

FREEMASONRY - SECRET OR NOT SECRET

Many people are of the opinion that Masonry is a secret society, but I hope to dispel this misconception. There is much that may be told to wife or mother, father or friend - told to the glory and the help of the Ancient Craft with no violation of the solemn pledge sacredly to keep secret that which is secret.

It is no secret that he who becomes a Freemason joins an order which reverences womanhood, which upholds law and constitutional government, which cares for the widow and the fatherless, which inculcates the highest moral and religious principles, which fosters patriotism, which instructs in toleration and obliges conscientiousness in human relations.

The most careful brother may tell his wife that in his Lodge the Holy Bible lies open upon an Altar. The fact is written in a thousand volumes, and is proclaimed in Masonic books of the law.

The manuals and monitors of many Grand Lodges set forth the prayers which are uttered in the degrees -- what is printed by a Grand Lodge cannot in its very nature be a secret from any one. That all Lodges are opened and closed with prayer -- that every Lodge has a Chaplain -- is a secret from no one.

It has been well said that Freemasonry is not a secret society, but a society with secrets. A secret society is one of which only its members know; a society with secrets may be one of which the world knows much.

Grand Lodges publish "Proceedings" in which the actions of the Grand Lodge at annual and special communications are set forth. Many of these contain the names of every man who is a Freemason. To be found in Libraries the world over -- these are no more secret documents than is a telephone or city directory.

There is nothing secret about a man being a Freemason -- he is proud of the fact and the Fraternity is proud of him.

Freemasonry appears at times in public -- usually to lay a cornerstone, or to conduct a Masonic funeral. Such ceremonies are performed by Masons who have met and opened a Lodge; the members wear Masonic aprons. Yet some men are so over-cautious they do not dare tell such simple facts as these.

Freemasonry is a charitable, benevolent, educational and religious society. Its principles are proclaimed as widely as men will hear. Its only secrets are in methods of recognition and of symbolic instruction.

"But my wife wants to know what we do in Lodge" - someone states.

Tell her what you do in Lodge! You meet and open. The opening is a ritualistic ceremony in which brethren are reminded of that which is high and holy in Freemasonry. The chaplain invokes the blessing of God. Minutes are read, visitors welcomed, matters of business and charity are discussed, action is taken. The ill are heard from, through the Committee on the Sick; letters from absent brethren are read. Is there anything here, except the words and form of ritualistic ceremony, that the world may not know?

A degree is conferred. Here, indeed, is secrecy! But the degree is but a manner of teaching, and if Freemasons desire to keep it to themselves, it is because those who are not Masons cannot understand. The instructor of mathematics would gladly teach the binomial theorem to a kindergarten child, but the child would not know even the meaning of the words. He must have knowledge before he can comprehend. So it is with the degree -- it can only be understood by those who have been taught -- and it is itself that teaching.

The degree over, there follows a social hour, a fraternizing and fellowship. Then the Lodge is closed, again with a ceremony which is uplifting and inspiring. Again the blessing of the Most High is asked and the brethren return to their homes. He is poor of spirit indeed who takes not with him something of inspiration from this that he has heard as simple as it is profound.

If there be anywhere a member of the Order who is not a loving husband and father; who does not give loyalty to his friends and government; who is not honored of men and reverent before God; who is not charitable and compassionate in act as well as thought; who is not honorable before all men; such a one has not abided by that which Masonry teaches, nor lived up to the obligations he has most solemnly assumed. And of this there is no secrecy -- Masonry proclaims these teachings as her own, and any Freemason may tell them to whom he will.

Freemasonry is meaningless unless we shape those ideals into actual life and work. Only then will it and our work become real and effective.

The heart of the message of Freemasonry must be in our hearts and its ideals of brotherhood must be in the living practise of our work and lives in whatever form it takes.

A true Mason in his work inspires others, understands others, reasons with others, helps others, appreciates others and yet may even disagree without being disagreeable.

A true Mason in his work also recognizes others and knows that a thank you now and then strengthens the bond of goodwill among men.

