

# Catechism!

First performed by members and guests of St Laurence Lodge No. 5511, the Master being W. Bro. Ed Fehler.

*Seating arrangements*

*Insert diagram*

## Performance notes

*Catechism!* is a series of question-and-answer sequences. The questions are read by the WM, the Wardens and others (referred to in the script as guests 1, 2 and 3) who might be lodge members or visitors. The answers are read by brethren in teams of four. For example, in the first sequence the Master and Senior Warden read the questions which are answered by brethren identified as B1, B2, B3, B4.

Chairs for the answering team are lined up in the West. The DC and ADC bring out and remove each team of four in turn while the Narrator is speaking. Thus, at the end of its sequence, team B1-B4 is returned to its seats by the DC and ADC who then bring out the next team B5-B8 to answer its questions in sequence and so on. It helps if teams are seated together in the lodge and if the Q&A sequence is marked up in the script for each team, using a highlighter pen.

To accommodate the guest questioners, a chair is placed immediately in front of the WM's pedestal. The Wardens lead their sequences from their own pedestals. There are two sequences answered by lodge officers who remain in their normal places. The Narrator stands in the North East and acts as a Master of Ceremonies. His introductions give the DC and ADC time to change the teams over.

*Remember that this is not ritual. The words and rubric can be adapted as required. The purpose is to inform and amuse.*



Narrator In the early days of Freemasonry, lodges were quite small, perhaps ten brethren meeting in a room in a tavern. They sat around a table with their food, wine and pipes and worked the Lectures, guided by the Worshipful Master and breaking off at intervals for a song.

Initiations, known as *makings*, were infrequent. The normal work was to moralise on Masonry, that is draw moral lessons from it, working the Lectures. We have an echo of this in the Charge after Passing:

*As a craftsman, in our private assemblies you may offer your sentiments and opinions on such subjects as are regularly introduced in the Lecture, under the superintendence of an experienced Master who will guard the Landmarks against encroachment.*

The Lectures started out as fairly simple catechisms – questions and answers. Over time they grew until many of the answers became Lectures in themselves. Today, we will demonstrate some of the catechisms, new and old.

DC To answer the questions in the catechisms, we will invite brethren, four at a time, to come forward and take seats in the West. At the end of each sequence, we will invite another team of four to come forward.

Brethren who have volunteered will have received copies of a sequence of questions-and-answers and the answers they are to give have been highlighted. The first four brethren are shown as B1 to B4; the next four B5 to B8 and so on. Please be guided by me and by the Assistant Director of Ceremonies.

*DC and ADC get first team, B1 to B4, into the chairs.*

Narrator Be careful how you read the answers, brethren. Sometimes what you read may

look like modern day ritual but the words are subtly different. Here we go.

To start with, we have two sections about the examination of a Freemason, *when properly called upon*. Today such an examination is a rare event - even though we mention it in the questions leading from the first to the second degree. In earlier times, before certificates existed, examinations were more frequent - and more necessary.

**First sequence** (*B1 – B4 in the chairs*)

WM Bro. (*using name of B1*), are you a Mason?

B1 I am so taken and received among the fellows and brothers.

WM How do you know yourself to be a Mason?

B2 By the regularity of my initiation, by repeated trials and approbations and by my readiness to undergo an examination when duly called for.

WM How do you make yourself known as a Mason to others?

B3 By signs, by tokens and by perfect points of entrance.

WM What are signs?

B4 Squares, levels and perpendiculars regularly given which Masons will always honour and obey.

WM What are tokens?

B1 Regular friendly grips of the hand, mutually given and received, which distinguish Masons in the clearest day as well as in the darkest night.

WM What are points of entrance?

B2 Those are secrets which I am bound to conceal.

WM What is their number?

B3 They are innumerable but three are generally known.

WM Name those three.

B4 With you reciprocally I have no objection.

WM Will you begin.

B1 Of, at, on.

Narrator The phrase *Of, at and on* is what is called a ‘catch’ answer, one that only a fellow Mason would be able to give. A similar ‘catch’ question and answer is:

WM How old is your Mother?

B2 (*Gives the number of the lodge.*)

Narrator The answer, brethren, is the number of the respondent’s Lodge. So back to the examination.

WM What does *Of* refer to?

B3 *Of* my own free will and accord.

WM What does *At* refer to?

B4 *At* the door of the Lodge.

WM What does *On* refer to?

B1 *On* the point extended to my n... l... b... (*say the words.*)

Narrator Most of what we have just heard is from William Preston, writing in about 1770. Let us now look back at the *Edinburgh Register House* manuscript of 1696, twenty-one years before the formation of the English Grand Lodge and 40 years before the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

WM Bro. Senior Warden. Will you lead?

