PROFICIENT

February 7, 2005

My Brothers,

There's a milestone in Masonry called proficiency. When we receive our degrees, the Master of the Lodge tells us that when we have demonstrated the necessary proficiency, we may advance. And when we have advanced through the degrees and demonstrated the necessary proficiencies in each one, we reach the Masonic milestone of receiving our Proficiency Card. That's it. We have completed our degree work. We're done, we're Masons.

Yes, but there's one small catch. We have demonstrated only what the Master termed, "the necessary proficiencies" in the degrees and, in our jurisdiction, Grand Lodge terms it, "the minimum proficiency”.

But even that's not the 'catch'. The catch is, that in having reached the necessary and minimum proficiency, in tucking away that signed and dated Proficiency Card, we have taken on a burden of choice. We must now determine just what 'proficiency' will come to mean for us as Masons; not what we have just done and demonstrated, but what we will do; what Masonry will become for us, and, what we will become as Masons. With that card, we've received Masonry's burden of choice. That's some catch!

This burden of choice offers some wonderful opportunities and some awesome consequences because it is so personal. We make little choices many times, every day, without having to give them much thought. We pretty much know how are lives are ordered and how we want our choices to fit into them as we go along. We deliberate and sometimes agonize over larger choices in life, especially when we may have to live with the results for a good while. But there is another, higher level of choices, the major life decisions which define who we are, what we are, and what we may become. The choice we made in becoming a Mason was a major life decision. It was a major life decision because it was not just joining a club, or belonging to a fraternity. Masonry's Obligation, lived in full, is life changing. So, in choosing how we develop as Masons, in how we live Masonry, there are outcomes that can impact us at the deepest, most personal levels, the levels where what we believe about ourselves and how we truly feel about ourselves, live. That must give any prudent man pause to think. With our innermost futures at stake, how will we make the choices ahead in living Masonry?

On the one hand, we are guided by Masonic rules and ritual and organizational structure that gives us some due boundary lines. We have our Brothers to encourage us and support us, and to advise friendly circumspection when we need it. We're given the Three Great Lights and their embedded principles and virtues to rule and guide us agreeably as we make our way in Masonry. But, on the other hand, we're just starting out and have no real idea of where we're going in Masonry, where we can go, or of the ultimate consequences in our choices. It is ironic that our greatest needs for proficiency seem to begin just when we have been deemed minimally proficient and given a card to prove it. We lack the experience in Masonry that would give us the confidence to make the choices that will impact our Masonic futures and, ultimately, how we live within ourselves.

So, we ask the questions, "What do Masons do?", and, "What does our Lodge do?" But, under them, the new Mason is really asking, "What am I expected to do?", and, "What are we doing that I can be accepted in doing, too?" We Brothers should never ignore those questions, as they are coming from that innermost place where the deepest needs live. But we Brothers can never answer them for another at his neediest level. We can only stand with him at his crossroads, at the intersection of his choices, and point in every direction, restricting none. For, each man, each Mason, must determine his own path and begin walking his Masonic destiny guided by what Masonry has given him, and by what talents and interests his Creator has blessed him.

And so, with the receipt of the Proficiency Card, begins the true quest for Masonic proficiency, the first step along the pathway of a new way of life; a burden of choices, a promise of fulfillment. Move in any direction your interests take you; the key is to move on and gain experience in life's proficiency.

It does not matter which choice you make or which direction you chose, or how many times you change direction; all steps lead East for Masons, and you never walk alone.

Br. Stephen C. Harrington