

## Mysterious Connections That Link Us Together

Presented to Luxor Daylight Lodge, October 21, 2009  
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At my official visit with the brethren of Atomic Daylight last week, I spoke of how we as Masons have made it our immediate life's work to chip away at what we metaphorically refer to as the "Rough Ashlar" which alludes to those character imperfections which tend to permeate our humanity. As I noted then, we strive to move to the right where lies the "Perfect Ashlar" and which represents "perfection". The reality, of course, is that that goal of achieving perfection eludes us our whole life, but we as Masons always endeavour to move in that direction.

The tenets of Masonry weigh on each of us to become that which lies open in Lodge and on which we ponder. And so this morning I wish to discuss one of the many traits which make up our revered tenet of "brotherly love". And we must realize that when we speak of "brotherly love", we speak not only of our commitment to each other within the body of Freemasonry but our love and respect for our brothers and sisters throughout the world. And what is the glue that binds us as humans each one to the other? That glue my brethren is "empathy".

It is first important to note here that empathy is very distinct from sympathy or pity. Sympathy is: "I'm sorry for your sadness; how can I help? Empathy is: "I recognize how you feel". The latter is a much closer association with the person to whom you are offering yourself. Empathy is the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.

Often as I sit in Lodge with my brethren and look about the Lodge room I ask myself what is it that draws us together as a fraternity, when in my mind, I know that we do not share in common a multitude of issues which pervade our society on a daily basis. I know that within this room where, we all meet on the square, there are those brothers who would disagree with me on various philosophical, political, social and religious issues. But in the end, although we may not share the same opinions about a multitude of topics, I know we all concede to one principle, and that is the principle of empathy.

Within each of us, we instinctively know that we have in common a feeling that we are all sharing the same emotional experiences in life, albeit for different reasons. Happiness, sadness, enjoyment, disappointment, hard work and idleness.... As a result, we feel we are, in fact, each other's brother. Once we rid ourselves of the trappings of our particular biased opinions of the world, we are left with what and who we are; we are, as Masons, men who care about humanity and in the end, regardless of our "trappings", will reach out and do the right thing because we feel for our fellow man, regardless of the many influences which might sway us in other directions. This is our strength – empathy -- a concept that leads us to our basic precepts of brotherly love, relief, and truth. Brotherly love, our concern for our fellow man; Relief, the manner in which are charitable to our fellow man; and Truth, the moral compass we use in dealing with our fellow man.

Many of you have had the opportunity to have read the story of Huckleberry Finn, written by our Brother, Mark Twain (Polar Star Lodge 79, St. Louis, Missouri), or Samuel

Clemens, as he is more informally known. In that story Huck is faced with a dilemma regarding his friend and runaway slave, Jim, with whom he shares a raft on the Mississippi, traveling from one adventure to another. Now Huck has to decide whether or not to give Jim up to the authorities. Huck is told in church that people who allow slaves to go free will endure fire and brimstone for eternity. Contemplating this fate for protecting Jim and at the same time reflecting on the friendship he shares, Huck thinks back and imagines he and Jim in “the day and nighttime, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing.” At this point, he sees Jim not as a slave but as a human being and he decides there and then, “alright then, I’ll go to hell.”

What Huck rejects is not religion but an attitude of self-righteousness and inflexibility. He acknowledges his fate but recognized his higher calling to the causes of humanity. And that, brethren, is where we come together as Masons, regardless of the negative influences of others.

As we sit back and read our newspaper or tune in to the evening news all the events of the day seem so one-dimensional. We read, we watch, but moments later, we lay the paper down and turn the radio or TV off. For but a brief moment in time we were confronted with the issues largely specific to others and not to ourselves. We can easily distance ourselves from the starving children in Africa or the persecuted women in Afghanistan, or the British soldier killed in action in Iraq.

But let me put it to you, just as you and I interact each time we meet and we recognize our common empathetic bonds with each other, we must likewise recognize our empathetic bond with those who are outside our reach. We must have the ability to put ourselves in their shoes and the will to enter their world through our connection with each other as Masons and the values we hold dear. Without this empathy there can be no genuine dialogue, and we as individuals and nations will remain isolated and alien, segregated and fragmented.

As the story goes of two strangers in a row boat out in the middle of a lake, one man takes out a hand drill and commences to drill a hole in the bottom of the boat while the other excitedly asks “what do you think you are doing? Stop it!” The first stranger replies “mind your own business! I’m drilling a hole under my own seat not yours”. The second stranger responded, “You idiot! We are on the same boat!” And brethren, never let us forget that we are all in the same boat.

Elucidating the messages of our ritual and surrounded by the metaphorical trappings of what we believe to be tools necessary to live a good and upright life, we each month envelope ourselves with those ideals, trusting that we are each living up to the Masonic teachings. But the truth of the matter is that those teachings have to extend far beyond this Lodge room and into the world to which you emerge when you leave here. And feeling empathy for those around you who do, in fact, share your basic principles of life is the first step in being able to provide the assistance that your fellow man and humanity itself may need. And in your application of practicing “those virtues you now profess to admire” you will have truly moved the principles of Masonry from this Lodge room to the world in which you live.