



***Answers to
frequently
asked
questions
about
Freemasonry
in
New York***

We are often asked pointed questions about Freemasonry, questions that arise out of pure curiosity or from common misconceptions.

Who are we? What are we? What do we do? Are we a religion? Why are we such a secret organization? Is Masonry relevant in today's world?

As more thrillers based on Masonic themes are published, as more honest research appears, and as more TV programs and motion pictures call attention to Masonry, the questions about the "hidden mysteries of our fraternity" multiply. It is therefore time to put forward straight answers to some of these most frequently asked questions regarding Masonry in general and Freemasonry in particular under the Grand Lodge of the State New York.

Here then, is a concise reference guide that is a logical follow-up to and further explanation of the principles of Freemasonry as documented in the widely read Masonic Compact. We hope you find the factual information herein to be useful.

Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted
Masons of the State of New York



Historical Facts

Masons, also known as Freemasons, comprise the oldest philanthropic, community-oriented fraternal organization in the world. Masonry is not a religion, but its members must express a belief in a Supreme Being, and each Mason is encouraged to practice the religion of his choice.

Freemasonry stresses building of character, knowledge, patriotism, brotherhood, family involvement and community service among its members.

The Masons trace their origins back to the Middle Ages, when operative stonemasons, responsible for the construction of majestic castles and cathedrals, organized themselves into guilds.

The earliest known documented appearance of the Masons was in The Regius Manuscript Cerea, a "poem of moral duties," written in approximately 1390. Some Lodges in Scotland are reported to have minutes dating back to the 1600s, and the first formal association of Masons was the formation of the Grand Lodge in England in 1717.

During the 1700s the Masons became established in Colonial America. Several Lodges came

(Please note that customary usage calls for the capitalization of the first letter of the following words generally associated with Masonry: Mason, Master, Grand Master, Lodge, Grand Lodge, and the titles for Masonic leaders Worshipful, Right Worshipful and Most Worshipful. It should be noted that the word "Worshipful" is taken from the old English and denotes respect for authority; it bears no religious significance.)

into existence across the Colonies, and in 1731 Benjamin Franklin joined St. John's Lodge in Philadelphia.

Nine of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence were Masons; thirteen of forty signers of the Constitution were Masons.



George Washington



Andrew Jackson



Franklin D. Roosevelt



Harry S. Truman

Fourteen presidents of the United States were Masons: George Washington, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James Garfield, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Warren G. Harding, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and Gerald R. Ford.

To date, five U.S. Presidents have taken their Oath of Office on New York's historic St. John's Lodge bible – including George Washington, who took his oath as the nation's first President at New York City's Federal Hall on April 30, 1789.

George Washington and Harry S. Truman both served as President of the United States and Masters of Masonic Lodges simultaneously.

Masons are organized into Lodges, the leaders of which are called the Worshipful Masters. A Grand Lodge comprises local Lodges on a statewide level. Each Grand Lodge in each state remains sovereign and independent. There is no national Grand Lodge.

Nationwide, Masons contribute over \$2 million daily to charitable causes across the United States.

FAQ's

Q: What is Freemasonry?

A: Freemasonry is the largest secular, fraternal and charitable organization. It teaches moral lessons and self-knowledge through participation in a progression of initiatory Degrees.

Q: Are we a secret society?

A: We are not, but Lodge meetings, like those of many other groups, are private and open only to members. The goals and aims of Freemasonry are available to the public. Meeting places are known and in many areas are used by the local community for activities other than Freemasonry. Members are encouraged to speak openly about its existence and the contributions of Freemasonry to the world.

Q: What are the secrets of Freemasonry?

A: The secrets in Freemasonry are the traditional modes of recognition, which are not used indiscriminately, but solely as a test of membership, e.g., when visiting a Lodge where a member is not known.

Q: What happens at a Lodge meeting?

A: The meeting usually has two parts: as in any association there is a certain amount of administrative procedure – approval of minutes of the previous meeting, proposing and balloting on petitions for membership, discussing and voting

on financial matters, election of officers, news and correspondence. Then there are the ceremonies (or Degrees) for admitting new Masons and the annual installation of the Master and appointment of officers. The three ceremonies for admitting a new Mason instruct him in the principles and lessons taught in the Craft and feature a lecture in which the candidate's various duties are spelled out.

Q: Isn't ritual out of place in a modern society?

