

Making Resolutions...

I would like to share some thoughts with you about 'Resolutions'. Resolving to do something. To perhaps overcome a 'passion' of yours...perhaps your passion is a specific type of food....Crispy Cream doughnuts, possibly....or something a bit more serious....like smoking. Some among us make resolutions late in December of each year to stop doing something, or at least cut back a little on that vice.... and probably dismiss that resolution sometime later in January. Those of you who manage to keep your resolutions; you have my profound respect. I never found it all that compelling to make resolutions like that, but I certainly won't keep you from doing it! But, my comments are not really about New Year's Resolutions. It is about Masonic resolutions, and "passions", and the ancient Greeks, and Masonic pursuits.

First, the Greeks. One of the veterans of the Golden Age of Greece, Aristotle, lived from 384 to 322 BC and, even though his years run backwards, he is revered as a thinker of great thoughts and a philosopher for the ages. In 350 BC, Aristotle wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics* that focus on the importance of always behaving virtuously and developing a virtuous character. In the second of his ten books on the subject, Aristotle answered a question that has bugged me as a Mason for some time. If I am here to learn, to subdue my passions, and improve myself in Masonry, just what are those "passions"?

Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear the word, "passions", I immediately thought of something rated between 'PG' and 'R' with lots of heavy breathing and intense overtones of an erotic nature....but then, when I start to *think* rather than react, I can hear many different versions of the phrase, "I have a passion for...", something....you fill in the blanks. Some of mine are Philately (I happen to be a very serious collector of old postage stamps) Masonic research and writing is another, and most recently, spending quality time with my nearly 3 year-old granddaughter, Llera. Perhaps you have a passion for creampuffs, or bird watching, or pro football, or participating in the mysteries of Masonic ritual. My point here is, that "passions" are operative emotions that you express toward something.

Aristotle, having considered all this - well, he probably didn't consider pro football, but he did have to contend with the passions stirred up by the athletic events of the Olympic Games, didn't he? Yet, Aristotle first defined "passions" generically, and then went on to identify eleven specific "passions" that apparently plagued the Greeks. When we look at those, as you'll see, it seems that they still plague us today. Aristotle's "passions" may well be the Masonic "passions" which we are learning to subdue; remember, much of our current ritual was written during the Greek revival period of the mid 1700s, so that may have played a part in the development of 'Masonic passions'.

Even if his thoughts are not the basic watchwords in our Masonic "passions", his eleven specific passions are a good place for us to start. So, here are Aristotle's eleven "passions" of man: Appetite ... Anger ... Fear ... Confidence ... Envy ... Joy ... Friendly Feelings

... Hatred ... Longing ... Emulation ...and Pity. Any surprises in that list? I confess that I was a bit surprised to see Confidence, Joy, Friendly Feelings, and Emulation.

You'd think that being confident about something was ok, wouldn't you? But, maybe confidence is too close to pride, which goes before the fall. Can there be too much Joy in this world? I guess so - joy expressed to the exclusion of work and providing for the future may not be such a good idea. Aesop, told us the fable of the Grasshopper and the Ant. The Grasshopper was joyous all right...till the Winter season arrived, then he had no food stored away to keep him alive.

So, what's wrong with Friendly Feelings? Is caution and reserve a better approach towards others? Are Friendly Feelings the same as Brotherly Love? I think not! And finally, aren't we supposed to emulate the worthy Brothers among us, aren't we exhorted to emulate Grand Master Hiram Abif? Well, yes - and no. In the emulation of others, we can either 'mirror' them, or we can 'model' our actions and ourselves after them. To mirror, suggests that we lack free will in our actions. To model suggests the ability to adapt within an environment; and emulate what we find to be the good things and actions in Masonry. So emulation is not all bad.

Return with me now to my opening comments about resolutions. Listen closely for a speculative approach to 'subduing our passions'..... "There is probably one among us who has resolved to throw off his appetite for Crispy Cream Donuts. He may have become angry about the habit, or perhaps he feared its consequences. Right now he may lack the confidence in himself to be able to quit. He may envy another Brother who has quit and even though he expresses his joy and friendly feelings toward that brother's quitting, he may secretly hate himself for being weak, and he may long to emulate that other Brother. Finally, he may pity himself for having to go through it all in the first place."

Maybe we should just emulate Aristotle and work toward fine-tuning our Masonic passions and ethics that focus on the importance of always behaving virtuously and developing a virtuous character. We certainly can 'resolve' to do that! And now that the New Year is here...good luck with your resolutions!

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