

To the Newly Made Mason

The ceremony of initiation can be somewhat overwhelming. There is much speaking – too much to take in, to fully comprehend in one session. In the days and weeks ahead you will think back on certain aspects of this evening that particularly impressed you. Let me share a few observations and salient points for your consideration.

Every man comes to Freemasonry with high expectations. We must make two basic assumptions: that every man who seeks admission hopes to fulfill a personal quest, and that he is looking for something to satisfy a personal longing, perhaps undefined, seeking something that he has not yet found elsewhere in life.

When you were presented with the Constitution of Grand Lodge and the By-laws of the Lodge, you were informed that you were this evening made a *member* of the Lodge. However, the process of becoming a *Mason* is more complex and demanding.

This process of becoming a Mason may be simplified by identifying three parts. First, you were made a Mason *ritualistically* when you took the solemn Obligation of an Entered Apprentice Mason kneeling at the Altar. Second, you were made a Mason *legally* when you signed the By-laws at the Secretary's desk. Third, and the most important, you are now exhorted to become a Mason *philosophically*. That is an endeavour that will occupy you for the rest of your life. To state it simply: It takes about an hour to make a *member* – it takes a lifetime to make a *Mason*.

There is nothing 'magical' about Masonic initiation. Masons do not indulge in such 'hocus-pocus.' Nothing we do in these Masonic rites and ceremonies automatically confers knowledge and wisdom. It is no coincidence that what we do here in the Lodge is referred to as 'The Work.'

You were informed that although we inherited many traditions, signs and symbols from our ancient '*operative*' brethren, the stonemasons of the medieval period who built the magnificent cathedrals, abbeys, and castles that are the architectural glory of Europe, we by contrast are '*speculative Masons*.' You will come to understand that '*speculative*', means we are '*thinking*' men. In the lodge, we enter the world of the mind. I suggest to you that Freemasonry is really a gentlemen's philosophical society, dedicated to '*the cultivation and improvement of the human mind*.' As such, we are both a *learned* society and a *learning* society. In the company of like-minded men – fellow travellers – we have the opportunity to explore the world of human knowledge and the accumulated wisdom of the ages. That is the intellectual challenge that Freemasonry presents.

I must warn you that to fully understand the profound meaning that Freemasonry conveys requires effort – concentrated and continuing effort. I remind you that "*the rude material receives its fine finish from repeated efforts alone*." The lectures and charges offer hints and point you in the right direction, but you yourselves must tease out the inner meaning of the symbols and allegories presented. Let us begin at the beginning.

As you study the Entered Apprentice degree under the guidance of your sponsors and mentors, you will be coached in a few questions which you must answer in open lodge before proceeding on to the next level. The first of these questions is, "*Where were you first prepared to be a Mason?*" The response, I suggest, is the essence of our entire Freemasonic philosophy: "*In my heart, Worshipful Sir.*"

That is the symbolism of stone. The sculptor goes inside the stone to reveal its inner beauty – shaping, polishing, refining. Freemasonry regards the inner qualities, not the external. We are concerned with discovering and exploiting one's inner potential. Freemasonry is dedicated to the improvement of man as an individual and society as a whole.

You have probably heard the old cliché about Masonry "*making good men better.*" Freemasonry is a vehicle for self-improvement, but the truth of the matter: Masonry can only provide the roadmap and point the way; only you as an individual can become a better man – not better than your fellows, but better than yourself – to realize your potential, to reach for the top. By that I do not mean the ego-centred scrambling after rank and title that is sometimes evident in certain individuals in any corporate body. I mean the striving after excellence in everything we do.

The words '*KNOW THYSELF*' were inscribed over the entrance to the chambers of initiation in ancient time. This is the challenge of initiation into the secrets and mysteries of Freemasonry that has been set before you during your Initiation. You have embarked on a life-long journey of self-discovery. The goal

of every true Mason: to be a good man and a good citizen. Ordinary men called upon to do extraordinary things. You are now sworn and obligated to play out the game of life with different rules – timeless, yet timely old-fashioned values based upon virtue and morality. Thomas Paine (1737-1809) wrote, "*We see with other eyes; we hear with other ears; we think with other thoughts, than those we formerly used. The mind, once enlightened cannot again become dark.*" That is the transformation effected by Freemasonic initiation.

If there is one thing I urge you to take from this once-in-a-lifetime experience of initiation it would be this: In the final charge you were *urged* – *exhorted* is the word the ritual uses – "*to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge.*" Admonition is really about learning, improving yourself, as I emphasised earlier. "*Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest*" the ideas and ideals, the core values of Freemasonry in order to share in this vast store of accumulated knowledge and wisdom. The subject is inexhaustible and the resources are limitless.

We must question our teachings to enable us to understand them better. That great physicist and thinker of the last century, Albert Einstein (1879-1955) articulated it thus: "*The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.*"

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