

RITUAL'S PLACE TODAY

Discussion Leader – Naresh Sharma

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PART I.

RITUAL'S EVOLUTION

1356-In a Demarcation dispute between Mason hewers and "setters or layers", twelve skilled craftsmen went before the mayor & aldermen at Guildhall in London & drew a simple code of 8 regulations, called the "Code of Mason Regulations." This was the beginning of The Mason Trade organization.

On 24 June 1717, four London Lodges formed the Premier Grand Lodge of England. It should be noted that in 1717 Masonry had two degrees, the Grand Lodge had no rules, regulations, ritual or jurisdictional territory. The Grand Lodge, claimed jurisdiction over all of England only in 1735. One of the reasons given for the formation of Grand Lodge was: "*...between these dates (1356-1717) the Craft had undergone such vast industrial, economic and social changes as to suggest that the events of 1717 were the beginning of a new and separate story.*" Until Anderson produced the first Constitution in 1723, the Old Charges were the oldest rule books of the mason trade and provided the Craft ordinance, authority, ritual, rules, moral regulations and acted as reminders of religious duties.

113 versions of Old Charges or Manuscript Constitutions dating from *Regius* c.1390, Cooke, c. 1410 have been found, the last, named *Kevan MS*, c. 1714 was found in 1954. More than 75 of these documents are dated before 1717. Of the Old Charges found, most are preserved in England and Scotland, 4 are in US (Boston & Philadelphia) & 1 is in Canada. A study of them as a whole, reveals the development of our ritual and admission ceremonies. These Old Charges can be divided into 8 distinct families but all followed a general pattern which was:

1. An Opening Prayer.
2. A fabricated history of the Craft from Biblical times with historical characters. This was, in some Masonic scholars opinion, done to provide traditional background for longstanding customs. These histories contained Charges, general and singular, designed to preserve and elevate the moral character of Craftsmen.

3. Code of Regulations.

4. Oath or obligation, which is the first thing we have in the Craft even resembling a ceremony.

I will attempt to briefly look at how our ritual has evolved through 600 years of Masonry. To do this let us first look at the ceremony of admission into the Craft.

CEREMONY OF ADMISSION: The earliest documents indicate only one ceremony, meaning there was probably only one degree until 1598 when we know there were two degrees. It is not until early 18th century, 1725 to be precise, that we find the third degree.

The admission ceremony consisted of an Opening Prayer followed by a reading of appropriate charges and regulations. Then the candidate took his oath, which consisted of declaring his fidelity to the King, to the Master and Craft, and that he would obey the regulations and that he would not bring shame to the Craft. There were no penalties. It is only in 1593, according to the *Grand Lodge No. 1 MS*, the third oldest version of Old charges, that said, "...one of the elders would hold out the Bible and he or they that are to be admitted shall place their hand thereon." We learn from *The Edinburgh Register House MS*, c. 1696, that "secrecy" had been added to the obligation. According to this document the obligation for the second degree was the same with the exception of three words! The words, "without equivocation or mental reservation" appear in *Sloane MS*, c. 1700. We learn from *Dumfries No. 4, MS*, c. 1710 the addition of penalties where it says, "my heart taken out alive, my head cut off, my body buried within ye sea-mark." At that time the penalties were not part of the obligation but were included in the ritual that followed the oath. In the *Grand Mystery of Freemason's Discovered*, c. 1724 and *Wilkinson's MS*, c. 1727 but found in 1946, we find, "... and help and assist any Brother as far as your ability will allow...." The Entered Apprentice obligation in 1727 is very close to the one we have today. The MM obligation in *Three Distinct Knocks*, c. 1760, consists of 5 paragraphs as against the twelve we have now. In 1760, the penalties are separated.

CATECHISM OR QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: Until the early 18th century, questions and answers were not a part of the ceremony, but were recited to the candidate after his obligation. These were "Some questions that Masons use to put to those who have ye word before they will acknowledge them." The earliest questions & answers we find in 1696 when EA degree had 15 Q & A's and FC had only 2! In 1700, *Sloane MS*, has 22 Q & As, *Masonry Dissected*, c. 1730 has 155 Q & A's, 92 for EA, 33 for FC and 30 for MM. During the 1700's there is evidence of a certain amount of standardization of the ritual as the Craft ritual began to acquire that unique combination of symbolism with the teaching of religious and moral principles by the use of allegory, legend, and explanatory material which have made ours a "center of union between good men and true." This brought new life and spirit into the ritual.

