

A DISCUSSION ON MASONIC SYMBOLISM

Part Two, Preparation

PLEASE NOTE: In all of these essays, I am referring only to the Symbolism in the Ritual as used within the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York.

In the previous section, we looked at the symbolism of the candidate's being neither barefoot nor shod. In this section, we look at the custom of being neither naked nor clothed. Being dressed in this curious fashion is meant to signify two things: First, that the Candidate is neither totally naked nor defenseless, nor is he completely clothed and self sufficient. Second, the candidate is representing himself as being poor...and for that reason, he is informed to take no metallic substance with him into the Lodge rooms, the symbolism, with which we are all familiar, will be explained to him once he has proven himself.

Then he is hoodwinked. Despite the ritual, only a very ill-informed man can imagine that the hoodwink is for the purpose of concealing the Lodge room and the Brethren from the Initiate until he is obligated. Yet these thoughts may pass through his mind as well as the minds of the Brethren as they wait with keen anticipation to watch the effect that the ceremony has upon the candidate.

There is nothing secret about the inside of a Masonic temple. There is nothing within our walls that we are attempting to keep secret. Why, then, keep the Initiate totally in the dark until he is further bound by oath to the Lodge? Historically, it was understood that the eyes should not see until the heart had understood the mysteries of Masonry. In our jurisdiction, the Candidate remains blind to all that goes on around him until he is proven worthy, bound by oath, and requests the benefit of light. His darkness is a symbol of his ignorance...ignorance of our ways and ideals...until he, by his own request, is moved from the darkness of ignorance into the marvelous light of truth. How fitting and how very symbolic it is, then, that the first thing the new Brother will see within our Lodge room is the Great Light in Masonry, that rule and guide for the Craftsmen across the centuries.

There is yet one symbol to be worn by the Candidate, the Cabletow. For the Cabletow, the first meaning is quite obvious, that of a rope with which an uncooperative or disruptive person can forcibly be removed from the Lodge rooms to whence he came. But there is yet a deeper symbolic meaning – as there is in most of the symbols of Masonry. By accepting the application of the Cabletow, the Candidate is symbolically signifying his submitting to the unknown trials he may yet have to face and to the authority of those who will lead him through the darkness. It is, in a very real sense, a symbol of his tie to the Lodge and to all that represents. However, as a Cabletow has two ends, it is also a symbol, yet unknown to him, of the Lodge's tie to him, of their obligation to guide, protect, and teach him in all the aspects of Masonry to which he will soon become introduced.

While, in our Grand Jurisdiction, from this point in the Initiation process, the Candidate is led to a door of the Lodge, in a Traditional Observance Lodge, he will be

caused to wait in a “Chamber of Reflection” for a time of introspection. The Chamber of Reflection will be explained shortly in a separate essay.

At this point, the Candidate is properly prepared for Initiation and is led by his escorts to a door of the Lodge which, at this point, is closed to him...and it will be at this point in our study of symbolism that the next section will begin.

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