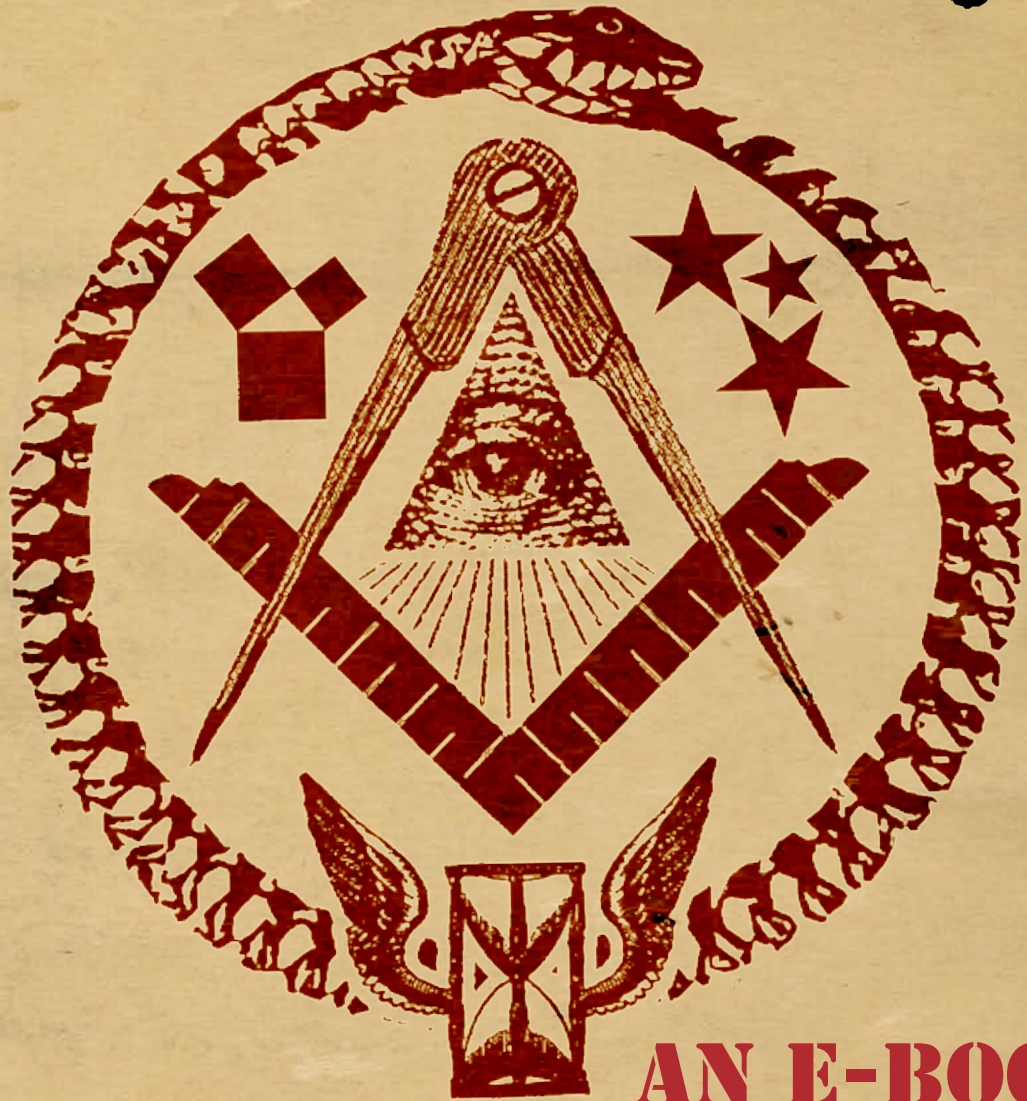


What is Freemasonry?



**AN E-BOOK
ON THE ANCIENT
AND HONORABLE
FRATERNITY**

Compiled by Greg Stewart
<http://www.freemasoninformation.com>

What is Freemasonry?

Why This E-book

Today many books exist on the subject of Freemasonry available at a variety of retail outlets and libraries. In those volumes are a variety of specific details and research that delve to great depths on the subject matter, often looking to find its historical or symbolic roots lost in the passage of time. These books are important, and a great resource to anyone who is looking to round and develop his or her interest in the gentle craft.

Missing from that collection however are works that speak of the fraternity in a more modern context. Absent is the present day going on, of how and why someone would want to become a Freemason. Often, the acronym of 2B1ask1 is the favored way to communicate the idea that to become a Freemason an interested party simply needs to ask another Freemason how. And, as the reach of the fraternity has diminished over the years, interested men are finding it increasingly more difficult to find someone even to ask.

How can you ask one to be one, when you don't know one?

In that question rests the reason for this e-book. For the fraternity to enter into the 21st century digital age, it needs to be approachable and available, and be so in a way that those interested can find them. Many web sites exist on-line, catering to a variety of reader types, from veteran members researching the latest paper topics to social discussion boards where the finite points of symbols are discussed. Some of these sites have some degree of information. None of them however focus specifically on the present tense idea of what Freemasonry is, today, right now.

So, to address that absence, this e-book was created to help address the question "What is Freemasonry?" In its present tense, and not in a manner that necessitates a long detail of the past.

I hope, in some small measure, this book answers some of the questions that someone new to the fraternity would ask. And, in answering them, I hope it compels them to learn more.

What is Freemasonry?

Introduction

Freemasonry has a long and active history in North America. Its origins can be traced into England, and the organization of the United Grand Lodge in 1717, which coalesced out of several existent lodges into one governing body. Its true and exact age, however, is lost in the sands of time.

Some have posited a connection to the Knights Templar, some to the Temple Builders of the Renaissance, and others to the Christian Mystics whose study of the Cabala was shunned by the Catholic, Anglican, and later Protestant churches that dominated Europe. Many historians, Masonic or otherwise, study Freemasonry and its roots in the past looking for its connections and links to the modern age.

Outside of that historical quest the regular practice of Freemasonry continues on everyday around us.

