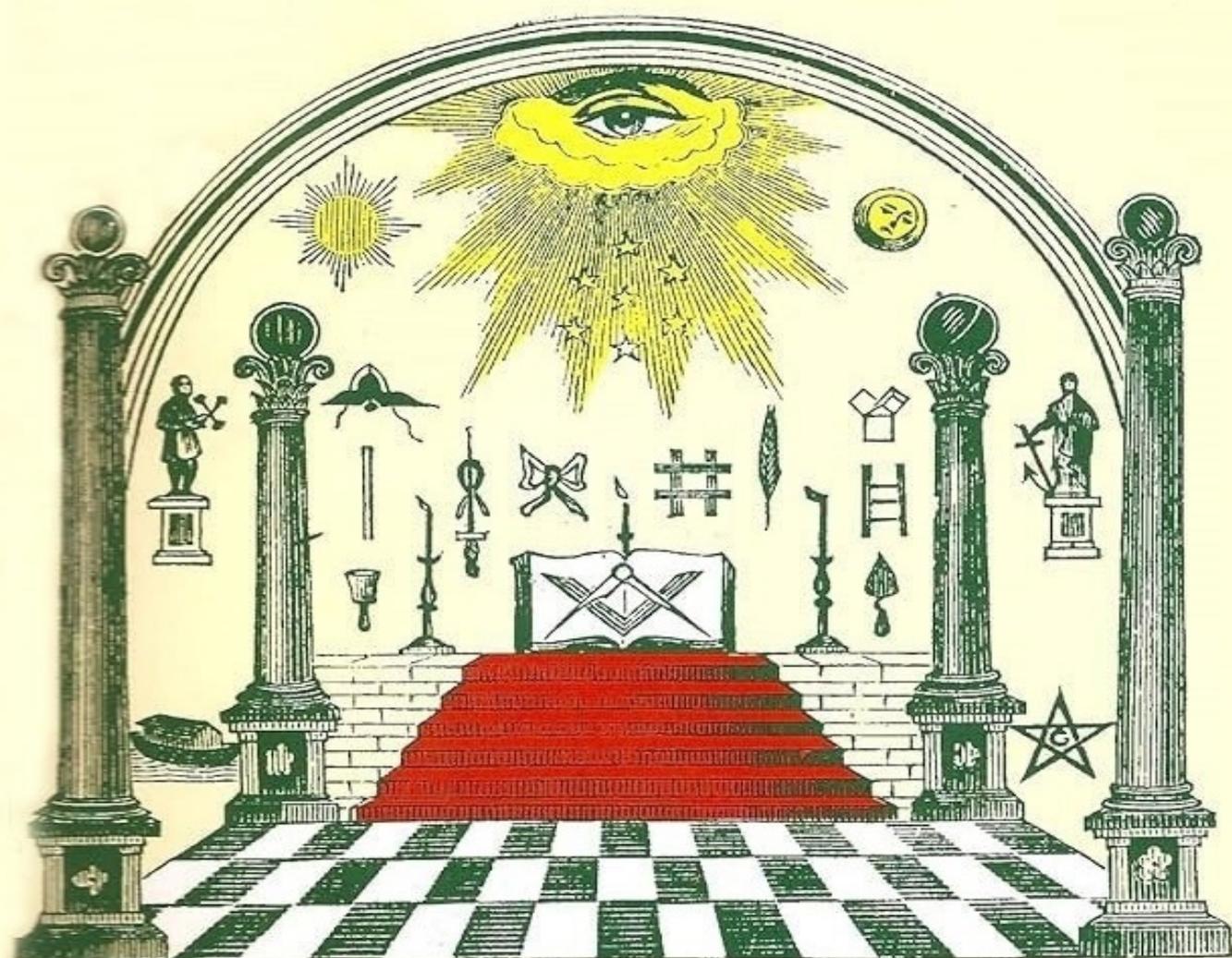


ON THE LEVEL



Vol IV

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A BI MONTHLY PUBLICATION BY LODGE MOTHER INDIA # 110



Fraternal Greetings All!

Are'nt monsoons the best season? The rains washes away all the dust settled & leaves the trees all lush green the roads spic and span and the weather does make you feel having *a garam cup of chai along with some pakoras.*

We had a set back with the passing of our MW Bro. Justice Devinder Gupta on 17th June 2024. I was fortunate to have met him as he and my Grandfather W Bro N N Mehra go a long way back.

As all the celebration were called off for the **Universal Brotherhood Day** what did not wane off was the enthusiasm of our charity programmes that were planned.

It is with great delight that I would like to point the charities we carried out :

- Charity begins at home. Our staff at Freemasons' Hall always had an hard time to get cold potable water, even Brethren had to order packaged water. This water cooler was a much needed relief to the FMH

COMPILER'S CORNER

- A total of Rs.2,00,000/- has been donated to get Govt. run Balwadis flooring work done. The money was raised from Brethren within the Lodge and a few Brethren from other Lodge too contributed. The highlight of this Charity was that a part was donated by one of the Candidates who yet was to be initiated!

- 10 computers were donated to Lok Vigyan Kendra – Rajkot. This was done through Lodge Kathiawar No. 59 and has been an on going Charity undertaken by our Lodge.

