



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

“Let brotherly love
ever distinguish us
as men and masons”

Why is the practice of brotherly love difficult to practise?'

Question: Name the three Grand Principles upon which the Order is founded.

Answer: **Brotherly Love**, Relief and Truth.

I was quite surprised to recently discover that there is a designated annual Kindness Day UK, and even a World Kindness Day, which falls on November 13.

This got me thinking about kindness and society, and i started to look at the various bodies, charities and organisations which exist to counter unkind behaviour what we also might call 'cruelty' – I fear you would be surprised as to just how many there are.

So what is **Kindness**, (*noun*): the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate. And is being kind in any way related to Brotherly Love?

The dictionary offers a simple explanation of the word. But what the definition doesn't reveal is how to actually **be** kind, and strangely it seems we do need to be 'taught to be kind' – some behavioural experts believe it's not natural to be kind, and that in fact human nature is more inclined to selfish behaviour as the norm.

I think we would all agree that if there is one aspect of human behaviour which we all find unacceptable it is surely the very unpleasant manner in which some individuals treat one another, what we generally refer to as 'being unkind', and whilst we would hope that this would never apply to our Brethren in Freemasonry, very sadly sometimes it does, although it is a very rare event.

One of the first and very significant lessons taught to a newly made Freemason is the important virtue of charity, and when using this word we should remember that in its original sense, which was still relevant and in use in the 18th century, meant much more than the act of buying raffle tickets or signing a five year covenant to the Charity Chest, which, generous as they are, represent only one aspect of an inner sense of morality, which can best be said to reflect what we refer to as the grand principles on which Freemasonry is founded 'Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth'. Brotherly love (of one another,) relief (of those disadvantaged) and truth, the courage to live and be true to high standards of morality.

At the initiation of every Freemason the following words are spoken but sadly not always heard. *'Be especially careful to maintain in their fullest splendour those truly Masonic ornaments, which have already been amply illustrated – Benevolence and Charity'*

Benevolence - the quality of being well meaning; kindness.

Charity - the voluntary giving of help. But in biblical terms used as a substitute for the word love.

The word charity entered the English language from the French word *charite* and which is itself derived from the Latin word *caritas*, in turn it became anglicised into the word 'charity' and is said to be the pre-eminent of the three graces.

In the VSL we are reminded '*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*' In many contemporary translations of the VSL the word charity is also referred to as love, taken from the Greek 'agape' This is the same word used to describe brotherly love which of course is the first of the three grand principles on which Freemasonry is founded.

Therefore i believe we can make a direct correlation between the act of kindness and the practice of Brotherly Love.

But in the 21st century should the word charity or indeed love be considered relevant to our attitude towards our fellow Brethren or is brotherly love on the wane?

I hope it isn't on the wane and I trust you will agree with me that brotherly love is as important as its place in our ritual would suggest.

If we believe and accept Freemasonry to be a 'family' - we would surely accept that from time to time there will be familial fall outs, differences of opinion, and occasionally outright hostility; however, as with most families, seemingly intractable problems are often short lived, and peace and harmony is eventually restored. Occasionally the 'issues' whilst not necessarily warranting it, are a little more difficult to resolve and lead to medium and even long term disquiet which might lead to estrangement. Such situations are very sad and at worst damaging to the very moral fabric of our Order.

Within a Lodge men meet with each other, enjoying each other's company and learning that each is not the sole person in the Lodge, but that others have their rights and are entitled to proper consideration. The friendly social inter relationship which comes from membership is of real value in helping to mould the character of every member of the Lodge. We are taught to subordinate our wills to the general good and to think and act unselfishly and for the good of the Lodge as a whole, rather than to simply go our own way ignoring the interests of others.

We all 'sign up' to the proposition that we will attempt to 'settle our differences amicably' in the earnest expectation that we will 'enter the Lodge and work with that love and harmony which should at all times characterise Freemasons.' And yet I find myself asking the question - is that

really what we aspire to achieve or is it simply a form of words which we repeat and hear repeated, but believe only applies to the Entered Apprentice to whom they are addressed?

