

**THE GRAND CHAPTER OF  
ROYAL ARCH MASONS OF NOVA SCOTIA**  
with jurisdiction over  
Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

**TALKS FOR CHAPTERS**

**A COLLECTION OF EFFECTIVE TALKS  
ABOUT ALL THINGS ROYAL ARCH**



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**Edition 2**

**September 2015**

## TALKS FOR CHAPTERS

### Introduction

Chapters are always looking for ‘speakers’ who are able and willing to present interesting educational talks related to Royal Arch Masonry. But good orators are not always good authors, nor vice versa. And good talks written for specific occasions often need revision for more general use.

This is a collection of talks already presented in some Chapters in Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island by various authors and orators. Each was effective, and each has been made available by the original author (with appropriate editing approved by him) for use by others.

Originally printed in 2003 as Edition 1 for use exclusively by Assistant Grand Lecturers, this Edition 2 has been authorized by the Board of General Purposes for wider use by more speakers.

The purposes of this digital file version (in PDF frozen format, and in Microsoft Word for easier copying,) are:

- to make such talks available to any and all willing speakers as a resource
- to encourage MEHPs to include such talks in their meeting program content plans, working with willing speakers and promoting attendance by ‘advertising’ them in Summonses
- and thus to help make Chapter meetings more interesting, informative, educational and rewarding.

This Edition 2 of the 1983 collection is a second starting point. Now that circulation by email attachment makes such distribution possible at almost no cost, the BOGP has also authorized a call for *more* contributions of successful Talks to be added to this collection for circulation later in a further expanded Edition 3.

Every Chapter and author is being encouraged to select Talks from their files (digital if possible, or at least clearly typed), to be sent to the undersigned for editing to make them appropriate for others to use. The goal is to make it easier for MEHPs and Secretaries to include interesting and educational program content in *every* meeting, ‘advertised’ in *every* Summons.

So mote it be!

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## **ASSISTANT GRAND LECTURERS OUR DUTIES AND RESOURCES – AT YOUR SERVICE**

As with most things we do in Freemasonry, I'm a member of a team. I'm the Assistant Grand Lecturer for this Royal Arch District, and a member of the Grand Chapter Ritual and Education Committee, chaired by the Grand Lecturer.

Today I want to tell you about my duties, the resources we Assistant Grand Lecturers have available to us, and the ways we try to help our Chapters. Essentially, we and those resources are at your service.

The Constitution specifies only two duties for Assistant Grand Lecturers:

- to work under the direction of the Grand Lecturer, and
- to respond to requests from the Chapters within the District to speak on Masonic subjects or matters of interest to Capitular Masonry.

You might think the Chapters would keep us busy with invitations to “speak on Masonic subjects or matters of interest to Capitular Masonry”. But that's not the general pattern, and we've been trying to figure out why.

One reason might be that some Chapters, or some High Priests, don't even know we're available. Another might be that we're not necessarily great speakers. In the past, appointment to the title of Assistant Grand Lecturer has been seen by some as simply a promotion, a reward, an award of the title Very Excellent. But we haven't all been very excellent at giving lectures.

Another reason has probably been confusion over the term “Lecturer”. In fact, the Grand Lecturer's main duty is to monitor the quality of ritual work in our Chapters – especially the lectures which are part of our Degree rituals – and help maintain the highest standards in our delivery of those ritual lectures.

And the obvious – if unstated – first duty of the Assistant Grand Lecturers is to assist the Grand Lecturer in those same functions ... to monitor the uniformity and quality of ritual work and help promote and maintain high standards.

How? Not by going around criticizing. I already said, we're not all very excellent at it ourselves!

No, the Constitution's wording is clear. We are to “respond to requests from the Chapters.”

What sort of requests? Well, that's where it gets really interesting, because as each of us progresses through the Capitular Degrees, and especially when we join Degree teams and have to memorize parts, we encounter a thousand and one unusual words, phrases, references and allusions that can and should prompt all sorts of questions.

Now, discussion of those questions and possible answers is often the great delight of Degree rehearsals, and can be the substance of really interesting regular Chapter meetings. Especially when we hear different opinions about the answers.

But that's one of the reasons Assistant Grand Lecturers do get called in: to help resolve disputes about correct interpretations of ritual instructions. And another is to help members understand some of the content of the rituals – the words, phrases, references and allusions. Because none of us can be very effective in delivering our roles if we don't understand them ourselves.

But let me be clear. As Assistant Grand Lecturers, we are not pretending to be the ultimate expert linguists, expert interpreters of every nuance and allegorical meaning in the rituals, or even expert ritualists in the simple sense of oratorical skills. In every Chapter we visit there are probably several members who have more of those kinds of expertise than most of us.

But we have one more thing that helps make us valuable to every Chapter.

We have access to more resources.

The Ritual and Education Committee has additional members, and access to the true experts in our Jurisdiction and beyond it, and part of our job as Assistant Grand Lecturers is to provide a communications link between their expertise and you – between your questions and their answers. We do that via the Grand Lecturer, who chairs that Committee and also sits on the Board of General Purposes.

He also leads an annual School of Instruction for all the senior Grand Chapter officers, which always includes more information than we can absorb at the time, but also helps us from all Districts get to know each other and exchange ideas.

Now, one of our duties not stated in the Constitution, but included in our Job Description approved by the Board, is “to give and obtain answers to ritual questions and encourage emphasis on the educational element of Capitular Masonry.”

Try *me* on a ritual question, today or any other day, and I might have an opinion to share. But be warned, I'll be just as likely to hold off answering until I have a chance to put that question to the Grand Lecturer and the Ritual and Education Committee. They're there to help me as well as you, and each of them has access to additional resources – research sources, networks of contacts around the world, a variety of prepared papers and talks, and other people with more experience than me.

But I can serve as a link between you and them. And if I don't have a satisfactory answer for you when you first ask, I'll promise to get back to you when I find one that satisfies me.

A couple of examples of questions that received carefully prepared responses from the Ritual and Education Committee are ones that also went on to the full Board of General Purposes before coming back to the Chapters.

One was about the correct lettering on our imitation Ark of the Covenant. What came back was a printed card that can be cut into a box-shaped model, complete with the minimum lettering considered desirable. Our Arks differ in size, shape and lettering, and that's fine. The problem was that some had lettering that was not just different but contradicted what's in our ritual, and that just leads to confusion.

So the Chapters with that problem got an answer to help them solve it.

Similarly, what we use to exhibit and explain the Key of Mysterious Characters comes in a variety of forms, but the Committee and the Board issued a recommended one.

Now, you've heard me refer to "education" several times, and specifically to our duty to "encourage emphasis on the educational element of Capitular Masonry."

Every Chapter convocation should provide some educational benefit to every member, and often that can be achieved through a well prepared talk on a subject related to Capitular Masonry – our history, how our Degrees evolved, interesting aspects of our rituals, the ancient characters like Solomon and Adoniram, the stories about them and the sources of those stories, the allusions to the books of the Bible and other ancient texts, and the lessons we should be learning from all that to help us become better men and more valuable to our families and communities.

But Assistant Grand Lecturers should not be thought of as the only source or even necessarily the best deliverers of educational talks. In 2003 we were each given a printed booklet of *Talks for Chapters*, and given the privilege of delivering them by request at any and all Chapters. Some copies escaped into more general circulation, and some of those talks found their way into addresses by High Priests during Rededication Services, for example .

No harm done. Not at all. Some of those talks proved to be very popular. But at the same time, because the printed copies were intended initially only for Assistant Grand Lecturers, many of the talks were either never given or never heard by the majority of Royal Arch Masons in our Jurisdiction.

But it is now possible for such collections of talks to be circulated at virtually no cost in digital form as attachments to emails.

And so, in September 2015, the Board of General Purposes authorized adaptation of that 2003 booklet into a digital document for distribution to *every* Royal Arch Mason in our Jurisdiction, with the express purpose of encouraging any and every willing speaker in every Chapter to offer to orate one or more of these talks, first obtaining his High Priest's permission, and then informing his Secretary so that he and his subject can be featured in his Chapter's next Summons as an attendance attraction.

So now, one part of my job as an Assistant Grand Lecturer is to encourage you, the capable speakers in this Chapter, to help me ensure that every meeting of your Chapter includes educational content, making good use of the *Talks for Chapters* collection as appropriate.

Further, the Board of General Purposes has also authorized the idea of attracting from the Chapters many more such talks for inclusion in a future much enlarged edition of the *Talks for Chapters* collection. We have a volunteer who has offered to edit them into the format needed so that any good speaker can orate them without sounding like the original author.

So rummage in your files, preferably for good talks already in digital form, or at least so clearly typed that a computer scanner can convert them through an Optical Character Recognition program, and send them in to me, or the Grand Lecturer, or the Grand Secretary, who will forward them to that volunteer.

No guarantee yours will be used.

But I can guarantee they won't if you don't offer them at all!



Another part of my job is to assist the Grand Lecturer and Ritual & Education Committee in introducing new or updated materials to all Chapters.

For example, I wonder how many members know that there are over one hundred differences between the maroon-covered ritual dated 1982, which was already decades old, the spiral-bound red-covered one dated 1997, and the red hard-cover one printed in 2004 and reissued in 2009, those differences having been approved by the representatives of all the Chapters assembled in Annual Convocation.

I know we could get into quite a discussion on that subject ... another time! But by now, everyone should be using an edition dated 2004 or later.

And the Manual of Procedure Guidelines is a further example of new or updated materials that we are to help ensure reach all the right hands and eyes and minds. If any officer of this Chapter doesn't have a copy of that Manual, I'm willing to discuss the reasons he should.

Our Grand Lecturers have also helped guide creation of the so-called "4 by 4" membership campaign scripts, and the Mark Master Mason Preview. I can help answer questions on those products ... or "tools" as we call them.

Well, Companions, I've tried to give you a better understanding of what's going on among the Assistant Grand Lecturers, and the Ritual and Education Committee.

We stand ready to serve you, by request, to the best of our abilities ... to help you maintain the highest standards in ritual work ... to tackle your questions ... to encourage inclusion of educational talks in every meeting ... and to strengthen the links between you and the many sources and resources available to help you make your meetings more interesting and rewarding.

We ask you to have patience with us as we try to do better each year, and we look forward to hearing from you whenever you have a question on ritual or education.

And we promise we'll always listen to your advice, as well.

Thanks for listening to me.

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## **WHY ARE WE HERE AT THIS ROYAL ARCH CONVOCATION?**

In 1998 when Past Grand Lecturer, R.Ex.Comp. George Mason was a District Grand Superintendent, he presented a talk to Chapters in his District on the subject of attendance.

It was a very personal presentation, ending in a prayer. But it had a quiet message for us all, and that's why it's worth repeating here, including the prayer.

I have a question for you, Companion Mason said.

Why are we here?

I'm not asking it as one of the age-old questions of humanity: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Is there a God? What happens after?

Instead I mean, Why are we here, in this room, today, as Royal Arch Masons?

What came we here to do?

Remember the question the Worshipful Master in Lodge asks the Senior Warden, in the Entered Apprentice Degree? "What came you here to do?"

And the Senior Warden answers: "To learn to subdue my passions and improve myself in Masonry."

Some say there should be a comma after "learn"; then the answer would fall into three parts: "What came you here to do?"

- "To learn,"
- "to subdue my passions"
- "and improve myself in Masonry."

Did *you* come here today to learn?

To subdue your passions, or learn to subdue your passions?

To improve yourself in Masonry?

Being a good man, did you come to learn more about how to make yourself a better man?

Or to learn more about how to help other good men make themselves better?

Did you come out of a sense of duty, to serve your Companions by serving the organization, the Fraternity in general, the Royal Craft in particular; by helping to preserve and strengthen it?

Or did you come to enjoy the companionship itself; the good feelings that come from meeting and working together in the common cause – the good cause inherent in our Order?

All good reasons, not least the last. Because, when birds of a feather flock together, if they're good birds, then good things happen. The good that's in the best among us rubs off on the rest, and we all become better.

Or was it one of the other reasons that brought you here today. Or several reasons in combination?

Why are you here? And why do you attend other Royal Arch convocations?

Think back to the last regular convocation you attended. Or another one in the last year or so. If you'd thought of the question then, "Why am I here", what would you have answered?

What would your Companions have answered? Would they have given a variety of answers? Or would most of them have given the same answer, in different words?

Might their answers – or yours – have been generic to Freemasonry? In other words, an answer that would fit any Masonic gathering – in Lodge, Chapter, Council, Preceptory, Consistory, wherever?

If so, that's not the answer I was hoping for. Let me repeat the question – the full version of the question: "Why are you here, in this room, today, as a Royal Arch Mason, and what came you here to do?"

See, what I'm chasing is the extra thought: We're not here today, in this room, just as Freemasons, but as Royal Arch Masons.

When our Chapter gathers in any regular convocation, we're not there just as Freemasons, but as Royal Arch Masons.

It may be easy enough to remember why we approached Royal Arch Masonry in the first place. But what has kept us coming back, returning time after time, convocation after convocation, as Royal Arch Masons?

A Mason once said, "I was drawn to the fraternity by the mystery, but was captivated by the reality." But that's true of the Craft generally, isn't it?

I repeat, Why here, today, as a Royal Arch Mason?

Me, personally, after I became a Mark Master Mason, then a Virtual Past Master, then a Most Excellent Master, and finally a Royal Arch Mason, I kept coming back because I found several things I hadn't found in Lodge, and still haven't found in Lodge since.

Several things.

I found the rituals of the Mark Master, Virtual Past Master, Most Excellent Master and Royal Arch Mason Degrees. Four superb rituals which, because of *what* they teach, and the *way* they teach so effectively, deserve to be preserved, perpetuated, shared with as many Master Masons as possible, communicated to them and their successors with the same scrupulous purity as our predecessors communicated them to us.

I found the Grand Omnific Royal Arch Word, and thereby found the Master Mason's true Word, the Great and Sacred Name ... or rediscovered it in a new and more effective light.

And through the methods of Royal Arch Masonry I found a deeper insight ... a further horizon ... new lines of thought about God, and life, and the immortality of the soul.

And I found more helpful lessons about friendship, the peculiar characteristic of a Master Mason; about unity, and the intimate connection which should ever exist between Ancient Craft Masonry and the most sublime Degree of the Royal Arch; about that fervency and zeal which should ever actuate all Royal Arch Masons; and about that purity of heart and rectitude of conduct which are essential to gain admission into the ultimate Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies ... heaven.

More.

- I found a deeper companionship with men who value stronger mystic ties;
- who are willing to work harder than average to comprehend the Masonic mysteries, and to communicate them effectively to others;
- men with higher than average Masonic standards;
- with more than average curiosity about Freemasonry's origins and the origins and intentions of the mysteries embodied in our rituals;
- men able to see the additional values offered by Royal Arch Masonry;
- able to see how those values would benefit other Brethren;
- men willing and able to serve through the chairs and the Degree parts, to keep the process moving onwards into the future.

And more. I found through Royal Arch Masonry a route onwards through other Masonic bodies and groups of Degrees and Orders, where benefits grow ever more rewarding, responsibilities more challenging, and the sense of duty to God and neighbour ever more profound.

I'm here today partly to say thank you again for what I've found, because I'll be forever grateful. But I'm also here again to ask for more, because I can probably never learn enough about how to subdue my passions and improve myself sufficiently in the eyes of God. And I'm here again to rededicate myself to that process, for my own benefit and the benefit of others.

I'm here again for *more* than I can experience in Lodge. Not that there aren't many wonderful men in our Lodges from whom each of us can learn. But in a Royal Arch Chapter their density is greater, and the means at their disposal are even more effective.

And finding more in Chapter, I can return to Lodge and appreciate Freemasonry more at that level, too. And when the opportunity arises, I can tell my Craft Lodge Brethren something of what I've found in Chapter ... and perhaps place in their hands a little booklet on Royal Arch Masonry – there are several available to those who do a little searching.

Similarly, when I'm in a Chapter I believe it's my duty occasionally to mention the benefits to be found in a Council of Royal and Select Masters, where it is said one can "complete the circle of Ancient Craft Masonry".

Wherever I go, I seek to share whatever I've learned recently that might be helpful or valuable to others.

Perhaps the most helpful and valuable little bit of wisdom I've learned recently, that I'd like to share with you today, I found in a novel by a writer named Glendon Swarthout. One of his characters said:

*"Vee get too soon old, and too late schmart".*

Think about that. "Vee get too soon old, and too late schmart".

I would offer a little prayer arising from that thought. Don't get up, but will you listen for a moment to my personal prayer?

Dear God, the years are rushing by.

I wish I could get wiser as fast as I'm getting older.

I know more than I used to, but one thing I know now is: I don't have enough time left to learn everything I'd like to know, nor maybe all I need to know.

But I've caught a glimpse of what's really important.

Maybe I'll never see it clearly, nor understand it fully, not in this life.

But I'm reaching for the light.

I guess that's why I'm here:

To keep reaching for the light, and say thanks for the glimpse.

Amen.

So mote it be.

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*(First delivered to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, Prince Edward Chapter No.12 ,  
and King Solomon Chapter No. 28, in 1998)*

## OUR GRAND CHAPTER

Companions, let's talk for a few minutes about our Grand Chapter.

Emphasis on that word "our".

Objective ... to be both informative and encouraging, because more of us can get more rewards out of Royal Arch Masonry by understanding more about how our organization works.

One of the first Royal Arch Chapters to be properly constituted in North America was right here in the north-east corner of the continent, in Halifax. The Grand Chapter of Nova Scotia has ancient and honourable roots.

Some of the Chapters which helped form the Grand Chapter, or which joined later, also have deep and sometimes tangled roots. The first Chapter organized in Prince Edward Island, for example – Alexandra – in Charlottetown, received its dispensation from Scotland and its initial educational materials from New Brunswick, but had what might be termed a tough childhood during its formative years – including a period when (to extend the metaphor) there seemed to be no parents around to make sure homework got done properly, or even at all.

In 1877, as if trying to make a fresh start after a period in reform school, Alexandra Chapter threw out its old rituals and changed the titles of its Officers, to those in use in Nova Scotia, and petitioned to untie itself from Scotland and join the Jurisdiction of Nova Scotia.

There are many interesting stories like that, but the Grand Chapter of Nova Scotia put out the welcome mat to all, and as their adoptive Mother she has ever since treated them all as fully equal with her other children.

Years later, when the Jurisdiction became so large – including Newfoundland – it needed to be separated into administrative districts, the Office of District Grand Superintendent was created, so that each District would have a resident representative of the Grand High Priest.

Eventually, each District also obtained an Assistant Grand Secretary, an Assistant Grand Lecturer, and an Assistant Grand Captain of the Host, all resident in their Districts, although maybe there've been times when some of us haven't made as full use of them as we could.

But no District has ever been separated from the centre of the Jurisdiction by more than distance. Every District has always been eligible to participate in the government of the Jurisdiction to the fullest extent for which volunteers could be found. Grand High Priests have come from every District and every Chapter.

And, of course, every Past High Priest from every Chapter, and every Presiding High Priest, King and Scribe, or their proxies, is:

- eligible to attend every Annual Convocation of the Grand Chapter,
- eligible to vote on all important issues,
- and eligible to offer resolutions and motions to amend the Constitution of our Jurisdiction.

That's why everyone can straightforwardly and quite happily call it "our" Jurisdiction. Every District is usually represented in two or three of the Grand Chapter Officers' seats, and another two or three Grand Chapter Committee appointments. Each usually sends two or three car-loads of delegates to the Annual Convocation. And those of us who go are welcome to speak on any subject. But if the members from one District ever took it into their minds to send more than two or three car-loads ... if they ever got so interested in some agenda topic that every set of three Council members from every Chapter in the District wanted to go, plus more than just a handful of its Past High Priests ... why they could make just as much noise there as any other group, if they wanted to.

But no District has ever had to shout to make itself heard. The Grand High Priest, Grand King or Grand Scribe pays a visit to every Chapter every year. They listen, as well as talk. And after each Grand High Priest completes his year, he's automatically eligible to serve on the Grand Chapter Board of General Purposes. Pretty well every District Grand Superintendent makes at least one official visit to each of the Chapters every year, and sometime more unofficial ones. And he gets heard at the high table, as an equal.

And that job of District Grand Superintendent lasts only two years, before another Chapter, sometimes in rotation, is invited to nominate a replacement.

Plus, each District has an Assistant Grand Lecturer who can be invited by any and all of a District's Chapters to visit at least once a year, to give a talk with focus on Royal Arch Masonry and help answer questions on matters of ritual and education.

And the addition of an Assistant Grand Captain of the Host in each District added a fresh source of guidance on proper etiquette, protocol and procedure.

The resident Assistant Grand Secretary takes the minutes at the annual District Meeting, and makes sure the Grand High Priest gets a copy.

And each of those officers is given a clear job description, and invited to annual Schools of Instruction, to help them accept more responsibility for making the links between our Districts and our Grand Chapter even more responsive.

An interesting geographical note is that while some members in some of the Districts can have some pretty long distances to travel to reach each other, that's not a unique problem for any of them. The distance they might have to travel to attend a Grand Chapter meeting is about the same from Prince Edward Island or Yarmouth.

No, if there's any problem in the relationship it's the other way around – that some of us don't participate in Grand Chapter activities as much as we're welcome to; as much as others would like us to; or as much as we should if we as individuals want to get as much benefit out of our membership as we can.

Two suggestions.

First, each and every one of us should consider attending the next Annual Convocation. For some, it's easiest to go the night before, to avoid a real early morning start and any risk of a

speeding ticket. A good crowd assembles at the Annual Convocation, swelled by those who come from local areas the morning of the meeting. You get to recognize and talk to quite a number of people you've met before – including Past Grand High Priests and other Companions who've visited here. Always there are delegates from New Brunswick and Maine, and usually from several other Canadian and U.S. Jurisdictions.

You make new acquaintances, some of whom become good friends after a while. Often there are publications and Masonic paraphernalia to look at and consider buying. You hear good meaty topics discussed. You learn new things about Royal Arch Masonry. You get to vote on behalf of your own Chapter, on subjects that will affect your Companions back home. And going and coming, you can travel with others, share the travel and hotel costs, and build the very strongest of lasting friendships with people of like mind.

As a High Priest, if you've taken the Order of High Priesthood in the Council of Anointed High Priests, you can attend that meeting the previous evening, and watch the awesome ceremony of the induction of new members. If you're a Past High Priest, and haven't attended that ceremony lately, go again and enjoy one of the great highlights in all of Freemasonry. Many go every chance they can, being freshly stimulated every time by the beautiful and fascinating material in that Order.

And that's the second suggestion. The first was that *everyone* here consider attending the next Grand Chapter Annual Convocation. The second is that *every* Present and Past High Priest attend the meetings of the Council of Anointed High Priests as often as possible.

Both experiences offer substantial rewards. Both provide you the opportunity to participate fully in the administration of Royal Arch Masonry in *our* Jurisdiction.

*Ours* ..... yours, to the extent that you want to join in.

You – we all – are more than welcome.

Thanks for listening.

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*(First delivered to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, 1996)*



## THE BRIDGE BUILDER

Some of you may have read the little poetic gem, *The Bridge Builder*, which tells of the old man who walked a lone highway and came at night to a chasm vast and deep and wide. The old man, because of his vast experience, had little trouble in crossing the sullen stream, but when he was safe on the other side he turned to build a bridge to span the tide.

A fellow pilgrim, you will remember, asked the old man why he stopped to build the bridge when his journey would end with the ending day and he would not again pass that way; and the old man replied:

“There followed after me today a fair-haired youth.  
This chasm which has been naught to me,  
might to him a pitfall be.  
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;  
good friend, I am building this bridge for him.”

Isn't there something for Masons, especially Royal Arch Masons, in that beautiful little poem, the author of which is unknown?

Royal Arch Masons may be likened to the old man who built the bridge at eventide for the fair-haired youth who followed along the lone highway. At least, we should play a part that would make it possible to liken ourselves to that old man. We should be building bridges for those who follow.

Of course, we should not try to persuade every Master Mason to become a Royal Arch Mason, but neither should we let ourselves be perceived as aloof, or superior.

Ours is the duty to set an example by ever remembering a Brother's welfare and by being ever ready to go on foot, along a lone highway, to bring cheer to the sick room;

ours the duty to welcome the opportunity to be observed performing any task the Lodge Master may ask us to perform;

ours the duty to be ever ready to give to others who may request it, the good counsel which our additional Masonic Light and experience qualifies us to give;

ours the duty to be fountains of knowledge from which others may drink;

ours the duty to measure up to what younger Masons expect of those who have advanced beyond the Lodge and received the additional Light intended for us;

ours the duty to be ever building bridges on the lone highway upon which others may be traveling;

ours the duty to provide safe highways through chasms vast, and deep, and wide, in which are concealed the beautiful Lessons and Teachings of Freemasonry, and in which are to be found additional interpretations of the enigmatic and priceless Symbols of Freemasonry.

Companions, I invite you at our Rededication Service, and later, when you have some quiet time to reflect on this little talk, to think not only about our duty to encourage others to follow our example in stepping forward from the Lodge into the Chapter, but also to think about the other ways by which we can set the example that they will want to follow ... the example that will prompt them to approach us and say, "Tell me more about Royal Arch Masonry".

If we set the example in those attractive ways, we will be doing our duty as Royal Arch Masons, but we will also be helping to make the world a better place by advancing the cause of the universal brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.

And that is something worth rededicating ourselves to, today and every day.

Thanks for listening

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*(Adapted by George I. H. Mason, GL, from The Bridge Builder, a talk for Past Masters' Night, in 3-5-7 Minute Talks on Freemasonry by Elbert Bede, 33°, Macoy, Virginia, rev. ed. 1981, for presentation to Royal Arch Chapters as a Rededication Service Address.)*

## **FRIENDSHIP AND BROTHERHOOD**

We use the term ‘Brotherhood’ in Freemasonry frequently. Yet how many of us could write an essay explaining that word and its meanings, as an exhibit to support a petition for membership in another Masonic body?

Companion Mark Mueller of Massachusetts did, when applying to Nova Scotia Conclave Number 6 of the Order of the Secret Monitor, a body dedicated to strengthening the Mystic Tie. His short essay not only helped earn him admission there, but the members of that body were so impressed they sought and obtained his permission to circulate it more broadly.

Although it isn’t specifically about Royal Arch Masonry, it’s also worth sharing with you today, because – as our ritual says – it is one of our great duties as Most Excellent Masters to dispense light and truth, and Companion Mark Mueller’s words contain both.

He titled his essay “Friendship and Brotherhood”. Here’s what he said:

Dictionary definitions of “friend” include one who one likes, and one whom one is allied with. Friendship is defined as the act of being a friend.

I only wish friendship were that easily defined. A friend, to me, is not limited by one’s likes and dislikes. As we all know, even the best of friends have times in their relationship which are strained, to say the least. There are times when we even dislike our friend, because of something or other our friend has done, or not done, which has gone against our personal wishes.

