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# Dignity and high importance

by RW Bro Kris Goodmanson,  
Senior Grand Warden, Grand Lodge of Manitoba

For some time I have been intrigued with that part of the *Charge to the Worshipful Master* at his Installation when we say "forcibly impress upon them the dignity and high importance of Freemasonry". We have all heard it many times, but what do we mean by "the dignity and high importance of Freemasonry"?

Perhaps we should start by examining the words:

Dignity, according to the dictionary, means nobleness, excellence, character which inspires or commands respect, high rank, an exalted office, staleness of aspect, manner or style, the quality of being worthy or honourable.

High, having elevation or extent: noble: lofty in character.

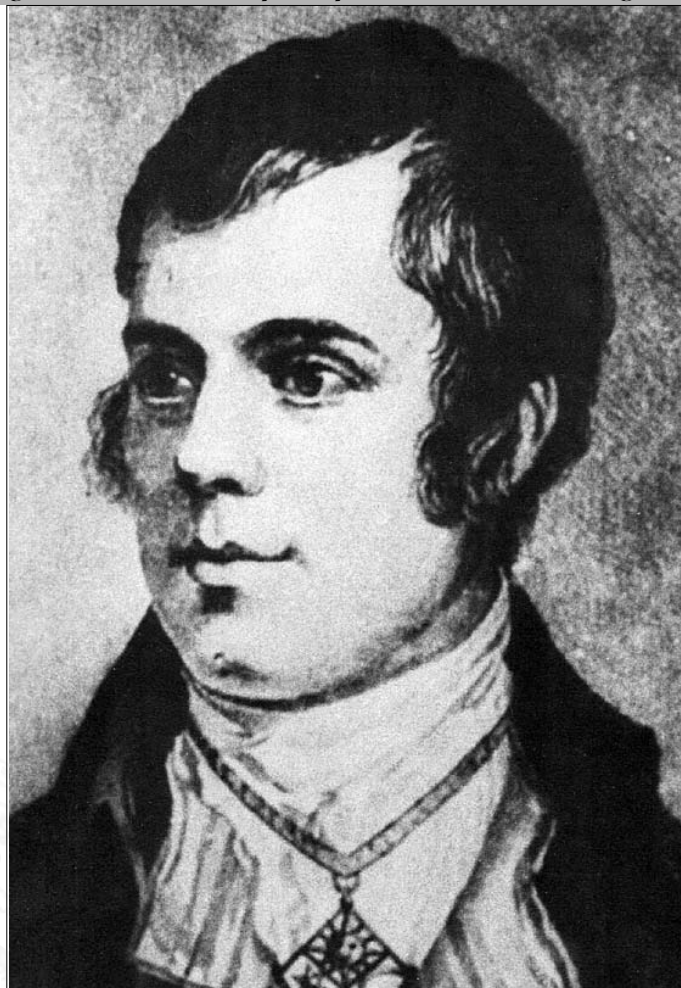
Importance, the quality of being significant or momentous, to be of consequence, weight or force.

Literally then, the Worshipful Master is charged with the responsibility of impressing his brethren with the quality of

being worthy or honourable, lofty in character, and that all their thoughts, words and actions should be of consequence. This of course is not only the responsibility of the Worshipful Master alone, but is the equal responsibility of every freemason.

Freemasonry unfolds its good and beautiful truth in three noble and impressive degrees, and no man can take them to heart and not be enriched by their beauty, dignity and importance. The Entered Apprentice degree lays emphasis upon that fundamental righteousness—that purification of heart which is the basis of life. The Fellow Craft degree lays stress upon the culture of the mind, the training of its faculties in the search of knowledge; the quest of light without which man remains a child. The Master Mason degree teaches and prepares us for the everlasting life which is to come.

