

WHAT IS ...

Freemasonry is the oldest and largest world wide fraternity dedicated to the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of a Supreme Being. Although Freemasonry is not a religion, it urges its members, however, to be faithful and devoted to their own religious beliefs.

Masons, when asked such a question, will give different answers, in their own words, based on their own perceptions, experience and education. The most common answer is "a peculiar system of morality, based on allegory and illustrated with symbols".

The lessons Freemasonry teaches through its ceremonies are to do with moral values (governing relations between people) and its acknowledgement, without in any way crossing the boundaries of religion.

All Freemasons are taught that any duties which they have as a Freemason come only after their duties to family, work, and faith. In no circumstances should their membership interfere with these aspects of their lives. Freemasons feel that these lessons apply just as much today as they did when it took its modern form at the turn of the 17th century.

Another way of explaining, "What Freemasonry is", is to detail what it is not.

FREEMASONRY AND RELIGION:

Freemasonry **is not** a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion, and it does not allow religion to be discussed at its meetings.

Its essential qualification opens it to men of many religions, and it expects them to continue to follow their own faith. All Freemasons are required to profess and continue in a belief in a Supreme Being.

It has no theology, nor sacraments, and it does not claim to lead to or offers no answers on matters of salvation, as these are the preserve of churches. All Freemasons are encouraged to find answers to such questions through their own faith, religion and church. Members are urged to respect the teaching of their own faith and not to allow Freemasonry to infringe, in any way, on the member's duty to their mosque, church, synagogue, etc. For this reason Lodges in Christian countries do not meet on Sundays. Lodges within Jewish communities do not meet on Saturdays and Lodges with a predominately Muslim membership will respect the Holy Days of that faith.

FREEMASONRY AND POLITICS:

Freemasonry **is not** a political organization, and it will not comment on, nor offer, opinions as to competing forms of Government. Freemasonry is non-political, and the discussion of politics at Masonic meetings is forbidden.

The reason for religion and the discussion of politics at Masonic meetings are expressly forbidden stem from Freemasonry's aims to encourage its members to discover what people from all different backgrounds have in common.

SECRECY:

Freemasonry **is not** in any way a secret society despite what many people claim. Freemasonry's so-called secrets are solely used as a ceremonial way of demonstrating that one is a Freemason when in Lodge meetings; that is, its traditional modes of recognition. Like many other societies, it regards some of its internal affairs as private matters for its members.

Other reasons why Freemasonry cannot be called a secret society are that Freemasons do not promise to keep their membership secret. All members are free to acknowledge their membership, where and when Freemasons meet are matters of public record (you can look up Masonic centers in telephone directories) and our Constitutions, rules, principles and our aims are readily available to the public.

It is ironic that because Freemasons used to be reticent about their membership, as they were and still are taught never to use it to advance their own interests, critics have taken this the wrong way and think that there is something secretive going on. Nothing could be further from the truth.

FREEMASONRY AND SOCIETY:

Freemasonry demands from its members a respect for the law of the country in which a man works and lives. Its principles **do not** in any way conflict with its members' duties as citizens, but should strengthen them in fulfilling their private and public responsibilities. The use by a Freemason of his membership to promote his own or anyone else's business, professional or personal interests is condemned, and is contrary to the conditions on which he sought admission to Freemasonry. His duty as a citizen must always prevail over any obligation to other Freemasons, and any attempt to shield a Freemason who has acted dishonorably or unlawfully is contrary to this prime duty.

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WHAT IT DOES

As a fraternity, Freemasonry provides an opportunity for men to meet and enjoy friendly companionship. In the spirit of helpfulness and brotherly love and guided by strict moral principles it encourages goodwill toward all mankind. Freemasonry is of a personal nature in its

private ceremonies. Its ritual dramatizes a philosophy of life based on morality. It promotes self-improvement. The tools of operative masons are used to symbolize and teach the basic principles of brotherly love, charity, and truth, which Masons are encouraged to practice in their daily lives. Charity is a tangible way in which Masons help those whose circumstances in life fairly warrant it.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Our traditions can be traced directly to the associations of operative masons. They were men of outstanding character and high ideals, who built the cathedrals, abbeys, and castles of the Middle Ages.

With the decline of cathedral building in the 17th Century, many guilds of stonemasons, called "Operative" masons, started to accept into their membership those who were not members of the masons' craft and called them "Speculative" or "Accepted" masons.

Our traditions can be indirectly traced to the Knights Templar, but cannot be proven.