I've heard said, and repeated on many occasions, that the practice of Freemasonry is about the journey and not the end destination. That it is not about how we arrived at where we are today but rather a culmination of our history and philosophy that equates to the modern practice. To that end, Freemasonry is at its heart the study and practice to encompass all perspectives, so that in our time as Masons through the liberal arts and sciences, we can better serve and contribute to the society in which we exist.

This short volume is meant to be a tool to inform the reader on the fraternity of Freemasonry as a free resource on the web. It's value is in the hands of those unfamiliar with the fraternity or to those who simply asks the question "What is Freemasonry?" The answers to the questions within grew out of personal correspondences over the course of several weeks. They are by no means the only answer to and represent my own perspective as no one man can speak for the fraternity, these are only one mans perspective on them.

I encourage the reader to reach out and ask a Mason about Freemasonry.

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What is Freemasonry?

What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is a post-collegiate male fraternity dedicated to the spiritual development of the initiate into a broader sense of the self, how he relates to the Divine, and his contributory role in the world. It conveys this message through a series of progressive degrees initiating the candidate into a deeper level of understanding and membership. Ultimately, the raised Master Mason is given the allegorical tools to further work on and develop their Masonic intuition.

What is a Freemason?

A Freemason is a man who, in searching for life's ineffable questions, finds his way into the company of fellow seekers. Comprised of men from every nation, races, social and economic level, all hold similar ideals and beliefs. The uniting idea is a faith in the divine founded in the certitude in an afterlife. This "belief" is grounded by certain landmark tenants and virtues which ultimately lead in exploration of those invisible questions, leading ultimately to the betterment of all mankind.

Alchemical Transformation

The dual nature of alchemy in the transmutation of lead into gold and the material man into the spiritual being.



What is Freemasonry?

How old is Freemasonry?

The history of modern freemasonry is fairly understood, going back to roughly the 1700's. Beyond that point in time, information starts to become less available. There are some documents and notable figures prior to that point in time, such as the Regius/Halliwel poem, and notables like Elias Ashmole, but no certifiable records exist to demonstrate organized activity as we have today.

One of the virtues of Freemasonry is that its study and practice allow members to explore this topic, and at times travel outside the bounds of connections typically explored in mainstream history. Some Masonic historians have attempted to draw connections to the Knights Templar, the Rosicrucian's, Jewish Kabbalah traditions, Alchemy, Christian Mysticism, and to much further back to the precursor Essenes at the time of Jesus. These explorations have been considered in both the past and present Masonic scholarship to varying degrees of acceptance, but many points of contention remain.

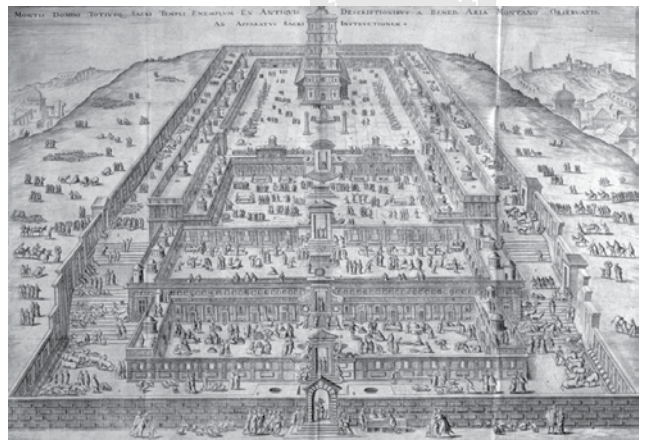
In present day, Freemasonry has little changed in the preceding 200 years since the founding of the United Grand lodge of England, and is modeled in a system that was likely little changed for the 150 years prior to that. It is believed that the working aspects of Freemasonry, the form and function of the lodge, comes from the stone working guilds of the European Renaissance and middle ages which, over time as that trade profession became less specialized, attracted new

What is Freemasonry?

How old is Freemasonry continued...

members of non practicing “speculative masons”.

From that shift, the present day fraternity moved from an “operative” guild to a “speculative” one in that the function of the lodge turned to the allegorical and symbolic meanings of the stone masons and less about the physical operation. These changes have evolved to shape the look and feel of modern lodge operation today.



King Solomon's Temple

Solomon's temple features prominently in the degrees of Freemasonry as it represents the ultimate construction of the house of God on earth.

What is Freemasonry?

Why are Freemason's so Secretive?

Many masons will not answer questions about the fraternity as they believe it is supposed to be a secret. In the end this becomes a loss for the fraternity as any time someone asks a question about Masonry, it's a great opportunity to talk openly about it. A common reaction to this idea is that Masonry is a "Society with Secrets", rather than a "Secret Society", but this is equally confusing. There are aspects to Freemasonry that are kept and taught to only those who go through the initiations and ceremonies so as to keep them in a proper perspective and contextual meaning. These aspects are not secrets but instead knowledge that is best communicated in a specific and concise manner. Many of the secrets have been published and written about, in many instances by Freemasons themselves, but the foundations of the teachings can be found throughout the spectrum of faiths and philosophical teachings of the past and present. It is in the process of their teaching that it could be best suggested where they are truly *secret*.

AUDE, VIDE, TACE

The motto at the bottom in latin is 'AUDE, VIDE, TACE. In English, LISTEN, OBSERVE, BE SILENT. Current arms of the United Grand Lodge of England.



What is Freemasonry?

Is Freemasonry a patriotic body?

Yes and no. The aims of Freemasonry are not specifically to embolden specific patriotism. It does, however, promote a strong affinity towards, and a passionate adherence to the nation in which the Freemason resides. It encourages more than a passive interest in the development of civil society and our roles as citizens in it. The patriotism that is displayed is the result of that interest in the well-being of society itself. The fraternity does strongly encourage the adherence to and following of the principles and laws of the country in which the member resides.



Washington as a Mason.

In Fredricksburg, at the age of 20, Washington joined the Freemasons, a fraternal organization that became a lifelong influence..

What is Freemasonry?

Why does Freemasonry not admit women?

The fraternity has, with an unwritten rule, remained a principally all male fraternity. At times, women have been admitted, but only in very rare occurrences. Specifically, the fraternity prohibits Masonic Congress between lodges of mixed or feminine gender.

