

## Chapter 19

# Ten Common Masonic Phrases

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### ***In This Chapter***

- \* Nattering in Freemasonry's nominative nomenclature
  - \* Matriculating through Masonic magniloquence
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Hang around Freemasons or surf Masonic Web sites for a little bit, and you'll come across the occasional peculiar word or phrase. Here are some of the top ones, a few of which have found their way into everyday language.

### ***The Third Degree***

No, not like in an old Bogart picture where some sniveling squealer gets worked over with a 200-watt light bulb in his eyes and a rubber hose. The is the highest degree or level of ceremony conferred in a Masonic lodge. It's known as the Master Mason degree; the two that come before it are the Entered Apprentice and the Fellow Craft degrees. You may encounter other Masonic degrees that have higher numbers, bestowed by some other branches within Freemasonry, but they are not more important or of any higher rank than the Master Mason.

### ***On the Level***

To a Freemason, means just that — all Freemasons are Brothers who meet on the same level, regardless of their social or economic status outside the lodge. Princes, presidents, and captains of business are no better or more important than bus drivers, plumbers, and paper boys when they sit in the lodge together. Masonry does not detract from a man's accomplishments, nor does it exalt him above his Brothers because of his position outside the lodge.

## ***On the Square***

When a stonemason cuts a block to use in the construction of a building, it must be perfectly shaped so that it will support the other blocks that surround it. The block's sides must all be perfectly straight with no faults, so that it will do its part as just one small piece of a much larger building. To check the reliability of his workmanship, the stonemason uses a tool called a square, which is shaped like a right angle, to determine whether the sides and angles of the stone are perfect. Freemasons use the term *on the square* to describe their trust in each other. A man who is on the square is honest and reliable, and is a strong part of the whole community around him.

The term *on the square* is also used to mean "just between you and me." When one Mason tells another Mason something he'd like to be kept private, he'll often say "This is on the square."

## ***Worshipful Master***

The primary officer of the local Masonic lodge is called the *Worshipful Master*. This does not mean that Freemasons "worship" him. The position is like that of a president in other organizations. The term comes from Old English and is used to mean "greatly honored." Mayors of English and Canadian cities are still referred to as "Your Worship." Because Masonry has its origins in England during the Middle Ages, the term has been passed down through the centuries and has been retained.

I'd like to go on record as saying that if it *Worshipful Master* mean "worship," my lodges didn't do nearly enough of it when *Worshipful Master* held the position.

## ***Cowan***

The Tyler's job is to keep off all "cowans and eavesdroppers" (for more on the Tyler, see Chapter 5). The term *cowan* is unusual and its origin is probably from a very old Anglo-Saxon word meaning "dog." *Cowan* came to be a Scottish word used as a putdown to describe stonemasons who did not join the Freemasons guild, while the English used it to describe Masons who built rough stone walls without mortar and did not know the true secrets of Freemasonry.

## ***Hoodwink***

Today, the term *hoodwink* has come to mean "to trick" or "to deceive." But in a Masonic lodge, it's a very old term used to describe a blindfold.

means “cover,” and            means “closed eye.” While being led through portions of the three degrees of the Masonic lodge, the candidate is            to prevent him from seeing certain features of the room until the proper time in the ceremony, to focus his attention on the words he is hearing, and to symbolize the search for            or knowledge. It does            mean he is being tricked or lied to.

## ***Token***

A            is a grip or handshake that is used by Freemasons to identify each other. Each of the degrees of Masonry has its own handshake that identifies the level of proficiency attained by a member. It enables one Mason to silently know another one without either calling attention to himself.

## ***Blackballed***

When Masons vote on a new member, they use a ballot box that contains white balls (for “yes”) and black balls (for “no”). The opening of the box is hidden from the view of the other members, and each Mason votes in secret. Voting against the election of a new member in a Masonic election has come to be called            and its use has spread to the outside world as well. These days, to prevent confusion while groping around in a little wooden box, the black pieces are now often cube-shaped, to avoid voting incorrectly by mistake.            just doesn’t sound right, so the term remains.

## ***So Mote It Be***

The phrase            is used by Masons as a response at the end of a prayer. It comes from an Old English phrase that simply means “so may it be,” and has been used in Masonic documents since its earliest beginnings. Masons use it as an affirmation of a prayer as a response to            a word of similar meaning.

## ***Are You a Traveling Man?***

One of the many phrases used when two Masons meet and are unsure of each other’s membership status, this question refers to a line in the Master Mason degree, “Whence come you and whither are you traveling?” Other greetings can be, “I see you’ve traveled some,” “Hello, Hiram,” or “Are you a Widow’s Son?” More obscure is “How old is your Mother?”, a question that refers to the number of your home lodge. These exchanges between strangers on a

sidewalk often result in baffled looks from your spouse or non-Masonic friends.

**<Remember>**

If you aren't really a Mason, you shouldn't try to pretend you are one. These are simply informal greetings. Freemasons have other ways to determine if you are, in fact, the real thing.