

“What is the Purpose of the Masonic Fraternity Now and In the Future”

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As any strict ritualist likes (loves?) to remind us, words have meaning. They are there for a reason. They have purpose. So, then, what is the “purpose” of the Masonic fraternity?

The exercise must start with the meaning of the word purpose itself. There is a contemporary school of managerial and organizational thought which hones in on this. In order to succeed, organizations (and their leaders) need purpose, which can be defined as the “why,” which, if successful and well understood, inspires leaders, employees, or members to action. As Simon Sinek says, “People don’t buy what you do. They buy why you do it.” Therefore, in order to understand the purpose of the Craft, we must explore the meaning behind it.

So what is the “why” of Freemasonry? Why was it created? Why does it exist? Why have men joined, why do they join, why will they (continue to) join? What are we trying to achieve through the series of progressive degrees?

Of course, the long used slogan provides a key – “Making Good Men Better.” That suggests a purpose, and a good one, as is continuing to preserve and carry on the traditional ritual, so the wisdom carried down through the ages never dies. But, as admirable and obvious as it is to make better men, with Masonic teachings, we should not stop there. There are plenty of paths

to moral or spiritual improvement - why does Freemasonry aspire to make good men better, using its specific methodology, its system of progressive degrees and symbols?

Clearly, the Craft as originally conceived must have a specific concept of what “better” is – if it is to improve men, it must be working toward a defined goal – a purpose – and has created an initiatic, ritualistic experience to serve that end. There is a why.

Freemasonry teaches men to seek truth and light, and, in doing so, provides direction from the volume of sacred law. It is also indicative that, in order to join the Craft, a man must believe in a Supreme Being. We are asked in whom we put our trust, whose will we invoke before any significant undertaking. Examining the ritual leads us to its purpose.

First a candidate will hear, “How good it is for brothers to live in harmony!” Masonry brings men together in a fraternity, a band of brothers, teaching them to treat each other well and spread brotherly love, which is foundational to a peaceful society. Later, the mason is reminded to set a plumb line, have a moral compass to govern one’s actions, and set an example for his fellow man. And finally, as he progresses through the sublime degree, the mason is urged to “remember [his] Creator before [he ages] and death draws nigh.” So let’s take them in reverse: honor and acknowledge the Great Architect of the Universe, a power greater than the self; aspire to live an upright and moral life, shining a light in the darkness among mankind; and live in peace as we establish a harmonious society.

In order to do any and all of the above, a brother must acknowledge the power of his Creator, and not put himself first. He must recognize the need to suppress his ego, even as he looks inward to better understand his Self. Ego leads to selfishness and materialism, which can be very destructive to the harmony of society (as well as the individual). He must set aside his pursuit of metals and minerals, subjugate his desires, and work toward the betterment of man, starting with himself. The process emanates from the recognition of a greater power than the Self. The improvement comes through this process of spiritual, inner transformation.

Purpose is intention. The Craft delivers its work and ritual with the intention of making good men better by igniting within each brother the spark of the Creator, and then providing the tools and lessons for ego subjugation and moral improvement. This results in a "better man," as made by Masonry: one who first recognizes and then humbles himself before his Creator, and then proceeds to live in accordance with universal moral law, in order to better set an example for his fellow man. The greater the number of "better men," the greater the example, the greater and more harmonious the society. Masons are repeatedly "charged" to be faithful to its tenets, and to convince the world (by example).

Too few set a public, let alone private, example of upright and moral living. Society has become increasingly secularized, losing sight of God and His authority. The world is fraught with darkness and conflict, with selfishness and hyper-individualism, with social capital having

declined to an alarmingly low level. Freemasonry has a role to play in society, as a mediating institution which can combat some of these ills. But it is crucial that the Craft not lose sight of its inner purpose. The fraternity does not exist as a social organization, a leadership training school, or as a charitable society. It also doesn't exist to show men how to convene in an orderly fashion, or even to become great ritualists. Those are all positive outgrowths or terrific undertakings of like-minded brothers, but they are merely the "how" or the "what," not the Craft's reason for being.

It is the "why" which is far more important, something the Masonic fraternity needs to reinforce and celebrate if we are to inspire the profane...and be considered successful. The Masonic fraternity exists to help man transcend his crude, material self, and guide men toward the inner spark provided by his Creator. Having been transformed, masons are then charged with bringing this light into the world, thus improving society.

Freemasonry has survived through the ages because of its consistency of purpose, a purpose which will remain unchanged, now and into the future. We are well-reminded to refocus ourselves on that purpose, how Masonry "makes good men better" by bringing them closer to God, so that our generations to come will continue to enjoy and benefit from that which has long endured.

Let there be light!

