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Practice of Every Moral & Social Virtue

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Most Worshipful Grand Master & Brethren;

Before I start this Lecture, it may be an idea to set layout a picture of Freemasonry in the United Kingdom. Under the United Grand Lodge of England, there are some 330,000 Freemasons, meeting in 8,644 lodges. These are grouped into 47 area's called Provinces, there are some 1,500 Lodges under the Metropolitan Grand Lodge of London and another 32 other Lodges under the United Grand Lodge of England overseas. The Province of Buckinghamshire is just north of London; it has 123 Lodges with just around 4,000 members.

This paper was written originally as "The Burnham Lecture 2005 – 2006". The Burnham Lecture's were an idea that came out of a meeting of the Buckinghamshire Association for Masonic Research and discussion with the Late Provincial Grand Master, Hugh, The Right Honourable Lord Burnham. He readily agreed to the idea of a Lecture commemorating his family's connections with the Province of Buckinghamshire without any hesitation, in fact, I would say he gleefully supported the idea and it is through his support that our Research Lodge and Association has gone from strength to strength. So much so that he actively encouraged us to be involved in many Provincial schemes which we have proudly carried out as a team.

This Lecture, the Second Burnham Lecture, is entitled: -

"The Practice of Every Moral and Social Virtue!"

We will all, I'm sure, recall the phrases used in the Charge after Initiation, most of which have long been in the Public Domain, and, in fact are listed in many Grand Lodge, Provincial and individual web sites.

Whilst I'm sure that in your company, I do not need to relate it completely, instead let us look at a few relevant passages: -

"No institution can boast a more solid foundation than that upon which freemasonry rests
 - the practice of every moral and social virtue; -----

Be Exemplary in discharge of your civil duties; ----

Contemplate the V. S. L., it is the unerring standard of truth and justice; be respectable in life, useful to mankind, etc."

In my opinion the four major thoughts upon which I wish to suggest we ought to contemplate used within this glorious piece of Ritual are: -

"Let Prudence direct you,
 Temperance chasten you,
 Fortitude support you,
 and Justice be the guide of all your actions."

We are also told: - Imprint on your heart the sacred dictates of Truth, of Honour, and of Virtue." It is the relationship of God, your Neighbour & yourself!

A comment in the booklet entitled "Instruction for an Entered Apprentice" by W. Bro. Malden of Madras, written and privately published in 1897 talks about the Charge after Initiation being the whole duty of a good Freemason. There-in, he says, you will be taught about the antiquity of our order, he makes comment that it highlights the fact we believe in one Supreme Being.

The personal beliefs of the individual are for that person, whether we be Hindu, Jew, Sheikh, or Christian etc. To each the path that is pointed towards the individuals Great Light if it be the Koran, the Vedas or the Bible is not the point!

We know it is possible to find traces of our forebears, Masonically speaking, back to the 15th century and beyond. For the Templars based in various Mediterranean Islands had Lodges & a Grand Master; they also had a number of Preceptors in each Lodge. There is one school of thought which suggests that something akin to Freemasonry goes back to the Roman era.

Therefore, we have an Institution that has its history going back many hundred of years, and we all know that modern Freemasonry started with the Four Lodges who came together in 1717 on June 24th. The first Burnham Lecturer, W. Bro. Bill Dwyer, spoke about some of the 100 or so Antient Charges that Operative Masons had to work by.

They go back to beyond the early 1400's and gave instruction on how Masons ought to work & live their lives for example: -

- (a) To be true to God, the Holy Church, and true liegemen to the King and the Craft.
- (b) The apprentice to be able of birth, that is to say freeborn, and whole of limb as a man ought to be.
- (c) To come and assemble once in a year to take counsel in their craft, vow they may work best to serve their Lord and Master for his profit and their own credit, and to correct such as have offended.

There are more and some of these tell how you should handle your relationship's with your employer and his family. The interesting thing to me is that this period of this country's history may be said to be amongst the most crude, and in some ways the most violent, yet Freemasonry rose from this background. It is possible that some of you whom I have already met; will have already heard my personal thoughts about the many Lodges only ever turning out Ceremonies for Candidates or even just giving demonstrations when there is no Candidate.

