



**Privacy**  
**Peace**  
**Harmony**

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## Privacy Peace Harmony

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It is worth remembering why Freemasonry has a tradition of secrecy. In the Middle Ages, secrecy was an economic necessity. Qualified stone masons were well paid for their time. The great Gothic building boom was in full swing, and the demand for new buildings was great. That meant that the demand for qualified builders was great. But how was someone to know, when a man showed up at a work site, claiming to be skilled in masonry, that he was qualified?

It was quite literally a matter of life and death. Unqualified builders were much more likely to cause accidents on the job, and most of those accidents were fatal. Poor work in construction might not show up immediately, but might a short time buildings developed major problems a perhaps even collapsed. And paper certificates assuring others that a man was a qualified builder did little good in a time when few people could hardly read and write,

The operative masons solved the problem by giving passwords and signs to men when they became qualified as builders, and by keeping those passwords and signs strictly secret.

Another tradition which developed at the same time was that nothing discussed inside the Lodge was ever discussed outside. That point was so important that it is found in possibly oldest Masonic document which exists--the Regius Poem, written about the year 1380. The poem lists several essential points for the conduct of Masons. The third point, translated into modern English, reads:

The third point must be strictly observed.

. . . The privities (that is to say, those things which happen) in the Lodge room, must never be told; nor shall you ever tell others of the Lodge business. Keep all such information to yourself, lest you bring shame upon yourself as a teller of tales or a violator of confidences.

It remains true today that it is a serious offense against Masonic ethics, in some places Masonic law, to argue about the business of the Lodge when not in the Lodge. The original reasons are obvious---the Lodge was the business office of the guild or incorporation. It is never wise to discuss business strategy and matters in public. Today, it is not a matter of trade secrets; but it is a strong tradition that our business is our business. It is private, not public, and should no more be discussed in public than should sensitive family matters. There is a powerful additional reason, of course. Non-Masons will not want to join a fraternity which openly disagrees in public. They have enough squabbling in their own lives without seeking out more.

A third tradition which developed in the Middle Ages was that no conflict between members is to remain unresolved. Again, it was originally a matter of survival. On a medieval construction job, accidental death was a very frequent reality. If two members of the Lodge had an argument--if there were, in the words of the ritual, "a Brother with whom you are at variance," you could not completely trust the man working next to you. It would be easy for him to arrange an "accident," or just not extend the little extra effort which might keep you from falling.

That is probably the reason the Regius Poem lists several things a Mason must do and must not do. If we paraphrase them into modern English, you can see that they centre on things which can cause conflict. For example:

- Do not take work away from another Mason.
- Do not criticize another man or his work or find fault with him: if you see him doing something you think is wrong, advise him, but never discuss it with another person.
- Especially when dealing with a Brother, keep all promises and pay all obligations quickly.
- Never violate the chastity of the female relative of a Mason (and the Regius Poem adds that you must leave his mistress alone as well).
- You are not required to like another Mason, but you are required to love him and to treat him as a Brother.
- There had to be complete trust, and that meant there had to be complete harmony.

For that reason, a Lodge could not be closed if two or more members had an unresolved conflict. Originally a Lodge could not be closed unless there was true peace, and if that meant that the Lodge stayed open indefinitely. Eventually, pressure from other members would force the quarrelling parties to work out a compromise.

Our language today contains many references to those traditions.

From different Rituals:

“Masons being Brethren, there exists no invidious distinctions among them,” and that they “love each other mightily.”

“We are taught that nothing can be united without proper cement, and that the perfection of the building depends upon the suitable disposition of the cement. So, charity, the bond of

perfection and social union, must unite separate minds and interests, that like the radii of a circle which extends from the centre to every part of the circumference, the principle of universal benevolence may be diffused to every member of the community. As it is used by the operative brother to spread the cement which unites a building into one common mass, so the F...n uses it emblematically for the noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of Brotherly love and perfection; that cement which unites the members of the fraternity into one sacred band or society of brothers, among whom no contention should ever exist.”

“... dependence is one of the strongest bonds of society: men were made dependent on each other for protection and security, thereby enjoying better opportunities for fulfilling the duties of reciprocal love and friendship.”

... and I'm sure we could relate to certain other passages from our own Ritual?

So the foundations of privacy, peace and harmony were laid early in our history. But they have, of course, been reinforced since then.

In many countries in the past 300 years, just being a Mason could get you killed. Whether we are speaking of the persecutions of the church, of Hitler's concentration camps, the Russian gulag, or some countries in South America, being a Freemason was literally punishable by death. Brothers had to rely on others with complete trust. And the tradition that you did not leave a Lodge room with an unresolved conflict was even more powerful.

By way of a factual example, it was, and should still be, so powerful, that during the Cherokee Civil War, fought in Oklahoma at the time of the War Between the States, it is said that the beginning of the end of the war happened when men

from both sides, men who had sworn to kill each other and who had killed many on the opposing side, met at a Masonic altar and knew they could not honourably leave until they had found a resolution to their conflict.

These three principles----

Privacy - the rule that what happens in Lodge stays in Lodge.

Peace - Masons are not allowed to become angry with each other, nor criticize each other, nor speak ill of each other

and most importantly;

Harmony - the peace and tranquillity of the Lodge must be preserved at all times, and that it is un-Masonic to bring about division or dissention within a Lodge

Brethren, these three principles have served us well for perhaps a thousand years, and I hope will continue to support us for another thousand years!

So Mote It Be!

Thank you!