

**The Ohio Ritualist’s Guide to World Religions:
Research, Education and Integration of Religious Requirements for Ritual Work**

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Purpose and Application

The purpose of the *Ohio Ritualist's Guide to World Religions* is neither to recommend nor approve any permanent changes to the approved Ritual of the Grand Lodge of Ohio, agreeable to the findings of the Grand Lodge Committee on Ritual. Rather, this document has been prepared and presented for educational purposes only. In application it references the relevant Sections of the Ohio Masonic Code and the existing process for requesting and obtaining Dispensations for individual cases. Reference of any portion of the *Guide* is optional.

This document was developed based on the perspectives and personal experiences of interested individuals too numerous to list. Contributors include candidates and Brethren, present and past Lodge and Grand Lodge officers, and laity and clergy of many religious communities. Their contributions, openness, and patience are most appreciated.

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Introduction

Freemasonry is not a religion; however, our Fraternity is certainly religious. All Freemasons have confirmed their belief in a Supreme Deity, though our individual beliefs and interpretations vary significantly. Uniting men of every sect and opinion is one of the foundational tenets of our institution. Great care is taken to prevent disharmony in our Lodges - religious discussions or debates are forbidden, and no religion is to be shown preference over others.

Dr. James Anderson published the first edition of his Constitutions of the Free-Masons in 1723. This document was based heavily on the older Cooke Manuscript, or Gothic Constitutions, and has since been incorporated into the Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Ohio (Article XII). The first of these Ancient Charges reads:

I. CONCERNING GOD AND RELIGION

A Mason is obliged by his tenure to obey the moral law; and if he rightly understands the art, he will never be a stupid ATHEIST, nor an irreligious LIBERTINE. But though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation, whatever it was, yet it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is, to be good men and true, or men of honor and honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the center of union, and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must have remained at a perpetual distance.

It is important to note that “stupid” is not used as a base insult. The archaic root of the word “stupid” is the same as the word “stupor”. It describes someone who sees but cannot perceive the world around him.

The requirement that all candidates express a belief in a Supreme Being flows down into the Ohio Masonic Code. The requirements of candidates, and the responsibilities of our Lodges to them, are established in the Ohio Masonic Code in Chapter 25. Section 25.01(a)(3) requires that any candidate *be able to respond of his own accord, at his reception into the Lodge, that, in times of difficulty and danger, he trusts in God.*

This is further enumerated in the requirements for formal recognition as a regular Grand Lodge. The Conference Of Grand Masters Of Masons In North America (COGMNA) requires *adherence to the Ancient Landmarks – specifically, a Belief in God, the Volume of Sacred Law as an indispensable part of the Furniture of the Lodge, and the prohibition of the discussion of politics and religion.* Section 10.01(d)(1) of the Ohio Masonic Code requires the *acknowledgement of a belief in God, the Father of all men.* These requirements demonstrate the necessary importance of religious belief, but the specific language maintained by the Grand Lodge of Ohio also hints at an underlying issue in our growth as a Fraternity.

Dr. Anderson's first Charge was very controversial when it was first published. The Gothic Constitutions upon which it was based admonished that *it behoveth [Freemasons] first, principally, to God and his holy church, and all-halows [i.e. the saints].* Being written between the late 14th and early 15th centuries, they reflected that Christianity was the only acceptable religion in England at this time. Dr. Anderson expanded this to reflect the more open-minded philosophy the Enlightenment era.

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The controversy at the time of publication was whether this was truly an opening of Freemasonry to all religions of the world, or just an update to encompass both Catholics and Protestants. The Cooke Manuscript itself dates to around 1450, when Catholicism was really the only option in western Europe. The Protestant Reformation wouldn't begin until around 1517 with Martin Luther and his Ninety-Five Thesis. Europe spent the next 200 years tearing itself apart over who was right and who was wrong. On the outset of these wars, Freemasonry was attempting to be something of a neutral ground, where those vehement (and sometimes violent) disagreements would be left outside the Lodge so that only harmony would exist within.

Opening to all religions was seen by some of Dr. Anderson's contemporaries as a step too far. However, the philosophy of his Constitutions of the Free-Masons have since prevailed and have been adopted by most (but not all) of regular Freemasonry. This is again reflected in the Ohio Masonic Code. Section 25.01(b) requires that *no religious test shall ever be required of any petitioner for the benefits of Masonry other than a steadfast belief in the existence and perfection of God*. Our Officers Manual also reminds us that:

The universal nature of Freemasonry should never, under any circumstances, be forgotten or ignored, even if every member present is of the same religious belief.

And that:

Respect for our members' and Candidates' religious beliefs means just that - and we both protect harmony and promote Brotherly love by guarding against insensitivity to the feelings of our Brethren.

However, traces of our ancient traditions still remain. Section 10.01(d)(7) requires that all foreign Grand Lodges make *the Sacred Book of the Divine Law, chief among the Three Lights of Masonry, indispensably present in the Lodges while at work*. Despite this general and more universally-worded requirement for others, the Ritual of the Grand Lodge of Ohio itself refers in most (if not all) instances specifically to the Holy Bible. The questions propounded to our Candidates prior to their Initiation have updated to remove specific references to God *as revealed in the Holy Bible*, but not until 2008.

