

# **FREEMASONRY - A MEASURE FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

by

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Alongside (following) is an essay whose author was awarded Grand Master's trophy in the Grand Lodge Essay Competition-1985

- Editor

The concept of National Integration has occupied the thoughts of all great nation builders from time immemorial. It is the sheet anchor of the very existence of a united nation. A brief scan of history is enough to bring home the point, that a strongly integrated nation is hard to conquer and that many a mighty empire has fallen when the thread of unity was broken.

National Integration however is not just a political question. It is multi-dimensional and political unity is just one, albeit very important aspect of it. National Integration is the end product of Social, Cultural and Political integration.

Looking from this perspective, let us examine what are the credentials of Freemasonry as a measure for National Integration. The driving forte behind Freemasonry that binds "wise" men together is the laudable Principle, called Fraternal Love. Freemasons are a group of people sworn to view humanity as one large family and to interact with each member of the community, with "malice towards none and charity for all". They are expected to be conscious of the Omniscient and Omnipotent power, which we mortals understand by the name GOD and to view all created by him as equals, the distinction created by society, race, colour etc., notwithstanding.

The importance of this Principle in bringing about social cohesion becomes evident when we look at recent history. Our own country has witnessed ugly force of communalism, not too long ago. Ours is a tradition based on tolerance and no other land has perhaps witnessed such a wonderful picture of different houses of worship of different religions and faith, side by side, on the same street and locality. But in spite of such a glorious tradition, we now see before us developments of disastrous degeneration. Communalism, regionalism, linguistic and religious fanaticism have taken roots in India and have started debilitating national integrity.

It is only the other day that we read about the tragedy that has befallen the Phoenix Ashram in South Africa. It is perhaps the irony of fate that the very institution started by Mahatma Gandhi to withstand racial discrimination in a non-violent way and to provide a roof for all those who believe in peaceful and brotherly coexistence became the target of Social riots. To think that was the birth place of "Satyagraha" is enough to make any thinking individual wonder as to what could be the cause of such disastrous tendencies.

In this context, it may be worthwhile to examine the fundamental principles of Freemasonry which are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. These Principles teach to remember our common origin without any distinction whatsoever. Masonry does not recognise any distinction of Religion and teaches us to cultivate and cherish a love for all creative beings. It aims at building the ideal temple of human brotherhood all over the world particularly the country whence a Mason derived his birth and infant nurture. A Freemason considers it as his duty to bring Peace and happiness to aid his fellow beings and to unite humanity into a great structure. He regulates his life and actions by the divine precepts contained in the sacred scriptures, whereby he is reminded of his important duties to GOD, to his neighbours and to himself. A Freemason is taught to be exemplary in his conduct as a civilian and in no way to be associated with any actions or tendencies that might subvert the peace and the good order of the society. He is expected to abide by the laws of the land. There is nothing in Masonry hurtful to his feelings as a man of honour, nothing at variance with his religious belief or political opinion. But faith in the Supreme being, respect for all religions, clarity of conscience and strict code of morality, are the essential qualifications of a Freemason.

A Freemason is taught that to improve the morals and correct the manners of men in society must be his constant care. For this purpose he is also taught to view the errors of mankind with compassion and by the regularity of his own behaviour afford the best example for the conduct of others. Morality is the sense of right or wrong in life. The purpose of morality is to point out the way to perfection. It is morality that fosters the conviction of the worth of men and women. Through it arises also the conviction of the greatness and dignity of human beings and the respect for human rights.

To aim for a faultless world is perhaps a very tall order. To err, of course, is human. We cannot bring about peace and purposeful living without compassion and a sense of forgiveness. Our sacred scriptures are full of examples that compassion can only come from a very refined soul. Refinement here is not synonymous with education. It is in this context that Freemasonry emerges as a powerful measure for national integration. Schools and Universities provide education, but recently we have seen that they are straying from the ancient tradition of providing the much needed refinement of the soul.

Tolerance and compassion are way of worship. So, there is no scope for a Freemason to become a religious fanatic. As stated in "Hitopadesa" the Good man cherishes no feelings of hostility towards any one, even at the moment of his being destroyed, just as the Sandal tree sheds perfume on the edge of the axe at the time of its being cut down. In a land like India, where a number of religions flourish, a true Mason can never sow the seeds of communalism. At a time when communalism, Regionalism and religious fanaticism have become the biggest problems facing Indian Unity, what better measure can we think of than promoting Freemasonry for our national integration?

Brotherly love which is one of the fundamental Principles of Freemasonry is not restricted to the four walls of the Masonic Temple. The teachings of Freemasonry expect its members to go beyond that. They believe the Brotherhood of men and Fatherhood of GOD. It means that all Men, be they Masons or not, are their brothers and are entitled to the brotherly love.

