

# FREEMASONRY

## FREEMASONRY DEFINED

Freemasonry cannot be defined in a few sentences. One of the most common definitions heard is that it is a system of morality, veiled in allegory (or a story) and illustrated by symbols. This is true, but Freemasonry is more than that. While it is certainly a course of moral instruction that uses both allegories and symbols to teach its lessons, Freemasonry is also an organized society of people. It uses symbols derived from operative stonemasonry and architecture but not exclusively. Much of its symbolism is also taken from Biblical sources, especially the stories surrounding the building of King Solomon's Temple. Great stress is placed upon the development of moral and ethical virtues and the building of character, with Truth being the guiding principle of our lives. Thus, brotherhood and charity are natural outcomes which further define what we are. In other words, we are using a proven method to enhance the lives and spirits of our members in a tangible way.

## THE PURPOSE OF FREEMASONRY

What is the purpose of Masonry? One of its most basic purposes is to make good men and women even better. We try to place emphasis on the individual by strengthening his/her character, improving his/her moral and spiritual outlook, and broadening his/her mental horizons. We try to impress upon the minds of our members the principles of personal responsibility and morality, encouraging each member to practice in his daily life the lessons taught through symbolic ceremonies in the lodge. One of the universal doctrines of Freemasonry is the belief in the "Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God". The importance of this belief is established by each Mason as he/she practices the three principle tenets of Masonry: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Masonry is also the custodian of a tradition of initiation. It is the duty of every Freemason to preserve and perpetuate this tradition for future ages. This is a heavy responsibility and should give pause to any who would seek to make changes in the body of the Craft, except those with the highest motives and deepest understanding of the principles involved.

## ORIGIN OF FREEMASONRY

We are not sure when our craft was born. We do know it goes far beyond written record and we believe it was not always called Freemasonry. It is obvious that some of the ancient Mystery Schools of Egypt, Greece and the Near East influenced the ceremonies that are used today. These ceremonies were designed as tests, and admission was granted only to those who passed and were worthy of further instruction. Our ceremonies have some of the same elements, though probably of a less physical nature, while still maintaining its spiritual form. Specifically, there are points of similarity between our Fraternity and the society founded by Pythagoras and the Fraternity of Hermes at Hermopolis in Egypt. We can also find affinities in the great Mystery Schools of Isis and Osiris of Egypt, the Dionysiac/Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries of Greece, and the Mithraic Mysteries of ancient Rome. Other groups that carried on like traditions include: the Jewish eschatological sect of the Essenes - from whom some believe John the Baptist came; the Roman Collegia of Artificers - an organization of builders - that Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (under the Emperor Augustus) led in the first century; and, the Comacine masters who flourished at the fall of the Roman Empire. The last group provides some link with the cathedral building projects of the medieval ages that were virtual bibles in stone. Our connection with these great schools of the past and other organizations is tenuous at best, but nevertheless, a study of them yields deep insight into

our own Organization. It is generally thought that the medieval craft guilds gave rise to the operative lodges that in turn became the birthplace of Freemasonry as we know it today.

## THE ORIGIN OF OUR RITUAL

Where and when did the Ritual work originate? The origin of our Ritual cannot be traced much beyond the years of the 18th century, or around 1700. The Ritual of Freemasonry was a continuation of the practices and customs of the day-to-day work of the Operative Freemason. The emphasis gradually shifted from the practical to moral and spiritual virtues as the Accepted Masons began to outnumber the Operative Brethren in the Lodges. In early Speculative Masonry, there may have been but one degree and a Master's part. After a few years, three Degrees were used.

## IS FREEMASONRY A SECRET SOCIETY?

The answer is no. A secret society is one in which the membership is concealed, the meeting places are kept secret, and knowledge of its organization and principles is unknown to the public. True, we have a few secrets in Freemasonry: a part of our ritual, our modes of recognition and the business of the Lodge. Portions of our ritual have been handed down within Freemasonry for centuries and form a part of our tradition. However, our purposes, ideals and principles may be learned by anyone who inquires. There are numerous books on these subjects available to the public. All printed Masonic information, with the exception of our esoteric work, may be freely discussed in public. As Masons, we wear lapel pins and other Masonic jewelry, march in parades with our distinctive aprons, advertise the time and place of our meetings and openly sponsor charities. We can hardly be called a secret society. We do prefer to keep our rites confidential, because keeping them sacred and solemn can only enhance their initiatory value. It should also be mentioned that the true secrets of Freemasonry are contained within the repository of the faithful breast and cannot be revealed to those who are not duly and truly prepared to receive them.

