

THE ASHLAR

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What Is An Ashlar?

An ashlar is finely dressed stone, either an individual stone that has been worked until squared, or a structure built from such stones. Ashlar is the finest stone masonry unit, generally rectangular cuboid, less frequently trapezoidal, mentioned by Vitruvius as opus isodomum, or “work of equal height”. It is stone mined from a quarry to be used in construction as an alternative to bricks or other building materials. After removing it from the quarry, stonemasons use chisels and other tools to refine and smooth the rough stone to give it a more finished appearance. They are designed to fit together tightly, with little or no mortar, and are set down in horizontal layers, creating strong and sturdy structures. ASHLAR means hewn or squared stone.

Rough Ashlar

The rough ashlar represents an unprepared, undressed stone in Operative Freemasonry. In Speculative Freemasonry, a rough ashlar represents an uninitiated Freemason before he becomes enlightened. There are other messages contained within the Rough Ashlar. There are the internal messages concerning the quality, potential, and character of the stone. The stone must be of good quality and possess the potential to be a "perfect" stone in its use. It must have no flaws of character, which may cause it to weaken in its purpose or use. Thus, when we look at a candidate for the degrees, we should look carefully at their qualifications and character. The candidate must be of sound quality and have the potential to serve and support our Fraternity. He must be carefully inspected, as the Rough Ashlar, in order that he "fit" in the design of Freemasonry, its tenets, and goals. Just as one bad stone could ruin the exterior of a building, or weaken the overall structure, so one flawed Rough Ashlar can bring censure and reproach upon the Fraternity, and thus weaken Freemasonry in the eyes of the outer world. Some stones may have blemishes or geomorphological faults, but rather than weaken the stone, it in fact would add beauty and or quality. An example of this is Quartzite that can be found in Granite, so be very efficient when doing an investigation on a potential candidate as what may seem as irregularities could be strengths in character or disposition.

Perfect Ashlar

The perfect ashlar is the dressed stone that has been shaped, smoothed, and made uniform with the mallet, chisel, utensils and other working tools. The chisel is used in English Freemasonry, but it isn't used as a Freemason symbol in the United States.

Of particular importance to the Fellowcraft Degree are the Rough and Perfect Ashlars, two stones marking a path for self-improvement for the initiate. The lessons outlined in this degree rely upon many symbols concerning education and the gaining of knowledge as a means of advancing, both morally and spiritually. However, there are other lessons to be gained by examining the stones themselves, notably the Rough Ashlar. Operative Master Masons can take a perfectly squared ashlar and work or change it for the benefit of

repurposing it for the builder's use. Examples are turning an oblong stone into a keystone or adding etching to create a corner stone or even a headstone, etc.

Dressed For The Builder's Use

In the days of old, quarried stone that could easily be shaped into the required configurations were called 'freestone.' Examples of freestone are sandstone, limestone, argillite, feldspar and geologically related rock or stone. These rough stones must be refined and smoothed before they could be used.

In the Fellowcraft degree, the Rough Ashlar represents the unrefined state of a man and the need for the man to be improved. The unrefined man learns that he could become a better man through better conduct and better spirituality of thought. He is charged to become a better person through obligations, expectations, and duties.

A Freemason continually smoothens his external and internal rough edges or chips away at those vices and superfluties to become a better man and a better Freemason.

The Prospect of Change

All rough ashlars have the potential to become perfect ashlars. But first, the rough ashlar must be made of solid materials and their character flaws must be minimal. They must be receptive to change, and they must be capable of being worked into a perfect stone. In line with this, candidates for each Masonic degree are asked a lot of questions to know more about their characters, their qualifications and disposition and demeanor.

Candidates must have the capability to serve and support the Brotherhood. They must be carefully inspected to certify that they can fit into Masonic goals and tenets and remain compatible with God's laws.

An imperfect ashlar can be made perfect, but some major flaws are difficult to change, and these flaws can weaken a structure when the ashlar is fitted into the structure. This applies to both men and stone.

Condition of Vacillating

Freemasonry is a noble and ancient Brotherhood with a long history. A flawed ashlar can bring in negative thoughts, reproach, and embarrassment to the Brotherhood from non-Freemasons outside the Esprit de corps. So, flawed ashlars can't be allowed to join our Brotherhood.

We must also understand that perfect ashlars can't just be found in the stone quarries. They must be hammered, chiseled, and polished before they attain their perfect state.

It's hard to find 'perfect men' that exist without Brotherly light, guidance, and love. It's not easy to find Freemasons that have not been in the state of rough and imperfect ashlars at some point in their lives.

How Can We Contribute to the Making of Perfect Ashlars?

1. Brothers must seriously consider their personal responsibility to educate other Brothers towards their improvement. We get enlightened when we assist others and donate to those in need. Master Masons uphold the tenets of the craft and teach other Brothers what they have learned.
2. All Lodges should take time in judging the potential of a candidate. They must weigh their characters and evaluate their potential for change.
3. All Freemasons must extend a friendly hand of affection and love, to help new brothers become better people. We must help them stand upright with the plumb, live on the square and become true Freemasons who will make the Creator proud of them.
4. In the first degree, the rough stone is pointed out to the initiate and then he is directed to then notice the perfect ashlar. This is an inviolable guide and cause for pause to figure out how to achieve that perfect state? To accomplish this we have to make use of the working tools that are given to us and explained in all the degrees since we cannot be made perfect without the gauge to measure and lay out our work, the common gavel to chip away the rough parts of stone, the square to secure perfect angles and sides, the plumb to prove verticals, etc. and only by use of the tools are we then able to create or achieve the perfect ashlar.

We should also note that there are no dimensions for the perfect ashlar, so it can be a 4 inch granite cube and a 3 ton quadrilateral conglomerate block, we choose our base material and it depends on each brother how long and arduous he chooses to get to the perfect stone and together with perfection can the most beautiful buildings and edifices be erected.