- 5 computers were donated to Indian Association For Promotion of Adoption & Child Welfare for their School Computer Laboratory which is located in Khetwadi, Mumbai.

- Around 100 people were given food along with help of Datt Devasthanam in Goregaon West. This ongoing charity done by our Lodge.

Post this, we recently carried out very a very successful FREE CANCER DETECTION CAMP under the Aegis of Cancer Patients Aid Asso. CPAA

The initiative was supported by the District Grand Lodge of India Scottish Constitution and jointly organised by Lodge Mother India 110 (GLI), Lodge Friendship and Harmony 27 (GLI), Sir Lawrence Jenkins Lodge no 70 (GLI), The Lodge Ashok 122 (GLI), and The Deolali Lodge 91 (GLI).

The camp was inaugurated by Past RGM of WI, RW Bro. M S Federal and RW the DGM of the Dist. Grand Lodge of India (Scottish Const.) Bro. Kersi Limathwala.

In all, a total of 102 individuals underwent screening, with 40 recommended for further radiological tests such as USG prostate, abdomen, breast, and mammography. These follow-up tests will be provided FREE at NM Medical Centre by appointment.

The camp was attended by several Mumbai ARGMs namely, RW Bro. Quresh Habibulla, RW Bro. Anil Karnik, RW Bro. Shabbir Rangoonwala, RW Bro. Surendra Mayapuri, and WMs of L110, L27, L70, and numerous local brethren.

We will be carrying out many more of Charity events in the coming months and reach out to the society and our brethren, invoking this distinguishing characteristic which always shall define a FREEMASON.

In this edition we will conclude the Instruction Guide for the D of C by W Bro Dr. Chetan Arora.

Along with that we have a very insightful write up by W Bro. Rinesh Hegde on 'The significance of the Masonic Apron'.

W Bro. Rinesh is a rockstar and runs the popular podcast *The Ashlars* along with W Bro. Shishir Chris. In the quest to know more about Freemasonry I had stumbled upon this podcast and it caught on to me with the very 1st episode! They have really done a great job here.

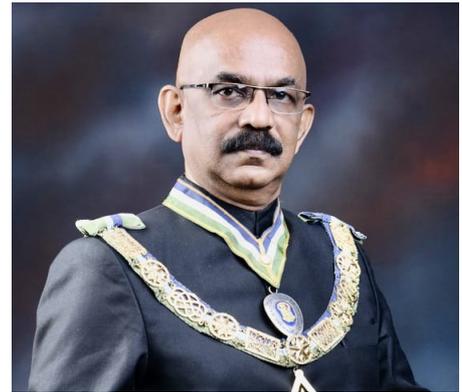
In fact I was happy to finally meet Bro. Rinesh and he was sporting enough to join us for our meeting as he happened to be in town.

I really exhort all the Brethren to read and understand the articles and I am sure you will enjoy discovering new facets about our craft.

Fraternally Yours

Bro. Nikhil Mehra

FOREWORD



**R.W.Bro. R.Sushil Raj OSM
RGM SI-2011-2014 . DyGMGLI 2014-2015**

I must congratulate W.Bro.Dr.Chetan Arora, the Regional Grand Director of Ceremonies for his initiative and efforts in bringing out this Instruction booklet of "the Director of Ceremonies" for the benefit of the officers and brethren of the region.

A well compiled edition which will be a guide to the regular working of any Lodge. The booklet is not limited to the Director of Ceremonies alone , but to all officers and brethren, highlighting on a disciplined functioning, maintaining decorum and protocol, for the lodge meetings.

I am sure this effort will help many of us to perform our duties and assignments to our lodges with perfection.

With fraternal regards and best wishes

Sushil

The Director of Ceremonies

By W.Bro.Dr. Chetan Arora



OPENING/CLOSING OF THE LODGE:

The D of C does little in the ceremony of opening/closing, as he has already seen to it, that everything is in order. He will place himself conveniently, within the hail of the WM (usually at the left of the WM), so that he will be able to see all that is going on in the Lodge. He should not necessarily call upon the brethren to stand or resume their seats during the ceremony as the WM is in charge of both the opening and the closing and both commands come in as part of the ritual. He should however be alert and quick to observe that the Wardens have attended to their respective columns and lights and also to see that the IPM is not oblivious of his duty. Remember it is no part of the duty of the D of C to prompt the WM. (which is always done by the IPM). For the sake of regularity this may be followed. As the IPM kneels and the deacons cope, the D of C says: *"To Order, Brethren"*

The Director of Ceremonies' duties during the meeting are essentially to:

- ensure the correct seating of Brethren,
- escort latecomers to their seats,
- oversee the conduct of business, including ballots,
- give salutations to distinguished visitors,
- ensure the proper conduct of ceremonies,
- prompt all ritual except that of the Worshipful Master (prompted by the IPM),
- attend promptly to any unexpected difficulties or emergencies,
- organise processions,
- *advise the Worshipful Master as required.*

CEREMONIES OF THE 3 DEGREES :

As far as the D of C is concerned, the ceremony of the 3 degrees may all be discussed together. As already discussed, first and foremost, it is desirable that he should ascertain that the requisites of each degree are ready and in their proper places. All the requisites should be close at hand, so that the sending of messages outside the Lodge or the D of C retiring to retrieve a required item may be avoided. In many Lodges the apron for the candidate is taken from the WM to the SW or else placed inside the SW's pedestal.

