

AS A FREEMASON AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

We start our Masonic Journey at our initiation where we are placed in a position of “extreme danger” where we are supported by two of our Brethren, whom we may or may not have met, but are unaware of who is supporting us. This starts our journey of trust as we trust these Brethren not to let us fall. Later we are divested of everything which we know in our lives, and in our catechism, we are asked why all metals were removed from us, to which we answer “To instruct me that I was accepted as a Freemason poor and without means, so also all worthy poor Brethren should receive support from me.”.

This concept of being your brother's keeper is often associated with looking out for the well-being of others, particularly those who are part of a close community like our Fraternity. It signifies a sense of responsibility, support, and care for one another. In the context of Freemasonry, our members are encouraged to uphold this principle by offering aid, guidance, and support to their fellow brethren.

But what does this actually mean, and do we, as conscientious Freemasons actually apply this principal in our daily lives?

Being our brother's keeper is a fundamental principle that embodies the idea of taking responsibility for the well-being of others, not only in our communities, but particularly with regards our Brethren. This concept extends way beyond simple acts of kindness. It requires that we commit to support, protect, and uplift those around us, especially in times of need. Need, takes on many meanings, and is not necessarily confined to where one is suffering financial hardships. One could be going through some deep trauma in one's life, or believe it or not, being abused (maybe not physically but emotionally), these needs are different.

When we embrace and take on this role of being our brother's keeper, we acknowledge our interconnectedness (the Brother Chain which binds all of us) and shared humanity. It requires each one of us to reflect inwardly to ensure that we have a sense of compassion, empathy, and solidarity with our fellow individuals, fostering a sense of belonging and unity. By actively looking out for one another, we not only strengthen the bonds within our Order, but this transcends into our communities and by so doing we create a more supportive and caring environment for everyone. By this we make the world a better place for all.

When we examine the NEED aspect, we realise that we are urged to offer a listening ear, provide assistance when needed (within our meagre means) stand in solidarity with a Brother when he is facing many of life's challenges.

When we hear of abuse, under the pretence of this just being a joke, or a bit of fun, but where the Brother is the subject, and is clearly disturbed by this, do we stand up and put an end to this specifically where the perpetrators are members of our Order, or do we turn a blind eye, for fear of exacerbating the situation or in just plain cowardice? On a recent trip, it is rumoured that such a situation arose, where what started out as supposedly being a joke, escalated into a situation which turned nasty and viscous, and sadly this was by men who profess to be Brothers. I was saddened by this, as it put a damper on what was perceived to be a very important trip, where we as the Grand Lodge of South Africa were well represented by members of a multitude of backgrounds, symbolising the harmony and unity which Freemasonry espouses.

The obligation which we take at our initiation is binding on each and every one of us. There is not one set of rules for some and another set for others. We are given the name Brother. We profess to be brothers, and we are advised not to stain that sacred name. We can offer guidance

to a fellow brother, lend a helping hand in times of crisis, or simply be a source of comfort and support. Being your brother's keeper is a commitment to building a network of trust, respect, and camaraderie, which starts at the very outset of our Masonic journey.

By professing to being our brother's keeper, one should reflect this undertaking in our daily lives as living a testament to our shared humanity and the belief that we are all connected in our journey through life. This principle must be embodied in our lives, through our actions and attitudes and how we speak to each other. What may not be offensive to one person could well be highly offensive and hurtful to others. We need to rein in our tongues and think before speaking. If we do this, we contribute to a more compassionate, inclusive, and supportive world where individuals can thrive and grow together, irrespective of our different cultures, citizenships, ideologies, backgrounds, etc..

At every Installation ceremony, the ancient charges are read. The following are extracts from these:

- Every Freemason is forbidden to act in any manner which may subvert the peace and good order of any Lodge, a Provincial Grand Lodge or the Grand Lodge itself.
- The Grand Lodge acknowledges the equality of all persons, the universal brotherhood of man and every man's duty to labour for the welfare of the community.

Part of the aims and objectives of the Grand Lodge states the following:

It is the objective of this Grand Lodge:

- (1) to encourage the development of every member's social and spiritual character which will let him understand his weaknesses and take steps to overcome them;
- (2) to empower every member to implement what he has learnt and thereby uplift the society in which he lives;
- (3) to inculcate the concepts of truth, integrity, brotherly love and charity in every member's life and make these a part of his being.

The behaviour of those involved in the very sad incident above, should be remorseful of their actions and they should seek to amend their ways. We know we must be forbearing of the frailties of mankind, that is no excuse in such an incident. Without introspection on their part, and a commitment to living by the essential core belief systems of our Order, we will see the opposite of being our Brother's keeper emerge and the peace and harmony amongst us will be disturbed.

Remember, being your brother's keeper is not just a duty but a privilege - one that allows us to forge deep, meaningful relationships with our Brethren, build a strong sense of community, and make a positive impact in the lives of others.

It is up to us to review where we stand when we answer the question: "Am I my Brother's keeper?"