There are bodies comprised of mixed gender, and singular gender that have varying degrees of recognition to one another. Through most of the world, however, the predominate body of Freemasonry is masculine which is decided collectively by governing bodies of Grand Lodges who have come to a mutual accord of recognition between one another as a masculine only body. Within in this collective, there is a stipulation that “Regular Freemasonry” is a masculine only body.



Women and Freemasonry

This early cabinet card depicts a woman dressed in Masonic regalia and holding her working tools. There are many bodies that confer the Masonic Degrees on women..

What is Freemasonry?

Why does Freemasonry not admit women continued?

By most it is suggested that this is the only way in which Freemasonry is organized, which is based on ancient practice, held sacred by the present predominant collective of Grand Lodges. This does not mean that Masonry is something women cannot understand, nor does it mean that women should be excluded from it. Rather, from a modern perspective, the exclusion of women is a vestige from a bygone era that has not yet been fully addressed in the present day, and like other issues from past generations this one will undoubtedly be addressed at some point in the future. Today, the exclusion is predicated on issues such as distractions in a predominant male environment, the need for unfettered brotherhood, and the belief in purism of ritual practice. The concentration of masculine masonry does afford the opportunity to encourage mentorship and spirituality between men and friendship. Ultimately, women Freemasons do exist with their own unique ritual practice and philosophies that are similar to the “regular” practice.

What is Freemasonry?

Why does Freemasonry say it is a ritual practice?

The use of the word ritual is described as the regular practice of the same series of ceremonies at each meeting. Often there is a connotation of something sinister or counter to popular practice by the use of the term ritual. To the contrary, it is instead meant to imply that the degree rituals are an established or prescribed practice to convey the knowledge and symbolism of the Fraternity in a repetition to impart their teachings.

What this means is that the same ritual ceremony is practiced with each candidate to induct him into the fraternity so that each man undergoes the same experience creating a unifying shared experience. That practice imparts the three principal tenets of the fraternity which are Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

Worshipful Master in the East
It is the duty of Masonry to assist in elevating the moral and intellectual level of society; in coining knowledge, bringing ideas into circulation...



What is Freemasonry?

Why is “Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth” so important to Freemasonry?

These three virtues are the foundations upon which Freemasonry is built. Brotherly Love as directed towards all mankind and especially to other Masons. Relief, in that every Mason is obligated to relieve the suffering of any Master Mason they encounter who is in dire need, and if in their power to do so, to the best of their ability, Also to act charitably towards society, giving of themselves to better the common good. And Truth, which is represented by the Divine in its multiplicity and diversity, as understood by all men. These three ideas represent the core upon which Freemasonry focuses in its ultimate distillation, in that Freemasonry does not hold one faith above another, rather seeing faith itself as the common denominator between all of faiths.

Three Virtues of Freemasonry

The principal tenets of Freemasonry are Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. It is necessary not to overlook the word “principal”, for it signifies that, while our fraternity lays the greatest emphasis on these three teachings, yet there are others which must not be overlooked.

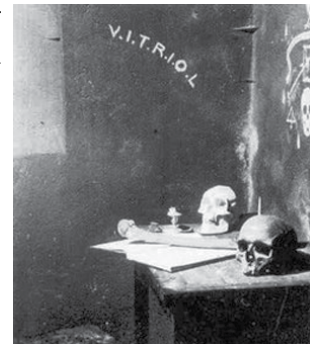
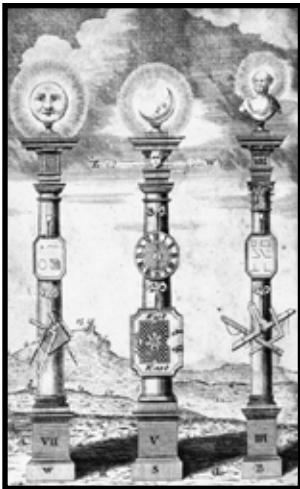


What is Freemasonry?

Why does Freemasonry use such odd symbols?

Freemasonry is a system of symbol and allegory. By using such symbols, it conveys specific meanings or lessons that each recipient can apply to his personal life and spiritual development.

The skull and bones, or specifically the skull (or death's head) is actually a symbol to remind us of mortality, as it is the ultimate equalizer of men of all rank, as none can avoid its inevitability. This is more a means to remind us that no matter our station in life, rich or poor, we are all subject to the same fate, and that our goal should be to make this world better for everyone. All Masons should always strive for our noble endeavor of spreading brotherly love, relief, and truth. The hourglass similarly reminds us of the swift passage of time, so as not to delay. The temple of Solomon has many meanings within Masonry; most significantly it represents the Temple built to hold the laws of God to man in the Judaic tradition. Though its use implied a religious connotation, its application is universal and serves as an allegory to a deeper meaning.



V.I.T.R.I.O.L.

In the Chamber of Reflections, in which the candidate is required to meditate for some time prior to his introduction in the Lodges in some of the Masonic Jurisdictions and that, the word represents the initials of the words in the Latin sentence *Visita Interiora Terra Rectificando Inventies Occultum Lapidem* - Visit the interior of the earth and rectifying, you will find the hidden stone.

What is Freemasonry?

Is Masonry Practical?

The question of practicality is entirely a self-answered question. Only if something is applied can it be practical so it is only a question that one involved can truly answer. It is a self-achieving process whereby the individual receives from it that which it is put into it.

Lessons that Masonry Teaches are:

1. Fraternity
2. Responsibility
3. Charity
4. Temperance
5. Virtue
6. Fortitude
7. Duty
8. Morality
9. Service
10. Community

Working Tools of Freemasonry
FORCE, unregulated or ill-regulated, is not only wasted in the void, like that of gunpowder burned in the open air, and steam unconfined by science;



What is Freemasonry?

Does Freemasonry promote drinking alcohol?

Temperance is a virtue promoted within Freemasonry. When, why, or who made that its social mandate is lost to the sand of time. Masonry does not frown on the consumption of alcohol, but many lodges are essentially dry. It is an odd paradox that a Fraternity founded in taverns of old is dry today but for now it is predominantly a temperate society. But, like all men, Masons still meet socially for drinks and imbibe together and at certain special occasions serve beverages for lodge functions. Most likely the prohibition of alcohol is a past social stigma playing out rather than a symbolic one. Also, lodges in Europe and elsewhere do not as strict on this topic as North American ones are.



