

**T.F.S.**  
**Three, five, and seven**  
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By Ed Halpaus, Grand Lodge Education Officer.  
Number 173 – June 20. 2010

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**“Free Born: A free soul; one having attained mastery of himself by self discipline. It is a misconception that this refers to one not born into slavery.”**

From ‘Facts for Freemasons’ by Harold V.B. Vooris

When it comes to the qualifications of a candidate we learn in the first degree what the qualifications of a Freemason are; being a man, free born or lawful age and well recommended. However we know that there is another qualification and that is to be a man who believes in a Supreme Being, in Minnesota the petition for the degrees of Freemasonry asks; “Do you have a sincere belief and trust in God?”

I think the qualifications of a Freemason are interesting to think about; especially the qualification about being Free Born. When I was first made a Mason and began to learn the first section of the lecture of the first degree, I asked about the phrase Free Born. The answer I got, seemed to me, to be much less than satisfactory, and it seemed to me to smack of racism. Ever since then I have been interested in why we, as Freemasons, hang onto the phrase Free Born, instead of changing it to Free Man. The United Grand Lodge of England in 1847 made the change from Free Born to Free Man, but as far as I know they are in the minority in making that change in the wording.

When I think of the word or words Free Born I remember a phrase I heard, long enough ago to forget where I heard it; *“there is no shame in having been a slave, there is only shame in having been a slave owner.”* Being born into slavery is not a choice; it is an accident of birth. As Brother A.S. McBride says in his book ‘Speculative Freemasonry’ *“A man may have been born a slave, yet attain his freedom and possess all the qualifications necessary for making a good Mason, why should he be excluded?”* Brother McBride wrote this in 1924 when most men, who had been born into slavery, in the United States, would have been pretty old, but the question still is a good one. Brother Henry Wilson Coil wrote in his encyclopedia regarding the words Free Born and Free Man that if the requirement were only Free Born then a man born in slavery would be excluded under the qualifications of a petitioner, but a Bondsman would be eligible. However, using the term Free Man would not exclude a man born into slavery, but would exclude a Bondsman.

It might be appropriate here to include the dictionary’s definition of Bondsman: “A male Bond Servant.” The definition for Bondservant has the meaning of a slave or serf, also called a ‘Bondslave.’ These definitions might be helpful when we think of a Bondsman or read about the philosophy of Brother Martin Delaney when it comes to the question of Free Born.

When it comes to reading and thinking about the phrase ‘Free Born’ I do like what our Brother Martin Delaney wrote on this subject. From a talk he delivered to St. Cyprian Lodge #13 on St. John the Baptist Day in 1853 he mentioned that *‘in many parts of the world, the people of various nations were subject to lose their liberty in several ways’*; a forfeiture by crime, voluntary servitude [Bondsman] for a stipulated sum or reward, and capture in battle by which one could be sold into slavery. It was his opinion that those who voluntarily gave up their freedom, such as by committing and being convicted of a crime or being a bondsman, were ‘positively proscribed and utterly unworthy of its [Freemasonry’s] benefits.’ He said in his talk that *‘none but him who voluntarily [surrendered] his liberty was recognized as a slave by Masonry.’*

Regarding the third category, talking about slaves and their offspring, he said; *‘You have the bold, the brave, the high-minded, the independent-spirit, and manly form of a kindred brother in humanity, whose heart is burning, whose breast is heaving, and whose soul is wrung with panting aspirations for liberty – a commander, a chieftain, a knight or a prince, it may be – still he is a captive and by the laws of captivity, a slave. Does Masonry, then, contemplate the withholding of its privileges from such applicants as these? Certainly not; since Moses, (to whom our great Grand Master Solomon, the founder of the temple, is indebted for his Masonic wisdom,) was born a slave, and lived in captivity eighty years and by the laws of his captors a slave. It matters not whether captured in actual conflict, sleeping by the wayside, or in a cradle of bulrushes, after birth, so that here be a longing aspiration for liberty, and manly determination to be free. Policy alone will not permit the order to confer Masonic privileges on one while yet in captivity; but the fact of his former conditions as such, or that of his parents, can have no bearing whatsoever on him. The mind and the desires of the recipient must be free; and at the time of his endowment with these privileges, his person and mind must be unencumbered with all earthly trammels or fetters.’*

From the above quoted portion of his talk; “Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry: Its Introduction into the United States, and Legitimacy Among Colored Men,” we learn something about Brother Delaney’s philosophy on the question of whether the term Free Born should be taken literally or if it should be taken to mean Free Man, and some today ask whether to end the confusion, of the term, the ritual ought to be changed to Free Man.

