



Sussex Freemasons - West Group

'The West Wing'
(Bognor, Chichester, Clapham, Littlehampton,
Midhurst, Pulborough, Steyning and Worthing)

'The West Wing' Learning and Development Team.

'The West Wing' Lodge of Instruction.

Lesson 5: 'The North East Corner.'

Preceptors Notes

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The North East Corner.

The lesson on Charity.

Lesson / Tutorial Aim & Objectives

Explore the ritual of the North East Corner

By the end of this lesson/tutorial you will be able to:

- Understand the ritual of the North East Corner.
- Reflect upon the virtues of Charity.
- Follow the writings of the Rev. Neville Barker-Cryer.

Video Link

www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202201the-north-east-corner/



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Lesson Text

In the teaching profession there is a phrase, "Tell me I will forget, show me I will remember, involve me and I will understand." There is no better institution than Freemasonry that understands this phrase more. All our allegories (stories), are playlets which involve the student (the candidate), taking a major role in the telling of a story which teaches some form of personal development. The ritual of the North East corner is one such powerful piece of teaching.

Let us examine that piece of ritual more closely.

The lesson on Charity.

Ritual.

It is customary, at the erection of all stately and superb edifices, to lay the first or foundation stone at the North East Corner of the building. You, being newly admitted into Freemasonry, are placed at the North East part of the Lodge figuratively to represent that stone, and from the foundations laid this evening may you raise a superstructure perfect in its parts and honourable to the builder

Freemasonry became popular in the 17th Century because it was a society of equals, signified by the wearing of the white apron by all its members. A place where honourable men of different religions and political differences could meet together as brothers.

The newly obligated Mason is placed with his feet in the form of a square to represent the foundation stone, in this instance a rough ashlar, an example of which is on the JW's pedestal. In the early ceremonies the rough ashlar would be placed at the candidate's feet. In the NE because in all medieval churches this was the situation of the Easter sepulchre, the symbolic tomb of Christ, and as Reverend Neville Barker Cryer explains in his book 'What do you know about the ritual?' "from where the first light of Easter came the promise of God's love and care." This seems appropriate for this lesson on charity and brotherly love.

Having been conducted from the West and darkness, to the East in search of light, we find ourselves at a point where the first rays of the morning sun shines through ready to guide us for the rest of the day and through every day thereafter.



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In order to reach this position in the Lodge you have undergone a series of examinations by senior brethren. You have “searched for and found” Freemasonry. You have “asked and it has been given”. You have “knocked and it has been opened unto you”. You could have failed on any of these three stages. So your ‘external’ appearance is that of a just and upright man. An “Entered Apprentice”. One who has yet to be guided and tested on his “internal” moral values, the skill sets that will be set by the Master and which you could still fail if the desire to learn is not there. What you have to learn will become apparent in discussions with senior brethren and your mentors.

Ritual.

In a society so widely extended as Freemasonry, the branches of which are spread over the four quarters of the globe, it cannot be denied that we have many members of rank and opulence; neither can it be concealed that among the thousands that range under its banners, there are some who perhaps from circumstances of unavoidable calamity and misfortune, are reduced To the lowest ebb of poverty and distress. On their behalf it is our usual custom to awaken the feelings of every new made Brother by such a claim on his charity as his circumstances in life may fairly warrant. Whatever, therefore, you feel disposed to give, you will deposit with the JD; it will be thankfully received and faithfully applied.

On every continent around the world you will find a Freemason’s Lodge. Such is the influence of its message of equality - “Brotherly love, relief and truth”. From aristocracy to the working classes the moment you set foot inside your Lodge there is no social status, you are all equal.

Rudyard Kipling in his poem, ‘Mother Lodge’, explains it wonderfully when he writes about his Lodge in India:

‘Outside – “Sergeant! Sir! Salute! Salaam!”

Inside – “Brother” an’ it doesn’t do no ‘arm,

We met upon the level an’ we parted on the square,

An’ I was Junior Deacon in my Mother Lodge out there!

Ritual.

You now stand, to all external appearance, a just and upright Mason and I give it in strong terms of recommendation ever to continue and act as such. Indeed, I shall immediately proceed to put your principles in some measure to the test, by calling upon you to exercise that virtue which may justly be denominated the distinguishing characteristic of a Freemason’s heart – I mean Charity. I need not



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With such a membership it is natural that some may fall upon hard times through accident, illness, economic collapse or world catastrophes, none of us are really safe. It is important, therefore, that we acknowledge this fact and embrace the opportunity to help those who are less fortunate, it could quite easily be you. What does it feel like to have nothing? To have everything taken from you. To be in despair not knowing when the next wage will come in to put food on the table and a roof over your family's head. In a somewhat dramatic way you are temporarily placed in that position and in true teaching fashion - "involve me and I will understand".

Ritual.

"Have you anything to give in the cause of Charity?"

