

The Entered Apprentice

Grand Lodge Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Maryland

The Entered Apprentice

You have now taken the First Degree, and you are an Entered Apprentice. The word Degree, used in a Masonic sense, means a step. You have taken the first step toward becoming a Master Mason. You have had experiences which you will never forget. You have entered a new world. You have heard words and phrases which probably sounded strange to you. You have learned that Freemasonry is serious business; that it pays reverence to God; that it inculcates the virtues that characterize good men and true. You have been taught something about your duty to God, to your neighbor, and to yourself. You have been impressed with the importance of improving yourself in your understanding of what Freemasonry is and what it is trying to do.

Along with the responsibilities you have assumed, you have also acquired certain privileges. You have taken the first step toward becoming a full-fledged member of your Lodge and a brother to all Masons everywhere. You have the privilege of being in your Lodge when it is working in the First Degree. You have the right, as well as the obligation, to receive instruction which covers the essentials of the experiences you have had. You have the opportunity to learn something about the deeper meanings which lie behind the ritual.

The Freemasonry of our time is based on the customs and practices of the Cathedral Builders of centuries ago. There have come down to us a number of what are called "Old Charges." The first of those Old Charges goes back to 1390 A.D. It contains a number of "articles" and "points" for the guidance of the Lodges of Cathedral Builders of those long ago days. Here is one point that you will do well to ponder: "The apprentice must not lay bare, nor tell to any man, whatsoever he hears or sees done in the Lodge."

All through the Middle Ages there were groups of trained artisans who were engaged in building the great cathedrals that dotted the British Isles. These artisans we call "Operative Masons" because they were actually engaged in building. As time went on, men who were not artisans sought admission to their Lodges. Those men were called "Speculative Masons." The root meaning of the word speculative carries with it the idea of mental examination and reflection. Speculative Masons, not artisans themselves, found in the practices and usages of Operative Masons certain fundamental principles of right living which help and strengthen all men.

As time went on, the building of cathedrals gradually ceased. In the early Eighteenth Century four of the Lodges in London, England, which included a number of Speculative Masons in their membership, came together and in 1717 formed the Grand Lodge of England, the premier Grand Lodge of Masons in the world. The movement spread with remarkable rapidity. Some men who had been made Masons in England emigrated to the American Colonies. Here and there in the Colonies those men found other Masons. They formed Lodges and made Masons. Away back in the early 1730's Benjamin Franklin, for

example, was made a Mason in a Lodge in Philadelphia. George Washington was initiated into a Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg, Va., in 1732. Many years later—in 1798, just thirteen months before his death—he wrote a letter to the Grand Lodge of Maryland. Here is a sentence from that letter: “So far as I am acquainted with the doctrines and principles of Freemasonry, I conceive them to be founded on benevolence and to be exercised only for the good of mankind.”

Now, let us retrace our steps and go back to the days of Operative Masonry. How did it perpetuate itself? From time to time it took into its Lodges, which were usually small buildings near the cathedrals in course of construction, boys from 12 to 15 years of age. Such a boy was called an apprentice. An apprentice is a beginner, a learner—one who is bound by agreement, in return for instruction in a trade or craft, to serve another a certain number of years. The spirit of the apprenticeship system continues to our day. No one, for example, may be licensed to practice law or medicine until he has undergone a period of training and has passed the prescribed examinations. Until comparatively recent times many physicians and lawyers obtained their training while working with men who were engaged in the profession of medicine or law.

Back in the days of Operative Masonry, the boy who wanted to be received into a Lodge made application of his own free choice. He had to be freeborn, of sound body and mind, of good habits, obedient, and willing to learn. In due time he was called to a meeting of the Lodge, so that the members could assure themselves that he possessed the required physical, mental, and moral qualifications. Some member stood sponsor for him—perhaps his father or a friend. The boy took a solemn pledge to work diligently, to observe all the laws and rules of the Craft, and to keep the secrets with which he would be entrusted. He was, furthermore, required to confess his faith in God and to be loyal to his country and to the Master to whom he would be assigned.

When these preliminaries had been completed, the boy’s name was entered on the roll, and he became an “Entered Apprentice.” He often lived with the family of the Master to whom he was indentured. Day after day—for seven years—he was engaged in learning the methods and trade secrets of the Craft. In the beginning he did menial work. As time went on and he proved his worthiness, he was given more important work and his wages were increased.

After seven years the apprentice was privileged to bring before the Lodge a specimen of his handiwork. He was given an examination and, if found proficient and otherwise worthy, he was declared a Master. No longer a servant, he now became a Fellow of the Craft, capable of earning his living and entitled to travel to other places where cathedrals were being erected and to choose his employer. Along with training in the Craft, he was also given moral instruction by his Master, who in those days was called the ‘Intender.’”

