



Grand Lodge of Mississippi
Free & Accepted Masons

YOU HAVE PROBABLY WONDERED...

**“WHAT YOU CAN DISCUSS ABOUT
MASONRY WITH A NON-MASON”**

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Every Mason remembers well his obligations to secrecy, and he is often reluctant to talk to non-Masons about things masonic. Yet, we want to inform the non-Masons about who we are, what we are, and what we do. Therefore, it is important that every Mason understand clearly which things he can talk about and which things he cannot talk about.

What is A Secret?

By “secret” we usually mean information that is known only to a very select few people. Furthermore, it is information that is intentionally kept limited to those few people. Classified military information is of this nature. The names of spies of the United States are secret. Personal medical records and financial data are also secrets. In each of these cases, outsiders can obtain the information only with great difficulty, if it is at all possible.

What is A Masonic Secret?

What are the things we call the secrets of Masonry? First of all, we have (1) the secret ballot. No one can know how a Mason votes, unless the Mason tells them, and that is considered to be un-masonic conduct. The ballot is definitely a secret, but it is one which the American public accepts quite readily.

Next, we have (2) the modes of recognition (signs, words), (3) the obligations, (4) the ritual for conferring the degrees, and (5) the legend of the third degree. These four items are usually considered to be the “real” Masonic secrets. Yet, we all know that any interested party can go to a public library or through an online source and obtain books which reveal all these things and more. They can also buy books which pretend to reveal the secrets, but which are totally incorrect. Clearly we cannot consider these to be secrets in the true sense of the word. There is no way that we can keep these books from the public. What then is the meaning of our obligation to secrecy?

Our Obligation to Secrecy

We must notice that the obligations of Masonry, as well as the other teachings of our Craft, are not things that Masons impose upon other people. These obligations and teachings are things that each Mason agrees to accept for himself and apply to himself. Thus, when we agree to keep a Masonic secret, we only agree that we will not discuss the matter with a non-mason. This agreement is then binding upon the Mason, but it is not and cannot be binding upon the non-mason.

Masons should not be disturbed by this. If a non-Mason learns what he considers to be our secrets, we are under no obligation to take action of any kind. However, if the same person comes to us and asks us affirm or deny that certain things are our secrets we are most certainly obliged to not even answer his question. We must neither confirm nor deny that what he has learned is one of our secrets. We must simply change the subject to something else.

Discussing Non-Secrets with Non-Masons

The limits of course only apply to the things that are Masonic secrets. If a non-Mason asks about anything else about Masonry, it is in our best interest to give them a full, accurate and complete answer. Thus, if a non-Mason should want to discuss the orders of architecture or the cardinal virtues- temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice- feel free to discuss these with them. If a non-Mason comes to you and says he or she has learned Masons worship the devil, be sure to assure them that this is false. Feel free to discuss all of the non-secrets of Masonry with any who are interested in them.

Private Masonic Matters

In addition to the five types of secrets previously mentioned, there are some additional topics considered to be private among Masons and which we do not discuss with non-Masons. Principal among these are (6) certain points of the lectures and (7) the Masonic business that takes place in the tiled Lodge.

The Lectures

Those parts of the lectures that are **not** written out in the *Blue Lodge Textbook* are considered private and can be given only in a tiled Lodge.

Private Masonic Business

When we talk about things concerning the relationships between Brothers, then we are involved in Masonic business and these topics should not be shared with the public. For example, charges of un-masonic conduct, applications for membership or a request from a needy brother. These topics are clearly not the concern of the public and should be treated as Masonic secrets.

Public Masonic Matters

At our business meeting we discuss many non-ritual topics, some of which are public business and some of which are Masonic business. Under public business, we can classify those items that concern the world outside of the Lodge; such as committee reports on DeMolay or Rainbow Girls or scholarship programs, discussions about parties, trips, picnics, etc. All these things are public business because they deal with our interaction with the public. These items of information are not Masonic secrets, and they can be shared freely with non-masons.

Public Presentations of the Ritual

The *Blue Lodge Textbook* contains nearly all of the symbolic lectures, plus the charges and many other parts of the ritual. This material is considered to be non-secret. These parts of the degrees can be presented in Lodge to non-Masons and can be discussed freely with non-Masons. However, before you talk about these it is recommended that you consult the Textbook to be sure of the parts that are not secret.

Things to Tell a Non-Mason

What can we tell a non-Mason? The simple and truthful answer is that we talk about almost everything.

Masonic Charities

We can talk about the many humanitarian and charitable actions of Masonry. In Mississippi, these include our relief programs, charitable donations to restoration funds, the veterans hospital visitation program, the Shriner's Hospitals, the Knights Templar Eye Foundation, and many others. It is estimated that the Masons in the United States donate two million dollars each day to charitable causes.

