



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRENDS IN EMERGING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRENDS IN EMERGING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Volume 3; Issue 5; 2025; Page No. 94-98

Received: 05-07-2025  
Accepted: 13-09-2025  
Published: 16-10-2025

## Encounters with Fifteen Women of Freemasons - Questions and answers

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17486544>

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### Abstract

Very little research exists on the perceptions of women of Freemasons regarding Freemasonry and what they think about their husbands' activities.

This work has given the wives of Freemasons the opportunity to express themselves and share their perceptions and points of view.

Thirty-four people were interviewed on condition of anonymity. What do they think of Freemasonry? How do they feel about their spouses being members of a Masonic lodge? Has Freemasonry had any influence on their married life? Do they see any benefits in their husbands becoming Freemasons?.

**Keywords:** Freemasonry, Freemason anthropology, Social sciences

### Introduction

#### Target population and number of women interviewed

**Period:** 2017-2018

Total: 15 wives of Freemasons interviewed

#### Masonic Easts and number of people interviewed

Grand Lodge of France (1894) – 8 Rue Louis Puteaux, 74017 Paris: 2

United Grand Lodge of France (1994) – 11 Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris: 0

Grand Lodge of Belgium (1959) - Place Simonis 19, 1081 Brussels: 1

Grand East of Belgium (1833) - Rue de Laeken 79, 1000 Brussels: 2

Regular Grand Lodge of Belgium (1979) – rue Royale, 265, 1030, Brussels: 3

Grande Loge Nationale française (1913) – rue Christine-de-Pisan, 12, 75017, Paris: 2

United Grand Lodge of England 1717) –London WC2 Great Queen Street, 60, London, WC2B 5AZ: 1

Grande Loge symbolique de Hongrie: 2

French Grand Lodge of Misraïm: 0

Grand Lodge of Scotland: 0

Grand East of the Netherlands: 1

Belgian Federation of Human Rights: 0

French Federation of Human Rights (1921): 1

Zero means that there was no positive response to the proposal to participate.

### Special conditions

Spouses or partners have been members of a Masonic Lodge for at least three years or have become Master Masons.

Anonymity guaranteed at their request.

The women I met and who agreed to be interviewed were aware that I myself am a Freemason.

### Sample constitution

It was necessary to contact 28 wives of Freemasons to obtain a sample of 15 women who agreed to testify.

### The 8 questions that were asked: (Q1 to 8)

1. What do you think of Freemasonry?
2. Does your husband or partner talk to you about what happens in his lodge?
3. Has your husband/partner becoming a Freemason been

beneficial for your relationship?

4. Has your husband/partner's behaviour changed since he became a Freemason?
5. Have you ever thought about becoming a Freemason yourself?
6. Do you think that your husband becoming a Freemason has had a positive impact on him?
7. Do you attend the Tenues Blanches (white meetings)? Do you attend the celebrations if partners are invited?
8. Are you happy that your husband/partner is a Freemason?

#### **Answers to questions (Q1 to Q8) – T1 to T15 are the women interviewed**

##### **Questions and answers**

##### **1. What do you think of Freemasonry?**

##### **Answers**

- T1:** My partner tells me very little about it. Especially about what goes on there. However, he invites me to their party every summer. It's an opportunity to get to know his friends... or rather, his brothers! For me, it's a philosophy lived out between people. They use rituals like a play.
- T2:** I did some research, because he doesn't talk to me much about it. It's like a fraternity or a bit like Rotary. But they are more secretive. It seems like a nice ideal, but I have doubts about how it works in practice.
- T3:** It's like an association of people who like each other and work together intellectually on social and human rights issues, but they don't get involved in politics or religion.
- T4:** My husband sometimes talks to me about it in positive terms. He told me that Freemasonry is an ideal of peace and shared research so that everyone can progress.
- T5:** My husband once asked me if I wanted to join, but I said no. I can't see myself sitting with women circling a candle and reflecting on things that seem very abstract to me. But it's an association he enjoys, and that's what matters. For me, it's a place where people meet to think about humanity and personal and spiritual development.
- T6:** The lodge is a discreet place where men and women meet to talk about spiritual matters and human values, and to improve themselves.
- T7:** Freemasonry is a fraternal movement that dates back to the 18th century. An ancient ritual is used at each meeting, but they have decorations that are beautiful, but make me laugh a little. But I don't tell him that.
- T8:** It is an association where only men or only women meet. There is also a mixed association, but I don't really know the differences. All I know is that my husband is in an association where men do research to improve themselves spiritually. In practical terms, he's been going for three years and I don't see that he's changed.
- T9:** My partner talks to me about it quite often. It's a beautiful ideal of peace and brotherhood and spiritual development, but frankly I have my doubts, because at the same time he tells me about tensions between brothers, a brother who doesn't deserve to be part of Freemasonry.