Masonic Temperance

The Freemason who properly appreciates the secrets which he has solemnly promised never to reveal, will not, by yielding to the unrestrained call of appetite, permit reason and judgment to lose their seats and subject himself

What is Freemasonry?

Why do so many Masonic Lodge buildings look old?

The issue of the older Masonic buildings is a paradox from the 1950's when Freemasonry was in a boom era of incredible growth. At its height, Freemasonry had more than 4 million members and consequently lots of member money. With its growth of membership so did its infrastructure grow. One of the consequences of having these expensive buildings that were built or purchased in the 1950's and 1960's is that they eventually needed to be updated to modern building codes which became very expensive which coincided with a decline in membership. The consequence of this is that the buildings became less and less available for public and commercial use as they fell out of code and too expensive to update. This, with the decline in membership, led to fewer and fewer funds to refurbish them. Today, there is an abundant inventory of lodges, with a decreasing volume of membership. There are many lodges that have not fallen into disrepair and are beautiful temples of the fraternity.



Knight Templar Parade
A late 19th century Masonic parade of Knight Templars Masons forming a cross.

What is Freemasonry?

How does one become a Mason?

What are the first steps to petitioning?

If you do not already know a member of a lodge, an interested party needs to reach out to get to know one. If interested, you should explore your families past for connections, or your friends affiliations for those who may be a mason but not expressing it openly. Many members do not wear rings, pins or other regalia, so talking about your interest is a great way to connect with someone who may be a member.

The process begins first by getting to know the lodge you wish to join. This is really the first step in becoming a member, and starts with introducing yourself to a lodge at a dinner and getting to know the membership before the lodge opens.

2B1ASK1

QUALIFICATIONS:

Every applicant must advocate his belief in the existence of a Supreme Being.

The mission of Freemasonry is to promote a way of life that binds like minded men into a worldwide Brotherhood that transcends all religious, ethnic, cultural, social and educational differences; by teaching the great principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth: and, by the outward expres-

What is Freemasonry?

Becoming a Mason...

sion of these, through its fellowship, its compassion and its concern, to find ways in which each may serve his God, his family, his country, his neighbors and himself.”

This list is true for “most” states” and as such there may be some variations.

Keep in mind, Masons do not solicit for members, the decision to become a Mason is your own.

If you are seeking Membership YOU MUST ASK a Mason or a Masonic Lodge for an application.

You must be a man at least 21 (18 in some jurisdictions) years of age.

You must be of good moral character.

You must have a personal belief in a Supreme Being (the definition of a Supreme Being is up to you)

You must be a Resident of your state for 12 months (in most cases).

You must decide to become a Mason of “your own free will and accord”

You will need to express your personal interest in joining the Fraternity.

What is Freemasonry?

Becoming a Mason...

You must be loyal to your country.

You must be dedicated to providing for your family

You must have a sincere determination to conduct yourself in a manner that will earn the respect and trust of others and possess a desire to help others through community service and universal benevolence.

You must be willing to sign a Petition, stating your age, occupation and place of residence.

There are NO religious, political or racial restrictions for membership other than the aforementioned belief in a Supreme Being, as any discussion of religion or politics is strictly forbidden in a Masonic Lodge.

Admission is decided by ballot. To be accepted, the ballot must be unanimous.

To petition a lodge, the first step is to find one close to you, which you can do by selecting the Grand Lodge in your state and following their contact instruction. Once you have selected a lodge (or several) reach out and make contact. This is particularly important if you do not know a member of that lodge. Reach out and contact the lodge secretary who would be happy to speak to you about upcoming activities and/or open houses.

What is Freemasonry?

How do I find a suitable lodge?

In most major cities there may be several lodges near you. The local White Pages or Yellow Pages will have a listing of those in your community.

If there are several lodges near you (relatively speaking) the best thing to do is contact all of the ones sufficiently close to you, and set up a time to go down and meet with them. Lodges in California often meet on the first Thursday of the month and serve a dinner prior to the regular meeting, and in other places, lodges do something similar. This would probably be the best time to go in and meet the membership, even if informally. The way to go about this would be to contact the lodges' secretaries (via email or phone) and let them know you are interested and would like to come in and meet them and check their schedule for the best time. Additionally, check the state Grand Lodge Website for a complete listing of lodges in your state to find a local lodge. Also, you can find a national map of lodges at [Freemason Information](#) to find a lodge nearby.

The Knife and Fork Degree

The Knife is an instrument made use of by operative Masons for the purpose of keeping the wild animals at bay, in the event of an attack. But we work in speculative Masonry only, so, we are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of slicing our Steaks, and Vegetables prior to ingesting them.



What is Freemasonry?

Is every lodge different?

Lodges do have individual personalities and should be evaluated as such. The dynamic, however, can change so what may seem one way may be something else another time, but you can often get a general feel for the lodge on a visit. The best things to look for are a vibrant membership with diverse age groups, and members.

What are Masonic Lodge Hours?

Most should have their hours posted for visitors on the outside of the building for when someone will be there.

Also, check their web site.



Masonic Festive Board

The Festive Board is as important a part of any Masonic meeting as is the work done in the Temple. It affords the Brethren the opportunity to enjoy the social side of Freemasonry as well as the more formal ritual side.

What is Freemasonry?

What are the requirements of becoming a Mason?

There are some self-study requirements to learn certain aspects of the fraternity, and then a degree of expectation that you will further your knowledge about the Freemasonry, which will eventually become second nature. To join, it is expected that the individual be of good reputation, have a good moral disposition, and a personal desire to become a Freemason.

How long does it take to become a Freemason?

It can take from six months to eighteen, depending on your interest, ability, and time. It could theoretically be faster or longer, depending on how one applies himself.

The Hour Glass and Scythe
“The Hour-Glass is an emblem of human life; behold! how swiftly the sands run, and how rapidly our lives are drawing to a close. “The Scythe is an emblem of time, which cuts the brittle thread of life and launches us into eternity.



