

SEVENTEENTH DEGREE

KNIGHT OF THE EAST AND WEST

By A.G. Salmon

HISTORY OF THE DEGREE

In AASR Degrees, Albert Pike utilizes various religious traditions, legends and philosophies to convey universal truths, independent of any specific faith. Until the 16th Degree, Hebrew and Middle Eastern traditions prevail: Jerusalem, King Solomon's Temple, Hiram of Tyre, Zerubbabel, Cyrus, Darius etc.. All words are Hebrew, Phoenician, Samaritan or Syriac. The 17th Degree is a major turning point in AASR symbolism. We leave the Hebrew tradition in order to enter the mystical and chivalric symbolism of Christian Knighthood.¹ The Degrees no longer deal with the reconstruction of Solomon's Temple, but with the Celestial Jerusalem in Saint John's « Revelation », or « Apocalypse », a Greek word for « secret revelation for initiates », in the New Testament. There are also clear allusions to the Knights Templar. It is one of the most powerful and profound degrees focusing on **the use of the spiritual energy available in the innermost core of every human being, to reach the ultimate goal of human life, the return of Man's mind to the unity of God.** The many hints at the symbolism of further degrees let scholars think that this degree was developed much later, but was placed here in the sequence because it proved to be the best introduction to the mysticism of mediaeval Knights and Cathedral Builders, which is the basis of the 18th Degree (Knight Rose-Croix). Here, the second coming of Christ, or Messiah, results in Mankind's liberation from materialism and sin, after the catastrophic but decisive conflict of Armageddon which ends with the victory of Good and the eradication of evil once and for all. This symbolizes Man's long and hard battle within his innermost self in order to attain the divine Light and thus regain the Lost Word, the lost Paradise of his Soul.

¹ This turning point in the AASR Degrees reflects a major shift in the history of Western spiritual evolution. It happened when Christianity spread all over the West and monotheism was no longer the exclusive privilege of Judaism. With Christianity, Man's religious mind evolved and looked for a new path: Dogmatic affirmation and belief, reason and logic were no longer sufficient. Imagination, creative exuberance and passionate love of God took over, as reflected in Christian art and cathedrals. The mediaeval era, the Middle Ages, had arrived. However, after the Greco-Roman civilization collapsed, the Western world sank into the darkness of ignorance, with only sparks of light subsisting in a few abbeys. Moral chaos and blind brute force came to prevail. The meek, the weak and the poor were crushed and lawless violence prevailed between masters and slaves, victors and vanquished, lords and commoners. Then, just as a flower may bloom out of a dungheap, a noble institution was born amidst the anarchy, tyranny and barbaric ignorance of the feudal society. This institution, born from the oppressors' class itself, defended the weak and oppressed, and cultivated generosity, bravery, fidelity, protection of the disarmed and prostrate enemy, and « courtly love », or respectful love for women. This institution was called « Chevalerie », that is to say chivalric nobility, or Knighthood.

LEGEND OF THE DEGREE

After Jerusalem was caught by the Romans, most Jews left and looked for a country where their rights would be respected. Finding none, a number of them founded spiritual societies such as the Therapeutes or Johannites, the disciples of John of Pathmos (Saint John the Evangelist or Divine Saint John) who maintained the cult of the Great Architect in its purity. Together with other local heroic fighters, they became the Knights of the East. When the Knights of the West, the Crusaders, came to Palestine, the Johannites revealed to them some of their sublime mysteries and, together, they founded a new Order, the ðKnights of the East and Westö, whose goal was to ð**make Light burst out of darkness**ö (Ex tenebris lux) and ð**get brotherhood rooted in all hearts and minds**ö. This union, based on mutual assistance and common zeal of faith, took place in 1118, at the time when the Order of the Temple was established under the leadership of Garimont, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. At a later stage, it merged with the Knights of Saint John of Malta, but disappeared with the failure of the Crusades. However, in the 18th century, it was revived under the pressure of intense intellectual and spiritual activity and gave birth to an exuberant love for, and worship of, the One God and the passionate faith of the Middle Ages.