Our modern age is a multicultural one, and world religions are now widely dispersed. Communities of different faiths have been established in all corners of the country and our world is in constant motion. Businessmen relocate for new opportunities. Students travel abroad. Families flee adversity to the relative safety and freedom that our country provides. Just as the United States is a melting pot of uncounted cultures, so too is modern Freemasonry.

The philosophical focus of our Ritual is on the experience of the candidate. The initiate should enjoy his Degree and, while it may be at times uncomfortable by design, the experience should never be distressing. Our Officers Manual explains that,

One function of the Ritual is to impress upon each Candidate the lessons and principles of the Fraternity and to provide a shared, common experience for men who may be from very different religious, ethnic or social backgrounds. It should accord the candidate a genuine moral and solemn experience, while providing him a vision of a new life as a member of the Fraternity.

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It goes on to admonish that *the interest and value of a man's entire Masonic career may be contingent upon the gracious consideration and solemn treatment accorded him as a candidate.*

Every group – religious, social, occupational, familial, etc. – naturally forms its own culture of beliefs, traditions, and expectations. Explicit expectations are written down and easily available. One example of an explicit expectation within Freemasonry is the concept of “breaking the light” during a Lodge meeting, which is explained in our Officer's Manual. Implicit expectations, commonly known as “unwritten rules” or taboos, are understood by insiders but are not accessible to outsiders or newcomers. One common example in Ohio Freemasonry is the restriction of wearing the square and compasses (in their traditional arrangement) to Master Masons only. This is not written down anywhere in our guiding documents but, depending on the Lodge culture, it may be an embarrassing lesson to Entered Apprentices who attend their next Stated Meeting wearing such a lapel pin or ring.

Different religions have different concepts of reverence and respect, and what may seem an innocuous reference or action during our Ritual may be of significant concern to a different practitioner. There is also a wide variation in individual interpretations and beliefs. Many interviewees described a reluctance regarding any special treatment, either to preserve the traditional Ritual language or to avoid being known as “the Muslim candidate” or “the Buddhist candidate”, while also noting some amount of cultural conflict that detracted from their experiences.

Lodges may not be aware of these potential conflicts for many reasons. Some may have never encountered such conflicts before and simply do not think to ask. Others may feel that they cannot or should not ask. As previously mentioned, section 25.01(b) of the Ohio Masonic Code admonishes that *no religious test shall ever be required of any petitioner for the benefits of Masonry other than a steadfast belief in the existence and perfection of God.* This section is meant to prevent Lodges from discriminating against candidates due to their personal beliefs. However, it can be interpreted as a general prohibition on discussing those beliefs, even in a positive and constructive manner with regards to the candidate's Degree experience. By solving one problem, this interpretation may unintentionally create another.

Failure to discuss the needs of the candidate, and to take those needs into account, can have catastrophic results. Neither the candidate nor the Lodge may be aware of a cultural conflict until it presents itself during the Degree, leaving the candidate with an unfortunate choice – to continue on with the Degree in violation of his personal beliefs, or to stop the Degree. Section 25.01(e) of the Ohio Masonic Code requires that *the refusal of a candidate to conform to any part of authorized ceremonies disqualifies him from receiving Masonic degrees.* Thus, perceived irreverence or cultural differences during our Degrees can possibly result in the rejection of an otherwise-worthy candidate. This disastrous scenario is a possibility that the *Ohio Ritualist's Guide to World Religions* seeks to mitigate through education and respectful accommodation.

In a conflict between the letter and spirit of the Ritual, it is the opinion of the author that the latter should take precedence within reasonable bounds. Thus, while we are committed to preserving our traditions, we should also take appropriate measures to address significant concerns regarding cultural differences. Failure to do so could detract from the candidate's appreciation of our Degrees and tarnish his esteem of our Fraternity. Minor adjustments of our practices could be made on an individual basis, and with proper dispensations from the Grand Lodge of Ohio, to ensure the experience of the candidate without detracting from the meaning and solemnity of our Degrees.

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Any adjustments must be identified based on the specific needs of the individual candidate. Lodge officers should not assume such requirements without due consultation, nor interject personal opinions into the process. Discussion with the candidate will guarantee a respectful and representative Degree experience with a minimum of necessary deviations from the established Ritual.

Encountering different religions remains an uncommon occurrence, so few Lodge officers will have direct experience with this issue before the potential candidate walks through their door. It is not practical for Lodge officers to develop an understanding for all possible situations in advance. However, it is quite possible to cultivate a general appreciation for this issue in our Lodge officers. This mindset can be supported by the development of research and education on this issue and the training of specific key individuals to assist our officers as needed.

Recommended Selections from the Ritual

Many portions of the Ritual are presented with two alternatives, one having distinct Judeo-Christian language and the other being religion-neutral. The following selections from the Ritual may be fitting for candidates of non-Christian faiths:

Entered Apprentice:

- The second opening prayer on page 11
- The first Apron Lecture on page 23
- The second closing prayer on page 51

Fellow Craft:

- The second opening prayer on page 58
- The second closing prayer on page 90

Master Mason:

- The second opening prayer on page 98
- The "Optional Prayer" on page 132
- The second closing prayer on page 158

Possible Conflicts

An initial evaluation of possible cultural conflicts was conducted by reviewing our Ritual with the assumed character of a religion-neutral candidate. Informal interviews were also conducted with present and past Lodge officers involved in the conferral of Degrees upon non-Christian candidates, as well as with current members of the Fraternity who follow non-Christian religions. Finally, a review was made of publicly-available guidance documents from the jurisdictions of the Grand Lodges of Minnesota, Iowa and Singapore.

