

For every WHY there is a WHEREFORE!

Supplement to WHY? – The most important question in Freemasonry

Be curious always! For knowledge will not acquire you; you must acquire it. (Sadie Black)

Every Brother is encouraged to think for himself about the countless questions that must arise in the mind of every serious Mason – to question, discuss, read, study and learn WHY we say and do certain things in the rites and ceremonies of the several Degrees. The classic definition of Freemasonry – “a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols” – should remind us that symbols can be interpreted in many and varied ways and have multifold and variegated meanings. Freemasonry has the innate ability to provide all things to all men!

Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of life. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lodge a holy curiosity. (Albert Einstein)

There is some reluctance to supply answers to these questions. Learning is a ‘D-I-Y’ project, and the main emphasis of the present program of Masonic Education is on participation in honest, open discussion around the table: **Discuss – Question – Think – Learn – GROW.** What a keen student discover for himself will always be more valuable than what he is told by others.

Freemasons are free to think for themselves. The following notes do **not** give definitive answers to the questions posed in this learning exercise. No one has the final answer! Every Brother has the right to express his own opinion, carefully investigated, considered, developed and expressed to his own satisfaction.

Remember, real power comes when knowledge is shared.

R.S.J.D.

Let's talk Symbolism

1.

WHY is the Candidate deprived of all metals before entering the lodge for Initiation?

The First Degree is symbolic of birth – our entrance to the life of Freemasonry.

“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” (1 Timothy 6: 7)

Yet, we spend our lives accumulating materials things. Masonry teaches that it is the internal, not the external qualifications of a man that count. ‘Metal’ probably is intended here as a symbol of money ‘gold and silver’ coins. All men enter Masonry as equals, regardless of affluence or influence in the world outside. This is one of the main reasons for removing street clothes and putting on the simple suit worn in each of the Degrees.

A man entering Masonry should have nothing to hide. It is often said that baring the right arm proves that the Candidate is not carrying a concealed weapon!

[See also question 8 below.]

2.

WHY are there columns on the Wardens' pedestals and not on the Master's pedestal?

Where did the columns on the Wardens' pedestals come from?

In old lodges the Wardens were both placed in the West – Senior Warden on the North side, and Junior Warden on the South side of the entrance. Thus the stations of the three principal officers formed a triangle, with the Worshipful Master's chair at the apex. Within the entrance, beside the Warden's chairs, were two large pillars representing those that stood at the porch of King Solomon's Temple. All Brethren entered the lodge passing between them. When the stations of the Wardens moved to their position in the West and South respectively, they took miniature replicas of the columns with them to represent the large pillars that remained in their original location at the entrance.

That explains the origin of the columns on the Warden's pedestals, and may account for the fact that the Worshipful Master does not have a column on his pedestal. But how do we explain the situation in those few lodges where a column is placed on the Master's pedestal?

Our ritual informs us that three pillars support a Masonic lodge – '*Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty.*' It is not uncommon to see the Master's and Wardens' pedestals carved to represent the three classical orders of architecture - **Ionic, Doric, and Corinthian.*' The reason for which is explained in the description of the Three Lesser Lights.

Ornamental lights are another matter that may suggest a simple practical explanation. Not so long ago, in the days before lodges were lit by electricity, candlesticks were placed on the pedestals. These are a few lodges where small lights still adorn the three pedestals. It is obvious that these cannot be used symbolically, raised or lowered in the ceremonial opening and closing of the lodge.

Have you noticed the many triangular patterns formed about the lodge by the placement of the three principal officers' stations, the three pillars, the three Lesser Lights? In a subsequent Degree, the Candidate will be told that Geometry is the basis of Masonry.

3.

WHY is the V.O.S.L. opened at Ruth 4: 7 in the Entered Apprentice Degree?

"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)

The ancient custom signifies the binding nature of the Obligation. The correspondence is obvious.

It cannot be mere coincidence that the principal character contracting the real-estate transaction recorded in this chapter is **Boaz**. We might also note that this was done in the presence of 'the elders and all the people' – "*And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders said, We are witnesses.*" (verse 11) See question 4 below!

4.

WHY do all Brethren present stand at the Sign of Fidelity when the Candidate takes his Obligation?

Although the Candidate, being hoodwinked, cannot see them, all the Brethren present stand with him, not only to renew their own Vows of Fidelity, but also to pledge their mutual support to him in the Masonic journey on which he is taking the first steps.

There are three distinct stages in the Masonic rites and ceremonies when a man is made a Mason.

1) **Ritual** – when the Candidate has taken the solemn Obligation, and is raised at the Altar as a Brother among Masons. 2) **Legal** – when the new Member signs the Bylaws of the Lodge, and is ‘entered’ on the Roll with all the rights and privileges, as well as the duties and responsibilities of membership. 3) **Philosophical** – a life-long process, achieved when the Brother seriously undertakes and diligently strives to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge.

5.

When the Candidate is restored to light when the verses from Genesis are recited following the Obligation, WHY do the Brethren clap once?

In simplest terms, the handclap may represent the acclaim and applause of the Brethren, acknowledging and welcoming a new Initiate into the Brotherhood.

The sound adds a dramatic element to the restoration of Light. In nature, lightning is followed by thunder. The Jewish tradition associated lightning with revelation. The Hebrew word used in the Creation story may be translated as eight “*light*” or “*lightning*. ” In ancient times thunder symbolized the voice of God, and lightning, the written word of God. “*God thunders wondrously with his voice.* ” (Job 35:7)

“Let there be light, and there was light”

Joseph Campbell, in his insightful study, “The Inner Reaches of Outer Space” (2002) refers to the oriental *vajra* – “the thunderclap of enlightenment.” In the Hindu and Buddhist tradition, a thunderbolt in the form of a diamond scepter splits the clouds of ignorance revealing ‘knowledge.’

