

PERSONAL INTEGRITY

by Sir Knight Clayton J. Borne, III

In the September 2007 Louisiana Freemason is an article entitled Relevancy of Freemasonry in the Twenty-First Century, originally presented at the 8th World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges in Paris. The paper ended with the conclusion that our fundamental principles and their significance to society are just as relevant today as they were to our ancient brothers.

Accepting this conclusion as the premise for this paper and extrapolating the cause and effect relationship forward in time, civilized society and mankind in general will measure the dynamics of our spiritual brotherhood not by its idealistic objectives, but whether the Masonic philosophy is truly alive and evident in the lives of each of our Brothers. In other words, if instead of integrity they see hypocrisy, instead of truth they see prevarications, instead of honesty they see deception; our footprints on the pages of time will have been tarnished. Where our history evidences a God centered life adorned in a cloak of charity, brazen by badges of truth, honor and courage, the 21st century will continue to see men drawn to our lodges, as the Brotherhood and its destiny is truly a reflection of who we are and all that we do.

As a predicate to this paper, I ask each of my brothers the question, "Why do we, as a brotherhood, believe that belief in a Supreme Being is necessary for a personal transformation in our lives and ultimately necessary for the development of a disciplined yet free society?" As an extension of that thought, "Why is a belief in a Supreme Being essential to the landmarks of our fraternity and sacred to the ritual of our regular Masonic Lodges?" The answer is fundamental to understanding the Masonic philosophy or the Masonic way of life.

Exactly how were we able to affirm a belief in a Supreme Being and what effect did that acceptance have on our lives? Have we truly challenged the concept of the "Being behind Reality" and its effect on the men that we are? Did the Masonic initiation ritual enhance your conviction and your commitment to spiritual growth? Philosophers over the ages have challenged this basic concept and pushed mankind to investigate more specific questions: "What is the nature of God, and how is God related to the universe?", "Is God a force responsible for creation?", "What is the true concept of God?", "Is it possible to even come to a knowledge of God?", and for us, as Masons "Why was it essential to the tenets of our brotherhood that we affirm the concept before gaining admission?" and "Why have we severed communications with those Grand Lodges that believe it is no longer essential to the Masonic discipline to embrace a belief in a Supreme Being?"

Knowledge of God

The concept challenged by many early philosophers and historians which is fundamental to each of our most basic beliefs is “How do we as humans come to a knowledge of God, and why is it important?” Further, for the purpose of this paper, what effect does this academic inquiry have on our Masonic Brotherhood its spiritual pursuits, and objectives?

After much research, self reflection and thought, it is my sincere belief that for a finite creature, such as man, to come to a knowledge of an infinite creature or being, such as God, is on its surface impossible. The reason: man as a finite creature cannot truly understand or comprehend the limitless concepts such as eternity or infinity. Despite many brilliant philosophers’ allegations to the contrary, finite man conceptually defines everything in terms of, or with limits.

God, however, most definitely can be known. God is known to the extent that his nature would demand it be revealed; that is, in the ways God would choose to reveal himself to his creations. An example would be found in our perception and knowledge of nature. As a Christian the revelation would be the embodiment and person of Jesus Christ. There are others. Only in the revelation is a finite knowledge of God possible. By his creation, God or the Creator becomes the principal of the Universe. God is the whole of his creation; God is truly the “Grand Architect of the Universe”.

I submit that the reason that a belief in God is essential for our Spiritual Brotherhood is because of our fraternity’s purpose to aggressively encourage the development of the spiritual nature of man, well knowing that our object over time is the creation and development of a self-disciplined society. That development must begin with each of us personally and its success be measured by our individual spiritual advancement. When viewed collectively, this discipline creates dynamic lodges. The obvious question becomes, how does this process individually and collectively take place? Exactly what are the results, and are they truly in harmony with what we believe are our personal objectives?

