

THE SECRET IDENTITY OF FREEMASONS

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To explain the secret identity of Freemasons properly requires a considerable review of historical and philosophical background. Sadly, while there has been a great deal of speculation, there is no reliable information on the subject of the origin of our Order. The most popular theory is the Transition Theory which states that perhaps sometime in the late 16th and early 17th centuries – there is no certain knowledge - operative lodges began to admit Gentlemen, and that it was from this practice that the speculative craft emerged.

In fact, the first large scale evidence we have of Masonic activity are “casual lodges”, that is to say groups of men assembled to “make Masons”, meeting in Britain in the mid-to-late 17th century. We call them “casual lodges”, because at that time there was no formal Freemasonic organization with the authority to charter a Lodge. The first formal Masonic organization was the Premier Grand Lodge that was formed in London in 1717. All of this material is very well known, and it is not our purpose to consider it in detail here. The purpose for this observation is to point out that the time of the start of Freemasonry is the end of the Renaissance in Britain and northern Europe. In that context it is reasonable to assume that the “Masons” of this period were thinking the thoughts that were characteristic of the Renaissance intellectuals. Brother Elias Ashmole is an example of a Mason made in a casual Lodge in 1646, and his writings in *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* certainly support this hypothesis. With this idea in mind we will look at the Renaissance.

The Renaissance is generally considered to be an explosion of art, and of course it was; but there was much more to it than that. The name “Renaissance” was not assigned by historians studying the period; it was actually chosen in the mid-1300's by a group of philosophically inclined gentlemen in Florence. Their philosophy was based on Judeo-Christian monotheism; but it was also characterized by the seeking of a rebirth of the Classical world and its thought (in particular the Greek and Roman cultures) and by a strong neo-Platonic influence. Medieval scholars had been interested in classical philosophy from the point of view of reconciling it to Christian doctrine. Renaissance scholars were interested in classical philosophy for what it said about man, himself. These Renaissance philosophers incorporated a good many Greek (particularly neo-Platonic) and Jewish mystical ideas into their orthodox Christian thought. The first of these influences came principally from a body of writing called the *Hermetica* which originated in Alexandria sometime near the start of the Christian era. The *Hermetica* seems to be a form of early Egyptian philosophy with a heavy overlay of Hellenized Judaism and Christian thought; and it has been shown to have had substantial influence on the formation of early Christian doctrines.¹ The second of these influences came from Kabbalah, the mystical tradition of Judaism, which was dispersed throughout the Mediterranean basin by the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Dame Francis A. Yates, latterly a Reader of History at the University of London, has called this fusion of Classical and Jewish philosophy the “Hermetic/Kabbalistic Tradition”². After these two influential philosophies had been reinterpreted in the context of orthodox Christian doctrine, the Hermetic/Kabbalistic Tradition was fundamental to the philosophy of the early Renaissance. While it was subsequently repudiated by Counter-Reformation writers, it remained the essential core of Renaissance thought. Thus, I think the metaphysics of the Renaissance represents as close to a “general” statement of Western Metaphysics as we are likely to find. As we have said, Speculative Masonry dates from the end of the Renaissance, and it is my view that Freemasonry is actually a codification of this thought that was at the core of the Renaissance.

¹ *Hermetica*, trans. Scott, W., (Boston, Shambhala, 1993) pp. 14-5

² Yates, Frances A., *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, (London, RKP, 1979), Introduction p. I

Four fundamental ideas seem to characterize this Renaissance philosophical view: First, was Neo-Platonism. The Deity is considered to be without limit. Rather than thinking of the Deity as a creator - which must necessarily be separate from its creation and is, in that respect, limited - the Neo-Platonist understands the Deity to have projected *Itself* into existence as the entire universe. This results in a view of all existence as a single, tightly integrated unity centered on the Deity. A particularly straightforward statement of this view comes from the *Hermetica* :

"...for God contains all things, and there is nothing that is not in God, and nothing which God is not. Nay, I would rather say, not that God *contains* all things, but that, to speak the full truth, God *is* all things."³

