



FRANK REED HORTON MEMORIAL LODGE NO. 379, F. & A. M.

UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND LODGE OF FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS OF THE PHILIPPINES

Lecture No. 10 **MASONIC FELLOWSHIP**

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A Phenomenon

It's an unfortunate fact that over approximately the last 50 years, something has changed in our Craft. Strangely, "fellowship" is currently treated as a phenomenon – among Filipino Masons. Sadly, fellowship is presently a topic of Masonic discussion and debate – versus being an "action" item. In the final analysis, "fellowship" is about action, not discussion. "Fellowship" has seemingly fallen into the shadow of mystery. It would seem that the interpersonal associations of "fellowship" have been replaced by discussion and "consensus."

So, one asks, "*.... what happened?*" Suddenly, Masons are asking why the members' seats are so typically empty in the Lodge rooms. The Masonic officer lines are becoming more difficult to fill. Not that long ago, those positions were coveted!

Experience attests to the fact that size isn't the key to fellowship; many a small Lodge is the epitome of 'Spartan;' with their ritual being as complete as any larger Lodge, but often famous for being expedient. So, the fellowship is obviously far more a function of the social events, before and after the meeting. Then, how does one account for that fellowship? Somewhere, the key obviously lies not in the quantity; it's clearly the quality.

It must also be acknowledged that all the fraternities are experiencing such losses, with similar descriptions of failing fellowship.

The current fear is that Masonic fellowship – if not the Craft - is on the brink of extinction. Obviously, the threat is real, evidenced by so many empty chairs and the numbers of fading Lodges – there is no denial available. Something obviously needs to be changed; something needs to be restored.

Still another failure is in sight – the lack of 'leadership;' having been generally replaced by 'management.' Leadership is remembered as that "...follow me" substance which comes of mission assignment and goal attainment – add the support of the 'troops.' Conversely, "management" takes the form of awful-izing and blame apportionment.

To be brief, "leaders" are recognized by their broken trails; "managers" are recognized by their paper trails. "Leaders" are applauded and made famous for the risks which they take. Conversely, "managers" are applauded for the risks which they avoided. The 'test' is in the end result. That's not to discount or deny a need for management, versus putting both leadership and management into perspective.

While it is not really certain exactly what happened, it is worth questioning whether or not our culture, in particular, is experiencing a negative dividend from a "...**what's in it for me...**" attitude, which is so common in our societies. How many times do we encounter an attitude, whether spoken or implied through actions, which goes to the question, "**Why should I?**" Or; "**What do I owe them?**" By all outward appearances, those attitudes have permeated the Lodge rooms, as well. Certainly, the "personal power trip" of the usual 'nay-sayers' hurts such organizations.

Fellowship is also a production item – not just a matter of personal attitudes and decisions; some form of leadership is required to methodically assemble a 'fellowship' event. Comparably, such also requires tactfully and assertively holding any criticism to the standard of 'constructive' criticism; minimizing any 'nay-saying,' as well as appropriately holding any detractors responsible for arbitrary criticism.

Questioning reveals that the eldest Masonic members can't quite describe what the magic was, when the Masonic Lodge rooms were normally full. The typical comment from the elders is important: "**There was a time when being a Mason really meant something!**"

What was that "**.... something?**" There's a clue in that statement; it's heard too often. That "something" has to go beyond the Masonic element of membership 'legacy,' there was obviously more there – it could only have been a unique social occurrence – "fellowship." There is a missing emotional payoff – the "zing" - of belonging.

While working as a team member is vitally important - and with Masons emphasizing "meeting on the level" - individual contributions are historically recognized and applauded in Masonic circles. One must question whether or not the traditional recognition of outstanding individuals has been 'mysteriously' changed. If so, it's clearly necessary to reverse that trend. If nothing else, the sterility of the Communist societies needs to be recognized for the social and economic poison that it was. Is Masonry witnessing something comparable? Being "Politically Correct" is a well-known social poison; even if it serves as a bureaucratic band-aid.

It is valid to ask, "**Is the absence of individuality – and its rewards - hurting the Craft?**" In many circles – including Freemasonry – truly outstanding individuals and their efforts are discounted, instead of being celebrated. The dark side of 'envy,' or even blatant jealousy, far too commonly takes its toll – with a bizarre impunity.

