

Academia Lodge № 847

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Masonic Tradition

Exploring a Classical Approach to the Lodge

by Shawn Eyer, P.:M.:

We are often asked what it means that Academia is a Traditional Lodge. It goes without saying that all of Freemasonry is more or less traditional. The symbols, ceremonies, lectures, offices and procedures of every true and regular Lodge are steeped in centuries of tradition. Masons have always been proud of their history. So what makes a specifically traditional approach different? Part of the answer lies in the wider implications of the word itself:

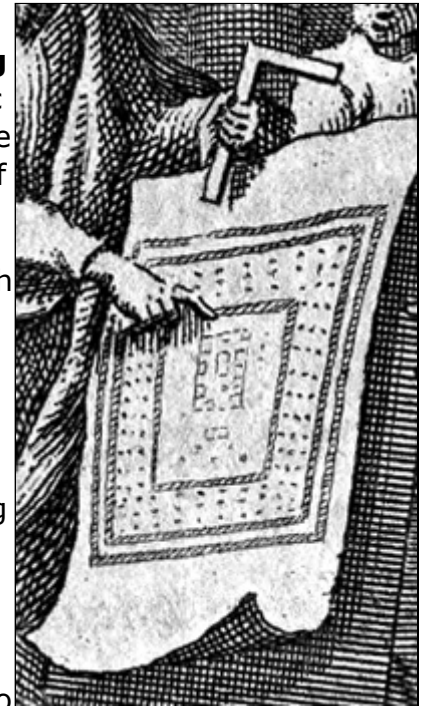
The word **tradition** comes from the Latin noun traditio (handing over), which derives from the verb tradere (hand over, deliver). Traditio corresponds closely to the Greek paradosis, which also comes from a verb (paradidomi) meaning "hand over." Traditio and paradosis can be used literally or figuratively, in the latter case often to mean "teaching" or "instruction." . . . A belief or practice in any field of culture may be said to be a tradition to the extent that it is received from the hands, lips, or the example of others rather than being discovered or invented; that it is received on the assumption that the authors and transmitters are reliable

and therefore the tradition valid; and that it is received with the express command and conscious intention of further transmission without substantial change. (Mircea Eliade, Ed., **The Encyclopedia of Religion**, Macmillan, 1987, vol. 15, p. 1.)

In light of this, a Traditional Lodge **actively acknowledges the value of tradition as an enduring source of wisdom and guidance.** It considers Masonic history not just as a series of events that got us to where we are today, but as a blueprint to guide the decisions of the Lodge in the present.

There are some reasons to explain why such an approach is compelling. First, however modernized the common Masonic culture may become, the ritualistic aspect of Freemasonry is staunchly traditional. We are enjoined at every turn in our Masonic journey to preserve the Art inviolate. This is implicit in the fact that the ritual and candidate's lectures are memorized verbatim: rephrasing the ritual is not an accepted practice. And it's given explicitly in the various charges to the Master on his Installation night, when he must "admit that it is not in the power of any man or body of men to make

innovations in the body of Masonry," and "promise . . . to discountenance imposters, and all dissenters from the **original plan of Masonry.**" Perhaps even stronger than these examples is the instruction given to the Fellow Craft:



The lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance, and the devastations of war, have laid waste and destroyed many valuable monuments of antiquity. Even the temple of King Solomon, so spacious and magnificent, and constructed by so many celebrated artists, was yet laid in ruins, and escaped not the unsparing ravages of barbarous force. Free-Masonry, notwithstanding, has been able still to survive. The attentive ear receives the sound from the instructive tongue, and its sacred mysteries are safely lodged in the repository of faithful breasts. The tools and implements of architecture, symbols the most expressive! imprint on the memory wise and serious truths, and transmit unimpaired, through the succession of ages, the excellent tenets of this institution. William Preston, **Illustrations of Masonry**, First Edition, 1772, pp. 11-12)

Those words comprise the classic definition of the Craft's the basic method in the transmission of the most essential Masonic ideas. It is easy to see why a traditionally-minded Mason must be one who seeks to truly become this "attentive ear." Tradition is not, to him, a mere formality. He is content, even eager, to change his ways based upon what he learns—even if it doesn't fit with his own preconceived

notions. And only then can he become the "instructive tongue" capable of "transmit[ting]unimpaired" the teachings of the Order.

We allow tradition to inform our practice, shape our opinions, and—in some cases—determine boundary lines that the Lodge will not cross. Following tradition closely helps the Lodge avoid many difficulties that might cloud or distort the intended effects of the Masonic ceremonies. There are many factors that can get in the way—after all, Masons are only human. Our desires to "leave a mark" can often get the best of us. This is why we are taught, as Entered Apprentices, that we must actually learn to renounce our own wills regarding Freemasonry and submit to its instruction. This is not because Freemasonry desires its members to be servile. W.:Bro.: Harry L. Haywood got it right when he said:

By having a ritual as the basis of lodge work the lodge is **saved from the caprices of the individual**, and from the dictatorship of some masterful leader . . . a rich and many-sided ritual, evolved through generations of usage, full of glancing lights, shadows, and mysteries, is never at the mercy of individual caprices or individual failures. (H.L. Haywood, **The Great Teachings of Freemasonry**, 1921)

This is why Academia Lodge is committed to the traditional observance of Ancient Craft Masonry. By returning to our roots and studying carefully the symbols left for us by those who first framed our great institution, we feel that we derive more benefit from the Lodge. We believe that the "wise and serious truths" to which our rituals refer are only made clearer and more powerful by a vigorously traditional approach. And most importantly, we have found that—for us—it has become the most rewarding way to ensure that Freemasonry is not merely studied, but becomes truly applied in our lives.

We delight to feel, brethren, that the past, measured by as many ages, is under us; but it is not beneath us in a broken symmetry, and a dead grandeur.... It is rather beneath us as the roots are beneath a tree, and as the central rings are hidden in the trunk. They give power and pith to the structure still. They are part of its present majesty, sources of its living vigor, prophecies of its future strength.

Rev. Bro. Thomas Starr King
Grand Orator of California
May 16, 1863



It is time for the fraternal movement to give an accounting of who they are, what they know, and what they have to give to the world of men. It

is imperative that Masons explain how Masonry addresses different ideologies and how these can be successfully synthesized in a world comprised of both traditionalists and modernists. It is now important that the fraternity express the value of individual freedom and how such freedom is connected to societal fulfillment. There is a moral compass within Masonic teachings that tomorrow's man will just as readily adopt and use as the guide to their own lives. It is time to introduce the sacred space of lodge as a place there the male psyche is consoled by other men struggling in the midst of their own ineffable mystery.

If the fraternal movement is to make a comeback, the men of fraternity must get back to focusing on the true mission of Masonry; and broadening their own connections to what is around them. They need to express who they are on a more intimate level with other men; they should become vested in the support of their fraternal brothers. They need to recognize that they are participants in the raising of the next generation of elders; and their examples can produce men behind them who will lead with honor and integrity; that they are the bridge to their own future. If the Freemasons would truly practice Masonry as both a reflective and active art, they would capture the interest of a sufficient number of American males to give them a collective moral voice in society.

Robert G. Davis, **Understanding Manhood in America**, 2005, p. 150.

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