

One Hundred One Questions About Freemasonry



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Many matters are discussed in these hundred one questions besides those specifically mentioned in the inquiries. To make reference to these easy, this Index has been compiled. Numbers referred to are the numbers of the questions, not the pages. For speedy information *use the Index.*

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FOREWORD

In March, 1938, the *Association* published a Short Talk Bulletin entitled "Nine Questions"; in May, one called "Nine More Questions," and in March, 1953, "Please Tell Me" (which contained still another nine questions). These are queries made especially by newly made Masons.

So many are the requests for these Bulletins, and so numerous are other questions which the *Association* is asked in almost every mail, that this booklet, containing one hundred one of the most commonly asked questions, resulted.

Replies to these questions are compiled from the files of old publications, reference books, Masonic volumes, encyclopedias, the *Transactions* of Research Lodges. As the information herein contained necessarily comes from many diverse sources, and is here combined into a booklet by one staff and one Editor, it seems wise to suggest that, while every attempt has been made to keep it authoritative, there are paragraphs herein which may justly be judged as opinions.

The book is designed for any Mason of an inquiring mind, but should be especially useful to instructors in the ritual. These devoted brethren are sometimes greater students of and experts with the *words* of the degrees than with simple explanations of the meanings of some of the words, phrases, symbols and practices of Masonry.

Should this small volume assist these—or, indeed, any brethren—to "more light," the time spent on it will bring to its compiler and Editor "a Master's Wages."

QUESTIONS RELATING TO HISTORY

1. *Why is the Masonry of today called "speculative"?*

The word is used in the sense that the Masonry of today is theoretical, not practical, building; that it is a pursuit of knowledge, not of the construction of edifices.

Speculative Masonry began with the practice of admitting to membership in operative lodges men who were not practical builders, stonecutters, architects, etc., but who were interested in the moral, ethical and philosophical teachings of the Fraternity.

2. *How old is Masonry?*

The question is not answerable unless Masonry be defined. Some form of organization of builders, according to the oldest Masonic document, the Regius poem, existed as early as A.D. 926. Freemasonry, as distinguished from any other organization of practical builders, probably began among the Cathedral builders of the middle ages—tenth or eleventh century. The first Grand Lodge came into existence in 1717. Freemasonry in the United States dates definitely from 1730 and probably earlier.

3. *Who discovered, designed or invented Masonry?*

No one man, any more than any one man discovered, designed or invented democracy, or philosophy, or science, or any one government. Freemasonry is the result of growth. Many Masons had a part in it; it has taken to itself teachings from many religions, philosophies, systems of knowledge, symbols.

The most generally accepted orthodox belief as to those who "began" Freemasonry is that the Craft is a descendant of Operative Masons. These Operatives inherited from unknown beginnings, of which there may have been several and were probably many, practices and some form of ritual. Speculative Masonry, reaching back through Operative Masonry, touches hands with those who followed unknown religions in which, however, many of the Speculative principles must have been taught by the use of symbols as old as mankind and therefore universal, and not the product of any one person or time.

4. *Why are we called "Freemasons" ?*

There are many theories: a man was a Freemason because his ancestors were not slaves nor was he a slave; he was so called because he was free within his Guild, or free of the Guild's laws and could thus "travel in foreign countries" and work where he would; he was a Freemason because he worked in freestone, which is any stone which can be cut, smoothed, carved in any direction; he was free when he had passed his apprenticeship and became a Fellow of the Craft; he was free when he had left the status of serf or villein and legally became free. Probably at one time or another masons were called Freemasons for any of these reasons or for all of them. The consensus leans to the theory that the Freemason was such because of his skill, knowledge and abilities which set him free of those conditions, laws, rules and customs which circumscribed masons of lesser abilities in the Cathedral building age.

5. *What are the Ancient Landmarks?*

Various Grand Lodges have "adopted" various

"lists of Ancient Landmarks" and thus have given the tenets in the list the force of law in those Grand Lodges. But no Grand Lodge can make or unmake a landmark, any more than the Congress of the United States can make or unmake a law of nature. Congress might pass a law saying that the law of gravitation was hereafter to be inoperative, but presumably an apple rolling from a table would still fall to the floor!

