

Our Purpose defines Our Direction

The eye reveals the transparency of our intentions...

Our traditions and our ethical modes of behavior -- not one but all the religious and philosophical traditions of our humanity -- attempt to guide us toward happiness. The notions of friendship, love, and truth can be found in all traditions as primary values of ethical behavior, even if we cannot agree on the details of that or how it might be accomplished...

There are two reasons for conflict in our lives. And these two reasons exist in everything from the struggles of nations down to the struggles with those we encounter daily in our immediate lives...

The first reason is that we fail to align our expectations of others with their expectations of us. The most common complaint in the world is that we understand what others want, for better or worse, and that the others have little or no understanding of our expectations. But it is always abundantly clear that the others claim that they understand our desires, for better or worse, to a far greater degree than we understand theirs...

The second reason is that we fail to reconcile these expectations with others in order to bring peace and harmony and happiness. There is no conflict nor is there any strife when we act to engage a civilized process that brings common focus and common understanding to differences of perspective and constructive joint effort...

* * * * *

Odd Fellowship could offer every man, woman, and child alive the opportunity to live good and happy lives but the Order must change for this to happen...

The members of the Order must be willing to reexamine and redefine the values of friendship, love, truth, faith, hope, charity and universal justice, not because these foundational values have changed in any way as personal commitments and paths to happiness. Rather, such reassessment and description about the relevance of these fundamentals must be ongoing as our modern society changes...

And the Order has not been flexible enough to maintain its stride with the world as it is now in this moment. That inflexibility threatens its very existence...

The Order is in conflict with our larger society these days and the nature of that conflict is society's fundamental perception that the Order is out of touch with society's needs as those needs exist today. In an age of instant communications, we should be able to see how our larger society reads our messages and how compelling they find our purpose to exist. There is good reason to believe that society does not know all the good notions we have to bring to the affairs of mankind...

* * * * *

But anyone who visits a typical lodge meeting may leave at the end wondering what all the fuss was about. Why all the ritual and regalia...? Why all the baffling references to unwritten work or 19th Century secret society trappings...? Why all the conversation about the "right way" and the "wrong way" to do things in the midst of rules and protocols that are, at best, quaint...?

In some respects for those who know, the ritual is a good thing, almost comforting in its predictable presentation of the lodge's issues to be discussed and decided. And for those who really know about the commitment that members must make to participate, the ritual is a symbolic experience, learned and practiced over time by study, observation, and practice. The ritual provides a path to implementing effective social process and participatory behaviors...

The interesting perspective here is that we do not wish to bring the outside world into the Lodge hall but, rather, we should want to take the spirit and practice of Odd Fellowship from its focused practice and mastery out into the outside world. And those who see that this is a good thing, will want to be a part of it...

But it is easily argued that the ritual is of another time...

And modernizing is not simply an adoption of modern technologies. Only once during a degree ritual was I forced to confront my own mortality and to realize that I had to make the best of the rest of this life for good purpose (I was already trying to do that and this only brought that notion home) but the image of that moment I have carried with me since it happened. The personal experience of that moment never would have become my very personal reminder had I seen this from a DVD...

Modern technologies have changed the ways we relate to people, communicate with them, and attempt to motivate and organize them for a cause or other good purpose. These information technologies are tools by which we communicate, motivate, organize, and learn. And, believe it or not, they are critical for Odd Fellows to master. These technologies are available to most of us. But they come to us without a sense of civility or good manners...

The elements of friendship, love, and truth are very different on the Public Network. But there is no reason at all why we could not create a virtual lodge with its own virtual ritual...

And there is no reason why we cannot create a new ritual for the lodge hall downtown that addresses the needs for civility, good manners, and civic progress among us all in these modern times. A ritual that will serve as our guide in any effort we assume in our lives...

* * * * *

I have believed since the beginning of my time in the Order -- about ten years ago -- that the local IOOF Lodge should be the "go-to-place" for civic leadership in any community. If we can put our egos on the shelf for a bit, everyone who wishes to be a part of this effort can have the opportunity to contribute in significant ways -- in the Lodge and in their community -- to the development of leadership in themselves and in their brothers and sisters...

It is what we all have in common -- all of us around the world -- and it is much more than just the Golden Rule. Odd Fellows have the opportunity now to look to the Order's traditions and core values and to redefine the protocols of exemplary civil behavior, civic leadership, and achievement in group effort for the world today...

It is hard for me to believe that good men and women of any community would not seek to be a part of that...

Offered for your consideration in friendship, love, and truth...

Robin Oliver
<http://BelovedOrder.info/>