And yet, if we are truly friends, we remain friends after such an incident, because true friendship goes beyond mere likes and dislikes. True friendship involves respect and understanding, compassion and admiration. True friendship allows us to render to each of our friends a feeling of dignity, even if they have fallen to the depths of depravity. It allows us to stretch forth a helping hand to assist and serve a fallen brother.

In like wise, brotherhood is not limited to one’s circle of friends, or necessarily to an organization or particular congregation to which one belongs.

Yes, we are taught in every Masonic Degree and order that we are to give aid and assistance to our Brethren of that particular Degree. However, if we look at the macrocosm of the idea of brotherhood, we find that all the great religions of the world teach that we are children of our Creator, created, literally or figuratively, in His image. Therefore, when we honour our brethren, we honour our Creator.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the one in which I was brought up, these teachings boil down to two great commandments, love God, and love your neighbour.

We are, therefore, commanded to be our brother’s keeper. I believe that the anthropomorphic manifestations of the Creator in such instances as Jesus the man as the human aspect of God, or Buddha Sakyamuni as the corporeal manifestation of the Godhead, are meant to teach us to treat each other as we would treat our Creator.

While our tendency is to group together with like minded individuals for our common defence, support, and encouragement, bound by the cement of Brotherly love and affection, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family.

We are taught to aid and protect that family, those children of one Almighty Creator. We are, truly then, a Brotherhood of Men under the Fatherhood of God.

When we live by this teaching, the light of our Masonic Brotherhood can be a shining example for the entire world to see. We are, when all is said and done, a society of friends *and* Brothers.

If all of our Masonic work teaches us but one thing, and that one thing is the building and cementing of lasting friendships, then our work about the altar of Freemasonry will not have been in vain.

Companions, let me repeat that last paragraph of Companion Mueller's essay:

"If all of our Masonic work teaches us but one thing, and that one thing is the building and cementing of lasting friendships, then our work about the altar of Freemasonry will not have been in vain."

The building and cementing of lasting friendships.

What a perfect description of both the activity and rewards we all can and should share.

Let me share them now by saying, thank you for listening, my friends.

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*(First delivered to:  
Alexandra Chapter No. 11, Charlottetown, 2002  
Also: King Solomon Chapter No. 35, August 2003)*

## **OPPORTUNITY FOR BROTHERHOOD**

Companions, one of the greatest American Freemasons of the twentieth century, Joseph Fort Newton, a clergyman whose sermons were as famous with the general public as his Masonic talks were within our Fraternity, published in the 1920s a book of his Masonic talks.

One of those talks was titled *Opportunity for Brotherhood*. It was written soon after the First World War, the so-called “Great War”. But even today, it still seems appropriate – almost eerily so – for careful consideration in our own age.

It spoke then of the growing complexity of life, and the new phenomenon of mass communication media – including radio!

That may seem to date this talk in one way, and the style may sound a little stilted to our modern ears. But in a more important respect – its call for Freemasonry to help fill the need for ways to unite the world – it may never become *outdated*.

Will you listen again now to the words of Joseph Fort Newton, and decide for yourself whether his message has value for you, for us, and for our world today?

The days in which we live, he said, may not be the best or the worst in history, but to us they are the most interesting. “The world is so full of a number of things, I am sure we should all be as happy as kings,” said Stevenson. But we are not happy, and we are not kings. Whether we will or no, humanity is drawn together, jammed together, and we can never be happy until we learn to live together.

The outstanding trait of our times is an extreme complexity of life. What a variety of interests appeal to men, bombarding them from every side all the time. As a result there is a chaos of conflicting ideas, a widespread fermentation of mind, a lack of repose, and unstable equilibrium of thought and life. Over this tossing sea of activity and change, there hangs a cloudy apprehension of uncertainty – a cloud to some observers roseate with hope, to others dark with dread.

Consider the facts. For one thing, we have a vast and bewildering extension of the means of intercommunication. The railroad, the telegraph, the telephone, and now the radio, make the earth a whispering gallery and a hall of mirrors. If a man wanted to be a hermit, there are only one or two places left on the globe which would suit his purpose.

He might build his hut either at the North Pole or the South; but if he did so he would soon be joined by the agent of a land company seeking to establish a popular resort. There is hardly a spot left where the hum and rattle of the world does not beat upon the ear with more or less distinctness.

There is a like extension of the means of intelligence (the gathering and sharing of knowledge). Every man travels or talks with traveled men. The newspaper is omnipresent, and claims to be omniscient! Take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, and behold the morning paper flies on those same wings.

Every part of the world knows about every other part. And the naked African prince, who asked Stanley if the people of Europe talked much about him, was a true son of his time. All the doings of the world, from the diplomatic fencings of the powers of Europe down to the heart-tragedies of the city slums, are but the gossip of an enlarged neighbourhood.

It is a noisy, snippy neighbourhood, in which folk hang over the back fence and say nasty things about each other – but a neighbourhood nonetheless.

Indeed, it looks as if the world is about to become too small and too familiar to afford sufficient stimulus to our jaded appetite for sensation, and men are foretelling the days when the space between the earth and Mars will be like the Straits of Dover, and the inhabitants of the neighbouring planets will launch forth in electric air navies, and fight for the supremacy of the solar system, using the Moon for a national cemetery!

The result of this shrinking of the earth has been a rapid death of provincialism and the growth of the cosmopolitan spirit. Once, local ideas were the standards by which men measured every thought and custom that chanced to stray from the outlying regions of darkness into the little circle of light which they inhabited. Every deviation from the manners and customs of the neighbourhood, or the state, was deemed a violation of the order of the universe, an exhibition of anarchy, a bit of the original chaos not yet reduced to system.

By the sudden enlargement of the neighbourhood to the limits of the world, the different and incongruous local ideals, customs, and traditions, have jostled each other in strange confusion. They have tended to neutralize and destroy one another, or at least have stripped one another of much of their authority and sacredness, until men are half ashamed to wear a lingering rag of local prejudice, and look with tolerant and pleased eye upon the variegated life of the race, and rejoice in the differences of custom, speech and ideas as adding infinitely to its picturesqueness and philosophic interest.

Today men pride themselves upon being citizens of the world. We are losing the power of being surprised. Goldsmith's 'Citizen of the World', as he traveled into strange lands, remarked: "When I have ceased to wonder I may possibly grow wise"; and surely, we have reached the point in our development when the wisdom ought to be in evidence. We are no longer shocked by strange customs, and discoveries which would have startled us fifty years ago hardly keep pace with our expectations. New ideas have become commonplace. The freshest ideas are the old ones, forgotten in the hurry of running after the novel.

The result of all this process, so hastily sketched, is a growing sense of the unity of humanity. The feeling of fraternity is one of the noblest notes of our times. It is atmospheric. It is insistent. It is passionate. It is the first article of the creed of the age. It is an article of the religion of every man; and is the only religion which many men have.

Like other creeds, it is belied every day in practice; but it stirs the heart as nothing else. Even the most phlegmatic must respond to it in some extent, while sanguine idealists become ecstatic, dream dreams and see visions.

Such is the opportunity for brotherhood today. Once a fine sentiment, it has become a necessity – a vast in-flowing tide of facts, and the pressure of reality the might of which we can neither measure nor forever resist.

But it must pass from sentiment to science, and the irritation we feel today, in the wake of the war, is due to the discovery of the fact that we are in truth brothers, to the last man of us, whether we like it or not. Perhaps the greatest truth burned into our minds by the World War is that the good of the race as a whole *does* actually exist, and that no one race or land can reach its full development by itself.

In such a world Freemasonry, the oldest and greatest fraternity known among men, must now do its work. Its secret is now the open secret and quest of the world. Its truth is the universal dogma. Its ideas and methods are copied in a thousand ways.

How will Masonry meet this marvellous age and measure up to its opportunity? Is it a progressive science, as it claims to be? Can Masonry itself unite in a common undertaking for the common good, in service to mankind?

Companions, such were the words of Joseph Fort Newton in the 1920s. Tonight, let us paraphrase his final question:

Do we here in this room see our Fraternity as a common undertaking for the common good, in service to mankind?

I do hope so. And I thank you for listening.

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*(Adapted from a talk by Joseph Fort Newton included in his book  
Short Talks on Masonry, Macoy, Virginia, 1928)*

## THE GRAND CHAPTER CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Every year, a number of Chapters in our Jurisdiction submit a record of their activities and earn a Certificate of Achievement.

A number do. But most don't.

And not all those who submit their records earn the Chapter Achievement Award.

But more Chapters could earn that Award if they did fill out the report form.

And it has been said that virtually every Chapter could win it if every High Priest planned his year's activities with the Award's criteria in mind.

Most Chapter Secretaries are familiar with them. But the question has been asked, how many new High Priests have that same awareness?

Obviously, it's the responsibility of Past High Priests, not just Assistant Grand Lecturers, to draw attention to the standards considered desirable, because achievement of those standards results in more informative, more educational, more enjoyable, more rewarding meetings.

The purpose of the Grand Chapter Achievement award is not just to *recognize* achievement of standards of work considered desirable for all Chapters, *after the fact*, but to encourage every Chapter and every High Priest to *plan ahead*. To plan to win.

So let's talk about the Chapter Achievement Award today; not just to the present High Priest, if he will forgive me, but to you other Officers who are on your way up, and who will one day have the opportunity to plan a program for your year in the East.

That planning task can be easier if you look to the *criteria* of the Chapter Achievement Award for some guidance.

They are included in the Achievement Award application form which is shown in full at the back of the Manual of Procedure Guidelines.

But let me hit the highlights.

The Certificate of Achievement can be earned by any and every individual Chapter. All the Chapter has to do is measure up to certain desirable standards, and then report that it has indeed succeeded in doing so.

And doing so isn't that tough! The challenge is three-quarters in raising awareness of what's needed, in advance, so you can then set out to perform what's needed – the performance being only one quarter of the challenge for the simple reason that many Chapters already regularly do most of what's needed.

It's the little extra touches that make the difference – those extra touches you can add if you know in advance what they should be.

For example, here's the first criterion: Advance, pass, receive and exalt at least one candidate during the year. Well, there's no Masonic business more important than attracting candidates and performing the Degrees for them. If we don't have that as the core of our program, each and every year, we're going to be in trouble anyway.



Next criterion: That one or more members of the Chapter Council *preside* during at least two of those four Degrees. That shouldn't be a problem – it's an opportunity for each High Priest, the ultimate opportunity to experience the rich depths of the rituals; to learn by participating. And don't forget, the first three of those Degrees are Lodge-type Degrees, which can be presided over by the King or Scribe.

As a Past Master, either can lead the whole Degree, including the Obligation, if the High Priest doesn't want to. We don't have to use a Past High Priest in those Degrees.

Next: Any ten of the twelve principal Chapter Officers must each attend no fewer than nine of the ten regular convocations – but if the minutes can show that an absentee has sent his regrets and reasons for being absent then he'll be counted for this purpose as having been present. Therefore, all you have to do, Companion Officers, is make a mutual compact that while you'll strive to attend all convocations you will never fail to send in your regrets and reasons if and when your cable-tow just can't stretch far enough. Attend, or send regrets. It's that easy.

Fourth criterion: Two out of three of the Grand Council Officers must attend the Grand Chapter annual meeting. Any two of the three of you. Both the Constitution and the terms of your Installation encouraged you to see that as a duty; part of your service to your Chapter and to the Grand Chapter. But, aside from duty, have you ever met a High Priest, King, or Scribe, who felt he'd wasted his time attending the Grand Chapter Annual Convocation? It's your opportunity to participate in the *government* of the Royal Craft.

Fifth criterion – there are eleven: Two out of three of the Grand Council Officers should attend the District annual meeting. Well, that should be easier than the previous one.

Sixth: Two out of three of the Grand Council Officers should be at their stations when the District Grand Superintendent or other Grand Chapter representative comes to visit – so long as he gives notice of his visit in time to have it included in the Chapter summons. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

Seventh: The Chapter must send in its annual returns and annual dues to the Grand Secretary, postmarked on or before January 31. Thanks to our Companion Secretary, we've probably already met that criterion for this year. If so, we thank him. If not, we must encourage him.

Eight: The Chapter Secretary should inform the Grand Secretary, on the proper form, of every death, demit, suspension, affiliation and exaltation, within thirty days of each event. Again, we should be able to look with confidence and pride towards our Secretary's desk, knowing that it's manned by one who won't fail us on that criterion!

Nine: The Chapter should have a social or other special form of fellowship communication, with notice given in a summons. I'll come back to that one.

Ten: The Chapter should listen to an educational talk given by a Grand Chapter Officer (present or past) or a clergyman, but not including the official visit by the District Grand Superintendent or other Grand Council representative. If that's a problem, then we need to do some more

advance planning. Among present and past Grand Chapter Officers, there's plenty of Masonic speakers available for the asking. And there's lots of Royal Arch clergymen.

But you do have to ask.

Finally, the eleventh criterion: that our Chapter should make at least two official visitations to other Chapters. Some say that visiting other Chapters is one of the most rewarding privileges of Royal Arch membership. Plan ahead, tell the other Chapters in good time that we're coming, so they have time to put it in their meeting notices, fill a car-load, and enjoy. Enjoy the visit, and enjoy the travel.

Now, out of those eleven criteria for the Chapter Achievement Award, which are the toughest? All officers, attend nine out of ten meetings or send your regrets with reasons – that the tough one? Two out of the three Grand Council Officers attend the Grand Chapter annual meeting, the District meeting, and the official visit by the District Grand Superintendent?

Or is it the ninth criterion – that the Chapter should have a social or other special form of fellowship communication, with notice given in a summons. Well, if that one sounds like a good idea to a few of you, how about volunteering to help organize such an event – an opportunity perhaps for families to join in – perhaps an open house here at the Masonic Hall, followed by ice cream and cookies?

Let me express the hope that next time we get together we might find time to discuss that idea of a social or fellowship communication; or comment on the idea of attending nine out of ten communications or at least sending in regrets and reasons; or comment on the overall aim of earning that Chapter Achievement Award.

Next time we get together, how about giving us the benefit of *your* views on this subject, and you might be surprised how many others agree with you, and how easy it can be to earn the Chapter Achievement Award.

I hope we will earn it, if not this year then next year. Because, if we do, everyone will benefit.

And that's the whole idea!

Thanks for listening.

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*(Originally prepared by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason, Grand Lecturer  
for use by any senior officer,  
adapted further for use by any speaker to give to his own Chapter)*

## THE FIRST GRAND MASONIC COUNCIL

In 1998, after then Grand Lecturer George Mason was first appointed to the Grand Chapter Board of General Purposes, he wrote a talk to give to his own Chapter about his reactions.

He said of course that he felt honoured. But it's what he said after that, that might be helpful to others to hear:

I did some more research on the Board of General Purposes, he said, so I might not sound too dumb if anyone asked me a question about it. Like, my wife.

Maybe some Craft Lodge Masons can get away with not telling their wives much about what they do in Lodge. There are still some who think they shouldn't tell their wives anything! But it seems to me, the further we advance in Masonry, the higher the office we accept, the more we *have to* tell our wives – or we won't get all the support we need to be able to enjoy the additional activities and perform them effectively.

Still, try explaining to your wife what the Grand *Chapter* Board of General Purposes *is*. You'd probably start by saying it's like a Grand *Lodge* Board of General Purposes. Which, when you stop and think about it – or when your wife points it out – doesn't really help her much.

So you say, well, it's kind of like a board of directors ... except not really, because a board of directors establishes direction, whereas in Freemasonry it's the Grand Lodge or Grand Chapter, meeting in annual assembly, that establishes direction. The Boards of General Purposes just follow that direction ... except where decisions have to be made between annual meetings ... although then it's the Grand Master or Grand High Priest who provides the direction ... except the Grand Master or Grand High Priest doesn't *chair* either of the Boards of General Purposes, the Deputy Grand Master or Grand King does ... the Grand King in Grand Chapter being like the Deputy Grand Master in Grand Lodge.

At which point your wife turns away with a shake of her head, and a little sigh.

Which is actually quite helpful. It tells you, if you're going to go to Chapter and talk about the Board of General Purposes, you've got to do better than you did with your wife!

Here's what our Grand Chapter *Constitution* says:

“The Board of General Purposes shall consist of the Grand High Priest, Grand King, Grand Scribe, Grand Treasurer, Grand Secretary, Grand Archivist, Grand Historian, Grand Lecturer, Grand Captain of the Host, the District Grand Superintendents, all Past Grand High Priests residing in the Jurisdiction, and six members of Grand Chapter, three of whom shall be elected by Grand Chapter and three appointed by the Grand High Priest immediately after his installation.” And: “The Grand King shall be Chairman of the Board.”

And it goes on to describe the Powers and Duties of the Board, making it responsible for financial forecasts, investments and audits; for appointing various committees, including one on Ritual and Education, one on Fraternal Relations with other Grand Chapters, and several others.

And there's an interesting final responsibility that says "The Board shall proceed to the consideration of any special matter referred to it by the Grand High Priest or Grand Chapter, in preference to other general business", which, if I read it right, remembering the Grand High Priest isn't Chairman of the Board, means he could refer everything interesting to the Board and stay home and watch television every day ... except when he has to visit all the Chapters in the Jurisdiction, and attend Grand Chapter functions in other Jurisdictions, and ... in fact in the *Constitution* there's such a list of things he has to do, it's amazing he has time even to *attend* any Board of General Purposes meetings!

I was explaining something along these lines to a Royal Arch Mason, thinking I was doing better than I'd done with my wife; that I'd got a handle on what the Board of General Purposes is, and how the Grand High Priest is supposed to be too busy to be its Chairman; and out of the blue he asks me a question that throws me completely for a loop:

"Is it like a Grand Masonic Council?" he asks.

"Grand Masonic Council," I said, not sure whether to nod or shake my head, but thinking fast. I mean, I know what a Council of Royal and Select Masters is. And they have a Grand Council, like we have a Grand Chapter. But "Grand Masonic Council"? Where had I heard that before?

"Like, in the question and answer every time we open Chapter," this Royal Arch Mason said. "*Whom do the first three represent?*" And the Captain of the Host answers, '*Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, those three ancient worthies who composed the first Grand Masonic Council at Jerusalem and held their meetings in the Tabernacle.*'

Is the Board of General Purposes like a Grand Masonic Council?"

Well, I admitted it then and I admit it now. That was the first time I'd ever given any thought to that whole line about that "*first Grand Masonic Council*".

I'd researched Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, the three who were in charge of building the Second Temple, the one that replaced Solomon's Temple. And I knew which ones were Priest, Prince, and Prophet, as represented in a modern Chapter by High Priest, King and Scribe.

And, okay, they'd worked together as a team to get the Second Temple built, sitting in Council, you could say. As big bosses, maybe you could further say they were a *Grand Council*. And because the project was a stone building, and they supervised the stonemasons, you could describe them as a *Grand Masonic Council*.

But here's the thing. What's the point in describing them as the "*first*" Grand Masonic Council? I mean, doesn't that imply that there've been *other* Grand Masonic Council's since? I don't know of any modern group called a Grand Masonic Council, but maybe it's the idea that's important, rather than the exact words. And so maybe, yes, a Board of General Purposes *is* like a Grand Masonic Council, if the members take their responsibilities as seriously as Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai did.

Funny thing, the more you think about that line, "the first Grand Masonic Council at Jerusalem", the more there is to think about;

the more questions come to mind;  
the more you have to speculate about possible answers, spend time in research, or in discussion  
with your Companions.

Companion Mason ended his talk by joking that he was going to try those questions on  
his new Companions on the Board of General Purposes.

I don't know whether he ever did.

But me, I'll end just by thanking you for listening.

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*(Adapted from a talk delivered to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, 3 September 1998)*

## **SOME DEFINITIONS BEGINNING WITH THE LETTER C**

One of Freemasonry's great delights is that it's an endless source of bits and pieces of fascinating knowledge – a bottomless well you can keep lowering your bucket into.

Thousands of Masonic writers have written billions of words, intended to encourage all of us to think more and learn more about our Craft, and about the many valuable lessons it teaches.

One of those writers was named Henry Wilson Coil, a Royal Arch Mason who wrote one of our most useful Masonic encyclopedias.

Here's just half a dozen little bits of knowledge he included in his encyclopedia, all under the letter C – starting with a definition of the word 'Craft':

### **Craft:**

A trade or art requiring skill and dexterity. Also the word used by Freemasons to describe our Fraternity – the Craft of Freemasonry – and its members – the Craftsmen or the Craft.

A question occurs to some: How many Speculative Masons understand that to help make themselves into better men through their involvement in the process of Freemasonry they need to *work* at developing skill and dexterity in this Masonic Craft? They need to become Craftsmen in all the different senses of the word.

Now here's another definition beginning with the letter C:

### **Candidate:**

The word is derived from the Latin *candidus* meaning white, hence pure. Those who sought admittance to ancient mysteries or societies were clad in white robes to indicate purity or innocence and called candidates.

To most of us, it seems most fitting to use the term *petitioner* for one who has applied, and to call him a *candidate* after he has passed the ballot. Strictly speaking, he is not a candidate until he presents himself, is prepared, and knocks on the door, for prior to that time he may back out. After reaching the state of a true candidate there is seldom a rejection, but mere petitioners are sometimes rejected.

### **Ceremony:**

Coil defines *Ceremony* as something done in formal manner according to ritual.

Installations, initiations, passings, raisings, etc., are ceremonies. They are intended to make a *deep and lasting* impression upon those who participate or witness the rites.

That definition helps us understand why in Masonry we take ceremony seriously – why we have so much ceremony and why we consider it serious business.

It's because when it's done well we remember it well!

### **Chapter:**

We work in Chapters. Why do we call them that? Coil says this word, originally spelled *chapter*, has two meanings:

- (a) architecturally describing the globe or capital at the top of a column; and
- (b) a meeting or assembly.

In the latter sense it was originally a meeting of the canons of a cathedral, or the monks or members of a monastic or other order.

The oldest record extant of a Masonic application seems to be in the statute of 1425 which forbade unlawful assemblies of Masons in “Chapiters or Congregations.”

Then the General Regulations adopted by the Premier Grand Lodge in 1723 provided that: “The Master of a Lodge has the right and authority of congregating the members of his Lodge into a Chapter at pleasure.”

Whether or not that referred to the conversion of a Lodge meeting into a Royal Arch Chapter meeting, is debatable and not supported by hard evidence, because there’s actually some hard evidence that Royal Arch meetings were also called Lodges at the time.

But the earliest definite record of the term *Chapter* for a Royal Arch body was in 1766 when the Modern Grand Lodge referred to the organization of the previous year as the Grand Chapter.

But it seems clear that the word *Chapter* came to mean a meeting of Lodge Brothers for the purpose of conducting Royal Arch business, during which they call themselves Companions instead.

Indeed that’s exactly what still happens in England and some other Jurisdictions, where a Lodge closes on the third Degree, Masons who haven’t been exalted to the most sublime Degree of the Royal Arch leave, and the rest then proceed to open a Chapter.

Here’s another definition:

**Charity:**

It’s generally agreed that charity means love, but love in Christian churches and societies so often manifested itself in alms – meaning donations of money or food – that charity came to mean only relief or assistance to the poor.

But the two ideas are distinguished in Masonic tenets, for we speak of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, which could also be expressed as Brotherly Charity, Relief and Truth.

If charity is a virtue it should be extended to all mankind.

Masonically, it means a kindly, tolerant, considerate and helpful attitude toward everybody – a loving attitude.

And here’s the sixth and last definition for today, beginning with the letter C:

**Convocation:**

This is the official term for a regular meeting of a Chapter, whereas a regular meeting of a Lodge is called a Communication. One possible reason for the use of these terms is to signify that they are more than mere assemblies once they have opened in form – with the appropriate ritual. However, they also help to differentiate the many different kinds of Masonic assemblies, which also include conventions, congresses, councils, encampments and other types.

Let's end by encouraging everyone here to find an opportunity to buy or borrow a good Masonic encyclopedia – and you probably can't do better than Coil's – and browse through whichever one you do find.

Maybe then *you* could offer to give a short talk to your Chapter on interesting definitions beginning with the letter D.

Or E. Or F.

You won't agree with everything in any encyclopedia, no matter who wrote it. But it's guaranteed that you'll find the exercise stimulating and rewarding.

Which is what I've been trying to be these last few minutes.

Thanks for listening.

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*(Originally prepared by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason, Grand Lecturer,  
for use by any senior officer, now available to any willing speaker)*



## EQUALITY

Sometimes we might wonder whether the papers we write about Freemasonry, or talks we give, are actually read or really heard by anyone else.

Well, one of our past Grand Lecturers wrote a paper on the origins of Freemasonry. And our then Grand Archivist, R.Ex.Comp. Bill MacLennan, read that paper. And it got Bill to thinking about something he'd read and heard many times without understanding it as clearly as he would have liked. So Bill sat down and wrote out *his* thoughts. The result made things so much clearer for him that he put it in the form of a talk for his own Chapter. He titled it "A universal truth hidden within the Mark Master Mason Degree". And others read that result and wanted to see it shared around more Chapters. Bill gave permission, and here's what he said:

I caution you!, Bill said. What I am about to say may be entirely incorrect – but I have the courage to stand up and say it to my Masonic Brothers and Capitular Companions because it is truly the way one piece of our ritual strikes me, personally.

Let me start with a direct quotation from a piece written several years ago by one of our Grand Lecturers. Speculating on the long transition of Lodges of operative stonemasons into secret Lodges of speculative Freemasons, he wrote:

*Quote: ... meeting by day in Lodges to discuss work, and by night, by candle light, to discuss more, much more, always questioning, speculating, sharing; their Craft evolved to attract the attention of the most knowledgeable of men ... evolved into a way of life based on intellectual freedom combined with the discipline of learning, on self development and self discipline, on generosity of spirit and mutual assistance, and above all on certain pure and fundamental religious beliefs: the existence and beneficent attributes of a Supreme Being, and the moral and ethical obligations of every man to his neighbour. Unquote.*

We know that much of this moral and ethical thinking was carried into the short plays or Degree rituals of our three Craft Degrees "including the Holy Royal Arch".

Some would say, however, that we perform these rituals with too little consideration of the fundamental and world-changing truths that they were and are meant to illustrate.

I am talking briefly of one of those tonight, Bill said – a fundamental truth that, to me, seems to be concealed in an almost inconsequential part at the end of our Mark Master Mason's Ritual. You will recall, I know, that in that Degree, after the workers have lined up and been finally paid (all receiving an equal payment), the Right Worshipful Master seems suddenly to be aware that all is not well in the workplace and, addressing the Senior Grand Warden, asks "What is the cause of this disturbance?"

Remember the answer? "We who have borne the heat and burden of the day complain that those who have come in at the eleventh hour have been made equal unto us."

