

Four Responsibilities / Privileges

From the Entered Apprentice Initiation

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Initiation is a rite of passage or a ceremony marking entrance or acceptance into a group or society. In an extended sense, it can also signify a transformation in which the initiate takes on the responsibilities as well as the privileges associated with this new station in life. Examples of initiation ceremonies include Christian baptism or confirmation, Jewish bar or bat mitzvah, acceptance into a fraternal organization, religious order or even recruit training. Taking an active role, prayerfully reflecting on important decisions, striving for unity, and trusting in Deity are four aspects of the Entered Apprentice Degree that may be considered to be at once privileges and responsibilities.

First, consider taking an active role. The initiate in the Entered Apprentice Degree soon understands that he must take an active role in the initiation, and in all that follows. He cannot be a successful Mason and a passive Mason. When he knocked on the West Gate before entering the Lodge, he was making an allusion to Luke 11:9, ("And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.").

One interpretation of this allusion, paraphrased from the *Matthew Henry Complete Commentary*, is that we have not only the goodness of nature to take comfort from -- but in seeking, the assurance as well-- of Deity: "*Ask, and it shall be given you; either the thing itself you shall ask or that which is equivalent; either the thorn in the flesh removed, or grace sufficient given. We must not only ask, but we must seek, in the use of means, must second our prayers with our endeavors; and, in asking and seeking, we must continue pressing, still knocking at the same door, and we shall at length prevail, not only by our prayers in concert, but by our particular prayers.*"

The initiate alone was responsible for asking for a recommendation from a friend, using that recommendation to seek to be initiated, and knocking to gain admittance. At several other points during the ritual he was reminded that all of Masonry is available with only one limitation – he must be as willing to receive as the other Brethren are to give. Masonry has the promise of individual growth for the member who, in return, invests his time and energy.

Next, consider prayerful reflection on important decisions. The initiate in the Entered Apprentice Degree soon understands that daily devotions to his God are vital to his success in life. At one point in the ritual, he was invited to kneel as a prayer is recited. Later, he is reminded that no man should begin an important undertaking without a blessing from Deity. This underscores two important thoughts: first, the initiation itself is a solemn and important

undertaking, an appropriate time for prayer. Second, even if it has not been his personal habit to ask a blessing for important decisions and stages in his life, the first instructions for entering the Masonic Fraternity include seeking guidance from Deity.

Also, remember that the prayer itself has a message of the rewards of unity. The ritual prayer is Psalm 133:1-3: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." It is appropriate that unity is portrayed as something to strive for and at the same time as a reward for living in friendship and brotherly love. Unity is important because it makes Masonry a positive example, drawing others to us. It helps us cooperate and renews our energy. Unity does not mean we agree on everything. There will be many opinions, but we must agree to work as Brothers to follow Masonic principles and to support our communities and those in need.

Finally, consider the idea of complete trust. During the ritual, the initiate is also asked a question about where he places his trust. His answer must indicate that he believes in a Supreme Being. Masonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion. Masons are encouraged to follow the tenets and beliefs of their own religions. One purpose inherent in our Craft is to take good men and make them better. A man must start with a belief in Deity in order to be made a Mason. With that as a foundation, fellowship with likeminded men, in a spirit of friendly social interaction, where the rule is to best work and best agree, can be instrumental in personal growth and a deeper commitment in service to God and to mankind. Trust in Deity is the key element in Masonry, one in which we must all display unity. Without that trust in Deity, no man can be made a Mason.

Four responsibilities and privileges made clear in the Entered Apprentice Degree: be active in your role as a Mason, seek guidance and blessing on your decisions and actions, strive for unity, and trust in God. The initiate who accepts these responsibilities and privileges associated with his new status as a Mason is prepared to reap the true benefits of membership in our Craft.