ESOTERIC SYMBOLISM

Lodge Decor: The Lodge represents the Council Chamber of the ð**Preceptory**ö, a name given to the Knights Templarö bodies. Its shape is a heptagon (a polygon with **seven sides**) hung with **crimson red** draperies sprinkled with **stars of gold**.

In each angle is a **square column**, each in one of the seven colors of the **rainbow** (Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet). It is lit up with **7 great lights**. The capital of each column bears the initial of the name in Samaritan letters of one of the last **7 Sefiroth** of the Kabalah, namely **Khesed** (mercy, generosity), **Geburah** (justice, discipline), **Tephareth** (truth, beauty, morality), **Netsach** (victory, power, zeal), **Hod** (glory, honor), **Yesud** (foundation, duty, application) and **Malkuth** (dominion, force, realization). On each column is also written one of the **7 knightly virtues**: Union, Honor, Duty, Loyalty, Courage, Discretion and Silence.

In the East, over the Masterö seat is a Templar **two-edged cross-hilted sword** pointing upwards on a **red** background, with 3 stars on either side, forming a triangle, and one star (**7 in all**) over the point of the sword. Above is the initial letter of **Kether**, the first and highest Sefirah, the Crown, Godö ineffable Being and Realm.

The **Master's platform** is ascended in **7 stairs** and is supported by four winged oxen, respectively with the heads of a Lion, an Ox, a Man and an Eagle, the emblems of the four Evangelists. On the platform is a **square altar** on which are a **Book with 7 seals**, each in one of the 7 colors of the **rainbow**; a **silver basin** with perfumed water; and a

chafing dish with live coals. In front of the altar is a **violet vacant armchair** for the Messiah to come. **Violet** is traditionally the color of sanctity and divinity.

The **Tracing Board** of the degree, above the altar, is a **heptagon** around which are the full names of the **7 last Sephiroth** and the **7 knightly virtues** (as on the Lodge columns). In the center is **the Ancient of Days**, an old man with white hair and beard, in a white robe, holding **7 stars**. His eyes flash light rays, his head is surrounded by an aureole and he holds a two-edged sword in his mouth. Around him are **7 candlesticks** with the initials in Greek of **Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea**, the **7 Christian churches** existing in 90 A.D., when Saint John's «Revelation» is deemed to have been written.

The Senior and Junior Wardens' seats are on either side of the platform: Over the **Senior Warden** is a **rising sun** on a **yellow** background. Among the rays is the initial of the second Sephirah, **Hokhmah** (wisdom). Above the **Junior Warden**, on a **blue** background, there is a crescent **moon**, with its horns upwards, and over it the initial of the word **Binah**, the Third Sephirah (understanding and intelligence).

There are **24** thrones in the Lodge, a reminder of the 24 elders in « Revelation », including the **3** thrones in the East for the Master and Wardens, respectively in red, yellow and blue, and the other **21** (in **3** groups of **7**) around the room in various **rainbow** colors. The officers wear **white** robes with **crimson red** sashes.

Colors: **White** symbolizes **purity**, a sine-qua-non to ascend towards the knowledge of, or mystical fusion with, God. This is emphasized by the ceremony of **lustration**, or baptism by **water**, the rough purification performed by St. John the Baptist. White also symbolizes **knowledge** which is divided into the **7 liberal arts and sciences** (grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy), just as white light is the **essential unity** hidden under the **illusory diversity** of the 7 colors of the rainbow. **Red** primarily symbolizes the more refined mystical baptism by the **fire** of the Holy Spirit, performed by Jesus, as described by St. John the Evangelist. It also symbolizes the **zeal of faith** required to eradicate evil and the **blood of human martyrdom** throughout history. **Yellow** is the color of dawn and hope, and **blue** symbolizes spiritual sanctity and divine purity, as often depicted in Virgin Mary's robe.