Although the *Hermetica* anti-dates Neo-Platonism, this Hermetic statement of Neo-Platonism is not surprising; the *Hermetica* comes from Alexandria at the time when that philosophy was emerging. Second, is the principle of the "Macrocosm and the Microcosm". The concept here is that the Universe, the Macrocosm, and Man, the Microcosm, are both created, formed and made "in the image of God"; and that the same set of laws operate in the experience of both. Third, the universe consists of four levels; Elemental, Celestial, Super-Celestial and Divine; and in each of these levels there are opposite or contrasting agencies which are held in balance. Fourth, knowledge of the "higher", or more subtle, aspects of the Universe was thought to be available only by personal experience (i.e. by one's own revelation); certainly not by logical argument, nor, ultimately, by faith in the authority of another's revelation.⁴ This idea of "interior work", the process of turning within and seeking a "mystical ascent" in consciousness culminating in the experience of the presence of an indwelling Deity, is as old as human civilization. It recurs periodically throughout the world's history in various cultural idioms and has been referred to Aldous Huxley as "the perennial philosophy".⁵ I will suggest that the Masonic tradition reflects these principles and the Hermetic / Kabbalistic idiom from which they are derived. Indeed, these principles are represented on the Tracing Boards. It is in that sense that I suggest Freemasonry to be a codification of the philosophical essence of the Renaissance.

It seems to me that as the scholars of the late Renaissance became increasingly more interested in the investigation of the physical world, e.g. Newton and the work of the Royal Society, those with a metaphysical interest decided that it would be important to codify the mystical thinking of the period; or those ideas would be lost. It could well be that it is from such a concern as this that Speculative Masonry emerges.

In order to make a connection between Freemasonry and the principles listed above we will consider the Craft's symbolism, and we will find it to be a remarkable depiction of the metaphysical principles outlined above. However, I must preface the seeking of that correspondence by saying that the ideas that I will present here are my own. They are not the teachings of the United Grand Lodge of England, of any other Grand Lodge, or of any private Lodge.

Now let us look at the First Degree Tracing Board in Figure 1. I suggest that it is a representation of a Man standing in a Landscape; that idea will become clear in time. One of the central ideas fundamental to Renaissance thought was Neo-Platonism, the unity of all being and the consequent omnipresence of the Deity. For me, that principle is represented on the First Degree Board by a group of three

³ *Hermetica*, trans. Scott, W., (Boston, Shambhala, 1993), LIBELLVS IX, p.

⁴ Reuchlin, J., *De Arte Cabalistica* (1517, reprint Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln example

⁵ Huxley, Aldous; *The Perennial Philosophy*; (Chatto & Windus, London, 1944)

