

# **THE MEANING OF FREEMASONRY**

An Address by

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Wherever the avocations of Freemasons call them, in whatsoever country they may reside, though they may be unacquainted with a single syllable of the language, yet there they find brethren brethren ever-ready to assist them in necessity, to extend to them the right hand of fellowship and cheer them with those numerous offices of neighbourly love and charity which are the chief characteristics of the sacred creed.

It must be a relief to every brother to come into the quiet sanctuary of the masonic Lodge, in this troublous period of our history, where, apart from the so-called cold war and the listening to disquieting reports, we can carry on the ancient ceremonies and renew friendships that exist among Freemasons throughout the entire universe.

Some, who have the interests of Freemasonry at heart, have thought it possible to say something on this subject that might tend to remove erroneous impressions, to increase union and harmony among Freemasons, and to persuade society at large that its well-being and progress are, to some extent, involved in the advancement and prosperity of Freemasonry. It would need no argument to show to the masonic Order itself, as to any other order or association, however unpretending and unimportant, that struggles for the possession of power, jealousies and heart burnings must necessarily be harmful, retard its growth and progress, repel those who, if it were at peace within itself, would seek to approach its doors, and at first diminish and ultimately destroy its capacity for usefulness. If this were all that I desired to establish, I might say so much and at once conclude. But we, Brethren, do not believe that this is all. We think that the highest interests of society and of the community in which we live, and perhaps, even interests wider and more general still those of the nation and of humanity at large are affected and injured, in that which affects and does harm to Freemasonry. We think that the world without our Temples is deeply interested in the continuance, or restoration, of peace and harmony within. Every Freemason who encourages or, by apathy, permits dissension within the walls that veil our mysteries from the world's eyes, is an enemy, not of Freemasonry only, but of that world's advancement and prosperity.

It is indeed true that the world at large, the statesmen and the men of business, are not in the habit of attaching much importance to the peaceful operations, the active efforts and silent influences of Freemasonry. Some even think evil of the order. To others its pretensions are the subject of mirth and food for ridicule, while probably the general impression is that it is a harmless and inoffensive association, rather laudable for its benevolent propensities, its charities, and in general, the assistance its members mutually lend each other, but one in which the world at large is in nowise interested mere pretence, its titles and dignities absurd, and its dissensions mere childish disputes for barren honours and an empty precedence, fit only to excite the pitying smiles of the grave and the sarcastic laughter of the ill-natured.

Is society really interested in the peace and progress of Freemasonry? Has the world a moral right to demand that harmony shall govern in our Temples? Is that a matter which at all concerns the community? How grave and important are the interests that, by our mad dissensions, we recklessly put at hazard? And by what means are peace and harmony to be restored and maintained? Such, Brethren, are the questions which it is demanded of us to consider. To do so, it is evidently necessary first to settle what Freemasonry is, what its objects are, and by what means and appliances it proposes to effect those objects.

The well-being of every nation, like that of every individual, is threefold — physical, moral and intellectual. Neither physically, nor morally, nor intellectually is a people ever stationary. Always it either advances or retrogrades; and, as when one climbs a hill of ice, to advance demands continual effort and exertion, while to slide downward one needs but to halt.

Freemasons who do not live up to the teachings of the Order prove to me only one thing that they are men; and that, like other men, they are weak with the frailties of human nature, and that, in the never-ceasing struggle with our passions and the circumstances that environ us all, it is often their lot to be discomfited. If the doctrines of Freemasonry are good, they of necessity have their effect, and are never taught in vain. For not in vain are the winged seeds of truth ever sown, and, if committed to the winds, the G.A.O.T.U. sees to it that they take root somewhere and grow.

To inquire what Freemasonry is, is not only to seek to know its history, its antecedents and its statistics, but more, and chiefly, to inquire what are its morals and its philosophy. This latter is the inquiry that I am hoping to endeavor to answer, but, as its importance to the world without depends upon the extension of the order, the number of its members and its permanency, I must first, and with that view alone, say a few words as to the former, if the Masonic Order were merely a thing of yesterday and were to pass away tomorrow, if it were local and confined to one country or to men of one faith, or if the number of its initiates were small and, therefore, its capacity for good or evil limited, it would be comparatively unimportant to inquire what were its morality and its philosophy.

We know from historical testimony that the Order existed in England and Scotland in the seventeenth century and was introduced into France in the year 1721. As early as 1787 it had extended into almost every state in Europe, the East Indies, West Indies and Turkey; and in Canada and the United States there were estimated to be eighty-five Lodges. In every Christian country on the globe our Temples were frequented; and in Turkey, India and Persia the Mohammedan bows before the altar of Freemasonry.

