

Concept of Masonic Renewal – What does it mean to you now and in the future?

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If the craft does not modernize, we will witness the degradation of the fraternity that we all hold so dear. Times have changed, and our heritage has not adapted. The very core principles that the craft predicates us with should become the essence that makes us strong enough to adapt and remain relevant through time. In lodges across the nation membership is declining. I have been present for many conversations that discuss why this is happening and most of them end the same way; we need more people to join; but the craft does not recruit, nor should we. If we were as good as we claim to be, new members would be lined up outside the door. If the craft is dying, have we strayed from our path? As we continue to knock off our rough edges and square our actions, the answer should become clear. Our system of morality and internal strengths should, as it has for our ancestors, guide us back to the path that our forefathers so confidently placed before us.

As a college student who regularly attends an academic lodge (Patriot No. 1957), I have plenty of young people ask me about my “ring.” I normally ask them what they think it means and see where the conversation takes us. Often, the conversation ends up with, “what is Free Masonry?” I give them the usual response, “it is a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols,” which results in a face that looks much like a question mark. Although the mystique does have its appeal, I find that most of the younger generation that I interact with, will stop right there and change the subject. It seems that if you do not want to tell them, then they do not care to know. Therefore, I normally explain what the response means and encourage them to look into the craft a little more. The next time I interact with the same person I normally ask them if they did. After many of these encounters, two years on the college campus, I have come to learn that the younger generation is not interested because they do not see a benefit for themselves. As selfish as it may seem and as much as I am a sentry for our fraternity, it seems that we are not known for our strengths and morality.

Although the fraternity is diverse, we all share a common moral thread. The more homogeneous a society is, the less conflict. Opposingly, the more that a group thinks, acts, and responds the same way,

the less development and change the society will incur. We have a moral standard that stretches across the entire globe, fosters growth, progress, and evolution; our fraternity has developed fantastic members of society, world leaders, and nations. As we continue to be the tip of society's spear, we must adapt and remain fluid as times change.

Society has many avenues that allow individuals to develop, but the Lodge is unique in its development of the house not built with hands. For the raising of a child and the edification of an adult, society has developed schools and other nexuses. Even within those schools there are clubs and groups that hone inclinations toward basketball, chess, and other interests. For the life after this one, we have adapted various beliefs and religious centers. But, none of these avenues specifically address a global system of morality the way that we do. Within the Lodge, all we need to do is "look to the East" to find the rough and perfect ashlar, which should remind us of our journey. The moral system that we focus on makes the Lodge unique and it is the very core that has allowed us to stand for so long.

However, we have reached a point in our society where some of our principles and practices are not modern and are not necessarily perceived as good. As the Order of the Eastern Star dies along with DeMolay, the Lodge has forgotten our families. There are some Lodges that do not recognize people of color. Our lives have become more compartmentalized and segregated. Yet, society has grown closer together and now we are the pariah of the moral circle. Albert Pike wrote, "Intellect is to the people what the slender needle of the compass is to the ship, its soul."¹ Are we not aware that times are changing, or are we so parochial that we think we do not need to improve? If we understand what direction the needle points, then we must counsel the ship and make sure that it remains on course.

At the Mid-Atlantic convocation of Academic Lodges, I witnessed those in attendance discuss how to improve our craft. In the morning portion at the House of the Temple, I asked the panel speakers, "what is an academic lodge?" Although I have my own opinion, I wanted to hear what the

¹ Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma*, (Charleston: Supreme Council of the Thirty-Third Degree, 1872), 1.

panel thought. I was informed that an academic lodge is a portion of our fraternity that is only accessible by those members of specific schools. As if an academic lodge is not accessible to other members of the fraternity and that we are nothing more than a sub-category that fits more than one criterion. If this is all we are, then why would people join? Instead, I believe that an academic lodge can access information and concepts in a manner that other lodges cannot. Once again, we need to exploit our own strengths and uniqueness to renew the craft. Why not bring in various professors that can enlighten us on various complex topics within our craft? Experts from all the seven noble arts and sciences are present and no one is using this knowledge to strengthen our craft.

I am of firm belief that we have a unique role that is needed, but our strength remains unnoticed to the profane and even to some of our own members. Sure, people enjoy field days, tours, and events, but is that who we really are? Are we a charity, a fraternity, a group of old men or what? These aspects are partially true, but it does not describe our unique feature. We are a group of men that aims to improve ourselves through the generations by making sure that we, society, are moving in a direction that will better mankind. Although we have archaic rituals, we are not ancient men, nor could our ancestry ever foresee society's current form. It is up to you and I to work within society and let our good conduct proliferate and manage our environment, just as the compass guides the ship. When you see a broken-down car on the side of the road would you help the owner? What if he or she was a different color, race, gender, or harbored a different sexual orientation? When you witness a brother that is divested is it not your obligation to go to his aid? Not that the profane are our brethren, but that our fraternity has taken the time to teach us that mankind is a cohabitation that is responsible for one another. Was it not your brother who came to your aid? It is us that makes the difference and it is us that will continue to vanguard society through our cause. Renewal is not a changing of our character, instead it is exploiting our strengths and understanding how our morals apply to the current era and will carry us into the future. We must continue to shape ourselves and grow, otherwise we will witness our

fraternity become more irrelevant. If you are a financial consultant, be a good treasurer; if theology is your strength, teach us the ritual; if you have a revelation, share it; we must all do what we can to help each other progress. I encourage every single one of you to look amongst your members and discover your strength and make sure that we are all using them for our moral purpose. I hope each and every one of you has become a better man in our society and is able to shape our world for the best. Right now, more than ever, we need it; *so mote it be!*