

The Hero's Journey

As I began revisiting the degrees and jotting down notes, I initially found myself referring to the candidate as "the Candidate" in my head. Then, as I was starting to actually summarize the degrees, I switched from "the Candidate" to "the Man." With our GMHA as the ultimate example, we are all on a quest to become the best man that we can possibly be; for our families, our communities, our countries, and our world. So as I typed it seemed apt to me to refer to the candidate as the Man. However, somewhere around the Ninth Degree, my whole scheme changed and I stopped typing "the Man" and started referring to "the Hero" in my summaries. Perhaps it was the action of the Ninth and Tenth Degrees that made me feel that the candidate is much more in these dramas than simply a man. Perhaps it was the idea that if we are looking at the Scottish Rite degrees as a mythic journey, in the vein, say, of *The Odyssey* or the *Epic of Gilgamesh* or even *Star Wars*, then it is appropriate to refer to the protagonist as a hero. Or perhaps it was the realization that I am not summarizing a journey that someone else has taken; I am revisiting a journey that I myself have taken. This is not some distant, anonymous hero we are discussing here. Really, what we are learning is how to be the Hero of our own lives. On my office wall I have a picture, drawn by my second-grade son, that says, "My dad is my hero." With the help of the Scottish Rite degrees I hope to live up to that, and ensure that his faith is well founded.

Fourth Degree: Secret Master

The journey of the Scottish Rite begins here. The lodge is in mourning over the death of the Master Hiram and the consequent loss of the Word. In this setting the hero is reminded that it was, above all, a failure of duty that led to the murder of Hiram by the Fellow Crafts. Thus, Duty is the central lesson of this degree, "inexorable as fate." The upright Mason does not perform his duty for the hope of reward or recognition, but because it is the right thing to do. The specific duties of a Scottish Rite Mason, throughout the coming degrees, are silence, obedience, and fidelity. Through their practice we hope to learn to use the ivory key of self-knowledge and recover the Word.

Fifth Degree: Perfect Master

This degree takes place on the anniversary of Hiram's death. As in the Third Degree, the hero represents our GMHA, reinforcing the notion that we are to model our conduct on his most exemplary character. Yet, even though he performed his duties faithfully, death came for him unexpectedly. Thus, we are reminded to put our affairs in order because our own death can claim us at any time. Further, we are admonished not to squander our days, for we can never get them back. We should strive to live in such a way that, when we are gone, the honors due to Hiram may also be due to us.

Sixth Degree: Intimate Secretary

The hero for the first time represents someone other than himself or our GMHA in a Masonic degree. He now represents Zabud, a faithful servant of King Solomon. Through a series of misunderstandings, Zabud is accused of eavesdropping and his life is threatened by King Hiram. King Solomon wisely counsels that just as God forgives us, we ought to be quick to forgive others. He further notes that Zabud was merely ready to defend his king, if necessary, at peril to his own life. Thus, we learn the lessons of zeal and disinterestedness, and are bound to act as peace-makers, not sowers of discord.

Seventh Degree: Provost and Judge

In this degree the hero observes a dispute among workers on the Temple. This illustrates that sometimes even men of good conscience can disagree. However, in this case, the dispute

revolves around bigotry and prejudices, and Zabud is asked to be biased in his judgement in return for the possibility of career advancement. In the resolution of the dispute we are taught not only to be knowledgeable of the law and the facts when called upon to judge, but to judge impartially in all cases. In what is perhaps one of the hardest lessons to follow, we are directed to be as generous in assigning motives to the actions of others, as we would hope that others would be to us and our motives.

Eighth Degree: Intendant of the Building

It is now time for King Solomon to address some of the practical problems that have arisen because of the death of our GMHA. Namely, how is he to finish work on the Temple? An aid suggests that because Hiram had taken such joy in passing his knowledge on to others, perhaps his students could complete the work. The hero is among those selected. He is to be charitable and benevolent, and to sympathize with the working man. This teaches us to correct our own faults as well as those of others. Also, like Hiram, we are to transmit our knowledge, so that it doesn't die with us. Knowledge acquired but lost through death is of no use. Finally, we learn that all work is honorable if honorably done.

Ninth and Tenth Degrees: Elu of the Nine and Elu of the Fifteen

In these degrees the hero represents Yehu-Aber, one of the brothers who were elected to find the assassins of our GMHA. In the first part, together with another Elu, the hero enters a cave where he sees a fountain, a lamp, and one of the assassins sleeping on the floor of the cave. After a struggle, the hero slays the assassin and is later rewarded by King Solomon. In the second part of the degree, the hero joins others to apprehend the two remaining assassins in a quarry. As a reward they are admitted into a higher order of the Mysteries.

By going into the cave, the hero learns to confront the darkness of ignorance. By the (seemingly) feeble light of knowledge he is able to fight fanaticism and persecution with education and enlightenment. We are taught to enlighten our souls and minds so that we may not easily be led astray through misplaced zeal; and to instruct and enlighten others.

Eleventh Degree: Elu of the Twelve

The hero now represents Ben-Dekar and first witnesses the trials and executions of the three assassins. He learns that while we must pursue and root out evil, revenge is ultimately met out by God. King Solomon decrees that our GMHA symbolizes fidelity, and the three assassins represent ignorance, ambition, and fanaticism. The hero then learns that unscrupulous tax collectors are keeping a portion of the taxes they collect. King Solomon appoints twelve Elus, the hero among them, to oversee the revenues. By this we learn to deal fairly with all men and see that none are unjustly burdened or extorted.

