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THE ADVANCEMENT OF FREEMASONRY

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When a man is initiated into the Craft, he is the central focal point of the ceremony. He might be elated with expectancy and hope or he might be apprehensive with feelings of trepidation. But he now feels he has been accepted and that the brethren have judiciously considered he is worthy to be allowed to become a Freemason. He has been recognised as a just and upright man and has been especially selected after due examination for excellence of character.

At the end of the ceremony of initiation, he feels he has participated in moral enlightenment; he has been impressed with the drama of the First Degree. In the South at the festive board, he is welcomed by the brethren of his Lodge and by the visitors. He has arrived! He is very pleased with the attention received; it is warm and sincere; the glow of brotherhood has made its impact.

The first step has been taken and he is aware of some of the procedures in the Lodge Room. Now he is expected to study and learn the Questions prior to taking his next step, the Second Degree. Here, he is again the centre of interest in the proceedings of his advancement to the Second Degree. If the Charges are delivered to him with understanding and intelligence, he will listen avidly and absorb their messages.

He now feels that he is being brought within the folds of brotherhood with the warmth of acceptance in a pleasant and instructive experience. Again our candidate is feted in the South and his response to his Toast is now easier, less formal, because now he is talking to his brethren. He feels a closer acceptance and satisfaction from his brothers.

Then he takes the Third Degree with its dramatic presentation and the experience of its impressive ceremony. Now he is fully aware that the Craft has great depth and substance and he is ready to accept his responsibilities. He is not yet fully aware of the implications of the three degrees. He has been accepted, but he is in a quandary about what he is supposed to be, what he is supposed to do to warrant acceptance. What is now expected of him? He waits for guidance and monition. But unfortunately, in some cases, nothing happens. Where is the welcome and warmth? Where is the friendship and brotherhood? That brethren is the crux of the problem.

Let me tell you what happens in the cases I have investigated. The brethren are out looking for the next initiate. Our newly raised brother is left in the cold; he has served his purpose. But brethren, that is the exact time to nurture him, to explain to him and answer the questions that must be now puzzling him. This is the time, the most important time, to show him you still care and that the warmth of welcome always remains; that is how we hold a brother in the Craft.

What about his proposer and seconder? Where are they? They are his mentors. They should make him acquainted with the history and philosophy of the Craft, or point him in the direction of those who can. Never leave him in ignorance for that only leads to lack of interest and eventual resignation.

It must be explained to the newly raised brother that what he has experienced in the three degrees, is not the end of Freemasonry, but the beginning of what he is going to learn about the tenets of the Craft. To have an understanding of his responsibilities, he must be made acquainted with the fundamental truths of the Order. That is the solemn duty of his mentors, always.

The duties of a Proposer and Secunder to his candidate may be summarised as follows:-

1. They should make clear to the candidate that entering the Craft is not a short-cut to monetary advantage.

2. They should explain the obligations that membership entails and the necessity of regular attendance if elected and admitted.

3. They should make sure the Lodge is one in which the Candidate will be happy. For example, if the man is enthusiastically musical, or a deep thinker, or one with literary associations, then he should only join a Lodge where there are those with whom he is compatible.

4. When the Candidate has passed through the Degrees, the obligations of his proposer and seconder are only just beginning. They must guide his infant steps through the three stages and even when he has taken his Master Mason's Degree, he is only just, so to speak, commencing to stand alone.

5. They must act as his guide and counsellor in his early masonic undertakings.

6. They should impress the necessity for his attendance at Lodge rehearsals, see that he realises the reality of his Obligations and act as older brothers in assisting him to understand his duties.

7. The proposer and seconder should make a point of taking their candidate visiting to other Lodges which are working the Degree or Degrees the candidate has already taken, thus making him well acquainted with each Degree before he goes through the next stage.

8. They are also responsible for assisting the candidate preparing and memorising the answers to the Questions before Passing and Raising and should personally make sure that the candidate knows his answers correctly before coming forward to his next Degree.

But what are the responsibilities of a Freemason? A man is a Freemason because he has gained the privilege of membership. We have accepted him because it is felt that he has the personality and the sincerity to represent the Craft in his family and community.

The permission to join, after close scrutiny and examination, is one that has the approval of the Lodge. A man has a right to choose whether he wants to join or not and we have the right to accept or reject his application. Once the decision has been made and he is accepted by his brethren, he is pledged to serve his Lodge, his family, his community and his country. It is a moral and ethical obligation he accepts.

Freemasonry is not just another social club. The structure of the organisation is planned with many aims in view; to link and identify the Craft with the community and the world. It endeavours to create goodwill and solve the problems of people.

To do this every brother is pledged to serve by being active and alive and by putting the Craft in a good light and making attractive its endeavours. This can only be done with strength and sincerity of purpose. It is necessary and vital that every brother realises this and makes his attendance at Lodge regular and vigorous.

Now to the practical ways of nurturing and fostering a Candidate. This method has been tried and found to be highly successful. It must be performed with purpose and regularity, to give continuous information of interest and knowledge to the members of your Lodge.

In my researches into the knowledge and philosophy of Freemasonry, I come across many accredited works of great interest that I feel will assist in the edification of members, especially in the elucidation of topics that assist and educate. I enclose them with the monthly summons to the members of my Lodge. It is a regular feature and the members now look forward to these items of great interest. It causes discussion and debate. In addition, I also enclose a question and answer sheet from the numerous enquiries made by the members of my Lodge who are perplexed and puzzled on matters in Freemasonry which appear to be strange and problematic. These must be answered by close examination and study, to acquaint them with the reasons of the ceremonies of our ritual, which are, of course, logical and rational.