The Ritual of the Grand Lodge of Ohio strictly refers to the Volume of Sacred Law as the Holy Bible in all instances. There may be a preference to describe the Volume of Sacred Law by the particular title appropriate to the candidate – e.g. the Tanakh – or by a more universal term such as the "Holy Book". Spoken references are not anticipated to be a major point of concern for candidates, and references to the Holy Bible are commonly explained during initial interviews and Investigations without issue. However, accommodation of a change in wording could provide a personalized and respectful Degree experience.

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Similarly, a more thorough explanation of the dedication of our Lodges may be valuable prior to the Entered Apprentice Degree. The candidate is taught that modern Lodges are dedicated to the Holy Saints John. However, non-Christian religions do not necessarily recognize the concept of sainthood. This reference may be seen as an endorsement, or even an enforcement, of Christian beliefs and may detract from the Degree experience. Removal of the reference is not necessary. Rather, an explanation can be provided that our Lodges are dedicated to the memory of these upstanding individuals, and that the formal title of Saint is applied out of respect, rather than religious veneration.

Different religions may have different concerns regarding the swearing of oaths or obligations. This is a common issue even within particular denominations and followers of Christianity, such as the Quaker community. It is a well-documented phenomenon in our Fraternity and, again, is commonly addressed in initial discussions with a candidate. Furthermore, Section 25.01(d) of the Ohio Masonic Code states that *"the obligation may be administered by affirmation to one who is conscientiously opposed to taking an oath."*

Actions speak louder than words. The most significant area of potential cultural conflict is in the physical handling of the Volume of Sacred Law during our Ritual. We show the Holy Bible the utmost respect and reverence, according to Christian tradition. However, different religions have different interpretations of what constitutes reverence and irreverence, or even insult. These differences may not be immediately apparent to outside observers, and constitutes a very real danger for unwary Lodge officers. We absolutely do not want any part of our Ritual to be construed as inappropriate, sacrilegious or blasphemous by a candidate in the midst of his initiation.

Candidate Interviews

The easiest and most accurate way to avoid potential cultural conflicts is to build an understanding of the expectations of the candidate himself. This will allow Lodge officers to identify any potential misalignments or personal offenses well in advance of Ritual work. However, it is often considered taboo to ask a candidate for fine details of his religious beliefs. This is in part due to Section 25.01(b) of the Ohio Masonic Code, which reads in part: *"No religious test shall ever be required of any petitioner for the benefits of Masonry other than a steadfast belief in the existence and perfection of God"*. Thus, it can be difficult to determine potential issues before they arise – Lodges may not want to pry deeper than this, and candidates cannot know what additional information to volunteer.

Several explanations and questions can be employed to develop mutual understanding prior to the candidate's initiation without breaking with good etiquette:

- *The focal point of the Lodge is the Volume of Sacred Law. Masonic tradition makes reference to this Volume of Sacred Law as the "Holy Bible", but this is not meant to give preferential treatment to the Christian Bible. For our Degrees, a holy book is selected based on your personal beliefs.*
- *Which holy book would you prefer for your initiation?*
- *Freemasons treat the Volume of Sacred Law with the utmost respect. Does your religion have specific guidelines for showing this holy book due reverence?*

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The HBO Miniseries *John Adams* includes a reenactment of George Washington's first inauguration and includes many details that are very similar to our Ritual. This scene is currently available on YouTube at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOvHjvrhXPA>

After viewing this scene, the candidate can be asked if any of the actions seem disrespectful or unacceptable. Thus, the candidate can be engaged regarding potential issues with handling the Volume of Sacred Law without spoiling any of the surprise of the Degree experience.

It is important to approach this issue with sensitivity. We should avoid profiling candidates based on appearance, name, place of birth, or any other detail listed on their petition. General questions such as these can be used to engage every candidate equally without bias.

Resolution through Dispensation

Possible resolutions to these conflicts include:

- Dispensation to change all spoken references to the "Holy Bible" to the "Holy Book".
- Dispensation to change the procedures for opening the Lodge, the circumambulatory recitation, placement of the candidate at the altar, and sealing the obligation to fit the requirements of the candidate's religion.

Changes to the setting of the altar during opening and closing of the Lodge would not necessarily require an adaptation of the Ritual. It may be advantageous to open and close the Lodge using the Holy Bible and change to the Volume of Sacred Law of the candidate immediately prior to the Degree. The Volume of Sacred Law should be opened to an appropriate (and, ideally, pre-defined) passage for the given Degree. In some cases, the Volume of Sacred Law may not be opened or touched at all. In others, the Senior Deacon may be required to wear gloves when handling the holy book or conduct a ceremonial washing prior to the Degree.

