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Three, five, and seven

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#207

“In the art of living, man is both the artist and the object of the art; he is the sculptor and the marble; the physician and the patient” Erich Fromm Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics

As Masons we strive to improve our moral behavior or the standards of behavior we accept as valid. The book, Amador, by Fernando Savater(1) helps us rethink the ethical values our moral behavior is based upon and offers a fresh look at the meaning of a good life and what constitutes an ethical life. Unfortunately it is out print and only available thru second booksellers. Therefore it seems worthwhile to summarize some of its salient contents.

Savater believes the focus of ethics is really how to live a human life among human beings, and live it well. Knowing-how-to-live is the art of living which we call ethics. Since there are opposing points of view as to what is good or bad, knowing how to live is complicated. Choosing the course you prefer or the one that best suits you is not always easy. We must think about what we are free to choose to do and not do it because we think we have to. On the one hand we cannot spend our lives doing only what our whims tell us to do but on the other hand we must not just follow the rules and habits imposed on us by others. Rules and habits can cause us to choose behavior that neither fits for us or the situation.

Sometimes we decide how to behave based on our fear of criticism, ridicule, censure gossip or our desire to be accepted by our peers. The freedom of deciding what is right or fits for you must also involve realizing how you are deciding. We are not free to be free. Our decisions are not necessarily best if they are done just to obey a rule, a custom or an impulse. Yet our mores and moral behavior are based on the rules and

customs of the society in which we live. What is virtuous in one family or culture may not be in another.

So how can we as a Mason do what we want and have a good life and still be virtuous? If we are free, wellborn and educated, do we have a natural impulse to flee from vice? In doing what we want we must take seriously the question of our own freedom and take the responsibility of creating our own path and be responsible for the consequences of our actions. Accepting responsibility is truly being free for better or worse. As masons we know a good human life depends on having relations with other human beings and that friendship, respect, and love, develops best among equals. Treating other people by taking note of what they want and what they need and not just what we can get from them we make it possible for them to give back to us. Thus we come to enjoy human life among our brothers and fellowmen.

(1)Amador by Fernando Savater Translated from the Spanish by Alastair Reid first American edition 1994 Henry Holt and Company, Inc ISBN 0-8050-3271-1

Words to Live By: *“Freedom is not a philosophy, nor is it an idea----it is a stirring of the conscience that causes us to utter, at certain moments one of two monosyllables: Yes or No. In that instant, fleeting as a lightning flash, it shows the whole contradiction of human nature”* Octavio Paz, The Other Voice

If you have any comments, suggestions, or questions, please send them to: shapiro.stanley@gmail.com

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