Whilst I still hold the same beliefs, this is not, the thrust of this paper. I would, however, suggest that we need to understand exactly what the Ritual can tell us, especially as we all know too many Masons who are completely ignorant of the history, the nature, the design and **the true symbolism of Freemasonry**.

It is though they had never become a member, even though they are very familiar with the words of the Ritual. Remember, we need to understand our own individual relationship with our Supreme Being!

Let us look at the Ritual, it is a particular type of formal performance, in which the participants carry out a series of relatively stereotyped actions. They make a series of relatively standardized statements largely prescribed by custom and sanctioned by precedent. Historical evidence suggests that, Rituals tend to be much more stable and invariable than most human customary activity.

Drama resembles ritual, and certainly sometimes is historically derived from it, but differs from it in two main respects: -

Firstly, dramas have audiences while rituals have members who participate.

Secondly, unlike dramas, rituals are not primarily recreational. For our members they are serious affairs, which do not merely communicate but also, through the intervention of a Supreme Being or some other Spiritual influence, actually accomplish something. Coronations and other installation rituals sanctify, define, and legitimize transfers of power and authority.

Marriage and other life-cycle rituals bless, mark out, and sanction significant transitions in the lives of individuals. Our rituals ought to provide an established, ordered, and meaningful pattern

for the changing seasons, be productive and teach young men, young in Masonic terms, about our activities. Therefore, we must keep our Ritual, Traditions, and our fundamental values. The Traditional values particularly must not be allowed to change. Freemasonry may be said to be distinguished from other fraternal orders by its emphasis on moral character, its ornate rituals and its long tradition and history. Just compare other Ritualistic Societies and in some cases their lack of a belief of a Supreme Being! One of the purposes of Freemasonry is to aid self-knowledge; to teach moral lessons through participation in a series of symbolic plays.

When researching my Masonic Papers I have been amazed how many things of a non-Masonic nature you meet that have large Masonic overtones or thoughts if you study them. Consider this Phrase: -

“Search for the things inside yourself, until you find the “Key” to your Life”.

At first thought, you may think that is a fairly profound Masonic style of thought, but it was actually taken from a song written in part by Heather Small of the Pop Group “M People”. It was partly this that started me thinking about the direction of this paper.

A fellow Freemason Researching the Craft, W. Bro. John Acaster, a P. M. of the Manchester Lodge of Masonic Research No. 5502, wrote in a paper on Freemasonry: -

“It is a unique organisation, it has a deep-rooted mystery, defying exact description. It is concerned with the meaning of life, with truth, beauty, and the exercise of goodness. It is neither a philosophy nor a religion, though it promotes wholeheartedly the objects of both. Through entering into Masonic activity its members frequently find themselves becoming better people, more principled, understanding, and socially adept. Freemasonry includes a rich symbolism and the performance of ritual in its progressive proceedings, but the effects of this cannot be appreciated except through trial, acclimatisation, and practice”.

In Emulation, the superb piece of Ritual we call “The Charge” we hear of the suggestion that we all ought to make a daily advancement in Masonic Knowledge, how many new or for that matter older members actually carry out what is requested of us all, surely if we begin this thirst for knowledge then we will end as the respectable ornament useful to mankind etc. If we look closer at this specific piece of Ritual it might just be said that it is very easy to see how certain headings may be linked together, especially within the title of this talk. By understanding this Charge we may be able demonstrate how Secrecy, Fortitude, Temperance, Obedience, Justice, Fidelity, Prudence, Benevolence & Charity are all extremely well linked.

In 1734 the Smith’s “Pocket Companion” talks about the Charge After Initiation, the similarity to the Emulation Ritual is very apparent. It is looked in some detail W. Bro. A.S. Hall-Johnson a South American Freemason in his 1949 paper “A First Degree Development of English Masonic Ritual.” He highlights that before the “three degree” system of Freemasonry an Entered Apprentice often was called “A Fellow”.

In the 1700’s it is likely, Bro. Hall-Johnson points out that, the Ritual did not include the “Charge” in any form that we would recognise today. But by 1893 George Kennings and Son was printing the First Degree Charge that is almost identical to that used today in many Rituals.

The Scottish Grand Lodge Web site gives some very worthwhile thoughts upon this and I commend their site to you.

