

Explanation of the Symbolism of the Ceremony of Initiation

Whilst the friendships made are extremely important and not to be underestimated in any way, the key to enjoying your Freemasonry to the full lies in understanding it. However, in coming to understand the meaning of our Ceremonies, we have a problem, for different Brethren will interpret them in different ways. What is more, none of them will be wrong. After all, if we were all able to understand the Ceremonies in a uniform manner, there would be little point in coming to our Lodges to witness them time after time, as their significance could perhaps be explained in a single visit. Over a period of time, the ritual you see, hear and learn, will prompt you to think about it more widely and more deeply. This will lead you to consider the one constant that should be in our minds - How can we improve ourselves as building blocks for the Temple we are contemplating?

This is a challenging concept for anyone who has just been initiated and gone through a Ceremony that may be viewed on the evening of their Initiation as confusing, perhaps somewhat bizarre and more than likely a little nerve wracking!

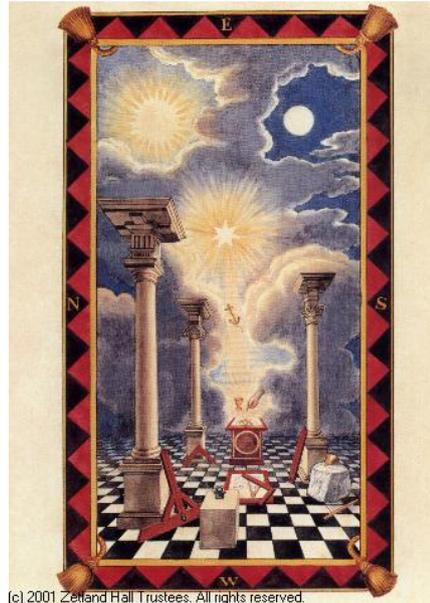
The ceremony represents the birth of Man. At birth we are all naked, without possessions and rely upon the help and guidance of others until we reach maturity and can, in turn, extend help to others.

You may remember that just before you entered the Lodge Room you were confronted with the challenge, --- "Do you feel anything?" This symbolic challenge was designed to intimate to you that you were about to engage in something serious and solemn.

A second challenge awaited you inside the door of the Lodge; "Are you free?" After you vowed that you were free of any bondage, the blessing of the Almighty was invoked upon the proceedings.

Then almost immediately came the third and most important challenge of all, "In all cases of difficulty and danger, in whom do you put your trust?" There is, of course, only one answer to this question. "In God" for the Christian; "In the name of Allah" for the Moslem; in other words, in the name of the Supreme Being appropriate to the religious persuasion of the Candidate. To avoid possible offence and to promote unity among all men, the Supreme Being of all denominations is referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe.

The *hoodwink* or blindfold that you wore represented the darkness before birth and education and also made it possible for you to be led from the Lodge



Room without seeing it, if you refused to continue with the Ceremony. The *Cable Tow* placed around your neck was an emblem of the bondage which comes from ignorance, but together with the *poignard* which was presented to your naked left breast, also served to control your movements during the ceremony. You were *divested of all metallic objects* so that you could not bring any offensive weapons into the Lodge to disturb its harmony. The naked heel and the *slipshod* are because the ground is consecrated and the knee is bare so that there is nothing between it and the Earth when the Obligation is taken. The *trouser leg* is also *rolled up* to demonstrate the Candidate is a free man, bearing no marks of a leg iron. The Left Breast is made bare so that the points of both the *poignard* and the compasses can be felt next to the heart and also to prove that the Candidate is not female! It is appropriate that you entered the Lodge Room in a state of darkness, for it symbolised the gateway or beginning of life. You proceeded down the North side, a place of darkness. Your movements around the Lodge Room followed the path of the sun in the Northern Hemisphere, where our ceremonies originate. It rises in the East, reaches its highest point in the South then sets in the West and returns to the East through the hours of darkness.

