

## Chapter 2

---

# WHY JOSEPH SMITH JOINED THE MASONIC FRATERNITY

---

There are few churches in which the spirit of brotherhood abounds as it does in Freemasonry. In their lodges they talk about fraternity and brotherly love as much as it is preached in most of the churches of the land. In daily life they carry such teachings into practice. Many books have been written extolling the fraternity for its benevolence.

As we read the following quotations we shall see at least one reason why Joseph Smith sought membership for himself and brethren in this fraternity. Dr. George Oliver has written:

Masonry works daily without noise, regarding all Brethren with love and honour; not asking one which system he follows, nor another the colour of his decoration, or how many degrees he has, but judging only from his works; not minding what his business may be, or what sect he belongs to, but if he be a faithful workman whose example may be followed. Thus will Freemasonry increase, the different systems and forms will vanish, and the true Fraternity form a chain of Truth and Light.<sup>1</sup>

Another authority has written of the bonds of friendship engendered by this fraternity:

---

<sup>1</sup> George Oliver, *The Historical Landmarks of Freemasonry*, I, 101.

By the exercise of brotherly love we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, who, as created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support and protect each other. On this principle, Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion and causes true friendship to exist among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Oliver has written of this "indissoluble chain of affection," the very thing for which the Mormons were searching in the communities where they found so much opposition and persecution:

Masons profess to be united in an indissoluble chain of sincere affection, called the five points of fellowship; by which, when strictly adhered to, they are bound heart and hand so firmly, that even death itself cannot sever the solemn compact, because in another and more glorified state those relations are perceived and acknowledged, which have characterized the union here on earth. These five points refer to certain virtues requisite to be practised in this world in order to the enjoyment of happiness in a future state, and mark distinctly the difference between virtue and vice.<sup>3</sup>

A Masonic poet has written of this unflinching devotion of members for each other:

#### THE FIVE POINTS OF FELLOWSHIP

Joyful task it is, dear Brothers  
Thus to take upon the lip,  
With full heart, and fitting gesture,  
All our points of fellowship.  
Foot and knee, breast, hand and cheek  
Each a measured part shall speak:  
Speak of answering mercy's call;  
Speak of prayer for Masons all;  
Speak of keeping secrets duly;

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Wright, *Indian Masonry*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> George Oliver, *The Antiquity of Freemasonry*, p. 168.

Speak of stretching strong hand truly;  
 Speak of whispering the unruly.

Foot to Foot: 'tis Mercy's mandate,  
 When is heard the plaintive sigh,  
 Hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked,  
 On the wings of aid to fly;  
 Hasten, mitigate the grief.—  
 Hasten, bear him quick relief!  
     Quick with bread to feed the hungry;  
     Quick with raiment for the naked;  
     Quick with shelter for the homeless;  
     Quick with heart's deep sympathy.

Knee to Knee: in silence praying,  
 Lord, give listening ear that day!  
 Every earthly stain confessing,  
 For all tempted Masons pray!  
 Perish envy, perish hate,  
 For all Masons supplicate.  
     Bless them, Lord, upon the ocean;  
     Bless them perishing in the desert;  
     Bless them falling 'neath temptation;  
     Bless them when about to die!

Breast to Breast: in holy casket  
 At life's center strongly hee,  
 Every sacred thing intrusted,  
 Sealed by faith's unbroken seal;  
 What you promised God to shield  
 Suffer, die, but never yield.  
     Never yield whate'er the trial;  
     Never yield whate'er the number;  
     Never yield though foully threatened,  
     Even at the stroke of death.

Hand to Back: A Brother falling,—  
 His misfortune is too great,  
 Stretch the generous hand, sustain him,  
 Quick, before it is too late.  
 Like a strong, unfaltering prop,  
 Hold the faltering Brother up.  
     Hold him up; stand like a column;

Hold him up; there's good stuff in him;  
Hold him with his head toward Heaven;  
Hold him with the lion's grip.

Cheek to Cheek: O, when the tempter  
Comes, a Brother's soul to win,  
With a timely whisper warn him  
Of the dark and deadly sin.  
Extricate him from the snare,  
Save him with fraternal care.  
Save him,—heavenly powers invoke you,—  
Save him,—man is worth the saving,—  
Save him,—breathe your spirit in him  
As you'd have your God save you.<sup>4</sup>

As a footnote this explanation is given of the symbolism suggested in the poem:

The paraphrase embodies the following ancient form of injunction. "Foot to foot (teaches) that we will not hesitate to go on foot and out of our way to aid and succor a needy Brother; knee to knee, that we will ever remember a Brother's welfare, in all our applications to Deity; breast to breast, that we will ever keep, in our breast, a Brother's secrets, when communicated to us as such, murder and treason excepted; hand to back, that we will ever be ready to stretch forth our hand to aid and support a falling Brother; cheek to cheek, or mouth to ear, that we will ever whisper good counsel in the ear of a Brother, and in the most tender manner remind him of his faults, and endeavor to aid his reformation; and will give him due and timely notice that he may ward off all approaching danger." These sentiments seem to express the whole charitable scheme of Freemasonry.

