

## PREREQUISITES FOR MEMBERSHIP OF FREEMASONRY AND ENGAGEMENT UPON THE 'WORK'

Presented in Open Lodge to the Brethren of Oracle Lodge 1003

on

10<sup>th</sup> November 2003

by Brother Paul Kenny

I begin by asking the Brethren to call to mind the purpose for which we have gathered here tonight. We are here to engage in **Work** or **Labour**. From the moment the Lodge is declared open until it is declared closed the Brethren are engaged upon the building of a 'Temple'. It is a personal Temple, a Temple in our community and one of a universal nature.

The Work is engaged upon regularly, suggesting that the Temple is a work in progress and requires persistent effort in the hope that we may erect an edifice and Temple worthy of the approval of the G.A.O.T.U. It requires a range of skills, each gained and perfected through persistent effort and learning. This, Brethren is our Labour.

Most importantly, we engage fully conscious of the fact that we do so with a single purpose in mind. That purpose must surely be to better ourselves. Can any Brother suggest any more noble a purpose in life than to strive to make oneself the best he can possibly be?

It should also be acknowledged that while this Work continues on into our daily lives, it is while we are gathered together in Lodge that the Work is conducted in perfect peace, love and harmony and in the presence of the G.A.O.T.U.

Before one can be invited to engage upon this work in the name of Freemasonry it is suggested that each Labourer first have certain qualities and abilities, or, at a minimum, potential. A candidate should not be recommended for membership of Freemasonry unless he first meets the requirements set out in our ritual.

At first glance this arrangement may seem to be unfair, even exclusive. We must realise, however, that Freemasonry is but one of many disciplines which guides its followers in interior work. Freemasonry may not be the most appropriate path for every seeker of instruction in the Mysteries. As we examine the qualifications required we gain a first glimpse into the nature of the Work in general and into the process of interpreting the symbols of the Craft in particular.

The **first** prerequisite for entry into any form of the Work is that the prospective candidate must believe in a Supreme Being. There are several reasons for this requirement. The course of instruction, which is our ritual, is based on understanding teachings and precepts considered to be of Divine origin. The objective of the instruction is to bring the candidate to a mindful awareness of the presence of Divinity. These notions are meaningless unless the

candidate believes in some Deity in the first place. More fundamentally, the candidate is expected to commit his new-found knowledge to the service of his God. A candidate who lacks this fundamental belief cannot make such a commitment. Further, there are stages in the course of the Work when the candidate's belief in his God is the only thing that is available to him as a guide. At these junctures one who has entered the Work depending only on his own capacities can expect to find himself in difficulty. In the Masonic idiom, this fundamental requirement for belief in a Supreme Being is stated in exactly those terms.

The **second** prerequisite is that the candidate shall be a volunteer and engage of his own freewill and accord. No coercion may be applied. This is a difficult predicament because in a very real sense, the prospective candidate has no way of knowing what he is getting into and is taking a leap of faith. It is nonetheless very important. In the process of Masonic Labour the candidate will strive to come to 'know himself'. Human beings do not, as a general rule, see themselves objectively. They rarely examine their real motivations, and they seldom acknowledge the effects that their actions have on others. The man who would be a Freemason in the interior sense will do all these things.

The task of examining one's motives and the effects of one's actions is usually unpleasant and sometimes painful. It is important that the individual knows very clearly that he has undertaken the experience himself. If he can blame his difficult circumstances on anyone else, he will not grow. In the Masonic idiom this requirement for voluntary commitment is expressed in two ways: first, by the fact that membership is not, or arguably, should not be, solicited – it is often preferred that one ask to become a Mason; and second in the ritual by the demand for an assurance by the candidate that his request for admission is of his 'own free will and accord'. It is important to understand the concept of voluntary commitment and unsolicited membership correctly. When someone is clearly seeking the sort of experience and learning the Work provides it is not improper to suggest that he investigate this or that area, nor is it inappropriate to indicate that the Craft offers instruction of this sort. What is improper is to urge someone to begin an examination of himself before he is ready to undertake the task.

The **third** prerequisite for the Work is that the candidate shall be mature and stable. Various schools of thought express this requirement in different ways. The Craft expresses this requirement by specifying that the candidate be twenty-one years of age, and this rule is based - like all ritual - on a very specific principle. The human being is thought to develop according to a very definite sequence of stages consisting of approximately seven years each. From birth to age seven the child develops his concept of himself as a separate identity; from seven to thirteen he develops his mental capacities with endless exploration and play; from fourteen to twenty he develops the passionate side of his nature. By the time the person is twenty-one, physical and elementary mental development is complete; one is entering one's physical prime. With the turbulence of adolescence in the past, one is ready to continue the normal pattern of human growth by developing the capacities of the psyche. By whatever standard one measures it, maturity and stability are important requirements because objective examination of one's self is, at best, an unsettling experience.

The **fourth**, and last prerequisite for entry into any form of the Work is that one should be prepared to accept responsibility for one's behaviour. It should be clear that individual

responsibility for one's actions is necessary for any kind of constructive learning about one's self, because, as long as one's circumstances are perceived as being the fault of another, a person is powerless to change his own situation. In the Masonic idiom the prerequisite of individual responsibility is expressed by requiring that the candidate shall be 'a man free born'. No one should have any difficulty with the use of freedom in this context. The symbolism uses the word freedom in contrast to the condition of slavery, because a slave can legitimately place responsibility for his actions on his master.

In addition to the basic prerequisites for candidacy, the Craft looks for certain motivations in its candidates. These motives are typically sought by all traditions of interior work. In Freemasonry they are expressed in the questions put to the candidate immediately after his admission to the Lodge as a candidate for the First Degree. Although these questions are generally treated as the merest formality, they are, in fact, of great importance. The appropriate motives are a real desire to learn about one's self, to come to 'know oneself', and to put that new-found knowledge to use on behalf of mankind. Furthermore, this motivation must be strong enough to impel the individual to persevere because the Work is difficult and at times demanding of real sacrifice. No one should enter the Work with the idea of personal gain or without the willingness to make whatever changes in himself the requirements of Providence, operating through the medium of his personal experience, will demand. There are personal gains but they are by-products of Masonic Labours, not achievable directly as personal objectives. Coming, as they do, early in the Ceremony of the First Degree, the questions should be regarded as a warning by those who would look deeply into the Craft.

Those of us fortunate enough to have found our way onto a path of self-development and improvement must not, once on the path, be tempted to relax but endeavour to maintain the Work engaged upon to the best of our ability. Our experience should, indeed, be a joyful one but never trivialised. This Institution's origins are both ancient and unknown but acknowledged as retaining timeless wisdom that can help us achieve a higher state of being.

Seek knowledge, not for its own sake but as a means of learning and a source of inspiration. As we learn we grow mindful of our purpose. This purpose cannot be stated - only experienced. The purpose is revealed in both the answer and in the pursuit of the answer. It is not for the faint hearted as difficult challenges face all sincere students of the Work. Steady progress rather than instantaneous gratification rewards the student who, committed to his purpose, will, after a time, become one with his purpose.