

When Am I Truly A Master Mason?

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The answer to the question “When am I truly a Master Mason?” – which, by the way, is *not right now, nor do I know you ever will be* – matters.

Masons are attuned to focus on a plethora of existential awards and titles from the minute they are exposed to Freemasonry, to that final moment when they die or decide to demit (or are suspended for non-payment of dues).

Most lodges, under the auspices of protocol, take advantage of the newly raised captive audience for that ultimate moment of pontification, commonly known as “introductions.” Introducing Past Grands, District Deputies, Sovereign Grands, Most Whatever, Right Whomever, Very Worshipful What’s His Name, the list goes on and on. Unarguably, the newly raised Master Mason has no idea what any of the titles mean. Ironically, we raise a brother to the sublime degree of Master Mason, tell him we are all “on the level,” and then introduce him to a dozen guys who are “more advanced” than he.

Under “normal” circumstance, I would applaud the progress that a brother Master Mason presumably has achieved to obtain such lofty titles, but the seasoned Mason knows this is frequently not the case. American Freemasonry has diluted its “honors” system. It has watered down what were at one time in history, extraordinary achievements, among extraordinary men to look more glamorous and sexier to the uninformed.

This watering down effect was not by accident. It was a calculated and deliberate action taken by the shrinking appendant bodies, to gain their “fair share” of new members out of the dwindling numbers of newly raised Masons.

The actions of the appendant bodies have caused some collateral damage within the ranks of the Blue Lodge. They have created division among Masons, rather than the “exclusive” motivation they may have originally attempted to stimulate. In the York Rite, there are the Knights of the York Cross of Honour, Red Cross of Constantine, Allied Masonic Degrees, Royal Ark Mariner, Night Masons, etc. The Scottish Rite of Freemasonry has the Knights Commander Court of Honor, and of course, Sovereign Grand Inspector General. Each appendant body spends an incredible amount of time, money and influence within the fraternity trying to retain membership, instead of focusing on the conferral of degrees, and the opportunity for advanced Masonic education within.

The solution to the problem is simple. Reform the entire procedure, establish time tables limiting the pace that a Master Mason is “promoted” through the ranks. The time table would NOT be as strictly adhered to as a Masonic maturity timetable. We are burning brothers out with appendant body work, degrees, fund raisers, when most don’t even have a solid understanding of the first three degrees of Masonry.

The veteran, seasoned Masons will be held to task to ensure degree work is done. Whether it takes a man one year or ten years to receive all 32 degrees in Scottish Rite Masonry, will be the ultimate challenge for a man to continue his Masonic journey, well after he receives his red, white or purple hat.

Our Masonic journey should be recognized as the personal journey that it is. No single Freemason has the right to judge whether a man is a “Master Mason,” as we all have different starting points, and presumably, no true ending point.

Ritual work is meaningful and the most necessary step toward a future improved self, otherwise Freemasonry would not be any different than any other men’s group. Reciting perfect charges, showing up to stated communications, and offering positive mentorship to fellow Masons are indeed important undertakings in one’s pursuit of the elusive perfection promised by becoming a Master of the Craft. Consider the application of the lesson we learn as Entered Apprentices. We are taught to divide our time into three equal parts, thus introducing us to the principle of time management. If we recognize that some of our time spent within the confines of a Masonic hall is unproductive and squandered, we are forced to conclude that practicing “Masonry” may actually be yielding the exact opposite effect of that for which we are striving.

The best example of what “Freemasonry can do for you,” is making good men better in measurable and visible ways. We are not here to become good salesmen of hats and ties, good fryers of fish or good pancake flippers. We came here to learn, to gain control over our desires and to improve ourselves in Masonry.

Being raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason is not the end of one’s journey. It is the beginning of a transformative process not measured by the number of degrees received from appendant bodies, offices held, or awards received. It is the work of a lifetime. A work that has no end. As man can always improve, so can Masonry always offer lessons leading to improvement. I can’t tell you when you will truly be a Master Mason, but I can assure you that until you accept this basic truth, your journey has not yet begun.

Presented by David V. Cassesa at William O. Ware Lodge of Research, “Papers Night,” May 30, 2018. Bro. Cassesa is a member and Past Master of Robert Burns Lodge No. 163, as well as William O. Ware Lodge of Research. He has served on the Grand Lodge of Kentucky’s Committee on Education.