

# Ceremonial Preparation

February 13, 2017

## CEREMONIAL PREPARATION

### ORIGINS OF THE RITE

Ceremonial preparation is an ancient rite that has its origins shrouded in the mists of time. In every period, from the primeval ages of the most primitive races to this modern era of diverse and sophisticated peoples, some form of preparation has been required and continues to be required of candidates for acceptance into many of the broad spectrum of our religious organisations, sects and societies. Lengthy and arduous preparation, which usually involved fasting and frequently involved danger, was a prerequisite for admission into the ancient Mysteries. Severe personal trials also must be completed for initiation into many African, Australian, South American and other aboriginal tribes. Ceremonial preparation frequently includes washing, or an equivalent symbolic purification, followed by the wearing of a special garment such as a white robe to signify that the candidate has completed the purification process. Ceremonial preparation is an integral part of many religious ceremonies as diverse as the Jewish bar mitzvah, Christian baptism and the Islamic hadj.

In the Mysteries of Osiris in Egypt, Mithras in Persia, Eleusis in Greece, the Druids of Britain and Gaul and many others, as much care was taken with the preparation of the candidate as with the initiation ceremonies that followed. It is recorded in the Scriptures that great care also was taken in respect of the personal condition of every Israelite who entered the tabernacle or temple for Divine worship. In a similar manner, Muslims are required to wash their hands and remove their shoes before entering the mosque for prayers. The traditional preparation of

a candidate for initiation into modern speculative Freemasonry obviously has been influenced by these ancient practices, although it was derived more directly from the usages and customs in operative lodges, which have been modified and extended. The mode of preparation is entirely symbolic, with every part conveying an important message. It is an essential part of a candidate's initiation and is one of the most delicate duties to be performed, because of the lasting impression it will create in the candidate's mind.

### OPERATIVE BACKGROUND

The rituals of the operative Free Masons were based on Biblical events. Nimrod, the renowned hunter who also was the first great builder mentioned in the Scriptures, plays an important role in the ancient traditions. The floor work in the several operative degrees is based symbolically on the procedures used during the erection of the temple at Jerusalem for King Solomon. In each degree the candidate personifies a particular stone used in the construction of the temple, on the basis of which he receives moral instruction, is gauged and must pass the test. Whilst being conducted around the candidate's track, from which the perambulations in a speculative lodge were derived, the candidate is required to take steps that symbolise either the placement of the stones in a particular course or the measurement of the relevant dimensions. The steps used in a speculative lodge to approach the altar for obligation are not used in operative lodges.

In operative lodges the initiate was "neither naked nor clad" and wore a special white garment or "toga candida" to give effect to that description. "Candidate" derives from the Latin and originally meant "clothed in white", from the Roman custom of requiring candidates for office to wear a "toga candida" in the form of a white robe. In the old operative lodges,

candidates were examined by the Fraternity's physician to ensure that they were "perfect in all their parts". If found to be whole and physically fit and accepted by the brethren and fellows of the lodge, the candidate was required to bathe seven times and to be clothed in the "toga candida". He was then conducted around the lodge to prove to the brethren and fellows that he was "properly prepared" and "fit and proper" to be admitted to the Fraternity. In contrast to speculative practice, candidates in operative lodges were specially prepared only for their initiation, being clothed in the apron of their degree for later advancements.

### DIVESTITURE OF METALS

In operative lodges the candidate for initiation usually was a young teenager seeking his first employment, who therefore was poor and penniless. Towards the end of the initiation ceremony the new apprentice would be asked how he would subsist until he drew his first wages. On receiving the inevitable response, the master would have a collection taken on the new apprentice's behalf, relieving him of his embarrassment and illustrating the generosity of the Fraternity. The apprentice then received a brief homily on the importance of service and charity in the Fraternity. As candidates for initiation in speculative lodges cannot be in a similar situation, they are divested of all metals so that a similar moral can be imparted. The lesson simply is that a man should not be esteemed on account of his worldly possessions, but that when he is in need he should be assisted to the extent that prudence and the capacity to assist will allow.

### THE HOODWINK

In all of the ancient Mysteries the aspirant was shrouded in darkness for long periods, most commonly deep within a cave,

when he was required to fast and undergo a series of trials and afflictions. In the rites of Mithras around 5000EBC and in the Eleusian rites around 1800EBC, the aspirants endured fifty and twenty-seven days respectively in darkness, to remind them of their inherently wicked nature and prepare them by solitary contemplation for the full light of knowledge. The hoodwink represents that darkness and also is a mystical reminder to the candidate that he is lost without the light that comes from above. The removal of the hoodwink signifies that the candidate has acquired the right attitude of soul that will lead him quickly from darkness to everlasting light, as symbolised in JohnE1,EvE5, which in the New English Version of the Bible says: "The light shines on in the dark and the darkness has never mastered it". The hoodwink is also a symbol of silence and secrecy.

#### THE CABLE TOW

In operative Lodges the candidate was fully restrained and guided by pairs of ropes held by four members, who thus conducted him into and around the Lodge. One of the ropes was a cable tow, which seems to have been used the same way in the ancient Mysteries. This symbolism is very old and has been found around the world. In some Temples in Egypt, the bas reliefs show candidates being led into the Mysteries by a cable tow. A vase found in Mexico depicts several candidates going through a similar ceremony, each having a cable tow with a running noose round his neck. A cable tow was also used by the ancient Israelites when leading their victims for the burnt sacrifice to and around the altar, whence it became known as an emblem of death. The cable tow obviously provides a means of restraint until the candidate has taken his obligation. As an emblem of death the cable tow also signifies that the candidate is prepared to sacrifice his old life to gain a new and higher one, that spiritual rebirth achieved in his search for the Light and

symbolised by his initiation.

