

Making Good Men Better - part I

The Strength and Importance of Freemasonry

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The theme I want to talk about tonight is one I first developed several years ago for a lecture I gave in Lodge. Since then, I have, I hope, refined it. However it is too long to give at the end of an official visit. For which you may now give a collective sigh of relief! What I'm going to do therefore is to divide it into parts each of which will stand on its own but which can be grouped together as they all will form a continuous theme or series of related ideas.

In a famous experiment called the Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971 a psychologist at Stanford University, Phil Zimbardo, -- <http://www.zimbardo.com> -- gathered 20 perfectly healthy and mentally stable young volunteers. He randomly assigned them to the role of either prisoner or guard. The prisoners got work clothes and had their names replaced with numbers. The guards got billy clubs and sunglasses to obscure their faces. The guards only task was to maintain order among the prisoners. The experiment was supposed to last two weeks, but after six days it had to be shut down because the guards were humiliating and tormenting the prisoners with an intensity no one had predicted.

Phil Zimbardo has since used the experience as a way of understanding why seemingly moral people commit horrific acts. The experiment was published in academic journals as a failed one but, after the horrifying events at Abu Graib in Iraq where soldiers were charged with abusing prisoners and were punished for it severely. Lombardo believed that these men and women were behaving in a way which could have been predicted and should never have been put in this position. He published a book on this whole topic, called [The Lucifer Effect](#).

The Stanford Prison Experiment shows that people behave as to how those around them behave, how they are expected to behave, and how they themselves are treated. As Eliza Doolittle says in Pygmalion "Because you see, Lady Higgins, 'the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated'."

What does Freemasonry do for good men? Does regular Lodge attendance "induce the habit of virtue and strengthen the fundamental principles of the order, Brotherly love, relief & truth"? There are many examples we could study. Tonight I want to briefly look at two of them

Of the 130 holders of the Victoria Cross (the majority) about 10% of the total, were Masons. Were Tommy Douglas or John Diefenbaker enabled to do what he did because they were masons? Did Masonry make these good men better. You bet it did. And also for:

Sir John A Macdonald

John Ross Robertson

Sir Alexander Fleming

John Molson

Ernest Shackleton

Ben Franklin

Sam Steele

Neil Armstrong

Mark Twain

Peter Lougheed

Winston Churchill

Douglas McArthur, and

Tim Horton

Voltaire

Harry S. Truman

The Antarctic expedition of Shackleton

The Antarctic is a place where humans don't belong. It is either uninhabitable and the least inhabitable place on Earth. It's a frozen desert. Ten million sq. km. A continent covered with ice up to 5 kilometers thick and averaging 2 to 2.5 kilometers thick. It is a continent surrounded by ocean. It is different from the Arctic which is an ocean surrounded by continents. Any animal needing warmer conditions has to swim there or fly there (so no polar bears!) Wildlife is plentiful: albatross, seals, penguins, whales, humpbacks & minke, krill and orcas.

Attracted to people who set out to stretch their limits and possibilities.

Joe McGinnis, physician, scientist and undersea explorer, who was interested in human performance in a high risk environment, dove under the North Pole. Titanic.

The first person to walk on Mars is alive today. I want to inspire her to go there. NASA uses the Antarctic to train for flight conditions where stabilisation/evacuation mode is impossible. Antarctic an ideal place to prepare and train for this. Requirements for a trip to Mars will be several habitations, a laboratory, mechanical infrastructure, environmental controls, preparation of nutritious and varied meals & the ability to move about outside. And do this for five to ten years. Crew will need to be cross trained – mechanical engineering, cook and doctor/surgeon may well be the same person.

Imagine doing all of the above without special modern equipment or maps. In 1914 Bro. Ernest Shackleton set out to cross the Antarctic via the South Pole. He had offered to give up his ship for the war effort but this was rejected by government. In South Georgia, he encountered the worst ice conditions in history. With limited financial resources he had to rely upon luck. So he went for it. After 60 miles, his ship became trapped in ice then crushed. From here he began the journey from which all survived. Shackleton was a man of immense courage and hyper-resilience; he understood in his bones the forces of nature. His ship, The Endurance, was trapped in ice and crushed. He led his men to the safety of an uninhabited island after a sea journey of 28 days on an ice floe. Then led a small party of five to South Georgia, which reached the safety of a whaling station. All were rescued.

This inspirational man (and a Mason) understood the forces of nature, the limits of technology, the thermodynamics of survival psychology: the interpersonal forces which enable men of different personalities to work together towards a common goal. To paraphrase the general charge always given at the end of our Installation Ceremony, Shackleton indeed was "respected by his superiors and revered by his subordinates; he never proclaimed what he had done, will do, can do, but where need was, he laid hold with dispassionate courage, circumspect resolution, indefatigable exertion and a rare power of mind and who did not cease until he had accomplished his work."

Sir Ernest Shackleton.

February 15, 1874 - January 5, 1922



Ernest Henry Shackleton was born in County Kildare, Ireland on 15 February 1874, his family originally coming from Yorkshire, England.

Shackleton was initiated into Navy Lodge No. 2612 (United Grand Lodge of England) on 9 July 1901. His advancement was notably slow. Almost immediately after his initiation Shackleton joined Captain Scott's expedition to Antarctica that aimed to be the first to reach the South Pole. Despite the expedition's failure Shackleton was inspired to lead his own expedition in 1907 that came within 97 miles of the South Pole. He was subsequently knighted in 1909. Despite appearing on many Navy Lodge summonses throughout the period, Shackleton attended the first regular meeting of Guild of Freeman Lodge No. 3525 (United Grand Lodge of England) in 1911 and was passed to the second degree by that lodge on 2 November 1911. He was raised to the degree of Master Mason at Guild of Freeman Lodge on 30 May 1913.

Masons are inclined to be able to interact positively with each other. Their ritual and teaching will (or should) assist them in so doing. Their characteristics would be invaluable in creating teams of experts to work together and to enable teams of non-experts to work in other capacities.

Brethren, the capacity of Masonry to enable good men to make themselves better is a quality of which this world is in great need. You can help fill this need by your diligence in selecting good men and focussing hard on the condition of Masonry in all our Lodges. We will then truly induce the habit of virtue and strengthen the fundamental principles of the order, brotherly love, relief & truth.