To settle the matter, the Right Worshipful Master comes forward and reads a "Law" – actually a parable from Matthew Twenty – which begins: "***For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man – which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.***" You know the piece of scripture and our ritual well.

The full-day workers were finally told ***“Take that thine is and go thy way. I will give unto these last even as unto thee.”*** After having that “Law” read to them, the workmen in our ritual declare it to be “a good law” and seem to go away happy.

But, I ask each of us today, is it a “good law?”

I spent most of my life in industrial operations, starting as a plant worker, a few years as a foreman, a decade as a manager, ending up as the chief executive officer of a good sized company. In that time I made more than a few mistakes but *never* did it occur to me to pay the guys that worked full shifts the same as guys that showed up late and worked only one hour. If I’d done that, the Shop Stewards would have been enraged. I would have received an angry phone call from the Teamster’s Business Agent. I would have been the laughing stock of the Rotary Club and my Board of Directors would have said: “Bill, are you crazy? You can’t get away with that!”

The method of payment outlined in that Parable and in our Ritual would *absolutely* not work in any workplace that I’ve seen. Yet, in our ritual, we are led to agree with the Marshal who, speaking on our behalf, says ***“We are satisfied. That is a good law!”***

So – again, I ask, just how is it a good law?

Part of the answer, it seems to me, is in the first sentence of what the Right Worshipful Master reads from Matthew Twenty: ***“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man.”*** Ah! It’s about the Kingdom of Heaven – and not a newly proposed labour-management theory!

But at that point, I’m still confused. If this is supposed to teach us something we can apply to our everyday life – what is it?

Well – another part of the answer may be in the *last* line of the parable – the “punch line” if you like. And what does it say? Listen carefully!

***“So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called but few chosen.”***

***“So the last shall be first, and the first last .”***

We, I think, slide past those words: ***“So the last shall be first and the first last,”*** without any shock or surprise. We’ve perhaps heard them too often. However, I suggest to you, *most urgently*, that it was not always thus.

Let’s try to place ourselves in the shoes of our ancient brethren in, perhaps, the 17<sup>th</sup> century, meeting in total secrecy as that Grand Lecturer suggested – and using that secrecy to discuss ethical and social issues and principles that, if spoken openly on the street, at that time, would have likely lead to arrest, imprisonment and, sometimes, to execution – on charges of *heresy*.

Within those early, secret Lodges, good men gradually came to agreement that certain principles, though socially and legally unacceptable at that time, were in fact – *correct*. Many of our ancient brethren eventually came to agree, privately and secretly, like the Marshal in our Mark Degree:

**“We are in agreement; that is a good law.”** And then, by various means, they set out to change the world – to change society until these great fundamental truths that compose our Masonic teachings came to be the standards of present day society.

Why is it a good law? I suggest to you that we accept it as a good law, not because we think that employers the world over should embrace it as the new way to pay workers – to pay people that work one hour the same as those who work twelve hours.

I suggest to you that our ancient brethren saw it as indicating something else. They saw it as meaning ... *equality*!! They heard it as a call for *equality* – that *all men are created equal*! Contrary to the way the world worked in all times previous to our times, that the first *shall* be the same as the last. That Masons, and perhaps all men, should *meet on the level and part on the square*.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and the many centuries before, one could not imagine that a practical application of such a statement of “equality” (the last first and the first last) could ever be applied in real life. In those times, life was dominated by power figures in state and church. Kings, Queens and Emperors applied their “Divine Right” of total life and death power, over all of the unfortunate masses who they found under them. All of these power figures would have been (and were) terribly threatened by the suggestion that **“the last shall be first and the first last.”** They would have been terribly threatened by the notion that, in God’s World, all men, all peoples, are created – and should stand *equal*!

We accept that principle today and defend it in courts and, perhaps, in battle. Our ancient brethren, when the world was not as ours is today, had to gradually convince themselves that what was totally unacceptable in the power circles of *their* day, was, nevertheless, *fundamentally* correct and a cause for which many would risk all – to bring to the acceptance of society.

I’m also going to suggest that strange, seemingly out-of-place parts of our rituals may have been secret triggers – secret triggers that caused or enabled our ancient brethren, in the confidence of their lodges to discuss, openly, such unthinkable possibilities that maybe, just maybe, the last could be first and the first could be last. That maybe, just maybe, a society, even a country could be created in which all man would be considered to be equal. It may have taken centuries of secret discussion and debate in Masonic lodges and other secret philosophical bodies to finally enable the changes in society and governance that are now part of our known history. In the British Isles, where Masonry first became sufficiently mature to emerge into open society, the all-powerful ‘royals’ and nobility were part of the system and many of the moves toward recognized *equality* were made without terrible blood shed.

In 1776, the following sentence became one of the opening salvos of a Declaration of Independence of a new country – **“We hold these truths to be self evident.”** The very first of those self evident truths was: **“That all men are created equal.”** We know that many of the men who came to that realization and approved the writing of those words were Masons or heavily influenced by Masons.

Later, in France, amid much bloodshed, their new Republic gradually came to the conviction that the country, their new Republic of France, could be summed up by their present national motto: ***Liberty – Equality – Fraternity***. Just how Masonic can you get?

In 1948, the United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in which the very first article says: ***“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”*** Again – – just how Masonic can you get?

I recognize that I may be putting an incorrect spin on this part of our Mark Master Mason ritual, but – I suggest that just because I have proposed this tonight, the next time you witness this part of our ritual, it may occur to you that, maybe, just maybe, that’s what it really means.

And isn’t that what it’s all about?

That our secret rituals and symbols should mean more than they seem to mean on the surface. That, to our ancient Companions, there were powerful moralistic and ethical meanings behind some – or all of the rituals that we have received from them – and that we should do today just what they may have done.

When the Almighty leads us to see some of these deeper meanings, rightly or wrongly, we should, as I have tried to do tonight, be so bold as to tell each other about it.

So wrote Bill MacLennan, and he thanked his audience for giving him the opportunity to share his thoughts.

As do I.

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*(First delivered to: St. John’s Chapter, No 8, Pictou, N.S., June 12, 2003)*

## **INNOVATION IN THE BODY OF MASONRY**

Our late Grand Historian, R.Ex.Comp. J. Douglas Welsh, gave a talk in which he challenged the popular perception that our Ancient Landmarks ban *innovation* in Freemasonry. He not only disagreed, and explained why, but offered reasons why healthy innovation might be needed as urgently today as ever.

Perhaps his thoughts deserve to be voiced to more audiences.

If you're willing to be one such audience, I'll serve as his voice here.

A hundred years ago, Companion Welsh said, the pillars of the community were also the pillars of the Lodge. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, researchers, scientists, architects, businessmen, judges, churchmen, politicians, statesmen, policemen, they didn't talk to their families or non-Masonic friends about being Masons, but they were proud to be part of a fraternity like ours, that was active and involved in the community. Their community. These men were known across the community as special in some way. They were known to be moral men, just, trustworthy, honest, reliable, men to use as patterns for the youths of the day.

We still have such men in the Lodge. Pillars of their communities. A few. I know two judges, Doug Welsh said, (Judge Black and Judge Williams), and one lawyer (Gil Gaudet), a dentist (Phil Amyss) and a doctor (Craig Goss), one churchman (Carman Riggs), a couple of politicians (John Buchanan and Jamie Muir), but at this point, I start running out of prominent people in the Craft. They don't join in the numbers that was once the case.

Why not? We haven't changed. What they saw in the Craft a hundred years ago is still here. Nothing is lost. We're just as we were, a hundred years ago. But, are we? Should we be? Why haven't we changed? Everything around us has changed. Why have we stood still?

Good questions; let's look at some answers.

In less than a hundred years, our world has witnessed a score of events which have shaken the old lifestyles a hundred times: World War. The nuclear age. Radio and television. Computers. Cars. Planes. Rockets. Sputniks and space shuttles. Diseases and cures. The changed definitions of "Family" and "Society".

Lower attendance at churches, synagogues, temples and mosques all over the religious spectrum. Women's Liberation. Political Correctness. Change has screamed across our world, reshaping our society, and we've done little to keep up with those changes we've seen. In fact, we've largely laboured to keep change from affecting us at all. Why would we do that? Well, another name for change is "innovation", and you all know how we as Masons feel about "innovation", especially within the Craft.

The Antient Charges and Regulations of the Craft, to which every Master in the Nova Scotia Jurisdiction must give his agreement before he can be installed, includes one on "innovation":

Charge 11 reads "You admit that it is not in the power of any Man or Body of Men" (here it comes, that dreaded I-word!) "to make any Alteration or Innovation in the Body of Masonry, without the consent first obtained of the Grand Lodge."

*Without the consent first obtained of the Grand Lodge.*

Most times, when this Antient Charge is spoken or written, it is abbreviated. That last, key phrase is usually omitted. Most Masons believe that Innovation cannot be permitted.

*They're wrong!*

From the earliest period of our history, *Innovation* has not only happened, it has happened regularly! The Fraternity was constantly being rewritten and improved, made more interesting or more open or more something.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the Craft experienced significant change in more years than it stayed unchanged!

So, when did we stop welcoming change?

Shortly after the Union of the “Moderns” and the “Antients” in 1813, change in the Craft slowed to a crawl, at least in Grand Lodges which owed their existence, to a greater or lesser Degree, to one of the “Home Grand Lodges” of England, Scotland and Ireland. Ritual development stultified. Degree development left to find more open homes. The spirit of change left, and hasn't returned. How do I know that? Because when the development of Degrees and Ritual stopped in the English speaking Masonic world, it continued in the non-English Masonic world.

Now, I'm not going to suggest that the infamous Italian pseudo-Masonic lodge, “Propaganda Dué” or “P2”, was in any way an example of good development of Masonry Universal. Far from it. We'll get back to them in a bit, though. What I *am* going to suggest is that Continental Freemasonry continued to change in response to the changes in the world around it. Continental Masonry is not just unrecognized Masonry, or clandestine Masonry, or improper Lodges and Grand Lodges. It exists, and is part of the worldwide Masonic fact. But it is more than that. Continental Freemasonry is growing. At rates that often exceed ten percent annually.

Yes, growing at more than twice the rate we are shrinking.

I'm not going to suggest that they have all the answers, but some of them sure have answers we don't have and could certainly use.

About that “other” Masonry, like P2; it was never a part of any genuine form of Masonry, but think about this. When some evil men wanted to hide their skulduggery under a wrapping of apparent innocence, they didn't choose our brand of Masonry to mimic. “Mainstream Masonry” wasn't even of value to crooks.

Two hundred years ago, “mainstream Masonry” on *this* Continent refused to accept the existence of Black Masons and Black Masonry, with the refusal to accept Prince Hall Masonry as regular. That is changing, and while it is darned well about time, it is changing now because some Grand Lodges started trying to change the “mainstream mentality” on Prince Hall over 150 years ago. It's taken time, but it's happening.

A hundred years ago, the United Grand Lodge of England declared the Shrine to be a “clandestine” body, in that it was “imitative” of regular Masonry and because it sucked resources and men away from the Craft Lodges. Today, there is a Shrine club in England.

A hundred years ago, the United Grand Lodge of England threatened expulsion to any Brother who joined the Order of the Eastern Star. While the Star is still not a large part of the Masonic world in England, it exists, and has long been a significant part of the Masonic scene in Scotland, just a few miles to the north of England.

In 1717, there were only two Degrees, and both were conferred on the same night. By 1730, there were three Degrees. By 1743, the Royal Arch was growing. By 1750, the Degree we know as Virtual Past Master was part of the Antients' version of Masonry. By 1776, the first version of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite was formed in France. By 1801, it was established in North America. By 1800, the Cryptic Rite was established in North America. By 1800, the Knights Templar were established in North America. By 2003, we knew that the Royal Arch was around in some form *before 1600*.

Each and every one of these milestones was once "innovation". So was the first Masonic Charity. So were the first Masonic Homes, and Hospitals, and Schools.

The truth is, Companions, we've been innovators for our entire history. Or at least, we were. Until we forgot what we were really here to do. Until we were changed into a secret society. Until we were taught not to discuss our belonging. Until we were taught to be discreet about being Masons. Not discreet about our rituals, our Words, our secret handshakes. About *being* Masons. That has only happened in the last hundred years. It's an "Innovation". One that almost all of us accept.

We've all been hearing about the worldwide crisis in Freemasonry: numbers dropping, Lodges closing, suspensions and resignations climbing, politicians and maverick churchmen making careers out of hounding Masons out of public life. We've all heard the complaints, and we've all heard the dire threats, that Freemasonry will become extinct, like the dinosaurs and the dodo bird, and nobody has "the answer" to our dilemma.

The continuing shrinking of our membership is causing us pain. It should have caused us pain when it first started, in 1955. But we were too busy looking at ways to make ourselves inconspicuous, so no one would make fun of us, laugh at our "little cases" or at grown men wearing aprons.

So we missed it when it happened, and we're only catching on, now, late, and we are all afraid that the Fraternity, which has weathered wars, rebellions, revolutions, religions and frauds of all kinds for more than three centuries, is going to die out in a mere twenty years.

*If we don't change, and soon, we won't be here to discuss our crisis!*

When our numbers exploded upwards after World War II, it wasn't because all those returning servicemen wanted to be made over, like a guest on Oprah or Dr. Phil. It was because they saw the calibre of men who were already in the Lodges, and working still in the communities. Too many of us, in that large influx after 1945 only saw that the senior men around them in the Lodges were very good men; we didn't catch on that they became such good men because they took what they saw in men they admired, and put it to work in their own lives, and came to

Lodge to be with each other so that their children, us, could learn to be better men *with* their help than we could be without it.

All we really need to do is look closely at who we used to be. Not just to see the doctors and lawyers and judges and so forth, but also to see the kind-hearted men who founded orphanages to care for the parentless children of the community. The thoughtful men who founded libraries, so the children of their communities could learn about the outside world. The careful men who worked their whole lives in their communities. And took time out of their busy lives, once in a while, to go to Lodge and meet like-minded men who also spent their lives making their communities better places to live.

We've all heard the complaints, and we've all heard the dire threats, that Freemasonry will become extinct, like the dinosaurs and the dodo bird, and nobody has "the answer" to our dilemma.

I have it.

One word.

I'll share it with you.

Relevance.

That's all. One medium-sized word.

To stop our shrinking numbers from getting too small, all we have to do is become relevant again. Time was, our communities valued us because they knew what we did for them. And they told others about how we could always be relied on to help. And the others watched, and saw, and joined.

Companion Welsh concluded by asking, "Who have *you* inspired today, Companions?" And left us to consider our answer.

Are we relevant in our communities today? Do we, as Freemasons, inspire others? Good questions. Thanks for listening to them.

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*(First delivered to: St. Andrew's Chapter # 2, Halifax, NS, May 15, 2003)*



## **SOME MUSINGS ON THE DEGREE OF MARK MASTER**

In 1999, Robert G. Davis, now a Past Governor General of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America, wrote a series of articles for the *York Rite Crusader*, the College's periodical. Each article focussed on one of the Capitular Degrees. All were superb examinations and explanations of these wonderful Degrees. One of our Grand Lecturers adapted each article for presentation to our Royal Arch Chapters as talks. It's my pleasure this evening to deliver the one on the Mark Master Mason Degree. I hope it will be your pleasure, and your gain, to listen carefully to this material – among the most helpful many have ever encountered.

It would not be hard, Companion Davis wrote, to make an argument that the Mark Master Degree was developed during the formative stages of Speculative Masonry, and was intended to be included as a part of the working of the Fellow Craft Degree. Certainly, the setting of the Degree begins with a Fellow Craft as the central character. From an ethical and symbolic viewpoint, this Fellow Craft clearly advances in this Mark Degree from where he was left at the close of the Second Degree. And there are some interesting parallels in the structure of both Degrees.

For instance, the Lodge of Mark Master Masons is opened for the purpose of “advancing” a candidate. This would only be possible for a Fellow Craft, since a Master Mason cannot be “advanced” to any Degree and, in fact, has already proceeded beyond the lessons taught in the Mark Degree. Further, the candidate is clothed as a Fellow Craft and is preparing to have his work as a craftsman inspected by the overseers of the work. This occurs on the evening of the sixth day, the time when only the Fellow Crafts reported each week to receive their wages. And, at a certain point in the Degree, the candidate is asked if he is a Fellow Craft and he answers, “I am, try me.” Thus, one can easily conclude the Mark Master Degree is a Degree for the Fellow Craft Mason.

But, as far as historical research is concerned, the earliest reference to a Degree existing under the title of “Mark Master” occurs in the Minute Book of Royal Arch Friendship Chapter Number 3 held at the George Tavern in Portsmouth on September 1, 1769, forty-five years after the development of the tri-gradal Degree system. The Provincial Grand Master, Thomas Dunckerley, made several Brothers Mark Masters, requiring each to choose his Mark.

It is not known when or where Dunckerley himself received the Degree. It is surmised that he may have received it while in the navy, where he had frequent opportunity to visit military Lodges, many of them under Irish Constitutions. The Degree did not surface in Scotland until 1787, and was not officially recognized in Ireland until 1845.

Dunckerley himself may well have been the author. Right Worshipful Brother W. Redfern Kelly, an Irish Grand Chapter officer, wrote in 1917 that, in his opinion, Dunckerley invented the Degree in 1767, shortly after the formation of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of England. Kelly also contended that Dunckerley may also have been the author of the Most Excellent Master Degree.

There is one other possible theory. Some historians believe the “*Marked Mason*” Degree may have been worked as a Heredom Degree between the Fellow Craft and Master Mason Degree at some early stage of ritual development. But since essentially all other ritual workings of the early Speculative period were published almost immediately following their adoption, either by Masons themselves as aids to the memory work, or by non-Masons as exposures, it seems remarkable that such an ‘interim’ Degree would have slipped past the scrutiny of such exposers.

We may never know, but we do know that Dunckerley had received the Degree himself only shortly before he conferred it on the Brothers of Friendship Chapter Number 3. He wrote the Minutes in cipher himself, and made note of the fact that he had “just lately received the Mark”.

Regardless of its origin, today the Degree is worked either in the Craft Lodge or in Royal Arch Chapters in essentially every Jurisdiction that practices the York Rite system of Degrees. In most cases, the Mark Master Degree is a prerequisite of the Royal Arch.

In the Mark Master, we find the candidate off to have his work inspected and to receive the rewards which are due a craftsman who has produced well. In the first section of the Degree, he prepares to show a sample of his work for inspection but, finding a building stone of another workman which, in his eyes, is more beautiful and fitting for the Temple, he substitutes it for his own. Of course, the substituted stone, not being square and true, as required of the Fellow Crafts, is rejected and thrown among the building rubbish. When the candidate then attempts to receive wages for work that is not his own, he is labelled an impostor and threatened with the punishment of having his right hand severed.

He is saved by a friend who has worked in the quarries alongside him and can vouch that he is indeed a Fellow Craft. The candidate is then sent back to the quarries to produce his own work and, when such work is again examined by the overseers, it is accepted. He is given wages and told that his work is indeed true and square, and of his own making.

In the second section, the candidate is clothed as a Master Mason and given the working tools of a Mark Master, which are the Chisel and Mallet. He is received into the Lodge as a Mark Master and given his obligation. He is again challenged with a pledge he has just made and to which he cannot comply. But his brethren, when called upon, all offer to assist him in meeting his pledge.

In the final section of the Degree, the workmen are distressed because the Keystone cannot be found for the corner. And, after a search, it turns out to be the stone the Fellow Craft had originally given for examination to the overseers which they had subsequently tossed in the pile of building rubble. The stone was the work of Hiram Abif, completed shortly before his death.

And thus we have the Mark Master Degree, powerful in its symbolic content, and among the most interesting and important of all the Degrees in Masonry. In the Mark Master, we find the candidate really in search of himself. As in all symbol systems of Masonry, he is on the Hero’s quest. It is the search for the Holy Grail. It is the journey of the Master for the Lost Word. Our young Fellow Craft sets out to build his temple *within*, so he may be transformed in the consciousness of God.

The esoteric theme of this Degree is the Quest itself, and that which is being sought on the Quest. Indeed, it is typical of all the great Quest themes. The Hero sets out on a journey and first tries to identify himself with another person who has already passed whatever task, or test, is involved. The reason this element is found in so many of the Quest stories is that everyone needs a Hero, and we all try to emulate those whom we see as great examples. But we find that we must ultimately set aside that identification and go in search of ourselves. We cannot progress in life by imitation. We must make our mark only by personal development.

Further, in the Mark Master Degree, the central element around which the story is based is the stone which the Fellow Craft is to produce. All through Masonic tradition, the candidate is taught that he is engaged in the preparation of material and the actual process of building.

Of course, what he is building is his own spiritual Temple, that “house not made with hands.” He himself is a “living” stone. He is the building material. In preparing his stone, he is preparing himself, and becomes incorporated into the structure of self improvement the moment he steps into the Lodge. He is both the builder and the building material. For this reason, the stone he produces must be his own work. We all must go back to the quarries many times until we learn how to find Perfection.

And in this Degree, the working tools are tools used for shaping and molding that stone. We are all engaged in the work of perfecting our own Ashlar. This is the work of the mind, which is what the ritual tells us the Chisel represents. It takes knowledge and education to achieve perfection. The Mallet provides the means whereby we can keep our moral progress in balance as we shape our own life.

It is also interesting to note that the Mark Master receives as wages a coin. He has advanced by knowledge and education beyond the wages of corn, wine, and oil. Because of his advanced learning, he now has some freedom of choice in his decisions. The coin represents that instrument of exchange which enables him to select wisely the fruits of his own labour, and to make the best use of his learning.

The Penalty of this Degree also ties to the Fellow Craft Degree. When one remembers where the right hand is placed in the obligation of the Fellow Craft, it is easy to see the inference to the Penalty of the Mark Master. We are dealing here with the destruction of that which is abused, namely the rights and benefits of a Fellow Craft Mason for violating his obligations. In Masonry, the right hand is the hand of strength, the hand that does the work. When we do not live up to our duties as a Mason, we symbolically are divested of that which gives us the strength to build well.

Finally, there is the symbolism of throwing away the Keystone into the building rubbish and rediscovering it as the head of the corner. This Keystone is a symbol of the ‘Lost Word’ which is never really lost. It is always present, but we often fail to recognise it because it is outside our consciousness. When we reach that level of awareness where the ‘Word’ (or Keystone) is essential to our further progress in building our own Temple, we are able to discover it.

Just as the vacant space in the Arch foreshadows the Keystone, so the need for the Spiritual within us directs the way to that which can mark our improvement.

Thus as a Mark Master, we are once again reminded that Masonry is a progressive science, attainable only by that insight and knowledge which comes from making “the noble quest”.

Well, Companions, what you’ve just heard are one man’s interpretations. Or are they? Think about them. Come to your own conclusions. And then, some time in the future, when *you* have an opportunity to present a talk on the Mark Master Mason Degree to others, remember that this one already exists. And if you can’t do better, pay your compliments to Companion Robert G. Davis, by digging this one out of the files again.

Thanks for allowing me to share it with you this evening.

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*(First presented to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, 1999)*

## THE MOST EXCELLENT MASTER DEGREE

Some of you are familiar with the *York Rite Crusader*, a Masonic publication of the York Rite Sovereign College. Those who received the Winter 1999 issue might have read an article by the College's Governor General, Robert G. Davis, which all of us could benefit from. One of our Grand Lecturers made a few small adaptations to fit it to our terminology.

It is titled, "Most Excellent Master – Consecration Ceremony for the Enlightened Mind."

So, if you don't want your mind to be enlightened, stick your fingers in your ears now. But if you do, listen up! There might be an exam immediately after!

In the York Rite system of Degrees, the Governor General wrote, that of Most Excellent Master is the first which most likely originated in America. While we can find several Degrees in England, Ireland and Scotland which bear the name of Excellent, none of them have any resemblance to the Most Excellent Master Degree practised today in most, if not all, the American Grand Chapters of Royal Arch Masons.

It is believed the Degree originated in Temple Chapter at Albany, New York about 1797. Indeed, Thomas Smith Webb, author of the American craft ritual, was situated in Albany at that time and was busily publishing the first American ritual monitor, which included the York Degrees. He and a fellow named Hanmer had organized Temple Lodge a year earlier so they could work the Royal Arch Degree. Webb gave an account of the Most Excellent Master Degree in his first edition of the *Freemason's Monitor*. It is not known whether Webb invented the Degree, or simply arranged it from other previous works. There is some evidence that it had been worked for several years prior to 1797. However, in publishing it with his first monitor, he may well have expanded or improved its ritual form. Regardless of origin, Webb is certainly given the credit for having brought the Most Excellent Master into the Royal Arch system.

Undoubtedly, the Degree is one of those supplementary Degrees which arose during the time when ritual differences among the lodges had the state of the craft in general chaos. It is felt that the Most Excellent Master Degree was actually incorporated into the regular Capitular system to fill a gap which existed in the ritual system of the time.

As we know, the Temple was left unfinished in the Third Degree and the Royal Arch Degree noted its destruction. Its completion and consecration, and its use as the central glory of the Jewish nation for the four hundred years which elapsed between the legend of Hiram and the destruction of the Temple, had previously been passed over by the rituals of all the other Rites extant during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And so this Degree seemed essential to the overall legend of the Masonic Degrees, and in developing the complete allegory of Freemasonry.

Here, we find the candidate in waiting to join a lodge dedicated to the memory of King Solomon. He has been advanced to the Degree of Mark Master, inducted into the oriental chair of Solomon as a Past Master, and is received and acknowledged as a Most Excellent Master.

It is significant to note that he is not *initiated* into anything in this Degree. His initiation process was completed in the Mark Degree. He was initiated into the higher mysteries at the altar of symbolic Masonry. Thus, he is already the Complete Man, or Master Mason. And he comes to this Degree clothed as a Master Mason. Thus, in the Most Excellent Master's Degree, he is "received and acknowledged", meaning that the lodge recognizes he has already passed the tests of proficiency and has "made himself" a Most Excellent Master. The lodge is simply honouring, with a ceremonial form, his adeptship in Masonry.

We also observe he has a cable-tow six times about his body. This has a double meaning. First, it represents the normal progression of Degrees, indicating that Masonry is a progressive science attainable only by Degrees. Just as the cable-tow is wrapped once in the Entered Apprentice Degree, twice in the Fellowcraft, and so on, it is the sixth Degree of Masonry he is now entering upon. Secondly, he is reminded that he has taken six obligations in Masonry and thus owes a double allegiance to his own duties and responsibilities as a Master Mason.

The obligation of this Degree is one of the most profound in all of Masonry. It recognizes for the first time that the real mission of Masonry, and of each individual Mason, is to enlighten mankind and make the acquisition and teaching of knowledge a duty, rather than an ideal. The *steps* the candidate takes in the altar approach also has the same numerical meaning in sequence from the first Degree of Masonry.

