

A Trip to the Serpentarium

by **Sir Knight Tom Lewis, Jr.**

Equality and love for everyone, it's hard to argue with that. We were born pure, not seeing race, sexuality, ego, hate, or anger. It's hard to remember those days, but there are reminders every time a new life enters this world, and if you can believe it, it is still inside everyone. Our core has been clouded over the years, but perspective usually comes when you least expect it. It is truth.

Here is a quote by Dr. Helen Schucman that sums everything up quite nicely, "Your task is not to seek for love but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it." 1

We are often taught that our fear of serpents goes back to the Garden of Eden, that it is an inborn reaction. We are afraid of serpents because of the enmity that has always existed between serpents and the children of Eve, just as distrust and enmity have always existed between Jews and Muslims or Muslims and Christians. The problem is that Muslims didn't always hate Jews and Christians. At the close of the first millennium, Muslims respected Christians and Jews as "People of the Book." So where does the hate and distrust come from?

A few years ago, my wife and I took our four month old grandson, Jay, to Edisto Serpentarium, and given that most people are, if not downright afraid, at least apprehensive of snakes and such, Jay's reaction was amazing. He was totally fascinated with all the different colored snakes and other reptiles. When I brought over a six foot ball python for him to see up close, he was actually reaching for it! He could sense Betsy and I weren't afraid of it, so he wasn't afraid either, but he was curious. It was something new, and he wanted to experience it. The experience just reinforced in me the fact that we aren't born afraid of anything; it's all learned behavior. We learn to fear from our families first and then our companions. Our children learn to fear what we fear, just as we learned to fear what our parents feared. Our children learn our attitudes and prejudices from us as surely as they learn to talk with the same regional accent as we have. My son may have attended grammar school in Connecticut, but he still has my southern drawl.

We say in our ritual that among Masons no contention exists except that noble contention or rather emulation of who can best work and best agree. Masonry teaches us that a man's personal faith is not relevant in the Lodge as long as he has one. His name for God and his method of worship are his own business. Likewise, we say that race is not an issue among Masons. Among many of us that have taken the deeper concepts of Masonry into our hearts and lives, that is true. Unfortunately, many others among us only give lip service to Masonry; they still practice Masonry only on the surface. By observing our babies, the evidence is clear that we are not born with prejudices - prejudices are born of fear, and babies are born fearless. Perhaps to truly practice the precepts of Masonry we must become as little children and seek to break down the barriers we have built over a lifetime. After all, as Christians we believe Jesus said, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."2 Maybe this is what Jesus meant - that we must divest ourselves of the fears we have learned and developed over a lifetime and become as fearless and accepting as babies.

Think for a moment what it could mean to the state of the world if people could lose their fear of things and people that are just different. If we didn't unconsciously consider anything or anyone who was different to either be inferior or dangerous. What a world we would live in if everyone in the world would view the world as a child does - a place full of wonder rather than a place full of danger, if we actually took the extra effort to evaluate those we meet as individuals rather than as a member of a group or class.

It must start somewhere. What better place than within our fraternity? We already profess to be willing to risk our lives for each other, to be unwilling to cheat each other, and to consider each brother of our order and by extension his family as members of our own families. It's all right there in the obligations we all took. What if we all actually did what we swore before God with our hand on his Holy Word that we would do? What would happen if we all decided to throw off our prejudices like a worn-out shirt and decided to treat others according to each one's own qualities rather than as a member of a group we may have learned to distrust? What could it mean to each of us personally, to Masonry as a whole, and to the world we live in if we all just lived up to our Masonic obligations? It couldn't fail to be noticed. Then we wouldn't have to seek brotherhood; it would seek us. Rather than going in search of light, we would reveal it.

End Notes

1 Marcus Amaker - Charleston Post-Courier

2 Luke 18:17

Sir Knight Tom Lewis, Jr. is a member of Jackson Commandery No. 13 in Jackson, Tennessee. He resides at 2104 St. Peters Lane, Charleston, SC 29414 and can be contacted at thl@gel.com.

Update: July 12, 2014

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