

COMMUNICATION

Words are fascinating and are frequently frustrating to define. Many words which are used in Masonic ritual or terminology take on special meanings, which further compound the confusion of definition.

In this age of changing technology, the science of COMMUNICATION has made some dramatic advances . . . Radio, TV, Space Communication. We tend to accept these advances without question, and in the course of acceptance we also seem to lose sight of some of the more basic definitions of COMMUNICATION. Sometimes a simple referral to the dictionary definition can reshape our thinking and stimulate our awareness. Let's take a look at some of the definitions we find for COMMUNICATION in any standard dictionary.

COM . MU . NI . CA TION. noun.

an act or instance of transmitting; a verbal or written message; the act of communicating; exchange of information or ideas; intercourse; a system (as of telephones) for communication; Eucharistic communion; a system of routes for moving troops, supplies and vehicles; a process by which meanings are exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols; a technique for expressing ideas effectively in speech or writing through the arts; the technology of the transmission of information.

Those are the basic definitions. However, they don't seem to include any of the Masonic meanings of COMMUNICATION. What about "stated and emergent COMMUNICATIONS?" . . . or "Grand COMMUNICATION . . . "Quarterly COMMUNICATION?" . . . or the "COMMUNICATION of Degrees?" In Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry we find:

COMMUNICATION: The meeting of a Lodge is so called. There is a peculiar significance in this term. To communicate, which, in the Old English form, was to common, originally meant to share in common with others. The great sacrament of the Christian Church, which denotes a participation in the mysteries of the religion and a fellowship in the church, is called a communion, which is fundamentally the same as a communication, for he who partakes of the communion is said to communicate. Hence, the meetings of Masonic Lodges are called communications, to signify that it is not simply the ordinary meeting of a society for the transaction of business, but that such meeting is the fellowship of men engaged in a common pursuit, and governed by a common principle, and that there is therein a communication or participation of those feelings and sentiments that constitute a true brotherhood.

The communications of Lodges are regular or stated and special or emergent. Regular communications are held under the provision of the by-laws, but special communications are called by order of the Master. It is a regulation that no special communication can alter, amend, or rescind the proceedings of a regular communication.

So we find that a Masonic Communication takes on a much greater meaning--that of joining together in a common brotherhood in pursuit of common goals and common purposes based upon our common principles. With that explanation in mind, we can better guard ourselves in the transaction of our lodge business, in the conferral of our degrees and in the meeting in fellowship with our Brethren. The Lodge Communication is much more than just a meeting. It is much more than an assembly of Masons. It is, must, and should ever be, a joining together of kindred spirits for those loftier purposes of promoting, practicing, and extolling those Masonic virtues we espouse.

The meetings of Grand Lodges are known as "Grand Communications." The word "Grand" is used to distinguish the level of meeting Masonically. COMMUNICATION, as we learned from Mackey, is the name given to a meeting; a lodge or Grand Lodge meets in a stated, special, regular, business, emergent, occasional Communication, using the word in its ancient sense of sharing thought, actions, and friendship in common.

The term "Communication of Degrees" is peculiar to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. Mackey explains it in these words:

COMMUNICATION of DEGREES:

When the peculiar mysteries of a Degree are bestowed upon a candidate by mere verbal description of the bestower, without his being made to pass through the constituted ceremonies, the Degree is technically said to be communicated. This mode is, however, entirely confined in America to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

The Degrees may in that Rite be thus conferred in any place where secrecy is secured; but the prerogative of communicating is restricted to the presiding officers of Bodies of the Rite, who may communicate certain of the Degrees upon candidates who have been previously duly elected, and to Inspectors and Deputy Inspectors-General of the Thirty-third Degree, who may communicate all the Degrees of the Rite, except the last, to any persons whom they may deem qualified to receive them.

The Quarterly Communication, or Quarterly Grand Communications are held in England, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and in a few other Jurisdictions. It is at these Quarterly Communications that the majority of the routine fraternal business is conducted, and is generally open only to the Grand Lodge Officers and the Masters and Past Masters of lodges.

