

The Common Gavel

Within the Lodge room, we learn of three hammers, namely the common gavel, the setting maul, and the gavel held by the Worshipful Master. Each has a special purpose and application in our ceremonies and rituals. Each carries both an operative and symbolic message.

The gavel held by the Worshipful Master is not a “common gavel”, but rather a “mallet” used to preside at the meetings of the Lodge and allows him to conduct its business with decorum and harmony. As the principal officer, the Worshipful Master uses his gavel to represent his authority and position. Through it we are taught to rise, sit, and finalize our business during the course of our labors. The many gavels seen at the annual convocations of grand lodge range in size and frequently are more “mauls” than gavels. Their size would better suit them for “setting” large stones, than governing a meeting, but as symbolic of our Grand Master’s power and office, they are considered “gavels”.

The “setting maul” carries great significance in our Third Degree and is a symbol of death. In ancient times this maul was a heavy wooden hammer used to “set” stones in the construction of buildings. Through its use, stones were hammered into place to close tolerances and, if needed, small quantities of cement used to unite them. In addition, mauls were used to drive chisels and wedges into stones, breaking them for the builder’s use. The setting maul would be a formidable weapon if used as such.

The “common gavel” is in fact a true gavel. Its shape has a “gable” on one end and a flat surface on the other. As noted in the Entered Apprentice degree, its purpose is to break off the rough parts of stone, found on the Rough Ashlar, and preparing it to become a finished stone or Perfect Ashlar, which then can be used in building a structure.

As an Entered Apprentice, we are reminded of our personal “rough and imperfect” state and of the need to gain education, understanding, and control of our many imperfections. It is through reflection and effort each Mason forms the foundation and building of his personal temple. Becoming a better Mason comes through divesting our minds and consciences of the vices, habits, desires, and unnecessary wants so common in our youth. Each of these imperfections appears as a rough point on our character and the common gavel calls us to pay due attention to them and smooth them away, always preparing for the Spiritual Temple in our future.

While a “common” implement of the Mason, the gavel is a constant reminder of our need for self-improvement and watchfulness. Perfection in conduct, like that of a perfectly flat surface or perfect stone, comes through work and constant vigilance. Placed in our hands as Entered Apprentices, the gavel is a symbol of that responsibility and opportunity to be better men and Masons.