It was in these groups, called lodges, comprised mainly of "Accepted" masons that Freemasonry, as we know it today, had its beginning.

In 1717, four such lodges, which had been meeting regularly in London, united to form the first Grand Lodge of England under the direction of a Grand Master. From that first Grand Lodge, Freemasonry has spread throughout the world. Today, some 150 Grand Lodges have a total membership of approximately four million Masons.

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ORGANIZATION

The organization of Freemasonry is based on a system of Grand Lodges, each sovereign within its own territory. There is no central authority governing all Grand Lodges. However, to be acknowledged by others, acceptable traditions, standards and practices must be maintained. It is under the leadership of a Grand Master. He presides over the masons who belong to the lodges under its jurisdiction. Each of those lodges is under the direction of a Master.

The basic 'unit' of Freemasonry is the Lodge. This was the basic unit of stonemasons, references to which are found in Scottish records as early as 1491.

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CEREMONIES

Masonic ceremonies are secular morality plays, which are learned by heart by lodge's members for the benefit of the person who is becoming a Freemason or who wishes to explore Freemasonry further. Each ceremony has a message for the candidate.

All Freemasons experience the three basic ceremonies unless they drop out from Freemasonry very early on. These three ceremonies (or degrees as we call them) look at the relations between people, man's natural equality and his dependence on others, the importance of education and the rewards of labor, fidelity to a promise, contemplation of inevitable death, and one's duty to others.

The origins of the ceremonies originated, as explain before, from stonemasons who taught new members morality without infringing on matters that were the concern of the church. In educating their members they performed ritual 'plays' based on legends of the origins of the craft of stone masonry. These plays were common during the medieval period as the majority of people were illiterate and a dramatic representation was a popular teaching method. It is not surprising to learn that the 'props' used in these plays were the working tools of the stonemasons, something with which they were intimately familiar and to which they ascribed certain meanings. This form of teaching is no longer common but perhaps the Passion Plays at Oberammergau (Germany) are the nearest, albeit religious, equivalent today.

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THE THREE GREAT PRINCIPLES

For many years Freemasons have followed three great principles:

- **Brotherly Love** -- Every true Freemason will show tolerance and respect for the opinions of others and behave with kindness and understanding to his fellow creatures.
- **Relief** -- Freemasons are taught to practice charity, and to care, not only for their own, but also for the community as a whole, both by charitable giving, and by voluntary efforts and works as individuals.
- **Truth** -- Freemasons strive for truth, requiring high moral standards and aiming to achieve them in their own lives.

Freemasons believe that these principles represent a way of achieving higher standards in life.

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CHARITY

From its earliest days, Freemasonry has been concerned with the care of orphans, the sick, and the aged. This work continues today. In addition, large sums are given to national and local charities.

Today in North America, the Masonic Fraternity continues this tradition by giving almost \$1.5 million each day to causes that range from operating children's hospitals, providing treatment for childhood language disorders, treating eye diseases, funding medical research, contributing to local community service, and providing care to Masons and their families at Masonic Homes.

The following is a list of [charitable contributions](#) done by Masonic Organizations

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QUALIFICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

The essential qualification for admission, and continuing membership, is a belief in the Supreme Being. Membership is open to men of any race or religion who can fulfill this essential qualification and are of good repute.

Membership is for men, 18 years of age or older, who meet the qualifications and standards of character and reputation, who are of good moral character, and who believe in the existence of a supreme being.

One of Freemasonry's customs is not to solicit members. However, anyone should feel free to approach any Mason to seek further information about the Craft.

A man who wants to join a lodge must be recommended by members of that lodge. He must understand that his character will be investigated. After approval by the members of that lodge, he will be accepted as an applicant for membership in Freemasonry.

The doors of Freemasonry are open to men who seek harmony with their fellow man, feel the need for self-improvement and wish to participate in making this world a better place to live.

Any man who becomes a Mason is taught a pattern for living - reverence, morality, kindness, honesty, dependability and compassion. He must be prepared to honor his country, uphold its laws and respect those in authority. He must be prepared to maintain honorable relations with others and be willing to share in Masonic activities.

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CONCLUSION

A Freemason is encouraged to do his duty first to God (by whatever name he is known) through his faith and religious practice; and then, without detriment to his family and those dependent on him, to his neighbor through charity and service.

None of these ideas is exclusively Masonic, but all should be universally acceptable. Freemasons are expected to follow them.

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