

SEEKING LIGHT

Preparation.

You have been elected to membership in the Masonic Fraternity. Congratulations! In your petition soliciting this honor you made several significant statements. You stated that:

- You were not biased by improper solicitations of friends.
- You were not influenced by mercenary motives.
- You were prompted by a desire for knowledge and a sincere wish to be of service to your fellow citizens.
- You would cheerfully conform to all the ancient established usages and customs of the Fraternity.

All of this would indicate that you realize the importance of becoming a Mason. You should approach Masonry with a receptive mind. As you progress through the three degrees, interpret for yourself, as far as possible, all that you hear and see. Everything you find difficult or obscure should be a challenge for you to search out its meaning and historical significance. Your decision to become a Freemason should not have been entered into hastily, inadvisedly or by persuasion.

When you enter a Masonic Temple, it should become for you a respected place. It should be a place where you love and serve your Brethren, honor a Supreme Being and learn the many lessons which Freemasonry seeks to teach.

Before you arrive at the Temple:

- Be assured that Masonic Degrees are serious proceedings. In a Masonic Lodge, there is not a word spoken or an action performed which will hurt your feelings or your dignity. There is no torture, physical or mental, to degrade you or Freemasonry. There is no "horseplay."
- Be clean in body. This is symbolic of purity of mind and heart.
- Be clear in mind. Come with your mental faculties free from anything which might impair your ability to accept and assimilate the solemn truths you are about to contemplate.
- Be pure in heart. Put away evil thoughts of every kind. If you have done anyone wrong, seek honestly to redress it. Set aside any prejudice against any other person.
- Be prayerful in spirit. Whether or not it is your daily habit to pray to a Supreme Being, pray on the eve of your initiation. Ask for His blessing upon what you are about to do, for wisdom that will help you to understand, and for strength of purpose that will make you steadfast.
- Be confident of your intentions. Be sure that it is still your sincere desire to proceed upon the quest for light and knowledge. It is vital that you know, before you cross the threshold, that there is no proper place in Freemasonry for the half-hearted or unstable.

Symbolism reaches a high degree of development in Freemasonry and is largely responsible for its universality. Men of different tongues often may find it difficult to reach a common understanding but symbols enable all men to comprehend without the necessity of any spoken

word. The use of symbolism is one of the most effective means by which Freemasonry endeavors to unite all men.

The symbolism of Freemasonry deals with the intellectual, moral, and spiritual values of life. There is a profound significance in every step of your progress. You will be amply rewarded, as many others have been, by an earnest study of these principles and for their faithful application in your everyday life.

What Is Freemasonry?

There have been a great number of definitions of Freemasonry. Perhaps one of the simplest and most direct is that employed by our English Brethren: "Freemasonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols." The idea of teaching through allegories and symbols, however, is not a new one. All great teachers have used this method.

The system of morality referred to as Freemasonry is that which every Mason is bound to profess and practice. If it includes principles with which you were more or less familiar before your entrance into Masonry, you will nevertheless find these presented in new ways and under forms different from those with which you were previously familiar. If you find in Masonic teachings nothing startlingly new, you must remember that, in some respects at least, there is "nothing new under the sun." The essence of morality is to be found in the utter simplicity (though not the ease) of its requirements.

The elementary principles of Freemasonry are exemplified in the three degrees of a Masonic Lodge. A Masonic Lodge is sometimes also called a Symbolic Lodge, or in colloquial speech, a Blue Lodge. Nearly every community in America has at least one Masonic Lodge. The same is true in many other parts of the world, notably the English-speaking countries. There are more than 3,000,000 Masons in the United States.

Each Lodge has its own officers, headed by the Worshipful Master, its own committees, and its own appropriate activities. Each Lodge, however, is subject to the jurisdiction of a Grand Lodge. Thus the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin exercises jurisdiction over every one of its Constituent Lodges in the state. There are 50 recognized Grand Lodges in the United States: one in each state (other than Hawaii which is under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of California) and one in the District of Columbia.

In becoming a member of a Wisconsin Lodge, you become subject not only to the general customs and usages of the Fraternity, but to the laws, rules, and regulations of the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, as well as to the by-laws of your particular Lodge. Masonry will never, however, require of you anything which might conflict with your duty to God, your country, your neighbor or yourself.

In your progress through the degrees of the Lodge, which may require some months, you will be "initiated" an Entered Apprentice, "passed" to the Degree of Fellowcraft, and "raised" to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

There is, of course, a ritual appropriate to each degree, the significance of which will become apparent as you proceed. Your primary duty is to approach each degree calmly and solemnly, with mind and spirit attentive to the lessons to be imparted. All the ceremonies are of a most serious character, and you need have no apprehensions whatever as to the manner of your reception into each degree.

