



Paper

First-Degree Q & A

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Summary

Q & A on First-Degree Initiation Ceremony.

Keywords

First-Degree, Initiation, Q & A

First-Degree Questions & Answers

Q1. Why are First-Degree Freemasons called 'Entered Apprentices' and not just 'Apprentices'?

In the days of the medieval Operative Masons, a young man wanting to learn the trade of stonemason was apprenticed to a Master Stonemason for five to nine years. An indenture or contract would be drawn up, in which the Master agreed to inform the apprentice no later than the end of the second year of his apprenticeship whether he was likely to make the grade or not. If an apprentice's work and aptitude were satisfactory then he would be 'entered' on the books of the Guild or Company of Stonemasons and would thus become an 'Entered Apprentice'.

This is still relevant in Freemasonry today when Past Masters interview potential Candidates to join their Lodges Freemasonry: they are not looking for raw recruits, but for men who have already shown in their lives and actions that they are likely to become good Freemasons and be initiated as Entered Apprentices.

Q2. What does this exchange from the Initiation Ceremony mean?

Worshipful Master: *Describe the mode of your preparation.*

Brother: *I was divested of all metals and hoodwinked. My right arm, left breast and knee were made bare, my left heel was slipshod and a cable tow with a running noose was placed around my neck.*

Let's answer this phrase by phrase

- *'Divested of all metals'*

'Metals' here means coins, and by extension 'worldly goods'. In the Address to the Candidate in the North-East corner he is encouraged to recall that, since he was 'poor and penniless' when he became a Mason, he should be sympathetic towards a Brother needing charity. It also symbolises the Candidate removing all his mundane assets, so he can focus on the beginning of his Masonic journey of moral improvement, without the additional complications of money and worldly goods. This continues in the Second-Degree, but by the time he reaches the Third-Degree, metals are reintroduced as he is considered sufficiently advanced in his journey to deal with the additional problems associated with worldly possessions. In a similar way, the aprons of Entered Apprentices and Fellow-Crafts have no metal on them, not even clasps, but those of Master Masons have metal snake clasps (the snake is a symbol of wisdom) and metal tassels (the seven balls representing the seven liberal arts and sciences.)

- *'Hoodwinked'*

The first duty of every Freemason is to ensure that the Lodge is properly 'tyled', i.e. secured, and that only authorised Freemasons are present when the Lodge is at work. When a Candidate enters the Lodge, he is not yet a Freemason, so he is prevented from seeing anyone or anything until he has taken his Obligation to keep the mysteries of Freemasonry secret. Also, the hoodwink reminds the Candidate that his Masonic journey is from darkness to light, or from ignorance to enlightenment.

- *'My right arm, left breast and knee were made bare'*

This symbolises more links to the days of the Operative Stonemasons. Women were not permitted to become Freemasons, so baring the breast confirms to the Brethren that the Candidate is not a woman. Stonemasonry was a physically demanding job, so the baring of the arm and leg shows that the Candidate is fit for hard physical labour. In early Freemasonry, physically disabled people were barred from becoming Freemasons, as it was feared they would become a drain on charity funds. Today, fortunately, this has changed. This link is referred to again later in the ceremony, when the Worshipful Master orders the candidate to perambulate the Lodge to show that he is 'fit and properly prepared' (many Lodges use the phrase 'comes properly prepared', emphasising the fact that later speculative Lodges appreciated the distinction between 'speculative' and 'operative', i.e. the need to be fit for manual labour.)

- *'My left heel was Slipshod'*

The Lodge is considered a sacred space and so the Candidate removes his shoe because he is standing on holy ground, a reference to the Bible, where God speaks to Moses from the burning bush: *'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the ground whereon thou standest is holy ground'* (Exodus 3:5). In Scottish Lodges, the Candidate removes his slipper and gives it to the Worshipful Master before taking his obligation since giving someone your shoe was a symbol of sealing a pledge in Old Testament times, *'Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel.'* (Ruth 4:7)

- *'And a cable-tow with a running noose was placed around my neck.'*

The cable tow symbolises the security of the Lodge and the Candidate's willingness to submit to its Rules, as is made clear in the Address following his Obligation.

Q3. What is the significance of this exchange from the Initiation Ceremony?

Worshipful Master: *Where were you made a Mason?*

Brother: *In the body of a Lodge, Just, Perfect and Regular.*

Note the comma after 'Just'. The Lodge is 'Just' and 'Perfect' and 'Regular'. 'Just' because the Volume of Sacred Law is always open when the Lodge is at work. 'Perfect' because seven or more Masons make a Lodge 'Perfect' and have to be present for an initiation ceremony to be valid. 'Regular' because the Lodge has a Warrant from a Grand Lodge.

Q4. What do the astronomical references in this exchange mean?