And, if the symbolism of the Master's Degree implies that one is bound to his relationships with God, his fellow, and his society; then, in the Most Excellent Master, one becomes aware of the trinity within himself which can lead him to salvation only with good faith and right action.

It is also a Degree "in memoriam" to Hiram Abif, the Master Builder of our great legend. We observe the vacant seat, and are reminded that our own earthly life must also end. We should thus live in this world so that, when we cross that distant shore to where only the true and faithful dwell, we will be mourned by those we leave behind.

In the second section of the Most Excellent Master, we return to the biblical account of the completion and dedication of the Temple. In fact, much of the Degree is centred around the story given in *I Kings*, Chapter 8. An historical account is given of the years required to erect the edifice, the labour of men working side by side, and the joy of achievement that was felt when the last stone – the keystone – was placed, thus signalling the Temple was completed.

But one thing remained to be done – to seat the sacred Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place and to solemnly dedicate and consecrate this noble Temple to God. A monument of architectural beauty, regardless of how superbly erected, is but an empty shell until sanctified by the Divine presence.

So it is with all human endeavour. No human achievement, however noble or perfect, can be done alone; nor can it attain its full potential until, in spirit and purpose, it is consecrated by Divine Will. Thus, the Temple of our present life, symbolically erected by ourselves as individual Masons, assisted by our family, friends and Brothers, is not truly complete until dedicated to God and consecrated to the service of mankind.

As Master Masons, we place our own keystone and review our own life, and we must regularly consider whether we have built well our moral and spiritual temple. We have indeed built our life and erected it from the materials of our own heart; but we must thoughtfully reflect on whether what we have built is suitable for the indwelling with God. And, if it is not, we must hasten to consecrate it so that God may dwell therein forever. The keystone is symbolical of completion of life, of death, beyond which lies eternity.

The Most Excellent Master's Degree teaches us that the Temple of Solomon is truly a symbol of mortal life, limited and perishable; vain and empty until consecrated to a higher purpose and sanctified by the indwelling of God. To our ancient brethren, it was a living Temple, harbouring the presence of God; to us it is the symbol around which is woven, in the great allegorical language of Masonry, the principles by which we are to erect the moral and spiritual temple of our second life.

There is no greater gift man can give his fellow man than knowledge. It is the charge of the Most Excellent Master that we learn well so we can "dispense Light and Truth to the uninformed Mason".

Well, Companions, you are surely not "uninformed Masons" – but dispensing Light and Truth is what Companion Davis did with this article, and what I've tried to do by drawing your attention to it.

Thanks for listening.

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*(First presented to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, March 2000)*

## THE NINE NAMES (version 1)

At every opening of our Chapters, and every closing, and during the Royal Arch Degree, we hear the three Masters of the Veils each give their three pass words – nine words in all – nine names – Shem, Ham and Japheth – Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel – Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai. We marvel at the ability of the Masters to remember those names. We sympathize if they struggle to figure out how to pronounce them correctly. And maybe we join some of them in wondering why those nine particular names were selected as pass words.

That kind of wondering, preferably followed by research, is one of the values of the *process* of Freemasonry – the process of learning and developing, over time. Part of that process is in asking questions and seeking answers. Or in listening to answers offered by others who've found time and opportunity for research.

A Grand Lecturer once wrote a talk on those nine names and then offered an adaptation of it for use by others. I'm one of those "others" who think his story is worth repeating.

He happened to come across a reference to one of the old manuscripts describing the origins of modern Freemasonry – the *Graham Manuscript* of 1726. The quote from that manuscript went like this: "Shem, Ham and Japheth went to the grave of their father, Noah, for to try if they could find anything about him for to lead them to the virtuable secret. All things needful for the new world was in the ark with Noah."

What caught the Grand Lecturer's attention was this: He'd forgotten that Shem, Ham and Japheth were Noah's sons. Twice a month, ten months every year, he'd heard those names rattled off by the Master of the Second Veil, as being the pass words of the Master of the First Veil. And, every time, a little voice in the back of his mind had muttered, "Where have I heard those names before? Who are they? Why are those three names used as pass words?"

And then, bingo! Reading about the *Graham Manuscript*, he'd stumbled on part of the answer: they were the sons of Noah, of Noah's Ark fame. But then his mind spun. Noah's ark! "All things needful for the new world was in the ark with Noah."

He had time, so he dug deep, and deeper, until he had a pile of bits and pieces about not only Shem, Ham and Japheth, but also about Moses, Aholiab, and Bezaleel, and about Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai.

And when he'd rearranged that pile – put things in order – he had the beginnings of some understanding about why our predecessors chose those nine names.

One link between those nine men is that they all built something, under instructions from – and in covenants with – God.

Shem, Ham and Japheth helped their dad build Noah's ark, before the great flood.

Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel built the Ark of the Covenant, during the exodus from Egypt.

And Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai built the second Temple in Jerusalem.



There's quite a few references to all of them, in various books of the Bible, not to mention books on Freemasonry. Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth get several chapters in *Genesis*, which says: "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." You remember the story:

And, behold," God said, "I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every living thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee," God said to Noah, "with thee will I establish my *covenant*; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive."

"And behold, I establish my *covenant* with you, and with your seed after you ... neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood, neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, this is the token of the *covenant* which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a *covenant* between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I will remember my *covenant*."

"And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were **Shem, Ham, and Japheth** ... These are the three sons of Noah, and of them was the whole earth overspread."

Overspread! Boy! *Genesis* Chapter 10 lists all the sons of Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their sons, grandsons, and so on. It's one of those lists with dozens of 'begats'. According to *Genesis*, Shem had five sons, Ham had four sons, and Japheth had seven sons, which makes sixteen in total, and they all did a whole pile of 'begatting', themselves. And so it shouldn't be much of a surprise that rather large quantities of Jews, Aramehans, Persians, Aravians and Assyrians are all supposed to be descended from Shem; copious numbers of Cushites, Egyptians and Canaanites trace their ancestry from Ham; and it's easy to lose track of what happened to all of Japheth's offspring.

Anyway, lots of years later, the original three, Shem, Ham and Japheth, sons of Noah, co-builders of Noah's ark, got their names further immortalized as the pass words of the Master of the First Veil. What's significant about them is how they make us think about the ideas of making a *covenant* with God, and building an ark, a kind of floating house of God, in which a lot of important things were preserved.

Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel did the same kinds of things. Moses, you'll remember, he of burning bush fame, was up on the mountain getting the ten commandments while his brother, Aaron, of Aaron's rod fame, was down in the valley melting down everyone's jewellery to make a golden idol in the shape of a calf.

Down came Moses, ranting and raging when he saw the golden calf, busting the tablets in a rage, and then ordering the Ark of the *Covenant* to be built, to contain the pieces.

Aholiab and Bezaleel were the craftsmen who actually did the work, under direction from Moses, who'd been given the measurements and specifications by God.

Part of the story is in *Exodus*: “And the Lord spake unto **Moses**, saying, See, I have called by name **Bezaleel**, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have given with him **Aholiab**, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; the tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle.”

So, we get from those words that Bezaleel was no slouch when it came to metalwork and gold leaf; had something of a reputation as an operative stone mason; and maybe was a good wood worker, too. Although, perhaps Aholiab was even better with the wood carving. Whatever, it took well-developed skills to fashion that Ark. Imagine Moses hovering over the work, checking the measurements were exactly as he'd been told they should be; remembering the gold rings for each corner, and gold-covered staves of a specific type of wood to go through those rings, for lifting the Ark; rings and staves perhaps made by Bezaleel; and Moses admiring the carvings of the winged cherubim, surmounting the top like guardians – carvings perhaps made by Aholiab.

And inside the Ark went the pieces of the tablets bearing the ten commandments, the words later recorded in the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Bible.

And inside also, according to St. Paul, went Aaron's rod, the rod that when planted in the earth started to grow again;

and the pot of manna, that miraculous food that came down from heaven to save the Israelites during their exodus through the wilderness.

You can imagine Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel, gathered around the Ark they'd built, placing these things carefully inside – following through on the *covenant* made with God. Perhaps they were inside their tabernacle, which was a temporary, portable structure, easy to erect and dismantle wherever they went; made of tent and pole materials, and draped inside with a series of veils. Can you see it in your mind? – the tabernacle, and inside with the Ark were those three people memorialized in the pass words of our Master of the Second Veil: Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel. Builders of the first Ark of the covenant – or was it the second?

Finally there's Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, “those three ancient worthies who composed the first Grand Masonic Council at Jerusalem, and held their meetings in the Tabernacle.” That's not the same tabernacle Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel met in, down in the Sinai desert. Nor is it the tabernacle at Shiloh, a small city near Jerusalem, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept – as the Bible says: “from the last days of Joshua to the time of Samuel.” In fact, a fellow can get a bit confused with all the tabernacles and Joshuas who litter up the story, because the Joshua in that line isn't the one who hung around with Zerubbabel and Haggai.

What we've got to do is imagine a whole lot of years passing, during which Solomon's Temple is built, the Ark is moved into the Temple, the Temple is destroyed, the Ark is stolen and melted down or lost, and, finally, we get to the time of the building of the *second* Temple.

At that time, there was a priest's son, name of Jeshua or Joshua, and a prophet, name of Haggai, and a governor's son, name of Zerubbabel, and some other guys who were writers. Problem was, the writers couldn't agree on how to pronounce or spell some of the names. The one who wrote the Bible book of *Ezra* refers to Jeshua, son of Jozadak, as being the priest pal of Haggai and Zerubbabel. But the one who wrote up Haggai's story said the names should be pronounced Joshua, son of Josedech.

No matter how you pronounce or spell it – Joshua or Jeshua – it's the same guy. According to some, depending on which jurisdiction you're in, he's the one represented by our office of Most Excellent High Priest. And this is what we know about him from the Bible: “Then the prophets, including **Haggai** the prophet, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel. Then rose up **Zerubbabel** and **Jeshua** (Joshua), and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem, and with them were the prophets of God helping them.”

“In the second year of Darius the King, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel and Joshua ... Then Zerubbabel and Joshua, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord. Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, and the spirit of Joshua, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.”

And the Lord said, “According to the word that I *covenanted* with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.” “In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, and will make thee as a *signet*, for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Now, there's more to the story of Zerubbabel than we can cover today. But it's straight out of the Bible that he was descended from King David, whose son Solomon completed the first Temple; was born in Babylon as a Jewish exile, was later appointed first governor of Judea by King Cyrus; was the leader of the first band of Jews that returned from the captivity in Babylon; superintended the building of the *second* Temple, and helped restore the religious rites of the nation of Israel; and that he was helped by Joshua and Haggai who were widely acknowledged as prophets.

In English Freemasonry, the character of Haggai is represented by the second officer of the Council – the three guys up there – and over that side of the Atlantic that second officer has the title Prophet. But over here, we relegate him to third, and represent him as Scribe, presumably because we give him credit for having written his own Bible book.

So, Joshua or Jeshua, our High Priest; Zerubbabel, represented in our Council by the King; and Haggai, represented here by the Scribe. Organizers of the building of the second Temple;

- in charge when – according to our ritual – the copy or imitation of the Ark of the covenant was found down under the ruins of the first Temple by three of their workers;
- three workers who also came out of captivity in Babylon, to help, aid and assist in rebuilding the house of the Lord; were rewarded for their valuable discoveries by being

made Grand Masters of the Veils; but whose names we don't know, because Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai took most of the credit for the discoveries!

There we are, Companions. Three groups of three names:  
Shem, Ham and Japheth, sons of the builder of Noah's ark;  
Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel, builders of the Ark of the Covenant;  
and Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, directors of the building of the second Temple when the imitation Ark was found.

Three times three.  
And now, maybe a little easier to remember.  
Thanks for listening.

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*(Original talk by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason,  
first presented in Alexandra Chapter No. 11, 1992)*

## THE NINE NAMES (version 2)

You visit a Chapter in another Jurisdiction, and they ask you a test question:

“How shall I know you to be a Royal Arch Mason?”

Confidently, you reply: “By three times three.”

And your examiner asks, “Who were they?”

Huh?

He’s departed from the script. You’ve heard the standard catechism – the questions and answers during opening and closing – dozens of times. Maybe you’re a Past High Priest and your Companions think you could fill in for any missing officer, right? With a few minutes notice to check the ritual wording, you could handle the questions and answers for that chair, no sweat.

Maybe, so long as they came in the usual sequence, right?

But now you’ve been asked, “Who were the ‘three times three’?”

You think fast. Three times three equals nine.

How many compose a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons? Nine or more.

When composed of only nine, who are they?

“The Most Excellent High Priest, the Excellent ...”

“No,” your examiner interrupts. “Who *were* they?”

Who *were* the nine?

Nine. Three times three.

Well, there’s “Whom do the first three represent?” And “Whom do the latter three represent?”

But that only makes six.

Where do you hear three sets of names given three times?

Oh, yeah! The names given by the Masters of the Veils!

At every Chapter opening, and every closing, you hear the Masters of the Veils give three sets of pass words – nine words in all – nine names – Shem, Ham and Japheth – Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel – Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai.

So, that’s the answer to the question, “Who were they?”, right?

Partly.

Could you also explain *why* those nine particular names were selected to serve as Chapter pass words? What’s significant about those nine people? Exactly who were they?

A Grand Lecturer once wrote a talk on those nine names and then offered an adaptation of it for use by others. I’m one of those “others” who think his story is worth repeating.

He happened to come across a reference to one of the old manuscripts describing the origins of modern Freemasonry – the *Graham Manuscript*. The quote from that manuscript went like this: “Shem, Ham and Japheth went to the grave of their father, Noah, for to try if they could find anything about him for to lead them to the virtuable secret. All things needful for the new world was in the ark with Noah.”

What caught the Grand Lecturer's attention was this: He'd forgotten that Shem, Ham and Japheth were Noah's sons. He'd often heard those names rattled off by the Master of the Second Veil, as being the pass words of the Master of the First Veil. And every now and again he'd also heard a little voice in the back of his mind:

"Where have you heard those names before? Who are they? Why are those three names used as pass words?"

And here he'd stumbled on part of the answer: they were the sons of Noah, of Noah's Ark fame. But what else was special about them? Shem, Ham and Japheth.

What did they have in common with the other trios – Moses, Aholiab, Bezaleel, and Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai?

He did more research, and came up with the beginnings of some understanding about why our predecessors chose those nine names, three sets of three.

They all built something, under instructions from – and in covenants with – God.

Shem, Ham and Japheth helped their dad build Noah's ark, before the great flood.

Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel built the Ark of the Covenant, during the exodus from Egypt.

Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai built the second Temple in Jerusalem.

There's references to all of them, in the Bible, and in various books on Freemasonry.

Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth get several chapters in *Genesis*, including this bit of the main story:

"And, behold," God said, "I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth ... and every living thing that is in the earth shall die.

"But with thee," God said to Noah, "with thee will I establish my *covenant*; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee."

And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were **Shem, Ham, and Japheth** ... and – after the flood – "of them was the whole earth overspread."

Overspread! Boy! *Genesis* Chapter 10 lists all the sons of Shem, Ham and Japheth, their sons, and their sons, and so on. It's one of those lists with dozens of 'begats' in it. According to *Genesis*, Shem had five sons, Ham had four sons, and Japheth had seven sons, which makes sixteen in total, and they all did a whole pile of 'begatting', themselves. And so it shouldn't be much of a surprise that rather large quantities of Jews, Aramehans, Persians, Aravians and Assyrians are all supposed to be descended from Shem; copious numbers of Cushites, Egyptians and Canaanites trace their ancestry from Ham; and it's easy to lose track of what happened to all of Japheth's offspring.

Anyway, donkeys' years later, the original three, Shem, Ham and Japheth, sons of Noah, co-builders of Noah's ark, got their names further immortalized as the pass words of the Master of the First Veil. What's significant about them is how they make us think about the ideas of making a *covenant* with God, and building an ark, a kind of floating house of God, in which a lot of important things were preserved.

Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel did the same kinds of things.

Moses, you'll remember, he of burning bush fame, was up on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments while his brother, Aaron, of Aaron's rod fame, was down in the valley melting down everyone's jewellery to make a golden idol in the shape of a calf.

Down comes Moses, ranting and raging when he sees the golden calf, busting the tablets in a rage, and then ordering the Ark of the *Covenant* to be built, to contain the pieces. Aholiab and Bezaleel were the craftsmen who actually did the work, under direction from Moses, who'd been given the measurements and specifications by God.

Part of the story is in *Exodus*:

“And the Lord spake unto **Moses**, saying, See, I have called by name **Bezaleel**, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.

And I, behold, I have given with him **Aholiab**, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; the tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle.”

So, we get from those words that Bezaleel was no slouch when it came to metalwork and gold leaf; had something of a reputation as an operative stone mason; and maybe was a good wood worker, too. Although, perhaps Aholiab was even better with the wood carving. Whatever, it took well-developed skills to fashion that Ark. Imagine Moses hovering over the work, checking the measurements were exactly as he'd been told they should be; remembering the gold rings for each corner, and gold-covered staves of a specific type of wood to go through those rings, for lifting the Ark; rings and staves perhaps made by Bezaleel; and Moses admiring the carvings of the winged cherubim, surmounting the top like guardians – carvings perhaps made by Aholiab.

And inside the Ark went the pieces of the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. And inside also, according to St. Paul, went Aaron's rod, the rod that when planted in the earth started to grow again; and the pot of manna, that miraculous food that came down from heaven to save the Israelites during their exodus through the wilderness. You can imagine Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel, gathered around the Ark which they built, placing these things carefully inside – following through on the *covenant* made with God. Perhaps they were inside their tabernacle, which was a temporary, portable structure, easy to erect and dismantle wherever they went; made of tent and pole materials, and draped inside with a series of veils. Can you see it in your mind? – the tabernacle, and inside with the Ark were those three people memorialized in the pass words of our Master of the Second Veil: Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel.

Finally there's Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, “those three ancient worthies who composed the first Grand Masonic Council at Jerusalem, and held their meetings in the Tabernacle.”

But not the same tabernacle. A whole lot of years had passed, during which Solomon's Temple was built, the Ark was moved into the Temple, the Temple was destroyed, the Ark was stolen and melted down or lost, and, finally, the time came for building the *second* Temple.

At that time, there was a priest's son, name of Joshua (or Jeshua, depending on who's telling the story and how good his spelling is). And there was a prophet, name of Haggai, and a governor's son, name of Zerubbabel.

In the ritual our Jurisdiction uses, Joshua's actually the key guy. He's the one represented by our office of Most Excellent High Priest. And this is what we know about him from the Bible:

“Then the prophets, including **Haggai** the prophet, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel. Then rose up **Zerubbabel** and **Jeshua** (Joshua), and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem, and with them were the prophets of God helping them.”

And the Lord said, “According to the word that I *covenanted* with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.” Then God turns to Zerubbabel:

“In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, and will make thee as a *signet*, for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.”

It's also straight out of the Bible that Zerubbabel was descended from King David, whose son Solomon completed the first Temple; that Zerubbabel was born in Babylon as a Jewish exile; was the leader of the first band of Jews that returned from the captivity in Babylon; superintended the building of the *second* Temple, and helped restore the religious rites of the nation of Israel; and that he was helped by Joshua and Haggai who were widely acknowledged as prophets.

As to Haggai, in our ritual he's our Scribe, probably because he wrote his own Bible book.

So, Joshua, our High Priest; Zerubbabel, our King; and Haggai, our Scribe. Originally, the organizers of the building of the second Temple;

- in charge when – according to our ritual – the copy or imitation of the Ark of the covenant was found down under the ruins of the first Temple by three of their workers;
- three workers who also came out of captivity in Babylon, to help, aid and assist in rebuilding the house of the Lord; were rewarded for their valuable discoveries by being made Masters of the Veils; but whose names we don't know, because Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai took most of the credit for the discoveries!

Still, if you're asked “Who were the three times three?” try answering with the nine pass words:

Shem, Ham and Japheth, sons of Noah who built the floating ark;

Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel, builders of the Ark of the Covenant, the ark that was still around in Solomon's time, during the building of the *first* Temple;

and Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, directors of the building of the *second* Temple when the *imitation* Ark was found.

How shall I know you to be a Royal Arch Mason?

Partly by your answers to questions about what our ritual *means*, not just what it says.

Our ritual is a wonderland of curious questions.

And once you get curious enough to research some of them, you can end up like Alice in Wonderland, saying: “Curiouser and curiouser!”



And you can learn more about the Bible, about God's covenants, and about how the Bible, God, and God's covenants are part of the very substance of our beloved Craft.

Thanks for listening.

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*(Original talk by R.Ex.Comp. George I.H. Mason,  
given as Address during Annual Rededication Service of  
King Solomon Chapter No. 28, November 1998)*

## **THE PASSED (?) MASTER**

Every student of Capitular Masonry asks questions about the origins and historical purposes of our Degrees, especially the Past Master Degree, now called Virtual Past Master, but the answers sometimes seem to conflict.

Our late Grand Historian, R.Ex.Comp. J. Douglas Welsh, prepared a talk examining those questions and answers, which deserves to be heard in every Chapter, no matter whose voice delivers it. If you'll listen carefully to the detail in Comp. Welsh's material, you're almost bound to hear something new to you, and helpful too.

Most well-read Freemasons are already aware, Comp. Welsh wrote, that at the formation of the first Grand Lodge, in 1717 London, the Craft work consisted of only two Degrees. Most are also aware that the ritual of the Degrees evolved out of an operative framework toward a speculative edifice. It is reasonably well established that the Master Mason Degree grew out of the former Fellow of Craft Degree, and that the same process eventually allowed for the development of the Mark Man or Mark Mason, or Mark Master Mason, out of the remaining body of the Fellow of Craft Degree, much as the lessons of the Royal Arch grew from the parts of the Fellow's Degree that were split off to form the Master Mason Degree.

The existence of the Royal Arch Degree has been confirmed as early as 1741. The oldest Mark ceremony for which I've found reference is in 1778, but the Degree was established here by 1782 where it was one of the Degrees worked regularly in Virgin/Artillery Lodge, now Number 3 of the Grand Lodge of Nova Scotia.

To understand this evolution more easily, it's helpful to examine how our predecessors advanced to the Royal Arch.

Our ritual says the Virtual Past Master Degree exists in conformity to an ancient custom and practice, that only those Masons who had been elected to preside over a regular Lodge could be admitted to the Royal Arch.

If the Royal Arch is, indeed, the "completion of the Master Mason Degree", as evidenced in many writings by others, then the historical background of the Royal Arch would support the claim that only those who had presided over a regular Lodge could be admitted to the Royal Arch. This is based on the belief that the first appearance of the modern Master Mason Degree (from which the Royal Arch was split about 1741) was initially only conferred upon that Fellow of Craft (in modern parlance, a Journeyman) who had been elected to preside over his Lodge.

At this period of Masonic history, it was not uncommon to find elections in Lodges occurring twice in each year, on the meeting day nearest to each of the St. John's Days celebrations. Even with two candidates coming from each Lodge each year, this process did not permit much growth in the Order of the Holy Royal Arch. Remember too, that these early framers of our Order faced similar concerns as we do, in regard to membership, demits, deaths, and loss of interest. It soon became clear that restricting the Royal Arch to actual Masters of Lodges, and to Past Masters, would not allow for either much growth or stability.

It is a fact that, in England, the history of Craft Masonry is much confused by the lack of written evidence of many early practices. Additionally, the existence of two and sometimes three or more so-called Grand Lodges leads to more confusion in specific areas. The Antient or Atholl Grand Lodge was erected at some point between 1747 and 1752. (Records exist of that Grand Lodge from 1752, and the charter of the oldest Lodge under the Atholl Grand Lodge was dated 1747. Nothing more definite survived.) Minutes of that Grand Lodge in 1752 refer to the Royal Arch in such a way that there can be no doubt that the Antients considered the Royal Arch to be an essential part of their Masonic experience. In Laurence Dermott's *Ahiman Rezon* book of constitutions of 1756, he expressed the opinion of the Antient Grand Lodge in these words: "The Royal Arch I firmly believe to be the root, heart, and marrow of Masonry". But the opinion he expressed in 1756 was not fully reflected in the structure of the Antients' Masonry until 1771, when the Royal Arch was plainly held to be an integral part of Craft Masonry and was to be practised and conferred under the authority of the regular warrant of the Lodge.

The situation with regard to the elder Grand Lodge, styled from 1752 as the "Moderns", was clearer. The Grand and Royal Chapter, from 1765, exercised control of the Royal Arch Degree as a separate and independent body within the "Modern" system.

The plain fact is that the Royal Arch was occasionally conferred in lodges under both obediences at early dates, and along with that Degree, in both obediences it was common practice to "pass Brethren through the Chair", in other words, "conferring the Degree of a Past Master" without the Brethren having served in the Office of Master.

Laurie's *History of Freemasonry* alludes to the practice of conferring the "Degree" of a Past Master in the Royal Arch Chapter as well as in a Lodge, saying: "Although this is now frequently communicated by Royal Arch Chapters as a separate Degree, with a formal initiatory ceremonial, embracing words, signs and tokens, it belongs to the Order of Craft Masonry, and is still practised by many of the Lodges in the Third Degree, but is only communicated to the newly elected Master when about to be installed". He describes the Degree as being worked in a separate apartment, with none but Past Masters present.

From the English practice in the early days, it would seem that, almost from the inception of some sort of Work particular to the Office of Master, the actual ceremony had gone in two directions – in one direction, it became the Board of Installed Masters, while in the other direction, it became the Past Master Degree.

The situation became even more confused at the time of the Union of the Modern and Antient Grand Lodges, in 1813. That Act of Union reunited the Brethren of the two systems, and confirmed the eminent place of the Royal Arch as the pinnacle of Craft Masonry, being the "completion of the Third Degree" as we have heard. That Union also gave a steady form and purpose to the Board of Installed Masters, a ceremony which many Lodges under the Moderns had not used at all, although it was an established part of Antient practice from at least 1768. It is interesting to note that, even at this early date, there were instances of both Actual Masters and Honorary Masters receiving the same ceremony on the same night from the same team of officers, and at the same time. With the Union of 1813 in England, the Chapter's version of the ceremonial was dropped, and the Board of Installed Masters was adopted by Grand Lodge.

When the now United Grand Lodge, at the same session, dealt with the Royal Arch, forming the Supreme Grand Chapter within the Grand Lodge, the requirement of the Moderns, that a Brother must be an actual Master of a Lodge, was dropped in so far as simple membership in the Royal Arch was concerned, but it was retained as a requisite qualification for election to the first of the three senior offices, called Principals.

Between 1813, when the ritual of the Craft became somewhat more settled, and 1869, the English Lodges in Nova Scotia settled in to a regular use of the ceremonial of the Installed Master, or Inner Work of the Installation ceremony. The use of a “Chair Degree” was also becoming standardized in the Scottish Lodges at home and abroad.

