

THE MASTER MASON DEGREE

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEGREE

This Degree is the crown of the Lodge. It is the culmination of all that has been taught to the candidate in the two preceding ceremonies. At this point the candidate has symbolically, if not actually, balanced his inner natures and has shaped them into the proper relationship with the higher, more spiritual parts of himself/herself. His physical nature has been purified and developed to a high degree. He/she has developed stability and a sure footing. His/Her mental faculties have sharpened and his/her horizons have been expanded. The candidate is now ready to approach the portal of the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

Regardless of the candidate's pace through the Degrees, he/she should always review his/her personal progress and take action to improve himself/herself in Masonry. He/She should not be satisfied with taking the Degrees halfheartedly and then consider himself/herself a Master Mason. Very few of us are truly Masters of our Craft, and we should maintain a healthy deference for this exalted status. For the designation Master Mason should always be before us in our journey toward the Light as the ideal of our Organization. Being "Raised to the Sublime Degree" is the appropriate terminology. Sublime is defined as being exalted or elevated so as to inspire awe and wonder. And it also means to undergo sublimation that, like distillation, requires a volatilization of a substance that rises and reforms at a higher level. The significance of this Degree is the portrayal of the removal of everything that keeps us from rising to that state where the soul communes with the Supernal Light.

SYMBOLISM OF THE DEGREE

The candidate enters the Lodge of the Master Mason in darkness, for he/she has not witnessed the Light at this Degree before. But the difference of this entrance from that of the others is that he/she is now in a state of equilibrium and is prepared to walk on sacred ground. He/She becomes fully committed to the Organization and completely puts his/her faith on the Three Great Lights. The initiate is given full use of every working tool, but the one tool exalted above the others from this point on is the one that symbolizes the spreading of love.

After ceremonies in the first section which seem quite familiar, the candidate now partakes of the central Mystery Drama of our Fraternity. In this Degree, the Lodge becomes a representation of the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies, within King Solomon's Temple of Jerusalem. The very nature of participating in this rite and assuming the role of the Grand Master Hiram Abiff is to forge a link with the inner soul of our Organization. And as our legend is completely and absolutely consistent with some of the august Mystery Schools of antiquity, we are communing with the archetypal forces that are the foundation of our tradition. And at least in some small way, we may momentarily forget who we were when we entered the Holy of Holies and realize who we really are. The symbolism that we encounter in this Degree can be traced back for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Some of it is almost identical with very ancient usage, but most of it has taken on the cultural flavor of its successive conveyors. We will try to rediscover the hidden meaning of some of these symbols.

THE WORKING TOOLS

The Working Tools of a Master Mason are "all the instruments of Masonry." In the United States, the Trowel is especially assigned to this Degree. The Master Mason uses the Trowel to cement ties between Masons, and to spread Brotherly Love. It may be remembered that this Degree is specifically related to the soul and, as such, the Trowel being the symbol of love is specifically related to the soul's relation with Spirit. Although all the tools are available to the Master Mason, it is the Trowel with which he must now work. It should be remembered that tools have always aligned us with the creative and builder spirit within us.

THE LEGEND OF HIRAM

Hiram Abiff, the skilled artificer, was the Son of a Widow of the Tribe of Naphtali. The earlier accounts of Hiram are recorded in the 1st Book of Kings, 7:13 & 14. His coming to work on the great Temple at Jerusalem is mentioned in a letter written to King Solomon by Hiram, the King of Tyre, and recorded in II Chronicles, 2:13 & 14. The word Abiff is believed to mean "his father", and the name is often translated as "Hiram, my father". He was regarded as the father of the workmen on the Temple. One of the lessons of the legend of Hiram Abiff is that of fidelity to your one's highest ideals. Hiram Abiff is, in essence, identical with many of the Mystery School heroes. The drama of the Egyptian god Osiris began with his tragic death, the search for his body by Isis, its discovery, and its restoration. The Greek god Dionysus was attacked by the Titans. In the course of the fight he went through many transformations but was finally overcome. The Titans dismembered him, but in due time the goddess Rhea came to his aid and he rose glorious and entire. This formula is ancient. It is the concept of the sacred king, who in many instances is lame (which signifies his dedication), and is destined for sacrifice, that the earth might become regenerated and uplifted by divine power.

Regarding Hiram as the "Son of the Widow," there are a few things to mention. The Egyptian god Horus, as the child of Isis and Osiris, was also the son of a widow. Hermes Trismegistus called the stone "orphan." There seems to be a Manichaean origin to the terms "son of the widow" and "children of the widow". The Manichaeans were called "children of the widow". Etymologically, the word individual is related to the word widow. Vidua, Latin for widow, derives from the verb videre, meaning "to part."

THE WAGES OF A MASTER MASON

Our ancient, Operative Brethren performed manual labor and received wages which would contribute to their physical welfare. These nominal wages were Corn, Wine and Oil. The wages of a Speculative Mason must come from within, as he/she is concerned with the moral, rather than the physical, labor. The intangibles of love, friendship, respect, opportunity, happy labor, and association, are the wages of a Master Mason who earns them. Not everyone earns them.

