

**Do the three great questions
of initiation allow for the
Agnostic?**

Presented By:

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I'm nervous, though I'm told not to be. This has been explained to be one of the most interesting nights of my life, so it's hard not to be nervous. There's a couple of knocks at the door and three men leave the lodge room and enter the small room in which I now reside. I'm asked three questions; three rather simply but quite profound questions. I've been asked these in the past but am asked once again. I look past the repetition and simply assume this is all part of the ceremony to come. I answer all three questions in the honest affirmative and take solace in the fact that I am acceptable to join this fraternity which has so captured my interest. Two of the men return to the lodge and I am joined by another. I'm nervous, though told not to be. All goes dark as the blindfold covers my eyes.

I start the journey that so many men have taken before me. I enter the lodge unaware of my surroundings. I follow my friend and guide with nervous confidence. I answer questions that are soon forgotten, take steps and motions that seem awkward in the dark and finally kneel before an altar. I am instructed to handle a book that rests upon said altar. My friend and guide assists in what seems like a most confusing task while blind. Once holding the book in the correct manner the obligation begins. I listen intently, trying to discern just what exactly I am swearing an oath too. Once finished in my obligation I am asked about light and gladly accept. I want to see all that which is before me. The men who were speaking, the objects that make up a lodge and above all else what warrants such secrecy. I hear a clap and the blindfold is removed. My eyes take a moment to adjust and my attention is directed towards my hands.

I look upon the square and compasses the well known symbols of Freemasonry and below that a book. I am told that this is the Volume of the Sacred Law though upon further examination I recognize this book by another name, the Bible, the holy book of the Christian faith.

The ceremony continues and the more I learn the more I seem to forget. The return of my vision does not help the fact that I am still quite nervous and confused though, I remember, that this was to be expected. Lectures are given, questions are asked and secrets are shared. Through out the ceremony references are made to the book which rests upon the altar. During this time I find myself wondering. What happens when it's found out, that I'm not a Christian?

Brethren the topic of my paper is something that I have lived with for the last four years of my Masonic journey and that question being – **Do the three great questions of initiation allow for the agnostic?**

The purpose of this paper is to inspire thought and to create discussion. It is not to inspire doubt and create animosity between those who share a different belief structure than me. The craft teaches us universal tolerance and with that I have the utmost respect for those of different faiths though, I do not share their beliefs. I simply wish to express my views and how I feel my beliefs fit within the craft.

DO I BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF A SUPREME BEING?

YES.

DO I BELIEVE THAT THE SUPREME BEING WILL PUNISH VICE AND REWARD VIRTUE?

YES.

DO I BELIEVE THAT THE SUPREME BEING HAS REVEAL HIS WILL TO MAN?

YES.

By definition an Agnostic is a person who believes that nothing is known, or can be known, of the existence or nature of god. In commonplace, it is also a term used to describe many of us in society who do not prescribe to an organized religion. This is a position in which I find myself. I've heard it said that to be a Mason a man should be a follower of one of the three monotheistic religions - Christianity, Judaism or Islam. This is the point today that I wish to challenge.

The Craft in my opinion, in all its many forms and wonders is a fraternity of men under the watchful eye of a supreme being. A supreme being who is never named by the conventional religious references but, referred to in either quite general terms or quite specific terms which are relative to the craft. Our own ritual teaches Masonry as being a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. In and of itself this shares many similarities with religions. However, I wish to share my view that it also lends itself to those of us who do not prescribe to any one faith.

The precepts of morality are shared by those of us who wish to be good for goodness sake rather than fear of what may come after death. In the same token we seek the rewards in life brought about by goodness notwithstanding to our uncertainty of an eternal reward afterwards.

We can all agree that although we may find religious connotations in our ritual it is not a religion. I've heard the term god based psychology used which lends itself well to another popular term - western mystery tradition. This in my opinion seems more fitting as to how I view the craft. Many of us in the western world were not brought up without religion or chose to change our beliefs when we matured. However, I believe that the fundamental properties that allow religion to have such a profound effect on our lives are naturally craved by people. In turn we seek out sources to satisfy these cravings. For those of us who do not or cannot subscribe to organized religion Freemasonry is the perfect solution.

