

FIFTEENTH DEGREE

KNIGHT OF THE EAST

(or OF THE SWORD or OF THE EAGLE)

HISTORY OF THE DEGREE

This degree appeared in 1749 to supersede the Fourteenth Degree of Perfect Elu. Why additional degrees to the Perfect Elu? Albert Pike provides an answer in his "Liturgy: "The tendency of all Orders is to multiply too greatly the number of their initiates, until their secrets and purposes are even divulged to the profane, and then to create new and higher degrees, conferred at first on a small number of the Elect, in order to confine to them the knowledge of the Secret or Holy Doctrine, and of the real purposes of the Order. It has been especially so in Freemasonry". However, this degree also announces a mystical trend which will be fully realized in 1765 when the Eighteenth Degree of Knight Rose-Croix is established as the crown of the Scottish Rites, which it remained for some time.

LEGEND OF THE DEGREE

The "Chosen People" had transgressed the Covenant with its God Jehovah by worshipping "false gods". So Jehovah punished the Hebrews through Nabuchadnezzar, the pagan king of the Babylonian Kasidim (Chaldeans), who destroyed Jerusalem (including Solomon's Temple) and deported most of the Hebrew people as slaves to Babylon. Only a small remnant of Hebrews were left behind and fled to Egypt. After 70 years of captivity, Zerubbabel, a Prince of Israel, besought Cyrus, the new Persian king of Babylon, to free the Hebrews and allow them to return to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple. Cyrus agreed and Zerubbabel went to Jerusalem to assess the destruction. He was greeted by the poor and dejected Hebrews who had come back from Egypt, but he was also confronted with the enmity of the peoples who had settled in Israel and the idolaters of Samaria who were reluctant to see the Hebrews masters of the land again. In historical terms, Nabuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) made Babylon the capital of his Oriental empire after defeating the Egyptians in 605 and taking Jerusalem in 587, which enabled him to annex Syria and Palestine and bring back a huge number of slaves from among the vanquished, as it was usual.

SYMBOLISM

LODGE DECOR:

- **The Lodge** consists of **two major apartments**: One is the **Hall of the West** and represents the Hebrews' encampment amid the ruins of Jerusalem. The hangings are crimson, blue, purple and white. **Crimson** symbolizes fervency and zeal in war against evil; **blue**, fidelity, benevolence, friendship, right and spirituality; **purple**, royalty and constancy in fighting; and **white**, purity of life, cleanliness of mind, heart and soul, rectitude of conduct and justice. There is a **candelabrum of 7 lights** near the **altar** on which lie the VSL, the Book of Constitutions, a sword and a trowel and a pair of compasses. Above the altar is a **five-pointed star** with red and green rays: **Red** here refers to the most precious value of Masonry, the hope of a new day that comes with the crimson dawn, and the fire of purification which leads to truth; and **green** symbolizes the immortality of the human soul and the transcendent nature of Masonry, and the hope that Masonry will one day be universal. There are **70 candles in 10 groups of 7** forming a **square** and a **triangle**. Seventy refers to the **70 years of the Hebrews' captivity**. In kabbalistic numerology, **Number 7** expresses God's generative, creative power in the universe as well as the first step in Man's spiritual ascent towards God's Truth and Unity. **Number 10** expresses the manifestations of God projected into His creation, through which Mankind can get an inkling of God's otherwise ineffable unity and reality. It takes a long time to reach an enlightened level of understanding and wisdom with regard to Man's relationship with God and the universe. "To pass from the square to the compasses" is a **slow process**.

- The second is the **Hall of the East** which represents the Council Chamber of Cyrus. It is brilliantly lit. The **hangings** are **green** and the altar is **gold**. A transparency above the throne depicts Cyrus's dream to free the Hebrews and help rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem; a roaring **lion** ready to devour him if fails in his promise; a **blazing star** for the godly wisdom of the Initiate; an **eagle**, the symbol of Liberty, with a ribbon in its beak bearing the words "Restore Liberty to the Captives"; and the figures of Nabuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the former kings of Babylon loaded with chains and eating grass. God seems to be unfair with those he uses to enforce his justice on his disobedient children!
- There is a **passageway** between the two halls with a **bridge** bearing the letters **L D P**, meaning in French "Liberté de Passage" (Freedom of Passage). There is also a **third apartment** representing **Cyrus's Treasure Chamber** containing the sacred treasures of Solomon's Temple: The Ark of the Covenant, the Altar, and gold and silver vessels.

