

## Passion as the Pathway to Perfection

MW Bro. Dean Elliott, Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan

Grand Lodge of Alberta Weekend Without Titles

March 11, 2023

Gentlemen, the genesis for this speech came about while I was watching the Mexico City Formula 1 race last November. That probably tells you I'm not here to tell you about the proper way for the Deacons to hold their wands while at work in the Lodge or whether Ancient York Rite is better than Canadian Rite 😊

Rather, I am here to talk about **Passion as the Pathway to Perfection**.

In June 2008, Nelson Mandela, the late South African president, celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. A few months later, Sir Lewis Hamilton, then a driver for McLaren Racing, won the first of his seven Formula One world championships.

When Hamilton attended Mandela's birthday celebration in London, he was invited to meet Mandela privately at his home in Johannesburg. The meeting was a significant moment for Hamilton, who has spoken about the profound impact Mandela had on his life and worldview. In interviews following the meeting, Hamilton described Mandela as an inspiration and a role model, noting that the two had discussed their shared passion for using their platforms to make a positive impact in the world.

Hamilton has continued to honor Mandela's legacy in the years since their meeting, using his platform to speak out on a range of social and

environmental issues and advocating for greater diversity and inclusion in motorsports.

Asked as to the best piece of advice he has been given, alongside his father Anthony's mantra of "never give up", which has become ingrained in Hamilton's psyche, he again referenced Mandela and the words spoken to him.

"You will always be learning' and that's what I learned from Nelson Mandela," recalled Hamilton.

"He was like, 'I'm 90, I'm still learning today and it's okay to be learning'. You're always going to be learning something new and growing yourself."

So why reference this story and these two men to start my speech today? Firstly, I hope that you all believe in the importance of continuing to learn and grow in all aspects of your life, but particularly in Freemasonry. Secondly, their examples can help us learn more about how passion can drive men to succeed despite the many obstacles that life may present us.

## **Nelson Mandela**

Nelson Mandela was the first black head of state in South Africa, serving as the first president of the country from 1994 to 1999. His government focused on dismantling the legacy of apartheid through racial reconciliation.

Mandela studied law at the University of Witwatersrand, where he was the only black African student and subjected to considerable racism. These early experiences led him to becoming involved in African nationalistic politics in the mid-1940s, mainly through the African National Congress. Although initially committed to non-violent protests

through defiance campaigns, he later concluded that violent action would be necessary to end apartheid and white minority rule. He co-founded a militant organization based on ideas of guerrilla warfare learned from Che Guevara and Mao Zedong and led a campaign of sabotage against the government. In 1956 he was arrested for “high treason”, for which he eventually spent 27 years in prison, spending much of his time in solitary confinement. Once released in 1990, at the age of 71, he worked tirelessly with President de Klerk to negotiate an end to apartheid which set the stage for the first true democratic, general election in South Africa, in 1994.

After a single five-year term as President of South Africa, Mandela stepped down and devoted his later years to serving as an elder statesman on the world stage. He is often cited along Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s exemplary anti-racist and anti-colonial leaders.

### **Sir Lewis Hamilton**

Lewis Hamilton was born to a white mother and black father in Hertfordshire, England. As a five-year old, he was subjected to racist abuse while competing against adults with radio-controlled cars. He began karting at the age of six, winning his first championship at age ten. He progressed through the ranks of different formulas until entering Formula One with McLaren in 2007 at the age of 22 where he won his first World Championship one year later. After switching to Mercedes in 2013, Hamilton collected another six Formula One World Championships.

Hamilton has continued to be dogged by racist abuse throughout his career, whether by fans dressing in blackface (he continues to be the only black Formula One driver) or the continued insults and threats posted online.

As his prominence in the sport grew, Hamilton used his platform to lead the charge for diversity in motorsports and ultimately launched Mission 44, a charitable foundation created to help young people from underrepresented backgrounds to achieve their wider ambitions in society. He continues to speak out on issues of human and animal rights and environmental issues along with lending his support to UNICEF and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. He has recently been named the most influential Black Briton and one of Time Magazine's 100 most influential people globally.

Although Mandela and Hamilton are generally viewed as leaders on the world stage, they are both considered polarizing figures because they espoused views not consistent with the popular narratives of the time. Despite regular threats made on both their lives, they harnessed the passions that emerged early in their lives and used their positions to advocate for positive change in the world.

While we may not achieve the status on the world stage as these two noted men, we do have our own lofty aims to pursue.

### **Perfection in Freemasonry**

What is it that we as Freemasons harness our passions for? Let us consider the possibility of aiming to achieve perfection in Masonry.

