

# The Fraternal Family

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It is always good to meet and socialize with brethren from around the commonwealth. Many of us travel long distances to be here.

In masonry we are taught that the beehive is an allegory for industry, but are further taught that it symbolizes interdependence in our families and in the fraternity. Man was formed to be social and the hive represents this well. An Irish expose from 1724 described a "hive of Freemasons", building on a long and rich history about bees. In ancient Egypt bees were the tears of the sun god Ra, the Hindus represented the god Shiva by bees surmounting a triangle, and for the early Christians bees represented virtue and fidelity.

In one sense, bees function together as a super-organism, working towards the greater good over that of the individual. William McNeill described an altered state of consciousness and "muscular bonding" among the men marching and drilling in WWII. These men would function as a unit with complete trust, forgetting their individual selves. In such a way the Greek and Roman armies were able to overwhelm and defeat much larger armies of "individual" warriors.

Jonathan Haidt, a UVA psychologist, has posited that "human beings are conditional hive creatures- we have the ability to transcend self-interest and lose ourselves into something larger than ourselves."

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We now know from neuroscience that oxytocin will lead to increased trust in partners, but this effect is limited to couples or groups, not humanity in general. It has this effect whether endogenous or if sprayed into the nose. It makes our families closer, in essence leading, according to Haidt, to parochial altruism. Mirror neurons are another finding that demonstrates collaboration within groups. When we move our thumb and finger certain neurons fire. Researchers found, however, that the same neurons would fire in a monkey if that monkey was completely still and witnessing the researcher doing the activity from across the room. In humans we have strong emotional connections through our limbic system, in particular our amygdala. When we smile, certain neurons fire, but seeing someone else smile activates those same neurons in your own brain – essentially someone else's smile causes your own brain to smile too. When your brain smiles, it makes you happy; and you smile, which passes the smile on to another one of our group.

Marcus Aurelius wrote about the importance of caring for the beehive, to take care of the bees inside: *To toi smenei me sumpheron ode tei melissei sumpherei*, or *that which is not good for the beehive cannot be good for the bees*. We need to care for our group, our family, in addition to ourselves. These findings change the way we see each other and appeal to our communal nature. It changes us from I to we, from my to our, towards shared goals and values. We, as a fraternal family, become a human beehive.

Shalom.