The greatest and some of the best men in every country have adorned our great order in both ancient and modern times; and have united zealously in its labours. Statesmen, soldiers, advocates, scholars, poets, artists, the merchant, the mechanic and the labourer have for many years met in our Lodges upon the level and parted on the square. Lafayette and Washington were Freemasons. In other countries Freemasonry counted its distinguished names, too numerous to mention; and, at the present day, in our own country its initiates

occupy the high places, hold the helm of the ship of state, sit in the departments of state, war, the interior and others, preside on the bench, and represent our countries the United States of America and Canada at foreign courts. In Europe Freemasons have founded public libraries, established free schools, given rewards for eminent acts of virtue and heroism, established homes for their poor and destitute, fed the hungry, clothed the naked; and always Freemasonry has been the friend of the oppressed and the unfortunate. With this mere glance at the history, the antecedents, the personnel and the statistics of Freemasonry I feel I must be content. It is sufficient to show that it is of some importance to the community, to the union and to the world, to know what are the morals and philosophy taught by this great, permanent and widely known Order.

What, then, is the morality of Freemasonry? Freemasonry says to its initiate: Be content. Compare not your condition with the few above you, but with the thousands with whom you would not be any means change your fortune or condition. A soldier must not think himself unprosperous if he be not successful as some of the generals of his day, nor should any man deem himself unfortunate that he has not the wealth of Rothschild. But rather, let the former rejoice that he is not lessened as were the many generals who went down, horses and men, before Napoleon; and let the latter rejoice that he is not the beggar who, in the bleak winter days, holds out his tattered hat for charity. There may be many who are richer and more fortunate, but it is certain that, compared to you, there are many thousands who are more miserable. But a Mason's contentedness must by no means be a mere contented selfishness; as he who, comfortable himself, is indifferent to the discomfort of others. In this world there always will be wrongs to forgive, sufferings to alleviate, necessities and destitution to relieve, sorrows asking for sympathy, and ample occasion for the exercise of active charity and benevolence. But he who sits unconcerned amidst it all, perhaps enjoying his own comforts and luxuries the more by contrasting them with the hunger, ragged misery and shivering wretchedness of his fellows, is not contented; he is only unfeeling and callous.

Freemasonry expects every brother to do something within and according to his means; if not alone, then by combination and association, for we never know the importance of the act we perform. The daughter of Pharaoh little thought what she was doing for the human race and, in fact, the vast unimaginable consequences that depended on her charitable act when she drew the little child of a Hebrew woman from among the rushes that grew along the bank of the Nile and determined to rear it as her own.

Brethren, Freemasonry inculcates upon the Master care and kindness to all his brethren and, in my opinion, it teaches to the employers of other men in mines, workshops, factories consideration and humanity for those who depend upon their labour for their bread, and to whom want of employment is starvation, and overwork is fever, consumption and perhaps death. While it teaches the employee to be honest, punctual and faithful, as well as respectful and obedient to all proper orders, it also teaches the employer that every person who desires work has a right to have work to do. Also, it teaches us all that those who, from sickness or feebleness, old age or infancy, are not able to work, as I see it, have a right to be fed, clothed, and sheltered from the inclement elements. He who ceases to operate his mine, workshop or

factory when it does not yield him what he considers sufficient profit, and so causes a sad situation to exist by dismissing his workmen, commits an awful sin against Freemasonry.

The Freemason should be devoted to the cause of toleration, liberality, education and enlightenment against error, ignorance and barbarism; and he should be opposed to fanaticism and persecution. Toleration holds that every other man has the same right to his opinion and faith that we have to ours. Liberality holds that, as no human being can say with certainty, in the clash and conflict of hostile faiths and creeds, what is truth, or that he is surely in possession thereof, so he should feel that it is quite possible that another, equally honest and sincere with himself, yet holding the contrary opinion, may also be in possession of truth, and that whatever one firmly and consciously believes, is true to him. There are the mortal enemies of that fanaticism which persecutes for opinion's sake; and instruction, education and enlightenment are the only certain means through which intolerance and fanaticism may be rendered powerless. No true Freemason scoffs at honest convictions and ardent zeal in the cause of truth and justice.

