



## Nugget

# Mysteries and Privileges

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What does 'The Mysteries and Privileges' of Freemasonry mean today?

### Summary

This nugget deconstructs and examines the phrase 'The Mysteries and Privileges' of Freemasonry, to enable us to make sense of it in the modern world.

### Keywords

Freemasonry, Mysteries, Privileges



## The Mysteries and Privileges of Freemasonry

This is a phrase all of us have heard so often. The first time was at our initiation. When being admitted into the Lodge Room, we were described as a *'poor candidate in a state of darkness'* humbly soliciting to be admitted *'to the mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry'*. We heard it again as we were led round the Lodge-room, when the Junior Deacon introduced us to the Junior and Senior Wardens. But do we know what it means? What are these 'mysteries' and 'privileges'? Do they give us some special and obscure knowledge denied to the rest of Society, and do they give us a special status? We might be led to believe that, given the current general usage, but we would be wrong. To understand what the words truly mean we must go back, as is so often the case in Freemasonry, to history.

First, what is a 'mystery'? Mystery is not magic, neither is it about unsolved crimes in a TV series. Originally a 'mystery' was a trade secret, the special skills and training that a craftsman needed to be able to follow his calling. Such skills could only be learned over time and were only to be taught to those who promised to maintain 'trade secrecy' and thereby protect the economic interests of their fellow craftsmen. All trades were thus in a sense a 'mystery.' This was particularly true of the printing trade, which was for generations spoken of as a 'mystery' and had a structure similar to the Lodge system of Stone Masons. In it, workers were organised into 'Chapels', each headed by a 'Father.' This reflected the secretive nature of the printing trade.

Our 'mysteries' now are the secrets of Freemasonry which have much more to do with learning the values of friendship, fidelity, honesty and integrity, than with certain words in the Ritual. The 'mystery' into which we are initiated is that of making a life-long journey of self-discovery, via the practice of tolerance, sympathy and benevolence, and thus to come to better appreciate our own self-worth, our place in the world and in our own created order.

Secondly, we must understand that the word 'privilege' has also changed its meaning. It is derived from the Latin words for private and law, 'privus' and 'lex.' Nowadays 'privilege' usually denotes some especially advantageous position in society. However, we must not think that our membership of the Craft gives us any such status. Once again history tells us that until quite recent times, most economic activities were privately regulated by those who engaged in them. Operative Stone Masonry was so regulated. It had its own legal system, its own private laws to determine who could practice the trade. So, it is still with Speculative Freemasonry. We have our own private rules to decide who can be a Freemason. We only admit those who are said to meet certain moral and ethical standards. So that admission implies, not the granting of advantages, but rather the acceptance of the requirements of the Craft to live one's life in a particular way. The 'privileges' of Freemasonry are thus obligations and duties, not exemptions and advantages denied to other people.

So, whenever we hear the phrase the *'mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry'* let us remember that it refers to living life in a just and upright manner with a charitable and benevolent attitude to all; not just our brethren in the Craft.

##END##



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## Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

- Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; *though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.*
- Themed with the meeting or activity.
- Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.
- Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.
- Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

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

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