Changes to the placement of the candidate at the altar may require an adaptation of the spoken instruction of the Senior Deacon. If the Volume of Sacred Law cannot be opened or touched, an adaptation may be required for the arrangement of the candidate's hand(s). Also, as with the opening and closing ceremonies, the candidate may be required to wear gloves to touch the Volume of Sacred Law. This would require an additional change to the preparation of the candidate before the ceremonies, but not to the Ritual itself.

Each Degree includes a circumambulatory recitation, which is a reading of the relevant passage to which the Holy Bible is traditionally opened. Changes to this recitation may be to read the passage of the Volume of Sacred Law selected by the candidate, performed by the Chaplain or another willing brother. Note that, during this recitation, the Ritual does not dictate that the Lodge assume an attitude of prayer or otherwise participate. This recitation is purely for the benefit of the candidate.

Changes to the sealing of the obligation may require an adaptation of the instructions of the Worshipful Master to the candidate. There may be alternative salutes or affirmations that would impart the same importance to the candidate.

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Preserving the Harmony of the Lodge

Modification of the established Ritual is an uncommon, and sometimes disorienting, occasion for the Lodge. It is recommended that the Worshipful Master and Lodge Education Officer hold a discussion with the Lodge membership prior to the Degree. This discussion will identify the expectations of the Lodge, the specific needs of the candidate, and an appropriate path forward to minimize confusion during the Degree.

The Degree experience is an internal matter of the Lodge. However, if deemed necessary, this discussion could include external support such as a District Education Officer (for general assistance), a District Deputy Grand Master (for specific questions regarding interpretation of the Ohio Masonic Code and requesting a Dispensation), or other knowledgeable resource

Researching Example Religions

As mentioned previously, Christianity remains the most common religion encountered in candidates for Freemasonry. Several example non-Christian religions have been identified for further study based on local communities and national demographics. Research into the high-level requirements of these faiths has been conducted along four parallel approaches:

1. Initial study has been accomplished through academic means through reviewing religious teachings and the published recommendations of other Grand Lodge jurisdictions. Example publications are referenced at the end of this document.
2. Academic study can develop only a conceptual understanding of a religion. The second approach is to reach out to local religious leaders for their perspectives and recommendations.
3. Brethren of different faiths have been interviewed regarding their experiences. While all have been quick to note that they do not consider themselves expert sources, they have valuable perspectives both as lay practitioners of their faiths and as Freemasons. They are also in a unique position to provide feedback on our Ritual and their individual candidate experiences.
4. The most important approach is to gauge the expectations of the candidate himself. Differences exist not only between religions, but between sects and communities, and even individuals. Each candidate is different and it is vital to understand their personal views and requirements.

Additionally, references to example passages will be obtained for the opening of the Volume of Sacred Law during each Degree. Passages for the Entered Apprentice Degree were selected for imagery of enlightenment and revelation. Passages for the Fellow Craft Degree parallel the Ten Commandments as the foundational instructions of each religion. Passages for the Master Mason Degree expound upon the concerns of growing old, coming to terms with mortality, and the comfort of having lived correctly.

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Research Summary

Faith	Volume of Sacred Law	Relevant Passage			Special Instructions	
		EA	FC	MM	Handling	Saluting
Christianity	<u>The Holy Bible</u> (KJV)	Psalms 133	Amos 7:7-8	Ecclesiastes 12:1-7		
Judaism	<u>The Tanakh</u>	Psalms 133	Amos 7:7-8	Ecclesiastes 12:1-7		
Noahidism	<u>The Tanakh, the Holy Bible, or other</u>	Psalms 133 or other	Amos 7:7-8 or other	Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 or other		
Islam	<u>The Holy Qur’an</u>	Suratu-l-Imran 3:103	Suratu-l-Baqarah 2:255	Suratu-l-Buruj 85:12-16	If using a true <u>Qur’an</u> : Candidate should complete full ceremonial washing prior to the Degree. All other brethren should at least wash hands before handling.	
Zoroastrianism	<u>The Avesta</u>	Yasna 31:6-7	Yasna 12:8	Yasna 71:13-16		
Sikhism	<u>The Sri Guru Granth Sahib</u>	Ang 20 Verse 4	Ang 1367 Verses 58 and 59	Ang 167, Verse 4 5 11 49	Anyone handling or reading the book must be barefoot, fully-clothed, and wearing a head covering. Hands must be washed before handling.	Bow and touch forehead to the book.
Hinduism	<u>The Holy Bagvad Gita</u>	10:10-11	13:16-18	2:19-20		Bow and touch forehead to the book.
Jainism	<u>The Agams</u>	Not traditionally used for this purpose.			Hands must be washed prior to handling.	Bow and touch forehead to the book.
	<u>Tattvartha Sutra</u>	The Categories of Truth 1:1-3	The Vows 7:4-13	Liberation 10:1-5		
Buddhism	The most appropriate option may be to administer the obligation by affirmation, rather than by oath.					
	<u>The Dhammapada</u>	The Wise 6:87-89	The Path 20:277-279	Age 11:146-151		
Ásatrú	<u>The Poetic Edda</u>	Hávamál 6-7	Hávamál 127-128	Hávamál 77-78		
Deism	<u>The Jefferson Bible</u> or other	Mark 4:21-23 (page 24)	Mark 12:28-31 (page 60)	Luke 17:26-33 (page 48)		

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Christianity

Most major Christian denominations adhere to the Holy Bible as their guiding religious text. While not all specifically adhere to the King James Version most commonly used in Ohio Masonic Lodges, the approved passages as they appear in the Ritual are equally approved for all denominations.