Regalia: The **triangular apron** is made of **yellow** silk lined and edged with **crimson red**. The shape is the emblem of Deity in its first three emanations, namely wisdom, strength and beauty. The yellow color symbolizes the **dawn of hope** for Mankind's rebirth in the Celestial Jerusalem after the catastrophic convulsions of the old evil order and the final victory of Light which will come from the East to dominate the world. As for **crimson red**, it symbolizes the knightly **zeal of faith** required in the final battle against evil and the blood that a Knight is prepared to shed for the triumph of Good. In the middle of the apron is a **gold** triangular **Tetraktys**, formed by **10 Hebrew letters** « **yod** ». Ten is precisely the number assigned to the letter **ōyodō** in Hebrew Gematria. It represents the 10 Sephiroth of the Kabbalah's «Tree of Life». They symbolize the

manifestations and attributes of God's ineffable unity perceivable by Man only through God's created universe.

There are two **cordons**, one white and the other black from which the jewel is hanging. They cross each other on the chest, forming a **St. Andrew's Cross**. The opposite colors symbolize the dialectic conflict of dualism in Creation, as expressed by Zoroaster and Manes, and the paradoxical **equilibrium** it generates: The harmonious balance and unity of the whole universe results from the conflicting interaction of its innumerable elements, as symbolized by the perfect circle formed by the complementary opposites of the Oriental Yin and Yang. As for **St. Andrew's Cross**, it symbolizes **change and transformation** in time and space, as opposed to stability expressed by the circle, or fixity symbolized by the square-angled Latin cross. It also alludes to the angle made by the ecliptic plane with the axis of the Earth, as it ceaselessly revolves around the sun. In this Degree, it symbolizes the transformation of the vital raw spiritual energy conferred by St. John's baptism by water into the refined spirituality generated by the Law of Love in the Celestial Jerusalem, brought about by the return of the Messiah symbolized by the vacant seat in front of the altar (See « Lodge Decor » above). This will be the main theme of the following Knight Rose-Croix Degree. This symbolic transformation, also found in the alchemical process, represents **transfiguration** in Rosicrucian mysticism, when Man is essentially changed into a saint (or *ārahatō* in Buddhism) through mind and soul purification and enlightenment, acquired through the fight with evil, pain and sorrow, which are part of the Christic baptism of fire. This temporary **suffering** is ultimately required for « the wise and beneficent purpose of spiritual purification », just as smelting the vile metal ore is necessary to transmute it into gold, and the longer the smelting process, the purer the gold. This justification of suffering is a major theme of the 18th Degree.

The **jewel** is a **heptagonal** medal, **half of silver and half of gold**, another symbol of dualism. It also symbolizes the power that creates and the power that nurtures, the male generative and female productive powers of Nature, the dialectic opposition of which is necessary for motion, the essence of life and consciousness, that is to say Creation. On one side are engraved in Samaritan letters the initials of the **last 7 sephiroth** with a **star** above each letter. In the center, the **Lamb** of God is lying on a **Book with 7 seals**, each bearing in Roman letters the initials of the above Sephiroth. On the other side, two crossed swords pointing upwards rest on even scales symbolizing **justice, equanimity and equilibrium**. All around are the initials in Greek of the **7 original Christian Churches** (see the « Tracing Board » above). The **gloves** are **black**.

Numerology: In this Degree, **Number 3** refers to **divinity** as conceived by Man's consciousness. It symbolizes the human potential for Divine knowledge. The **three** Hebrew letters Yod, He and Vav represent the most advanced stage in human understanding of God's nature and attributes. **Number 7**, the prevalent number in this Degree, expresses God's generative, creative power in the universe, the central point in the six-pointed Star of David. This point also symbolizes mastery over earthly dualism

represented by the two inverted triangles of the Star, the first necessary step in Man's spiritual ascent towards God's Truth and Unity.

Lodge Officers: There are **twelve officers** in the Lodge. Of these the **Master** represents John the Baptist, presented as an Essene, a member of a Pharisaic sect of mystics living near the Dead Sea. Their strict rules were exclusive love of God, justice and charity for all men, ceaseless search for Truth, absolute secrecy regarding their society and God's Name, and purity of life, including celibacy, whenever possible.

SIGNS, TOKENS and WORDS

Signs: While A and B exchange the first token (a) below, A looks at his right shoulder, saying "Abaddon" and B responds by looking at his right shoulder, saying "Jabulon". In an old ritual, both raise their right hands over their heads, with thumb and small finger closed, and turn their heads as above.

