

## 5 Minute Mason - Getting Your Bearings



Freemasonry can seem very strange and overwhelming to the newcomer. And even very experienced brethren from time to time are bound to recognize that Freemasonry can take many forms, some of which are surprisingly dissimilar to what they are used to.

For instance, looking around any lodge meeting you will find a wide variety of aprons being worn. Each apron is a badge of sorts that says something about the man who is wearing it. Similarly the different 'jewels' worn by many brethren make a statement about their individual background, loyalty, and service to the Craft. Some basic knowledge is necessary to 'read' them.

For experienced Masons who are able to take such things for granted, they in their turn become aware of many particular areas of Freemasonry that offer very different experiences and teachings, such as 'Royal Arch', or 'Scottish Rite Masonry', or The Knights Templar, and many others.

And then, across the globe, now so easy to connect through the world-wide web and email, there exists many indigenous forms of Freemasonry, each with their own customs and colors and languages of ritual. It is a confusing world out there! For those brethren with extensive knowledge of the craft it indeed becomes difficult to speak of 'Freemasonry', in the singular, when it really seems more sensible and helpful to speak of '*Freemasonries*' in the plural. So, how does a newcomer, a seeker if you will, get his bearings and find his way, in the midst of all this confusion?

I believe, among all the variations of the *Freemasonries* in this country and around the world there exists one obvious common strand: they are oriented by reference to the points of the compass. Ah, back to that tool I told you about, found in that forgotten room in the depths of the temple. Whether your Lodge is in Manchester, England, or Manchester, New Hampshire; whether it is in Paris, France, Paris, Ontario, or even Paris, Virginia; whether you are in Ireland or Hong Kong, your bearings are the same. The Master sits in the East, the Senior Warden in the West, and the Junior Warden is at the Sun in the South. So, when you walk into a Lodge room the highest chair, the one invariably occupied by the Worshipful Master, will always designate the East.

Our earliest Masonic ritual writings agree on this matter. All of them, drawn from different parts of the British Isles and written down between 1696 and 1726, asked this same question and received the same response:

*Q: How stands your Lodge?*

*A: East and West, just as the Temple of Solomon.*

Though apparently simple, I see this question and answer as rather profound. By studying it, you may begin properly to understand the serious nature of Freemasonry, and the ground from which it takes its roots. *Freemasonries* of whatever sort and color, across the globe, follow the pointer and context this provides. They are united by the symbolic bearing of East and West, which is not north and south as leads the secular world outside. Aligned in parallel to the Temple of Jerusalem, new masons should be ready for a most intriguing quest, toward all that this special compass bearing will imply.

In a previous ‘nugget’ I shared my vision of what I termed your ‘personal compass’....a tool that could keep you ‘on the straight and narrow’, working as a guide toward the Light that we all are seeking.

So, tonight I leave you with this question to ponder.....can it really just be a happy co-incidence that Masonic leaders all around the world are placed in the East, and that we therefore take our cue from them, and look in their direction for inspiration? Or, may we reasonably conclude that the orientation of all our Masonic meetings towards the East, through whatever source it may have evolved, reflects in its symbolism, a strange and harmonious mystery that really falls under the designation of divine providence? You have the tool....your compass...do you have the correct ‘bearing’....toward the East?



**... The 5 Minute Mason: #87 in a series of nuggets from the Quarry of Freemasonry.<sup>SM</sup>**

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Source: The concept for this Nugget was adapted with permission from a presentation by Wor. John Acaster, Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lancashire, UK