A: No. The ritual is a shared experience which binds the members together. Its use of drama, allegory and symbolism impresses the principles and teachings more firmly in the mind of each candidate than if they were simply passed on to him in matter-of-fact modern language.

Q: Why do Freemasons recite obligations?

A: New members make solemn promises concerning their conduct in Lodge and in society. Each member also promises to keep confidential the traditional methods of proving that he is a Freemason, which he would use when visiting a Lodge where he is not known. Freemasons do not swear allegiances to each other or to Freemasonry. Freemasons promise to support others in times of need, but only if that support does not conflict with their duties to God, the law, their family or with their responsibilities as a citizen.

Q: Are Freemasons expected to prefer fellow Masons at the expense of others in giving jobs, promotions, contracts and the like?

A: Absolutely not. That would be a misuse of membership and abuse of privilege. On his entry into Freemasonry each candidate states unequivocally that he expects no material gain from his membership. At various stages during the three Degrees he is reminded that the concept of Brotherly Love is to be applied to the whole human race and that his charity should extend to all.

Q: Isn't it true that Freemasons only look after each other?

A: No. From its earliest days, Freemasonry has been involved in charitable activities. Since its inception, Freemasonry has provided support not only for widows and orphans of Freemasons but

also for many others within the community. While some Masonic charities cater specifically but not exclusively for Masons or their dependents, others make significant contributions to non-Masonic organizations. On the local level, Lodges give substantial support to local causes.

New York Masons are proud of their Masonic Care Community in Utica, NY and the Masonic Medical Research Laboratory, also in Utica. Various Grand Lodge-sponsored programs represent direct outreach to the community: the NY Masonic Child ID program; MSAT (the Masonic Student Assistance Training program), which



teaches teachers and other key school personnel to identify, mentor, and remediate at-risk students; the many scholarships; a Blood Donor program and sponsorship of youth programs.

A Mason believes...that charity is the distinguishing human virtue, and that personal community service is the best demonstration of one's commitment to humanity; [he] acknowledge[s] that words without deeds are meaningless, and [he] vow[s] to work with [his] Lodge to provide service to the community, and to promote charity, friendship, morality, harmony, integrity, fidelity and love.

Q: Aren't you a religion or a rival to religion?

A: Emphatically not. Freemasonry requires a belief in GOD and its principles are common to many of the world's great religions. Freemasonry does not try to replace religion or substitute for it. Every candidate is exhorted to practice his religion and to regard its holy book as the unerring standard of truth. That is why he takes his obligations on that book. Freemasonry does not instruct its members in what their religious beliefs should be,

nor does it offer sacraments. Freemasonry deals in relations between men; religion deals in a man's relationship with his GOD.

A Mason believes...that freedom of religion is an inalienable human right and tolerance an indispensable trait of human character; therefore, [he] will stand in [his] Lodge with Brothers of all faiths, and respect their beliefs as they respect [his], and [he] will demonstrate the spirit of Brotherhood in all aspects of [his] life.

Q: Why do you call God the Great Architect?

A: Freemasonry embraces all men who believe in God. Its membership includes Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Parsees and others. The use of descriptions such as the Great Architect prevents disharmony. The Great Architect is not a specific Masonic God or an attempt to combine all Gods into one. Thus, men of differing religions pray together without offence being given to any of them.

Q: Why don't some churches like Freemasonry?

A: There are elements within certain churches that misunderstand Freemasonry and confuse secular rituals with religious liturgy. Although some denominations have occasionally criticized Freemasonry, within their memberships there are many Masons and indeed others who are dismayed that the Churches should attack Freemasonry, an organization which has always encouraged its members to be active in the religion of their own choosing.

Q: Isn't Freemasonry just another political pressure group?

A: Emphatically not. While individual Freemasons will have their own views on politics and national policy, Freemasonry as a body will never express a view on either. The discussion of politics at Masonic meetings has always been prohibited.

A Mason knows that his...obligation to community extends beyond [his] local sphere and is partly fulfilled in [his] patriotism: love of [his] country, obedience to its laws and celebration of the freedoms and opportunities it symbolizes.

Q: Are there not Masonic Groups who are involved in politics?

A: There are groups in other countries who call themselves Freemasons and who involve themselves in political matters. They are not recognized or countenanced by regular Grand Lodges who follow the basic principles of Freemasonry and ban the discussion of politics and religion at their meetings.

Q: Is Freemasonry an international Order?

A: Only in the sense that Freemasonry exists throughout the free world. Each Grand Lodge is sovereign and independent, and while following the same basic principles, may have differing ways of passing them on. There is no international governing body for Freemasonry.