In the Craft Ritual the role of the D of C is limited to only retiring before the first degree ceremony, to assist the Tyler in preparing the candidate. He may ensure that before the Candidate is presented to the WM, for the communication of the p.g and p.w, others below the rank of the higher degree are passed out. This, he will ensure, every time the Lodge is opened in a higher degree.

The D of C may help, direct and guide the deacons during their perambulation if they go wrong (Prompting done only by D of C). In the third degree ceremony he may assist the WM during entrustment, if required.

When the WM leaves his chair for a PM to occupy, the WM will be seated to the left of the IPM. Please note that the IPM is never disturbed.

In Lodges where two candidates are there for a ceremony (avoiding two candidates for initiation is recommended), the D of C may assist the Wardens in giving the Grip, Sns etc. and also in raising the candidate and also during the entrustment in raising.

THE INSTALLATION MEETING :

The D of C has an important role to play and oversee on the day of the WM's Installation. He will be there early enough to see that the requisites for the ceremony are there. In the setting of the Lodge, he will make sure that the S & Cs are to be placed on the VSL the Master Elect is to take his obligation. A copy of the B of C, RGL Bye laws and the Lodge Bye laws are kept on the WM's pedestal. The Secretary has kept ready the relevant pages from the B of C to read the Ancient Charges and regulations to the Master Elect.

When the RGM or his representative is usually received for the ceremony, the D of C should see that an Order of Procedure is prepared and handed over to the WM & ME so that in the presence of the distinguished Brother, the

proceedings of the Lodge are in order. If the RGM or the GM is present, he should see that a Stwd, of the Lodge, be in attendance during their entire presence inside and outside the temple. The Stwd should be briefed on his duties of attending to the distinguished visitors. He should also advise the WM that the Lodge has to be closed in the third and second degree as per the ritual after receiving the distinguished visitor.

The D of C should see that as soon as the RGM or his representative is received and greeted the WM closes the Lodge in the third and second degree, admits all brethren, welcomes the RGM or his rep., before taking up the rest of the items in the agenda. It is suggested that on the installation evening, the Lodge may be opened earlier than the regular meeting time and after completing the regular items in the agenda, be Called Off after opening in the third degree.

The Lodge is Called On again at the scheduled time, so that the RGM or his rep. need not be kept waiting.

Before the Board of IM's he should see that a spare P.M's apron is at hand, see that all officers leave their collars behind when they leave the temple and that they are arranged in order for the investiture, and kneeling cushion close at hand for the ME to kneel. He should see that when the brethren re-enter they form a semicircle with the EA's in the S., FCs' in the W. and the MM's in the N.

If the RGM or his representative is conducting the ceremony of installation, the RGD of C will present the Master-Elect, not the Lodge D of C. The D of C will assist the IO till the incoming D of C is invested.

Checklist :

- The Book of Constitutions
- The Lodge Bye Laws
- The RGL Bye Laws
- The Warrant of the Lodge
- Master's apron
- Past Master's Jewel
- Inventory of Lodge Properties

RECEIVING THE RGM OR HIS REPRESENTATIVE :

The Lodge is opened in the Three Degrees. It is recommended that the Lodge is opened earlier in the evening to carry out its regular business, opened in the Three Degrees and Called Off. After the arrival of the distinguished visitor it may be Called On.

The WM reads the item on the agenda.

WM: *"The next item in the agenda is to receive RW The RGM R.W.Bro.or his representative."*

WM: *"Bro. D of C, you will retire and inform the RGD of C that the Lodge is ready to receive him."* The D of C is passed out by the IG. He goes outside the door of the Lodge and informs the RGD of C that the Lodge is ready to receive him. He comes back and occupies his seat.

(It may be noted that as the D of C is on a duty directed by the WM, he need not salute the WM when retiring or entering).

Tyl: Gives third Degree Knock..

IG: *"Bro. JW there is a report."*

JW gives one knock. IG goes to the door and opens.

Tyl: *"The RGD of C seeks admission."*

(Note: it is "seeks" and not "Demands" or "Desires"). IG closes the door and reports to the JW

IG: (With step and sign) *"Bro. JW. The RGD of C seeks admission."* (Holds Sign)

JW: (With step and sign) *"WM. The RGD of C seeks admission."*

WM: *"Admit him."*

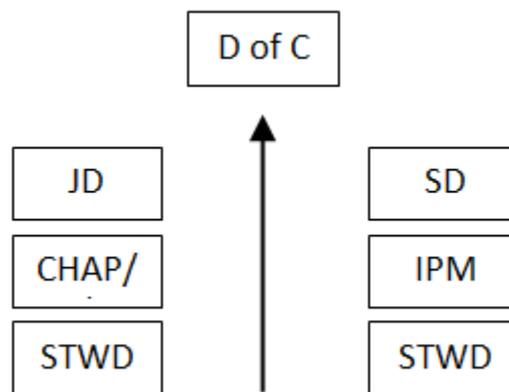
JW: (cuts sign, sits, says to the IG:) *"Admit him."* (IG cuts sign goes to the door and admits the RGD of C.)