To sum up part of what they say: - “The world at large as well as we Freemasons need to understand our PURPOSE FOR EXISTENCE - To Make Good Men Better, then we might say that one of our GENERAL OBJECTIVES will be a well-rounded program of Masonic Education.

We might decide this because we could conject that there can be no future for Masonry without education”.

Perhaps, all Master Masons should Master Masons in every sense.

And, if this is one of our GOALS, and I really think it ought to be, then we want to have more Masonry in men.

We need to have a team that can get together and can set about this great task. But remember Brethren, we cannot just leave to them! The them of which I speak, is us, ALL of US!!!! We all need to consider the need to train new Masons, to keep them interested, to allow them to grow with the Masonic Family. The Province of Buckinghamshire as a member of the United Grand Lodge of England has already started that great task, a task which those of us who are involved as members of The Buckinghamshire Lodge for Masonic Research, are extremely proud.

Today, having Morals, and living by them, is, in some quarters, considered to be only for those who may be called 'long-in-the-tooth'. This kind of thinking, that Morals are no longer relevant in modern society, allows some to rationalise all sorts of actions which might just damage their fellow citizens. As Freemasons, we claim no moral high ground. We claim no monopoly on morality or the application of it in our everyday lives. Indeed there are many hundreds of thousands of people who live lives which could be described as being Moral by nature and yet who are not our Brethren. Surely we ought to accept our responsibilities as Citizens of the world? And, should we not aspire to the highest of moral standards as Freemasons?

The difference is that Freemasonry, as an Institution, teaches us morality in an unusual way during the course of its degrees. We could justly call this a System of Morality. This 'system' has existed for hundreds of years and remains a central feature of Freemasonry today. No single principle of Freemasonry has been more consistently maintained and free from question and long may that remain. Today, we seem to be in some eyes still out of step with most of society, yet, perhaps we really do need to be forthright and sticking our to moral standards too.

Let us for a moment go back to what is reputed to be the very oldest document of the Craft; the *Regius MS.* (c.1390).

The Articles for the Master prescribed that he should be steadfast, trusty and true; must accept no thief for an apprentice lest it turn the Craft to shame', must not supplant another Master but be a brother to him; must be fair and free and do nothing that would shame the Craft, etc. Substantially the same was repeated in all the Antient Constitutions.

And, nowhere did Dr. James Anderson, who wrote the very first Book of Constitutions, catch the spirit of the Ancient Charges so accurately, as on the subject of Morality. In his *Constitutions* of 1723, he did not attempt to make the Fraternity sacrosanct or to paint it as pretending to a degree of morality that it had not attained but, with a commendable restraint. Masons were required to obey the moral law, to be good men and true, men of honour and honesty.

During the times when very few were literate, the use of symbolism was widespread. It was a form of 'visual shorthand' which, suggested abstract concepts as well as telling particular stories. Symbols were easily recognised, and understood, but, as literacy increased the need for symbolism declined. In centuries past, symbols, especially religious symbols, were common throughout the then known world.

It did not matter where one lived, one would recognise most, if not all, of the symbols although there were, of course, local variations. When a series of symbols were associated, a whole string of ideas could be conveyed. At the simplest level symbols could be used to relate a story, a parable, and an event by grouping, in sequence, a number of symbols.

We must not, however, lose sight of the fact that there are many Sacred writings that pre-date the *Regius Poem* etc. As far as Freemasonry is concerned, we are using the oft repeated methods of encouraging our members to be better citizens than they might have otherwise have been. Like many other very old institutions and fraternities, Freemasonry has built up, over the centuries, its own 'visual shorthand' and the understanding of this has declined although the use of symbolism has not. Thus we have the curious situation within Freemasonry where symbols continue to be used but the reason and meaning of them is now little understood.

The reason for this process of decline in English Freemasonry is not at all clear but it is just possible that the huge increase in Lodges from the end of the First World War really did not allow

time for the high educational standards Masonically speaking, that were available prior to 1914. This was also true following the Second World War. Lodges had to concentrate on Initiating, Passing and Raising their candidates.