Very simply, a belief in God has an immediate and direct bearing on our values and convictions. Those have a direct effect on our behavior. The motivation of the acceptance of belief opens the door to the spirit life after death and our ability as finite creatures to pass upon death to an infinite state. Exactly how does this intellectual belief transform each of us, and is our Masonic Fraternity doing its part in stimulating this growth?

Understanding that once man has a belief in God, this belief creates, in addition to the most basic concept of survival which dominated and existed in a non-orderly barbaric society, a true purpose for life. Belief in a creator, God, transforms man from a rude, self-centered, savage state into a creature with a more civilized, meaningful purpose. That objective or hope is to unify himself ultimately with his creator with the sincere desire of returning to the spirit or infinite state always with eternity in view. It begins to change our convictions and beliefs and ultimately our lives. How does the acceptance of God and this life changing process take place?

Our Masonic Brotherhood teaches and encourages a philosophy of self transformation and the development of a character that recognizes the need to subordinate personal gain and self interest to the greater good of society. The transformation of the finite spirit in each of us demands a reassessment of the most basic concepts of life in order to give priority and meaning to the fundamental concepts of goodness which are absolutely necessary for the advancement of mankind in a free society. This society evidences the individual and collective self-discipline necessary to maintain order. That order has a fundamental principle; that principle is "truth". Our Brotherhood embraces truth as the heart and soul of each and every virtue. As Masons we advocate a virtuous life. It logically follows that a virtuous life results in a life of integrity.

I submit that individual integrity is the essential element in a social structure that encourages individual and collective liberty. It insures a disciplined society that cultivates, in a secure way, the collective, peaceful advancement of humanity. In general, where personal integrity is lacking, laws become problematic and are of little value. This is why we, as Masons, endorse this unselfish discipline for all of humanity, especially our brotherhood. How exactly do we individually achieve these idealistic principles, and what is our responsibility as Masonic mentors, especially to the Entered Apprentice, who is still trying to understand himself and the confusion of the world in which he lives? It begins with a belief in God.

MASONIC IDEALS

As we strive to cultivate integrity in our personal lives and collectively in our spiritual brotherhood, our efforts meet with constant resistance. As appalling as it may be, society today is a reflection of disrespect, an unappreciative and uncaring disease that migrates into all aspects of our culture. The cure as with all other social problems is education.

The Masonic ideals and their influence on society through the ages have been exerted in no better or nobler purpose than the ageless struggle by the Brotherhood for "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" and ultimately a secure freedom for society. Our Fraternity, through the ages, has been the champion of oppressed people with the object being the emancipation of mankind from every form of tyranny. Within our lodges, liberty or freedom, especially in thought, was freely encouraged. That freedom, based on these principles, made possible the natural progression of a transformed life.

The humanist philosophy so prevalent in society poses obstructions to our Masonic ideals. The basic concept of Liberty has always had an aggressive enemy. It is the self-centered concept of entitlement. The entitlement belief is the direct result of the modernist doctrine that there is no rational basis for values. Despite our Masonic brotherhood's continued efforts to promote integrity, the value system of society has been eroded. Many of society's values become problematic; in other words, nothing is truly good or bad. It's all a matter of opinion. We must ask then, how and why have principles? Do as you please or whatever you can rationalize as

being right. Without the liberty to choose our own actions and make our own choices, we lose the qualities of responsibility that make us uniquely human.

It is only when people do the right thing freely that we can have confidence in their character. If they act out of principles such as truth, benevolence, and productiveness as taught in our Lodges, then we know that their actions result from good character and the principle of liberty is preserved.

The world in which we now live is dramatically changing. Idealistic principles are important to fewer and fewer people. We demand of our leaders honesty, but we don't really expect them to be honest. Our societies have become problematic where honesty becomes relative and rationalization of all conduct is the norm. We often say that our communities are civilized societies of law, but too often laws are broken, and then attempts are made to justify the actions. That logic is corruptive, destructive but most importantly contagious.

