

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

SYMBOLISM OF THE FIRST DEGREE

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The symbols, emblems, and allegorical ceremonies of the First Degree each have many meanings; together these comprise the teaching of the Degree. It would take many hours to give you complete explanations of each of them, in detail so I will focus on the key mean of these symbols, today. It is upon each of us to learn more through study and application to the task of seeking more light.

The Hoodwink represents the darkness in which an uninitiated man stands as regards to Masonic life. It is removed at the moment of enlightenment, suggesting that we do not make the great things of existence, such as goodness, truth, and beauty, but find them. They are always there; it is our blindness that conceals them from us.

The Cable Tow is a symbol of all those external restraints by which a man is controlled by others, or by forces outside himself. If a man does not keep the law of his own free will, he must be compelled to keep it. The removal of the Cable Tow signifies that when a man becomes master of himself, he will keep the law instinctively by his own character.

The Lodge is a symbol of the world, more properly the world of Masonry. Initiation means birth, an entrance into the world. The extent of Freemasonry is as broad as human nature and as wide as mankind; as a spirit and an ideal, it permeates the whole life of every true Mason, outside the Lodge, as well as within.

The Ceremony of Entrance, all that happens at the West Gate, signifies birth or initiation and symbolizes the fact a candidate is entering the world of Masonry, there to live and learn a new kind of life.

The Reception typifies the one real penalty for violations of the obligations, the destructive consequence to a man's nature of being faithless to his vows, untrue to his word, disloyal to his obedience.

The Rite of Circumambulation is Masonry's name for the ceremony of walking around the Lodge room, an allegorical act rich with many meanings. One of these is that the Masonic Life is a progressive journey, from station to station of attainment and that a Mason will always search for more light.

An equal significant ceremony is that of **approaching the East**. The East is a source of light, (remember that light means knowledge) that station in the heavens in which the sun appears to dispel the darkness. Masons are sons of light; therefore, we face the East.

The **Alter** is a symbol of that place which the worship of God holds in Masonry; the center around which all else revolves.

The **Obligations** have a literal meaning and thus are the foundations of our disciplinary law. Above this, they signify the nature and place of obligation in human life. An obligation is a tie, contract, pledge, promise, vow, a duty that is owed; in addition to the obligations we voluntarily assume, there are many in which we stand naturally; obligations to God, our families, to employers or employees, to friends and neighbors. A Mason can be depended upon to fulfill his obligations to the best of his ability.

The **Three Great Lights** in Masonry are the Holy Bible, Square, and Compasses. As a Great Light, the Holy Bible represents the will of God as man understands it; the Square is an emblem of virtue; the Compasses signify the moral and spiritual life. If a man acts in obedience to the will of God according to the dictates of his conscience, he will be living in the illumination of the Great Lights and cannot go astray.

The **Lesser Lights** represent the Sun, Moon, and Master of the Lodge. The Sun is a symbol of that which is masculine, active, and aggressive; the Moon, of that which is feminine, receptive, non – resisting; when these two types of human action are maintained in balance, mastership is the result.

The **Word and Grip** are our means of recognition by which, when among strangers, we can prove others or ourselves regular Masons in order to enter into fraternal intercourse.

The **Rite of Salutation**, in which the candidate salutes each station in turn, is his recognition of the authority of the principal officers. It is also a symbol of a Mason's respect for the obedience to all just and duly constituted authorities. The Old Charges state this in a single sentence: "A Mason is a peaceable subject to the Civil Powers wherever he resides or works."

The **Worshipful Master** is a symbol as well as the executive officer of the Lodge. As the sun rules the day, he rules and governs his Lodge; his title, Worshipful, means that he is worthy of reverence, respect, and obedience.

The **Lambskin Apron** is an emblem of purity and the badge of a Mason. By purity is meant blamelessness, a loyal obedience to the laws of the Craft and sincere good will to the Brethren; the term, the badge of a Mason, signifies that Masons are workers and builders, not drones and destructionists.

The symbolism of **the Rite of Destitution** refers to those ancient times when men believed that the planets determined human fate and controlled human passions, and there was a metal by which each planet was controlled. In ancient initiations, candidates were compelled to leave all metals behind, lest they bring into the assembly disturbing planetary influences. While with us, this symbolism no longer has its astrological

character the old point about keeping out disturbing influences remains; the candidate is not to bring into the Lodge room his passions or prejudices lest harmony, which is one of the chief concerns of Masonry, be destroyed.

The Northeast Corner, halfway between the North, Masonically termed, a place of darkness, and the East, a source of light, is traditionally the place where the cornerstone of a building is laid. The Apprentice stands there to receive his first instruction; this signifies that he is the Cornerstone of the future of the Craft. What Apprentices are today, Masonry will become in the future.

The Working Tools represent those moral and spiritual virtues, habits, and forces, by which a man reshapes the crude and often stubborn materials of his nature to adjust himself to the requirements of human society. To become a Mason, a man who has lived carelessly, without a plan, without aim or ideal, must learn to bring system to his life as signified by the Twenty-four Inch Gauge. If he has traits of temper, habits of speech, or defects of character that disturb or injure others and interfere with his proper place in the Brotherhood, as corners of rough stones interfere with putting them into their allotted places in the building, he must rid himself of them with the Common Gavel.

The **Entered Apprentice is himself** a symbol, one of the noblest in the emblematic system of the Craft. He represents youth, typified by the rising sun, trained youth, willing to submit itself to discipline and to seek knowledge to learn the great Art of Life, which is the real Royal Art, represented and interpreted by all the mysteries of Masonry.

It was through **all these symbols and emblems**, which our magnificent First Degree gave to you as a man and an Entered Apprentice Mason. We sincerely hope that these suggestions as to the meaning of these symbols and emblems will lead you to seek further for more light, not only that you may become a well-learned Mason, but also for their value to your life outside the Lodge room.

References

- Masonic Trowel. (N.D.). The Symbols of the Entered Apprentice Degree. Retrieved from http://www.themasonictrowel.com/Articles/degrees/degree_1st_files/the_symbols_of_the_enterd_apprentice_degree.htm
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