

NINE QUESTIONS

Newly raised brethren are naturally filled with curiosity regarding Lodge behavior, ritualistic inquiries, Masonic lore in general. They ask questions. Some of the more common are these - can you answer them?

Why do brethren not pass between Altar and East when Lodge is at labor?

Why do brethren entering and leaving a Lodge salute the Master?

Why does not ordinary parliamentary law apply in a Lodge?

Why is it un-Masonic to disclose how one has balloted ?

How may I know that a stranger is a Mason

How should I make myself known to a stranger as a Mason?

Is it expected that I now do business only with Masons?

What is the "Lodge of the Holy Sts. John at Jerusalem?"

Where is the Masonic goat and why did I not ride it?

Simple questions. elementary indeed for the old and the experienced brother, but puzzling to the new. Here are explanations which be of use to those who, though they probably know the facts, may not have phrased them in the form of answers to questions.

Brethren do not pass between the Altar and the East in a Masonic Lodge it labor because the Master is supposed to have the Great Lights constantly in view. In theory, at least, he draws inspiration for presiding over the Lodge from the Altar and must not, therefore, be prevented from seeing it at any time.

The custom is but a pretty courtesy but it is rooted in a fundamental conception of the Craft - that the Altar is the center of Masonry and that from it and the Great Light it bears flow all that there is of Masonic inspiration and truth and light.

In English Lodges there is not this problem, since the Altar there is a pedestal near the Master on which lies the holy book.

Masons entering or leaving a Lodge salute the Master at the Altar if the Lodge is at labor - they salute the junior Warden if the Lodge is at refreshment. There are several reasons for this practice. It assures the Master that the brother knows on what degree the Lodge is open. A

brother making a wrong sign can be instructed immediately. It informs the Master that the brother is a Mason of the degree on which the Lodge is open; if he make all inferior sign, and cannot, on request, give the right one, the Master call then use other means to ascertain that no Entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft is present in a Master Mason's Lodge. The salute is a silent assurance to the Master and through him to the brethren: "I remember my obligation".

Brethren salute on retiring to get permission to leave. No one can enter or leave a Lodge room while a lodge is at labor without permission. If the Master does not wish the brother who salutes to retire he tells him so, instead of responding to the salute.

At refreshment the Lodge is in charge of the Junior Warden and the same salutes are given him as are usually given the Master, and for the same reasons. In some Grand Jurisdictions, on very busy evenings, as during a visitation or other Masonic function. the Master will instruct the Tiler to ask the brethren to salute the West, instead of the East, in order not have his own labors in the East interrupted.

Newly raised brethren speedily learn that the parliamentary law which governs the usual body of men assembled in any organization does not govern a Masonic Lodge. A Master may put a motion which has not been proposed, or seconded. He call close debate at his pleasure. He does not have to put a question even after debate if it his desire not to do so. He entertains no motion too "Lay on the table" or to postpone" or "to adjourn." No one call "move the previous question" in a Masonic Lodge, and so on.

The reason is found in the responsibility which is the Master's. The Grand Lodge and the Grand Master hold him responsible for everything that happens in his Lodge. He is not accountable to his Lodge, cannot be removed by his Lodge. There are certain things he cannot do without Lodge action, such as spending Lodge money, or open before the time stated in the by-laws at a regular communication. But the Lodge cannot dictate to him what can be discussed, and if, in his judgment, something should not be discussed or acted upon, it is for him and only for him to say that it should or should not. Were it otherwise, a Lodge might "run away" with him, and in enthusiasm do that for which the Grand Lodge or Grand Master would censure or punish him. Therefore, the Master has full control of debate, and work, and acts, and ordinary parliamentary law, which might interfere with that control, does not apply.

In all Grand Jurisdictions, the ballot on candidates is secret and inviolable. It is considered un-Masonic, and in most Grand Jurisdictions is against Masonic law, for any brother to divulge how he has or will ballot on any candidate. Masters are instructed strictly to adhere to this requirement. The newly, raised brother will speedily learn that peace and harmony are the very foundations of any Masonic meeting. For Brother Jones to learn that Brother Smith has or will ballot against his friend who applies would disrupt that peace and harmony. Moreover, the rejection of a candidate is naturally a sore blow to him who has applied. If every one knew who had cast the black cube, the rejected mail might speedily learn, and a cause of friction in the profane world would then have come out of a Masonic Lodge, which again prevents peace and harmony.

A ballot is sometimes immediately retaken. This is because the appearance of a single black cube may be all error, cast by mistake. If the single black cube appears the second time, presumably it was intentionally cast.

Ballot taking differs in different jurisdictions. In some, a "collective ballot" may be taken on several candidates at once; if a black cube appears, each name is then balloted on separately. In others, a "multiple ballot box" is used, with a compartment for each name, which is printed above it. In still others, each name is balloted on separately from the beginning, using a single box. In most Grand jurisdictions, one ballot elects to all three degrees. In some, a separate ballot is taken for each degree, and in one, at least, still another ballot on "moral qualifications." But in all Grand Jurisdictions, ballots are secret, inviolable and regarded as the corner stone on which the fraternity is erected.

