

Some Reasons I Became A Freemason

An excerpt from an unfinished work in progress: "Why I'm A Freemason"

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I wonder what it took for people to join together and start building civilization.

Imagination and hope and inspiration and possibility would have pushed up. Other forces would have pulled down. One was the power of nature. Heat, cold, night, decay, fatigue, death, gravity, genetics, agriculture, weather. Another was the nature of people, and the limit of their shared awareness. Until awareness expanded enough to encompass certain truths hidden by the enormity of reality, the physical world would have defeated every *supraordinary* possibility.

Awareness isn't easily shared. An idea trapped inside one mind dies. To come to life, it has to cross the treacherous space between two minds, where thoughts are so vulnerable, where identities are bestowed or withheld, where naysayers afraid of or ashamed to embrace revolutionary discoveries thrive, where the always-larger group conforms to itself and easily ridicules truths the simple appearance of things conceals.

But the human brain, remarkable product of nature that it is, makes remarkable sense out of senseless symbols. So on the narrow, tangled channels of human communication, the earliest visionaries put their thoughts in order, passed them around, comprehended a collective voice, amplified their strength by becoming a force of one, *slowly* expanded the boundaries of understanding, and started to build on a grander scale.

All because of symbols. We call ourselves *homo sapiens*, but wisdom isn't what distinguishes us from other animals. Language is. It's so fundamentally human, I propose defining the human being as a communications support system, and changing our taxonomic label to *homo dictens*.

Joking. Sort of. But not joking when I point out that people have an uncontrollable need to express what they experience, and to sense that what they've expressed arrived unharmed in another person's conscience. Speech is so powerful that uttered sounds don't just describe experience, they cause it. With the assent of a group, what is merely spoken, true or not, can become profoundly real. On a very basic level, this happens all the time in "performative" language: "We find the defendant not guilty." "With this ring, I thee wed." "You're under arrest." "We hold these truths to be self-evident." It happens with things we create to represent something else: The dollar bill, the signed contract, the penal code, the country's border. And it's quite possible that what causes us more pain or regret than anything else are spoken, or unspoken, words.

On a much less basic level, the Greeks, as you know, said reason is the controlling force of the universe that expresses itself with something they named *Logos*. The ancient Hebrews applied that word to the force behind the genesis of everything, and in the Old Testament a stroke of creative inspiration is said to be a divine message, or the Word of God. *Logos* is also the Word of God in the Christian Bible, as well as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity (embodied in Christ), and the principle that animates and rules the world.

Maybe the immortal idea that language has divine essence comes from ancient mystics/priests/philosophers trying to use unwieldy symbols to say something like this: an

originating, causative force—often called God or, understandably, sometimes simply accepted as something unnamable and so labeled G-d—is the source of everything that exists. This force “expresses” or manifests itself via something that is not the force itself, something that is compelled to adhere to universal physical laws. We give that something a name: *Logos*. Likewise, human expression takes place by means of *Logos*. And true representation of the physical realm emanating from the causative force would have to be “logical.” So *Logos* can be thought of as something like the universal creative instrument, which is limited only by the limit of *Logos*. And the limit of human awareness is what our Logical faculty can conceive and bring into language.

With the invention of lingual symbols, the domain of awareness, of possibility, of everything human beings consider “real” can grow. A simple example might be the specific moment some people agreed that the sounds *munus* (*munia* its plural, *gift* and *hand* its English equivalent) would represent the concept of relinquishing something possessed. Someone, somewhere, was the first to combine *munia* with *capere*, a word root found in Latin ([habere](#)) and in English (*accept*, *keep*, *receive*, *have*, etc.), so that a new word, *municipal*, could label the idea of putting people’s diverse contributions into a social organization.

The assertion of the natural (“God-given”) right to make full use of the natural (“God-given”) faculty of speech was the highest-priority addition to the enlightenment’s revolutionary U.S. Constitution. Some of its authors no doubt understood that people fight reality wars on the language battlefield by silencing, imprisoning, torturing, and executing other people for what they said or wouldn’t say. They had likely learned that together—and only together—can people create towers, temples, pyramids, economies, governments, cities, and cultures. They probably knew that if there’s no human experience, no language to connect it, and thereby no means with which to elevate it, there’s no collective unit, no *e pluribus unum*, no great oneness of anything.

In spite of tough resistance at the boundaries of the awareness of the day, they declared as a legally enforceable, self-evident truth the equality of all men and their natural (“God-given”) rights, including Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—which anyone who’s deprived of self-expression is unlikely to attain. This great product of their lives, unprecedented in thousands of years of history and accomplished only a few hundred years ago, did change things. But it’s an embankment at the edge of a pounding ocean, and that’s what it will be as long as there are people with or seeking power who’d silence others if they could; as long as people, from tumultuous forward thinkers to despicable little bullies, keep essential truths in dark secrecy instead of exposing them to the open world of speech; as long as our precious right to speak can be taken away, if not by law, then by certain realities of everyday life.

I also believe conscious protection of the freedom to exercise the fullest extent of our humanity—that is, highly developed communication—is the origin of just about everything that takes place in a Freemasonic lodge. With our roles, ceremonies, and spoken oaths, we revere the pursuit of truth via conscious but unobstructed language. Our job is to create and make use of shelter from the profane world, where—at all historic times, under all social circumstances—*inquiry* can replace *dogma*, *tolerance* can replace *bigotry*, *ordered hierarchy* can replace *arbitrary dominance*, *systematized meritocratic advancement* can replace *repression of personal development* and *stagnation of spirits*, the *truth* can rise above the *false*, a *plan of action* can emerge from *apathy*, something can come from nothing, and the worst in us can be replaced by the best.