What is Freemasonry?

How much does Freemasonry cost?

Costs are separated into two categories: joining fees and annual dues. The cost of dues can vary, but are typically not much more than one hundred dollars for an annual membership. Joining fees, or initiation fees, can be several hundred, and vary lodge to lodge, but after that, fees are fairly inexpensive.

When compared to other annual costs, the fee is very low, when compared to the annual costs of a family YMCA membership of \$840 annually (\$70 per month), or an annual Club Store membership of \$600 (\$50 per month).

As with any organized body, the dues go to the operation and management of the lodge to which they are paid, as it forms the basis of a fraternal home to the membership.

The Great Seal of the United States
Designing the Great Seal involved three committees, six years, and several of America's most gifted founders who represented diverse experiences and points-of-views. But only four men actually contributed elements to the final design. And they were not Freemasons.



What is Freemasonry?

Does membership offer family activities?

Yes, frequently there are dinners or other functions that invite family and friends to attend, and share in the festivities of the lodge and fraternity. Specific lodge meetings are open only to Master Masons, as are some key events in the year. Most lodges encourage and welcome spouses to the monthly meeting dinner, as this enhances the overall experience.

Family Groups Include:

DeMolay

Rainbow Girls

Job's Daughters

and

Order of Eastern Star

(husband & wife)

The Steps of Freemasonry

Masonry is composed of several layers of membership. At its base are the three degrees of craft or "Blue Lodge" Freemasonry. The fraternity looks to these three degrees as being the highest attainable, as all of the lessons of the fraternity can be found within them.



What is Freemasonry?

Are lodges diverse?

The diversity of each lodge varies. This variance exists from state to state, city to city, even lodge to lodge. Undoubtedly, the fraternity was dominated by the social mores of the eras it has evolved through, some of which, unfortunately, has misconstrued it as a prejudicial organization. Many inroads have been made to eradicate that sentiment, as the fraternity is a reflection of society. In some places lodges are made up of a singular group, some are a blend of many. Each lodge is unique to its community composition. The unique individuality of Freemasonry in each state varies as does each lodge. Some places are very progressive, some are not so. The Fraternity of Freemasonry itself does not foster or promote any race, creed, political, religious, or color divide. Nowhere in its tenets or lessons does it espouse any sort of segregation or inequality between men. In fact, it professes the exact opposite, seeing everyman as equal.



The All Seeing Eye of Providence

Imagery of an all-seeing eye can be traced back to Egyptian mythology and the Eye of Horus. It also appears in Buddhism, where Buddha is also regularly referred to as the "Eye of the World" throughout Buddhist scriptures

What is Freemasonry?

What is the lodge experience like?

The month-to-month experience varies from mason to mason. Depending on how active they choose to be will vary the degree to which they are engaged. As the old adage goes each member gets from it, out of what they put into it.

So, the more active you are, the broader the experience will be. Activities vary, as there is a wide range of things to do. It is not like a church service or board of directors meeting, where those in attendance sit passively, to the contrary those in attendance are actively encouraged to participate.

A typical lodge month can have as few as one meeting per month or more than five or six.

The Masonic Temple
Many Masonic Temples host several lodges and several groups under one roof making a variety of groups and activities available to those interested.



What is Freemasonry?

Are meetings mandatory?

No. None of the meetings are mandatory. Once a candidate has been raised to the third degree, participation is completely voluntary and at the individual's will and pleasure. Furthermore, a Mason is not obligated to go only to his lodge once all three degrees have been obtained and a certain degree of proficiency has been achieved. Once full membership is achieved, the Mason can go to any lodge or Masonic function.

There are certain protocols when visiting distant lodges, which will be explained to you when you learn the degree work.

What is expected/hoped for new members?

Ideally, once you go through the degrees it is hoped that the new member will desire to attend the regular meetings and contribute to the organization as their time permits.

The Holy Saints John.

The Saint's, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, appear to Freemasons in several places in our catechisms. Their proximity and use in our rituals have been questioned for many years as to their use and placement. Looked at together, saint John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist serve to represent the balance in Masonry between zeal for the fraternity and learned equilibrium.



What is Freemasonry?

What does “making good men better” mean?

Making good men better is a distillation of the purpose of the Masonic experience. The ritual and ceremony serve to convey these tenets and teach certain moral lessons to elevate the individual's response to a position higher than themselves. The lessons are things you have likely already heard or have learned in church or moral society. What makes them unique to Freemasonry is that they are presented in a specific format and context.



First Degree Masonic Tracing Board

The First Degree Tracing boards were created as visual aids created to illustrate the meanings and principals of Freemasonry as taught within the degrees. The symbolism is very symbolic, but the items within are adoptive to the modern mason.

What is Freemasonry?

How does it make you better?

The process to make individuals better is achieved by teaching and applying the Masonic lessons to one's life and existence. These lessons are not necessarily anything one has not ever learned before, as they are things you may have forgotten, or don't do regularly for a variety of reasons.

The whole of Freemasonry is based on allegory and symbol, and it is in the study of this, that one starts to discover what its meanings and correlations are. The parts of Freemasonry lead to a whole and it is what that sum equates to that makes it truly applicable. In the end, it could make bad men better, but like participation, philosophically you get what you put into it. Ultimately, the philosophy is about making good men better, but it is still up to the man to apply it.

Masonry in many ways is what the individual makes of it. You can have a large role, or a small one, it is incumbent on you and your interest and time. If the philosophy resonates well with an individual, then it will be a great experience in which you are inspired to learn from it.

In its simplest of personal reaction to it will cause the participant to reflect on something different than what they have experienced before. What it makes better is their dedication to family, duty to country, and an understanding of the divine and how to understand our relation to it.

What is Freemasonry?

Are there any subjects not discussed in a lodge?

The two cardinal topics not to talk about in lodge are religion and politics, as Freemasonry is concerned specifically with neither.

