

Meeting Our Obligations in Resolving a Conflict with a Brother

By Worshipful Stephen L. Young

On a few occasions, I have observed a paradox in Masonry – we espouse lofty principles and then we sometimes act in petty ways. We take on sacred and binding obligations as we advance through the degrees, and then we sometimes act in ways inconsistent with those obligations. One of the most troubling inconsistency between principle and action is the way we allow conflicts to develop between members of our Fraternity, and how we sometimes allow these conflicts to linger without resolution.

Fortunately, this does not happen too often, but when an instance occurs, it is the obligation of the Worshipful Master to address it. It is also the obligation of each Brother to work to resolve these differences, and when we ourselves are a party to the conflict, we have a personal duty as a Master Mason to reconcile with our Brother.

These obligations are at the core of what it means to be a Master Mason and should compel us to exemplify the tenet of brotherly love, especially toward a fellow Mason, and take the necessary steps toward reconciliation.

I believe we should take our guidance from the many examples of friendship and brotherly love that are presented to us as moral lessons as we advance through the degrees in our ancient Craft.

The Degree of Entered Apprentice is marked by a passage of scripture that is as simple and direct as it is instructive: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity; it is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments: As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life forevermore.” (Psalm 133: 1 – 3)

This goal of unity and the rewards it brings are one of the first lessons we learn in Masonry. Another early lesson is the importance of charity. Charity is not merely the donation of money to a worthy Brother in need or another cause, it is also that generosity of spirit that allows us to forgive a wrong, admit a mistake, and practice another tenet of Masonry: the tenet of Brotherly Love.

In the Degree of Fellowcraft, we are reminded that our ancient operative Brethren worked six days in the quarries before receiving wages. That work was hard physical labor with an expectation that the result would be “good work, square work, just such work as is needed for the temple.” Sometimes, our labor in the speculative quarries of friendship and brotherly love can be just as demanding. As speculative Masons, we are building a temple of living stones. Our work here also needs to be “good work, square work,” if we are to be successful in our endeavors. It is not easy to overcome our own pride and the hurt feelings that come from a perceived wrong, or to admit that we made a mistake. But sometimes, this is the labor required of us. Be assured that Master’s wages will be paid to those who can accomplish this difficult task.

An idea that is made plain in the Degree of Master Mason is that our time in our earthly Lodges is fleeting. Each day slips by as grains of sand in an hour glass, almost imperceptibly. But all too soon, the grains of sand, and our days on earth, are exhausted. This is a potent message – each of us should attempt to finish our work here before we – or the Brother we have a difference with – may be called to the Celestial Lodge above. As reconciliation is one of the tasks you should complete, you must take steps to accomplish this work while there is still an opportunity.

Finally Brethren, at the closing of each stated communication, we are reminded how Master Masons should meet, act, and part. We should meet by the plumb – with actions that are upright and unbiased. We should act on the level - no difference in our station in life or past disagreements should divide us. And we should part upon the square – each feeling that the other has dealt fairly with us according to Masonic principles.

The ideas above represent only a few of the lessons of friendship and brotherly love available to us as Masons. I hope this talk will remind you of other lessons as well that will convey this important concept in a way that is meaningful to you.

Let me conclude by quoting the very relevant words of Worshipful James Rockland Meehan, Past Master of Lee Lodge No. 209, who said in one of his Lodge programs: “I know that each man who enters by the West Gate is a good man. At least two of my Brothers have vouched for him. Many others may have spoken on his behalf. An investigating committee

has recommended him. And all present during balloting have agreed that he should be admitted. I know I can accept him as a Brother, because my Brethren guarding the West Gate have admitted him to the Lodge.”

I would add that any man who has been accepted as a Brother is worthy of an attempt to reconcile, unless he has been expelled or suspended. So how are we to proceed in reconciliation? Maybe a way to start would be at the beginning, by exchanging the Entered Apprentice grip and saying “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in unity!” But, how you begin is less important than that you do begin the reconciliation process. Masonic principles from time immemorial and your Brethren support you in this important work.