

The Short Talk Bulletin

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'HIERARCHY OF NEEDS' AND MASONIC MEMBERSHIP

By Kevin B. Todd

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Masonry is like a large rock in the middle of a river. It stays in one spot with the river moving around and sometimes over it. Masonry had grown to its maximum size in the 1950's and has slowly receded (with a few exceptions) ever since. I have been asked more than a few times if I know why that happened. What did the Masons of the 1950's do differently than we do today to achieve those membership successes? What special programs did they offer to attract the quantity of good men that joined in those days? The simple answer is, "not much." As a matter of fact, there are more programs available to the Masons of today than existed 60 years ago. Masonry in those days was truly the benefactor of the changing times. To further the analogy, the rock in the river did not move or get any larger, but an island grew up around the rock in the middle of the river. In the times since then, the river has eroded that island to the point where the rock is itself in danger of erosion. What's the answer to this dilemma? Do we want to move Masonry (the rock) out of the mainstream to the quiet back water where it is no longer in danger of erosion? Do we harden and reinforce Masonry to be able to resist the erosion? Perhaps the course of the river (society) may change on its own to avoid our rock and thereby avoid erosion. There is no single easy answer to this issue. But whatever else we do, we must begin to understand the nature of the situation. What is going on in society that is causing a decline in membership of our fraternity? What is going on in the fraternity that affects the declines that we are feeling in our current environment?

One thing is for sure, Masonry is growing in areas outside of the traditional strongholds of our Craft. Is the next big surge in Freemasonry going to be in Eastern Europe or in China? And to understand why that is happening, you need to see what is happening in those societies. To better understand their environment, you need to know- about the five levels of needs, known as "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs."

1. **Physiological Needs:** These include the most basic of needs that are vital to survival, such as the need for water, air, food and sleep. These needs are the most basic and instinctive needs because all other needs become secondary until these physiological needs are met.

2. **Security Needs:** These needs include the need for safety and security. Security needs are

important for survival, but are not as demanding as the physiological needs. These include the desire for steady employment, health insurance, safe neighborhoods and shelter from the environment.

3. Social Needs: These include the needs for belonging, love and affection. Relationships such as friendship, romantic attachments, and families satisfy the need for companionship and acceptance, as does involvement in social, community or religious groups.

4. Esteem Needs: After the first three have been satisfied, esteem needs become increasingly important. These include needs that reflect on self-esteem, personal worth, social recognition and accomplishment.

5. Self-Actualization Needs: This is the highest level of the hierarchy of needs. Self-actualized people are self-aware, concerned with personal growth, less concerned with the opinions of others and interested in fulfilling their maximum potential.

Do you recognize your own place or that of others in this hierarchy? You need to understand that you can move up and down this hierarchy with a changing environment too. And you can be at more than one level on different aspects of your life. As the river (society) changes, you will find yourself and others with new and different needs.

Just consider what happened in the middle of the 20th Century to propel the Fraternity of Freemasons to the level of membership that it achieved in the 1950's. Millions of good men were sent to war ... for years ... to secure the freedom of our world as we knew it. Their human struggle in those difficult times pushed them down on their hierarchy to at least the second level (Security Needs) if not the first level (Physiological Needs) for years at a time. They all came home to a world where they were at first 100% occupied with satisfying their Security Needs by getting employment and shelter. Once that was accomplished, they transitioned to the search to satisfy their Social Needs. Do you recognize the fraternal aspects of a Masonic Lodge here? It definitely fills the need for companionship and acceptance in a social or community setting, doesn't it? So what changed? Society (the river) changed. In the 1960's government social programs were instituted that provided the basic security that was so missing when those millions of good men came home in the '40s and '50s. Then other avenues were available to men to fulfill the need for belonging and acceptance. Society was less accepting of groups fulfilling this need and it was more into the individual satisfying this need. Perhaps you remember the "dawning of the age of Aquarius?" The age of communication and the internet further advance this change by providing a sense of belonging to something larger and avoided the perceived downfall associated with personal contact and individual interactions.

So think about it for a moment. What exactly were you looking for when you joined your Masonic Lodge? Where did it fit into your hierarchy of needs? If you are an officer of your lodge or a district officer, why would you do that? How does that fit into your hierarchy of needs? When you joined your lodge, were you satisfying a Social Need? Then when you became an officer, did that move you up a step to a need for Esteem (things that reflect on self-esteem and accomplishment)? So what are you looking for next? Perhaps something that fulfills your need for personal growth and achieving your maximum potential?

What can make it all work again? We, as Masonic organizations, need to position ourselves in that river, this society, to take the best advantage of the ebb and flow of this environment. We need to provide the resources for the good men looking to satisfy a need that will position them higher on the hierarchy of needs than they find themselves now. That is not simple or exclusive. We need to continue to attract good men to Freemasonry who find themselves at different levels on the hierarchy.

We are working hard to develop leadership training and programs to help good men feed their Esteem and Self-Actualization needs. That is all good. It is the right thing to do at this point. However, we need to do a better job of selling it. Reminding a good man that his grandfather was a Mason does establish a connection, but does nothing to create the desire ... the need to join.

We need to work at publicizing those Masonic virtues and programs that emphasize those things that create, increase or improve self-esteem, personal worth, and social recognition and accomplishment. We need to maximize the exposure to our programs that concentrate on personal growth.

If we continue to concentrate on programs whose purpose is to satisfy Physiological and Security needs, then we can only expect those men to join us for whom those things are a concern. And our society provides ways to satisfy those needs outside of Freemasonry anyway. One of the most common things said about men not joining Freemasonry is that they are too busy with their occupations, their families, their community activities. I submit to you that those are the very men we would attract if we position Freemasonry in the right place for them. They are not turned off to Freemasonry. We have just not pushed the right buttons for them yet.

I am not saying we should give up on our programs that help meet the hierarchal needs for Security, Safety, or Social needs, but we do need to stress the higher benefits of being a Mason. We need to promote those aspects of Freemasonry that result in increased self- esteem and personal growth.

The future will arrive without help or direction from any of us. But if we take an active part in the world around us, we can have a tremendous impact on what the future has in store for us and for our families. We need to accept responsibility for what we do today, our own futures, the futures of our families, the future of our communities, the futures of our lodges, and the future of Freemasonry. The future of Freemasonry is up to you.

**Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology, proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation."*