

THE ROYAL ARCH PATH



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An end and a beginning of the Masonic Journey

**By
Philip A. Hardiman**

The Royal Arch Path
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Dedicated to the memory of

Edward Philip Hardiman

Past Master, Washington Lodge # 20

Past Master, Drytown Lodge # 174

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**Whose heart always glowed with fervent heat
when he conferred Masonic Degrees and which
resides still with the many brothers he coached
from 1956 to 1998.**

January 31, 1920 – April 6, 1998

Rest in Peace, good and faithful servant

PREFACE

This work was undertaken for several reasons. First and foremost is the author's desire to show how the York Rite Degrees and Orders cohere with the Craft Degrees. This Truth is not fully appreciated when we explain the importance of the Royal Arch in restoring the Lost Word to the newly raised initiate. Without a full appreciation of what the Lost Word represents, its restoration may seem anti-climactic to the initiate and, as a consequence, he may not make the same commitment to Capitular service as otherwise might be the case. This discussion remains incomplete until a future date when an analysis of the Council Degrees and Templar Orders can be added.

Secondly, it is the author's belief that the effect of the initiatory experience could be had by anyone capable of plumbing the depths of Scripture. Unfortunately, Scripture can be impenetrable, particularly for the novice. Furthermore, Christ taught his Disciples in the Upper Room, and did not share the profundity of his teachings with the masses. The York Rite experience can be as instructive to our modern candidates, then, as the

secret teachings of Christ to his Disciples was 2000 years ago. Think of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard at Matthew Chapter 20, and how the Mark Master Degree raises our understanding of this parable above the absurdly unfair. And so the ignition experience can be helpful to the candidate in understanding scripture and growing spiritually. Though “Masonry be not religion, it is emphatically religion’s handmaid...” as explained to the Chaplain at his installation.

Thirdly, the author tries to respond in part to the modern exposes of Masonry, which are deliberately oriented to keeping men away from masonry and, in many instances, attempting to induce Masons to deny their Craft. The author’s intent, then, is to help make the controversial aspects of Masonry more understandable in their broader context – particularly the so-called “bloody oaths,” or “terrible” penal signs we use. His hope is to show how these penal signs are used to direct the initiate’s attention to certain aspects of his spiritual development. Masons are explicitly forbidden elsewhere in the underlying ritual from ever following through on these “terrible” penalties – hence, they can only be symbolic and instructive tools. In an important sense they express sincerity of intention – much like the phrase “May lightning strike me dead!”

Finally, Freemasonry and the York Rite represent one of the best adult moral and philosophical educational systems in the world today -- if not the best. Different men learn different lessons and take from the Craft a different understanding and develop different modes of service.

With these factors in mind, it is the author's hope to make a small contribution toward dispelling anti-Masonic sentiments and encouraging the *growth* that our Craft and our future initiates so richly deserve. He acknowledges the suggestions and encouragement provided by the following members of California Royal Arch Masonry: Most Excellent Sean N. Foran, Grand High Priest; Right Excellent Don Lamoureux, Grand Lecturer; and Excellent Companion Jon Humphreys. Any errors in interpretation, however, are entirely the author's.

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INTRODUCTION

MASONRY AND THE YORK RITE

Craft Masonry

The journey through the York Rite degrees and orders is down a path that can lead to enlightenment. It is a complicated journey that can be completed on various levels – complicated by the mysteries of symbolism and the effort required to achieve the higher levels. This effort involves attention and awareness on the one hand and concentration and will-power on the other. It is essentially a spiritual journey drawing on Old and New Testament scripture for its ritual underpinnings. Although the three orders of Templary require a Christian profession of faith, the degrees that precede it do not.

Nevertheless, proceeding down the path of the Blue Lodge and York Rite Degrees is *not* a religious endeavor. Although Masonry teaches matters of religious significance, it is neither dogmatic nor doctrinaire – only teaching and requiring belief in two related concepts: 1) the existence of God; and 2) the immortality of the Soul. Hence, though certain doctrine held by some religions is strongly

intimated in Masonic ritual, it is up to the aspirant to accept or reject for himself that doctrine, and to fashion for himself from the ritual an understanding of his relation to God, to himself, and to his fellow Man. After initiation, though, all Masons accept the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.

Why the term “aspirant”? Simply because the object of Masonic ritual affirms that he freely and voluntarily offers himself as, or “aspires” to be, a candidate -- to learn what he can from the ritual and his association with the Masonic Brotherhood. He furthermore affirms that he wishes to be able to serve his fellow creatures, with the knowledge and skills he acquires through the ritual experience and his future development. It is the purpose of this commentary to clarify that knowledge and those skills, and to set them in the broader context of spiritual growth and development.