This is an odd paradox in that fundamentally it promotes the individual connection to the Divine, but it admonishes us to not promote one belief system over another. Other topics such as work, family, business or other interests are openly talked about and should be amongst brothers as it builds our fraternal bonds. There should be no safer place to discuss these things, our triumphs and the tragedy as it is always amongst brothers with whom you build these bonds. You can, if you have specific leanings, find others of a like mind and engage in interesting discussions building friendships that will last lifetimes. Like any organization of people, you will find a wide variety of interests and ideas all within one lodge.

It does seem like there is a paradox there, but in reality, that is the harmonious balance. The reason for not allowing politics or religion to be discussed is the ideal. Do brothers discuss these things anyway? Absolutely. Should they? No. The practice of Freemasonry does promote and teach a sort of ecumenical philosophy of tolerance, which is the overarching idea. It does not imply one system of politics or religion is right or wrong. Examples of political or religious issues can be brought into discussion, but opinions on them are left out of the lodge.

What is Freemasonry?

Is there a racial divide in Freemasonry?

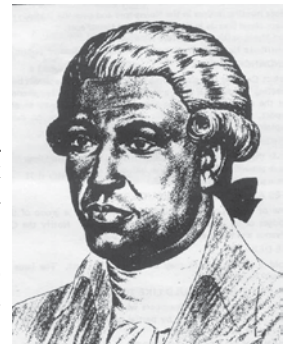
The race question is divisive, depending on where you look. Just as with people on the street, some wear their bigotry on their sleeve, and some do not. It is impossible to say that a particular individual or lodge segregates itself based on race. By its very nature, Freemasonry is a tolerant society, without any racial or religious divide. A man of any race should be able to walk into any lodge and petition for membership.

Again, however, each lodge does things uniquely their own way. Segregating lodges based on race is immoral and illegal and against the principals of Masonic conduct and ethos. Any division based on race is wrong.

Prince Hall

Prince Hall (c.1735 – December 4, 1807) is considered the founder of “Black Freemasonry” in the United States, known today as Prince Hall Freemasonry.

On March 6, 1775, Prince Hall and fourteen other free black men were initiated, passed and raised in Military Lodge No. 441, an integrated Lodge attached to the British Army and then stationed in Boston.



What is Freemasonry?

Are there other functions or clubs?



Yes, the Scottish Rite and the York Rite, the Shrine, as well as others. These clubs also have monthly meetings, some with several informal get-togethers.



What is Freemasonry?

What is Esoteric Masonry?

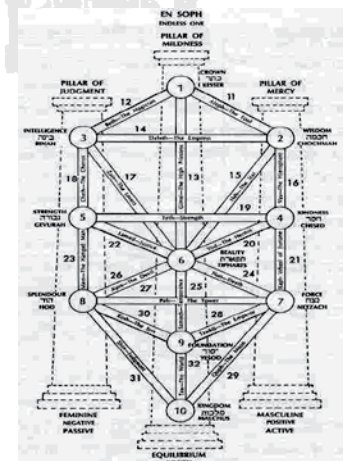
Esoteric Masonry is the personal exploration into some of the less mainstream areas of the fraternal society. Some of these aspects include personal development, spiritualism, mysticism, and so on. It can include aspects of its history not commonly looked at by mainstream historians or participants. Also, it investigates lines of religious thought that exist on the fringes of mainstream doctrine. Investigation does not mean they work to prove (or disprove) one aspect or another; to the contrary, the esoteric side of masonry seeks find additional sources of wisdom and understanding.

Interest in Esoteric masonry is starting to make a comeback. Not that its pursuits ever disappeared, but certainly aspects have shifted in focus. It looks at personal resonance with the symbols of Freemasonry and helps develop our own faith. It can be very rewarding and fulfilling.

This is not strictly what masonry is, but is one aspect of the Masonic experience.

The Tree of Life

Originally deriving from the Torah (especially Genesis) and the Vision of Ezekiel (the Chariot of God), a large body of thought is arranged through a schema based on the names of God, the Hebrew alphabet and the digits, and these themselves can be organized into a diagram called "The Tree of Life". The ten digits form the centres of Divine Manifestation, called "Sephiroth" (singular: "Sephirah"), which are connected by twenty-two paths corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.



What is Freemasonry?

My Father, Uncle, Grandfather, Great Grandfather, was a Freemason. How do I find out more about his Masonic history?

The best place to start would be at the Grand Lodge of the state in which he was a Mason. Some Grand Lodges keep records of past members and may be able to determine what lodge they were a part of and any notable achievements or awards they may have had with the lodge, or ancillary bodies, they belonged to. Other than the Grand Lodge, the next step would be the local lodge to which they may have belonged. They may have some of their individual information that they can research.

Additionally, if they were a Scottish Rite Mason, York Rite Mason, or Shriner, the national offices of these bodies of these groups may be able to supply some information or do some research into their history. No global list of all Masons exists in any searchable databases.



Knight Templar in Uniform
An antique image of a York Rite Knight Templar dressed in full regalia taken some time in the early 20th century.

What is Freemasonry?

Why is there a decrease in membership?

In the period from the 1960's to 2000's membership numbers have dropped as more and more activities compete for free time. Additionally, a generational gap in the 1960's and 1970's ensued with disenfranchisement to establishment activities seen as secretive and exclusive. That, coupled with an organization swollen to over 4 million members became introverted and less involved with the daily goings on of society, largely because of the public perception indicated above. This grew into a spiral of further decline as other Masonic bodies took on the public persona of the Fraternity. Today, masonry has a membership role of over 1.4 million members in the U.S. and remains the longest continually in existence fraternal organization.

Can you leave the organization once you become one?

Yes, however the knowledge gained will forever live on for the rest of the individual's life. Nothing beyond the fraternal bond of Brotherhood makes any requirement to remaining a Freemason.

The Symbols of Freemasonry
Once collected, the symbols of Freemasonry make an impressive array of allegorical and symbolic devices to impart the philosophies of the fraternity.



What is Freemasonry?

