

INTRODUCTION TO FREEMASONRY

The Fellowcraft Degree

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The Globes

The "world celestial and the world terrestrial" on the brazen pillars were added by comparatively modern ritual makers. Solomon knew them not, although contemporaries of Solomon believed the earth stood still while a hollow sphere with its inner surface dotted with stars revolved about the earth. The slowly turning celestial sphere is as old as mankind's observations of the starry decked heavens.

It is to be noted that both terrestrial and celestial spheres are used as emblems of universality. This is not mere duplication for emphasis; each teaches an individual part of universality. What is called universal on the earth – as for instance the necessity of mankind to breathe, drink water and eat in order to live – is not necessarily universal in all the universe. We have no knowledge that any other planet in our solar system is inhabited – what evidence there is is rather to the contrary. We are ignorant of any other sun which has any inhabited planets in its system. If life does exist in some world to us unknown, it may be entirely different from life on this planet. A symbol of universality which applied only to the earth would be a self-contradiction.

Real universality means what it says. It appertains to the whole universe. A Mason's charity of relief to the poor and distressed must obviously be confined to this particular planet, but his charity of thought may, so we are taught, extend "through the boundless realms of eternity."

The world terrestrial and the world celestial on our representations of the pillars, in denoting universality, mean that the principles of our Order are not founded upon mere earthly conditions and transient truths, but rest upon divine and limitless foundations, coexistent with the cosmos and its Creator.

The Winding Stairs

Like so much else in Freemasonry the Middle Chamber is wholly symbolic. It seems obvious that Solomon the Wise would not have permitted any practice so time wasting and uneconomic as sending many thousand workmen up a flight of stairs to a small Middle Chamber to receive corn, wine, and oil which had to be brought up in advance, only to be carried down in small lots by each workman as he received his wages.

If we are to accept the Scriptural account of the Temple as accurate, there actually were winding stairs. "And they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber" is stated in I Kings. That the stairs had the three, five, and seven steps by which we rise is not stated in the Scriptures. Only in this country have the Winding Stairs fifteen steps. In older days the stairs had but five, sometimes seven steps. Preston had thirty-six steps in his Winding Stairs in a series of one, three, five, seven, nine, and eleven. But this violated a Pythagorean principle – and Freemasonry has adopted much in its system from the science of numbers as exemplified by Pythagoras as the Fellowcraft will discover when – if – he receives the Sublime Degree.

The great philosopher Pythagoras taught that odd numbers were more perfect than even; indeed, the temple builders who wrought long before Pythagoras always built their stairs with an odd number of steps, so that, starting with the right foot at the bottom the climber might enter the sacred place at the top with the same foot in advance. Freemasonry uses only odd numbers, with particular reliance on three: three degrees, three principal officers, three steps, three Lesser Lights, and so on.

Hence the English system later eliminated the number eleven from Preston's thirty-six, making twenty-five steps in all.

The stairs as a whole are a representation of life; not the physical life of eating, drinking, sleeping and working, but the mental and spiritual life, of both the lodge and the world without; of learning, studying, enlarging mental horizons, increasing the spiritual outlook. Freemasons divide the fifteen steps into three, referring to the officers of a lodge; five, concerned with the orders of architecture and the human senses; and seven, the Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The Number Three

The first three steps represent the three principal officers of a lodge, and – though not stated in the ritual – must always refer to Deity, of which three, the triangle, is the most ancient symbol.

Their principal implication here is to assure the Fellowcraft just starting his ascent that he does not climb alone. The Worshipful Master, Senior, and Junior Wardens are themselves symbolic of the lodge as a whole, and thus (as a lodge is a symbol of the world) of the Masonic world – the Fraternity. The Fellowcraft is surrounded by the Craft. The brethren are present to help him climb. In his search for truth, in his quest of his wages in the Middle Chamber, the Fellowcraft is to receive the support and assistance of all in the Mystic Circle; surely an impressive symbol.

If we examine a little into the powers and duties of the Worshipful Master and his Wardens, we may see how they rule and govern the lodge and so by what means they may aid the Fellowcraft in his ascent.

Worshipful Master [vii]

The incumbent of the Oriental Chair has powers peculiar to his station which are far greater than those of the president of a society or the chairman of a meeting of any kind. President and chairman are elected by the body over which they preside and may be removed by that body. A Master is elected by his lodge but can be removed only by the Grand Master (or his Deputy acting for him) or Grand Lodge. The presiding officer is bound by the rules of order adopted by the body and by its by-laws. A lodge cannot pass by-laws to alter, amend, or curtail the inherent powers of a Master.

Grand Lodges so differ in their interpretation of some of the "ancient usages and customs" of the Fraternity that what applies in one jurisdiction does not necessarily apply in another. But certain powers of a Master are so well recognized that they may be considered universal.

The Master may congregate his lodge when he pleases and for what purpose he wishes, provided it does not interfere with the laws of the Grand Lodge. For instance, he may assemble his lodge at a special communication to confer degrees, at his pleasure; but he must not disobey that requirement of the Grand Lodge which calls for proper notice to the brethren, nor may a Master confer a degree in less than the statutory time following a preceding degree without a dispensation from the Grand Master.

The Master has the right of presiding over and governing his lodge, and only the Grand Master or his Deputy may suspend him. He may put any brother in the East to preside or to confer a degree; he may then resume the gavel at his pleasure – even in the middle of a sentence! But when he has delegated authority temporarily the Master is not relieved from responsibility for what occurs in his lodge.

It is the Master's right to control lodge business and work. It is in a very real sense his lodge. He decides all points of order and no appeal from his decision may be taken to the lodge. He can initiate and terminate debate at his pleasure and can propose or second any motion. He may open and close the lodge at his pleasure, except that he may not open a stated communication earlier than the hour stated in the by-laws. He is responsible only to the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge, the obligations he assumed when he was installed, [viii] his conscience, and his God.

The Master has the right to say who may enter and who may leave the lodge room. He may deny a visitor entrance; but he must have a good and sufficient reason, otherwise his Grand Lodge will unquestionably rule such a drastic step arbitrary and punish accordingly. Per contra, if he permits the entry of a visitor to whom some member has objected, he may also subject himself to Grand Lodge discipline. In other words his power to admit or exclude a visitor is absolute; his right to admit or exclude a visitor is hedged about by the pledges he takes at his installation and the rules of his Grand Lodge.

A very important power of a Master is that of appointing committees. No lodge may appoint a committee. The lodge may pass a resolution that a committee be appointed, but the selection of that committee is an inherent right of the Master. He is ex officio a member of all committees he appoints. The reason is obvious; he is responsible to the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge for the conduct of his lodge. If the lodge could appoint committees

and act upon their recommendations, the Master would be in the anomalous position of having great responsibilities, but no power to carry out their performance.

Only the Master may order a committee to examine a visiting brother. It is his responsibility to see that no cowan or eavesdropper comes within the tiled door. Therefore, it is for him to pick a committee in which he has confidence. So, also, with the committees which report upon petitioners. He is responsible for the accuracy, the fair-mindedness, the speed and the intelligence of such investigations. It is, therefore, for him to say to whom shall be delegated this necessary and important work.

It is generally, not exclusively, held that only a Master can issue a summons. In a few jurisdictions the lodge members present at a stated communication may summons the whole membership.

If he keeps within the laws, resolutions, and edicts of his Grand Lodge on the one hand, and the Landmarks, Old Charges, Constitutions and ancient usages and customs on the other, the power of the Worshipful Master is that of an absolute monarch. His responsibilities and his duties are those of an apostle of Light!