Generally speaking, our Ritual is compatible with the traditions and practices of the Christian faith. There are, however, a few exceptions. For example, the Quaker denomination does not allow the swearing of oaths for any purpose. It is proper to administer the obligation by affirmation, rather than by oath, as described in Section 25.01(d) of the Ohio Masonic Code.

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (commonly the LDS Church or Mormonism) is the major denomination of Restorationist Christianity, founded by John Smith in the 19th century AD. The holy books of the LDS Church include the Holy Bible (King James Version), the Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. All practices concerning the obligations can be conducted per the Ritual without any necessary modifications.

Judaism

Judaism is the oldest of the Abrahamic faiths, and is the foundation upon which Christianity and Islam were built. Many of the allegories of the Symbolic Lodge and appendant bodies are based on the stories and traditions of the Jewish faith.

The Tanakh, also known as the *Mikra* or Hebrew Bible, is the canon of the Jewish faith. It includes the *Torah* ("Teaching"), *Nevi'im* ("Prophets"), and *Ketuvim* ("Writings"). The Old Testament of the Holy Bible, the King James Version of which is the Volume of Sacred Law specified in the Ritual, is based primarily on the Tanakh. As such, all practices concerning the obligations can be conducted per the Ritual without any necessary modifications.

The Tanakh should be handled with the same reverence as the Holy Bible. Additional respect should be paid if the Tanakh is accidentally dropped, by kissing the book after it has been retrieved from the floor.

Note that Judaism observes the Sabbath (*Shabbat* or *Shabbos*) beginning 20 minutes before sundown on Friday through approximately 20 minutes after sunset on Saturday. Scheduling Degrees and other Lodge activities during this time should be avoided.

Noahidism

A Noahide is a "righteous gentile" (non-Jew) that follows the Seven Laws of Noah. The laws are largely sourced from the Book of Genesis and are formally enumerated in the Talmud, the central text of Jewish religious law and theology, as follows:

- Do not worship idols.
- Do not curse God.
- Do not commit murder.
- Do not commit sexual immorality.
- Do not steal.
- Do not eat meat from a living animal.
- Establish courts of justice.

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Traditionally, a *ger toshav*, or "resident alien", was a Gentile living in Israel who formally accepted the Seven Laws before a rabbinical court. Today one can become a Noahide informally without following the process of rabbinical recognition. Following the Seven Laws may be supplemental to another personal faith, it may be a personal faith of its own, or it may be an initial step towards converting to Judaism as a *ger tzedek* ("righteous convert").

The modern worldwide Noahide movement, of following the Seven Laws as one's personal faith, is a relatively recent development within the last 30 years. Beyond the Seven Laws, there is no formal dogma or liturgy. Some Noahides adopt traditions of Judaism, although some practices - such as observing the Sabbath and other Jewish religious holidays - are not generally considered appropriate. Other Noahides develop their own personal observances.

In most cases, the Tanakh or Holy Bible will be selected as the Volume of Sacred Law with the traditional verses, and no modifications to the Ritual are likely to be necessary.

Islam

Islam is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the 6th century AD. The largest sect is Sunni Islam (85-90%) and bases its traditions on the life of Prophet Muhammad. The second largest is the Shia (10%), which includes the continuing legacy of the Prophet Muhammad's descendants and successors.

The Volume of Sacred Law for Islam is the Holy Qur'an (or Koran). It has been translated into English and many other languages; however, the original Arabic is considered the only true version. Example passages from the Koran were referenced from an article on the topic written by Worshipful Brother Rashied K. Sharrieff-Al-Bey of Cornerstone Lodge #37, Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, F&AM of New York.

Example passages include:

Entered Apprentice:

And hold fast by the Rope which G-d stretches forth for you, all together, and be not disunited. And remember G-d's favor to you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favor you became Brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it. Thus G-d makes clear to you His messages that you may be guided.

Suratu-l-Imran (The Family of Imran), 3:103

Fellow Craft:

G-d! There is no god but He, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist. Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Who is he that can intercede with Him, but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases. His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Great.

Suratu-l-Baqarah (The Cow), 2:255

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Master Mason:

Surely the Grip of thy Lord is strong. Surely He it is Who creates first (most initially) and then reproduces; And He is the Forgiving, the Loving. Lord of the Throne of Power, the Glorious, Doer of what He intends.

Suratu-I-Buruj (The Stars, or The Zodiac), 85:12 – 16

The true Qur'an is in original Arabic text. When handling a true Qur'an (in the original Arabic) in prayer, such as the candidate would during the Ritual, it is preferable to first complete the Wudu. This is a ceremonial washing of the hands, mouth, nose, arms, head, and feet with water. This is not necessary if the Qur'an is only being read or otherwise handled, such as during the opening and closing of the Lodge, but at least the hands should be clean. An English-only translation of the Qur'an is not considered a true Qur'an and may be exempt from some or all of these requirements. Kissing the Qur'an is common practice in many parts of the world, and is considered a sign of honor and respect.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion that arose in Persia in the 6th century BC. Adherents include Darius the Mede, king of Babylon, and Cyrus the Great, king of Persia. The Volume of Sacred Law for Zoroastrianism is the Avesta. The *Yasna* is a subdivision of texts that are directly attributable to the prophet Zarathustra. Example passages include:

Entered Apprentice:

To him shall the best befall, who, as one that knows, speaks to me Right's truthful word of Welfare and of Immortality; even the Dominion of Mazda which Good Thought shall increase for him.