So the York Rite Path is composed of rituals performed and conferred by four separate but linked organizations: 1) the Blue Lodges, or Craft Masonry; 2) Royal Arch Chapters, or Capitular Masonry; 3) Cryptic Mason Councils, or Cryptic Masonry; and 4) Commanderys of Knight Templars, or Chivalric Masonry. In California, membership in each organization requires membership in the previous. Hence, the ritual experience is progressive, and it takes time for the ritual to have its full impact. Some who have

followed this Path feel that all that Masonry has to teach is embodied in the first three degrees of the Blue Lodge; that all that comes after is mere elaboration, perhaps clarification. This is not correct. The first three degrees of the Blue Lodge (the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft, and the Master Mason degrees) are only preparatory for that more profound work on oneself that can be consummated only in the higher degrees.

This is not to say that those men who go no further than the Blue Lodge have not acquired some personal growth of great significance. Indeed they have; and in fact they may achieve the more profound work on themselves through other organizations, like the Scottish Rite. Or they may, in fact, be content with the moral and ethical teachings and perhaps with the opportunity to donate to worthy charitable causes that benefit mankind in general, and go no further in the ritual experience.

Capitular Masonry

The historical claim has been that the Royal Arch Degree, the fourth of the Capitular Degrees, is the “perfection and consummation” of the Third Degree of the Symbolic Lodge. Formerly, this degree was conferred in symbolic lodges until control was passed to a Chapter Organization – in California,

and most of the United States, to Grand Chapter. In America, this fourth degree is preceded by three degrees, although in Great Britain a candidate may pass directly from the Third Degree of the Symbolic Lodge to the Royal Arch Degree. This fact does not imply a *significant* difference in the distinct approaches to conferring the Royal Arch, but it does mean that the American Capitular experience is richer in content.

The first of the Capitular Degrees is the Mark Master, and is conferred in Great Britain under the auspices of a separate Mark Master Grand Lodge. The second is the Past Master and confers “virtual” Past Master status on the candidate, in order to make him fully eligible for the Royal Arch. The third is the Most Excellent Master and celebrates the completion of the Temple – which “completion” represents the final preparation for the “august” instructions of the Royal Arch. These three Capitular Degrees are then, in a certain sense, parallel to the three degrees of the Symbolic Lodge; and there is a correspondence in the way in which the due guards and signs represent treatment of, or draw attention to, the *heart*, the *mind*, and the *soul*. So, in a meaningful sense, the first three Capitular Degrees recapitulate the first three Symbolic Degrees, and prepare the way for those “further and more profound researches” which the Royal Arch stimulates and which should leave the candidate with a fully integrated personality, fully aware of

his physical, emotional, intellectual, psychological, and spiritual content.

But these first three degrees of Capitular Masonry serve a more “profound” purpose than the three degrees of Symbolic Masonry. They presage the work on the “subconscious” which is the principal objective of the Royal Arch – to recognize and appreciate that which is represented by the Ark of the Covenant. It is this Ark and the spiritual content which it contains which is itself represented by the Lost Word of the Third Degree. And it is the discovery of this content, and the process leading to the discovery, which is the major point of having the Lost Word restored. Hence, possessing only the substitute for that Lost Word, given in the Third Degree, leaves the spiritual journey of the Masonic initiatory experience incomplete. Receiving the Lost Word in the Royal Arch then is not simply an anti-climactic, short-term experience, but it is intended to have a permanent, life-changing effect.

This effect can be had, of course, without the first three Capitular Degrees. But these Degrees are more explicit in dealing with groups of candidates or initiates. The Mark Master deals with the craftsmen as a group and the process of their receiving wages; the Past Master Degree implies a group of brethren as the members of the Lodge over which the initiate presides; the Most Excellent Master Degree receives and acknowledges three

initiates as Most Excellent Masters, while craftsmen group together to congratulate them and acknowledge the goodness and mercy of God; and the Royal Arch is explicitly prohibited from being conferred on fewer than three candidates. This treatment of *groups* of initiates is significant as it is part of the crucial symbolism of the Chapter ritual – that of teaching the individual initiate the importance of bringing into his own consciousness his own different attributes, or characteristics, indeed the different “selves” he has to deal with.

