

“Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.”

~ C.S. Lewis

“In a word, I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong.”

~ Charles Dickens

16th ° **PRINCE OF JERUSALEM: FOR CONSIDERATION**

The Lodge of Perfection symbolizes the highest level of perfection a Mason should reach to become a real Master. It is the basis for the Chapter of Rose Croix, which aims at raising the Mason’s mind to a higher level of mystical consciousness, or a union with God’s spirit; starting with the 17° and ending with the 18°. Likewise, the 16° complements the 15° and finalizes the necessary moral foundation which makes a Mason’s mystical assent possible. Discuss what comprises this moral foundation.

Foundations of Morality

The sixteenth degree, is both a supplication to a King, and a reaffirmation of adherence to an oath, **our** oath. With a goal of allowing a people, primarily brother Masons to clear the rubble of a prior edifice, and rebuild it for the occupancy from on high. This prior edifice has fallen due to attack by other peoples, as well by the abandonment of the principles that were its foundations, and/or perhaps contamination from insurgence of aberration and societal degradation. The ruins of a people no longer in favour. We are only told that Babylon (now known as a great evil) was allowed to breach the walls, destroy the housing, and carry off the wealth of the temple. Generations have passed, with the acceptance of the fall pervasive, coupled with a bemoaning of abandonment and continued harassment. A few spiritually hungry are egged on by the prophets to rebuild, return the Temple to its former glory and occupancy.

It has been said Faith is dead without worksⁱ . . . , so too Masonry. We have become comfortable in our past achievements, as well those of our forefathers. Society is no better, for our comfort. As we have progressed from an Entered Apprentice up through the degrees we have sought ‘more light’ with that (in my opinion) being a deeper understanding of our role as stones, as fit, prepared, good and square ashlar in the ultimate ‘Temple not made with hands’. Not all who are raised, ever truly become Master Masons. Zerubbabel having achieved or rather been raised

to Master (that he so achieved becomes evident later) having put in the time, the works to circumscribe the desires, to embrace the validations of the sephiroth, Zerubbabel was dispatched to get governmental consent to rebuild the temple. That is, to attain an intimate understanding thereof. This Light, this Truth will set us free. The entirety of Masonic teaching is to bring us to this end. That is, if we can circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds, and hopefully coax our co-citizenry along the path through mimicry.

The fall of the temple, a reflection of the death of our Grand Master, or perhaps a failing of Kingship to allow other gods to be worshipped. Perhaps this, was the cause which allowed all of the treasures to be carried off. All that was known to be true was allowed to fall to ruin. Similar to the fall of all great countries, a misguided submission to (or allowance in the name of tolerance of) aberration. Throughout which all Masonry vied to remain true, keeping to the work, to the aspiration to an intimacy with the Supreme Architect. We are told that Darius, being a man of the mysteries sought, that Zerubbabel would initiate him into the mysteries of Masonry, for the paltry sum of his honour. This degree, is the final exam. This degree the culmination for the preceding degrees, testing whether or not we truly learned of the failures of entitlement, pride, arrogance and insecurity among others. It was through Zerubbabel's assimilation of these values and upholding the steadfastness of purpose and adherence to the vows, which secured Darius's search and reinstatement for the fulfillment and support for the reconstruction of the Temple.

It is not sufficient, not enough, that Masonry learn the work. It is not enough to speak the ritual letter perfect, if the meanings and truths the words convey are lost in the ruins. We must espouse the ideals, the precepts we claim to espouse and further them, then the words (within all languages) will be upheld. Within the sixteenth degree we are given two role models, Darius who has promised to rebuild the temple (as did we), and Zerubbabel, who has braved death and/or imprisonment to exort Darius to decree the rebuilding, as so too, must we exort ourselves. We are shown that a decree (our vow) is immutable, that it is unchanging and must be followed. After temptation to fore swear our oaths to the Supreme Architect and our brethren, so too we are exposed to apparent benefit for our apostasy along the path. We are left of our own volition to decide whether or not these obstacles will be steps up, or road-

blocks to seal off our passage, whether or not to leave the Temple unbuilt. Recall too, in our raising, our demise for a time, from our blows against the Master, demanding upon pain of death the secrets, demanding the Master's Word.

