

BROTHERLY LOVE IN THE LODGE

“By the exercise of Brotherly Love
we are taught to regard the whole human species
as one family...”

As Masons we often hear that we are all Brothers, who meet upon the Level, and part upon the Square. What does this mean? Is it that we are all the same? Of course not. Some of us are tall, others short. Some fair and some most ugly. We are of every race upon earth, speak in different ways or even use different languages. Even more, some people are very smart, some dim, slow or downright stupid. Some like to gratify their senses, some are absorbed in mental pursuits. As we look around, we see some wearing very expensive shoes, others ragged sneakers. In fact, Masonic Lodges are one of the few places in society where men of every social status and education and income meet together. This is one of the basic characteristics of our Masonic life. Most other forms of social interactions are discriminatory. This or that group are unwelcome, and in this way groups define themselves. We all have known men who complain that their group- even Masonry- is being ruined by the inclusion of this or that kind of human beings. Great care is usually taken to keep the different social groups apart so tensions will not develop. If anything, this trend is expanding. Some even call it the Balkanization of America. Even our road signs have to be in multiple languages, as well as the instruction in our schools. Maybe this idea that men are all brothers is only an outmoded idea from the past, a part of Masonry we should hasten to change, so we will be up with the times. After all, do we not have to celebrate diversity by insuring that each group is distinct and there is no blending or union between them? How can the Rights of Man be maintained if I must endure the annoying habits of another, or if my own bad behavior can offend another? Are there not laws against such things, or should be?

We are taught that in Masonry we must make an effort to exist and to interact in harmony. Harmony, founded on Brotherly Love: that is the foundation. But how is this possible? By striving for balance. First we must be balanced within ourselves so our minds and bodies are in balance. This means we are in harmony with our selves, in contact with our deep minds, able to iron out our tensions and rest in the certainty that we are focused and complete. If we are satisfied in our own selves, we are less likely to be dissatisfied by the actions of our Brothers. If, on the other hand, we are a boiling caldron of unsatisfied desires and stunted ambitions, it is sure we will be annoyed by all around us. Here the question is- is it us or our Brothers who are the problem? It is only too easy to project our own problems and emotions unto others and, by rejecting them, seek to distance ourselves from our problems. This is the basic mechanism of the “scapegoat” which worked so well for Hitler and Lenin. We attack the things in others we dislike in ourselves, and thus feel purged and purified. This is about as far from balanced as can be. Walking on the “checkered pavement” of black and white squares, we insist that all black must be gotten rid of, or all the whites suspended or black balled. After all, it’s our Lodge and what right do “they” have to try to change it. And so on.

In the second sentence of the EA lecture, which I hope we all had to memorize, it says: “What come you here to do?” Here, being in our Lodge, means among our membership of Masons. The response is: “To learn to subdue my passions and improve myself in Masonry.” Now, why do we need to “subdue our passions” in order that we may improve ourselves in

Masonry? In order to be in harmony with 20 to 60 other Brothers means, basically, to act in concert with them without regard to what we, as individuals, desire. Not to insist, to impose, to seek to dominate, but to act in harmony for the general good. This is to act upon the Level, by the Square. And to be in balance within ourselves, we must have had some success with subduing our passions. With body and mind filled by a parade of contenting emotions, we are contentious and cannot be in harmony with others.

To be in balance with our Lodge, we must not bring personal passions into the group. If we love ritual but hate prayer; if we enjoy the meal but hate the business meeting; if we love to talk with our brothers but hate Masonic education; it is impossible to be in harmony. Acting in a self-centered way means you will oppose and be opposed: acting selflessly for the good of the Lodge means harmony will reign.

Basically, Freemasonry forbids you to hate your Brother. You can disagree with your Brother's thoughts, his statements, his initiatives, but you cannot wish to banish, diminish, silence or destroy your own Brother. To disagree with what a Brother says is human, and is your right. But to hate and wish to destroy one who has been united with you in the bonds of Fellowship is to commit a severe Masonic error. It is not to be allowed, nor, if done, to be suffered to continue. This is what is meant by the Mystic Tie, or the Cement of the Lodge. To allow any compromise with this most basic of Masonic commitments is to be hacking away at the very foundation of Freemasonry.

