

KOSHER WINE and FREEMASONRY

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Budapest Synagogue Stamp 1954

The presence of alcohol in Masonic Lodge Halls across the United States and Canada is a fairly controversial topic. Ever since the Temperance Movement of the 1800's up until relatively recent years, any type of alcohol was generally prohibited inside Lodge Halls was generally forbidden. Its use was frowned-upon in most Blue Lodges and generally the only waivers given, were if a Hall was shared with the York Rite Bodies and / or the Scottish Rite Bodies which were given a tiny degree of latitude for token-amounts of Wine for ceremonial purposes during ritualistic conferrals or special Observances. It must be stressed that the amount was indeed a token-amount. The libations so few ounces, that a person might imbibe a greater percentage of alcohol via cough-syrup (if they had the cold or flu). The alcohol content of Wine used at a ceremony of the Rites is so minuscule that, quite often grape-juice is offered as an alternative.

In today's modern era, in some Jurisdictions, although alcohol is largely "taboo" in the Lodge room 'proper' (except for the aforementioned dispensations for tiny amounts utilized during York Rite and Scottish Rite conferrals) the rules have been loosened to allow alcohol at some Masonic Banquets, Dances, and events where the building is rented-out or leased to groups for wedding-receptions or other events. Back in olden times, I have read "Minutes" of various Masonic Lodges and "Proceedings" of various State Grand Lodge meetings which were so stern, that even if the Masons shared a building with another tenant that served alcohol --and even if a literal "wall" separated the two entities --the Masons were forced to either 'move' or 'close down and surrender their Charter.' The Temperance Movement for decades had a solid grip on most Masonic Grand Jurisdictions in the U.S.A. and Canada. Perhaps, it is good that a slight relaxation of the rules has occurred. In ancient times, Freemasonry had its "Festive Board," and even in England and elsewhere in Europe, the social features are highlighted more.

The distinguished Masonic scholar Dr. Albert G. Mackey, 33^o, and a Knight Templar, said that "the custom of drinking to one's good health at banquets is a very old (tradition)" that "can be traced to the days of the ancient Greeks and Romans. From them, it was handed down to the modern (civilizations), and especially in England, we find the 'waeshael' of the Saxons a term used in drinking, and equivalent to the modern phrase 'To your health.'

Mackey notes that although a "convivial spirit" existed in Masonic Lodges of the Eighteenth Century, "all excess was avoided." That is a pivotal distinction. Mackey clearly states that all Freemasons were (and still are) instructed to obey the four Cardinal Virtues:

1. Prudence: *The ability to judge between actions with regard to appropriate actions at a set given time.*

2. Justice: *The perpetual and constant pursuit of fairness, rightness, and appropriate remedy.*



3. **Temperance:** *Practicing self-control, restraint, abstention and moderation; tempering the appetites and passions.*

4. **Fortitude:** *The courage, forbearance, endurance and ability to confront fear, uncertainty and intimidation.*

In any case the Old Masonic Charges "directed the Brethren to enjoy themselves with decent mirth, not forcing any Brother to eat or drink beyond his inclination, nor hindering him from going home when he pleased."

The Master of the Lodge was responsible for decorum and usually the first 'Toast' was made to The Grand Lodge (out of Respect). In countries with a Monarch or Sovereign, a 'toast' might be made to that governing Official (regardless of whether or not he, or she, was affiliated with the Craft in any way).

Traditionally, bottled-wine was never stored standing upright. The custom of storing wine bottles on their sides, kept the wine in contact with the cork, thereby preventing the cork from drying, shrinking, and letting-in air. According to experts, a really great tasting wine will have a long aftertaste; whereas, inferior ones will have a short aftertaste. The whole point of 'Toasts' is a salutatory 'Salute' or 'Remembrance.' Only a few other, shorter 'toasts' were made. They were usually directed toward the health and prosperity and happiness of the Craft, including, "To the health of all Regular Freemasons where-so-ever dispersed in any of the Hemispheres, worldwide."

Today, in Victoria, Australia, the Master of the Masonic Lodge drops a piece of toasted bread into each wine glass to temper undesirable tastes or excessive acidity in the wine.

In any event: any Master Mason (regardless of his Jurisdiction) is admonished to act in a dignified and respectful manner when consuming even a small amount of wine or any other alcoholic beverage (and substitutions are allowed such as grape-juice or water).