From the dusty attics are discovered nearly ancient and beautifully framed certificates, attesting to the Mason attaining his Third Degree. It is certain that the certificate once hung proudly on the wall of a living room or den; possibly in an office. Today, those certificates are rarely found in the possession of a new member. The matter of 'expense' aside, it is worth questioning whether or not such mementos played a vitally key role in the history of the Craft. One can imagine a visiting friend or neighbor viewing such a certificate on a living room wall, asking "**What is this? How does one join?**"

From history, the most original of Masonic documents, "Anderson's Constitutions" (1723) made such loyalty a mandate. Somewhere in time, that magnitude of fraternalism faded. Current social imagery being what it is – one would think that it would be 'cool' to stand up and say that "**I took care of a Brother.**" Certainly, that would make for some neat fellowship. One can only imagine the effect of the subsequent acknowledgement, when the statement is made, "**I'll never forget that Brother Juan saw to it that my family was fed.**"

So, in a sentence, what might serve as a definition of "fellowship?"

The Real Meaning

FELLOWSHIP: *"The joy which accompanies the acts of **unconditional** giving and thanks giving."*

That definition requires the getting away from the thought that **"This is a give and take world - quid pro quo - something received for something given."** Yet, it is only fair to ask why one would abandon that idea. In the simplest of terms, because it is a SEVERELY LIMITING idea.

Imagine what goes on at a potluck dinner. Everybody brings; everybody receives. AND; there's usually a lot of food left over, which people are begged to take home!

AND – those in attendance look forward to the next such event!

Imagine that! **All because of an attitude!** An attitude which has been a historic and a major part of the traditional Masonic experience. An attitude which needs to be recognized and rejuvenated.

Returning to the idea that our 'discretionary time' is almost as important as our 'discretionary income;' then we must question what fills the successful Lodges of today? There are still many successful Lodges. What works for those organizations? What would easily bring someone out to a Lodge? What motive can be provided? "Education" might fill the members' and guests' minds; the issue is more appropriately directed at that which would fill their hearts - the gift of genuine caring!

The silent mandate is for upcoming or aspiring Masters to write the history of their year in the Masonic East – **in advance** – starting with a citation on how the element of fellowship will be successfully handled.

In the case of Masonic organizations, one of the key elements which is traditional and successful – anywhere - is the element of "passion!" Just the setup of a Lodge room is a production in itself; it should be a team effort – a 'social' event. The 'before-and-after' social events are best appreciated when the room seems to be 'charged' with positive energy. Masonic ritual is most impressive when it is done with the flair of showmen – with "passion."

It is appropriate to take a moment to examine the emotional needs of men, in particular. Not just a man's experiences, thoughts or beliefs – but, rather, the thrill and passion of being a Mason. Remember the 'classic' of mountain climbers? **"It was there; so I climbed it."** The greater truth is best described as, **"It was there; and I knew how great it would FEEL to climb it."**

The function of "motivation" says that the 'payoff' conviction had to precede the event. What would compel someone to risk life and limb – to climb a mountain?? That obvious emotional gratification speaks to a range of rewards from personal satisfaction / gratification – before, during and after - to public acknowledgment, applause and even honors. The emotional payoff is the key. So is it among Masons, even today. Thus, we must advise the ladies, that men ARE emotionally available, they're just a little bit "different."

Of all the lessons to be learned in life, there are few as powerful as: **"People will forget what you do and say; they will never forget how you make them feel!"** No, we don't "make" feelings in others, we INSPIRE feelings; good, bad or otherwise. That's an important distinction to make.

It's not difficult to find someone impassioned about being a Masonic member; those are whom come to Lodge, regularly. **BUT**, the Craft is challenged to attract those who are also sincerely "gratified" to be a member.

So, where does one start? Think to that seeming 'wall flower,' for example. He just looks like he wants to be left alone. Typically, we quickly rationalize that we're being 'courteous' to leave him alone.

That's a mistake!!!

True wall-flowers stay at home! Just by virtue of their membership, we must recognize that the Masonic members want and need to be recognized and acknowledged. That's as simple as saying ***"It's good to see you again, thanks for coming. I hope to see you more often. Are you coming to the meeting next month?"***

The dynamic member makes it a habit of going over to those they don't know – or haven't seen in a while – and striking up a conversation. Masonry is a social organization; people should be reasonably comfortable in going over to a person & introducing themselves. It should be reasonably easy for any member to find it in themselves to let the other members know that you care about him.

