

DEO Talk at District Ritual Meeting Symbolism and Teachings of the Degree of Master Mason

You recall that the Degree of Entered Apprentice started us on the path to becoming a “more perfect Ashlar,” and the Degree of Fellowcraft tasked us to acquire additional knowledge and apply that knowledge to building our character and improving the society in which we live. Now, in the Degree of Master Mason, we are urged to consider our own spiritual development, that we may be worthy of our creator and reach that celestial Lodge above.

Thus, while the symbolism of the two preceding degrees focused on the physical aspects of our nature, and on architecture and the sciences, the Degree of Master Mason teaches us more profound lessons, and its symbols focus us on the spiritual aspects of our being.

Let us take a moment to consider the significance of the final Degree conferred by the Blue Lodge that raises us to the rank and status of Master Mason. It is the culmination of all that we have been taught in the two preceding ceremonies. At this point, we have symbolically, and should

actually, have balanced our inner nature and shaped it into the proper relationship with the higher, more spiritual parts of ourselves. Our physical nature should have been purified and developed to a higher level. We should have developed stability and a sure footing. Our mental faculties should have been sharpened and our horizons expanded. All of this is to make us ready to approach the portal of the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

In fact, most of us will not have fully achieved that state of balance and equilibrium we have sought, and will need to review our personal progress and make midcourse corrections as we continue to develop our character and improve ourselves in Masonry. Very few of us are truly Masters of our Craft when we receive our dues card. We will spend many years, and require much mentoring, before we fully understand the philosophy, have internalized the behaviors, and live by the values of Freemasonry. But only then can we be comfortable in saying that we really are Master Masons.

The symbolism of this Degree is designed to focus our minds on the divine rather than the secular. We enter the

Lodge of the Master Mason in darkness, for we have not yet witnessed the light of this Degree. But the difference of this entrance from that of the others is that we are now in a state of equilibrium and are prepared to walk on sacred ground. We become fully committed to the Fraternity and completely put our faith in God, the Great Light in Masonry.

After ceremonies in the first section which seem quite familiar, we partake of the central Mystery Drama of our Fraternity. The very nature of participating in this drama and assuming the role of Grand Master Hiram Abiff is to forge a link with the inner meaning of our Fraternity.

The clothing we wear for this Degree is to remind us to be humble, to recognize that we share a common humanity regardless of our status in life. We learn that as we progress in Freemasonry, our obligations become more extensive and more binding. And we are reminded that we can attain our most important objectives only with the help given by friends and brethren, but more significantly, with the assistance of Deity.

The Working Tools of a Master Mason are “all the implements of Masonry.” Since the Degree is focused on the sacred and spiritual aspects of life, we are taught to how

to use the symbolic meaning of these tools to build our spiritual temple so that we may act in accordance with the will of the Supreme Architect of the Universe.

In the United States, the one tool exalted above the others from this point on is the Trowel, which symbolizes the spreading of brotherly love. As the Trowel is used by operative Masons to spread the cement that holds blocks together, so we as Master Masons symbolically use the Trowel to cement ties with our Brethren, and to spread the cement of Brotherly Love that holds all people together in a symbolic temple of all humanity.

The Trowel particularly reminds us that we must act morally and pay greater attention to our spiritual development which, while all important, is so frequently neglected in the press of everyday life.

In the Degree of Master Mason we also hear about the Legend of Hiram Abif, the Son of a Widow of the Tribe of Naphtali. The earliest accounts of this skilled artificer 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 Abif 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.

The legend of Hiram Abif has its roots in 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 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 story line 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. And as Hiram was the “Son of the Widow,” so too the Egyptian god Horus, was the child of Isis and Osiris, and also the son of a widow.

But more important than this historical background, are the lessons in this drama:

- We learn the importance of fidelity to our promises.
- We learn that some of our worst enemies may appear to be our friends.
- We learn that we may be harmed by our own working tools, which are our own inner qualities.
- And most importantly, we learn that even if we are falling short, there is always hope that we might be put on the right path through the assistance of our Masonic Brethren.

In this Degree we also learn about 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 (wheat), wine, and oil. The wages of a **speculative** Mason, however, must come from within, as he is concerned more with moral, rather than physical labor. The rewards of love, compassion, friendship, and brotherhood are the wages of a Master Mason.

And as we speak about wages, so too we speak about traveling, because the goal of our ancient operative Brethren was to become masters, so they might possess those secrets which would enable them to practice the art of the master architect, no matter where they traveled – even in foreign countries.

The term “foreign countries” is used symbolically in speculative Masonry, and is not meant to refer to a certain geographical location. Freemasonry itself is a foreign country to those not initiated into its rites. To fully appreciate and enjoy the privileges of the Craft, each of us must become familiar with the territory of Freemasonry by learning its language, customs, and history, and stretching our minds to interpret and use its symbols so that they teach us important moral lessons. After receiving the Degree of Master Mason we are expected to continue our journey toward a deeper understand of the Craft and continue to search for truth wherever it may be found.

The term “foreign countries” also is a metaphor for the spiritual worlds. The ancients concerned themselves with vast spiritual worlds, and their method of gaining admission

through various spiritual spheres was through secret passwords, grips, signs, and holy words.

In this talk we have touched upon only a few of the many symbols we find in the Master Mason's Degree. But each of them helps us to remember the lessons we were taught in the Degree, and assists us to continue our journey toward the light.

Being "Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason" is no trivial matter. Sublime is defined as being exalted or elevated so as to inspire awe and wonder. And so as Master Masons we are to be ever mindful of the obligations we have assumed and endeavor to let our example shine to the community at large. The ceremony is designed to push us to go beyond the person we have been and help us become the person we could be, if we could only reach our full potential by continuing to build our moral and spiritual temple.

That is our challenge and that is our opportunity.

Written by RW Malcolm R. Holley

Credits:

Master Mason Educational Proficiency Manual, Grand Lodge
AF & AM of Virginia

The Master Mason Degree, Grand Lodge F & AM of
California