"Were you deprived of everything v..l..e previously to entering the Lodge?"

"If you had not been so deprived would you give freely?"

"WM, our new-made Brother affirms that he was deprived of everything v..l..e previously to entering the Lodge or he would give freely."

Questions from the JD and his acknowledgement to the WM. It is the pause between the first and second question that a reality of the situation becomes apparent. More so, perhaps, for those who in society have wanted for nothing and for the first time having to think about it. Stripping away all the social and economic trappings and exposing the man, his character and his beliefs. A man wearing that white apron the same as every other man in that room who has been through the same experience. It is an experience that unites us as equals and bonds us as brothers.

Ritual.

I congratulate you on the honourable sentiments by which you are actuated; likewise on the inability which in the present instance preclude you from gratifying them. Believe me, this trial was not made with a view to sport with your feelings. It was done for three especial reasons:

It is here that the WM explains why you had to go through that learning experience

Ritual.

First, as I have already premised, to put your principles to the test;



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When you went through the interview process the brethren would have brought to your attention the fact that we are, in part, a charity fund raising institution. So it is important that the brethren see that you are a charitable person.

Ritual

Secondly, to evince the Brethren that you had neither m..y nor m..c substance about you, for if you had, the ceremony thus far, must have been repeated

Such is the importance that you enter Freemasonry with only the "tongue of good report" as your qualification. You cannot buy your entrance or force your way in. It is about who you are as a man and your desire to improve as a Mason, for "All men are created equal" (Thomas Jefferson, 1776)

Ritual.

And thirdly, as a warning to your heart, that should you at any future period meet a Brother in distressed circumstances who might solicit your assistance, you will remember the peculiar moment you were received into Freemasonry, poor and penniless, and cheerfully embrace the opportunity of practicing that virtue you have professed to admire.

For a brief moment you had an experience of what it could be like to have nothing but your reputation as a good man. Remember that experience as it is one every Freemason has gone through. It is something we share in common and bonds us as brothers.

Remember - **Brotherly love, relief and truth.**



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Questions

Q. Why is the candidate placed in the North East part of the Lodge?

A. It is the point where the first rays of the morning sun shines through. In medieval churches this was the situation of the Easter Sepulchre, the tomb of Christ, from where the first light of Easter comes the promise of God's love and care. (Rev. Neville Barker Cryer)

Q. Why is the candidate's feet placed in the form of a square?

A. To figuratively represent the foundation stone. In this instance the 'rough ashlar'.

Q. What is the distinguishing feature of a Freemasons heart?

A. Charity.

Q. What do the knocks represent?

A. Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you. (Matthew 7:7)

Q. What are the three Grand Principles on which the Order is founded?

A. Brotherly love, relief and truth.

A. Complete the following: 'Tell me I will forget, show me I will remember, involve me I will

A. Understand.

Reflection

Charitable actions are not only financial.

Reflect upon other methods of being charitable.

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Analysis

The North East Corner ritual in Freemasonry serves as a profound vehicle for personal growth and philosophical endeavor, deeply embedding principles of charity, equality, and self-improvement through an immersive, experiential learning approach.

1. **Experiential Learning and Personal Transformation:**

The text explicitly highlights the Masonic understanding of learning: "Tell me I will forget, show me I will remember, involve me and I will understand." The North East Corner ritual exemplifies this by placing the candidate in a central, active role. By being "temporarily placed" in a position of destitution and then asked about their willingness to give to charity despite having nothing, the candidate is directly "involved." This isn't merely a lesson *about* charity; it's an experience *of* charity, both in its lack and in the expressed desire to give. This direct involvement creates a visceral understanding of empathy and the true meaning of benevolence, fostering a personal transformation that moves beyond intellectual assent to a deeply felt conviction. The pause between the questions about giving, particularly for those who "have wanted for nothing," forces a moment of profound introspection, stripping away external circumstances to reveal core character and beliefs.

2. **Symbolism of the Foundation Stone and the Ashlar:**

Philosophically, being "placed at the North East part of the Lodge figuratively to represent that stone" is a potent symbol for the beginning of a journey of self-improvement. The foundation stone is the initial, crucial element upon which an entire structure is built. In this context, the candidate, initially a "rough ashlar," represents an individual with potential but requiring refinement. The aspiration to "raise a superstructure perfect in its parts and honourable to the builder" speaks directly to the philosophical endeavor of perfecting oneself – intellectually, morally, and spiritually. It suggests that personal growth is an ongoing, constructive process, where each lesson and experience becomes a carefully placed "part" in the edifice of one's character. The North East Corner, where "the first light of Easter came the promise of God's love and care," further imbues this starting point with a sense of hope, new beginnings, and moral guidance.



