

On the Threshold Lessons



The Right Worshipful Grand Lodge
of
Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

You have been balloted for and approved to receive the three degrees of Freemasonry in _____ Lodge No. _____, F. & A.M.

We congratulate you on your acceptance and welcome you, as one about to enter our ranks as one earnestly seeking the truths our Fraternity has to offer. Millions of men have traveled this path before you. Nearly all have received considerable benefit from their efforts. However, experience has shown that many of these men had limited knowledge or understanding of what Freemasonry should mean and can do for them. For this reason, we are holding this session to convey certain thoughts and information with you, which we feel, will better prepare you for your future Masonic career.

The basic purpose of Freemasonry is to take a good man and make him better. By its teachings, Freemasonry seeks to impress upon the minds of its members the principles of personal responsibility and moral living and to give each an understanding of a feeling for charity. It endeavors to encourage each Mason to put these lessons into practice in his daily life.

Masonry is a voluntary association of men of every social class, of every race, creed and color, as well as, various political and widely divergent religious beliefs. Masons are bound together in one common purpose—that of gaining a better understanding of men and, fraternally, to love one another. In the framework of its teachings, each man may find a philosophy of life, which will fit his own need.

WHAT IS FREEMASONRY?

Freemasonry is a philosophy of life, serious in character, built on a system of moral living, expressing a belief in a Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul. It is not a religion or an alternative to a church or synagogue, but it is set in a religious character with moral content based upon only two truths: the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. It helps us to realize that there exists a nobler path of life than we experience in the non-Masonic world.

Although generally acknowledged as a way of life, in reality, Masonry is a way of thinking that makes men aware that there are more profound treasures in life than the materialistic things we momentarily cherish. Masonry strives to be an effective force for good in this world. It offers no inducement to prospective candidates other than the opportunity to render service to their fellow man in keeping with the concept of Brotherhood.

Masonry uses symbols to intrigue us and stimulate our curiosity. It recognizes no single interpretation but encourages thought and study on the part of each member. Masonry teaches love and kindness in the home; honesty and fairness in business or occupation; courtesy in social contacts; help for the weak and unfortunate; trust and confidence in good men; resistance to evil; forgiveness toward the penitent; love toward one another and above all reverence for the Supreme Being.

HISTORY

You may have heard or read that Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest organizations. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Freemasonry is its history. In general, its history may be divided into two distinct eras. The first refers to the era that came before recorded or written history. The second refers to the era that runs back from the present day approximately 800 years and covers that period of which there is a definite record.

There are those who believe that Freemasonry originated with the very beginning of civilization, indeed with the start of intelligent thinking in man. However, there is no reasonable basis for such a belief. We do know that as time and experience proved certain truths, these truths were taken and carried to the thinking people of the various tribes. We know, also, that in several of the ancient civilizations there existed certain mystic societies. These mystic societies had a Lodge form, with Lodge officers, all similar in character, and teaching moral living. In essence, Freemasonry may be said to have co-existed with altruistic thought throughout the ages.

While we refer to ourselves as Freemasons, the accepted term for hundreds of years has been simply, Masons. Defined, Masons means builders. Starting some 800 years ago, and lasting nearly 400 years, was the era during which hundreds of great cathedrals were built in Western Europe. To accomplish what they did, the Masons of that era banded themselves together in workmen's guilds. Each of the guilds formed a Lodge, with regular Lodge officers and with three grades or classes of membership. The first, or lowest form of members, were apprentices or bearers of burden. The second form, were the craftsmen or fellows, the skilled workmen on the temples. The third or highest form, were the masters constituting those who were the overseers and superintendents on the building. Also, certain states of proficiency were required before a man could pass from one grade to the next. Furthermore, they all taught and required of their membership certain attributes of moral conduct. It was these guild Lodges that actually gave birth to modern Masonic Lodges and present day Freemasonry.

We refer to these guild Masons as “operative Masons” because they actually operated and performed as working Masons. However, during the sixteenth century there began a decline of cathedral building and with it a decline in the strength of the guild Lodges. Lodges began taking in other members, that is, men of high moral character but not necessarily of the builder’s trade. These non-operative members were referred to as “speculative Masons.” Eventually the guild Lodges came to be known as speculative Lodges and Masonry went through a transition from building cathedrals to building character in men.