Tokens: (a) Take each other's left hand in one's right hand and close the fingers; and (b) A's right hand on B's right shoulder and B's left hand on A's left shoulder. In an old ritual, shake both crossed hands. In both cases, crossing hands or arms alludes to St. Andrew's cross (See "Regalia").

Password: **JABULON**, the Companion that found the Royal Arch treasure in the vault. This name symbolizes the light of the divine treasure hidden in darkness under the ruins of the Temple, just as Man's divine soul is buried deep within his material body.

Sacred Word: **ABADDON**, the angel of death, symbolizing evil and death eventually vanquished by the Light bursting out of darkness, just as the Phoenix is reborn out of its ashes, and the divine essence of Man is regained through the fusion of his Soul with God in meditation and contemplation.

Battery: 7 (in $3 + 3 + 1$)²

Age: None - "I am very old"

Hour: From "The time is coming" (Waiting for the Messiah and Armageddon)
To "Time no longer exists" (After the Celestial Jerusalem is established)

CEREMONY

The **Candidate** represents a weary Prince of Jerusalem wandering on the shore of the Dead Sea which symbolizes the stark and dry speculations of Egyptian and Greek philosophies which gave no hope or peace. After sincere repentance for precious time

² Similar to the stars above the Master's seat.

wasted in wrong or useless thoughts, words and actions and impelled by courage and zeal, the Candidate becomes a Johannite, an Essene, prepared for the mystery of the seven seals which will open the gates of immortality.

In the **first part** of his initiation, the Candidate has to be purified by **water** from the perfumed basin on the altar. It is the ritual of **lustration**, one of the most universal rituals of **renovation** and **regeneration** found throughout Antiquity, from the Flood, considered as the baptism of the whole earth, to Saint John baptizing Jesus as the incarnation of the New Law. Then, the Candidate is purified by the **fire** of the red-hot coals from the chafing dish on the altar, symbolizing the mystical baptism, the enlightenment of the soul by the Holy Spirit. During the last trial, the Candidate has to demonstrate the fidelity and courage required from a knight prepared to give his life for God, his friends, country and Mankind. His dedication to honor and virtue is symbolized by the cross drawn on his forehead. After this **purification** of his total being, the Candidate becomes a soldier of God, ready to shed his own blood in the Masonic fight against evil on earth caused by fanaticism, intolerance and bigotry. These fundamental evils cause **human suffering**, but at the same time, they paradoxically strengthen the human soul and are incentives for the noblest chivalric virtues. There is also some **Kadosh** spirit here: Freedom of thought, speech and conscience is not readily available on earth. It has to be ceaselessly fought for.

In the **second part** of his initiation, the Candidate, like Christ, opens the **seven seals**, as he progresses towards his ultimate victorious glory: For instance, as the fourth trumpet blows and the fourth seal is opened, the Junior Warden invests him with a **crown of gold**; at the fifth seal, the Senior Warden gives him a **golden girdle**; at the sixth, the Junior Warden gives him the signs, tokens and words; and at the final seventh, the Candidate ascends the vacant throne at the right of the Master, just as Christ is said to be sitting at the right of God for the final judgment of the world. Each seal opening ushers dreadful disasters for the earth: The first four seals unleash 4 horsemen spreading war, enmity, strife, famine and plague; the fifth releases the souls of dead martyrs; the sixth triggers a devastating earthquake; and the seventh starts the final battle with hail and fire, volcanic eruptions, falling stars and the darkness of an eclipse. At the same time, the locusts of ignorance, fanaticism, and superstition and the four demons of bigotry, intolerance, ambition and selfishness kill one third of Mankind. Then, the last trumpet announces the return of the Messiah to establish the New Jerusalem, the eternal kingdom of God's Truth and Light. It would be difficult to give a more striking feeling of **Man's fierce battle against himself to reach enlightenment, mystical ecstasy and divine liberation**.

PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHINGS

The universal common core of wisdom and love: Albert Pike's overview of ancient religious and philosophical doctrines range from the Hindu Vedas to the Phoenician and Egyptian creeds, the Zoroastrian Zend-Avesta, Gnosticism, Plato's and Pythagoras's philosophies and Jewish traditions and beliefs, with a few hints at Buddhism.

This review shows that all religions and philosophies have a common denominator which forms the **ōnatural religion on which all good men agreeö**, as taught by Masonry. They constitute the **common core of wisdom, love and strength** of all Mankind. Its major tenets are: God is one, the Supreme Being and Principle, immutable, unchangeable, infinitely good and just; Light will eventually win over darkness, good over evil and Truth over error; all spiritual beings, and above all, Men, are emanations and projections of Deity. Their individual soul, their innermost Self, is of identical nature with God. However, they have progressively degenerated over time in their lost fight against evil which is coexistent with Good. Such is the essential dualism of Creation, based on such adverse principles as light and darkness, spirit and matter or love and hate. This results in Manø pure, divine Soul constantly battling with an irrational mind, the seat of evil desires. The Soul is imprisoned in the body, and matter subjugates intelligence. However, intelligence can free itself from that slavery. Eventually, Man will indeed be redeemed by a Savior, or be enlightened as a result of his own spiritual efforts. Primeval harmony will be reestablished and all will regain their original divine condition in the bosom of God.

Mankind's imperfect conception of God: However refined and elevated Manø attempt at ascending back to Godø unity may be, human light will always be only an imperfect reflection of the Infinite and the Divine. This imperfection results in the loss of the right concept of God, the loss of the Sacred Word, and the human creation of öfalse godsö, that is to say improper anthropomorphic concepts which have resulted in hatred, fanaticism and intolerance. Therefore, any human truth - and is there anything else than human truths after all ? - should never be imposed but left to individuals or groups of individuals of the same conviction for free interpretation.

Virtues required to be a Mason worthy of that name: Such return to Godø reality implies a long and deep search for Truth. Unfortunately, such essential Truth is concealed under a mass of symbols and allegories. Traditional and personal interpretations are innumerable. The essential Truth is presented to the masses of people in the language of parables, legends, allegories and basic morality, but its exclusive, mysterious knowledge is revealed only to those who think beyond the superficial letter of the texts to find the hidden glorious spirit of the teachings as expressed, inter alia, by Kabalah, Gnosticism, Sufism or such Christian mystics as Saint John of the Cross, Saint Theresa of Avila, Saint Christine of Sienna or Hildegard von Bingen. Although they suppressed the Gnostics to establish the power of the Church, Origen and Saint Gregory held that the Gospels were not to be taken in their literal sense and Athanasius added: « Should we understand sacred writ according to the letter, we should fall into the most enormous blasphemies ». Albert Pike, quoting Philo of the Jewish-Hellenistic School of Alexandria, is less severe: öWhoever has meditated on philosophy, purified himself by virtue, and by contemplation raised himself to God and the world of Intelligence, and received their inspiration, pierces the gross envelope of the letter and is initiated into mysteries of which the elementary or literal instruction offers but an imperfect imageö. Only by deep meditation isolating the spirit from the body, can Manø soul be carried back to God. Such was a basic tenet of the Essenes. Therefore, laborious study and concentration, courage and patience are required, particularly from Masons, if they want

to attain their innermost Light, the divine spark in their Soul, placing them at the top of Creation, and thus lead a worthy human life.

Man should toil for Good but only God can change the world decisively for the better: Man, and particularly a Mason, can be instrumental in improving himself and society. However, the history of Mankind and its perennial, most often self-inflicted martyrdom may cast a strong doubt on a decisive victory. A divine power alone could make individuals and society perfect. Let us hope God will soon do it through an Emanation of Himself, a Redeemer saving the world once and for all. Meanwhile, let us humbly follow the seven precepts of this Degree: 1. Work and meditate; 2. Hope and believe; 3. Watch over Freemasonry; 4. Teach Masonic Truth; 5. Assist the poor; 6. Love Mankind; and 7. Have contempt for death. Let us start with meditating on the saffron yellow and crimson red of our Knight of the East and West's apron and keep our hope in a Golden Dawn after the Flood of blood.