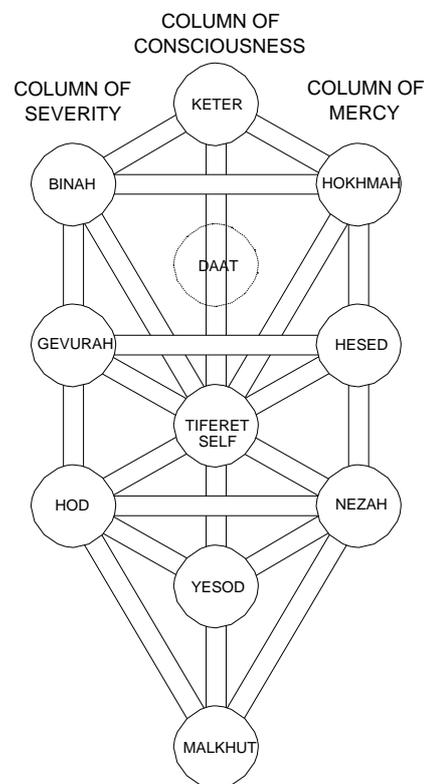


Figure 2

symbols that are called, collectively, the "Ornaments of the Lodge". The fact that the Masons who formulated our symbolism gathered these three objects into a single group seems to require that we consider them together and in relationship to each other. The Ornaments of the Lodge are the "Blazing Star or Glory, the Chequered Pavement, and the Indented, Tessellated Border"⁶; and I will suggest that they are all intended to refer to the Deity. The Blazing Star or Glory is found in the center of the Tracing Board (Figure 1). We can be sure that it is not a representation of what today's astronomers would call a "stellar object." Stellar objects (stars) are to be found with the Moon in the upper left of the picture. In fact, the Blazing Star or Glory is a straightforward heraldic representation of the Deity. Figure 2 shows the obverse of the Great Seal of The United States. You will see the Deity represented there in the same manner. The Blazing Star or Glory, shown on the First Degree Board in the Heavens, represents the Deity as *It is*, in all Its Glory, as It projects Itself into existence. The Chequered Pavement represents the Deity as *It is perceived to be* at the opposite pole of consciousness, here on Earth in ordinary life. The light and dark squares represent paired opposites, a mixture of mercy and justice, reward and punishment, passion and analysis, vengeance and loving kindness. The squares also represent the human experience of life, light and dark, good and evil, ease and difficulty. But that is only how it is *perceived*. The *squares* are not the symbol; the *Pavement* is the symbol. The light and dark squares fit together with exact nicety to form the Pavement, a single thing, a unity which is depicted as being without limit. The whole is surrounded by the Tessellated Border which binds the drawing into a single symbol. In this representation on the Tracing Board, the Border binds not simply the squares of the Pavement, but the entire picture, into a unity. The Tassels can be thought of as representing the Divine agency that operates throughout the whole.

Except in the case of the Glory, which stands alone, the symbols of duality occur throughout the Board: from the black and white squares at the bottom to the Sun and Moon, an ancient symbol for the paired opposites of masculine and feminine, at the top. In the central area of the Board duality is represented by two of the three columns; but here, as we rise from the fixed duality of the elemental existence in the physical world, the third column introduces a new idea. The striking thing about these columns is that each is of a different Order of Architecture. In Masonic symbolism they are assigned names: Wisdom to the Ionic Column in the middle, Strength to the Doric Column on the left, and Beauty to the Corinthian Column on the right.⁷ How shall we interpret these Columns and their names?

As we have seen, one of the principal components of Renaissance thought was Kabbalah, and, in particular, it was the Sephardi Kabbalah which spread throughout the Mediterranean area with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. During the Renaissance several very significant books were written on the subject of Kabbalah.⁸ One of the principal diagrams used by Kabbalists to communicate their ideas is the "Tree of Life" which is shown in the adjacent figure.⁹ The column on the right is called the "Column of Mercy" and is the active column. That on the left is called the "Column of Severity" and is the constraining column. The central column is called the "Column of Consciousness"; it is the column of equilibrium with



⁶ Dyer, Colin, *Symbolism in Craft Freemasonry* ; (Lewis, Shepperton, 1983);p. 113

⁷ Dyer, C.; *op. cit.*; p.72

⁸ e.g. Reuchlin, *op cit.* and Agrippa, H. C.; *De Occulta Philosophia* , (Antwerp, 1531) ed Donald Tyson, (reprint Llewellyn, St. Paul, 1993)

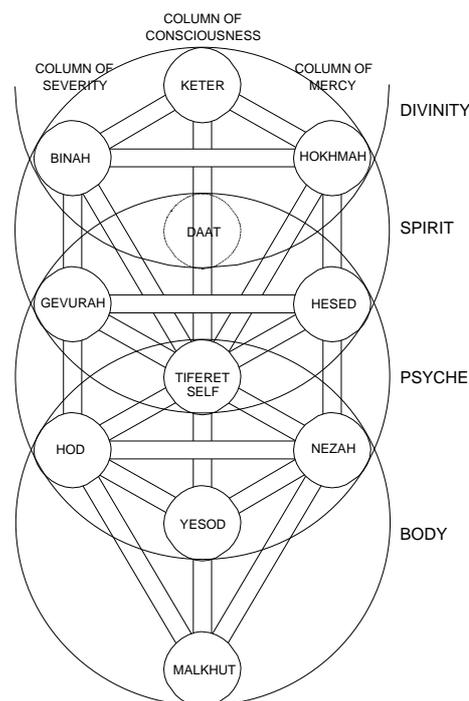
⁹ For an accessible introduction to Kabbalah see Halevi, Zev ben Shimon, *Adam and the Kabbalistic Tree* , (Bristol, Gateway, 1974)