RGD of C enters, salutes the WM in the Three Degrees and informs the WM that the RGM or his rep. is outside the door of the Lodge and desires admission.

WM: *"Bro. RGD of C, we will receive him with pleasure. Bro. D. of C form a suitable escort. In the meanwhile you may retire if you so desire"*

The D or C comes to the centre of the Lodge. He stands in front of the SW's pedestal facing the WM.

D of C: *"Bro. Deacons. Bro. Stwds."* Goes to the IPM and Chap (or PM) and escorts them to form the procession. The deacons align themselves in line with the JW's pedestal and stand facing inwards, so do the Stwds and PM's who stand behind the deacons. The Stwd should have the collars and aprons f their offices.



D of C: *"Escort turn, and Follow."*

The D of C leads the escort outside the door of the Lodge following the RGD of C (incase the RGD of C is in the lodge). They stop at the head of the RGL procession waiting outside. The D of C informs the escort that once outside the door of the lodge they have to exchange sides before they come in.

The IPM and the D of C are taken by the RGD of C to meet the RGM or his Rep. The IPM greets the Dignitary with a hand shake and says

IPM: *"R.W. The RGM, on behalf of the WM and members of Lodge No....., I welcome you to our Lodge."* The RGM acknowledges and instructs the Lodge D of C to take instructions from the RGD of C.

The RGD of C takes them back to the escort and the escort turns as they came and forms the head of the procession. The D of C places himself ahead of the

JD while the RGD of C is in front of the SD, both keeping in line. The RGD of C announces at the door of the Lodge and the Procession enters. Note that the WM remains standing when the procession returns and sits only when the RGM or his representative salutes him. He then stands up again till the deputation is seated. The deacons halt slightly before the WM's pedestal the escort halt and face inwards. The D of C should see that the Deacons cope when the RGM salutes the WM. Once the RGL deputation is seated the D of C conducts the IPM and Chap to their seats and then says

D of C: *"Members of the escort resume your seats, Brethren be seated."*

The same escort is formed when the RGM retires, waiting at the door for the RGL deputation to leave, the Deacons coping for the RGM or his rep, only.

OTHER GOOD PRACTICE ITEMS :

Dress Code :

The dress code in the lodge is clearly mentioned in the Craft Ritual Book/BofC/Reg byelaws/Lodge byelaws and even on the Summons. In spite of such clear instructions it is not followed, not even by the WM, principal officers and senior brethren in many lodges. D of C should use tact and force in right measure and inform the concerned brethren in person to correct the error before openly pointing it out in the lodge.

D of C Kit :

A kit consisting of black safety pins, a pair of scissors, a sticking tape (on which can be written) and a waist size string are the essential constituents of the kit.

Addressing the Worshipful Master :

Junior Warden: faces North and turns only his head towards Worshipful Master.

Inner Guard: faces East and turns only his head towards Junior Warden.

Secretary & Treasurer: face front and turn only their heads towards the Worshipful Master.

Tyler & Inner Guard dialogue :

During the Ceremonies, dialogue between Tyler and Inner Guard must be distinct and audible to every Brother in the Lodge. The Brethren are witnesses to each Candidate's progression and acceptance into each degree.

Acclamation of Ritual :

Some Lodges have a practice of giving acclamation after a Brother has completed a portion of ritual. D of Cs of these Lodges must ensure that this practice is not extended to any work undertaken by the RGL or GLI Officers or Officers visiting in an official capacity. Acclamation is indicated by a single clap and is generally used as an acknowledgement of a good ritual working, appointment or achievement. Applause is occasionally acceptable, such as the acknowledgement of some special achievement or award. These acknowledgements will be given under the direction of the Director of Ceremonies.

Court Bow :

The Court Bow is simply a forward inclination of the head, the body does not bend from the waist. Officers being placed in their seats give a Court Bow to the DC.

Signs :

The Director of Ceremonies should ensure that the signs given by every member of his Lodge is of a high standard and correct. A particular effort should be made by the Senior Lodge Officers, who are often in the limelight, as less experienced Brethren will be watching them to imitate what purports to be good practice.

In rehearsals it is useful to ensure that the Brethren know, for example, when to cut the Third Degree Penal sign with or without recovery. Detailed guidance on this subject is to be found in the 'Craft Ritual book'. Do not allow the steps or the position of the feet to be ignored, as these are integral parts of each sign.

The Sign of Fidelity when used for the Obligation in the 2nd Degree is given by placing the right hand on the left breast, fingers together, and thumb at right angles in the form of a square.

The Sign of Reverence is used for all Prayers and when the GAOTU is invoked. It is given with the right hand placed on the left breast but with the fingers and thumb together. The hand is dropped not cut.

We are instructed in the First Degree that a mason is expected to stand perfectly erect, the feet formed in a square. This should be remembered when giving the Third Degree signs when Brethren should remain erect with the body facing front. Also in the opening of lodge in third degree, maintaining the step reminds brethren about "All glory to the Most High" to follow.

