

A Masonic Minute

What are we trying to save?

"Our greatest responsibility is to be good ancestors." Jonas Salk (1914-1995)

Those delivering Masonic addresses often remind us that we are the inheritors of a great tradition and, as the current custodians of that tradition, urge us to preserve and enhance it for the benefit of the next generation – to perpetuate the legacy for a season. The following admonishment was delivered by M.W. Bro. A. Lou Copeland, Grand Master 1985-1986: *"Let us be sure that those who follow us tomorrow can be forever proud of our achievements in Freemasonry today."*

However, before we can accept that challenging responsibility, we must define exactly what it is that we are attempting to preserve – *What are we trying to save?* The real challenge facing the fraternity is to understand the true and profound meaning of Freemasonry and what it means to be a Freemason. It is essential that we get our own house in order. Until we begin to understand the essence of Masonic philosophy, our labours are in vain. As a start, each of us must be able to articulate with clarity and precision, in our own words, what Freemasonry means?

- *Why are we here?*
- *What do we come here to do?*
- *How should we be going about doing it?*

Going back to the operative period and beyond to its roots in the ancient mystery schools of the East, Masonry in all ages has been an educational institution, a medium for self-improvement. Properly considered, the Lodge is an extended study group seeking to rediscover the collected wisdom of the ages in a mutually supportive network of like-minded men engaged in a common quest – truth-seekers known as philosophers. Every lodge is a school room and the Master is the instructor. Every meeting should provide a learning opportunity.

The course of study was prescribed long ago in these lines:

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;

The proper study of mankind is man.

That virtue only makes our bliss below,

And all our knowledge is ourselves to know." Bro. Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

"Tradition simply means that we need to end what began well and continue what is worth continuing." – Jose Bergamin

Over the centuries the Craft has accumulated many traditions, usages, and customs that define the fraternity. Other traditions have been discarded as the culture evolved. We no longer meet in taverns and alehouses as we did in the convivial period.

A spittoon is no longer placed beside the Master's chair. Gallons of rum no longer feature in the accounts payable. Our ancient rites and unique ceremonies set us apart and distinguish us from every other society or organization. While to some, these may appear archaic and anachronistic, they are respected, maintained and perpetuated to be transmitted "*unimpaired from generation to generation.*"

"Our duty is to preserve what the past had to say for itself, and to say for ourselves what shall be true for the future." – John Ruskin (1819-1900)

- *What do you want to be known for?*
- *How do you want to be remembered?*
- *What do you want your legacy to be?*
- *What can you do to make these happen?*¹

"It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities." – Josiah Charles Stamp (1880-1941)

Herein I have posed a number of searching questions that each of us must attempt to answer after sober contemplation and quiet introspection. These are questions that not only our leaders and those aspiring to positions of added responsibility in Grand Lodge, but each and every man who calls himself a Mason must answer.

"An institution is the lengthening shadow of one man." – Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

A lodge is comprised of men, and Freemasonry consists of the actions those men take, both within and without the lodge. There are many worthy men in our great fraternity who work selflessly, diligently and vigorously with enthusiasm for the greater good and the commonweal. They understand the principle articulated in the General Charge that "*there is no real greatness without self denial.*" They are devoted to its moral and ethical principles and dedicated to the practice of its excellent precepts. They are the Masons making a difference in their community. Leading by example, they should be our inspiration and guiding compass.

In his concluding Address as Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Copeland uttered this challenge: "*I believe in Masonry because I believe in its influence for good and to that influence I would give myself and challenge each of you to join with me in making our Freemasonry come alive during our allotted time! The future is in our hands – yours and mine.*"

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¹ These questions were posed by Alexander Kjerulf