After convincing the Brethren you were properly prepared to be made a Freemason, you made significant declarations about your honesty to the Craft. You declared that you offered yourself freely and voluntarily as a Candidate, that you wished to serve your fellow man and that, if you were admitted, you would adhere to the established customs of the Order. You were then advanced to the pedestal by three steps, the beginning of your journey to the East, or light, in Freemasonry. You stepped off each time with the left foot, the left side traditionally symbolises evil. Each step with your left foot was symbolical of putting down evil. Each step represented your growing confidence.

Upon reaching the pedestal, you entered into an obligation of concealment. On your knees before all the assembled brethren, you vowed to hele and conceal what you might learn. Both words have the same meaning, namely, to cover over. The word 'hele' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon language used in England before the time of William the Conqueror. The word 'conceal' comes from the Norman French. Both words are used to ensure that the vow of secrecy was clearly understood.

You were made a Freemason in the body of a Lodge "just, perfect and regular". 'Just' because the Volume of the Sacred Law was open on the Master's pedestal; 'perfect' because there were seven or more regularly made Freemasons in attendance; and 'regular' because the Lodge has a Warrant from the United Grand Lodge of England, which gives authority to perform the ceremony.

After being restored to material light, you were informed of the *three great though emblematical lights*, or guides, in Freemasonry, the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and the Compasses. **You received light at the pedestal facing East, symbolising birth and became a Brother among Masons.**

Having taken the great and solemn obligation of a Mason, you were entrusted with the *Sign, Token and Word* of an Entered Apprentice Freemason. A great deal happened to you during the ceremony and it would not be surprising if you have difficulty recollecting them. Do not let this concern you, for your Mentor will go through them again with you, before the next Lodge meeting. You were invested with the *badge* of a Freemason, which is a simple white lambskin apron derived from the aprons worn by the ancient operative masons. It symbolises purity and innocence, white being the emblem of purity and the lamb being usually considered as the symbol of innocence. This badge is the basis of all Masonic aprons and it is adorned to show the progress a Brother has made in the Craft. The badge is more ancient than the Order of the Golden Fleece, which was established in 1430, or the Roman Eagle, which the early Romans carried at the head of a staff as an emblem of honour. It is more honourable than the Most Noble Order of the Garter founded in 1346, the highest order of knighthood in the world. Apart from signifying purity and innocence, the apron also denotes friendship. We are urged to use this symbol as a guide in our daily lives and never to disgrace the principles for which it stands.

You will remember being placed in the *North East corner* of the Lodge, body upright, feet in the form of a square. This is where you represented the foundation stone of a new building, the building of your new Masonic life. Be upright in life, deal with every man on the square and continue to look to the East for learning. On this foundation you were challenged, 'to raise a superstructure perfect in all its parts'. The North East corner has been well chosen for this foundation stone as it represents the point where you move from the North, the place of darkness and ignorance, to the East, the place of light and learning. Make learning a life-long ambition.

The Charity lecture challenged: "Have you anything to give"? You were deliberately prevented from accepting the challenge. All valuables had been taken from you. It demonstrated that charity comes from the heart and is a way of life not just a payment. Your dress and absence of valuables must have made you ponder in what ways you can demonstrate charity. It was meant to be a constant reminder of your obligation to relieve the distress of indigent or needy Brethren. Charity may take the form of your time, your energy, your friendship or financial assistance. The practice of charity in its broadest sense is the foundation and springboard for other qualities in life.

The twenty-four inch gauge, the common gavel and the chisel are the *Working Tools* of an Entered Apprentice. They shape the rough stones of the future building. Symbolically, the twenty-four inch gauge teaches you how to use time; part in prayer to the Great Architect of the Universe; part in caring for your neighbour and part for yourself, particularly as it relates to your family, your work and your recreation. Your Masonic life is a symbolic rough stone that needs to be shaped for the intended structure.

The common gavel represents the voice of conscience, which is ever ready to warn us when we may tend to err. It reminds us with every knock to keep down all vain and unbecoming thoughts.

The chisel points out the advantages of education and discipline. As the

workman uses the chisel to give form to the shapeless mass of stone, so education transforms the ignorant person into a civilised being.

The Working Tools which were presented to you are to teach the basis of a good life which is explained in more detail in the Charge.