SW With pleasure, Worshipful Master.

SW Bro. (*using name of B2*) Are you a Mason?

B2 You shall know it by signs, tokens and the other points of my entry.  
 SW What is the first point?  
 B3 Tell me the first and I'll tell you the second.  
 SW Hele and conceal.  
 B4 I hele. (*Sign of EA*) I conceal (*Cuts sign*)  
 SW When were you entered?  
 B1 At an honourable Lodge.  
 SW What makes a true and perfect Lodge?  
 B2 Seven Masters, five entered apprentices, a day's journey from a borough town without a bark of dog or crow of cock.  
 SW Do less make a true and perfect Lodge?  
 B3 Yes. Five Masons and three Entered Apprentices.  
 SW Does no less?  
 B4 The more the merrier. The fewer the better cheer.  
 SW How stands your Lodge?  
 B1 East and West as the temple of Jerusalem.  
 SW Where was the first Lodge?  
 B2 In the porch of Solomon's Temple.  
 SW Are there any jewels in your Lodge?  
 B3 Yes, three: Perpend Esler, a Square Pavement and a broad oval.  
 SW Where shall I find the keys of your Lodge?  
 B4 Three foot and a half from the Lodge door under a green divot; but under the lap of my liver where all the secrets of my heart lie.  
 SW What is the key of your Lodge?  
 B1 A well hung tongue.  
 SW Where lies the key?  
 B2 In the bone box.  
 DC Thankyou brethren. Perhaps you would return to your seats. Brethren holding cards B5 to B8 please step forward.  
 Narrator The sequence we have just heard includes a number of unfamiliar words whose use perhaps indicates a closer connection to the Mason's trade than we have today or even Preston had in the 1770s. The mis-spellings may also indicate an already declining familiarity with the trade. '*Esler*' is a corruption of *Ashlar*, and a '*perpend ashlar*' is a stone that has two smooth faces, both showing in the wall, perhaps at a corner. '*Broad oval*' is a corruption of the words '*broached ornel*', a soft white building stone worked with a chisel. The bone box? Well, here is Preston's version.

**Second sequence (B5 – B8 in the chairs)**

WM Brother Junior Warden. Will you lead?  
 JW With pleasure, Worshipful Master.  
 JW What is the first lesson taught in Masonry?  
 B5 It is the virtue of secrecy and the advantages we may derive from the observance of that virtue.  
 JW Where are our secrets kept?  
 B6 In a safe repository, the heart.  
 JW To whom do we reveal them?

B7 To Freemasons only.

JW How do we reveal them?

B8 By particular signs, particular tokens and particular words.

JW How do we hope to get at them?

B5 By means of a key, curious in its construction and singular in its operation.

JW Where do we find it?

B6 In a bone box, secured by ivory keys.

JW How shall we find it?

B7 We find it pendant, not dormant.

JW Why so?

B8 That it may be ever ready to defend and never to betray.

JW If pendant, by what does it hang?

B5 By a sure hold, the thread of life.

JW Of what metal is it composed?

B6 It is composed of no metal.

JW Solve the mystery and explain.

B7 It is the tongue of good report in the act of speaking favourably, when justice and propriety require it; otherwise the Mason's chief virtue, silence.

Narrator The bone box - the skull - contains the ivory keys - the teeth. William Preston was an educated man and his version of the Lectures is a literary creation. He saw the Lodge not as a place of physical labour but as a moral ideal. Here is his description of entering the Lodge.

WM Whence do Masons principally come?

B8 From the holy Lodge of Brethren and Fellows.

WM What recommendation do you bring?

B5 A double salute to the Master of the work.

WM What other recommendation?

B6 Hearty good wishes to all Brethren assembled under his direction.

WM What is the purpose of your visit?

B7 To rule and direct the passions and make progress in the art of Masonry.

WM How do you hope to do that?

B8 By the aid of Heaven, the instruction of the Master and by my own industry.

WM When entering the Lodge, what first struck your attention?

B5 The sun, emerging through the darkness, rising in the East, opening the day and diffusing light, life and nourishment to all within its circle.

WM Through what medium did you behold this luminary?

B6 Through the medium of the Master, who placed in the East opens the Lodge and conveys light to the understanding, knowledge and instruction to all who are under his direction.

WM What was the second object that struck your attention?

B7 The sun in its meridian at noon in its full splendour, when its rays are most powerful and the cool shades most pleasing.

WM Through what medium did you behold this luminary?