the role of keeping the other two in balance. When the Tree is used to represent a model of the Universe, groups of ideas such as revelation, expansive growth, and passion are associated with the right (active) column. Groups of ideas such as principled understanding, disciplined restraint, and classification / analysis are associated with the left (constraining) column. Ideas and agencies relating to consciousness that keeps the active and constraining forces in balance are found on the central column. The three columns all terminate in (depend upon) Divinity at the top of the central column. Look again at the columns on the First Degree Tracing Board (Figure 1). The Corinthian Pillar of Beauty is on the right, and in our lectures it is associated with vigour, expansion and growth.¹⁰ The Doric Pillar of Strength is on the left, and its elegant simplicity suggests such things as discipline, restraint, and stability. The Ionic Pillar of Wisdom is in the middle. The Ionic design is an intermediate between the other two - not as simple as the Doric, less ornate than the Corinthian. The Three Pillars, like the Tree of Life, speak of a universe in which expansive and constraining forces are held in balance by a coordinating agency.

The Universe, as it was perceived¹¹ by the Renaissance philosophers, consisted of "four worlds." The Hermetica describes such a division with each of the four worlds associated with one of the "elements."¹² Kabbalah has the same division as the figure on the right indicates.¹³ They are the "elemental" or physical world of the body, the "celestial" world of the psyche or soul, the "supercelestial" world of spirit, and the Divine world. We can see that these same levels are represented on the First Degree Board (Figure 1). The four levels on the Board are more obvious if we remember that the symbols were taken from a time when the universe was considered to be geocentric with earth at the center and heaven beyond the stars. The Pavement represents the "elemental", physical world, the central part of the Board including the columns and most of the Masonic symbols, represents the "celestial" world of the psyche or soul, the Heavens represent the "supercelestial" world of the spirit, and the Glory, as we have seen, represents the Divinity.

Thus far we have considered how this picture can be understood as a representation of the structure of the universe as it was conceived by the intellectual community in the Renaissance. That is the "landscape." Where is the "man"?

Remember that one of the ideas fundamental to Renaissance thought was the concept of a Macrocosm (seen as the universe as a whole) and a corresponding Microcosm (seen as the human individual). The idea is that the universe and human beings are structured using the same principles, both having been made "in the image of God"; and that in the course of events there is always a correspondence between activity in the greater and lesser worlds. This is a



¹⁰ Lectures of the Three Degrees in Craft Masonry; (Ian Allan Regalia, 1997); p.128

¹¹ This word is chosen carefully. They *conceived* of the Universe as a highly integrated unity; they *perceived* it (as incarnate humans do) as having this hierarchical structure.

¹² *Hermetica*, trans. W. Scott (Boston, Shambhala, 1985) Stobaeus, Excerpt XXIV, p.495

¹³ Halevi, op cit. p.28 Renaissance literature is not uniform in this respect. Such a hierarchy is generally present, but some authors describe "three worlds" and seem to lump Divinity and spirit together.

necessary consequence of the Neo-Platonic principle of "Oneness." In the Hermetica, "As above, so below," sums up this idea; and it was stated in detail in England in the early 17th century by Robert Fludd in his *History of the Two Worlds*.¹⁴

Thus far we have avoided speaking of one of the principal features of the Board, the Ladder. On the First Degree Board it extends from the Scripture open on the Pedestal to the Glory that represents the Deity; and in the Masonic symbolism, it is said to be Jacob's Ladder. We will consider the ladder together with another symbol, the Point-within-a-Circle-Bounded-by-Two-Parallel-Lines, which can be seen on the face of the Pedestal that supports the Scripture. Why should we consider these two symbols together? Look at the Frontispiece from Masonic Miscellanies (Figure 3). As in many early Masonic drawings the Ladder and the Circle bounded by Parallel Lines appear together as if they have some connection. Consider the Two Parallel Lines first. They, like the Doric and Corinthian columns, represent paired opposites, active and passive qualities. Why are they opposites? Because in Masonic symbolism they are said to represent Moses (the Prophet) and Solomon (the Lawgiver). In earlier Workings, before the symbolic structure was de-Christianized, the lines are associated with the Saints John.¹⁵ Since the Baptist's Day is Midsummer, and the Evangelist's Day is Midwinter, we see substantially the same idea of paired opposites. The ladder with its "three principal rounds", Faith, Hope, and Charity, rises between the two parallels to the "Blazing Star or Glory".

