

## **THE MEANING AND PRESENTATION OF THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Our Degrees are difficult to understand fully and demand thought and study. A Chapter cannot present the Degrees intelligently to its Candidates unless those involved understand exactly what they are endeavouring to portray.

These notes therefore offer a brief explanation of each Degree (in this case the Royal Arch Degree) with some general suggestions as to its presentation.

### **THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREE**

Technically the Royal Arch is much the most difficult of the three Degrees as its lessons are deep and fundamental, and in physical preparation it must be intelligently sited in so many differing areas.

The Degree opens in a Chapter Room, where the Candidate must be Obligated to preserve the Secrets of the Degree. He retires to enter the building in Jerusalem where the Sanhedrin is sitting, with the entrance protected by the veils, each with its Captain or Guard. He passes the veils by means of the tests received at Babylon and now for the first time enters the white veils. Here he finds the Sanhedrin itself, the Chiefs in their rich robes and head pieces, with the Council fully in session. He is examined, accepted and sent off to begin work clearing away the ruins of the old Temple.

The discovery that is made is miraculous though its full import is beyond the understanding of the workmen. They decide to return to the Sanhedrin to report and receive instructions. With Scribe Ezra they investigate further and again return to the Council Chamber to report.

This is the last entrance and from this point the Council Chamber of the Sanhedrin gradually merges and becomes a Chapter Room and there the remaining ceremonial takes place. From all this it is clear that in presenting the Degree the different areas should be defined as clearly as possible or the Candidate will be bewildered. The areas may be defined thus:

First Entrance. This is the Chapter Room. The East (Sanhedrin) is veiled and the Candidate must not see the Officers robed and crowned. This he first does when he enters the Sanhedrin after passing the veils. Thus the Crown is removed before Z passes through the white veil to obligate the Candidate, and also he must not see the characters on the Altar, the Standards of the Tribes or the Zodiac Signs. This is Vault equipment.

Second Entrance. This is the approach and entry to the Sanhedrin and again no Vault equipment should be seen. The officers of the Sanhedrin are of course completely robed.

Third Entrance. The Candidate now enters the old Temple area and in due course the Vault beneath. It is desirable to keep the Vault hidden while he works amidst the ruins. Lighting and curtains will assist in this. A rheostat will allow the lighting to be increased for each descent. If possible the East should be left dim so that no emphasis is given to the Principal Officers. They are not part of the scene.

Fourth Entrance. We are now back in the Sanhedrin and in theory the Vault should be removed but that is not practicable. It must therefore be ignored.

Fifth Entrance. The site is once again the old Temple area, leading down into the Vault.

Sixth Entrance. The last entrance - it takes us back into the Sanhedrin, which soon merges into and becomes a Chapter Room. The Vault may now be left fully in view as the Candidate is experienced enough to understand its significance.

The key to the Degree and the ultimate secret of all Freemasonry is the discovery in the Vault of the Sacred Name, J.H.V.H. Up to this point the Candidate has had only moral lessons but suddenly he is left to find the

true spiritual meaning of the Craft. It is a solemn moment, the greatest in all Freemasonry, when first he gazes on the Sacred Name. Later he learns that there his search has truly ended and Freemasonry has bared its final secret, the search for God Himself! Perhaps too he has found the original Mason Word, sacred and ineffable, the answer to the search that all men must make as they pass through life itself. With the Ineffable Name, unpronounceable to the orthodox Jew, it is the Royal Arch word, also secret for us.

When at last he comes to realise what he has found, the Candidate must know that his search has ended and that the true meaning of Masonry is revealed to him. He knows at last that the moral rules he has been taught do no more than lead him to the spiritual truths that are the ultimate teaching of the Craft.