

What is Masonic Formation?

By Wr. Giovanni Lombardo, P. M.
Lemmi Lodge # 400
Grande Oriente d'Italia

The greatest patrimony of Freemasonry consists not only in rites and symbols, but also in its members. The Brethren guarantee the future of the Order as well as attaining its goal, that is, to ameliorate humankind, by assimilating and practicing the teachings that they have received in the lodge. Hence the need to form the Brethren, so to that their initiation finishes to be “virtual”, thus becoming “effective”.

The first task is to select the Candidates. I am aware that my Anglo-Saxon Brethren do not invite profanes to join, preferring to be asked. This is justified by the circumstance that people are quite familiar with Freemasonry, both its nature and its message, as they are commonly perceived.

This is the point to change. Freemasonry regrettably is intended as a social and charitable association. If it now wants to restore the traditional path, it has to change its message, thus speaking a different language which, by its nature, shall be understood by a minority only. In this case, to select the Candidate shall assume primary importance: we must learn to “guard the West”.

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The perspective Candidate shall be pushed by the need of his inner improvement. His feature is to be a humble researcher. He must be sure about the existence of a superior entity, whichever the name, but doubtful about the way to reach it. He must be a humble researcher, a “heretic” in the etymological and noble meaning of the word: a man “able to choose”. To act so, man has first to know, knowledge being the *a-priori* condition of any choice. To the three degrees of Craft, in fact, match as many duties, or layers of knowledge: of oneself, as Entered Apprentice; of the surrounding world, as Fellow of the Craft; of the transcendent, as Master Mason.

The Candidate’s selection is therefore the main task of any old and wise Freemason.

Once the Candidate petitioned, there must be an adequate interval between his petition and initiation. In Italy—according to our statutes—it cannot be shorter than two months, but some lodges leave the Candidate outside for a longer period, from six up to twelve months. During this elapse of time the Petitioner should ponder his decision, dedicating part of his time to self-examination and introspection.

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On his initiation, the profane is an Entered Apprentice. Silence is the feature of this degree. He cannot speak for any reason at all. I think that silence is the greatest gift for a newbie. So doing, he his forced to pay attention to what it is said and to think over it, learning to separate wheat from chaff.

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In Italy lodges usually conduct business in the first degree, so anybody can take part in. Attending the meeting is a duty for everybody; absences have to be justified either previously or the next following meeting.

The Brethren's work consists in presenting a paper of either esoteric or philosophical nature, to read and to discuss it. Brethren should strive to read and to understand the ritual as well as the meaning of the symbols which appear in their respective degree. Sometimes man can discuss an exoteric subject, about a social problem, for instance: after all, exoterism and esoterism are two faces of the same coin and any aspect of the life can be approached in an esoteric manner. The discussion must be conducted with politeness and order: the Brother shall hold his speech staying "at order", so that he cannot gesticulate. Expressions such as "let me differ" or "I do not agree" are banned. Each Brother can disclose his ideas, even if they are different from one another's one, but there is no need to underline such a difference: the Brethren shall recognize it.

The Brethren shall assume a particular posture, that of the Pharaoh (see figure). In this way they excite the *kundalini*, the vital energy that origins from the coccyx reaching the cerebellum. Their mind is therefore cleaner than ever and ready to absorb what is said by the others.



Interval between degrees is usually one year, said rule to be interpreted with prudence and wisdom.

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A lodge should be compound by no more than fifty Brethren. For various reasons. The discussion cannot be monopole of some Brethren; to the contrary each of them has to feel free to intervene, EAs excluded, of course. Time is however a tyrant, so the meeting cannot last more than a reasonable period, usually two hours. If the lodge is too numerous, it happens that some Brethren refrain to intervene, in order to spare time, and this is a pity, indeed. A smaller group prevents these inconveniences, apart from the circumstance that certain discussions can be enjoyed within a harmonious group only.

Each Brother, especially each Officer, must consider himself as an irreplaceable part of the lodge, and this does not happen if a Brother thinks that somebody else can do his work: this circumstance encourages absences.

Last, but not the least, Brethren must become friends: they have to share not only thoughts, but also feelings. Bro. Goethe wrote: *Attitudinal education is Freemasonry's most distinguished task. Only with our attitudes can we bring together people of differing opinions; opinions which, as human beings, keep us apart.*

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Freemasonry is a particular school: we are, at the same time, apprentices and masters. Man learns from everybody. There are no blackboards, no classrooms. Above all, no programmes. The Masonic journey is more similar to a sea voyage, with no compass but one's own conscience, rather than to a travel by railway.

Man is sure to start, not to arrive. Masters teach by giving their example, rather than through their literary knowledge. The knowledge which initiates long for cannot be found in the books: it is the knowledge of the supreme reality, the Great Architect, who his hidden within ourselves that have been created "in His image".

To know is therefore to be. Mauna Ujjayi wrote:¹

The initiatory work can be fruitful if it is done with engagement and dedication, love and devotion (*bhakti*) towards our Being, the inner Self, that God that remains silent since it is wrapped in the darkness of the ignorance (*avidya*), in the veil of the prejudice and the presumption, in the mantle of the attachments, of the illusions (*maya*) that weight down, slow down and often prevent the way towards the light. The realization begins to give its yields progressively, while man is working on his own transformation, facing the more difficult fight that the man has ever fought: that against his passions, against his conflict *ego*.

A very hard work, to be done in silence and secrecy, within our inner. The attachments of the profane life, the desire of money, the ambitions and the prejudices must be kept under strict control and possibly rejected during the journey.

The charity is useless to transmute oneself. It demagogically cleans our conscience, but has no effect on the inner transformation. Charity and other pious actions is the natural by-product of the man who realized himself, that is free from the neuroses, that has gone beyond the appearances. Who has caught self-consciousness he actually works for his transmutation, in total respect of the Tradition; he will then be brought beyond the time and the space, till to the Supreme Knowledge... Even if the initiation is practiced in a community, it is nevertheless a unique, ineffable experience. Man has to live it directly, in person. Nobody could rationally describe it, even by approximate words, as said Plato. Nobody can be our substitute for the solution of the *Eternal Mystery*.

¹ *Sé Metafisica Realizzativa*, Rivista di Studi Tradizionali, Estate 2004