I'll be the first to admit that I entered the craft under different reasons than why I've stayed. I was searching for knowledge, not of myself but rather of the mysteries and secrets that fill our world. I read many "creative" works of history by Masonic authors who took in my opinion, liberties in the in the history of the order. I yearned for lost knowledge about the world and the universe as a whole. A lot of this I believe stems from the fact that the world as we know it is a much smaller place than it was. I was curious to see what secrets were available to the select few that weren't available to the masses. What I found was something quite different and more valuable to me than any secret in existence. What I found was purpose, something that gave meaning to my life. Asked for little, offered much and made me all the better man for it.

Like so many young people I found myself a product of a broken home and became jaded with the many authoritative levels in our society. In my youth there was some minor exposure to religion but nothing that would have a lasting effect. As I reached adulthood I found myself searching for something more to believe in. I appreciated what my Christian friends had obtained through their churches however, try as I might I could never share their beliefs nor bring myself to simply go through the motions. I viewed it as a disservice to both myself and their faith. It was after I quit searching that I discovered the craft and what a discovery I found!

An order which personified all the basic fundamental principles that I sought for myself yet none of the dogmatic consequences which caused me to turn away from organized religion. I was quick to learn why it was so easy for members of many faiths to be Masons. However, I also came to an equally profound observation that many of those faiths were not as accepting to those of us who do not prescribe to their beliefs. For a time I maintained my silence, however as my exposure to the craft increased so did my willingness to openly discuss my differences. I admit that belonging to an organization where a large majority of the membership collects a pension can, at times not avail itself to discussions which go against the grain of past societal norms. What can so easily be discussed with my peers can be seen with great disdain through the generational gap.

However, the beauty of our ritual is that it can be perceived in so many ways. The method by which it is taught, through its figurative properties allows the Mason to draw his own conclusions. It encourages him to see what that particular ritual means and how it affects him. This in

and of itself allows the Mason to grow as a person and essentially become more than what he was before the lesson. It in its purest form is not laded down with dogmatic principles though there is the possibility that it could be perceived in that sense. Once again I am speaking on behalf of only myself. To that point, I wish to speak on the three fundamental questions that either grant or deny entry into the order.

DO I BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF A SUPREME BEING? Yes I do. However, I do not claim to know the true nature of this being. I do not prescribe gender, colour, or appearance in any way. I feel that the vastness of the Supreme Being is beyond the scope of anything my mind can grasp. I recognize in our ritual gender is assigned to the Supreme Being. However, like so many figurative references in the work I simply choose to look into what I perceive to be the deeper meaning.

DO I BELIEVE THAT THE SUPREME BEING WILL PUNISH VICE AND REWARD VIRTUE? Yes I do. However, I cannot confine myself to the belief of eternal glory in the clouds or fiery damnation in the earth. I believe in the positive and negative reactions of my life that are a direct or indirect result of the Supreme Being. These reactions being results of the decisions I willfully made knowing the consequences of making them. Again, the figurative nature of our ritual teaches make this a truth as I perceive it.

DO I BELIEVE THAT THE SUPREME BEING HAS REVEAL HIS WILL TO MAN? Yes I do. I only have to search my own heart and conscience to realize the fundamental truths of that statement.

These three questions are so simply yet can be perceived in many ways. They can promote affirmative answers which stem from many such perceptions. In my opinion they express the fundamental principles of the order in a clear and concise manner. Through which all men are acceptable to join our ranks no matter what their faith. The drive has always been to make good men better. These simple questions allow the good men to enter and in turn the order can assist in making them better. It's these simple truths which allow me to believe that although I don't share the religious beliefs of many of our members, that of which in our North American Masonic society is predominately Christian, that I, as an agnostic am fit and able to be a Mason.