

Freemasonry – from ‘A to Z’

I think that most of us know what Freemasonry means to us as individuals, but few of us can explain it in anything other than simple phrases that don't really do justice to the vast complexities and fraternal bonds of this ancient craft. Having said that and having acknowledged that Freemasonry may be all but impossible to define or explain, let's attempt to do just that by defining Freemasonry from 'A to Z'.

Apron - The Badge of a Free and Accepted Mason. Symbolic of the innocence of the lamb from which it comes.

Brotherly Love - Godly men “love their neighbors” and show a love for all mankind. In our fraternity – we have a special love for our brethren. Brotherly Love inculcates the bonds and obligations that define our responsibilities to our brothers.

Cardinal Virtues – The basis of our order...Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice.

Degree - A specific part or fraction of the whole, or one 360th of a circle. Masonic Instruction and advancement is done by “Degrees” implying that each one is only a small part of the whole.

Esoteric - In Freemasonry the “Esoterics” are the secret or hidden parts available only to the heart and mind of the initiated as opposed to the Exoteric or common parts available to all.

Fortitude - The second of the four Cardinal Virtues. The virtue displayed by Master Hiram Abif in being willing to forfeit his life rather than betray a trust.

The letter “G” - Great Architect of the Universe. The Speculative Mason's Symbol for the Universal Deity that allows each brother to define his personal belief.

Hele - To cover up. There was a recognized trade of being a heler who covered with tiles, straw, sod, etc. Today we would call them “roofers”. In Freemasonry we hele.... promising to cover, or keep secret.

Inculcate - A term that means “to teach” or to find meaning within each lecture, degree and lesson in Freemasonry. They all have a universal truth and law “inculcated” within.

Jachin - The massive brass pillar placed on the right, within the outer porch of King Solomon's Temple. When combined with "Boaz", the two offered "stability" to the structure.

Keepers (of the House) - From the book of Ecclesiastes...."the keepers of the houses shall tremble..." It is a reminder of the failures of our human body. Keepers often allegorically represent the arms and legs. Build a spiritual temple for yourself, as the physical one you now occupy will surely cease.

Landmarks - in ancient times permanent landmarks defined all property, for example...property between the river and the crest of the hill. The landmarks were boundaries that never changed. Freemasonry has its never changing boundaries. While a complete list of Ancient Landmarks for our order has never been universally agreed upon, all Freemasons can certainly agree on these four: being a man, free born, of lawful age, and good report.

Master - Master of the Lodge – qualified to do the work of the Lodge, teacher of morals through symbolism utilizing: myth, legend and allegory. It also means Master Mason – the highest degree in our ancient craft.

Northeast Corner - The position of the foundation stone of a building, and the point from which we all began our Masonic journey. The first and most important lesson of Freemasonry – should you at any time encounter a brother in distress who claims your assistance, you will contribute to his relief as liberally as you can, without material injury to yourself or family.

Obligation - A covenant of brotherhood and friendship, given under a solemn oath of fidelity and loyalty. Your pledge of secrecy given in the name of God, where perjury is subject to severe penalties, both symbolic and "real".

Progressive – Refers to the "progressive nature of our science". Advancement is made by mastering one step at a time.

Quran – sometimes spelled with a 'K', but for my example we revert to the older accepted spelling. It is an example of another "volume of the sacred law"....in this case for those of the Muslim faith. It reminds us that the universality of our science allows each Mason to maintain his personal beliefs. Bro. Rudyard Kipling once wrote of a Lodge meeting he attended where seven sacred books rested upon the altar.

Rough Ashlar - One of the three immovable jewels in the Lodge room, along with the perfect ashlar and trestle board, for the brethren to moralize on. It's symbolic of our state

of imperfection and the moral process of Freemasonry, as we chip away one character flaw at a time. It alludes to the never-ending process of self-improvement.

Speculative - The philosophy of Freemasonry as a speculative art, contrasted to the science of the operative mason. In a Lodge we teach in symbolic terms drawing on operative tools, to express the laws of morality and the improvement of humanity.

Tiler - A more recent term for a Heler (a coverer of buildings, or in modern day terms, a roofer). As the protective roof tiles secured the structure when completed so the Tiler of the Lodge secures and protects the Lodge when at work allowing none to enter but those that are qualified.

Unity – This is the “Mystic Tie” of Freemasonry. United around the globe in a common fraternity of brotherly love. It’s actually quite difficult to put words to paper to describe what that concept really is, but I would describe it as the harmony of a tune that we all know, but can not hum, nor can we say the words, but, we all *know* the ‘feeling’, don’t we?

Vouching - To step forward as an individual and confirm another’s membership in the Craft can only be done through strict trial, due examination, or legal information. If vouched for – he is then accepted without reservation, the necessary element of fraternal acceptance worldwide.

Winding Staircase - “The journey of a Mason”. Symbolically drawn from the 15 steps ascending to the temple porch of Solomon. Often used as a metaphor for the progression through Masonry by degrees.

Yield - The process of surrendering one’s self. The acknowledgement of a higher authority or “Power”. The process which brings us all to the same level.

Zion - The mountain or hill in Palestine on which Jerusalem was built. Symbolically used to denote the ultimate goal of “Heaven”.

Now....I know you were all counting down the letters (if only to determine how much longer I might be talking) and some were even speculating about what the next letter might refer to....and yes, it does appear that I do not know my alphabet, however - I did not miss the letter “X.” I purposely saved that important element for last. It is...

The “X” Factor - A single, undefined meaning that each man carries concerning his membership in craft Masonry – it might be friendship, brotherhood, equality, acceptance, morality, code of conduct, or perhaps relief, charity, love, fraternity, or perhaps a relationship that can’t be summed up in a single word, or even a simple phrase.

Each of us has his own personal understanding of what it means to be a Mason, and this diversity of thought within a universal acceptance of one another, is what makes our order, both unique, and yet open to the common man.

Our fraternity can be a very complex and demanding aspect of our lives, and it doesn't just 'happen', you have to really 'work' at it! It's your personal "X Factor" that makes your Masonry uniquely special, and it must be defined by each one of us, within our own heart and mind.

Adapted from various sources.
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