



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

November 8, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Time to dip into our "philosophy bag". Brother Louie Sarmiento has submitted a well-researched article on the underpinnings of Odd Fellowship. At bottom, it asks the most basic question: "Why am I an Odd Fellow?" I submit that you can't be in a position to bring in new members to a Lodge unless you are solidly grounded in the reasons you joined and the reasons you remain an Odd Fellow.

Further, Lodges have suffered due to the failure by some members to adhere to most basic principles of friendship, love and truth. In those Lodges, discord and disagreement is prevalent. It's pretty hard to bring new members into a Lodge which is striven by dissension.

The article is lengthy, but thought-provoking.

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Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

MORAL OBLIGATIONS OF ODD FELLOWS?

Greetings!

Another issue commonly observed among Odd Fellows and Rebekahs in North America is attitude (stripped away of the moral purposes of our Order). These are bickering and back-biting among members which has severed relationships among members as well as discouraged new members from staying or being involved with the Order. Having new members observe or witness this inner fighting and organizational politics within the Order gives Odd Fellowship a bad image to newer members as well as non-members who hear some of our members saying bad things about other members of our Order. If we read the roots of our Order, our purposes are not only brotherhood and charity but also "improving and elevating the character of mankind". All fraternal orders were not just plain mutual-benefit associations but they were also "moral societies" too. Hence, that it the purpose of the ritualism in our Order -- to impart noble principles and pledge to help each other morally and in times of need.



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I am a member of another fraternal organization and, to be honest, I can compare the "strength of brotherly love" among members in that organization as compared to the I.O.O.F. which has a weaker "sense of fraternity" among our general membership. This is probably because many of our lodges in North America and the Sovereign Grand Lodge have marketed the I.O.O.F. more as a "charity organization" and a number of our members are blind of the "moral and fraternal purposes" of Odd Fellowship. During Sovereign Grand Lodge Sessions, quite a number of members do not even shake each others' hand or offer the "hand grip of Odd Fellowship" among each other. Many just walk pass through each other. Some do not even say "hi" even if they know the person is an Odd Fellow or Rebekah. This is not the case in the other fraternal orders I have been a member or observed because my friends or family are members. In one fraternal order my father is a member, everyone gives a hand grip of their fraternity every time they see each other and you can really feel the "warmth" of their brotherhood. This is the same with college fraternities and sororities, it is commonly practiced that members exchange hand grips when they see each other. We barely use our hand grip to our fellow members. In that other fraternal order, their sense of morality and respect towards fellow members also seems higher than among Odd Fellows based on my observation. One thing my father shared is that they take their fraternal obligations seriously and they gave binding promises towards the entire fraternity and their brothers. I scanned their obligation and I have seen the difference why.

In North America, our Odd Fellow rituals only give a "functional" obligation and not much of a moral and fraternal purpose. When I say functional, this means that our obligation only lets members promise to keep secret the passwords and signs and the books of our Order and that's it. It doesn't have much of a "moral and fraternal" content.

In my communication with several members of our Order in Europe, I felt how serious they take their obligations and how they say that the first purpose of the Order is that of a "school of morality" or "school of ethics" and you can see that they do look like they have "quality" members in terms of character. Below is the 1978 Danish obligation:

I, - give your name -, / promise to the best of my ability and with an honest mind / that I will fight against the evil within myself / and that I will strive to attain and practice / the principles of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. /

I promise to the best of my ability / to strive to be a true Odd Fellow, / a good and faithful person / and that I will serve my lodge by willingly taking part in its work.

I promise / that I will never reveal the passwords, signs / and internal affairs belonging to the Order, / by word of mouth or in writing, / directly or indirectly, / to any person unauthorized to receive them. / And should I ever be expelled or voluntarily leave the Order, / I will consider this promise fully binding. /



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To the faithful performance of all which, / I pledge my sacred honor. /

Their obligation has a "moral" and "fraternal" content and having this content in our obligations could help prevent the in-fighting within the Order. From the moment members join the Order, they promise to give friendship and never to slander brothers and sisters and to fight the evil within him or herself and be a true Odd Fellow by practicing the principles taught in our degrees. The moment I read this version of the Danish Odd Fellow obligation and imagined myself taking that obligation, I felt different and enriched of my obligation as an Odd Fellows as compared to that obligation I took from the 2003 Rituals of the Sovereign Grand Lodge which were more of a functional secret society type obligation and does not influence me to be brotherly and to strive to become a better person by practicing the principles of our Order.

Another way to also address the attitude problems within the Order is for the Sovereign Grand Lodge to create a list of "Code of Ethics" based on the teachings of the rituals of our Order. In the Order of DeMolay, which I am a senior member, we are made to memorize the following Code of Ethics once we join the Order:

A DeMolay serves God.

A DeMolay loves and honors his parents.

A DeMolay honors all womanhood.

A DeMolay is honest.

A DeMolay is loyal to ideals and friends

A DeMolay Practices honest toil.

A DeMolay's word is as good as his bond.

A DeMolay is courteous

A DeMolay is gentleman at all times

A DeMolay is a patriot in peace as well as in war.

A DeMolay is clean in mind and body

A DeMolay stands unswervingly for the public schools.

A DeMolay always bears the reputation of a good and law-abiding citizen.



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A DeMolay by precept and example must preserve the high standards to which he has pledged himself

This Code of Ethics I embraced from the Order of DeMolay continue to guide me in my personal life up until today. The obligations I took in the Odd Fellows were too plain that it did not touch my life until I did my own research from old books that are not even available to the majority of the members. In 2009, I wrote some kind of summary from what I learned from the Degrees of the Odd Fellows Lodge:

An Odd Fellow bases his thoughts and actions on healthy philosophical principles. He believes that life is a commitment to improve and elevate the character of humanity through service and example. He is humble in a way that he never boasts about himself. He knows and accepts his strengths and weaknesses and keeps away from badmouthing people and making unreasonable allegations. He understands that certain things in life are unavoidable. He is aware of the vanity of earthly things, the frailty and inevitable decay of human life and the fact that wealth has no power to stop the sureness of eventual death. He then asks the question, "How am I going to spend my life?"

An Odd Fellow an advocate of FRIENDSHIP and never looks at people with prejudiced eyes or bases his judgment on outward appearances. He supports the idea that all people, irrespective of race, creed, nationality, color, social status, sex, rank and station are equal. He does not take an undue advantage of his power or the weaknesses of those around him. He is gentle in behavior and never inflicts pain. He avoids impurity in thoughts and unchaste conduct. He also knows that he should respect himself by following temperance in his desires, fighting vices of every form, chastity of person and purity in heart and mind.

An Odd Fellow is an enactor of LOVE in a way that he feels jointly responsible for his fellowmen and prepared to give attention and help wherever and whenever help is needed. He is a person who treats others, especially women and children, with dignity and respect. He accepts the fact that nothing is perfect but believes that he has an obligation to contribute in making the world a better place to live.

An Odd Fellow adheres to equality, justice and righteousness and a pursuer of TRUTH. He sees searching for truth as searching for clarity in the sense of his life. Every time a small piece of



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truth is found, he will try to use it only in ways where he will be able to be true to himself and his fellowmen. Oftentimes, he thinks before he acts and speaks. He knows that, as a human being, it is a fact that he can think. He gives account to himself and knows that before he starts doing something, he can make the choice what to do and can think it over and consider whether the choice was the right one. He believes that making good and well-considered choices is called "behaving in a responsible way".

I wish we can make a summarized version and in bullet form of the general teachings taught in our rituals that members can easily understand and hopefully apply in their own lives.

In FLT,

Brother Louie