

The Black Cube

Adapted from an anonymous article written in 1929

"A white ball elects, a black cube rejects."

Before voting on someone's application to become a member of Freemasonry, it is customary to make a statement similar to this at the lodge.

Within the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Illinois, when voting on an applicant in the Masonic Fraternity, it is required that the ballot be taken in secret. It is considered a violation of Masonic ethics and is against Masonic law to try to find out how another brother plans to vote or to reveal your vote on the applicant. Maintaining the secrecy of the ballot and ensuring that the vote is unanimous for election are two important values of the Fraternity.

Sometimes, keeping secrets and making decisions unanimously within a fraternity may seem unfair to a deserving individual who should be welcomed as a brother. However, no human organization is flawless, and individuals within the fraternity may only sometimes act in the best possible way. So, if the system occasionally fails to deliver complete justice, it's due to the behavior of the people within the fraternity and not the organization itself.

The phrase "Harmony being the strength and support of all institutions, especially ours" is well-known among Illinois Masons. Harmony, which refers to having unity in mindset, effort, ideas, and ideals, is a crucial aspect of Freemasonry. Anything that disrupts this harmony can harm the Institution. For this reason, lodges must maintain a harmonious membership, and no one should be allowed into a brother's Masonic home against his will.

To ensure transparency and fairness in the selection process, the names of lodge applicants must be presented to the entire membership before a vote is taken. This allows all members to be aware of who is being considered for membership and gives those with objections or concerns about a particular applicant a chance to express their opinion and vote accordingly. It is a fundamental part of upholding the values of brotherhood and unity within the lodge.

As a Master Mason, one holds significant power. Our voting decisions are private, even from the Grand Master, and the black cube we cast cannot be overridden. The applicant is rejected if a black cube appears in the ballot box. In the event of a single black cube, the ballot is retaken to avoid errors. If the black cube appears again, the applicant is rejected.

When an application is rejected, the consequences go beyond simply being denied the degrees. The applicant becomes subject to lodge jurisdiction, meaning he cannot apply to another lodge for the same degrees without obtaining a jurisdiction waiver. Even if he reapply to the same lodge, he must wait a year, and his previous rejection will be disclosed. Essentially, receiving a black cube denies the degrees and imposes a permanent restriction on the applicant.

When a brother votes for an applicant, he holds significant power. This power can be used for good or bad, affecting the person it's used on and the person wielding it. Unlike many other powerful tools in the hands of people, this one cannot be controlled or reviewed by any human entity. No king, prince, potentate, law, custom, regulation, Masonic brother, or officer can interfere with how an individual uses his power.

It is unknown who utilizes the black cube or the reasons behind its casting. Only the individual brother and his God possess this knowledge. The lack of accountability to society or any governing body emphasizes the importance of using this power wisely and only when it aligns with Masonic values after careful introspection and consideration.

It's not uncommon for people to have many reasons for casting a black cube. Whether it's to protect the lodge, ourselves, or an absent brother who may suffer if the applicant is elected, it's important to remember that using our power to reject an applicant for valid reasons is ethical and just. However, there is no definitive answer to what constitutes a good reason for casting a black cube. It's up to each individual to judge for himself. That being said, offering suggestions to help guide our decision-making is possible.

We are acquainted with a man whom we do not have a favorable opinion of. He holds different beliefs and belongs to a different social circle than us. He is not the type of person we admire. Our feelings towards him do not amount to hatred and are not based on any negative traits in his character. We simply do not get along and clash with each other. If he seeks membership in our lodge, we must weigh the negative impact of having him as a member against the potential benefits he could gain from learning the teachings of Freemasonry. We must question whether our dislike for him is enough to prevent us from accepting him as a brother.

We all know cases like this; the bank president turns down Johnson's application for a second mortgage. Johnson makes the matter personal. He "has it in" for the president. The president applies for the degrees. Someone casts a black cube. It may or may not be Johnson. We don't know. But perhaps, later, we hear Johnson's boast, "I got even with the son-of-a-gun who turned down my loan!" He doesn't say how he "got even," of course. But we are pretty sure we know.

Using the black cube for personal revenge is completely against the principles of Freemasonry. It is a misappropriation of a powerful symbol. We cannot justify transforming the Masonic black cube into a tool for seeking revenge.

Freemasonry has the power to work miracles. An individual who had risen from poverty to become a successful businessman applied five times for degrees in a particular lodge. Though he lacked education, he was an honest, upright citizen who had made something of himself through his efforts. However, a certain Past Master, who was later found out, voted against his application four times before leaving the city. On his fifth attempt, the petitioner was finally accepted into the lodge. Through his involvement in Masonry, he was inspired to pursue the education he had previously lacked and eventually found his way to the church. He became

highly respected in the Masonic community and was eventually elected Master of his lodge. He remained one of the most revered and accomplished Masters to have held that position.

After a decade or so, the Past Master, who had been absent, returned. Looking back on the situation, he admitted (even though he shouldn't have!) that he was the one who had prevented this man from joining the Fraternity. He believed that the man's rough demeanor would diminish the dignity and honor of the organization. However, it turned out that through his involvement in Masonry, the "roughneck" had become educated, a devout churchgoer, an outstanding Mason, and a remarkable officer. If the Past Master, who had acted with good intentions to benefit the Fraternity, had not left town, this man's heart may have never opened up to the blessings of Masonry. Furthermore, society, the lodge, and the church may have missed out on the contributions of a man who generously gave of himself to all three.

The Fraternity's great protection is the black cube. It allows members to keep their secret knowledge private while still using it for the benefit of the Craft. It also grants all members the right to refuse membership to anyone they choose. However, the black cube puts every brother's Masonic heart and personal honesty to the test when deciding to use it. It thoroughly tests our understanding of Justice, a cardinal virtue of Masonic teaching that enables us to treat every person fairly. We are taught that Justice should be practiced without exception and with the utmost attention to detail.

To maintain justice within our lodge, we must use the black cube when we deem an applicant unfit. It is also important to consider justice for ourselves by using the black cube for individuals who may disrupt the harmony of the lodge. However, we must also remember to administer justice fairly to each applicant. It is crucial that we do not use the black cube for petty or insignificant reasons and that we take the time to deliberate carefully before acting. Only the All-Seeing Eye will know our actions, which judges us based on our merits.

Paraphrasing Shakespeare, having great power is admirable, but using it to oppress others is unjust. Using the black cub recklessly or without proper Masonic reasoning can cause harm not only to the intended target but also to the one who casts it. The black cube symbolizes the immense power of Freemasonry and must be handled with care and purpose.