Now, when we look at this Point-within-a-Circle-Bounded-by-Two-Parallel-Lines together with the Ladder and its three levels, we see a pattern very similar to the three columns. There are three verticals, two of which relate to active and constraining functions while the third, the Ladder, reaches to the heavens and provides the means by which we hope to ascend thereto.¹⁶ The ladder, which I think of as a representation of individual consciousness, has "three principal rounds" or levels, represented by Faith, Hope and Charity (they are so labeled in Figure 3) which correspond to the three lower levels of the four-level Universe we observed earlier. Both the Macrocosmic "Landscape" and the Microcosmic "Man" share the same source, the fourth level of Divinity, represented by the Blazing Star, or Glory, from which they both emerge. Taken together the Ladder and the Point-within-a-Circle-Bounded-by-Two-Parallel-Lines represent the human individual, made "in the image of God," according to the same principles on which the Universe is based.

There is one more idea upon which we should touch before we leave the First Degree Board. A Mason is sometimes called "a travelling man," and one of the Masonic catechisms gives us a little insight into this seldom used epithet. "Q. - Did you ever travel? A. - My forefathers did. Q.- Where did they travel? A. - Due East and West. Q. - What was the object of their travels? A. - They traveled East in search of instruction, and West to propagate the knowledge they had gained."¹⁷

Notice the cardinal points of the compass on the Border of the First Degree Tracing Board (Figure 1). They define the East West direction as it is to be understood in terms of the Masonic Symbolism, and in doing so they make some comment about the nature of the journey which the new Mason apprentices himself to undertake. That journey from West to East is represented, symbolically, by the progress through the Masonic Degrees; and it is, in fact, the ascent up Jacob's Ladder, one of the "Principal Rounds" for each Degree.

¹⁴ Fludd, R., *Utriusque Cosmi, Historia*, (Oppenheim, De Bry, 1617-9)

¹⁵ Dyer, C.; *op.cit.*;pp.98-9

¹⁶ *ibid*;pp.94-5

¹⁷ Lectures of the Three Degrees in Craft Masonry;(Ian Allan Regalia, 1997);p.107

Indeed, from the point of view from which we are speaking, the "East - West Dimension" as shown on the Tracing Boards is the dimension of consciousness: ordinary consciousness of the physical world on the Ground Floor at the West and consciousness of the Divine Presence at the Blazing Star to the East. As we have seen, the notion of a "mystical ascent" was part and parcel of the Hermetic / Kabbalistic Tradition. It is a devotional exercise, to be conducted in the context of the religious belief of each individual, during which the individual rises through the worlds of the soul and the spirit and at last finds himself experiencing the presence of the Deity. Reuchlin describes such an ascent in *De Arte Kabbalistica*¹⁸ where the result is achieved by means of contemplation of the Divine Name and Seventy Two verses selected from the Psalms; another can be found in the *Hermetica* which is an example of a seven level ascent in an astrological idiom.¹⁹ Some of these ascents are deeply Christian in their character. In *De Occulta Philosophia*, Agrippa "rises through the three worlds, the elemental world, the celestial world, the supercelestial world....where he is in contact with angels, where the Trinity is proved, the Hebrew names of God are listed, though the Name of Jesus is now the most powerful of all Names."²⁰ As he starts on the interior journey the Mason is inexperienced; and he must depend upon his interior guidance, that is, he must practice the first of the Cardinal Virtues, Faith.

The Entered Apprentice learns some interesting lessons on the Ground Floor. When he enters the Lodge for the first time he leaves behind all "minerals and metals", all the things that give him any status in the physical world. This would have been especially true in the 1700's when it was not uncommon for Gentlemen to carry swords. This symbol tells us that on entering the Lodge we leave the things of this world behind. This is an essential for the mystical ascent which we shall see subsequently. The Working Tools of this Degree, the Gavel, the Chisel, and the Gauge, are tools of action²¹. We can think that the Gavel represents our capacity to experience passion, the Chisel represents our capacity to perform classifications and analyses, and the Gauge tells us how much of each to use and when. It is very valuable for our daily life to be able to use passion and analysis in a thoughtful, well balanced way. Doing so is a prerequisite for the practice of the Cardinal Virtues. The Cardinal Virtues, Temperance, Prudence, Fortitude, and Justice, are qualities are very important for us to practice in our day-to-day life. In practicing these Virtues we will establish the reputation in our community of being a very solid citizen. That reputation will ensure that we have a stable life, and that no one will rattle our cage when we are giving our attention to the experience of our interior work.