About which he in the beginning thus thought, "Let the blessed realms be filled with Light", he it is that by his wisdom created Right. Those realms that the Best Thought shall possess those dost Thou exalt, O Mazda, through the Spirit, which, O Ahura, is ever the same.

Yasna 31:6-7

Fellow Craft:

I profess myself a Mazda-worshipper, a Zoroastrian, having vowed it and professed it. I pledge myself to the well-thought thought, I pledge myself to the well-spoken word, I pledge myself to the well-done action.

Yasna 12:8

Master Mason:

Let the holy Zarathushtra himself seek out a friend and a protector. And I say to thee (O Zarathushtra!) to make to thee a friend holy beyond the holy, and truer than the true, for that is the better thing; for he is evil who is the best to the evil, and he is holy to whom the holy is a friend,

For these are the best of words, those which Ahura Mazda spoke to Zarathushtra.

And do thou (O Zarathushtra!) Pronounce these words at the last ending of thy life.

For if (O Zarathushtra!) Thou shalt pronounce these words at the last ending of thy life I, Ahura Mazda, will keep your soul away from Hell. Yea, so far away shall I hold it as is the breadth and extension of the earth.

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As thou dost desire (O holy one!) so shalt thou be, holy shalt thou cause thy soul to pass over the Chinvat Bridge; holy shalt thou come into Heaven. Thou shalt intone the Gatha Ushtavaiti, reciting the salvation hail.

Yasna 71:13-16

All practices concerning the obligations can be conducted per the Ritual without any necessary modifications. According to Tushan Driver, secretary of the Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago:

The concepts of Freemasonry - fraternity, brotherhood, and a commitment to public service - are very compatible with Zoroastrian principles and practices. Different communities across the world practice Zoroastrianism differently, but as a religion, it is mostly devoid of ritual and dogma, and most Zoroastrians follow some fairly basic guiding principles to lead their lives in a good, righteous way. As such, any ritualistic initiation ceremonies in Freemasonry, would be completely benign to Zoroastrians, and would cause no sense of disrespect whatsoever.

Sikhism

Sikhism is a montheistic religion that was founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region of India circa 15th century AD. It follows the teachings of Guru Nanak and the nine Gurus that followed, the most recent being Guru Gobind Singh circa 18th century AD. Sikhism emphasizes meditation on the name of the creator, unity, selflessness, social justice, honesty, and integrity.

The Volume of Sacred Law for Sikhism is the Guru Granth Sahib, named for the final and immortal eleventh Guru as foretold. Passages are listed by page (Ang) and verse, which is found at the end of the passage. Example passages include:

Entered Apprentice:

The Gurmukh knows the Divine Light, while the foolish self-willed manmukh gropes around in the darkness. One who sees that Light within each and every heart understands the Essence of the Guru's Teachings.

Ang 20, Verse ||4||

Fellow Craft:

Kabeer, the door of liberation is very narrow, less than the width of a mustard seed. Your mind is larger than an elephant; how will it pass through? Kabeer, if I meet such a True Guru, who mercifully blesses me with the gift, then the door of liberation will open wide for me, and I will easily pass through.

Ang 1367, Verses ||58|| and ||59||

Master Mason:

My condition, O my True Guru - that condition, O Lord, is known only to You. I was rolling around in the dirt, and no one cared for me at all. In the Company of the Guru, the True Guru, I, the worm, have been raised up and exalted.

Ang 167, Verse ||4||5||11||49||

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Anyone handling or reading from the Guru Granth Sahib must be barefoot, fully-clothed, and wearing a head covering (e.g. hat, bandanna, turban, etc.). It is also improper to kiss this holy book. Instead, candidates may bow and touch their forehead to the book to seal their obligations.

Hinduism

Hinduism began to develop in India following the Vedic period, circa 5th century BC. It is the third largest religion in the world, with approximately 15% of the world population. Hinduism is also very diverse and varies from a religion, a general philosophy (*dharma*), and a cultural tradition. It has no ultimate ruling body, no prophets, and no universally-binding scriptures.

Holy scriptures include the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Agamas. The most common Volume of Sacred Law for Hinduism is the Holy Bhagavad Gita. Example passages from the Gita include:

Entered Apprentice:

To those who are constantly devoted, who worship Me with love, I give them understanding by which they come to me. Out of care for them, I dwell in their soul and with the lamp of knowledge, I destroy the darkness born of ignorance.

The Yoga of Divine Manifestation, 10:10-11

Fellow Craft:

The Supreme Lord is outside and inside all beings. He is moving and He is stationary. He is subtle and beyond mental and sensory comprehension. He is far yet He is near. Though He appears divided among living beings, He is undivided. He is the creator of all and the destroyer of all. He is the supreme source of all light and is beyond darkness. He is knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the goal of knowledge. He is situated in everyone's heart.

