

UNDERSTANDING THE MEM DEGREE

I personally don't have difficulty in understanding why some Masons prefer one Masonic body over another. I do have difficulty in accepting why some Members just don't like a particular body, or in some cases critique a body in which they have not ever participated. In my experience I have heard the following remarks, I prefer Chapter over Lodge – it's more relaxing or more "fun". I've heard some members say "no degree is supposed to be fun". Or that one Rite is better than the other – I like the York Rite because its workings are similar to Lodge OR I prefer the Scottish Rite because it's more theatrical. And sadly, I have heard "I just don't 'get' Chapter, it doesn't do it for me", and I've heard this comment from a few very loyal and longstanding Craft Lodge members.

I believe that like many things, we don't 'get' it because we don't yet understand it and have not opened our eyes to it; similar to the Overseers who, not being able to ascertain a use for the keystone, rejected it. Perhaps, it's just different and hard to grasp or appreciate.

The MEM degree is a difficult degree to understand as it is quite different from most Masonic degrees. There are several cases in point where the MEM degree is different. Let's examine some of these differences and see if we can obtain a better understanding and appreciation for them.

The MEM degree is a "modern" degree and relatively short. The degree is said to have originated in Albany, N.Y. in about the year 1797, long after the MMM and RAM degrees. It is short because it was created for one specific purpose: to bring to the candidate the story of completing and dedicating the first temple. In the third degree, the temple is never completed due to the untimely death of HAB. The MEM degree returns to the biblical account of the completion and dedication of the temple.

The MEM degree is the 5th lodge in which the candidate has entered before seeing the temple completed and dedicated; In the 1st lodge he is initiated, to a EA, from darkness to light; In the 2nd he passes, to a FC, from ignorance to knowledge; In the 3rd he is raised to a MM, from death unto life; and In the 4th the candidate advances to the honorary degree of a Mark Master Mason.

Unlike the previous four degrees, there is no initiation or advancement. The candidate is not initiated, passed, raised, or advanced; instead he is received and acknowledged for what he has already accomplished. He has already made suitable proficiency in the preceding degrees.

It is not a 'working' degree – labour is over. There are no working tools (of measurement or of labour); the candidate is received on the keystone, a finished product.

During the perambulation, the following ode is given: "The temple's completed, Exalt high each voice, the Cope-stone is finished, our labour is o'er, the sound of the gavel shall hail us no more"

After the keystone is placed and the ark safely seated, the W.M. says "Blessed be the Lord that hath given rest unto His people Israel". At this moment, the SW & JW place their aprons in front of the pillars of the Arch. This action may seem unmasonic as in the Craft Lodge we are taught to never remove our aprons; but again, this degree is different and the removing of the aprons is done purposely to symbolize that labour is over. After the candidate is received and acknowledged, the SW & JW resume their aprons.

The degree is much more religious, scripturally, than the preceding degrees; At the Opening, the 24 Psalm is read: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof"; When the candidate is conducted twice around the Lodge, the W.M. reads Psalm 122; "I was glad when they said unto me 'Let us go into the house of the Lord", the ritual given at the Altar is the biblical account of the dedication of the Temple and Solomon's prayers at the dedication: 1 Kings 8, Chapter 8, versus 17-21, 23-24 and 28; When the fire is displayed, the ritual given is 2 Chronicles 7, versus 1-4 which deals with the sacrifice and dedication when the Lord appears and speaks to Solomon - "Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering..."; and at the Closing, the 23rd Psalm is read "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want".

The candidate is instructed to dispense light and knowledge to all uninformed Masons. When we think about it, there is no greater gift than to dispense knowledge. To do this we must be completely conversant in all the degrees heretofore conferred upon us.

Brethren, let us keep our eyes open to the many diverse Masonic degrees open to us and be not quick to reject what we don't understand. Let us discharge with propriety the various duties incumbent on us so that we truly are a Most Excellent Master.

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