

# **THE MOST EXCELLENT MASTER**

## Foreword

In some constitutions the Most Excellent Master is an introductory degree to the Royal Arch Degree. The USGC of NSW & ACT practice is for the Excellent Master degree to be the introductory degree to the Royal Arch. This and several other differences will be noted by the reader.

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In the Craft degrees the candidate is "INITIATED" an Entered Apprentice, "PASSED" to the degree of Fellowcraft, and "RAISED" to the sublime degree of Master Mason. All these ceremonies are true "initiation". In the Mark Master degree the candidate is "ADVANCED". Again, correctly speaking, he is "initiated". His "INDUCTION" into the oriental chair in the Past Master degree, it was discovered is not "initiation" neither can the ceremony of the Most Excellent Master degree be so called. It is more correctly described as a pageant.

In this degree the candidate is not "initiated," he is not "made" anything; he is but "RECEIVED AND ACKNOWLEDGED". This is highly consistent with all Masonic teaching, for the candidate who has actually made suitable proficiency in the preceding degrees has MADE OF HIMSELF, a Most Excellent Master. It remains only for the Lodge to "RECEIVE AND ACKNOWLEDGE" him as such.

This degree contains no ancient, veiled symbolical meaning. It is modern and was created for a specific purpose. It performs the function for which it was originated. The only symbology contained therein is that referring to other degrees, and its import is identical with the meaning discovered in the degree from which taken.

The degree of Most Excellent Master is said to have originated in Temple Chapter, Albany, New York about the year 1797. Thomas Smith Webb has generally been credited with having been its author. Its sole *raison d'etre* is to bring to the candidate the story of the completion and dedication of the Temple of Solomon and it attempts to fill the gap in Masonic legend which would otherwise remain between the Third degree and the Royal Arch degree.

In the Third degree the Temple is under construction and nearing completion, but of that completion and dedication the candidate never learns. His attention is abruptly turned from the actual building to more serious matters. Thenceforth the ritual confines itself to the events immediately following that tragedy and finally concludes with the story untold, a great loss and the candidate in possession of but a substitute fox that of which he was in search.

As an introduction to the Royal Arch degree, which is claimed to be the consummation of the Third degree, it is highly consistent that the candidate be acquainted with the material Temple in the Most Excellent Master degree.

A portion of the allegorical story of the second section of the Third degree is taken from the Bible, and then the statement is made: "Masonic tradition informs us". This phrase when used in Masonic ritual, is always warning that a departure is about to be made from Scriptural historical recital and the realm of fancy is to be entered for the benefit of "veiling in allegory". The Most Excellent Master degree returns to the Biblical account of the completion and dedication of the Temple and uses much of the story as related in 1 Kings: 8. Only in the setting of the Keystone does the ritual digress from the Biblical narrative and this brief return to "Masonic tradition" is vitally essential to set the stage, so to speak, for the future discovery in the Royal Arch degree.

The steps taken by the candidate in his approach are accounted for numerically by the position of the degree in sequence from the First degree of the "Blue" Lodge. As observed, the position in which the obligation is assumed is the same as in the preceding degrees of the Chapter and also of another degree. This is consistent as there is no symbolic necessity for a change.

One of the exceptions referred to in the introductory remarks is noted in the obligation and this exception is one of the most praiseworthy in any "modern" degree found in Freemasonry. It recognizes the real reason for the perpetuation of Masonic philosophy. To enlighten mankind and makes the acquisition of knowledge a duty and its dispensing an obligation.

In ancient times the Hebrew Priest appeared before the congregation of Israel with the tallith (praying shawl) over his head, which he held uplifted from his face with both raised hands. His index fingers touched each other and the thumbs extended below, likewise touched each other, thereby forming, approximately, an equilateral triangle. The fingers of each hand were held divided, that is the first and second fingers were together with a space between the second and third, the third and fourth being together. This formed the Hebrew letter (V) shin, initial letter of "shaddai." "Shaddai" literally means, "hovering over" and carries the inference that it is "Divine Presence" which is "hovering over."

In this manner the Priest uttered the "three-fold benediction" repeated three times: It is an interesting sidelight that this might easily be referred to as "three times three."

"May the Lord bless thee, and keep thee.

May the Lord let his countenance shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

May the Lord lift up his face unto thee and bestow upon thee peace".

This beautiful benediction suffers through translation; the English word "peace" does not convey the fullness of meaning of the Hebrew word "shalom" which means "completeness of being".

More cannot be written without Masonic indiscretion, but the similarity between this ancient sign and one used in the Most Excellent Master degree, as well as a sign used in a degree of the Symbolic Lodge will be apparent to any well informed Royal Arch Mason. When one reflects on the pre-eminence to which

a Most Excellent Master has presumably attained, it is obvious that a reminder of his final goal — COMPLETENESS OF BEING—is most appropriate.

There is no more altruistic teaching nor loftier sentiment expressed in any degree of Freemasonry than in the charge of the Most Excellent Master degree. Printed in plain English in all manuals, no one can take exception to quoting in part there from, No profane can read it without forming "a favourable opinion of the order". No Royal Arch Mason can be too often reminded of its content: "It is one of your GREAT DUTIES, as a Most Excellent Master, to DISPENSE LIGHT AND TRUTH to the uninformed Mason; and I need not remind you of the impossibility of complying with this obligation without possessing an accurate acquaintance with the lectures of each degree. If you are not already completely conversant with the degrees heretofore conferred on you, remember that an indulgence, prompted by the belief that you would apply yourself with double diligence to become so, has induced the brethren to accept you. LET IT; THEREFORE, BE YOUR UNREMITTING STUDY TO ACQUIRE SUCH A DEGREE OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION AS SHALL ENABLE YOU TO DISCHARGE WITH PROPRIETY THE VARIOUS DUTIES INCUMBENT UPON YOU".

There is no greater gift man can give his fellow man than knowledge. Think for a moment, what a glorious renaissance Freemasonry would experience if each Companion who has assumed this solemn obligation accepted the duty which it imposes upon him and heeded the charge. If he faithfully let it be his "UNREMITTING STUDY TO ACQUIRE SUCH KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION" as would enable him to actually "DISPENSE LIGHT AND TRUTH TO THE UNINFORMED MASON"; that he might in fact be such an EXCELLENT MASTER as the Hebrew word "Rabboni" describes—"MY MASTER,—MY TEACHER,— MY GREAT ONE".