

Brotherhood: My Brother

By RW Brother Len Wyllie

I wish to convey various thoughts I have regarding some strengths that we have and must use to nurture, and propagate our gentle Craft in order to not only survive -but to flourish in this 21st century.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that like most of us, my thoughts and ideas are derived to a large extent from what filters out as a building block base, supported by what I read and what I learn firsthand from acquaintances. The G A O T U has given us the capability to reassemble and regurgitate, (if you will), this building block base, so that it appears as new information, but mostly it is, as I have said, a collection of information from others. The words "my brother" can conjure in the mind a wide variety of subjects and connotations, but today I wish to restrict my remarks to what we as Freemasons call "disinterested friendship". Do not let those words fool you ---there is not any real disinterest, it is just a clarification or distinction of our brotherly love for one another. We restrict ourselves to assuming the same interests as one biological brother to another.

In my humble opinion, there are two levels of our interaction with each other as Brethren of the craft:

Firstly, we know there are many hundreds of thousands of Masons that we do not even remotely know as acquaintances. As well, there are several hundred within a closer sphere that we have met once or twice but are not part of our immediate circle of Masonic friends. We know that to all these Brethren we have met or not met we have a common bond as Brothers by our acceptance of the same Masonic principles and ideals. That without the need to become personally familiar we can carry on with whatever human interactions are at hand and that the foundations constructed for us to become friends without fear of underlying motives.

Secondly, we have the immediate realm of friendships; that is, the Masons we know very well in our District and Grand Jurisdiction and more especially those with whom we share the same Lodge. It is on this closer circle of Masonic friendship that I would like to focus this talk, because, that is where we must concentrate our efforts to become closer to one another as Freemasons. I believe that becoming closer to one another within our Lodges and District will not only result in further strengthening of our fraternity but our feelings towards one another will also exude a more favourable impression on the public at large, because, like it or not, our organization is transparent in this regard.

This evening I wish to discuss a few of the important aspects of our Masonic relationships that I think we take for granted and that I see we occasionally stumble on. I believe that if we recognize what we deem interpersonal skills as strengths that we can build on, the results can only benefit our beloved fraternity. Brethren, I ask you to reflect back, when you first became a Freemason - did the significance of a simple handshake change dramatically for you? It certainly did for me! What to me was a time-honoured ritual of greeting or meeting someone for the first time and where the act of shaking hands was just a relatively meaningless formality; after my initiation it immediately took on new significance. A handshake acquires new meaning with much more intensity and substance because now the person I greet for the first time could be a Brother Freemason, and the Brother I do know, of course, I get great pleasure in greeting him.

What is it that allows us to feel more comfortable when greeting one another as Brethren? It is that as brothers within our gentle craft we are all partakers of the same basic principles and have shared similar experiences - all of which has created incredibly strong inherent bonds throughout which contain informal and unspoken ties. All that we accept and practice we do voluntarily - of our own free will and accord which, of course, has tremendous significance, in that what we stand for and practice, is without external motives, pressure, or coercion, and comes from within the heart of every Brother. We feel secure in that as Brothers we are admonished not to cheat, wrong, or defraud, but on the contrary, to support every Brother in all his lawful undertakings - that those basic tenets of our institution instill in us a sense of honesty, integrity, and moral fibre that will withstand the tests of human corruption.

I expect that my Brother, in applying his Masonic skills to life's situations, will practice the correct way to treat people, with polite manners and social customs, and that he will be ever mindful of the dignity of others, which includes my dignity, and he has the propensity and inclination to follow society's rules. When I greet him without knowing or caring about his station in life, we will

meet on the level and treat each other as equals. I anticipate that he stands for the dissipation of discord and dissension, and that our meeting will not become confrontational, but through prudent discourse, will end in harmony. Again, these are the basic principles by which we anticipate that we can build relationships on. These basic principles however need to be further refined and defined in the process of building and maintaining the all-important relationships within our close circle of Brethren.

I think we can all agree that our world has changed and continues to change dramatically. Our current way of thinking has emphasis that is more scientific and I would suggest less import on authority, traditions and things held sacred. Have you not noticed that we tend to jump or act more quickly to resolve a situation than our forefathers did? The other day I heard an interesting story that illustrates this point:

It is about a man who was working in his shop out back when he noticed his eight-year-old daughter standing beside him. When he stopped working his daughter asked "Daddy what are sex?" The man thought quickly that even though she was very young she deserved a straight answer; so he painstakingly described human reproduction in great detail along with the joys and responsibilities of intercourse. When he finished explaining the little girl was looking at him with her mouth hanging open and her eyes as big as saucers and seeing the look on her face her father asked her "why did you ask this question honey?" Because Mommy sent me out to tell you that lunch would be ready in a couple of secs.

We pride ourselves on the antiquity and history of Freemasonry. However, will our ceremonies and ritual satisfy future generations? Along with others, I feel that the future will demand a better understanding of what Freemasonry really is. I am convinced that a silent example of men with personal integrity, who display the moral and social virtues of good men who do the right thing for righteousness sake will prevail and fill the social gaps left by the new age. Our task in this regard is to promote an awareness that connects these visibly good men to Freemasonry and its ideals.

