

The Value of Freemasonry

by

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Freemasonry is older than recorded history, and has over two and one-half million followers in this country alone, has contributed immeasurably to the establishment and growth of our nation and has brought peace and happiness to countless millions, yet stands virtually unknown, unrecognized and unappreciated by many-yes, even by SOME of our own members. There are many things about our fraternity that are quite unique.

There are many things about it that have been imitated by others. Yet, our organization has some weaknesses that need to be strengthened. Let us pause to take a closer look.

First, Freemasonry is very old. We cannot establish its age. We know that it is older than our other institutions- our state, our nation, our churches and many religious groups, our schools, our homes, our businesses, our social clubs, and even our democratic way of life. It was present when each of these institutions was established in this country and made a definite contribution to each. Without the influence of our gentle craft, at a key time in the history of the world, it is doubtful that we would enjoy the blessings of many of these institutions today.

Without Freemasonry it is doubtful there would have been a United States of America. It was Freemasonry, which poured its teachings into the hearts of faithful patriots who wrote the Declaration of Independence and formulated the Bill of Rights for our new Constitution. A Freemason led the continental army to victory and became the first President of this Republic. Brother George Washington took his oath of office upon a Masonic Bible when he became President. And again, he acted in the capacity of a Master Mason when he laid the Cornerstone of our nation's capitol according to ancient Masonic ceremonies. Another Freemason, Benjamin Franklin, led the establishment of our foreign policy, and based it on time-honored Masonic principles of brotherly love, relief and truth, principles that continued to guide our country when it gave help, aid, and assistance to other nations of the world, especially during and after two world wars.

Freemasonry is, and always has been, a true friend and ally of the free church, even though some perceived it to be a threat to religion. During the middle ages, Freemasonry supplied architects and builders for the great cathedrals, and down through the centuries loved, protected and taught from the Holy Bible. The fraternity has provided light in order to help understand the Holy Scriptures, and by doing so, has given to many men a deeper understanding of sermons, hymns, and church liturgy. Some have accused our fraternity of being a competitor of the church, yet Freemasonry claims no creed, no dogma, no doctrine except that of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God. It has taught men how to teach and to lead other men. It has produced great men of the cloth like Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, and Rev. Forrest Delos Haggard. Our great fraternity teaches a man the true value of himself and his fellow man.

Freemasonry's contributions to the establishment, maintenance, and defense of our free public school system are well known to us all. Through the years many of our members have served unselfishly on school boards and in other capacities for public education. Members of our fraternity have felt the lashes of persecution and suffering under the Fascists in Italy and Spain, the Nazi's in Germany, the Communist dictatorships of the former Soviet Bloc countries, and the radical fundamentalists in Iran. They have suffered in the fiery pyres of the Inquisition with great martyrs for the cause of freedom, like Jacques DeMolay and the Templars. We were attacked with church documents - encyclicals, edicts, and bulls - beginning in the 18th Century because some feared our purpose. We endured the anti-Masonic era of the early nineteenth century in America. Our Brethren have suffered under the ruthless hands of tyrants in all ages and in all nations, wherever they have lived, including our Prince Hall Brethren who have felt, and still feel, the pangs of racism in our great, yet imperfect country. In some countries of the world today, men are still confined to prison, their only crime being that they belong to our Masonic Fraternity.

Freemasonry has been falsely accused of being a political organization, yet we do not permit the discussion of partisan politics at our lodge communications. We do not permit our members to use the good name of the fraternity in their political campaigns. During the Civil War, a war where brother fought brother and father fought son, Freemasonry remained a "House Undivided" and supplied cement of brotherly love and affection, which aided the states to come back together after that terrible event.

Our fraternity never supported any political party, but has always defended the right of every man to belong to the party of his own choice. Freemasonry takes no stand in matters of religion or politics. Yet, whenever men of the past have felt the need to throw off the yoke of oppression, whether political, intellectual, or spiritual and demanded their inalienable rights, they have found a true friend in the Masonic Fraternity.