Another historian has written of the fraternal spirit of Masonry:

On the rolls of Masonry, those lodges will stand highest in which not some few, but each and every member cheerfully gives of his time and labors to make the others happier, not some of the time, but all of the time. I believe in a short while you will see, as I do, that the lodge which succeeds best is the one that limits

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert Morris, *The Poetry of Freemasonry*, p. 82.

its membership to say one hundred or less, and whose dues are only enough to pay its running expenses, but which keeps a fund freely contributed by its brethren at each meeting, sacred alone to relief of the worthy, and unknown to the world in its distribution. Let it join with other lodges in a comfortable and dignified Masonic temple home. Let us see a lodge whose members press forward as one man. What ho, boys, Brother John is down! Then hand to his back and up with him! All together now,—steady his feet. Our strength is his and his strength is ours. There, he walks,—hurrah, he is safe! Then on with the battle of life, we're shoulder to shoulder again. Softly there, boys, Br. John can no longer take his place. He has gone down the long path. Come hither and bid him reverently a godspeed. Then do for those he left behind as you would for him. Our strength is still his and the strength of his character is still ours. So on with the battle of life again. we're all together yet, and just as strong.

Build up a lodge where the brethren do not have so much work that they cannot gather at stated times, and every man knows his brother and, by knowing him, deals kindly with his faults and stands by him in times of sickness, distress and peril; a lodge where the brethren can learn more of the true meaning of Masonry; in short, a lodge based on the family idea, which is the very foundation of this country, and should be the true and firm Masonic foundation. The members of a good family know each other well and stand by each other, as I would have a good Masonic lodge do, and it would do, if mercenary motives be done away with.<sup>5</sup>

Such professions of fraternity as are expressed in these quotations have long been made by the Masonic brotherhood. The Mormon brethren in Nauvoo, aware of the fraternal spirit of this organization, would be deeply interested in it as a means of making friends with prominent people and thus avoiding bitter persecution such as they had experienced in New York, Ohio, and Missouri.

It had seemed to Joseph Smith that every man's hand was against him. He was a man of peace and desired the friendship and good will of everyone. He knew that many of the prominent officials of the state were Masons and that

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Wright, *Indian Masonry*, p. 116.

if the spirit of fraternity were extended to the Mormons, they would thereby escape the prison dungeons and other forms of persecution they had recently experienced in Missouri.

Furthermore, many of the Mormon brethren had been admitted to Masonry before they joined the Church. These brethren realized the advantages of membership in such an organization and encouraged Joseph Smith to seek a special dispensation for all the Nauvoo brethren. Among the prominent Mormons who had been Masons for years were the following, though the list does not include them all: Hyrum Smith, Newel K. Whitney, Heber C. Kimball, John C. Bennett, George Miller, Lucius N. Scovil, Elijah Fordham, John Smith, Austin Cowles, Noah Rogers, and James Adams.

These men prevailed upon Joseph Smith to seek a dispensation for the benefit of the other brethren at Nauvoo. Their leader had become a powerful figure in the political and religious life of the time. If he and his brethren could attend Masonic conventions and freely mingle with the prominent jurists and lawmakers of the state, they would surely be spared the persecution they had witnessed elsewhere, they thought. They considered the Masonic fraternity a necessary means to this desired end.

Joseph Smith and his brethren sought membership in the Masonic lodge for the same reason that people seek its influence and fraternity today. They desired the prestige, protection, and power such an alliance should have guaranteed at a time when they were sorely in need of such friendship. Their reasons may have been summarized in these words:

“Who are the friends of Masonry?” inquires one who knew the answer. “Generals and Presidents, Magistrates and Clergy, Lawyers, Doctors and Statesmen, good men and

true. Number the stars if you can, or the sands upon the sea shore, then count the friends of Masonry.”

It is certain that no sinister motives prompted their interest in the Masonic movement. There was no thought of theft or desire to expose or betray the brotherhood. Their thriving city had gained a place in the sun; they had grown in membership and influence until they were a power to be reckoned with. If the brethren of the Illinois lodges had manifested the spirit of fraternity that has made their order famous, they would have had as much to gain as the Mormons sought to win.

Since the spirit of intolerance and persecution cannot be controlled by the compass or kept within bounds by the square; since the tokens of the five points of fellowship become merely the sound of tinkling cymbals when religious hatred creeps in, the advantages they sought were certainly not achieved.

In a later chapter we shall point out how useless it was to expect to fraternize with the prejudiced Masons in Illinois. It is sufficient to relate here that in the hour of death Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum sought in vain for the hand of fellowship from members of the fraternity.