

Benefits of Membership

By Ed Halpaus, MPS (L)
Grand Lodge Education Officer

I once had a new Brother ask me; “what are the benefits of membership?” Has anyone ever asked you that question? Have you ever asked the question yourself? Well, it is my belief that we should be able to answer the question fairly, truthfully, and completely without doing a whole lot of thinking about it. (I remember reading somewhere that “any organization that cannot, or will not, convey accurate, truthful, and complete information to its employees [members] is an organization that either is in, or is headed for, trouble.”) In order to be able to answer a question like that we need to thoroughly know, and understand ourselves just what benefits a Mason enjoys as a member of the craft.

I’m sure much of what I will say in this little article will be about things you already know, but please read on anyway. They say there is nothing new under the Sun; only things we ourselves learn for the first time, or rediscover what we already know.

It seems to me that many years ago when I was first becoming acquainted with the Masons, that a friend of mine, who as it turned out was a member of the Lodge I had petitioned, used the phrase “rights, lights, and benefits.” I think that might be a good phrase to use in this article as relates to the benefits and privileges a Mason enjoys.

A benefit has been described as anything, which is helpful, profitable, and advantageous to a person.ⁱ A Masonic benefit may be able to help a Mason improve himself, and promote his happiness.

There are a number of benefits and privileges, (both tangible and intangible,) and I will attempt to discuss some of them here, but I’m sure that you will be able to add others, so this is not meant to be an exhaustive study or list of all the “Rights, Lights, and Benefits.”

One of the first benefits we receive as Masons comes to us before we are elected to receive the degrees of Masonry. That is the right to petition a Lodge, and having made a petition, the petitioner receives the benefit of having three men from the Lodge come and visit with him, (one at a time,) about Masonry, and the possibility of his becoming a member of the fraternity. By the very fact of a friend submitting a petition for him, and in effect vouching for him, the Lodge immediately tells him, by appointing these three Masons that he is important to the Lodge, and is entitled to full consideration of becoming a Mason.

The next benefit after a Man is elected to receive the degrees of Masonry is that he is assigned a Coach and a Mentor, two Masons who will do everything in their power to help him learn all he can about this new experience, and the beginning of this new period in his life. This is also a great benefit to the Coach, and Mentor, being able to help a new Brother, and having the opportunity to be a friend.

The next benefit is the conferring of the First Degree, which is the beginning of the new Mason’s Masonic Education, and that continues through the other two degrees. One of the rights we have as Masons, and I think it is a major benefit, is the right to be instructed in the work, and in matters pertaining to the degrees of Masonry.ⁱⁱ The benefit of having a Ritual Coach, and a Mentor from the Lodge is a benefit that is a continuing one that in many cases will result in a life long friendship between those three men, so that is certainly an important benefit.

Non-Masons are aware of the spirit of friendship that exists between Masons, it seems very obvious to them. So obvious in fact that sometimes they will ask if we are obligated to do business with other Masons. Well we know that we’re not obligated to do business with a Brother Mason but, when I want to buy a product or service, I would prefer to do business with someone I know, someone I like, and someone I trust, and that to me, is a good description of my Masonic Brothers.

Another part of the benefit of receiving the degrees, which is not lost on most new Masons, is the fact that the degrees are conducted for him alone, (even if he is one of multiple candidates, he is the reason for the degree.) He realizes, and appreciates, that the effort from all of those taking part in the degrees, proves that the Lodge, (which are all of the Masons who are assembled together,) is devoted to the importance of him as an individual. It also tells him that we, as his friends and Brothers, will do all we can to help him in his quest for Masonic Light.

Upon becoming a Master Mason the new Brother receives the benefit of becoming a member of a worldwide fraternity that is dedicated to the "Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of Man." This is an important benefit, as any Mason knows. When one Mason meets another for the first time, whether near or far from home, there is an instant sense of friendship that exists between them because they have a common outlook, a common experience, which makes good men better, and they know they can trust one another. One of the most valuable benefits that one can enjoy by being a Freemason is the unlimited opportunity to develop close lifelong friendships. And a benefit that goes right along with that is the benefit of being able to speak safely and in confidence with a Brother Mason. We know that if we need a sounding board we have one, and that if asked our Brother will tell us what we need to know, if that is in our best interest, instead of what we want to hear.

