

Living with Imperfection

Presented to Atomic Daylight Lodge, October 13, 2009
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One of the duties of a District Deputy Grand Master during the course of his tenure is at the closing moments of open Lodge speak briefly on matters which he feels will stimulate the brethren in the direction of inspired contemplation.

To ease this burden, and perhaps from feelings of inadequacy to deliver such inspiration, my first consideration was to refer to authors who had already traveled this road. And so into cyberspace I moved, "googling" various titles which might guide me towards those words and phrases which would move even the weariest of my brothers to thoughtful reflection. To the forefront came such words of inspiration as moral rectitude, commitment, kindness, generosity, love of family, honesty, clean living, sincerity, and so on and so on.

As I reflected on these various subjects, it came to my mind that for each and all of these, I probably had as much experience as any of these authors, having lived within the bounds of the human race now for some 63 years. And then it came to mind that those to whom I was directing these introspections, **you**, were no doubt similarly experienced.

And so the dilemma. Here I was, as the expression goes, preaching to the converted. Or was I?

As I looked at my own life as it related to that first characteristic "moral rectitude", which generally brings to mind someone who lives their life above and beyond the expectations of even the greatest leaders of morality including such names as say Pope Paul, Mother Teresa, or Mahatma Ghandi, it immediately became evident to me that although I may strive to reach those lofty levels of "moral rectitude", the reality was that, over the years, I had many times fallen woefully short. And not to mirror my life and experiences on each of you here tonight, but it would be my opinion that many of you may likewise have fallen "woefully short" and to some extent perhaps continue to do so. And so to the theme of a few of my talks throughout the District over the next number of months. How does Masonry embellish that which we have become and make us better men, better citizens, better husbands, better parents and grandparents, and better friends?

As Masons, we have made it our immediate life's work to chip away at what we metaphorically refer to as the "Rough Ashlar" which basically refers to all those character imperfections which permeate our being. We strive to move to the right where lies the "Perfect Ashlar" and which represents "perfection". The reality of course is that we really never achieve that lofty goal but it should always be in a Mason's heart to move in that direction. Hence, the tenets of Masonry weigh on each of us to become that which lies open in Lodge and on which we may ponder.

Let us first look at one of the four tassels and up there in the north east corner of the Lodge hangs "Temperance", one of the "heavenly" virtues.

When I think of “temperance”, which in use today is somewhat of an antiquated term, I always think of it reflecting the principle of restraint. Holding back, withdrawing from temptation, exercising good judgment not to indulge in excess. This sounds to me that conforming with the exercise of this morality beacon may just take a little enjoyment out of life because what can be more fun than indulging occasionally in excess.

A preacher from the deep South was finishing a temperance sermon. "If I had all the beer in the world," he said with expression, "I would take it and pour it into the river." "And if I had all the wine in the world," he continued, with even greater emphasis, "I would take it and pour it into the river." And finally, he cried, "And if I had all the whiskey in the world, I would take it and pour it into the river."

Having completed the sermon, he sat down. At that point, the song leader rose and, with a sheepish grin, cautiously announced, "For our closing, let us sing Hymn #279, 'Shall We Gather At The River'."

No doubt all of us may come up with numerous examples of having digressed on the side of excess without feeling that somehow our morality was compromised.

How would we broaden the meaning of this cardinal virtue in order to provide each of us with something beyond how we traditionally think of this virtue as it relates to transgressions with respect to such things as alcohol, food, and cigarettes? I am going to propose that when you reflect on this “tassel” you apply its meaning not so much to the physical temptations of life but also to your thoughts of non-physical temptations and in particular the most significant of which is negative thinking. The challenge is to “temper” to as great an extent as possible, bad thoughts. Positive thinking is a mental attitude that admits into the mind thoughts, words and images that are conducive to growth, expansion and success. It is a mental attitude that expects good and favorable results. A positive mind anticipates happiness, joy, health and a successful outcome of every situation and action. Whatever the mind expects, it finds.

Remember, positive and negative thinking are both contagious. All of us affect, in one way or another, the people we meet. This happens instinctively and on a subconscious level, through thoughts and feelings transference and through body language. People sense our aura and are affected by our thoughts. Is it any wonder that we want to be around positive persons and shun negative ones? As I have always said about pessimism, if you have to get some money borrow from a pessimist. He doesn't expect to get it back.

And so when you leave this evening and negative thoughts start filtering through your mind, try this. Recalibrate and visualize a favorable and beneficial thought. Be like the ninety year old man who gets married and looks for a house near a school or the fellow who gets treed by a bear and enjoys the view. Use positive words in your inner dialogues or when talking with others. Smile a little more, as this helps to think positively. If you persevere, you will transform the way your mind thinks.

Once a negative thought enters your mind, you have to be aware of it and endeavor to replace it with a constructive one. The negative thought will try again to enter your mind, and then you have to replace it again with a positive one. It is as if there are two pictures in front of you, and you choose to look at one of them and disregard the other.

Persistence will eventually teach your mind to think positively and ignore negative thoughts.

So, beware of that insidious disease known as 'negativitis'. It is as pervasive as the common cold, but far more damaging. It mutilates, cripples, and corrodes the human spirit. And so when you think of "temperance" as one of your guiding lights, please consider for a moment the "tempering" of your thoughts. This can make a huge difference in your life and perpetuate all the things we are taught in Masonry. As is reflected in the JW Lecture in the Entered Apprentice Degree a statement to the view of positive thinking and temperance.

"Let us act as the dictates of right reason prompt us, cultivate harmony, practice charity and live in peace with all men."