From this brief account you can see how the practices in which apprentices in the days of Operative Masonry were instructed eventually became the basis of the Entered Apprentice Degree which you have just taken. Today, you and I as Masons are not engaged in the building of cathedrals. We do not use the gauge and the gavel, for instance, in the way they were used by our ancient brethren. The tools of

Operative Masons have become for us symbols which are intended to impress moral lessons on our minds and hearts.

There is something extremely personal about Freemasonry. What you do with it and about it depends largely on yourself. You can enlist the aid of your Brethren. You can—and should— read and study this booklet when you have been made an Entered Apprentice; but you yourself must do the work required to understand the inner meaning of Freemasonry. Only when you come to understand that inner meaning can you put Freemasonry to work in your daily life.

Our purpose here is to emphasize for you the real meaning of just a few aspects of the symbolism of the Entered Apprentice Degree. Remember that it is the symbolic meaning of what you heard and saw that is vitally important. The real significance of Freemasonry lies behind and beyond the literal.

You learned early in the Degree the truth of the essential equality of all human beings. You were taught that Freemasonry is not concerned about a man's status in the world. It takes no account of his wealth, his position, or his prestige—or the lack of them. This characteristic of Freemasonry is movingly portrayed in an old Masonic poem that has come down to us.

Yes, we meet upon the level,
Though from every Station come.
The rich man from his mansion,
The poor man from his home;
For the rich must leave his hoarded gold
Outside our temple door,
And the servant feel himself a man
Upon the Master's floor.

The first lesson to learn, therefore, is that Freemasonry regards a Mason not for the position he holds in the world; rather, it bases its estimate of him upon what he is as a man and a Mason. In the Entered Apprentice Degree you have been taught to think of all human beings as one family. In Freemasonry the walls that separate you from men in other relations of life are broken down. Indeed, the whole purpose of Freemasonry is to unite, never to separate; to bring together, never to keep apart.

Recall, too, how the Fact of God was brought to your attention in a dramatic and unforgettable way. Directly and symbolically, Freemasonry teaches, "Our Trust is in God." It engages in no arguments or controversies about Deity. It does emphasize the basic truth that there is an overruling Providence in the affairs of men.

The shedding of Light on how character is developed is the constant theme of Freemasonry. The Holy Bible, as you will recall, opens with a scene which quickly leads to the Divine pronouncement, "Let there be Light." From that Book we derive the Light which darkness never can put out.

Remember that Freemasonry is not concerned about “interpretations” of the Bible or of any other Book that men venerate. It considers the Holy Bible as the symbol which represents truth in every form. That form may be the written Word. It may also be those manifestations of creative power and might which you see all around you in nature. You may recall what the Psalmist said: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

You learned that the three attributes of Freemasonry are wisdom, strength, and beauty. Here you are deep in the realm of symbolism. Remember that knowledge and wisdom are two different things. The man who has developed wisdom looks below the surface of life. He tries to build a character that is strong, firm, and enduring. “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right”—there in the words of Abraham Lincoln you have the essence of what Freemasonry is trying to teach you. Genuine wisdom will bring strength and firmness into your life.

Wisdom and strength, however, are not enough in themselves to form character. A third quality is essential—beauty, the beauty of kindness, of generosity, of brotherly love—all that harmony of mind and heart and spirit which makes a man what God intended him to be.

There is no plan to walk this traveled way
In quiet peace, no way to be content
In times of tumult which the soul torment
Except to speak with kindness every day.

Rest assured that those simple lines are not just Pollyanna poetry. On the contrary, they set out a basic fundamental in the conduct of decent human relations in this complex and confused world in which our lot is cast.

You also learned something about the principal tenets of Freemasonry—Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. By a tenet Freemasonry means a teaching that is so plainly true, so universally accepted, that all men take it without question. All right-thinking people instinctively know that honesty is better than dishonesty; that saying is better than wasting; that work is of more value than idleness; that education is to be preferred to ignorance. These teachings and a thousand others are taken for granted by decent people everywhere. They are tenets.

Now, Freemasonry says that Brotherly Love is a tenet. It is not just an ideal—something visionary to be dreamed about. Not at all. Freemasonry says that Brotherly Love is true; that it is a tremendous reality inhuman life—a reality that you cannot question any more than you can question the reality of the ground under your feet or the sun over your head.

By the tenet of Brotherly Love, Freemasonry means to say that you are kin to all human beings. You do not seek any selfish gain from that relationship. Your love for your brother man is its own justification

and its own reward. Brotherly Love is one of the supreme values of life; without it our lives would be lonely and unhappy.

