

PREJUDICE

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The paper you are about to hear – or the “drawing” as it is referred to in German Lodges – was written by Worshipful Bro. Ulrich Winter of Sarastro Lodge in Stuttgart Germany and relates to a part of the German ritual used in his lodge. The Worshipful Master of the Lodge gives the Brethren a parting word of remembrance before they depart from the temple.

I find it fascinating that even though we all belong to the same fraternity, the differences in regional rituals are highlighting different parts of our teachings and yet they all relate back to the same core principles and teachings.

By translating and presenting this paper to you, I hope to bring some of these differences yet similar ideas and thoughts from one of our Brothers across continents and also cultures as well as generations to you. Brother Ulrich just turned 80 and presented this paper prior to his 80th birthday. I feel like we had similar discussions around this and other topics in this Lodge before and it is great to see this common train of thought.

Allow me to begin the paper.

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Remember: What are the closing words of the Worshipful Master in the ritual of closing the Lodge?

“Return to the world, my Brethren, and prove yourself as Freemasons. Fight injustice where ever it shows, never turn your backs on hardship and misery. Free yourselves from the slavery of prejudice.”

Prejudice! A “pre”-evaluated judgment about people and opinions. We use the term prejudice in daily life to describe distinct positive and negative opinions or attitudes of others about a certain object, a thing or a person, when they are neither realistic nor relevant.

Prejudice, or more literally “pre-judgment,” is easily cast. On the other hand, a judgment has to be justified and cast by a judge. It is a legal process, sometimes lengthy in civil and criminal law but is to serve justice, or should do so. I ask for your understanding that I only address the “pre-judgment” or “prejudice” in this paper in terms of the negative connotation. However, prejudice does not always have to be negative but can also be very positive in nature. Looking at our state, our society, the thoughts that bind us together as Freemasons are just a few examples of it. I am also not talking about details in perception of understandings or opinions. These are necessary in the communication of ideas, experiences and knowledge as well as in the evaluation of different mindsets and information, where as the increase of information often goes hand in hand with the increase of unrest, potentially meaning creativity.

So far, so good. But why is the admonition to “*Free yourselves from the slavery of prejudice*” placed so unmistakably at the end of the ritual? What does the ritual want to tell us, to plant in our consciousness when we leave the temple? Why is it encouraging us to not give prejudice a chance to spread in our daily life, within our family, in our private and professional environment? “*Free yourselves*” the Worshipful Master calls to us!

There *must* be a reason why his words are so insistent. Today, tomorrow, every day! Free of the burden – a depression, a threat which influences our thoughts and actions.

How can we free ourselves? What can the individual do? Are we afraid to recognize negative trends, to judge and not to be able to master them?

What's our opinion on topics about racism, immigration, current events? Is there still ground for prejudice to flourish? By whom, for whom, from whom? Which consequences do we have to get out of this as Freemasons? How can every individual implement his calling in daily life? Are we really doing it? You, me, all of us?

Its implementation is difficult, I know. I strive for it, but is that enough? Am I satisfied with it? Not always, I have to admit. It is about the statements, attitudes and judgments of people and people. For we should know that prejudice is a pre-judgment about people or thing which is not sufficiently grounded in reality or experience. It has the character of a cliché and is presented most the time as it would be self-evident and mostly irrefutable. It contains judgments which aim at people, groups or circumstances. And that's critical, it sticks. Albert Einstein once said so accurately: "It's easier to split an atom than prejudice!"

The actual danger, however, is its long term effect and where it ultimately leads. Meaning, the point at which we hear: "It is so. Everyone speaks about it – surely there must be something about it." People believe the most outlandish lies, as long as they comfort, promise gains or are able to inspire. I refrain from naming examples of such events of the past in politics, culture and the economy.

Prejudice is more convenient than the critical and well thought-through point of view... because you don't have to think about it, no proof is needed, and no control necessary – it is enough to simply depict it.

