



Paper

Properly Prepared Six Steps

Index

An explanation of why the candidate ‘comes properly prepared’ for his initiation.

Summary

An explanation of the origin and meaning behind the six steps necessary to ensure that the candidate ‘comes properly prepared’ for his initiation.

Keywords

Metal, Clothing, Slipper, Hoodwink, Cable-tow, Sharp-instrument

Properly Prepared - Six steps

For most of us, the preparation of a candidate for entry into a Lodge is something that we have either completely forgotten, or have begun to so take for granted, and it requires a real effort of memory to recall just what was involved.

Whilst that may often not be a matter of great importance, because we have an efficient Tyler or a Past Master who admirably supervises the preparation, there is still one aspect of this important part of our practice that ought to matter to us: an understanding of why this preparation was done in the first place, and why it is done in this particular manner.

So, let us look at the six points that make up a true preparation of a candidate for Freemasonry on the occasion of his Initiation. They are:

1. Being deprived of all metal objects;
2. The re-arrangement of clothing;
3. The provision of a sandal or slipper;
4. Being blindfold;
5. Having a cable-tow placed round the neck;
6. An encounter with a sharp instrument.

We shall consider each of these actions in turn looking at both the origin of their adoption and also the purpose which they currently serve in teaching a Mason about the Society that he is now about to join.

1. Making sure that the candidate has neither metal nor valuable items on his person. This is one item of his preparation about which mention will be made in the ceremony that follows and hence it may seem to need less explanation than the others. What is behind it, however, can only be fully appreciated when we recognise the situation in which this practice first appeared in Freemasonry. It was in the days of a Mason's Guild Lodge, when the candidates were those who were not ordinary working men but Freemen of a city or borough and who qualified as Fellows of some trade. They had status, the means to run a business and employ apprentices, and were qualified for the offices of local government. The setting for the ceremony was not a working Lodge on a building site, but in a finely furnished room within a guildhall or better-class inn. They would have come in their best clothing, expecting to be admitted to what they are sure is the company of their equals, who were also established trades folk of the locality. They knew that to join this company was a not inexpensive business and they were prepared and able to pay their dues. They had therefore to learn an early lesson. Entry to Freemasonry is not something you can buy. If you are to be admitted to this Fraternity the most important asset is yourself and not your bank balance, your jewellery or your gold watch. It is therefore essential that on your initial entry to a Lodge you should be seen to be 'without your normal possessions' and relying on your own character, as a man 'of good report', for your acceptance.

Similarly, just as you cannot buy your way into this company, neither can you force your way into it. If you were accustomed to wear a sword or carry a dagger, as a gentleman might in the 17th century, then this too has to be removed so that you will not be tempted to rely on that part of your normal attire to assist your entry.

It is when we consider this background to our practice that we fully appreciate the words at the North-East corner, *'to evince to the Brethren that you had neither metal nor valuable substance about you for if you had the ceremony of your Initiation thus far must have been repeated'*. We can now see why, because any variation in this requirement casts doubt over the attitude with which a candidate has entered our midst.

2. In considering the re-arrangement of an applicant's clothing we touch on what is generally regarded as the most unusual, as well as the most distinctive, aspect of becoming a Freemason. The outside world may use this part of our preparation to trivialise our whole involvement, and there may be moments when we ourselves pause to wonder whether such a procedure is really necessary. Indeed, unless we again appreciate what is behind such a requirement as having an open shirt, a bared knee, and a cord to retain our trousers if a metal belt or braces are denied, we might well think that this is a requirement too far.

In fact, what we are being asked to represent here is a working mason of the late Middle Ages. He came to work with an open shirt, knee breeches and a cord around his waist, and it is that impression which the candidate is now to offer. When, in what were now ex-Guild Lodges, candidates who had not been apprentices in the stonemasons' trade presented themselves, the working Masons present required that the least that the candidate could do, was to come in the age-old manner of working Mason apprentices. It is this that we are now to reproduce, though in the first 'Accepted Lodges' there was only one ceremony and one obligation, and the candidates came with both knees bare. It was only later that the idea of dividing up the ceremonies led to one leg exposed in the apprentice degree and the other in the Fellowcraft degree. If we are ever challenged in future about the way in which we entered Freemasonry, a short history lesson may be in order.

3. So why do we have this next preparation of a slipper on one foot? Surely that has nothing to do with the way in which working masons were dressed. It hasn't. This practice was begun in the days when there was a Lodge attached to the Mason's trade guild, at the time of Queen Elizabeth I, when what we call 'Symbolic Ritual' was beginning to be created. All this early ritual was based on stories and events taken from the Bible, which had recently been translated into what was then 'modern English' and was much more available for families, schools and individuals to read.

