

Living Masonically Outside of Lodge

Freemasonry is an individual journey towards becoming a better father, husband, friend, citizen, and man supported by other men at different points on the same journey. For centuries, the individual Lodge has been the focal point for Masons on that journey. It has been the place for Brethren to identify and learn to live their Masonic values, it has been the launch-pad for Masonic Education, it has been the common ground for Brethren of different backgrounds to meet and exchange ideas, provide support, and offer friendship.

Freemasonry was always meant to be lived outside of Lodge. Brethren have always been charged with taking the lessons learned in Lodge and practicing them in their daily lives. We now live in a world where Masonic resources are more available than in years past to supplement what Masons get from a strong and vibrant Lodge Experience. We also live in a world where it is much easier for Masons from around the world to connect and socialize. The following suggestions are offered to Masons so that they can live each day, building a temple in their heart that reflects the order and beauty of the Great Architect.

Live Your Masonic Principles

As the old adage goes, ‘Actions speak louder than words;’ so should we strive to live every day by our Masonic Principles: Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

By Brotherly Love, we regard the human species as one family; and, as a member of that family, we should act with respect and understanding towards others and seek to aid and support those who are in need. As Masons, we understand that everyone has their own path and their own obstacles. We aid and whisper wise counsel where we can and we offer support and protection when necessary. In other words, Masons take responsibility for their communities and care for the people in them. Communities are not limited by geography, and a Mason is a member of many communities through his career, faith, and interests.

By Relief, we understand our obligation to assist those in true distress, whenever possible, without injury to ourselves and to our families. As Masons, we should help others to negotiate the obstacles in their path, if not remove it altogether. Sometimes, Relief takes the form of a well-needed kindness at the right time. Most Masonic Relief is of this nature and is rarely, if ever, talked about. A mother who has to transport her child to a hospital three times a week for cancer treatments will find an envelope in her mailbox containing gas cards, a veteran finds that his meal has been paid for, or someone stops to assist the family with a flat tire on the side of the road. As Masons, we do not seek applause for our relief work; because we believe that offering Relief is not a rare circumstance to be celebrated; but the way that we are supposed to behave and conduct ourselves.

By Truth, we have high moral and ethical standards for ourselves and in our dealings with others; we respect and encourage the reciprocal acts of education and reflection, and is that which we use as our compass on our path to becoming a better father, husband, friend, citizen, and man. More and more in society, people do not expect of one another and we, as Masons, believe we should act differently. As Masons, we seek to gain knowledge and understanding, utilizing that information to improve ourselves, our families, and our communities.

As Masons, we understand that it isn’t enough to just desire to improve oneself or live a principled life, we need to be actively working towards betterment. We also recognize that knowledge gained should be knowledge shared; that investing your time, knowledge, and experience through the act of mentoring and coaching is one of the better ways to live your Masonic Principles. As the old adage goes, ‘Actions speak louder than words;’ so should we strive to live every day by our Masonic Principles: Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

Educate Yourself

Freemasonry is a big tent, and people come to it for many different reasons seeking different experiences. Because of this, there are many different lenses to use when looking at Freemasonry. It is worthwhile to look at Freemasonry through different lenses or viewpoints to increase our knowledge and understanding. There are a wealth of print, television, movie, and online resources for the modern Mason and most of them can be categorized as presenting from one of the following viewpoints:

