

Virtues

by

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What do we know about Virtues? I would guess most of us know something about the topic, but not as much as I believe we should. This evening I want to take you on a journey to learn more about them.

Recall these words for the Ancient Ritual. I believe you can find similar references of the work in your ritual.

1. If you disgrace it, that disgrace will be augmented by the consciousness of the fact that within these walls you were taught the correct principles of morality and virtue. (presentation of the lamb skin)
2. This virtue should be the constant practice of every Fmy... (temperance)
3. This virtue is equally distant from rashness and cowardice... (fortitude)
4. This virtue should be the peculiar characteristic of every Fmy... (prudence)
5. This virtue is not only consistent with divine and human laws... (justice)
6. As an EA you were simply bound to secrecy, while the holy principles of morality and virtue were inculcated by beautiful ceremonies and lectures... (Master's statement before proceeding to the FC obligation)
7. ...squaring our actions by the square of virtue... (Working tools of a FC)
8. My Bro. you have been admitted into the middle chamber by virtue of the letter G... (G lecture in FC deg.)
9. ...that you will conform to the principles of the Order by steadily persevering in the practise of every commendable virtue. (Charge of a FC)
10. Your virtue, honour and reputation are concerned in supporting with dignity the character you now bear. (Charge of a MM)
11. May Brotherly Love prevail and every moral and social virtue cement us. (closing of MM lodge.)
12. ...the book opened before her (the beautiful virgin weeping), that his (HA) virtues lie there in perpetual record (Alternate MM Lecture)
13. ...(beehive) recommends the practice of that virtue to all created beings... (Alternate MM lecture)
14. ...let us imitate our Grand Master, H Ab. In his virtuous conduct...
15. ...a calm inquiry into the beauty of wisdom and virtue, and the study of moral geometry...

16. ...to induce a habit of virtue, and to strengthen the fundamental principles of our Order...
17. ...and carries into active operation the practice of the four cardinal virtues: temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and justice,...
18. ...who honours virtue though it be in the most humble garment...
19. ...to harmonize our conduct by the principles of morality and virtue...
20. ...The doctrines of morality and virtue will form the appropriate lessons...
21. ...aiding the strength of reason, dispensing the beauty of virtue and lessening...
22. To obtain this end, let us continue to cultivate the great moral and social virtues laid down on our Masonic tracing-board

In the Canadian Ritual, the word 'virtue' is mentioned 16 times.

Virtue, by definition, is the moral excellence of a person. A person that has a character made-up of virtues is valued as good. For example he is honest, respectful, discrete, generous, and kind. Because of these positive character traits, he is committed to doing the right thing no matter what the personal cost, and does not bend to impulses, urges or desires. He acts according to values and principles. When he attains virtues in his character he tends to work towards goodness in life.¹

It is said that good qualities are innate and developed through good parenting. Some are, but not all parents are perfect so some virtues might not be demonstrated. Virtues, though, can be cultivated to become regular in daily life and therefore can become the person. With the habit of being more virtuous, we take control of our life, directing our life towards greater fulfillment, peace, and harmony.¹

Virtues are universal and recognized by all cultures as basic qualities necessary for our well-being and happiness. Popov's work (See later) identifies virtues as being universal in all cultures. When we practice virtues and build character we will attract what may have been missing in our lives - fulfilled relationships, achievement of meaningful goals, happiness, and a love of life.

Often we know that it takes perseverance to reach our goals, and even through persistence and determination, some of us still never make it. We know if we forgive someone then we may not be as angry and tense, and we know it takes courage to accomplish such great things.

So why then, if we know what to do to improve, do we still not get better?

Usually the reason lies in not applying a virtue to a given situation so as to alter

our behaviour. There is not enough of emotion around the event to warrant us to change. In Freemasonry, this is our life's work. We are taught to learn the virtues, to remember the virtues to become better citizens. Emotion with a virtue attached to an event, will to make the virtue indelible, will imprint it in our minds - we will change.