To diffuse useful information, to further intellectual refinement, to hasten the coming of the great day when the dawn of general knowledge shall chase away the lazy, lingering mists, even from the base of the great social pyramid, is its high calling in which the most splendid and consummate virtue may well press onward, eager to be a part. And it is to be hoped that the time will soon arrive, for which Freemasonry has so long laboured, when, as men will no longer suffer themselves to be led, blindfold in ignorance, so they will no more yield to the vile principle of judging and treating their fellow creatures, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, but according to the accidental and involuntary coincidence of their opinion.

One of the earliest lessons taught the masonic initiate is, that every Masonic Temple, itself a symbol of the universe, and of the soul of every upright man, is supported by three great columns: Wisdom, Strength and beauty, or if you so wish Harmony.

When the Freemason is advanced to a certain point, however, he learns that these three pillars of the old Temple are replaced with three others, the names of which are familiar to us all: Faith, Hope and Charity, which virtues every Freemason and every man and woman ought to possess. We must have faith in the G.A.O.T.U. and faith that He is good and wise and merciful, a father and not a tyrant; faith in human nature and confidence in our kind; faith in the honesty of men's purposes and intentions; faith in their capability for improvement and advancement, and the same faith in ourselves, in our power to do good and to exert good influence upon our fellows. We must have faith that if we are but earnest, honest and sincere, we can help destroy ignorance, error and wrong, and become immortal in our good influences living after we are gone. Finally, we must have that noble and modest confidence in ourselves which is the secret of all success and perhaps the parent of all great and noble actions.

We must have hope in the ultimate annihilation of evil in the universe, in the final triumph of Freemasonry, that shall make of all men one family and household, in the cessation of war and bloodshed, and in the advent of peace and liberty. Charity is taught us by faith and hope, for those who differ with us in opinion, for them and for their faith, and even for their errors; charity which relieves the necessities and distresses of men, and with open hand gives the suffering and destitute solace and comfort, and which forgives and utters merciful judgement upon the faults and shortcomings of others, believes them to be better than they seem, and teaches us to judge and do unto others as we should wish them, and think it right for them, to judge and do unto us.

To be truthful, to be hopeful, to be indulgent these, when all around us are selfishness, despondency, ill-opinion of human nature, and harsh and bitter judgement, are the true supports of every masonic Temple and the bases of every manly and heroic nature. These attributes are also the old pillars of the Temple under different names, for he only is wise who judges other charitably and deals with their errors mercifully; he only is strong who is hopeful, and there is not beauty of proportion or harmony like a firm faith in the G.A.O.T.U., our fellows and ourselves.

We are taught to be on our guard against the overwhelming desire to be possessed of vast worldly possessions, which so often stunts and dwarfs within us the true principle which it is the aim of Freemasonry to foster that of practising charity towards our brethren and extending to them the right hand of fellowship. So again I say we are instructed in the three grand principles on which our Order is founded: brotherly love, relief and truth. Brother love is the sacred principle which combines and cements our Fraternity in the practise of moral virtue and the pursuit of scientific attainment. Relief is the duty which every man owes to his fellow man in consideration of the common infirmities of human nature, and stronger is the claim of those to whom we are voluntarily and reciprocally pledged in the bond of brotherly love and affection, and, therefore, it unquestionably is the right of Freemasons to rely upon each other in the hour of need by procuring assistance, advice and protection according to their relative circumstances in life. Truth is the aspiration of every true Freemason who seeks to walk according to the light to make that sacred principle the guide of his words and actions, ever remembering that truth and wisdom are the same; and to him who makes truth the object of his search, that truth will assuredly prove the reward of his perseverance.

The new Freemason, one will recall, is enjoined to stand perfectly erect, with his feet in the form of a square, his body being thus emblematic of his mind, and his feet emblematic of the rectitude of his actions. Uprightness in conduct is therefore essential.

The true Freemason occupies himself with what is near at hand. Right there he finds enough to do. His Masonry is to live a true, honorable, upright, affectionate life from the motive of a good man. One finds evils enough near him and around him in trade, in social life, in neighbourhood abuses, in wrongs swarming everywhere all to be righted. Freemasonry, it has been well said, cannot, in our age, forsake the broad way of life. It must walk in the open street, appear in the crowded square, and teach men by its deeds, its life more eloquent than any lips to respect all forms of worship, to tolerate all political and religious

opinions, not to blame, and still less to condemn, the religion of others, not to seek to make converts, but to be content if they have the religion of Socrates, a veneration for the Creator, the religion of good works and grateful acknowledgment of God's blessings. The fraternize with all men, to assist all who are unfortunate and cheerfully to postpone their own interests to those of the Order, to make it a constant rule of their lives to think well, to speak well and to act well are the duties of all Freemasons.