Some of the "firsts" in our ritual:

1. Letter G, for Geometry appears in 1726.
2. Jachin and Boaz were words of the first degree.
3. Five points of fellowship in 1696.
4. Cable-tow is mentioned for the first time in 1710.

5. Hiramic Legend first mentioned, in detail, in 1730 in *Masonry Dissected*.
6. Three lights are mentioned in early 18th century, first as three windows "to light the men" and the three fixed lights were three large candles.
7. First legendary ritual "Raising" was in 1726 (?) but the "*old gentleman raised from the grave was not Hiram Abif but Father Noah.*" and he was raised on the FPOF by his sons Shem, Ham and Japhet.
8. The first Third Degree on a candidate: Lodge Dumberton Kilwinning, now No. 18: Mar. 1726, Gabriel Porterfield. (May 12, 1725?)
9. Ritual changes and the addition of the Third Degree was achieved without authority, guidance or supervision of the Grand Lodge!
10. Cowan appears in minutes of Lodge Kilwinning on Dec. 20, 1705.
11. Apron as a Badge of Honor and Stars & Garter, 1730.
12. Lodge of Kelso No. 58 (Scotland): Jan. 18, 1754 meeting Minutes indicate that the members of the Lodge did not know that the Masonic world had three degrees
13. Middle Chamber & winding stairs in 1730.

A study of the development of the ritual over the past centuries brings up an interesting question - why should we not see if it can stand some updating now? The requirements for advancement of a candidate for degrees in masonry deserves serious consideration. In the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania an Entered Apprentice is required to learn answers to nine questions; a Fellow Craft learns answers to only seven questions; a Master Mason learns answers to only ten questions. In Emulation Ritual, practiced in almost all countries outside North America, an Entered Apprentice learns answers to eleven questions and a Fellow Craft learns answers to only nine questions which are written in plain English! What would be beneficial for our state and masonry in Louisiana?

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. "*World of Freemasonry*" by Harry Carr.
2. "*The Early Masonic Catechisms*" by Knoop, Jones and Hamer.
3. "*The Pocket History of Freemasonry*" by Pick & Knight.

PART II.

Masonic Oaths and Obligations and Penalties

by Naresh Sharma, 33^o

The earliest Masonic document, *Regius MS, c. 1390*, mentions a oath as an essential element in a mason's admission ceremony. The oath was a simple pledge of fidelity to the King, the master and fellows and that he would be true to the craft. This oath related to the "Charges" or regulations which consisted of fifteen 'Articles' dealing with trade matters and fifteen 'Points' which were a guide to candidate's duties and responsibilities as a man.

Until early eighteenth century there was only one obligation in Masonic ceremonies, the candidate merely repeated it in the second degree and after 1726, when he took the Master's degree. There were no penalties, as we shall see, until the early eighteenth century. The penalties contained in the obligations have been the subject of much criticism from both anti-masons as well as Masonic scholars. The Grand Lodge of Ireland removed the penalties from the obligations in 1894. Since then many jurisdictions have either removed the penalties from the obligations or the candidate is informed that the penalties are merely symbolic. In December 1995, the Grand Lodge of Virginia joined other Grand Lodges around the world when they removed the penalties in their jurisdiction. Let us trace the growth of the one simple oath taken by a candidate to the present elaborate obligations containing different penalties in each degree.

MANNER OF TAKING THE OATH

The first mention of the manner in which the oath was administered is found in the *Grand Lodge No. 1 MS, c. 1583*, which states that:

"Then one of the Elders shall hold the book and he or they [that are to be admitted] shall place their hand on the book and the following charges shall be read."

In the same text are found the exact words of the oath:

"These charges that we have now rehearsed unto you all and all others that belong to masons, ye shall keep so help you God and your hollydome, and by this book in your hand unto you power. Amen. So be it."

With the passage of time, the obligations in Old Charges gradually became longer and included comprehensive precautions to ensure secrecy. In *Buchanan MS, c. 1670*, we find the following,

"These charges that you have received you shall well and truly keep, not disclosing the secrecy of our lodge to man, woman nor child, stick nor stone, thing movable or immovable, so God you help and his hollydome."

A fuller version of this oath is found in *Harris No. 1 MS, c. Second half of seventeenth cent.:*

"These charges which we now rehearse to you, and all other charges, secrets and mysteries belonging to Free-Masonry, you shall faithfully and truly keep together with the council of this lodge or chamber. Ye shall not for any gift, bribe or reward, favor or affection, directly or indirectly, for any cause whatsoever divulge or disclose to either father or mother, sister or brother, wife, child, friend, relation or stranger or any other person whatsoever, so help you God your hollydome and the contents of this book."

