

## **Some thoughts on what a prospective candidate for Freemasonry needs to know.**

Freemasonry is described in the *Test Questions of the First Degree* as a “peculiar (i.e. particular) system of morality veiled in allegory and Illustrated by symbols”.

During his Initiation and the subsequent degrees the candidate is given an overwhelming overload of information which is usually beyond his capacity to process and fully understand at that time – so when and how does he get to understand what the experience of Freemasonry is all about and the allegorical lessons it contains? It evolves progressively with his developing experience.

The candidate for Freemasonry needs to know a little more than he has traditionally been told about it. At the very least he needs to know that:-

1. His Initiation begins a journey of applied morality intended to last for the rest of his life.
2. The ceremonies of Freemasonry require the individuals involved to know their part “by heart” and so far as possible to deliver them fluently and with understanding and meaning.
3. After Initiation he will be encouraged, but is not obliged, to take an active part in the workings of his Lodge including learning (by rote) and delivering some of the shorter charges.
4. If he ultimately accepts a commitment to “go through the chairs” he will begin a well structured, progressive journey lasting several years during which he will be required to learn the ceremonial ritual of each office in turn as well as other associated charges, ending as Master of the Lodge.  
This journey may be interrupted at any time the member feels unable, or if the Lodge deems him not ready, to proceed further. Otherwise it is normally an annual progression.
5. The real benefits and understanding of the teachings of Freemasonry accrue from this active participation. It becomes a way of life.

## **And after his Initiation**

The Test Questions of the First Degree are the new Freemason’s first experience of this Learning by rote.

To understand any charge properly he needs to learn it. As he submits to the discipline of learning the charge a Freemason should begin by carefully reading it through it several times so that he fully understands the story (or what it is trying to say). He should also determine the meaning of any obscure words or phrases. Only then is he ready to start committing to memory. Then he continues with his own tried and proved process (my own is to take a paragraph at a time etc. etc.....) until he reaches a confident fluency.

During the process he will find his understanding improves and as his mind relaxes the allegorical meaning may slowly evolve but this can take quite a long time so be patient and don't expect anything overnight! In my own experience even after 50+ years nuances of meaning still evolve.

As well as developing this understanding the immediate benefits include memory training, gaining confidence in presenting yourself in public and the satisfaction of knowing when you have done the job well (and you do). Your own critical appraisal of your performance is usually enough to tell yourself what is needed to improve. Once you have learned a charge thoroughly it is relatively much easier to bring it back to full fluency.

The long term benefits occur as you get older and your continuing ritual work helps keep the brain active and thereby delays or avoids the onset of possible dementia related disease.

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