



UGLE Oration

Building the Temple

Index

Building the Temple within oneself.

Summary

Building the Temple by means of a symbolic progression, to reach the inner-self.
“The North-East Corner”

Keywords

First-Degree, Temple, Cornerstone, Morality, Virtue

Building the Temple: The North-East Corner

'It is customary', the Master says, addressing the recently admitted Initiate, 'at the erection of all superb edifices, to lay the foundation stone at the North-East corner of the building'. And he continues: 'You, being newly admitted into Masonry, are placed at the North East part of the Lodge to represent that stone, and from the foundation laid this evening may you raise a structure which is perfect and which will bring you honour'. He is explaining, in other words, that you have now begun your journey within Freemasonry; a journey involving Three Degrees of Craft Masonry and the Royal Arch.

This is presented by means of a symbolic progression by the Candidate through the three courts of King Solomon's Temple where he learns the lessons of each before finally entering the Holy of Holies where the true significance of this journey is discovered. The Holy of Holies was the mysterious inner sanctum of the Temple where the High Priest met with the eternal Divine presence. When, two thousand years ago, the Roman commander entered the Holy of Holies of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem following the destructive war, he was surprised to find it completely empty; simple proof that the deepest mystery was truly not of this World.

But at the same time as you are travelling in this symbolic manner through an image of a historical temple, you are, in your imagination, and in your life, using your head and your heart to construct your own interior temple. The rough quarried stones are worked with loving care using your workman's tools, in particular, the gavel and chisel. These, we are taught, are the instruments used to smooth and prepare the stone for building; they symbolise the force of conscience which should remove the coarseness of vanity and vice so that our lives may be lived in accord with the eternal teachings; so that we may become living stones in that great spiritual temple of humanity. Such force of conscience arises out of the heart for it brings a warm and living harmony to our lives, not a cold precision.

The building so carefully constructed is that temple within oneself. This is a symbolic presentation of the progress, and end, of the Masonic journey which brings the hope that by careful and skillful use of the tools he has been given, his head and his heart, each Freemason might seek to perfect himself. The Freemason himself can be seen as the Temple; the Holy of Holies as the place within each and every one of us where that small spark of Divinity resides - that vital and immortal principle which inspires us with that longing to return to our true home.

But there is another meaning concealed here which concerns Freemasonry itself: where would it be without Initiates? You are told that you should see yourself as representing the foundation stone of a building. A foundation stone which not only contributes to the elegance and excellence of the finished construction, but which also helps bear its load; that is, it helps share the burden of the whole. Without solid foundations and careful construction, using all the principles of harmony and proportion, a building could not stand, could not fulfil the purpose for which it was designed. It would instead decay and crumble into nothing. Initiates continuously renew the foundations of Freemasonry, and we should allow the new life they bring to add to the whole; we should encourage their enthusiasm and desire to learn.

Freemasonry needs its symbols and we can extract ever deeper messages from contemplating them. We can probe into a symbol, asking it questions, seeking other ways by which it might be understood. But remember, no symbol can be tied to any fixed interpretation but is a kind of lens through which we might view the *Beyond*; and through which the *Beyond* might shine its light upon us.

Take the time to sit still and imagine yourself as a living stone bearing a great and important temple, one which not only shelters all who come to it, but which also provides an inner space where the GAOTU can be approached directly by those who have found the way.

We can see that there is a further important moral message concerning society, and our role within it, that we can draw from our exploration of this symbol, the Temple of Solomon.

Can it be right that the foundation stone of such a great structure should be free to crumble away if it wished, to shed any responsibility for sharing the common burden and so cause the whole structure to fall? That is the right that many insist is promised by the demand for freedom, a right which often finds expression as a willful independence. It is too easy to forget that to be independent does not imply that you are free.

This First-Degree then teaches us to play our part in society, and to work towards its improvement for all. In other words, it teaches us the advantages of Morality and Virtue for it is these qualities which hold the structure of society together for the benefit of every member; those who are truly free are those who are also truly aware of their responsibilities.

We know, from our Ritual, that to begin the First-Degree, is to begin the path to perfection, and by doing so, we draw ourselves ever closer to that greatest honour - one which comes as a glittering gift from above, like the morning star after a long night.

##END##

Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by 'any questions'
 - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*.
Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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