

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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THE APPROACH TO FREEMASONRY

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From those days, early in the eighteenth century, when operative Masons found their guild customs and rituals falling into disuse, and decided to "accept" worthy men, not necessarily stone workers, to a participation in their trade mysteries, few movements have shown such vigor as that which, adopting for its keynotes an ancient guild ritual, wove around and into it a system of moral philosophy acceptable to all men who believe that humanity moved within the compass of some vast scheme and the moral life was but the prelude to greater possibilities.

Freemasonry, as we know it today, permeates the social life to an immense extent and furnishes a constant driving force in life and the maintenance of the social structure. Whilst affording a magnificent instance of well organized benevolence, the Craft has grown to such an extent that the individual is no longer in such close touch with the centre of affairs and the sources of information as was the case when the movement was the interest and recreation of fewer in number and perhaps more studious in application.

In the rank of the thousands who, year by year, offer themselves for initiation there are many to whom Freemasonry became a greater mystery than intended. Who, either from disability or disinclination to unravel things for themselves, are satisfied with a merely superficial view of the Craft and gravitate towards that position where its teachings are acceptable as something rather beyond comprehension. This attitude is, unfortunately, met with. Happily the influence of the Craft on social and moral good is in no way lessened as a result. Brethren translating into their daily lives even the surface teaching and principles of the Masonic Order must, of necessity, become daily greater service to humanity and help to steady the structure of good order and society.

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No importance, therefore, attaches to what is termed as "The approach to Freemasonry". Being a close society, which does not advertise its activities, the viewpoint of the candidate for its many privileges may be based on curiosity or, more properly, upon a hope of personal welfare to accrue from the association. There is only one position in which a man can stand safely at such a juncture-- the simple and sincere desire to associate himself with others in the quest of high ideals and the practice of charitable work.

Initiation from any other motive whatsoever must, by reason of its exacting obligation, become an act of perjury. No man can become a member of the Order unless he is introduced by two or more Brethren to whom he has been known for a number of years. The duty of such Brethren is not to conclude with introduction of a candidate for whose integrity and worthiness they are prepared to vouch; they should make clear to the candidate or inquirer that Freemasonry is so much more than a mere fellowship of choice spirits; that it is a definite scheme of moral and ethical teaching, designed to encourage a proper humility of mind and lofty conception of life and the candidates part in life. If this information lessens the desire of the inquirer for participation, both he and the Craft will be better for his retirement.

It cannot be stated too plainly that good fellowship alone is no criterion of fitness to membership to the order and a man, whose only gratification lies in the finding of this admittedly helpful and useful aspect of our Rule, will seldom reach to a full realization of the great and valuable teachings our system exists to instill. Those teachings are not reserved to persons of profound thought. The success of Freemasonry may be attributed to the fact that, given a real interest on the part of any brother, our Craft practices lead to the unfolding of rich thoughts and present many useful lessons, whilst they provide intellectual stimulation to the more studious in ratio to their application of mind.

In a movement so widely established as Freemasonry, with responsibilities over so wide a field, it necessarily follows that the first principles to affirm in all cases of initiation is the need for such qualities as will tend to add thoughtful men as well as good fellows to our Craft. The strength of lasting movements lie, not in numbers, but in zeal and interest of the personnel. Rigidly banning any interference with religious or political life or with the religious political views of its members, our Craft finds innumerable avenues for useful and beneficial work but the forcefulness of its measures has been, and always must be found in the high integrity and devotion of its members, characteristics which are fostered and developed more by a realization of the mysteries than by a mere submission to its rule. The approach to our Craft is not altogether free from possibilities of disillusionment. Care should be taken to see that just as the real assert of good fellowship is not allowed to become an end in itself, so, likewise, shall expectation of a more serious kind be tempered with caution. Our Order certainly represents the truest manifestation of democratic principle, but is by no means a haven of relief for tired sociologists on the lookout for a model closer to their views than the existing order of society. Neither should persons of evident religious favour be allowed to imagine that the beautiful tenet of the Craft may provide that one thing needful to their spiritual attainment.

FREEMASONRY EXISTS TO USE MEN, NOT TO BE USED BY MEN. It stands to provide much that is uplifting and ennobling; it suggests a number of great and satisfying conclusions which might and should reasonably react upon the social and religious outlook of its devotees, but through glory of the system lies in that it defines no creed whilst it recognizes and commends good in every form irrespective of the source.

In an age largely affected by desire for internationalism, Freemasonry has already proved the one and only successful bond to a common humanity by its disregard of colour, race or creed, binding men together to a real Brotherhood, the roots of which are just sympathy and the common quest of a fine ideal. The approach to the Craft, therefore, should be actuated by a desire for the subjugation of self and the opportunity for service to humanity. Brethren who have failed in this conception of their membership must have misread their obligation and failed utterly to understand the meaning of things they say and do.