Freemasonry is a great charitable institution -- giving away some \$1.4 million each day. We have taken the old traditional ideal of a personal, private, Masonic charity of orphanages, homes for the aged, hospitals, educational and healing foundations for our own members and dependents, and turned it into a major, public institution of philanthropy, aimed primarily at crippled children and burn victims, literacy, sight improvement, and medical research. All this would testify eloquently to the unselfish character of Freemasonry's vast charitable endeavors. It's difficult to think of any area of human benevolence in which Freemasonry is not at work.

In spite of the frequent persecution and false accusations, Freemasonry is not bitter; it does not hate nor seek vengeance. On the contrary, charity, truth and loving kindness have become our watchwords. "Peace and harmony should be the strength and support of all societies, but more especially of ours." Our fraternity throws around each other the broad mantle of Masonic charity. As the historian and author of *Born in Blood*, John Robinson, said: "Freemasonry is probably the only organization in the world which ever truly exercised that great Christian virtue of "turning the other cheek." It wasn't long after John made that statement

when he decided to become a Freemason himself. Lack of attendance at communications, apathy, disinterestedness, and being dropped for non-payment of dues, however, are all sadly occurring in our fraternity. It is disappointing when many of our own members do not appreciate or take advantage of what our fraternity has to offer, or when they fail to live by its teachings, and by doing so, they fail to attract many good men to its doors.

There is also a tendency on the part of some to lower the moral and spiritual requirements of men who would join us. I am against this. If we do not maintain high standards, we will not attract men of the highest caliber. Men who join only for the social aspects and are not interested in character development, education, charity, and other more noble purposes, will not remain with us very long -- I suspect that much of the problem of non payment of dues falls into this category. We should study this problem, find out if such is the case, and, if so, look well to the ballot box in the future.

We must remember that, as an organization, we are always just one generation of men away from extinction. The men who will ultimately make Freemasonry survive and thrive are not yet Freemasons, and we must meet these future brethren on their terms. This is something, which, in the past, Freemasonry has always done quite well. But today, we either have to think like they do, or put these men in leadership positions. They will not think like us. They cannot assimilate today's culture using our rules. However, they can organize their needs around our values. They have already told us their needs. We know their expectations of the organizations, which they will join. They want fraternity, fellowship, community attachment, charitable causes, family involvement, and opportunities for leadership. Freemasonry can and must meet these needs. When John Robinson was in Minnesota, he said something very profound. He talked about our membership problem and said, "Freemasonry grew by men having sons who became Masons. And then they had grandsons who became Masons." He said you wouldn't have a membership problem at all if the sons of Masons became Masons, and the grandsons of Masons became Masons. If you cannot convince your son sleeping in the room next to you that this fraternity is worth being in, how do you ever expect to convince the guy down the street who doesn't even know you? And so from him has come, I think, some wisdom that we need to think about. We are somebody's impression of Freemasonry, and that somebody may well be our son or a grandson or a nephew, or some other close male relative. Have you lived your life according to the tenets of this fraternity to the extent that this young man can see in you what we really are? If he cannot see it, there are only two reasons why: it was not there in the first place, or you have not helped him to understand the benefits of this fraternity in your own life.

When a young man comes up to his father, uncle, grandfather, or even a friend, who is a Mason and says, "Why should I be a Mason?" The usual response is to say things about fellowship, our illustrious history, famous Freemasons, or our charities. But I believe this fraternity has many additional benefits to offer a young man, which, for some reason, we rarely seem to tell him. We need to tell him there aren't many other places in the world where you can get the practical training, which Freemasonry offers: training in public speaking, conducting a meeting, budgeting, planning, social, organizational, and

leadership skills, intellectual discipline and activity, practical experience in psychology, etc.