In 1869, our Grand Chapter was formed, with Union Chapter Number 118 English Constitution, St. Andrew’s Chapter Number 55 Scottish Constitution, and Hiram Chapter Number 33 Registry of Canada. The ritual to be used by the Grand Chapter had been chosen and prepared in advance, and our first officers were elected and installed using, in the main, the titles we know today, coming from the rituals used by our major trading partners and most frequent Masonic visitors, the American Grand Chapters of Maine, New York and Massachusetts.

This “York Rite” carried with it the traces of the Antient or Atholl Grand Lodge in that the organisation of the Royal Arch also brought with it the tradition of the Past Master Degree. So now in 1869, Nova Scotia has, long after the question of the Work of the Chair was settled in our parent Grand Lodges, both the Installed Master Work in the Craft and the Past Master Work in the Royal Arch.

The question of membership requirement in the Royal Arch was resolved by requiring applicants to the Chapter to have served a full 12 months in the Craft before being eligible to enter a Royal Arch Chapter, and receive therein the Mark, Past Master, Most Excellent Master and Royal Arch Degrees according to *Antient* or *Atholl* practice; but a Companion in possession of these Degrees could only proceed to the Chair in the Royal Arch if he were an actual Installed Master, which was a *Modern* tradition. Proposals to eliminate this requirement came before Grand Chapter regularly from 1870, but it was only removed by vote of Grand Chapter after 1909. It is also interesting to note that, while the versions of the Master’s Work were clearly connecting the Craft and the Royal Arch, it was not until 1909 that membership in the Royal Arch became dependent on maintaining Craft membership.

Now, when Comp. Welsh delivered this talk, he threatened to follow it with a quiz, to see what his listeners had learned. Or maybe to check whether they’d been listening at all!

Me, I’ll simply hope you found it interesting, and thank you for listening.

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*Delivered to:  
Royal Union Chapter # 1, Halifax, NS, April 16, 2002  
Renown Chapter #19, Dartmouth, NS, May 28, 2002*

## **THE PAST MASTER DEGREE – MORE MEANING THAN FORM**

In 1999, Robert G. Davis, now a Past Governor General of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America, wrote a series of articles for the *York Rite Crusader*, the College's periodical. Each article focussed on one of the Capitular Degrees. All were superb examinations and explanations of these wonderful Degrees. One of our Grand Lecturers adapted each article for presentation to our Royal Arch Chapters as talks. It's my pleasure this evening to deliver the one on the Past Master Mason Degree. I hope it will be your pleasure, and your gain, to listen carefully to this material – among the most helpful many have ever encountered.

But I must first give you some explanation of its context.

The Past Master Degree, as originally written, contained a scene in which – after the Candidate was inducted into the Oriental Chair – the Brethren rebelled, giving him a very trying time, often far more so than was ever intended. Potentially powerful lessons were frequently overwhelmed by the Candidate's negative reactions to silly and aggravating tomfoolery, when some would act as if they'd been given licence to act in rude, crude and completely unMasonic ways.

As a result, by the Twentieth-century, virtually all Jurisdictions had changed, embellished or rewritten the Degree to modify that scene, or even eliminate it. Some even dropped the Degree altogether, so dismayed and disgusted were they with what it seemed to encourage in the actions of some of the Brethren.

Our Ritual for the Past Master Degree was one from which the rebellion scene was simply dropped, leaving – in the minds of many of us – something that no longer made much sense without some further explanation or embellishment. Various attempts have been made since then to produce an improved rewrite.

In the United States, a rewrite was approved by the General Grand Chapter, and is in use in many Jurisdictions in that country. And it's that modified version of the ritual that is discussed by Companion Davis in the article I'm going to read as part of the talk this evening.

Therefore, as you listen to it, don't be confused by the *differences* between our present ritual and aspects of his ritual being discussed by Companion Davis. Instead, listen for the similarities, and especially for the interpretations Companion Davis offers. I guarantee your efforts to listen carefully will be rewarded:

The Past Master Degree, Companion Davis wrote – the fifth in the system of Degrees known as the American Rite – is too often seen as a mere prerequisite to the Royal Arch, conferred for the sole purpose of fulfilling some ancient landmark which allegedly prohibited all but Past Masters of Symbolic lodges from being exalted to the Royal Arch, thus enabling the completion of one's education in Craft Masonry. Being a small Degree in length, and delivering what would appear to be a single lesson in the due diligence required of a presiding officer, the Past Master Degree is generally viewed as to form only, without regard for its deeper symbolic significance.

In actuality, the symbolic lessons are of major import and lend credence to the admonition that the Degree should be taken seriously by the Chapter.

Certainly, it should be conferred free from any horseplay or harassment, sometimes wrongly given license here because of an obvious oversight of one whose experience in lodge administration might otherwise call for at least a mild reprimand from those companions of his lodge who have passed the chair themselves.

Historically, the Past Master Degree entered the system of Freemasonry to facilitate the growing popularity of the Royal Arch during the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century era. The Grand Lodge of the ‘Ancients’ regarded a lodge Master as more than the chairman, or presiding head, of the lodge. He was considered superior to his junior brethren. Installed as a Master, he had passed through an esoteric ceremony of distinction, making him a man of a definitely higher grade. In many lodges, the Master’s Word was only given to those who became Masters of their Lodges. The Mark Master Degree is believed to have been worked in England shortly after the establishment of the Third Degree in 1725. The ‘Ancients’ simply refused to confer the Royal Arch Degree upon any brother who had not passed through the oriental chair, insisting he was simply not good enough to be a Royal Arch Master.

The ‘Moderns’, on the other hand, had no formal ceremony of officer installation prior to the 1750s and were generally quite content with a man becoming the Master of a lodge simply by assuming the chair. In fact, the earliest record of an ‘Installed Master’s’ ceremony in a ‘Moderns’ lodge is found in the Minutes of the Anchor and Hope Lodge of Lancashire on November 30, 1769. While it is known that many lodges began working a ceremony of installing their Masters during the later half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the Premier Grand Lodge did not sanction such ceremonies until the ‘Ancients’ and ‘Modems’ began working out their ritual differences shortly before the Union of 1813.

From a practical point of view, with the rise in popularity of the Royal Arch Degree and with assigning the government of that Degree to Chapters rather than Lodges, the rule that a candidate had to be an installed Master became unworkable. A system was therefore devised which would allow a man to ‘pass the chair’ without having actually served in that capacity. He was made a ‘Virtual Past Master’. This ceremony, while distinguishing him as someone different than an ‘Actual Past Master’, eventually found its form in what we inherited as the Past Master Degree.

In the United States and some Canadian Jurisdictions, the Degree is conferred under the authority of Chapters of Royal Arch Masons as a grade to qualify a Mark Master Mason to receive the Royal Arch Degree, or the Degree of Most Excellent Master. The ritual working of the American Past Master Degree can be traced to as early as 1783 in Pennsylvania, some 30 years after the first working of the Royal Arch Degree in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Coincidentally, the earliest record of the Mark Master Degree conferral in America was the same year (1783) in a ‘Mark Lodge’ in Connecticut. The inclusion of the Past Master Degree as a requirement in the York Rite system was tenable up to the 1850s, when the General Grand Chapter finally concluded the Degree was important enough to be practised throughout, with its working falling under the jurisdiction of Grand Chapters.

In the American Degree we find a Mark Master ready to assume the Oriental Chair of King Solomon, qualified by having been elected to preside over a lodge of Past Masters. He is given entrance without alarm, dressed as a Master Mason, obligated, conducted to the east, invested with the jewel, crown, and a gavel of a Symbolic Lodge Master, given a charge, and asked to

proceed with the usual order of business as the presiding officer. But quietly, an adjustment has been made beyond his notice. And when his work is completed, the candidate is ordered to surrender his jewel and gavel and is removed from the Oriental Chair and placed in the north-east to receive the lecture. Here, he is informed that the properties of the altar were missing and is admonished that Masonry could not exist without the Great Lights upon its altar; just as a man cannot be a Mason without regard for their guiding influence in his life. He is then once more reminded of the significance of the Volume of Sacred Law, taught to guard it as the fundamental rule of living and informed that he is now a Past Master.

Symbolically, there are several points one can easily observe. First, the candidate enters the lodge without alarm. The reason for this is that he has already been initiated, and having symbolically served as Master of his lodge, he has already prepared himself to be made a Past Master.

One is not *initiated* to the Degree of Past Master; he is *inducted* to the Oriental Chair and *elected* to the honour by his peers. He is given a peculiar grip which symbolically implies that ‘three’ is stronger than ‘two’ and alludes to the three planes of a man’s being—the physical, mental and spiritual. The three-fold cord has the same symbolism; it is not easily broken because it represents the whole man.

The jewel of the office is the square, which is the emblem of the material world and figures interestingly into the symbology of the right triangle, as a representation of the complete man. The Master’s hat, or crown, symbolizes that the candidate is the ‘anointed one’ of the lodge given the right to lead. The gavel is an emblem of authority, but in the text of this Degree, it alludes to a man’s authority over himself. It is within each man’s power to shape his life by such deeds and actions so to lead him to self improvement.

Further, the lodge of Past Masters is dedicated to the Saints John. The word ‘John’ comes from the Hebrew ‘Jochanan’, or ‘Yochanan’, which means ‘favoured of God’. Thus, the ‘lodge of Saints John’ as used here refers to a state of existence rather than a place. It is a state of completeness of being, and symbolically alludes to what was lost in the Master Mason Degree, and to that which we seek in our quest for the ‘True Word’.

The Past Master Degree is also a Degree very much connected with moral geometry. In the symbolic structure of Ancient Craft Masonry the Blue Lodge represents a line, whose number is three. It forms the foundation of learning and understanding. The Chapter represents the square whose number is 9, or 3x3. The Council represents the Cube, in which we find 3x9 or 27, which forms the Cube and comprehends the whole of Ancient Craft Masonry. This same symbology can be found in the Middle Chamber of the Fellow Craft Degree, where the candidate is told of the point, line, superficies and solid. In the journey of the initiate from Symbolic Masonry to the Royal Arch, through the three Degrees of Mark Master, Past Master and Most Excellent Master, we behold the outlines of a Cube. Here it represents the attainment of perfection.

In applying this idea to our candidate, we see the Mark Master as an individual working in the quarries, shaping the rough ashlar of his own possibilities into the perfect ashlar of individual improvement.

The Past Master then, in presiding, provides the second dimension of one's role in participating in the progress of self and society. His position gives him both length and breadth, forming the mathematical square.

One should be a Past Master of the Art of Masonry in the highest sense so he may be eligible to receive the sublime Degree of the Royal Arch. This is why every Chapter should make it possible for the candidate to acquire an intimate knowledge of Masonry. After all, one cannot be *initiated* a Past Master. He is *inducted* into the oriental chair as a distinguished honour of his supposed understanding of the responsibilities of a Master – the responsibilities of learning Masonry and assisting others to learn.

The Past Master Degree is also the fifth Degree in ancient Craft Masonry. The number five is symbolic of union. We are also told that the colour of the Degree is purple, which is that of the second veil. Purple is a combination colour between blue and scarlet, thus showing the connection between Symbolic Masonry and the Royal Arch Degree. The Past Master Degree then becomes the point of union, or apex, between Symbolic Masonry and the Royal Arch.

Again, in the Fellow Craft Degree, we have 3, 5 and 7 steps leading to the Middle Chamber. The first three represent the first three Degrees of Masonry. The fifth Degree of Past Master is logically the fifth step to the seventh Degree of Royal Arch. The number 5 further alludes to geometry, the fifth of the liberal arts and sciences. Note also that the number 5 is the value of the hypotenuse of a right triangle with sides of three and four. There are three Degrees in Symbolic Masonry; four in the Chapter. Full comprehension of these would make the Past Master (representing the number 5 or the union) a real adept in Craft Masonry.

And, of course, in Masonry, the right triangle represents the complete man, striving ever upward toward perfection. This symbology represents man's evolution from his physical to his spiritual being. The horizontal line can be thought of as the lowest plane of purely physical existence and we "travel upon that level of time" in search of our human soul, which is represented by the perpendicular line. It is joined to the horizontal by the 'perfect angle' – a right angle, described as an angle of 'ninety Degrees or the fourth part of a circle', analogous to the perfect union of the mental with the physical to form the complete man, composed of body, mind and spirit.

This complete man is the Master Mason, ready to develop himself. The labour he is called to perform is to be Worshipful Master of *his* lodge, which is himself. As such he wears the jewel of his office, a square, or one-fourth part of a circle, representing the above mentioned union. Our candidate, advancing through the Degrees of the Chapter, represents the complete man not yet perfected.

But, as a Past Master, he is divested of the square and invested with the triangle, a compass opened to 60°, a symbol of the perfect man. He has completed his work in the lodge and will not pass this way again. He is now working at different labour – developing himself as a spiritual being.

The Past Master Degree then is essential to maintaining the integrity of the whole of the Chapter system of Degrees. In fact, to not confer this Degree would, in essence, destroy the symbolism of



the number five in the Masonic sequence of 3, 5, 7 and 9, and would undermine the hidden Truths which may be contained therein.

Like all other Degrees of Masonry, it is indeed a Degree with more *meaning* than form, and more meaning than many of us appreciate at the time we receive it.

Well, Companions, one more observation. Since this article was written, we here in Nova Scotia have produced and adopted our own new ritual, and carefully titled it Virtual Past Master.

But no less now than ever, it is surely helpful to know the history behind the Degree, and to have a better sense of the powerful lessons intended by those who wrote the original.

Thanks for allowing me to share this information with you this evening.

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*(Adapted by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason  
First presented to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, 1999)*

## **PUNISHMENT, PENALTIES AND SIGNS**

There was a controversial story in a recent newspaper about punishment in a local school. A noisy boy, running and shouting in the school's corridors, disrupting classes, had been collared by a teacher – literally grabbed by the collar – and held while being made to apologize to a class – held so firmly that a mark was left on his neck. His parents had complained, demanding an apology from the teacher. The story suggested the teacher was probably now headed for punishment, maybe with stiffer penalties than the boy received.

Just who would eventually end up getting punished for what, and whether the relative punishments and penalties would be deemed appropriate in public opinion, and whether the controversy would do good or harm in the long run, we would have to wait and see.

Today, let's not debate whether or not teachers should be allowed to manhandle unruly students, if that's what actually happened. There's a broader perspective to consider.

Oh, the story might have struck some as something of a storm in a teacup; a series of over-reactions, out of proportion to its starting points, hardly deserving all the emotional content and likely further repercussions the newspaper article would doubtless help stir up.

But consider. What a wonderful country we live in, where people devote time and energy to such an example of misbehaviour, punishment and appropriate penalties. How fortunate we are that such a local incident is, indeed, considered so important here. Running, shouting, collaring, a firm grip, a mark on a neck, complaints, investigations, front page newspaper reports! Why, in some countries, murder, mayhem, torture and grizzly executions wouldn't get half the attention! In some countries, both the boy and the teacher might have 'disappeared', and no one any the wiser!

Consider further. How about the misunderstandings and controversy that occasionally surround the symbolic Penalties in our Masonic Degrees; misunderstandings that arise from limited knowledge of the facts; controversy and reactions out of all proportion to the truth about our Penalties; and revisions to our rituals sometimes made or forced by those who seem to least understand the facts and the truth, and to have lost all sense of proportion.

To most who do a fair amount of research into the history of the Penalty statements in our Degrees, one conclusion stands out: ... that when those Penalties were first included they weren't controversial at all, because they reflected what was considered normal at the time.

Back in those days, centuries ago, such punishments were commonplace, administered by both church and state authorities, often for crimes far less than murder, treason, or betrayal of trust. Simply saying aloud that you didn't agree with what was being preached in the pulpits, or proclaimed by the government of the day, could get you hung, drawn, quartered, disembowelled, burned alive, or tortured and killed in any of the various ways we describe in our Degrees.

But back then, Candidates for Freemasonry wouldn't have thought twice about the Penalty statements associated with the oaths they were required to swear; because they were quite familiar with such penalties, which were normal, and would have been considered appropriate

and proportional, albeit by those who never expected to experience them themselves – not in real life, and certainly not within Freemasonry, which was understood from Day One to present a set of *symbolic* rites, including *symbolic* penalties.

It's only now, in the twenty-first century, in countries where such punishments are now described in law as cruel and unusual, that some among our modern societies are horrified by even the thoughts in those penalty statements, and about oaths that include them, and want to ban such statements, eliminate such thoughts, as if to extinguish even the possibility of anyone taking them seriously.

But the Masonic literature is quite clear to all who read it carefully. The Masonic Penalties were never *real* threats. They were elements of dramatic stories, parts of allegories intended to teach morality lessons by dramatic presentation. And while such punishments were real enough in the societies of those times, their inclusion in the Masonic Degrees could also be interpreted as something of a *protest*. Because, obviously, in real life they *were* excessive, even then. That's why we've since eliminated them from real life. At least in Canada, right?

Modern Canada is the most wonderful country the world has ever produced. And most believe such old-time barbarism never happened here, and never could. Not here. We've got the right perspective, everything in due proportion and under appropriate control, right? And we'll never let them get out of control. The slightest hint of excessive punishment sends us into a tizzy, even the idea of a school teacher trying to control the out-of-bounds behaviour of a schoolboy by grabbing him by the scruff of his neck. Or his collar; whatever the truth.

But that socially benevolent attitude, and that resolve to eliminate arbitrary and excessive acts of punishment by those in authority, were among the reasons many came to live in Canada. Canada continually fills them with gratitude for the present, and optimism for the future.

But, nonetheless, many believe that we in Canada should never relax our vigilance against authoritarian government and barbaric punishment. We must never become complacent about how fortunate we are. We must never look at what happens elsewhere in the world, and speak those naive words: "It could never happen here. Not here. Not in these modern times."

In fact, authoritarian governments and religious fanatics are in control right now, today, as we speak, in many other places. Many people elsewhere still see no hope of an end to what we judge as utterly barbaric, disproportionate and wholly inappropriate punishments and penalties for what we describe as minor crimes. In many parts of our *modern* world, such penalties as our Masonic Degrees describe *remain* normal.

And just a little while ago, in the middle of the twentieth century, in some of the most civilized nations on Earth – or nations who thought they were – such punishments *did* return to become an awful reality again. We can name Germany, and Japan, and they weren't alone. They said it couldn't happen *there*. But it did. Not centuries ago, but almost just yesterday.

*Oh, please, don't ever say it can't happen here.*

Be ever on your guard against those who have no knowledge or sense of history; no awareness of the realities of the modern world; no knowledge of why they should feel grateful for their immense good fortune; no sense of risk; no zeal to safeguard the future.

When someone says our Penalty statements are barbaric and should be eliminated, remind them of the facts:

- that such penalties were commonplace at the time the statements were first included in our rituals;
- that they're still far too commonplace elsewhere in the world today;
- that what happened during the 1930s and 1940s proved they can become commonplace again almost anywhere at any time, if we let down our guard.

And tell them that an excellent reason for keeping our Penalty statements is to remind us of the truth and importance of those facts.

In our context, our Penalty statements are and always were symbolic, intended to teach lessons. And not the least of those lessons is that such symbolic penalties could once again become real ones, not imposed by one Freemason upon another – they never were – but by authoritarian government and religious extremism.

Our chances of success in sustaining free and benevolent civilization in North America will be the greater if we retain those reminders, and the lesser if we misunderstand them to the point of eliminating them.

Anyone who believes our Penalty statements aren't symbolic has missed the whole structure and theme of the three Craft Degrees. The great drama of the Third Degree reaches its peak when the Three Ruffians express remorse from clefts in the rocks, each saying he would have preferred to have been put to death in one of the ways described by the Penalties, "than to have taken the life of so great and good a man as Hiram Abif." And after admitting guilt, they are punished "according to their several imprecations" – just as they described. The three Degrees are drawn together and made one by the restatement of the three Penalties at one time. Through the wisdom of Solomon, the Ruffians receive what they swore to accept if they betrayed their trust.

That's the symbolic drama. Tear the penalties out of it, and you *gut* the drama; make it undramatic; meaningless; a story with no allegorical impact; and a set of Degrees with no connection, no climax, no effectiveness as a morality play.

There can be only one motive for wanting to strip out the penalties ... misunderstanding them as literal rather than symbolic; missing the symbolic value altogether. The value is in the drama's climax, when a horrible death is preferred over a life filled with regret for crimes not only of violence but of breach of trust; not only of murder but murder of a good and innocent man. The very excessiveness of the Penalties establishes the high values of trust and goodness.

In the Mark Master Mason Degree in a Royal Arch Chapter, the Candidate is taught a new Due Guard and Sign. The Sign echoes the drama of that Degree, which places the Candidate in danger of having one of his hands struck off – still a penalty for minor theft in some parts of the world today.

And there's often some discussion about how those Signs vary from one Jurisdiction to another. Perhaps the hand should be shown palm up, or perhaps on edge, perhaps another way.

But is it all that important that the position of the hand varies? That's a minor detail compared with the importance of the symbolism the Sign seeks to help teach.

The true facts behind that newspaper story about the noisy boy and the angry teacher will eventually come out. But nor are they as important as the issues of how naughty a boy can be before he needs punishment; and how extreme the penalty should be for that kind of behaviour; and whether a teacher should decide the punishment and penalty in anger, or without control by a behaviour code established and maintained to guard against excessive use of authority

To guard against old-time penalties again becoming real life --- here.

Similarly, no particular detail of what we've considered today is worth further discussion in itself; not compared to the two central themes intended:

- that our Penalty statements help to preserve truths in our history of centuries ago and of this century and of today, and therefore themselves deserve and need to be preserved;
- and that knowledge about what is *true* needs to be *shared*.

Thanks for listening.

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*(Ad-libbed by George I. H. Mason at the 1997 Annual Meeting of District 5, Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Nova Scotia, in O'Leary, PEI, and written down later)*

## LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE

Here's a talk that was written as a Rededication Service Address, inspired by an old story that might be familiar to you, too.

Years ago, a wealthy Brother helped substantially in building a new Temple for the Craft. As the Temple neared completion, the question of lighting arose. The wealthy Brother assured the building committee that he would take care of that aspect. He was a good Freemason, so they had no qualms about leaving the matter to him.

But on the first meeting in the new Temple, the chairman of the building committee noticed that there were no lights inside. He saw brackets on the walls, one behind each and every seat, but nothing hanging from the brackets. He asked, "How will the Temple be lighted?"

At the appropriate time, however, the Junior Deacon came around with a box full of small oil lamps, and distributed them, one for each Brother. The wealthy Brother used a candle and lit the first lamp, then passed the candle to his neighbour, who lit his lamp and passed the candle on. The candle was passed around until the entire building was aglow.

Then everyone was instructed to hang his lamp on the bracket on the Temple wall behind his seat. It was an inspiring sight.

At the close of the meeting, the wealthy Brother asked every other Brother to remove his lamp from its bracket and take it home with him. He said, "Whenever we hold our meetings, each Brother will be responsible for bringing his own light with him. When you are here, your area will be lighted. When you aren't here, your area will be dark."

Think about that.

Every single one of us here knows something nobody else knows. When we pool that knowledge, we have a wealth of fascinating and valuable information to share. We have all shared similar experiences here, and yet every individual brought his own initial perspective to those experiences;  
caused him to focus on different details;  
form his own conclusions;  
find a set of values that have brought him back, time and again;  
that have prompted him to become involved in discussions, Degree work, offices, the process of learning more and sharing what he learns with others;  
in preserving and passing on to succeeding generations what he has seen as important ..... seen by the light he kindles each time he arrives here, and the collective light of his Companions.

Those who bring their 'light' here, month after month, deserve our deepest gratitude. We gain wonderful inspiration and great encouragement from those who came before us; those who have travelled the paths of Freemasonry with us; those who lit their lights here, and passed a candle to us.

And it is true: the larger the number of lights at any meeting here, the greater the illumination; the more knowledge shared; the stronger the sense of companionship; the greater the mutual rewards.

Once a year we gather for a Rededication Service. It is a service unique to Royal Arch Masons.

- It is a time to gather with a common focus on our common purpose.
- A time to remember what God has done.
- A time to rejoice in what God is doing.
- A time to rededicate ourselves to our beliefs and the Craft.

It is a time to reflect on what makes Royal Arch Masonry uniquely effective.

Yes, we extend the great moral allegory of the story of King Solomon's Temple and Hiram Abif; of the duties and rewards of upright morality, diligent craftsmanship, and responsible leadership. Yes, our ritual Degrees are the product of inspired genius, wonderfully conceived, beautifully written, rich in detail, awesome in their potential effectiveness.

But, ultimately, what makes them effective is not the words on paper. Sell a million copies of our Ritual book through thousands of bookstores, for anyone to read, and very few will gain much understanding of Royal Arch Masonry.

For Royal Arch Masonry is more, much more, than our rituals. The ties that bind us together as Companions are formed not merely from the content of our rituals, but from what we share *together*;

assembled here;

voluntarily;

working in teamwork;

in harmony;

adding light to light, to produce a collective illumination that is greater than the sum of its parts;

a mystical experience we might have difficulty explaining in words, but feel in our hearts, and recognise in our minds.

Because we understand its true source.

Have you had the experience of being the first to arrive here ... the one who turns on all the electric lights in this room?

Have you had the experience of being last to leave ... of extinguishing those electric lights, plunging the room back into darkness?

Imagine we had no electricity, but lots of brackets on the walls, and each Companion his own oil lamp. First to arrive, you enter with your own lamp, and can see your way to your own place. But not much more.

Another arrives, and his lamp shows you other familiar objects.

More come in, and a friendly warmth begins to permeate the room.

Oh, how one might wish one day to see a lamp on every bracket; a Companion in every seat. But it is not necessary to fill the room; to dazzle the eyes. Enough is when the number is sufficient for us to do the work of Royal Arch Masonry effectively.

What is that work? Each of us has his own answer. It is what brings him here, meeting after meeting:

- To learn, and to share.
- To preserve, and perpetuate.
- To add his light, that all might see the more clearly.
- To encourage.
- To strengthen the mutual sense of inspiration, enlightenment and motivation.

And to leave here with his light still lit, not now in the hand but in the mind and the heart; brighter than any one candle, any one little oil lamp; a share of the collective light that illuminates this room, and all our minds, and all our hearts, together, thanks to each Companion who came to add his own.

Please rise and let us join in prayer.

Supreme Architect of the Universe, creator of our hearts and minds, source of our inspiration, author of our enlightenment, accept and understand our sense of gratitude for Royal Arch Masonry – this additional opportunity to learn more about how to practise what you would have us do for our own benefit, for our families, our neighbours, and the good of all mankind.

We rededicate ourselves to that purpose – of learning and sharing through increased comprehension of your divine design.

