

Chaplain's corner 2004-2005



VW Bro. Ian D. Paton
Grand Chaplain

Reprinted from
Grand Lodge Masonic Bulletin,
edited by Trevor W. McKeown and
published by the Grand Lodge of British Columbia & Yukon A.F. & A.M.
Vancouver : 2004-2005.

www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/grandlodge/chaplain2005.pdf

Cover: Faith, Hope and Charity from THE GENIUS OF MASONRY, frontispiece to
Anderson's *Constitutions*, by Francesco Bartolozzi, 1784.

Salutation of the Dawn

Many of us have heard or read the *Salutation of the Dawn*, a poem fragment attributed to the fifth century BCE Vedic playwright, Mahakavi Kálidása:

“Listen to the salutation of the dawn. Look well to this day, for it is life. The very life of life. In its brief passage lie all the realities and varieties of our existence: the bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendor of beauty. For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision. But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well therefore to this day.”

These old Sanskrit writings have no doubt inspired countless numbers of troubled people over the centuries.

They don't mention the fact however that for most of us there are many days when it is awful hard to “look well to this day.”

There are for all of us many yesterdays that are not dreams of happiness and there will no doubt be tomorrows that will not be visions of hope.

These are the days when we must recall that peculiar evening in our masonic careers when we knelt between two great pillars, poor and penniless, neither naked nor clothed, neither barefoot nor shod. We were asked one very simple question—In times of difficulty in whom do you place your trust? On bad days—and good days—let us remember the answer we gave and rejoice in the knowledge that we don't face any of our days alone. ■

September 2004

Thanksgiving

The first Canadian day of Thanksgiving was proclaimed in 1872, not many years after Confederation, to celebrate the recovery of the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) from a serious illness. Since that first special day, Canada has moved

Thanksgiving Day around by proclamation and by association with Remembrance Day, until in recent years we have settled on the second Monday in October of each year.

Our American brothers and sisters settled on the fourth Thursday in November many years ago—recalling the thankfulness of the Pilgrims in a new land and recognizing the reality of a later harvest time in the more southerly parts of our bountiful continent.

It's great to have special day set aside for turkey and trimmings—for family and friends. It's also great to have the opportunity every day of our lives to give thanks for all of the wonderful things that are part of every day here in dear old Canada.

Lets count our blessings on October 11, and every other day of the year. I like the thoughtful invocation that says

“Thank you for good food in a world in which many go hungry. Thank you for good friends in a world in which many are friendless. Thank you for our faith in You in a world where many walk alone.” ■

October 2004

Remember

The November *Bulletin* was devoted to masonic charities. A good subject for the month when we think of giving and remember the gifts of those who served our country in two world wars, in Korea, and in many other peacekeeping and humanitarian roles around the world.

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month each year we stop to say, “we remember.” ■

November 2004

Feasts and festivals

If any month of the year could be described as “veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols” it is the month of December Centuries ago, the midwinter feasts and festivals of

December heralded the lengthening of days and gave rise to many of the symbols and customs that characterize modern year-end celebrations

The symbolism of the ancient bonfires that dispelled winter gloom became the symbols of the Light of the World who came for those who are drawn to the good news that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Lights of Christmas—lights of Hannukah—lights on carol ships and trees—lights in department store windows and lights around altars in masonic lodges all symbolize goodwill, forgiveness, faith, generosity and love among all of God's creatures.

In every way from mundane year-end tax calculations to children's' anticipation of Santa's arrival; December is the month of taking stock and resolving to welcome a new year in a renewed spirit of friendship and brotherly love.

January is named after Janus, the two headed god who looked backward and forward at the same time.

I think December is an even better month for that sort of thing. We wind down after a busy year, we feast and celebrate and give of ourselves to those around us and we start to wind ourselves up as a new year approaches, determined to live out a renewed message of peace and goodwill

There isn't much better symbolism than that. ■

December 2004

An old story

An old man sat each day at the gate of a small desert town watching the village children at play and answering their many questions as they spent time together. One day a traveller arrived at the gate with his family and all their possessions loaded on a cart drawn by a faithful donkey.

"We are looking for a new place to live," said the traveller. "What kind of a town is this?"

