

A MASONIC MINUTE

“our fraternity has been formed and maintained in perfect unanimity and concord”

It is often informative and enlightening to trace the etymology of words used in our rites and ceremonies. These words are from the concluding lines of The General Charge delivered once a year as the finale of the Ceremony of Installation and Investiture of Officers of a Lodge.

‘*Concord*’ is from the Latin ‘*con*’ and ‘*cors*’ – of the same heart or mind. *Concordia* was the Goddess of Harmony, worshipped from early times in Rome. She was a symbol of peace and agreement between the two social classes of Rome – plebeians or commoners and patricians or nobles. Thus, our use of the word concord in the Masonic context implies not only peace and harmony, but also equality, reminding us that we are all Brothers ‘on the level.’

In the Book of Common Prayer, the Most High is addressed as “*The author of peace and lover of concord.*”

In music, ‘*concord*’ is defined as harmony that is pleasing to the ear. When a music student studies harmony, he learns that all discords are resolved in concord. In Masonry, we are admonished to work together in harmony, and “*settle our differences amicably*” – in other words, resolve discord in concord. As Masons, we are charged “*to act as the dictates of right reason prompt us, cultivate harmony, practise charity and live in peace with all men.*”

The General Charge reminds us that ‘*the chief point in Freemasonry*’ is “*to endeavour to be happy ourselves, and to communicate that happiness to others.*” This has a deeper meaning than simple enjoyment or having fun. It is much more than Disney style amusement. Happiness in this context implies deep personal satisfaction and inner contentment based upon a solid foundation of sincere fraternal affection and respect. This was the meaning of “*the pursuit of happiness*” penned by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence of the United States. It was rooted in the 18th Century Enlightenment, articulated by the Scottish philosopher, Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746): “*That action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers.*” To apply that concept in practice, the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) wrote: “*The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.*” Modern Freemasonry emerged in and is a direct product of the Enlightenment. It is from this historical perspective that we should understand the meaning of *happiness*.

Bro. Albert Pike eloquently described the Masonic ideal: “*When friends meet, and hands are warmly pressed, and the eye kindles and the countenance is suffused with*

*gladness, there is a religion between their hearts; and each loves and worships the True and Good that is in the other. It is not policy, or self-interest, or selfishness that spreads such a charm around the meeting, but the halo of bright and beautiful affection: the splendour of kindly liking and affectionate regard – honest, heartfelt, disinterested, inexpressible affection.”*¹ If we find such an overt expression of magnanimous sentiment uncomfortable it is because it is diametrically opposed to the self-serving, me-first hedonistic age in which we live.

The Worshipful Master is charged at his Installation with the responsibility of ensuring the happiness of the brethren: “*The happiness of the brethren will be generally promoted in proportion to the zeal and assiduity with which you promulgate the genuine tenets and principles of the fraternity.*”

Referring to the Lodge, Pike continued, “*Here we meet as brethren, to learn to know and love each other. Here we greet each other gladly, are lenient to each others’ faults, regardful of each others’ feelings, ready to relieve each others’ wants.*” Surely this is what it means to be a Mason and defines what is meant by *perfect unanimity and concord*.

RSJD

¹ Albert Pike (1809-1891). **Morals and Dogma.** p. 213.