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Becoming a Mason and Being a Mason

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What induced you to become a Mason? The answer I'm looking for is probably not what you are thinking.

It is true that our ancient, operative Brothers wanted to travel in foreign lands to earn a respectable living for their families. They also wanted to have the wherewithal to be charitable to those in need. That being the case, becoming a stonemason was an attractive and practical vocation to pursue for those operative ancestors of ours.

But what about you? What really induced you to become a Freemason? I doubt seriously that it was the prospect of a well-paying job building temples in Mesopotamia.

Perhaps your father or grandfather, or someone else in your family was a Mason. Maybe you had a good friend who was a Mason, or there were some people in your community whom you admired, that you knew were Masons. These are certainly valid reasons for thinking that this just might be the kind of organization of which you'd like to be a part.

Of course, something specific attracted our interest and raised our curiosity about Freemasonry. Each of us has his own personal story to tell about his journey into the Craft, and each of our individual motivations, whatever they might have been, was sufficient enough to propel us on a mystical journey that has become an important part of our lives.

For some men their original motives for becoming a Mason may seem less noble. They may have been attracted for more selfish reasons, for

example, the belief that membership might yield a business or personal advantage. On the surface, we could judge such reasoning to be shallow and less than honorable.

But perhaps it's not. Think about it for a moment. Even these Brethren were soon exposed to the same Masonic light as all the rest of us. We each discovered that there was indeed personal gain available to us, but the gain was not material or monetary. The light that we received was not aimed at enhancing the face that we present to others, our self-serving reputation. It was a deeper and longer lasting than that. It was aimed at building our character.

I read somewhere that character is like a tree, and reputation is merely its shadow. The shadow might be what we notice, but the tree is the real thing.

The light that we received upon becoming Masons provides us a path to follow which can make us better men than when we first joined the Fraternity. This is what we mean by taking good and upstanding men and making them better. It is not always easy, and the challenge we face daily is to stay squarely centered on that path while still meeting those pressures and demands of everyday living, which often get in the way of fulfilling all the promises we made while taking the obligations, which truly made us Masons.

We can succeed if we remain focused on two very important concepts that are at the center of Masonic teaching.

The first one is the three Tenets of our Fraternity – brotherly love, relief, and truth, which give us purpose and inspire us to be generous and honorable along our path.

The second is the four Cardinal Virtues of Masonry -- temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice – which always should guide our conduct.

This is not a multiple choice... we don't get to pick and choose which virtues best suit our individual desires. A true Mason embraces all these virtues.

I want to read you a poem that was written many years ago by a well-known American poet and Masonic brother named Edgar Guest. He wrote several books, was syndicated in newspapers across the country, and even hosted a folksy radio show during the 1940s and 50s. I think this is a great poem, and it delivers a simple, yet inspiring message. I hope you'll agree.

“I watched them tearing a building down,
A gang of men in a busy town.
With a ho-heave-ho and a lusty yell,
They swung a beam, and the side wall fell.

I asked the foreman: "Are these skilled--
And the men you'd hire if you had to build?"
He gave me a laugh and said: "No, indeed!
Just common labor is all I need.

I can wreck it in a day or two
What builders have taken a year to do."
And I thought to myself as I went my way,
Which of these roles have I tried to play?

Am I a builder who works with care
Measuring life by a rule and square?
Am I shaping my deeds to a well-made plan,
Patiently doing the best I can?

Or, am I a wrecker who walks the town
Content with the labor of tearing down?"

~

So... no matter what prompted you to become a Mason, your obligation made you a Mason, and your conduct and demeanor now defines you as a Mason.

Ask yourselves, my Brethren, these three simple questions:

- Are you the kind of builder who measures your life by a rule and square?
- Are you doing the best that you can do – for you and your family, your community, and this great Fraternity of ours?
- And finally, how well are you staying on the path to make you a better man?