

Let's Talk about EQUALITY

Brethren,

In my first presentation we began the discussion of the WHY for our Brethren to have as their “elevator speech” if someone asks them about the Craft, for our new Candidates to better appreciate and fully embrace the Craft as members, and particularly for new Candidates who are younger in order to speak to them in a mutually-engaging manner.

That discussion of WHY touched on WHAT is happening in our ceremonies and WHAT the SECRETS are and the purpose of having them. Entwined in both are the precepts of LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY. Tonight we will begin the journey over a series of nights of discussing the WHY for these aspects being fundamentally important to our lives, to our families and to common society who benefit from Masons carrying their practice from the Lodge room out into the world. One of their greatest promoters was the literary giant Bro. Rudyard Kipling.

Some of you may recall a Masonic Education piece I prepared at the request of W. Bro. Allin on the origin of modern Professional Engineering, its oath and the recognizable Iron Ring that came into being from the request from a Canadian Brother Haultain to his benevolent Brother Kipling in the United Kingdom. It is but one of Kipling's many contributions to Masonry and a vehicle of improvement to the world. Tonight though we will discuss perhaps my favorite, that truly captures the WHY, and illustrates the teachings of the previous lesson. Rudyard Kipling drew on his own experiences in the Hope and Perseverance Lodge No. 782 in Lahore, Punjab, India. He joined the Craft around 1885, earlier than the required age of 21 by dispensation. His father was a dedicated Freemason, the young Kipling's name was well-known as an industrious young newspaper writer, so the Lodge in need of a new secretary considered Kipling well-suited for the task.

THE OLD MOTHER LODGE circa 1885 goes like this:

The Mother-Lodge

by Rudyard Kipling

There was Rundle, Station Master,
An' Beazeley of the Rail,
An' 'Ackman, Commissariat,
An' Donkin o' the Jail;
An' Blake, Conductor-Sergeant,
Our Master twice was 'e,
With 'im that kept the Europe-shop,
Old Framjee Eduljee.

Outside—“Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!”

Inside—"Brother," an' it doesn't do no 'arm.
We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,
An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

We'd Bola Nath, Accountant,
 An' Saul the Aden Jew,
An' Din Mohammed, draughtsman
 Of the Survey Office too;
There was Babu Chuckerbutty,
 An' Amir Singh the Sikh,
An' Castro from the fittin'-sheds,
 The Roman Catholick!

We 'adn't good regalia,
 An' our Lodge was old an' bare,
But we knew the Ancient Landmarks,
 An' we kep' 'em to a hair;
An' lookin' on it backwards
 It often strikes me thus,
There ain't such things as infidels,
 Excep', per'aps, it's us.

For monthly, after Labour,
 We'd all sit down and smoke
(We dursn't give no banquets,
 Lest a Brother's caste were broke),
An' man on man got talkin'
 Religion an' the rest,
An' every man comparin'

Of the God 'e knew the best.

So man on man got talkin',

An' not a Brother stirred

Till mornin' waked the parrots

An' that dam' brain-fever-bird;

We'd say 'twas 'ighly curious,

An' we'd all ride 'ome to bed,

With Mo'ammed, God, an' Shiva

Changin' pickets in our 'ead.

Full oft on Guv'ment service

This rovin' foot 'ath pressed,

An' bore fraternal greetin's

To the Lodges east an' west,

Accordin' as commanded,

From Kohat to Singapore,

But I wish that I might see them

In my Mother-Lodge once more!

I wish that I might see them,

My Brethren black an' brown,

With the trichies smellin' pleasant

An' the hog-darn passin' down;

An' the old khansamah snorin'

On the bottle-khana floor,

Like a Master in good standing

With my Mother-Lodge once more.

Outside—"Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!"

Inside—"Brother," an' it doesn't do no 'arm.

We met upon the Level an' we parted on the Square,

An' I was Junior Deacon in my Mother-Lodge out there!

Wonderful isn't it. We can all picture ourselves in Lodge with this Brother, feel the warmth inherent in the words, and the power of their message: of brotherhood, loyalty, unity between races and classes, and memory, expressed in plain informal language. Kipling does an excellent job at presenting a picture of the mother lodge members' joviality and the strong sense of fraternity felt by all. The men care little for the color of each others' skin or their religions; indeed, they spend all night talking about the God they knew best. Kipling is also proud of their shared humility – these men do not care for the trappings of wealth, being too poor to hold decadent banquets and preferring to indulge in cigars instead. Their importance does not come from their uniforms (which are threadbare) or the gilded appearance of their lodge (it is bare, too), but in their strength of character and their value of friendship and honor.

For me these words strike a nerve every times I hear or read them. At my Initiation many years ago I am privileged to say it was a Special Night for the Lodge, with skilled Ritualists from across the District participating with depth and precision. More than that, taking the Chairs for the evening were adherents to all three of the Abrahamic faiths, a Sikh, a Buddhist and perhaps others. There were professionals and tradesmen, the wealthy and those of modest means, those of elder years, and younger Entered Apprentices. A Festive Board before the meeting was filled with warmth and laughter, interesting side discussions of business and the world, jokes and goings on in the District, things to look forward to. My Sponsors introduced me around, the Officers of the Lodge made a fuss. In a word, I felt WELCOME. After the meeting as was the custom, there was coffee and cookies. The Master approached me and my Sponsors to remind them of the 1st Degrees happening in the District and confirming one of them would pick me up to travel together, vouch, and discuss the WHY of the Degree. There was also a reminder that Instruction Night was on the third Thursday as I recall, and to make an efforts to be there with my Sponsors. That evening I learned something, I enjoyed myself, I met Brethren I speak with and keep up with regularly to this day. My wife of course asked me when I got home, "What happened"? to which I replied, "I had a good time". Just like Kipling did, as so eloquently captured in his immortal words...it was his favorite time he wanted to return to as he reflected back. Strikes a timeless chord in the turbulent times we currently live in, and a model we also might aspire to.

I've come back night after night, year over year, and tried my best to make that night and the time devoted to it the best I could to pay that back for those who did so for me, particularly the Entered Apprentices. And that Brethren is tonight's WHY on EQUALITY.