



AN INTRODUCTION TO FREEMASONRY

Freemasonry Defined

What is the definition of Freemasonry?

In old England, it was defined as "a system of morality, veiled in allegory (or a story) and illustrated by symbols." Masonry is a course of moral instruction which uses both allegories and symbols to teach its lessons. For instance, our symbols for the Entered Apprentice Degree are the 24-inch gauge and the common gavel.

Today, Freemasonry is defined as "an organized society of men symbolically applying the principles of operative Masonry and architecture to the science and art of character building". This means applying Masonic principles will make you a better person.

The Purpose of Freemasonry

What is the purpose of Masonry?

The basic purpose is to make "better men out of good men." There is an emphasis placed on the individual man by strengthening his character, improving his moral and spiritual outlook, and broadening his mental horizons.

Masonry tries to educate its members about:

- The principles of personal responsibility and righteousness
- Understanding of and feeling for Freemasonry's character
- How to put these lessons into practice in their daily life


This is how we try to build a better world - by building better men to work in their own communities. Freemasonry believes in universal peace made possible by teaching its doctrine through the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God.

Origins of Freemasonry

How did Freemasonry originate?

Masonic scholars are not sure at what point in time our Craft was born. Every Mason knows it goes far beyond written record, and we believe it was not always called Freemasonry.

Some of the ancient mysteries of Egypt, Greece and the Orient influenced the ceremonies Masons use today. These ceremonies were designed to test men, to allow only those who were worthy to be



admitted. Our ceremonies are somewhat the same, less physical in nature, and more spiritual in form.

What caused the transition from "Operative" to "Speculative" Masonry?

Operative masonry can be traced back to the Middle Ages and beyond. Operative masons back then formed groups with structures similar to ours today. They had officers and stations just like ours. Other men were admitted only after they had served a number of years of apprenticeship. This is the source of the first degree, the Entered Apprentice.

What is the difference between "Operative" and "Speculative" Masonry?

Operative refers to the time in our history when masons actually did the physical labor of building. They were the best at their craft, and they kept secret their methods of building. Speculative refers to the period of time when men were accepted into the Craft without being physical builders, but rather were spiritual builders.

Origin of Grand Lodge

What is the Grand Lodge?

Modern speculative Freemasonry, as we know it today, owes its structure to the Grand Lodge. The first Grand Lodge under our present system of speculative Masonry was organized in London in 1717 and is known as the United Grand Lodge of England.

With the exception of a few lodges, every regular Masonic lodge today was granted a charter or warrant from a Grand Lodge. Every Grand Lodge has a certain jurisdiction or area over which to preside. In the United States, the boundary of each state is that area governed by a separate Grand Lodge.

What do the titles of Grand Lodges - A.F. & A.M. and F. & A.M. - mean?

Titles of Grand Lodges in the United States vary. Some are called A.F. & A.M., which means Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. The other most commonly used title is F. & A.M., or Free and Accepted Masons.

The reason for this difference is that in England when Grand Lodges first started, there was a rivalry between two factions of Masons. One faction adopted the title "Ancient" and the other did not. This carried over to the United States where both titles are still in existence.

Two other titles exist in America. Masons in South Carolina call themselves A.F.M. - Ancient Free Masons. Those in the District of Columbia call themselves F.A.A.M. - Free and Accepted Masons. But no matter what the title, all lodges work toward the same end.



What does the title of Free and Accepted mean?

How did the words "free" and "accepted" originate? The ancient craftsmen were very skilled, and their craft was considered to be indispensable to the welfare of both church and state. For this reason, they were not placed under the same restrictions of other workers - they were "free" to do their work, travel and live their lives in a manner which befitted their importance.

In Medieval England, this freedom of movement was almost unheard. Most workers were under bond to the owners of the land on which they worked. We believe this freedom for the operative mason may date back as far as the year 946 in York.

The word "accepted" also goes back to the time of the operative mason. During the latter years of the Middle ages, there were few educated men outside the monasteries of the church. Naturally, men wanted to become Freemasons to get the advantages the Craft had to offer. These men did not necessarily want to build buildings, they wanted to belong to the organization.

These were "accepted" Masons rather than operative masons. This practice probably originated when some of the people for whom craftsmen were working asked to be admitted and the practice grew with time. This was a big boost to Masonry, because the secret techniques of building trades were becoming more widely known, the requirements of architecture were changing, and our operative membership was declining. By becoming "speculative," we grew rapidly.

As time went on, there became more and more of the accepted members than there were operative members. Sometime in the late seventeenth century, we believe the accepted masons outnumbered the operative masons, and we became a speculative organization rather than operative one.

Is Freemasonry a Secret Society?

The answer is no. A secret society is one which conceals its membership, has secret meeting places, and of which the public has little or no knowledge of its organization or its principles.

This does not fit our organization at all. We are not a secret society, but we are a society with secrets. Our secrets, maintained through a sense of tradition, are very few in number and deal mostly with the obligations and modes of recognition. These requirements have been handed down by word of mouth for centuries.