From this point on, we do not have to speculate since we have written records from which this is taken. The first Grand Lodge of England (and in the world) was formed on June 24, 1717 in London by four Lodges which had been meeting in different taverns in the city. Its Constitution was compiled in 1723 by James Anderson, Grand Secretary. Eight years later the Grand Lodge of Ireland began work and was immediately recognized by the Grand Lodge of England. During the years 1749 and 1750, a number of English and some Irish Masons could neither affiliate with nor visit Lodges under the Grand Lodge of 1717, because they belonged to “the laboring class”. On July 17, 1751, these Masons formed a second Grand Lodge of England, known as the “Most Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons according to the old Constitution.” Its Masonic attitude was more progressive than the older Grand Lodge and more appealing to men interested in Freemasonry. The members of this organization, contending that their ritual alone preserved the ancient customs and usages of the Craft, styled themselves “Ancient York Masons” and dubbed the 1717 Grand Lodge “the Modern Grand Lodge,” because they felt that the older body had modernized its ritual, thus straying from the ancient usages and landmarks. The Constitution of the 1751 or “Ancient” Grand Lodge is the Ahiman Rezon compiled by Brother Lawrence Dermott, Grand Secretary and printed in 1756. Both English Grand Lodges, “Moderns” and “Ancients,” and their subordinate lodges continued their separate ways, as rivals and competitors, creating discussion and confusion until the union of the two Grand Lodges in England in 1813.

Just when Masonry came to Pennsylvania is difficult to determine. Benjamin Franklin printed in his Pennsylvania Gazette of December 8, 1730, “there are several Lodges of Free Masons erected in this Province...” The Constitutions of St. Johns Lodge, written by Thomas Carmick in 1727, attests to the fact that Masonry was established in Pennsylvania at an early date. This “Carmick Manuscript” is still in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. On June 5, 1730, the Duke of Norfolk, then the Grand Master of the (1717) Grand Lodge of England (Moderns), deputized Colonel Daniel Coxe of New Jersey, a member of the Lodge at the Devil Tavern within Temple Bar, London, to be “the

Provincial Grand Master of the Provinces of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.” His deputation took effect June 24, 1730 and extended to June 24, 1732. The deputation authorized Brother Coxe to appoint his officers for the two years he was the Grand Master. This explains a certain entry in “Liber B,” the only known record of a Philadelphia lodge of this period (now in the possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania). “Liber B” was the account book (from 1731 to 1738), of St. John’s Lodge, Philadelphia, and the entry lists William Allen as Grand Master on June 24, 1731. It seems plausible that Coxe appointed Allen as Grand Master, since his deputation gave him the power to do so. Allen was then elected Grand Master, as recorded in the Pennsylvania Gazette, June 19-26, 1732, the election taking place on St. John the Baptist’s Day, 1732. Allen then appointed William Pringle, Deputy Grand Master, and Thomas Boude and Benjamin Franklin, Wardens. Benjamin Franklin would become Grand Master in 1734, the same year he published Anderson’s Constitutions, the first Masonic book printed in America.

By September 5, 1749, some Brethren of this Grand Lodge, feeling that their self-constituted Grand Lodge lacked the authority it formerly possessed, made an appeal to the Masonic authorities in London for the appointment of a Provincial Grand Master of Pennsylvania. The Grand Master of England (Moderns), William Lord Baron of Rochdale in the County of Lancaster, appointed William Allen, who had been Grand Master in Pennsylvania in 1731.

At a meeting of the Grand Lodge, March 13, 1750, William Allen presented his deputation as Provincial Grand Master of Pennsylvania and assumed that office. The action taken on that date marks the end of the independent Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and its inception as a Provincial Grand Lodge affiliated with and deriving its authority from the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns). The Grand Lodge was composed of three Philadelphia Lodges: St. John’s, No. 2, and No. 3.

On February 13, 1760, the Members of Lodge No. 1, (Ancients) in Philadelphia, balloted for a Provincial Grand Master. William Ball, a wealthy landowner in the Province was elected. Following the election of Ball, an application was made by the Members of Lodge No. 1 to the Grand Lodge (Ancients) in London for a Provincial Grand Warrant for Pennsylvania. they were successful in their efforts and warrant bearing date of July 15, 1761, for the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania (Ancients) was issued. This venerable document is in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

Whereas the original Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania (Moderns) had been very conservative and relatively inactive, the new Grand Lodge of the Ancients was progressive and alert to all opportunities. During its entire career, the Modern Grand Lodge never had

more than four constituent lodges on its rolls, even in its most prosperous years. On the other hand, from the date of its establishment up to the beginning of the Revolutionary War, the Ancients' Grand Lodge granted warrants to sixteen lodges and during the Revolution warranted seven more. Indeed the war only intensified the rivalry and considerable friction between Ancients and Moderns in Pennsylvania, because the Modern lodges, to a great extent, were composed of conservatives who were inclined to be Loyalists, while a large majority of the Ancients espoused the cause of independence. By the end of the war the "Moderns" Grand Lodge and its three subordinate lodges had died out. With the death of Brother Franklin, April 17, 1790 at age 84, "Modern" Masonry in Pennsylvania, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist.