Secrecy is another principle that the Entered Apprentice learns. It is a controversial subject; and, in fact, there are no Masonic secrets. Everything that any Mason is obligated to hold close is generally available on the Web in anti-Masonic web sites. But secrecy is necessary for one who practices the mystical ascent through consciousness. As one makes that ascent one learns things about himself that will seem strange, even impossible, to those who have not had a comparable experience. Secrecy tells us that we should not share valuable, personal information with those who cannot appreciate it. This is not a new idea. About 2000 years ago one of the most important Teachers in Western Civilization said, "Neither cast ye your pearls before swine"²². Masonry teaches by the use of symbols, and secrecy is a symbol that teaches that same principle.

The last, and perhaps most important, of the objectives of the Entered Apprentice Degree is the individuation of the Self as the term is understood in Jungian Psychology. In this context the purpose of the Self is to integrate the various components of the psyche, to cause them to operate in an harmonious and consistent fashion, and to enable the person to operate as an

¹⁸ Reuchlin, J. *op. cit.* Book Three p.277

¹⁹ *Hermetica*, trans., Scott, W., (Boston, Shambhala, 1993), LIBELLVS I, p.129

²⁰ Yates, Frances A., *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, (London, RKP, 1979) p.63

²¹ Dyer, C. *op. cit.* p.p.149-52

²² Matt 7:6

independent individual. The individuation of the Self facilitates the ability to start the mystical ascent.

With this background we are ready to consider the title of this paper, "The Secret Identity of Freemasons". In fact, this identity is not really secret; it was revealed many years ago in a publication that is generally considered to be very reliable. And, actually, the identity does not relate exclusively to Freemasons. It is the symbolic structure of Craft that makes it particularly relevant to Masonry. Look at the Second Degree Tracing Board in Figure 4. That is a picture of you. This statement raises the question, "Which of the two Officers depicted on the Tracing Board represents me?" The answer is, "Neither of them. The entire picture refers to you. Know ye not that ye are the Temple...?"²³

In fact, this Second Degree Tracing Board is a detailed drawing of a part of the First Degree Board. Of what part? Of the Microcosm or the Man. If that sounds strange, consider the following ideas. On the First Degree Board the Microcosm was represented by Jacob's Ladder between the two opposite vertical Parallel Lines. Here on the Second Degree Board there are two verticals, the Pillars that are the Archives of Masonry; and we know that they are opposites because they are topped with Celestial and Terrestrial Spheres. The Ladder has been replaced with the Winding Stairs, but the stairs perform the same function. And there are four levels, the Ground Floor – connected with the physical world, the Middle Chamber – representing the Soul, the pale blue Balcony which has no direct Masonic symbolism but seems to be placed there to represent the level of the Spirit, and Divinity – represented by the Sun which is rarely found shining inside a building. This idea suggests that the Lodge and all the ritual events that occur within it are a description of the events which one will experience within himself when he makes the mystical ascent.

Now, with the Second Degree Tracing Board in view, let us consider the lessons to be learned as one ascends the Winding Stairs. We will start with the "ear of corn". It is a product of nature, and we can understand that it tells us that this mystical ascent is a process of natural maturation. The next thing to notice is that the bottom of the Stairs is guarded by the Junior Warden, who symbolizes the Self; and his presence indicates that the interior ascent cannot start until the Self has individuated.

The climbing of the Winding Stairs is a journey in consciousness. The ritual journey in the Lodge describes the event; but the actual ascent occurs within one's self; and one does it by one's self – not at the instruction of another Mason. At the start of this ritual journey the Junior Warden asks the Candidate for a password, and this password introduces a long and complex story. It would be inappropriate to discuss that story here, since such a discussion might enable anyone to identify the password. But if you recall that story with care, and consider the actions and motivations of those characters that experience difficulty, you will realize that the password establishes two requirements which are very relevant to the climbing of the stairs. The first requirement is: Before starting to climb one must have completed the proper prerequisite. From the Masonic point of view, that prerequisite is the learning the lessons of the First Degree as discussed above. The second requirement is: One must have the proper motivation. This is an important idea. There are many ideas that motivate people to seek an experience of elevated consciousness. Some want to be able to gain information; some want to manipulate others, some want to perform magic by imposing their will on the universe. We need not discuss whether or not such motives morally correct or even possible to achieve. The point here is that none of those motives are appropriate to Freemasonry. The only reason a Mason is taught to climb the Winding Stairs to enable him to seek, and ultimately to experience, the Divine Presence.