We must make the welcoming of new members a very important part of what we do in Lodge. It is the experiences of their first few months and years that will determine how they view Freemasonry for the rest of their life. That is why I am personally fully committed to our mentor program. It gives the new Mason the foundation and some tools he will need in the "pursuit of happiness" over his Masonic career. The Mentor program fills some of our future needs by helping new members understand the value of Freemasonry in a more timely fashion. I believe our Lodges should strive for better Masons rather than more Masons. There is a story about a man who was considering offering himself as a candidate to Freemasonry. He gave himself the initial task of selecting one of two Lodges in his area. After he was made a Freemason, a friend asked why he had selected his particular Lodge. His reply was that after interviews, to him the selection was easy in that one Lodge was very interested in him as a candidate the other was interested in him as a man. Which do you think he chose?

It is my firm belief that; although we can make our meetings more interesting by social events and Masonic education, the driving force that brings Masons together is our fellowship when we meet, whether at Lodge meetings or by chance encounters on the street. It does not take very long for a new Mason to realize that he can expect to form new friendships and continue to form new friendships for the rest of his life. He realizes that some new friends will be closer than others and that in itself is okay. However, one of the major dangers we have in our Masonic organization is when that realization of making and keeping friends fails him. This can lead to a change in his priorities and to move Freemasonry way down or even off his list of personal involvement. When a man's attendance becomes irregular, or he stops coming to Lodge, it suggests that his priorities have changed. It is our duty to find out why his priorities have changed so that we may make remedial changes. To do that we must be able to talk to that man as knowing him well - as Brothers.

Some of the other potential reasons for changing a man's priorities are (and these are what spurred me to prepare this talk) :

We do not make it easy for someone to say no when asked to do a job;

We do not make it easy for someone to get out of a commitment;

We do not say enough "how are you doing with your task / your life?";

We sometimes do not mentor the Worshipful Master who is occupied with day-to-day and current issues and not necessarily long-term activities or decisions. We sometimes do not help him find someone to do a job;

We do not have a "board of Elders", for lack of a better term, that can shape the destiny of a Lodge;

Nor do we have anyone overseeing how things are going with individuals who have jobs within the Lodge or with committees who have assigned responsibilities. We must be concerned about the emotional impact on a person performing a task -not purely looking at it from a functional point of view (i.e. how the project is coming along).

The ideal is that Lodge meetings should produce the effect of senior members giving direction, but reality is that often does not happen. Perhaps that is why you see some Lodges run by an individual such as a secretary, who, by default, makes all the decisions (because somebody has to do it) and then he is chastised for making all the decisions. We cannot expect a WM who is in the job for one year to make all the decisions.

Brethren, quite often on this day we stand here and say "I know I'm preaching to the converted because you are here; however, this is one time when I won't say that, because what I am discussing starts here - today, within ourselves. I believe we can fill some of the gaps as I have described by sincere open discussion and a sincere desire to be honest with ourselves. To get to that point of good frank discussion, we must be close to our Masonic Brethren. We must make a concerted effort to elicit the views and feelings of all members, not just a few. If the formality of our lodge meetings impedes input from some members, we must recognize that and solicit their opinions at Committee of General Purpose meetings, or by face-to-face discussion. It is important that every Brother feel that he is not left out, that the Lodge welcomes his views and as we say "He has had his just due". It is important for us to recognize that it will not just happen, we have to work at it.

We must make our Masonic activities and social fellowship attractive to existing members and prospective members alike. We must be careful not to just associate with our perceived like-minded masons, for this creates what appears to be "cliques". I say perceived, because sometimes we do not spend enough time to fully understand others. They may be like-minded more than we realize. We must be open and ask others am I doing a good Job? We do not always make good decisions, even though they appear fine on the surface. Occasionally it is only after the test of time and trial, that errors are detected. We must be open minded in our approach to fix what needs fixing. Take for instance, when the smoking in restaurants issue was in its heyday and the Government decreed that there be specific smoking sections in eating establishments and we were so happy. I ask you - is there any difference in creating a peeing section in a swimming pool? It took us a long time to figure that out. We must be especially sensitive and caring to the requirements of those who are ill, in addition to those Brethren, whose age is changing their needs, or where circumstances have dramatically altered the life of a brother, such as the loss of a loved one. Finally and most importantly, we must practice openness and tolerance:

Openness: - to feel free to discuss delicate issues, human issues that are important to making and keeping good relationships. Because we are all different, think and act differently, we must get to know one another sufficiently, so that we can converse on a level that will promote friendship and at the same time avoid discord. We need to be able to recognize conversations or deeds that could offend some, but not others, and exercise that knowledge in our day-to-day dealings with fellow Lodge members. We must learn to communicate with all within our close circle and communicate we must.

Tolerance: - We have to assume an attitude that is completely tolerant of the views and ideas of our fellow Brethren. We may feel that their idea or point of view is wrong, but we must recognize that they have their own reasons for their expressions, and it is not our lot to judge them for that. We all say or do things that later we wish we could take back. Well, we can openly try to take them back, by being honest with ourselves and try to right those wrongs, and to quickly and easily forgive those transgressions by others. I know from personal experience that I have offended others - albeit not consciously - and I am always extremely grateful to the person who points this out so that I can try to make amends. That is important to me! I think all of us here know members of the craft who for one reason or another are in some level of emotional dispute with other Masons. Are these disputes really that important in the Grand scheme of things? I sincerely believe that good honest discussion would make these disputes non-existent. We each must learn to seek out and accept admonitions from others as support and try to correct situations, if possible, and at the very least have some concord by "agreeing to disagree"

Brethren -You can make a difference! I ask you to consider and practice that openness, tolerance and to express a genuine interest in your fellow Freemason, the man you call My Brother.

Be a true Brother to him.