

# William O. Ware Lodge of Research

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## What Does Freemasonry Mean to Me?

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**D**uring his time as The Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, F&AM, William O. Ware posed three questions, during his travels throughout the Jurisdiction, for the craft to reflect upon: *What is Freemasonry? What does Freemasonry mean to me? What do I mean to Freemasonry?* This paper is an attempt to answer the *first* of these questions. Most people who pose the question, “What is Freemasonry?” are actually inquiring for more than simply a dictionary definition. They are really seeking to understand the purpose of our society.

To answer that question, we will explore one simple, yet profound, passage in the Entered Apprentice degree that defines the purpose. We will look at the philosophy that is employed to approach meeting that purpose, and we will look at the process that our Philosophy clearly directs us to follow.

### Purpose of the Fraternity

When members of the Craft are asked to clarify the purpose of our Fraternity, there are numerous answers. Typically, however, the answer falls into one of two general forms. They range from the haughty, complex statement that Freemasonry is “a fraternity that educates men using a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols” to the overly simplistic elevator-pitch: “We take good men and make them better”. The former answer provides a definition that is typically not fully understood by the person parroting the answer, much less by the person, who made the inquiry. The latter answer is often rephrased and similarly said by numerous organizations, the US Marines being just one example.

Finding a concise, clear answer to GM Ware’s first question is a great undertaking. One more precise answer that defines our purpose can be found directly in our rituals. As Masons, we are taught that before any great undertaking to invoke the aid of Deity. So let us examine the cases in our ritual where we specifically invoke the aid of the Deity.

Within the Three Degrees which are conferred upon a candidate, there is one time where the Master formally prays for the candidate. In most jurisdictions that prayer begins,

“Vouchsafe Thy aid Almighty Father to this \*\*\* and *grant* that this candidate \*\*\* may dedicate \*\*\* himself to thy service...” Throughout the degrees, there are verses quoted from Scripture. There are prayers that are given by the actors in the Master Mason legend. However, the prayer offered in the EA degree is the only time in the ritual, where the Craft assembled, is specifically asking the GAOTU to *grant* us a specific outcome. We are hopeful that the new initiate, among us, will be as true faithful to that purpose as we are. If this is the one thing for which we pray, it is reasonable to conclude that this invocation may be our defining purpose.

## **Freemasonry Philosophy**

The Masonic Philosophy, which serves as a way of living for us to obtain this connection with the Divine, is a “modern day” expression, and implementation of a way of life, that lies at the core of most Mystery Schools from time immemorial. The components of the Freemasonry rituals draw upon the same fundamental ideas as the Platonic assemblies in Greece, the Stoicism of Rome, and many other initiatic paths, many of which are older than recorded history. These paths all trace the journey of the Seeker, as he learns to “kill off” his profane self, to be raised to a new state of awareness and connection to God. There are many scholars who expound on this Philosophy more suitably than I can. Past Grand Master Ware, the namesake of this Lodge of Research, specifically recommended the work of Brother W.L. Wilmshurst (Annual Proceedings Of The Grand Lodge of Kentucky F.&A.M., p. 68). He was not erroneous in offering that recommendation. Our Ritual provides a clear map of a path which has proven to, if followed, bring this philosophy to life and provide us with the secrets to become servants of the Deity. Brother Wilmshurst explains this philosophy by close examination of the meaning and symbolism of the Three Degrees.

### **The First Degree**

The purpose of the first degree is to transform the internal qualities of the man. As such, the new brother is *to be first taught*, to free himself from the superfluous squandering of his time. “Time” is after all the one limited, unquantified resource that mortals have. The second undertaking should be for the Master to help the Apprentice to first identify, and then strip himself of all of those vices that separate his heart and spirit from the Great Architect. Thus, he balances his relationship to self; and in so doing, strengthens his heart for the connection to the Deity.

### **The Second Degree**

The Fellowcraft Degree has two purposes. Whereas the purpose of the first degree is to allow a man to adjust himself, the purpose of this degree is to teach the candidate to fix his relationships with others. The VSL which is placed on our altar provides a guide for our conduct as we balance our relationships with the rest of humanity. We do this by first ensuring, in every encounter, that we are standing plumb (oriented), that we then create a level playing field with everyone we meet, and finally that we are acting on the square (by engaging in balanced exchanges with those we meet). Completing the Working Tool training in the Two Degrees prepares us to be ready for a relationship with the Creator.

Now, most of Freemasons would readily admit that we have never actually met the GAOTU. Since we, as mortal creatures, cannot see the Creator, we can only begin to approach the GGOTU, by learning to appreciate the wonders of His Creation. While many Masons will, on occasion, stop to be amazed by some aspect beauty and order in nature, there are few who experience the full sense of the grand design as introduced in the G Lecture. The Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences are the vehicles for understanding this design. These have been handed down from the ancient Mystery Schools, as the path to prepare our Minds for our relationship to the Supreme.

## The Third Degree

The final degree in our symbolic Lodge is actually a confirmation and acknowledgment that we have done the work to perfect ourselves - and - raised ourselves to a new spiritual life. How we then choose to dedicate and devote ourselves in service to the Almighty is purely a matter of choice for the individual Brother. But if we follow the map of the lower degrees, we may certainly live a life, as a “true and faithful” Brother, among the other Living Stones who have done the same.

