

**Should  
I ask?**



## The Masonic Commitment to Character

Many years ago, the famous Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote these magnificent words,

**It is not enough merely to exist  
.... Every man has to seek in  
his own way to make his own  
self more noble and to realize  
his own true worth.**

Those words capture the meaning of Freemasonry. As the world's oldest and largest fraternity, our goal is to build a man's most valuable possession - his character.

We believe that the strength of the family, the church, the community and our country rests with men of strong conviction, firm ethical and moral values and a devotion to our democratic system of government. As Masons, we help each other intensify our devotion to these enduring values.

In a day when it seems that few people really care about rising to the highest and best in life, it is good to know that there is a group where a man can work *to really* improve himself.

In lodge meetings, there is no talk of politics, no discussion of religious issues, even though every Mason must affirm a belief-according to his own understanding -in deity and devotion to his country.

Masons are concerned with developing their minds and enlarging their scope of knowledge. In a word, Masons are dedicated to becoming better men.

Because a man's personal desire to build his own character is at the heart of being a Mason, you must ask to join. You must make the request.

Men of every walk of life belong to Masonic Lodges. They are proud of their centuries of tradition, their belief in brotherhood, country and the many Masonic acts of charity and compassion.

## The Founding of Freemasonry

The origins of Masonry reach back to Medieval times when the great cathedrals of Europe were built. The stonemasons who created these awe-inspiring Gothic structures formed craft guilds to protect the secrets of their trade and to pass on their knowledge to worthy apprentices.

In 17th century England, these guilds began accepting honorary members, men of learning and position. These new members were not working stonemasons or even associated with the building trades. As "accepted Masons," they eventually grew into a separate organization called Freemasonry, a moral and ethical society that taught the 18th century ideals of equality and the importance of education in freeing mankind from prejudice, superstition and social injustice.

## **Masonry Today**

Masons continue to use the simple tools of the ancient stonemasons-the square and compasses, the trowel, plumb and level as symbols to teach their ideals. A Mason

is oath-bound to build his life and character with the same care and precision that stonemasons used to construct the cathedrals and temples centuries ago.

Today, there are almost five-million Masons in the world, with the United States claiming about three and one half million of the total membership.

## **Masonic Concern for Others**

Freemasonry has an outstanding record for helping others. Along with scholarships and loan funds to assist young people in furthering their education, Masons support important research projects aimed at finding answers to many devastating diseases. Retirement homes and hospitals for the elderly provide care for those who can no longer care for themselves.

One of Masonry's associated groups operates institutes for the severely burned, along with the famous hospitals for crippled children, while another sponsors an eye foundation responsible for restoring sight to many youngsters and adults.

One of the nation's most prestigious schizophrenia research programs is sponsored by Scottish Rite Masons. Nearly \$8,000,000 has been contributed since 1934 to finding the causes of this widespread and devastating form of mental illness.

Scottish Rite Masons also sponsor extensive programs to understand and aid children suffering from aphasia. These youngsters have serious difficulty in learning to speak. Other aphasic children have an inability to read, write and communicate in other ways.

The Scottish Rite Masonic Museum of Our National Heritage in Lexington, Massachusetts, expresses the strong Masonic commitment to our country, as this vigorous institution tells the story of America to thousands of visitors. It fosters a feeling of patriotism and a dedication to principles which have made this country great.

## The Improvement of Life

Yes, Masons are members of a fraternity that has its secrets, but the many charitable and character-building activities of Freemasonry indicate that it is far from a secret organization. Masons are active in their dedication to improve life. Always ready to undertake a difficult task in a quiet, dignified way, today's Masons go about the job of extending the hand of brotherhood.

It should not be surprising that so many famous men have been proud to be called Masons. George Washington and thirteen other Presidents have been Masons. Other countries honor such names as Simon Bolivar, Benito Juarez, Bernardo O'Higgins, Jose de San Martin, Francisco da Paula Santander, Jose Rizal, Jose Marti, Pandit Nehru, Lajos Kossuth, Jonus Furrer, Guiseppe Mazzini, Eduard Benes, John A. MacDonald, Edmund Burke and Winston Churchill.

But it is perhaps not as well known that many leaders in the professions, arts and sciences and other human endeavors benefiting the world at large have been members

of the Masonic Fraternity. A few names that come to mind are such writers as Walter Scott, Robert Burns, Rudyard Kipling and Mark Twain; poets-playwrights - Wassily I. Maikow, Heinrich Heine, Jean P. C. de Florian, Leopoldo Lugoner and Antonio de Castro Alves; musicians - Wolfgang Mozart, Jean Sibelius, Franz von Liszt, Josef Hayden; philosophers - Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Gotthold E. Lessing and Francoise Voltaire; medicine-Dr. Alexander Fleming, Jules Bordet, Antoine DePage, Edward Jenner, Charles and William Mayo and Karl and William Menninger; sculptorGutzon Borglum; artists-Charles W. Peale and Alfons M. Mucha; scientists-Hans C. Orsted, Jons Jakob Frk. von Berzelius, Alfred Edmund Brehm, Luther Burbank, Johan Ernst Gunnerus, Albert Abraham Michelson, Gaspard Monge, C. F. S. Hahnemann and Pedro N. Arata; labor - Samuel Gompers; industrialists and commerce leaders - Henry Ford, Walter P. Chrysler, John Wanamaker, S. S. Kresge and J. C. Penney.



Many others prominent yesterday and today in these and other fields, such as the law, religion, space exploration, news media, sports and entertainment, have a common bond to Freemasonry.

## **The First Step**

For the man who is looking for deeper meaning in life and who wants to be part of a fraternity committed to his growth and improvement, Masonry is filled with marvelous opportunities and limitless possibilities.

The first step in Masonry is one a man must take himself. He must say, "I want to become a Mason." What follows will be thrilling, exciting and extremely worthwhile.

"Should I ask?" That is the one important question. The answer is up to you.

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