These pamphlets from accredited Masonic sources, such as Lodges of Research from all over the world with whom I am in correspondence, encourage members to ask further questions of

interest. This method is fruitful, as the young mason begins to realise and appreciate the depth of Freemasonry and it leads him, by research, into the further studies of the Craft.

Once the interest has been created, we move to the next step, the learning and delivery of a charge.

Firstly, he must have knowledge of the meaning of the charge; this is of great consequence; he is conveying a message to the recipient. Thus the message must have the intelligence of understanding from both the deliverer and the recipient.

Secondly, it is most important that the delivery of the charge be performed, yes performed,. We have all heard galloping charges, mispronunciations of words and words used out of context, so we must give the responsibility of the delivery of the charges to those who are capable. As well as the spoken word, there is stance, eye contact and pauses after an idea has been expressed and before the presentation of the next idea of the charge. All important is modulation of the voice, not a monotone but the rising of the voice to a climax, pause, then lower the voice to a slower speed of delivery and using the hands when necessary in gestures of emphasis. This system is available and should be used to a greater extent.

This opportunity of participating and belonging as an integral part of the Lodge is giving him the responsibility of mounting the ladder of progression within his Lodge.

Brethren, When a brother seeks information and knowledge of Freemasonry; then we have a Freemason who cares and stays.

When a brother gives a charge, asks its origin and reads it in context to the ceremony and finds its deep meaning within the ceremony and delivers it with intelligence and understanding of the message he is conveying; then we have a Freemason who stays.

When we have a brother who becomes involved and is imbued with the spirit of the Craft and puts that into operation in his dealings within and without the Lodge Room; then we have a Freemason who stays.

When we have a brother who is nurtured by his brethren and feels at all times that he is an integral part of the Lodge; then we have a Freemason who stays.

When we have a brother who knows that he is in a family of sincere men who care and is accepted by his brethren in good times and bad times; then we have a Freemason who stays.

My brethren, it is as simple as that. Let all our brothers work at this simple solution; because if it is recognised that there is a problem, then it must be also recognised that we have a solution. Remember brethren, you have all taken your obligations on the V.S.L. in the three degrees to undertake certain binding agreements. These are irrevocable, not to be taken lightly and are meant to acquaint you of your responsibilities.

So I ask you to consider your position within your Lodge. To reflect that your promise as a Freemason, if sincere, will lead to brotherly love, kindness and the joy of knowing the true call of being a Freemason and of the privilege that has been afforded to you of being accepted and the pleasure of being called 'Brother'.

The method we have used in my Lodge to attract worthy members without solicitation and with great success, is that fathers have introduced their sons, brothers, their brothers and workmates, their workmates. When we have welcomed them into the Lodge and they have found genuine and sincere brotherhood and the satisfaction of belonging, they selectively introduce men whom they feel will give of themselves in Service. There is already a bond to start with. That is the strength of our Lodge; if you want it to work and if you make it work.

The aim of Freemasonry and its objective is friendship and mutual fellowship. It is the centre of union between good men and true, the happy means of conciliating friendship among those who must otherwise have remained at a distance; to bring men together for a common aim of brotherhood.

"Just words", I hear you say? Right then you bring them to fruition by your efforts, deeds and actions; get involved, do something about it; do not just sit there. Talk is not enough unless there is a follow up and a follow through by action, your action.

The fact that the Craft has lasted so long and its basic fundamentals and precepts have spread all over the democratically motivated countries is sufficient proof of its viability, its practicality at all times. We must make sure that we have sufficient brethren ready, willing and able to carry the torch of Freemasonry forward, ever forward.

Brethren, to live we must give, that is part of my faith. Members of our organisation tell me that numbers are falling, that Lodges are amalgamating or handing in their Warrants. We are in less a time of danger than of new challenges; above all it is a time of new opportunities; the claims to attention are manifold. Perhaps the reason is that within the Lodge there are not sufficient brethren who are prepared to take up the challenges or are prepared to join in the work of giving of themselves in service to the Lodge, the community and to our country. It must be always borne in mind that a brother's first responsibility is to his family because that is where his discipline must start. I repeat, to live we must give.

Brethren, there is no abracadabra in Freemasonry, no magic wand; everything that is achieved is done with effort and purpose. It is up to you to decide what you want to encourage the continuity of attendance in your Lodge. To create interest, to improve the quality of the work to an intelligent rendering, so that understanding by the deliverer and the recipient creates that interest.

Improve your festive board, not a lavish banquet, but a supper worthy of consideration. Improve your napery, cutlery and glassware so that your tables reflect the quality expected these days especially by the younger masons.

Make your behaviour in the Lodge Room and in the Dining Hall be worthy of the Craft, harmonious with dignity. Let the new mason appreciate that he has joined an organisation of substance that has respect, friendship, fellowship and brotherhood with a true moralistic and ethical approach to life. Always remember, membership in Freemasonry is a privilege, not a right.

Brethren, concord is a unity of feeling and interest, it is harmony, agreement, accord and peace, to concur and co-operate with your fellow man. An organisation like ours, that does not believe in itself, cannot flourish. If we do not renew Freemasonry today, it will die the slow death of lingering irrelevance.

Brethren, I offer you your solution; now make it work. "Hoc opus hil labor" said Cicero- "This is a task, this is toil". Let us all shape the future of a changing world. S.M.I.B.

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