By the time things had settled down after the Second World War at least one generation of Freemasons had been lost and with them their knowledge, and ability to educate new Freemasons. Brethren, with declining numbers we now have a new opportunity to return to the previous method of educating the Brethren, not just new members. It is 'simply' a matter of making it happen. I am, however, aware of a few Lodges who are choosing to have a 'slower' timetable than previously. We see that these Lodges are now extending the 'use' of new candidates by interspersing the Degrees with Lectures. I must make clear, immediately, that this is no criticism of any Lodge structure in particular or their individual method of attempting to make men better citizens.

I simply note that in most cases we need to continue to improve methods of education. We need to draw the attention of all of our Brethren to the symbolism of the Craft. That symbolism may differ to each and every one of us, but it is important that we understand what it can tell us as individuals.

Julian Rees, Secretary of the "Cornerstone Society", which exists to provide a forum where the meaning and relevance of Freemasonry can be discussed in an open and constructive environment, and where your Grand Master has delivered two superb papers, made comment in paper given to a New York Lodge during March 2003, that even back as far as the 18th Century, Lodges of Instruction were used to teach Freemasonry not just Ritual. He went on to say that The First Degree Ceremony if carried out correctly, and by this he does not mean correct words, but, with the feeling and the meaning behind each word, that Degree is an Intimate feeling, it can be an Intensely Personal Journey. This should be understood by those carrying out the Degree, as well as the Candidate, for they should also be making such a journey themselves.

Also, in a recent Cornerstone Society meeting the Pro Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England, The M.W. Bro. The Marquess of Northampton is reported to have made the following remark: -

"It is important that at the centre of Freemasonry, there is a core of Brethren who do understand the spiritual message that our rituals contain.

I am sure that like me there are many who joined Freemasonry as earnest seekers after light and wisdom, only to find that much of the masonry as practised in the English Constitution, and indeed in many parts of the world, has forgotten its destiny . . .

As a result the learning of ritual has become a drudge and an understanding of its purpose is almost impossible" . . .

"A good mason does not necessarily have to be a good ritualist as long as he participates in the affairs of his lodge and his heart is in the right place".

One could rightly say that a definition of Freemasonry: might be said to be: -

"A Peculiar system of Morality, Veiled in Allegory and Illustrated with Symbols".

This was penned over 150 years ago and the words may well seem a little obscure now especially as the meaning of many of the words has now changed. When this definition was written, 'peculiar' meant special or unique whereas today the word is commonly used to denote something odd or strange. As Allegory, in a Masonic sense, means hidden; the word 'veiled' would seem to be redundant but this is incorrect. It is because there is more than one possible interpretation and that the meaning(s) are hidden.

This last part of this definition of Freemasonry appears to be the straighter forward and indeed it is, provided that one is aware that Symbols do not always represent what they appear to represent. Symbols are therefore, at the simplest level, illustrative of the Morality and Allegory of Freemasonry. A more modern and upto date definition taken from a Scottish Web site

states: - "A special and unique method of teaching men morality, which is disguised in order to encourage and which uses particular visual aides".

Therefore, it is my opinion the four major thrusts of the Charge Ritual are: -

Prudence; Temperance; Fortitude & Justice: - Namely Plato's 4 Virtue's.

Let Prudence direct you: - Prudence is one of the four Cardinal Virtues. Its modern meaning is the exercising of sound judgements. Aristotle said it had the merits of brevity and inclusiveness. Prudence, therefore, has a directive capacity with regard to the other virtues. It lights the way and measures the arena for exercise. The insight it confers makes one distinguish successfully between their mere semblance and their reality. It must preside over the eliciting of all acts. Thus, without prudence bravery becomes foolhardiness; mercy sinks into weakness, and temperance into fanaticism. But it must not be forgotten that prudence is a virtue adequately distinct from the others, and not simply a condition attendant upon their operation. Its office is to determine for each, in practice, those circumstances of time, place, manner, etc. which should be observed. So whilst it qualifies immediately the intellect and not the will, it is nevertheless rightly styled a moral virtue.

Let Temperance chasten you: - Temperance, another of the four Cardinal Virtues, and a term more commonly applied to organised efforts to temper or abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages. It is also about the avoidance of "fanaticism" in its widest sense. In order to achieve their aims, most temperance organisations have, at one time or another, advocated the enactment of legislation prohibiting both the sale and the consumption of alcoholic beverages. But, in Masonic terms temperance may be regarded as a characteristic of all the moral virtues. The yearning for pleasures and delights most powerfully attract the human heart. Some are associated with the preservation of the human individual; others with the perpetuation of the race, and others still with the well-being and comfort of human life. Under this aspect temperance has for subordinate virtues, abstinence, chastity, and modesty.