Signs are given in silence whilst salutations or greetings are audible.

Salutations :

When Brethren are called to order the Director of Ceremonies should ensure that Brethren know to step and then make the relevant sign.

The FC salute is often the least well given at Installation meetings and would benefit from rehearsal followed by a reminder whilst the Inner Working is in progress.

The Grand or Royal sign is commenced with the hands at the sides.

Standing & Sitting :

Unless explicit in the ritual, it should not be necessary for the Worshipful Master to request Brethren to stand or sit. They should follow his example. As a guide for the Worshipful Master, when the candidate is kneeling he and the rest of the Lodge should be standing and when the candidate stands, he should sit.

Wands :

Wands are badges of office and should be carried by the D of C and the deacons. The deacon's wand should be held between the fingers and thumb not with the fist (it is not a javelin!). This enables the wand to be borne in the correct vertical position and raised just off the floor. The upper arm should form a square with the lower arm, as all Sq's; L's and P's are true and proper signs. When Deacons are instructing Candidates, wands must not be used as "pointers" e.g. in the Third Degree, and should never be leaned upon. The wands are NOT gavels and should NOT be used either to attract attention or to initiate floor movements - the voice should be sufficient.

Visitors Greetings :

Visitors greetings should begin from immediate left of the WM. Always note that brethren who are members of the lodge who are also members of the visiting lodge/s have to stand with the visitors when they are giving the greetings of the visiting lodge/s.

Charity :

Charity collection should start (like the visitors greetings) from the left of the WM, with the IPM. The D of C should inform the brethren to honour the charity bag while standing and the deacon or anyone else who is collecting the charity should have his eyes away from the bag.

The National Anthem :

When this is to be sung in the Lodge at the closing then it should be the subject of a separate announcement after the Closing Hymn.

FESTIVE BOARD :

The festive board is as important a part of any Masonic Meeting as is the work done in the temple. It affords brethren the opportunity to enjoy the social side of Freemasonry as well as the formal ritual side. It is also a "formal affair", with its structure and rules of deportment, giving enough time for the brethren to interact amongst each other and enjoy the fellowship.

The Festive Board is just as important as any ceremony in terms of correct protocol and decorum. Similarly, efficient management and good time keeping of the proceedings are the mark of an effective D of C.

Regrettably, many newly installed Masters are given no instruction or guidance whatever. The D of C must take the Master Elect through all aspects of the meeting before he goes into the Chair. He must go through the Toast List to ensure his proficiency. It is surprising how many errors are made e.g. the words, RW,VW, OSM are omitted. The Master Elect should also appreciate that the Toasts should include one for his Installing Officer in case it is not the IPM.

The gavel must be respected and total silence maintained before the Worshipful Master or D of C speaks. If necessary the D of C should robustly remind the Brethren.

It should be noted that the gavel is the emblem of power of the Worshipful Master, and his alone. It is only the WM who carries the gavel at the Festive Board. As the Worshipful Master's D of C it is practical for him to sit opposite of the WM. This makes for ease of communication between him and his WM.

Make sure that the WM is aware of the Official Toast List in front of him and that it is up to date. Always remember, as in the Temple, that the pace of the proceedings is under your control. Once events begin to drift it is more difficult to put them back on course.

The D of C has a great responsibility to see that the Stewards carry out their work efficiently and correctly during the festive board. If there is a banquet or toasts, the head table is laid out as follows:

The RGM is seated immediately to the right of the WM, followed by the ARGW and others according to the seniority of their ranks. The IPM and Installing Officer is to the left of the WM. And RGD of C opposite the RGM. If the GM and RGM are present the GM is seated on the right and the RGM on the Left of the WM. If

there is a candidate that evening he should be seated to the right of the WM, immediately after the Grand Officers. LTS Jewel recipients are seated on the left of the WM, after the IPM. It should be noted that only the WM should use the gavel at the festive board. It is the DUTY of the D of C to ensure that the gavel is respected immediately.

The D of C should see:

- The Stewards circulate amongst the brethren
- The fellowship is restricted to a time limit
- The gavel must be in the charge of the WM (not the D of C)
- The visitors and dignitaries are provided proper seats of honour
- The visitor who is to respond to the visitors toast is briefed ahead.
- Call the attention of the brethren as soon as the gavel is used by the WM
- The toast list is ready
- The obligatory toasts should have the correct names

EFFECTIVE USE OF TIME :

The importance of the D.C.'s role in controlling the pace of the proceedings in conjunction with his WM has been mentioned previously and cannot be emphasised too strongly. If a D.C. does not take a keen interest throughout then matters begin to drift and Brethren, particularly visiting Brethren, become impatient for the next part of the proceedings to begin. Always remember that there are three phases to a Masonic evening - Lodge, Festive Board and Socialising - all are important. If the first two take too long there is no time for the third. Consideration should be shown for Brethren who may have a long journey at the end of the evening or may have an early start on the following day. Consider how time may be used more efficiently, for example:

- What is the latest time the Lodge could be opened to accommodate the proceedings, particularly on Installation evenings?
- The minutes could be circulated with the summons. This also has the advantage that absent Brethren are kept up to date with affairs of the Lodge.
- If it is proposed to 'Call Off' during the proceedings the question should be asked: "Is it necessary and appropriate in the present day?" If the answer is "Yes" then it is the D of C's responsibility to ensure that the interval between Calling Off and Calling On again is kept to the absolute minimum and the Brethren remain readily available for re-entry. Nothing conveys an adverse impression of a Lodge more than seeing Brethren milling around aimlessly after

the Lodge has been Called Off with no real purpose in evidence and no one appearing interested in moving the proceedings forward.