## IS FREEMASONRY A RELIGION?

Again, the answer is no. Because of the nature of the teachings of Freemasonry, we require our candidates to acknowledge a belief in a Supreme Being. Otherwise, the ceremonies would be meaningless. But there is no requirement that you belong to a particular religion or a particular church. That choice is a personal decision. It is the opinion of our Order that membership in our Organization will only enhance a person's experience in whatever religious community he/she chooses to belong. An atheist can not become a Mason, because he/she cannot express a belief in a Supreme Being. Masonic ideals are not set forth in written creeds. For the most part, the individual Mason must interpret the rituals for himself/herself and come to whatever understanding will satisfy his/her own mind and conscience, allowing others to do likewise. This is an example of Masonic tolerance, one of the primary principles of the Craft. There is no Masonic dogma. Our Order seeks only to unite good people for the purpose of brotherhood - not to promote a specific religion.

## THE USE OF SYMBOLISM AND ALLEGORY

Freemasonry makes extensive use of symbolism and allegory. A general study of symbolism is recommended to every Mason. Research into the historical uses and meanings of symbols utilized in the rituals, as well as a comparative study of mythology, provides a sure foundation for Masonic education. Especially recommended to Masonic researchers is a working knowledge of the stories from the Bible. Whenever a person or story is explicitly mentioned or alluded to in the rituals of our Fraternity, it is our task to find out why.

In Masonry, the Lodge is the center of activity. It is symbolically the Temple of Solomon. All degree work (ritual) and advancement is done within the Temple. The Temple is considered to be an exact replica of the divine world. It is sacred; it is the center of the universe. Its structure, furnishings, dimensions, and proportions - its architecture - are a mirror image of the Divine. Usually a temple is high upon the mountain (to be closest to God) and is considered the center of the cosmos. It is sacred space, a place out of the ordinary. The Temple is the place where the human is most likely to encounter the Divine. Being Masons, we might expect that the symbolism of stones would be important. The importance of stone symbolism is pervasive in religious thought. We can find references connecting stones with the gods back to the remotest times. It has been considered by some religious historians as being an archetypal image representing absolute reality. Many of the old gods (i.e. Mithras) were thought to be born from stones (petra genitrix). Stones possess the qualities of stability, solidity, and everlastingness which are also qualities attributed to the gods. There are numerous references to stones throughout the Bible which allude to a link between the stone, the sacred, and spirituality. In Isaiah 28:16 we read: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: ..." In Psalm 118: 22 we find: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." Also, in Revelation 2:17 we read: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." We also read (Genesis 28:11) that when Jacob had his vision of the angels and the ladder reaching to heaven, he used a stone as a pillow. After he awoke: "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-El (God's House)."

### **Officers of a Masonic Blue Lodge**

There are normally thirteen officers in a Masonic lodge.

The elected officers include:

**The Master** – The chief executive officer of the lodge is addressed as “Worshipful” or “Worshipful Master,” depending on the context of the greeting. The elected master or acting master is always seated in the east, also called in some jurisdictions the “Orient,” or Oriental Chair. Past or former masters of a Masonic lodge are also entitled to be addressed as “Worshipful” in perpetuity and to append the post nominal P.M., or past master, to their names as, for example, Brother John Doe, P.M. The jewel of his office is the square and symbolizes virtue.

**The Senior Warden** – The second-in-command of the lodge. He is the master’s right-hand man and responsible for the education and behavior of all candidates. His station is in the west. He is

usually addressed as Brother Senior Warden. The jewel of his office is the level and symbolizes equality.

**The Junior Warden** – The third-in-command behind the senior warden. His is the responsibility of feeding the lodge and of bringing Masonic charges against any brother suspected of un-Masonic conduct or breach of his obligation. His station is in the south. He is usually addressed as Brother Junior Warden or simply Brother Junior. The jewel of his office is the plumb and symbolizes upright behavior.

