

Wardrobe Lodge No. 555

October 28th, 2013.

‘Making Good Men Better’

“Look it up”. This was a refrain echoed through our house from the time I was learning to spell until I graduated from high school. It would be so easy I thought to myself.... just give me the answer and I can get the job done. It would be so easy, while doing my homework, to yell down the stairs at my mother in the kitchen and ask her how to spell some word that only world class scholars would use. It would be...but she didn’t buy into it. Instead.... you could bet your last dollar on this one....she would say ‘look it up’. Why?

In some small way, by this example, she was contributing to my development. She was trying to make me a better person; independent and self-reliant.

This is what parents do..is it not? They mold, teach, advise, love, nurture and hopefully...the end product will be a happy productive and contributing member of our society.

So, with due consideration to this preamble and keeping in the same vein, I am not going to give you a spelling lesson or a parenting tutorial, but rather I would like to explore exactly what it means when we say that Freemasonry ‘Makes Good Men Better’. Firstly...it does not. It is Freemasons that ‘Make Good Men Better’...that is you and me.

As a starting point, I don't think its necessary to delve into an explanation of a 'Good Man'. We may not always be able to put it into words...but we certainly know one when we meet one.

So then, is Freemasonry some sort of factory...1...2...3...voila...a 'Better Man'? I don't think so....and, neither do you. Is there a bench-mark at which we can say..."he's done"...sort of like a loaf of bread coming out of the oven? I don't think so either.

Personal development is an ongoing, lifelong process of discovery and improvement. It is not a collection of wealth or possessions or tangibles. It is the subtle intangibles, the finishing polish of a rough diamond. Never being entirely satisfied or complacent with your inner self.

How do we do this...this process of development? Undoubtedly, a spark deep within the soul of an individual can lead him to greatness and an elevated self-awareness. Some call this divine intervention, but for us mere mortals.... it takes a plan and a lot of work. This work should be enjoyable, because after all, we are doing this for our candidates and ourselves. Freemasonry does have a plan; a systematic progression through various degrees designed to cultivate and enlighten the mind. The work initially falls squarely on our shoulders. We are setting the stage for what is yet to come.

If we profess to make good men better and yet we do not demonstrate sufficient confidence in the Ritual or the process....we may have lost a good deal of the import of our message and have compromised our ability to 'Make Good Men Better'.

Cultivating the mind would engage such areas as classic literature, great novels, the arts and philosophy; all this would be a great place to start. Immerse yourself in culture and polite society.

As my great-grandmother would say..."be a person of good breeding". Need I remind her I am not a horse? Never the less, I caught the jist of what she was intimating.

Sounds like a tall order to 'become a better person; culture, the arts, literature, philosophy, and polite society. Does Freemasonry not embrace a good number; if not all of these attributes and disciplines?

Like I alluded to before...Freemasonry is not an 'in and out' fraternity. Our candidates have initially made a financial commitment, backed by a lot of faith and a little knowledge, and we have made or should be making a commitment to their betterment. As he kneels at the altar, taking a solemn obligation as to HIS duties, we, the more seasoned and skilled Masons should be taking a similar obligation with respect to OUR duties towards the candidate.

I feel our duties and responsibilities extend beyond sharing the fundamental tenets and principals of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Although I am a big proponent of doing the Ritual as intended, the Ritual in itself is not the beginning and the end. It is a tool. Similar to Aesop's fables, it tells a story...and then allows the audience the opportunity to reflect on its message.

We are probably all familiar with the Fable about the tortoise and the hare. The message is hardly about which animal is faster. It is about slow, steady and humble perseverance. Did our Candidate or younger members grasp the meaning of our lectures? He stood there...we talked...he listened and nodded politely. How do we know he 'got it'? I doubt he did....not entirely. How could he? I am still discovering aspects of our ritual that aid in my development and I have been a member for 25 years, unlike the candidate who has been a member for 25 minutes. If the lessons are lost...then we must evaluate how we mentor so the ongoing process of "Making Good Men Better" stays on track.

We are not to present the ritual, congratulate the candidate and then send him on his way in the hopes he will be back in 28 days; a better man and ready for his next degree. If we have done our job correctly, the candidate will have more questions than answers and he will be willing to ask them. We need to be there to answer and mentor. Time IS on our side. Lets use it wisely. Nurturing is a long and patient process.

In addition to The Ritual, the candidate is invited into a world of 'Gentlemen and Polite Society'; men who are dressed impeccably, well groomed, well mannered, polite and courteous.

Our Candidate is exposed to elements of behavior and etiquette that are considered sophisticated, polite and at sometimes, elegant.

In keeping with this observation, it emphasizes the need to follow the proper protocol and etiquette as set forth by our Grand Lodge in both the banquet and lodge room. These formalities are not just things we are conscripted to do because they are outlined in some manual; they are elements of refinement and discipline. These are worthy characteristics of the 'Better Man'.

THIS is what WE do. THIS is what sets US apart. And all of THIS contributes to 'Making Good Men Better'. We simply must lead by example...consistency and repetition is the key to the process.

Psychologists generally agree that consistent repetition of a desired behavior over a period of 29 days will in fact SET that behavior. Might I suggest a daily advancement in Masonic Knowledge?

Right from the get-go, Masons are taught in the Working Tools Lecture of the first degree...."repeated efforts". Not surprising is it?

My brethren, we have a great responsibility, and yet an enjoyable one at that. What could possibly be more rewarding than improving the lives of others; supported by our Ritual, executed by our actions and its success maintained by our support?

So, the next time someone asks what we do, proudly say, “We Make Good Men Better”. And by all means; don’t tell them to “look it up”.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Written by:

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