The story from which this incident of a slipper comes in the Book of Ruth which spoke about Boaz. The story goes that when Boaz wanted to make Ruth part of his family he made his way to the gate of the town where the heads of the families met. There he took off one of his slippers and handed it to the head of the family of Naomi, her mother-in law, in which Ruth had become a member. When the head of the family accepted the slipper, it meant that he approved of the person named leaving his family and joining that of the person whose slipper it was. So, Ruth became the wife of Boaz. A slipper given was the sign of joining another family and that is what is now to happen to the candidate. The Lodge hands over a slipper and the candidate by accepting it agrees to become the member of this new family of the Lodge. The slipper also means something else as some early rituals show. The question was once asked, *'What is that which you are wearing?'* The answer was, *'An old shoe of my mother's'* and the meaning of that exchange was that the candidate was recognizing that from the start of his Masonic career he was indebted to his new Mother Lodge for something needed in his Initiation. He is at once reminded of the bond that is being formed between him and his new Masonic family.

4. The reason why the candidate is 'hoodwinked' or blindfold follows very naturally from what has just been explained. Some explain the blindfold as being necessary so that the candidate should not see the interior of a Lodge, or the members gathered there, before he has committed himself by an obligation to confidentiality. That may have been one of the original reasons, though given that nowadays, possible candidates are invited to Ladies Evenings, to meetings with the Lodge members, to a lecture to which potential candidates and their partners are invited, or 'white-table nights', it seems hardly a good enough reason for the continuing the practice.

The main reason for a blindfold is so that from the very outset we can both test and create the candidate's full reliance and trust in those whom he cannot see and almost certainly cannot know. The candidate is asked at the very start of his journey into the Lodge in whom he puts his trust. The answer expected is '*In God*'. Yet we cannot see God and our very trust is therefore being tested. In exactly the same way the Worshipful Master tells him that he may with confidence follow his guider, whom he cannot see, and nothing will happen that he needs be afraid of. This is the first step in becoming a trusting member of the very same Lodge that has given him his slipper. Even before many words are spoken we are teaching our candidate the lesson of what being a Brother really means.

He also has a cable-tow placed around his neck. Here we can be more certain as to what this is meant to teach. After all there will be a moment before long when the Worshipful Master explains that such an item round his neck '*would have rendered any attempt at retreat equally fatal*'. It is true that the cord around his neck does link up with the old type of penalty which is not now administered, but only explained. What is interesting is that it is not called a rope, a cord or a halter. It is called a 'cable-tow' which is a maritime term and seems so out of place in a society which derives from men who built structures on land. Medieval Masons used ropes and cords and halters for their cart animals so why should we now have a 'cable-tow' put round the neck of an apprentice Freemason? The answer is very significant. It connects with the same reasoning behind the use of 'doves' on the top of most Deacons' wands. What we see here is a very ancient connection with the Bible story of Noah and the Ark.

Without going into great detail, ancient Freemasons were called 'the sons of Noah' because all the knowledge acquired by Adam was supposed to have been kept in the Ark when the Flood came and so those who were able to receive the ancient knowledge after the flood subsided were the 'sons of Noah'. The idea of the Ark as the ship that carried all those who obeyed and trusted God to safety was strongly believed in the Middle Ages. That is why the main part of the church buildings that Masons constructed was called a 'nave'; which comes from the Latin word for ship. Moses too created an Ark to contain the things that brought the Israelites from Egypt in safety and that Ark was placed in King Solomon's temple. Thus, the idea of Noah as the father of knowledge and trust in God continued that is why we have the cable-tow from his Ark and possibly explains why the old form of the penalty spoke of being buried in the sands of the sea a cable-tow's length from the shore.

The cable-tow round the new Mason's neck is to teach him that he is setting out on a journey into the unknown as Noah did and if he should fail then he will be lost at sea. The doves of Noah on the Deacons' wands are meant to be messengers of hope to the members of a Mason Lodge.

5. As he enters the Lodge room for the first time the candidate is gently prodded with the point of a sharp instrument. This is part of another ancient practice which required that any candidate for the trade of a Mason had to have all his faculties. To test these, we still ask whether the candidate can see anything. We test his hearing by asking a question and making knocks. We know he can walk because he is asked to follow his guide and we know he can feel because we now touch his flesh. In earlier days, as in some Scottish Lodges still, he would have smelt incense on the central pedestal. Thus, is his preparation complete. He is a 'fit and proper person' to be admitted into a Lodge of Brother Masons whom he can trust and who trust him.

You can now see that what we do by way of preparation are not meaningless and odd. They are ancient and significant. Let us retain them but let us also explain them.

##END##

Recommended use of Papers

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.

For further papers and other learning materials visit "Solomon" at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

Acknowledgement:

UGLE gratefully acknowledges the Province of East Lancashire as the originator of this document and for their permission to publish it in this form.

Disclaimer:

The views or interpretations contained in this document are those of the author. UGLE recognises there are many different interpretations of ritual, symbolism and history. It does not endorse the contents of this document or of any external websites linked to within the document.

Copyright:

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from The United Grand Lodge of England in writing.