Twelfth Degree: Master Architect

In this brief degree the hero takes on the character of Adoniram, who had been appointed the Chief Architect of the Temple. Due to his superior knowledge and skill, he is advanced to Master Architect, the first to receive this degree. This teaches us that only the wisest and most capable among us should be leaders of men. The task set before us is to seek to understand the Truths of the universe, and to communicate them to others, particularly through our actions. The tools

of the Master Architect aid us in this quest, for knowledge is the path to wisdom. In this degree, we move from lessons of morality to those of philosophy, with the first hints of the principle of duality found in the Seal of Solomon.

Thirteenth Degree: Royal Arch of Solomon

This degree, along with the next, is pivotal in the life of the hero. For here, as Adoniram, he descends deep into the earth (himself) and for the first time sees the Lost Word (the Divine Spark in man). The Word is found engraved upon a triangle of gold, which rests atop a cubical stone. Not only does this represent the material and spiritual worlds, but the hero re-discovers that his first Masonic step toward discovering the divine within himself was at his initiation as an Entered Apprentice, for the cubical stone surmounted by a triangle was foreshadowed in his EA apron. The light by which the hero explores the ninth apartment reminds us always to seek the light of knowledge.

Fourteenth Degree: Perfect Elu

In the final degree of the Lodge of Perfection the hero again represents Yehu-Aber. Although there is no plot, as such, this degree is very powerful. After answering probing questions in front of the Brethren regarding his worthiness, he undergoes a symbolic purification by water, or "lustration." Having satisfied the necessary requirements, the hero partakes of a meal of bread and wine, which here symbolize brotherly affection, knowledge, and virtue. By these acts he is more deeply bound to his Brethren and the Fraternity. The hero is reminded that knowledge without application is of no value, for with knowledge comes responsibility. Finally, he is again consecrated to secrecy.

Fifteenth Degree: Knight of the East

From the glories of the previous two degrees, we descend once again. The Temple is in ruins and the Israelites are in captivity. The hero represents Zerubbabel, who appears before King Cyrus to ask him to fulfil his promise to aid in the rebuilding of the Temple. Through a series of bribes and threats, Cyrus says that he will help if Zerubbabel tells him the secrets of his Order. The hero says that he would rather the Temple remain in ruins than break his vows. For not forsaking his integrity, Zerubbabel is rewarded and work on the Temple begins. By this we learn fidelity to our duty and perseverance in the face of obstacles.

Sixteenth Degree: Prince of Jerusalem

Here the candidate assumes the character of Kadmiel ben Zamud, who is assisting in the work on the Temple. The work is progressing slowly and the workmen are forced to labor with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, due to the surrounding adversaries. After the action of the degree the hero is accepted as a Prince of Jerusalem and work on the Temple can continue unhindered. The special duties of this degree include judging equitably, acting the peacemaker, aiding fellow Princes of Jerusalem, and keeping faith in the goodness of God. We learn that it is difficult to rebuild the Temple of Liberty once it has been overthrown, but that with the sword of courage and the trowel of perseverance, the truths of Freemasonry may better the world.

Seventeenth Degree: Knight of the East and West

In the first part of this degree, the hero represents a member of the Essenes, a traveler seeking knowledge. On another level, the hero represents the human soul, weary of empty philosophies and vain religious forms. Many claim that John the Baptist was also an Essene, and in this section the hero witnesses a confrontation between John the Baptist and Herod, ultimately ending in the former's death. Herod, then, is an object lesson, for some men, after rising to a high rank, allow their pride and hubris to prevent them from realizing their spiritual potential. The hero endures a symbolic trial by fire and water and, once purified, is admonished to war against fanaticism, intolerance, bigotry, and superstition. He then experiences a scene from the Apocalypse of St. John. He learns that one's life must mirror one's spirituality, for once you realize a truth, you are changed, and must live in conformity with that truth. The path to wisdom and understanding is not an easy one, and the hero's resolve to proceed is tested.

Eighteenth Degree: Knight Rose Croix

It is my contention that in this final degree of the Chapter, one of the most philosophical degrees in Masonry, the hero represents Christ. Not that we see ourselves as saviors or "God become Man" in the same way that Christians believe Jesus was. But that, in much the same way that we use the imagery of various religions or figures from Biblical history to teach moral lessons, I suggest that in this degree the hero undergoes a symbolic death to his old life, a period of three days "in the tomb," and a kind of resurrection to the New Law--each stage symbolized by one of the three apartments. (See my essay on this degree for a much deeper exploration of this notion.) Throughout the drama, questions of opposites are addressed, and the hero learns to reconcile the existence of pain and suffering with a loving and beneficent God. In the Fourteenth Degree, the Lost Word was revealed; in this degree the True Word is revealed. By this word the hero learns that he may use reason to decipher the Great Work and see the divine in himself--just as Christ said, "I dwell in him and he in me." When the meaning of the True Word is finally revealed to all men, light will dispel the darkness, and the New Law will rule on earth. The beginning of the New Law must be with ourselves. To be a Knight Rose Croix, one must declare that he accepts all good men of whatever faith as Brothers.

Works used in preparing the Hero's Journey

de Hoyos, Arturo. *The Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide*. Washington, D.C.: The Supreme Council, 33o, Southern Jurisdiction, 2007.

Hutchens, Rex R. *A Bridge to Light*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C.: The Supreme Council, 33o, Southern Jurisdiction, 2006.