

The Right Stuff

By Alfie Kwong '67



The Upsilon journey begins with the individual. This notion is inherent in our motto, "We gather light to scatter." It is also understood by our founding brothers that in the phrase, "Tried and True." Tried comes before True. Thus, when we seek those who may walk among us as brothers, we must first determine whether the beggars who come knocking are lights. The fraternal community of the Upsilon Sigma Phi embraces the important interplay of being and becoming, and it recognizes that a worthy harvest can only be garnered from the right soil. The seed of brotherhood that we plant in the individual brother must rest in the proper growing condition for it to become a life-nurturing tree. We thus look into the intrinsic before we can let potentiality do its work. What then is the right soil? What constitutes a light that we can gather? What is that inner being we seek?

The Credo makes it clear when it says, "I cherish the sincere fellowship of my fraternity brothers because they consider me an upright, self-respecting man capable of growth and greater service to my fellow men." Here it spells out the two requirements of the man we seek: 1) upright; 2) self-respecting.

"Upright" simply means not slanted – straight and firm, something unwavering. The common attributes of an upright person are: integrity, courage, self-control, fairness, among others. But uprightness also means that the person is properly rooted or grounded or established, like a tree that is planted by the water, which shall not be moved, i.e., the firmness of character, which does not mean inflexibility, stems from the person's core values which have become a habit to him. He has the basic foundation of good citizenship. He is thus rooted in a love for his country and for his countrymen.

"Self-respecting" means an individual with a confidence of his own self-worth and conviction that he can make a difference. He assigns significance to his own existence. The root of self-respect is the result of a sober self-assessment, a self-awareness of one's gifts, intelligence, and

positive outlook. Self respect does not mean narcissism nor self-centeredness. It allows for egoism but not egotism. It also accepts enlightened self-interest. Self respect thus embraces the golden rule: do unto others what you want others to do unto you. Thus it posits a practical morality that we love our neighbors as ourselves. The attribute of a self-respecting man is that he must first respect others; he is thus kind, gentle, and patient. The man Rudyard Kipling is referring to in "If" is a self-respecting individual who possesses a certain inner joy no matter what the circumstances. He is an upright man, rooted in his trust for himself and a calmness of spirit, which transcends all adversities.

Thus the "being" of an Upsilonian is his intrinsic qualities – his uprightness and his self-respect. These intrinsic qualities are what is being "tried" and tested in our initiations. Thus, just as a true Upsilonian cannot exist without first being tried, so it is that one cannot become without being first. The journey thus begins with the individual, but we are only half way there. The road to being a true Upsilonian is in his capability of growth and greater service to his fellowmen. In this sense, one can view this as a third ingredient, the individual's potentiality. However, one cannot speak of potentiality without first assessing the raw material, the input, the "clay" from which the final sculpture is to emerge. And thus, I have placed "capability" as part of the process of "becoming" which means more than mere potentiality but actuality. In the end, a true Upsilonian cannot just end at the "capable" level, he must actualize this capability of growth and greater service. He cannot just dream and make dreams his master, or think and make thoughts his aim.

Finally, we must discern the true meaning of fellowship in the context of this interplay between being and becoming. The key I believe is in the "ship" of fellowship. The mystery of fellowship lies in these five ships: Stewardship, Relationship, Partnership, Companionship and Discipleship. Stewardship means a proper management of resources, and in the fraternal context, it is the proper management of the individual gifts and abilities of the members. In fellowship, we are not owners of our own gifts, but managers. As stewards, we must recognize that all we have (intrinsically) belong to the Fraternity so that we are to share equally our privileges and responsibilities – the assets and liabilities and the blessings and burdens. As for relationship, fellowship must be viewed first and foremost as a relationship rather than an activity. Relationship describes what we are: a community of people bound together by common ideals. Partnership describes how we are related to each other in that relationship. Here it means we are

partners in our fraternal enterprises, whatever they may be, in which we are to work together in a common purpose to obtain common objectives for the glory of the Fraternity (the Union).

Companionship is the interchange of communications (communion) that exists among companions. The key ingredient here is communication. Key words in companionship:

"interchange, communion, sharing." Communication is the sharing of concepts, feelings, ideas, information, needs, etc. through words and other symbols. Thus our saying, "When I meet you in the sun, Brother, I shall tell you much" means precisely these kinds of communications. Finally,

Discipleship is the process through which the more senior Upsilonians teach the Juniors our tradition of excellence and our yearning for economic stability and political maturity. Thus our concept of Seniority encompasses not only a relationship but discipleship. Thus fellowship has both its objective and experiential aspects.