The Yoga of Discrimination Between the Field and the Knower of the Field, 13:16-18

Master Mason:

It is only the bemused person who thinks that it is the Soul which destroys and that it is the Soul that is destroyed. The Soul neither destroys, nor can be destroyed. The Soul has no birth or death. It has no being, and hence will never cease to be. Birthless, deathless, and without a beginning or an end, the Soul is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.

The Yoga of Ultimate Reality, 2:19-20

The Gita may be opened and handled freely. However, it is not proper to kiss this holy book. Instead, candidates may bow and touch their forehead to the book to seal their obligations.

Jainism

The Jain Dharma was formed in India following the Vedic period, circa 5th century BC. Its founders rejected the Vedas and developed their own scriptures. Jain philosophy details the accumulation of karma by the soul, leading to a tormenting cycle of death and rebirth, and how each soul can obtain release by living non-violent lives and shedding karma.

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The most revered holy books for the Jain religion are organized into an anthology known as the Agams. However, they are not easily available and most lay practitioners study "Explanatory Treatises" written by more contemporary scholars. The most appropriate to serve as the Volume of Sacred Law is the Tattvarth Sutra, written by Acharya Umaswati circa 2nd century AD, which is accepted as canon by all major Jain sects. The English translation is readily available.

Example passages include:

Entered Apprentice:

The enlightened world-view, enlightened knowledge and enlightened conduct are the path to liberation.

To possess the enlightened world-view is to believe in the categories of truth.

The enlightened world-view may arise spontaneously or through learning.

The Categories of Truth, 1:1-3

Fellow Craft:

The observer of the vows should contemplate the pitfalls and blemishes of violence, falsehood, and so on, in this life and the next.

Acts of violence and so on are nothing but unmitigated suffering.

The observer of the vows should cultivate friendliness towards all living beings, delight in the distinction and honour of others, compassion for miserable, lowly creatures and equanimity towards the vainglorious.

The observer of the vows should reflect upon the natural world outside and inside his own body in order to quicken fear of, and disinterest in, worldly life.

Taking life away out of passion is violence.

To speak what is not true is falsehood.

Taking anything that is not given is stealing.

Coupling is carnality.

Clinging is possessiveness.

One who is free of any thorns is an observer of the vow.

The Vows, 7:4-13

Master Mason:

Omniscience arises when deluding karma is eliminated and, as a result, knowledge-covering, intuition-covering and obstructive karma are eliminated.

There is no fresh bondage because the causes of bondage have been eliminated and all destructive karmas have worn off.

The elimination of all types of karma is liberation.

When the five states in all their varieties and also the state of being worthy of liberation cease, with the exception of the perfect enlightened world-view, perfect knowledge, perfect intuition and the state of being liberated, then there is liberation.

When all karmic bondage is eliminated, the soul soars upwards to the border of cosmic space.

Liberation, 10:1-5

Jain holy books may be opened and handled freely. However, hands must be washed prior to handling. It is also improper to kiss Jain holy books. Instead, candidates may bow and touch their forehead to the book to seal their obligations.

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Buddhism

Buddhism formed in the same time period as Hinduism and Jainism, circa 5th century BC. It was founded by the first Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, who was raised as a noble but instead became an ascetic. Similar to the early Jains, he rejected the Vedas, and sought release from the karmic cycle of rebirth. He evaluated but ultimately rejected Jain ascetic practice as being too extreme, creating instead what he termed the Middle Way.

There are three major branches of Buddhism – Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna – each with their own texts and traditions. Theravāda is most common in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and seeks the sublime state of Nirvana through the Middle Way or Eightfold Path. Mahāyāna is most common in East Asia and includes Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism, and places a higher emphasis on attaining Buddhahood by helping others along their paths to enlightenment. Vajrayāna is the form originally practiced in India, and has since been preserved through Tibetan Buddhism.

Buddhism organizes sacred texts into canons, rather than a singular Volume of Sacred Law. Across the three branches, the Dhammapada may best serve as the Volume of Sacred Law. This book is a collection of sayings of the Buddha in the form of short poems, to serve as simple guidelines for living. Example passages include:

Entered Apprentice:

They leave darkness behind and follow the light. They give up home and leave pleasure behind. Calling nothing their own, they purify their hearts and rejoice. Well-trained in the seven fields of enlightenment, their senses disciplined and free from attachments, they live in freedom, full of light.

The Wise, 6:87-89

Fellow Craft:

*All created things are transitory; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure wisdom.
All created beings are involved in sorrow; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure wisdom.
All states are without self; those who realize this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure wisdom.*

The Path, 20:277-279

Master Mason:

*Why is there laughter, why merriment, when this world is on fire? When you are living in darkness, why don't you look for light?
This body is a painted image, subject to disease, decay and death, activated by thoughts that come and go. What joy can there be for him who sees that his white bones will be cast away like gourds in the autumn?
Around the bones is build a house, plastered over with flesh and blood, in which dwell pride and pretense, old age and death. Even the chariot of a kin loses its glitter in the course of time; so too the body loses its health and strength. But goodness does not grow old with the passage of time.*

Age, 11:146-151

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Buddhism is a highly individualistic religion that places a heavy emphasis on personal accountability. The concept of swearing an oath in the name of a deity simply does not exist in many communities, though many Buddhists will do so to conform to societal expectations. The most appropriate and personally meaningful option for Buddhist candidates may be to administer the obligation by affirmation, rather than by oath, as described in Section 25.01(d) of the Ohio Masonic Code.

