



UGLE Oration

Free and of Mature-Age

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An exploration of the phrase 'Free and of Mature-Age'.

Summary

An exploration of the phrase 'Free and of Mature-Age', which marks the first-step in our Masonic Journey.

Keywords

First-degree, Free, Mature-age, Beginning, Journey

Free and of Mature Age: Beginning the Masonic Journey

When each of us came to be Initiated we were first asked whether we were 'free'. And we answered that we were. But did we really understand what we were saying? For this challenge, and our answer, is supremely important. Yet it is little explored in the complications of the ritual which follow. Nevertheless, it underpins our entire Masonic journey, both now and yet to come.

In Freemasonry, truths are veiled in imagery; not so much to hide them, although that is a popular understanding, but, paradoxically, to communicate them.

This needs some explanation: these truths are hidden because they are not seen – like a face cleverly concealed by an artist in a painting, at first sight, of rocks, or of a landscape. They are not seen because they entail a complete shift of focus, they entail insight! And, until the coming of this clear sight, these truths do not apparently exist.

It is the act of unveiling these truths that is of value to Freemasons. So how might we approach and perhaps find them? By recognising that in our hearts we already know them. This makes the task one of remembering: remembering who we really are; where we really come from; why we are here. To do this we need prompting. We need catalysts which can alter our perception which has long been trained to view reality in a rational and logical manner. Of course, logic is very useful in our daily life, but not so useful in the search for meaning. It is difficult to prod such a mind into allowing markedly different thought patterns to emerge and grow. We need help in this task. And Freemasonry, with its symbols and rituals, assists in that very purpose.

While truth remains veiled in symbols, these provide a regulated and well-mapped set of paths into this unknown and apparently hidden destination which we seek. But this is not an intellectual journey: we need to always remember that symbols can be understood intuitively, without rationality and logic, but well able to help us in our journey from ignorance to knowledge.

For Freemasonry is a journey, a recent variation on a very ancient theme, and I hope that you have touched some of the depth which seeks expression in Freemasonry, especially in the Ritual of Initiation, where even the symbols are veiling a more hidden imagery, in layer upon layer of patterns of meaning in order that each Freemason can move ahead on his personal journey at his own rate, confident in the knowledge that, 'Where the name of God is invoked, no danger can ensue'. And this is a line which can long be contemplated upon for its layers of meaning.

You entered the Temple. You attested to your freedom to choose to journey ahead. You travelled a path, simultaneously actual and symbolic, where you were unsettled and humbled. But you passed the test and you were, in our Temple, amongst our Brethren, accepted into this Lodge of Freemasons, as a Brother.

This acceptance began when you were first presented to the Wardens as a candidate recommended for admission. '*Enter, Free and of Good Report*' the Junior Warden said to you.

Enter: Enter our Lodge. But further, enter the journey of a Freemason: that journey which moves from darkness to light, from the rough to the smooth. A journey where, instead of treading the rocky ground alone, you have friends to help you.

Of good report: Your reputation as a man has preceded you. Your conduct in the Temple has become you, and the Warden has confidence in the future success of your endeavours.

But free? Here is the heart of the matter: freedom sits at the heart of Freemasonry. You need to be free to enter through the doors of our Temple. You need to lay aside your social and political burdens. We are not here concerned with politics or history; we are concerned with meaning and experience.

And in this sense, talk of freedom means much more. It allows us to travel on the greatest journey a human being can make: towards that Light which is eternally present, beneficent, and the very source of meaning and truth. Divine, we can call it, but it needs no names or explanations. It comes in many forms; but no single form has a monopoly over it.

To travel on this important journey we must be free. We must have been able to make the decision to take that first step into the unknown without any influence from others, free from hidden desires for worldly advantage, and free from the emotional winds which so often blow us off our chosen course. We must be of mature age: in other words, we need to be responsible for our own decisions and capable of accepting and integrating into our lives the insights we will experience.

Each man's journey is unique, yet, in order to begin it, and to make it, he *needs* to be free; for *he must choose for himself, to begin:*

'Step off with the left foot'; 'The first regular step in Freemasonry'; 'Advance to the pedestal in due form'; our Craft has all the symbolism, if we could recognise it. Ancient Chinese wisdom tells us, *'A journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step'*. And that first step must be freely chosen. And the journey must be travelled freely - without attachment, as the principles of Indian Yoga explain it.

Freemasonry is based upon the realisation that once the journey has begun, our faith and our hope can be transformed through compassion, tolerance, and humility, into a living knowledge of the *True* – which, as masons, we speak of symbolically as the Great Architect of the Universe.

Brother ... We welcome you into our midst as we too walk on that journey. Brethren ... We are all walking on the journey, at our own speed, in our own time. And that is how it should be, for there is no rush, and the journey is as much interior as exterior. *We might recall the words of the Egyptian philosopher Zosimus who wrote to a friend saying, 'Don't rush about the world trying to find God; sit quietly at home and God will find you'.*

##END##

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- 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.

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