The following analysis deals only with Craft and Capitular Masonry and overlooks much of the rich content of the Degrees of these bodies. The major goal is to show the clear progressive connection between these degrees, and the primary importance in all of them for the initiate to develop his internal attributes and exercise control over them. As the Craft Degrees help the initiate examine and reconstitute himself in accord with moral and ethical principles so the Capitular Degrees induce a higher level of consciousness and finally, in the Royal Arch Degree, drive him down to his subconscious in order to bring it up to that higher level.

I

ENTERED APPRENTICE The First Degree

“...even life for evermore.” Psalm 133.3

The primary purpose of this degree is to prepare the candidate to receive certain ethical, moral, intellectual, and spiritual instruction. This degree, like all rituals, consists of a preparatory phase, an obligation, a lecture, a charge, and sometimes a portrayal. After interrogation which stipulates that he should be in search of knowledge and have a sincere wish to serve his fellow creatures, he is introduced to the ritual experience in a manner designed to impress upon him the “secret” or esoteric nature of the work he is embarking upon. So, all during passage along the path of his life, the candidate has a reminder to be *watchful* and *attentive*.

The opening prologue, using Psalm 133, also informs him of the spiritual nature of his engagement and of the importance of brotherly

unity to the development of his spiritual nature. For who would argue that disunity and disharmony are not antithetical to spiritual growth? One additional aspect of the preparatory process is to alert him that he is proceeding from darkness to light in order to receive and have the benefits of Masonry. It is that process of being transformed into the light that is the chief benefit alluded to – the Light which supports self-observation. For how can you be transformed, or change yourself, unless you have been given light to see those aspects of your personality requiring change – especially negative emotions, but also inattention to the acquisition of knowledge and to the requirements of spiritual growth.

The penalty of the obligation is meant to symbolize to the candidate the need to erase his mental constructs, presumptions, biases, attitudes, etc.; to set aside or ignore his intellect for a time; and begin to re-construct his emotional life in accordance with the basic tenets of Masonry (Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth) and the four Cardinal Virtues (Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice). Hence, his emotional template, by which he governs his interaction in society, is to function under the control of his Mind. A quick survey of mankind will demonstrate that man in general does not exercise this kind of control. Typical man's behavior is governed by negative emotions – fear, worry, depression, etc. Lest this seem farfetched,

the lecture of this degree explicitly states that it is the “internal qualifications which recommend a man to be made a mason.” In other words, it is his internal nature that he is to work upon.

Finally, the implements of this degree teach “discipline.” The 24 inch Gauge teaches the candidate to divide his time appropriately and behave accordingly – by work, by rest, and by service to God. In the Charge, it is made clear that the Bible teaches his duty to God, his neighbor and himself – the latter in terms of developing a course of discipline to preserve bodily and mental faculties. The Common Gavel is used to further represent to the candidate his need to remove the rough aspects of his personality and replace them with those positive aspects of Masonic teaching – hence, using discipline to apply the basic tenets of Masonry to his own life. Twice in this degree the man is challenged in a way to force his attention to important matters – namely, being secretive (i.e., working internally) and being prepared.

II

FELLOWCRAFT The Second Degree

“...and now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” I Corinthians 13:13

In the first degree, the candidate was prepared for further instruction by symbolically having his mental prejudices removed so that it can be recast in line with Masonic teachings. In this degree, his heart is symbolically removed so that his emotional content can be recast in line with Love – Brotherly Love as defined and described in that great passage from the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. The intent is that the candidate should understand that he brings to his Masonic experience a lot of emotional baggage, the effect of his personality development, much of which is negative: petty jealousies, hatred, anger, selfishness in its broadest aspect. Continual exposure to this degree *must* cause him to reduce if not eliminate those negative emotions, and replace them with the fruits of service to God and his neighbor.

The ceremony upon entering the Lodge in this degree is designed to teach him that Morality (i.e., those principles which govern the conduct between men) is that primary emotion that should be the basis of all his actions throughout life; that it is prime among all emotions and should be seen as governing them, and, in fact, preventing negative emotions from arising. The working tools of this degree, the Plumb, the Square and the Level, emphasize the importance of walking uprightly and virtuous conduct and, as well, the spiritual objective of his journey through life as he travels to “that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns.”

This degree also imparts to the candidate the importance of the seven liberal arts and sciences, as a template for the kind of knowledge he should acquire as he reconstitutes his intellect (that intellect of which he was symbolically divested in the first degree): Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. This is further embellished with a discussion of the Orders of Architecture; of Geometry in particular; and of the five senses of human nature. The latter presages the work the candidate is to do on his physical presence in the next degree.