It is the saddest of all sights upon this earth, that of a man, lazy and luxurious or hard and penurious, to whom want appeals in vain, and suffering cries in an unknown tongue. The man whose hasty anger hurries him into violence or crime is not half so unworthy to live. This is the faithless steward that embezzles what is given him in trust for the penniless and impoverished among his brethren. The true Freemason must be, and must have a right to be, content with himself; and he can be so, only when he lives, not for himself alone, but for others who need his assistance and have a claim upon his sympathy. Freemason, be good, be kind, be humane and charitable, love your fellows, console the afflicted, pardon those who have done you wrong. In short, do that which thou oughtest to do, let the result be what it will. These grand and mighty thoughts are bound up in the tenets of Freemasonry, and time alone will bring about that fruition on which the Craft is based.

The above thoughts cannot be entertained without feeling that a challenge to Masonic leadership and to that multitude of members of which Freemasonry is composed is placed very definitely before them. Leadership in the Order must be of the highest standard intellectually, morally and fraternally, and the Craft as a whole must follow in the same footsteps. It is of no profit to have a perfect foundation stone unless the rest of the intended structure is of perfect material also. One faulty stone can, in time, cause damage, as also one faulty member can disgrace the Craft. The challenge, therefore, is to make sure that the tenets of the Order are well planted and instilled in every individual who enters Freemasonry, and by applying this masonic principle without fear or favor, the Craft can look to the future for that happy fulfillment and adornment which its ancient founders designed and resolved to put into active use.

Freemasons must ever go forward as man goeth forth to his work.: Every enlightened brother knows that a seed of goodwill, planted in the mind of the apprentice at his entry into Freemasonry, will, in due time, produce good fruit, and will be one more in the cultivation of fellowship and goodwill, bringing, as it does, happiness to one and all. Clean living also can improve the conditions of that life in which man finds himself, and thus contribute to the betterment of all men. As Freemasons, we know the constant check on any impurity, uncleanness, squalor, or ruffraff tendencies, is not only beneficial to the Craft, but also to those with whom we mix in everyday life. Let us, as Freemasons, never forget that, although we may have passed the mature age, our perfection of life may not have matured. Furthermore, although one may have received the degree of a Master Mason, Freemasonry desires more; it requires the accomplishment of the mastery of one's self. There is only one way to crown one's efforts in Freemasonry. Every member of the Craft must plant the seeds of the brotherhood of man himself in himself; no one else can do it for him. By so doing he consecrates his life to Freemasonry, and, as the days go by and his Masonic life matures, the

beauty and splendor of that life will unfold to his view; and happy is the brother with that unity and harmony who profits by his Masonic attainments.

Much ill-founded, yet interesting conjecture, has ever surrounded the theories concerning the origin of Freemasonry, and no point of time in antiquity seems too remote for its genesis in the eyes of its more enthusiastic friends. Some trace it to the time of the erection of the Tower of Babel, others to that of Solomon's Temple. Others allege that it came into existence at the time of the crusades, but, in view of the almost ecumenical character attaching to the freedom of masonic religious conceptions, this seems improbable. The most unbiased historians, however, seem to concur in relating its origin to the purely utilitarian association of fellow craftsmen in a mason's guild or trade union. There is some warrant for this genealogy, because the art of Gothic architecture and its allegorical meaning were in no small degree the possession of the stone cutters who were employed by the abbots. The secret signs used by itinerant masons were devised for the purpose of mutual recognition of each other as experts in their art and not mere imposters. Moreover, the twelfth century affords something like proof of the existence of an association of Bauhütten (literally wooden huts of masons and stone cutters) in various parts of Germany, bound together by common craft laws and trade customs, and acknowledging a common ceremonial and set of symbolic forms. Its members as a whole possessed benevolence and charity rather than architectural or stone cutting skills.

The principles and tenets of our Craft are the highest principles of morality, charity, truth and justice, which we have received as a sacred legacy from our forefathers, teaching us by sign and symbol those duties we owe to others and to ourselves.

Finally, if all men had always obeyed with their heart the mild and gentle teachings of Freemasonry, the world would always have been a paradise, whereas intolerance and persecution make of it a state of misery. For this is the Masonic creed. Believe in God's infinite benevolence, wisdom and justice. Hope for the final triumph of good over evil, and for perfect harmony as the final result of all the concords and discords of this universe. Be charitable towards the unfaith, the errors, the follies and the faults of men, for all make up one great brotherhood.

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