The requirement: **Just do it!** Fellowship is a dynamics – action! Ideally, the Master of the Lodge should always be giving social instruction, as well. 'Social skills' have a nasty habit of deteriorating.

If one must admit that they don't have a required answer; then they have taken the first step toward seeking the solution - only then. Claiming to be "mystified" by the problem doesn't solve it. Often enough, it's necessary to look to what you know works in other arenas. If one is a dog or cat owner, it's a matter of asking what makes the dog or cat come to you - and love you. Brotherly love isn't all that much different.

An illustration comes to us in the form of a true story. A member of an American Grand Lodge team began describing a 'mystery' in the fellowship which he observed in the Filipino community; in and out of the Lodge environment. He attempted to account for that fellowship by describing such things as a common native language (Pilipino), a common heritage, a common geographic origin, etc. The Filipinos, he described had a wonderful result of that commonality – fellowship. Interestingly, his cultural description of the Filipinos was that of everyday America – except for the fellowship.

One must quickly conclude that 'fellowship' IS more than a cliché. There are certain identifiable characteristics or 'processes' of "fellowship," which make it a dynamic 'happening.'

It's elementary that our general association of "fellowship" concerns sharing and caring in numbers. Masonry is an association - a positive interpersonal relationship; the members first have to assemble with a willingness (if not an intent or design) to experience a good time; and

enhance the experience of others. True fellowship is not merely mechanically assembling in a common space; something needs to happen there. Personal agendas or 'power trips' are not appropriate. Fellowship is about positive sharing and caring – and giving. Ideally there is an aura of "passion," at such events.

There's also the very important aspect that one feels 'special,' to be included in such a gathering. The purpose of the Masonic initiation is to make the member feel unique - special! The basics of "caring" or love are the same – it's all a matter of magnitude and circumstance.

So, what's true in the idealized "fellowship" picture?

1. You communicate to the other brethren THAT you care.
2. You communicate to the other brethren WHY you care.
3. You demonstrate to the other brethren that you care.
4. The affection has to be unconditional. (Expectations don't belong.)
5. The affection has to be trustworthy.

Obviously, when one shares the joviality of a particular environment, one witnesses and experiences "gifts" of humor, toasts of respect, compliments and sometimes physical gifts. In some form, the dynamics listed above are ALL present.

It is worthwhile to observe a piece of Scripture – ***"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*** The dynamics of that bit of Scripture go deeper, as the 'giving' produces an emotional result sometimes related as 'fun' or even joyous.

Or, if one is 'into' the dynamics of "dysfunctional family psychology," change that statement to ***"It is more thrilling to give, than to receive."***

In the Masonic community, the 'gift' can be attendance, interaction, listening without passing judgment, protecting and honoring the other person's feelings, dignity, offering support, advice, an idea, a compliment, a joke, a sincere question – or even a tangible present. Or, perhaps, 'all-of-the-above.' Fellowship is that close-in charity, which we give to each other. Again, it's about action!

In terms of dynamics, Freemasonry is not a "one-size-fits-all" organization; it serves as an opportunity for the individual – for that which composes the individual. Ideally, Freemasonry should allow the individual, that what appeals to the individual. A gourmet cook may delight in preparing meals – they may abhor leadership. Aha! The compulsive Steward; a 'win-win' scenario is born! That's not necessarily the individual who should be encouraged to "go through the chairs." Therefore, by identifying the preferences of the individual, the Craft serves the individual, while offering the individual the opportunity to express himself.

So, what can an individual be reasonably expected to bring to a "fellowship" event? Particularly today, just a member's presence is truly a "gift." The member can easily bring a good attitude and a sense of humor; perhaps a joke or an interesting story. They can bring their anticipation of - or creation of - a good time. Granted, that may require one overcoming any reservations or perceived 'risks,' as to whether or not they will have a good time – or learn (possibly receive) something of value.

Equally important would be the bringing of another member, or a friend, as appropriate. That invites the dynamic of stretching one's comfort zone, by reaching into OTHER social circles – other Lodges, other organizations. Our time-compressed society makes the bringing of such a friend a bit more challenging than simply putting that friend on notice of an event. In today's world, Masonic events don't normally serve as the powerful social magnets of long ago. It is vital to dynamically extend an appropriate invitation, to somehow secure a commitment – where possible; then be so caring as to remind that other person in a polite and timely manner. Again, it's as vital to offer contact information, as it is to solicit that information.