List of U.S. Grand Lodges

Alabama	Louisiana	Ohio
Alaska	Maine	Oklahoma
Arizona	Maryland	Oregon
Arkansas	Massachusetts	Pennsylvania
California	Michigan	Rhode Island
Colorado	Minnesota	So. Carolina
Connecticut	Mississippi	So. Dakota
Delaware	Missouri	Tennessee
Florida	Montana	Texas
Georgia	Nebraska	Utah
Hawaii	Nevada	Vermont
Idaho	New Hampshire	Virginia
Illinois	New Jersey	Washington
Indiana	New Mexico	Washington DC
Iowa	New York	W. Virginia
Kansas	No.Carolina	Wisconsin
Kentucky	No.Dakota	Wyoming

Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction

Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite Northern Jurisdiction

York Rite

Shrine International

Rainbow Girls

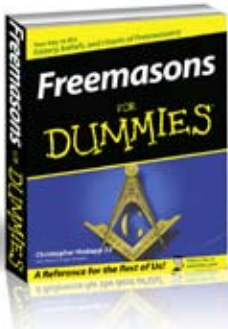
Job's Daughters

DeMolay International

Order of the Eastern Star

What is Freemasonry?

Major books on Freemasonry



Freemasons For Dummies by Christopher Hodapp

This balanced, eye-opening guide demystifies Freemasonry, explaining everything from its elaborate rituals and cryptic rites to the veiled symbols and their meanings. The book profiles famous Freemasons throughout history including many of America's Founding Fathers as well as prominent politicians and business leaders offers a balanced assessment of the many controversies and conspiracy theories that continue to swirl around Freemasonry. For anyone who wants an evenhanded overview of Freemasonry's past, present, and future, this guide is the key.

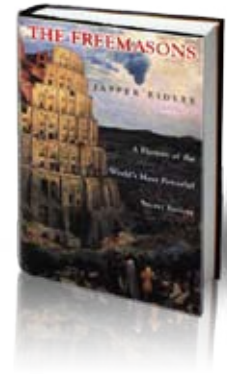
Paperback: 384 pages ISBN-13: 978-0764597961

Available on Amazon

The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society by Jasper Ridley

Many books about the Freemasons are hysterical polemics based on ludicrous conspiracy theories. British historian Jasper Ridley offers a welcome antidote to these half-witted tomes with *The Freemasons*, a sober-minded account of a secret society that has survived for centuries. Most important, Ridley provides the one thing missing from many discussions of the masons: facts. For instance, after noting the "well-established legend in the United States that the Freemasons made the American Revolution," Ridley shows that "of the 55 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, only nine were certainly masons."

Paperback: 368 pages ISBN-13: 978-1559706544



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Freemasonry

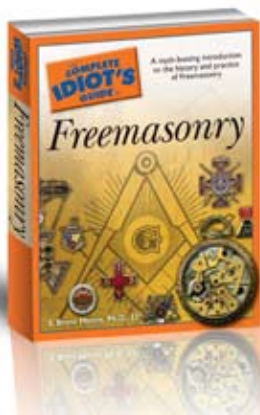
by S. Brent Morris

What is the truth about the Masons suggested in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*? Can Freemasonry really be dated back as far as Babylon? Did they really coordinate the Boston Tea Party and the American Revolution? What really goes on at a Mason lodge during an initiation? Here is the real story behind the secret society that now boasts nearly five million members (and has included such illustrious fellows as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin), as revealed by a Master Mason.

Paperback: 334 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1592574902

Available on Amazon



The Meaning of Masonry by W. L. Wilmschurst

This book discloses the real purpose of modern Masonry, and clearly states the true body of teaching and practice concerning the Esoteric meaning of Masonic Ritual. Written by a great mystic to promote a deeper understanding of the Fraternity.

Hardcover: 128 pages ISBN-13: 978-1595475275

Available on Amazon



What is Freemasonry?

Famous Freemasons



George Washington

(February 22, 1732– December 14, 1799) Washington was the commander of the Continental Army in the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) and served as the first President of the United States of America (1789–1797). For his central role in the formation of the United States, he is often referred to as the father of his country. Washington was made a Master Mason 1753 at age 20 at Fredericksburg Lodge, Virginia.



Benjamin Franklin

(January 17, 1706 – April 17, 1790) Franklin was an American printer whose first publication in the colonies was - Anderson's Constitutions of 1723 a Masonic book of conduct. Franklin was an inventor, writer, publisher, author, diplomat, philosopher, and scientist who contributed greatly to the founding of the United States. In his time as a Mason he held the position of Grand Master of Pennsylvania (a Masonic leadership role). Franklin was made a Master Mason at St. John's Lodge Philadelphia PA.



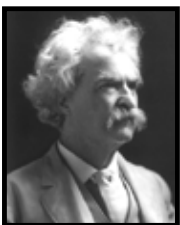
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(27 January 1756 – 5 December 1791) The Austrian composer was a prolific and influential composer of the Classical era. He composed over six hundred works, many acknowledged as pinnacles of symphonic, concertante, chamber, piano, operatic, and choral music. He is among the most enduringly popular of classical composers. Mozart was made a Mason in Lodge Zur Wohltatigkeit., Vienna, date unknown.



Franklin D. Roosevelt

(January 30, 1882 – April 12, 1945), often referred to by his initials FDR, was the 32nd President of the United States. He was a central figure of the 20th century during a time of worldwide economic crisis and world war. Elected to four terms in office, he served from 1933 to 1945 and is the only U.S. president to have served more than two terms. Roosevelt was made a Mason in Holland Lodge No. 8, New York City



Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens)

(November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910) better known by the pen name Mark Twain, was an American author and humorist. Twain is most noted for his novels Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, which has since been called the Great American Novel and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. He is extensively quoted. During his lifetime, Twain became a friend to presidents, artists, industrialists, and European royalty. Twain held immense public popularity because of his keen wit and incisive satire which earned him praise from both critics and peers. William Faulkner called Twain "the father of American literature".

What is Freemasonry?

Famous Freemasons



Harry Houdini

(March 24, 1874 – October 31, 1926, born Erik Weisz later spelled Ehrich Weiss) was a Hungarian American magician and escapologist, stunt performer, actor and film producer of Hungarian origin. He also was a famous skeptic who set out to expose frauds purporting to be supernatural phenomena. Houdini was made a Mason at St. Cecile Lodge No. 568, New York City.