Thus, we become more virtuous over time. Our principles upon which we base our behaviour become enduring. Will we stick to our principle or forget it this time? When we suddenly come face to face with a decision we have to make — the deeper the indelibility, the stronger we will be to stick to our principles.

Human nature, though, continues to test our strength; do we adhere to our principle or we placate. Freemasons adhere to their principles; they stand firm, always. Family members, friends, co-workers and neighbours will see our actions, our speech, to certain situations and recognize the virtues we adhere to. Freemasonry encourages us to work in building principles of life as a natural part of our nature and character.¹

The Virtues Project authored by Linda Popov returned to my thoughts. A brother had just read about the project. I had taught it in school years before. He noted its content and believed that the whole project was a lesson of Freemasons. After review of Popov's work, I too saw our Freemasonry. The topic Virtues is now a course of study in the British Columbia Ashlar College of Freemasonry.

[www.ashlarcollege.ca]

The Virtues Project

Briefly, Linda Popov was the creator of the school Virtues Project. Each week the school would choose a Virtue, and through the week, lessons would be the focus of their written language work, their behaviour, their spoken language, and sometime even performing arts. The principle of the project was for schools to take responsibility of building a positive character, which would be bound in our actions, our language and interactions with other – something that Popov felt was lacking. Over past decades, parents, and church to an extent, taught proper behaviour (virtues). Dwindling parenting skills in general of proper behaviour and fewer people attend church today, well, who is going to teach these important etiquette of behaviour? Popov felt a school program was necessary – She wrote of the program:-

Fives strategies were create to help students enjoy a more reverent, purposeful life, raise morally conscious children, create a culture in schools, and enhance integrity in the workplace. They are being used world wide to build safe and caring communities.

5 Strategies of the Virtues project:

- i) *Speak the Language of Virtues*
- ii) *Recognize Teachable Moments*
- iii) *Set clear boundaries*
- iv) *Honour the Spirit*
- v) *Offer Spiritual Companionship*²

The Brother's comment made me realize that indeed the Virtues Project is our Freemasonry in a different form. He and I discussed the question - why do we not use the program in Freemasonry to enhance the teachings that our ritual offers us? How could it be done? How could we connect our Freemasonry with the project? Could it be a strong part of the work for a new Master Mason?

And when we discussed further, we realized that indeed, Freemasonry's job is to teach Virtues and to make them our way to be - through our language, our actions, and our conversations. However, Ritual only brings forward for our attention about 18 virtues. What about all the others?

We speak of Lodge as a school of learning, we build members to be better citizens. Analyze our ritual, and study our lectures and charges, you surely must come to the same conclusion.

In her studies and travels, Ms Popov listed of virtues, common to cultures of the world. The list is an impressive 96 virtues. In searching for further lists on websites, a website called Virtuescience³, lists 119 virtues. Those chosen by Ms Popov in the Virtues Project she reduced to a set of 40 in her Virtues Project for Schools. - a word a week.

The word 'virtues' come up frequently in our ritual. Making daily advancement in Freemasonry might be to search for virtues and to work on them for them to become yours.

In ritual, we speak of Peace and Harmony, of Duty; in our obligation to Help, Aide, and Assist; our tenets Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth; our four cardinal virtues, Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice; our theological rounds of

Faith, Hope, and Charity. These are easily found. The others – about 80 more - require a little more investigating, and detective work.

What does all this about Virtues tell us of our philosophical foundation of Freemasonry? I believe the answer is clearly. Our Masonic philosophy is directly related to the virtues of life. Our ritual is a program to encourage us to become better, to make all 96 virtues principles of living life well.

When we say that Freemasonry will...

to take a good man and offer him a program to make him a better man

...it is the virtues, that is the essence of our work. That is our life's task, to search and to discern virtues.