Occasionally Masons will sometimes hear another Mason comment about someone he knows saying; that he will check with [insert the name or title here] and if they say it is o.k. then he will join, [the Masons.] When I hear something like that reported I think about two things; one is that this doesn’t sound like someone coming to Masonry of his own free will and accord, and the other thing I think of is that it sounds like he’s abdicated his freedom to make a decision to someone else, and has therefore in some small way voluntarily surrendered his right to choose, at least on this question, to another. In any event it doesn’t sound, to me, like a Free Man making his own decisions.

To read about Brother Martin Delaney is an enjoyable experience. He was a most remarkable man of great accomplishment. Information on him can be found on the Internet and also in ‘Black Square and Compass’ by Brother Joseph Walkes Jr.

To learn more about the qualifications of petitioners see the section under that name and title in Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia, it is quite extensive and interesting with information about all the Masonic Manuscripts. For instance, Brother Coil's encyclopedia says all but the Regius Manuscript say Free Born; it [the Regius Manuscript] says instead 'No Bondsman,' meaning free at the time of entering the fraternity.

If you don't have these books in your personal Masonic Library it is something you might want to consider, (it is a small investment for one involved in a lifelong study of Freemasonry,) but do yourself a favor and read them in your Lodge's Library. By the way, a Lodge making an investment in books for their library is a good thing for a Lodge to do. By having a wide variety of books in a Lodge Library many Brethren can read, lean and enjoy, without each one building up his own personal library. A Lodge Library is a most cost effective way for Masons to learn about Freemasonry.

**“Man's greatest power is his power to choose; to make his own decisions. No one should take that power away from him, and he should allow no one to do it.”** Ed Halpau

**Words to live by:** “You might as well expect rivers to run backwards as any man born free to be contented penned up.” Chief Joseph

**From volumes of Sacred Law:**

**“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners;”** Isaiah 61:1 Tanakh (Old Testament)

**“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”** Galatians 5:1 New Testament NASB

**“We have offered the responsibility (freedom of choice) to the heavens and the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were afraid of it. But the human being accepted it; he was transgressing, ignorant.”** Qur'an 033:072 Khalifa translation

Please remember: if you would like to participate in the latest Masonic Monday Question, please go to <http://www.lodgebuilder.org> and click on the Lodge Education forum. When you have an answer send it to [masonicmonday@gmail.com](mailto:masonicmonday@gmail.com) the Masonic Monday Question for the week of 06/21/10 is: **What Mason was the last surviving general officer (of Washington's General Officers) in America's War for Independence?**

**“Surely the day will come when color means nothing more than the skin tone, when religion is seen uniquely as a way to speak one's soul; when birth places have the weight of a throw of the dice and all men are born free, when understanding breeds love and brotherhood.”** Josephine Baker

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**“Under the law of nature, all men are born free, every one comes into the world with a right to his own person, which includes the liberty of moving and using it at his own will. This is what is called personal liberty, and is given him by the Author”**

President Thomas Jefferson

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAcUiBn8xI0>.

TFS & Masonic Matters can also be read on Ed's Face Book page;  
<http://www.facebook.com/ed.halpaus> - <http://halpaus.blogspot.com> - <http://www.mn-masons.org>

Please remember – Ed's new email address is [erhmasonic@gmail.com](mailto:erhmasonic@gmail.com) the old one is going away.  
With "Brotherly Love",  
Ed Halpaus  
Grand Lodge Education Officer

**Seek to mentor a Brother Mason:  
It's good for him, it's good for you, and it's good for Freemasonry!**