After an important lecture on the moral dimensions of Geometry, the candidate is cautioned that the “*attentive ear* receives the sound from the

instructive tongue, and the mysteries of Masonry are safely deposited in the repository of *faithful breasts*.” This works on several levels: first, when the candidate’s coach instructs him in the meaning of the work through which he is progressing; secondly, when the candidate speaks and hears for himself what proceeds from his own mouth. Both levels are important, but the second level emphasizes the beneficial effect he can have on himself and his emotional life if he moderates what he says and maintains a positive mental attitude. The wages of a Fellowcraft are Corn, Wine and Oil – the Corn of nourishment, the Wine of refreshment and the Oil of Joy, signifying that the Fellowcraft that works rightly to reconstitute his emotional life will have good reason to be Joyful!

Finally, the Charge leaves the candidate with an important issue to explore: the connection between Geometry and Morality. At first blush, there seems no connection, but Geometry in part deals with right angles and therefore symbolizes uprightness or “righteousness.”

III

MASTER MASON The Third Degree

*“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth...and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.”
Ecclesiastes 12:1-7*

In the first two degrees the candidate is taught that he must work on his Emotions and on his Mind, his heart and his intellect, and reconstitute them in accordance with the teachings of Masonry. In this third degree he is taught to work on his physical nature – his body. The prologue from Ecclesiastes teaches that the man has only a short time to work with his body and bend it to the service of his Brothers and his God; and that finally that body will be returned to earth and his spirit will be returned to God. During the time that his spirit is connected with the body, he must use his reconstituted heart and mind to control and discipline the body to optimize his ability to serve. Hence, he will be moderate, or temperate, in all things – not given to gluttony, nor drunkenness, nor debauchery. The manner of the candidate’s entry in this degree

harkens back to the first degree teaching at the altar that the man is to "...circumscribe his desires and keep his passions within due bounds..." In the Charge, he is taught to instruct other, less-informed brothers "... to fortify their minds ... against the snares of the insidious" and "...to guard them against every allurements to vicious practices." Understanding what the vices are to which "vicious practices" refers is crucial to understanding the impact this degree should have on the candidate. In essence, he must learn that his body is a temple, a "house not made with hands," which he must preserve and maintain in good health in order to serve God and his fellow man.

The working tool of this degree, the Trowel, is the most sacred of emblems, teaching that Brotherly Love is the cement which unites us into a society of friends and brothers – a society represented by, in another sense, that "house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens." This is, indeed, a "holy" society as it is composed of brothers "...among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention, or rather emulation, of who best can work and best agree." Masonry then can be seen as a dynamic workplace, where friends come together as brothers to work together for a common or shared purpose – always remembering the primary importance of working together in an amicable manner. The point is that working together, in accordance with Masonic tenets,

prevents the introduction of egotism and the negative emotions that derive there from.

In the obligation, the penalty brings to mind the complete annihilation of the Body and what is left thereafter – namely, the Soul. It is in this degree that Masonry as a *Fraternity* is emphasized. Though not explicitly stated, it is clear from the work in these first three degrees why women are excluded. Men need, figuratively speaking, “rough” handling to get their attention – women typically do not; furthermore we are simply not going to expose our women to rough treatment.

After the obligation, the degree revolves around the Hiram Legend, a portrayal of which includes the candidate as a participant and observer. In this Legend, Hiram the Builder is murdered as a consequence of his refusal to compromise his integrity. The candidate is raised from the symbolic grave and invested with a substitute for the Master’s Word. The Legend is based on an account of the building of King Solomon’s Temple as given in Kings and Chronicles, and these accounts do not include the death of the Builder. Hence, this death in the degree should be understood as symbolic, and therefore represents the death, not of the body but of the former personality. The “raising to the sublime degree of Master Mason,” then, is to be understood as representing the transformation of the candidate from his former, incomplete state of being, to a

more advanced state, based on reconstituting his life in accordance with Masonic teachings and integrating his body, mind and emotions into a consistent entity.

The Hieroglyphical Emblems presented in this degree serve to recapitulate and embellish the essence of all three Blue Lodge degrees. They are worthy of much study, and yet in today's conferrals they are only optionally explained and rarely presented. Little more is typically said about them than that they are available in the monitor, to be presented later to the candidate, and that it is hoped he will read them. Dare say few do. So these Emblems taken as a totality are like the "stone which the builders rejected (*possessing merit to them unknown*) [which] became the chief stone of the corner." The following brief commentary should serve to indicate how important the heart, mind and spirit are as the substance of Masonic consideration.