When a man receives his



**Robert Burns (1759-1796), affectionately known around the world as Rabbie Burns—and in Canada as Robbie Burns—is also styled the Poet Laureate of Freemasonry although this honour was never officially bestowed. His being made Poet Laureate of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning on 25 June 1787 has unfortunately proven to be an historical chimæra.**

degrees in Freemasonry, he takes a vow to uphold and practice, to the best of his ability, the principles of Freemasonry. The dignity and high importance of our fraternity is emphasized throughout our lectures and teachings, and yet many do not grasp the significance of what we are trying to teach. Is it because what we are trying to promote

is something that is so difficult to understand? I don't think so! The principles of Freemasonry are simple. A freemason should be a man of honour and conscience; of good morals, honest and true; submissive to the laws; devoted to his family, his country and humanity; kind and indulgent to his brethren; a friend of all men, and ready to

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## Dignity

from page one

assist his fellow men, by all means in his power.

These are simple and good things for anyone to understand, yet we have all heard it said before that the language in our ritual is old fashioned, and difficult to follow and understand. I for one, struggle with my ritual, but I still find it to be a beautiful and fascinating language, as it stimulates our minds and furthers our interest in the mysteries of our wonderful fraternity.

These days we seem to abbreviate and shorten names, words, almost anything. Consider for example our youth, and how they have developed their own abbreviated language when texting one another on their cell phones. One could be left the impression that if we make things easy enough, we won't have to challenge ourselves to think at all. This would be truly unfortunate. When God created man after his own image, he not only gave him a body but also a brain with which to think. Intellect and reason are God's highest gifts to man, and only by their full development and use can we attain that which is rightfully ours.

When we have learned the fundamental teachings of our order, we should be ready and willing to put them into practice in our daily lives. This is not going to be easy. There seems to be so many obstacles, trials and difficulties facing us these days, and it's easy to see why one can become discouraged. We are taught in Freemasonry that labour is the lot of man. There is no escape from work, and I think rightly so. We must work, and work as hard at our Freemasonry as we do at anything else in life. My father taught me that if you are going to do something, you should always do it well. I have

found in life it is much easier to do something well if you are interested and enjoy what you are doing. What greater interest and enjoyment can you find than in the work of Freemasonry?

It is the duty of Freemasonry to assist in elevating the moral and intellectual level of society; bringing ideas into reality, and encouraging the minds of our youth to grow in truth and justice. We must not imagine that as individuals we can do little. Many great deeds are done in the small struggles of life. There is no limit to the possible influences of a good deed, a wise word, or a generous effort.

These days, our work in Freemasonry calls for patience and tolerance. Almost daily, we are faced with situations where the physical and material things in life are more important than truth, character, and love. Honesty and integrity are being pushed into the background, and sometimes good manners and common courtesy are getting harder to find. I believe the dignity of man, once considered to be of great importance in human values, is now viewed by many as something outdated and old fashioned, maybe even to the point of being ridiculed.

How can we correct this type of thinking, when we are admonished to be tolerant, to respect other's opinions, even to respect the right of that person to hold those opinions. Tolerance does not mean indifference to the truth or any weakness in defending it. It is not a refusal to take sides, nor is it approval of error.

A freemason who has clear and firm beliefs can be tolerant. He will stand for his beliefs, he will fight to defend them, but he will use reason and not force, persuasion and not punishment in his search to bring others around to his own way of thinking.

Freemasonry today, as in the past, by virtue of its principles

and history, stands for those great freedoms of the mind by which men arrive at the truth. Our fraternity is committed to the principle of freedom of thought, and the duty of man to seek every way for the truth by which no man is injured but by which we have the basis for freedom and faith.

When we speak of the high importance of Freemasonry we must consider the importance of education. Masonic education builds character, and in the struggles that face us today, a strong and noble character is of the highest importance. All we do, all we think, goes into making us the characters that we are. Every passion, every aspiration has to do with it. If we are selfish, it is ugly. If we are greedy and hateful, it is hideous. If we are good, honest and true, it is beautiful. It has been said that in the cheque book of life, the stubs remain behind to record the transactions of one's life, so every act and deed has become a record of our being and character. Such a record should make every man think and consider what *he* is making out of his life, and what it will look like in the end.

