

The Writing Ceremony - or as Depeche Mode would say “Enjoy the Silence.”

Todd Connor

V1.2

July 2024

To be a good and bright Mason

Within our first hours as a Mason, we are seemingly given permission from the Worshipful Master and challenged to jot down any portion of the ceremonies through which we have passed that we can remember. We know the result that this challenge usually elicits, but why are we bothering to shake up our new initiates so jarringly over seemingly innocuous trifles – especially when we are in the company of established Brothers who are presumably far more adept and knowledgeable of our ceremonies than the new Entered Apprentice, and well-versed in anything that might be transcribed? Is this because the contents of our ritual monitor is material of such sensitivity and utter import that merely permitting it to be written in any form more expressive than the established cipher of the Grand Lodge of Florida would forever tarnish the integrity of our gentle Craft and make available our deepest secrets to the most unscrupulous profane? There are other lectures out there that posit that "the secrets of Freemasonry cannot be revealed" – not because it is forbidden, but rather because the notions and concepts of the Divine, Nature, and ourselves that one man formulates within his own heart are ineffable; they belong only to that man within whose heart they reside. There is no language with which those "secrets" may be effectively communicated to anyone, much less someone who has not yet contemplated our symbols and lessons.



Statuette of the Egyptian god Harpocrates, image credit: https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/

But Freemasonry is not the first or only group to inculcate such strictures on maintaining silence and secrecy. The same principles of discretion existed in all the ancient mysteries and systems of worship. When Aristotle was asked what thing appeared to him to be most difficult of performance, he replied, " To be secret and silent."[1] The ancient Egyptians celebrated a god who is thought to have embodied the virtue of silence: Harpocrates. Most representations of Harpocrates depict him giving the seemingly universal sign of "Shush!" This "shush" symbol which he often portrays in his representations may be recognized by most well-traveled Masons from several of our degrees in various Masonic bodies. In the school of Pythagoras, silence was admonished by the sage to his disciples and a novitiate of five years was imposed upon each pupil, which period was to be passed in total silence and religious and philosophical contemplation.

[1] Mackey, Albert G., Cryptic Masonry – Manual of the Council, (Maynard, Merrill & Co., New York, NY, 1897) p43

When his novitiate was complete, he was then admitted to full fellowship in the society, and an oath of secrecy was administered to him on the sacred tetractys[2]. In contemplation, this isn't terribly divergent from our Masonic protocol of today as it pertains to our initiation period and processes.

A possible reason for inculcating this discipline of discretion and silence can perhaps be attributed to our Masonic landmark to not discuss religion or politics. This prohibition naturally fosters a neutral environment focused on personal and moral development, free from the divisiveness that such topics can bring. It helps maintain harmony and brotherhood among members of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Harmony with our Brothers is, indeed, a cornerstone of our Craft – but I don't believe that this is the core rationale behind our practice of silence and discretion. When one endeavors to learn a topic of ineffable quality such as that which our Craft embodies, there is no certainty that each student will arrive at the same revelations in the same proportions or lagniappe. Each of us has progressed along our Masonic journey and have achieved various degrees of revelation based on the time that we have devoted to study and our personal capability and willingness to understand. There is surely no guarantee that each pupil will reach the same level of understanding contemporaneously. There is also the possibility that the underlying theological framework of those concerned may be completely incompatible vis-à-vis individuals with differing experiences and create differing predispositions and predilections from one man to another.

On the topic of secrecy, Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, wrote in the mid-fourth century that "the Lord spake in parables and allegories which he spoke in public. The splendor of glory is for those who are early enlightened: obscurity and darkness are the portion of the unbelievers and ignorant." Similarly, St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan writes in his work *De Mysteriis*, that "All the Mystery should be kept concealed, guarded by faithful silence, lest it should be inconsiderately divulged to the ears of the Profane. It is not given to all to contemplate the depths of our Mysteries." And we can state the same notion, more simply quoted from Bible passage Matthew 7:6, which reads "Beware of casting pearls before swine."

<u>So why all this secrecy?</u>

The consequence of inappropriately revealing esoteric secrets was stated by St. Cyril of Alexandria in the mid-fifth century. He states that the need for discretion is because "men are apt to deride what they do not understand. And the ignorant, not being aware of the weakness of their minds, condemn what they

[2] A tetractys is an emblem equivalent in symbolism to the Jewish tetragrammaton, in reference to Diety.

ought most venerate."[3] In my own personal experience, your humble author can honestly claim to have been qualified by Brothers in our Craft as "zoomie" in reference to the occult or mystical nature of some of my writings of the past.

Albert Mackey sums up what I feel to be the fundamental goal of our commitment to silence and discretion, when he states:

> {The Mason shall} work in secrecy and silence, that he may prepare and preserve the sacred deposits of truth until the time shall come for its full revelation. And so should all men do, working now, yet not for the present time alone, but that their labor may bring forth fruit in the future; laboring here amid the foundations of the first temple of this transient life, that when their hours of work are finished on earth, the deeds which they have done may be brought to light, and the reward be bestowed in the second temple of eternal life.[4]

In conclusion, Brothers, we are all on the same journey; we share many of the same paths. Some of us follow those paths leisurely, others assiduously. Some explore many paths before settling on a desired route and some devoutly trace to a narrow margin. Each of our backgrounds are diverse and our pantheons don't always converge. Somehow, we all manage to gather in peace and harmony under the canopy of Heaven and travel our common ground to the betterment of all. Let's continue to enjoy this road.

As a final statement, I will recall the words of a famous philosopher of our time made famous from the Austin Powers films, Dr. Evil, who admonished us to "zip it!"

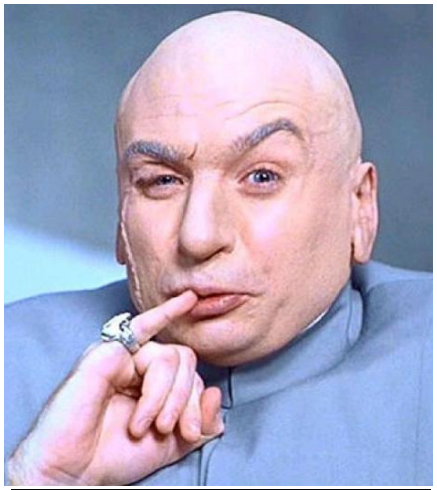


Image credit: Michael Myers, *Austin Powers*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 1997

[3] Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, 2nd annotated edition, 2nd printing, (Supreme Council, AASR SMJ, Washington, DC, 2016) p649

[4] Mackey, Albert G., Cryptic Masonry – Manual of the Council, (Maynard, Merrill & Co., New York, NY, 1897) p37

Bibliography

Mackey, Albert G., *Cryptic Masonry – Manual of the Council*, (Maynard, Merrill & Co., New York, NY, 1897)

Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, 2nd annotated edition, 2nd printing, (Supreme Council, AASR SMJ, Washington, DC, 2016)