The first thing you learn in Freemasonry is that the fraternity expects something of you. It's astounding how often in this world absolutely nothing is expected of you. Our fraternity expects a new member to do something almost immediately, Freemasonry expects him to use his mind -- first to memorize, to think, and later to understand. To begin with, the memorization of ritual is a priceless discipline whose value we too often overlook. The newly made Entered Apprentice quickly learns that he is required to commit a small portion of the ritual to memory before he is allowed to continue. Every time we reduce or eliminate memorization of a portion of our ritual, we send out a wrong signal, especially to the young man -- we don't place much value on what we teach in the lodge! Some urge Freemasonry to reduce the memory requirements, shorten the degrees, change the obligations, and tamper with numerous other traditions of our craft that have served us so well for more than two hundred and fifty years. I am very concerned about our "rush to judgment" relative to these issues. We should give each of them serious thought. In our haste, we may do more damage than good. We need a complete and thorough discussion of all possible ramifications of such changes, a discussion outside the crowded and severely limited time constraints of the Grand Lodge. I personally didn't realize how priceless the skill of memorization was until I came into Freemasonry. It's amazing the difference in my own life as a result of my having to learn ritual. Your mind is like any other muscle -- it gets flabby and weak if you don't use it! Memorization of ritual is good exercise for the mind. The oral presentation of ritual also helps you develop and polish your speaking skills, which will be useful throughout your life. The two most important skills for any college student to develop are writing and speaking. Most students work hard on the writing, but few do so on the speaking. There is a reason. It's fear!

The most common fear among people is not a fear of high places, or a fear of small enclosures, or of some wild animal, of a dreaded disease, or a fear of a dangerous storm; the most common fear is a fear of speaking before others -- people are terrified to speak before large groups, especially in public. Now, the average person on the street, not being a Mason, is not aware of the incredible ability of our minds to memorize and learn vast quantities of information. Doctors and lawyers know this. They went to medical and law school -- they had to memorize anatomy, legal cases, etc. Memorization of ritual for lodge is hard work, but it gives you a sense of how powerful the human mind can be. If you discipline your mind and if you discipline your time, you can learn a tremendous amount before you have to make a presentation. Freemasonry teaches you first how to speak before a small group with relative comfort in small stages. You do not have to do the Ritual of the Craft until you have learned it well and are ready to do it. When you stand before your Brethren for the first time, you have three things going for you. First, you know word-for-word what you are going to say before you ever get there, so you're not quite so nervous. Second, you know that you know it, because you've worn a hole in your carpet at home while learning it, and your wife and dog each know you know it because they learned it right along with you. They're just not saying anything. And third, when you look out at that audience, just as I do now, you see nothing but men who

have your best interests at heart, men who silently are cheering you along, who want you to do well, who in your mistakes will only see a reflection of the mistakes they made, who will encourage you and support you and help you until you get it right. And when you get it right, they will pat you on the back and congratulate you. And when you get it right you'll know there is no better feeling anywhere.

So, at first you learn to stand up in front of a small group of people and repeat things that you've memorized; soon, you're comfortable with that and before you know it, you stand up at a stated meeting and speak your mind, articulate your opinion, volunteer to give a talk, before you know it you're giving speeches all over the place, you're Grand Orator; the possibilities are endless!

If you are fortunate enough to be appointed as a line officer in your lodge, you will learn to serve other men for a higher purpose in life. As Master you are taught to get the best out of your officers. Think what kind of an employee you can be, if you learn to serve the higher purpose of your job than just the salary. Think what kind of an employer you can be to get the best out of your employees.

Freemasonry is a university for the practical needs of life, and no one else teaches these needs as well or as consistently as we do. This is a fraternity where men develop talents and skills and a professional acumen not taught in school or college. These are qualities of great value in the world. So I encourage you to think about what Freemasonry offers you in practical terms when you talk to that young man.

I think we often underestimate our new members. When they enter the lodge, they are like a blank slate so far as Freemasonry is concerned. They don't know much about the Craft and they want to learn. It's up to us to teach them, to foster the love of knowledge which brought them here to find out why it meant so much to their father or great uncle to be a Mason. It's up to us to encourage that natural curiosity.