"What kind of town have you come from?" countered the old

man.

“A miserable place,” said the traveller. “Little work, thieving employers, a poor school for my children and only gossiping neighbours for my wife’s company.”

“You must keep going, friend,” said the old man, “as you will find this town to be much like the one you have just left.”

The next day another donkey-drawn wagon filled with furniture, children, pets and smiling parents arrived at the gate. The father questioned the old man regarding the town and its prospects.

“What kind of a town have you left?” asked the patriarch.

“A friendly little place,” said the man. “A great job that ran out, a good school, and neighbours devastated over our having to move away.”

“Well,” said the old one, “go on into town and find a place to live, as you will find this to be a community much like the one you have just left.”

Confused, the children demanded an explanation as the two answers given by the old man seemed to be in serious conflict, one with the other.

“The answer is simple,” said the old man. “We have to take ourselves with us wherever we go, and you can always find good friends and good neighbours by being friendly and neighbourly yourself and by treating others as you would like them to treat you.”

A great old story, worthy of re-telling even in our high-tech, cosmopolitan, high-stress world

Maybe the second traveller and his family were members of our masonic family, looking forward to meeting a whole new circle of friends in whatever new location they found themselves. Maybe he knew also that he and his family had a quiet presence traveling with them wherever their journey should lead them, whether it be to a new town. a new job, new relationships... or to the end of their days. ■

January 2005

Say “thank-you”

Do you have a daily routine? Of course you do. We all have a daily routine of some sort.

A daily cholesterol pill, or at least a baby aspirin. A quick look at the morning headlines, the comics and the obits. Maybe a blood sugar regulator or a daily walk, or run.

How about coffee time with the gang, or that dietary régime designed just for you?

We all have built some kind of routine into our lives. For many of us this is a programme launched by medical professionals who have prescribed a therapy that will help us to feel better, cope better and live better.

I would like to suggest you add the following to your daily routine. It is inexpensive, not age or gender-related and is completely free of dangerous side effects.

Every morning, the minute you wake up and immediately before your brain starts to process the day’s schedule, say these words quietly to yourself.

“Lord; fill me with your power, your love, your strength and your healing grace so that I can handle whatever this day brings. Thank you for being with me on my journey today and every day. So mote it be.”

Then get out of bed and go get the morning paper, your coffee and all the other things that make up your daily routine.

As Grannie used to say, “if it di’na help, it will do ye nae harm.”

February 2005

With the help of God

It is good for us to sneak away at least once during each year to relax in the sunshine or to vacation at a favorite getaway spot. Treating ourselves to these important interludes is often described as ‘topping up our tanks’ or ‘re-charging our batteries.’

When we literally top up our tanks at the fuel pump, we sometimes have the uneasy feeling that the day will come when we will run out of some of our precious non-renewable resources. These are not the only sources of energy that can be used up.

Every day we read or hear about busy people suffering from ‘burnout’ or ‘running on empty’. These have become common phrases in our stressful, modern society.

Freemasons are fortunate because they have each decided and declared at some point in their lives that in ‘times of difficulty and distress’ they put their trust in a mysterious source of strength and guidance that will never run out.

We all love that great old Master’s question at the raising: “How does he hope to obtain that privilege?” Who can forget the answer: “With the help of God, the united aid of the square and compasses and the benefit of the password —Worshipful Master.”

We draw strength and support from what the great Scottish poet Bro. Robert Burns described as “The Mystic Tie” that binds us to our creator and to each other around the world.

This unfailing and totally renewable source of help and energy from beyond ourselves may not spare us all the hurts and setbacks that befall us—but it sure beats running on empty! ■

March 2005

Pride and humility. Lets get it right!

We’ve all heard the old country and western classic “O Lord it’s hard to be humble, when I’m perfect in every way.”

We are told in at least one lecture: “To walk uprightly and with humility before God is a freemason’s highest calling.” We are also charged to remember that the ideal freemason does not boast of what he has done, can do, or will do.

We all feel we have a pretty good handle on what kind of pride and what kind of humility we’re talking about. Our comfort level tends to drop when we consider the wide range of meanings that our language applies to the words humility and pride.

