

THE PERFECT POINTS OF ENTRANCE

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I have often wondered at parts of our ritual which have no ready explanation, nor any forthcoming, and which are routinely committed to memory and recited when called upon to do so. One such is "The Perfect Points of Entrance" that demonstrate proof of being a Freemason. The Entered Apprentice responds in the ceremony that the Perfect Points of Entrance are "Of, At and On". Yet, how these are the perfect points of entrance is not clear. So I decided to explore how and when this was included in the ritual. I had recourse to Donald Falconer's "The Square and Compasses: In Search of Freemasonry", and Wilmhurst's 1925 paper on The Fundamental Philosophical Secrets in Freemasonry, and transcripts of some of the Ancient Manuscripts and decided to give it a shot.

In modern day Freemasonry clear reference is made to the perfect points of reference in the rituals in the United States of America: "Were I to ask you how I should know you to be a Mason, your answer should be: "By certain signs, a token, a word, and the points of my entrance." The signs, token, and word have already been explained to you at the Altar; it now remains for me to explain to you the points of your entrance, which are four: the Guttural, Pectoral, Manual and Pedal, and they allude to the four cardinal virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice."

However RW Bro Hiltz points out that there is no evidence to suggest that the cardinal virtues (which did not enter the rituals till the late 18th century) and the signs imparted to early Masons and classed as guttural, pectoral, manual and pedal were in any way related to each other or to the perfect points of entrance mentioned in early catechisms.

As far as I can make out, up to 1750, points of entry were no more than secrets, signs, tokens, etc. The first known reference is in a catechism[1], under the heading "Some questions that masons use to put to those who have ye word before they will acknowledge them". Catechisms in succeeding manuscripts [2] provide evidence of the continued use of the expression long after the original Grand Lodge of England was established. However, these catechisms refer to several operative signs that are no longer used in speculative freemasonry, but which are still included in the rituals of the Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviers, Plaisterers and Bricklayers, commonly referred to as "The Operatives".

In the earliest lectures these were called "Principal Points". They began to be referred to "Perfect Points of Entrance" in the rituals of the operative freemasons in Scotland and Ireland which were later adopted by the Ancient Grand Lodge of England (the Atholl Grand Lodge). Those catechisms seem to have fallen into disuse by about 1760 but reappeared in England near the end

of the eighteenth century, when William Preston explained them in his First Lecture of Freemasonry (1790). When the United Grand Lodge was formed in 1813, various aspects of an operative origin, including “the perfect points of entrance” and the tassels in the four corners of the lodge, were either omitted or so reduced in scope that their true symbolic importance was virtually lost.

In his enlightening book of questions and answers, entitled *The Freemason at Work*, Harry Carr gives an interesting review of the subject and questions whether “entrance” signifies the precise moment of entry into the lodge, or if it relates to the whole ceremony of admission. We must keep in mind that the original catechisms were intended to provide a foundation to help freemasons understand the ceremonies through which they had been conducted. Falconer gives an excerpt from the catechism of “the perfect points of entrance” which I reproduce below.

The Catechism

The Points necessary to make a freemason are five. They are called the Perfect Points of your Entrance and are Preparation, Obligation, Sign, Grip or Token and Word.

Before you entered the lodge you were prepared in accordance with ancient custom, so that you could be received at the door of the lodge, admitted into the presence of the brethren, interrogated, obligated, brought to light, instructed, entrusted, proved and invested as freemasons have been from time immemorial. Your conductor knocked on the door of the lodge, where you were received in darkness on the point of a sharp implement and exhorted always to behave with the utmost fidelity.

When admitted into the presence of the brethren you were required to kneel while the blessing of heaven was invoked. You were then conducted around the lodge and interrogated to ensure that your application for admission was just and that it had been based upon worthy motives alone, as well as to prove to the brethren that you had been properly prepared to be made a freemason. You were then presented to the Master, who gave instructions for you to advance towards the east with the proper steps, then kneel with your left knee bare, which symbolically was on the rough ashlar stone. The master placed your hand on the Volume of the Sacred Law, in which position you took the great and solemn obligation of an apprentice freemason. When you had completed your obligation you saluted the Volume of the Sacred Law and were brought to light in the usual regular manner. The symbol of bondage was then removed and the three great lights in freemasonry were explained.

At the beginning of the final stage of your admission you were placed in front of the Master on the squared pavement, when he told you how to advance towards him with the first regular step in freemasonry. The Master then instructed you in the method of giving the sign, showed you how to communicate the grip or token and entrusted you with the word. He also cautioned you that the word must never be given without the grip, but even then only in the same strict manner as you had received it. The derivation and import of the sign and the word were also explained.

You were then conducted to the wardens for examination to prove your ability to communicate the modes of recognition in the prescribed manner. You were invested with the distinguishing badge of a mason and warned that you must never disgrace it, because it will never disgrace you. In future times you probably will visit lodges where you are not known to any of the members present, when you will be required to undergo examination.

