

# *What is Freemasonry?*

---

STUDY OUTLINE No. 3

---

By  
SILAS H. SHEPHERD  
P. M. Hartland Lodge No. 122,  
F. and A. M.

Published by  
Wisconsin Grand Lodge Committee  
on Masonic Research

Silas H. Shepherd, George C. Nuesse, George B. Goodwin  
and Fred W. Russell

Pamphlet No. 32  
November 21, 1927

## *What is Freemasonry?*

NOTE—Let us not attempt to define Freemasonry definitely or completely, because Freemasonry comprehends such a vast field of speculation that the best any of us can hope is a continually improving conception of Masonry. The object of this outline is to develop thought and discussion, and it is the desire of the committee to have suggestions or criticisms brought to their attention.

---

There are three principal classes of symbols used in Freemasonry: architectural, geometrical and allegorical. The architectural symbols consist of tools and implements used in a speculative manner to build a Temple of Character.

“At the building of King Solomon’s Temple there was not heard the sound of an ax, hammer or any tool of iron.”

In Freemasonry the Temple of Solomon symbolizes the Temple of Character, which, as speculative craftsmen, we are engaged in completing. In order to make our workmanship conform to the designs on the trestleboard of the G. A. O. T. U. we must divest ourselves of purely physical thoughts, and work with the tools of high ideals and spiritual aspirations.

The Holy Bible instructs us to: “Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.”

We are asking the privilege of participating in a glorious work. We are seeking knowledge of our true relationship to God and our fellow creatures. We are knocking at the door of opportunity to be serviceable to God and humanity. If these are not our motives Freemasonry has little to offer us; but if they are, we have opened to us the possibility of great accomplishment.

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK, may indicate to the student of Masonic symbolism and philosophy the three, four and five of the Pythagorean Triangle. As this triangle is one of the reputed secrets of the old operative masons and was one of the first aids in constructing a perfect square or angle of ninety degrees, so the three sides of the triangle of moral progression may aid in forming a perfect square of character.

"If he must knock for entrance into this world it is to remind him that everywhere and always he must knock for entrance into any of the great worlds of existence. God in His unsearchable wisdom has ordained that, except for the involuntary entrance into physical existence, every birth comes from our willing to have it so. The world of nature, the various worlds of literature, of science, of art, of religion, lie about man, but the doors leading therein never open except a man knock once, twice, thrice. It is only after the blows of his hammer, after his tireless, patient study of details, that the heavy portals of the rocks open their secrets to the geologist; it is only after the student has a hundred times implored in toil and prayer that music can be persuaded to swing back her ivory wickets of sweet sound. Over the lintels of every realm of great achievement the Infinite has carved His irreversible law, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you.'" (Read chapter 8 of Haywood's *Symbolical Masonry*—"The Entrance".)

### Reception

Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* contains a very interesting description of a ceremony used in the Mithraic rites in which the novitiate was met at the entrance of a cavern and a sword thrust carefully at his naked left breast so as to slightly wound him and draw blood. The significance of this ancient ceremony is only clear by consideration of its possible allusion to the emotional nature.

Freemasonry appeals to the highest emotions. The usual expression of a person's qualifications are such as "good-hearted, tender-hearted, hard-hearted." If Freemasonry is to function to its maximum, it is necessary to appeal in the strongest manner possible to the emotional nature. The preparation for Freemasonry by development of qualities of love in the heart, must be supplemented by arousing love to its highest development.

"The shock of Entrance is, then, the symbol of the disruption of the candidate from the ties of the world, and his introduction into the life of Masonry. It is a symbol of the agonies of the first death and the throes of the new birth." (Read Mackey's Encyclopedia—article "Shock of Entrance", also Mackey's Manual of the Lodge.)

### Trust

"In God We Trust" is found on all the gold and silver coins of the United States of America. "In the Lord is all our Trust" is an ancient Masonic form of expression. It is believed by many that this motto on our coins is due to the influence of prominent statesmen who were imbued with Masonic ideals. Freemasonry has ever made it an important part of its moral teaching to stress this need of Trust in God. Every Freemason believes in God; but Trust is still a higher duty.

