BROTHERLY LOVE

April 3, 2006

My Brothers,

Tonight we will talk about Brotherly Love. Brotherly Love is professed among Masons more than any other Masonic value, but it may be the least understood despite its common usage. Many of us believe that a warm smile and kind words accompanied by a pat on the back is Brotherly Love in action. That's how we understand it and that is usually the extent of our application of Brotherly Love on a day-to-day basis. Many of us also believe that being generous to less fortunate others defines Brotherly Love. This generosity, although admirable, is only a small portion of the philosophy and actually intermixes the concepts of Brotherly Love and Masonic Charity. In this session, we will try to separate Brotherly Love from the mixture and, hopefully, clarify its component parts. Getting a handle on Brotherly Love and Charity as separate philosophical ideas is important, as we will see.

The Entered Apprentice Lecture states that the three Principle Tenets of Freemasonry are Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. The specific section begins with the phrase, "By the exercise of Brotherly Love...". Right here, before we go any further, we need to pause and think for a moment because that word structure is no accident. This opening phrase says that we are not waiting for a definition of Brotherly Love, we are exercising it as a whole philosophical construct, already. There are other ways that the phrase could have started: "In Brotherly Love, we are taught to...", or, "Brotherly Love teaches us to...", but both changes would distort the meaning in the Lecture and alter the underlying Masonic philosophical structure. Let's look.

The first option, "In Brotherly Love, we are taught to...", would suggest that regarding the whole human species as one family and aiding, supporting, and protecting all mankind is, of itself, Brotherly Love. We would be doing this in Brotherly Love, for the end purpose and sake of Brotherly Love. This mental interpretation is the primary source for our intermixing of Brotherly Love and Masonic Charity. By this subtle change in understanding we equate Masonic Brotherly Love as being aid, support, and protection to all mankind. This is a laudable belief system, morally sound, and consistent with exterior religious teaching, but it stems from a misunderstanding in our Masonic interpretation.

The second option, "Brotherly Love teaches us to regard the whole human species..." would be a limiting phrase akin to saying, "Prudence teaches us to regulate our lives and actions..." By saying it this way, we would focus the philosophy of Brotherly Love upon quantifiable actions toward all mankind; it would be like following a cookbook for Brotherly Love. We would be saying that if we were to take this or that specific action in regard to mankind in the way of aid, support, or protection, then that would be Brotherly Love. This change puts us right back to where we were a moment ago, intermixing the concept with Masonic Charity while at the same time forgetting that Brotherly Love is already something that is being exercised as an existing state within Masonry. What, then, is Brotherly Love if it is already defined, already whole cloth?

Brotherly Love is broader in scope than simple definition in this first light allows; as Masonry is a progressive moral science, we have not yet received its full meaning at the time of this Lecture, it is referred to for later reflection. Its definition becomes whole for us only after the fact of our completion. As explained by Webb and Mackey, two eminent Masonic scholars, Brotherly Love is founded on the fraternal meanings of the Five Points of Fellowship. Each point's explanation, taken as a whole, constitutes the philosophical structure for Brotherly Love. The resulting philosophy is uniquely Masonic, intrinsic to the Five Points of Fellowship, and for the benefit of Brother Masons, but it can be and is often applied to the outside world. Our internal philosophy of Brotherly Love is reinforced by this positive external application, by its exercise and extension to others, but its primary object is to cement a stronger Brotherhood within Masonry.

So, we may now return to what is actually said in the Lecture with a stronger understanding of all that follows: "By the exercise of Brotherly Love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family; the high and the low, the rich and the poor; who, as being created by one Almighty parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support, and protect each other. On this basis, Masonry unites men of every country, sect, and opinion who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance." We can now see by this that Brotherly Love is the philosophic and obligatory mortar that cements Masons throughout the world together, Masons high and low, rich and poor, and by exercising our philosophy of Brotherly Love among ourselves, we become the representatives and facilitators for mutual understanding, fidelity, and the support possible among all men, just as it is, first, among all Masons.

That's Brotherly Love.

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