To the question "How were you made a freemason?" you should reply "By the perfect points of my entrance."

To the question "What were the perfect points of your entrance?" you should reply "Preparation, obligation, sign, grip or token and word." When asked to give proof of your proficiency you must only communicate the modes of recognition in the same manner and with the same strict caution as you have received them. As during the course of your examination you might also be asked specific questions concerning the mode of your preparation, I will now explain it in more detail."

Falconer notes that in the ceremonies through which an apprentice is conducted there are, in fact, three separate points of entry.

The first point of entry is when the candidate approaches the door of the lodge. This is the preparatory entrance that is complete when the candidate has been received upon the point of a sharp implement and admonished appropriately.

The second point of entry is when the candidate is called upon to kneel while the blessing of heaven is invoked, after which the core element of the initiation ceremony is carried out. It consists of the perambulation,

preliminary interrogation, presentation and advancement towards the east, followed by the obligation. This entrance is complete when the candidate has been brought to light in the usual regular manner and has received an explanation of the three great lights in freemasonry.

The third point of entrance is on the squared pavement when the Master instructs the candidate to advance towards him with the first regular step in freemasonry, instructs him in the sign, communicates the grip or token to him and entrusts him with the word. This entrance is complete after the Wardens have examined the candidate to prove his proficiency in the modes of recognition and he has been invested with the distinguishing badge of a mason.

RW Bro Ray Hilton, however, notes that, "we might consider the Perfect Points of Entrance, not necessarily in the order in which they are listed, as: the reception upon the point of a sharp instrument, the due guard, the penal sign, and the position in the northeast corner of the lodge upon the first step of Freemasonry, which allude to obligations, penalties, and moral responsibilities.

According W. L. Wilmhurst[3] there is a speculative explanation to the Perfect Points of Entrance, which refer to appropriate faculties of perception and understanding. "For just as to enter into perception and understanding of the outer world we need our five outward-pointing senses, so for perception and appreciation of the inner world, we need a corresponding inward sensorium. The pentagram or five pointed star indicates our five points of entrance into relations with the world of sense and phenomena by the limited imperfect channels of the senses; and, to cognise the secret things of supra-sensual life, we must have developed corresponding, but perfect points of entrance into it in the form of soul-faculty, inward vision, inward audition. Hence inward truths and mysteries are inevitably and automatically secret from those who have not yet acquired perfect points of entrance to them, not because of any capricious withholding of them by some better informed person, but because such men are without the appropriate faculty for perceiving them; their inner vision is as yet hoodwinked, darkened, and prevented from recognising them."

Finally a perusal the Rev Olivier's[4] paper reveals that the rituals were changed from time to time as and when Lodges broke away from a Grand Lodge to form their own Grand Lodge, resulting in doubt and uncertainty about the origin of the phrase which ritualists are unable to rationalize.

What is clear is that the current vestige of the “perfect points of entrance” that exist in our ritual stems from the Prestonian ritual. In 1777, the Lodge of Antiquity, of which Bro. William Preston was a Past Master, seceded from the London Grand Lodge and avowed an alliance with the Grand Lodge at York. Preston was initiated in a York Lodge, became a thorough master of all the details, as practised by both sections of the Fraternity. He developed a ritual that divided each degree into sections, and subdivided each section into clauses as a convenient help to memory. In his Fifth Clause we find the following interrogation:

Q. How do you know yourself to be a Mason? ...

A. By having been examined and approved, well reported of, and regularly initiated into the Order-

Q. How will you convince me that you are a Mason? ...

A. By signs, tokens, and perfect points of entrance-

Q. What are signs?

A. All squares, angles, levels and perpendiculars are good and sufficient signs to know Masons by-

Q. What purpose do they serve? ...

A. To distinguish a Mason in the light-

Q. What are tokens? ...

A. Certain friendly and brotherly words and grips, which distinguish a Mason in the dark as well as in the light. -

Q. Will you give me the points of entrance? ...

A. Give me the first and I will give you the second. -

Q. I hele.

A. I conceal ...

Q. What do you conceal?-

A. All secrets and mysteries belonging to Free Masons in Masonry, except it be to a true and lawful Brother for his caution :

Q. But as I am the examiner, you may safely reveal to me the points of entrance...

A. Of, at, and on.

Q. Of, at, and on what? ...

A. Of my own free-will and accord, at the door of the Lodge, and on the point of a sharp implement.

[1] Edinburgh Register House MS of 1696

[2] Sloane MS, also of about 1700, The Dumfries No 4 MS of about 1710, the Trinity College, Dublin MS of 1711, the Wilkinson MS of about 1727 and Samuel Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* of 1730

[3] Lecture delivered to the Masonic Study Society , London in 1925

[4] "The various rituals of freemasonry beginning in the tenth century", Lecture delivered in the Witham Lodge, Lincoln, England, 1863