THE THREE STEPS represent the three degrees as well as the three ages of man – youth; manhood; and age, of which it is said that, because we acquired *knowledge* in youth and applied it in manhood, "we may enjoy the happy reflection consequent on a well-spent life, and die in hope of a glorious immortality."

THE POT OF INCENSE is an emblem of a pure *heart*.

THE BEEHIVE is an emblem of industry, which teaches us “that as we came into the world rational and *intelligent* beings, so we should ever be industrious ones.” One can quibble over the meaning of the verb “came into,” but it suggests the possibility of the pre-existence of the soul and raises many theological questions worthy of consideration by all – particularly about its residence in the body, and proper care while there!

THE BOOK OF CONSTITUTIONS GUARDED BY THE TYLER’S SWORD reminds us of those “truly Masonic virtues, *silence* and *circumspection*.” It cannot be repeated enough that the application of these virtues is crucial to induce the man to deal with his internal realities – specifically, his Mind and Psyche, his Heart and emotions, and his attitudes about healthy living and proper care of his body. In short, if he is “silent,” as he should be in accord with this emblem, he *must* be introspective.

THE SWORD POINTING TO A NAKED HEART “demonstrates that Justice will sooner or later overtake us all,” irrespective of the fact that our thoughts, words, and actions may be hidden from the eyes of men. Contemplating this great Truth forces a man to recognize that his behavior during the short span of his life will have consequences beyond that life, into that “undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns.”

THE ALL-SEEING EYE “pervades the inmost recesses of the human heart and will reward us according to our merit.” A most beautiful rendering of the Law of Karma, so prevalent in all major religious traditions. In Christianity, for example, we have “What ye sow so shall ye reap.” Galatians 6:7

THE ANCHOR AND Ark are emblems of hope and a well-spent life, which ends in a “peaceful harbor, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary shall find rest.”

THE FORTY-SEVENTH PROBLEM OF EUCLID is perhaps the richest emblem, forcing us to consider the life and thought of our great brother, Pythagoras, who was said to have been “initiated in several orders of priesthood and raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason.” Pythagoras lived and learned and taught in the 6th Century Before Christ – what, therefore, does it mean for him to have been “raised as a Master Mason”, when modern Masonry was supposedly instituted in 1717 in London? And how should his teachings be incorporated into the corpus of Masonic thought and belief? What did he learn in Egypt, where he was initiated, and how did that influence his thinking? And why does this particular emblem teach us to be general “lovers of the Arts and Sciences”?

THE HOUR-GLASS is an emblem of human life. “Behold how swiftly the sands run, and how rapidly our lives are drawing to a close!” What more need be said to spur us on to action as masons, as builders, once we have acquired knowledge and understanding and improved our level of Being as Masons.

THE SCYTHER is an emblem of Time “which cuts the brittle thread of life.” Make good use of it while you have it, brethren!

IV

THE MARK MASTER

“So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few are chosen.” Matthew 20:16

The opening passages of this degree explicitly inform the initiate that the work he is doing involves the building of his own temple, the temple of his present life, “...in which every stone is a good act or constructive deed, each bearing the mark of (his) own good name.” So, in the same sense that the Temple (or Lodge or Chapter) may represent society, and the specific stones that compose it may represent individual craftsmen, the Temple may also represent the individual, and the stones that compose it may represent the various characteristics of the individual. Or, in another sense, those characteristics may themselves be understood to be individual workmen composing the complete character of the initiate. And these individual workmen are sometimes in conflict!

But before providing the ritual that is designed to resolve the conflict, the degree teaches the initiate to evaluate “work” in terms of Truth, Goodness, and Morality. This teaching refers to all “work” -- whether work on oneself in the sense of resolving internal conflicts; or work on external matters, such as the bricks which compose a building, which must of course be true and good and square; or work with brethren in the sense of accomplishing shared goals.

The ritual then emphasizes that wages will be paid for such work, and only for such work. Work that deviates from original design is cast out, so the degree teaches excellence in applying one’s skills. It also teaches the practical essence of “brotherly love,” in using one’s Mark as part of a process to receive and give support to a needy brother. In this context, we can appreciate the emotional aspect of this degree and its correspondence to the emotional aspect of the Entered Apprentice Degree. This emotional context is set by the form of the due guard, in a manner similar to the way it is set in the First Degree of Masonry.