What is the root of these "passions" which obstruct our advancement in Masonic knowledge? It is Ego. There is no argument that the sense of Ego is a basic and indispensable part of every sentient being, nor can fault be found with a just measure of self confidence and with a strong sense of self worth and purpose. The problems begin when we compare our own self against others, and conclude that we are special, we are better, we are more intelligent, we are more favored by Deity, more deserving of advancement or applause, better looking, more skillful, of a higher class, deservedly more wealthy and have more abundant and beautiful possessions, on and on. Unfortunately, the props of human egotism are nearly endless in number. I believe it was Emerson who said "Every man is a king, so long as he has someone to look down upon". In the lodge, we see divisions between those who can memorize or perform our rituals, those who are better public speakers, or who confuse their office with self worth. The Ego seizes upon these differences between men's abilities and aptitudes to justify a sense of superiority; a supercilious attitude emerges which delights in reminding those around us of their inferiority and a constant need to defend our superior caste.

Others, of course, will not agree with our assessment of the superior dignity of our own selves and will challenge us in every way, making it necessary to defend our positions, our rank, our decisions, or our social position. This is where those passions come in. Very quickly, in defense of our own feelings of Egotism, we are led to love our friends, who agree with us, and to hate those who tend to disagree with us. Discontent leads to dislike, dislike to anger, anger to hatred, and hatred to murder or at least a desire to get rid of the other Brother. Instead of improving ourselves in Masonry, we have been hastening in the other direction and finding in the Lodge only another battle ground to dispute our Ego against others. Such Masons have never listened to the words of our lectures and degrees, and have taken obligations which are, to them, only

the mouthing of unconsidered words devoid of meaning. We all know such Masons, because unfortunately, our Lodges are full of them. They are often the best men in the Lodge, the high achievers, or, as a PGM used to call them, the "Alpha Males". They can be wonderful at Masonry, but, as far as being Masons they have not gotten beyond the first sentence of the EA lecture, and have failed to subdue their passions. And in the process, they have failed to realize the very first Tenet of Freemasonry: Brotherly Love.

Now, what should we do about these men? How can we handle them without furthering the discord of the Lodge? In most cases, it is not by jumping down in the pit with them and screaming "you big idiot, you are supposed to love your Brothers!" A better approach is to have self confidence within our self and do just as Jesus suggested, return love for hate. By doing so we demonstrate to them the true Masonic path, and some of them will slowly learn the unvoiced lesson we are giving. I do however recognize that not all of them will get the message, and, when in the most gentle manner reminded of their faults, will respond by calling names and boiling over with righteous anger. In its ancient wisdom, Masonry has provided for this with Masonic trials within the Lodge, trials for unMasonic conduct, or conduct unbecoming of a Mason, or simply conduct which is damaging to the harmony of the Lodge. I feel we have abandoned the use of this part of our institution because we are so few we fear becoming less. I have also seen many good Brothers stop attending Lodge because of the actions of one or two members who feel it is within their rights to spread hatred and discord in the sacred halls of Masonry. I myself left my mother Lodge because of the hatred towards me of a single Brother, who replaced the joy I felt in Masonry with depression. I think my story is a common one.

It must be apparent to every thoughtful man that the human being has developed his Ego far beyond any other of the animal kingdom. This has led to many important discoveries and advancements that have in the end yielded modern civilization. But this development has at the same time made us the most war like of all animals, and it is fair to say that whatever advancements in culture we have made through the centuries, all have sooner or later been consumed by the dark side of human passions. It is unreasonable to suppose that the men who will live two thousand centuries hence will possess of our time any more than the few ruins and scraps that have survived to us from the time of Christ. Thus does a portion of our Fellowcraft work remind us that "the lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance, and the devastations of war, have laid waste and destroyed many valuable monuments of antiquity, on which the utmost exertions of human genius have been employed".

It was to counter this almost overwhelming tendency of our nature that, in the "Age of Enlightenment", men erected our Masonic edifice upon the foundation stone of Brotherly Love. We hear our lectures and degree work insist so often upon this not because it is an established fact, but because it is so rare and so difficult to achieve. Speculative Masonry sets forth the magnificent idea that men of every race and creed, station in life and abilities, are equal before the sight of our Creator and stand as equals within the Lodge. Our first sign, the EA, alludes to this equality. It is this mighty foundation stone that Freemasonry lays within the balance's dish to counter weigh the might of human Egotism that rests in the opposite pan. This wise Tenet is one of the main reasons our Institution has survived for over 400 years, while nations & governments have risen and fallen around us. It is why women are not members of the Lodge, for what greater incitement to passions of all sorts exists? It is why we are forbidden to discuss politics and party within our Lodges, and why although many of our

customs are religious in nature, all particular religions are similarly banned from our midst.

