



# Paper

## Frequently asked questions

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Answers to a range of questions about Freemasonry in general.

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Answers to frequently asked questions by wives, partners, family members and others.

### **Keywords**

Freemasonry, Questions and Answers, Wives, Partners, Friends

## Frequently asked questions from wives, partners, family members and others

### Introduction

When it comes to attracting men to join Freemasonry, the opinion of their wives, partners and family members will play a large part in the decision-making process. Many will not know anything about Freemasonry, or they may have preconceived ideas about Freemasonry, based on their memories of fathers, grandfathers or other relatives or friends who were, or are, members.

Unfortunately, many of these ideas may be vague, or even false. People may think Freemasonry is a religion, or a substitute for religion, or a political organisation. Freemasonry is often seen as groups of men in dark suits carrying odd-shaped attaché cases containing strange aprons, who meet up to indulge in strange ceremonies and rituals. Recent exposures have concentrated on the more dramatic aspects of Masonic ritual, such as Candidates for initiation with their bared chests and rolled-up trouser leg and the 'secret handshakes'. This may make wives, partners and family members worried about what their husband, partner or relative is getting himself into.

To help the wives, partners and family members of potential Candidates come to a more informed decision about their attitude to Freemasonry, here are some answers to their frequently asked questions:

### Q1. What is Freemasonry all about?

In a nutshell, Freemasonry is a moral and ethical learning society, and a universal Brotherhood, affectionately known to its members as 'the Craft'. Its primary aim is to teach morality and ethics to its members.

One of the best ways to define Freemasonry is to quote from Masonic Ritual itself: *'Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.'* (Here, *peculiar* means special rather than strange or unusual.) The idea of teaching through allegories, illustrations and symbols is not a new one; all great teachers have followed this method, more or less. Every Freemason is bound to profess and practise the Masonic system of morality, which is based on principles with which he was familiar, more or less, before deciding to become a Freemason. Nevertheless, he will find them presented in new ways and forms from those he may have experienced previously.

Freemasonry recognises the rich diversity of cultural beliefs of all men, and nobody is excluded from membership on the basis of race, religion or politics. In this sense, it can be seen as 'liberal', recognising the value of all men who share a belief in a supreme being, and who are interested in self-improvement and working towards the betterment of the human race.

The three great principles that are the cornerstones of Freemasonry are taught in Lodges throughout the world. These are traditionally described as brotherly love, relief and truth.

Freemasons are expected to put these principles into practice by:

- showing tolerance and respect for the opinions of others
- behaving with kindness and understanding to all people
- practising charity and care for their own relatives and for the community through charitable giving and voluntary work
- striving to achieve the highest ethical and moral behaviour and spiritual truth.

## **Q2. How is Freemasonry organised?**

The basic unit of Freemasonry is the Lodge, of which there are many thousands across the world. In England, each Lodge comes under a Provincial Grand Lodge or the Metropolitan Grand Lodge of London. The Provinces roughly correspond to the pre-1974 counties (eg Nottinghamshire, Sussex). In turn, the Provinces and London are governed by the United Grand Lodge of England ('UGLE') based at Freemasons' Hall, Great Queen Street, London.

Apart from its ordinary members (known as 'Brethren' and calling each other 'Brother'), each Lodge has a number of officers, the three most important of which are the Worshipful Master, the Senior Warden, and the Junior Warden. The Lodge officers serve for a term of one year. In most Lodges, a new Master is elected by the members on the same date each year. At his Installation, the new Master appoints the Lodge officers and invests them with the collars which show their office. All things being equal, any Freemason can visit any Masonic Lodge anywhere in the world, and can join as many different Lodges as he wishes.

## **Q3. What do Freemasons do at Lodge meetings?**

Lodges meet at various times and days around the world. In England, many Lodges meet around four times a year, usually between October and the following April; though some meet every month on the same day. At each meeting, the Lodge is opened according to its ritual, and then the members discuss administrative business (confirmation of minutes, correspondence, Treasurer's report etc.). Then the Master and Officers 'work a Degree', which means they perform a ceremony for new members of one of the three Degrees (or ranks) of Freemasonry (see below). If there are no candidates for a ceremony, the members of the Lodge may listen to a guest-speaker talking about an aspect of Freemasonry.

The three Degrees, from lowest to highest are: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. On the day he joins, the new member becomes an Entered Apprentice. At subsequent meetings he becomes a Fellow-Craft Freemason, and then a Master Mason. There is often a gap of six to twelve months between a member receiving each Degree. The ceremonies use rituals which date back several hundred years.

## **Q4. Why are Masonic ceremonies secret?**

The ceremonies of Freemasonry hark back to the practices of mediaeval stonemasons (or 'Operative Masons'). In the Middle Ages, stonemasons travelled from place to place seeking work. Most of them were illiterate and there were no paper qualifications, so they developed a system of signs, and passwords and words that a stonemason could use to prove his experience and skill to the Master Mason in charge of a building site at a castle or cathedral. Thus, when a stranger turned up, his qualifications and experience could be checked.

These signs and passwords have come down to modern Freemasons and have been incorporated in the rituals we use today. Obviously, if they were widely known, they could be used by imposters, so both the mediaeval stonemasons and modern Freemasons swear to keep them secret.