In the Junior Warden's lecture, we are introduced to the immovable jewels - the Tracing Board, the Rough Ashlar and the Perfect Ashlar. The Tracing Board is for the Worshipful Master to lay lines and draw designs on; the Rough Ashlar is for the Entered Apprentice to work, mark, and indent on; and the Perfect Ashlar is for the more expert workman to try and adjust his jewels on. They are called the immovable jewels because they lie open in the Lodge for the brethren to moralize on.

Please take a moment to visualize the Ashlar's in your Lodge and how they were introduced as part of your Masonic journey.

In operative masonry, a rough ashlar is a rough, unprepared or undressed stone. In speculative Freemasonry, the Rough Ashlar represents the uninitiated Freemason before he has reached enlightenment.

In operative masonry, a perfect ashlar is the dressed stone after it has been made uniform and smoothed by the use of the working tools. In speculative Freemasonry, the Perfect Ashlar represents the Freemason, who through Masonic education, works to achieve an upstanding life and strives to obtain enlightenment.

In Freemasonry we use the term perfect in this context to represent that for which we strive, not necessarily to denote a state that we have attained. Thus, reaching perfection is impossible, but the attempt to do so should be unending.

Let us also consider that the operative mason never adds material to the rough stone; rather, he chips and cuts away to remove visible flaws to take what is already there and turn it into the Perfect Ashlar.

Although it may be impossible to achieve perfection, you must strive to minimize your flaws as you reveal that impeccability of character which lies within. What does it take for a man to want to do so?

Passion!

### **Passion in Freemasonry**

Nelson Mandela and Sir Lewis Hamiltons' passions grew out of their early, generally negative experiences in the world. Unlike them, I would contend that men do not develop a passion for Masonry early in their

lives. In fact, many of you came to Freemasonry much later in life. Did anyone in the room have a passion for Masonry in as a young child? In your teens? Early 20s? Did you join because of a passion for the Fraternity that you sought to explore, or did your passion grow once you were initiated and began your personal Masonic journey?

### **Harnessing your Passions**

How might a Mason manage his passions to grow as a man and Mason, while ensuring that your fellow brethren are given time and space to explore their own passions.

Do you have a passion for ritual? If so, how do you use that passion to promote quality ritual in yourself and others, without being one of the men whose wagging finger has sapped the passion for ritual from others? Do you lead by example, and help all brethren in your Lodge, whether the newest Entered Apprentice or the most seasoned Mason, experience the excitement of learning and delivering ritual, whether for the first time or for the 100<sup>th</sup> time.

Do you have a passion for education? If so, how do you help educate other Masons about our Fraternity? Is it through one-on-one conversations or by writing and/or delivering educational items in your Lodge or for your District or the jurisdiction. Does your Lodge spend part of each Masonic meeting addressing one or more topics of education? If not, why not? How can education help stir the passion for Freemasonry in yourself and the brethren at large?

The adage that you don't really learn something until you teach it to others is equally true with Freemasonry. It would be nigh on impossible for a candidate to completely internalize the lessons learned in a degree through that initial experience – hence the importance of learning and delivering ritual for others as they progress through their degrees. It takes many performances of a certain charge, or the

working tools, secrets or floor work before the work becomes internalized as part of a larger Masonic story rather than a memorization of line.

Writing a paper can help you coalesce your nascent ideas into a workable proposition – regardless of the topic under consideration. Those who have little experience in this regard might consider writing a short book review, or review of an article someone else has written or perhaps you are ready for a deep dive into an esoteric topic. Writing the paper for your eyes only can be a great starting point – but be sure to read it out loud to see if it flows as intended.

How do you bring your passion for Masonic charity to life? What do you do to help others in need, whether Masons in your Lodge, Masons in general or others in your community. Do you help the widow, the orphan and those in need? Do you lead charitable efforts at the Lodge, District or jurisdictional level? Do people in your community know of the Masonic charitable efforts that are underway?

Where should passion in Freemasonry lead us? Recall that the charge to the Worshipful Master at Installation reminds him to “forcibly impress upon them the dignity and high importance of Freemasonry, and charge them to practice outside of the Lodge those excellent precepts which are ever inculcated within it; so that when any one is said to be a Mason, the world at large will know he is one to whom the burdened heart may pour forth its sorrow, and the distressed spirit prefer its suit, whose hand is guided by justice and whose heart is expanded by benevolence.”

Brethren, if we harness our **passion as the pathway to perfection** in Freemasonry, we will achieve that goal.

Thank you.