Freemasonry also honors the value of labor. We are a building craft, builders of men's character. Our central personage is our Ancient Grand Master Hiram Abif, the chief architect and master builder of Solomon's Temple, who taught us to yield up our life rather than forfeit our integrity. Hiram symbolizes that respect the Craft has for labor. Freemasonry's purpose, like that of a true university, is to teach you to want to learn. If we can do that, if we can instill in your mind a curiosity, a sense of wonder, a sense of the depth of human knowledge, then we have accomplished our purpose. We want to make you curious. Because, if you're curious and if you follow that curiosity, if you follow the rivers of thought to their source, indeed you will be a Mason who has done the labor of Masonry.

I think one of the most exciting things going on in the fraternity today is what the Grand Lodge of Minnesota is doing for its members -- the development of the Masonic Light Program, the addition of Lodge and Grand Lodge Education Officers, the Grand Lodge Bookstore, the LEO Fall Conferences, Minnesota Masonic computer networking, etc. Minnesota no longer simply gives lip service to education in Masonry. Our Grand Master

Rod Larson and Grand Lodge Education Officer Terry Tilton both especially deserve a lot of the credit. They have worked hard and long, and they will leave a tremendous legacy when they step down; their leadership, enthusiasm, energy, knowledge and friendship have been an inspiration! They made us all realize just how important Masonic Education really is. Their impact in Masonic Education will be felt throughout Minnesota for years to come.

The teachings of Freemasonry can do much to help win the battle, which now rages to conquer the hearts and minds of young people. Each of us, as individuals, must set an example and practice out of the lodge those great moral and social virtues that are inculcated in the lodge. Too many members see in Freemasonry only the beautiful jewelry, pomp and pageantry, prestige and prominence, instead of the service and sacrifice, humility and prayer, light and wisdom. We must serve as exemplars for our fellow man if we ever hope to win that battle.

Our Fraternity guides us to a better knowledge of God, ourselves, and our fellow man; guides us away from ignorance, fanaticism, intolerance, and bigotry; and guides us to the side of a needy Brother in distress and to the defense of Truth. Freemasonry admonishes us to provide for the needs of widows and orphans; to visit the graveside of a fallen Brother; it directs us upward, never downward; toward light, never darkness; toward love, never hate.

In the Holy Bible, the Mason's trestle board of life, we read both in the Old and New Testaments that we all are creations of God-the children of God. In Freemasonry, Brotherhood is one of our basic tenets. With us, Brotherhood is an activity which involves three types of reaching, each in a different direction. First, we reach downward with helping hands to lift and support a faltering brother. Second, we reach out on the level to extend the hand of fellowship, and welcome a friend and brother to join us in worthy endeavors and accomplishments that will make this world a better place in which to live, and thus benefit all humankind. Our third reach is upward. Masons should ever remember that when the strength and wisdom of man fails, there is an inexhaustible supply above yielded to us through the power of prayer. In our moments of weakness, stumbling, and confusion, we reach toward the heavens for the strength to rise, and the wisdom to go forward along the path of righteousness.

Let me quote from the New Testament: He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.... If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also. I JOHN, 2:9-11; 4:20-21 The Golden Rule is the rule of Brotherhood. It has been committed to memory by countless generations. It has been recited in school, in the pulpit, and in the forum. However, evil will continue to grow and violence continue to spread across our land, while ignorance, fanaticism, intolerance, and bigotry take control

of people's lives, unless we learn to apply the lessons of universal Brotherhood. Here of all places, in America, we, as Freemasons, should do everything in our power to eliminate racial prejudice. May that effort spread around the world and bring Unity and Brotherhood to all mankind. The poet, and brother Mason, Edwin Markham, put it this way

"THE CREST AND CROWNING OF ALL GOOD,
LIFE'S FINAL STAR, IS BROTHERHOOD
FOR IT WILL BRING AGAIN TO
HER LONG-LOST POESY AND MIRTH
WILL SEND NEW LIGHT ON EVERY FACE
A KINGLY POWER UPON THE RACE
AND TILL IT COMES, WE MEN ARE SLAVES
AND TRAVEL DOWNWARD TO THE DUST OF GRAVES
COME, CLEAR THE WAY, THEN CLEAR THE WAY
BLIND CREEDS AND KINGS HAVE HAD THEIR DAY
BREAK THE DEAD BRANCHES FROM THE PATH
OUR HOPE IS IN THE AFTERMATH
OUR HOPE IS IN HEROIC MEN
STAR-LED TO BUILD THE WORLD AGAIN
TO THIS EVENT THE AGES RAN:
MAKE WAY FOR BROTHERHOOD-MAKE WAY FOR MAN!"

