

## 8. RITUAL GESTURES AND LANGUAGE PATTERNS

Ans. “I asked the recommendations of a friend to become a Mason, I sought admission through his recommendations, and knocked, and the door of Masonry opened unto me.”

Going further, Cheryl Bruno, Joe Steve Swick III, and Nicholas S. Literski also mention Prichard’s 1730 exposé, which refers to the “Three Great Knocks” that killed Hiram Abiff within the legend of the third degree. They see an affinity in Prichard’s mention to the “death, transformation, and resurrection” symbolism that occurs near the end of the endowment.<sup>808</sup> Three, five, and seven are important numbers in Masonry. In other degrees, the number of knocks within and without the door of the Lodge vary.

Ritual gestures corresponding to “tokens” (grips), “signs,” and “penalties” (penal signs) are also used in Freemasonry. Benjamin Franklin’s gave this famous tribute on the subject, which extolled the efficacy of Masonic signs and tokens as universal credentials:<sup>809</sup>

These signs and tokens are of no small value; they speak a universal language, and act as a password to the attention and support of the initiated in all parts of the world. They cannot be lost so long as memory retains its power. Let the possessor of them be expatriated, shipwrecked or imprisoned; let him be stripped of everything he has in the world; still these credentials remain and are available for use as circumstances require.



8-13: *Operative Freemason at Work.*  
The Hague, Netherlands.

Like Franklin, historian Michael Turnbull highlights the practical utility of the gestures, attributing the origins of signs and grips in Freemasonry to the everyday needs of early craftsmen:<sup>810</sup>

While the techniques of building, stone-carving, and architecture could be absorbed only through a long and structured apprenticeship ..., the craftsmen (like most medieval working people) were unable to write ... and needed to be able to prove their qualifications and skills as they moved from one part of the country to another. They did this through special signs and passwords (rather like today’s credit-card [personal identification] numbers/passwords), which

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8-14: Hans Memling (ca. 1433–1494): *The Gates of Paradise with St. Peter*, 1471–1473.

a sacred handclasp.<sup>813</sup> The scene recalls an image from the tenth-century *Bamberg Apocalypse*, where John is admitted to the New Jerusalem by a special handclasp.<sup>814</sup>

they could learn only when they had completed their apprenticeship and mastered their craft. This was, in other words, a practical and sensible way of ensuring that quality-control mechanisms were in place in an industry where many unqualified workers tried to pass themselves off as experienced craftsmen.

Differing from the utilitarian emphasis of Franklin and Turnbull, Joseph Smith's temple teachings stressed the other-worldly significance of the words and gestures. The allegorical and practical uses of signs and tokens in Freemasonry were subordinated to his understanding that that the keys of the priesthood were primarily of religious significance. In this respect his interests were more closely allied with those of the ancient world who saw salvific significance in ritual gestures.

For example, in Hans Memling's striking fifteenth-century depiction of the gates of Paradise,<sup>811</sup> a sacred grip is featured alongside other, more conventional symbols of heavenly ascent after death. The doors at the top resemble the porch and façade of an imposing gothic cathedral, flanked by musical angels. Other angels prepare the elect for entry by helping them don priestly vestments. A crown shaped like a mitre is placed on their heads, prefiguring later Masonic rites.<sup>812</sup> Significantly, as a precursor to the climb of the righteous up the final stairway, Peter himself personally extends his hand to approaching men and women in