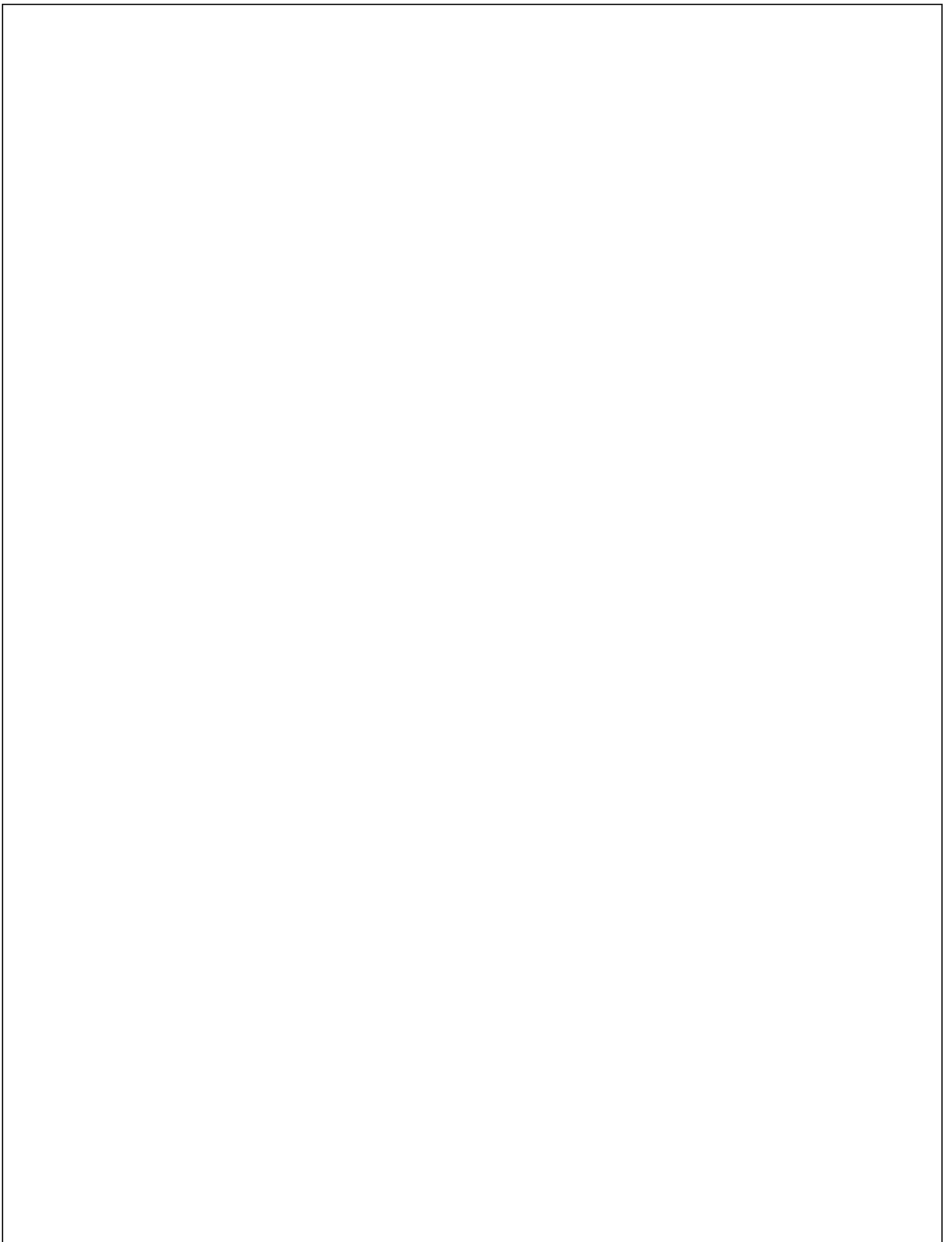
## Process of Labor

However, we must be mindful that there is a second part to that prayer request in the EA Degree. The Master also beseeches the Almighty to endue the candidate the “with a competency of thy divine Wisdom \*\*\* pure principles of our Order, \*\*\* be enabled to display the beauties of holiness, to the honor of thy holy name”.

Competency, however, requires study and practice to develop. It is unlikely that the GAOTU will miraculously open the heavens and give us competency. To obtain the Secrets, which our society purports to offer, Masons must “labor”. In the degrees, we are given tools to symbolically point to the work which should be done. In the Charges of the various degrees, we are firmly directed to **do the Work**. The common mistake that many Brothers make is to assume that this is speculative labor. This is operative work, on ourselves, not speculative. As a simple example, the newly initiated Brother is directed to make the specific effort of recording his time each day and ensuring that the labors of the day are focused to the three categories, as explained in the ritual. The candidate should be encouraged, by his Master, to eliminate all of the activities that do not fit into those categories as superfluous. Thus, the candidate learns to stop squandering this resource. Likewise, there are similar directions given for the use of all of the other Working Tools, and the reader is encouraged to investigate their uses -and- to engage in the work.

## In Summary

What is Freemasonry, then? Freemasonry is a philosophy, a process, and a path by which we can let go of our rough nature. It is a progressive method by which we can balance ourselves, our connections to others, and train ourselves to understand the Divine by understanding the divine plan. Through our Work, we can receive that, for which the Master asked God to grant us in that one EA prayer. May our prayer be answered, and may The Grand Master of All Things bless us with the strength and wisdom to do our Work.



## References

- The Grand Lodge of Kentucky F.&A.M. (1958). *Annual Proceedings Of The Grand Lodge of Kentucky F.&A.M.* Kentucky, U.S.A.: Masonic Home Print.
- Wilmshurst, W. L. (1927). *The Meaning Of Masonry* (Reprint of the 5th Ed. ed.). Avenel, NJ: Grammercy (1995).