The journey in consciousness that is symbolized by the climbing of the Winding Stairs is not usually understood to be a particularly difficult adventure; and generally speaking, it is not. We

²³ | Cor 3:16

can think of it as a process of turning within and, through processes such as meditation, coming to know one's self. As one does this, memories from the "archives" come to mind. Such memories often have an emotional load – good or bad – which can compel or inhibit. The task is to drain the emotion out of the memories so that they are simply memories and no longer compel or inhibit our activities. However, such memories can sometimes be very painful; and in that case the climbing of the Stairs can be very stressful. Such experiences are very personal and private. Sharing them with a Brother who can be sympathetic and can, perhaps, help one to understand his situation in a less stressful way can be very helpful. This is the reason why we are pledged to keep each other's secrets – but never to keep secrets of a criminal nature. The climbing of the Winding Stairs is a rigorous, sometimes difficult process, and no one should be talked into doing it. That is why one must ask to become a Mason.

The climbing of the Winding Stairs brings one to the Middle Chamber of the Temple. When we consider the Temple as a model of each of us then the Middle Chamber represents our Soul, the seat of our morality. This may seem an unusual idea, but consider the events that occur in the Middle Chamber. The working tools of this Degree are the Plumb Rule, the Level and the Square. Unlike the tools of the previous degree, which are tools of action, these are tools of testing. Each tool measures against an absolute criterion, two of the criteria are opposites, and the third defines the relationship between the other two. In a Universe where opposites are held in balance, that has a lot of the characteristics of a system of morality. We can consider the Plumb Rule to represent "license", the Level to represent "discipline", and the Square to represent the ability to coordinate and apply each of them properly. Such an idea is reinforced when we look at the Perfect Ashlar which is placed in the Middle Chamber "...for the experienced craftsman to try his jewels on"²⁴. Given that the Working Tools of this Degree are also the "movable Jewels" and that both are referenced in the Fifth Section of the First Lecture, I suspect that we have here an interesting image from the operative craft. Operative's squares, levels and plumb rules were made of wood; and when used on stone they would get abraded. It is not unreasonable to think that a perfect ashlar would be kept in an operative lodge to enable the craftsmen to calibrate their tools. When viewed from the Freemasonic perspective, and considering the characteristics we have attributed to our Working Tools, that image makes the Perfect Ashlar look like our conscience, placed in the Middle Chamber of our Soul to enable us to ensure that the criteria with which we make moral judgments are accurate.

There is another event here that is very instructive. The builders of King Solomon's Temple were said to go the Middle Chamber to receive their wages, and they were confident that the wages were appropriate and fair. When the Middle Chamber is understood to represent one's soul this symbol takes on an interesting context. It suggests that each of us has, within his soul, an agency that ensures that we each get the wages that we deserve. Wages seem to be the Craft's symbol to communicate the teaching from the Western version of the Great Light that says, "...whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."²⁵ This is generally considered to be a good and beneficial principle; but for a person who finds himself in a difficult or painful position, it can be an idea of which he wants no part. In fact, I think this is one of the most important principles Masonry teaches. On the one hand, it tells us that, at the foundation of things, life is fair. More importantly, it is the basis of individual freedom. If you find yourself in a situation you do not like, you can change it. If you don't like the wages you are receiving, work differently; and you will get different wages. In the alternative idiom, if you don't like the crops you are reaping, sow different seeds; and you will reap different crops. Many people don't like this idea. They would rather look at others and say, "They have done this to me." Sometimes that is an accurate statement, but to give much attention to "them" misses the point. In blaming others for our situation, we give up our own personal freedom. In accepting responsibility for the "wages" we receive – that is for the circumstances in which we find ourselves - we give ourselves the power to work differently and to live a different life. It is the source of individual freedom.