- When a Candidate retires for restoration the Secretary could deal with routine matters including correspondence. Similarly it may be possible to take reports from the Almoner, Charity. The presentation of a Grand Lodge Certificate may be an option during this period.
- Consideration should be given to emailing many of the items traditionally reported in detail during the Risings. A lodge magazine/newsletter could cover these and other Lodge news.
- Try to ensure that the time allowed between ceremony and dining is minimal and rigidly maintained. This is also a courtesy to the caterer and his/her staff.
- Have a target time for toasts to commence and adhere to it. These should be kept running with no long delays in between.
- In deference to older Brethren and those with disabilities why not give them the courtesy to remain seated after the first few toasts.
- It is highly recommended to agree with Responders and Speakers the length and content (where deemed necessary) beforehand. If possible minimise the number-keep to the essential ones.

It is a good practice to complete the Festive Board by 10.00pm. A regular meeting ought to be achieved within three hours; an Installation meeting thirty minutes longer.

BROTHER D OF C

The D of C should be a good friend, confident demonstrator of the ceremonial, a guide and counsellor, the encouraging hand to the brethren lacking in confidence, and above everything else always approachable and calm, and in the process become loved for his contribution to the happiness of the brethren and that of the Lodge.

*You can reach W Bro Dr. Chetan on
crarora@hotmail.com*



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MASONIC APRON

By W. Bro. Rinesh Hegde

Why this topic?

The masonic apron is one of the most distinguishing features of a Freemason. There were several occasions wherein I had been directly or indirectly questioned on the requirement of the apron and its significance within Freemasonry. Here are a few:

When I attend my monthly masonic meeting, I skip 1 day of work every month on the same day as clockwork, obviously some of my close colleagues noticed this pattern and asked me about it. When I told them that I was a Freemason, most of them had no idea what I was talking about. A few of them did some research, and the one thing that got registered in their head, apart from, *"We Ruling the World"*, was and I quote, *"the guys who wear the funny aprons"*; not the impressions that I wanted to create.

During one of the meetings, I met a newly raised Master Mason, who was attending his first lodge meeting as a Visitor. He was happy to see another lodge's working and was eager to learn more. During our interaction, a query that he raised was, why do we need to wear an apron and are we not Freemasons without our aprons?

Lodges in Mumbai keep their aprons locked in the locker in the Freemasons' Hall itself. While attending a meeting there, we were informed that the caretaker who manages their lockers has not come to work. Upon hearing this, one of the senior brothers, requested the WM to reschedule the meeting to another date.

No Apron – No Meeting!

Military lodges are chartered in regiments within armies and these lodges are authorised to conduct their activities wherever the regiment is stationed. During a battle of Ladysmith, South Africa, British Army Freemasons were deprived of their regalia and used a large handkerchief as an apron.

These instances showcase the ignorant, the learner, and the educated. Freemasons around the world can be easily recognised thanks to the apron – Regular, irregular, clandestine, women, etc.

The History

The apron is not a recent creation but is as old as the first garment humans ever worn. It is mentioned in the Old Testament in the Book of Genesis 3:7 (King James Bible), '*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves **aprons.***' Anthropologists have found evidence of aprons in cave paintings and in the pyramids of Ancient Egypt and Mexico. They were symbols of priesthood in India, Persia, and many other cultures, and was considered as the sign of allegiance to the 'Gods' and a badge of authority.

Not just humans, even ancient Gods wore aprons and evidence of this can be found around the world in some of the old religious sites.

For one purpose or another, and in some shape or form, the apron has been used in almost all ancient mysteries. In Mithraism, the candidate was invested with a 'White Apron' and the initiate of the Essenes received an apron during his first year of membership.

So, when the SW invests us with the distinguishing badge of a Freemason which is, '*...more ancient than the Golden Fleece (from Greek Mythology and The Order of the Golden Fleece founded in 1429) and the Roman Eagle (symbol of Roman Legion) and more honourable than the Garter/Thistle (Order of the Garter founded in 1348 and the Order of the Thistle founded in 1687) or any other Order in existence*', he is not exaggerating but stating an actual truth.



The origins of Freemasonry are obscure, and we have many theories about it. The most common one is that Freemasonry developed from stonemasons of the medieval period. The reason why they are called Free Masons are thus:

There were two kinds of masons – the rough masons who worked on the ordinary hard stone which was what made the structure and the highly skilled masons who worked on softer or chalky stone called free stones which was part of the façades of the cathedrals.

They were also called Free Masons as they were the only group / guild of workers who could roam freely, from one worksite to another, and were not bonded to any lord.

These stonemasons were credited with building the great cathedrals and abbeys during the Medieval Ages and were referred to as 'Operative Freemasons'.