After admission into the Fraternity, the cable tow should be a continuing reminder to every Freemason that he is bound to attend and serve his Lodge, "if within the length of his cable tow". This is derived from operative practice, in which the cable tow was replaced by a blue cord after the candidate had been obligated and had signed his indenture. The Indentured Apprentice was required to wear that cord for the full seven years of his apprenticeship, as a constant reminder of his bond to the Fraternity. The blue colour of the cord was a token of the universal friendship the Apprentice would always find within the Fraternity. In the Irish working the candidate wears the cable tow as an emblem of servitude until he is about to take his obligation. It is then removed by the conductor and thrown contemptuously onto the floor behind the candidate, who is informed that none but a free man may be made a Freemason. In some old Scottish and related workings the cable tow is wound three times round the neck in the first degree, twice in the second degree and once in the third degree, symbolising a progressive reduction in the "bondage of ignorance".

#### THE BARE RIGHT ARM

The use of the right hand as a token of sincerity and as a pledge of fidelity is ancient and universal. For example the members of many Indian tribes of Central and North America, when preparing for their sacred dances, apply the mark of the right hand to their naked bodies by smearing them with white or coloured clay, to demonstrate their sincerity and allegiance to their Deity. We also know from the Scriptures that the Israelites, from the time of Abraham to the days of Saint Paul, considered the right hand to be an emblem of truth and fidelity. Among the Hebrews "iamin" signified the right hand, which was derived from "aman" meaning to be faithful. Among the Romans

“jungere dextras” meant to join the right hands and thereby to give a mutual pledge. Among the Persians and the Parthians the right hands were joined by those entering into a pact, to signify that they had taken an inviolable obligation of fidelity. In ancient days, before printed books were available, operative masons took their obligations with their right hands placed on a cubic stone on the altar. This was the custom in Biblical days, when it was deemed essential that nothing should be interposed between the flesh and the stone. When printed books became available, operative masons were obligated supporting a copy of the Holy Book on the left hand with the right hand placed upon it, from which is derived the Scottish practice.

In Masonic preparation the right arm is made bare as a token of sincerity and to signify that an obligation of fidelity is being taken. The right arm is used for the reasons already mentioned and also because, from time immemorial, the right side has been regarded as the stronger or masculine side. Plato was the first to rationalise this belief, when he expressed his opinion that the right side is the stronger because it is used more than the left. By way of interest, this is supported by statistics, which indicate that at least 90% of the members of the human race use their right hand as their working and therefore stronger hand. The bare right arm also demonstrates that no weapon of offence or defence is being carried, because neither is required when within the lodge. Whilst the usual convention is for a sword to be worn on the left side so as to be readily available for use in the strong right hand, it is a traditional belief that small weapons usually are concealed in the right sleeve.

#### THE BARE LEFT KNEE

As a corollary to the ancient belief that the right side is the stronger, so the left side is considered to be the weaker. In

the symbolism of Freemasonry, the candidate is taking his first or weakest step when he is being initiated, therefore it logically follows that an apprentice is typified by the left side. It is for this reason that in speculative lodges the initiate kneels on his bare left knee. The progressive kneeling postures adopted in speculative lodges were not derived from operative practice, but they probably are intended to reflect the symmetry of nature and to symbolise the progressive character of Freemasonry, as well as reminding the candidate of the posture of his daily supplications that are due to the Creator. In operative lodges the candidate was required to kneel with both knees bare on the rough ashlar stone, so that nothing was interposed between his flesh and the stone. This perpetuated the ancient concept that the strength and stability of the stone would thereby be communicated to the candidate, so that an oath taken on a stone would be inviolable.

### THE SLIPSHOD HEEL

From the most ancient times it has been customary, as a token of respect, to remove the shoes before stepping onto holy ground. The practice is mentioned many times in the Bible, on the first occasion when Moses saw the burning bush and the angel of the Lord said to him: "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground". In most Eastern countries it is customary to remove the shoes before entering a temple, as the Muslims do before entering a mosque. The Druids practised the same custom when celebrating their sacred rites. The ancient Peruvians are said always to have removed their shoes before entering their magnificent temple consecrated to the worship of the sun. In Freemasonry the candidate is considered to be on holy ground when taking his obligation and therefore symbolically is required to "slip his shoes from off his feet". It also was an ancient custom among the Hebrews, when sealing a bargain and "confirming all things", to hand over a

shoe, as recorded in the Bible in relation to Boaz and Ruth. Symbolically, the "slipshod heel" might be regarded as equivalent to removing the shoes on holy ground, as well as ratifying the obligation taken by the candidate. The custom is derived only indirectly from the practice in operative lodges, where the candidate for initiation must slip off both his shoes at the appropriate time in the ceremony. Later he is also required to remove and hand over his left shoe to confirm his obligation.

The above paper was part of a much larger collection of Masonic lectures believed to have originated from the United Grand Lodge of England.

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### Comment

As a great number of readers will already know, I am constantly searching for the **WHY** in what we do as Freemasons & this paper goes a long way in providing such answers.

My own Lodge Haida #166 Grand Lodge of BC & Yukon (Canada) will be conferring an Entered Apprentice Degree on Feb 22nd, and it is my intention to email this paper to each and every member of the Lodge, prior to the Degree, in order that he may have a better understanding of **WHAT** is happening before his very eyes and **WHY**.

Possibly some Education Officers, reading the paper, may consider doing the same within their own Lodges.

Have a Wonderful Day & God Bless == Norm