**T10:** He often talks to me about 'brotherly spirit' in a chain of union, about improving oneself through introspection, and lots of things like that. But in reality, when I meet his friends, whom he calls 'brothers', I don't really feel a true spirit of brotherhood. We have friends who are not Freemasons whom we can rely on much more, I believe.

**T11:** These are men and women who meet in lodges belonging to an East. So it's pyramidal. If it's pyramidal, where's the freedom? They have decorations, values such as faith, charity and hope. He told me that there are also business lodges where the topics discussed are more political. There are mixed lodges that deal with social issues.

**T12:** A ritual is used each time with a ceremony and assigned roles. There are officers, a Worshipful Master and others. But I don't know much more about what happens there because he doesn't tell me. Sometimes he comes back between 11 p.m. and midnight, which sometimes annoys me.

**T13:** The principle seems interesting, brotherly love, the ideal of peace, human rights, but I find it a bit limited compared to what I've read before. There are apparently more philosophical east, I think, where the concerns are neither political nor societal. He tells me a lot about this and would like to change and go to the Grand Lodge of Belgium. He doesn't like it where he is now, because there are apparently tensions between brothers.

**T14:** It's a global organization, I believe, where there are two tendencies: those who are in favour of secularism and those who are closer to the English and ancient traditions. He told me about 'landmarks'. But it seems complicated, because in fact there are different Easts. I looked into it a little on the internet, but I find it all rather utopian.

**T15:** Freemasonry sounds wonderful in words, but when I hear that there are a lot of disputes in his lodge and that he wants to join another one, I wonder about the values of the brotherhood and equality. It seems that some people are chasing power in the lodges! I have doubts about the sincerity of fraternal mutual aid and brotherly love.

##### **Reflective distance**

Wives and partners seem to have limited knowledge of what Freemasonry is. Some seem to have doubts about the sincerity of the words used in Freemasonry. Freemasonry is perceived as being divided into two camps: those who are philosophers and think only of self-improvement, and those who are committed and sensitive to socio-political and cultural concerns.

Some know that a ritual is used in lodges. Several are aware that there are lodges for men or women, but also mixed lodges. Freemasonry is perceived as a utopia or difficult to achieve. One of them says that for practical help, non-Masonic friends are there. Some have searched the internet to find out more. It appears that husbands or partners do not share much about their experiences in Freemasonry. One of them complains that her husband often comes home between 11 p.m. and midnight. One of them wonders if Freemasonry is pyramid-shaped in its organization, where is

the freedom? One questions her partner when he complains about arguments in the lodge. Ultimately, the perception of Freemasonry seems unclear; therefore, it is not surprising that the comments gathered do not show enthusiasm.

