

Guidelines for the Lodges Desiring to Use a Chamber of Reflection

Developed by
Grand Lodge Education and Information Committee

Reviewed by
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Approved by
M.: W.: Grand Master
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INTRODUCTION:

According to its charter, the first responsibility of a lodge is to make Masons: to initiate, pass, and raise good men into the fraternity. Looking back over 300 years of speculative Freemasonry, we find descriptions of our initiatory practices in many of our foundational documents, including those written by James Anderson, William Preston, and Thomas Smith Webb as well as the early Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Ohio.

One important element of those practices is the candidate's declaration of intent (comprised of the questions propounded to each man prior to his first entrance into the lodge. Over the centuries, the emphasis on how a candidate is first prepared to be made a Mason has varied with the times, but it remains an essential requirement of the fraternity. In the 18th Century, Preston wrote that this preparation was twofold: internal and external. A man must be a Mason in his heart before he knocks at our door.

The recent interest in the Chamber of Reflection among some Ohio lodges as part of the initiatory experience has its root in this twofold nature. Conceptually, a Chamber of Reflection allows a candidate to prepare himself mentally – the Internal – while the Preparation Room is where he prepares physically – the External – for the degree. When he is prepared at both internal and external levels, he is ready to knock at the door of Freemasonry.

The goal of formally introducing the Chamber of Reflection concept is to enhance the candidate's experience of our Ohio Ritual and to better balance the emphasis on both the internal and external. This could be accomplished by using two separate spaces, each designed for its specific function. However, because few lodges have facilities to accommodate separate spaces for a Chamber of Reflection in addition to a Preparation Room, they must carefully prepare their existing space to facilitate the twofold aspect of our ritual and create essentially a Chamber of Reflection *and* Preparation.

In so doing, lodges must take care to create a space and an experience that conforms to Ohio ritual and Masonic Code of Law. The Internet and certain publications from other jurisdictions are rife with recommendations, objects, and symbolism that are foreign to our Ohio ritual, which is based on the work of Preston and Webb. While Master Masons are free to explore these speculations as individuals, lodges and lodge officers must transmit unimpaired our Ohio ritual and official teachings from generation to generation. Therefore, this document has been developed to provide examples and guidelines consistent with Ohio ritual for lodges that wish to incorporate a Chamber of Reflection into their lodge experience.

PREPARATION:

Why a Chamber of Reflection: Through a Poet's Eyes

As an Entered Apprentice, we are offered our first glimpse at the light of Freemasonry. All five of our senses are bombarded by an initiatic experience that our profane life has left us ill-equipped to comprehend. Strange words...ancient rituals...character tests...after which (under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Ohio) we are offered what appears to be an explanation of everything that has occurred. As the Entered Apprentice sits and listens to the lecture and charge of the degree, he will

either consciously, or unconsciously, decide whether or not he is going to seek to learn more. This gives us a glimpse at the first phase in development - knowledge.

But why is he ill-equipped? Why is it that after having petitioned a Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, after being interviewed by a committee of Masons, after being educated in some of the concepts of Freemasonry that we will encounter do we find ourselves ill-equipped? Perhaps it isn't so much about what we know or don't know about Freemasonry, but rather how we think and process the things.

The way we react to a given situation is greatly influenced by our state of mind prior to the encounter. Most Masons tend to go straight from the dining room, where they have been discussing the everyday minutiae of life with newly made friends, to a broom closet that doubles as a preparation room just off of the ante room, where jokes, comments and other unrelated comments can be overheard, and put into garments just prior to being thrust into a world that expects us to reflect deeply, to speculate, and to absorb teachings passed down from centuries past.

Is this a fair expectation? Perhaps it is not. Perhaps what would aid our new Brother in his transition from the profane to the initiated world of Freemasonry are a few moments of quiet reflection where his mind can ramp down from the hectic world beyond the sacred space of the lodge room, where he will face, perhaps for the first time, emblems of his mortality, and symbols that impress upon him the solemnity of the experience that awaits him. Perhaps this is what it needed to help our newly made Brother to get the most out of his experience - to help the experience be one that will leave him wanting to learn more...to participate more...and to truly seek light in Freemasonry. The Chamber of Reflection is offered as that place of transition.

INTENTION:

In professional theater, directors will tell you that the performance does not start when the curtain rises on a show; it starts as soon as the audience enters the building. The best of directors will consider the entire experience that they want their audience to have: from the music playing in the lobby to the lighting in the theatre when the audience enters to the words that are written in the program. They do this to ensure that the audience is in the best possible frame of mind to have the type of experience that the director intends.

In much the same way, the Chamber of Reflection is an option to prepare the candidate intellectually before preparing him physically for the personal and transformative initiation that he is about to experience. It is not meant to replace current ritual as much as offer guidelines for lodges to enhance current practice.

The guidelines for the Chamber of Reflection are given loosely to allow for a lodge's particular tradition, resources, and intention. A lodge should give significant thought to the type of experience that they would like their candidate to have as he is initiated. The lodge should craft that experience through the choice and arrangement of the various elements utilized. Elements should not be used for their own sake, but because they enhance the experience for the candidate. Suggestions, options, variations, and resources can be found later in this document to help guide a lodge in adapting and implementing the Chamber to reflect their particular tradition, resources, and intention.

It is not the intention that every lodge should adopt the use of a Chamber of Reflection; it is one option, among many, towards creating a strong lodge experience. At the very least, what a candidate experiences outside the lodge room should have the same pride, quality, and consideration as what he experiences inside the lodge room. Having a candidate wait in what is essentially a storage room, or a room in need of repair, or a clinically drab space does not communicate the message that the Freemasonry seeks to convey to its initiates: that this candidate is joining an organization and a lodge with a rich tradition that takes pride in their work. If all a lodge would at least clean, update, and repair the space where their candidate waits for the degree, this; too, will help prepare him for a personal and transformative degree experience.

