FRAMEWORK OF FELLOWSHIP

November 3, 2003

My Brothers,

In the last two sessions, we’ve looked into Masonic philosophy and piety. One is a framework for our development, and the other is a framework for reverence toward the Divine. Pretty heavy stuff, this Masonry. I thought that tonight, as a change of pace, we’d look at another aspect of Masonry - the Framework of Fellowship. First, a question or two - I always have questions! Why did I call it the Framework of Fellowship? And, why am I not starting out by defining the meaning of Fellowship?

Well, as for the definition, I went to the Masonic Encyclopedia to see what the smart Brothers thought. Mackey says a ‘fellow’ comes from the old Saxon language as ‘folgian’ and means ‘one who follows’. Fellowship means following. But that comes from a time of Operative Masonry, of the guild structure, of Masters directing their Craft. It’s nice to know the root of the word, but what does Fellowship mean now, in today’s Speculative Masonry?

I fumbled through several ideas about that. But, you know, I came to the realization that Fellowship may have as many meanings as there are Brothers to define it. You try it for a second. Think to yourself, what does Fellowship mean to you? OK, good. Now, look at the Brother next to you. What does Fellowship mean to him? AHA! Suddenly, you’re not so sure about what it means, are you? And if you don’t know what it means to him - he sure doesn’t know what it means to you! What we DO know is that each of us is most likely to define Fellowship based on what we want it to mean, - in other words, based on our individual wants and needs. So, let’s drive one stake into the ground about Fellowship. What we think Fellowship is or should be may be based on our needs.

Let’s look at our reactions to being asked what the Brother next to us thinks. There are differences among us. Some of us thought, “I don’t know.” Some thought “How could I know?” Some thought, “Why don’t I know?” Some thought, “Why do I have to listen to this?” - and some of us were napping or thinking about Monday Night Football. So, let’s put another stake down and say that how we respond to others’ needs may be based on our knowledge, our self-interest and needs. This is the mirror image of our first point. There’s something beginning to take shape here. Do you see it? Fellowship seems to have something to do with our needs vs. another’s needs.

What does Masonic ritual or Lecture say about Fellowship? It says, almost from the first moment of Initiation, that we are in the hands of true and trusted friends on whose fidelity we can with utmost confidence, rely. It says that we’re linked together by indissoluble chains of sincere affection. It says that we are to aid, support, and protect each other and that it is on this basis that we form our friendships and establish our connections. That’s Trust, Brotherly Love, Mutual Aid, Support, and Protection and these are universal needs met by our Brotherly Fellowship. Another way of saying it is that our Principle Tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth are a Framework for Fellowship, a guide for meeting each others’ human needs. We have a Masonic framework for our development, a framework for reverence to the Divine, and now, a framework for our interactions.

So, back to the education point and our stakes in the ground. In the context of Masonry, should we allow our modern definition of Fellowship to be based on OUR needs or should it be based on the needs of the Brother next to you? And isn’t that definition really spelled out in Masonry’s Principal Tenets?

In preparing this, I realized something wonderful. Every time I’ve talked to our Worshipful Master and, I’ll bet, every time you’ve talked to him, too, he’s asked how we’re doing and if we need anything. He has been teaching us Fellowship by practicing it. The ancients called it “noblesse oblige”, the concept of the ruler being the servant of those ruled. The smart Masons in the encyclopedia called it Fellowship. Masonry’s Framework of Fellowship teaches us that we can best rule and govern ourselves by learning to serve others, and that service of Fellowship is Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. It seems there was some merit after all in being placed in the NE Corner of the Lodge, near the Worshipful Master. We are receiving from him those necessary instructions relative to our own moral and Masonic superstructure. And it seems that the modern meanings of Fellowship are still the historical ones.

I’ll end this session about the Framework of Fellowship with this thought. One way of learning is to teach; one way of receiving is to give.

Can you give Brotherly Love, Relief, or Truth - to yourself?

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