

# What Is the Point of Freemasonry?

Shôn Ellerton, November 29, 2022

*A question that is asked too often. What is the point of freemasonry?*



Late one evening, I made my way into the centre of Adelaide to attend a bimonthly meeting with a chapter of Royal Arch freemasons. The meeting took place at Freemasons Hall, a most assuredly impressive and rather imposing edifice. Ghost hunters claim of curious spectres of irate past masters, glowing orbs, doors that open by themselves, self-operated lifts, and to boot, a woman dressed in a white robe loitering at the corner of the mezzanine level puffing away at an ethereal cigarette. OK. I made up the cigarette bit.

The atmosphere inside the hall at night can be described, at best, awesome and creepy. Standing in the vast foyer with its tessellated black-and-white floor surrounded on either side by thick stone columns in the half-light of the cold meagre light emanating from the open doorway of the adjoining corridor, one could be forgiven that something lurking in the tall shadows might pounce on you. If you believe in that sort of thing, of course. The hall, being strangely absent of colour, I felt I was immersed in one of those old atmospheric black-and-white movies. In true Edgar Allan Poe fashion, it really needed a sinister looking grandfather clock ticking away timelessly to complete the experience.

Upstairs, in a more agreeable room of green colour and wood, with curtains, strange little alcoves and an old heavily soiled carpet, the companions got together to share a meal together, congratulate two new members who just undertook the ceremony of exaltation, and, of course, to tell stories and chat. It was, altogether, a very different sort of crowd than my own local provincial lodge on the outskirts of Adelaide. One of the members, being a wine guru, made it his

personal obligation to see that the companions got fine wine during their meals, and, indeed, it was most quaffable.

After the meal, most of the older companions made their way home leaving behind a few of the younger ones including the two newly exalted ones. Freemasonry, as well as many other established social clubs like Rotary and the Lions, have struggled to keep numbers and getting younger people involved has become an increasing challenge. So, it was nice to be able to sit down and chat with a coterie of younger members after the meal. As of the topics of discussion, they were varied and interesting. For those who know me, small talk doesn't come easily for me, and I was delighted that we were embarking on some heavy philosophy and metaphysics. From Georg Cantor's vexing problem of reconciling infinity with God to interpreting a passage in an ancient charge amusingly citing *stupid atheists*.

I'd like to elaborate on this passage if I may. For many, the term, 'stupid atheist', might suggest that atheists are stupid. I interpret this arresting phrase somewhat differently. That, in order for an atheist to have the necessary morals and virtues to remain respectable in life, they *must* have enough knowledge through the science of philosophy to achieve this. It is far easier to inculcate morals and virtues through the indoctrination of religion than through the teachings of philosophy, some of which can be difficult to interpret due to its, often, many layers of abstraction. In principle, an uneducated atheist may be more prone to becoming succumbed into a cult or nihilistic ideology than an educated one armed with enough knowledge to establish what's good and what's bad. It is especially important to distinguish faith in spirituality than that of religion, a topic complex enough to span an entire tome.

After much moralising, it all built up to the point I was asking myself.

“What is the point of freemasonry?”

In another article I wrote, I articulated what [freemasonry meant to me](#), which provides an introduction what freemasonry is to anyone unfamiliar with it and why I joined the fraternity.

Sometime after that meal, I thought more about the question of what the point of being a freemason is and what it brings to the table for others.

For some with a little more time on their hands, it almost seems like a 'business'. Bouncing about from one lodge to another on a near-daily basis. Joining as many

orders as possible. Contributing as much to ritual during the ceremonies. Eating a bit of food and downing a can of beer or glass of wine at the festive board, packing up as quickly as possible to get enough sleep to attend tomorrow's festive board. This, I find, a very commendable activity for those retirees playing an active role while meeting other members, teaching new people within the order, and of course, keeping their own minds fresh. But lacking any deep and scintillating discussion following the festive board except for those few die-hards willing to stay on later.

And there are those who achieve the ceremony of being raised to a Master Mason, continuing to pay the annual fee, and sort of, not bothering to turn up at lodge nights due to lack of interest. This seems a pity when new talent loses interest as evidenced by the glut of past masters being invested as officers leading up to the Worshipful Master's chair due to lack of candidates to fill them.

For me, Freemasonry is an excuse to get out of the house and dress nicely, meet new friends, do a bit of acting, learn some vocabulary seemingly forgotten in today's generation, and taking part in something I find quite beautiful and profound. To others, Freemasonry may mean something quite different.