Remembering that fellowship is an action item, not just an option; one is tasked by the question, **"So, what can I do?"**

Following is a short 'list:'

1. Be aware of what is presently going on – the immediate event is destined to be the primary source of conversation and interaction. If boredom should somehow prevail, the individual may be able to stimulate conversation, entertainment or information.
2. Make it a point to assertively interact; to get to know others – and allow them to get to know you. Share information with others; name, family, job, travels, interests, hobbies – even problems (and solutions.)
3. Be alert and considerate as to the needs and wants of others. Traditional appropriate courtesies – including expressed gratitude - are required. Your input may be required. The infamous wall-flower may need to be drawn out; but, possibly, he may need to be left alone. Good judgment is required.
4. Acknowledge, recognize, applaud, congratulate, reward and facilitate others.
5. Find, share or create humor – and fun!

There is a caveat.... the aspect that the caring has to be trustworthy! The Lodges need to be filled with great feelings, not great agendas.

Many a member of Masonic organizations well remembers the enthusiasm experienced when they signed their Lodge By-laws. For most, that was a great feeling; they were then certified as being 'special.' Later, they are all-too-often compelled to ask whether or not something changed. That feeling of being special somehow went away.

Even with regular initiations of new members, the Lodge rooms approach being empty. Thus it is compelling for the 'regulars' to inquire what happened to those members who are rarely – if ever again - seen at Masonic events. Those in regular attendance at their Masonic events should actively question what happened to the other members, or visitors. These are people whom the membership know; or SHOULD know.

Current Masonic statistics demonstrate that 50% to 85% of the new Master Masons give up within their first year. It's necessary to put those statistics into the perspective of the percentage of members who actually attend their Lodge – not counting visitors from other Lodges. Five percent? Fifteen percent? **What happened?**

In all likelihood, the element of 'fellowship' went missing; the absent members ultimately became Masonic "JAMs" (**J**ust **A**nother **M**ember). From that time forward, they no longer felt 'special,' nor did they probably feel 'included.' Often, they quit, demitted, or just resigned

themselves to pay dues & maybe attend Masonic functions occasionally. Some "shopped" the Craft, attempting to find that niche, where they could trust in being or feeling 'special.' According to current statistics, some made it; most didn't. In a sentence, they were probably left feeling detached; or outright abandoned. The element of fellowship failed.

Freemasonry is famous for giving away millions of dollars away to public charity – every day! Current Masonic PR is oriented around impressing the public with the various charity contributions. But, Masons are appropriate in asking, "**What do we give to each other?**" As a beginning, Masons can offer "fellowship," the dynamic version; in most cases it's even "free!"

Yet, there is the usual - and valid - question of "**WHY**" to fellowship. To borrow a line concerning sex, from a Barbara Streisand movie – ["The Mirror Has Two Faces"]

"Because it just _____ feels good!"

At least as a beginning, Masons can take two simple steps:

First, get in touch with this thought, "***I go there, because I feel so good when I leave!***" That feeling should be a sense of excitement, as well as a special sense of human warmth, comfort and safety.

Second, visualize a full Lodge and Chapter Rooms; ***what feelings go with that vision?*** "**Pride**" is also a feeling.

There is another dynamics; a thing called "reputation." A good "reputation" means that anyone can have a thing called "confidence" in having a good time, at the particular event. Any experienced Mason will have a mental list of Lodges with good reputations – even if the dynamics of those Lodges are mysteriously NOT emulated, elsewhere. The Lodge reputation is vitally important for a regular event - such as a Lodge meeting night.

The aspect of personal decision-making can't go unmentioned. Implied is the requirement for the element of courage to attend, to participate and to properly facilitate the elements of fellowship. Attending 'fellowship' events require the courage to attend - with a "go for it!" attitude. Sometimes it's also a matter of inviting and/or challenging others to do the same. This is another example of reaping what one sows.

For any Mason, there is a simple challenge – to invite someone – anyone - to join in an event – any event; then give that person a reminder phone call or text message. Let them know that someone cares. Then, to see what happens, as a consequence.

All too often, Masons come under the cloud of "...all titles; no legacy." Ideally, Masonic officers should be somehow held accountable for being more than a name on a list of Past Masters - or other titles. What monuments can a Mason leave behind? The authorship of a paper, a book, a gift to the Lodge, or Grand Lodge, a year of membership expansion or commendable ritual – or the history of a year of fabulous "**fellowship!**"