Ásatrú

Ásatrú, meaning "faith in the Æsir" in the Old Norse language, is the traditional religion of the ancient Nordic pantheon. It is also known as Ásatrúarfélagið, or "Ásatrú Fellowship". This religion was legally recognized by Iceland in 1973. Ásatrú does not have a fixed dogma, but encompasses many community and familial religious traditions. Practices and interpretations vary greatly between groups and individuals.

Ásatrú is largely a skaldic tradition, or one based on oral recitation of poetry. The main sources of the skaldic tradition are two books collectively known as the Eddas. The Prose Edda, also known as the Younger Edda, is a manual of poetics that also includes many mythological stories. The Poetic Edda, also known as the Elder Edda, is a collection of Old Norse poems recited by skalds. Among them is the Hávamál, or "Words of the High One", which is a collection of proverbs attributed to the god Odin.

Although the Eddas themselves are not typically considered holy or sacred books, the Hávamál is often selected by Ásatrú candidates for Freemasonry to serve as their Volume of Sacred Law. The translation into English by Henry Adams Bellows, referenced at the end of this document, is generally considered the best available.

Example passages include:

Entered Apprentice:

*A man shall not boast of his keenness of mind,
But keep it close in his breast;
To the silent and wise does ill come seldom
When he goes guest to a house;
(For a faster friend one never finds
Than wisdom tried and true.)*

*The knowing guest who goes to the feast
In silent attention sits;
With his ears he hears, with his eyes he watches,
Thus wary are wise men all.*

Hávamál 6-7

Fellow Craft:

*I rede thee, Loddfafnir! and hear thou my rede,-
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
If evil thou knowest, as evil proclaim it,
And make no friendship with foes.*

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*I rede thee, Loddfafnir! and hear thou my rede,-
Profit thou hast if thou hearest,
Great thy gain if thou learnest:
In evil never joy shalt thou know,
But glad the good shall make thee.*

Hávamál 127-128

Master Mason:
*Cattle die, and kindsmen die,
And so one dies one's self;
But a noble name will never die,
If good renown one gets.*

*Cattle die, and kinsmen die,
And so one dies one's self;
One thing I know that never dies,
The fame of a dead man's deeds.*

Hávamál 77-78

In Ásatrú tradition, swearing an oath upon a ring (or sometimes another personal item) is considered the most solemn form of obligation, and the most binding. Ásatrú candidates have requested permission to swear their Masonic obligations upon such items, in addition to the Volume of Sacred Law. This practice has been discussed by the Grand Lodge Committee on Ritual and no official guidance is available. The author suggests that dispensations can always be requested, although they may not be granted. Additional references are provided for further reading at the end of this document.

Deism

Deism is an umbrella term or broad concept, rather than a unified theory. This belief system grew in prominence and popularity during the Enlightenment and many Founding Fathers (including Right Worshipful Brother Benjamin Franklin) are thought to have been deists. In general, this belief system views the universe as having been set in motion by a Supreme Being; however, this deity has little or no intervention in human affairs and does not manifest itself through supernatural events. Deity is thus unknowable through direct revelation but can be glimpsed through a study of the natural world that it has created.

Of “the great books of nature and revelation”, deism focuses primarily on the former and largely rejects the latter. Thus, deciding on a Volume of Sacred Law may prove difficult for candidates. Many deists have taken their obligations on the Holy Bible out of tradition, or have selected the holy book of another faith that more closely aligns with their own personal beliefs.

One peculiar option may be The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth, more commonly known as the Jefferson Bible. This book focuses on the teachings of Jesus rather than on the miraculous or supernatural elements of the New Testament. Thomas Jefferson (himself a deist) curated this version by cutting excerpts of the four gospels from three different Holy Bibles and arranging them in chronological order. He also included translations in Greek, Latin, French, and English.

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Thomas Jefferson worked from 1794 to 1819 to complete this project. This original copy was transferred from the Jefferson family to the United States National Museum (now the Smithsonian Institution) in 1895, and published by an act of the United States Congress in 1904. A copy was given to each new member of Congress after taking the oath of office until 1957.

Example passages include:

Entered Apprentice:

*And he said unto them, "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick?
For there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.
If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."*

Mark 4:21-23 (page 24)

Fellow Craft:

*And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"
And Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord:
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.' This is the first commandment.
And the second is like, namely this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

Mark 12:28-31 (page 60)

Master Mason:

*And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man:
They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark; and the flood came, and destroyed them all.
Likewise also, as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded:
But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.
Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.
In that day, he which shall be upon the house-top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.
Remember Lot's wife.
Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.*

Luke 17:26-33 (page 48)

As the Jefferson Bible rearranges excerpts from all four gospels, locating particular passages may be challenging. The original text, as reprinted in facsimile form, is marked with book and chapter notations in the margins. Page numbers have also been included for quick referencing. Editions printed by other publishers may vary significantly in reference style.

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