

JUST, PERFECT AND REGULAR

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Brethren, I invite you all to recall the time you were initiated into Freemasonry and try to remember the words you were asked to repeat when giving your obligation in the first degree. To some, the impact of the whole ceremony is still very clear, but to others, the words said, were, at the time, not fully understood and with the passage of time are still not comprehended.

To me, this is a shame, but understandable. Some of the words used in the ritual have an entirely different meaning in today's idiom to that which was intended when written. For instance, the word *hoodwink*. The Oxford Dictionary defines hoodwink as *to deceive, a humbug*, which in turn is described as a sham or a nonsense.

Yet we admit in our answer to one of the test questions of the first degree that we were hoodwinked. Were we deceived? Was it a sham? Certainly not.

As is explained by the experienced brother who gives the reasons for preparation to the Entered Apprentice, we were hoodwinked or blindfolded as a symbolic representation of our darkness, or not understanding, of masonic mysteries. Perhaps, in this century, *blindfolded* should be the appropriate word used in our answer to the test question, as that was the meaning intended by the ritual writer.

Many other words with a different meaning today can be found throughout the ritual of the three degrees, so it is essential that the original meaning is understood to get the full impact from the degree which is being worked. It is my intention, in this address, to attempt to explain what I think the ritual writer meant when he wrote the words *just, perfect and regular*.

The blindfolded initiate is guided by the Junior Deacon around the Lodge, via the irregular steps, to a kneeling position where he is instructed to place his hands and his right foot in a peculiar masonic manner.

Peculiar is another of those words which have a different connotation in today's language to that of the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

The initiate is told to repeat words spoken to him by the voice of a brother he cannot see. The words of the ritual, taken as a whole, were skilfully crafted and were designed to make an impact upon the new Freemason. But when given in short segments, as in an obligation in order to be repeated, they become confusing.

We have the alliteration of *worthy, worshipful and warranted*, the rhythm of *hele, conceal and never reveal*, the legalise of the words *may heretofore* and the choices of *part or parts; point or points; him or them* and *he is or they are*, all contained in the first sentence of the obligation. No wonder the initiate is confused. Having just absorbed and repeated one set of words, he receives a different set in another form.

At the end of that long first sentence of the obligation, we are asked to repeat *OR in the body of a Lodge, just, perfect and regular*. Note that I placed emphasis on the word *or*. That is deliberate. Why did our ritual writer choose that word? The word *and* could have been used, but, when the whole sentence is studied, it is obvious that the ritual writer wished to give us a choice. We could either, communicate direct with a proven brother, already vouched for, at any time or place, or, to an unknown brother within the *just, perfect and regular* precincts of a Lodge.

Why not say *in a Lodge* – full stop? Why add *just, perfect and regular* and why must it be *in the body of a Lodge*? The answer is - because we know that in the body of a just, perfect and regular Lodge only proven Freemasons are present, even though some of them may be unknown to some of the brethren, and we know that the Tyler has done his job of keeping out all cowans and intruders.

Therefore, any strangers present must have been vouched for by another brother or proven by a trial conducted by an experienced Past Master. Our Brother Junior Warden must have been satisfied as well, because, at the opening of the Lodge, he affirmed that only Freemasons were present. If he had any doubts, he would have said so. The Junior Warden should have been introduced to the stranger by his vouching Brother before the Lodge was opened. Thus knowing that all present are Freemasons can only be true in the body of a just, perfect and regular Lodge.

What do those words mean? Twentieth century dictionary definitions can help us W 'some measure ...

Just— *conforming to what is right; rendering to each his due; or adj. upright; fair; correct; due; proper; right or adv. exactly; barely; a moment or not long ago; quite; simply; decidedly.*

Perfect – *adj. complete; not deficient; faultless; thoroughly learned; thoroughly trained or skilled; exact; precise; entire or as a noun the perfect tense or even as a verb, to perfect.*

Regular – *adj. following a principle; harmonious; consistent; systematic; symmetrical; recurring uniformly, habitual; constant; orderly; not casual; correct; properly constituted; not defective; fully deserving or as a noun, a regular (soldier).*

Which of those do you think apply to our ritual words? My choices are:- *just* .. correct or proper; *perfect* .. complete or entire; and *regular* .. properly constituted.

Why? Because a Lodge is *just* when it is properly formed; it is *perfect* when the brethren present complete a Lodge; and a it is *regular* when it displays a valid Charter showing it is properly constituted.