There is only one obligation for the two degrees in masonry.

SECRET WORDS AND SIGNS COMMUNICATED AFTER THE OATH:

In *Harleian MS No. 2054, c. 1670*, we find the first evidence that a secret word and sign was communicated to the candidate after he took the oath:

"There is several words and signs of a free mason to be revealed to you which as you will answer before God at the great day of judgement you keep secret and not reveal the same to any in the hearing of any person but to the Master and fellows of the said society of free masons, so help me God."

EXPANDED OBLIGATION AND FIRST HINT OF PENALTIES AND OF A SIGN:

Three documents, *The Edinburgh Register House MS, c. 1696*, *Chetwode Crawley MS, c. 1700* and *Kevan MS, c. 1714*, describe two degree ceremonies with an expanded obligation and the earliest information of the penalties. The candidate takes the same obligation in the two degrees. The entered apprentice candidate was placed 'upon his knees and after a great many ceremonies to frighten him' he took up the Bible... 'laying his right hand on it.' The candidate was exhorted to secrecy under threat of damnation and murder and after he had promised secrecy he repeated the Oath:

"By God himself and you shall answer to god when you shall stand naked before him, at the great day, you shall not reveal any part of what you shall hear or see at this time whither by word nor write nor put it in write at any time nor draw it with the point of a sword, or any other instrument upon the snow or sand nor shall you speak of it but with an entered mason, so help you god."

(The Edinburgh Register House MS, c. 1696)

After the obligation, he was taken out of the lodge by the youngest apprentice who taught him the sign, postures and words of entry. Thereafter the candidate returned to the lodge, took off his hat, made a 'ridiculous bow' and gave the words of entry which finished with the words, *"under no less pain than cutting of my throat."* A footnote in the manuscript says, *'for you must make that sign when you say that.'* Here is the earliest evidence of a sign for the entered apprentice.

An obligation without a penalty in also contained in the *Sloane MS, c. 1700*, but in this manuscript the penalty is contained in the catechism which the candidate hears after taking the following obligation:

"The mason work and everything therein contained you shall keep secret you shall never put it in writing directly or indirectly, you shall keep all that we or your attenders shall bid you keep secret from man, woman or child, stick or stone and never reveal it but to a brother or in a lodge of freemasons and truly observe the charges in ye constitution all this you promise and swear faithfully to keep and observe without any manner of equivocation or mental reservation directly or indirectly so help you god and by the contents of this book."

The catechism following the obligation contains this exchange:

Q. *Which is the first sign or token, show me the first and I will show the second.*

A. *The first is hail and conceal or conceal and keep secret by no less pain than cutting my tongue from my throat.*

Dumfries MS, c. 1710, has a different penalty in the catechism following the obligation:

Q. Why a rope about your neck?

A. To hang me if I should betray my trust.

Q. What punishment is inflicted on those that reveal the secret?

A. Your heart is to be taken out alive, your head to be cut off and your body to be buried in the sea-mark and not in any place where Christians are buried.

Help and assist a brother first appears in the following obligation contained in the *Grand Mystery of Free-Mason Discovered*, c.1724:

"You must serve God according to the best of your knowledge and institution, and be true Liege Man to the King, and help and assist any brother as far as your ability will allow, by the contents of the sacred writ you will perform this oath. So help you God."

THREE PENALTIES IN ONE OBLIGATION:

Obligation contained in *Wilkinson MS*, c.1727, *The Mystery of Free Masonry*, 1730 and *Pritchard's Masonry Dissected*, 1730, have three separate penalties. By 1730 masonry had seen the introduction of the Master Mason degree but there was still *only one obligation that the candidate took*. Obligations in the three documents are very similar. Following is the obligation contained in the *Wilkinson MS*, c. 1727:

"I do hereby solemnly promise and declare in the presence of almighty god that I will hail and conceal all the secrets or secrecy of a mason or masonry that have heretofore, shall be now, or at any time hereafter, revealed to me that I will not speak or declare them to any saving a brother or fellow after due examination that I will not write them, work them mark them, point them or engrave them; or cause them to be wrote, written, marked, pointed or engraved on anything movable or immovable.

"Under no less penalty than having my throat cut, my tongue tore from the roof of the mouth. My heart plucked from under my left breast and buried in the sands of the sea, a cables length from the land, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in 24 hours, my body to be burned to ashes, and the ashes scattered over the face of the whole earth that there may be no remembrance of me... so help me God."

