

Happiness, Morality and the Mason (Official Visit to Wingham Lodge, October 2, 2012)

You know that sensation when a song plays in your mind, and you can't shake it? I'll try to plant one now. A song written by Jule Styne, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green called "*Make Someone Happy*". The final few lines:

*"Make someone happy
Make just one someone happy
And you will be happy too"*

'Happiness' - that sense of well-being, being pleased or contented; a feeling of enjoyment, pleasure, or joyfulness. The opposite of sadness, sorrow or despair.

So, a question: 'What's this got to do with Masonry?' I think quite a bit.

Each of our meetings closes with the J. W. making his observation that we are "*Happy to meet, sorry to part, and happy to meet again.*" The same words close our banquets, when the J. W. gives this familiar toast.

The moral of the W. T. of an E.A., is that knowledge, when based on truth, aided by diligence, labour and persistence, will create happiness in our daily quests.

But the reference to happiness that I want to talk about tonight, occurs in the General Charge at the close of the Ceremony of Installation and Investiture. In the opening paragraph, we are reminded that those who rule a Lodge, and those who submit and obey, have together one common aim, "*... to please each other and unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness*"

Several paragraphs later, we are instructed that the chief point, to repeat, the chief point, of Freemasonry is "*... to endeavour to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others.*"

Even the American *Declaration of Independence*, written several decades after that first paragraph of our General Charge, declares that all men are created equal, and that they have a God given right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Happiness – it seems an odd inclusion when compared to the right to life, and the right to live it free from oppression.

Clearly, something is going on, something that perhaps indicates being happy and communicating happiness is more than just feelings of joy and pleasure, more than just sharing fun. I think it does.

In a book called "*How the Scots Invented the Modern World*", Arthur Herman writes about the "Scottish Enlightenment," beginning in the early 1700s, co-incidentally, about the same time as the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland and Ireland were becoming formally organized and consolidating our Masonic tenets and principles. Herman discusses philosophers who tackled

questions of morality, who addressed the 'why' questions of life: Why does mankind act in a moral manner? Why do we choose right over wrong, good over bad, good over evil?

Thomas Hobbes typified the harsh view of those in secular and religious authority. Man is selfish and vicious and requires the force of the state, and especially the church, to keep him moral. The powerful state Church preached this philosophy; the fire and brimstone theology of John Calvin and John Knox.

Samuel Pufendorf, thought man carries within himself a spark of the Divine; allowing him to grasp nature's laws, including moral laws. His views echo in our General Charge. Man in society has basic rights, but those rights bring obligations: the duty to obey those laws established through common consent, and the moral laws governing our private conduct towards others. Without moral law, no community is possible; and without community there is no protection for our person nor our property; no survival. Man is moral out of self-interest, because doing the right thing enables us to live safely among others, and benefit from the protection of society.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, took a loftier view. Man serves others, not because he needs to for survival, but because he enjoys doing it. Helping others fills us with a sense of well-being and pleasure. This is the essence of morality; being good means doing good; virtue requires it; our own feelings confirm it. Man was born to belong, to be with others, and to make their lives more pleasant. Being wicked or vicious is to be miserable and unhappy.

Francis Hutcheson. A man of the Church, Hutcheson knew the conviction that man was moral only through his fear of an eternity in Hell. But, he had been influenced by Pufendorf and Shaftesbury, among others. Hutcheson decided that human beings are born with a moral sense; the ability to make moral judgments; a fundamental understanding of right and wrong. We are predetermined to feel pleasure in the practice of virtue and to approve of it when practiced by ourselves and others. This benevolent feeling for our fellow creatures, this delight in the good of others, becomes the basis of our sense of right and wrong. That which helps and pleases a person for whom we have affection, is good, it gives us pleasure. That which injures him is bad, it causes us pain to see him unhappy. We begin to realize that the happiness of others is also our happiness. In our Masonic terms, we communicate happiness.

Hutcheson decided that happiness is everyone's goal in life, and in its ultimate form, making others happy. The basic rules of morality teach us how to act in the world so that we can achieve this goal. Happiness has two parts: our self-gratification through a joyous and contented life, and the gratification we feel in the happiness of others. Altruism and self-interest are not at odds. Virtue is indeed its own reward. Seeing others happy makes us happy, and making others happy is the highest form. In the words of the General Charge, the chief point is to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others.

How does this relate to Masons? Hutcheson's 'Doctrine of Happiness' leads us to those principles and tenets we express in our Craft. It takes us to the three 'great social treasures': fraternity, equality and liberty. It takes us to the three fundamental principles: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

Brotherly Love, fraternity, means we are to treat one another, Mason and non-Mason alike, with the respect and affection that one would give to our own brother, to show true regard for the well-being of others. Relief means charity, and not only the charity of donation, but the charity that benefits both the giver and receiver: mercy, compassion and kindness; goodness and sincerity; treating others as equals, treating them as we ourselves would wish to be treated. Truth is our quest for knowledge, the path that we must follow if we wish to improve ourselves: being true to our nature and by so doing, being truthful with others. Liberty is ensuring another's right to live his life free from oppression, tyranny and domination.

And why would we do this? Why should we treat people this way? Because it is the correct choice, the moral choice, the right thing to do, and we know that because it creates in us, and others, feelings of pleasure, contentedness, and well-being. To give is to receive; it makes us, and them, happy. Because our common aim is *“to please each other and unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness.”*

Hutcheson taught that the best action is the one that produces happiness in the greatest number. In the Charge to the Newly Initiated Candidate we are told that Masonry is an honourable society only if we are obedient to its precepts, its teachings, and only in the practice of the social and moral virtues. Belonging is not enough; honour requires actions as well as words. There is a difference between saying what is good and right and doing what is good and right. We were told to practice what we preach, to make our words become our deeds.

Hutcheson wrote that man must get out and become involved in the lives of his fellow human beings. As Entered Apprentices, we were charged to serve our neighbour; practice charity in its fullest sense; treat him with justice and mercy; relieve his necessities, soothe his afflictions and do for him as we would wish him to do for us. Traces of Leviticus and Matthew: love your neighbour as yourself; of Matthew and Luke: treat your neighbour as you would wish to be treated; the Golden Rule of Christianity. Why? Because it is the right thing to do, it is the proper moral choice. Because, in the words of the General Charge, Masonry's chief point is *“... to endeavour to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others”*.

Herman writes that Hutcheson believed that the desire to be moral, virtuous, and treat others with kindness and compassion; that the desire to be free, including political freedom; and that the desire to enjoy the rights of society; are universal desires. Man desires them because they lead to human happiness; Masons practice them because doing so is what makes our Craft honourable; because these are our tenets of fraternity, equality and liberty; these are our principles of brotherly love, relief and truth.

*“Make someone happy,
Make just one someone happy,
And you will be happy too.”*

Bibliography

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