A Lodge is considered *regular* only when it has a Charter issued by the Grand Lodge under which jurisdiction it belongs and only when that jurisdiction is formally recognised by sister Constitutions. The Lodge Charter is entrusted to the Master at his installation and it is to be displayed at all times throughout every meeting of the Lodge (Rule 23, Book of Constitution, GL of NZ, 1999).

As a Freemason in a Lodge of the New Zealand Constitution, there are some Grand Lodges, throughout the world, which are not formally recognised for various reasons by our Grand Lodge but may be recognised by other Constitutions. They are classified as irregular and we should not either visit a Lodge under that Constitution or allow a Brother of one of their Lodges visit us.

Greece is a good example. In Greece today, there are two Grand Lodges, the Grand Lodge of Greece founded in 1811 by the existing French, Italian and English Lodges which were in the country then and the National Grand Lodge of Greece founded in 1987 as a breakaway group from the existing Grand Lodge. The split being caused by some Lodges objecting to the Grand Lodge of Greece sponsoring the creation of a Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Greece thereby taking the control away from those Lodges. This new National Grand Lodge did not receive any recognition for over five years, until, in 1993, the Grand Lodge of England recognised them and withdrew its recognition of the Grand Lodge of Greece. The Grand Lodges of Scotland, Ireland and a few others, soon after, emulated the English, but the Grand Lodges of the USA, of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and others, did not follow suit. No doubt this may still be under review and may change, but until then, a New Zealand Freemason cannot visit any lodge under the jurisdiction of the National Grand Lodge of Greece, though an English, Irish or Scottish Freemason living in New Zealand, can. Similarly, if a Greek brother from the National Grand Lodge Constitution visits New Zealand he can attend a meeting in an English, Scottish or Irish Lodge but not in a New Zealand Lodge. If you happen to be a visitor to one of those Lodges when that Greek brother visits, you are required to leave. You are not permitted to fraternise with him.

There are a few other Grand Lodges also not recognised by the Grand Lodge of New Zealand and Brethren are advised to seek information from our Grand Secretary before departing to an overseas country with the possible intention of attending a lodge meeting in that country so that you are aware of which ones are out-of-bounds. Some of those Lodges are in some States of the USA.

It is also required of a Lodge that it open a VSL at the beginning of each regular meeting and that it remain open throughout. In New Zealand Lodges, whose members are predominately Christian, the Holy Bible is used, but the book, or books, of other faiths are used when brethren who profess another belief are present. These VSL being placed side by side on the pedestal, all opened at the appropriate page for the ceremony to be worked.

What makes a Lodge *perfect*? At the opening of the Lodge, the Brothers Wardens are respectively asked as to how many principal and assistant Officers are there in the Lodge. The answers are three and five. In the second degree we are told that three *rule a Lodge*; five *hold a Lodge* and seven *make it perfect*.

Seven Brethren are needed to be present before the Lodge is able to be opened. If there are any less, the Lodge cannot be formed. Indeed, if the membership of any Lodge falls to seven, the Master must return the Lodge Charter to the Grand Secretary (B. of C., Rule 118).

This only leaves us with what makes the Lodge *just*? The Lodge must be properly formed, which means it must have been opened in *due form* by an Installed Master and his Wardens, the three principal Officers. Only an Installed or Past Master can open or close a Lodge. Although a Warden can conduct the business of a Lodge, other than the conferring of degrees, from the West or the South in the absence of the Master and the Deputy Master. But only after the Lodge has been opened by a Past Master of the Lodge, or a member of the Lodge who is a Past Master of another Lodge (B. of C., Rule 46).

For constitutional purposes, the Grand Master is a member of every Lodge under his jurisdiction by virtue of his Office, even though he is not liable for Lodge dues or levies (B. of C., Rule 44). Constitutionally, he can formally be represented in any Lodge by the Pro Grand Master (if appointed) or his Deputy Grand Master, or the Divisional Grand Master or the District Grand Master for the Division or the District to which the Lodge belongs. They can, as his representative, open and close any Lodge (B. of C., Rule 45) and, if required, remove the Charter from the Master's custody, thus making the Lodge not *regular* and unable to conduct any business. The Master can also remove the Charter from the Lodge thus rendering it unable to open. Even though the Charter is entrusted to his care, the circumstances of its removal would need to be extremely warranted before such a move was contemplated by the Master.

Hence, Brethren, the secrets and mysteries of a Freemason can be communicated freely within the body of a Lodge just, perfect and regular. But not anywhere else, unless they comply with the strict conditions of an Entered Apprentice Freemason's obligation and definitely not in an irregular Lodge or one where an un-proven stranger is present.

Did you understand what you were committed to when you repeated your obligation? If you didn't, I trust that now you do.