

California Masonic Education

FREEMASONRY DEFINED:

What is the definition of Freemasonry? In old England, it was defined as “a system of morality, veiled in allegory (or a story) and illustrated by symbols.” It is a course of moral instruction which uses both allegories and symbols to teach its lessons. Our symbols of the Entered Apprentice Mason Degree are the 24" Gauge and the Common Gavel. The modern definition is “Freemasonry is an organized society of men, symbolically applying the principles of Operative Masonry and architecture to the science and art of character building.” In other words, we are trying to use the old methods to make good men better.

THE PURPOSE OF FREEMASONRY:

What is the purpose of Masonry? One of the most basic purposes is to make “Better men out of good man” We try to place emphasis on the individual man by strengthening his character; improving his moral and spiritual outlook; and broadening his mental horizons. We try to impress upon the minds of our members the principles of personal responsibility and morality; teaching each member to practice in his daily life the lessons taught through symbolic ceremonies in the lodge. One of the universal doctrines of Freemasonry is the belief in the “Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God”. The importance of this belief is established by each Mason as he practices the three principle tenets of Masonry: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

ORIGIN OF FREEMASONRY:

How did Freemasonry originate? We are not sure at what point in time our craft was born. We do know it goes far beyond written record and we believe it was not always called Freemasonry. Some of the ancient mysteries of Egypt, Greece and the Orient influenced our ceremonies that are used today. These ceremonies were designed to test men and to admit only those who were worthy. Our ceremonies are somewhat the same - only of a less physical nature, and in a more spiritual form.

THE TRANSITION FROM OPERATIVE TO SPECULATIVE MASONRY:

What is the difference between “Operative” and “Speculative” Masonry? Operative refers to the time in our history where Masons actually did the physical labor of building. They were the best at their craft, and they kept secret their methods of building. Speculative refers to the period of time when men were accepted into the Craft as “non-operative” members. They were not “physical builders”, but “builders of character” instead.

ORIGIN OF THE FIRST GRAND LODGE:

By the first part of the 18th century, there were many lodges in England. By the year 1716 A.D., most of the lodges had only nonoperative members. In December of 1716, on St. John's Day, a number of members met in London and had an informal meeting. As a result of this meeting, the members of the four Lodges met again in London on June 24, 1717 A.D. and formed the first Grand Lodge. This became one of the most important dates in Masonic history because it marked the start of modern Freemasonry as we know it today. With the exception of a few Lodges, every regular Masonic Lodge today was granted a charter or warrant from a Grand Lodge. Every Grand Lodge has a certain jurisdiction or an area to represent. In the United States, every State and the District of Columbia is governed by a Grand Lodge.

TITLES OF GRAND LODGES - F. & A. M. and A. F. & A. M.:

Titles of Grand Lodges in the United States also vary. Some are called A. F. & A. M. which means Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. The other most commonly used title is F. & A. M., or Free and Accepted Masons. The reason for this difference is that in England, when Grand Lodges first started, there was a rivalry between the Irish faction and the English faction - much like there is, yet, today. One faction adopted the Ancient title and the other did not. This carried over to the United States, and we still have both titles in existence. Two other titles exist in America. South Carolina Masons call themselves Ancient Free Masons or A. F. M., the only jurisdiction so designated in the United States. The District of Columbia Masons call themselves Free Ancient and Accepted Masons, or F. A. & A. M., but, no matter what the title, all Lodges work toward the same goals. In California, we call ourselves F. & A. M., - Free and Accepted Masons.

THE TITLE OF "FREE AND ACCEPTED":

How did the words "Free" and "Accepted" originate? The ancient craftsmen were very skilled, and their craft was considered to be indispensable to the welfare of both "Church" and "State". For this reason, they were not placed under the same restrictions as were other workers - they were "free" to do their work, travel and live their lives in a manner which befitted their importance. Back in old England, this type of behavior was rare. Most workers were under bond to the owners of the land on which they worked. We believe this freedom for the Operative Mason dates back to the year 946, in York, England. The word "Accepted" also goes back to the time of the Operative Mason. During the latter years of the Middle Ages, there were few educated men outside the monasteries of the world. Naturally, men wanted to become Freemasons to obtain the advantages the craft had to offer. These men did not, necessarily, want to build buildings; they wanted to belong to the organization. These were "Accepted" Masons, rather than "Operative" Masons. This practice, probably originated when some of the people, for whom craftsmen were working, asked to be admitted and, therefore, the practice grew with time. This was a big boost to Masonry, because the secrets of building trades were becoming more widely-known, architecture was changing and our membership was declining. By becoming "speculative" the Craft grew rapidly. As time went on, there became many more "accepted" members than there were operative members and eventually we became a speculative rather than an operative organization.

