

To the Glory of the Great Architect of the Universe.

In the Entered Apprentice degree, as soon as the candidate has passed the Senior Deacon's tests of qualification, he is led to the symbolic "center of the Lodge." There, a traditional invocation is given.

They are words we all know so well. "Vouchsafe Thine aid, Almighty Father of the Universe, to this our present convention; and grant that this candidate for Freemasonry may dedicate and devote his life to Thy service, and become a true and faithful Brother among us. Endue him with a competency of Thy Divine Wisdom, that by the influence of the pure principles of Freemasonry he may the better be enabled to display the beauties of holiness, to the honor of Thy Holy Name." (*California Monitor*)

Since we hear this prayer at a time of welcoming our new brother into the Craft, we associate it with fraternal affection. But the *force* of this address to the Great Architect transcends the sentimentality that we naturally feel.

Its implications are worthy of serious reflection, not only for the newly initiated man, but more importantly for those of us who have been Masons for a decade or longer. After all, whatever one's faith, an invocation to the Deity is no small thing.

The "great and important undertaking" to which the Senior Deacon alludes immediately prior to this prayer is nothing less than the new initiate's entire Masonic life. Thus, the words of this invocation are relevant to all of us, not just on the night of our first degree, but without end.

The words of this beautiful portion of our ceremony are nearly universal, with only slight variations. They are truly critical in our quest to understand what Masonry meant to those who originated it, and what that can mean for us today as we involve our lives in the traditions of the Lodge.

It will please the brethren to learn that this prayer is an essential aspect of the Masonic tradition, and certainly predates its first recorded appearance in the original edition of William Preston's *Illustrations of Freemasonry*, printed in 1772.

Let's listen to the old wording.

“Vouchsafe thy aid, Almighty Father and supreme governor of the world, on this our present convention; and grant that this candidate for masonry may *dictate* and devote his life to thy service, and become a true and faithful brother among us. Endue him with a competence of thy divine wisdom, that, by the *secrets of this art*, he may be better enabled to *unfold the mysteries of godliness*, to thy holy name. Amen.” (Preston, 1772, pp. 209-210)

That's an inspiring phrase, isn't it: “to unfold the mysteries of godliness.”

It calls many things to mind, deeper and more resonant than today's popular concepts of self-improvement. To me, it speaks to a powerful potential in the human spirit. After all, we cannot unfold the mysteries of godliness unless they are already folded into us. We cannot display the beauties of holiness unless they are within us to display.

In asking this of us, the Fraternity demands much. It also supplies much. Through light, further light, and finally all the light that the lodge can confer. our ancient and gentle Craft is a guide and support toward the fulfillment of these time-hallowed words.

No ritual alone can make us better men. But the ritual exemplifies beauty and knowledge, and through learning it, witnessing it, and best of all through performing it, we do indeed change. What was closed does open. We have all been asked, “How did you know there was a door?” In the answer to that question, we begin to understand, *at a tactile level*, this task of unfolding the mysteries. What was solid and impenetrable *does yield* at the proper time, to one who is duly and truly prepared. Knock and it shall open.

This lesson comes to us in many forms. There is a tradition we have in California Masonry which is very profound. In most jurisdictions, when the Senior Deacon opens the Volume of the Sacred Law at the beginning of the meeting, the leaves may be opened only to the display of the particular passage associated with the degree being enacted. But in some obediences, including our own, the Great Light is allowed to open randomly.

Randomly, anywhere.

There’s a lesson in this. We may deepen our experience of Freemasonry starting from any point. A single action may suddenly reveal some wisdom to us. A single word may unfold its mysterious and profound truths. Everything in this Lodge room is a message. All of the lights, shapes, objects, words, gestures and gavel-taps were wisely chosen to powerfully affect our minds. And together they *do* form one harmonious whole, the substance of which—we are absolutely promised—will become gradually perceptible to us, to the extent that we take it seriously. In the words of William Preston’s 1772 monitor, which we cited earlier: “The whole [of Freemasonry] is one regular system of morality, conceived in a strain of interesting allegory, which unfolds its beauties to the candid and industrious inquirer.” (Preston, 1772, p. 60)

My friends and brothers, let us behold the Great Light *wherever* it opens, unfold the mysteries of this Craft *whenever* the opportunity arises, and plumb its truths in *candor* and unrelenting curiosity.

We *will* find that our ritual's claim that Freemasonry is interwoven with divine wisdom is no mere pretension. Nor is it an empty affection when the Craft asserts that we can, by its pure influence, display the beauties of holiness to the honor of that Name in which we desire to proceed in *all* our doings, the Name eternal beyond *all* Names, the Grand Geometrician of existence itself.