The fifteenth degree enumerated the virtues and reminded us, what we as Masons are supposed to espouse and further these ethics, primarily as they pertain to ourselves. Whereas the sixteenth degree is transitional from individualistic to relational, that is a practice of religion – a people in submission to their God – to the truth. When we extrapolate the attributes and virtues we as individuals have assimilated, to societal virtues for the benefit of the community, we rebuild the Temple for all. We have always considered that the non-Jewish builders were in some way respectful of the Jewish deity. With Darius' response to Zerubbabel's pronouncement that Truth is stronger than all else, this illustrates a foundation to brotherhood. Hinting perhaps that the Deity was (is) one in the same after-all, so that the Temple can be fit for both, nay for ALL peoples. That all, could benefit from the foundational precepts of the mysteries, and particularly Masonry.

The progression upon the path reinvigorates within us the tooling that chips away at our rough ashlar. As we, like minded Masons, come together and work for the benefit of the communities that house our lodges, each stone becomes a part of the communal temple. As the temple, or the school, we too, chip away at the herd instinct of self-destruction (witnessed in the rise and fall of all great societies). We see the cycle repeating in the decline of the American body politic. Through reaffirmation of mutual beneficence and a judicious application of ethical values and humanistic precepts we can stem the flow, perhaps stop it, and breathe fresh life into the country.

As the Temple was originally built on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, so too must the winnowing of chaff continue in our leaders. Pike tells us that it is better for a corrupt though competent leader to have control, for he will assure full coffers, whereas an ethical idiot would reduce us to ruin. If those are the only choices, I too agree with Pike. But, in my humble opinion WE need to secure a leadership of ethical competence such that both value and life style are advanced. The sixteenth degree illustrates for us, a mode of redress. As we approach the government and petition for the sanctioned revitalization of a Spiritual Center, our Temple, we need to model the circumscription of

desires, and withhold our passions, that public scrutiny will not be (nor prove to be) detrimental. We have to be the leaders. That our leaders will not succumb to the temptations of wealth – or even treasures sullied by the abandonment of ethics and moral precepts, will prove our leadership to the people and gain from them public support. Only our purity and transparency of purpose, acting for a common good will sway the people, and may possibly revitalize the country.

The rebuilding, revitalization, and the ultimate completion of the second temple, is a symbol of hope for mankind, assuming they know it exists. This hope, facilitated by us, is the culmination of our ascent. We are told that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves: can we then in good conscience merely tolerate our neighbors? Can we in good conscience keep our neighbors, in the dark, merely because of their state of being profane? It is this furthering of true brotherhood, and acknowledgement of our entwined existence (as a species) that will revitalize our country. Our operative brethren, have always built their temples for the masses, and propped up their lodges on the withers, so too must we.

The Scottish Rite teachings bring together the commonality of religious precepts, from the ancients forward, across the depth and breadth of known benevolent religious practices. We are quick to remind our acolytes that we do not intend to convert, but only enlighten and expose the common threads tying them together – if separate – but equal. These were the ideas that ‘birthed’ America. Penning the thoughts that; “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Though in their routine company, at the writing of these lines, there is no proof that Jefferson was a Mason, perhaps we can surmise that masonic thinking can (and must) infect those who come in contact with it, and sully them with Light, furthering equality. We cannot let our lack of work, our apparent apostasy, allow us to lose faith and leave the first Temple in ruins.

The sixteenth degree sets us a goal as Masons. We have travelled from the east, drawing ever closer to the Light. We have learned the penalties of self-betrayal, even if it is in pursuit of noble goals. The ends do NOT justify the means,

it is never enough that all is well at the ending. We must ever learn to keep our brethren's confidences, and carry this further to a moral rectitude of conscience and action that will inspire our neighborhoods to higher moral standards.

This second temple, must be approved by the government, given proper support, and guided by *we* the Princes of Jerusalem who are free from the temptations of wealth, or sullied treasures. Our work is now the stability of further improving ourselves, through the second temple, and in turn stabilizing and helping our country to prosper. We must raise ourselves and the new Temple to 'more Light'.

¹ Jas 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.