

A Matter of Balance

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Approximately 30 years ago, Hollywood produced a movie about a young man, new to his community and trying to find his way, was put upon, bullied and beaten by a group of young upper class thugs. At the moment of great physical peril to this young man, a much older and culturally different man, interceded on what was to be a terrific beating...and put the young thugs to flight. As the young man healed from his physical altercation, he pleaded with the older man to teach him, to instruct him on what the older man did to save him, and chase of those thugs who would do him more harm in the future.

No doubt by now you have concluded that I speak of Mr. Miyagi, or Noriyuki "Pat" Morita, whom some of you may not know was a Brother among us. He was a Mason, but sadly has passed to the Grand Lodge Above. The young man is Daniel, played by Ralph Macchio. I am sure you all remember the famous "wax on, wax off" But, what I want to speak about is some of the best advice Mr. Miyagi gave to Daniel-san – when he said "Daniel-san, everything in life needs Balance, you must find your balance, not balance in your stance for fighting, but life balance; find your Balance, Daniel-san."

Each and every one of us, at one time or another has felt like they are being pulled in two, three, sometimes four different directions. This is stressful on you, your significant other, your family, your co-workers and yes your Lodge Brothers. Balance. My credo for freemasonry, as I see it, was brought out by a realization about the purpose of freemasonry, one that is illustrated by the following short story by Bro. A. Peterson:

It was an exciting time at the building of King Solomon's temple for two fellows of the craft. Jethro and Saul, brothers from the land of Tyre, had been selected to prove their proficiency to advance to the degree of Master Mason! The task laid out to them was simple enough. The Chief Architect presented them each with a rough Ashlar, the tools of the craft, and a trestle board with the design they were to make. They were each given 6 days to complete their Ashlar.

The brothers set to the task each toiling the best their skill would allow. On the third day Saul had made great progress. Jethro however, had made minimal progress. Saul, with the best of intentions, insisted that Jethro allow him to assist. Jethro refused, insisting that he was doing just fine in his labours. On the fifth day Saul was close to being complete with his Ashlar. Jethro was still far off, but working diligently. That night Saul hardly slept. He wanted his brother to advance with him, but he would not accept any assistance. Saul had to find a way to help his brother.

On the sixth and final day, Saul quickly checked his Ashlar and, finding it complete, sped away to try one more time to assist his brother. He found Jethro slowly chipping away at his Ashlar and begged him to let him assist. Jethro staunchly refused yet again. Saul walked away vowing in his mind to help his brother whether he liked it or not. That night as Jethro slept, Saul slipped away to the quarry and finished Jethro's Ashlar.

The seventh day the Chief Architect went to the quarry to judge the brothers work. The first Ashlar he judged was Jethro's. The Chief Architect was quite impressed with work. It was finished exactly to the specifications laid out on the trestle board. The Master's eye was keen though, and he noticed something was amiss. Some of the chisel marks were different in character than the majority. He said nothing and went to Saul's Ashlar. Saul's ashlar was perfect in virtually every respects. There was one crucial flaw that should not have been missed by a Master Mason who did a thorough inspection of his work. The Chief Architect also noticed something that made both works make sense. The odd chisel marks on Jethro's ashlar were the same as the one's found on Saul's.

The Chief Architect summoned the brothers to the lodge to hear his judgment. Jethro, he said, your work indicates that you understand the fundamentals of Masonry, yet you have trouble applying them to our work efficiently. Saul, your work indicates that you have much skill as a mason. Yet your focus on the imperfections of others work, causes you to miss the flaws in your own. I therefore order you both to the quarry for another year's time as fellows of the craft. Take with you the lessons of this trial, and perhaps you will indeed become Master Masons.

Saul was more interested in making his brother succeed when he was not ready than in focussing on his own work, and therefore missed the point, and was sent back to think about it for another year. It's about balance, and it's about self improvement. You cannot force a man to be something he is not; though you can share with him things that can help him along the way... you cannot do the work FOR him.