We are the fortunate ones in belonging to this great fraternity. The opportunities given to us are not available to all men. You and I, my brethren, are living examples of a way of life. How we conduct our affairs, how we treat our fellow men, how we stand in public and private life, are examples of our thoughts and actions.

We must renew our vows to make Freemasonry more real, more active, and more earnest, both in our lodges and in our lives. If we are to act as true and faithful craftsmen, we should start now. We have all the necessary qualifications to do the job. We have the intellect and reason; we have the working tools of our masonic teachings; we have Faith—as laid down in the

Volume of Sacred Law. If our way of life as freemasons is to survive, and continue as a source of power and influence for good among mankind, now would be a good time to stand up and make ourselves heard.

How can we accomplish this? Let us be more aggressive in our application of the truths of Freemasonry. We must show more energy and enthusiasm in our masonic work. Henry Chester once wrote:

"Enthusiasm is the greatest asset in the world. It beats money and power and influence. Singlehandedly, the enthusiast convinces and dominates where the wealth accumulated by a small army of workers would scarcely raise a tremor of interest. Enthusiasm tramples over prejudice and opposition, spurns inaction, storms the citadel of its object, and like an avalanche, overwhelms and engulfs all obstacles. It is neither nothing more nor less than faith in action."

Faith in action, what a timely opportunity for Freemasonry. All our efforts in this direction must not be taken lightly, but with resolute hearts and strong hands, for our task is not an easy one. Our enemies are many. Greed, selfishness, hatred, fear and suspicion, to name but a few, are quite prevalent these days. We also have enemies within our own ranks. I mean apathy and indifference. They are by no means insignificant opponents. The attitude of indifference is probably the most difficult to overcome and, in my opinion, will have to be conquered first if we are planning to fight our enemies with any degree of success.

Most of us are already giving our time and talents to many fields of endeavour, including our church, the local community club, or to one of the many concordant bodies in our masonic family. We must continue to be sensitive to our rôles in the community, and

participate in activities which give us opportunities to teach and impress our youth with the ideals of Freemasonry. Let us promote what the teachings of Freemasonry have done for us; how they have helped us to be better men to our families and in our communities; and finally, have given us greater understanding and broadened our views of brotherly love, relief and truth, and strengthened our faith in the Great Architect of the Universe.

I believe if we pursue our efforts with renewed determination and resolution, and with the guidance of the Most High, our message cannot help but appeal to many receptive hearts and minds. We must have confidence in ourselves and in the principles of our order. Only then, will we be able to fulfill the true purpose of the dignity and high importance of Freemasonry—the glory of God and the good of mankind.

I would like to close my paper with the following poem by John R. Rodgers (circa 1944)

*He shall never live long who serves only himself  
He shall never be great who thinks only of self  
Though he grow to be gray In his own narrow way,  
He shall find that the gold He has laboured to hold Is an empty reward for his long years of strife,  
And too late he shall learn he has wasted his life.  
He shall never be wise who thinks only of gain;  
And toils for but what he himself may attain  
He shall sigh at the end,  
For the smile of a friend,  
And shall reap from his years Only hatred and sneers,  
And alone he shall sit at the end of his days,  
And wish he had traveled by kindlier ways.  
He shall never be big who has never been kind  
But shall always be little of soul and of mind,  
He may scramble and fight For everything in sight*

*And may get to the peak  
By destroying the weak  
But there he shall find that his conquests are spoiled,  
And robbed of their charm by the way he has toiled.  
The service worthwhile is the service men give  
That others in sunshine and laughter may live...  
The big men are they  
Who will pause on the way  
To play for another,  
The rôle of a Brother,  
The great men are they who are gentle and kind;  
They live when they die in the friends left behind.*

## Paradoxes and the Craft

by W Bro. Harry Seddon II, editor of Tsawwassen Lodge's "The Tomahawk"

A paradox is a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.