B8 Through the medium of the Junior Warden who placed in the South at high twelve invites the Brethren to the shade where uninjured they may enjoy the prospect and regale.

WM When you depart, what is the third object that struck your attention?

B5 It is still the sun in a scene equally pleasing, setting in the West, closing the day and lulling as it were all nature to repose.

WM Through what medium did you behold this luminary?

B6 Through the medium of the Senior Warden who placed in the West, at the command of the Master, closes the Lodge, rendering to every Brother the just reward of his merit, to enable him to enjoy a comfortable repose, the best effects of honest industry when they are properly applied.

DC Thankyou brethren. Perhaps you would return to your seats and the brethren holding cards B9 to B12 will step forward.

Narrator We are all familiar, of course, with the letter G. There is often a G light in the centre of the Lodge, but do we know to what the letter G refers? Here is the meaning given by Samuel Prichard, writing in 1730.

**Third sequence (B9-B12 in the chairs)**

WM W. Bro. *(Guest 1's name)* Would you lead?

Guest1 With pleasure, Worshipful Master.

*Guest 1 sits in the chair immediately in front of the WM's pedestal.*

Guest1 How came you to the middle chamber?

B9 By a winding stair.

Guest1 How many?

B10 Seven or more.

Guest1 Why seven or more?

B11 Because seven or more makes a just and perfect Lodge.

Guest1 When you came to the door of the middle chamber, who did you see?

B12 A Warden.

Guest1 What did he demand of you?

B9 Three things.

Guest1 What were they?

B10 A sign, token and word. *(Gives sign of fidelity.)*

Guest1 How high was the door of the middle chamber?

B11 So high that a Cowan could not reach to stick a pin in it.

Guest1 When you came into the middle, what did you see?

B12 The resemblance of the letter G.

Guest1 What doth G denote?

B9 One that's greater than you.

Guest1 Who's greater than I that am a Free and Accepted Mason, the Master of a Lodge?

B10 The Grand Architect and Contriver of the Universe, or he that was taken up to the top of the Pinnacle of the Holy Temple.-

Narrator So in Prichard's view the letter G refers to the GAOTU, a meaning with which we are all familiar. However, it may surprise you to learn that this is not always so.

WM W. Bro. *(Guest 2's name)* Would you lead?

Guest2 With pleasure, Worshipful Master.

*Guest 2 sits in the chair immediately in front of the WM's pedestal.*

Guest2 Why were you passed to the second degree?

B11 For the sake of the letter G.

Guest2 What does that G denote?

B12 Geometry, the fifth science.

Guest2 What is Geometry?

B9 A science by which we ascertain the contents of bodies unmeasured by comparing them with those already measured.

Guest2 What are its proper subjects?

B10 Magnitude and extension, or a regular progression of science from a point to a line, a line to superficies and superficies to a solid.

Guest2 What is a point?

B11 The beginning of geometrical matter.

Guest2 A line?

B12 The continuation of the same.

Guest2 What are the superficieses?

B9 Length and breadth.

Guest2 A solid?

B10 Length and breadth with a given thickness which forms a cube and comprehends the whole.

DC Thankyou brethren. Perhaps you would return to your seats. Will brethren with cards B13 to B16 step forward?

Narrator In this passage we see that G stands for Geometry. The second degree, as we know it, is said to lead us to '*contemplate the intellectual faculties and to trace them in their development through the paths of heavenly science.*' There is a persuasive theory that knowledge of geometry, sometimes referred to as 'sacred geometry,' was the real secret of Masonry. Jealously guarded by our operative brethren was the knowledge – the 'mystery' as it was called in the middle ages – of the measurement of angles, squares and solids. Here is more from Preston.

**Fourth sequence (B13 – B16 in the chairs)**

WM What is the secrecy which subsists amongst Masons?

B13 The art of Masonry, or Masonry and Geometry combined.

WM What is Masonry?

B14 It is a complete science, which comprehends the system of nature and morals, philosophy and physics, mathematics and mechanics and forms an institution that is wisely calculated to promote the universal philanthropy, true friendship and general happiness amongst men.

WM What does operative Masonry inculcate?

B15 By it we are taught the proper application of the useful rules of architecture so that a structure may derive figure, strength and beauty from the due proportion and just correspondence of all its parts.

WM What does speculative Masonry inculcate?

B16 By it we are taught the proper application of the rules of philosophy in the conduct of human life - by ruling and directing the passions, acting upon the square, keeping a tongue of good report, maintaining secrecy, practising charity and every virtue which can adorn the human species.