A Freemason is taught to render his neighbour every kind office which justice or mercy may require, to relieve his necessities and to sooth his afflictions. He is also exhorted to dedicate himself to such pursuits as may enable him to be respectable in life and useful to mankind. Freemasonry also inculcates the useful lessons of Natural equality and mutual dependence. It also instructs in the active Principles of beneficence and charity - to seek the solace of his own distress by extending relief and consolation to his fellow creatures in the hour of their affliction. Masons, whether Hindus, Mohammadans, Christians, Parsis or Jews, never suffer any religious disputes in their lodges and they only pursue the religion of Nature.

Though the origin of Freemasonry is not in this country, it can be seen that its Principles are no different from the teachings of its great souls, namely, Sree Sankara, Sri Ramanuja, Manikya Vachaka, Thiruvalluvar, Namdev, Tukaram, Swamy Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi etc. All the grand Principles of Freemasonry are also amply illustrated in the sacred scriptures which Freemasons keep open in the Lodges when their meetings are in session. The devine precepts contained therein are interpreted by defferent members of the order and practised in accordance with their respective religious faith and moral standards.

In all cases of difficulty and danger, a freemason is taught to put his trust in God. But Freemasonry does not care in what building or under what appellation, God is worshipped, for it believes that neither the building nor the name could alter the fact that it is GOD who is worshiped. Masonry believes and respects every religion of an equal status in as much as each leads man towards GOD.

Now let me quote a story from the "Upanishaths". The Devas, the Asuras and the Manavas were studying under their Father "Brahma". They Wanted Brahma to teach them the highest rule of conduct. Brahma, then instructed them the word "Da". This word was interpreted by the three of them in three different ways in accordance with their moral nature. The Devas who were lacking in their self control understood the word to mean "Damatyam or being subdued. The Asuras who were notorious for their cruelty interpreted the word to mean "Dayadvam" or being merciful. The Manavas ,or Men who, were essentially selfish by nature said that the word meant "Datta" or giving.

I have chosen this illustration because the three meanings of the word "Dal" as interpreted by different classes, represent the three main principles of conduct which a Freemason is bound to follow, in his daily life, they being that straight and undeviating line of conduct laid down for his pursuit in the V.S.L. The rule of thumb here is "let reason prevail in your, words and deeds and virtue like a shadow would follow".

In the words of R.W. Bro. Abbot, "Masonry is an art of the Brotherhood of the man, a code of ethical laws and revelations impressing all men with its Candour, Justice and Faith; commending its members to extend justice to all mankind and inculcating love of GOD; home and country and respect for the rights of a brother"

According to the famous Masonic writer, OSKAR POSNER, "Life Separate man from man, to unite him again with man needs an art, a means to this art is Freemasonry. Freemasonry is therefore the medium of an art which strives to mould people whom life has separated, so that they can enter a new communion with one another".

In India, though Freemasonry has been practised for ever two hundred years under the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland and Ireland, the Grand Lodge of India came into existence only in the year 1961. Though the spread of Freemasonry in his country after the formation of Grand Lodge of India has been amazing, there still is a need to extend it further in view of the magnitude of the problems facing us.

The problems of national integration not something new to mankind. This issue has confronted our ancestors in no less magnitude and intensity as it is facing today. But now we seem to be moving on the surface of ammunition dump which needs only a Spark to cause a mighty explosion. A person reared in the true Principles of Freemasonry will never supply that spark and cause humanity to suffer. This sentiment of universal Brotherhood should spread further to wider circles in the country, if we do not want narrow communalism, Religious fanaticism and provincialism to blind peoples' vision and lead them astray from the path leading to their ideal of a united nation. Freemasons have a great part to play in the reconstruction of the nation. If such a construction is to be of any benefit to the mankind, it has to be based on the solid foundation of the Grand Principles of Freemasonry, namely, Brotherly love, Relief and Truth.

Thus, in this moment of a great national crisis, when we are passing through a moral and spiritual depression, it is time Freemasonry rose up to the occasion and averted the great dangers that is ahead. Let the order of Freemasonry be extended to wider circles in this country to achieve its desired objects of improving the morals and correcting the manners of Men in Society and binding various communities and sections of the Indian Society to a common way of thinking without impairing the local and the regional arts and cultures. Let Masons transcend the barriers of race and space to draw together the finest aspirations of all men and unite them in Universal Brotherhood. Let them replace greed and force with self restrain and reason. Let the spirit of self rivalry be replaced by universal brotherhood. Instead of cynical disbelief, let there be severance and tolerance. With this hoary tradition and belief, Masonry can go a long way in helping the country to choose the right path and to make it a strongly integrated nation. Perhaps no institution other than Masonry could help the country in this regard.

The message of Freemasonry is the message of love & peace.

"So many gods, so many creeds  
So many path that wind and wind  
When just the art of being kind,  
Is all the sad world needs"

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