While working, these stonemasons needed to protect themselves from the stones that they cut or that gets chipped and used an apron made of thick animal skin or leather. It was quite large, held by a strap around the neck, tied around the waist, and covered them from their chest to their ankles.

But why do we wear an apron? We are not stonemasons cutting stones or operative freemasons building any cathedrals. Then what's the point of wearing an apron.

Over time Freemasonry developed into a 'Speculative' form and comprised of individuals who did not actually work as masons – they came to be referred to as 'Speculative Freemasons'.

The most famous definition of Freemasonry is, '*A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.*' Usage of an apron is exactly that; an apron is a symbol that teaches us certain things and has been concealed appropriately in a humble lambskin.

Let's dissect it!

We have been told that our badge, the apron, is made of lambskin – but why lamb, why not any other animal?

Lambs by their very nature have historically symbolised innocence, purity and honour. The lambskin apron's colour and spotless surface is a constant reminder to the Freemason that their life and conduct need to be pure and spotless. It needs to be guided by amoral compass.

The role of the apron is symbolic and our work for personal development has become like the physical labour of a stonemason. We acknowledge our craft's heritage by wearing aprons at our meetings. When a Mason puts on his apron he is said to be "*properly clothed*" and that is exactly what the SW checks during the opening of a lodge.

Old to New

During the initial years of organised freemasonry, freemasons were known to wear long leather aprons with flaps. Considering that the apron was worn as a symbolic gesture there was no need to make it cumbersome in size and material and hence the aprons started becoming shorter and softer fabrics were being used. The flap was retained but was cut to a triangular form or in a semi-circular shape. The lower part of the apron was sometimes squared off, but generally the corners were trimmed to give a semi-circular line, and the leather straps were displaced by ribbons or strings.

Freemasons used to paint their aprons with number of masonic symbols like, the Holy Bible, Square and Compasses, the two pillars, etc. As there were no restrictions on what needed to be represented on the apron in the Grand Lodge, each brother was free to adorn his apron with symbols that he can connect with.

The Union of the Modern and Antient branches of English Freemasonry in 1813 brought into effect many changes in dress and ritual which still prevail to this day. In respect to the Masonic apron it was felt necessary to have these standardised and the resulting effort are the aprons we have in use today.

If you look at those old 18th century aprons, the modern aprons lack the artistic flair as it obviously does not contain those symbols which was either hand-painted or manufactured by regalia companies with unique designs. However, our aprons still contain much Masonic symbolism and inner meaning which to an ignorant eye – is just a funny piece of cloth worn by grown men.



The Aprons

I will now try to explain the various types of apron; to keep this a bit simple, I will refer to the aprons worn in our Indian / English Constitution and American Constitution.

The Entered Apprentice Apron

As per the Book of Constitution, the entered apprentice apron should be a plain white lambskin, fourteen inches wide, twelve inches deep, rectangular in shape with white strings and a flap and without any ornaments.



The four right angles teach us that Purity, Truth, Sincerity, and Honesty are the foundations of morality. Like its colour, it teaches us to keep our actions pure or spotless of any misdeeds. Its four sides remind us to practice the four cardinal virtues. *Temperance* in word and deed, *Fortitude* as a noble purpose, *Prudence* in wisely ruling, and *Justice* to the noblest and greatest alike.

In India and England, the Entered Apprentice apron is the simple white lambskin apron with strings, and it is loaned to us for the meetings. It distinguishes a brother from a Fellow Craft and Master Mason so that we unknowingly do not open the lodge in the II or III degree. This apron does not have any rosettes ; again, used to distinguish between a Fellow Craft and Master Mason and to prove that they have still not received any badge of recognition of progression.



In USA, the Entered Apprentice apron is worn with the triangular flap pointing up. As he is an Entered Apprentice in Freemasonry, he represents the apprentice among

stonemasons who is doing rougher and dirtier work during their learning period and needs more protection to cover their chest and body completely. The flap is a symbolic gesture showcasing that an Entered Apprentice is a novice and is working on himself hence he needs protection when he chisels out the bad things from him to make his rough ashlar smooth.

The triangle of the flap is a symbol of Deity as it associates itself with the number 3 or Trinity. In Geometry, a single line cannot represent a perfect figure, neither can two lines, but three lines presents a perfect demonstrable figure, depicting the Eternal God, who is infinitely perfect in nature.

The upward facing triangle represents the soul or fire while the square represents the material world. It is worn in that manner to indicate that the

soul has not yet entered the material world.

Hence the apron presented to the Entered Apprentice is not just a piece of cloth to distinguish him as a Freemason but also a symbol to guide him to a moralistic life filled with virtues under the watchful eye of God.

The Fellow Craft Apron

The Fellow Craft apron used in India and England is exactly as the Entered Apprentice apron except that it has two rosettes as shown in the adjoining figure. It is not known how rosettes came to be added, but it would have been a way to distinguish the degree of the brethren, instead of just being ornamental in nature.



Rosettes are used as a badge of office and as a symbol of recognition. The two rosettes symbolise the dual nature of man (body and soul) and shows that he is at the stage where he needs to start understanding his body and his soul and bring them together to live a harmonious life. This means adulthood.