- Freemasonry 101-These resources seek to give the basic information about the history, nature, and specifics of Freemasonry such as Brother Christopher Hodapp's *Freemasons for Dummies*.
- Moral, Ethical, and Spiritual Inspiration-These resources help explain, reinforce, or invite reflection upon systems of thought and belief such as Volumes of Sacred Law or Joseph Campbell's *'Power of Myth.'*
- Foundational Documents-These resources are examples or explorations of the original documents upon which Speculative Freemasonry is based, such as Brother James Anderson's *Constitutions of 1723* or Brother Thomas Smith Webb's *The Freemason's Monitor: Or Illustrations of Masonry*.
- Masonic History-These resources explore the history of the institution, the institution's role in historical events, and/or the lives of influential and/or famous Masons.
- Masonry Explained-These resources seek to explain Masonic symbols, shed more light on aspects of the degrees, or increase understanding on the lessons of the different degrees such as Brother Allen Roberts' *The Craft and Its Symbols*.
- Esoteric Masonry-These resources explore the less mainstream areas of Masonry, often including aspects of spiritualism, mysticism, hermeticism, and mythology such as Brother W. Kirk MacNulty's *Freemasonry: A Journey Through Ritual and Symbol*.
- Anti-Masonry-These resources explore the religious, social, and historical objections to Freemasonry, offering evidence and information to respond to those objections such as *Is It True What They Say About Freemasonry?* by Brothers Arturo de Hoyos and S. Brent Morris.
- Masonic Conspiracy Theories-These resources, usually created by non-Masons, seek to implicate Freemasonry in explaining mysteries such as the Whitechapel Murders or the Oak Island Treasure or seek to show Freemasonry as a clandestine global authority that directs everything from the fates of nations to the winners of entertainment awards.
- Masonic Fiction-These resources utilize Freemasonry as part of the story, such as Dan Brown's *'The Lost Symbol,'* Umberto Eco's *'Foucault's Pendulum,'* or Rudyard Kipling's *'The Man Who Would Be King.'*
- Masonic Poetry-These resources feature poems by Masons or about Masonry such as MWB Rob Morris' *'Poetry of Freemasonry,'* or works by WB Rudyard Kipling, WB Robert Burns, WB Jason Eddy and others.
- Masonic Leadership-These resources explore ways of becoming a leader, being an agent of change within a Lodge, or call for a re-examination of Masonry such as PGM James Easterling's *'The Successful Lodge: Best Practices in Freemasonry by 70 Well-Traveled Brethren,'* RWB Dan Hrinko's *'The Craft-Driven Lodge,'* or Brother Andrew Hammer's *'Observing the Craft.'*

This list is not exhaustive and any resources listed should be considered a representative example and not construed as being an endorsement. When utilizing any resources, Masons should keep a healthy level of skepticism and utilize their powers of investigating and reasoning to evaluate the source, ideas, and viewpoint. We live in a society awash in information, but not all of it is good, valid or useful.

As Masons view Freemasonry through different lenses, some find that they have a particular interest in one view over another; they may also find gaps in their own knowledge. As Masons, we recognize that there is always more to know; therefore, keep interested in your own development as a man and Mason. There are many ways to develop: a study of one of the seven liberal arts and sciences, perfecting your skills as a craftsman, enhancing your abilities as a father and husband, or taking the time to contemplate and appreciate the great works of Creation can be just as valuable. Some Masons will tell you that they learned more about Masonry taking their daughter fishing than they ever did reading a book or going to a website.

Education can be difficult on your own, and the inquisitive Mason will find that there are many like-minded Masons readily available. For centuries, the Masonic Lodge has been the place for men to share their knowledge, to discuss challenging ideas with peers, and come away with their own knowledge increased and thinking clarified. As the old adage goes: "If you are uninformed, surround yourself with informed people; if you are informed, surround yourself with informed people who are not afraid to respectfully disagree with you when necessary and explain why." As you develop, bring what you have learned back to your Lodge and your other communities. Apply and share what you have learned. A perfect ashlar on a shelf is nice to look at; but its true beauty is discovered once it is put to use.

Connect With Other Brethren

Freemasonry is a personal journey towards becoming a better father, husband, friend, citizen and man supported by others at different points on that same journey. The importance of the Fraternal Connection cannot be understated and, for many years, the focal point of that connection was the individual Lodge. We now live in a world where there are many ways to connect with Brethren from different cities, jurisdictions and countries. You are an individual Mason, but you are part of a Brotherhood that spans the globe and spans the centuries. A perfect ashlar's true beauty is only discovered when it is used in concert with others, together creating something beautiful, useful, and steadfast.

Some Masons find that regularly attending Lodge is not a good fit with the other demands on their time and efforts. These Masons usually find that the best way for them to connect with their Brethren is through activities that are outside the regular Lodge meeting. Participating in a community event like Special Olympics or a local fair, attending special Masonic events like Table Lodge or the Annual Inspection, taking a specific part on the Craft Team for one degree or another, or even just meeting with Brethren for a meal or an activity separate from Lodge altogether are all wonderful ways to connect with Brethren. Masonic Brotherhood was never limited to the confines of the Lodge Room and to the monthly Stated Meeting, nor should it ever be.