## **2. Does your husband or partner talk to you about what happens in his lodge?**

- T1:** Not really. At least not enough for me to know what really goes on there.
- T2:** He talks to me about it from time to time, especially to tell me about something interesting he heard during a Masonic meeting. But he also tells me about some brothers who aren't very nice, and that upsets him. I've asked him why he doesn't leave his lodge if the atmosphere is so bad.
- T3:** He sometimes asks me for my opinion or feelings about a special event, such as a white meeting where wives and partners can attend. But when it comes to the content of a Masonic meeting, he remains very discreet. And frankly, I prefer not to get too involved in that.
- T4:** He shares with me what happens there, but I never force him to talk about it. He's the one who brings up the subject. In any case, being outside of it all, how could I have an objective opinion?
- T5:** He seems interested in staying, but he can't stand some of the people who are apparently bootlickers. In the end, they're just men with their faults, aren't they?
- T6:** He often talks to me about the topics that have been discussed and asks what I think about them. He once told me that, to him, I was 'a mason without an apron'! He has suggested several times that I join, but I told him that based on what he has told me about his brothers, I am not very motivated. Personally, I prefer to attend a conference or a debate without belonging to a corporation or association. Freedom, freedom!
- T7:** No, he never talks to me about it, and it's frustrating when he tells me it's too complicated for me. Otherwise, we get along well, but it's his 'private domain'.
- T8:** Sometimes! He's quite secretive about what goes on there. The veil is lifted a little when there are parties where wives and partners are invited. In fact, I have formed friendships with some of the wives and partners.
- T9:** He doesn't talk to me about it, and I told him that I didn't have a positive impression of Freemasonry after reading about it on the internet and learning that there were tensions between some members of the lodge.
- T10:** He talks to me about it regularly, and I listen to him more than I talk to him about it. Basically, if he likes it, why not? And then, when he goes to the lodge, I also have time for myself.
- T11:** He tells me about the work presented, which is sometimes interesting, and sometimes asks for my opinion. I don't always agree with him, but we don't argue about it, even though apparently there can be arguments in lodges about the roles to be played or because two or three brothers are in conflict.
- T12:** He often talks to me about it and I'm quite curious. We discuss it, but it's not my main concern. The children come first. I wonder if I shouldn't take the plunge and

join too, but with two children to look after, it would be difficult for me because I don't have the time. And then he comes home late, so if I did the same thing, who would look after the children?

- T13:** No, he keeps quiet about it and he knows I'm not very interested.
- T14:** He talks to me about it, but mostly when there are funny things to tell. I tell him he's a dreamer and that the Masonic ideal cannot be realized. It's utopian.
- T15:** He knows that when he talks to me about problems in his lodge, it bothers me, and I tell him that if he complains and stays there, it means that things aren't so bad! From what he tells me, it's often just pompous talk. It has nothing to do with everyday reality.

## **Reflective distance**

Husbands and partners seem to be fairly discreet about what goes on in the lodge. Wives and partners are generally willing to listen. One person says she is considered a 'Freemason without an apron', no doubt because she shares with him. What bothers some women are the tensions and arguments in the lodge; listening to this can be difficult to accept. The amount of time spent in the lodge can also be disturbing.

## **3. Has the fact that your husband/partner became a Freemason been beneficial for your relationship?**

- T1:** It hasn't changed much in our relationship.
- T2:** No, it hasn't had any impact.
- T3:** We get on well and Freemasonry has nothing to do with it.
- T4:** No, except that he likes going there. I don't want to take away his desire to go, as long as it's not more than once a week, for example.
- T5:** It hasn't had any positive or negative impact on our relationship.
- T6:** It has enriched our conversations, but it hasn't had any impact on our relationship.
- T7:** I think he's away too often and it's starting to annoy me. The children need him too, don't they? I tell him: family comes before Freemasonry. But he doesn't always understand that.
- T8:** No, I have a neutral opinion on the subject.
- T9:** No, things are quite compartmentalized, and I think that's much better. However, if he talks to me about it, I listen.
- T10:** It hasn't magically transformed our relationship!
- T11:** Our relationship hasn't changed, but it seems to me that he asks himself more existential questions since he became a Freemason.
- T12:** Sometimes I express my dissatisfaction when he comes home too late. Sometimes he drinks a little too much and it bothers me. Why do his 'brothers' let him drink?
- T13:** Our relationship hasn't changed at all because of this.
- T14:** No, nothing has changed in our relationship.
- T15:** Our relationship hasn't changed because he became a Freemason! However, I have to stop him when he starts saying bad things about one of his 'brothers'. I ask him if that's what brotherhood is all about. In any case, I tell him that I'm not a punching bag! He told me that there were tensions in several lodges. Often, these

would be animosities between people, organizational tensions, competition for a position, etc.

