

## Our Masonic Purpose

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No institution, however noble, can afford to entertain delusions of grandeur.

Whatever title to grandeur it may possess must reside in the ultimate achievement of those lofty aspirations toward which good men strive with unaffected humility.

In Freemasonry this truth is obvious and basic. We build a hope that belongs not only to the Fraternity, but to all humanity. Our excuse for being and our legitimate claim upon men’s efforts and devotion lie in the ability of individuals to build and to keep building more closely to the designs of our Great Creator.

Our purpose is to strive for the completion of a spiritual temple, a vision grand enough to have stood the passing years and strong enough to overcome whatever problems the future may bring. Freemasonry’s spiritual temple is the moral and spiritual growth of the individual. A lack of faith in our ability to fulfill this aim and our failure to realize the Fraternity’s important mission constitute our chief weakness in this age of dissolving beliefs and withering standards.

William Blake wrote the following lines that Masons might well read again:

*And did the countenance divine  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here  
Among these dark Satanic mills?  
I will not cease from mental fight*

*Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England’s green and pleasant land.*

These lines transcend any particular place on earth. They are an affirmation for men everywhere. There is a ring of purpose here, a change in the soul of a man that must underlie all lasting undertakings. The sword of the spirit is in the hand.

Yet now, more than one hundred and fifty years after Blake wrote this hymn of spiritual transformation, the world lies dark on every hand – perhaps darker for all our technical advances. The temple lies unfinished. The builder’s tools lie rusting in the sand.

We can echo the sentiment of Wadsworth:  
*Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man?*

And we must agree with Brother Robert Burns:

*Man’s inhumanity to man  
Makes countless thousands mourn.*

While builders procrastinated and let the temple of the spirit go unfinished, others turned to different programs. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, a small man lived out his last years in “England’s green and pleasant land.” This was Karl Marx; but his solution for humanity’s troubles began

not with the individual soul, but with political and economic materialism, a program of mass manipulation in which the individual is to count for very little. Because Marxism was an easy program to follow and appealed to what was commonly and basically wrong with mankind, the way of communism caught fire and spread

like fire. Now a disturbingly large segment of the world’s population has committed itself to a purpose alien to all that every well-informed Mason holds sacred.

Any thinking and feeling man must sense an approaching storm. It howls like a wolf at our very door. In our country we are aware that too many young people are incapable of accepting the dignity of true greatness; too many are incapable of understanding those traditions that are the sinews of our western culture. In the name of social progress and sophistication we have struck down our tallest heroes and discarded as old-fashioned three thousand years of human experience. In the words of the prophet Jeremiah, we have built a cistern that will not hold water.

Blake’s dream of a New Jerusalem, a holy atmosphere where men stand in a light that leaves no corner darkened, might well be used as a hymn of Masonic purpose. To build a better and finer world according to God’s plan is the task that is at once our duty and our happiness. The design for a spiritual temple built of strong and good men starts not with the state, not with the lodge, but with the individual.

Two steps in this purpose are plain. The first is to mold the man as a builder; the second is to set the brethren to work. The individual Mason must first come to believe in Freemasonry’s purpose and then equip himself for his duty.

No man actually becomes a Mason until he has obligated himself in his heart and mind never to cease in the perfection of his craft and to practice the Fraternity’s

tenets, which are brotherly love, relief, and truth. It is then that the light begins to break from the grandeur that lies ahead and toward which the brethren labor. It is doubtful that anyone of us ever becomes a Master Mason in the sense that we have perfected our skills. It is in the striving for this attainment that our purpose lies. Let us not delude ourselves; the stakes are high. Upon our moral and spiritual achievement depends the survival of civilization itself. Let us “build Jerusalem” in the place to which our duty called us.

If the future of Freemasonry does reside in a vitally alive purpose, the question becomes: how can this spirit be propagated? Too often we have accentuated the pumping of hands and the slapping of backs, as if the best attribute of Masonry were a smile and a merry conformity and this despite the earnest lessons of our highest degree. We do not bring a new Mason into the presence of wisdom or to a willingness to grow spiritually as simply as that.

The proper Masonic avenue to the heart is through the mind. That is the essential meaning of the second degree. We are eager to assert that our order is not a religion. This is proper, for we know that Masonry was not designed to carry out the functions of a church.

But we have been far too reluctant to proclaim that Masonry has a deep spiritual philosophy and that that system of beliefs requires positive, constructive action from a builder. The mind must first be taught and convinced. There is no weakness in what Masonry has to teach, no lack of

strength in its purpose, no major fault in the logic. Yet far too often, the curtain is kept drawn; the real light is excluded from the temple upon which we are supposed to be laboring. Is it because we are ashamed of deep feelings, or is it because we are afraid of the consequences that must come from a deep commitment to our Masonic purpose?

No man should dedicate a vital part of his life to Masonry without first asking himself a serious question. Does Masonry have within its ancient philosophy a scope and depth sufficient to make truly significant contributions to mankind? In our time, brethren, we need an affirmation that Masonry has a destiny to fulfill! That affirmation must be made by individual Masons, through the lives that they lead in their own communities.

Freemasonry rests upon a foundation cleanly cut and unambiguous. Its basic principles are few in number; each has been tested by the square of human experience; each has been proved again and again throughout the years. The teachings of our order are not strangled by dogma, prejudice, or narrow creeds. The symbolism of the Craft is not veiled in mysticism; it pertains to life as it is lived by men. A study of Masonic history gives testimony that our order is capable of fulfilling its aims wherever its principles are followed by men who give with their minds, their hearts, and their hands.

The shame of humanity, that after so many years the spiritual temple still stands unfinished, is ours to share; for we have obligated ourselves to be builders. We

can- not merely belong in Masonry; we are committed by our vows to labor on that temple.

In a world where “man’s inhumanity to man” lurks on every side, where temperance and justice are mocked, and where a reverence for God is left for emergencies or abandoned completely, we Masons must be shocked by that ancient evil and by the loss of dignity and wisdom.

Our apprenticeship must begin anew. First, we must learn to be true to our real natures, and then to master the art of building for humanity. This is the only way that we can help to lift the darkness of violence and greed or to escape the fears of hate and ignorance. Then, when our work is done, we may lay down the tools of our Craft and stand among the brethren looking up- wards at the new light in the east.

We need not ask if our purpose is real, for the answer to that lies in the imperative vision of a brotherhood devoted to the love of justice and truth. We need not ask if this purpose can be transmitted from brother to brother, for we ourselves are a proof of that. There is but one question that we need to ask ourselves over and over again. That question is as simple as it is challenging. Are we men enough to be Masons?

How long can a Mason afford to be a Mason only in his speech and ritual verbalizations? How long can we afford to put our building aside for the little problems and pleasures of life? Masonry and humanity await our answers and our deeds!

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