

# Freemasonry: Its Place In The World

by **Sir Knight Norman Buecker**

by in its present form has existed for less than 300 years, yet there have always been organizations resembling this great Fraternity.

Such groups were formed in many places over several centuries. Why? Because man is a social creature; he has an inherent need for companionship, friendship, and association with others.

There are many definitions of Freemasonry. Perhaps the one most often quoted is that it is an association of men believing in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, using building tools as symbols to teach basic moral truths, thereby impressing on the minds of its members the cardinal virtues of Brotherly love, Relief, and Truth which they should apply in their everyday activities.

If this description seems rather trite, maybe out of place in this cynical world of today, we need only remember that there is a real need for what are, somewhat scornfully, called "the old fashioned, out-of-date virtues."

Let us step back in time. At the dawn of history, man was confronted with many problems; hunger, the elements, disease, predators, and many others. But God gave man memory so that he could profit from his experiences. Later, he was given the gift of communication so that he could pass on what he had learned from generation to generation. Thus, through the succession of ages, man has developed the means to increase our food supply, provide shelter from the elements, conquer many diseases, and solve many of the problems concerning the practical things of life. Yet with all this progress in technology we have to ask; "has man's moral progress kept pace?" I think not. In spite of all the comforts that we enjoy in this modern world, there is no worldwide happiness, peace, or tranquility.

As we look around we find frustrated individuals and unhappy people. Everyone is demanding more rights, more security, and more things. Our community problems such as drugs, gangs, and corruption are increasing.

"What does Freemasonry offer the world?" Let us rephrase that question and ask "What can we learn from Freemasonry which will help our modern world?"

First: Freemasonry does not deal with the mass media. It works with and through the individual. In our Fraternity, the individual is all-important.

He is considered the most important thing in the world. Our communities are made up of many people, and to have a happy community, the people must, individually, be happy. In our form of government, the individual is all-important; he is a vital part of this nation's governing body. As Masons and Americans, we believe that the government

exists to serve the people. There are other political ideologies, "isms" if you will, that consider a person only as a means of serving the government. Freemasonry offers to the world a basic ideal that is being forgotten - every individual is important and his personal welfare counts.

Second: Freemasonry believes in and teaches the Fatherhood of God. Before an individual enters a Lodge, he is asked "Do you believe in the existence of God?" to which he must give an affirmative answer. In many places God is forgotten, even denied. Many of the "isms" consider God and religion as old-fashioned, out-of-date, superstition, an opiate of the mind. We, as Freemasons, consider God as the very foundation of Freemasonry. Be advised that Freemasonry does not concern itself with doctrine or the theology of any church or form of worship. It requires only that a Mason must profess a belief in God. Freemasonry does not teach how God manifests Himself to man or how man is reconciled to God. It is true that it tries to enrich a member's belief in God by instructing him in the moral law. It tries to do that for every member. Freemasonry therefore teaches tolerance for the religious beliefs of all men to the point that we can and do meet together and pray together in complete harmony. To a Mason there is only one Supreme Being no matter what name we give Him. Freemasonry affords men of all creeds the opportunity to meet together and to understand each other's beliefs. It is the only organization where political and religious discussion is prohibited within tiled walls.

Third: Another principle offered to the world by Freemasonry logically follows from that which has just been said - "the Brotherhood of Man." If we have a common Father-God, are we then not all brothers? We hear nothing about this principle today. All around us, we hear demands for "rights" of one kind or another. How often do we hear of duties or obligations? In Freemasonry we are taught the duties we owe to others; we are taught the obligations we owe to our families, our community, and our country. With every "right" there is a corresponding obligation. Freemasonry says nothing about "rights", but it has much to say about duties and obligations that we as members owe. If we all do our duty, all of us will profit. Dr. Joseph Fort Newton tells us that "a duty dodged is like a debt unpaid; it is only deferred and sooner or later we must settle the account."

Fourth: The Freemasonry that we know today evolved from the builders' guilds of the Middle Ages. Therefore, the word "work" plays an important part in the philosophy in our ceremonies. Today, as I implied before, there is a great desire to get something for nothing. We have quiz programs, horse races, lotteries, bingo games, and casinos all catering to this desire.