WM How are these two - operative and speculative Masonry – connected?

B13 Perfection is the aim of operative Masonry. Happiness is the aim of speculative Masonry.

Narrator Three, five and seven; numbers common in Freemasonry. Three, five and seven

steps. The three grand principles. The five pillars. William Preston, in his *Illustrations of Masonry*, imagines the seven liberal arts inscribed on the steps of the staircase in King Solomon's Temple.

*Even though they are not answering in the fifth sequence, B13-B16 remain in the chairs. The officers speak from their normal positions.*

**Fifth sequence (Officers 1)**

*Note that this is not a Q and A sequence but a series of definitions.*

WM Having passed through the porch, the skilled craftsmen came to a winding staircase that led to the middle chamber where Solomon had ordered all the gifts of merit to be conferred. On every step of that staircase was stamped the name of a different art and over each was appointed a superintendent to try the merit of the claimants to the art.

Secretary *Grammar* teaches the proper arrangement of words and how to speak and write a language with justice and accuracy according to reason and correct usage.

Charity Std *Rhetoric* teaches fluency of speech on any subject with all the advantages of force and elegance, contriving to captivate the hearer with strength of argument and beauty of expression.

Almoner *Logic* teaches the art of guiding reason; to infer, deduce and conclude a train or argument according to premises laid down.

Treasurer *Arithmetic* teaches the properties of numbers, giving reasons and demonstrations to find any number whose relation to another number is already known.

Organist *Music* teaches the art of forming concords and composing delightful harmony by a proportion and arrangement of acute, grave and mixed sounds.

Chaplain *Astronomy* teaches the art of reading the celestial hemispheres by observing the motion, measuring the distances, comprehending the magnitudes and calculating the periods and eclipses of heavenly bodies.

Narrator Freemasonry is a system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. The allegory is the trade of the operative mason. The symbols are found in and around the Lodge. The explanation of a tracing board and the Grand Lodge certificate are examples of moralising on the design, furniture and jewels of the Lodge.

**Sixth sequence (Brethren B13 – B16 still in chairs)**

WM How many jewels are admitted among Freemasons?

B13 Six. Three moveable, restricted to the person, and three immovable, restricted to the employment.

WM What are the moveable jewels?

B14 The plumb, the level and the square.

WM What are the immovable jewels?

B15 The rough ashlar, smooth ashlar and tracing board.

WM Why are these implements called jewels?

B16 On account of their moral tendency, which renders them jewels among Masons of inestimable value.

WM What is the Junior Warden distinguished by?

B13 By the plumb.

WM Why?

B14 Because by that instrument, placed at his breast, he exemplifies his uprightness and integrity in the discharge of his duty as the guardian of the Lodge against the attempts of intruders who may dare to encroach upon the privileges of the institution.

WM What is the Senior Warden distinguished by?

B15 By the level.

WM Why?

B16 Because that instrument is an emblem of the equality of his government in the West with the government of the Master in the East so that union is effected in the Lodge to contribute to its durability and strength.

WM What is the Master distinguished by?

B13 By the square.

WM Why?

B14 It is an emblem of the moral tenets it is his duty to inculcate, to promote harmony and ensure happiness among the brethren which it his duty to cherish and support.

WM What moral is deduced from the immoveable jewels?

B15 The rough ashlar is an emblem of the human mind in its pristine state which, rude and uncultivated, is like that stone before it has been improved by pious example and virtuous education.

B16 The smooth ashlar is a representation of the mind improved by culture and civilisation, enjoying all the advantages that can be derived from study, example and education.

B13 The tracing board is the emblem of the book of nature, in which are delineated the designs of an all-Supreme Being. An observance of those designs will lead to the perfection of our system, afford present and ensure future happiness.

DC Thankyou brethren. Perhaps you would return to your seats and the brethren holding answers B17 to B20 will step forward guided by our Assistant Director of Ceremonies.

Narrator Here the jewels have been moralised upon – that is, moral lessons have been drawn by a speculative Freemason from the working tools of the operative Mason but we moralise on other aspects of the lodge as well.

### **Seventh Sequence (B17 – B20)**

WM W. Bro. (*Guest 3's name*). Would you lead?

Guest3 With pleasure, Worshipful Master.

*Guest 3 sits in the chair immediately in front of the WM's pedestal.*

Guest3 What moral does the mosaic or chequered pavement call to mind?

B17 The variety displayed in the works of nature and the vicissitudes to which the life of man is subject.

Guest3 How is that exemplified?

B18 The pavement reminds us that the days of man are chequered by a strange contrariety of events. Today we may tread the flowery mead of prosperity and tomorrow we may totter on the rude track of adversity.