Q: What is the relationship between Freemasonry and groups like the Knights of Pythias, Odd Fellows and Elks?

A: None. There are numerous fraternal orders and societies whose rituals, regalia and organization are similar in some respects to Freemasonry's. They have no formal or informal connections with Freemasonry.

Q: Why don't you have women members?

A: Traditionally, Freemasonry is constituted for men. The early stonemasons were all male, and when Freemasonry was establishing, basing itself upon that predecessor organization, its concern was with the role and responsibility of men in society. There are two separate organizations for women in Freemasonry in New York State: the Order of Eastern Star and the Order of the Amaranth.

Q: How many Freemasons are there?

A: Under the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, there are 50,000+ Freemasons, meeting in more than 500 Lodges. According to figures published by the Masonic Service Association of North America there were 1,569,812 members in Grand Lodges in the United States in 2005, the most recent date of record. Worldwide, there are over 3 millions.

Q: Why do you wear regalia?

A: Wearing regalia is historical and symbolic and, like a uniform, serves to indicate where members rank in terms of responsibility and service within the organization.



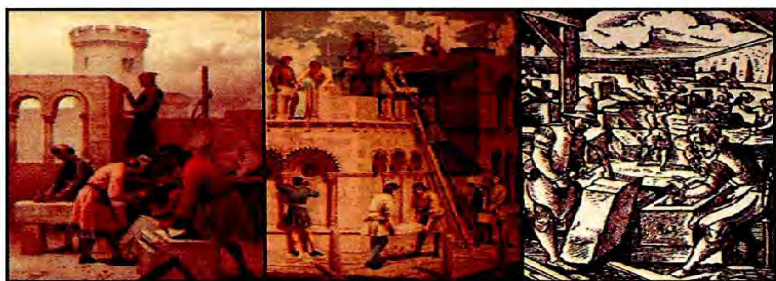
Q: How and where did Freemasonry start?

A: It is not known. The earliest recorded “making” of a Freemason in England is that of Elias Ashmole in 1646. Organized Freemasonry began with the founding of the Grand Lodge of England on June 24, 1717, the first Grand Lodge in the world. Ireland followed in 1725 and Scotland in 1736. All the regular Grand Lodges in the world trace themselves back to one or more of the Grand Lodges in the British Isles.

There are two main theories of origin. According to one, the operative stonemasons who built the great cathedrals and castles had lodges in which they discussed trade affairs. They had simple initiation ceremonies and, as there were no guilds certificates, dues cards or trade union membership cards, they adopted secret signs and words to demonstrate that they were trained masons when they moved from site to site. In the 1600s, these operative lodges began to accept non-operatives as “gentlemen masons.” Gradually these non-operatives took over the lodges and turned them from operative to “Free and Accepted” or “Speculative” Lodges.

The other theory is that in the late 1500s and early 1600s, there was a group which was interested in the promotion of religious and political tolerance in an age of great intolerance when differences of opinion on matters of religion and politics were

to lead to civil war. In forming Freemasonry, they were trying to make better men and build a better world. As the means of teaching in those days was by allegory and symbolism, they took the idea of building as the central allegory on which to form their system. The main source of allegory was the Bible, the contents of which were known to everyone even if they could not read, and the only



building described in detail in the Bible was King Solomon's Temple, which became the basic part of the allegory of the ritual. The old trade guilds provided them with their basic administration of a Master, Wardens, Treasurer and Secretary, and the operative mason's tools provided them with a wealth of symbols with which to illustrate the moral teachings of Freemasonry.



Q: How many Degrees are there in Freemasonry?

A: Basic Freemasonry consists of the three "Craft" Degrees (Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason). There are many other Masonic Degrees and Orders, which are called "related" or "concordant." They are not basic to Freemasonry, but add to it by further expounding and illustrating the principles stated in the Craft.

Q: How much does it cost to be a Freemason?

A: It varies from Lodge to Lodge, but anyone wishing to join can find a Lodge to suit his pocket. Upon entry, there is an initiation fee and a member pays annual dues to his Lodge. This covers his membership and the administrative cost of running

the Lodge.

It is entirely up to the individual member what he gives to Charity, but it should always be without detriment to his other responsibilities. Similarly, in New York State, he may join as many Lodges as his time and personal finances may allow, as long as it does not adversely affect his family life and responsibilities.