We believe that wealth comes from work, working with natural resources, and creating useful products. Some seem to think it comes from government, but it doesn't. Mostly the government collects money from us, the taxpayers, and then distributes it, and the handling charge is tremendous! The operative masons in the middle ages worked with their hands. They built huge structures of wood and stone. They had an apprentice system to teach young men to work and develop their natural skills. The idea of "work" is woven into the very fabric of Freemasonry. The world needs to be reminded that work is honorable, work is necessary, and work makes for happiness.

Freemasonry takes the idea of work from our ancient brethren and converts it into a symbol. We, as Freemasons, no longer build visible structures, but we build a symbolic structure - a structure of character, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Our Constitution assures us that we are entitled to the right of the pursuit of happiness. But in this assurance, the emphasis is not on the word "happiness" itself, it is on the right to "pursue" happiness. We are offered and guaranteed the right to use our God-given skills and by employing them to secure happiness.

Fifth: Freemasonry offers an opportunity for social contacts and the development of friendships.

The feeling of belonging, being a part of something, is a vital part of every man's being. No man is an island unto himself. To be happy we must belong to something: a family, a community, a country club, or some other group.

Freemasonry is one of the best groups to which we can belong. It has a glorious past. Many great men have been Masons. It teaches valuable lessons and affords the opportunity for service to mankind. The bringing together of its members in worthwhile activities helps to promote this feeling of belonging.

The psychologists tell us that the feeling of being important to someone or even something is what makes us happy. Freemasonry provides many opportunities for the development of this feeling. A member can feel pride in belonging to the oldest, largest, and greatest Fraternity in the world. He can serve a vital function by serving as an officer, he can do charitable work, or he can visit the sick and shut-ins, all which gives a member a feeling of knowing that he is important to others and to Freemasonry. But here again, we stress the importance of the individual, not the group.

I think this is one of the intangible, subtle, and necessary elements of Freemasonry - making the individual happy. We have already said that if the individual is happy, the community is happy; if the communities are happy, the nation is happy; and if the nations are happy the world will be at peace.

Sixth: Freemasonry offers the world a philosophy of life. Our degrees are designed to teach each member certain basic moral truths. No man ever became a Mason without becoming a better man. Our lessons are taught in a unique manner which makes the principles more effective.

Oft times we are asked; "if the lessons of Freemasonry are so beneficial, why they are taught behind closed doors?" The answer lies in the very nature of man. That which is open to constant view becomes commonplace and attracts little attention. That which is hidden, sought for, and searched for becomes attractive and creates interest.

That is the purpose of the secrecy of the ritual - the element of anticipation, an air of mystery, the feeling of surprise. All these put the new member in a receptive frame of mind. In addition is the fact that our lessons are taught using symbols. This is an effective teaching method. With the use of builders tools, Freemasonry teaches moral

lessons. Many Masonic expressions have found their way into everyday conversation. We use the square to illustrate honesty in our dealings with one another: "He is on the square" or "He is a square dealer."

Each candidate receives this philosophy of life in a most impressive manner. This "way of life" contains all the lessons or rules adopted and practiced by all good men. It covers the Golden Rule. It teaches us that we are our brothers' keeper; that we are to aid the widow and orphan. It teaches us that we can best worship God by rendering service to our fellow men. It teaches that honesty is the best policy. These moral lessons are taught in schools and churches, but the method of teaching used in a Masonic lodge is unique. These lessons are taught without reference to sectarian creeds or religious dogma. Freedom of thought and expression is taught and practiced without any reference to the results of the next election. Many of the characteristics of church, school, social clubs, and ethical societies are incorporated in Freemasonry, and while resemblance to such organizations can be discerned, none is exactly like this great organization that the world knows as Freemasonry.

To summarize and answer the question asked in the beginning, "What does Freemasonry offer the World?" very briefly, Freemasonry offers to mankind an emphasis on the importance of the individual, the belief in the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God, the concept of the dignity of work and its necessity for the pursuit of happiness, the opportunity to realize one's social aspirations in a moral and constructive atmosphere, and a philosophy of life which can lead to individual and therefore community happiness. The world really needs what Freemasonry has to offer!

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