Nat 'King' Cole

(March 17, 1919 – February 15, 1965), known professionally as Nat “King” Cole, was an American musician who first came to prominence as a leading jazz pianist. Although an accomplished pianist, he owes most of his popular musical fame to his soft baritone voice, which he used to perform in big band and jazz genres. He was the first black American to host a television variety show and has maintained worldwide popularity over 40 years past his death. Cole was made a Mason at Thomas Waller Lodge No. 49 PHA. Los Angeles.



Buzz Aldrin

(January 20, 1930 -) Born Edwin Eugene Aldrin, Jr. is an engineer, retired United States Air Force pilot and astronaut who was the Lunar Module pilot on Apollo 11, the first lunar landing. He was the second person to set foot on the Moon. Aldrin was made a Mason at Montclair Lodge No. 144 New Jersey



John Wayne

(May 26, 1907 – June 11, 1979) Born Marion Mitchell Morrison was better known by his stage name John Wayne, who was an American film actor, director and producer. He epitomized rugged masculinity and has become an enduring American icon. He is famous for his distinctive voice, walk and height. He was also known for his conservative political views and his support in the 1950's for anti-communist positions. Wayne was made a Mason at Marion McDaniel Lodge No. 56, Tucson, AZ.



Ernest Borgnine

(born January 24, 1917) Earnerst is an American actor who won an Academy Award for Best Actor for the motion picture Marty in 1955 . On television, he is known for playing the title character in the 1960's comedy series McHale's Navy. He received an Emmy nomination at age 92 for his work on the television series ER August 2009 at age 92 he earned the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Rhode Island International Film Festival. Borgnine was made a Mason at Abingdon Lodge No. 48, Abingdon, Virginia.

What is Freemasonry?

Quick symbolism guide.



The Lambskin or White Apron.

A common emblem of Freemasonry is the Lamb Skin Apron. The apron has many meanings but traditionally is representative of the fraternities link to its operative Mason past as the garment of workmen in the Quarries. Symbolically, it is said to represent the growth towards a pureness of spirit.



The Letter G

The use of the letter G has many meanings, including Geometry, which is said to be the first and noblest of sciences. It is in this formulation that the basis upon which the superstructure of Masonry is erected. By geometry, we may curiously trace nature through her various windings to her most concealed recesses. By extension, the letter G is said to denote the identification of deity, or God, as it is through His Geometric workings in nature that man may come to understand its meaning. Further, it is suggested that the letter G represents the Hebrew letter gimel and defined in the meaning of bringing man from his rude state of ignorance to the highest possible limits of human attainment.



Jacob's Ladder

Taken literally from Genesis 28 11-19 Jacob left Beersheba, and went toward Haran. He came to the place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!

What is Freemasonry?

Quick symbolism guide continued.

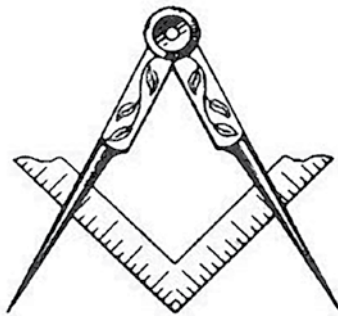
Symbolically the ladder represents the transition of spiritual states making use of the illustration in Genesis of the movement from a material world to a spiritual world. It is in this idea that Freemasonry derives an idea of spiritual transformation making use of this spiritual operation.



The Acacia tree

Acacia is a tree with a rich world history. Known to grow around the world, it is said to have been the material by which the first tabernacle was erected that housed the 10 Commandments within the Ark of the Covenant.

On a symbolic level, the species of tree is an evergreen variety which has particular relevance to our Masonic ceremony.



The Square and Compass

Quoting from Pike's *Morals and Dogma*: *The Square is a right angle, formed by two right lines. It is adapted only to a plane surface, and belongs only to geometry, earth-measurement, that trigonometry which deals only with planes, and with the earth, which the ancients supposed to be a plane. The Compass describes circles, and deals with spherical trigonometry, the science of the spheres and heavens. The former, therefore, is an emblem of what concerns the earth and the body; the latter of what concerns the heavens and the soul.*

The Square and Compass are the universal emblems of Freemasonry and the symbol by which they are recognized. Though Pike's definition from *Morals and Dogma* defines them in both a mechanical and spiritual sense, they emblematically represent the working tools of speculative Freemasonry and the construction of the metaphorical temple.

What is Freemasonry?

More info on the web



Freemason Information

<http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com>



Home of the Masonic Central Pod Cast



Phoenix Masonry

<http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/>

An organization exhibiting Masonic documents, lectures, and objects in a historical context.



Masonic Info

<http://www.masonicinfo.com/>

Anti-Masonry Points of View



Grand Lodge of British Columbia-Yukon

<http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/info.html>

A website designed to answer just about any question you might have about Freemasonry.



Pietres Stone

<http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/>

The Masonic Magazine where Freemasons find educational material for Masonic lodge lectures and their daily advancement in Masonic knowledge after initiation.

What is Freemasonry?

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About Freemason Information

Freemason Information is dedicated to the presentation and communication of Masonic knowledge for all who are interested to seek it. Presented in an electronic format, the purpose of this book is to illuminate the foundations and branches of Freemasonry, and illuminate its principal tenants of *Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth*. But this book is more than a collection of questions and answers, its broader goal is to be a link between Masons and men everywhere.

All content is representative of the authors opinion and does not represent the opinion of any regular or irregular Masonic Lodge, Grand Lodge, Rite, College, or Body.

The Ordo Structor
Created as the mark of Freemason Information, the "Ordo-Structor" represents the ever renewing idea of Freemasonry as traveled through the time-immemorial mystery schools. The Gnostic idea of "As Above - So Below" is represented in the stars mirroring one another, with a 3rd star introduced to represent the 3 great lights of Freemasonry. The 47th Problem of Euclid stands as the path to finding our center, measuring our furthest reaches. Below is the reminder of the fleetingness of time, it being ever in motion away from us. And ultimately, all centered under the all seeing eye of the Great Architect, overseeing all..