#### Reflective distance

The fact that the husband or partner has become a Freemason does not seem to have an impact on the couple's life. But arguments in the lodge are disturbing, as is the fact that the husband comes home too cheerful because of a Masonic meeting where too much alcohol was consumed! One wife clearly states the choices to be made: family before Masonic activity.

#### 4. Has your husband/partner's behaviour changed since he became a Freemason?

- T1: Yes, he likes to talk about Masonic values, and because of this he seems more open to the future of humanity, but otherwise he has remained the same.
- T2: No, frankly, he hasn't changed.
- T3: No, not fundamentally.
- T4: He often talks to me about Masonic values and the bonds between brothers, but I can see that it is a society of men with the same flaws as people who have not been initiated. He hasn't changed for me.
- T5: Absolutely not, he is the same man.
- T6: No, but he is more concerned about others, about some of his brothers.
- T7: Yes, he is more interested in deeper, spiritual matters.
- T8: Yes, he is more interested in what is happening in the world: inequality, poverty and injustice, for example.
- T9: Yes, I think that despite the tensions in his lodge, he is a man who questions himself more.
- T10: No, he's the same man; he hasn't changed.
- T11: No, he hasn't changed, even though he's more interested in the work in his lodge, with interesting exchanges with me.
- T12: No, he hasn't changed at all.
- T13: No, he has remained the same with me and the children.
- T14: No, not with me, but he has become more grumpy because of one of his brothers. His brother has not been fair to him.
- T15: I don't think so, unless I don't know everything, because it's quite a closed association.

#### Reflective distance

A majority of the women questioned answered 'no' to the question. Their husbands or partners have remained the same since becoming Freemasons. Others gave nuanced 'yes' answers.

#### 5. Have you ever thought about becoming a Freemason yourself?

- T1: I wonder if I shouldn't take the plunge and join either, but with two children to look after, it would be difficult for me because I don't have the time. And he comes home late, so if I did the same, who would look after the children?
- T2: No, not at all.
- T3: No, I'm not interested.
- T4: I have better things to do than go to an "ivory tower" to think!

T5: No.

T6: I thought about it, but that's over now. It's too time-consuming.

T7: No, it's like a play, with all their rituals and sets. It doesn't appeal to me.

T8: I'm not interested.

T9: I value my freedom too much to join a lodge where there are rules to follow. Ultimately, what is freedom?

T10: I've thought about it, but it didn't work out. It takes too much time, and in the evenings too!

T11: No.

T12: No.

T13: I'm not ready to join, because I have too much to do. I work, I have my housework and a child whom I end up looking after more than he does, even though he's a caring father.

T14: No, not interesting.

T15: What would I do there? I prefer to read a good book and get some fresh air. And when he's not there, I take the opportunity to have a little time to myself.

#### Reflective distance

Women or wives do not seem attracted to the idea of joining Freemasonry. Several say that it would be impossible for them due to lack of time and family responsibilities. One person says that she takes advantage of the time her husband spends at lodge meetings having some time to herself. One of them even refers to an "ivory tower" when thinking about the activities of the lodge her husband attends.

#### 6. Do you think that your husband becoming a Freemason has had a beneficial impact on him?

- T1: Yes, he is more thoughtful
- T2: Yes, he questions things and tries to share his opinion with me.
- T3: Yes, he is calmer, more 'Zen', I think.
- T4: Yes, because he is influenced by some friendly brothers. Others are less friendly.
- T5: I can't answer that.
- T6: At first, yes, but I think he has lost his 'sacred fire' and is much more demanding in terms of the definition of brotherhood.
- T7: No, I don't think so, but I'd rather not talk about it.
- T8: Yes, he has a more open and tolerant mind.
- T9: Yes, perhaps. I haven't asked myself that question.
- T10: Certainly, because he willingly attends lodge meetings, even if everything doesn't seem perfect.
- T11: I don't think so, because he is very critical and apparently expresses doubts about the fraternal spirit of some people when he talks to me.
- T12: Yes, I think he has found fulfilment in terms of reflection and his intellectual thirst.
- T13: Despite the problems he tells me about, I think so.
- T14: I don't think there is any beneficial impact on him.
- T15: A beneficial impact on him? I don't know. In any case, I haven't found any so far.