There is a part of the "Examination Before Passing" in the *Canadian Work* that refers to an apparent paradox concerning the time of day. The paradox is then explained, quite glibly, and the ritual moves on. If only all the paradoxes that are part of our gentle Craft could be so easily dealt with!

We don't have to look very far to find these paradoxes; they occur at every lodge meeting, in the conferring of every degree, and within the very substance of Freemasonry. We learn to accept them as part of who we are and what we do, and rarely question them. But now and again, just for fun, or for a closer examination of our belief system, or because something jars us, it behooves us to look at these paradoxes, anomalies, contradictions, call them what you will, and bring them into question. Our "history" is full of them ....

Do we really believe that

Freemasonry began with King Solomon? That the Prophets and Heroes of the Old Testament somehow played a part in the organizing of the Craft? That Holy Scripture provides a degree of "proof" of this? Oh, that it were true! And if some can question the legitimacy of such connections, we can equally ask them for their proof that it wasn't so. Or is it all part of a "beautiful system ... veiled in allegory"? Or is our history simply the imaginings and speculations of some mischievous and creative and perhaps wine-stimulated early brethren who let their flights of fancy take them on incredible journeys across time and truth? Or did it all just begin in 1717 when a group of philosophers, poets and philanthropists met in a London pub? We will likely never know where the truth lies—and that oxymoron, "truth lies," probably sums up our paradoxical history as well as anything.

And then there's our creed and doctrine wherein paradoxes abound. It would be hard to find another philosophy so full of contradictions, where "all men are equal and brothers," and yet support a system where Masters at various levels hold, at least in theory, unquestioning power and control. "All men are equal, but some are more equal than others," to paraphrase George Orwell. Of course there are "checks and balances", such as our *Constitutions*, but like those that restrain Presidents and Prime Ministers in present-day democratic societies, they can be set aside should circumstances warrant or in "special cases."

We need to look back to those days of verifiable history, the early eighteenth century, to find the reasons for this paradox. Freemasonry was very much a child of the Enlightenment. European artists had looked to Rome and, particularly, Ancient Greece for inspiration for several centuries



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prior to the eighteenth century, and the Renaissance that resulted had changed the face of art. But painting, sculpture and music had not challenged the structure of the existing society, indeed they had been absorbed by it. It was science that began to worry the rulers, religious and secular, of the *Ancien Régime*. It is not an accident that Freemasonry places so much emphasis on science and mathematics; it was through those disciplines that men began to question centuries-held beliefs. Once one challenged the notions of how the universe was organized, it was a short and inevitable step to question how human society functioned. Many men of vision felt it malfunctioned—that it supported out-worn and untenable principles of privilege and class. It was from among such men that Freemasonry appeared in its early form. It would be a mistake, however, to believe that these men were democrats in any contemporary sense of that word. They were much more akin to the citizens of ancient Athens than to the citizens of, say, modern Vancouver. They still believed in a top-down societal structure; that only certain people had the right to participate fully in the management of that society; and that life's finest fruits were reserved to those who merited or had earned them. The battle-cry of the French Revolution "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!" would not have found favour with many English freemasons of a century earlier. It is worthy of note that that slogan has only been incorporated into masonic writing in the fairly recent past.

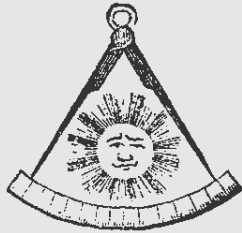
Thus our eighteenth century freemason would have seen nothing incongruous about being part of a brotherhood that excluded so many from its ranks. George Washington, a proud freemason, owned 316 slaves at the time of his death. The paradox within our Order has only become apparent

since the Enlightenment—with the abolition of slavery, the development of democratic principles, and the winning of universal suffrage. Only now might we question the idea of there being a master among equals. Fortunately, this paradox very rarely emerges to disturb the peace and harmony that exists in our lodges. We learn to play the game, and smile a little as we march in due procession before our Master, saluting him with the words, "I obey you."