Gone are the days of being care-free but now it is all about how to be responsible and the fellow craft degree teaches us exactly that in the form of the liberal arts and sciences. The two rosettes could also refer to the two great pillars, showcasing that we have come to the stage where we know what the names and significance of those two pillars are, thus drawing our attention to the growth in our masonic knowledge.



In olden times the position where the two rosettes are placed contained buttonholes or buttons so that the same could be folded and the fold could store the tools that a fellow craft mason needed. This is exactly the reason why, I believe, a Fellow Craft freemason in USA folds his apron from one corner.

For an American freemason the triangular flap pointing down indicates that spiritual and material world has come together, and that the soul and body have now started to act in unison.

Master Mason Apron

The Master Mason Apron has the same dimension except that it has a blue lining on the border and an additional rosette on the flap. The apron strings that was available in both Entered Apprentice and Fellow Craft aprons have now been replaced by a belt with a fastener for longer use and there are two sets of silver tassels with 7 strings in each of them.



The tassels are a sort of 'in memoriam' to the strings that are no longer available in the apron.

The third rosette has now formed a triangle pointing upwards – it represents Soul or Fire or Divine Spark. The triangle of the flap represents Water and the union forms a square that represents matter or material world.

This shows our journey of finding ourselves is completed, which in literal and masonic sense is far from true.

The 7 strings represent:

The 7 Liberal Arts and Sciences

7 or more makes the lodge perfect

King Solomon was 7 years and upward in building the temple

7 Altars burned constantly before Mithra

7 gates to Vaikuntha (Lord Vishnu's abode)

Each of these points showcases our advancement in Masonic Knowledge.

The MM apron of USA in some jurisdiction is like our Master Mason apron except that it doesn't have the tassels and they normally have it embroidered with masonic symbols the most common being the Square and Compasses and the All-Seeing Eye. In some jurisdiction our Entered Apprentice Apron is their Master Mason Apron. The flap is down, the



corners are not folded thus portraying that they have merged their soul into their body proving their advancement in Freemasonry.

Colour of the Apron

Operative Freemasons during the 14th Century were divided among square masons and arch masons. Square masons will build the walls and arch masons will build the penetration in those walls. They were done by two different set of masons who were expert in their respective field. King Richard III provided each of this guild of mason coat of arms. The square masons were issued a coat of arms with the field of blue and the arch masons were issued the coat of arms with the field of red. Whoever here is a member of Royal Arch Chapter, now knows why we use the colour red and now all of you know why the colour Blue is predominant in Craft Masonry and why Craft Masonry is called Blue Lodges in USA.

The colour of the apron is closely related to Virgin Mary, which is itself derived from the Blue of the Ancient Egyptian Goddess Isis. It is emblematic of universal benevolence and charity and teaches us that our hearts should be expansive as the blue arch of Heaven.

Some lodges prefer to use their lodge colour instead of blue, for e.g. Lodge Star of the South and Lodge Saatvik. Grand Lodge of Scotland uses Green instead of Blue on all their aprons to represent the Order of the Thistle.

Snake in the apron

The modern method of fastening the apron by means of a hook and eye is interesting. If you notice the hook, it is a snake and it looks like it is trying to eat its tail. This is symbol of Ouroboros.



The symbol originated in ancient Egyptian iconography and was then adopted as symbol in Gnosticism and Hermeticism symbolising eternity. In our apron I would like to think it represents the eternity of our soul. So even though it was never part of the old apron, the modern masons added it beautifully.

The Worshipful Master Apron

As the Master Mason advances and becomes the Worshipful Master of his Lodge, the rosettes of the apron are replaced by three Taus or levels. The significance of a Tau needs a separate session, however, in brief it is a symbol of life or resurrection. One more explanation that I felt made sense was that the level or tau on the apron is a juxtaposition of the warden's column. When the Lodge is pen, the Senior Warden's column is erect whereas the Junior Warden's column is lowered and as the Worshipful Master is the one who is asking them to open the Lodge, these two columns are merged together to showcase his authority.



One more theory, the three Taus when merged together is a glimpse of the Chapter, where the icon is used. More on that when you join the Holy Royal Arch. From a stonemason's or the modern architect's/draftsman's perspective the tau/level represents the 'T-Square' used to draw square – square your actions. It also resembles the shape of cornerstone used during the 15th Century, that is what we all are.

Conclusion

Thus, the humble lambskin apron that you and I have been wearing for so many of our meetings is something that we should treasure. When handed over to us, it was white in colour, without fault or stain, that's the colour of our Soul when we were born. It is now our responsibility to maintain the apron without any blemish and keep it as a mirror of our soul and actions.

The Masonic apron stands for three specific things: it is the badge of innocence, it is the bond of friendship, and it is the universal badge of a Freemason that sets us apart from the world at large.

God's message to us is, *"Be faithful unto death, and I shall give thee a Crown of Life"*. May the purity and whiteness of our apron reflect our Soul so that when our name is called on Judgment Day, we may look up to God and say, *"I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course and I have kept the Faith."*

And the Great Architect will say, **"Enter, free and of good report"**.

α - Deo Gratias - Ω





Compiled and Sponsored by Bro. Nikhil Mehra