#### Reflective distance

A majority of women answer 'yes' to the question. However, several answers are nuanced. On the other hand, several answers are more reserved about the positive impact of Freemasonry on the husband or partner.



### 7. Do you participate in White Meetings? In parties where partners are invited?

- T<sub>1</sub>: At first, yes, but not anymore, because the relationships are artificial.
- T<sub>2</sub>: Yes, to support him.
- T<sub>3</sub>: Not all the time.
- T<sub>4</sub>: Yes, at certain parties where wives are invited.
- T<sub>5</sub>: Yes, I meet up with a few friends.
- T<sub>6</sub>: Yes, because it's festive and I get to see some of the people he spends time with.
- T<sub>7</sub>: Yes, it allows me to meet brothers and their partners.
- T<sub>8</sub>: Yes, I quite enjoy it, but I find that not everyone is friendly.
- T<sub>9</sub>: No, I didn't feel comfortable there twice, so I stopped going.
- T<sub>10</sub>: Yes, to accompany him and get to know his brothers.
- T<sub>11</sub>: Yes, it's very good.
- T<sub>12</sub>: Yes, I'm happy to go.
- T<sub>13</sub>: No, because frankly, there are some people who are unfriendly and conceited.
- T<sub>14</sub>: Yes, they are celebrations where relationships are friendly at that moment, at least.
- T<sub>15</sub>: Yes, but I don't think they happen often enough.

### Reflective distance

A majority of wives or partners participate. However, there are negative and neutral opinions. Some wives or partners participate to please their spouse, out of curiosity, or to get to know the brothers their spouse associates with better.

### 8. Are you satisfied that your husband/partner is a Freemason?

- T<sub>1</sub>: I don't have a particular opinion. He is free and if he likes being there, that's fine, as long as it doesn't affect the family.
- T<sub>2</sub>: I don't care! It's his decision. I'm happy being a member of a fitness club.
- T<sub>3</sub>: He has always been interested in theosophy, Buddhism and even spiritualism. So if he finds happiness there, why not?
- T<sub>4</sub>: Yes, because he talks to me about it a lot and we have interesting conversations.
- T<sub>5</sub>: Yes, because I can sense his passion, but sometimes he gets disappointed about certain things.
- T<sub>6</sub>: Yes, because I've also been able to meet people, but they're not all interesting.
- T<sub>7</sub>: No, because he's away too often.
- T<sub>8</sub>: I don't know how to answer that. He is the one who must find satisfaction in it first and foremost.
- T<sub>9</sub>: I think that if it makes him happy, that's the main thing. Frankly, it's not for me to say.
- T<sub>10</sub>: No, because he talks to me more about problems than about being happy in reality. I wonder why he wants to stay there.
- T<sub>11</sub>: No, and I don't want to add anything to that.
- T<sub>12</sub>: Yes, for him.
- T<sub>13</sub>: No, because I feel that there are more negatives than positives, in my opinion.
- T<sub>14</sub>: No, because it doesn't really bring me any happiness.
- T<sub>15</sub>: If he likes it, good for him, but I can't encourage him because I don't particularly benefit from it.

### Reflective perspective

A minority of the women interviewed answered yes. Pride, for example, did not emerge from the responses. One woman mentioned her husband's frequent absences. Others mentioned a certain unease due to tensions within the lodge their husbands attended. Some women gave a neutral response.

### Conclusions

This research does not allow for the generalization given the small number of people questioned. However, this research has the merit of lifting the veil on the opinions of 15 women of Freemasons, allowing us to question the responses and encouraging further research.

The important thing in this research was to immediately capture the responses of fifteen women of Freemasons. It is also worth noting the response of women who consider that, for them, Freemasonry remains a society of men and women, with their qualities and their faults. I will conclude with the following words: 'Nihil Novi sub Sole', from the book of Ecclesiastes (Vulgate) or the Hebrew Bible Qohéleth.

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