By 1813 when, in Jurisdictions throughout the world, Modern and Ancients began to be reconciled and united, no reconciliation was necessary in Pennsylvania. Therefore, the ritualistic changes and compromises resulting from the reconciliation of 1813 did not affect the ritual in this Commonwealth, and Pennsylvania Masons continued to work in the pure "Ancient" way, as "Ancient York Masons". This appellation was changed to "Free and Accepted Masons" about 1872. No written record of this change has been discovered, except that at about this time, the general return forms issued by Grand Lodge for the use of the subordinate lodges began to be printed with the "F. & A.M." designation. During the nineteenth century, Grand Lodge concentrated on building stability and uniformity among the lodges in Pennsylvania, and during the twentieth also concentrated on strengthening membership. In the twenty-first century, in addition, the lodges will be increasing their outreach into their communities and modernizing the way of Freemasonry through a "Renaissance."

Pennsylvania is the only Jurisdiction which titles its Grand Lodge Officers "Right Worshipful", instead of the usual "Most Worshipful." The members are universally called "Brother." As of January 2006, Pennsylvania Masons may enjoy plural membership.

PURPOSE

What is the purpose of Freemasonry? This is not a simple question that can be answered in a short span of time, because Masonry has many meanings to all of its members. Three principal tenets are: Brotherly Love, Charity and Truth. Through the practice of these tenets, we strive to make ourselves better husbands, better fathers and better men.

One of the fundamentals of Freemasonry is the practice of brotherly love. True brotherly love is more than the congenial bond of goodwill and understanding that exists

between close personal friends. To practice true brotherly love means to practice true and genuine tolerance, charity, truth and justice toward all human beings. The concept of love and toleration for all men does not mean approval or sanction of all that men say or do. Love and toleration represents a two-way road of mutual respect.

We must be willing to overlook or forget petty grievances or peculiarities. We must strive to see that the good things in our Brethren that will make us love them in a fraternal sense as a "Brother." We must cast aside our passions and prejudices; remember that, "by the exercise of Brotherly Love we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and low, rich and poor, and that we must aid, support and protect each other."

The most common interpretation of relief is some form of charity. To contribute to public charity is the responsibility of everyone, and as a citizen of the world, we are obligated to society to carry our fair share. Masonic charity has still another meaning. A person may be distressed in many ways other than financial. He may be lonely and a cheerful word may give him relief, or perhaps all he seeks is a pleasant smile. To sympathize with their misfortunes, to console them in their sorrows and to restore peace to their troubled minds: This is the grand aim we have in view.

In considering truth, we commonly think of truth as the opposite of falsehood. When a person's word is as good as his bond, he is thought to be truthful. To be good and true is the first lesson we are taught in Masonry. Without truth, there would be no foundation for trust and fellowship.

WHAT DOES MASONRY EXPECT FROM A MEMBER?

To be a true Mason, the Craft will make demands upon your conscience, by requiring you to live by and act consistently with your promise or obligation. If they are ignored you will not be able to perform your duties as a Mason, nor will you be able to claim any rights or privileges. You will not find the duties, rights or privileges of a Mason anywhere fully explained, clearly numbered, stated or cataloged. They are however, scattered here and there, some in the form of symbols, others of customs, others of laws. Some are clearly and explicitly stated, others merely implied. Your Masonic obligation is not inconsistent with civil or moral law, nor is it inconsistent with one's religious duties or the duties a man owes to his wife and family.

While it may be rather unpleasant to mention dues at this time, we know you are aware they exist. We must contribute to the financial aid of the Lodge in order for it to function. The fees are very nominal by today's standards. However, our dues or fees

become due no later than January first of each year and we are expected to keep them current. Otherwise, if you allow them to lapse into arrears you are unnecessarily subjecting yourself to suspension for non-payment of dues.

Visiting Lodges in which you do not hold membership is both a right and a privilege, though not a duty. It is a right in the sense that you may seek admittance into any regular Lodge. It is a privilege in the sense that your admission into that Lodge is contingent upon your being vouched for or examined and being permitted to enter by the Worshipful Master. If a Mason is not permitted to enter a Lodge at a certain time, the fact does not cancel his right to seek to visit at another time or seek to visit any other regular Lodge. A Mason's privileges are to be described in principle and in spirit rather than in detail. You have the right of a voice in your Lodge, as well as, to hold office. Membership however, gives no member the right to demand these things of either the Lodge or Grand Lodge. However, thanks to the right circumstances and good fortune, if they are offered, each member has the right and, depending on personal perception, a "duty" to accept. Always remember, you will not be thought less of should you choose to decline. All that Masonry is, all that it means, all that it has to give or offer, belongs to every individual Mason in the same way and to the same extent as to all other Masons. Freemasonry in its height, breadth, length, depth and richness belongs to you to use and enjoy

The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania

One Broad Street Philadelphia, PA 19107-2598



215-988-1900

e-mail: gsoffice@pagrandlodge.org

web: www.pagrandlodge.org