

Orators Report
on the 23rd degree
CHIEF of the
TABERNACLE
Jan 4, 2012



The Apron and Gloves of this Degree are yellow. At the top of the Apron is a raised, bare arm holding a drawn sword

Bremerton Valley of the Scottish Rite

The Legend: The degrees of the Council of Kadosh are chivalric and philosophical, but also contain mystical material. The word "Kadosh" is a Hebrew word meaning "holy, consecrated, or dedicated". This Degree is an introduction to the Ancient Mystery Degrees: 23rd-26th. The legend is based on the old testament story of Korah, Dathan and Abraham. They were leaders of a revolt against the civil authority claimed by Moses. They were swallowed up by the earth for their presumptive actions and their followers consumed by fire or died by the plague. This is a simple lesson on learning proper subordination to superiors.

The Setting: The Lodge of the Chief of the Tabernacle is represented by an encampment of the 12 tribes of Israel, similar to that of the 19th degree, seated at the 4 cardinal directions. The cardinal directions are represented by the lion, bull, man, and an eagle. Parts of each form the body of a Sphinx symbolizing an enigma, riddle, or puzzle. Here representing the Mysteries. In the center of the Lodge is a representation of the Tabernacle of Moses, described in Exodus, chapters 26 and 36. Furnishings include the Ark of the Covenant and a candelabrum with seven lights.

The Ritual: The presiding officer represents Aaron, the brother of Moses and is called the Venerable High Priest. The Candidate represents a young Levite, presenting himself for initiation into the first mysteries of the Hebrew priesthood. The Candidate, in a darkened cell of probation, hears the fate of the leaders of the revolt. The candidate is instructed to pray for mercy and is instructed to approach the Mysteries with a purity of heart, devotion to God, and repentance. The mysteries represented a series of increasing purifications of the body and spirit, and an increasing awareness of one's own spiritual identity. It was not a single event but a process, not an act but a journey. The goal was self-discovery.

Upon being accepted by the Chief of the tabernacle and initiated, the symbolic meanings of the ornaments of the Lodge are explained and the meanings of the number seven are explored (planets, colors, musical scale).

The apron worn is white bordered with red, blue and purple ribbons. The meanings are taken from the writing of Flavius Josephus. These colors represent earth, fire, air and sea respectively, as well as the Lord's beneficence, glory, wisdom and power. On the apron is the golden seven-branched candlestick, representing the seven planets and virtues; the sun, faith, and aspiration toward the infinite; the moon, hope; Venus, charity; Mars, fortitude, "victory over rage and anger"; Mercury, prudence; Saturn, temperance; Jupiter, conqueror of the Titans and justice. The jewel worn is a small silver censer held by a handle in the shape of an open hand.

The Lecture: This degree, Chief of the Tabernacle, is the Masonic equivalent of what were known as the Lesser Mysteries. The Lesser Mysteries were received by all, but only a few were initiated into the Greater Mysteries.

Originally the Mysteries were meant to be the beginning of a new life of reason and virtue. The initiated or esoteric companions were taught the doctrine of the One Supreme God, the theory of death and eternity, the hidden mysteries of Nature, the prospect of the ultimate restoration of the soul to that state of perfection from which it had fallen, its immortality, and the states of reward and punishment after death. The uninitiated were deemed Profane, unworthy of public employment or private confidence, sometimes proscribed as Atheists, and certain of everlasting punishment beyond the grave.

Pike believed that the Mysteries were originally few and simple, teaching the great truths of the primitive religion and morality. Over time, this purity was lost, the rites of initiation became more complicated and more degrees were invented to maintain only a few adepts who were initiated into the higher degrees.

The method of instruction emphasized in the Mysteries utilized symbols and allegories, treating a mysterious subject mysteriously. Masonry still follows this manner of teaching.

We learn in this degree that the man who forgets his duty to God, family, country and himself will be in danger of moral and spiritual destruction by thoughts and unworthy ambition.

DUTIES:

- Be devoted to the service of God.
- Constantly endeavor to promote the welfare of man.
- Act with proper subordination to your superiors.

LESSONS:

- Simple faith is wiser than vain philosophy.
- A society's concept of the Deity and the universe are consistent with its development.

FOR REFLECTION:

- What is the nature of God?

IMPORTANT SYMBOLS

The standards of the twelve tribes of Israel, darkness, light, the colors: scarlet, white and purple.

Colors associated with the Tabernacle dominate in this Degree.

The Apron and Gloves of this Degree are yellow. At the top of the Apron is a raised, bare arm holding a drawn sword. Below him there is a human figure, erect, with wings, his right-hand index on his lips; in his left hand he holds a key. It is the Egyptian figure of silence. The Collar is a wide black belt worn from right to left.

The Jewel is a silver full moon. Above the Jewel there is an arm raised, holding a drawn sword, and around it the motto *Fiat iustitia, Ruit Coelum*, which means "do justice, even if the heavens collapse." These were the words of William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield (1704-1793), Minister of Justice of England, spoken in the case of *King v. Wilkes*, July 8, 1768.