### Circumambulation

"The rite of Circumambulation, derived from the Latin verb 'circumambulate', to walk around anything, is the name given to that observance in all religious ceremonies of antiquity, which consisted in a procession around an altar or some sacred object. Thus, in Greece the priests and the people, when engaged in their sacrificial rites, always walked three times around the altar while singing a sacred hymn. Macrobius tells us that this ceremony had reference to the motion of the heavenly bodies, which, according to the ancient poets and philosophers, produced a harmonious sound, inaudible to mortal ears, which was called 'the music of the spheres'. Hence in making this procession around the altar, great care was taken to move in imitation of the apparent course of the sun. \* \* \* But its intellectual symbolism is, that the circumambulation and the obstructions at various points refer to the labors and difficulties of the student in his progress from intellectual darkness or ignorance to intellectual light or Truth." (Mackey's Manual of the Lodge, also see Mackey's Encyclopedia, Circumambulation.)

In all the ancient ceremonies the right side was always next the altar. If we look upon the altar as a symbol of Light and Truth, on which burns the Fire, this ceremony may also be considered as a purification.

See Symbolical Masonry (Haywood), chapter 11.  
 Symbolism of the Three Degrees, page 41.  
 Symbolism of Freemasonry (Mackey), chapter 21.

### Approaching the East

The continual progress in search of the light and truth which is to be fashioned into living stones for a Temple of Character implies a journey of life. Whither will we direct our steps? The East has from times of the most remote antiquity been considered symbolical of the source of intellectual and spiritual light as it has of physical light through the rising of the great solar luminary.

From whence came we? From the source of all light and truth. We traveled westward into physical existence, and after a time turn to journey back to Him Who sent us.

"The candidate's 'approach to the East' is a symbolic art of far-reaching meaning, for it signifies nothing less than that he has tuned his will toward the perfecting of his own human nature in order to enter into communion with the Divine; if he is compelled to advance by a certain regulated manner it is in token of the fact that the soul itself is a realm of law and that he who would reach the soul's highest development must walk in harmony with the spirit's laws; and if, in the succeeding degrees, his manner of approach approximates more and more toward a perfect step it is in recognition of the necessity of gradual and orderly progress in the highest growth. Always and everywhere, in whatever condition or task a man finds himself, if he would 'go up into the seer's house', he must mount by those virtues of Purity, Beauty, and Truth which are hidden laws of the heart." (Haywood's Symbolical Masonry. Read entire chapter 12.)

See Symbolism of the Three Degrees (Street), page 42.

"All human life, having originated in the Mystical 'East' and journeyed into this world which, with us, is the 'West', must return again to its source."

"From East to West the soul her journey takes;  
 At many bitter founts her fever slakes;  
 Halts at strange taverns by the way to feast,  
 Resumes her load, and painful progress makes  
 Back to the East."

"Masonry, by means of a series of dramatic representations, is intended to furnish those who care to discover its purport and to take advantage of the hints it throws out in allegorical form, with an example and with instructions by which our return to the 'East' may be accelerated. It refers to no architecture of a mundane kind, but to the architecture of the soul's life. It is not in itself a religion; but rather a dramatized and intensified form of religious processes inculcated by every religious system in the world." (The Meaning of Masonry.)

In our journey toward the East as Speculative Craftsmen, are we not following out that "Quest of the Ideal" of which MacBride speaks in "Speculative Masonry"?

"In human history, from the earliest times, we have evidence of the Quest of the Ideal, and it has usually taken the form of searching for that which was lost. Isis searching for her murdered lord and master, Osiris, in the waters of the Nile. Venus cried for her slain Adonis on Mount Libanus. Ceres sought for the lost Prosperine in Eleusis. The sons of Odin searching for the body of Balder in Scandinavia. The Knights of the Round Table traveling in quest of the Holy Grail. The Alchemists strove to wrest from nature the lost secret of life. Thus in every age and in every land, the Quest of the Ideal has been pursued. It has called into existence innumerable societies, religious, political, and social, and of these the Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, the world has seen."

### Secrecy

Probably no phase of Freemasonry has received so much unfavorable comment from those who are not members of the Fraternity as its secrecy. There is little, however, to warrant the criticism. Freemasonry is not a secret organization, so far as its aims and objects are concerned, and really has no secrets except such as pertain to its private ritualistic work. It has certain methods of recognition which are entirely improper for others to know. The vital secrets of Freemasonry which are sometimes alluded to as its secret arts, might be more correctly called sacred arts, which are too solemn and important to divulge to any except those who are qualified by moral and spiritual attributes to understand and use them.