Sadly, Brethren do 'fall out' with one another, and discord, and a lack of harmony does occur in Lodges and between Lodges, all too frequently the **fallout** from the **falling out** can have dreadful repercussions totally disproportionate to the events which caused the issue in the first instant. How can this be? What heinous offence can ever occur which would justify the harmony of the Lodge being so disturbed, and how can we stray so far from the ideal expressed in the Address given to the Brethren at every Installation ceremony.

If we are so disposed to act in a manner so clearly at odds with the principles and tenets of our profession, then surely we should remind ourselves of those words: *'May brotherly love and affection ever distinguish us as men and as Masons. May the principles and tenets of our profession which are founded on the principles of religious truth and virtue, teach us to measure our actions by the rule of rectitude, square our conduct by the principles of morality, and guide our inclinations, and even our thoughts, within the compass of propriety.'*

Brotherly love is the foundation of true Masonic happiness and if there is one truth of which I am most certain, it is that the purpose of our Masonic life is to be happy and to communicate and share that happiness – but don't simply take my word for it, consider the injunction to the Brethren of the Lodge at the Installation of a new Master – *'that we shall have but one aim in view, to please each other and unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness'* and if that wasn't sufficient to convince you of this inalienable truth, consider the entreaty to the Master *'the happiness of the Brethren will be promoted in proportion to the zeal and assiduity with which you promote the genuine principles and tenets of the craft'* and I believe we are all of one mind that the genuine principles referred to are those based on religious truth and virtue and must be those on which Freemasonry is founded – Brotherly Love, relief and truth.

There can be no merit whatsoever in attempting to appear virtuous by donating money towards a charity outside your Lodge if you are not in charity, or are at variance, with a Brother within it. Charity truly begins at home.

Before we took the first step in Freemasonry we were instructed to *'stand perfectly erect, your feet in the form of a square'* this somewhat odd position wasn't to make us uncomfortable, rather it was to make an impression on our mind. *'Your body, thus, being considered an emblem of your mind, and your feet the rectitude of your actions'*. Your feet were placed in the form of a square because

the square is that emblematical light in Freemasonry which *'regulates our actions'* and the word rectitude means - morally correct behaviour.

The Charge after Initiation leaves no room for challenge or misunderstanding. *'As a Freemason, let me recommend to your most serious contemplation the Volume of the Sacred law'* - what a way to grab the attention of the newly made Freemason, but the exhortation is not yet complete, it continues *'charging you to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice and to regulate your actions by the divine precepts it contains'*.

Indeed, one of those precepts is mentioned a little later when we are reminded of that *'duty we owe to our neighbour, by acting with him on the square, by rendering him every kind office which justice or mercy may require, by relieving his necessities, soothing his afflictions, and by doing unto him as in similar cases you would wish he should do to you.'* If that doesn't require a huge dollop of Brotherly Love, I don't know what does.

Brotherly love is much more than offering 'a handshake' which all too frequently reveals itself in a demonstration of false bonhomie, and lacks any sincerity, sense of genuine concern or interest for the well being of those greeted. And just by the way, the recipient of such false largesse is more likely than not to be very aware of the situation.

Brotherly love is not about 'doing someone a favour' it must of necessity be much more than that. The mortar of brotherly love needs a better mix; the trowel must distribute the cement in better proportions.

Brotherly love is not just about being polite either. To listen politely, to answer respectfully and to avoid giving offence are worthwhile virtues and we should cultivate them; but they are not necessarily the purposeful acts of a Freemason who is consciously using the trowel of brotherly love and affection.

Acknowledging a Brother is not the same as responding or communicating with him, just as listening is not the same as hearing what was said.

It is often said that a true friend is one who recognises and accepts another's faults as well as their virtues, and accepts them for what they are in the here and now. To reject them, no matter how carefully it is done, is still a rejection, something which can never ever be part of Brotherly Love and affection.

Thomas Dunkerley visited Marlborough in 1769 and in a meeting held at The Castle Inn said:- *By Brotherly Love, we are to understand that generous principle of the soul, which respects the human*