Freemasonry teaches us, when speaking of the 24" gauge: The Rule — directs the undeviating discharge of all our duties; that we should press forward in the straight path of right and truth, without inclining to the one hand or the other; in all our doings having eternity in view. The 24 inch gauge teaches time management, the point within a circle that tells us how to centre ourselves. These are reminders in Masonry to have balance. You are taught early on that the Entered Apprentice degree is the foundation that you are going to build on, it is no mistake that you have to start with balance, so that you can understand and acquire the knowledge in the progressive degrees, including all the degrees and orders in the appendant bodies. Time management is a tool in your toolkit to work toward Balance.

We are also directed to daily employ the compasses in our daily lives, circumscribing our desires and keeping our passions within due bounds toward all mankind, particularly our brethren in freemasonry. Of course, we are also taught to use the square to square our actions by the square of virtue.

Karl Wallenda – the renowned high wire walker, and also a brother Mason, used a long pole to balance himself on the wire many stories above the ground. This long pole was in motion to keep him balanced, as you keep your life balanced, this pole is moving all the time in and out up and down trying to find that elusive balance point. Balance is not static it moves changes and flows. Like Brother Wallenda's pole, we have to be dynamic and moving and seeking to find that balance. When you are at work, give your whole attention to that work, do not let yourself be distracted; same in your family, and same at lodge; give your focus do not be distracted and you will find success.

One of my early, balanced life, role models was my Dominion Grocery Store manager. I worked for while I was in junior and senior high school. I worked for him for four years and learned a lot about balancing work, family and personal interests. He didn't ever appear to focus on his balance, but naturally modelled it every day. He loved what he did for a living, always spoke about his family life, was heavily involved in his children's sporting activities and took every occasion he could to engage in his hobby tying flies and going salmon fishing with his sons. He was always smiling, happy and relaxed. I could not think of a better wish for my life. When my family would travel during the summer months, he would always encourage me to go with them. "Your job will be waiting for you when you return," he would reassure me, "Enjoy your summer." He inspired me to relish and experience life.

Find people in your life or industry with a similar livelihood, that successfully live healthy, happy and balanced lives. Watch them. Follow them online. Speak to them to discover what they are doing right. Emulate areas of their behaviour which work for you and help you achieve your own goals.

Balance in work, in family, in church, and your Masonic life is not an easy thing. Like Brother Wellenda, moving that pole in and out up and down to keep his balance, so must each of us work hard to find out where that "sweet spot" is, and it is elusive my Brothers. For my Balance is very different from that of a younger (in years) brother, where my wife and I are both retired, and we are empty nesters. Whereas, as a younger Brother who has small children and he and his wife both work outside the home, then there is a different set of issues to find balance. This young man must give his children the love, the guidance, and be the father they want him to be. How does this young Brother strike that balance? Though my wife and I have no children at home, we do have our grand kids, and our niece and nephew live near and we love to spend time with them and their wee folks, and we have to work to find that balance where we have time to spend with them. To free ourselves from other distractions so that we can be focussed on them, to give them that much needed attention.

At times this can be very delicate, there are nights, I am sure, when Dad arrives home, the kids already know he has to leave either before or just after supper for a meeting. To them it matters not that there is a Fellowcraft Degree. Tonight, to them, their dad is not home, and this can, and more often than not, weighs on our younger Brothers. It does get tough, pressures at work, pressures at home and the work that has to be learned at lodge. The work increases and it gets busier and busier as you progress through the line of officers. It comes down to how much you are willing to sacrifice, however, if you are willing to invest time and effort in the Lodge. Discuss this with your spouse, with your lodge brethren, and yourself; it can cease to be a sacrifice and becomes an investment.

Whether new mason or experienced mason, no matter how long you have been a member, you have to learn to prioritize. This is one of the tools that you can use to move toward finding the balance. Prioritize what is important to you, your spouse, your kids, your work, your church and your Lodge. For example, 1st Birthday or Lodge Night – First Birthday; Wedding Anniversary or a Committee of General Purpose – Anniversary; After work Social Function or Third Degree at Lodge – Third Degree. I cannot assume to stand here in my patent leather shoes and tell you what will work for you. You know your path to balance better than anyone.

