



UGLE Oration

The Middle Chamber

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The Middle Chamber and the 'parable of the talents'.

Summary

Here is the key to the lesson of this Degree: that you have a choice, your future progress on your journey is up to you.

Keywords

Second-Degree, Middle, Chamber, Choice

The Middle Chamber - The Intellectual Faculty

In the Second-Degree you have moved a little further along on your Masonic journey. You are now a Fellow of the Craft and with this new status comes both a responsibility and a dilemma. While you will continue to receive guidance on your journey you are also left now to your own desires and the guiding strength of your own conscience. If you wish to progress, to improve yourself step by step, a great and satisfying future awaits you. But if you wish to turn aside, then that too is possible.

You stand at a dividing of the ways; which road will you take?

For now, you must make your own decisions as regards your further progress along the narrow path to wisdom and Truth. In order to progress you must learn to read the Masonic symbolism, to place yourself within the ritualized story which, while at first may seem but an indistinct tale or play drawn from a mixture of imagination and half-remembered history, will, upon reflection, reveal itself as a means by which you may be instructed on how to progress along the path to wisdom.

Your present state is well symbolised in the ritual you have just experienced: after having been led you up a winding staircase to a higher floor, you find yourself within the Middle-Chamber of King Solomon's Temple in order to receive your wages. And now, having received those wages, you are confronted by a decision which only you can take.

In the First-Degree, when you were Initiated and made an Entered-Apprentice, you were not allowed the freedom you have now achieved. This was symbolised by your wages in that earlier Degree: you were not paid in coin but were given only some basic needs of life: corn to make bread to eat; wine to slake your thirst; and oil to cook in and to put on your food. These essentials would sustain you while you trained and learned, as an Apprentice, the beginnings of what it means to be a Craftsman. But learning always with the hope of advancement, a desire to master the Craft and be able to teach it to others.

You have now advanced sufficiently to be a Craftsman and as a reward you are now paid in coin. This is a symbol of your freedom to use the fruits of your skill and labour in whatever way you wish. For, as you attested when you were Initiated, you are a free man. You may act as you wish. Freemasonry wants only those men who choose (who freely choose) to act in such a way as to progress along the great journey that we are all moving along. Or you may choose not to. That, now, is up to you.

This symbolic payment is similar to the Biblical 'Parable of the Talents': you may use the coins to purchase whatever you need for sustenance on your journey; you may hoard the coins for fear of loss and thus starve and cease your travel; or you may waste the coins, gamble them away perhaps, and so derive neither sustenance nor progression. So, you can see, this simple action, mentioned only briefly in the Ritual, is of crucial importance. Here is the key to the lesson of this Degree: that you have a choice; your future progress on your journey is up to you.

The concept of a spiritual path as a journey is common to very many traditions around the world.

Freemasonry is not alone in having such a view, but it is unique in its imagery and unusual in its existence within a busy commercial world.

However, it is important to realise that there are many paths by which the journey might be successfully made; there are many different paths to the top of the mountain and no single path is necessarily any better than another. There are different paths which suit different people. All deserve respect, and all travellers deserve the space and the freedom to move forward. Furthermore, one responsibility of travelling any path is to avoid placing obstacles on the course for those who might be following: for example, to avoid claiming any exclusive truth for any particular path. Those, who do that, have certainly strayed from the path of wisdom.

You are confronting here, as an independent individual for the first time, the principles of Brotherly Love and Relief. They are the principles upon which your continued progress on the journey depends. The journey is towards Truth, that great Truth about life and its aftermath which strikes us all; I am referring here to death. But before pursuing this great and often terrifying subject you must discover the means by which learning might take place: you must learn the use of reason, in order to freely distinguish between truth and falsehood; you must train your mind to be able to focus, to research into the hidden wisdom inherent in nature and revealed by observation and trial. You must hone your skills such that the building you are symbolically constructing might not only stand with stability and strength but that it is constructed with such beauty, such harmony, that it will add to the sum of beauty in the world. Here we refer to the three pillars which support the edifice you build: wisdom, strength and beauty - that is, a harmony of form and function.

For our journey in Freemasonry is symbolised in two ways: on the one hand it is seen as a free progression towards insight and wisdom; on the other hand, it is seen as the building of a great spiritual Temple within, one which grants the ability and wisdom to help shoulder the load of society, to ease the burden of others, and to add to the harmony and beauty of our civilisation. For only a wise man and a free man can have the confidence and the compassion for others in order to choose, while still learning himself, to use his talents for the benefit of the culture within which he has been born.

We should always remember the tools we work with in this degree: the Square which symbolises morality, the Level, equality, and the Plumb-Rule, justness and uprightness of our life and actions. The Indian sacred texts call life a pilgrimage and they are correct to do so; we are all travellers seeking the end of the path which is Truth; a path which is paved with Truth. Might we see these stepping stones clearly.

##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.

For further papers and other learning materials visit "Solomon" at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

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