Finally, the degree portrays briefly an application of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, found at Matthew chapter 20. So we have the fascinating usage of the New Testament to instruct workmen at the building of King Solomon’s Temple in the importance of harmony, which building occurred at least 1,000 years prior to the writing of that New

Testament! This should not be understood as an internal inconsistency but rather as an indication that the Parable is timeless and its ultimate source dating far back in time. Furthermore, this parable should not be understood as a blatant attempt to force laborers to accept an unfair treatment. Once the laborers are understood to represent different aspects or characteristics of the initiate's personality, then the issue of fairness of payment of wages becomes moot. What should be understood by the initiate as he awakens to the demands of spiritual development is that the laborers that represent earlier developed characteristics must accept and appreciate newly developed skills of the individual – skills perhaps of a more spiritual nature that are equally important to fully integrating one's personality.

Similar usage of New Testament wisdom occurs during the Lecture when Revelation 2:17 is quoted: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." This concept of *overcoming* has direct relevance to the initiate in the sense of emphasizing to him the importance of resolving that internal conflict represented earlier in the degree.

The working tools of this degree are the Chisel and the Mallet. The Chisel teaches the advantages of discipline and education, hearkening back to the First and Second Degrees. But most importantly these tools represent “enlightened reason,” and how it helps control the passions of ambition, envy and anger.

V

THE PAST MASTER

“...If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. ... Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” James 3:2,10

The Past Master Degree claims to be a preparation for the Royal Arch. This makes sense in the York Rite context because the initiate cannot truly be ready for the discoveries in the Royal Arch until such time as he has actually practiced ‘ruling and governing the Lodge over which he is called to preside.’ It becomes clear, once the Lodge is understood in the Mark Master sense as the composite of his own personal characteristics, that the initiate acquires Past Master status once he has acquired control over his own attributes.

This Degree also says that, as Master, the initiate is to take care to maintain the dignity and decorum of “the brotherhood over which you preside.” The change in terminology from “Lodge over which you are called to preside” to “brotherhood over which

you preside” helps reveal the personal and internal nature of the work the Master is to perform. In other words, he is to become Master over himself (represented by the word *brotherhood*, inasmuch as the word “Lodge” would connote a collection of individuals), not just leader of a group of like-minded individuals who call or elect him to govern them.

This degree further emphasizes, by implication, the significance of the difference between the external and the internal -- by the manner in which it defines the York Rite initiate as a “virtual Past Master,” who is not entitled to all the honors and peculiar privileges of an “actual Past Master.” In other words, it is the internal (or virtual) attributes that are of primary significance, not the external “honors and privileges” – further clarifying that it is his own internal work the initiate is to concentrate on. This becomes even clearer when the initiate is instructed about the furniture of the Lodge, especially the Holy Bible which will guide *him* to all Truth, direct *him* to the Temple of Happiness, and point out to *him* the whole duty of Man.

VI

THE MOST EXCELLENT MASTER DEGREE

“...O Lord my God ... hearken unto the cry and to the prayer ... That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou has said, My name shall be there ...” I Kings 8:28, 29

This degree is based on the interior work necessary to complete the Temple, and hence informs the initiate of the importance of that internal work on oneself that is foreshadowed in all preceding degrees. It draws upon Psalm 24 to clarify the attributes of an individual who “shall stand in His holy place,” which of course is what the Temple is intended to be: namely, he who has clean hands; a pure heart; a soul not given over to vanity; and who has not sworn deceitfully. So it is clear that this degree is oriented to helping the initiate understand the internal attributes that he should develop for himself, further clarifying the type of individual he should become when, as exhorted to do in the Mark Master degree, he curbs his ambition, depresses his envy, and moderates his anger. This control of the negative emotions is balanced by the development

of positive behavior – namely, aiding and assisting widows and orphans and “dispensing true Masonic light and knowledge” to less informed brethren.

Once this constructive work on the personality is completed, the copestone can be placed and the Ark of the Covenant can be seated -- for the Lord will not reside in a defiled place, nor can godliness arise or be present in the soul of an unprepared individual. This preparation is represented by the consumption of the sacrifice – that sacrifice by the individual of his internal conflicts, of his ambition and envy and anger and other negative emotions. All attributes of the initiate, all entities that occasionally exert control over the individual, then, are brought together to worship the Lord for His goodness and mercy. Hence, at the point of the completion of the Temple there is represented harmony among the workmen – that is to say, internal harmony within the individual initiate. And again we have repeated in the Master’s prayer the essential charge of a Most Excellent Master – “assist us to find true pleasure in teaching good will to mankind.”