The Motto of the United Grand Lodge of England is: - 'AUDI VIDE TACE' translated means 'HEAR, SEE, BE SILENT'.

Let Fortitude support you: - yet another of the four Cardinal Virtues, again, Aristotle speaks of fortitude -- the will being courageous, but the human spirit co-operates, he has not a similar contempt for the body, and speaks more honourably of courage when it has for its prime object the conquest of bodily fear before the face of death in battle, and of course we mean the moral courage.

And finally: -

"Let Justice be the guide of all your actions": - this is often given as the most important of the Cardinal Virtues, in its ordinary and proper sense it is to signify the most important of the cardinal virtues. It is a moral quality or habit which perfects the will and inclines it to render to each and to all what belongs to them.

Of the other cardinal virtues, prudence perfects the intellect and inclines the prudent man to act in all things according to right reason. Fortitude controls the passion; and temperance moderates the appetite accordingly as reason dictates. While fortitude and temperance are self-regarding virtues, justice has reference to others. Together with charity, it regulates man's intercourse with his fellow men. But charity leads us to help our neighbour in his need, out of our own stores, while justice teaches us to give to another what belongs to him.

Overall we are told: -

"Imprint on your heart the sacred dictates of Truth, of Honour, and of Virtue."

This idea, is very old as it goes back as far as the 1300's when an Italian Florentine Chancellor and a Humanist was quoted according to the "On-line Encyclopaedia Britannica" as saying: -

"One must stand in the line of battle, engage in close combat, and struggle for justice, for truth,

for honour.”

Brethren all, to explain why I consider Plato's Virtues as the most important let explain my understanding of the Virtues: -

Prudence - This was not wisdom in the more mystical sense, but sound judgement in practical affairs.

Justice - This meant fair treatment of others, rather than a formal system of judgement.

Temperance - The original meaning of this meant careful moderation of all kinds of appetites. By the 19th century, it was often taken to mean only abstaining from alcohol.

Fortitude - This was not just straightforward courage, but also the endurance to withstand all kinds of troubles.

To me this is what we should aspire to, even though we may not achieve it.

I would point you in the direction of a number of Lecture's given by the MW Bro Fabio Venzi, the Grand Master of the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy for some deeper insights into Platonism in his very interesting talks recently given to the Cornerstone Society, as I have already mentioned.

Perhaps as Freemasons we ought to stand up against our de-tractors, engage in close verbal combat to let them know we are not anti – religion, but rather supporting of all faith's. Perhaps, we ought to struggle for justice and not in the political sense, but seek out truth, support all those who fight for honour. Later in your Masonic life you will recall that we are reminded to emulate that glorious & unshaken fidelity, if in a state of trial!

We should bear that in mind in our daily lives! I would conclude by saying we need to continue our openness, for we have nothing to hide, **and we must** ensure that all of our Brethren are taught what the Craft can do for them.

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren, we MUST get more Masonry into men, and get a better quality of Candidates and as important in my opinion, a better quality of Proposer's & Seconder's to stop the turning off newly made masons, as so many unfortunately are. Freemasonry has much to offer us all; let's us take it forward into the 21st Century & beyond!

We must however understand, ourselves and our fellows and our relationship with our own God. It is after all developed in the Holy Royal Arch, the Ritual will have different meaning to all faiths as well as individuals!

It was W. Bro. Ernest Smart P.A.G. CHAP. Provincial Grand Chaplain of the Province of Buckinghamshire in the United Grand Lodge of England who suggested that I modify an oft quoted statement which I believe to have been made by President John F Kennedy: -

“Ask not what Masonry can do for you, rather what you can do for Masonry!”

In conclusion, as a friend stated when he read the first draft of this paper: -

“Perhaps the application of every moral and social virtue in our own lives will, hopefully, make us better citizens and better Freemasons.

And, just maybe that will take us further and allow us to contemplate “that most interesting of all studies; the knowledge of yourself!”

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren I feel the tingle of another Lecture coming on! I thank you for your attention and the chance to be here in this “august” company!

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