It is the intention of the Grand Lodge of Ohio that the guidelines offered here be emblematic of the transition and transformation contained in the Entered Apprentice degree. The framework offered is meant to enhance the propounding of the questions and the candidate's experience in his journey from candidate to Brother.

PROCEDURE:

- Conceptually, a Preparation Room is a place for a candidate to be prepared physically and a Chamber of Reflection is a place for him to be prepared mentally. Ideally, these would be two separate spaces prepared for two separate purposes within the lodge; but this may not be practical. These guidelines are intended for a lodge that is using one room to serve as both a Preparation Room and a Chamber of Reflection.
- It is assumed the candidate has received On the Threshold before being led into the Chamber of Reflection.
- The candidate should be led into the Chamber of Reflection by the Stewards or Brother(s) charged with preparing the candidate.
 - The room should be prepared for the purpose of being a Chamber of Reflection.
 - The lights in the room should be dimmed or dark except for a single source of light such as a candle or lamp.
 - The Chamber should be silent, but it may be practical to have music played to cover noises from adjoining rooms and to establish a setting conducive to quiet reflection.
 - The room should contain a table and chair for the candidate.
- The candidate is caused to sit at the table and is instructed on the Chamber.
 - The candidate is told that he will be left alone for a few minutes to consider the emblems and questions before him, appropriate to the degree being conferred.
 - On the table in the Chamber are the following things:
 - Symbols of Transition or Transformation
 - Common symbols are an hourglass, a mirror, or the working tools of an Entered Apprentice.

- An Emblem of Light
 - This can be a candle, lamp, lantern, etc.
 - Opportunity to Reflect and Act
 - The card with the five questions given to the candidate (Declaration of Intent) should be on the table.
- At the direction of the Worshipful Master, the Stewards will retire to the Chamber and ensure that Declaration is answered satisfactorily and dress the candidate.
 - The Stewards should read the five questions aloud to the candidate and instruct him to answer each question in writing. The candidate and Stewards then sign the Declaration.
 - The candidate is instructed to divest himself in the usual manner and dressed for the degree (pants, shoes, etc.), but not prepared (hoodwink, cable-tow, etc.).
 - The candidate is instructed to wait patiently and contemplate the next step in his journey.
 - The Stewards leave the candidate to report and present the Declaration to the Worshipful Master.
- At the direction of the Worshipful Master, the Stewards will then prepare and present the candidate.
 - The Stewards will return and read the Penalty Disclaimer.
 - The Stewards will prepare the candidate by adjusting the clothes, putting on the cable-tow and hoodwink.
 - Once prepared, they will direct the candidate to knock.
- During the degree conferral, the elements for the Chamber should be removed from the room, so that the candidate returns to a simple Preparation Room with the purpose of investing himself with the things he had been divested of. At the proper time in the ritual, he will be returned to the lodge.

VARIATIONS:

The guidelines presented here are intended to enhance the transition and transformation contained in the Entered Apprentice degree by offering the candidate an opportunity to reflect and then affirm his choice to become a Freemason in this particular lodge. A lodge may prefer to further guide a candidate's reflection and any such variations should keep the original intention in mind, such as the following:

- The candidate is given a relevant piece of writing such as 'Preparation' by Carl H. Claudy to read and consider.
- The candidate is presented with a collection of Masonic histories of Brethren who have passed on and given a blank Masonic History for him to start and add to the collection.

- The Chamber is decorated with pictures of Brethren, the lodge, and lodge activities for the candidate to consider as he answers the five questions.
- The source of light in the Chamber is a candle that has burned down and is almost spent, on the table is a new candle. It would be the hope that the candidate would light the new candle from the old candle while in the room.
- The following suggestions represent additional actions in the chamber beyond silent contemplation, mental reflection, and the completion of the Declaration of Intent. These can be valuable speculative exercises; but should not be confused with our ritual Declaration of Intent. In other words, any such exercise should be in addition to, not replace the Declaration of Intent
 - In addition to the Declaration of Intent, the candidate is presented with a relevant piece of writing like ‘Challenges for the True Mason’ and asked to copy it down on a blank sheet of paper, in his own hand.
 - In addition to the Declaration of Intent, the candidate is presented with a blank piece of paper and prompted to write down what he expects to get out of Freemasonry, three strengths and three weaknesses that he sees in himself, or other reflective question. This paper will be kept and presented to him when he is raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason to reflect upon as he looks back upon his experience through ritual.
- This list should not be considered exhaustive and a lodge may adapt the experience within these guidelines, the Masonic Code of Law, and the ritual to reflect their particular tradition, values, and resources.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

- A Chamber of Reflection is an experience that is not right for every lodge and should be used only with the consent and will of the brethren of that lodge.
- When considering a Chamber, a lodge needs to determine and articulate what it is that they value, what they want their candidates to experience before the degree, and their available resources.
- A lodge’s actions should reflect their tradition and values, which may be communicated by a Chamber of Reflection or simply by due consideration given to the lodge’s current Preparation Room.
- A critical eye should be given to the choice, arrangement, and utilization of the elements of a Chamber of Reflection to ensure that they reflect and communicate the intention of the experience as well as the values and traditions of Freemasonry and that particular lodge.

- The Chamber of Reflection is not an end to itself, but part of an overall effort to communicate the values and traditions of Freemasonry through a strong, quality lodge experience. The Chamber is not the impressive, personal and transformative experience; it prepares the candidate for the impressive, personal, and transformative experience of the degree.
- As the Brethren craft their lodge experience, they should be sure to consult the ritual, Code of Masonic Law, and manuals.