The United Grand Lodge of England, as recently as the year 2011 reiterated that "Freemasonry is not a religion, but as a precondition of membership acknowledgement of belief in a Supreme Being is required. In recent years the members of the Province of East Kent have attended Evensong Services bi-annually at Rochester Cathedral and last year (2010) at Canterbury Cathedral." The idea of holding a service at a Synagogue was particularly appealing and was arranged, "with the kind permission of the Margate Hebrew Congregation, at the Margate Synagogue on Sunday 19 June 2011." "The order of service was printed in Hebrew with an English translation. After an opening Ode, a thanksgiving prayer was given by the Chaplain."

Later, the Deputy Provincial Grand Master, Roger Odd, read Genesis Chapter 49. The Ark was opened by a Synagogue member and local Freemason, Jon Lloyd. The scroll was taken out, and "prayers were offered for the Royal Family and peace in the world, before the Scroll was replaced and the Ark closed. The Reverend Malcolm Weisman (the Chief Rabbi's minister to small communities) then gave an outstanding address, in the course of which he made particular reference to his appreciation of the common beliefs of the Hebrew Faith and Freemasonry. The service was brought to an end, with the Closing Ode and the National Anthem. **Then, the distinguished guests retired in procession to the ante-room where they were joined with the rest of the congregation and provided with kosher wine and challah bread.**"

Completely separate and apart from the imbibing of small quantities of wine, was the PHYSICAL APPLICATION of CORN, WINE, and OIL at Masonic Cornerstone Laying Ceremonies.

Brother Albert G. Mackey states that wine has that two-fold function. He defines the composition and purpose of Wine as: **"One of the elements of Masonic consecration, and, as a symbol of the inward refreshment of a good conscience is intended, under the name of the Wine of Refreshment, to remind us of the eternal refreshments which are good to receive in the future life for the faithful performance of duty in the present."**

The Corn, is technically called: "The Corn of Nourishment." It is another element of Masonic consecration. The last element is Oil. Mackey mentions that the Hebrews anointed their Kings, Prophets, and High Priests with oil intermingled with the richest spices. They also anointed themselves with Oil on all festive occasions, and references the Biblical passage in Psalm 45:7 which says, "God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness."



Masonic consecrations are not religious services in their makeup. By that, I mean that Masons do not act as religious ministers. The Dedications of Masonic Halls or Public Buildings (such as Courthouses, Libraries, and Civic Buildings) are simply 'dedications' or 'commissions' for those buildings, offices or other worthy causes. The ancient Masonic public ritual is seen by all, and it is clearly noted that such a ceremony, is "to offer, give, and dedicate, in pious and decent language and gesture, all Glory and Honor to Almighty God." It is the means of mortal man acknowledging his frailty and invoking the aid of Almighty God in looking down and protecting the edifice and the people, and beseeching our Creator's Blessings for the success, smooth-functioning and prosperity for which the Building was intended. In today's language, people often refer to "Grand Openings" of some business or venture. Masonic Dedications are confined to special buildings or "special purposes which serve the good of humanity"; and the special Dedication ceremony is done in the most solemn manner.

"In Masonic Processions, the Corn alone is carried in a golden pitcher, the wine and oil are placed in silver vessels, and this to remind us that the first, as a necessity, and the 'staff of life', is of more importance and more worthy of honor than the others, which are but comforts."

Macoy's "Masonic Manual" published in June 1867, has quite a unique Protocol for "Processions at Laying Foundation Stones":

Two Tylers, with drawn Swords;
Tyler of the oldest Lodge, with a drawn Sword;
Two Stewards of the oldest Lodge;
Entered Apprentices;
Fellow Crafts;
Master Masons;
Stewards;
Junior Deacons;
Senior Deacons;
Secretaries;
Treasurers;
Past Wardens;
Junior Wardens;
Senior Wardens;
Past Masters;
Mark Masters;
Royal Arch Masons;
Knights Templars;
Masters of Lodges;

The Grand Master commands silence, and the necessary preparations are made for laying of the stone, on which is engraved the year of Masonry, the name and title of the Grand Master.

A Past Master holds the Holy Bible on a velvet cushion.