Finally, the Ark is seated, prompting the initiate to wonder what the Ark represents, what it contains, and what its contents represent. The initiate is now ready for the Royal Arch and the insight that august degree stimulates in answer to these questions.

VII

THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREE

“And Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord commandeth, Fill an omer of it to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness ... and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations.” Exodus 16: 32,33

“And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.” Exodus 25:16

“And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.” Exodus 31:18

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron’s rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me that they die not.” Numbers 17:10

And so we come to the crowning glory of the Capitular experience. But why is it so important? Put simply, the initiate who comprehends the Royal

Arch experience will be freed from the internal conflicts, and the confusion and ultimate despair that arise there from, and will become constructive in all the walks of his daily life. He will no longer be ruled by arbitrary and negative emotions but will govern himself, as the Master of a Lodge is taught, with patience and cheerfulness, with a firm and alert watchfulness to preserve his own dignity and decorum. He functions more consistently with friendliness, fervency, zeal, and rectitude. He promotes more consistently “peace, love and unity.”

The first six degrees deal with the building and completion of the original Temple, in approximately 1000 B.C. The Royal Arch degree deals with the return from exile in Babylon of the Jewish people, and the building of the second Temple, said in Capitular Masonry to have occurred 470 years after the building of the original temple. While building the second Temple, several workmen discover the original Ark, or a copy, and its contents are revealed. What does this process of discovery represent and what do the items in the Ark represent? What does the Second Temple and the journey from Babylon to rebuild it represent?

In the same sense that the original Temple represents the individual, so does the second Temple. And the interior work done in the first six degrees to integrate the personality comes to fruition in the discovery of the Ark, which therefore

represents the fully integrated soul of the initiate. The soul then is the controlling entity, or organizing principle, of the spiritually mature individual. And the contents represent the three major constituent elements of the individual – the body (Pot of Manna), the Mind (the Book of the Law representing control of the emotions by the intellect), and the Spirit (Aaron’s Rod).

But what does Babylon represent, and where is it? Is it actually a place, or a state of mind? Think of the individual who drinks too much in his youth, despoils himself and almost ruins his life, but then has a spiritual awakening, gives up the dissolute lifestyle and returns to the land of the living, so to speak. Is this tantamount to “returning from Babylon”? Or the individual who manages to skate through Youth, with good health and a good education and a fine career, but no worship of his Creator, no recognition of his duty to give back a portion of what he has received - but then recognizes, as he approaches Old Age, the need to come to grips with eternal themes? If he studies and applies the Book of the Sacred Law to his life, can he be said to be “returning from Babylon”? Or does Babylon perhaps represent the “place” where the soul resides after death, and the “return from Babylon” thus represent the resurrection to a new Life?

That this degree, in fact the entire Capitular experience, is designed to deal with these important practical and spiritual themes is indicated by the four veils. A veil typically covers or conceals something, and the fact that *four* veils must be removed in order to discover the hidden matters of the Royal Arch indicates how important and difficult the journey can be expected to be. The “warriors” that impede the candidate’s progress represent the innate tendencies of the candidate to stop short along the way, to settle for progress already achieved, to be content with what one has already achieved or acquired rather than aggressively strive to learn more and *do* more – in service to God, his country, his family and himself. This emphasis on *action* is best represented by the crimson color of the third veil and, indeed, the color adopted by Capitular Masonry itself – the color which represents “fervency and zeal which should *actuate* all Royal Arch Masons.” The colors of the other veils are also highly significant: blue for friendship essential to fraternal interaction; purple to remind us of the connection between Craft and Capitular Masonry; and white as emblematic of purity of life and *conduct*.

The emblems on the banners of each veil are significant for various reasons. First, taken in sequence as a glyph, from lion to ox to man to eagle, they represent the very progress in development which is the whole point of the

initiatory experience: that development from primal, instinctive behavior of the lion, through patience and intelligence, to that final spiritual development represented by the eagle. Hence, understanding ‘patience’ as control over our emotions, the glyph demonstrates the need for the candidate to gain control over his body, his emotions, his mind and his spirit – in short, to become a fully-integrated individual. This is of crucial significance in our current, hyper-intellectualized, materialistic era, characterized by an over-indulgence of bodily desires (food, sex, music, etc), by one segment of society, and an over-valuation of academic and scientific achievements, by another.