The tenet of Brotherly Love is, therefore, not a hope or a dream, but a fact. Freemasonry builds on that fact. It provides opportunities for you to have such fellowship; it encourages you to understand and practice Brotherly Love and to make it one of the guiding principles of your everyday living.

The Masonic tenet of Relief, as you were taught, goes far beyond charity. In our modern economic world, society makes provision for the necessities that often arise from catastrophes and old age. We have private organizations that try, in one way or another, to help the unfortunate. Freemasonry recognizes its obligation to Masons and others who, through no fault of their own, need help. It has established and it maintains homes for the aged, for example. Masonic Relief, however, is something personal and individual. It seeks to restore peace to troubled minds, as well as to minister to physical needs. It does its work entirely without the fanfare of publicity. The Masonic tenet of Relief is an outgrowth of the first of its principal tenets—Brotherly Love.

Truth is the third of those principal tenets. There are, of course, other tenets of Freemasonry; but Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth are the principal ones. It is characteristic of a free society that men have the right to search out the truth. Their minds and spirits are not bound by the demands of an autocratic authority. Freemasonry, like democracy itself, stands for freedom of thought, speech, conscience, action, and religion—always with due regard to the freedom of others. Truth, you have been taught, is a divine attribute; it takes its character from God. It is the foundation stone on which all other virtues rest. To be truthful in word and deed is to be loyal to the highest ideals of life, faithful to your brothers and friends, dependable in your attitude and actions, and honorable in all your dealings. Freemasonry accepts these characteristics as being true of Masons; hence it says that Truth is a tenet—a basic fact of its brotherhood.

You were taught also the four cardinal virtues. The word cardinal comes from a Latin word which means a hinge on which something else turns. In a Masonic sense, cardinal means that which supports, that which is basic and fundamental. The four basic virtues which you heard briefly explained were taught by the ancient philosophers who lived hundreds of years before Christ. The Masons who formulated the ritual which you have seen and heard exemplified drew much of their material from ancient thinkers, who set out truths that are universal in their application.

Remember that temperance means moderation in all things. It stands opposed to excesses of all kinds—in speech, thought, or action. The ancient Greeks taught the doctrine of the middle way, which does not go to extremes in any direction. Freemasonry, too, teaches you to restrain yourself, to keep your appetites and passions under control, to think of others as well as yourself; in short, to live and to help live.

Fortitude is simply courage—not only physical courage, but more especially moral courage. Freemasonry seeks to ennoble your life and to elevate your thinking, so that you will always be among

those who uphold the right against the wrong in all the associations of life. The lessons which you learn and the relationships which you establish in the Lodge will give you strength and courage to meet with fortitude the situations that confront you.

Prudence means common sense supported by reason. Too often people allow their passions and prejudices to dominate their thinking and control their acting. In affairs of business they may act with prudence; but when it comes to human relations, they too often allow their emotions to outrun their reason. Freemasonry, you see, is not confined to the Lodge. Far from it. The cardinal virtues which it emphasizes extend into all aspects of life.

Justice—equal justice for all—is one of the essential elements of the free way of life. It is a civic virtue and a personal virtue. When the courts of justice break down, civilization comes to an end. The virtue of any people can rise no higher than the virtue of its individual citizens. Every man—and especially every Mason—has a profound responsibility to exercise justice in his dealings with his fellowmen. Freemasonry gives you privileges and opportunities; but with them, it always couples obligations and responsibilities.

Lukewarmness and complacency are real dangers. It is so easy to take for granted the great simplicities of Freemasonry. Now—at the very beginning of your Masonic career—make up your mind that you will develop that fervency of heart and that zeal for truth and righteousness which the Entered Apprentice Degree in its closing moments emphasizes. Sustained enthusiasm, coupled with constant struggle for the right and against the wrong, is the distinguishing characteristic of the true Mason. Remember that you do not become a Mason just by being exposed to the Degrees. You become truly Masonic in character and attitude when you try day by day to comprehend and to apply to your own life and conduct the fundamental principles of right living which Freemasonry through its symbols everywhere teaches.

It is such high and noble thoughts that have been dramatically brought before you in the Entered Apprentice Degree. It is a Degree, you will find, to which you can turn again and again without exhausting the rich veins of truth that run through it and beneath it. Reflect that the mineral treasures of the earth do not often lie on the surface. Just so, remind yourself continually that you can make the treasures of Freemasonry your own only by going beyond and behind what you hear and see in the Lodge. The miner digs for gold; so the true Mason digs for Masonic truth, which is embodied in the symbolism that is shot through and through the outward aspects of the ritual.