The importance, the meaning of what was heard or read, the reiteration of prejudice is at the same time the confirmation. That's the way it is. It's true.

Now negative prejudice is starting its work. Like a cancerous tumor it penetrates our own thoughts, distorts them, break all resistance. With us, with you, with me.

Who doesn't know the bad feeling to not trust someone, simply because you had heard, read "something." Here prejudice meets with a rumor about a lovely person who was once trusted. And you would like to trust again. You start to doubt, more and more and at the end your own doubt is the confirmation.

"I knew from the beginning." Satisfied? Anxious? Disappointed?

Prejudice in our little fraternity?

There was and always will be. But what would help look like? Strangely enough, all views about a brother are always obtained from the person across from me. The brother, the friend. *Never from within me.* That's convenient. Releases me. The "other one" is keeping his prejudice, nurtures it, insists upon it, and keeps it. *And I? Do I not have prejudice against the one of my friend?*

The one we are facing is always as difficult as we make them ourselves. There is no nostrum for interpersonal conflicts. I suspect, that everybody once had an encounter with a difficult person. And because family, colleagues, friends and Freemasons are people, people none the less who are difficult to avoid, the potential for conflict and suffering is often very high. People are hard to change. No one can be forced, if under the

power of prejudice, that he will change it by himself, not to be able or willing to free himself from prejudice.

My experience in this case is to not harm him, but to bring ease into the argument, to listen to him and to thank him for the conversation. To convince him of my explanation based on my experience and knowledge will then be useless. This mutual behavior is often frustrating, but is to strengthen my position of respect towards the other.

Conclusion: The difficult person and brother remains difficult.

And it causes the fellow man a lot of work to get along with him. I will try. How about me? In the face of my counterpart I am difficult too?

To acknowledge a negative prejudice and to try to erase it, *I have to ask myself as a brother why I conduct myself with reservation against him? Could it be that I only see his prejudice on a subject, his sometimes inappropriate comments on a topic, his irrelevant and out of context accounts? But to exclude myself from it? Isn't it really my prejudice? Did I ask him what he is basing his prejudice on, what he really meant? Did I listen to him attentively? Not interrupting him right away, but really listened, to let him finish? Not to set against him the sentence which kills every discussion, the "but-sentence"; "but I see this totally different"? Isn't it said that: "Democracy is, if you let the other one finish his sentence. Tolerance is, if you also actually listen to it".*

Did I recognize, feel what was on his mind, why he has so inflexible opinions which often are based on things that are long past and don't apply any more and why he expresses them? Did I engage him in a confidential conversation? Does he know my opinion based on facts? What do I know about his situation? His family, his job? What is depressing him, what is distressing him? Did I offer my help or the help of the fraternity? Did I ever invite him for a fraternal meeting outside of the Lodge? Did I talk to him about the true meaning of Masonic symbols? What power originates from the ritual? Did I lead the conversation with consideration? Also respected his point of view? Why do I always sit at the same spot at the Agape? I could also sit next to him, right? Then we are both not alone, can learn from each other. Could it be that some Brethren stay away from Lodge because they have prejudice?

Why do I withhold praise from my Brother? For example, for his contribution in a discussion or for the delivery of his toast at the Agape? Every person seeks and needs acknowledgement and praise.

It should be well understood that these targeted explanations are not only for the younger Brethren in the chain, also for Brethren that I know for a very long time. Really know?

I admit to you, that I too have prejudice and I strive to get rid of them. Or do I ignore it all? I am not interested. I have enough to deal with. Have to look out for myself how I get by?

Then I did not understand the work on the rough ashlar, then I became shallow. But the work on this paper helped me to question some thoughts.

Know thyself!

Listen first,

Then debate.

And act.

This is my advice.

We are getting close to the end of this presentation – or as the German Brethren refer to “the drawing on the drawing-board.” My plea to you: Contemplate the last words of the Worshipful Master and try to follow them. So mote it be!

Thank you for your attention. My drawing is done.