IS FREEMASONRY A SECRET SOCIETY?:

The answer is: “NO”. A secret society is one in which the membership is concealed; the meeting places are kept secret; and knowledge of its organization and principles is unknown to the public. We have a few secrets in Freemasonry - a part of our ritual, our modes of recognition and the business of the Lodge. Portions of our ritual have been handed down within Freemasonry for centuries and form a part of our traditions. However, our purposes, ideals and principles may be learned by anyone who inquires. There are numerous books on these subjects available to the public. All printed Masonic information, with the exception of our esoteric work, may be freely discussed in public. We wear lapel pins and Masonic jewelry, march in parades as Masons with our distinctive aprons, advertise the time and place of our meetings, and openly sponsor charities. We can hardly be called a secret society. Yes, we have some secrets, but no more so than most other fraternities or even families.

IS FREEMASONRY A RELIGION?:

Again, the answer is “NO”. Because of the nature of the teachings of Freemasonry, we do ask our candidates to acknowledge a belief and trust in God. Otherwise the ceremonies would be meaningless. But we do not require that you belong to a particular religion or a particular church. An atheist can not become a Mason because he can not express a belief in a Supreme Being.

Religion is defined as:

1. Belief in a divine or superhuman power or powers to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator and ruler of the universe.
2. Expression of this belief in conduct and ritual.
3. Any specific system of belief, worship conduct, etc., often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy.

Masonry, like all its teachings, is not set forth in written creeds. The Mason must come upon it for himself and put it in such form as will satisfy his own mind, leaving others to do likewise. This is Masonic tolerance, one of the prime principles of the Craft, and protected by the Old Charge which forbids all sectarian discussion in our assemblies. Our Order seeks only to unite good men for the purpose of brotherhood - not to promote a specific religion.

CATHOLICISM AND MASONRY:

Can a Catholic become a Mason? There is nothing within of our doctrines which would prohibit a Catholic from becoming a Mason. There are many misunderstandings by the public, and by our own members, concerning this issue. These misunderstandings have led to many false conclusions, and created barriers where none exist, so far as

Freemasonry is concerned. In other eras, some Catholic Popes regarded Masonry with disfavor and have issued edicts which condemned Freemasonry and prohibited membership to all Catholics. In spite of this, many prominent Catholics have become Masons. Our organization generally has given no official recognition to these edicts. We have chosen to follow a course of "silence and circumspection" since the first of these edicts was issued, in 1738, by Pope Clement XII.

SUBJECTS NOT PROPER FOR DISCUSSION IN LODGE:

Religion and politics should not be addressed in Lodge, and there are very good reasons why these subjects should not be discussed. When we meet in a Lodge, we are all on a common level, and are not subject to the classes and distinctions of the outside world. Each Brother is entitled to his own beliefs and may follow his own convictions. Our objective is to unite men, not to divide them. These subjects create honest differences of opinion which might well cause friction between Brethren. There will also be subjects concerning the Lodge's business that should not be discussed. All deliberations should be kept within the bounds of propriety and everyone should show a tolerance for the opinion of the other. Every Master wants harmony in his Lodge; and, once a matter has been put to vote in the Lodge and a decision is made, the decision should be accepted by all members, regardless of how they voted. We try to teach every Mason to be a good citizen and to perform his civic duties. We do not try to keep anyone from expressing his opinion, or from serving his city, county, state, or nation, in an honorable manner. Anyone who serves in political office should not act politically as a Freemason. Nor use the name of Freemasonry, in exercising his political rights - such as showing affiliation with any Lodge in his campaign advertising.

QUALIFICATIONS OF A PETITIONER:

The qualifications to be a Mason are few. The person must be a man, have a belief in a Supreme Being, at least 21 years old (in California), free of any previous felonious criminal convictions and be of good moral character. Loyalty to one's country is an essential qualification in Freemasonry, and only those are acceptable who cheerfully render obedience to every lawful authority. Disloyalty in any form is abhorrent to a Freemason, and is regarded as a serious Masonic Offense.

PREPARATION FOR INITIATION:

While Freemasonry is not a religion, its ceremonies are of a serious nature, dignified in its presentation and impart teachings which, if properly understood, obligate a man to lead a better life. To get the greatest good from the ceremonies, a candidate should first prepare his mind to understand and absorb these teachings. The

candidate should pay strict attention to every part of the ceremony, in order that he may gain some understanding of the teachings of Freemasonry. The methods we use in teaching will be new and unusual to the candidate. These methods have been used for

over two centuries and have not changed significantly since they originated. Finally, he should learn that every Mason in the Lodge room is his friend and brother.

NO HORSEPLAY OR HAZING:

There is no place for horseplay or hazing during our ceremonies, and the candidate can be assured that there will be none. The rituals are serious and solemn, and we try to teach moral lessons with great dignity. Anything which is told to the candidate in a joking manner serves only to desecrate the honorable purposes of Freemasonry. The candidate should have no apprehension about entering a Lodge. He is always entering a society of friends and Brothers, where he will be treated with dignity and decorum at all times.

THE HEART OF THE MASONIC FAMILY:

Freemasonry is not just another fraternity or association of men banded together for social, political or economic advantages. Our foundation is built on a philosophy of friendship and brotherly love. We also make many worthwhile contributions to our society and community. For example, the California Grand Lodge manages two magnificent total care homes in Union City and Covina for our aged Brethren and their mothers, daughters, sisters and widows. In addition, the Masonic Home in Covina, cares for the disadvantaged children or Grandchildren of our membership.