6.

WHY is the Candidate ‘slipshod’ and not ‘barefoot’?

This is known in some jurisdictions as the **Rite of Discalceation** from the Latin word *discalceatus* – unshod. It is a sign of humility before God to tread on holy ground in a holy place. God commanded Moses: “*put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.* ” (Exodus 3: 5) It is said that Pythagoras told his followers to “offer sacrifices with thy shoes off.”

However, the Candidate is ‘*slipshod*’ not ‘*barefoot*. ’ To assume the rights and privileges of Freemasonry, a man must be ‘free by birth.’ In ancient times, shoes were the mark of a free man, and slaves went barefoot. Retaining shoes, though ‘*slipshod*’ indicates that the Candidate is his own master, self-sufficient and responsible for his actions.

7.

The Lesser Lights are placed in the South, West, and East. WHY is no light placed in the North?

In the Northern hemisphere, the “North” is a place of darkness, being farthest away from the light-giving Sun as the Earth turns on its axis. In many traditions, the North symbolized cold, hunger, chaos, and evil.

Yet, in our lodges, the Chaplain is stationed in the North, to communicate the lessons of virtue and morality. Remember that the star gleams in the centre of the mosaic pavement as a symbol of Divine Providence.

The Egyptian philosophers taught that the North was a source of light. Perhaps there is a ‘light’ in the North. **Polaris**, visible as the unmoving North Star in the constellation Ursa Minor (The Little Dipper) has been the guiding light for navigators for thousands of years. In ancient times it was revered as the Gate of Heaven, the apex of the pillar or pole around which the constellations revolved – the true centre of the Universe.

If we consider that Polaris is a light to guide us on our journey through life, an artificial light placed in the North would be redundant, and by ‘light pollution’ of the sky, would dim the brilliance of the guiding light of the star that never rises or sets in the heavens.

Perhaps this is why the five-pointed star is the jewel of the Deputy Grand Master, who presides over the Board of General Purposes, the Executive body of the Grand Lodge, and is found at the centre of the jewel of the District Deputy Grand Master, and in the collar of the Worshipful Master. In a real sense these Officers are the ‘navigators’ – the ‘captains’ of the Masonic Order.

The Candidate is placed in the North when the ‘secrets’ of each degree are communicated. The location chosen to impart this basic ‘Masonic knowledge’ may be symbolic of moving from darkness to light.

8.

WHY must the Ceremony be repeated if the Candidate had money or metallic substance at the North East Angle?

This statement in the Lecture given to the Candidate at the North-east Angle must be the most puzzling in the entire First Degree. Why would the discovery of money or metallic substance, in other words, anything of material value, invalidate the entire Ceremony of Initiation? Although a fee for Initiation is required, no man can buy his way into Masonry. He is judged, accepted, admitted, and advanced by merit alone.

The Entered Apprentice Degree symbolizes ‘rebirth’ – not physical, but in an intellectual and spiritual sense. “*Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.*” (Job 1: 21)

Freemasonry is a peace-loving and law-abiding institution. Disputes and differences arising between Masons are settled peacefully. In the eighteenth century, the gentlemen would leave their swords in the anteroom. Only the Tyler is “*armed with a drawn sword.*”

“*And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.*” (1 Kings 6: 7)

“a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Corinthians 5: 1)

The Candidate is placed at the North-east Angle to represent the foundation stone on which he is to raise a superstructure, “perfect in its parts and honourable to the builder.” *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ... The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”* (1 Corinthians 3: 17)

9.

WHY is the Candidate directed to retire in order to resume his personal comforts before the final sections of the Degree are completed?

This simple gesture of courtesy and respect, properly considered, has profound significance to the thoughtful Mason. At this point in the ceremony, the degree is complete – admission, obligation, communication, proving possession, and investiture. There are obvious practical reasons for resuming normal clothes undistinguished from the other members of the lodge.

Consider what follows when he returns to the lodge – *‘an explanation of the tracing board’* and a Charge outlining the duties and *‘qualifications’* of a Mason. One of the first things he is told in the Lecture given by the Junior Warden is the *‘vast extent’* of a Masonic lodge – *‘from east to west, from north to south, from the surface of the earth to its centre, and even as high as the heavens.’* The lodge extends far beyond the walls of the room where the ceremony is held, encompassing the entire universe. The lessons of morality and virtue, the standards of public conduct and personal behaviour to be practiced and applied in all aspects of everyday life are outlined in the Final Charge. It is symbolically appropriate that he receives these prescriptive instructions dressed in the normal attire in which he is expected to fulfill them. He is now a Mason, a changed man with added responsibilities. He returns to the real world as a man and a Mason to play out the game of life following new rules.

10.

WHY does it matter which side of the Junior Deacon, right or left, the Candidate is on when they perambulate the lodge in the several parts of the Degree?

When he first enters the lodge, the Candidate is described as being *‘in a state of darkness,’* by his own admission, seeking light. Once he has been “restored to material light” it may be said that he is *“in a state of ignorance”* seeking knowledge, until “the secrets” of the Degree are communicated, and he proves that “he is in possession of the secrets of the Degree.” At first, the Candidate is conducted around the Lodge on the outside, away from the centre, where the Volume of the Sacred Law lies open on the Altar, the source of Light and Truth.

When the Secrets are being communicated in the North, it should be noted that the Deacon steps up on the right when called on to prompt, between the Altar and the Candidate, acting as the transmitter or channel.

After ‘proving’ that he is in possession of the signs, token, and word of the Degree to both Wardens, the Deacon changes sides, going over to the Candidate’s left, where he remains for the subsequent perambulations in the Degree.