When you think about it, secrets feature in most of our daily lives. We agree to keep privileged or confidential information received in the course of our work secret. The discussions of a company board meeting are secret. Family members agree to keep things secret. So it is with Freemasonry. That said, 95% of what occurs in a Masonic Lodge is not secret. The location and membership of a Lodge are not secret. You can buy a copy of the Masonic Book of Constitutions, or a copy of Masonic ritual, from bookshops, or you can borrow them from a public library, or look them up on the internet.

#### **Q5. What are Masonic ceremonies about?**

The First Degree (Entered Apprentice) symbolises one's birth, the Second Degree (Fellow Craft), one's transition through life, and the Third Degree (Master Mason) deals with the subject of death. Fundamentally, every Freemason undertakes a personal journey of self-discovery.

#### **Q6. Is Freemasonry a religion?**

The answer is no.

Freemasonry is neither a religion, nor a substitute for religion. It does not offer salvation to its members, nor does it use sacraments. Freemasonry in England is open to anyone who believes in one God. We count Jews, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs and Buddhists, as well as Christians, among our members. When a man joins the Freemasons, he is asked if he believes in God, and must answer in the affirmative. That is as far as our organisation's interest in the subject goes. How each person relates to God is an individual matter, purely for him and, interestingly, the discussion of religion and politics is not permitted in Masonic Lodges. Freemasonry is a uniting Brotherhood, and it doesn't take much thought to realise that the two main things which divide people are religion and politics and Freemasonry takes no position on either. Outside the Lodges, its members are welcome to share their religious or political opinions, but not inside.

#### **Q7. I've heard that people only become Freemasons for what they can get out of it. Is this true?**

Nobody should become a Freemason in the hope of material advantage. Candidates are specifically told they cannot join if they are influenced by '*mercenary or other unworthy motives*'. Certainly, Freemasons will assist each other in times of trouble, that is one aspect of Brotherhood, but no more than they will assist anyone in need, Freemason or not. Freemasons cannot expect, nor will they receive, preferment in employment or in any other way just because they are Freemasons. However, they will receive the considerable advantage of the moral teachings of Freemasonry.

#### **Q8. Why do Freemasons wear aprons?**

All Freemasons wear aprons at Lodge meetings. That is what they are carting around in those odd-shaped attaché cases! Back in the Middle Ages, stonemasons wore aprons to protect themselves and their clothing while working and to carry their tools, just like carpenters and butchers do today. In Masonic Lodges, the aprons denote the ranks of their wearers and are symbolic badges of honour.

**Q9. Does it cost a lot of money to be a Freemason?**

Any social organisation or club has membership fees, and a Masonic Lodge is no different. Each Lodge needs to pay the costs associated with the room or hall it meets in, plus printing and postage, etc. The annual membership fee varies from Lodge to Lodge, but is generally between £100 and £200.

**Q10. Why can't women become Freemasons?**

Historically, the mediaeval stonemasons were men-only, and the respect for tradition in Freemasonry means that there has never been a desire among the majority of Freemasons to admit women.

However, there are numerous all-female Masonic Lodges throughout England, though they are not affiliated to the United Grand Lodge of England. There are also some Masonic Lodges that admit both men and women, but again none affiliated to UGLE.

**Q11. Can wives and partners of Freemasons become involved?**

Yes, they can. Most Lodges host social events throughout the year including dinners, barbecues, quizzes, and film or theatre nights. Wives and partners of Lodge members are sometimes invited to attend dinners after Lodge meetings. Some Lodges also have social groups for the wives and partners of Lodge members.

**Q12. What do Freemasons do when their Lodge meeting is over?**

Many Lodges hold 'Festive Boards' after Lodge meetings. This is simply the Masonic term for a lunch, dinner, or supper. Most often, they are held in another room in the same building, but some use a local restaurant. The meal, and all it involves, is a way of engendering harmony and fellowship, which are both important aspects of Freemasonry.

**Q13. What do Freemasons do in their local communities?**

Many Freemasons do voluntary, unpaid work in their local communities, on parish councils, volunteer fire brigades, or through organisations such as the Lions Clubs and Rotary. In addition, Freemasonry is directly involved in donating and raising money for many charities, including Masonic charities. In the UK, the Freemasons are significant donors to charities, both national and local. National Masonic charities and funds are at the forefront of relief efforts after natural disasters worldwide. They are also major donors to medical research charities and hospices across the UK.

**Summary**

A conscientious candidate for Freemasonry should be free from any form of self-interest. As a truly ethical organisation, Freemasonry demands that all candidates profess their faith in God and their free acceptance of our moral law. This is the dynamic of Freemasonry today. It has an intellectual appeal and it captures the imagination in its colourful and dramatic rituals. But underlying all this is a sense of belonging to a Brotherhood reaching far back into the past and full of promise for the future. The deeper messages of our rituals bind us together through a bond of friendship and a unity of spirit. Freemasons also have a lot of fun! I hope the answers to these questions have helped 'lift the veil' on Freemasonry and reassured you that Freemasonry is a force for good in society. It is often said of Freemasonry that *'it takes a good man and makes him better'*!

##END##

## Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
  - Followed by 'any questions'
  - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
  - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*.  
Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

**For further papers and other learning materials visit "Solomon" at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>**

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### **Acknowledgement:**

UGLE gratefully acknowledges the Province of Nottinghamshire as the originator of this document and for their permission to publish it in this form.

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