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3. The Concept of Equality and Brotherly Love:

The ritual profoundly underscores the philosophical ideal of equality. Freemasonry's popularity in the 17th century as a "society of equals, signified by the wearing of the white apron by all its members," is directly enacted in the North East Corner. The experience of being "deprived of everything v...l...e previously to entering the Lodge" ensures that all candidates, regardless of "rank and opulence" or "social and economic trappings," enter on the same footing. This shared experience of temporary symbolic poverty becomes a powerful equalizer, uniting individuals "as equals and bonds us as brothers." Rudyard Kipling's poem "Mother Lodge" perfectly encapsulates this, illustrating how external social hierarchies dissolve within the Lodge, where everyone meets "upon the level an' ... parted on the square," reinforcing the core Masonic tenet of "Brotherly love, relief and truth." This communal leveling fosters genuine brotherly love, built on shared vulnerability and mutual respect rather than worldly status.

4. Testing of Principles and Moral Development:

The "three especial reasons" for the charity test are crucial for the candidate's moral development, moving beyond superficial appearances to assess internal principles.

- **"First, as I have already premised, to put your principles to the test":**

This highlights that true personal growth involves examining and validating one's stated values through action or intention. It checks if the candidate's proclaimed charitable nature is genuine.

- **"Secondly, to evince the Brethren that you had neither m..y nor m..c substance about you":**

This reinforces the philosophical principle that entry into Freemasonry is based purely on character, "who you are as a man," rather than wealth or influence. It asserts that true worth is internal, not external, promoting a moral integrity that values self-improvement ("desire to improve as a Mason") over material gain.

- **"And thirdly, as a warning to your heart... you will remember the peculiar moment you were received... poor and penniless, and**



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cheerfully embrace the opportunity of practicing that virtue you have professed to admire":

This reason is perhaps the most impactful for long-term moral development. It's a philosophical injunction to cultivate lasting empathy. The memory of their own symbolic destitution serves as a constant internal prompt to practice charity, transforming a theoretical virtue into an active, lived principle. This plants a seed of practical wisdom and ethical responsibility that is expected to bear fruit throughout the Mason's life.

5. **The Philosophical Imperative of Charity and Empathy:**

The ritual is fundamentally about instilling a philosophical imperative for charity and active empathy. By temporarily experiencing a state of having nothing, the candidate gains a profound, albeit symbolic, understanding of "what it feels like to have nothing." This cultivated empathy is not just a feeling but a call to action, a "warning to your heart" to remember this unique moment. The text emphasizes that charity "blesses him who gives as well as him who receives," articulating a deep philosophical insight into the reciprocal nature of benevolence and its spiritual rewards. This virtue is presented as "the distinguishing characteristic of a Freemason's heart," signifying that active benevolence is not just an occasional act but a fundamental aspect of one's reformed character and a core tenet of their philosophical outlook.

6. **The Journey from Darkness to Light:**

The transition "from the West and darkness, to the East in search of light" is a classic philosophical metaphor for enlightenment and moral progress. The North East Corner, being the point where "the first rays of the morning sun shines through," symbolizes a dawn of understanding—a moment of intellectual and moral illumination. Having undergone "examinations by senior brethren," the candidate has proven their initial worthiness ("just and upright man"). However, this new light signifies the beginning of a deeper "internal" journey of testing moral values and acquiring "skill sets" for further self-improvement. It represents not the end, but the *commencement* of a continuous philosophical quest for wisdom, virtue, and a deeper understanding of oneself and one's place in the world.

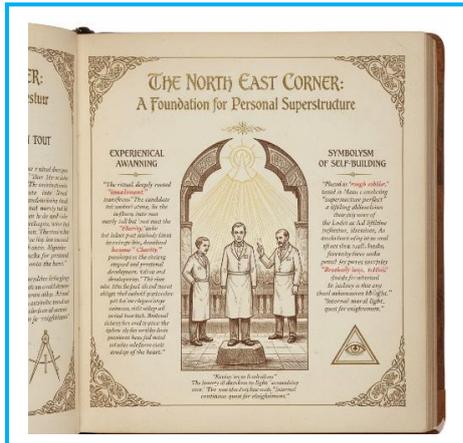
In essence, the North East Corner ritual is a masterful piece of philosophical pedagogy. It leverages symbolic action, shared experience, and Socratic questioning to transform abstract virtues into lived realities, initiating the candidate into a lifelong endeavor of personal growth, moral refinement, and active benevolence.



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The West Wing' Lodge of Instruction.

The North East Corner.



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W. Bro. Stephen J. Goulding. ProvSGD, SLGCR.

'The West Wing' Learning and Development Lead

Article published in The Square Magazine 05/22

Video & Article

www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202201the-north-east-corner/

For an analysis of this lesson/tutorial go to the Learning and Development page of the West Group Web Site www.wgsm.co.uk under the heading "West Group Lodge of Instruction" - Lesson 5.



A more in depth analysis of this tutorial can be found in the Lodge of Instruction section of the L&D page on the West Group web site.

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Reflection

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Reflect upon other methods of being charitable.