We’re not instructed. We’re merely guided. We guide by, among other things, emphatically encouraging each other to look for, discover, and speak the truth. Freemasonry might be the only

not-academic society in which the conscious pursuit of truth is a principal purpose. That search can keep us, no matter where we may be in the profane world or in life, pointed in a worthy direction, the way a sailor keeps his ship on course by looking again and again to the north star.

But literally anything can be asserted as truth and, often disastrously, be treated as such by a neglected, truth-averse human mind. So what is it? My definition: languaged reason. That's quite the opposite of some esoteric, mysterious secret. "Truth" means just that and nothing more. By definition, it has to be simple. It's unclouded. It's not confusing. Speaking it concerns honesty, not just in the sense of fairness, but also in friendships and love, emotions and moods. It's genuinely knowing and abiding by your opinions and tastes. It's standing alone and holding forth for truth no matter how strong the pressure to believe and propagate falsehoods gets. It's being humble enough to release even the most cherished belief when premises that support it collapse, and then having the strength of character to resist concocting foolish explanations to fill the caves of the still-unknown that reappear. It's having the intelligence to discern truth in chaos, or failing that, having the skill and patience to keep looking for the truth when, in spite of how much you wish it weren't, you know it's evading you. It's presuming that there does exist an objective truth, the pursuit of which enables us to disprove and unemotionally shed erroneous beliefs and instead relentlessly put ourselves on the shoulders of true giants who came before us.

The principles Freemasonry is based on bequeath to every generation a legacy of hundreds if not thousands of years of logically supportable human rights work that's now preserved in law, tradition, consciousness, and the verbal substance of Freemasonic rituals—where, for example, the words that stand for the concepts Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity have been selected from the whole of human lexicon for ritualistic repetition. Along with ritual, in our created, safe shelter, discussion can be and often is the ancient dance of human beings' lively imagination pushing up against all the forces that pull it back down. At a meeting of selected, searching minds, the private monolog_(os) that would otherwise circulate silently inside us can engage with the much richer dimension defined not just by the walls of our lodges (*logos*), but also by our convened consciences, and then by the shared adventure of our conversations. That old reliable Socratic method of discovery by means of dialog_(os), or rather *multi-log*_(os), can take place. Perspective can be broadened, questions can be posed, premises can be examined, faulty reasoning can be pointed out, assent of others might be reached, and something closer to truth might be revealed. Fences marking the edges of presumed possibility might shake and crack. A truth might plant itself for the first time in the womb of human awareness, a symbol for it might come forth, and the future just might shift.

The Freemasonic model is based on natural law, but Freemasonry is an unnatural human fabrication that can take form only by conscious group effort. As individuals, and as diverse people linked by a chain of union that reaches around the world, we guard and protect our created place to be sure people can come safely together to stand consistently and eternally for the conscious discovery, preservation, and dissemination of truth. We guarantee each other the freedom to reason, dream, and explore mere ideas in the critical dimension of other thinking people. We comprise an alternative to parroting and deferring to some vaguely understood, finite, contradictory doctrine, where the blindness of blind leaps of faith produces such zealous adherence to the madness of the leap.

As Masons, we serve each other (or can) in our self-directed efforts to grow in character as long as we live. We are, therefore, a venue in which the greatest qualities of humanness can unfold and flourish, and so can be an emanating cause of creative joy, for ourselves, and for everybody else.

Without this—in spite of the first amendment to our country’s constitution, and whether it’s the work of Freemasons or somebody else—the upward building stops. Without it, illiteracy is the norm, and knowledge is arcane. Without it, the mad rantings of dictators and ideologues drive unquestioning, speechless agents to send innocent people to horrific deaths. Without it, purchased people line up like subjects before a kinglike ruler with their spirits so broken that any complaint stays at the petty level of impatience with an insufferably long wait for a signal to wipe the king’s feet and be gone, but not about the unspoken yet ironclad pretenses that let such spirit-crushing rules exist. Without it, creative universes in billions of human minds lock themselves up and sleepmarch through dead, silenced lives. Without it, our preciously imagined, slowly constructed vision of what we know is *true*-ly possible for human life crumbles again into chaos, superstition, tyranny, preventable disease, crippling loneliness, blind rigid custom, neuroses, unnecessary suffering, broken hearts, injustice, the lead of greed, the right of might, and on.

When people joined forces to build civilization, when several separate churning minds used language to push a tangible version of an unformed idea into the transparent air, something individual was expanded into hundreds of listenings, and hundreds of listenings were condensed into the unity of a single vision. And then, one day, all humankind, in spite of so much opposition, stepped out of an awareness of cramped mud huts into a larger sphere of human capacity to both behold and become something that was, in the fullest sense of the word, magnificent.

I wonder how much they adored their turn in living the endless lifetime. I wonder if the drone of everyday life stopped when their routine thoughts were overtaken by the magic that causes a rose, fig, or helpless lamb to push its growing symmetry into existence. I wonder if they dreaded the unstoppable cold blackening of the day, and cheered the loyal sun blasting every blinding, scary night into silver gold blue red timeless perfection. I wonder if they tried to imagine what created the extraordinary thing we call imagination.

I wonder if they wondered what gave them the yearning to divine heaven on earth. But I know that yearning is as uniquely human as it is to utter symbols for the beauty of the rational order by which we rise to discover this is true: “If we can imagine and name it, we can build, and be, that more perfect ideal.”