

The Choices We Make

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Note: The following is NOT a paper, but rather a speech presented at the Toronto Research Society intended to inspire spirited discussion.

The choices we make in our lives and the narrative we inhabit give shape to the moral life we lead. Archetypal stories like ours share a commonality in terms of - not only - being one of the greatest stories ever told - but to revivify and redeem a sense of fairness, justice and compassion. As masons we inhabit a moral narrative from the very first three degrees. Stories of rebirth and transformation are about going to the underworld to face and rediscover values we have lost. To remember what we forgot we knew. A particular ritual in craft lodge analogizes the plot of three ruffians symbolizing that which ossifies and darkens the human mind and spirit. Enemies of virtue and reason historically never fail to show us how easy this is with ample time. Some of these go by the name of ignorance, fanaticism, and tyranny. Ignorance and fanaticism go hand-in-hand long before any tyranny could be secured. Its death blow is a mere effect of the other two and may be seen representing the allegorical death of Hiram Abiff by jubilation. How is it that Freemasonry makes great deal of mentioning truth and morality, yet equally have its members transcend morality and dogma and in so doing - avoids the three aforementioned psychological frailties. I feel, Freemasonry does two seminal things that contribute to the enterprise of western culture by uplifting members in socially constructive ways. For one: it accomplishes opposite of fanaticism ignorance and tyranny by differentiating "truthfulness" from "truth". When we use these words

interchangeably it is easy to lose sight of the former over the later in a misguided belief that there is a great "ultimate truth." Adamant truth is synonymous with ignorance fanaticism and tyranny. Fanaticism for example has many definitions. But a salient one we could all agree on - all fundamentalists share - is that vitriolic attempt to superimpose a single truth on a pluralistic world. Historically, Freemasonry never seeks to impose unity on the world, (this would be a historically dangerous naive assumption) nor does it propose uniformity on its members. Instead, it assumes and maintains the idea of unity without uniformity. How is it then, that Masonic truth differs from dogmatic truth? How do we reconcile the difference between "truth" and "truthfulness" in a fraternity that makes a great deal of mentioning this - when it comes to truth? How do we foster e pluribus unum. Rabi lord Jonathan Sachs gives an example: if you read the bible carefully it doesn't talk about truth but about covenant. Covenant is a relationship. Jews believe they have a covenant with God, Christians believe they do, and so do Moslems. The truth is, there is nothing incompatible with this. I have three children (he says) and love them all. I don't believe any of my children is the one "true" offspring of me. I think they are all different. I love them all and I hope they love me. I think that is how God relates to us. Therefore stop thinking about truth. Start thinking about covenant - about relationships. He continues to explain how the name Emmet in the bible which is known to mean 'truth' is a 'Greek translation'. Emmet really means being truthful. It means being honest. The Greeks were known to be interested in truth. The Israelites were interested in relationship. Freemasonry, Christianity and Judaism share a common theme. Freemasonry owes cultural ties to mystery schools of ancient Greece and Egypt and it's Judeo-Christian heritage. Christianity itself is a hybrid of the religion of Israel

and Ancient Greek culture. The first Christian texts were written in Greek. Therefore this is how the word "truth" (a Greek idea came into Western civilization) perhaps maybe into Freemasonry today. A way of dealing with this says rabbi Lord Jonathan Sachs - is to uncover these roots by rediscovering the importance of covenant, the importance of relationship in our lives with emphasis on truthfulness and honesty. Not by ascribing to uncover or reach an ultimate super - ordinate truth. Instead, the goal is to be truthful. This underpins the allegory of the three ruffians and the tale of Hiram Abiff - which is to live a life of authenticity. There is nothing more truthful in the life of a human being than that.