One of the fundamental principles of our organization is the practice of "relief." A Mason ministers to the widows and the fatherless. Today, the practice of relief means charity. Freemasonry is a fraternal rather than a charitable organization, but Masons and Masonic Lodges participate in and support charitable activities. These include the Wisconsin Masonic Home at Dousman, the Masonic Medical Foundation of Wisconsin (which provided the Masonic Diagnostic and Treatment Center in Milwaukee), the Wisconsin Masonic Foundation (which has a Home Endowment Fund and which has a general fund from which scholarships are given to students throughout Wisconsin). In addition, numerous local community charities receive financial and volunteer support from the Masonic Lodges throughout the State.

Freemasonry's philosophy is in harmony with the church, the school, and all other worthy institutions. The teachings of the Fraternity transcend all denominational and sectional divisions. Freemasonry teaches and practices freedom of religion for each individual man. There is no religious test for membership, except that a man must profess a belief in a Supreme Being. There is no restriction with regard to the race, color or creed of an applicant.

Who Is Eligible For Membership In The Masonic Fraternity?

As you have been informed previously, not every man can fulfill the requirements of Masonic eligibility. The primary requisite is high moral character. One whose reputation in the community is questionable cannot expect to become a Mason* But there are additional requirements which the petitioner must have, such as the following:

- He must be at least nineteen years of age.
- He must be sound of mind and body, as determined by the Lodge.
- v • He must profess a belief in a Supreme Being.

You, like Masons in all ages before you, have come of your own free will and accord to knock at Masonry's door. Two Brethren have vouched for your character and the sincerity of your motives. In a real sense, therefore, they are your Masonic sponsors. You have resting upon you the great responsibility of seeing that they, and others who have accepted their assurances, will not be disappointed.

What Freemasonry Expects of You.

In asking Freemasonry to share with you its past, present, and future (and all of the privileges of its brotherhood), you must bear in mind that the relationship is a reciprocal one, and therefore certain things are expected of you.

Remember always:

- The calling of a Freemason is a high one, and your personal conduct should always reflect this.
- Loyalty to home, to country and to the Fraternity is expected of you at all times.
- Patriotism is a duty, and you should not approve disloyalty or rebellion.
- The Masonic institution stands for liberty, equality, and fraternity — not only for Masons, but for all mankind.

- Freedom of thought, speech and action is supported by Freemasons, so far as not incompatible with the rights of others.
 - Every Freemason is the enemy of ignorance, bigotry, oppression, superstition, and all mental and spiritual darkness.
 - A Mason champions the cause of the widow, the fatherless, the weak and the oppressed. He challenges the arbitrary assumption by anyone of the power to dictate actions, beliefs and destinies of any group or individual.
 - The time-honored virtues so cherished by our forefathers are still relevant. Humility, patience, charity and gentleness are among the hallmarks of purity and integrity of character.
- Brief History of Freemasonry.

In the book of human history, Freemasonry has a chapter of its own. A little of that story will enable you to better understand the three steps of initiation which lie before you.

In all ages and in all lands, men have formed societies, made use of ceremonies of initiation, employed symbols, emblems and means of recognition. When Freemasonry came into existence — nobody knows how many centuries ago — it inherited much from such societies. Along your path of initiation you will encounter ancient rites and symbols; and their antiquity makes them more important in our eyes.

The oldest existing written record of our Craft is a manuscript written by an unknown Brother in England, about 1390, nearly six centuries ago. The document, known as the Regius Poem, shows that even then Freemasonry was very old.

At the time this document was written all Freemasons were operatives; that is, they were workers engaged in constructing buildings. There were many kinds of Masons, but the evidence indicates that "Freemasons" were those builders of a superior type who designed, supervised, and erected the great cathedrals and other marvelous structures in the Gothic style of architecture.

Operative Freemasons designed the buildings; dressed the stone from the quarries and laid it in the walls; set up arches, pillars, columns, and buttresses; laid the floor and built the roof; carved out the decorations; made and fitted the stained-glass windows; and produced the sculptures. Their work was difficult, called for a high degree of skill and genius, and required much knowledge of mechanics and geometry as well as of stone-masonry. They were the great artists of the Middle Ages.