For example: "Pride—an inherent feeling of dignity and worth" right through to "Pride—an overly high sense of ones own value bordering on conceit and arrogance." Quite a range in meaning!

Similarly, humility can mean anything from modesty over status right through to a lowly opinion of oneself.

In Freemasonry we are taught to strive for the perfection of the finished ashlar and to bring to that perfection the inherent feeling of self worth that results from quiet achievement..

It also produces the modesty over status and achievement that is in fact, true humility

If we're perfect in the right kind of way it won't be hard to display the right kind of humility coupled with the right kind of pride.

Strive for the right kind of pride and the right kind of humility. Goodness knows there's enough of the other kind. ■

April 2005

A picture of God

Most of us have heard the great old story about the little girl who was busy with her crayons and pencils, laboring over a drawing on her sketch pad. Her mother asked her by way of conversation what she was doing.

"I'm drawing a picture of God" said the little girl, in a somewhat exasperated tone.

"You can't draw a picture of God," said her mother, patiently. "No one knows what God looks like."

"Don't worry, mum," said the little girl. "Everyone will know after I finish this picture."

Good little story, and a great message.

Freemasonry is free in such a wonderful variety of ways. We are free to each draw our own picture of that wonderful mystery from which we draw strength and support, healing and help, comfort and companionship.

In lodge, we are not questioned as to our school of theology, or the address of our church, mosque, synagogue or temple. We are simply asked this question In times of difficulty and distress: “in whom do you place your trust?”

Like the little girl, when we have completed our own private picture, we each have our own personal answer.

If we want to embellish and highlight our vision of the Great Architect through study or congregational worship within our community, that is our prerogative

In lodge, however, on this subject we each draw our own picture. What a privilege. Thanks, little girl. ■

May 2005

A personal note

I would like to wind up *Chaplain’s Corner* for the year on a somewhat personal note.

I have been involved in hospital chaplaincy and church outreach over a number of years. Most of my close associates in this work know that I am a freemason. I am sometimes asked the question, how can a man be a committed Christian, Jew, Sikh, Hindu or Muslim and also be a freemason?

Obviously, as a result of some terribly bad information, the questioners have concluded that freemasons are somehow to be viewed with suspicion, and probably best avoided completely.

My reply is always short and to the point. I simply say, “throughout history, all great religious teachers have given their followers only two wonderful rules to live by—love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength; and love thy neighbor as thyself.”

These rules form part of the ancient laws found in numerous places in the old Hebrew and other sacred writings and form the basis of Jesus’ message to his faithful followers.

I go on to gently explain to my questioners that in almost forty years of lodge membership I have been unable to find

anything in Freemasonry that is inconsistent with these simple teachings.

Surprisingly, the odd questioner will then ask how they can find out more about the masonic order, its place in society and the work of its members.

What a privilege it is to be part of a system of morality that lets us be strengthened and guided by our individual beliefs without having to explain our personal faith journey to anyone. Every member of the Craft will recall the Master's assurance just before that first great and solemn obligation:

“Nothing in this obligation or in Freemasonry will be inconsistent with your civil, moral or religious duties.”

I hope you have enjoyed *Chaplain's Corner*. I am looking forward to leaving the office with an important final message to the brethren at our Annual Communication in June. See you in Penticton! ■

June 2005

Address to Grand Lodge, Penticton - 2005

As your chaplain during this past year I have kept in touch with you all through a regular feature in our monthly *Bulletin* called *Chaplain's Corner*. I have also had the opportunity of visiting with many of you during the year. Today I bring you a closing message to mark the end of my appointment as your Grand Chaplain. The end of a chaplaincy appointment of just a year's duration is bound to have associated with it the feeling that more could have been done in order to live out the words of the installation charge to the chaplain to be diligent in the upholding of morality and virtue and in the teaching of universal tolerance.

Therefore it is in the context of 'unfinished business' that I want to leave you with some thoughts that will reflect upon the things that are on our minds as we come together this weekend. I especially want our leaders and our aspiring leaders to draw near and listen closely.

At the outset I want to repeat something that Edmund Burke, the great British political philosopher, said three hundred years ago, and I quote:

“The only thing necessary for the forces of evil to triumph in this world is for good men to do nothing !”