REGALIA

- The **apron** is crimson (green in Europe and Latin America) with a **green** lining and fringe. It is adorned with **three nested gold triangles** formed from **chains with triangular links**. These links symbolize the limitations and enemies of the human intellect, namely tyranny, superstition and privilege. The red velvet means that the honors of Masonry are more precious than the gifts of kings. On the **flap** is a **gold bleeding head** over **crossed swords** symbolizing the Mason's duty to fight and defeat arbitrary limitations on intellectual, spiritual and political freedom..
- The **cordons** are green without a jewel.
- The **sash**, worn around the waist, is made of **white** (light green in Latin America) silk fringed with **gold**, symbols of sacred purity. It is embroidered throughout with severed heads and limbs, swords and crowns symbolizing the fight for purity and liberty. The two ends hang from the left side. One end bears a **gold arched bridge** with the letters **L D P**, that is "Liberty of Passage" to which Albert Pike added "Liberté de Pensée" (Freedom of Thought), as liberty, to be true and complete, must include body and mind: One must be free to move, to do and to think. From the right side of the sash there hangs a **silver trowel**, symbolizing the constant effort required to keep up the temple of our individual lives and society.
- The **sword** is cross-hilted. The hilt is gold-plated and the scabbard is black with gilt bands. This symbolizes the constant necessary fight against all destructive factors ceaselessly affecting the integrity of the Temple.
- The **jewel** is **three nested gold triangles** with two **crossed swords** in the center symbolizing truth and justice, the weapons with which liberty, equality and fraternity (the motto of the French Republic), as well as law, order and subordination to democratic rule (the three triangles) are defended. These triangles represent the antidote to the slavery of the mind symbolized by the chainlinks on the apron (above). The jewel is a sword in Europe and Latin America.
- The **gloves** are green and the broad-brimmed **hat** is adorned with a green **plume**. **Green**, the dominant symbolic color, represents the immortality of the human soul and Masonry. It also symbolizes the Mason's eternal hope of being strong enough to constantly maintain, improve and, if need be, rebuild our godly temple in ourselves and in society.

RITUAL

- **Signs:** (a) **Order:** Lay the right hand on the left shoulder (No sign of order in France).
(b) **Recognition:** Starting from the sign of order, bring down the right hand in a winding manner to the right hip; draw the sword and standing on guard.

- **Token:** Take the counterpart's left hand, keeping the arm up and straight, as repelling an attack, while pretending to open one's way with the right hand; place the point of the sword on the counterpart's heart, exchanging the words: **J...n** and **B..z** (respectively **authority and liberty in equilibrium**).
- **Password:** YABABORU HAMMAIM (the waters flow),
- **Sacred Word:** RAPHODON (from "Rephidim", the place of the 10th encampment of the Hebrews on their way back from Egypt. The lack of water in this isolated place, not far from Mount Horeb, led the Hebrews to revolt against Moses, hence their reputation as insubordinate, independent and seditious, as reported to Xerxes I, or Ahasuerus in the Bible, and his son Artaxerxes in the Vth century BC).
- **Great Word:** SHALAL SHALLUM ABI (he breaks the peace of the father). The words SHILO, SHALOM, ABI are sometimes used as well.
- **Battery:** 7 in 5 + 2
- **Age:** 70 years
- **Time:** From the rising of the morning till the stars appear.

THE CEREMONY

The candidate is dressed as a XIVth Degree Perfect Elu and represents Zerubbabel, Prince of Israel, deported to Babylon, an initiate of the Hebrew and Phoenician Mysteries.

Hall of the West: Zerubbabel (Sasbatzer in Hebrew, i.e. keeper of the fire) comes from Babylon to inspect the ruins of Jerusalem and is welcomed by the distressed Hebrews. As Cyrus is an initiate of Mithra's mysteries, a Son of Light, possessing the True Word, Zerubbabel expresses his confidence that Cyrus will abide by his promise to free his Hebrew captives and help rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem.

Hall of the East: Zerubbabel, hands and neck bound with three chains of triangular links, appears before Cyrus in Babylon. Cyrus recognizes Zerubbabel as the person who saved his life once in battle and as an Adept of the Mysteries. He agrees to grant Zerubbabel's request if he tells him the secrets of the Order. Zerubbabel refuses in order to remain true to his oath. Cyrus then tempts him more strongly by taking him to the Treasure Chamber where he shows him the treasures of Solomon's Temple. Zerubbabel does not yield and reminds Cyrus of his own oath to Mithra. Cyrus remembers a dream in which he was to be devoured by a lion if he was not true to his promise about the Hebrews. Cyrus rewards Zerubbabel's virtue with a purple robe, a symbol of royalty. He appoints him as Satrap of Persia and Viceroy of Judea, and invests him with the collar of Noble of Medea and Persia and gives him his signet (ring) and thereby his own authority to take his Hebrew companions back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

While **crossing the bridge** on their way back to freedom, they are assaulted by robbers and Zerubbabel loses the noble collar given to him by Cyrus. This symbolizes the struggle necessary "to pass from slavery to freedom, from degradation and ignorance to civilization and enlightenment, from spiritual bondage to spiritual liberty". A life of virtue is a constant struggle against oneself and external temptations.