A great deal of communication is required. Brethren, before I agreed to let my name stand to receive the honour of being elected District Deputy Grand Master for Frontenac District, my wife, Patty, and I had many long and detailed discussions. For without her steadfast support and love, and a lot of understanding, I could not have accepted this honour to be the DDGM.

If you have an honest discussion with your spouse, or significant other, and let them know your feelings. If you are honest from the beginning, and let these people close to you know what Masonry means to you, what you want to do in the Craft and where you want to take it, this too will assist you in your effort to find balance. Mutual respect is needed for how each in the partnership uses their extremely valuable time. With respect comes understanding and love and another step toward this elusive balance. Communications is key – whether it be at home, at the office or at Lodge, for without good clear lines of communication nothing could be accomplished. Communication is essential; it insures that the Lodge is getting the attention it needs to grow, your family is getting the attention it requires and as well your success at your avocation; all of this requires good communication skills. Open, clear and honest communication is another tool in the tool box to be used to find your Balance.

For non-active members of the lodge, the search for Balance does not apply; they have already made their choice, so the non-active member has chosen his balance to be away from the lodge in other activities. Brethren you also need time for yourself. Remember to choose the life balance right for you. Don't adopt someone else's definition unless it fits comfortably with you. When it comes to life balance, one size does not fit all.

In the Disney movie Muppets Most Wanted, the lead female character has a "me" party. A line in the song proclaims "tonight I'm gonna celebrate for just the one of us." Incorporating this into reality is easier done than you think. Do something you enjoy which focuses entirely on you: self-improvement, classes, sports, charity work or simply reading a book, listening to music, going to the movies, a concert or theatre performance. Shut off your phone, computer and any devices diverting your focus away from time to think,

relax, recharge and have fun. Your family, friends and co-workers will benefit from these changes, too. They'll appreciate your lower stress levels and renewed focus "small things make a big difference." When you live a balanced life you dwell in a place where Anastasiya Goers, author of 5 Essential Zen Habits for Balanced Living says, "you can always offset any negative events in your life with positive ones . . . when you are happy working and playing equally."

Freemasonry states that its goal is to take good men and make them better men. This is good, because these good men live in society, and by the very act of improving them, society improves. This is the balance that freemasonry teaches. It is not about me changing them, it's about me changing ME. At first blush, this sounds rather arrogant and self focussed, but it seems to be the core of freemasonry. No one can change another fundamentally. Oh, you can pass laws, and like pointing a gun at someone's head, you can force them to ACT like they are something they are not, but the core remains the same. Freemasonry teaches, to each according to his willingness and ability, and of course, that is the beauty and glory of the craft. It is A Peculiar System of Morality, taught by allegory, illustrated by symbols. As freemasons, we inculcate the teachings of the craft in our private life, and then implement them in our public life.

We are Freemasons always, and that is how we should live our lives, never doing or saying anything that would cast a negative light on our ancient and honourable fraternity. The Peculiar System of Morality that the craft teaches us is freedom, circumscribed by the boundary of what is right. With great freedom comes greater responsibility. The responsibility for our actions is truly on our shoulders, for there is no one to blame but ourselves for the manner in which we employ our freedom. Never lose sight of the use of that valuable instrument by which we are taught to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds toward all mankind, particularly our brethren in Freemasonry.

Remember "wax on wax off" polished Mr. Miyagi's car and helped Daniel win over the bad guys, but did it help him find Balance? Remember Brethren, just when you have it figured out, it will change; the priorities change, events arise where what you have planned have to be altered or cancelled. It is a lifelong process finding balance and, like the wire walkers pole, it is constantly in motion, every step you take, there is a change, and you must learn to move, adjust to change and to adapt to find your own balance.

Brethren, I do not have the golden ring, or the magic solution to finding Balance, it is a search and a journey we must all take alone; you must seek it, work toward finding that peace and balance in your own life. Fulfilling your purpose is your destiny. Finding your balance in life is essential to unleashing your true potential. Take your first, small step today. Tomorrow take the next. I challenge you to travel a step at a time towards a life of balance, success and happiness. It's all about balance.