Secondly, these emblems are linked to the Four Gospels, in the sense that they can serve as a “key” to help understand each Gospel. The lion, ox and man together are linked to the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke; and the eagle to the Gospel of John. So in the Royal Arch Degree we have the same kind of blending of New Testament scripture in the Old Testament setting of the building of the second Temple, as we began with in the Mark Master Degree. It is, therefore, highly important to understand the timeless nature of the Gospel narratives and to realize that much of what is taught is an amalgamation of teachings from other cultures of the time – especially Egyptian, Greek and Hindu. In this manner, the teachings

and discoveries in the Royal Arch Degree are given a timeless significance in all cultural settings.

Finally, it is the Principal Sojourner who conducts the candidates through the veils and thereby discharges his duty, as given by Isaiah 42:16: “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.” The Principal Sojourner here is a representative of Masonry in its entirety serving to enlighten the candidates through the initiatory experience. Hence, passing the veils, achieving the spiritual growth that that represents, brings the candidates to the discovery of the Ark of the Covenant – in other words, to the discovery that each candidate is in a covenantal relationship with God.

PARALLELISMS

The parallelisms between Craft Masonry and the first three degrees of Capitular Masonry should be clear. However, they are not exact. The Capitular Degrees go beyond mere instruction in moral, ethical, intellectual and spiritual matters – they deal implicitly with *consciousness*, and are purposefully designed to induce the candidate to dig deep into his mentality to become *aware* of his soul and its content. For example, in order to complete the Temple the capstone must be found from among the rubbish, where it was cast in the Mark Master Degree. In the Most Excellent Master Degree it is put in place as the final step in building the Temple, which could only be done after the interior work on the Temple was completed. This interior work, of course, represents the interior work the candidate must do on himself – specifically, to become aware

of his own conflicting attributes and negative and self-serving tendencies, and overcome them. This consciousness is crucial to enable the candidate to progress from “brother” to “companion.” As happens far too often, in society generally, our natural egotism prevents us from acting harmoniously.

The signs of the Capitular Degrees, in fact, point to consciousness in a subtle way. Taken together as a group, they have the same effect as the signs of the Craft Degrees of focusing the candidate’s attention on the emotions, the intellect and the spirit. But they operate on a higher level in focusing attention on the three human faculties (seeing, hearing and speaking) that are engaged in making it possible for the human creature to be conscious – first, of himself, and then of his relationship to others and to God. This is foreshadowed in the Fellowcraft Degree where it is taught that “...the attentive ear receives the sound from the instructive tongue and the mysteries of Masonry are safely lodged in the repository of faithful breasts.” One of the mysteries of Masonry, then, is that consciousness that arises from our faculty for language – relying as it does on hearing, speaking and seeing.

SUMMARY

In summary, then, the benefit to a man in experiencing the Craft and Capitular Rituals is that it gives him understanding of himself, as an integrated entity of emotion, intellect, body and spirit; teaches him to plumb the depths of his psyche; and gives him a venue for spiritual growth and service. More precisely, the Craft Degrees awaken in him an awareness of these parts and the need to transform them according to the Basic Tenets of Masonry, the Four Cardinal Virtues, the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Hiramic Legend, and so forth. In the closing of the Third Degree lecture he is invested with an emblem that reminds him of his immortal soul. In the Capitular Degrees, he is taught to search *within* (a recapitulation of the First Degree lecture, wherein he is told that it is the internal and not the external qualifications that are important) for the lost treasure of his psyche, or soul. He is taught to characterize that treasure, and to understand its relationship to the Great Architect. Learning the Lost Word represents the coming into awareness of himself as a member of “that house not made with hands...”

The signs, grips and words associated with the various degrees are important in and of themselves. Much has been made among the uninitiated, who take them literally, of the so-called “terrible” nature of the signs, and who infer therefore that Masons are capable of harming brethren who violate their “oaths.” But these signs are meant to be taken symbolically only – the Mason who violates his oath does injury only to himself. Symbolically, then, the signs of the First and Mark Degrees are designed to induce the initiate to focus on the emotions, that about himself that is governed by the emotions or the *heart*; the signs of the Second and Past Master Degrees induce the initiate to focus on the intellect and *mind*; and the signs of the Third and Most Excellent Master Degrees induce him to focus on the *spirit*. Such focus is not trivial, as it is necessary for progress in self-improvement – hence, the importance of the journey through the Craft and Capitular Degrees.

So as the candidate completes the Royal Arch Degree, he has ended only the first stage of his Masonic journey. He is now equipped to proceed, in Life generally, to serve his God, his neighbors, and himself with “fervency and zeal.”