



Paper

An Initiate's Preparation

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Preparing the Initiate.

Summary

The reasons behind the mode of preparation for an Initiate are explained.

Keywords

First-Degree, Initiate, Preparation, Dress

An Initiate's Preparation

It is certain that most will remember the day they became a Freemason. The ceremony passed through was founded on the ancient initiation ceremony of a Mason, a temple builder; and symbolised the eternal search of the soul of man for spiritual light and understanding.

Masonry instructs us by means of symbols and its ceremonies are dramatic parables. If you are an Entered Apprentice, it must not be expected that you will understand the full meaning immediately. There are many levels of meaning, just as there are many degrees of understanding and you must search for the meaning yourself. These will be unfolded gradually but always remember that every part of the ceremony has a hidden meaning and ponder all this in your heart.

Being properly prepared also refers to the state of your heart and soul as you sought admission into our Order. *'Seek and ye shall find, Ask and it shall be given unto you. Knock and it shall be opened unto you.'*

Prior to being prepared for Initiation by the Tyler and introduced into the Lodge room, it was ascertained that you were willing to submit yourself, unconditionally, to the rules of our Fraternity. A man who has been properly prepared to be initiated into Freemasonry, is a symbol of a pure and uncorrupted man, as the Craft wishes and requires having as a member.

You were prepared in a particular way. Your physical preparation was the outward expression of your inner preparation, which precedes all true initiation and the form was very ancient. Let us consider some of the things that happened to you at your initiation and try to explain them.

In general, your clothing as a candidate is evidence of humility, one of the greatest of all qualities that Freemasonry attempts to teach.

As a candidate you were deprived of all metals for three especial reasons;

- **Firstly**, that you might bring nothing either offensive or defensive into the Lodge so as to disturb its harmony.
- **Secondly**, as you no doubt remember from the ceremony, you were received in a seeming state of poverty to serve as a warning to your own heart that should you meet a brother in distressed circumstances you should do to him as you wish him to do to you.
- **Thirdly**, that such was the excellence of the craft in those days, the building of King Solomon's Temple was completed without the aid of metallic tools. *'The house when it was a building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building'. (I Kings)*

You gave up all symbols of wealth to show also that you were ready to renounce material values and exchange them for spiritual ones. Being deprived of money and metallic substances is not only emblematic of being poor and penniless but also stresses the polluting influence they create. This is mentioned several times in the Volume of Sacred Law.

Our present-day procedure is probably a survival of the idea of pollution. Since you were symbolically erecting a Temple within yourself, you should resist all temptations that might cause pollution. You came into the Lodge as you came into the world, without material goods and throughout life, you should be ever mindful of the opportunity to dispense help and assistance to the needy.

You were slip-shod as a gesture of reverence and to show your inability to mount to higher things without guidance and support. It was also an allusion to a certain passage in scripture when the Lord spoke to Moses from the Burning Bush saying, *'put thy shoes from off thy feet for the ground whereon thou standest is Holy'*. There is also reference to physical preparation in The Jewish *Talmud* which states that *'no man shall go into the Temple with his staff, nor with his shoes on his feet, nor wearing outer garment or with money tied up in his purse'*. The inference to be drawn from the slip-shod condition is that symbolically a candidate is entering upon consecrated ground, in a state suggesting sincerity and honest intention.

A catch question in an 18th century irregular Masonic print is as follows, from which we may conclude that the Initiate then wore a slipper belonging to the lodge, just as today;

Q. *What did you pay for Freemasonry?*

A. *An old shoe; and old shoe of my mother's*

You were hoodwinked, that your mind might conceive before your eyes were enabled to discover the beauties of Freemasonry. As you were received in a state of darkness, you were reminded to keep the world so in respect of Masonic secrets. Moreover, had you refused to go through the ceremony you would have been led from the lodge without observing its form. That darkness that you went through also symbolises the humility which acknowledges your ignorance of the higher truths that were unveiled to you.

Here is part of an old catechism of the 18th century;

Q. *Why were you hoodwinked?*

A. *That my heart might conceal or conceive, before my eyes did discover.*

Q. *The second reason, Brother?*

A. *As I was in darkness at that time, I should keep all of the world in darkness.*

The reason why a cable-tow with a running noose was placed about your neck was explained in part during the ceremony. In ancient times the Entered Apprentice wore a cable-tow to impress on his mind his duty to keep within hail, to come in due time whenever summoned by his Lodge, unless prevented by sickness. The cable-tow is also a symbol of bondage and that bondage is a state of ignorance of the ritual of Freemasonry. The cable-tow or halter has been from time immemorial a symbol of captivity, serfdom and slavery. Conquerors in ancient and medieval times made leaders of defeated peoples appear before them wearing halters.

Your left-breast was bare to indicate there was no veil between you and your fellow Masons and that in your heart there was no evil intention. It would also reveal gender, as none save free born men of mature age can be made a Freemason. However, it is also likely due to the universal tradition that the heart associated with the left breast, is the seat of the soul; thereby signifying the candidate's fervency and sincerity and to remind us that the heart is the repository of our emotions. Your right-arm was also bare, as a token of singleness of purpose and sincerity and that the Brethren might see that you carried no weapon about you.

Your left-knee was bare in order that you could kneel at the altar with nothing between you and the earth, from which we all spring. It was also on that left-knee that you took your great and solemn obligation. The left-side of a man has always been considered his weaker side and although the obligation you took was sacred and binding, it is deemed imperfect without others, which are to follow. You took it therefore on your left-knee but your inherent weakness was strengthened by placing your right-hand on the Volume of Sacred Law.

You gained admission to the Lodge by Three Distinct Knocks, which alluded to an ancient and venerable exhortation, *'Seek and ye shall find, ask and ye shall have, knock and it shall be opened unto you'*.

There can be no better illustration of this than your presence as a Freemason. For you sought in your own mind; you asked of a friend whom you knew to be a Brother; and the door of Freemasonry was opened unto you.

##END##

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Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

Read at home for private study

- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*.
Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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