I would become an Entered Apprentice. Finally that night arrived, and I received the first degree of Masonry. By the time I left the lodge that night, words cannot describe how disappointed I was in what I had just taken. All these years later, I'm not exactly sure what I expected....but it certainly wasn't what I actually went through. The actual ceremony of initiation seemed silly instead of enlightening. The officers kept flubbing their lines, and all I keep thinking was that these guys were in desperate need of practice. Following the actual ritual, there was a session of mild hazing, and then a lecture was given on the ritual's symbolism. The lecture consisted mostly of biblical allusions and simple moral instructions known to every schoolboy.  
  
At that point, I was unsure if I was going to continue. I addressed my concerns to my sponsor, but he assured me the best was yet to come. So I decided to continue and to become a Master Mason…… Throughout this Masonic journey, I constantly was second-guessing myself. I had been indoctrinated into the Masonic notion, which is taken for granted among Masons, that there is something vastly important in Freemasonry for humanity, and that it must be defended and preserved at all costs.

But everywhere I turned, I saw things that told me the complete opposite. None of the men I talked to actually knew what the rituals and symbols meant, or even cared. They would repeat their lines in the ritual about universal brotherhood, and then,… I was also let down by constant bickering and backstabbing. These people called each other "brother" to their faces, but were constantly denigrating each other behind turned backs. And it was all so petty, all the time.”

The interesting thing about this blog is that the member became a Worshipful Master and still kept bemoaning the issues he had with the Work, the ritual and the hypocrisy he saw.

So tonight, I want to consider what could have been done to change this member’s perspective.  
  
I would have told him that Masonry is a continual journey of self-enlightenment. In each degree we are given opportunities to consider a broader perspective. But the Ritual is just the tip of the iceberg. Done well it sparks a curiosity and feeds a desire to know more, to become self-aware, live up to the promise the supreme being inculcates and expects from all of us. And ultimately to reflect on the most important of all studies; to know yourself.

The first degree is the most literal example of enlightenment. Consider that you went from Mister to Brother at the altar. You asked to be restored to the material blessing of light, and your perspective is forever changed. You see the light, with lessons imparted to you from the four great challenges…

First "Do you feel anything?" That first incident was designed to intimate that you were about to engage in something serious and solemn.

Second "Are you free?" Then, when you vowed that you were unfettered, body, mind and soul, the blessings of the Almighty was invoked on the proceedings.

Third "In all cases of difficulty and danger, in whom do you put your trust?" There is, of course, only one answer, but that answer is the confession of a simple faith - the simple faith of Masonry. We do not enquire a candidate's religion, but we do insist on a belief in a Supreme Being - faith in the Great Architect of the Universe is the rock foundation on which the whole Masonic edifice is built.

Then the fourth challenge, would you give if you could? To practice charity; when we see a need we fill it and in silence, because whatever aid we render to our distressed Brother will forever remain a secret between the giver and the receiver.

Finally I would have focused his thoughts. Mentioning that after you have received the light you were taught the first step in Masonry, the initial secrets and that the Harmony of the Lodge was paramount, to meet as brothers, work to maintain harmony and maintain a life upholding our values. We work together in harmony, to enlighten ourselves and each other, and celebrate our fraternal bonds. All this is contained in just the first degree. Yet the lessons fell on unfurrowed ground.

“Education is not the answer; listening and adapting is.” As a Past Master, a member, a sponsor, a mentor, or a Brother, the challenge to all of us is to work with our newer members. Ask them what they thought, experienced, and expected. Help them find the answers they seek.

Lastly, the challenge, that I believe everyone here has already accepted. Live our values, be by your conduct, the example you wish everyone to emulate.

Finally, be aware that ultimately the secret of enlightenment in masonry lies between both points of the compass. The three degrees help you prepare the way, and when you have the answer, you know it. But until they have it as well, you can’t explain it.

Note: the Four Challenges listed above are derived from:  
  
 “A Journey Through the First degree”  
MASONIC EDUCATION COURSE  
W.Bro. Kent Henderson  
Past Junior Grand Deacon,  
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