Grand Lodges which leave landmarks undefined and unrestricted by listing seem to have the better practice, just as those churches which do not list "the moral law" clause by clause seem to have a better grasp of what it is.

The late great Charles C. Hunt, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Iowa, put this point of view in a few words:

"The Masonic conception of a landmark is fundamental law of Masonry which no body of men or Masons can repeal. Anything that can be adopted can be repealed. If a Grand Lodge has power to adopt, it has power to repeal. It is the very fact that they are unalterable which makes the landmarks similar to scientific laws which cannot be changed or altered by any man or body of men."

It is probable that all English speaking Grand Lodges will agree that at least seven Masonic fundamentals are landmarks.

These are:

- a. Monotheism, the sole dogma of Freemasonry.
- b. Belief in immortality, the ultimate lesson of Masonic philosophy.
- c. The Volume of the Sacred Law, an indispensable part of the furniture of a lodge.
- d. The legend of the Third Degree.
- e. Secrecy.

f. The symbolism of the operative art.
g. A Mason must be a freeborn male adult.
Every Mason should ascertain what his own Grand Lodge has adopted (or not adopted) as "landmarks" and govern himself accordingly.

6. What are the "Old Charges?"

The first book of Freemasonry, printed in 1723, is known as *Anderson's Constitutions*. In it appear six "Old Charges" which are a statement of the old laws of operative Freemasonry concerning a Mason and his conduct. These six Old Charges are titled: Of God and Religion; Of the Civil Magistrate Supreme and Subordinate; Of Lodges; Of Masters, Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices; Of the Management of the Craft in Working; Of Behavior. The last, sixth Old Charge is concerned with behavior: "in the Lodge while constituted; after Lodge is over and the Brethren not gone; when Brethren meet without Strangers, but not in a Lodge; in presence of Strangers not Masons; at Home and in the Neighborhood; towards a strange Brother."

Many "Books of the Law"—Constitutions, Codes, etc.—of Grand Lodges print these Old Charges. They can also be found in Mackey's Encyclopedia and in the Little Masonic Library.

7. What is the Regius Poem?

Sometimes called the Halliwell Document, it is, loosely speaking, the oldest of the "Manuscript Constitutions" of Freemasonry. Dated approximately A.D. 1390, it is in old Chaucerian English, difficult to read without a translation. It is preserved in the British Museum.

It is not, accurately speaking, a "Constitution," although it has within it much that is found in

manuscripts. It is more a document about Masonry than for Masons. It is discursive, rambling, wordy and parts of it are copies of contemporary documents, notably "Urbanitatis" and "Instructions to a Parish Priest." Within the Regius, thirty-eight lines are devoted to "The Four Crowned Martyrs," who are not referred to in any of the manuscript Constitutions.

The book is approximately four by five and one-half inches, the pages fine vellum, the letters in red and what was probably once black but is now a rather drab greenish brown color.

Its most curious feature is that it is written in verse, which is why it is often called the *Regius Poem*, although it is much more doggerel than poetry.

It is important to Masonic students for many reasons; to the average Mason its most salient feature may be that it ends with what are, so far as is known, the oldest words in the Masonic ritual (see next question).

8. Why do we use "So mote it be" instead of "Amen"?

"So Mote It Be" are the final words in the Regius Poem. "Mote" is old English for "may." Masons have used the phrase since the beginning of the written history of the Craft. Freemasonry includes many other words, now obsolete, which bring the sanctity of age and the continuity of ritual from ancient days to modern times.

9. Is Freemasonry a religion or has it a religion?

No, to both questions. "A" religion connotes some particular religion. Freemasonry is nonsectarian. Before its Altar Christian, Jew, Mohammedan,

Buddist, Gentile, Confucian, may kneel together. If the question be phrased "Is Freemasonry religious" then the obvious answer is that an institution "erected to God" which begins its ceremonies and ends its meeting with prayer; which has a Holy Book upon its Altar; which preaches the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, of course, has a religious character, although, let it be emphasized again, wholly nonsectarian. All Grand Lodges require their initiates to express a belief and trust in God. No atheist can be made a Mason.