Masonic History

We can talk about our Masonic History and how it relates to the history of the free world. This includes religious freedoms and how it came from Anderson's Constitutions and wound up in our Bill of Rights and how the slogan of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" came from the Masons.

Famous Masons

We can talk about famous men who have been Masons: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Harry Truman, John Glenn, Rudyard Kipling, and Robert Burns.

The Mason's Philosophy of Life

We can talk about the lessons that Masonry teaches. These can be discussed as general concepts or they can be discussed in detail if you are careful to follow the materials printed in the Mississippi Mentors Manual. We can talk about the interpretation of these Masonic principals- the idea that temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice are important concepts in our personal life; that friendship, morality and brotherly love are not just antiquities; that faith, hope and charity are things to be practiced and not preached.

The fact is that Masonry is not a religion, but it is an organization that teaches men to practice their own faith and to respect the faith of others. We can tell that Masonry is an organization that is open only to men, but that there are related organizations for women, boys and girls and still others that are open to the whole family. We can talk about our working tools and what they mean to us, and we can talk about how each Mason is taught to use these tools and to apply them to himself so as to make himself better than he was.

Masonry deals with morality. Unfortunately this is not a popular topic in our society unless it concerns bad morals. If you find a man who is interested in discussing our moral concepts, then talk with him- he may be seeking what we have to offer.

Other Sources

There is much more factual material with can be obtained from the Grand Secretary or Masonic publishing companies.

Talking About Joining Masonry

Solicitation of members is a topic that nearly always comes up in discussing things that can be said to non-Masons. *The Williams Digest of Laws* says that it is un-masonic to solicit a petition for membership. However, the law does not define the word "solicit," so we must rely on other sources to make the meaning clear.

Before being admitted to each of the three degrees, the candidate is asked whether he is proceeding of his own free will and accord. Thus, it is clear that we must do nothing to interfere with a man's personal choices as concerns Masonic membership. However, this certainly allows us to give him information, verbally or in written form, which he can use to make an informed decision. "Accord" means to be in agreement, and a person cannot agree with something he knows nothing about.

What does the dictionary say about "soliciting"? Webster's New World Dictionary has three definitions under "solicit." One deals with prostitution, one deals with tempting someone to do an illegal act and one deals with pleading for something. Clearly we must use the "pleading" definition and refrain from pleading for petitions.

Does this then allow you to ask a friend, relative or son whether he would like to **learn** how he can become a Mason? Our Grand Master feels that such a question is entirely proper, as long as you are not trying to pressure your friend into joining.

How Do I Become A Mason?

If someone asks why he has never been asked to join or if he asks how to become a Mason, tell him that a man must ask to become a Mason and that no man is ever asked to join. Tell him about the standards and requirements of Masonry or give him a copy our brochures. Offer to talk with him after he had had time to read it. Even though a man has inquired about Masonry, we can still **not** use any pressure to make him sign a petition. We can only inform him. His action must be of his own free will and accord.

Conclusion

Masonry is not a secret organization and in fact, we have very few “real” secrets. There are only certain things that we choose to discuss only with our brothers. Except for these things, we will speak openly and willingly with anyone about any Masonic subject.

**Educational Note: The information in this pamphlet was prepared by the Minnesota Masonic Committee on Research and Education. Some changes have been made to conform to Mississippi Masonry. Furthermore, this pamphlet is a 2018 adaption of a publication of The Education Committee of The Grand Lodge of Mississippi, F. & A. M. Membership of the original committee included: Bro. C. Scott Bailey, chairman, James D. Harris, A. H. Rutledge, Wayne R. Miley, and Charles R. Gray.*

THINGS YOU CAN TALK ABOUT WITH A NON-MASON

That a man must ask to become a Mason.
The humanitarian and charitable actions of Masonry.
Public business conducted in Lodge.
Masonic history and how it relates to the history of the free world.
Famous men who have been Masons.
The ideals that Masonry teaches.
Our working tools and what they mean to us.
The ritual sections printed in *The Blue Lodge Textbook*.
The charges of the three degrees.
The interpretation of Masonic principles.
The appendant bodies for men.
The organizations for women, boy and girls.
Factual, non-ritual material contained in books.
How to get a petition.
When and where the Lodge meets
And much, much more!

THINGS YOU CANNOT TALK ABOUT WITH A NON-MASON

The modes of recognition (signs, words, grips, tokens).
The obligations.
The methods of conferring the degrees.
The legend of the third degree.
The Masonic business discussed in a tiled Lodge.
Certain portions of the lectures (See the * Textbook)
Neither confirm nor deny that any particular is a secret.
Do not argue about Masonry.