Many of the usual definitions of COMMUNICATION are also applicable to Masonry. When a candidate knocks on the door of our lodge, it is a form of COMMUNICATION. It tells us that he seeks entrance; that he wants to learn the mysteries of our Brotherhood; and that he is willing to conform to our laws and rules. Our response to his knock is also COMMUNICATION.

We assure him that nothing in his initiatory experience will conflict with his own principles and ideals. We are inviting him to quench his thirst for knowledge by entering our Brotherhood and embracing its teachings. How well we COMMUNICATE those assurances and teachings will greatly influence how well he accepts them. The ritual must be communicated with meaning,

feeling, sincerity, and dignity if we are to truly COMMUNICATE with the candidate. If we use poor communication we will merely be making a member instead of a Mason.

So many of our principles and teachings are taught by symbols that we must also consider symbols as a means of COMMUNICATION. There is a good reason why Masonry uses symbolism to impress its teachings. An idea which is COMMUNICATED simply as a statement seldom lingers very long in the heart and mind. When that same thought is tightly bound to a visible object which logically symbolizes the idea, the lesson is clear and more easily retained.

Signs and grips are also forms of COMMUNICATION. They carry the message that the one giving them is bound by certain duties, responsibilities and obligations. When given sloppily or incorrectly, they give the message that someone doesn't know their meaning--or doesn't care. The next time you hear the words, "Signs, Brethren," look around and see how they are given. You'll see all kinds of reaction: that of pride; indifference; that "lost" look; and sometimes complete panic.

The lodge Trestleboard or meeting notice is an important tool of COMMUNICATION. To be effective, it must contain those specifics about the COMMUNICATION as to the type (stated, emergent, etc.), time, place, and date, as well as communicating a message of inspiration, challenge and motivation that will cause the recipient to WANT to attend. All too frequently such notices are so cluttered with a repetitious listing of officers, Past Masters and committees that there is no room for the Master to "put the Craft to work with proper instruction."

VERBAL COMMUNICATION, too, is an effective "working tool" when properly applied. Lodge officers must be able to express themselves intelligently to the candidates, to each other, to the Master, and to the Brethren. Harmony will prevail if the lodge officers can give each other--and receive--constructive criticism on such things as ritual, floor work and expression. After all, it is a team effort. "Whispering wise counsel into the ear of an erring Brother" can be most effective if done in a spirit of helpfulness.

"Providing for the relief of a distressed Brother, his widow or orphan" is the ultimate in Masonic Communication. These are not idle words. Our individual concern for the "sick and distressed"--no matter how we

COMMUNICATE it, is the true test of how

seriously we take our Masonic obligations. Words of encouragement, whether written or verbal, often create a lasting effect upon the minds of those to whom directed. The COMMUNICATION indicates an interest and concern and serves as an example of the Masonic Way. Going out of our way to help, aid, assist, and comfort the less fortunate is Masonic Communication at its best. A Mason's hand is a hand that helps, That lifts the fallen one,

That comes, in need, with a kindly deed To him whose strength is gone.

A Mason's heart is a heart that loves The best that is good and true;

He stands the friend, his best to lend, Under his banner blue.

A Mason's eye is an eye that smiles And his a cheering voice;

He spreads the light, dispels the night And makes the world rejoice.

Over the earth in stranger lands, Where distant peoples dwell,

The eye, the grip, the life, the lip, Of love unchanging tell. By Bro. Carl W. Mason

"Body Language" is yet another medium of COMMUNICATION which can affect Masonry. While Masons are not puppets, the image of Masonry is frequently reflected by the way lodge officers comport themselves. A Master who slumps in the Oriental Chair gives the impression of unconcern. Lodge Officers who slouch give a message of indifference or boredom. The "angle of dangle" of deacons and stewards rods reflect their attitude to their duties. On the opposite side of the coin, the officers who sit or stand uprightly and alert. square their corners with precision and carry their rods in a uniform manner, COMMUNICATE the impression of efficiency and interest.

Just as a military unit must be able to "shoot, move and COMMUNICATE" to as sure success on the battlefield, Freemasonry must be able to COMMUNICATE if it is to have the desired impact "in the hearts of men.