Facts on the New York Masons

Nineteen Governors of New York State have been Masons.

Many famous celebrities have been New York Masons, including Harry Houdini, Irving Berlin, and Al Jolson, among countless other notables.

The Grand Master of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York at the present time (2007-2008) is Most Worshipful Neal I. Bidnick of New City in Rockland County. The Deputy Grand Master is Right Worshipful Edward G. Gilbert of Buffalo.

The New York Grand Lodge Headquarters, also known as Masonic Hall, is located at 71 West 23rd Street (at the Avenue of the Americas) in the historic Chelsea district of Manhattan. Masonic Hall is open for free public tours weekdays from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and by appointment.

Masonic Hall is home of the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library of the Grand Lodge, which houses one of the most complete collections of Masonic literature and artifacts in the world.

The New York Masons began the Child ID Program, in response to the number of children missing nationwide. In 2006 over 50,000 children



participated – and more than 275,000 have taken part since the program began in 1991. The N.Y. Masonic Child Identification Program imprints a child's digital image, fingerprints and records personal information on a Mini CD-ROM. The parents, only, retain this important information. In the event of an emergency the Mini CD-ROM can be given to a law enforcement officer and the information can be uploaded into the Amber Alert System.

The New York Masons own and operate the Masonic Care Community, a state-of-the-art retirement community in Utica, New York. It began operation in 1894 to provide care for indigent Masons, their widows and orphans. Today, the New York Masons provide a continuum of health care encompassing a range of facilities from an award-winning independent living campus to assisted living to skilled nursing and rehabilitation for Masons and non-Masons alike.

The Masonic Medical Research Laboratory (MMRL), founded by the Masons of New York State in 1958, is world renowned for its study of the electrical activity of the heart, especially as it applies to abnormal heart rhythms, known as cardiac arrhythmias. The MMRL is leading the way in genetic screening of cardiac disease as well as in the development of innovative and effective pharmacologic treatment for atrial fibrillation, one of the greatest unmet medical needs in our society today. Atrial fibrillation afflicts nearly one in five individuals as they approach 80 years of age and its prevalence is increasing at an alarming rate. The MMRL's cutting-edge cardiac research has attracted 10 international awards in recent years and its scientific achievements are published in the finest medical journals worldwide.



The Masonic Compact

Because I am a Freemason...

... I believe that *freedom of religion* is an inalienable human right and *tolerance* an indispensable trait of human character; therefore, I will stand in my Lodge with Brothers of all faiths, and respect their beliefs as they respect mine, and I will demonstrate the spirit of Brotherhood in all aspects of my life.

...I know that *education* and the rational use of the mind are the keys to facing the problems of humanity; therefore, I will bring my questions and my ideas to my Lodge, and strive to advance the growth of my mind alongside my Brothers.

...I know that the rich *tradition of Freemasonry* and its framework of *Ritual* are important platforms for growth and learning; therefore, I vow to stand upon these platforms to improve myself as a human being, and I vow to help in the mission of the Craft to provide tools, atmosphere, challenges and motivation to help each Brother do the same.

...I know that *charity* is the distinguishing human virtue, and that *personal community service* is the best demonstration of one's commitment to humanity; I acknowledge that words without deeds are meaningless, and I vow to work with my Lodge to provide service to the community, and to promote charity, friendship, morality, harmony, integrity, fidelity and love.

...I know that my obligation to community extends beyond my local sphere and is partly fulfilled in my *patriotism*: love of my country, obedience to its laws and celebration of the freedoms and opportunities it symbolizes.

...I know that *leadership* is best demonstrated by *commitment to serving others*; I will therefore participate in, and help work at improving individual leadership skills, and serve the Brothers of my Lodge to the best of my ability.

...I know that *friendship, fidelity and family* are the foundations of a well-lived life; I therefore vow to be a faithful friend to my Brothers, as I expect

my Lodge to respect my personal obligations, and to treat my family as though my family were their own.

...I know that the last great lesson of Freemasonry—*the value of personal integrity and the sanctity of one's word*—is a lesson for all people in all times; I therefore vow to be a man of my word.

...I know that *Masonry's power is best exercised when its Light is shared* with the world at large; I therefore vow to bring the best of myself to my Lodge, in order that my growth might be fostered and nurtured, and to present myself to the world as a working Freemason, on the path to building a more perfect temple.

Because I am a Freemason, these values and aspirations are guideposts for my progress through life.

For further information about Freemasonry in New York, contact:

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