The business and work of a Lodge is the private affair of its members and every brother should fully understand

his duty regarding silence and circumspection. In many ways secrecy is in itself a virtue. To be secret and silent, Aristotle said, is the most difficult task.

There is much to warrant the belief that most of the ancient religious systems taught a secret doctrine to the elect few who were qualified to understand and a more simple doctrine to the many. Jesus, speaking to his disciples, said: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but unto them it is not given."—(Matt. 13:11.)

"The secret doctrines of all the ancient peoples were never committed to writing, but were handed down from adept to neophyte by oral tradition. The Holy Books of India were handed down in this manner for many centuries with the utmost precaution to secure accuracy. They were not content by learning to recite them word for word, but many committed them backwards and in many other complicated methods, so that by no possible chance could the ancient text be altered. The secret mysteries of the Hebrew Cabalah (Kabbalah) (Quaballah) were transmitted by this method down through all the celebrated characters of Jewish history, and formed the basis of the famous 'Wisdom of Solomon'. The Christian Church of the age immediately succeeding the apostolic observed the same custom of orally instructing postulantes. St. Basil says, 'Lest the vulgar, too familiar with our dogmas, should lose respect for them.'" (The Lodge and the Craft, Blackmer.)

Additional references taken from the latest revised edition of Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry.

What the Apprentice should know of his objects:

| Article            | Page | Article      | Page |
|--------------------|------|--------------|------|
| Architecture ..... | 75   | Lodge .....  | 449  |
| Iron Tools .....   | 358  | Temple ..... | 766  |
| Labor .....        | 419  | World .....  | 859  |

What the Apprentice should learn of his means:

A triangle having one right angle is made up of three, four and five units, be they inches or feet or any other scale, as long as these members refer to the unit of length dimensions. With three, four and five in mind one easily compares ASK, SEEK, KNOCK, having the same number of letters, 3, 4, and 5.—(See Luke xi, 9, and Matthew vii, 7.)

Ask, indicates a want, 82  
 Seek, shows loss (Search for Truth, 675)  
 Knock, proves earnestness, 416

| Article          | Page | Article                    | Page |
|------------------|------|----------------------------|------|
| G .....          | 287  | Promise .....              | 592  |
| Geometry .....   | 295  | Publications, Masonic..... | 596  |
| Mystic Tie ..... | 501  | Seal of Solomon .....      | 674  |
| Numbers .....    | 520  | Worldly Wealth .....       | 859  |

#### What is hidden for the intelligent use of the Apprentice:

|                                   |     |                             |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|
| Darkness .....                    | 196 | Square and Compasses .....  | 708 |
| Mysteries .....                   | 497 | Shoe .....                  | 687 |
| Mystery .....                     | 500 | Strength .....              | 730 |
| Myth .....                        | 501 | Scriptures .....            | 672 |
| Word .....                        | 856 | Shock of Entrance.....      | 687 |
| Preparation of the Candidate..... | 578 | Shock of Enlightenment..... | 687 |
| Penal Sign and Penalty.....       | 549 | Twenty-four Inch Gauge..... | 811 |
| Prudence .....                    | 595 | Tessellated Border .....    | 777 |
| Right Hand.....                   | 624 | Truth .....                 | 805 |
| Relief .....                      | 617 | Temperance .....            | 763 |
| Religion of Masonry.....          | 617 | Wisdom .....                | 854 |
| Secrecy and Silence.....          | 675 | Working Tools.....          | 856 |

#### What the Apprentice should know of fundamentals:

|                               |     |                           |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|
| Christianization of F. M..... | 148 | Oral Instruction .....    | 532 |
| Degrees .....                 | 203 | Objections to F. M.....   | 525 |
| Esoteric Masonry.....         | 249 | Rite .....                | 626 |
| God .....                     | 301 | Ritual .....              | 627 |
| Initiation .....              | 350 | Secret Societies.....     | 677 |
| Information .....             | 351 | Speculative Masonry ..... | 704 |
| Morality of Freemasonry.....  | 492 |                           |     |