

Are We Really Brothers?

by Sir Knight Gerald W. 'Jerry' Brooks

Some thirty odd years ago, in a land on the other side of the Atlantic, I knelt in a darkened room at the altar in a Masonic lodge room and took upon myself the Master Mason's obligation. While I was repeating the obligation to the Master of the Lodge, my mind wandered over the many "I further-mores" of that sacred pledge I was making to my Brethren then surrounding me. It struck me, even then, that this was something of great significance. One of the most important thoughts that came to my mind was that I had, by the words I had spoken, bound myself as a Brother to every man in the room that night. I had by this earnest pledge bound myself by my honor and by my vow to Almighty God, upon His Holy Word, that these men and Masons wherever dispersed around the world were now my Brothers.

That, at that very moment, was a major "WOHA" if you know what I mean. Freemasons, wherever they are, were now my Brothers. It did not mean just those who could speak my language or who attended my church but every last one of them by the millions. That thought would stagger an elephant. Here I was, a brand new Master Mason, brimming with all of the emotion and feeling of true brotherhood. It was indeed a magic moment in time. Since that day, through my many years of Masonic membership in a number of lodges, through several Grand Jurisdictions, and among appendant bodies, I now, alas, because of some of the people I have met over the intervening years of my Masonic membership, have the feeling that some just do not feel the same way.

This has given me pause to reflect about the concept of Masonic brotherhood as I understood it then. As I have traveled throughout my Masonic career, in whatever Masonic bodies I have found membership, I have stumbled into situations where the Brethren are in disagreement. Disagreement is not all that bad unless the disagreement leads to conflict and animosity among the Brethren. I would like to ask; "What is it that sets us apart as Freemasons?" I had always thought that is was our brotherhood. Am I wrong? Do we all share that common bond when we take upon ourselves that Master Mason's obligation? In our Masonic work we are presented the working tools of a Freemason. I remember the explanation of the principal working tool of a Master Mason which is the Trowel. The Monitor of the Lodge of the Grand Lodge of Texas explains it this way:

"... but we, as Free and Accepted Masons, are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection; that cement which unites us into one sacred band, or society of friends and brothers, among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention, or rather emulation, of who can best work and best agree."

Now that seems simple enough. We are all "friends and Brothers," right? It seems to me that this was the whole idea; we are all Brothers working together for the greater good. When each of us took that obligation, I believe we all had that same feeling that I did so

long ago. If we have believed in the tenets and followed the guidelines of the order, those feelings might be true. Brethren, some believe that we are all the same in our thoughts, our words, and our actions. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but such is not the case. In truth, we are all different, and each holds to his own opinion about how things should progress in our lodges. This is normal human nature. Every man has all of the likes and dislikes that he had before he became a Master Mason and at times will come into conflict with the thoughts and ideas of those whom he calls Brother. Each person uses his own set of values in a specific situation ranked in the order of importance. This too is normal. It has been said that there are as many paths to a specific goal as there are people pursuing that goal, so we end up with disagreements and conflict among Brethren. However, the disagreement should not lead to disharmony among the Craft. Remember, if we work together for that common good, the greater goal of making our world a better place, we can settle disagreements as real Brothers. Consider this. Our founding fathers were of different backgrounds, different values, and different philosophies. Yet they came together to set this nation on a path that has led our country to its current place in the world.

Reasonable men can usually come to a mutual agreement or accommodation when approached in a reasonable and conciliatory manner. Reasonable men will work until a solution is found. Unfortunately on many occasions, we are faced with the problem of our own ego and stubborn approach, and our passions capture the moment instead of thoughtful and reasonable discussion. Tempers flare up, and reason is tossed out the window so to speak. Brother becomes pitted against Brother, trouble is created, and our Brotherhood is disrupted. We are a Fraternity of reason. We were born during the "Age of Reason," and the men who fashioned our Fraternity understood that men differ and opinions differ, but when each earnestly pursues the goal of the common good, then reason will prevail.

Over the years I have observed that every time this happens, the harmony within the Lodge and the Fraternity has been broken, and in the end, we have failed. We, as Master Masons, have failed to maintain brotherhood, and we have failed our Fraternity. Again from the Monitor of the Lodge at the closing in the Grand Lodge of Texas;

"May the blessings of heaven rest upon us and all regular Masons. May Brotherly Love prevail, and every moral and social virtue cement us. Amen. So mote it be."

If we are true to our Fraternity and if we adhere to the true principals of our Fraternity, how can we not maintain that brotherly love we proclaim? When disharmony erupts within a lodge and among the Brethren, then we have failed as Master Masons. Reason has departed from our midst, and the peace and harmony among the craft has been broken. The universe abounds with harmony. When you strike a note, the vibrations are felt, and the sound can be felt within our soul. When the note of true brotherly love is struck, it can be felt among the Brethren, and harmony sings with the soul. Disagreements happen, but if these are approached with an open hand and an understanding heart, they can be resolved, the peace and harmony that is the music of our fraternity and of our Brotherhood is felt by all, and the music is a song within our hearts.

You see my Brethren, the ritual gives us instruction, the obligation gives us direction, but the trust in our belief in brotherhood is what holds us together. We have our laws and our degrees and all that they entail, but it is our brotherhood which holds us in its grip, and when we let that be the guide in our deliberations and our relationships, we can truly feel the difference. A stranger in our meetings can feel the harmony or the lack of it. They do not understand why we have disharmony, because their trust is in our brotherhood. Whatever program we desire, whatever project we undertake can only be accomplished with the assistance of our Brethren and by the quality of our brotherhood.

The view of our Lodge from the outside is judged by our interaction with each other. Peace and harmony are essential for our Fraternity to be perceived as worthy of the non-Mason's time and effort when deciding to join our ranks. We are judged by our community, by our commitment to brotherhood, and by our sharing of the trials and tribulations we all face each day.

How can we proclaim our good intentions and worthiness to be viewed as a lofty example in our goal of "taking a good man and making him better?" If we wish to maintain our image, then we must live by the true rule of brotherly love and maintain peace and harmony among the craft. We must overcome our tendency to draw a hard line in the sand. We must keep to the ideals of brotherly love and work together in honest dedication to work in peace and harmony. It is not the "I" but the "WE" that becomes important. It is not the individual experience of Freemasonry but the shared experience that becomes important. We can change the world if we will just live and act within the bounds of brotherly love and work toward the good of the whole, the glory of the whole, for it is in that glory that our Creator prepared us to be a Brother and a worker, building a better world together. Our lessons in the tenets of our order are designed to help bring about such a world which is better in all respects and are based upon that brotherly love that emanates from our Creator. We can only do this if we are able "to subdue our desires and keep our passions within due bounds." Remember the lesson of the trowel, and live it everyday.

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