Because of the character, values, and skills of the Brethren, every Masonic Lodge does provide a unique experience. For some, a successful Lodge experience centers around education and discussion, for others it centers on the meal and the Brethren talking for hours, still others focus on Ritual Excellence, others focus on community service; Brethren are encouraged to visit other Lodges and discover the unique experiences available.

We live in a world with many resources for the digital or online Mason. Besides Facebook and Grand Lodge websites, you can find Masonic podcasts, Masonic blogs, and Masonic online communities where Brethren can connect, share, and discuss. These online resources can often supplement the experience of Lodge or meeting with other Brethren in-person, but should never completely replace that experience.

When connecting with Brethren, especially online, it is well to keep in mind the Ancient Charges of our Order, particularly the section regarding behavior toward a strange Brother.

You are cautiously to examine him, in such a method as prudence shall direct you, that you may not be imposed upon by an ignorant false pretender, whom you are to reject with contempt and derision, and beware of giving him any hints of knowledge. But if you discover him to be a true and genuine Brother, you are to respect him accordingly; and if he is in want, you must relieve him if you can, or else direct him how he may be relieved. You must employ him some days, or else recommend him to be employed. But you are not charged to do beyond your ability, only to prefer a poor Brother, that is a good man and true, before any other poor people in the same circumstances.

Finally, all these Charges you are to observe, and also those that shall be communicated to you in another way; cultivating Brotherly Love, the foundation and capstone, the cement and glory of this ancient Fraternity, avoiding all wrangling and quarreling, all slander and backbiting, nor permitting others to slander any honest Brother, but defending his character, and doing him all good offices, as far as is consistent with your honor and safety, and no farther.

We live in a global society. You will encounter Masons of all stripes as well as cowans and pretenders in your travels. Therefore, do not be too eager to reveal specifics of Ohio Ritual, Masonic Code, or Lodge business. Recognize that Masonry is a big tent and that people come to it for many different reasons seeking different experiences and have very different opinions. Be careful to avoid letting productive discussions devolve into rancorous arguments. In short, remember the cardinal virtues of Temperance, Prudence, Fortitude, and Justice.

Because connecting with other Masons is crucial to living a Masonic life, Brethren are encouraged to find the right fit for themselves. It may be that being involved only in activities outside the Lodge is the best fit for a Brother due to family and work obligations. It may be that the Traditional Observance Lodge in the next county or the Lodge in their District that is made of mostly veterans is the best fit for a Brother and what he values. It may be that an online community is the best fit for a Brother to use a particular lens to view Masonry and connect with informed Brethren. In general, we find that Masons will drive 3 hours one way to a Lodge or activity that is the right fit when they wouldn't cross the street for the wrong one.

Your Actions Have Undivided Attention

Recently, members of a Lodge attended a youth group Installation. During the opening prayer the Brethren put their right hands over their hearts and bowed their heads. There was a pack of Cub Scouts in attendance and a Brother noticed one of the young boys staring intently. The boy then, with great care, put his hand over his heart and bowed his head.

For many people, you will be their idea of what it means to be a Mason. Your actions will inform, influence and inspire their thoughts about the Craft.

We are reminded often in our Ritual to be peaceable citizens, industrious in our labors, humble and reverent before sacred things, loving and attentive to family, charitable and generous to those who despair, moral and judicious in our undertakings, and strive to live a life free of regrets, full of love and worthy of emulation.

When you took your obligation, you both created and became part of a Masonic Family. Your deeds will necessarily affect all those who have embraced you. In every moment of every day you are called to constantly act and walk in a way worthy of your Family.

You may stumble, you may fall, you may be tried; but rise, be persistent, and be willing to be tried again. Remember who is watching, and what they will learn from your actions and example.

Conclusion

Freemasonry is a personal journey towards becoming a better father, husband, friend, citizen and man supported by other men at different points on the same journey. Brethren have always been charged with taking the lessons learned in Lodge and practicing them in their daily lives. In our modern society, it is more important than ever that Masons endeavor to live their Masonic values and put them into action, educate themselves and reflect on topics relevant to a well-spent life, connect with other Brethren and live a life that informs, influences, and inspires others.