Guest3 What does that ornament teach us to practise?

B19 It warns us not to boast of any success but to give heed to our ways and walk uprightly and with humility before God. It instructs us to practise charity, cultivate harmony and live in unity and brotherly love.

Guest3 What is the proper covering of the Lodge?

B20 A clouded canopy of divers colours.

Guest3 How is it supported?

B17 By three grand pillars: *Doric, Ionic and Corinthian*.

Guest3 Why these three orders?

B18 Because they demonstrate the progress of science through strength, beauty and



wisdom.

Guest3 Exemplify the allusion.

B19 When men first reared an artificial shelter, strength not ornament was their object. The first rude column gave rise to the *Doric* pillar, the emblem of strength. The industry of the human mind led men to amend this column with figure and shape, giving rise to the *Ionic* pillar, the emblem of wisdom. A spirit of emulation was excited and each man vied to excel his fellow to further ornament the column giving rise to the finished base and enriched capital of the *Corinthian* pillar, the emblem of beauty.

Guest3 What is the grand moral?

B20 When we fix our eyes on the celestial firmament and contemplate the beauties there displayed, we behold the wisdom to contrive, the beauty to adorn and the grace to adorn the handiwork of the Creator.

Guest3 How do we hope to ascend to the canopy of divers colours?

B17 By means of a ladder, composed of many staves or rounds but strengthened by three strongest.

Guest3 What are these three?

B18 *Faith, Hope and Charity*. Our faith being well grounded, we hope as a reward of our labours to participate in those promised blessings and dispense such blessings to others.

Guest3 What is *Faith*?

B19 The foundation of justice, the bond of amity and the chief support of civil society.

Guest3 What is *Hope*?

B20 An anchor to the soul. For if we believe a thing to be impossible, our despondency may render it so but he who perseveres in a just cause will ultimately overcome all difficulties.

Guest3 What is *Charity*?

B17 An honour to the nature whence it springs. Happy is the man who has sown in his breast the seeds of benevolence. He envies not his neighbour. He believes not a tale told by a slanderer. He is ever ready to listen to those who crave assistance and, from those in want he will not withhold a liberal hand.

DC Thank you brethren. Please return to your seats.

Narrator Let us finish by illustrating the three Grand Principles which form the centrepiece of Masonry. The Lectures contain beautiful illustrations of these.

*The officers stay in their places, standing to give their answers.*

### **Final sequence (Officers 2)**

Narrator Bro. IPM. How do we meet as Masons?

IPM On the Square. When we meet in Lodge, all distinctions amongst us as men for the time cease.

Narrator Bro. DC. How do Masons rank?

DC As brothers to kings, fellows to princes, regardless of situation or circumstance. We are children of the same parent and brethren of the same tie.

Narrator And how many grand principles do we have?

DC (again) Three. *Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth*.

Narrator Brother ADC. Explain *Brotherly Love*.

ADC By this principle, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and low; rich and poor; sent into this world for mutual aid, support and protection of each other. On this grand principle, Freemasonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion so conciliating a friendship between those who

might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.

Narrator Brother SD. Explain *Relief*.

SD To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent particularly on Freemasons, who are linked by one indissoluble bond. To soothe the unhappy, sympathise with their misfortunes, compassionate their miseries and restore peace to their troubled breast, is the first aim we have in view.

Narrator Brother JD. Explain *Truth*.

JD It is the first lesson we are taught at our initiation and on this grand theme we endeavour to regulate our lives and actions. Hypocrisy and deceit are unknown amongst us. Sincerity and plain dealing are our distinguishing characteristics while the heart and tongue join in promoting each other's welfare and rejoicing in the prosperity of the craft.

Narrator Finally, Brother IG, give me a reason to be a Freemason.

IG I can give you many, my brother, but let one lesson suffice. Masonry gives real and intrinsic excellency to man and renders him fit for the duties of society. For it strengthens the mind against the storms of life, paves the way to peace while promoting domestic happiness; governs the passions, meliorates the temper and gives vivacity to social conversation.

It may be sufficient to observe that he, who cultivates the science and acts agreeably to the character of a Mason, has within himself the spring and support of every social virtue; a subject of contemplation that enlarges the mind and expands its powers – a theme that is inexhaustible, ever new, and always interesting.

Narrator Worshipful Master, we have glimpsed a small part of the *Lectures* but I hope the brethren will agree that it shows how Masonry is indeed, as our Brother the Inner Guard has just said, *a theme that is inexhaustible, ever new, and always interesting*.