Help us to understand that while our own modest light can reach but a short distance alone, it can – when added to those of our Companions – result in light enough to fill and overflow the confines of this room, by flooding our hearts and minds with an illumination that can help guide our steps in all our walks of life.

Keep us mindful of the image of a dark room, an initial candle, shadows fleeing as lights are lit one by one, and the empty bracket waiting for our own lamp.

And let us see the dawn of each new day as the relighting of your celestial candle; the world as one giant room; and our lamp as one among many but needed no less than any .... not to shine upon ourselves, but upon your great wonders.

To this, and your Holy Name, we rededicate ourselves.

Amen. So mote it be.

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*(Rededication Service Address by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, November 2000, and by V.Ex.Comp. Christopher Vessey, AGL, to Prince Edward Chapter No. 12, November 2004.)*



**THE HOLY ROYAL ARCH,  
KEYSTONE OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY WITHIN**

In 1999, Robert G. Davis, now a Past Governor General of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America, wrote a series of articles for the *York Rite Crusader*, the College's periodical. Each article focussed on one of the Capitular Degrees. All were superb examinations and explanations of these wonderful Degrees. One of our Grand Lecturers adapted each article for presentation to our Royal Arch Chapters as talks. It's my pleasure this evening to deliver the one on the Royal Arch Degree. I hope it will be your pleasure, and your gain, to listen carefully to this material – among the most helpful many have ever encountered.

If you do listen carefully, you'll hear some references to Degree elements and interpretations not included in our ritual, because Companion Davis is referring to the text approved by the General Grand Chapter of North America, to which neither we nor most Canadian Jurisdictions subscribe. But most of what you'll hear will either be familiar or will expand your knowledge and your horizons, and enrich your spirituality – which, again, is why it's worth your attention.

There is, Companion Davis wrote, an image in Masonry that is as powerful in its symbolic meaning as any encountered in the whole of the Masonic journey. It is the image of two pillars supporting an arch centred by a keystone, behind which is situated a sacred vault. Enclosed within this vault is the Ark of the Covenant. And within this set of symbols is found the great secret of the Royal Arch, and the central thought of Masonry.

We may never know from whence the Royal Arch Degree came. To date, there has not been a single source of possible origin which has not, at some time, been disputed by one or more Masonic scholars. Some say it came out of the Guild system of the Middle Ages; others believe it was practised within the 'Accepted Lodge' of the London Mason's Company during the 1600s. Yet others believe it had no point of origin until after Speculative Freemasonry was formally established in the 1717-1723 English Grand Lodge era.

And the Royal Arch Degree may not have been English in origin at all. There is a considerable favour given in Masonic literature that it was a Degree of French origin, brought to England sometime after 1730. Indeed, there is no question that many side Degrees and Degree systems were developed in France shortly after the craft ritual migrated to the continent; not the least of which was the Ancient and Accepted Rite, upon which contemporary Scottish Rite ritual is based.

And then there is the question of the 'incomplete' nature of the *Master Mason* Degree, lending credence to an argument that it was never intended to be the last of the Craft Degrees. Certainly, it seems unlikely that a Masonic Degree which provides a legend in which something is lost (and another substituted in its place until it can later be found) would represent the pinnacle, or end, of a progressive system of Degrees. It is easy to suggest that the Master's Degree was either originally part of a larger system which had to include elements of the Royal Arch Degree; or Degree writers of the early speculative period simply saw an opportunity in the Hiram Legend to complete the symbolic structure of the craft system through a continuation of higher Degrees.

Regardless from whence it came, we find elements of the Royal Arch being worked within craft lodges in England and France as early as 1733, and by 1740 the story of the rebuilding of the Temple of Zerubbabel had gained some prominence among lodges in their ritual workings. The first printed reference to the term ‘Royal Arch’ appeared in Faulkner’s *Dublin Journal*, January 10, 1743, reporting on a Masonic processional held on St. John’s Day a month earlier, wherein “the Royal Arch carried by two Excellent Masons” appeared in a parade in front of the Master of the lodge. Then, in 1744, a medical doctor named D’Assigny published a book which made the first known reference to a Royal Arch Degree, by referring to a group of men who were “Masters of the Royal Arch.” By 1745, it is known that a Royal Arch ceremony was being practised in Ireland, England, France, and Scotland, with the first exalting in the American colonies reported as early as 1753.

When the Grand Lodge of the Ancients established its Constitution in 1751, it made the Royal Arch an essential Degree to the Craft system of Degrees, thus bundling what would eventually become the “*ne plus ultra*” of Capitular Masonry across the globe.

In this Degree, we find three candidates in waiting to be “exalted to the august Degree of Royal Arch.” The ceremony of exaltation transfers them from the region of symbolic Masonry, wherein lessons in morals and ethics are taught by allegory; into the domain of religion, wherein the nature of God in man is revealed through the discovery of the Word.

Each candidate is bound seven times, representing the seventh Degree in the progression of Degrees thus experienced, and to remind them of the interrelationship between the numbers 4 and 3, to which they previously have been made aware in the many symbolic forms of the preceding Degrees.

The candidates are also uniquely connected, one to the other, formatting yet another triad in the midst of the many associated with this Degree – the three temples, three sojourners, three working tools, the three apartments, three arks, three veils and colours, the three courts, three lessons, etc. And thus, by being joined together, they symbolically cease to be separate individuals – they now represent the “Complete Man”, comprised of Body, Soul, and Spirit.

From this point forward, the three candidates are motivated by a single desire – to be “exalted” to the spiritual plane of being.

The first section of the Degree describes the moral causes which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the first temple. It bridges the gap between the Most Excellent Master and the Royal Arch Degree.

The second section of the Degree describes the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. It’s interesting that the Hebrew word for Babylon means “confusion”. It is a place of evil, materialism and chaos. Conversely, the Hebrew word for Jerusalem means “habitation of peace”. The last part of the word, [Jeru-]“Shalom” also means “whole, or perfect”. Thus, our candidates *psychically* journey from a state of chaos to spiritual perfection. In our own journey of life, each of us must become an active participant in building the house of the Lord, or our own spiritual temple. Both the hazards and beauty of the Journey described in this section of the ritual represent the trials and victories inherent in this journey.

In the final section of the Degree, the candidate is presented with a remarkable allegory, the same which can be found in the Master Mason Degree, and the same which exists in all of the ancient mysteries – the great lesson represented by the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. Symbolically, all of these allegorical forms are commenced in sorrow and terminated in joy.

In the Royal Arch Degree, there is a resurrection of that which had been buried – a discovery of that which had been lost – and an exchange of that which, like the body, is temporary; for that which, like the soul, is permanent. The life which we pass on earth is but a substitute for the exalted one we spend in eternity. And it is in the grave, in the rubbish of the temple, in the depths of the earth, in the experience and trials of our own life, that the “corruptible puts on incorruption, the mortal puts on immortality!”

The interval of time occupied by the captivity of the Jews at Babylon is now over, and the allegory of the Royal Arch is resumed with the restoration of the captives to their home. The sacred vessels and precious ornaments of the first temple were still in existence – that which had been lost is discovered, and the True Word is revealed. The building of the sacred temple out of the ruins of the first represents the rebirth of the human race in a new dispensation to be later revealed – and our own rebirth into a higher consciousness with God.

Such is the task of the Royal Arch Masons – to build the spiritual temple of his second life upon the shattered ruins of the old. The foundation is still intact, as in Jerusalem. And if his foundation of faith is firm, he may look forward to the object of his search – the revelation of Truth in the recovery of the True Word. As Royal Arch Masons, we are to be constantly engaged in the noble labour of consciously rebuilding ourselves from the shattered temples of our own passions, intolerance and ignorance; discovering beneath the rubbish the lost treasure of Light and Truth.

The Keystone signifies our rebirth. The foundation Stone of our new Temple is the Word of God, and the Sacred Book of Law. And our journey of faith lies in our hope that we may be admitted to the Sanctum Sanctorum of that House not made with Hands; where, in the presence of the Great Trinity, we may, by virtue of three times three, be invested with the immaculate Word of Truth – and dwell forever in the glory of a blissful reward.

Such are some of the lessons of the Royal Arch Degree.

Well, Companions, what you’ve just heard are one man’s interpretations. Or are they? Think about them. Come to your own conclusions. And then, some time in the future, when *you* have an opportunity to present a talk on the Royal Arch Degree to others, remember that this one already exists. And if you can’t do better, pay your compliments to Companion Robert G. Davis as I have, by digging this one out of the files again. Thanks for allowing me to share it with you this evening.

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*(Adapted by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason  
First presented to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, 1999)*

## THE OTHER HALF OF THE MASTER MASON DEGREE

In 1996, R.Ex.Comp. George Mason, later Grand Lecturer, presented a talk to the Craft Lodges from which Alexandra Chapter Number 11 draws its members, on the direct relationship of the Royal Arch and Master Mason Degrees.

He titled it “The *other half* of the Master Mason Degree”, and because it refers to our duty as Royal Arch Masons to make sure every Master Mason understands that relationship, I believe we should consider its content in every Chapter, as well.

Listen for a few minutes as I present it here, will you?

Like all of you, Companion Mason said, I’ll never forget the evening I was raised to the rank of a Master Mason. For me, the Third Degree was powerful stuff. But during it, and during the months afterwards, some of my first impressions later proved completely wrong. More, the Degree caused me to ask questions, and some of the early answers I encountered also later proved wrong.

I got the impression, for example, that the Master Mason Degree was the highest honour I could ever receive in Freemasonry. Later, I came to realize I’d confused that idea with what’s said about the White Apron. “Never again shall any honour so distinguished be conferred upon you.”

But those words concern the badge of full membership in a Craft Lodge.

And consider these words: “There’s no *higher* Degree than the Third.”

I don’t really argue that one. But I kept hearing it linked with the idea that with the Third Degree I’d received all the light Freemasonry had to offer; everything else would be mere variations on the theme – clarifications, expansions, embellishments. Again, nowhere does our Craft ritual say anything like that. And yet I heard and read it time after time elsewhere, that with the Master Mason Degree I could be comfortable in having been exposed to everything of essential importance; everything at the core of Freemasonry; everything the writers of our modern rituals, and designers of our modern institution, had intended for us.

For me, that didn’t ring true. I had too many unanswered questions.

Why did the Third Degree set up the subject of the Master Mason’s Word, then give me only a substitute?

Why did it say the Master Mason’s Word had been lost with the death of Hiram Abif, and I was being given the Substitute Word “until future ages should find out the right”?

Did future ages find it out? How was I supposed to know?

What was all that stuff about Solomon’s Temple, and three Grand Masters who’d promised each other never to give the secret Word of a Master Mason unless three who knew it were present and agreed?

Why raise all these subjects, all these questions, and more I haven’t mentioned, and not give answers? Why leave the whole thing seeming so incomplete? A big long Degree; lots of lecture material; time enough for a complete story; but instead a careful listener or thoughtful reader – after he gets a copy of the ritual – is left with a whole bunch of questions. Why?

The answer, my friends, took me years to uncover and understand. It’s an answer I believe I should have been given earlier, as the completion of the set of experiences which culminated in receiving my Master Mason Certificate.

The answer is that the material in the Master Mason Degree, as practised today, is not itself intended to be sufficient to make a Master out of a Mason; not intended to provide him with a complete story with no loose ends. It's not the last section of the material taught in Ancient Craft Masonry. There always was more. It was always meant that every worthy Mason should receive more. And I'm not referring to those secrets, those answers, that none receive until and unless we reach that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns. No, I'm talking about the secrets the original Masonic ritual writers intended should be exposed to as many of us as possible.

Let me offer you proof.

More than a century ago, a much-honoured Mason, name of William Singleton, wrote something printed in a book published in 1890, called *History of Freemasonry and Concordant Orders*. He said:

*"The ritual of the Third Degree was changed in the mid 1700s, and the most important 'secrets' were placed in the Royal Arch. Thereafter, a Mason was not a Master until elected to preside, nor a Master Mason proper until completing his exposure to the Royal Arch, intended to be given only to actual Past Masters."*

That same book, in words by other distinguished writers, goes on to explain that the 'Antients' – the Freemasons who split from the Premier Grand Lodge, who clung to the old ways and came to rival the 'Moderns' in number and influence – the 'Antients' preserved the secrets intended for Master Masons in *two* parts – or two halves, if you like – the Master Mason Degree and the Order of the Holy Royal Arch; split between the two, complete together; questions intentionally left unanswered in the one, and answered in the other; material originally developed in the one, but then separated into two parts, two halves.

More proof: A distinguished Canadian Freemason, MacLeod Moore, in the nineteenth century said:

*"The Royal Arch was authorized, not as a separate Degree, but as the 'complement to that of the Third or the Master Mason'."*

The 'complement' to the Third Degree. Not a separate Degree at all, not originally, but a second part, given to Lodge Masters or others found worthy.

Early Masonic literature, and early rituals, can make confusing reading on this subject of the relationship between the Third Degree and the Royal Arch, because of the rivalry between the Antients and the Moderns. And what was spread by the Grand Lodges in Scotland and Ireland, to their daughter Lodges elsewhere, and by the French and others whose ritual material was converted in North America into what we now call the Scottish Rite ... all very confusing ...

... until 1813, when the Antients and Moderns got together to form the United Grand Lodge of England, acknowledged by everyone today as the single most authoritative source in all Freemasonry.

In 1813, one of the Articles of Union said this:

*"Pure Ancient Masonry consists of three Degrees and no more, viz: those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft, and the Master Mason including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch."*

'Including'. What did they mean, 'including'? I think they meant that the Master Mason and Royal Arch rituals were to be regarded as two parts of one body of material; that the Royal Arch was to be experienced as part of the process of making a Master out of a Mason; the

process was to include both parts, and should not be considered complete without the second part; that the Master Mason Degree was to be understood as including more than the Craft Lodge was authorized to communicate; to include what the Royal Arch Chapter was authorized to add, whether that Chapter be an extension of a Lodge or a separate organization.

In the words of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America, published in 1986: *“The Blue Lodge exposes the Candidate to all the light in Masonry that it is authorized to communicate. In the third Degree, the Sublime Degree of Master Mason, the candidate receives light as fully as it may come to him in the Symbolic Lodge, including the substitute for that which through further search he may receive later, the real secret of a Master Mason, under the Royal Arch. After the Candidate receives the Master Mason Degree he receives no greater or higher honour, true, but in the attainment of other Degrees and Orders he receives further light and more knowledge of what the Masonic lesson is, and what the institution of Freemasonry seeks to teach.”*

And even more recently, in 1992, the United Grand Lodge of England sent a report around the world which said:

*“Brethren who are members of the Royal Arch should in their Craft Lodges ensure that Master Masons realize that their knowledge of pure Ancient Masonry is incomplete until they have been exalted to that important order, and give every encouragement to Brethren to become Royal Arch Masons.”*

Encouragement.

Bear with me a moment longer while I turn back to the subject of the Lost Master Mason’s Word. The Third Degree intentionally tells us it has been lost but not necessarily forever. How may it be rediscovered?

Without breaking any Obligation or spoiling anything for potential future Royal Arch Masons, we can tell them all that under the Royal Arch the true Master Mason’s Word is to be found today.

By ‘Word’ I mean a set of letters conveying the beginning of a meaning. It’s found with the help of another Word – the Grand Omnific or Royal Arch Word – which many confuse one with the other.

But Royal Arch Masons *own* neither the Lost Word nor its meaning. They – the Word and some of its meaning – belong to all. Or they should. They were meant to. No Master Mason should have to wait long to learn that the remainder of the Third Degree allegory is provided under the Royal Arch.

But the rediscovery is not merely of a Word. What is discovered under the Royal Arch is the inexpressible meaning of the completed allegory; a dawning comprehension – or a new sense of conviction about something previously only dimly perceived – something intensely personal about a man’s immortal soul and its relationship to God.

Listen to this, from the *Pocket Encyclopedia of Masonic Symbols*:

*“The Lost Word is not rediscovered in Craft Lodge Freemasonry; Craft Lodge Masons are given a substitute.*

*Of the Lost Word, it has been written: ‘Never may we find [its ultimate meaning] here. You shall gaze through microscope and telescope and catch no sight of its shadow.*

*You shall travel in many lands and far and see it not.*

*You shall listen to all the words of all the tongues which all men have ever spoken and will speak – the [meaning of the] Lost Word is not heard.*

*Were it but a word, how easy to invent another! But it is not a word, but The Word, the great secret, the unknowableness which the Great Architect sets before his children, a will-o'-the-wisp to follow, a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.*

*Never here is it to be found [in full], but the search for it is the reason for life.'''*

Every Master Mason should be told about this necessary search. And every Royal Arch Mason should know that it is his duty to help guide all such searchers towards the additional light always intended for them.

It is perhaps the lack of performance of that duty, by those who are supposed to know better, that leaves too many Master Masons still in the dark.

Companions, we all know better, right?

None of us leaves any Master Mason in the dark, right?

That's the part of this talk I particularly wanted to share here.

Thanks for listening to it.

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*(Adapted from talk presented to District 5 Lodges in 1996)*

## **THE ROYAL ARCH – WHAT'S THE POINT?**

A year after the Shriners changed their membership criteria to accept Master Masons, our Grand Historian, R.Ex.Comp. J. Douglas Welsh, examined the concern of many that the change was going to have a damaging effect on the Concordant bodies, including the Royal Arch Chapters.

But his interpretation was that Royal Arch Masonry had an excellent case for survival, and that we would survive if we Royal Arch Masons put just as much effort as the Shriners into presenting *our* case to every active Master Mason.

The talk he presented then is just as valid now, and if you've never heard it before I invite you to listen today as I repeat it, because it contains much valuable historical information as well as potentially being a booster to your confidence:

The earliest mention of the Shrine, Companion Welsh reminded us, was in 1870, when two prominent New York Freemasons started thinking about organizing a new "Order" for a group of friends who were all senior Masons. The first Shrine Temple was organized in 1872. From the earliest days of the Shrine, the requirement for admission to the Shrine was that a man must hold either the Degrees and orders of the Royal Arch Chapter plus the Christian Orders of the Preceptories or Commanderies of the Knights Templar, or that he must hold the 32° of the Scottish Rite. The requirements for entry to the Shrine more recently became only that a man be a Master Mason in good standing in his Grand Lodge.

There has been much negative discussion on the effect this move would have upon the memberships of the Knights Templar and the Holy Royal Arch.

Across North America, Brethren of good conscience began questioning the propriety of the move by the Shrine, and also, prophesying the death of the "Concordant Bodies".

While I think it was perhaps hyperbolic to speak of the change by the Shrine as "ushering in the death of the Concordant Bodies", I do think it is time for all of the Concordants to take a serious look at themselves, to see if they are meeting the needs of their members, or indeed, if they are meeting the needs of Freemasonry.

I believe it is important to recognize two things in regard to this matter. First, the Holy Royal Arch was a popular and well-known part of Masonry long before the Shrine was conceived. Secondly, the Shrine will continue to raise money to fund their 22 hospitals, regardless of the Degree of Masonic affiliation they require.

That being the case, let's take a look at the Holy Royal Arch, and think for a bit about what it means, and teaches.

Freemasonry has been facing a worldwide decline in membership for the past forty years. Our numbers peaked, here in the Nova Scotia Jurisdiction, in the late 1940s, and we have been in decline since then. Our experience mirrors the results seen in Jurisdiction after Jurisdiction around the world. The 'good men' of today have much more choice in terms of what they can do with their spare time than was the case 50 or 100 years ago. In fact, the amount of 'spare time' is not greater than it was in the past. There are more and more demands on the time and resources of people, and there are more and more places to spend that time and those resources.



Churches have also been affected by declining numbers. We are not alone in our concern over membership.

Let's take a very quick look at some rough statistics. Out of one hundred petitioners to Freemasonry, we seldom see more than twenty of those Brethren, on any kind of basis, after the Degrees. Of that twenty percent, we are usually looking at an average of half of them as being 'regular attenders', the backbone of Freemasonry. That is only ten percent, Companions, of all the Petitioners we bring in to the Lodge. Is it any wonder that numbers are dropping? Extend that trend to the Concordant Bodies, Companions. How does it fit?

With the pace of modern society, with the wealth of 'other attractions' available, with the increasing demands of family and employment and society, I think it is inevitable that overall numbers will decline. Chapters will return Charters. Preceptories will close. Lodges will surrender their Warrants. There is no question it will happen. The only question is how long will it go on. I have seen predictions that we will no longer exist within twenty years. My feeling, Companions, is that we *will* exist in twenty years; we *will* continue to seek out good men who can benefit from our teachings; we *will* continue to teach our lessons, and people will continue to learn from us. But things will be different.

The earliest mention of the Royal Arch as a separate ceremony is recorded in a newspaper clipping from about 1740. The Sublime Order of the Holy Royal Arch has been conferred on qualified Brethren in Nova Scotia since at least 1780. The earliest record of the Mark Master Mason Degree is in 1756, in a set of By-Laws found attached to a copy of Anderson's Constitutions of 1723, in the Library of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Durham, and the Degree has been performed in Nova Scotia since 1782.

The traditional history of the Royal Arch suggests a French origin for the Degree. In its earliest versions, the Arch in question was the Arch of Enoch, taking the Degree to a much older Biblical period. The Royal Arch in Ireland is still based on the Enochian story. Our Arch is in the Second Temple, the one built by the Jews returning from the Babylonian Captivity. This Temple is the one that existed when the Romans occupied Judea.

The story of the Royal Arch is sometimes believed to have been imported from the Middle East by the Knights Templar (the original ones, not the Masonic Knights Templar of today), and sometimes it is told that it stems from the sixteenth century, although still associated with Templar Masonry. Dr. George Oliver, the Masonic writer, wrote "There exists sufficient evidence to fix the era of its introduction to a period which is coeval with the memorable schism amongst English Masons about the middle of the eighteenth century". The late Bro. D. Murray Lyon was of the opinion that the Degree was fabricated on the Continent between 1735 and 1740. Bro. Robert Freke Gould says that, in England, "the Degree was certainly worked from about the year 1740, and presumably from an earlier date".

It is spoken of, at that date, as being a Degree which was restricted to Past Masters; an ancient provision eventually having given rise to the Degree which we now know in the Chapter as 'Virtual Past Master' to mark it from the 'Installed Master' ceremonial. From its earliest time, the Holy Royal Arch was considered something that had to be achieved, not just given to all and

sundry. It is often stated that the Degree is the “completion of the Master Mason Degree”, because it is in this Degree that the Lost Secrets of Freemasonry are again discovered.

The Royal Arch Chapter thus has its own reasons for existence, reasons that have little if anything to do with the membership requirements of another Concordant Body.

Has the structure of the Degree changed in significant detail from the form conferred in the late eighteenth century? Certainly, in some places it has changed. Yet, the Degree still teaches the same lessons, of humility, of continuity, of struggle, and of eventual victory in the struggle. Those lessons remain as valuable today as they were in the 1700s.

Once, being a Mason was a very special thing. Only special men, who looked on our teachings as valuable in their daily lives, were accepted through our doors.

Over a long period of time, we tried to expand the influence of Masonic teachings, to spread our ways wider and wider, and we eventually began to accept petitions from men who had no intention of working in the Lodge, or the Chapter, or Preceptory. We all know at least one “ring knocker”, a man who has taken the Degrees, but never attends Lodge, the fellow who always has an excuse for not attending, but always wears his ring anyway. I do not suggest that we did anything improper, Companions; that is not my point. But, such men are included in the numbers that are now declining. It is unfortunate that we are unable to always reach the hearts of the Petitioners to Masonry; but the hearts we DO reach are the important ones.

The change in membership requirement for the Shrine will have an effect on the Concordant Bodies. If we are watchful, we will see some of the ninety percent who never intended to work in the Chapter becoming aware of the fact that their Masonic Education is not complete. Some of those will come to the Chapter, later. This is a proven effect, Companions, as seen by several of the Shrine Temples that had been doing the same thing by dispensation for years. In the meantime, the Chapters have an opportunity, and that opportunity is to take the ten percent and educate them, work with them so that their understanding of the lessons of the Royal Arch will sustain them, keep them interested, and encourage them to continue working to improve themselves. We have an opportunity to prove that the Chapter is needed in modern Freemasonry. We have a chance to show that we, here, are the ten percent who can always be counted upon.

The Holy Royal Arch occupies a special position in Masonry, Companions. Only in the Degrees of the Chapter are we given the responsibility to teach, by example, the lessons of life that we learn as Masons. It is our Obligation to ensure those lessons are not lost to future generations, as the “Genuine Secrets of a Master Mason” are lost to the Brethren in the Craft Lodges.

Companion Welsh concluded by exhorting his listeners to “Be a Ten Percenter!” Well, here you are, a few years later, clearly among that core group. And I feel honoured to be counted with you. Thanks for listening.

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*(Delivered to Grand Chapter of RAM of Nova Scotia District 1 “Field Day”,  
September 22, 2001)*

## THE ROYAL ARCH SASH

A subject that comes up time and time again is the Royal Arch sash, and usually for one or more of three reasons:

- First, there are always some among us who are uncertain whether the sash should be removed prior to the opening of a Lodge for one of the preparatory Degrees. The answer is No, neither sash nor apron are removed, only the Jewels of Chapter offices. That much is never in dispute among those who've done even a little research.
- Second comes the question about whether all Companions on the sidelines should wear sashes at all times, and not just officers. And the answer to that one is Yes. During the Royal Arch Degree the King presents the sash to the newly exalted Royal Arch Mason along with the apron, as two components of one set of regalia. He is to wear both from then onwards. The sash is not an item reserved for officers, but is part of the official regalia of every Royal Arch Mason. Again, the proof in support of that answer is readily available.

Maybe confusion about whether the sash is mandatory arises because too few new members purchase their own dress regalia, being satisfied – perhaps even wrongly encouraged – to feel free to always wear the undress cloth or visitor's apron. To some, that seems a great pity, in all respects. They argue that when we receive a visit from the Grand High Priest, for example, we should demonstrate our pride in being Royal Arch Masons by wearing whatever jewels we might have been awarded, and at least by wearing our formal dress regalia. Do we wear cloth aprons even then because we lack such pride? Do we wear them because we think it a waste to spend money on a dress apron, believing the cloth one to be a sufficient symbol? Or is it perhaps that we cannot afford to purchase our own dress regalia?

Whatever the reason, the odd result is that visitors to some Chapters now find at the door cloth aprons for their convenience, but no sashes. And even *members* of those Chapters who have no personal regalia also find only aprons available to them, with no accompanying sashes.

Apparently there's a further cause of confusion. It can well be argued that wearing lambskin dress aprons at every convocation will soon wear them out, or at least cause them to lose their pure and spotless appearance! Honest toil does that to the best clothing!

