



What is Freemasonry?

Introduction:

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest secular fraternal societies. This leaflet is intended to explain Freemasonry as it is practiced under the United Grand Lodge of England, which administers Lodges of Freemasons in England and Wales and in many places overseas. The explanation may correct some misconceptions. Freemasonry is a society of men concerned with moral and spiritual values. Its members are taught its precepts by a series of ritual dramas, which follow ancient forms and use stonemasons' customs and tools as allegorical guides.

The Essential Qualification for Membership:

The essential qualification for admission into and continuing membership is a belief in a Supreme Being. Membership is open to men of any race or religion who can fulfill this essential qualification and are of good repute.

Freemasonry and Religion:

Freemasonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion. Its essential qualification opens it to men of many religions and it expects them to continue to follow their own faith. It does not allow religion to be discussed at its meetings.

The Three Great Principles:

For many years Freemasons have followed three great principles:

- **Brotherly Love**
Every true Freemason will show tolerance and respect for the opinions of others and behave with kindness and understanding to his fellow creatures.
- **Relief**
Freemasons are taught to practice charity, and to care, not only for their own, but also for the community as a whole, both by charitable giving, and by voluntary efforts and works as individuals.
- **Truth**
Freemasons strive for truth, requiring high moral standards and aiming to achieve them in their own lives.

Freemasons believe that these principles represent a way of achieving higher standards in life.

Charity:

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From its earliest days, Freemasonry has been concerned with the care of orphans, the sick and the aged. This work continues today. In addition, large sums are given to national and local charities.

Freemasonry and Society:

Freemasonry demands from its members a respect for the law of the country in which a man works and lives. Its principles do not in any way conflict with its members' duties as citizens, but should strengthen them in fulfilling their private and public responsibilities. The use by a Freemason of their membership to promote his own or anyone else's business, professional or personal interests is condemned, and is contrary to the conditions on which he sought admission to Freemasonry. His duty as a citizen must always prevail over any obligation to other Freemasons, and any attempt to shield a Freemason who has acted dishonorably or unlawfully is contrary to this prime duty.

Secrecy:

The secrets of Freemasonry are concerned with its traditional modes of recognition. It is not a secret society, since all members are free to acknowledge their membership and will do so in response to inquiries for respectable reasons. Its constitutions and rules are available to the public. There is no secret about any of its aims and principles. Like many other societies, it regards some of its internal affairs as private matters for its members.

Freemasonry and Politics:

Freemasonry is non-political, and the discussion of politics at Masonic meetings is forbidden.

Other Masonic Bodies:

Freemasonry is practiced under many independent Grand Lodges with standards similar to those set by the United Grand Lodge of England. There are some Grand Lodges and other apparently Masonic bodies which do not meet these standards, e.g. which do not require a belief in a Supreme Being, or which allow or encourage their members to participate in political matters. These Grand Lodges and bodies are not recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England as being Masonic ally regular, and Masonic contact with them is forbidden.

Conclusion:

A Freemason is encouraged to do his duty first to God (by whatever name he is known) through his faith and religious practice; and then, without detriment to his family and those dependent on him, to his neighbor through charity and service. None of these ideas

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is exclusively Masonic, but all should be universally acceptable. Freemasons are expected to follow them.



Foot Note: *This is the text of a leaflet published by the Board of General Purposes of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1984.*