If a person at his job is to be a moving force he must bring to it a sincere understanding heart and see each man's need as a challenge to service and to get the best out of our work or life we must put the very best into it. The art of true living includes the power of seeing good in others, in all our fellow men.

To be successful in our work we must remember those basic fundamentals - tolerance and love.

Masonry may be pushed aside at times for our job, TV, sports, service clubs, etc., but to be successful in whatever work we do we cannot push its principles aside, they must be a part of us.

A man is as great as the truth he speaks,
As great as the help he gives,
As great as the destiny he seeks,
As great as the life he lives.

Let's get down to positive facts and positive life, as we can make it. Rather than waste our energy crying the blues, pointing at problems and practices which are often cited as sure evidence that the world and its people are headed for Hell, non-stop -- we would be better off and more people would listen if we would only Eliminate the Negative and Accentuate the Positive. If we can keep an open mind and have no prejudices toward our fellowman, have more tolerance toward his shortcomings and problems, our outlook on life will improve and strengthen through sharing and being a part of the community in which we live. For, as a rule, people are ready and willing to accept us; the only requirement is that they be given half a chance.

One of our main poor contributors to breakdown in our relations with others is poor communication. Whenever people fail to express their feelings meaningfully, the distance between freezes over. It happens

between nations too, unfortunately. When a person neither speaks his mind or listens carefully to what is said by others, then he is on very thin ice. The result is usually a horrible death for personality or a nation.

There are times to forget Self and think of others. For instance, the Bumble Bee is built in a rather interesting fashion. Scientists say that physically speaking he should not be able to fly. The size and weight of his body do not provide a positive ratio when compared to the span and action of his wings. Aerodynamically the Bumble Bee is a Bungle. Sheer objectivity contends that he should never make it off the ground - but the Bumble Bee doesn't know that, so he flies anyway.

Many people are so conscious of themselves, so inhibited by their fears and so dominated by their own shortcomings or the opinion of others, that they never get off the ground either, not in their personal lives or in the field of productive living. They may know the facts of life and be completely familiar with the habits of the birds and bees, but life only begins there. Hopefully it will not end before what appears to be impossible has been achieved by transcending personal and physical failings. Let's not forget that funny old Bumble Bee in our approach to love and marriage and life in the community.

Every day is a present. How do you open it? Are you excited about how you will use it? There is nothing much sadder than to hear someone say, as we often have, "You know I have wasted my life, if only I could live it over again". Comments like this come from people over 40, who have taken life pretty much for granted. They have managed to fill in the time with the usual rounds; eating sleeping and earning a living. Then suddenly they realize that better than half their life span has slipped away and they haven't been living at all - just existing. There is a great deal more to life than this. We have minds which transcend the body and talents which, when developed, nurture the soul. Most, I am sure, would agree and say, "Yes, life is more than existing". Perhaps even those who do little more than exist would agree. This leads me to believe that there must be still another key to life. Indeed, there is the conviction that each new day is not just time to be spent but a treasure to be wisely invested.

TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF OUR LIVES ---- a brand new day for us to enjoy. More days will be coming, but no one of them will be more important than today. There will never be another just like it. It is waiting to be filled creatively and joyously with your living.

As we reflect on some ways by which we might better fill our days, here are some thoughts by Alice E. Chase in her poem, "If Suddenly We Knew".

"IF SUDDENLY WE KNEW"

by
Alice E. Chase

If suddenly we knew today
Was going to be our last
I'm sure we'd do a lot of things
Neglected in the past.

Like rising very early
So we wouldn't miss the dawn
Or running barefoot down a hill
Before the dew was gone.

I think we'd greet our neighbors
With a very special smile
And visit friends we hadn't seen
In quite a little while.

I'm certain we'd be careful
Not to tread on any toes
And listen with a kinder ear
To other peoples woes.

We'd find much greater magic
In a sunset or a star
And wish we'd noticed sooner
Just how beautiful they are.

And finally I think we'd ask
For extra time to do
These things we didn't do before
And lots of others too.

For all at once we'd realize
That our spiritual worth
Depends upon the way we live
While we are here on earth.