

## What Freemasonry Means To Me

The Reverend Dr. Norman Vincent Peale

I recently received a letter in which the writer asked: "Why are you a Freemason?" The question caused me to think and reaffirm my feelings about Masonry.

At first I thought about my own forebears. My grandfather was a Mason for 50 years, my father for 50 years, and I have been a Mason for 60 years. This means that my tie with Freemasonry extends back to 1869 when my grandfather joined the Masons.

My feelings on my first entrance into a Masonic Lodge are very clear in memory. I was a young man and it was a great thrill to kneel before the altar of the Lodge to become a Freemason. This must have been the same feeling my father and grandfather experienced before me. And it must also have been identical to the one that many great leaders of America and the world felt as they became Masons. Prominent among this select group are George Washington, Harry Truman, and 12 other Presidents as well as countless statesmen and benefactors of humanity.

So I found myself thinking: "What does Freemasonry mean to me?" Of course Masons say that Freemasonry actually begins in each individual Mason's heart. I take this to mean a response to brotherhood and the highest ideals. I recall the story of a man who came to me once and said: "I see that you are a Freemason. So am I." As we talked, he told me of an experience he had years ago. It seems that he joined the Masonic Fraternity shortly after he became 21 years old. When he was stationed in the military, he decided to attend various Lodge meetings. On his first visit to a Lodge in a strange city, he was a bit nervous. One thought was constantly in his mind; could he pass the examination to show that he was a Mason? As the committee was carefully examining his credentials, one of the members looked him squarely in the eye and said: "Obviously you know the Ritual, so you can enter

our Lodge as a Brother Mason. But I have one more question. Where were you made a Mason?" With that he told the young visitor to think about it because when he knew the answer the examiner would not have to hear it. He would see it in his eyes. My friend told me that after a couple of minutes a big smile came to his face and he looked at the examiner, who said: "That's right, in your heart."

Freemasonry is not a religion though, in my experience, Masons have predominately been religious men and, for the most part, of the Christian faith. Through Freemasonry, however, I have had opportunity to break bread with good men of other than my own Christian faith. Freemasonry does not promote any one religious creed. All Masons believe in the Deity without reservation. However, Masonry makes no demands as to how a member thinks of the Great Architect of the Universe. Freemasonry is, for all its members, a supplement to good living which has enhanced the lives of millions who have entered its doors. Though it is not a religion, as such, it supplements faith in God the Creator. It is supporting of morality and virtue.

Freemasonry has no dogma or theology. It offers no sacraments. It teaches that it is important for every man to have a religion of his own choice and to be faithful to it in thought and action. As a result, men of different religions meet in fellowship and brotherhood under the fatherhood of God. I think that a good Mason is made even more faithful to the tenets of his faith by his membership in the Lodge.

Freemasonry is much more than a social organization. Through Masonic teachings, good men practice love and charity. As a Fraternity they spend millions of dollars to support hospitals, childhood language disorders clinics, and research into problems that plague man's physical and mental being. Whenever I visit a Masonic hospital, of which there are many, my eyes fill with tears. As I see a youngster, who could not walk, now able to get from one end of the corridor to the other with the aid of an artificial leg, I am thrilled. For a young person to have the opportunity to become whole and productive is to me exciting and wonderful. And this

opportunity is given at no cost to his or her family or the state. Living is beautiful but sometimes life can be harsh and cruel. Whenever or wherever people are in need Masons are there to help. From large undertakings to the smallest of needs, Masons are always there, caring and serving.

I have always been interested as to why Masons devote so much time to their Fraternity. A good answer to this question came from a Grand Master who once told me that he enjoys his involvement because it gives him another dimension to living. The same answer is echoed by Brethren as they meet in Lodge rooms from one end of our Country to the other and around the world. Many of my best friends, associates, and fellow Christians are Freemasons and good churchmen as well.

In my travels at home and abroad a goodly number of Freemasons notice my Masonic ring, which I always wear. With pride they say: "I, too, am a Freemason."

To me, Freemasonry is one form of dedication to God and service to humanity. I too was a Freemason in my heart and so I will remain. I am proud of my involvement. I am proud to walk in fraternal fellowship with my Brethren. Why am I a Freemason? Simply because I am proud to be a man who wants to keep the moral standards of life at high level and leave something behind so others will benefit. Only as I, personally, become better, can I help others to do the same.