²⁴ Lectures of the Three Degrees in Craft Masonry;(Ian Allan Regalia, 1997);p.72

²⁵ Gal 6:7

The Middle Chamber is also a place of contemplation. It is a calm and quiet place, and it is a place in which we can look at the circumstances of our life and understand them in a very profound manner. If one sits quietly and looks within himself, many things will present themselves for contemplation. It seems to me that one of the most valuable symbols for contemplation in the Middle Chamber is the "Letter G". What does the "Letter G" symbolize? First, it represents the Regular Progression of Science. Second, it refers to God, the Grand Geometrician of the Universe. To say that the "Letter G" refers God makes a great deal of sense to English (and probably to German) speaking Masons. But to ask a French speaking Mason, for whom the word for God is "Dieu", to say that the "Letter G" stands for God is to ask him to make a large concession to the English source of the Craft. Can we understand the Letter G more broadly? I think so.

Looking at the history of the "Regular Progression of Science" we find that one of the earliest references to it is in Prichard's *Masonry Dissected*, c. 1730. That does not tell us much, nor does, *The Defense of Masonry*, the anonymous reply to that expose. However, the *Defense* was very well received; and it was published in the 1738 edition of *Anderson's Constitutions*. Although it does not say much about the "Regular Progression", the *Defense* is of interest because, next to the line in the text that mentions "Point, Line, Superficies, Solid", there is a marginal note that says, "Vid. Proclus in Euclid. Lib. II. Def. 2 & 34". The only English translation of Euclid available in 1738 was Billingsly's translation, c. 1570, a copy of which I was able to locate in the Library of American University. A summary of the referenced paragraphs is as follows: A point is position only; if a point moves, it generates a line; if a line moves, in a direction not parallel to itself, it generates a superficies; if a superficies moves in a similar manner, it generates a solid. This is certainly interesting geometrical information, but it does not seem to be the sort of thing that would be of use to an architect who is designing a Cathedral or to an operative mason who is building it. What did the Defender of Masonry have in mind by referring us to this quote from Proclus in a text from the Renaissance?

In this process, as it is described, the "stuff" of the point must become the fabric of the line, the "stuff" of the line becomes the fabric of the superficies, and the "stuff" of the superficies becomes the fabric of the solid. Since Proclus was the last of the classical neo-Platonic philosophers, this "progression of science" looks very much like a neo-Platonic model. Although, I have been able to find no reference to Proclus suggesting that, I have found that ibn Latiff, a Kabbalist in Moorish Spain, used this model to illustrate the neo-Platonic formation of the Universe and its four levels. (See figure 5)

As one works in the Middle Chamber of his own being and contemplates the "Letter G" and its neo-Platonic implications one is lead deeper and deeper into the Temple that one is. This is a process that each person must do by himself and for himself. No one can do it for him; and, while it is represented by a ceremony, the event itself it does not happen in a Masonic Lodge. At last, after much contemplation, one is led by one's own inner being to King Solomon's Porch, the Porchway Entrance to the Holy of Holies in the Temple that one is. This takes us to the consideration of the Third Degree and its Tracing Board. (See Figure 6.)

As illustrated on the Tracing Board of the Third Degree, when one stands in King Solomon's Porch one can see into the Holy of Holies. Now the Holy of Holies is the place in Solomon's Temple where the Deity was said to reside. To find one's way to that place in the Temple is the completion of the Mystical Ascent. It is a symbol of becoming aware of the Divine Presence. But there is a difficulty here. The Deity is without limit. If one becomes aware of the presence of a Being that is without limit, one's Self cannot exist. It dies. Consider the following quotation:

"Hence the Third Degree is that of mystical death, of which bodily death is taken as figurative..... . In all the Mystery-systems of the past will be found this degree of mystical death as an outstanding and essential feature prior

to the final stage of perfection and regeneration.”²⁶

This is not a physical death, nor is it a loss of identity. We can think of it as the death of our understanding of our Self; and through this “death” we are raised to a higher level of consciousness – the Spirit – from which we can experience the Divine Presence.

One last look at the Tracing Board of the Third Degree. The Points of the Compass on the border have been reversed. East is now at the bottom of the Board; and West is at the top, the direction in which we travel. After having experienced the Divine Presence one travels West to spread Brotherly Love and Wisdom, to assist those Brethren seeking to make the same journey, and to “...propagate the knowledge he has gained.”

²⁶ W. L. Wilmshurst, quoted by C. Dyer; *Symbolism in Craft Freemasonry* ; (Shepperton, Lewis, 1986) p.138