

DEO Talk at District Ritual Meeting Symbolism of the Entered Apprentice Degree

Many of us focus, as we should, on the very impressive ceremony of the Degree of Master Mason, and perhaps may not give sufficient attention to the importance of the Entered Apprentice Degree. But remember, this, the first Degree in Masonry, started us on the path to become a “more perfect Ashlar” and is rich with symbolism that has meaning in our daily life. If we apply the teachings of this Degree, we will become better men, better husbands, better fathers, better friends, and better Masons. Thus, it is useful to reflect for a few moments on some of the symbolism of our first Degree in Masonry.

You are told that **“You were first prepared in your heart.”**

This focuses us on the fact that while each of us may have many different reasons for petitioning, the most important reason was a stirring in our heart for a deeper understanding of life. Freemasonry is not a religion but it has a spiritual dimension, and its rites impart serious teachings that obligate us to lead a better life.

In the Degree of Entered Apprentice, we emphasize the point that the candidate must be prepared internally if he is to truly absorb the lessons of Freemasonry. And that is why, on the night of initiation, we say that each candidate who comes seeking Light must be first prepared in his heart.

The Brethren in the preparing room play an important role in helping to put the candidate into the proper frame of mind to experience all that is contained in the ceremony of initiation. To help them do this, the Grand Lodge has prepared a short booklet entitled *Questions and Answers for the Postulant*. This booklet contains seven questions and answers to present to the candidate. Each Lodge should have received a copy of this booklet from the District Deputy.

You are told that **“You were duly and truly prepared.”**

We remember in the lecture of the Entered Apprentice Degree that we were informed that we were duly and truly prepared by being divested of all minerals and metals. By submitting to this special preparation, we each signified to the Lodge and the Brethren the sincerity of our intentions. And this emphasized that Freemasonry was concerned with a man’s internal qualifications rather than his worldly wealth and honors.

You are told that **“You were worthy and well qualified.”**

When these words were first given by the Senior Steward to the Senior Deacon, you might have wondered what it meant. You were informed in the lecture and in the teachings by your mentors and catechism coaches that it meant you had been investigated by a committee of the Brethren of the Lodge. They reported to the Lodge their views about your intentions and reasons for seeking admission, and their evaluation of your character and good reputation. On this basis you received a favorable vote of the Lodge to be initiated.

“You entered into the Lodge.”

As you took your first step into the Lodge room, you symbolically entered into a new world – the world of Freemasonry – tied together by oaths and obligations to live a moral life and be helpful to your fellow man, more especially a Brother Mason.

Entrance into the Lodge and membership in our Fraternity is symbolic of the movement from the outer world of materialism to the inner world of a man’s true being. We know that by living in accordance with the Masonic principles taught

through the symbolism of the working tools we attempt to attain perfection in our character and change the course of our lives for the better.

“You were received on the point of a sharp instrument.”

After taking your first step into the Lodge, you remember that you were then challenged and told by the Senior Deacon the reason for the challenge. Your reception into the lodge room further symbolized the fact that our rituals are serious and that when we take upon ourselves certain obligations and responsibilities we are expected to live up to them. It was explained that there are serious consequences for violating our obligations – not the symbolic penalties that are never used – but consequences in terms of the esteem or censure of our Brethren, and the honor or dishonor we might bring upon ourselves.

“You were hoodwinked with a cable-tow about your neck.”

The hoodwink symbolized the darkness and ignorance of the uninitiated. They are not acquainted with the philosophy and teachings of Freemasonry and, therefore, may not live in accordance with its high moral standards. The hoodwink also symbolized the silence and circumspection with which a Mason acts – keeping the confidences of a Brother Mason. We also remember that the hoodwink was removed at a later and more appropriate time, when we were in the proper state to receive Light.

The **cable-tow** has a number of meanings. In nautical terms, a cable tow was the length of line needed to tow a ship. It was also defined as the distance a man could walk in an hour, which was assumed to be about three miles.

From our Masonic perspective, it is regarded as a symbol of the seriousness of our voluntary pledge to keep our Masonic obligations. Each of us is bound to all

other Masons by a tie as long and as strong as we ourselves determine our ability will permit, and so the length of our cable tow is the reasonable distance from which a summons must be answered, acceptable excuses for health, family, and business permitting.

“You were caused to kneel and attend lodge prayer.”

We all know that no great or important undertaking should begin without first invoking the blessing of Deity. Thus, at your initiation we called upon the Almighty Father of the Universe to bestow his blessings on you and each of us in the lodge. It was made clear that invoking the blessings of Deity is a central Masonic practice, and throughout the initiation and at other times in the Degrees we reflected upon the Supreme Architect and asked his guidance and blessings on our endeavors.

“You were conducted once around the Lodge.”

The symbolic journey around the lodge is called circumambulation, which means to walk around some central point or object. In Freemasonry this is done in a clockwise manner, patterned after the movement of the sun as it is seen from the earth, moving from east to west, by way of the south.

Circumambulation is a universal ancient practice and portrays the path of initiation as a journey. And, in fact, your initiation was the beginning of your journey to become a Master Mason. A second reason for the circumambulation was so the Brethren could see that you were duly and truly prepared. And a third symbolic meaning was to outline the circumference of your life from the material to the all important spiritual aspect at the center.

Let me close by suggesting that even this brief discussion of a part of the symbolism of the Degree of Entered Apprentice can help us to appreciate how

important this Degree is in orienting us toward the great teachings of Freemasonry and beginning what should be for each of us a life-long effort to seek ever more light. I think we would agree that if will apply the tenets and teachings of this Degree we can hope to become a “more perfect Ashlar” and a better man in every sense of the word.