Alternative version

WHAT HAPPENED AT YOUR INITIATION

Congratulations on being admitted into Freemasonry. As you read through the following text remember that your Mentor or any Brother in the Lodge will tell you what the words are which are 'incompletely shown'.

(1) You entered the Lodge Room prepared in a particular way :- this is why ...

The First Degree Ceremony represents birth, or the birth of knowledge. When we first enter Freemasonry, we are without the hidden knowledge of the Craft and rely on the help and guidance of others, our Sponsors, Mentors and indeed any other Brother, until we reach that maturity in the Craft when we in turn can extend help to others.

The h...w...k you wore, represented the darkness associated with the lack of knowledge and

Masonic Education and also enables the candidate to be led from the Lodge Room without seeing it, if he refuses to continue with the Ceremony.

The c... t... is an old emblem of a servant being bonded to his Master. In a Freemason's Lodge, it symbolises our bondage to ignorance until we are brought to the light of knowledge of the Volume of The Sacred Law. (In our Lodges this is usually the Bible, but could be the sacred Book of another Religion held by the Candidate, such as the Koran etc).

The 1..., b... is made b... so that the points of both the p..... and the c..... can be felt next to the heart. Also, some believe, to prove that the Candidate is not female.

You were d.v....d of all m.t.. objects, so that you could not bring any offensive weapons into the Lodge to disturb its harmony.

You were s..p...d to emphasise your poverty and your k... was made b... so that there was nothing between it and the Earth when the Obligation was taken.

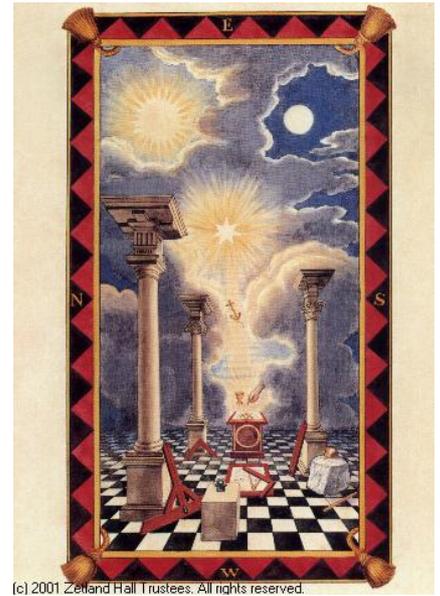
(2) Inside the Lodge Room you :-

- confirmed that your entry was of your own volition,
- confirmed your belief in God, and
- that you were of mature age
and you agreed to go through the Ceremony of your Initiation.

(3) You were paraded before the members as a good man and true.

(4) You recited an Obligation and agreed to obey the rules of the Organisation and promised to preserve the "Secrets of Recognition" which were explained and entrusted to you in detail; the symbolism of certain objects was also explained to you.

(5) You were examined twice in reciting the 'Secrets of the Degree', first at the



Junior Warden's pedestal and later at the Senior Warden's pedestal.

(6) You were invested with an Apron of plain white Lambskin which is a symbol of purity, and is derived from the Aprons worn by the Medieval Operative Masons. It is the Badge of the Order and all other Masonic aprons, however ornate, are derived from this Badge.

(7) As a test, at the North East Corner of the Lodge, you were asked to give to Charity. You will recall the result and that you were received without possessions, emblematically to show that you entered Freemasonry as a pauper and in need.

(8) The Working Tools which were presented to you, teach us the basis of a good life, which is explained in more detail in the Charge. You were then given copies of the Book of Constitutions and the Lodge By-Laws, after which you retired from the Lodge Room to restore yourself to personal comfort.

(9) When ready, you re-entered the Lodge Room where the "Antient Charge" was recited to you: recommending how you should behave in your life and actions.

Finally you saluted the Worshipful Master and took a seat in the Lodge Room.

Mentor: Please take this only as a template. This leaflet is based on Emulation ritual, and if you use a different ritual then please amend the handout to reflect your Lodge workings. What is important is that we encourage the new mason to appreciate what has happened to him and its greater significance. "Veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols"