



The Overy Papers

Number 28 - The Winding Staircase

Fraternal Greetings Brethren,

This Lecture is intended to be read following a Fellowcraft Degree

Tonight you were introduced to the Winding Staircase that is the central part of the Fellowcraft degree.

It shows a typical example of how the early writer of the Charges and rituals of the craft took an insignificant item, not actually a part of historical accuracy, and used it for dramatic effect to the candidates.

The first book of Kings, Chapter 6 Verse 8, in the 1611 King James Bible, is the only translation that mentioned a winding staircase.

This version states:

The door for the middle Chamber was in the right side of the house; and went up with a winding staircase into the middle chamber and out of the middle into the third.

There is one concept that the staircase was not in the temple proper but in the rooms that were attached to the outside and were possibly used as storerooms or dressing rooms.

Today most historians consider that the winding staircase mentioned in the 1611 bible held no importance whatsoever or the details of the temple construction would have devoted more space to it.

Scholars and Archeologists differ as to the interpretation on both the historical and archeological evidence and it is almost certain that both would not take much notice of the specific statements made in the Masonic Ritual of the second Degree that we used this evening.

Also there is no indication of the stairway being divided into three sections of three, five and seven steps, only it gave access to three floors. All earlier copies of the bible do not mention a winding stair and one even mentions a trap door with a basket that is drawn up like an elevator and as it passes the windows on the most Holy Place or inner chamber the passengers must hide their eyes.

Unfortunately successive conquerors of Jerusalem made a thorough job of the destruction of the temple so there is no part of the first temple remaining.

In our degree you are told how a Fellowcraft passes through to the middle chamber to receive his wages. Even the bible did not come up with that one. There were about 80,000 masons working on the temple and it would have taken weeks to pass out the wine oil and corn to the Fellowcraft Freemasons alone.

Still we can let the experts look after the answer because it is of little value to us as freemasons today anyway.

Our Masonic view was almost certainly taken from the 1611 King James Version of the Old Testament. The original ritulists who in the 1720's composed the lecture on the second degree, where every Fellowcraft must ascend the winding staircase in order to make his advancement in that degree, used this as a symbolic gesture.

We show it being made up of three divisions of three, five and seven steps leading to the Sanctuary of truth and it demands that the Masonic course of the candidate be clockwise and ascending to the East.

This clockwise ascendancy was accurate at least, as that was a defense system. In medieval times the spiral stairway wound in a clockwise direction to place the right handed attacking swordsmen, climbing up the stair, at a disadvantage.

The mason is from the moment of his initiation as an Entered Apprentice to the time at which he receives the full fruition as a Master Mason is an investigator whose reward is truth and all the ceremonies and traditions of our fraternity lead us to this ultimate goal.

My interpretation on this is the Entered Apprentice Degree is your Birth into Freemasonry and your Master Mason degree is your eventual Death and both are very symbolic degrees.

The Fellowcraft degree is different as the symbolism directs your working life. This part I call the nuts and bolts of your Masonic Life. A time when you are maturing that is shown by your advances up the stairway and you are invited to think and use your human senses, as these are the channels through which we receive our ideas of perception and which constitute the most important sources of our knowledge.

We see ourselves ascending the winding staircase with enquiring minds, discovering new ideas while the unseen reward of truth awaits us at the top.

We learn that the winding staircase represents the self-improvement of our intellect and moral character and this is the important issue to us.

It is your guide to a Mature Life that although is symbolic in its explanation is passing to you the advice on how you should advance as a man in the world.

It represents your personal self improvement and points to the practical side of Freemasonry and how you to lead your life and interact with your community.

Many of the people you meet as you pass through this, your mature life, will not be Freemasons. That should not prevent you from passing a helping hand when you feel it is needed and to offer comfort to everyone at a time of sadness. Not with the thought that you will be rewarded but because you are acting as a Freemason,

Thank you and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

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