Freemasonry being somewhat obsessed with geometry, I thought the humble equilateral triangle, with its three sides, could sufficiently represent what the whole point of it is.

Without defining it in some complex way, I think it is very simple.

1. Friendship
2. Self-improvement
3. Bettering society

Let's start with friendship.

Without a shadow of a doubt, loneliness is a big problem today, perhaps, more so than times of old. Many times I have listened to a song by The Cure titled *Other Voices* on its dark and haunting [Faith](#) album, its lyrics alluding to loneliness in the big city by living in desertion with eight million people. How true this is. Streaming entertainment, virtual worlds, online gaming, food deliveries and working from home is no substitute for socialising. Worse still, it is creating a new breed of paranoid introverts afraid to leave their own front doors. Every new initiate into Freemasonry, or that matter, any new member of a social club, is considered a little victory against loneliness. And there is much research to

suggest that loneliness is a major factor attributed to poor health, physically and mentally.

Then there is self-improvement.

Joining any well-intentioned social club is guaranteed to bring some level of self-improvement. As with friendship, Freemasonry is not exclusive for self-improvement of course. I used to be a member of a motorcycle club which taught me more than just how to ride motorcycles taking an example. My wife won't let me have a motorcycle, but that's another story! Not far where I live is a model railroad society, in which members meet up every Saturday. Sure, they play trains, but they are always on the path to improve themselves and gain knowledge which they may not get without socialising with others. Freemasonry is no different. One can delve *very* deeply into the meaning of the passages of the rituals in Freemasonry, but it is very clear that Freemasonry has designed itself in such a way to lay down a very logical path to becoming a respectable and useful citizen of the world. The existence of evil Freemasons seems almost inconceivable to me. Neither can I think of any recent politicians who are Freemasons either, but I could be treading on dangerous territory here.

Lastly, there is betterment to society.

Every freemason should read up on recent history of freemasonry, especially that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are many texts available to read but one which I recommend is John Dickie's [\*The Craft\*](#). As for laying out the values of Freemasonry and providing a guide as to what Freemasons should be advocating in society can be found in Albert Pike's, [\*Morals and Dogma\*](#), a lengthy and somewhat difficult to read tome which is rich in content. Charity aside, I personally think this is an area which freemasons are wholly far too quiet and dormant.

Why?

Well, it comes as no surprise that Freemasonry is heavily discouraged or banned from those societies in which there is suppression of free speech and curtailment of personal freedoms. Look no further than the former Soviet Union, China, Saudi Arabia and many other nation states which do not honour such values. The values of Freemasonry are completely at odds with those of nation states led by despots and ruled by tyranny and fear.

Why are so many freemasons quiet with their heads in the sand in times where individual freedoms and values of democracy are threatened by current events? On the surface, every freemason is taught not to discuss politics or religion *in the lodge*, and there is a reason for this, but *outside* the lodge? As described in Dickie's book, Freemasons of yesteryear were certainly active politically, especially during times of oppression, notably so in Europe from the 1920s to the 1960s. On the other side of the Atlantic during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, I have no doubt that those who were involved in the building of the great nation of the United States, many of whom were Freemasons, would turn in their graves if they could witness what is happening today.

Why is Freemasonry so quiet in today's discourse of political and social topics? Sure, they raise money for charity, but this is nothing particularly special as there are other well-known charities who do likewise. Perhaps what made Freemasonry so alluring in the time of old, is that Freemasonry had the potential to generate influence on today's social and political world for the betterment of mankind by promoting equality, liberty, and uprightness.

Today's Freemasonry has lost something of its allure and its ability to attract new candidates. The move by the United Grand Lodge of England to 'open out' Freemasonry and make it more transparent and less exclusive may have good intentions, but let's not deny ourselves the fact that human nature is attracted to the mysterious and the exclusive. After all, what's the point of joining the platinum club of your favourite airline if everyone else is invited?

After having that late night conversation with those bright young companions during the chapter's festive board, it gave me hope that, perhaps, there will be a resurgence of great Masonic thinkers willing to raise their heads above the parapet and actively participate in bettering our society.

In Freemasonry, charity should show no bounds save that of prudence, but it is not enough. What makes Freemasonry almost unique amongst today's social societies is that it has the capability and potential to make the world a better place socially and politically, but it needs its members to encourage free thinking and promote the necessary individual freedoms needed to maintain a true democracy rather than sitting on the sidelines in a world plagued by plutocracy, tyranny, stifling dogma and ill-based ideologies.