

Sunday Masonic Paper No. 797
The Chief Object of Freemasonry
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It is unfortunate that the General Charge, as used in the Grand Jurisdiction of Ontario, is only heard once each year, at the conclusion of the ceremony of installing the Worshipful Master for the coming Masonic Year. The General Charge contains many profound truths about our Craft, which are not repeated elsewhere in the ritual, and those truths deserve to be heard more often.

Twice, in the General Charge, allusion is made to the “*chief object of Freemasonry*”. What is that? The Charge defines it as.

“to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others”

If this is the chief, or main object of our Craft, why is it only mentioned here? And, what does it mean?

“To be happy ourselves”

On the face of it, this simple objective seems clear and unequivocal, but is it? Happiness is actually a difficult concept to grasp. In the USA, reference is often made to the well known phrase in the Declaration of Independence: “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness”. But, can we pursue happiness? As Masons, what defines happiness?

Answering this question forces us to go back to our Masonic roots and ask ourselves: why are we Masons? More specifically, why did I join the Fraternity in the first place? Probably, most of us were seekers, looking for something beyond the norms of everyday living. Many of us probably had only the dimmest idea of what we might be getting ourselves into, when we filled in that petition. But, now that we are here, do we look back and wonder whether we made a good choice? If we agree that we did, then we must have found some of what we were seeking before we were initiated. Whether we are “happy” as Masons will depend upon our degree of satisfaction with what Freemasonry has taught us. We will perhaps consider how much we value the friendships we have made with our brethren, and how broad those friendships are. But, most of all, we will probably ask ourselves whether we look forward to meeting and working with our lodge brothers. Is the next lodge meeting something to anticipate with pleasure, or is it a chore which we dread, but are unwilling to terminate. The answer to such question will define whether we, as individual Masons, are “happy”, or not.

As each of us as individuals defines whether we are “happy”, we can measure the “happiness” of the Lodge, and, by extension, the whole Craft. Much ink has been spilled lamenting the decline of Freemasonry in society, especially over the past few decades. Many have been the Masonic papers suggesting how to stem the bleeding, but perhaps our focus has been wrong. Maybe we should be concentrating on this phrase in the General Charge. Surely, if we aim to be “happy ourselves”, this must necessarily mean that each brother is happy. For that to be so, his expectations of the benefits of being a Mason must be met, for if they are not, it will be only a matter of time until he stops coming to lodge meetings and events, and eventually drops out.

It is beyond the scope of this letter to suggest how to ensure the happiness of our Brethren; this has been dealt with in many excellent papers prepared by eminent and thoughtful brother Masons. But we need to focus on this most important objective, if Masonry is to survive and prosper.

“To communicate that happiness to others”

The second part of the “*chief object of Freemasonry*” is “to communicate that happiness to others”. By implication, “others” means those who are not Masons. In this case, “communicate” does not seem to suggest that we beat a figurative Masonic drum; it has never been our practice to trumpet who we are and what we stand for. In point of fact, we more often err on the side of prudence. An example is the

rarity of occasion where Masonic regalia are worn in public. One does not see “Join Us” tables at fairs; we pride ourselves in *not* soliciting new members, preferring that they make the first move. Even the showiest members of our Order, the Shriners, don’t hide, but also don’t play up, the fact that they are rooted in Freemasonry.

So, what does “communicate” imply? As so much in the precepts of the Craft, “communicate” suggests that we show forth by example. We rely on every Mason, as the General Charge so eloquently puts it: to “set an example for others to emulate”. “Communicate that happiness”, then, suggests that we demonstrate to the world that Masons are a happy bunch, who love being in the Fraternity. If we actually succeed in generating such an impression, there is little doubt that the supply of petitioners will never dry up, and the future of our Fraternity will be forever secure.