

PROLOGUE

ENTERED APPRENTICE DEGREE

Congratulations on your decision to enter the world's oldest and largest fraternal organization. As an organization of good men and true, there is a well defined line directly connecting today's Masonry with the Operative Masons who built the great castles and cathedrals of the Middle Ages in Europe and the United Kingdom.

The path you will follow in your initiatory degrees will be identical with that trod by every other mason who has come before you. You will be asked the same questions. You will be required to take the same vows. Likewise, you will be accorded the same honors. Whatever you experience here - be assured that every Master Mason has experienced it before you.

We tell you this so you may better understand the reason for that which is soon to be unfolded to you. Masonry is a great philosophic system of morality, or ethics, interpreted by allegory and by the use of ancient symbols. Its great teachings are brotherly love, relief and truth- and these will be further explained to you as the day progresses.

In keeping with the traditions of the Operative Masons of the middle ages, you will enter our craft as an entered apprentice. Ancient apprentices served a term of seven years, during which their performance was evaluated to determine who would be advanced to the rank of Fellow of the Craft. Their initiation provided certain information to prepare them for their period of apprenticeship and enable them to identify themselves as members of the fraternity. Wise and serious truths were taught them using symbols to impress upon their minds the importance of adherence to these principles.

Every object, every word, every item displayed in the lodge has a symbolic significance. We encourage you to pay particular attention to every detail of the ceremonies you are about to witness. You may not learn the meaning of every symbol today and you will not remember every detail of the lessons presented. Your faithful attendance in the future will provide answers to the many questions, which arise as you witness these ceremonies.

You will find Masonry is dignified and inspirational. It should, and will, play a vital part in your future life.

Have no fear. There is nothing in a Masonic Lodge that does not have a direct bearing upon the lessons to be unfolded for your instruction. There is no mental or physical anguish awaiting you; no levity; no horseplay, and no embarrassment. Be alert to all that happens as you progress upon your way. Remember that you have entrusted yourself to friends- friends whom you will soon call brothers- and in whom you can safely place the utmost trust and confidence.

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FELLOW CRAFT DEGREE

During his seven-year apprenticeship, the new Mason generally lived with his Master and was really a bondservant with many duties, few rights, and little freedom. He could not attend meetings of Fellow Crafts, worked long hard hours as a bearer of burdens. At the end of his apprenticeship he was examined in Lodge. If his record was good, if he could prove his proficiency under test, and the members voted in his favor, he was made a full member of the Craft, with the same duties, rights, and privileges as all others. He was then called a “Fellow Craft Mason”.

For our ancient operative brethren, membership in the Lodge was far more than just a requirement of their occupation. It was the center of their social life, their security in old age, the livelihood, and the source of their education. It was during their “passing” to the rank and degree of Fellow Craft that their education began.

In this degree you will hear the Middle Chamber Lecture. It represents the beginning of a Fellow Craft’s education. We owe the form of this lecture to a man named William Preston, who lived in England during the early days of Speculative Masonry. Preston did not like that the lectures followed no ritualistic pattern, but could assume whatever form the Master desired. He set about to write a formal lecture for each degree. After working on these lectures for many years, he succeeded in having them adopted by the Grand Lodge of England.

Preston believed one of Masonry’s principal duties was to actually bring light to a candidate by educating him. He believed knowledge was the universal solvent for the problems of the world. In his time there were few opportunities for the average man to acquire formal education. And so, according to some Masonic authorities, Preston conceived the idea of condensing in the Fellow Craft Lecture as many of the elements of a formal education as possible. Thus, the new Fellow Craft received his first exposure to architecture, astronomy, and the seven liberal arts and sciences. The original lecture delved into these areas in great detail. In so doing, the lecture gave the average Masonic candidate of Preston’s era an insight into certain knowledge he might never have received otherwise.

As you progress through the three degrees, remember they are emblematic of the stages of ones life. The Entered Apprentice Degree represents youth, and the attainment of knowledge. The Fellow Craft Degree represents manhood, and the application of what has been learned in youth. A firm foundation on the principles taught in this degree will qualify you to advance to the last and highest grade of ancient craft Masonry- the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason.

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MASTER MASON DEGREE

You have now completed the first two degrees of Masonry and are ready for the final step into our fraternity-the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason. This is the highest honor Freemasonry can bestow. In it are found the most profound lessons taught in our gentle craft.

This degree, like the two preceding, presents its lessons rapidly, and at times almost casually, as if in passing. The scope of Freemasonry is so great; the teachings of each degree could not be fully expounded or comprehended in many, many evenings. In fact, a number of Masonic scholars and authorities have devoted much of their adult lives to the study of Masonry and have felt that such a lifetime afforded them only a beginning in their work.

You will find this degree, and more especially the second section, is more dramatic than the first two degrees. In the Master Mason degree you will see the symbols of some of the most soul searching questions ever asked by philosophers and wise men down through the ages. Our beliefs in the omnipotence of the Supreme Being, in eternal life, in piety, fidelity, moral conduct, and faithfulness, are dramatically stated in a ceremony so beautiful you will remember it for the rest of your lives.

A legend exclusive to Masonry will be presented. While this particular legend is found only in speculative Masonry, it has its counterpart in some form in the legends and folklore of practically all peoples of the world. Always- this legend takes a similar form- death by treachery, a search, discovery, and reward. Its origins in Masonry are unknown as it predates any written history about our fraternity. The message is absolutely timeless.

As in the other degrees, you are encouraged to pay close attention to not only the orations and activities that take place, but also to the many and varied symbols which are presented. As before, many will be explained. It may be many years before you will be satisfied that you have seen and understand all the symbols in these degrees. Only then will you realize that a lifetime of study can merely scratch the surface of the wonderful body of knowledge and lore contained in the first three degrees of Ancient Free and Accepted Masonry.