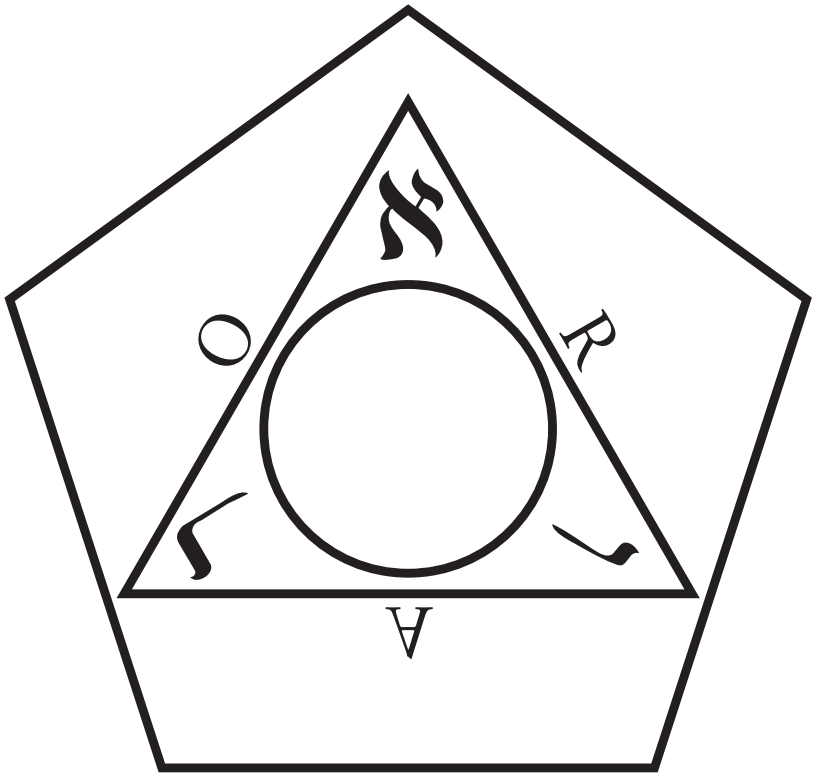
Academy of Reflection

— COURSE MATERIAL —



Practical Experiments in Reflective Dialogue

AOR1100

Prerequisite Courses

- *Basic Methods in the Intentional Practice of Awareness (AOR1000)*

Prerequisite Reading

- *None*

Course Guidelines

- None

Introduction

Many of us tend to think of reflection, contemplation, meditation and mindfulness as solitary activities. Even group meditations are easy to think of as moments in which we might be guided by another, yet the experience itself is essentially internal and separate from that of others. Yet consider how often we, as groups, discuss our experiences of group meditation, Masonic ritual, or things like common readings. Consider how often we discuss our solitary practices with other individuals. These moments of discussion are themselves opportunities for reflective practice and this course is intended to help develop your ability to engage them.

In the physical world, the phenomenon of reflection includes these elements:

1. An object is exposed to some energy, like heat, sound, or light.
2. That energy interacts with the substance of the object.
3. Some of the energy is absorbed by the object, and thus the object is changed in some way.
4. Some of the energy is reflected by the object, and thus both the energy and the environment around the object are changed.

We can use each phase of this phenomenon as an allegorical step in the processes of consciously reflecting on an experience.

1. You are exposed to some type of experience, whether physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and almost certainly some combination of these types.
2. You engage the experience, both consciously and unconsciously.
3. Some of the experience is absorbed, and thus you are changed in different ways.
4. Some of it is reflected outward by you, and so the experience itself and the environment around you are changed.

From these 4 steps, we derive 4 sets of questions to use in the intentional practice of reflection on any given experience.

1. What was the situation in which you were exposed to the experience? Describe the who, what, where, and when of the situation, including its physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions. How and why did the experience emerge within that situation?
2. How and why did you consciously engage with the experience at that time? What decisions did you make and what actions did you take at that time to engage the experience, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually?
3. What effects - physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual - began to happen within you at that time through the experience? What further effects have emerged within you since then? How have you been changed by it? How else might you be changed by it as you continue to reflect upon it?
4. What effects - physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual - began to happen to the environment (the people, place, and things) around you because of you engaging the experience? What further effects have emerged since then? How has the environment been changed by them? How else might you continue to affect it?

To these 4 sets we add a final one for summation and forethought.

- What did you learn from this experience?
- What uncertainties, questions, or new opportunities have emerged as a result of it?
- How might you engage similar experiences differently in the future?
- What new situations or experiences might you help create for yourself and others based upon this experience?
- What relevant decisions and actions are next for you?

At this point, we have described a process of reflection that involves only oneself. The following exercises will provide practical experience in all aspects of this process between two people. Note that it is important to prepare for these exercises by selecting significant experiences to process.

Part 1 – Long Form Reflective Dialogue

To assist person A in reflection on a given experience, person B (a course reviewer or another brother) asks person A every question through the first 4 sets in order, listening carefully and not interrupting to comment, but only to seek clarification on specific details.

Once all the questions have been asked and person A has nothing to add, person B asks if parson A would like feedback. If A agrees, then B comments on what he heard A say, and offers any thoughts or questions he thinks might be helpful. Then A responds, and a more open and spontaneous flow of conversation ensues.

When both A and B agree that the first 4 sets have been thoroughly discussed, B asks A the questions from the fifth set, listening carefully and not interrupting to comment, but only to seek clarification on specific details.

Once all the questions have been asked and A has nothing to add, B asks if A would like feedback. If A agrees, then B comments on what he heard A say, and offers any thoughts or questions he thinks might be helpful. Then A responds, and a more open and spontaneous flow of conversation ensues. When both A and B agree that the questions of the fifth set have been thoroughly discussed, the dialogue can be ended.

If both A and B engaged in the same experience, then A may ask the questions of B if he is willing.

Objectives:

- Document at least 120 minutes of reflective dialogue as person A.
- Document at least 120 minutes of reflective dialogue as person B.

Part 2 – Short Form Reflective Dialogue

The process of asking questions, listening, providing feedback and joining in spontaneous discussion occurs for each set before moving to the next. The actual amount of time to complete the short form may not differ significantly from the long form. If both A and B engaged in the same experience, then after each set A may ask the questions of B if he is willing.

Objectives:

- Document at least 120 minutes of reflective dialogue as person A.
- Document at least 120 minutes of reflective dialogue as person B.

Part 3 – Reflective Dialogue on Reflective Dialogue

Using either the long or the short form, you and one of your previous dialogue partners will reflect together on a specific dialogue from either Part 1 or Part 2.

Objectives:

- Document at least 120 minutes of reflective dialogue as person A.
- Document at least 120 minutes of reflective dialogue as person B.

Part 4 – Reflective Writing

Reflect upon your experiences with Parts 1-3. With at least 1000 words, summarize your experiences and insights, noting how they are personally meaningful to you in one or more of the following areas:

- Understanding of self
- Relationships with others
- Experience and appreciation of Freemasonry
- Relationship with the Divine.