Worshipful Master: *Freemasons' Lodges in this country being usually held in the evening, how do you account for that which at first sight appears a paradox?*

Brother: *The Sun being the centre of our solar system and the earth a spherical body constantly revolving round it and on its own axis and Freemasonry being spread over the whole habitable portion of the globe, it necessarily follows that the Sun is always at its meridian in respect of Freemasonry.*

The Worshipful Master sits in the East of the Lodge because the Sun rises in the East 'to enlighten the day'. He opens his Lodge and enlightens his brethren in Freemasonry. The Senior Warden sits in the West of the Lodge to mark the setting Sun and to close the Lodge, 'having seen that every brother has received his just due', i.e. his wages. The medieval stonemasons, like most other workers, worked during the hours of daylight, so a Freemasons' Lodge metaphorically works from dawn to dusk. The Junior Warden sits in the South of the Lodge and 'marks the Sun at its meridian'. It is not hard to imagine the Sun rising behind the Master's chair, passing over the Junior Warden's chair and setting behind the chair of the Senior Warden.

The Candidate's Masonic journey is towards the light, towards enlightenment, so every Mason is said to have been initiated 'when the Sun was at its meridian' so that he can see clearly where he is heading on his journey. The full explanation of why the Sun is 'at its meridian' when a Candidate is initiated is given in the final step of pure and ancient Freemasonry, the Order of the Holy Royal Arch.

The second phrase reminds the Candidate of the universality of Freemasonry, spread across the whole world, given there are over three million Freemasons world-wide.

Q5. What does this exchange signify?

Worshipful Master: *What is Freemasonry?*

Brother: *A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.*

Worshipful Master: *Name the three Grand Principles on which it is founded.*

Brother: *Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.*

Worshipful Master: *Who are fit and proper persons to be made Masons?'*

Brother: *Just and upright men, free by birth, of mature age, sound judgement and strict morals.*

- 'Peculiar' in this sense means 'discrete' or 'separate'. The Masonic system is 'veiled in allegory' so that its teachings can be interpreted in any place and at any time and in any culture. The symbols of Freemasonry are universal symbols adopted to illustrate its message. Some explain the main message as 'making good men better', others by saying that Freemasonry provides the support to enable an individual to improve himself in all aspects of life, particularly in his education and morals, in order to grow to be the best person he is capable of becoming.
- All Candidates should feel the Brotherly Love that fills every Lodge. They will also be well aware of Freemasons' commitment to charity ('Relief'). But what is Masonic Truth? It can be summed up by a phrase in the Volume of Sacred Law: '*Love the Lord thy God*' (Deuteronomy 6:5) and '*Love thy neighbour as thyself*' (Leviticus 19:17), the two great commandments given by God to Moses.
- Charity is the practical embodiment of loving one's neighbour. It is also important to remember that: '*Masonry does not stop at helping our brethren only but stretches out the hand of friendship to the popular and uninstructed world to do good to all mankind*' (from the Masonic Chain of Union performed at the First-Degree Festive Board.) Many non-Masonic charities, such as the Air Ambulance, Mountain Rescue and Transplant charities depend on money donated by Freemasons. We also sponsor five postgraduate research scholarships at the Royal College of Surgeons.

Masonic charities are also usually among the first to send donations to help deal with the effects of natural disasters and international appeals. Masonic Charity is Truth exemplified as Relief and founded on Brotherly Love.

- Note that it says ‘free by birth’ and not just ‘free’. When the rituals were being revised at the beginning of the 19th century, there was considerable public debate about the morality of slavery, which eventually led to the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833. This phrase was included to prevent freed or emancipated slaves from becoming Freemasons. It was one of the less attractive views held by the Duke of Sussex, First Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England (1813-43). It should probably now be omitted.

Q6. What is an ‘approbation’ and what are the ‘perfect points of entrance’ as used in this exchange?

Worshipful Master: *How do you know yourself to be a Mason?*

Brother: *By the regularity of my initiation, repeated trials and approbations and a willingness at all times to undergo examination when properly called upon so to do.*

Worshipful Master: *How do you demonstrate that proof to others?*

Brother: *By signs, tokens and perfect points of entrance.*

An ‘approbation’ is a formal approval. If Freemasons have a fault, it is that they are over-zealous in their approbations of their Brethren. It is certainly never lacking. There are many definitions of the ‘perfect points of entrance’. Nowadays they are usually defined thus: *‘Of my own free will and accord, At the door of the Lodge and on the point of some sharp instrument’*.

Recommended further reading:

Harry Carr, *The Freemason at Work* (Lewis Masonic)

This book is in the form of questions and answers, so it can be used as a reference text if you have a specific question, or just to dip into as part of your daily advancement in Masonic knowledge.

Roy Wells, *Understanding Freemasonry* (Lewis Masonic).

This covers much the same ground, but from an historical perspective, providing the origins of the phrases used in the current ritual.

##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.

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Acknowledgement:

UGLE gratefully acknowledges the Christopher Powell as the author of this document and his permission to publish it in this form.

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