Reserving the dress aprons and keeping them clean for special occasions therefore makes good sense to many. And thus the preference for wearing cloth ones for normal regular meetings. Okay. But that's no reason for leaving off the sash. The sash is not part of the dress regalia *only*, but part of the *regular* regalia of a Royal Arch Mason, to be worn on all occasions, at every meeting, for all purposes, whether with a dress apron or a cloth one.

Have patience ... We're coming to the proof!

But first, another reason offered for not wearing sashes is that a Chapter doesn't own enough to provide one for every Royal Arch Mason in attendance. To some, that seems the oddest reason of all, because – in fact – both the Ritual and the *Constitution* make it quite clear that the sash is to be worn by everyone.

Therefore, if a Chapter wants to be in conformity with the Ritual, and in obedience with the Constitution, it should provide a sash to everybody, or encourage everybody to buy one. And no matter what a person may feel about spending money on buying a dress apron, there's no question about the sash – wearing one is mandatory!

There's another reason why attention is often focussed on the Sash:

- The question is sometimes asked, What's the symbolism of the design – the shapes and colours on the sash?

In searching for an answer to that, let's start with our *Constitution*. It says the following:

“All present and past *elected officers* of **Grand** Chapter shall wear a **tricoloured** sash ... pale blue on the inside, crimson in the middle and purple on the outside. All *other* present and past Grand Officers may wear a **bicolour** sash of purple diamonds indented with a border of crimson ... All sashes shall be worn over the left shoulder.”

Notice, that statement includes the word *diamonds*. And it occurs in more than one place. For example, the *Constitution* also says:

“**All** Royal Arch Masons, other than Grand and Past Grand Officers, are ... to wear a bicolour sash worn with a crimson *diamond* outward and silk fringe at the ends ... The sash shall be worn over the left shoulder.”

All sashes over the *left* shoulder. Royal Arch Mason sashes with crimson *diamonds*. Grand Chapter officer sashes with *purple* diamonds. Grand *elected* officer sashes, three stripes.

Okay? So what colour are the diamonds on your sash? Take a look.

How about your neighbour's? Can you tell from his sash whether he holds a Grand Chapter rank? He doesn't have to hold a Grand Chapter office this year. He could be a Past officer, awarded permanent rank for effective service in that office. If so, he's entitled to continue to wear a Grand Chapter officer sash with *purple* diamonds.

Why do we wear sashes at all, other than because we're told to? What are the origins of the sash?

A wonderful little book called *The Freemason's Pocket Reference Book*, written by Fred Pick and Norman Knight in 1955, tells us the following:

“The sash in Freemasonry is very largely a survival from the days when gentlemen regularly wore swords. Such weapons then played a greater part in Craft proceedings than they do now. And whereas most of the brethren attending would hang their swords with their hats, *officers* of the lodge would continue to wear the sashes which supported their scabbards. There are many traces of this practice remaining in the ‘additional’ Degrees and Orders.

“In Royal Arch Masonry,” that book goes on to say, “ a sash is an essential feature of the clothing worn under all three Constitutions of the Grand Chapters of England, Scotland, and Ireland. In England and Scotland it is worn over the *left* shoulder, although in pre-Union chapters

under the Moderns the reverse seems to have been the case. In Ireland the sash, which is scarlet like the trimming of the apron, is worn over the *right* shoulder but *under* the coat.

“In *Scottish* Craft lodges the sash is much more in evidence. *The Constitution and Laws* of the Grand Lodge of Scotland describe it as ‘a traditional part of Scottish masonic regalia’, and require office-bearers of Grand Lodge and Provincial and District Grand Lodges to wear them, in the thistle-green and gold of the prescribed aprons, over the *right* shoulder. Daughter-lodges may (and often do) wear them in the colour adopted for their aprons.

“Scandinavian regalia,” the same book says, “includes sashes which indicate the Degree reached by the wearer. In France and Belgium a light blue embordered sash is more usually a feature of Grand Orient-type *irregular* lodges but in some which have subsequently adhered to a regular Grand Lodge the old sashes are worn in addition to the aprons and collars, often in ‘lodge’ colours, laid down by the new jurisdiction.”

Amazing how much information is packed into that little book! A much bigger book, *Freemasons’ Guide and Compendium*, written five years earlier by Bernard E. Jones, has more:

“The Royal Arch sash resting on the left shoulder and hanging with its device on the right side is now the very reverse of the idea of supporting a sword to be drawn by the right hand while the scabbard is steadied with the left. But there is evidence that the sash used to be worn on the *right* shoulder. In one of the earliest portraits of a Royal Arch Companion – that of Richard Linnecar, dating back to the 1770s or so – the sash is so worn, and in a painting about forty years later it is still worn in that position. In both of the instances here concerned, the Companions were of the ‘Moderns’, and the possibility exists that our present method of wearing the sash originated with the ‘Antients’.”

And, finally, our old friend Albert Mackey, in his *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, written in the nineteenth century, would like us to believe this:

“The sash, or scarf, is analogous to the Zennar, or sacred cord, which was placed upon the candidate in the initiation into the mysteries of India, and which every Brahman was compelled to wear. This cord was woven with great solemnity, and being put upon the left shoulder, passed over to the right side and hung down as low as the fingers could reach.”

Is that why we wear our sashes over the left shoulder instead of the right? Draw your own conclusion.

Oh, the colours of the *diamonds*. Crimson is the colour of Royal Arch Masonry, right? And purple is not only the combination of the blue from the Craft Lodge with the crimson of the Chapter, but also the traditional colour worn by persons of imperial, royal, or other high rank.

Easy, yes? Okay, so what’s the symbolism of the diamonds? Or are they really two equilateral triangles back to back? Or are the diamond shapes formed by triangles on the outside? Or are the triangles actually a “tessellated border”? Those can be questions for you to research for yourself.

But if the research quoted here was done properly, one thing you've learned or had confirmed – that isn't a matter of opinion – is that we all should be wearing a Royal Arch sash at all times in every meeting, in all Chapter Degrees.

And in giving you that answer, as well as the others, hopefully your knowledge has been expanded, or at least your confidence encouraged.

But if you disagree with anything said here, let me also encourage you to do your own homework, and come back with your evidence, citing your sources. Or pick your own subject, and help answer somebody else's question. Masonic research is exciting and helpful. But sharing the results – that's the biggest reward.

Oh, one more thing you maybe thought had been forgotten. Not all sashes in Canada have crimson diamonds outward. You get one with purple diamonds outward, and you're *not* a Grand Chapter officer, maybe you were exalted in Ontario and brought your sash with you when you moved here. Or your Ontario supplier didn't get the message that you wanted one that conforms to the Grand Chapter of Nova Scotia's Constitution. It happens.

But now you know what the correct sash is for a Royal Arch Mason exalted here. And that it should be worn at every meeting and never taken off for any of the preliminary Degrees.

Thanks for listening.

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*(Original author: R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason, Grand Lecturer.  
First presented to Alexandra Chapter No. 11 in April 2000,  
and King Solomon Chapter No. 28, December 2000)*

## **THE SIX LIGHTS OF ROYAL ARCH MASONRY**

How many Royal Arch Chapters around the world include a piece of furniture called the Six Lights? How many in our Jurisdiction? You might be surprised by the answers.

One of our District Grand Superintendents was attending one Chapter in our Jurisdiction while the Royal Arch Degree was being presented. He listened with admiration as the Chapter's King did an excellent job with the Symbolic Lecture, explaining the "Forms, Ceremonies, Symbols and Ornaments of Royal Arch Masonry", until the King came to the part about the Six Lights.

It was only then that the DGS noticed something missing.

The King was saying that "we acknowledge Six Lights", and "These Lights are placed in the form of an equilateral triangle". But what the King was pointing to was a set of three tall candlesticks placed around a triangular pedestal upon which rested the Three Great Lights – the Bible, Square and Compasses.

Incidentally, the triangular pedestal bore the symbol of the Triple Tau.

Over in one corner of the room were three other shorter candlesticks, not used that evening at all.

Perhaps you can imagine the discussions that followed during later meetings, after that DGS had done some homework on the subject, and came back to the Chapter to encourage a process of questions and possible answers.

The Chapter strongly defended its practice, arguing that it had always used only the configuration of three tall candlesticks around the triangular pedestal, and always had placed the Three Great Lights on that pedestal, the combination placed between the Lodge Altar and the East. Way out in front of the Altar. Big gap.

Yes, the Lodge Altar was still present, although bereft of its Great Lights. And when the Companions knelt in a circle, they attempted to encircle both Lodge Altar and pedestal, if there were enough present. If not, they favoured encircling just the pedestal and candlesticks.

The other three shorter candlesticks had never been used in the memory of any member present, and were thought to belong to some other Masonic body, unidentified. The Six Lights, they explained, were seen by them as being the combination of the three tall candlesticks and the Three Great Lights.

And the geometrical division of the large equilateral triangle was achieved, they said, by the three points of the triangular pedestal.

I said earlier, "perhaps you can imagine the discussions." In fact, I invite you now to imagine what your own reactions might have been, depending on how much knowledge you already have of different practices around the Masonic world.

Let's first review what the Ritual says about the Six Lights.

Let me invite all of you who have Rituals in your hands or pockets to open them to page 116 in the 2009 or 2004 editions. If your copy is an older edition than that, well, it's wonderful that you've been a Royal Arch Mason for such a long time!

In any case, here's what our Ritual has always said:

“As Royal Arch Masons we acknowledge Six Lights – three greater and three lesser – together representing the Law and the Prophets, and by their number alluding to the Patriarchal, Mosaical, and Prophetical dispensations.

“The three greater represent the Sacred Word itself – expressing His power, which is creative, preservative, and annihilative.

“These Lights are placed in the form of an equilateral triangle, each of the lesser intersecting the line formed by the two greater; thus geometrically dividing the greater into three lesser triangles at its extremities, and by their union forming a fourth triangle in the centre – all of them equal and equilateral.”

Now where, in that Chapter that dared to be different, were those Six Lights placed to fit that description, in the form of an equilateral triangle?”

One argument was that three of the Lights were represented by the Great Lights – the Bible, Square and Compasses – and the other three represented by three Lesser Lights – the three tall candles.

But that's not what the Ritual is talking about. The Bible, Square and Compasses are already in use elsewhere, on the Altar – or they should be. And in a Chapter, the Great Lights are not surrounded by three candles. We Royal Arch Masons do not place three candles or Lesser Lights around the Altar as if we were still in a Craft Lodge.

If you count the Bible, Square and Compasses as three Lights, then we Royal Arch Masons add six more Lights – for a total of nine, if that's how you want to think about it. But in our Symbolic Lecture, the Ritual is talking about those other Six Lights.

In the 1924 edition of Mackey's *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, originally written by the famous Albert G. Mackey in 1873, assisted by Charles T. McClenachan (both of them Royal Arch Masons and also Thirty-third Degree Scottish Rite Masons), and revised this century by another pair of Masonic scholars, Hawkins and Hughan, we're told this:

“In the American system of the Royal Arch there is no symbol of this kind, but in the English system there are six lights – three lesser and three greater – placed in the form of two equilateral triangles. The three lesser represent the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations; the three greater the Creative, Preservative, and Destructive power of God. The four lesser triangles, formed by the intersection of the two great triangles, are emblematic of the four Degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry.”

Let's get that last sentence firmly in mind: “The four lesser triangles, formed by the intersection of the two great triangles, are emblematic of the four Degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry.”



Remember, in England, as in some other Jurisdictions, the Royal Arch Degree is given as the fourth – as the second half of the Master Mason Degree. The Mark Master, Past Master, and Most Excellent Master Degrees are handled entirely separately.

So, we're talking here about the origin of this idea of a special layout of Six Lights. The origin isn't the U.S.A. – they don't use it down there. We here in Canada inherited it from the English system. It's in their ritual today, and in ours, too.

And we preserve it because it helps teach lessons about God, about the history of our culture and heritage, and about Masonic history.

Three of the Six Lights, the tall important ones at the three points of the big outside triangle, represent the three essential characteristics of God: His Creative, Preservative and Destructive powers. That description used by Mackey comes from way back in antiquity. You can find it in the oldest scriptures, including those that found their way into the Bible, and it's reflected also in our Ritual. Why?

Because it's meant to make you stop and think and understand more about God, and deepen your belief in Him.

As the Lecture in the Royal Arch Degree says, "It is calculated to impress upon our minds a firm belief in the existence and attributes of a supreme being".

The other three of the Six Lights, the shorter ones, each sits in the middle of one of the sides of the big triangle – or should. Then join any two of those smaller lights, and you have the base of a new triangle, each with one of the big lights at its tip. Three tips, three smaller triangles. And the three base lines of those three small triangles form the sides of a fourth triangle of the same smaller size, in the middle.

Mackey and others offer the idea that those four smaller triangles represent the three Degrees of the Craft Lodge plus the fourth Degree of the Royal Arch. The implication is that the Royal Arch Degree is at the centre, at the heart, surrounded and protected by the first three Degrees; or, if you prefer, those who are looking for the True Word must search beyond the outside surface, into the heart of our rituals.

Those who wrote our modern rituals – and by 'modern' I mean the rituals that emerged in writing in the 1700s – those ritualists loaded the Royal Arch Degree with dozens of allegories, metaphors, allusions, and direct quotations, all designed to stimulate thought and questions and research and speculative thinking ... to provoke and challenge us to ask and try to answer questions about Light and Truth ... to show us that they saw and understood more than appears on the surface ... and that we can see and understand more, too, once we realize that words and phrases that we don't at first understand do refer to knowledge we can investigate, can acquire, can come to understand, and can derive benefit from.

The Six Lights of Royal Arch Masonry, for example, and the ideas they represent, aren't readily understood by everyone. But that doesn't mean they're meaningless; nor that because their meanings are not understood by some they're not understood by any.

The importance of the presence of the Six Lights in every Chapter is that their meanings can be understood by those who try hard enough to understand them. And even if that's only a few men per Chapter per generation, and only those few derive all the benefit intended to be available to all, isn't that sufficient reason for every one of us to feel a sense of duty to try to help?

Isn't that what Freemasonry – and especially Royal Arch Masonry – is all about? The team effort to help each good man in his personal effort to make himself into a better man. Better, by being exposed to more knowledge, more ideas, more pointers towards Light and Truth.

The Six Lights might not fully illuminate the path for everyone. But, for centuries, for generation after generation, in thousands of Chapters, as intended by those who created our rituals, they have helped some.

We speak of our mysteries being “veiled” – not obvious – requiring effort – having their greatest and most beneficial impact on those who figure them out through their own additional efforts.

But it was never the intention of the ritualists that the significance of the Six Lights should be made especially difficult to spot. On the contrary, the Six Lights are supposed to be front and centre in our Chapters, calling attention to themselves; inviting questions and investigation and speculation.

But not in that Chapter where only three candles were lit, and where the Great Lights were moved from the Altar and placed on a pedestal instead!

The conclusion that DGS drew was that the Chapter at one time in its history had used both sets of candlesticks, the three tall ones still in use, and the three shorter ones sitting over in the corner, their purpose at some point forgotten.

And the pedestal with the Triple Tau design on it might once have been used during the Mark Master Mason Degree at an Overseer's station, a common usage elsewhere, and perhaps seen by a generous member who'd travelled, returned, and gifted the Chapter with one or more, but who was no longer around to correct its misuse as an Altar.

Would that have been your conclusion? Thanks for listening to this examination of the question, possible answers, and review of the true values involved.

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*(R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason, Grand Lecturer. September 2003)*

### THREE TEMPLES IN ROYAL ARCH MASONRY

Let me tell you about an occasion recently when one of our Grand Lecturers watched a Chapter put on the Royal Arch Degree, and the Principal Sojourner added a touch that prompted some discussion afterwards.

As the Grand Lecturer told the story, the Principal Sojourner came to where he led the Candidates out of the Chapter Room, to the place where they were to clear the rubbish of the old Temple, and make their valuable discoveries. The first discovery, remember, was the Keystone. Now, where did the Candidates discover the Keystone, out in that Chapter's Anteroom?

Remember, according to our Ritual, when the rubbish is removed the workmen find – and I quote – “the top of an arch”. They find the Keystone in the *top* of that arch. Later, they dig around the top of that arch, find a hole, and one of their members goes down into the hole, tied to a rope. And it's down in that hole, *under* that arch, that they discover the three Squares – the Jewels of our three ancient Grand Masters – and later the Imitation of the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, some Masonic Temples, Halls, Lodge or Chapter Rooms, have a 2-storey arrangement containing an arch beneath the floor of the upper storey. The Red Room of the old Halifax Temple was one example. There, it was possible to follow the ritual exactly, removing rubbish, finding the top of an arch, opening a hole, and going down into the hole – all very realistic.

But most can't. They have no hole in the floor; they don't tie the Candidate to a rope and let him down underneath. They pretend in some other way, or just collect each item from the Anteroom and use the ritual text to explain what's going on.

This particular Chapter had no hole, and no set way of enabling its Candidates to make the 'discoveries'. But on this one evening, the Principal Sojourner came up with the idea of taking just the top of the Chapter's arch assembly, placing that top down on the floor, partially covering it, and then having the Candidates uncover it and discover the Keystone. That little touch effectively conveyed to the Candidates that the Keystone was being found in the *ruins* of King Solomon's Temple.

The previous sequence of Degrees had illustrated the completion of King Solomon's Temple. In the Most Excellent Master Degree, that Keystone had been placed in the top of the Arch, to complete the First Temple, King Solomon's; an allegory based on an event supposed to have taken place around 1,000 BC.

However, in the Royal Arch Degree, the drama takes place 500 years later, around 500 BC. The Royal Arch Degree is about the building of the Second Temple, above the ruins of the First. In the Royal Arch Degree, it isn't King Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif, who are the builders. They're all long dead. Now it's Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai, and they're “rebuilding the House of the Lord”; building the Second Temple, and making valuable discoveries under the ruins of the First.

It's sometimes difficult to remember the sequence of events in our Masonic Degrees. Our ritual perhaps doesn't do a completely effective job for all of us, in emphasising that the Temple we complete in the Most Excellent Master Degree isn't the same Temple that's featured in the Royal

Arch Degree; that there's a 500 year gap between those two Degrees; that the valuable items were put in place beneath a principal arch of King Solomon's Temple and rediscovered 500 years later during excavation of its ruins; and that the guys in charge of that excavation, and of the building of the Second Temple were the characters our present-day Officers represent – Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai.

There's also another Temple, talked about throughout our Degrees, which is, in fact, the most important one of all. And that's the perfect Spiritual Temple which we, as Royal Arch Masons, are attempting to build within ourselves, helped by the lessons we learn here.

That Grand Lecturer felt grateful to the Principal Sojourner of that Chapter he was visiting, for adding that little touch of placing the top of the Arch on the floor, to more clearly illustrate the idea of the rediscovery of the Keystone in the ruins, 500 years later.

It's the sort of extra touch which helps prompt us to think more deeply about the stories in our rituals; about their deeper meanings; about the First Temple (King Solomon's), the Second Temple (Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai's), and Royal Arch Masonry's Temple, the most important of all, the Spiritual one we are helped to erect within ourselves each time we're stimulated to think about these stories, meanings and lessons, and comprehend them better.

Thanks for listening.

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*(November 1996)*

## WHERE IS THE TEMPLE?

Our late Grand Historian, Right Excellent Companion J. Douglas Welsh, created a talk on Solomon's Temple and what happened to it, that contains as much information as anyone could absorb in one sitting, while at the same time echoing with phrases and ideas we've also heard elsewhere – in Masonic rituals, church, Bible readings, even on television.

It's one of those talks that can help fill in gaps in your knowledge, while somehow also increasing your interest in discovering more.

For those reasons I'd like to offer a slightly abbreviated version of it here today. Companion Welsh titled his talk "Where is the Temple?", a question intended to remind us that, through Freemasonry, history can come alive in your heart as well as in your mind.

As Companions of the Holy Royal Arch, Companion Welsh said, we perpetuate some of the legends behind the erection of Solomon's Temple to the Most High, built in Jerusalem in about 1005 BC. Our Craft uses this large symbol of Faith and Devotion as a framework on which to graft our lessons in morality and natural justice.

But most of us do not really know very much about Solomon's Temple, nor about the several Temples which followed the original on a site still regarded as sacred by three of the largest religious groups in the world.

Ancient texts tell us that the First Temple was constructed on the threshing floor of a large farm. Second *Samuel*, chapter 24, tells us that King David erected an altar to the Most High on this spot, and offered burnt sacrifice and peace offerings around 1017 BC. First *Chronicles*, chapter 21, confirms the details, changing the farm owner's name, and changing the price paid him by King David from fifty shekels to six hundred shekels, but the rest of the tale is essentially identical.

Brother General Sir Charles Warren, founding Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge Number 2076, the famous English Lodge of Research, identified the location of that "threshing floor" as being the holy place now known as "The Dome of the Rock".

The Temple sat astride the boundary dividing the lands of the Tribe of Judah from the territories of the Tribe of Benjamin, thus linking the northern and southern tribes.

The famous brazen pillars with which we are familiar – Boaz and Jachin – did not perform a structural duty in this Temple, but only framed the portico or entrance, being placed there as memorials and monuments.

This Temple was destroyed in 588 BC by Nebuzaradan, Captain of the Guard to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, when he captured Jerusalem and the country of Judah.

Nebuzaradan was quite thorough in his work, as the First Temple was thrown down, stone from stone (as was the entire City of Jerusalem) to make it impossible for the remaining Jews to use the city as a rallying point for further rebellion against the Babylonian king.

Just fifty years later, Cyrus, son of Cambyses, King of Persia, had overthrown the Babylonian Empire and become Ruler. Two years after his conquest, he freed the Israelites from their slavery to Babylon, and allowed them to return to their ancestral lands, and not only gave them back the land, but he also contributed heavily to the costs of rebuilding the Temple.

Cyrus held the very enlightened belief (for the time) that it was not a bad thing to be nice to the Gods of other peoples, because you never knew when you might need a hand from somewhere!

This second Temple was the Temple of Zerubbabel, who we commemorate in our ritual through the office of Excellent King.

Construction of this Temple was no short-term work project. It took from 536 BC until 515 BC, the sixth year of the reign of Darius, to complete. But with even the best workers and the rich support of the King of the Persians, the Second Temple was but a pale shadow of the First, so far as the Israelites were concerned.

Solomon's brazen pillars had been broken up and melted down, and the precious vessels and furnishings of the First Temple had been taken to Babylon. The Ark of the Covenant was missing; "stolen" according to some sources, "hidden" according to others, before the Babylonian Captivity.

Not only was this symbol of the Israelites' close relationship with their God missing, so were the artifacts which had formerly contained the Sacred Fire (from which the flames for burnt offerings were taken), and the Shekinah or Presence of God, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Urim and Thummim. These objects were at the centre of the worship of the Israelites, from the time of their travels in the deserts of Arabia, and their absence from the new Temple led to changes in their whole way of living their Faith.

In 20 BC, Herod, King of the Jews under the oversight of Rome and Julius Caesar, decided that the Temple in his capital city was too old and worn, and proceeded to build the Third Temple, on the same site as the first two. His builders pulled down and destroyed the whole of Zerubbabel's Second Temple, with the exception of the platform used on Holy Days to show the sacrifices and burnt offerings to the people.

Herod had a purely secular motive in building the new Temple. He and his family were foreigners in Israel. They were Jews, but of another country, and had been brought in by the Romans, who had promised the Jews a King of their own blood.

This Third Temple did not last nearly as long as its predecessors. In 70 AD, the Emperor Titus captured Jerusalem, ending the rebellion of the Maccabees, and the city and Temple were destroyed by fire. The Emperor Titus carried the holy vessels from the Temple to Rome as spoils of war. They were lost at that time, and have not been seen since.

Today, only one wall of the Temple remains, that being the area known as "The Wailing Wall", where today's Israelis and pilgrims of all three "Faiths of the Book" can still visit the Holy Ground where Solomon built the Temple to the Most High that his father, King David, was not permitted to build.

*Where is the temple?*

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That third Temple has never been rebuilt, and Jewish tradition foretells that the building of the Fourth Temple will usher in the “End of Days”, so frankly, I’m not real anxious for that building project to start.

But this single building, so often destroyed, so often renewed, is held as a symbol of the world, and thus a symbol for the guidance of Man, that the spiritual Temple we are encouraged to build within ourselves be constantly improved and enlarged, to the betterment of all.

Our thanks should go to our late Companion Doug Welsh for those facts and wise words. And my thanks go to you for listening to them here today.

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*(First delivered to:  
George S. Wright Chapter #27, Bedford, NS, December 4, 2001)*

## WISDOM, STRENGTH AND BEAUTY

In 1993, one of our Chapter High Priests presented a Rededication Service Address focussed on our closing prayer about Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. It was intended to be educational as well as inspirational.

Companions, will you allow me a few minutes to share that talk with you now, because I agree that through more careful consideration of the different levels of meaning in our closing prayer we can both learn more and be inspired further.

That Excellent Companion alluded first to an observation made by many Masonic writers: that often it's possible to find three references, alternative implications, or overlapping meanings, in so many parts of our rituals.

It's true of this one: *Wisdom, Strength and Beauty*.

And as with other ancient texts, so with our written rituals (those writers suggest), we should look beyond literal meanings. We should look also for interpretations – often easy to find, perhaps with a little digging. Some come clear only after years of exposure to our work, and increasing familiarity with it, as patterns emerge, research trails are explored, original references are discovered, and reasons are perceived – the reasons why our predecessors selected what they wove into the texts which we, many generations later, hear, learn, repeat and consider.

And when we do carefully consider any one of the many special phrases or word-sets sprinkled throughout our texts (such as Wisdom, Strength and Beauty), we can – often – interpret such a phrase in three different ways; from three perspectives; draw three meanings; multiply our benefits; brighten the light by which we see; expand our horizons of knowledge, and come step by step closer to understanding why we search, what we seek, and where we might find the ultimate answers.

In the Royal Arch Degree, during the King's Lecture, we hear these words:

*"The number three has always been held in high estimation by the Fraternity. We find it pervading the whole ritual."*

Indeed we do:

- The three Great Lights: the Bible, Square and Compasses.
- And the three Lesser Lights: representing the sun, moon and Master of the Lodge.
- The three senior officers of the Lodge: the Master, and Senior and Junior Wardens.
- Three Degrees. Three distinct knocks. Three ways to meet, act and part.
- Three Masters of the Veils. Three words each – three times three.
- The Council of Three, plus the three Companions Captain of the Host, Principal Sojourner and Royal Arch Captain, plus the three Veil Masters again – and again three times three.
- The Triple Tau, Royal Arch Masonry's emblem.



But the number three is no *new* focal point. It had a sacred, magical or mystical significance among practically all ancient cultures. Several used it in one way or another to signify the Deity or Supreme Being who has three essential attributes: Omnipresence, Omniscience and Omnipotence.

The Hebrews used the number three for the yod – a point within an equilateral triangle – a triangle with three equal sides and equal angles – a mode of expressing the incommunicable name of Jehovah.