"I met a man on a train recently who said he was a Mason. How should I go about ascertaining if such a claimant really is a Mason? And how shall I make myself known to a stranger as a Mason?"

Questions like these are frequently asked by newly raised brethren. Sometimes the question is phrased "How shall I examine a stranger to make sure he is a Mason?"

The answer is Punch's famous advice to those about to marry - "Don't!"

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the man who wears a Masonic pin, or who says that he is a Mason, actually is one. While occasionally imposters seek Masonic aid without a shadow of a right to it, their number is small compared to the nearly three million men in this country who are Masons in good standing. But it is unwise, and often risky, to engage in loose Masonic talk with the stranger who introduces himself as a member of the Craft. Nor is there any excuse whatever for him to ask you to prove yourself a Mason. There is no need for you to know that he is a Mason, nor for him to know that you are one. Such necessity exists when you or he would visit a Lodge, but there the responsibility is the Master's, and it is for him to order a committee. Many newly raised brethren think that by giving some Masonic sign they, should secretly make themselves known to a supposed brother, but this is a mistake.

Not even when a call for Masonic help comes is there need for a ritualistic "proof" of mutual membership. If a man is in danger or difficulty, and time is short, there is no more need to find out whether he asks for aid because he is a Mason, than there is to ascertain of the drowning man that he is a respectable citizen before you throw a rope! If the Masonic lesson of charity and help indicates that aid should be given, give it, whether the man be telling the truth or not. But beware of the man who offers to "prove" himself, and does so by a ready knowledge of ritual. He may be, and probably was once, a Mason in good standing. But such are usually beggars, using a knowledge of Masonry - and sometimes a stolen or forged good standing card - to mulct the innocent.

In large cities, refer Masonic requests for aid to the Board of Relief which can be reached through the Masonic Temple or Lodge. In general, do not discuss Masonry with strangers; do not

try to "make yourself known" as a Mason to strangers; and pay no attention to those who wish to talk Masonry with you. In that course lies safety to yourself and to the Fraternity.

A problem which confronts many a newly-made Mason is his supposed obligation to give his business to fellow Masons rather than the profane.

Masonry is most emphatically not a back scratching organization, a Board of Trade, a Chamber or Commerce or a mutual admiration society. There is no obligation, actual or implied, which demands that, because you have become a Mason, you must forsake all those with whom you have been doing business who are not, and give your orders to brethren who may, and may not, be equally as satisfactory as tradesmen.

Other things being equal it is brotherly to give your business where it will help a fellow Mason. But other things must be equal. If the twin born with you sold poor shoes at fancy prices, while your neighbor's son sold good shoes for reasonable prices, you would not buy of your own blood brother. To do so would be to injure yourself and your family, since you would be wasting your money. Exactly the same idea applies to your fraternal brother.

The man who says: "Buy of me because I am a Mason" is not anxious to serve you, but to serve himself. If he is a good business man he does not need to depend on mutual membership in any organization, whether Lodge. Church or Club, for his business. If he is not a good business man - that is, if he sells poor goods - he has no moral right to attempt to offset poor quality by whining that you both belong to the same Lodge. Similarly he who comes to you and says: "I have come to you because I know you are a Mason, now I expect a discount because we both belong" is also using his Masonry to promote selfish interests and should be discouraged.

But to the tribe of men who give you their business because of mutual Masonry without asking favors, you may wish to belong - for here other things are equal!

"What is the Lodge of the Holy Sts. John at Jerusalem?" Many a Master puzzled to answer this simplest and most natural of questions. As there is not now and never was such a Lodge, perhaps there is reason for being puzzled.

Originally, Lodges were dedicated to King Solomon. Later - at least as early as 1598 - Masonry connected her name with that of St. John the Evangelist. Dedications to the Sts. John were made by other organizations as early as the third century, when the Church adopted the two pagan celebrations of summer and winter solstices and made of them our St. John's Day in Summer and St. John's Day in Winter. It was wholly natural for operative Masons, having dedicated their Craft to the Holy Sts. John, to begin to believe the Johns were themselves Craftsmen. Craftsmen must have a Lodge - where should that Lodge be, but in Jerusalem" Hence "The Lodge of the Holy Sts. John at Jerusalem" came into imaginary existence. Today, as we use the phrase as the starting point for a Masonic career, Masons mean only that their Craft is dedicated to these holy men, whose precepts and practices, ideas and virtues, teachings and examples, all Freemasons should try to follow.

Those who were terrified by talk of a Masonic goat which they were supposed to ride in the ceremonies of initiation, were among the unfortunates who have been victims of loose talk by coarse-minded men. They perpetuate as a jest, a ridicule of Freemasonry of the early seventeenth hundreds, when those who had been refused admittance to the growing Speculative Craft, whispered venomous tales that Freemasons were in league with the devil and raised his Satanic majesty in Lodge ceremonies! The devil rode a goat, because the conception of a living devil arose from the ancient mythological god Pan, who had horns, a tail and a goat's legs. Hearing these tales, Londoners of the early days of organized Freemasonry came to believe that Freemasonry not only raised the devil, but rode upon his goat! A childish tale, it has survived the ages as have so many myths and legends. But it has harmed the gentle Fraternity, in that it profanes and makes a mock of that which you now know to be a solemn and lofty ceremony.