THREE OBLIGATIONS FOR THREE DEGREES:

The first evidence of a different obligation for each of the three degrees comes in 1760 when *Three Distinct Knocks* was published. These obligations are reproduced below to show how they were in the very earliest version that is known.

The entered apprentice obligation:

"I,-----, of my own free will and accord, and in the presence of Almighty God, and this right worshipful lodge dedicated to St. John, do hereby and hereon most solemnly and sincerely swear that I will always hail, conceal and never reveal any of the secret mysteries of Free Masonry, that shall be delivered to me now, or at any time hereafter, except it be to a true and lawful brother, or in a just and lawful lodge of Brothers and Fellows, him or them whom I shall find to be such, after just trial and due examination.

I furthermore do swear that I will not write it, print it, cut it, paint it or stint it, mark it, stain it, or engrave it, or cause it to be done, upon any thing movable or immovable, under the canopy of Heaven, whereby it may

become legible or intelligible, or the least appearance of the character of a letter, whereby the secret art may be unlawfully obtained. All this I swear with a strong and steady resolution to perform the same, without any hesitation, mental reservation, or self evasion of mind in me whatsoever, under no less penalty than to have my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by the root, and that to be buried in the sands of the sea, at low-water mark, a cable's length from the shore, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours, so help me God, and keep me steadfast, in this my entered apprentices obligation.

The fellow craft obligation:

I _____, Of my own free will and accord, and in the presence of Almighty God and this right worshipful lodge, dedicated to St. John, do hereby and hereon most solemnly and sincerely swear that I will always hail, conceal and never will reveal that part of a fellow-craft to an entered apprentice, or either of them, except it be in a true and lawful lodge of crafts, him or them, whom I shall find to be such after just trial and due examination.

I furthermore do swear, that I will answer all signs and summonses sent to me from a lodge of crafts, within the length of my cable-tow.

I also promise that I will not wrong a brother or see him wronged, but give him timely notice of all approaching dangers whatsoever, as far as my knowledge leads me. I will also serve a brother as far as lies in my power, without being detrimental to myself or family; that I will keep all my brothers secrets as my own, that shall be delivered to me as such, murder and treason only excepted.

And that at my own free will, all this swear with a firm and steady resolution to perform the same without equivocation or hesitation in me whatsoever, under no less penalty than to have my heart torn from under my naked left breast and given to the vultures of the air as a prey; so help me God and keep me steadfast in this my craft's obligation.

The Master Mason obligation:

I _____, of my own free will and accord, and in the presence of Almighty God and this worshipful lodge, dedicated to St. John, do hereby and hereon most solemnly and sincerely swear that I will always hail, conceal and never reveal that part of a Master Mason to a fellow craft, no more than that of a fellow craft to an entered apprentice, or any of them to the rest of the world; except it be to a true and lawful lodge of Masters, him, or them, whom I shall find to be such, after just trial and due examination.

I furthermore do swear that I will answer all signs and summonses, sent to me from a lodge of masters, with the length of my cable tow.

I also will keep all my brothers secrets as my own, that is delivered to me as such, murder and treason excepted and that at my own free will; I will not wrong a brother or see him wronged, but give him timely notice of all approaching danger as far as my knowledge leads me.

I also will serve a brother as far as lies in my power, without being detrimental to myself or family.

And I furthermore do promise that I will not have any carnal conversation with a brothers wife, sister or daughter, and that I will never discover what is done in the lodge, but that I will be agreeable to all laws

whatsoever. All this I swear with a firm and steady resolution to perform the same, without any hesitation in me whatsoever, under no less penalty than to have my body severed in two, the one part carried to the South, and the other to the North; my bowels burnt to the ashes in the South, and the ashes to be scattered before the four winds, that such a vile wretch as I should be remembered no more amongst any manner of men (particularly masons), so help me God, and keep me steadfast in this my masters obligation.

Brethren, this is how the earliest oath taken by our predecessors in the fourteenth century has evolved into the three obligation we have today.

Bibliography:

1. *“World of Freemasonry”*, by Harry Carr. Lewis Masonic, Middlesex, England. 1990.
2. *“The Early Masonic Catechisms”*, by Knoop, Jones and Hamer. Quator Coronati Lodge, London, England. 1975.
3. *“The Pocket History of Freemasonry”*, by Pick & Knight. Redwood Press Ltd., Trowbridge, England. 1971.