Training men for such work called for a long period of severe discipline. Boys, sound in body, keen in mind and of good reputation, at the ages of ten or twelve, were apprenticed to some Master Mason for a number of years, usually seven. This Master Mason was such a boy's tutor, his mentor and his guide, who taught him both the theories and the practices of the Craft. At the end of his apprenticeship, the youth was required to submit to exacting tests of his proficiency before being accepted into full membership in the Craft.

When a number of Freemasons worked together on a building over a period of years, they organized a Lodge which might meet in a temporary building or in one of the rooms of the uncompleted structure. Such a Lodge was governed by a Master assisted by Wardens. It had a Secretary to keep its books, a Treasurer to keep and to disperse its funds and a charity chest from which to dispense relief to the members, their widows and orphans in case of accident, sickness,

or distress. The Lodge held regular meetings, divided its membership into grades and admitted members by initiation. In short, it was in essence what a Masonic Lodge is today.

The beginner in the builders' art was called an Apprentice. After he had served as such a sufficient time to give evidence of his fitness, his name was entered in the Lodge's books, after which he was called an Entered Apprentice. At the end of his seven years of apprenticeship he was called into open Lodge, his conduct was reported and he was required to prove his skill by producing what was called a "Master's Piece." Prior to that time he had been on probation; but if he passed his test satisfactorily he was made a full member of the Craft. Then he had equal rights and privileges with others, a Fellow of the Craft — the word "Fellow" meaning full membership. In the sense that he had mastered the theories, practices, rules, secrets and tools of his trade, he was called a Master Mason.

Completing their work in one community, the Freemasons would move to another, setting up their Lodges wherever they met. Other types of masons were compelled by law to live and work in the same community year in and year out, and under local restrictions. A number of historians believe that because the skilled traveling Masons were free from such restrictions, they were called "Freemasons."

Such was the Fraternity in its operative period; and as such it flourished for generations. Then came a great change in its fortunes. Euclid's geometry was rediscovered and published, thereby giving to the public many of the Mason's trade secrets. The Reformation came and laws were changed. These and other factors brought about a decline in the Craft. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Freemasons became so few in number that only a small Lodge here and there clung" to a precarious existence.

To recruit their numbers, Freemasons adopted a new practice. They began to accept non-Operative members. In the old days only an Operative Mason in the literal sense could become a member; but during the two centuries of the transition period, gentlemen with no intention of becoming builders were received as "Accepted Masons." At first there were few of these, but as time passed their number increased. By the early part of the eighteenth century they were more numerous than the Operatives and more influential.

The Craft then took a step destined to revolutionize it and to set it on a new path. On St. John the Baptist's Day, June 24, 1717, four old Lodges of London and Westminster met in London and organized a Grand Lodge, and on the same day selected their first Grand Master, M.W. Anthony Sayer.

Within a few years of that date the Craft had completed the transformation of an Operative Body into a Speculative Fraternity (by "Speculative" is meant Masonry in a moral or symbolic sense) and reorganized the two old degrees into the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason. Under the authority of the new Grand Lodge, the old Masonic manuscripts were collected and collated, and the first book of Constitutions was produced. Lodges in many countries, including our own, were chartered to take care of the Fraternity's membership, which began to increase rapidly shortly after the organization of the Grand Lodge. This was the beginning of organized Speculative Freemasonry as we know it. In 1751 a second Grand Lodge was organized in England; prior to that Grand Lodges had been set up in Scotland, Ireland, and on the continent of Europe.

As a result of the War of Independence, one after another American Grand Lodge became sovereign and independent. The question arose at that time whether there should be one Grand

Lodge for the whole of the United States, but the wisdom of the Craft prevailed and the scheme was abandoned.

Speculative Freemasonry did not spring full-formed out of nothing in 1717, but came as a gradual development of Operative Masonry. Through an unbroken line we can trace our lineage back to those builders of the early Middle Ages. We are builders, too, except that we have transformed the builder's art into emblems of moral and spiritual laws. We have incorporated the builder's practices and secrets into the Royal Arch of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. We employ their rituals — mellowed, enriched and made more beautiful with the passing of time — in the entering, passing and raising of our candidates. All that was living and permanent in their Craft, we have preserved to use in behalf of good will, kindness, charity and brotherhood among men.

Such is our heritage"; and, as you enter into it, you will discover it inexhaustible in its interest, life-long in its appeal, a power in your life to enrich and to inspire.

Conclusion.

In your progress in Masonic knowledge there are many more things for you to learn. In addition, there will be much knowledge for you to acquire through your own efforts. You will have abundant opportunities to converse with well-informed Brethren, to read Masonic books and other publications and to reflect upon the truths derived from these sources.

Grand Lodge F. & A. Masons of Wisconsin