I think that one of the most exciting and positive things that's happening in worldwide Freemasonry today is the formal, mutual recognition that is taking place between our organization and the Prince Hall organization. Our Prince Hall Brethren have had an illustrious history of achievement. When our country expanded westward, an outstanding record was established by the "Buffalo Soldiers", many of who were Prince Hall Freemasons and several of who received our nation's highest honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor. They were associated with Prince Hall military lodges chartered out of Fort Leavenworth in Kansas or similar such early military centers. Before and during the Civil War Prince Hall Freemasons helped establish, run, and maintain the "underground railroad" which helped thousands of slaves reach a life of freedom. During the last four decades, local and national leadership in the civil rights movement also involved Prince Hall Freemasons, men like former Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall who once headed the NAACP, Presidential candidate Jesse Jackson, Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta, Rev. Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Leadership Conference, and former Mayor Harold Washington of Chicago. It is significant that our legendary hero, Hiram Abif, inspected the work on the Temple every day at noon, or high twelve, when the harsh light most clearly revealed defects and weaknesses in the structure. It is even more significant that he did not hesitate to draw designs on the trestle board to remove defects and to improve and strengthen the building. We of Minnesota Masonry today are about to remove a serious defect in our own structure which will improve and strengthen our philosophical Brotherhood, a defect which should have been taken care of years ago, a defect which never should have been allowed. It is now high twelve for our Brotherhood of Freemasonry-as it continually is for every human institution. How proud

I'll be when our Grand Lodge reaches out, on the level, to extend our hand of fellowship and welcome our Prince Hall brethren and friends to join with us in the great mission of making this a better world in which to live.

The fundamental teachings, in both of our organizations, rest upon the most basic of all truths. Every man, before he is allowed to participate in the rights and privileges of our fraternity, must profess his faith in God the Father Almighty, the Grand Architect and Master Builder of the Universe. All Freemasons share a common belief in the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God. They believe in the dignity and worth of the individual, in his God-ordained right to achieve his destiny through his own effort. They are pledged to uphold the time-honored institutions of honesty, integrity and forthrightness and are strong supporters of the fundamental principles of physical, intellectual, moral, political and religious freedom for all our citizens.

Freemasonry may well be called the science of self-improvement. Her plan is simple. Begin with a man, just one man at a time, as good a man as possible, one that is respected in his community, lives according to the laws of the land. Then Freemasonry shows that man, again and again, how he can become better -- not better than his fellow man, but better than himself. By making better men, we build a better community, a better nation, and a better world.

" YOUR TASK -- TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD,"
GOD SAID, AND I ANSWERED, "HOW?
THE WORLD IS SUCH A LARGE, VAST PLACE,
AND SO COMPLICATED NOW,
AND I SO SMALL AND USELESS AM,
THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO."
BUT GOD IN ALL HIS WISDOM SAID,
"JUST BUILD A BETTER YOU."

The outside world knows but little of the teachings of Freemasonry, and virtually nothing of what transpires behind our tiled doors. That world will judge Freemasonry by the men who are known to be Freemasons. If the world sees that Freemasons are men of kindly hearts and helpful deeds and are men who have been weighed in the balances and found not wanting; if the world sees we are men of reverence and faith, who, with our trust in God, seek to discharge every obligation, and to have a conscience void of offense toward God and man; then, and only then, may we be sure that the world will honor freemasonry.
SO MOTE IT BE!