**The Treasurer** – Cares for the fiscal affairs of the lodge, keeping track of funds, expenses, and paying the bills when directed by the lodge membership. His seat is at the right of the Worshipful Master in the east. His badge of office is the square and symbolizes virtue. The jewels of his office are the crossed keys, which symbolize his duty to protect the lodge's financial well-being.

**The Secretary** – Is responsible for administrative matters under the direction of the master. He keeps the minutes, and handles the day-to-day affairs of the lodge. His seat is on the left of the Worshipful Master in the east. The jewels of his office are the crossed quills and symbolize his role as recorder and communicator.

Appointed officers include:

**The Chaplain** – Acts as the spiritual guide and mentor of the lodge. He gives appropriate prayers as directed and addresses candidates during their perambulations. He sits at the immediate left of the Worshipful Master. The jewel of his office is the scroll of Hebrew law and symbolizes our respect for God.

**The Senior Deacon** – His duty is to act as an administrative assistant and messenger to the master. He attends to certain alarms at the door of the preparation room and accommodates visitors. He is seated at the lower right of the master. He has an important ceremonial duty. The jewel of his office is the sun and symbolizes his role as messenger and aide to the master.

**The Junior Deacon** – His duty is to act as an administrative assistant and messenger to the senior warden. He attends to alarms at the door of the lodge room and has certain other ceremonial duties. He is seated at the lower right of the senior warden in the west. The jewel of his office is the moon and symbolizes his role as messenger and aide to the senior warden.

**The Marshal** – Is the ceremonial director, or “master of ceremonies,” for the lodge. He leads and organizes all processions, escorts and announces Grand Lodge officers, and examines candidates for initiation to determine their motives and intentions for joining Freemasonry. He is seated at the lower left directly opposite the senior deacon. The jewels of his office are the crossed batons and symbolize his role as master of ceremonies for the lodge.

**The Senior Steward** – In days past, the steward, or Stuart, was responsible for the feeding of the brothers and the care of the kitchen and its food and wine stores. Today, the stewards are responsible to the junior warden for preparing and escorting candidates about the lodge room and otherwise assisting him in providing for the physical welfare of the brothers. He sits directly in front

of and to the right of the junior warden in the south. The jewel of his office is the cornucopia and symbolizes plenty.

**The Junior Steward** – Has duties identical to those of the senior steward and acts as his assistant. He sits directly in front of and to the left of the junior warden in the south. The jewel of his office is also the cornucopia and symbolizes plenty.

**The Tiler** – Is the outer guard of a Masonic Temple or lodge room proper. No official, or “tiled,” meeting may be held unless and until the junior deacon reports to the master that the room is secure and that the tiler is properly at his station without the lodge door, where he will remain until the lodge is formally closed. The jewel of his office is the unsheathed sword and symbolizes his duty as guardian of the lodge.

**The Organist** – Is the principal musician of the lodge responsible for providing appropriate ceremonial and ritual music suitable to the occasion. The jewel of his office is the lyre and symbolizes the muse of music. Officers of a Masonic lodge serve in their respective offices as a privilege and not as a right. It is intended that all Masons work toward and eventually attain positions of responsibility after having demonstrated their good faith, ability to make a serious time commitment, and sincere desire to properly perform the necessary duties of the office elected or appointed to. The election of the master of any lodge is always of great importance and only those brethren who are well-versed in Masonic teachings, have the demonstrated ability and resourcefulness to lead, and whose personal character can serve as an exemplar to be emulated by all the lodge membership should be considered for this high honor and responsibility.

### **MASONIC LANDMARKS**

In ancient times, man marked the boundaries of his fields by means of stones or cairns. If these markers, or “landmarks,” were removed, men could no longer identify the proper and lawful boundaries of their property. Hence landmarks are “those peculiar marks or customs by which we are able to designate our inheritance.” In the case of Freemasonry, they are called the “landmarks of the order or craft”: the obligations, signs, tokens, and words of Masonic ritual. Other landmarks include the entire ceremonies of initiation, passing and raising, and the ornaments, furniture, and jewels of a lodge or their characteristic symbols.