WEAKEST

May 2, 2005

My Brothers,

Tonight, we may face the most difficult question that an education session can put before a Mason. To answer, we must be willing to look deep inside and do some soul-searching, and having answered it, we must not be willing to live with the answer.

Masonic education seems to go in two directions; either we're exploring why we do or say something in Masonry and what that something means, or, we are exploring Masonry's philosophy and trying to pull meaning from ideas and approaches to living that we can use to improve ourselves. Both directions increase our understanding of what we want from Masonry and of what Masonry wants from us. This session will take the latter approach and explore a little bit in our world of Masonic philosophy.

With philosophy comes thinking, and usually some questions that manage to clang around in the hard metal of the self. Dealing with philosophic questions about ourselves is not easy; none of us goes out of the way to soul-search and we especially don't like it when someone else is pressuring us to do it, like right now, for instance. But if not now, among our Brothers in Lodge, then when? The business of making Masons does not end with degree proficiency, that's only the start of our journey. In our quest to become better men, Masonry is our transportation down the road of personal development. Soul-searching, and sometimes facing difficult questions about ourselves, is the price of the ticket to ride. So, let's ease on down the road a piece and see where it leads us.

We have all received the valuable and deep lessons of Faith, Hope, and Charity. We all have been given the three Principle Tenets of Freemasonry, Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth, as our own to hold dear. We have all been presented with the four Cardinal Virtues, Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice and their complex explanations. And, we have been Charged to embrace them all in our Masonry. If you listen to the Lecture of the Entered Apprentice Mason, each is explained for what it means and its philosophical application to Masonry is explored. Of Faith, Hope, and Charity, the Lecture stresses Charity as "the greatest of these" after explaining why Faith and Hope are lesser. It is interesting that the three are metaphorically introduced as the three principle rounds of a theological ladder, especially as theology is the literal study of religion or the Divine. In that context, Faith and Hope make sense, but Charity, especially as we have come to apply the term in action, seems not to be much of a theological match. There are hints in its explanation that we may be applying it in a material rather than the implied spiritual way, but that is a topic for another session. We pretty much have a handle on the philosophy of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth; what could be simpler than loving one another, helping one another, and being truthful in our lives? And we understand the concepts embedded in the four Cardinal Virtues; do not live in excess, be strong and balanced in our character, be deliberate in our actions, and be morally and civilly just toward all men.

So, which of all those is the most valuable to Masonry: Charity, Brotherly Love, Justice, something else? That answer may depend on the perspective, whether we're considering Masonry from an internal or an external view. What we may visualize to be the single-most characteristic of Masonry, in Masonry, may be different than what is seen by outsiders, or what we think outsiders think of us. For example, do outsiders see and value Brotherly Love as much as we do internally, or, is Charity what outsiders think best defines Masonry, and is that what we think, inside Masonry?

On a more personal level, there is an internal and external view for us, too. Which one value most defines you, internally, as a Mason to yourself? Which value most defines you as others see you? Think through the lessons, the tenets, the virtues. Let's try two thought statements: Of all the values in the lessons, tenets, and virtues, the strongest one in me is - . You fill in the blank. And the next statement is: The one value in me most likely to be seen by others in, or out of, Masonry is -. Were they the same value in both statements? If they were different, are you comfortable in that difference? There is no right or wrong answer in this; we come to value what Masonry means to us in our own way and it is for us to decide what we think is valuable in our lives as Masons.

The terrain of the self through which we are traveling and exploring has the highest hills and the lowest valleys in the places where Masonry meets our inner life. We have just visited our highest hills; let us look at our lowest valleys. Now comes the question which I promised at the beginning, the one that may be difficult to think about, and the hardest to answer: Which of Masonry's values is the weakest in me, and what am I going to do about it?

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