HUMAN NATURE

May 1, 2006

My Brothers,

Tonight, we'll talk a bit about human nature and get around to a little Shakespeare for good measure.

One of the challenges to mastering our craft is overcoming the one working tool we all bring with us into Masonry, human nature. It is human nature to sort through a heavy load of information and sift for important nuggets that we can remember either intact, or in symbolic form. We keep some and drop the rest. Our brains are set up to do that. Take driving a car for instance. Have you ever driven in automatic mode where you have zero recollection of driving at all? Your thoughts may have been a thousand miles away, but your brain was sorting through the road environment, guiding your steering and speed, and seeing nothing out of place, it left you alone to daydream. You were operating on subconscious pattern recognition. If nothing was out of the ordinary or unexpected, like an oncoming car in your lane, there were no alarms.

We deal with the interior of a Lodge and its Masonic symbols in a similar way because it is human nature to overlook the things we are used to seeing all the time. We walk in to Stated Meetings on automatic pilot while we look for familiar faces. As long as the ornaments, jewels, lights, altar, etc., are not out of place we hardly register them. This is not surprising. The biology of the human mind supports this. While the meeting is going on, our subconscious minds recognize these visual symbols as nothing out of the ordinary and move on to other processing tasks like listening to ritual, which we also recognize and then push into automatic mode so that we can move on to more important tasks, like daydreaming. In the absence of something irregular or something new to chew on, our poor starved brains will supply us with things to think about and that, also, is human nature.

Well, here's some new input to chew on. In the course of progressing through Masonry, we received explanations about our Masonic working tools and we were pointed toward many others. We listened intently, we nodded in mute understanding, we made mental notes to remember what we were being told, and over time, we pretty much forgot about them. Oh, we could name most of the working tools and we could take a stab at paraphrasing their symbolic meanings, but the reality is that we don't understand their messages very well at all. And that, my Brothers, is ironic indeed! Here we are, most of us Master Masons, full-fledged Brothers in speculative Freemasonry, and most of us aren't familiar with the ideas that our own working tools represent, let alone masters of them. How in the world can we consider ourselves prepared to travel to unknown countries in search of Master Mason's wages?

This is a rather crucial question for us all. We may not realize it in a conscious way, lost in our daydreams as we are, but it is crucial because we are about to travel, if not today, then someday. We all received an exit visa at birth and we are all headed for that that Celestial Lodge, above, that "unknown country from whose bourne no traveler ever returns", as Shakespeare said. In that unknown country, the wages we will seek are the manifold blessings and comforts of the Divine. And, my Brothers, most of us are headed there on autopilot because that is our human nature. These symbols that we overlook and the meanings behind our working tools that we have forgotten are the representations of the work that we must master in order to receive our wages in that unknown country.

The 24 inch gauge and its three parts means something. The common gavel means something. The square, the level, and the plumb all mean something. The Due Guard and Sign mean something. Masonry created these symbols as a mental shorthand to stand for larger ideas that mean something. When we don't actively think about the meanings behind the shorthand these important symbols become just symbols; our minds dismiss them in pattern recognition mode and we pass over them without further thought. And that means that the messages, the larger ideas they represent, are soon forgotten and replaced by daydreams. This working tool of human nature is the one that we must overcome and master if we are to achieve our full potential in Masonry.

So, the message for us in this session is to come back from our daydreams, to break out of our usual pattern and see what is before us, to look at the symbols that surround us in a fresh way and recall the great ideas behind them. It is time to disengage the cruise control on our minds and return our attention to the tools that Masonry has given us for traveling, for we are definitely traveling life's course.

What remains to be seen is if we consider this coming trip important enough to work at overcoming and mastering our own human nature. For, we will not come this way, again.

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