THE THREE GRAND MASTERS

The three Grand Masters mentioned often in our rituals concerning the building of the Temple are: Solomon, King of Israel; Hiram, King of Tyre; and Hiram Abiff. In early times, some religions regarded Deity in three aspects. The secrets known only to these Three Grand Masters typify Divine Truth, which was known only to Deity, and was not to be communicated to man until he had completed his own spiritual temple. Once these secrets were attained, a person could reap the rewards of a well-spent life, and travel to the unknown country toward which all of us are traveling. By knowing the meaning of these names and references to their offices, you will better understand what the ritual means. Tyre, by the way, means stone or rock.

THE SPRIG OF ACACIA

Hebrew people used to plant a sprig of acacia at the head of a grave for two purposes - to mark the location of the grave, and to show their belief in immortality. Because of its evergreen nature, they believed it to be an emblem of both immortality and innocence. The true acacia is a thorny plant, which abounds in the Middle East. Both Jews and Egyptians believed that because of its hardness, its evergreen nature and its durability, it signified immortality. It is believed that the acacia was used to construct most of the furniture and the tabernacle in the Temple. Acacia has red and white flowers. It is a tradition in the Near East that the Crown of Thorns was acacia. In Egypt, it symbolized rebirth and was an emblem of Neith.

RAISING OF A CANDIDATE

Most people do not understand what being "Raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason" means. This Degree is the sublime climax of Symbolic Freemasonry. If you learn only that the living, dying and raising of a Master is a drama, designed to teach the virtues of fidelity, faith and fortitude, you have received only partial light and have seen nothing but a moral lesson. This Degree seeks to answer the age-old question put forth by Job - "If a man die, shall he live again?". The Degree delves into the deepest recesses of man's nature. While it leads the initiate into the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Temple, it probes into the Holy of Holies in his heart. As a whole, the Degree is symbolic of that old age and by the wisdom of which we may enjoy the happy reflections consequent on a well-spent and properly directed life, and die in the sure knowledge of a glorious immortality. It teaches no creed, no dogma, no doctrine, no religion; only, that there is immortality.

THE RIGHTS OF A MASTER MASON

These consist of Masonic Relief, Masonic Visitation, and Masonic Burial.

MASONIC RELIEF:

Masonic Relief may be applied for by any Master Mason - either to his own Lodge, or to an individual Master Mason. In every case, the individual asked has the right to determine the

worthiness of the request and whether such aid can be granted without material injury to his/her family. Relief is a voluntary function of both the Lodge and the individual.

MASONIC VISITATION:

Visitation of other Lodges is one of the greatest privileges of being a Master Mason. Before you can sit in another Lodge, you must prove yourself to be a Mason in good standing and you must carry your paid-up dues card with you at all times. You can gain admission to another Lodge in one of two ways - examination or avouchment by a Brother who has sat in Lodge with you previously. An examination usually consists of showing your dues card.

THE RIGHT OF BURIAL:

The Masonic Funeral Service is conducted only at the request of a Brother or some member of a Mason's immediate family. The choice belongs to the family, not to the Lodge. This service can be held in a church, the Lodge room, funeral parlor or grave site. It is a beautiful and solemn ceremony and, like Masonry herself, does not conflict with a man's personal religious beliefs.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MASTER MASON

The constant responsibility of a Master Mason is "to preserve the reputation of the Organization unsullied". Leading a good life is the best means of carrying through our individual responsibility to our Lodge and our Craft. The conduct of each Master Mason is strictly his/her own responsibility. He/She should choose the course which will bring credit to himself/herself and honor to the Organization. We would all do well to remember that togetherness is the cornerstone of our Organization. Treat others with the same respect and consideration with which you would like to be treated. In all your actions, be an example of brotherly love in action. Be not hasty to condemn others. How do you know that in their place, you could have resisted the temptation? And even were it so, why should you condemn one who is weaker than you? If your brother/sister should slip, offer your hand to him/her without judgment or harsh criticism. Judge him not by your standards but by his own.

LODGE ATTENDANCE

We do not have a mandatory attendance requirement as ancient Lodges did; nor is there a penalty for not attending, as there once was. However, every Master Mason has an obligation to be loyal to the Lodge which gave him Masonic Light and all the benefits which come with his membership. This should be your inducement to attend Lodge as often as possible and to join in the fellowship that is an important part of Freemasonry.

BALLOTING

Only Members in good standing have a right to vote. No member present can be excused from balloting on any petitioner before the Lodge. No member will be permitted to retire from the Lodge to avoid casting his ballot. The white balls indicate an affirmative, or favorable ballot, and the black cube indicates a negative, or unfavorable, ballot. If you have no reason to believe otherwise, then, you should accept the word of the Investigating Committee and cast a favorable ballot on a petition for membership. If you have an objection to an applicant, the time to raise that objection is before the ballot is taken. You have the right to speak to the Master privately and express your objection. This is one of the reasons we wait a full month after a petition has been presented before voting on it. However, if you know of some legitimate reason to indicate why the petitioner is unworthy, for strictly Masonic - not personal - reasons, a black cube may be cast to protect the Lodge from an undesirable member.

As you approach the ballot box, examine your motives and be sure that the ballot you are about to cast will do justice to the candidate and Freemasonry. The Right to Secrecy of the Ballot is guaranteed by Masonic law, and custom allows each member to have perfect freedom in balloting on petitioners. No brother/sister should disclose how he/she voted and no brother/sister should inquire into how another brother/sister voted on a particular candidate.