A decision to “do something” can be rewarding, satisfying and fulfilling. Not being able to complete that “something” can be frustrating, discouraging and emotionally exhausting.

Here then is my message:

Centuries ago a man named Paul wrote letters to his followers in Corinth and in Phillipi. He was concerned about his leadership and about what would happen to his teachings when they were left in the hands of those who were to come after him.

He had said earlier to some of his followers, “Who am I, Paul , and who is my follower, Apollos in the grand scheme of things and in the proclamation of the will of Almighty God?”

He answered his own question when he said, “I, Paul, sow the seed. Apollos waters the seed. But only God giveth the harvest.” He might have gone on to say that even if Apollos failed to water the seed—even if he neglected it—the seed will survive if it is a viable seed and a healthy seed and a hardy seed. It will be nourished and encouraged by the workers who follow and indeed the harvest will ultimately be gathered in.

Later Paul, in words of reassurance to his followers, gave them this message that has come ringing down to us through the centuries.

He said, “Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.

What these words say to us is simply this. If a project, or an initiative or a proposed piece of legislation is worthy of

inclusion in the statutes and bylaws of a nation or of an organization it will survive rejection, it will survive criticism, it will survive scorn and it will survive ridicule, because it has merit and is worthy of consideration by right-minded leaders.

In government many good and progressive legislative proposals have died on the order paper due to rejection and defeat, only to be resurrected and proposed again and again until finally adopted—adopted for the simple reason that adopting them was the right and proper thing to do.

Very few great leaders have ever left office with their desk cleared and their goals accomplished. There is associated with any leadership role the uneasy feeling that unfinished business will remain simply that—unfinished.

Succeeding leaders may well leave a predecessor's initiatives temporarily unfinished, replacing them with new agenda items and new priorities.

This notwithstanding, if the proposals and agenda items put forward by the predecessor are true and trusty, worthy of consideration and of good report, they will eventually find their way into the fabric of the organization. Maybe later than sooner and maybe not in their entirety and maybe not in their original form, but be assured if they are of sound principle and of good report, they will persist and will be accepted in the fullness of time.

Finally, I again invoke the words of the great apostle and say to you, "Whatsoever things are true, and honest and just and pure and of good report, think on these things." For if a leader's initiatives can stand the test of these ancient admonitions, the length of his term in office diminishes in importance.

There is no failure in one's inability to complete a task. The failure is in one's decision not to begin the task in the first place. The converse to all of this of course, is plain and simple: if a leader arbitrarily or unilaterally introduces policies

and practices that are counterproductive or unacceptable they will eventually be altered, modified or struck down because they do not meet the test of being worthy and of good report.

Some are called to sow the seed, and if it is good seed, those who follow will water it and nourish it. In the fullness of time the Great Architect of the Universe will bring in the harvest. May we be worthy of the trust that He has placed in us as faithful workers in His vineyard.

Let me close with these thoughts for ourselves and for our Grand Lodge and its officers for this year and the years to come.

We are called to extend our hands to one another in gestures of brotherhood but we sometimes fail to treat each other as loving brothers.

We don't always walk with each other through difficulty and distress to deal with issues that cry out for our attention.

We say we will remember each other in our prayers but often we pray about things best forgiven and forgotten.

We hesitate to disclose confidences to one another because we may recall the discomfort of having had a confidence betrayed.

We swear that we will respect and honor each other's good name, but sometimes find ways to discredit and diminish the good name of a brother freemason. We must act as freemasons are taught and sworn to act toward each other in thought, word and deed

And we would ask for our leaders: wisdom in their decisions, strength in their struggles, and above all, peace and harmony in all their communications We would ask them to be sowers of good and productive seed while we strive as their faithful workers in helping to bring in a bountiful harvest.

We must pray earnestly for the welfare of our Craft as we continue the deliberations of this Grand Lodge Annual Communication.

May the Great Architect of the Universe be with us in our time together and as we return to our homes and to the work that we have been called upon to do.

Thank you, and may the blessing of the Most High be with you all.

Ian D. Paton BSc
Grand Chaplain 2004-2005



www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/grandlodge/chaplain2005.pdf