10. Why does Freemasonry forbid brethren to ask their friends to become Masons?

One of the fundamental concepts of Freemasonry is that application for membership must be wholly a voluntary act. A man must seek for himself and join "of my own free will and accord." Under no other formula can men unite brethren of a thousand religious and political beliefs. Under no more constricting act could Freemasonry accomplish her only end, the building of character among men. Men who become members of a Masonic lodge for any other reason than their own desires can neither receive nor give to others the advantages of a wholly voluntary association. Freemasonry is bigger than any man; the man must seek its blessings; it never seeks the man.

11. Why are discussions of politics and religion forbidden in lodge?

The prohibition goes back to the early history of the Fraternity. It is written in the second paragraph of the sixth "Old Charge" (Behavior after the Lodge is over and the Brethren not gone); "No private Piques or Quarrels must be brought

within the Door of the Lodge, far less any Quarrels about Religion, or Nations, or State policy, we being only, as Masons, of the Catholick Religion above-mentioned; we are also of all Nations, Tongues, Kindreds, and Languages, and are resolved against all Politicks as what never yet conduc'd to the Welfare of the Lodge, nor ever will. This Charge has been always strictly enjoin'd and observ'd, but especially since the Reformation in Britain, or the Dissent and Secession of these Nations from the Communion of Rome."

Freemasons today hold that the Old Charge prohibits lodge discussions of politics in the sense of *partisan* politics and religion in the sense of *sectarian* religion.

12. Masonic dates are written "A.L." before figures which never correspond with the number of the year in which we live; why?

Freemasonry's practice has followed the ancient belief that the world was created four thousand years before Christ; that when God said "Let there be light" the world began. Therefore Masons date their doings four thousand years plus the current year, "Anno Lucis," or "In the year of Light."

It is but another of Freemasonry's many ties with a day so old no man may name it.

13. What are "A Master's Wages"?

According to the ritual, corn, wine and oil are symbolic of the payment a Freemason earns today by "good work, true work, square work." "A Master's Wages" may be the same, may be different, for every brother. They are the friendships formed through Freemasonry; the consciousness of unselfish work; taking part in movements and

actions for the betterment of the condition of neighbors; inherent in learning and in making it possible for other men to learn that men of widely different beliefs, convictions, circumstances, education, skills and character may live and work, play and love together in peace and happiness. A Master's Wages are intangible, but the more real because any brother may earn as much as he will.

*"I worked for menial's wages
Only to learn, dismayed,
Any wage I asked of lodge,
Lodge would have paid."*

This is a paraphrase indicating that there is no limit to the Master's Wages any brother may receive, except that which he may put upon himself.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

14. *Freemasonry is said to be a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. What is an allegory?*

Allegory is from two Greek words and means, "story within a story"—the Masonic story is told as a fact, but it presents the doctrine of immortality. Allegory, parable, fable, myth, legend, tradition, are correlative terms. The myth *may* be founded on fact; the legend and tradition more probably *are* founded on fact, but the allegory, parable, fable, are not. Yet they may be "true" if "true" is not taken to mean factual. "In the night of death hope sees a star and love can hear the rustle of a wing" is beautifully true allegory, but not factual. All allegories may contain truth, without being fact.

The allegory of the Master's Degree is not true in any factual sense, except in the historical background from the Biblical account of the building of the Temple. That the Hiram's were Grand Masters; that the workmen on the building were Entered Apprentices, Fellowcrafts and Master Masons; that they met in various apartments of the Temple, with different numbers required for various quorums; that the events delineated in the ceremony actually happened are not factual statements.

Yet the allegory is true in the best sense of the word. For the story of Hiram is the story of the dearest hope of mankind. It is a tale told in every religion. It is affirmation, by picture, drama, story, of man's rugged faith that Job's immortal question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" must be answered in the affirmative. It is a Mason's ob-