Besides a search for harmony in a discordant world, however, there is a further reason for insistence upon Brotherly Love. Masonry is founded upon wisdom, but teaches mostly through symbols and seldom directly discusses this wisdom. This is because men vary in capacity for understanding, and it allows each Brother to take from our presentations whatever wisdom he is capable of. But we might ask: why is Love for all men so important? Why these injunctions to constantly combat Ego, when we have seen what a mighty force it is? It is because Ego is an illusion and the prime barrier between ourselves and God. "Whatever a man may have gained upon earth, of title, wealth or honor, can never serve him as a passport to the Grand Lodge above." To have a true experience of Deity is Wisdom, and most cultures agree that experience comes to every person as a brilliant Light combined with an overwhelming feeling of loving and being loved. Mystics of every age and every culture affirm that this is so. The Light we so glibly mention in our ritual is not a symbol, but a real fact. And, it is shining upon all of us all the time, whether we are aware of it or not. To go beyond our own egos and witness the true brotherhood of men is to open our hearts to a truth that will not dissolve at the death of our bodies. It transforms us, like Scrooge throwing open his shutters on Christmas morning.

Our minds, our consciousness, are not ours, but God's. That Sentience is the very spark of Divinity that lifts up the cold clay and makes it alive. We have leave to do what we want with it, to fashion it into stumbling blocks and fortress walls, or towers towards the light, anthems of praise. That is free will. But there is essentially nothing we can do to change consciousness in any way. It is the visible hand of God. We can be more conscious or less so, but that only changes us, not Mind. My consciousness is absolutely identical to your consciousness; all minds are the one Mind. From the merest amoeba to Mozart, life is Mind and this Mind is God.

From this perspective, how petty seem all our squabbles with our Brothers! Like us, they were born; and like us, they will die and pass on into another reality. Each person is given consciousness and life, to do with it as we will. And, if indeed there is a judgment beyond the portals of Death, it is upon the use we have made of this gift that we will be judged. What advancement have we made towards that Light which shines eternally from every eye? Masonry bids us to look upon our Brothers with that understanding, and to see in them not foils for our own ego, but fellows sharing the great mystery of being a little time together in our Lodge. To know this is to know the true meaning of Brotherly Love. And only upon this foundation will we be able to lift up our eyes and witness the true Light of Masonry. Then all fetters will be ripped away in an instant, we will be free, soaring into the Brilliance.

A little poem from an old Mason:

What matters it what faith or creed
My Brother holds,
If to him through thought and deed
The truth unfolds?
What matters it what name he bears
If on life's way of pain and cares
He bears the sign?

For his own soul must learn the right
And his own eyes must see the Light,
Not mine nor thine.

The same sun shines on all men's ways
And chooses none.
How should I think he spread his rays
On mine alone?
The life eternal dwells in all,
Into his soul perchance may fall
The germ of power.
How shall I then pronounce his doom,
When in my brother's heart may bloom
The Holy Flowers?

(from the VT C of D proceedings for 1932)

However:

If we think that our fellows will appreciate the perspective that we are all truly united as the Family of Man under God as our divine origin and Parent, we are very wrong. This is the view of Wisdom, but is not the common view. Almost everyone is convinced that the ideas they have formed about the world are correct, and all who disagree are just plain wrong. Their goal is not to discover truth but to convince others that they are right. This inflexibility is only the nice side of the problem, since everyday millions upon millions of our fellow men engage in struggles literally to the point of death to assert or defend those ideas that seem to them self evident, however unworthy their ideas may seem of such emotion. So, we are not facing an easy task when we say to our Masonic brothers that all men are equal before God and on the level in the Lodge. The equality of man is now and has always been a dangerous and radical concept. Many sneer at Brotherly Love as but fodder for rubes.

The entire issue is made more complex by the differences between personality types. One need not be an astrologer to agree there are at least twelve different types of human beings, each with their particular way of looking at the world. To the Engineer, the Poet, the Political Advocate, or the Student, each problem we face in our Lodges will suggest a different solution. The sensualist will feel longer and larger meals are most likely to fill the sidelines on meeting night. The student will feel lodge education programs more likely to succeed, while the engineer might suggest a well thought out system of Lodge projects. Each will be likely to be convinced the approach of the others is a total waste of time. These differences in personality reflected in dress, speech, and ideas about life, will create feelings of appreciation in like minded individuals, while eliciting nothing but disgust in those cut from cloth of a different color.