British Freemasonry has always displayed a very practical side. As members of a society perceived to be secret, and so open to mistrust and attack, British freemasons quickly learned to protect themselves by becoming aligned with some powerful leaders in British society—namely the crown and the nobility. They were able to persuade a succession of princes and dukes, not only to join Freemasonry, but also to become Grand Masters, and not just for one year, but for life. They thus acquired "friends in high places" while making it clear that they were in no way a subversive or dangerous sect as their enemies claimed. The paradox of being part of an egalitarian fraternity having a royal patron and master is cheerfully accepted by our British brethren. And, of course, it could, and should, be noted that their regal and noble brethren underwent the same initiation as every other brother. One would have given a great deal to have been present as some cable-towed monarch was led into lodge

And so we come to what might be the biggest paradox affecting our fraternity. But first, let us look at some facts about Freemasonry.

While there might be considerable doubt about the biblical origins of the Craft, there is none about its mediaeval beginnings in the form of a guild, designed to protect and enhance the status



## GRAND MASTER'S ITINERARY JANUARY 2009

3	Sat	Installation	Victoria Columbia Lodge No. 1	Victoria
6	Tue	<b>District 22</b>	Comox Lodge No. 188	Comox
12	Mon	<b>District 14</b>	University Lodge No. 91	Vancouver
16	Fri		Vancouver Lodge of Education	Vancouver
17	Sat	<b>District 23</b>	Dogwood Lodge No. 192	Langley
19	Mon	Burns Night	Discovery Lodge No. 149	Campbell River
28	Wed	<b>District 1</b>	Aurora Lodge No. 165	Victoria
23	Fri	Burns Night	Mount Garibaldi Lodge No. 127	Squamish
24	Sat	Installation	Shrine	Burnaby
31	Sat	<b>District 18</b>	Ionic-Kent Lodge No. 19	Chilliwack

of its working-class members.

For reasons that are not completely clear, a group of aristocrats and intellectuals formed an association based upon that guild, adopting their dress, philanthropy and ritual, and adapting it to the eighteenth century ideas of societal change and scientific investigation that marked the Enlightenment.

Most of the ritual we use today was written long ago—some of it is over two hundred years old—and the archaic nature of the language, while often beautiful, makes it hard to understand and to memorize. And considerable memorization is a requirement of being a freemason.

To become a freemason, a candidate has to undergo a series of humbling rituals, and once inducted he has to wear an apron and perhaps carry a pretend sword or a toy spear. Pretty silly stuff for a grown man, some might think.

Freemasonry has made some very powerful enemies over the years. Several of the world's leading religions, including the Roman Catholic Church, have issued edicts barring their adherents from becoming freemasons. By forbidding women to become

freemasons, the Craft has undoubtedly alienated a large number of people in these days of political correctness.

Other critics accuse Freemasonry of encouraging all manner of deviant behaviour, from devil worship to black magic, from being the anti-Christ to sexual degeneracy—and these alleged perversions are believed by many.

Given all of the above, the question then arises, "Why on earth, in this day and age, would anyone want to become a freemason?" What could Freemasonry possibly offer an intelligent and responsible man in the twenty-first century?

Why are men still joining the Craft? That is the paradox of our brotherhood. And the answer is really known only to those of us who are freemasons. We know of the satisfactions, the friendships, the joys, the challenges, the mysteries, the sense of achievement, and the fun of being a freemason.

It is part of our task as freemasons to ensure that we communicate that sense of worth and accomplishment to the next generation. And, paradoxically or not, there are many men who still want to join us. ■