Prevarication or lying has infected our culture. The generation of today lies for no apparent reason. Recent surveys state that 90% of society frequently lies in some manner. Truthfulness is no longer a virtue people try to adopt for their lives. Conversely, Masonic philosophers and our Masonic ritual of instruction view truth as a divine attribute, and as we have previously stated, truth should be at the heart of each and every virtue.

Marriage and family are no longer sacred institutions. Infidelity is common place. The work ethics of our forefathers are disappearing from society. Procrastination at the workplace is common with no respect or appreciation given to employment. Society says it wants to respect, but modern man's life experiences evidence a serious lack of it. The lack of respect in society is the end result of a lack of purpose, discipline, and moral commitment. These are the very ideals that we, as Masons, fight to preserve.

A brother whose life evidences qualities of honesty, discipline, and courage is proof of a transformed life that has earned respect. His life embodies an individual quest and a determined search for light. It is a fraternal concept shared with our brothers of like mind. This writer submits that the attraction, the spiritual reward, the ultimate objective of our spiritual brotherhood is the character which is the epitome of all virtue; namely Integrity. In general the quality is defined as our ability to naturally embrace a way of life with moral and ethical principles. Its presence in each of our lives will be the attribute that will continue to draw good men to our Lodges.

The driving force of our Masonic fraternity is to instill in each of our brothers a mission to create within each man who knocks at the door of our lodge a thirst for integrity. That desire can only be quenched by a commitment to moral principles and goals in each of our lives. We must teach that truth, honesty, and moral principles are of prime importance. The newly made brother should be instructed to subsequently understand that a man of integrity is unimpeachable; he is steadfast;

his word is his bond. He is never critical of others, even of those with whom he is in opposition. He restrains his emotions and passions. He is reliable, and is one who always pays his debts. He should stand upon principle no matter what the consequence whether alone or in a crowd.

Conclusion

To the Entered Apprentice and his search for light, "Integrity", and its Masonic ideals are but idealistic concepts although often cognitively embraced; it is rarely evident in his life. The apprentice, as he begins his transformation, begins to understand that a person of integrity is a person that thrives for consistency of principal and that principle translates to living the ideals. In other words, ideals such as truth, honesty, charity and moral discipline are no longer problematic nor are they mere idealistic principles. They are to become a true way of life. Our young brother is developing a philosophy of purpose.

The Mason begins to understand that fullness of life is found in that consistency, and he is made aware of the rewards and blessings of living a life with ideals as guiding principles. He realizes in a more profound way that his integrity is defined by the choices he repeatedly makes in his daily life. The brother begins to realize that the joy in this life's reality is in the journey; the journey with ideals; the journey with purpose.

Our Spiritual Brotherhood is committed to the concept that all of mankind is entitled to be enlightened, and that process begins with a God centered life. It develops respect of the laws of society, but more importantly to us as Masons, it is a self imposed discipline. A discipline that through its ideal, generates unbelievable rewards; freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom to hold diverse beliefs to name a few.

Where the dignity of man, especially within the Brotherhood, is measured by the integrity of his life, that dignity becomes an ideal of respect; that ideal can then be freely expected and freely given. It is basic to the tenant of our fraternity.

Collectively, we as brothers, have the opportunity to make the world in which we live a better place, a place of integrity where our Masonic ideals do in fact become a way of life.

Sir Knight Clayton J. (Chip) Borne, III is a Past Grand Master of Masons in Louisiana and a practicing attorney-at-law in that state. He is a member of the Dormer Masonic Study Circle (London, England), the Masonic Study Society (London, England), the Louisiana Lodge of Research, and the Scottish Rite Research Society. He has published a book entitled The Story of Early History in Louisiana including History and Roster of Perfect Union Lodge (1973 to 2001). Sir Knight Borne and his wife Nancy reside at 1800 Lakeshore Drive, Mandeville, LA 70448