We also have the benefit of improving our memory, learning how to effectively work with others, learning how to develop and organize projects, and how to improve in public speaking, all benefits we can use in all the other areas of our lives, not just in a Masonic Lodge.

Fellow Crafts and Entered Apprentices have the right to attend Lodge if it is open on their degree and the right to advancement to the next degree. He has the same right as a Master Mason in that he has the right of a trial by his peers should he be charged with committing a Masonic offence, and the right and privilege of an appeal to the Grand Lodge.

Another important benefit that all Masons have is the benefit of becoming involved with, and in, the various worthy projects and programs of the Lodges, and the Grand Lodge, to help make our communities a better place in which to live. Such as the Kids I.D. Program, the program to help reduce domestic abuse, the program to volunteer to read to school kids in our local school districts, National Night Out, hospital visitation through the M.S.A. at our Veteran's Hospitals, the Masonic Care Bear Program designed to help children in tough situations, and a host of other worthwhile projects that local Lodges do to better their communities.

Master Masons also have the right of visitation, that is to visit a Masonic Lodge other than their own, and the right to vouch for another and to be vouched for, (called the right of avouchment.) A Master Mason also has the right to receive a Masonic Burial, a Masonic Memorial Service, (commonly called a Masonic Funeral.)

Also a Master Mason has the right to be elected or appointed to an office in his Lodge, and as a result he has the benefit of being of more service to his Brethren.

To me a very important benefit is the right of a Master Mason to vote. Our Fraternity places a high priority on freedom, and the freedom to vote how we choose is a basic freedom Freemasonry extends to its members in the right to vote.

In Minnesota, and I would suspect in other jurisdictions as well, a Master Mason, and his widow, has the right to preferential acceptance at the Minnesota Masonic Home, and for relief and assistance from the various charitable funds available through the Grand Lodge of Minnesota.

All Masons have the right to light, which many people including Masons define as knowledge. (That's why the "Lamp of Knowledge" is used as a symbol for schools of higher learning, just as it is used as a Jewell [symbol] for the Education Officer of a Masonic Lodge.) The lights of the

Lodge are many, but when used in “Rights, Lights, and Benefits,” they mean to me that I as a Mason have the right to instruction by the Master and Wardens of the Lodge who represent the lights to provide light to the workmen on their way to and from their labors. And through them, the instruction of other well informed Brethren of the Lodge.

Lights also refer to the Three Great Lights in Masonry, the Holy Bible, Square, and Compass. The Holy Bible, the volume of sacred law, is The Great Light, which teaches us about our relationship with the Great Architect of the Universe, it is a symbol of our acknowledgement of Him, and signifies our obedience and reverence to God. It also teaches us some of Freemasonry’s greatest lessons, such as tolerance, and the Virtues & Tenets. The Virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice are the Cardinal Virtuesⁱⁱⁱ, which by the way, means principal, or of prime importance, as in principal or fundamental virtues. And the Theological Virtues^{iv}, which are Faith, Hope, and Charity. The Holy Bible also teaches us about the Tenets of our Fraternity. A Tenet is an opinion or principle that is held as true, such as the Tenets of Freemasonry, which are Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. These virtues and tenets also come into the definition of a benefit, because they certainly help us to improve ourselves, and will aid us in our happiness.

The second light is the Square, it teaches us to be honest and forthright in our dealings with everyone, especially with our loved ones. And to live our lives so that we will never have any regrets to look back upon once we become Masons.

The third light is the Compass, it teaches us to live as gentlemen, (gentle men,) who always keep in check the emotions of fear, anger, envy, hate, love, joy, sorrow, and anxiety. All of those emotions that fall under the term “Passions,” which when kept in check, will serve to help us lead a happier and healthier life. The compass symbolizes poise, balance, assurance, confidence, - qualities which rise above all the negativity in the world at-large.^v

These “Rights, Lights, and Benefits” definitely contribute to making Freemasonry into the Fraternity that it is, and for me, they are some of the reasons I have come to love Freemasonry as I do. So the next time you’re asked; “what are the benefits of membership?” you can say: “there are a lot of them sit down here and let me tell you about them.”

ⁱ Short Talk Bulletin #78 – The Benefits of Masonic Membership by Alphonse Cerza

ⁱⁱ Your Quest for Masonic Light - book #3 – by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota

ⁱⁱⁱ The New Century Dictionary

^{iv} The New Century dictionary

^v Your Quest for Masonic Light – book #3 – by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota