

Setting The Example

By Chad Goyette

In trying times, amidst the chaos throughout the world, it becomes incumbent upon Freemasonry to set an example in dealing with each other with civility and respect. We have this responsibility, because we have been trained to do this and exercise our lessons in Lodge, and hopefully in the world, on a regular basis. There is a huge difference between being right and doing the right thing, and in my twenty-one years in the Craft, I see more Brothers working toward the latter than the former. This is an important step to setting the example to which I allude.

As Masons, we don't always know when people are looking at us to see how we handle situations, or how we treat others. Our "secrets," as few as they are, set us up for failure, but also set us up for great success. Somebody might recognize us as a Mason by seeing our ring, or perhaps a lapel pin. From that point on, they might form an opinion on what Masonry is by watching our actions and the way we speak, or even how we act on social media. By remembering the lessons of the degrees, we can set a positive example and display what Masonry truly can be.

One of the truly great lessons we are taught through the allegory of the building of King Solomon's Temple is that the efforts to perfect the ashlar as a Fellowcraft, and the proper placement of those ashlar by the Master Mason build a true and lasting structure. The quality of the stones contribute immensely to the integrity of the building, so the work of the Fellowcraft is critical. This is an important lesson in working together, each doing their job in the best possible way, and is also observed in the ancient structures that stand strong even today.

When we take this allegorical lesson and flip it around and look at it with different eyes, we discover that each thought and action of the individual becomes that ashlar or stone in the temple of their being. This is the structure on which we are always working, lasting a lifetime, and is never finished. The more perfect we try to make these stones, the greater the integrity of our edifice, which is self.

This is how we can set the example. By exercising these lessons when dealing with other people, we teach our lessons by actions. In this currently contentious world, if we put doing the right thing ahead of being right, everybody benefits. Knowing that others might be looking at the Mason to see how he deals with the situation, we answer with civility and respect. There is a certain "fighting human nature" aspect to this, because serving others before yourself takes conscious and cognitive effort. We practice this in Lodge, and it is taught so we can take it outside and change the world. Keeping this beautiful practice within the Lodge room only is selfish, and we are taught to be anything but that.

I am always amused by the concept of "random act of kindness." Not by the beauty of the act, but by the randomness of it. It's not random, we are kind and help our fellow creatures in a decisive manner. We choose to be a positive force, it is a conscious effort, and that's what makes it so valuable. It is an individual working diligently on the ashlar, and while we may never reach perfection, the attempt is glorious. The "random act of kindness" is a nice way to think of it, because it's inspirational and contagious.

Civility is always the key component in setting the example. We are taught to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds. For some people, this is a difficult proposal, but it goes hand

in hand with civility. One area where this is quite the challenge for some people is social media, where there is a false perception of anonymity, so people feel emboldened to respond emotionally to others. There is a reason people on the internet are called trolls, and it's not because they treat people with respect.

We can be better examples to the world by not participating in disrespectful confrontations with others on social media, especially when we display our Masonic ties. We can agree to disagree with respect, keeping our civility intact, and without letting our passions take control over our cognitive thought. How often in these type of posts and discussions do we change a mind? Much of social media is argument for the sake of argument. This is an opportunity to display a more civil side, and even though we know it won't change those who do otherwise, even a drop of water, over time, can create a hole in a stone.

I appreciate our ability as Brothers to discuss different points of view with respect. I can recall several occasions when, because I was listening with respect and brotherly love, that I changed my mind and vote on a topic due to my Brother's making an intelligent case. Civility is listening with the same consideration as you wish in return. We have learned this and because of that, we can display it as an example to all.