**Your Journey as a Mason**

***Masonic Life***

Welcome to the Fraternity!

With more than six million members worldwide, Freemasonry has been a cornerstone of fraternalism for centuries.

Freemasonry is the world’s oldest and largest fraternal organization. Its members have included kings, presidents, Supreme Court justices, titans of industry, movie stars… and probably your grandfather!

Freemasonry traces its origins to the operative stone mason guilds of the medieval period. Alternative historic accounts find its roots as early as the construction of King Solomon’s Temple, roughly 820 BCE. Regardless of when or where Freemasonry began, it’s generally accepted that the modern fraternity of speculative Freemasonry was established in England in 1717. In the United States, Freemasonry was first found in Pennsylvania, but quickly became popular throughout New England.

As a new member, you have much to learn and no doubt, you have many questions. One of the first questions folks ask is, “what is Masonry?” The definition given in our Masonic Ritual is that Masonry is a regular system of morality, veiled in allegory and symbolism. Now that’s quite a mouth full and it takes a considerable amount of time and much reflection to grasp its full meaning. Perhaps a simpler way to frame it is; Masonry is a pathway to knowledge and enlightenment through education, discipline, and introspection with the goal of making good men better. Our knowledge is imparted through moral lessons taught using symbolism and allegory. A good example of this technique is Aesops fables. Each one is a story about a situation or conflict that contains symbols and a lesson which teaches serious truths and life lessons using a short narrative with interesting characters. These fables can be easily told and enjoyed by all ages as simple and entertaining stories. But those seeking more, can discover the valuable moral and life truths beneath the surface.

All of this will become more evident as you progress on your journey towards understanding the deeper meanings of Masonry. As a starter, lets take a glimpse of some of the components of Masonry.

***The Masonic Lodge***

The most basic organizational unit and cornerstone of Freemasonry is found in the Blue Lodge, more commonly known as a Masonic Lodge or Masonic Temple. In a Blue Lodge, candidates for Freemasonry are progressively initiated into the fraternity through a series of degrees or allegorical steps designed to impart wisdom and knowledge. The term “lodge” itself comes from the structures which the stonemasons built against the sides of the cathedrals during construction. In winter, when building had to stop, they lived in these lodges and worked at carving stone.

Modern Lodges are buildings where a local or regional group of Masons meet to conduct business. They come in all sizes and architectural varieties; from simple to grandiose. From the outside, a Masonic lodge can look rather mundane. But inside the lodge room itself, Freemasonry comes to life, often with age-old artifacts, art, and the pageantry of our sacred ritual. More than anything, when Masons gather in the lodge, it’s a reaffirmation of our Masonic values of brotherly love, relief, and truth.

But a Masonic lodge is not simply a building. It is a representation of the character of its members and their projection into the community in which they belong. It is an organization made up of individuals from every race, creed and religion that come together for a common cause. It is a tight-knit group of men who make solemn vows to one another and become comrades in Masonry and life. Above all, a Masonic lodge represents open arms, a helping hand, and brotherly love to every Mason, anywhere, at any time.

On a deeper level, a Lodge is a symbol of the human mind and body and its relationship to the universe around us. The Lodge is a rather exacting symbol with strict rules on its, orientation, setup, adornment and staffing. All of these specifications, rules and symbolism will become more apparent as you progress in your knowledge and understanding of Masonry.

***Fraternal Brotherhood***

Whenever Masons gather it is a reaffirmation of our fraternal bond and a celebration of the Masonic values of brotherly love, relief, and truth.

Masonry does not discriminate based on religious beliefs, race or creed. Masons meet on the level, meaning that all have equal standing within the Lodge.

To become a Mason, one only needs to be a man of good character who believes in a Supreme Being, whatever form that may take for each individual. What binds Freemasons together is our obligation to each other to become the best possible versions of ourselves.

With this bond as common ground, strong, lifelong friendships form naturally between men. Ask any Mason, and he’s sure to tell you that through his Lodge, he has become Brothers with men whom he may otherwise never crossed paths with.

***Masonic Symbolism***

Symbols are all around us. They are fundamental to the way that we communication and process information about the world around us. While much has been made about the symbols, secrets and mysteries of the craft, many of its most famous and identifiable symbols are quite ordinary items. These symbols have straightforward meanings that are universally understood. But within the context of Masonry, they take on new and deeper meanings and lessons in moral truths.

One of the most prominent symbols of Freemasonry, is the square and compasses. The unofficial trademark of Freemasonry, these implements are among the basic tools of stonemasons. The square is used to prove right angles and ensure that building blocks fit together properly and accurately. The Compasses are used in drafting to create arcs, circles or other geometric figures, to bisect lines, find midpoints and help solve problems in geometry.

In modern-day Freemasonry, referred to as speculative Masonry, the square represents virtue, honor, integrity, truthfulness, and the ways in which we should relate to the people around us. The compasses represent the importance of control over our desires and prejudices and of leading a truly spiritual life.

The letter ‘G” has two allusions. First it represents geometry which is considered the first and noblest of the sciences upon which the superstructure of Masonry is erected. The letter G also has a higher and holier allusion, which is of the sacred name of Deity. Who must reside at the center of our thoughts, deeds and actions.

Obligations to the fraternity are taken with the right hand placed on the Square and Compasses, thus cementing their importance and stature as tools of the speculative Craft. These important symbols serve as a constant reminder that as men and Freemasons, we are bound to lead true and virtuous lives.

There are many, many more symbols that you will discover and learn about as you continue your masonic education.

***The tenets of Masonry***

The tenets, or principal beliefs, of Freemasonry are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

By the exercise of Brotherly Love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, who are bound to aid, support and protect each other. On this principle, Masonry unites men of every country, sect, and opinion and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise remain at a perpetual distance.

Relief – To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent on all men, but more particularly on Masons. We are all linked together by an indissoluble chain of sincere affection. On this basis we form our friendships and establish our connections.

Truth is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue. To be good men and true is the first lesson taught in Masonry. While influenced by this principle, hypocrisy and deceit are unknown among us, sincerity and plain dealing distinguish us, and the heart and tongue join in promoting each others welfare and rejoicing in each others prosperity

***Charity***

The greatest Masonic value is charity, which extends beyond the grave through the boundless realms of eternity. At the heart of everything we do is charity, or love, for ourselves and our fellow man. Freemasons are taught to practice charity, and to care, not only for their own, but also for the community as a whole through charitable giving and volunteer efforts.

From its earliest days, Freemasonry and its appendant bodies have been concerned with the care of orphans, widows, the sick, and the aged. This work continues today. More than 2.6 million dollars are raised each day to help people in need with large donations being given to national and local charities.

***The Road Ahead***

There is ancient Chinese proverb that says. “The journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step.” How logical and profound!

You will discover that the journey of becoming an enlightened Mason is a long and winding road which is mostly uphill, and fraught with darkness, distractions and hardships. It is symbolic of our journey through life, from darkness into the light. The trail you follow is a process of education, understanding, reflection and self-improvement.

You have begun your journey towards the light, with the goal of becoming a better man. Press on with courage and vigor.

Again, welcome to your new life as a Mason!