

MOST EXCELLENT MASTER – HIGHLIGHTS & TRUTH

The Most Excellent Master degree is a relatively modern degree and is believed to have originated in Temple Chapter at Albany, New York about 1797. It is my feeling that the MEM degree was incorporated to fill-in many of the important 'gaps' which existed and still do exist in the preceding degrees. Let's quickly review five points for what I consider to be the highlights of this degree and identify how these fill in some of the gaps.

1. The Temple was left unfinished in the Third degree. In the MEM degree King Solomon's Temple, the first great physical Temple, is completed and consecrated which seemed essential to the overall legend of the Masonic degrees, and in developing the complete allegory of Freemasonry.

2. The MEM degree answers the question that the candidate likely had when he is charged in the EA degree to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge. The MEM degree recognizes for the first time that the real mission of Masonry, and each individual Mason, is to enlighten mankind and make the acquisition and teaching of knowledge a duty, rather than an ideal.

3. It broadens the definition of Charity. In the EA and MMM degrees, Charity is of a material application. The MEM degree raises it from a material application and lifts it into the realms of heart and spirit that we should as MEMs endeavor to cover man's faults and imperfections with the broad mantle of charity and brotherly love.

4. Unlike all of the preceding degrees, in this degree, labour is over. There are no Working Tools. Indeed we take time to remove our aprons of labour, to dedicate our work and to acknowledge our brethren who have progressed this far towards perfection.

5. It is interesting to note that the word given in the degree is Aramaic [*Era-may-ick*], which was the language of our Lord and Saviour. It is found only once in the Bible, in the New Testament, St. Johns 20:16 and is a title of honour given by Mary of Magdalene, when she addressed Jesus after the resurrection. It signifies the Teacher or Master.

Now let's look briefly at a different topic: one of the grand principles on which Freemasonry is founded – "Truth". I wish to say that I am somewhat nervous touching on this topic because although it is introduced into our ritual, it is not defined, and probably for good reason. I also feel that there is a risk that delving into this principle may hinge on religion which Freemasonry must avoid. So Brethren, I'm not going to define Truth, but I would like to give you some ideas to think about.

There are several places in the Craft ritual where Truth is mentioned:

1. At the end of the JW Lecture in the EA degree, the candidate is informed that one of the tenets or fundamental principles of Ancient Freemasonry is Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.
2. At the end of the Charge to the EA, the candidate is directed to print indelibly on his mind the sacred duties of truth, of honour, of virtue.
3. In the Third degree, in the Raising, "Proceeding onward, and still guided in your progress by the principles of moral Truth" and "The secrets of nature and the principles of intellectual Truth were then unveiled to your view".

In the Exemplification on the Five Points of Fellowship, "It is thus my brother that we are bound together in one indivisible chain of sincere affection, lawful support, relief, fidelity and Truth.

Therefore, in accordance with Masonic ritual, Truth is a fundamental principle (both morally and intellectually) and a sacred duty that binds us together.

When we come to think about Truth we have an immediate problem of definition. Truth is most often used to mean in accord with fact or reality, or fidelity to an original or to a standard or ideal. The opposite of truth is falsehood. The concept of truth is discussed and debated in several contexts, including philosophy and religion. Many human activities depend upon the concept, which is assumed rather than a subject of discussion, including science, law (Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?), and everyday life.

Various theories and views of truth continue to be debated among scholars and philosophers. Many religions consider perfect knowledge of all truth about all things (omniscience) to be an attribute of a divine or supernatural being.

The MEM degree doesn't attempt to fill this gap. In fact the word "truth" doesn't exist in our RA ritual. In a way, Truth is similar to other Masonic landmarks – for example in the Installation ceremony where the WM-elect is directed that he must be well skilled in the ancient landmarks, but these landmarks are not identified anywhere.

I would like to share one attempt at defining 'truth' which was presented in a sermon at a district church service a few years ago in Beamsville. The service was presided over by a Reverend who was a relatively new Freemason. This young craftsman presented the following: "Truth occurs only in relationships, truth does not exist aside from relationships. Without a relationship we do not have truth, we have merely facts. We have facts that are accurate or inaccurate, but truth expresses how those facts are shared between one person and another. Truth exists in the relationship we share with each other. Truth implies honesty; truth implies sincerity, faithfulness – not merely accuracy. When we say that something is truthful we don't usually mean that it is correct, but we mean that it is honest and sincere."

Sometimes this definition of truth reminds me of my mother. In her elderly years her facts were often distorted. She would never forgive anyone who may have done her wrong years ago or reconsider conclusions that she had arrived at during her lifetime, but she was truthful. What she said she honestly believed to be true.

It may be supposed that Truth is the greatest and mighty above all things. A few quotes from the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle; "Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth; Piety requires us to honour truth above our friends; and A true friend is one soul in two bodies".

Brethren, it is our sacred duty to be truthful – may we endeavour to be truthful to God, to our neighbour and to ourselves.

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