Just how important are these virtues? The answer belongs to each individual Mason. Initiates to Freemasonry come to our lodge with many virtues already part of their lifestyle (*"We take good men..."*). We acknowledge them by the way they live, speak and act. The balance of virtues is what we focus on in lodge – identify them and work towards making those, missing in the initiate, become part of his life, (*"...offer him a program to make him a better man"*).

In Popov's book, *A Pace of Grace*, (2004) (a book worth reading) she suggests four parts of our life's journey:

- i) Purifying your life,
- ii) Pacing your life,
- iii) Practising the presence
- iv) Planning a sustainable life. ¹

Under each she uses specific virtues as a focus for the reader. As an example under *Pacing Yourself*, she discusses the virtues of moderation, acceptance, assertiveness, and creativity.

In the chapter under the *Virtue of Moderation*, she lists signs of success of captivating the virtue:

I am practising Moderation when I...

- Know what I need and get enough – no more, no less
- Take care of my health by getting enough of what I need
- Use self-discipline to stop myself from overdoing
- Balance work and play in my life
- Set boundaries for myself
- Am content with enough¹

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Here is a sense of the symbolism of the 24-inch gauge; measuring the time we have each day to do what we have to do – that time is of the core in our lives. We symbolically divide each day into three areas: service to God and distress worthy brother, to our avocation, and to refreshment and sleep. Here is balance. Here is self-discipline, here is taking care of health, here are setting boundaries, and if all in balance, here is contentment.

In our exercise this evening, I have Popov's list of virtues. I have placed each on a card. I ask you to take a card randomly from the pile and contemplate the word.

1. Can you recall any place in ritual or ceremony where the virtue is identified through it being a printed word, or an inference/suggestion through a phrase, or sentence?
2. What behaviour might we see from a Mason who has that virtue?
3. What words might we hear from a Mason with this virtue?
4. Have you the virtues? How many are your character?

References:

1. <http://www.virtuesforlife.com/what-are-virtues/>
2. Popov, L. (2004) *A Pace of Grace – Virtues of a Sustainable Life*, Penguin Group, Toronto.
3. <http://www.virtuescience.com/>
4. <http://www.worldlanguageprocess.org/comic%20books/virtues%20list.htm>
5. <http://writeworld.org/virtuelist> identifies over 150 virtues.

Finale: Only in relationship can you know yourself, not in abstraction and certainly not in isolation. The movement of behaviour is the sure guide to yourself, it's the mirror of your consciousness; this mirror will reveal its content, the image of the attachments, the fears, the loneliness, the joy and sorrow.

Hayward. S. 1988 *A Guide for the Advanced Soul*

Virtues: The Gifts Within.

Ref: Popov Linda K., 2004, A Pace of Grace, Penguin Books, Toronto. p.13.

Acceptance	Flexibility	Patience
Accountability	Forbearance	Peacefulness
Appreciation	Forgiveness	Perceptiveness
Assertiveness	Fortitude	Perseverance
Awe	Friendliness	Prayerfulness
Beauty	Generosity	Purity
Caring	Gentleness	Purposefulness
Charity	Grace	Reliability
Cheerfulness	Gratitude	Resilience
Cleanliness	Helpfulness	Respect
Commitment	Honesty	Responsibility
Compassion	Honour	Reverence
Confidence	Hope	Righteousness
Consideration	Humanity	Sacrifice
Contentment	Humility	Self-Discipline
Cooperation	Idealism	Serenity
Courage	Independence	Service
Courtesy	Initiative	Sincerity
Creativity	Integrity	Steadfastness
Decisiveness	Joyfulness	Strength
Detachment	Justice	Tact
Devotion	Kindness	Temperance
Dignity	Love	Thankfulness
Diligence	Loyalty	Tolerance
Discernment	Mercy	Trust
Endurance	Mindfulness	Trustworthiness
Enthusiasm	Moderation	Truthfulness
Excellence	Modesty	Understanding
Fairness	Nobility	Unity
Faith	Obedience	Uprightness
Faithfulness	Openness	Wisdom
Fidelity	Orderliness	Zeal