

# The Three Tenets

By: Jon Sage - December 21, 2016

One of the most enduring topics of Freemasonic discussion is that of membership attraction & membership retention. This is true within Freemasonry and also just about any organization known to mankind. Sure, we all want to be a part of “something bigger than ourselves” and to have great numbers makes us feel... well, it makes us feel secure. It’s only human nature to want to be a part of a successful program- if you doubt me, look at the processes that are used to recruit top talent for college sports programs. In these, the coaches look for and try to entice the best players to attend their schools; and... the players look for and try to PICK the best school/team to be a part of. It’s a two way street. One does not necessarily pick the other– instead, they both pick one another. The same holds true for the Masonic Fraternity.

We all wrestle with the idea of how to approach potential members, how to attract those candidates to petition for membership, how to go about initiating and mentoring newly Made Masons... all because our end result must be a retention of our membership, so that they too will approach, attract, initiate, and retain members. It’s a centuries old tradition, and one that has always had its ups and downs. Perhaps the biggest lull in membership has occurred in the last 30 or so years here in the U.S., and I would guess that this is not a phenomenon known only to this country in particular. However, the biggest surprise for all might be that the solution to this problem was explained, IN DETAIL, during a lecture in the Entered Apprentice, or the 1st degree. Were you listening? Consider the 3 tenets (we could also call them duties) of a Mason’s Profession, and then stop and think how those are applicable in the modern day, within and without Lodge.

## Brotherly Love

This duty is expressed as, quite simply, loving everyone on the planet and treating them as equals in the way that our Creator intended. We are not to quarrel needlessly, or display bigoted and racist behaviours. We are to hold every human being in the highest regard possible, for they are ALL the handiwork of the Deity. Pretty straightforward stuff. However, I know from experience (and I’m raising my hand as one who has been guilty in the past), that this is not always the way that we treat our Brethren, let alone those beyond the West Gate! My friends, this is not a suggestion, it is a mandate, supported by our Landmarks, that “by the exercise of Brotherly Love we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and low, the rich and poor; who, as created by one Almighty Parent and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support, and protect each other”[i].

## Relief

This is where the concept of Masonic charity comes into the picture. Put simply, we are to relieve those in distress, if it is within our power and capability to do so. Most have long envisioned these actions to be purely monetary in nature. But, I’m afraid that nothing could be further from the foundational truth! Although it is true that at times financial assistance is in order, far more often are the times when we are obliged to “soothe the unhappy, to sympathize with their misfortunes, to compassionate their miseries, and to restore peace to their troubled minds”... “this is the grand aim we have in view”[ii].

You see, the notion of Relief is really just being a good friend and Brother! We have all felt the need to cry on someone’s shoulder, to just talk with someone, to just be heard and appreciated. And yet, I ask you, how often have you noticed someone who was needing that very same thing, and avoided them, or cut them off shortly? Again, this is not an indictment but rather a reminder to do what is right and best for those among us. A kind and attentive ear is often the best medicine for someone in need - no answers– just listen, and “be there” for your friend and Brother.

## Truth

The last of our tenets is Truth. The definition in the lecture is rather wordy, but I can tell you that it ultimately just boils down to not only “talking the talk” but also and most importantly of “walking the walk”! Brethren, actions DO speak louder than words!!! In order to hear your words, folks need to be relatively close to you and you need to be talking. Actions though, that’s a bit different. People– from any distance– can usually observe your actions, and these are usually their first impression of us. The saying goes that you can’t change a bad first impression, and this is a fairly accurate statement. Our actions include expressions, tone of voice, and other body language. I’ve often heard the advice of “smiling” when you answer the phone. Guess what? It does work. I believe and have been told that the person on the receiving end of the phone can “hear” your smile. Likewise, it would hold true that they could “hear” a frown, a look of disdain, of anger... we are only MORE amplified in person. People can see us before they hear us, and the image is burnt in the memory– be it good or bad. In short, Truth is the element that holds everything else together and makes it all tick! This is where we walk uprightly before God and man, holding nothing back. I would encourage all to be themselves, and to make damn sure that this projection of themselves is something to be proud of.

How Does This Affect Membership? Simple. If we all were to constantly and religiously do what is asked of us in the instruction of the 1st degree, then those outside the Gate, who might be contemplating Freemasonry, would see a true picture of what it should look like. It's true! If any and all among us actually acted out these 3 tenets then my, oh, my— what a wonderful world it would be. I will wager that not only would people show up and ASK for petitions at your Saturday morning breakfast, but they would also turn out to be enduring members, foundational type Masons! I don't think I'm wrong on this.

Consider this one thought before we go. Think back, and remember the Mason who might have been that one guy who you instinctively looked up to and admired during your entry into Lodge. Now, think a little more in depth. What made him memorable and worthy of a stranger's admiration? The answer.... You already know the answer. That man displayed each and every one of the tenets of a Mason's profession, and he did so without having to put on a show! Meanwhile, I will once again wager that this man, if he still be among us, is still dedicated to those duties and embodies them daily. This is what we want and what we need. To simply follow the directives given us in our lectures. By doing so, we can be that "one guy" who others might look up to and maybe, just maybe, help to cultivate the next generation of good Masons.

References:

[i] Indiana Monitor and Freemasons Guide, 1997.