

Masonic Fables

1. Imagine a prospective candidate as a young man interested in your daughter. Would you say: "Usually we wait a month between your first date, your engagement and your wedding. However we can have a field day on Saturday when you can do all three and have the honeymoon suite Saturday night." Would you go out of your way to remove legitimate obstacles and delays? What does that say about you? About your daughter? About what it takes to become a member of your family? Would it surprise you to have him treat your daughter as a one-night stand?

2. A three-year old girl was asked if she knew what a dog was. "Of course," she said, "I have a dog called Fluffy." She was shown a St. Bernard and asked "Is that a dog?" "Nope" she responded. She was then shown a chihuahua and asked if that was a dog. "Nope" she replied again. She was asked the same question about a dachshund and gave the same answer. She was asked why she had said "No". "'Cause none of them look just like Fluffy."

It is a common habit of the human mind to make definitions of a broad nature based only on a very limited experience. We define humanity based only on the few people we know, and if we meet someone different, we hesitate to acknowledge their humanity. That was why the Greeks defined "barbarian" as someone who didn't speak Greek. Fortunately, for the most part, with age and experience we stop defining a dog as something that looks just like Fluffy.

Or do we? What do we say when we are asked to define the essential characteristics of Freemasonry?

Plato had the notion that concepts had certain essential characteristics which distinguished them from other concepts but were present in all manifestations of that concept. Other characteristics might be present but they could vary without affecting the essence. This idea was taken up especially by the science of taxonomy, particularly in Biology, where it is very clearly described what is and what isn't a dog. In Masonry also we have a notion that there are essential and inessential characteristics of Masonry. The essential characteristics we call landmarks.

A number of jurisdictions, particularly in the United States, saw this concept of a landmark as a challenge, an set out forthwith to define it completely and for all time. Unfortunately they usually defined Masonry as something looking just like Fluffy. So soon as we expand the length of our researches by studying the differences among Masonic bodies stretching into the dim past, the breadth of our researches by studying the differences among Masonic bodies stretching around the globe, and the depth of our researches by studying the differences among Masonic bodies which are collateral or supplemental to or competitive with the one we belong to, then we realize the hopeless inadequacy of the Fluffy definition.

Nor is this pursuit exclusively hypothetical and theoretical. It has important practical consequences. A suggestion is made to change something to continue the process of evolution of the Craft: the Fluffy definition says that we can't change anything or it won't look just like Fluffy any more, but the real definition will tell us whether the change really affects the essence of the Craft. A suggestion is made that we recognize a body of Masons in a different country, with quite different customs: the Fluffy definition says never, they don't look just like Fluffy, but the real definition will tell us whether the differences are essential. A body claiming to be Masonic with members in Manitoba seeks our recognition: the Fluffy definition says we can't recognize it, but the real definition says we might.

This question was of vital importance when the Grand Orient of France decided that the book on the altar did not have to be a real Holy Book. It was of vital importance when the Grand Lodge of England asked itself whether members had to be Christians. It was and is of vital importance in assessing the legitimacy of the Prince Hall Grand Lodges.

3. **H**ow many Masons does it take to change a light bulb? Five to complain about how much darker it is than it used to be; one to suggest that the bulb ought to be changed; another to say "Change!!? If we change that all our members will demit." Does the bulb get changed at all? It depends on whether there is someone who really wants more light in Masonry.