

DEO Talk at District Ritual Meeting Symbolism and Teachings of the Degree of Fellow Craft

The Degree of Fellow Craft is the second step in a system of progressive teaching directed toward perfecting our nature. As the symbolism introduced in the first Degree of Masonry, the Degree of Entered Apprentice, started us on the path to becoming a “more perfect Ashlar,” the Degree of Fellow Craft tasks us to acquire additional knowledge and apply that knowledge to building our character and improving the society in which we live.

The Entered Apprentice Degree is a rite of initiation into Freemasonry, and so it emphasizes a new beginning or spiritual rebirth as we begin to learn the principles of our Craft. As initiates we are as youths taking our first steps as we begin our journey toward the Light and learn the moral meanings contained in our Degrees and the philosophical underpinnings of our Fraternity. The Degree of Fellow Craft symbolizes the second stage in our new life as Masons, the stage of adulthood, and it stresses our responsibilities toward God, our family, our neighbor, and ourselves during our time on earth.

Basic Teachings of the Degree of Fellow Craft

Some of our Brethren may view the Degree of Fellow Craft as nothing more than a means to educate men in the liberal arts and sciences. And it is true that as a Fellowcraft Mason, we are urged during the ritual of this Degree to advance our education in these fields. But that would be a superficial understanding of the Degree, and other Brethren view Freemasonry and the three-Degree-system taught in the Blue Lodge as having a more spiritual dimension directed toward perfecting human nature. In this view, the three Degrees address three separate aspects of our being – the body, the mind, and the soul, and progressively teaches us to focus on each.

Thus, the Degree of Entered Apprentice Degree speaks to the body and our faculties of action in the world. The four cardinal virtues are extolled as the proper guides to our action in the world that we may perfect our relation to it.

The Degree of Fellow Craft speaks to the mind and its faculties. We are instructed in the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences which were formulated hundreds of years ago in order to develop and perfect our mental nature. But the intention is not simply to help

us advance in the material world; it is also to prepare our mind to better understand spiritual truths.

And then in the Degree of Master Mason we are urged to consider our spiritual development that we may be worthy of our creator and reach that celestial Lodge above.

If we accept this view of Masonry's purpose, then it is apparent that the Degree of Fellow Craft encompasses much more than just gaining a broad-based education. Its teachings are more exact and far more profound.

Symbolism of the Degree

The Degree of Fellow Craft represents an important step in our development and in our progress as Masons. In a sense, as Fellowcraft Masons we are emerging into a spiritual manhood. Therefore, we find, throughout the Degree, symbols of advancement and passage, of instruction and elevation. We find the symbolism of taking the next step, and of a new way of approaching the East. What we were instructed in the last Degree about our weaker nature has now been squared and elevated. While keeping our fidelity to the Three Great Lights, we

deepen our connection with the Fraternity and took on new commitments.

The Working Tools of the Degree of Fellow Craft are now our testing instruments. With them we try, we square, and we prove. With them we learn to develop the faculty of judgment allowing us to discern what is valuable, what is true, and what is real.

Since the central motif of this Degree is one of advancement, we are presented with the symbol of the Winding Staircase consisting of an exact number of steps leading to the Middle Chamber of the Temple. Staircases, ladders, extended vertical ropes, and mountains are all symbols of ascending to new heights. And our gaining entrance to a new place symbolizes our advancement in knowledge and in the workings of Freemasonry as we earn the status of Fellow Crafts.

Attaining this level gives us access to certain benefits that we were not entitled to before. These benefits are symbolized by Corn, Wine, and Oil, which we will discuss at another time. There are other things granted here as well. We become invested with the ability to hear the teachings of our Fraternity and keep them close to our heart. And perhaps most importantly, we are

reminded of our central focus in the symbolism of the letter “G” and the humility it should inspire in each of us.

Symbolism of the Scripture Reading

The Scripture reading of the Degree of Fellow Craft represents very well the teachings and tools of this Degree. We are told that “the Lord stood upon a wall, made by a plumb-line”. This portion of the Scripture signified the laws and commandments He has communicated to the people of Israel to build them into a just and upright nation.

This Scripture portion also emphasizes to each of us that we should build ourselves into upright citizens as we cross the plane from youth to manhood. We should be shining examples of the highest moral standards and be disciplined in our conduct and demeanor. We are additionally taught that we should judge our own work by our own plumb-line – and not someone else’s. And we are taught that, if we properly use the tools of this Degree, we can ensure that our work is good work, square work, and such work as is needed for the moral temple we are erecting within ourselves.

Just as the Lord set His plumb-line in the midst of His people, so should we set our plumb-line within the midst of our Brethren, friends, and family as we continue along the path to become better men and better citizens and, thus in Masonic terms, to become a more “perfect Ashlar.”