

A Masonic Minute

The Grand Design

“To endeavour to be happy ourselves and communicate that happiness to others”

The chief point in Freemasonry

This ideal is stated in the opening paragraph and is reiterated several times in the General Charge.

Where did the framers of our ritual come upon this concept of ‘*happiness*’ that they enshrined in our rites and ceremonies? Our traditional history bestows upon Solomon, King of Israel, the title of first Grand Master. We read in the Sacred Writings, that the Queen of Sheba at the state banquet provided by King Solomon on the occasion of her visit to inspect the Temple at Jerusalem was so impressed with the King’s renowned wisdom, made this pronouncement, “*Happy are the men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.*”¹ The Worshipful Master, as “*the humble representative of King Solomon,*” is reminded at his Installation that to promote “*the happiness of the brethren*” is his responsibility.

It is important to understand what “*happiness*” means in the Masonic context. The English language is a living language, and as such, meanings evolve and change over time. As modern Freemasonry emerged during the 18th century period of Enlightenment, with the formation of the first Grand Lodges, the explanatory definition of ‘*happiness*’ given by John Ralston Saul is informative.

*“The eighteenth-century ideal of happiness did not pop out of nowhere. It was the expression of a Greek idea – eudaimonia – itself fixed on fulfillment, accomplishment, the well-being of others. Today happiness is more often treated as a Disneyland sort of infantilization, distraction or self-indulgence. Yet every study of happiness as contentment seems to show that an individual’s positive sense of himself or herself grows with disinterested participation in the public weal. Today we often describe this as volunteerism, that is, doing something for others on a continuing basis. So **happiness** today might describe **an engaged citizen** or **an active volunteer.**”²*

“And now abideth faith, hope, charitie, these three, but the greatest of these is charitie.”

King James Version (1611) 1 Corinthians, 13. v. 13

Freemasonry has been described as ‘the science of service.’ Charity (*caritas*) is the basis of Brotherly Love – doing unto others what in like circumstances we wish them to do unto us. In this sense, happiness and kindness go together. That concept of

¹ 1 Kings, 10, v. 8

² John Ralston Saul. A FAIR COUNTRY: Telling Truths about Canada. 2008

charity goes far beyond contributing to worthy causes. The Mason, true to the principles the Order inculcates, is here to serve, not to be served.

A man petitions a lodge, and if accepted, enters the fraternity with high expectations. He pays a substantial initiation fee, annual dues, and is expected to devote considerable time and effort. What can he look forward to in return? What are the *privileges* of Ancient Freemasonry we promise to deliver? A lodge meeting should have more to offer than a friendly get together at Tim Horton's. First and foremost, as an initiatory order, the serious seeker is given the opportunity to undertake a graduated course in self-development in order to realize his personal potential – gaining “*a positive sense of himself*” with a feeling of “*fulfillment, accomplishment, contentment.*” It is almost too obvious to state that a man will only return to his lodge month after month, year after year if his expectations are realized. Then, he will understand ‘*happiness*’ in the Masonic context.

And so we say ...

Happy to meet • Sorry to part • Happy to meet again.

RSJD 2015