So it will not be enough to carefully explain we are all Brothers now because we have all taken the same obligation and carry similar dues cards.

We will not be able to depend upon our leaders for proper guidance either. Most Grand Lodges are racked with the same internal conflicts any Lodge or group may have. In fact, the entire

history of Freemasonry could well be told as a series of bitter feuds between rival groups. Perhaps the most famous is the animosity between the “Ancients” and the “Moderns” that set the founders of speculative Masonry at each other’s throats. Our own Supreme Council of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction was formed from a long conflict between no less than three different Supreme Councils, all claiming the same degrees and the same territory. In these cases, however, the great spirit of Masonry did at length prevail. Wiser councils succeeded in bringing the warring factions together, compromises were made, and reconciliations of differences were achieved which lead to the Masonry we have today. This illustrates that men can choose a higher path of wisdom, even when they feel divided by very emotional differences.

This leads me to some concrete suggestions we can use here in Vermont to tackle these divisive forces that will always be present in our Lodges. The first is my suggestion that a much, much greater emphasis be placed upon the necessity of leaving our sensitive Egos outside the Lodge room, along with our politics and religious differences. We should clearly understand and openly discuss this great enemy of human association, and seek to find ways to minimize its action within our Lodges. Masters should insist on maintaining the Cement of our Lodges. Much of this boils down to Attitude. By focusing on the negatives and ignoring the positives, many good Masonic groups have come to ruin. We have been taught not to carry a tongue of ill repute, not to speak ill about our Brothers behind their backs, not to harbor ill will against our lodge mates. Please, let us take these sections of our lectures and obligations very seriously. Masonic leaders should insist that this is so. When someone speaks ill of a Brother, it should be pointed out to him that he is violating his sacred obligation. If such attitudes are allowed to take root and grow, they will in time poison the atmosphere of the Lodge, and once firmly rooted can take generations to overcome. I am reminded of my experiences on my initiation night. The Tyler kept me entertained while we were waiting for the lodge to prepare for my EA degree by telling me stories of past feuds stretching back into his grandfather’s day. It was a Masonic Lodge, but how much Masonry was contained in it? When Lodges are doing poorly, it will almost always be due to an atmosphere of negative attitudes having made a home there.

It may seem strange, but outward forms can help with this. When we come into our building and meet with other Masons, how do we greet them? It should be a warm handshake, a greeting by name, an earnest inquiry into how they are doing, what has befallen them since last we met. A shared meal before the meeting in an atmosphere of family can also help a lot.

In the Lodge or in committee, instead of considering the thoughts of others as an unwelcome interruption in the pressing of our own ideas, try to sincerely listen to what is said with as open a mind as we can manage. Try to understand their point of view and say to yourself that your ideas are not necessarily the last word on the situation. When you feel passion rising against what a Brother is saying, recognize that this is the feeling of egotism and the enemy of harmony.

And I feel I must mention again that, with a Brother who insists on bringing disharmony into our midst and will not listen to good advice about his faults, stronger action is imperative. In such cases, the harmony of the Lodge, the foundation stone of Masonry, is imperiled. I would urge then that this behavior be brought to the floor of the Lodge for discussion and that it be clearly pointed out to the difficult Brother that such attitudes are non-Masonic behavior.

Well we have taken a good long look at human behavior and at how we all are made. And perhaps in the process you have come to have a better understanding of how the challenges of Masonry do work to transform good men into better. But not everyone appreciates these niceties or has any interest in improving themselves. After all, how can their perfection be made better?! It is not I who must change, but these others who are obviously completely wrong! If you think that the demon of human Ego is easily laid aside, then you will be in for a difficult path. The most we can do is to clearly recognize the problems Ego can cause in the Lodge, and to point out the necessity for each Brother to guard his own passions, like the Third degree symbol of the sword placed against the heart. Only then will we stop being our own best enemy, and have any hope of seeing our fellow men as they are, rather than as we imagine them to be. I hope that this little examination into human nature and Masonry will aid us in protecting our groups from ourselves, and serve to point out the way to control our passions and truly to improve ourselves in Masonry. Do we really need to dominate others to achieve excellence in ourselves? Is it impossible to accept that this old world is composed of many different types of men, each a proper light unto themselves? The Founders wisely laid upon us the rule of Equality in the Lodge as the exemplification of the basic Equality of Man. As children of God, why not learn to embrace each other as true Brothers, and in the spirit of Love? Only then will true harmony and Brotherly Love reign in our Lodge.

Thank you and God bless:
Eric Ginette
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