Many religions and mythologies – many – make reference to or use of the concept of the Triad (a succession or relationship of three, a ruling trinity, or a being in three forms):

- Osiris, Isis and Horus;
- Ormuzd, Mithras and Ahriman;
- Brahma, Vishnu and Siva;
- Zeus, Poseidon and Hades;
- Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto;
- Iaccus, Persephone and Demeter;
- Woden, Friga and Thor;
- Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

So, by no means has the number three been imbued with significance only by Masons. Quite the reverse. Our forefathers who planned, prepared and perpetuated our rituals consciously and carefully crafted them to include trios, triads and other threesomes as a reflection, reconstruction and reinvigoration of what others had done long before.

And they did so with enough obviousness to make sure we shouldn't overlook it; to encourage us to think about it; and to incite us to research it. They wanted to send us a message – or perhaps three messages:

One message is given in the Symbolism Lecture following the Master Mason Degree.

The wording varies from one ritual to another, but here's how it went in the old *Webb Standard Formula Ritual*:

*“How many grand Masonic pillars are there? Three: Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. Why are they so called? Because it is necessary there should be wisdom to contrive, strength to support, and beauty to adorn all great and important undertakings. By whom are they represented? By Solomon King of Israel, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif, who were our first three Most Excellent Grand Masters. Why are they said to represent them? Solomon King of Israel represented the pillar of wisdom because by his wisdom he contrived that superb model of excellence that immortalized his name. Hiram King of Tyre represented the pillar of strength because he supported King Solomon in this great and important undertaking. Hiram Abif represented the pillar of beauty because by his cunning workmanship the Temple was beautified and adorned.”*

A sufficiently valuable message? – that wisdom, strength and beauty are needed to contrive, support and adorn all great and important undertakings? Perhaps.

But there's another reference in the Craft Rite to wisdom and strength. At the raising of the body, in the Third Degree drama in the *Webb* work, King Solomon says these words:

*Masons should ever remember that when the strength and wisdom of man fails, there is an inexhaustible supply above, yielded to us through the power of prayer.*

Prayer is given as an inexhaustible source of wisdom and strength.

Prayer is inserted as an alternative for beauty – or perhaps a metaphor for the way to access it. And an allegorical meaning is offered, that God – to whom we pray – is the source of all wisdom, strength and beauty.

Again, a sufficient explanation for the multitudinous use of threes in Masonry? A sufficiently valuable message? Perhaps.

But we as Royal Arch Masons know that a fuller and larger message is offered to those who seek further light and come knocking at our door.

We say that the reason the number three has always been held in high estimation by the Fraternity is:

*because it refers to God;*

*it takes us back to when the Hebrews needed a way to express his incommunicable name, and used the yod – the point in the equilateral triangle.*

*Masonry therefore weaves into the fabric of its work – via all the uses of the number three in the Craft Degrees, and then via this further explanation in the Royal Arch Degree (both now taken together) – an allegorical emphasis on the historical, present, future and eternally transcending importance of God.*

The Royal Arch Degree, we are told, is “calculated to impress on our minds a firm belief in the existence and attributes of a Supreme Being, and it teaches us a due reverence for his great and holy name.” In its methods of doing so, it includes many references to ancient writings which compose the Hebrew Volume of Sacred Law (which Christians call the *Old Testament*); and to writings as old or older, from other parts of the world. The roots of those references can be traced to the mysteries of Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and far beyond.

And to the student of those references – to the reader of those older writings – to the amazed eyes of scholars who keep coming across such evidence of how our rituals reach back across not just centuries but millennia of questing, creative and reverent thought – to fill their minds with wonder and challenge and ever-greater reward – comes a third level of meaning, a third message, a third opportunity to understand:

- Freemasonry is a modern version of an old tutorial, told time and again by wise and good men wherever civilized society develops the will and capability to listen, to hear and to understand:

*Without a belief in and reverence for a Supreme Being – and without the hope of ultimately standing before the great white throne, knowing we have sought His grace and having confidence in His mercy – we are nothing and can amount to nothing.*

On those essential foundations, inherited from the ancients, are built the great and fundamental principles our institution seeks to impress on our minds; for then and only then can we feel that friendship, that union, that fervency and zeal, and that purity of heart and rectitude of conduct, which should actuate every Royal Arch Mason and which are essentially necessary to gain admission into the Sanctum Sanctorum above.

Here, where we consider those virtues, we are also necessarily led to contemplate, with gratitude and admiration, the sacred source from whence all earthly comforts flow.

Here, at the end of each convocation, our closing prayer recalls what we started to learn through the allegory of the Three Pillars of the Lodge, represented by the Worshipful Master, Senior Warden and Junior Warden, who represent in turn King Solomon's Wisdom, King Hiram's Strength, and the beauty of Hiram Abif's integrity. And here we rephrase it in terms of reverence for the source of *all* wisdom, strength and beauty, when we say:

- *By the wisdom of the Supreme High Priest may we be directed, by His strength may we be enabled, and by the beauty of virtue may we be incited to perform the obligations here enjoined on us, to keep inviolably the secrets here unfolded to us, and invariably to practise all those duties out of the Chapter which are inculcated in it.*

Here, then, we inculcate those duties we should practise before the world, in the sight of God.

But we cannot do so effectively without help. We need to be directed by wisdom, supported by strength, and incited by the beauty of virtue. We can tap an inexhaustible supply of wisdom and strength through prayer – prayer to the source of all beauty.

Belief that that is so – that the source exists – that there is a Supreme Being who is the epitome of all wisdom, strength and beauty – is not in itself a religion, though it is common to all virtuous religions and always has been. But surely it is the fundamental principle which inspired the minds and enlivened the souls of our Masonic forefathers.

As we listen to the literal words in our rituals, as we recognize the additional symbolic and allegorical meanings, and as we learn more about the patterns of truth and virtue which have actuated all good men down through the millennia, may our minds be so inspired, and our souls be so enlivened.

Amen. So mote it be.

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*(Rededication Service Address by George I.H. Mason,  
then MEHP of Alexandra Chapter No. 11, April 1993)*

## **THE VIRTUAL PAST MASTER DEGREE SOME REMINDERS**

The ritual for our Degree of Virtual Past Master, introduced in 2001 and adopted as official for every Chapter by the Annual Convocation of 2002, has received virtually unanimous support as a vast improvement over what we'd been using before.

But it's interesting to note that there still remain some who argue that Actual Past Masters of Craft Lodges shouldn't need to take the Chapter Virtual Past Master Degree – or that their Chapters shouldn't have to go to the trouble of presenting it to them.

There should be no discussion on the subject, because our Constitution makes it mandatory, and all of us have sworn to obey our Constitution. But the argument is based on the idea that the Lodge ceremony of installing a Master, and the Chapter Degree of Virtual Past Master, are the same.

They aren't.

One of our Grand Lecturers wrote a talk some time ago, comparing the two, and I'd like to read that to you this evening for its educational value. He didn't mean at the time to write a definitive statement of inarguable fact, or lay down the law beyond all dispute. So you might find yourself disagreeing with some of what he said, or wanting to expand on it.

But here's what he said at the time:

The ceremony in a Craft Lodge, he argued, installs a Master and leaves him in the Oriental Chair for a year. It includes a section governed by a Board of Installed Masters. If you want to think of that ceremony as a Degree, best think of it as the Installed Master Degree. But nowadays it should never be called the Past Master Degree because it does not create a Past Master. A Master of a Lodge is not a Past Master until he has *completed* his term as Master.

The Degree given in a Lodge of Virtual Past Masters takes a Master Mason into and out of the Oriental Chair all in one session, whether he has the rank of Actual Past Master of a Master Masons Lodge, or not.

It is a ceremony of *Passing* the Chair. Its purpose is to grant to a Master Mason the rank of Virtual Past Master, and teach him the essentials necessary for governing a Lodge successfully – that he do so not in a haughty or arbitrary manner but agreeably to the ancient landmarks, usages and regulations of the Craft – so as to prepare him for the even more important lessons of the Most Excellent Master and Royal Arch Degrees.

If he is already an Actual Craft Lodge Past Master, the Chapter Degree has the values of *reminding* him of those essential requirements; of emphasizing that they are no less necessary in a Royal Arch Chapter; and of teaching him that the Most Sublime Degree of the Royal Arch was once made available *only* to Lodge Past Masters and *never* to Master Masons, not then, and is therefore still to be considered by Master Masons as an honour subject to the separate ballot of Royal Arch Masons, and not an automatic right.

The Degree also has the value of helping an Actual Past Master recall one of the Signs, the sequence of Grips, and the Word of a Lodge Master, which he has experienced first hand usually only once.

Note that I say *one* of the Signs. There are *two* Signs given by a Board of Installed Masters. But one of those – chopping off the hand – is similar to one of the Signs of a Mark Master Mason. It is the other Sign, splitting the tongue from root to tip, that is similar in both the Installed Master ceremony and the Virtual Past Master Degree – although again in the Virtual Past Master Degree there is an extension not required of a Craft Lodge Master.

So let me repeat. The content of the ritual for Installing a Master of a Lodge, and the content of the Virtual Past Master Degree presented by a Royal Arch Chapter, are substantially different. If you aren't aware of how different they are, try memorizing them. Memorizing one will not enable you to present the other. As anyone will tell you who has done both, the two memorization tasks are two very different challenges.

Almost the first difference is that the Candidate here must approach the East by five steps, to take the fifth Degree. Remember, installation as Master of a Craft Lodge is not really a Degree at all. It's simply a ceremony. So, the Third Degree was that of Master Mason, the fourth is that of Mark Master Mason, and the fifth is that of Virtual Past Master.

Next difference. The Signs.

In fact, only the Grips and Word are the same – or should be. (In truth, attend Installation ceremonies in several different Lodges and you'll probably see several different Signs and Grips, and might even overhear different words.)

So, for once and for all, let's accept that regardless of how much the two ceremonies are similar or differ, and whether the differences were intentional or have resulted from revisions down through the centuries, the Virtual Past Master Degree given by us is thought to be the same as the ceremony of installing an Actual Lodge Master only by those who've never had the opportunity to study the differences, plus those who've never listened particularly carefully, plus those who tend in any case to sleep through all such ceremonies!

Oh, and *add* all Master Masons who aren't Installed Masters or Actual Past Masters, because they've never experienced the first and therefore have nothing to compare to the second.

And add most Actual Past Masters, because they were too nervous during the entire evening of their installation to recall much of anything anyway.

Which leaves very few, if anybody, who can't derive some benefit from receiving the Virtual Past Master Degree here. And I've never ever heard anybody say they thought they'd wasted their time receiving it.

So, we should feel pretty confident that we're not wasting our time presenting it.

Brethren, you now discover me [*perform the actions*] approaching you from the East under the Due Guard and Sign of a Past Master.

They are two separate actions. It's entirely possible to give the Due Guard alone. And that's all that should be given to any stranger, as an invitation to him to respond by giving you the Sign. That, many say, is exactly why the first action is called a Due Guard ... to remind you to guard against giving the Sign to someone you aren't absolutely certain is also a Royal Arch Virtual Past Master like you.

But when you're entering or retiring from a Lodge of Virtual Past Masters, or rising to address the Right Worshipful Master, you give both the Due Guard and Sign together.

So, this is the Due Guard, and alludes to the symbolic penalty of your Obligation, that of having your tongue split from root to tip.

This is the Sign, and alludes to the additional portion of the penalty of your Obligation, that of suffering the infliction of the several former penalties. You'll perceive that it covers the symbolic penalty of the Entered Apprentice – having the throat cut from ear to ear – the penalty of the Fellow Craft – having the left breast torn open – and the penalty of the Master Mason – having the body severed in twain.

The Grip of a Virtual Past Master is the same as that of an Installed Master. It starts with the Strong Grip of a Master Mason or Lion's Paw, the thumbs interlaced, the fingers divided two on each side of the wrist.

The left hand is then brought into action, creating a span by clasping the forearm in the middle. The left hand is then moved to grasp the upper arm behind the elbow, thus moving from the span to another grip.

“From a grip to a span, from a span to a grip.”

Now comes something of a mystery, the additional words: “A two-fold cord is strong, but a three-fold cord is not easily broken.”

What are these two-fold and three-fold cords?

Is the Strong Grip – the True Grip of a Master Mason – a two-fold cord? Is any grip involving two hands a two-fold grip?

Or is it the move “from a grip to a span” that creates a two-fold grip? “Two-fold” because there have been two movements?

And is it then the move from the span to the final grip that creates the three-fold grip? “Three-fold” because there have been three movements?

Or does the Three-fold Grip result from the involvement of a third person.

Remember that the new Master can be seated in the Oriental Chair only with the aid of a third person; a third person who takes the new Master's left arm by the same grips.

Whatever your personal interpretation of those terms, two-fold and three-fold, remember that the Grip of a Past Master starts with the True Grip of a Master Mason – the Strong Grip or Lion's Paw, and then progresses from a grip to a span, and from a span to a grip.

The name of the Grip, given as the Master is seated in the Oriental Chair, is G\*\*\*\*m, and signifies Stone Squarer or Stone Squarers. Some say the singular, a stone squarer, is G\*\*\*em, and the plural, stone squarers, is G\*\*\*im. If you can remember either pronunciation, you're doing as well as any Installing Officer.

Finally, consider having some discussion on how your Chapter would go about the process of welcoming and processing a visitor from Ontario, or somewhere that does not offer any form of Past Master Degree, and from where any visitor to a Chapter in our Jurisdiction must according to our Constitution be "healed" by taking at least our Virtual Past Master Obligation, and receiving the so-called "secrets" of that Degree before he can sit with us in Chapter.

However, be warned that such a visitor will probably be disappointed not to receive the whole Degree, because while it's the shortest of the four we offer, and often the most under-rated, it's the one most desired by visitors!

Now Companions, if any of you want to speak up in reaction to what you've just heard, we should record what you say, inform our District Assistant Grand Lecturer, and have him take the controversial element to the Ritual and Education Committee of which he's a member.

But meanwhile, thanks for listening to me.

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*(Adapted from a talk by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason,  
then an Assistant Grand Lecturer,  
first presented to Alexandra Chapter No. 11, February, 1999)*

## WORDS OF EXPLANATION

A few years back, our then Grand Lecturer, Companion George Mason, found some ways to help himself and others remember the lines delivered by the Masters of the Veils. He wrote them into a talk, which turned out to be educational and amusing, as well as helpful. Here's what he wrote starting with a line of ritual:

“What are his words of explanation?”

Where do we hear that? Everyone knows, yes? Three times during every opening of this Chapter, and three more during the closing, the Most Excellent High Priest asks the question: “What are his words of explanation?” – asks it of the Masters of the Second and Third Veils, and of the Royal Arch Captain.

“What are his words of explanation?”

“Cast his rod on the ground.” That's one example, right? Those are words of explanation, aren't they?

And the others: “Put his hand into his bosom.” That the right wording? (I always have trouble with that sign. I can never get my hand in easily, because my collar and sash keep getting in the way!)

What's the last set of words of explanation? “Take of the water of the river and pour it upon the dry land.” Right?

Nope. I'm wrong, you're right. Those sets of words *describe* the signs, but don't *explain* them.

“What are his words of explanation?”

Words of explanation ... explanatory of this sign ... cast his rod on ... who explains each sign? Does each Veil Master explain the sign *given* by the preceding Master, or *belonging* to the previous one?

Do you know, it was years before it finally registered on me that when the Most Excellent High Priest asks that question – “What are his words of explanation?” – *he always gets the same answer, every time.*

Always the same answer. Same words.

Every time.

From everyone he asks – the Master of the Second Veil, Master of the Third, Royal Arch Captain. Always the same answer.

What's the answer – the same one given by all of them, every time?

*“Explanatory of this sign, and are to be found in the writings of Moses.”*



And that's half the problem – they don't explain, those Masters and the Royal Arch Captain! They are asked: "What are his words of explanation?" But, in fact, they don't ever give any words of explanation. All they say is that the words are: "Explanatory of this sign, and are to be found in the writings of Moses."

Early on, Companion Mason said, soon after I became a Royal Arch Mason, I looked up the writings of Moses in my Masonic Bible, found the explanations of the signs, satisfied my curiosity – and promptly forgot what the explanations were.

I also forgot that the explanations are never given in the ritual itself.

And, ever since, I've been having trouble remembering – not just remembering the explanations, but remembering the signs, the descriptive wording of those signs; which ones are given by which Masters, and even which sets of passwords go with which Master.

Are there some ways to help a person remember? Some memory hooks?

Well, one of them is the answer to the question, "What are his words of explanation?"

It doesn't matter whether you're Master of the Second Veil or Third Veil, or Royal Arch Captain – the answer is always the same: "Explanatory of this sign, and are to be found in the writings of Moses."

Once you discover that everyone always gives the same answer to that question, you no longer have to struggle to remember it. It's just a matter of which sign to give while saying those words. "Explanatory of this sign, and are to be found in the writings of Moses." Easy.

But which sign?

Which sign goes with which station? And which words?

"Are you a Royal Arch Mason?" the Most Excellent High Priest asks the Master of the First Veil.

"I Am That I Am," answers the First.

"Where is the Master of the Second Veil stationed?" – and then: "What are your duties there, Companion Master of the Second Veil?"

"To guard the Second Veil and admit none without the words, sign and words of explanation of the Master of the First Veil."

"What are his words?"

Pity the poor Veil Masters! Every opening and closing, each has to try to remember or figure out which set of three words is his; which sign; which words of explanation; how to get his hand under his collar and sash; not to mention avoiding the confusion of additional thoughts such as: whose rod is being thrown upon the ground – Moses' or Aaron's – and why?

And when you stick your hand into your bosom, are you giving something like the sign of fidelity, but hiding the fingers for some reason?

And does the pouring of water on the dry land have something to do with desert irrigation or the annual flooding of the River Nile?

Oh, perhaps it's only the calmest among us who have those additional thoughts. For most, we hear that question: "What are his words?" And off we go – nosedive into hysteria:

*Oh, no! What are his words? I don't remember! And next you're going to ask me for his sign, which I also don't remember, and then for his words of explanation which I never was able to find in my copy of the ritual! Oh, God! Why am I the only one who has such trouble memorizing this stuff?*

But remarkable, isn't it! Every opening, every closing, six times at every convocation, maybe with a little prompting or a peek at the book, the Veil Masters do somehow manage to give their words, describe their signs for all of us to hear and think about, and then show the signs and tell us where we can find the explanations.

Six times at every convocation, ten convocations each year, sixty times a year we hear those questions: "What are his words?" Then: "What is his sign?" And: "What are his words of explanation?"

And yet, how many of us can easily remember what is said at each of the Veils, in the correct order?

Thing is, most of us don't have to remember, right? We're not Veil Masters, not any more. Not until we're called upon to act temporarily in one of those chairs, and then there's a frantic moment of searching through the book for the right lines; or searching through the old rubble of memory for them, desperately hoping to find the right ones for the veil we've been given.

"What are his words?"

It's the names being asked for, there. Names used as pass words.

The first group of names is Shem, Ham and Japheth – sons of Noah, who helped him build Noah's Ark, the boat needed to save them from the flood.

Noah got the tip-off from God, and the boys had the necessary skills.

The second group is Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel – they built the Ark of the Covenant, the box with the Cherubim on top. Moses got the plans from God, and Aholiab and Bezaleel were the craftsmen who did the work.

Third group: Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai – they built the Second Temple; were in charge when the imitation of the Ark of the Covenant – the safety copy – was found underneath the ruins of Solomon's Temple.

But remembering in which order those groups of names should come – which veil says which group – well, actually, that's easy:

In history:

- Noah's Ark came first, as did Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, back before the great flood;
- then Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel came out of the desert later with their Ark of the Covenant;

- and finally, underneath the arches – the Royal Arches – in the rubble – Joshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai’s craftsmen found the imitation of the Ark of the Covenant.

And the signs?

The sign belonging to the Master of the First Veil, but quoted by the Master of the Second Veil, is:

“In imitation of that given by the Lord unto Moses when he commanded him to *cast his rod on the ground.*”

And the Master of the Third Veil says:

“In imitation of that given by the Lord unto Moses when he commanded him to *put his hand into his bosom.*”

And the Royal Arch Captain says:

“In imitation of that given by the Lord unto Moses when he commanded him to *take of the water of the river and pour it upon the dry land.*”

All three of them start out the same way – identical words:

*“In imitation of that given by the Lord unto Moses when he commanded him to ...”*

Always the same starting words, by everyone:

“What is his sign?”

*“In imitation of that given by the Lord unto Moses when he commanded him to ...”*

Sixty times a year we hear those words.

Sixty times a year. Should be no trouble remembering them!

Okay, so you’re not able to come to every convocation. You come, say, half the time, five times a year. Six times five is thirty. Thirty times a year, multiplied by ... how many years have you been a Royal Arch Mason?

Still, once you tumble to the fact that most of the words are exactly the same for everyone, you also discover that that leaves only three lines to memorize:

“... cast his rod on the ground.”

“... put his hand into his bosom.”

and:

“... take of the water of the river and pour it upon the dry land.”

But how do you remember that that’s the right order for those lines, for those signs? – that it’s the Master of the Second Veil who casts his rod on the ground, the Master of the Third Veil who puts his hand into his bosom, and the Royal Arch Captain who takes of the water of the river and pours it upon the dry land? (Or the Masters of the First, Second and Third Veils, during the Royal Arch Degree itself.)

Well, what are their words of explanation?

“Explanatory of this sign, and are to be found in the writings of Moses.”

And where do you find the “writings of Moses”?

The answers are in a story told in the third and fourth chapters of the Book of *Exodus*. A story with a moral: If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again.

*Exodus*: the story of Moses leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness, toward the promised land, stopping part way to receive the tablets with the ten commandments, and building the Ark of the Covenant to contain the pieces of those tablets, and to contain the pot of manna and Aaron's rod.

But first, in chapter three, back in Egypt, Moses sees the Burning Bush, encounters God on holy ground, puts off his shoes from off his feet, and is told to go lead the children of Israel out of Egypt.

But Moses says: Lead the children of Israel out of Egypt? Who me? You expect me to go to them, say, "The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you," and they'll believe me? First thing they'll ask is: "What's his name?" And what am I supposed to say then?

And God told him.

"*I Am That I Am*," he said. "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, *I Am* hath sent me unto you ... this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations."

*I Am That I Am*. The pass words quoted at the First Veil.

"But what if they still don't believe me?" says Moses. "What if they say: 'Liar, liar, pants on fire, the Lord hath *not* appeared unto thee.'"

The Lord thinks a bit, and says: "What's that you've got in your hand?"

"That's a rod," says Moses.

"Cast it on the ground," says God.

Moses casts the rod on the ground and, whoops! it turns into a snake – a common magician's trick in those days, but Moses hadn't known his rod was capable of doing it and it gave him quite a start. You've seen modern magicians turn magic wands into bunches of flowers, right? Or straight wands – rods – suddenly go limp, yes? Well, back in those days they favoured casting their rods on the ground where they became snakes, okay?

Now: "Grab it by the tail," says God. And Moses carefully catches the snake by the tail and, what do you know? It turns back into a rod.

"That should make them believe you saw me," says God.

"Not necessarily," says Moses.

"Then try this," says God. "Put now thine hand into thy bosom."

And Moses did. He put his hand into his bosom. Underneath his collar and sash, or whatever he had on at the time. Stuck it in, and pulled it out, and, yuck! It had gone all white and horrible – "as leprous as snow," he said later.

"Not to worry," says God. "Pop it back in again."

And Moses does. Back in, and out again. And voila! Normal, right as rain, just like his other hand.

Impressive! “That should do it,” says God. “If they don’t buy the first one, try that, see if that works.”

But He can see that Moses is a real worrier; that he’s liable to chicken out without an extra confidence booster. So he gives Moses a third trick – a real original.

“If push comes to shove,” He says, then “take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land.”

Whoa! Blood! Even Moses is impressed, and off he trots to tell his brother, Aaron, all about it. Shows Aaron the signs:

- cast his rod on the ground,
- put his hand into his bosom,
- take of the water of the river and pour it upon the dry land.

And Moses also teaches Aaron how to do the snake number with Aaron’s own rod, because Aaron is in fact going to be the one, not Moses, who first shows the whole bag of tricks to the people – gets them all worked up and ready to leave Egypt – and then later also shows them to the Pharaoh – turns the river water red like blood, uses the rod to call up a plague of frogs, does all kinds of nasty things until the Pharaoh agrees to let them go.

Why didn’t Moses use his own rod, and show the people the signs himself? Because he had a bad memory! Couldn’t remember his lines, I’m convinced of it!

You should have heard the excuses he gave to God. “O my Lord,” he said. “I am not eloquent. I don’t have the gift of the gab. Never did, never will, not even with your help. It just doesn’t come easy for me, Lord. If I have to remember lines like *cast his rod on the ground*, I’ll get all tongue tied, Lord. Couldn’t we get Aaron to do the memory work, instead of poor me?”

And God said, “Alright, let Aaron do it, if you’re too chicken. But remember, you owe me one.”

And so, years later, at the end of the forty years in the wilderness, when the children of Israel reach their goal and are ready to cross into the promised land, God calls in his marker. Exit Moses from this mortal coil, and it’s Aaron who gets to lead the people down the home stretch; and:

- Aaron’s rod that gets immortalized by having a replica put in the imitation of the Ark, because it was Aaron who *cast his rod on the ground* time and time again;
- Aaron whom the Israelites and the Pharaoh saw *put his hand into his bosom*, without getting it tangled up with his collar and sash;
- Aaron who was always ready and willing to *take of the water of the river and pour it upon the dry land*.

And, clearly, it was Aaron who had no trouble remembering his lines, and who taught them to the writers of *Exodus* and *Leviticus* and so on, so they’d be remembered down through the centuries, right up to today, here in this Royal Arch Chapter, never, ever, to be forgotten again!

Right?

I heard that the reaction of the Veil Masters in Companion Mason's Chapter was to ask him for copies of that talk.

And that Chapter has since provided a copy to each new Master joining the line.

And then it was included in a collection called *Talks For Chapters*, which has since been circulated widely in digital form to every Royal Arch Mason in this Jurisdiction whose email address is on file with the Grand Secretary.

If you've got email and gave your address to the Grand Secretary, you should have received that collection. It's probably on your PC hard drive. And you can look up this talk, titled *Words of Explanation*.

If you don't have email, or a PC, find another Royal Arch Mason who does, and ask him to print off a copy of this talk for you.

Meanwhile, thanks for listening tonight.

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*(Adapted from a talk by R.Ex.Comp. George I. H. Mason, then DGS, District 5.  
First presented to Prince Edward Chapter No. 12, Kensington, PEI, February 2001, and  
thereafter circulated to Veil Masters in Alexandra Chapter No. 11)*

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