

He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from opposition; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach himself.
~Thomas Paine

Freedom has its life in the hearts, the actions, the spirit of men and so it must be daily earned and refreshed — else like a flower cut from its life-giving roots, it will wither and die.
~Dwight D. Eisenhower

15th ° **KNIGHT OF THE EAST : FOR CONSIDERATION**

The concept of liberty is central in this Degree. Are liberty and freedom the same thing? If not, how do they differ? How can liberty for the individual and liberty for the society coexist.

Liberty and Freedom to Decide

It is my intent to compare and contrast liberty against freedom, as it pertains to Masonry in general and specifically to the 15th degree of the Scottish Rite, concluding with the precept that the Scottish Rite is in the business of advancing liberty, both for the individual as well as for society.

A frequently quoted excerpt from the foundational document the United States' *Declaration of Independence* is "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". This presupposes that all men inherently understand the concept, and agree that *liberty*ⁱ is a God given, inalienable right. When we couple this with *freedom*ⁱⁱ, that peculiar American prerogative, the one that we try to assure and 'sell' wholesale to any society who would have it, bought and paid for by the blood of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines, we define the United States of America. I started this discussion with the understanding that though similar, both concepts were separate though related, and as such, were different. Let us suppose that Liberty is a nod at autonomy or self-determination, whereas Freedom is more a removal or absence of physical restraint or servitude. When I did a search for the definition I was vindicated, but also flabbergasted, and a bit confused, as each was used in part to define the other (refer to footnotes i, and ii.) Perhaps the key was in the methods or modes of fulfillment – Liberty was a mental state or attitude, and freedom a similar physical state. As an attempt to clarify and answer the questions posed, for purposes of this discussion I will define the terms.

Liberty: an inherent right to autonomy and self-determination, the ability to work towards a personal happiness and preservation of life, unencumbered by malevolent ideals or oppressions.

Freedom: an ability to determine of one's own volition where one chooses to live or work, as well as the ability to set one's own contracts and obligations without the undue influence or hindrance of one's neighbor, or one's neighbor's neighbor.

In addition to these imposed definitions, it must also be understood that at such time that one is determined or adjudged guilty of detracting or choosing to depart from society and work contrarily to an accepted common good or set of societal customs, that both liberty and freedom become forfeit.

So to answer the first part of the question, are Liberty and Freedom the same thing? My answer would have to be, "No, they are different, though possibly legs on the same stool." How are they different? Well, let me offer these scenarios to explain:

1. A man may be unencumbered by bondage, and as such be at liberty to decide that it is right to set up a school and teach all manner of dogma and contrary or minimally connected ideologies to his neighbor. Here we have both freedom (to enact) and liberty to pursue.

2. Take that same man who is allowed to establish the same school, but allowed only to indoctrinate with the **true** (as defined by the powers that be) thoughts or beliefs of the establishment, which control his thoughts through the fear that any digression will result in his death, or possibly that any variance will incur eternal damnation. Here we have freedom (to establish a school) without liberty (of his thoughts).
3. Now, take the man and confine him in a tower or prison, then encumber him with all manner of bondage, restrict his movements, regulate his personal sanitation habits, and grant that his eating is only allowed at prescribed times, but allow him to entertain whatever thoughts he can concoct or discern. This time we have liberty without freedom.

The final portion of the question is: How can liberty for the individual and liberty for the society coexist? On the surface this seems to be a no-brainer, allowing both should be sufficient. Yet, as we have seen enacted and hammered home worldwide is that given enough liberty to propagate one radical thought, and supply a scape goat, the stronger or more rabid supporters subjugate and remove the liberty of autonomy, and at times remove freedom. We have witnessed this through Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini as well currently we experience this in the misapplied ideals of political correctness, or rabid segmentation of society. (If you are not with us you are against us – regardless of the reality...)

Can both coexist? “Yes – and for humanity to survive they must.” But to do so we must educate, embrace and serve.

Human nature is an unstable vessel. It is easy for us to look across at our neighbors and fear their covetousness, to note their differences, their skin color, their religion, their age and “know” beyond all doubt that they mean us ill. But these are concepts and passions taught to us, ingrained in our character by the revitalization of our parents’ prejudices, and their parents’ before them, and theirs’... before them. We had to be taught, and then we must teach our children to hate. Hate is not a trait that we know fresh from the womb. Education, understanding, brotherhood: the very foundations and the furtherance of Masonic ideals will see us through. Were we to expand them and disseminate them widely enough on the wings of change and brotherhood, if we can instill a tolerance for ALL mankind and share brotherhood with every citizen, across all borders, then and only then can we risk allowing liberty to run rampant throughout our society. When we circumscribe our desires and keep our passions in due bounds only then can we be allowed to embrace our brother, from whatever mother, from whatever land.

We have spent too long riding the shirttails of those who have gone before: Washington, Franklin and Revere (among others), those who fought for the right of liberty for us to become free from the tyrannies of Mother England. We need to continue with their fight and strive for the fulfillment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, not just for pure descendants, but for all who made their way to our welcoming shore. We need to uphold and teach that all men are created equal. And rather than force our ideals of God and Country down their throats, we need to establish the common core of religions, and teach how best to juxtapose the divergent societies into one of warmth and mutual beneficence. As long as we are perceived as a secret society or perhaps the embodiment of world conspiracies, never will we be enabled to assume the role of peacemaker, or peacekeeper, never enabled to further the bounds of brotherhood. We will become a part of the problem –perhaps the whole of the problem. We have the freedom to move freely about the world, but we need to assure that the liberties we take are for a common good – one designed to embrace humanity, individually and its several societies.

We have seen that though closely aligned, liberty and freedom do differ, but more as a matter of state of being or consciousness. We have also determined that human nature generally is not disposed toward mutual liberty, and that the fears of our parents, the fears of our clan can hinder and hamper. These fears and failings are taught. But too, we can teach and further the ideals of brotherhood and mutual beneficence, and instill liberty not only for an individual but also for the society where all individuals have both liberty and freedom and can fulfill the American, and the Masonic dream.

i Liberty

(ˈlɪbəti)

n, pl –ties

1. the power of choosing, thinking, and acting for oneself; freedom from control or restriction
2. the right or privilege of access to a particular place; freedom
3. (often plural) a social action regarded as being familiar, forward, or improper
4. (often plural) an action that is unauthorized or unwarranted in the circumstances: he took liberties with the translation.
5. (Nautical Terms)
 - a. authorized leave granted to a sailor
 - b. (as modifier): liberty man; liberty boat.
6. at liberty free, unoccupied, or unrestricted
7. take liberties to be overfamiliar or overpresumptuous (with)
8. take the liberty to venture or presume (to do something)

[C14: from Old French *liberté*, from Latin *libertās*, from *liber* free]

Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003

ii Freedom

(ˈfriːdəm)

n

1. personal liberty, as from slavery, bondage, serfdom, etc
2. liberation or deliverance, as from confinement or bondage
3. (Government, Politics & Diplomacy) the quality or state of being free, esp to enjoy political and civil liberties
4. (usually foll by from) the state of being without something unpleasant or bad; exemption or immunity: freedom from taxation.
5. the right or privilege of unrestricted use or access: the freedom of a city.
6. (Government, Politics & Diplomacy) autonomy, self-government, or independence
7. the power or liberty to order one's own actions
8. (Philosophy) philosophy the quality, esp of the will or the individual, of not being totally constrained; able to choose between alternative actions in identical circumstances
9. ease or frankness of manner; candour: she talked with complete freedom.
10. excessive familiarity of manner; boldness
11. ease and grace, as of movement; lack of effort

[Old English *frēodōm*]

Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003