Our purposes, ideals and principles may be learned by anyone who inquires. There are numerous books on these subjects which are available to the public. We place public notices in the newspapers about our meetings, our members are often prominent citizens in the community, and our meeting places or temples are clearly marked as such.



Is Freemasonry a Religion?

Again, no. We do ask that you state that you believe in a Supreme Being. We do not require that you belong to a church, although many Masons are very active in their churches. Members have the right to belong to any church they want, and Freemasonry does not infringe on that right. However, members should not attempt to substitute the teachings of Freemasonry or membership in a lodge for their church. Masonry seeks only to unite men for the purpose of brotherhood - not religion.

Atheism or Communism and Masonry

Can an atheist become a Mason?

A candidate for Masonry must honestly profess a faith in a higher being such as God when applying as a prerequisite for admission. An avowed atheist would not profess this belief and thus would not be admitted.

Can a Communist become a Mason?

Since Communism also denies the very existence of a higher being, a practicing Communist could not become a Mason. However, we know there are Masons in Communist countries who meet secretly.

Proper and Improper Subjects for Discussion in Lodge

Are there subjects that cannot be discussed in Lodge?

Generally, religion and politics should not be discussed in lodge, and there are very good reasons not to discuss these topics. When we meet in a lodge, we are all on a common level and are not subject to the classes and distinctions of the outside world. Each brother is entitled to his own beliefs and may follow his own convictions.

Our objective is to unite men and not to divide them. These subjects create honest differences of opinions which might well cause friction between brethren.

Can there be arguments in the Lodge?

There will also be subjects concerning the lodge's business that should be discussed. These discussions should be kept within the bounds of propriety, and everyone should be showing a tolerance for the opinion of the other.

Every Master wants harmony in his lodge, and once a matter has been put to vote in his lodge and a decision made, the decision should be accepted by all members, regardless of how they voted.



GENERAL QUESTIONS

Are Masons encouraged to be active in their community?

We try to teach every Mason to be a good citizen and to perform his civic duties. We do not try to keep anyone from expressing his opinion or from serving his city, county, state or nation in an honorable manner. However, anyone who serves in political office should not act politically as a Freemason, or in the name of Freemasonry, in exercising his rights - such as showing affiliation with any lodge in his campaign advertising.

What are the qualifications of a Petitioner in the United States?

First, he must be a man. Second, he must believe in a Supreme Being. Third, in Illinois, he must be 18 years of age. Finally, he must be able to read and write English.

Why is it called the Blue Lodge?

We are not sure where the name Blue Lodge originated. There are three reasons that could explain why this term originated.

It could be because blue is generally regarded to be the color of truth and fidelity, and these are the basic teachings of the Craft.

Blue also is the color used to characterize friendship, as in a true-blue friend.

Finally, blue has been used to trim and decorate Masonic aprons, collars and clothing down through the ages, and this could be why we call it the Blue Lodge.

How can a candidate prepare himself for initiation?

To receive the greatest benefit from the initiation ceremonies, a candidate should first prepare his mind for its reception. He should not be apprehensive and should enter the lodge with the attitude which will enable him to appreciate the serious and solemn ceremonies through which he will pass. The candidate should pay strict attention to every part of the ceremony in order that he may gain as much understanding as possible of the teachings of Freemasonry.

The methods used in teaching are allegory and symbolism and will be new and unusual to the candidate. These methods have been used for almost three centuries and have not changed very much since they were originated. Finally, he should understand that every Mason in the lodge room is his friend and soon to be his brother.



Is there any horseplay or hazing during the ceremonies?

There is no place for horseplay or hazing during Masonic ceremonies, and the candidate can be assured there will be none. The rituals are serious and solemn and are to teach spiritual lessons with great dignity.

Anything which is told the candidate in a joking manner or otherwise, serves only to desecrate the honorable purposes of Freemasonry. The candidate should have no apprehension about entering a lodge. He is always entering a society of friends and brothers, where he will be treated with dignity and decorum at all times.

What do Freemasons support?

Freemasonry is not a fraternity or association of men banded together for social, political or economic advantages. Our foundation is built on a philosophy of friendship and brotherly love, but we also make many worthwhile contributions to our society.

As Masons, we in Illinois contribute toward the Masonic Home in Sullivan, the Masonic Children's Home in La Grange, the Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children in Chicago, and many other charities throughout the State.

There have been many famous men who were Masons. Some of the better known Masons include: George Washington, Paul Revere, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John Glenn, Gerald Ford, John Wayne, Gene Autry, Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle, Winston Churchill, Marquis de Lafayette, John Hancock, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, James Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James Garfield, William McKinley, William Howard Taft, Warren G. Harding, Davey Crockett, Jim Bowie, Sam Houston, Lewis and Clark, Christopher "Kit" Carson, Charles Lindbergh, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, John Elway, Henry Ford, Walter P. Chrysler, Colonel Harland Sanders, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Oscar Wilde, Mark Twain, Brad Paisley.