Back in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel is acclaimed by his Brethren and he creates this Degree to replace the collar of nobility that Cyrus had given him and which he had lost during the battle over the bridge. This symbolizes that there are dignities in life, and Masonic virtues in particular, which are more precious than the gifts of kings. The candidate is bestowed the title of Knight of the East, of the Sword or of the Eagle to symbolize respectively where the Light comes from and the constant struggle to preserve Liberty and Enlightenment..

PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHINGS

The reconstruction of the Temple after Deportation to Babylon: (a) It symbolizes "the restitution of primitive Truth to men", the highest concept of God in Man's mind. Without such belief in God, life is miserable and "the mind wanders through the infinite desert of its conceptions, without attraction, destiny or end". Man's free will is God's instrument, like all other forces of Nature, to bring the soul of Man, which is of identical nature with the God of the universe, back to its own source, back to itself, back to its own natural virtue, rest and bliss, after wandering in the ignorant and violent profane world. (b) **Liberty, equality and fraternity** in the soul of men and nations form the Masonic temple to be constantly built and rebuilt and defended against its enemies. Hence the symbol of the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. (c) **Masonry is engaged in a constant crusade** against ignorance, intolerance,

fanaticism (slavery in Babylon), superstition, error (the false gods of the idolaters) and selfishness. (d) The 70 years of the Hebrews' deportation mean that the struggle to achieve liberty and other Masonic virtues is a **slow and painful process**.

The Enemies: (a) They are the **apathy and faithlessness** of Masons themselves and the **indifference of the world** at large, of the masses of Mankind adjusting to any evil in order to avoid difficulties in their little habitual everyday life. As Albert Pike writes, "it is the motionless and stationary that impede progress, the Masons that doubt, hesitate, are discouraged, disbelieve in Man's improvement, that are not feeling like toiling and laboring for humanity, and expect others to do all while they sit, applauding and doing nothing". (b) Building our lives and society on an upright and virtuous basis is indeed difficult as the **power of evil** is far stronger than the power of Good and it demands a heroic strength and resistance not to yield in this world. Forces are always on the lookout to tear down what others have built, sometimes apparently or really with the best of intentions. Moreover, "in the roar and crush and hurry of life and business, and the tumult and uproar of politics, the quiet voice of Masonry is unheard and unheeded". (c) To have to build and rebuild over and over again and the setbacks in our endless efforts (the loss of loved ones, unfair socio-economic conditions, wars, the ignorance, stupidity and violence of masses of men) may lead to frustration, despair and exhaustion, especially if we expect to see the positive end results of our fight, as there is actually no end to the conflict. This is the dialectic law of nature, that is to say of the law of God in this world! This is one of the meanings of the True Word!

The Goal, the New Jerusalem: (a) Despite these odds, the Law of Harmony that binds the universe together and God's infinite Wisdom dictate that **upright and virtuous men** will ultimately prevail and establish a **just and loving society**. Liberty, peace and toleration only can make the earth a civilized and happy place in which to live. (b) This will be owed to **single individuals**, the real Elus, who have the force to master unruly passions and sensual appetites and resist temptations through their **lofty ideals and selfless transcendent goals** which may range from spiritual enlightenment and mystical ecstasy in God to the triumph of the People and the happiness of Humanity, or a mix of both!

Zerubbabel' character: Zerubbabel embodies that kind of exceptional heroes, True Masons, with **staunch fidelity to honor and duty** (which is its own reward), **constancy and perseverance** despite all odds. Zerubbabel indeed perseveres in reaching his goal, encourages the disheartened, cheers the timid, incites the indolent, forces the apathetic and reluctant. We will see in the next degree where this leads him and his people.

CONCLUSION

The Second Temple in the New Jerusalem is from now on only a pretext to illustrate the **mystical return of our own soul to its divine source within ourselves**. This can be achieved, of course, only if **freedom of thought and conscience** is ensured. In this mystical ascent, "we must **constantly pass through darkness to reach the Light**". We must learn, advance and improve ceaselessly, thereby overcoming our natural apathy, doubt, ignorance, disbelief and subsequently finding our true happiness in our own progress towards enlightenment as well as in the improvement of society amid which we labor and toil in a ceaseless struggle, which is the Law of Nature in this world of ours!