

Light Reflected - The Philosophy of Freemasonry

Editor's Note; I am violating my unwritten rule for this magazine by including a second story by an author in the same issue. This month I liked both of Brother Kohanke stories that much.

A monthly "opinion" by Brother Bradley Kohanke, 32 of Davy Crockett Lodge #1225 in San Antonio

Recently I was asked to give a talk on the Philosophy of Freemasonry at Brahan Lodge. This being one of my favorite topics, I gladly accepted. Besides, when we have our "Bring a Friend Night" program, this is the topic I discuss with the potential candidates. I submit it now for your consideration.

What is it exactly that we're doing here? There are all kinds of conspiracy theories about a one-world government, that we're a religion, that we're anti-religion, that we practice strange satanic rituals, etc. Look...this is all a bunch of baloney.

Freemasonry is not a religion, but it is spiritual in nature. We require that a man believe in Deity, that he practices Brotherly love, that he believes in the immortality of the soul, and that he be of good moral character. After that, there is no talk of religion. We open and close with prayer, but we do not do it under the auspices of any particular religion...we only acknowledge and thank the Supreme Being each of us believes exists.

Let me try and explain what our role is and how it differs from the church, synagogue, or mosque. We aren't allowed to discuss religion within the Lodge, but I am going to talk briefly about a person held by some to be Deity...but I'm going to talk about him in a purely historical context.

Regardless of your faith, I think we can all agree that sometime around 2000 years ago, there was a guy named Jesus. If you're a Trinitarian Christian, you believe he was God made flesh; if you're a Unitarian Christian, you believe he was the greatest reformer since Moses; if you're Jewish or Muslim, you believe he was a prophet or teacher; if you're Hindu or Buddhist, you believe he was an Enlightened One. So, for the sake of argument...there was this guy named Jesus.

Does anybody recall what his answer was when asked what the most important Commandment was? He said there were two: 1) love God with all your heart, mind, and soul; and 2) love your neighbor as yourself. Freemasonry does not deal with the first one and leaves it entirely up to your particular faith to teach you how and when to worship. Freemasonry deals with the second one. We focus on teaching you how to treat each other as Brothers...both inside the Lodge and in the world.

Now you may be saying to yourself; "But the Golden Rule is particular to Christianity." Well, you're wrong. Consider the following:

Christianity: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you." - Matthew 7:12

Judaism: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary." - Talmud, ShaBBath 31a

Buddhism: "Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." - Udana-Varga 5.18

Islam: "Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself." - Hadith

Hinduism: "This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you." - Mahabharata 5:1517

Confucianism: "One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct...loving-kindness. Do not do to

others what you do not want done to yourself.” - Analects 15.23

Taoism: “Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.” - T’ai Shang , 213-218

Zoroastrianism: “Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself.” - Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29

See? It doesn’t matter what your religious persuasion is, Freemasonry helps to enhance it by teaching those principles that are common to all religions. So, how do we do this? Through a system of teaching that involves questions and answers, symbols, rituals, parables, plays, and through mere exposure to those more senior and learned Brethren. Now, a lot of our symbolism and ritual is secret...but before I get around to explaining that, let me tell you about a couple of our “secret” symbols. Take a look at the ashlars. One is rough, but could be used for building purposes if necessary. The other is smooth and would fit quite well for the builder’s use. So, one of our symbols is the gavel. Just as operative masons used it to chip away the excess parts of stone, it symbolizes to us the constant work of chipping away the vices and superfluities of our life, constantly working to improve ourselves. Why would we be interested in doing that? Well...we believe that actions speak louder than words. It is one thing to profess your faith, whatever that faith may be. It is quite another to put it into practice in your daily life. So, every time I see a gavel, hammer, or mallet...I am reminded that I am supposed to be spending time bettering myself and reducing those actions and feelings that cause problems for myself and others.

Another example is the 24 inch gauge which operative masons used to measure their work. It is divided into 3 parts. Masonry teaches us that the reason for this is so that we remember that a portion of every day should be spent performing your duty to Deity and a distressed worthy Brother, a portion working, and a portion for refreshment and sleep. So, every time I see a 24 inch gauge, a ruler, a yardstick, or any measuring device...it reminds me of my three daily duties. Symbols help to remind us and they can be found everywhere. So, through our system of teaching, men are taught to be better citizens, better friends, better husbands, better fathers, better bosses, better employees...etc. Our principle tenets are truth, justice, fairness, equality, virtue, honor, integrity, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, etc. So why is there so much secrecy? Here’s what I think. Honestly, today...right now...here in the United States of America, there is no need for us to have secret symbols, rituals, handshakes, or modes of recognition. But it all depends on where you are geographically and when you are historically. Freemasonry is designed to keep the light of truth lit through the darkest of times. Imagine yourself in Nazi Germany. Hitler, as with all evil dictators used hatred and ignorance to subjugate a people. Freemasonry stands against that. And that is why he sent nearly 200,000 Freemasons to the death camps. What if you lived in the old Soviet Union or China 40 years ago? Belief in Deity was against the law and Freemasonry was outlawed. The same thing is happening in the Middle-east now. Freemasonry has been labeled as evil by the Islamic College on Sharia Law because it accepts into its ranks people of all faiths. What if you lived in Spain during the inquisition and were seen associating with a Jewish person or Moor? The tortures you would have been made to endure are unspeakable.

So...we keep the rituals, symbols, modes of recognition secret so that just in case times get dark (and they do)...the light of truth can be passed from generation to generation and good can eventually once again conquer evil.

