

Orators Report  
on the 25th degree  
Knight of the Brazen  
Serpent or Sufi Master  
Feb 1, 2012



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Bremerton Valley of the Scottish Rite

**The Legend:** The original legend of the Degree comes from an account of the Exodus. The people had started to complain to God about the length of the journey and the fact that there was nothing but manna to eat. God sent serpents among the people, and those who were bitten soon died. The people repented, and God spoke to Moses, telling him to make a serpent of brass and set it on a pole. Then, all that had been bitten and looked upon the serpent of brass lived. Thus, the serpent coiled around the handle of the Ankh symbolizes healing and spiritual grace.

In a system of degrees to complete the Scottish Rite, it was necessary to teach every religion and philosophy known, and so in this degree, we find the moral lessons of some of the older religions taught with vigor, especially that of the mystical death which symbolizes the descent of the soul into the infernal regions and afterwards its rise to the state of light, truth and perfection.

**The Setting:** Pike radically changed this degree in his reworking of the old ritual of the Rite. The characters in the old ritual were Hebrews. In Pike's version, the presiding officer is called Hakam, meaning wise or 'skilled' in Arabic, and the candidate represents an Ismaeli (a member of one of the major sects of Islam) in the area around Lebanon during the reign of Sayeed Abdullah, Great Emir of the Druses in 1450 A.D.. The candidate seeks initiation into the Druse system that he might become an Akal, a disciple of the Order of Truth. Islam, or Mohammedanism as Pike calls it, has been one of the major religions in the world for over eleven centuries. In this degree, some Islamic doctrine is presented through the re-creation of initiation into the elite group among the Druse, a quasi-Islamic religious sect living in the Lebanon area; we encountered the Druse previously in the 22nd Degree, Prince of Libanus. The Lodge represents a tent in the desert styled as the "The House of the Light". In some versions there are four apartments.

**The Ritual:** The Presiding Officer is styled First Sufi Master. Upon the Lodge floor there is a large Persian-style carpet

and large pillows as if in a tent in the desert. Seated about them are the Sufi Masters clothed in long white robes, with full sleeves, and wearing white muslin turbans. The Candidate is styled as a visiting guest of the Sufi Masters gathered in the tent. His conductor indicates that the Candidate desires further instruction in the Mysteries.

The Candidate suffers examination and questioning by multiple Sufi Masters. The Masters provide a philosophical discourse on truth, wisdom, goodness, and Islamic faith. The enlightened candidate is then presented with the apron, jewel and turban of the degree.

**The Lecture:** This Degree introduces the Sufi teachings and traditions, and gives us clues on how this esoteric branch of Islam might help overcome the difficulties encountered in our attempts to advance as novitiates in the mysteries.

It first asks us if we have truly performed all we have promised. This is a question we must frequently ask ourselves. In our Masonic careers we have assumed obligations to the performance of many duties. These obligations are real. If we have agreed to live by them and do not do so, we are hypocrites and dishonor the Fraternity. The Perfection that was idealized in the Fourteenth Degree reveals itself to be elusive, and the path to it requires constant attention.

Knowledge, the Truth, and opportunities for service often come to us in forms which are at first unrecognizable, and may seem at first sight, unacceptable. Truth may appear to us in a guise we find unrecognizable, or even foolish. By withholding premature judgment and by applying mature reflection we learn to recognize Truth, and in so doing we broaden our horizons of understanding, which leads to greater wisdom. As you have discovered throughout the Degrees, philosophical truths are not as easily digested, as are children's primers. We must vigorously apply ourselves to learning, and be prepared to do so at all times.

The Degree reminds us that men have found many ways to tell the great truths of spiritual and human experience. Some may seem primitive or childish to us today, but there is wisdom in the wonder of a child even as there is wisdom in the sayings of the sages.

#### DUTY:

- Fulfill your destiny and re-create yourself by reformation, repentance and enlarging your knowledge.

#### LESSONS:

- Man is composed of the flesh, the soul and the intellect.
- Man is a reflection of the Divine.
- Do not weary God with petitions.

#### FOR REFLECTION:

- Is it possible to find your way to heaven alone?

#### IMPORTANT SYMBOLS:

Sun, moon, brazen serpent, Pythagorean right triangle.

The apron is white, lined and edged with black; the white side spotted with golden stars, and the black side with silver ones. Those on the white side represent, by their positions and distances, the Pleiades, the Hyades, Orion and Capella. Those on the black side represent the stars of Perseus, Scorpio, and Ursa Major.

The jewel is a Tau cross, of gold, surmounted by a circle - the *Crux Ansata* of Egypt - round which a serpent is entwined. On the upright part of the cross is engraved the Hebrew word meaning 'he has suffered' or 'been wounded', and on the arms the Hebrew word given in the Bible for the brazen serpent, 'Nakhustan'.