Another Past Master holds a Light;
Two Past Masters, each holding a Light;
Grand Secretary and Treasurer, with Emblems;
Grand Junior Warden, with Pitcher of Corn;
Grand Senior Warden, with Pitcher of Wine;
Deputy Grand Master, with Pitcher of Oil;
Grand Master, Two Stewards, with Rods.

The stone is raised up, and then the stone let down into its place. The Holy Bible is open by the Grand Chaplain or assisting Brethren. Next, the principal Architect presents the "Working Tools" to the Grand Master who applies the Plumb, Square, and Level to the stone, in their proper positions, and pronounces it to be "WELL FORMED, TRUE AND TRUSTY." *(It should be noted that the 'Protocol' from this Manual has been revised, modified and updated in succeeding years.



Furthermore, various Grand Jurisdictions have their own Protocols, which supersede and take precedence in their own respective Grand Jurisdictions)

On September 18, 1793, President and Brother George Washington officiated at the laying of the Cornerstone for the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. and was assisted by various other Masons. Again, the Corn, Wine, and Oil were deposited on the cornerstone. The solemn service was concluded by prayer from the chaplain.

There seems to be no proscribed "recipe" for precisely what kinds or varieties of Corn, Wine, and Oil are utilized. However, since a great majority of Blue Lodges in the United States have a King James Version of the Bible visibly displayed at all meetings and Official functions, it would only be logical to assume that the particular varieties of the "Elements" would be in harmony with Judeo-Christian precepts. The "Corn" would be any native-grown corn or maize (in some Jurisdictions, 'wheat kernels' may be used in lieu of corn). The Oil should be a kind which is beneficial to the human body (whether it be a topical 'baby oil' typically used externally on the skin; or a 'clear vegetable oil' as used for food preparation). Although these elements are poured onto the Cornerstone, which is only mere 'matter,' the Cornerstone is reflective of the strength and integrity of those people who built the Building and of the patrons who will occupy or dwell inside the Building. Therefore, tender human touches are most appropriate.

While the word "**kosher**" generally refers to Jewish dietary laws which pertain to the manufacture and supervision of foods (even 'salt') --- the word also has a secondary definition, used as *slang*: "**Something that is legitimate, permissible, genuine or authentic.**"

In any case, the Old Charges admonish us: "Be reminded that in the pilgrimage of human life, you are to impart a portion of your bread (**CORN**) to the hungry; to send a cup of your wine (**WINE**) to cheer the sorrowful; and to pour the healing oil (**OIL**) of your consolation into the wounds which sickness has made in the bodies, or afflictions present in the heart of your fellow human-beings." As Masonic scholars, we as Masonic Rosicrucians have the pleasant task of studying Masonic History by virtue of logical, sound evidence. Whether it is the private atmosphere of our Ritualistic degree-conferrals or the public ceremonies of cornerstone-layings or dedications of buildings: Let us all ---cordially, politely and fraternally, encourage that everything surrounding the dispatch of such fraternal business be done "kosher" or in an authentic manner. So Mote It Be.

Sources / References / Exhibits / Recommended Reading :

- "FREEMASONRY TODAY": The Official Journal of The United Grand Lodge of England. 30 November 2011 issue.
- Masonic "Lodge Devotion 723" of The United Grand Lodge of Victoria, located at Melbourne, Australia. Article: "On The Grapevine", July 2012,
- Lodge Website pertaining to Wine: <http://www.lodgedevotion.net/devotionnews/food-cooking-wine-spirits/wine-tasting/delicious-facts-about-wine-2012-07>
- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry" by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33^o, and a Knight Templar, referencing the topics of Masonic Cornerstones; and separately the topic of a Masonic "Toaste" (sic) "Toast."
- "MACOY's MASONIC MANUAL" by Robert Macoy, 33^o, and a Knight Templar. Revised Edition: June 1867. Published by Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Company. Macoy was born in Ulster County, Ireland in 1815. He died 1895 in New York.
- Budapest, Hungary, Jewish Synagogue Postal Stamp. Issued in year 1954, depicting the Jewish Synagogue in Budapest and the "DIASPORA" (migrations of Jews to distant lands." Notice the other unique symbols, along the outer edge of the postage stamp which are common to both Freemasonry and the Hebrew Faith: The Sun, Moon, Star-of-David; Camp-Scene/Encampment, etc, etc.



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