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# TO LIGHT!



## Bringing Masonic Education To Light

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### Tolerance

Tol.er.ance *noun* Indulgence or forbearance in judging the opinions, customs, or acts of others; freedom from bigotry, or from racial or religious prejudice.

In recent months, in an effort to better understand the seemingly never ending turmoil in the Middle East, I sought out a book which would provide a comprehensive history and assessment of the issues that have so divided the region for so long. The book? *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Middle East Conflict*. Now before you speculate that I'm going to trivialize the situation, let me note that this is a very serious and well researched book, and I would highly recommend it as a primer to anyone who has been as baffled as I've been about this age-old conflict.

The book takes you on a journey from the era of Abraham and Moses, through the growth of the three great religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), to the impact of the Crusades and - where the majority of the book is focused - the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What struck me as I read about the conflicts in each historical era, and most specifically in our present era, is the total lack of toleration by one religion, culture or nation with respect to another. Time after time efforts of reconciliation have been within a hairbreadth of succeeding only to be thwarted because of one basic premise - intolerance. Never mind that if we lived together in peace we might both see increased prosperity - the issue is that because of your religion, or race, or nationality, or whatever, we cannot and will not coexist. Period. End of discussion.

In 1989 we were traveling through what was then Yugoslavia. We were charmed by the city of Sarajevo and its diversity, particularly when we toured a historic Catholic church that was conducting afternoon vespers, while across the street at the Muslim mosque we could hear the wailings of those at prayer. We asked ourselves why the whole world couldn't be like this, peacefully and respectfully conducting their own customs with complete toleration of each other. Two years later we found out why. Nationalism prevailed, intolerance reigned, and if you were not a Serb, your life and property were in danger.

The world is full of present day sentinel examples of the effects of intolerance. We see it in our own country (thankfully with less violence but nonetheless repressive) whether it be religious, racial, cultural or political. It is a social cancer that can have profound debilitating effects on individuals and societies.

If you are a Mason, you know that tolerance is a virtue. It is one of our core values. Interestingly, the word “tolerance” never appears in any of the rituals. Similarly the word “ethics” does not appear in our rituals, yet when you boil down all the lessons and symbols, “ethics” is the one word that best captures our mission as an organization. “Tolerance”, though never stated, is certainly implied in our symbols, such as when we “meet on the level”.

Albert Pike certainly recognized Toleration as a Masonic virtue, and he prominently advanced that virtue in his *Morals and Dogma* (pp. 160-161, 166-167). One excerpt from Pike’s observations about toleration follows:

“Toleration, holding that every other man has the same right to his opinion and faith that we have to ours; and liberality, holding that as no human being can with certainty say in the clash and conflict of hostile faiths and creeds, what is truth, or that *he* is *surely* in possession of it, so everyone should feel that it is quite possible that another equally honest and sincere with himself, and yet holding the contrary opinion, may himself be in possession of the truth, and that whatever one firmly and conscientiously believes *is* truth, to *him* – these are the mortal enemies of that fanaticism which persecutes for opinion’s sake, and initiates crusades against whatever it, in the imaginary holiness, deems to be contrary to the law of God or verity of dogma. And education, instruction, and enlightenment are the most certain means by which fanaticism and intolerance can be rendered powerless.”

Pike is noted for his verbosity, but he can make some very poignant statement. The last sentence of the quote above is the one that bears repeating and should be one of the main missions of Masonic education: “*And education, instruction and enlightenment are the most certain means by which fanaticism and intolerance can be rendered powerless.*”

Larry Jacobsen