

The Ceremony of Raising or Third Degree: A QuickStart Guide

This is not for you if you are an Entered Apprentice or a Fellowcraft

Introduction

The Third Degree ceremony is the final step in the process of induction which began with your Initiation. You are now a Master Mason and you will shortly receive your Grand Lodge certificate which will help you demonstrate that fact to others. The ceremony is more elaborate than the First and Second Degrees. They symbolised birth and learning through life; the body and mind respectively. The Third Degree forces us to face our own mortality and a return to the eternal principle that we characterise as the Supreme Being, the Great Architect, the Grand Geometrician, the Most High. The final goal of leading a virtuous and honourable life is ‘...to live respected and die regretted ...’. If the ceremony of Initiation contains some surprising elements, surely the surprises contained in the Third are more unexpected and awe inspiring to the thoughtful man. If you have any questions, ask your Personal Mentor for guidance. If he can't help, please feel free to contact your Lodge Mentor or the Provincial Grand Mentor



Some Key Points

1. **You were Tested, Entrusted and Prepared; the Lodge was Opened in the Third Degree**

This part of the ceremony was like that in the Second Degree but you needed different credentials to enter a Lodge open in the Third Degree while you were still a Fellowcraft. You will remember that in the First and Second Degrees your preparation emphasised the left and right sides respectively. In this degree the preparation included both sides. While you were being prepared outside the Lodge, it was opened in the Third Degree and became a Master Masons' Lodge.

2. **Your Entry to the Lodge**

The Tyler once again requested entry to the Lodge for you and when you entered you were immediately struck by the fact that the Lodge was in darkness with only the Master's candle lit.

3. **You Prayed, spoke with the Wardens and Advanced to the East**

The Worshipful Master then asked you and all the brethren to pray together. After the prayer, you were led around the Lodge three times – to be tested by the Junior Warden on the first turn and by the Senior Warden on the second. The Junior Warden proved that you were an Entered Apprentice and the Senior Warden that you were a Fellowcraft. In the third perambulation the Senior Warden proved that you had the pass grip and the password ‘... *leading*

from the Second to the Third Degree’. After you gave him the proof, he reported to the Worshipful Master that you were properly prepared to proceed with the ceremony and you were led to the East ‘... *by the proper steps*’. You should be able to connect the method of advancing to the story told later in the ceremony but note that symbolically you came close to the grave, that is, you came close to death.

4. You Took Your Obligation

The Master informed you that ‘... *a most serious trial of your fortitude and fidelity and a more solemn Obligation await you*’ and he asked if you were prepared to go on. You answered that you were and then repeated your Obligation. This is the longest obligation which once again emphasises the need for privacy and discretion, and you agreed to ‘... *adhere to the principles of the square and compasses*’. Although these are not defined in the obligation, we understand these principles to be a combination of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, and all the moral and social virtues that enable us to live respected and die regretted. You heard the four cardinal virtues in the Charge after Initiation – prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice and you were urged to practise ‘... *every domestic as well as public virtue...*’. You were introduced to the five points of fellowship and brief examples were given. Finally, your duty to treat other Master Masons with respect and protect their honour was explained.

5. You heard the Exhortation and the Story of Hiram Abiff, You Took His Place and You Were Raised ‘On The Five Points of Fellowship’

In the Exhortation you heard a short explanation of the First and Second Degree teaching. The First Degree is emblematic of birth, of a new beginning, and is the start of your masonic journey from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light, to enlightenment. It stressed ‘... *the principles of moral truth ...*’, ‘... *natural equality and mutual dependence...*’ and the benefits available to you by helping others. It informed you that the way to the Great Architect is only to be found if you purify your heart by eliminating ‘... *every baneful and malignant passion ...*’. The Second Degree turned to the world, to creation, to developing your understanding of it and your place in it relative to the Great Architect. You were encouraged to develop your ‘... *intellectual faculty ...*’ and to understand ‘... *intellectual truth ...*’. The Exhortation then turns to the objects of the Third Degree – to the natural end of our mortal existence and to the fact that ‘... *to the just and virtuous man, death has no terrors equal to the stain of falsehood and dishonour.*’

You then heard the story of the death of our Master, Hiram Abiff, because he didn’t break his word and reveal his knowledge when threatened. You took his part in a dramatic reconstruction of his death and were raised from the symbolic grave in a way representing the hope of existence after our mortal life – ‘... *a reunion with the former companions of (our) toils ...*’.

Be sure to read The Exhortation as it contains some of the most important ideas in the ceremony and thinking about the thumbnail sketches of the first two degrees will help to unlock their meaning and connections.

6. You Heard The Charge and Were Entrusted with The Ceremonial Modes of Recognition and then Retired to Restore Yourself to your Personal Comforts

After you were raised from the symbolic grave you heard The Charge. This short section contains one of the most important elements of the ceremony. The opening words appear to present a paradox as they refer to '*... darkness visible ...*'. This phrase is borrowed from both John Milton and Alexander Pope, great English poets and writers of the 17th century who were active when speculative freemasonry began. Both used it to convey the idea of something hidden and unknowable and yet of tremendous importance to us – and, considering the object of this degree, we can see that in The Charge it refers to what happens to us after death. It encourages us to have '*... a holy confidence ...*' that if we are '*... faithful and obedient ...*' we will be reunited with '*... the Lord of Life ...*'. If we follow the principles and tenets of Freemasonry, death will bring a propitious outcome, according to our beliefs. In the middle of The Charge comes perhaps the most important phrase in the whole of the ritual: '*Let the emblems of mortality which lie before you lead you to contemplate on your inevitable destiny, and guide your reflections to that most interesting of all human studies, the knowledge of yourself.*' Here we see the most important precondition for our own improvement. Without '*... the knowledge of yourself ...*' how can you begin to improve? It would be like setting out on a walk in the country to visit a beauty spot without knowing where you were starting from – you would start out lost and without direction. This is a tough challenge. You must recognise both your strengths and your weaknesses and accept that the flaws can be and should be corrected. As you will hear elsewhere in the ritual '*... what you observe praiseworthy in others, you should carefully imitate, and what in them may appear defective you should in yourselves amend.*'

After The Charge came the explanation of the ceremonial 'modes of recognition' – the signs, token and word of the degree. Ask your Personal Mentor to explain the way that we use the signs when the Lodge is opened and is open in the Third Degree. You should also look at the Five Points of Fellowship and understand their meaning. You then left to restore your personal comforts.

7. You Returned, Received the Badge and Heard The Traditional History and the Further Explanation of the Signs

On your return to the Lodge the Senior Warden invested you with your Master Mason's apron. You then heard the continuation of the story of Hiram Abiff and how, by his death, certain knowledge was lost and because of the way his

body was found, certain 'secrets' were substituted and are now used in the Third Degree. Further signs were also explained and, on the conclusion of the ceremony, you took your place in a Master Masons' Lodge.

The Important Messages Communicated by the Degree

All the Degrees stress the need to follow the 'principles and tenets' of the Order and add messages about improving ourselves in various forms – ethical behaviour and moral truth in the First, our intellectual development and knowledge and appreciation of the world in the Second and by confronting our own mortality, spiritual understanding in the Third. From the story of Hiram Abiff, we learn that *'To the just and virtuous man, death has no terrors equal to the stain of falsehood and dishonour.'* We should live an honourable life by practising every moral and social virtue. Your Raising was accomplished by the Master and his two Wardens acting together with the Five Points of Fellowship. It did not symbolise bodily resurrection – Hiram Abiff was not resurrected – it symbolised the result of achieving honour through virtuous behaviour and escaping from the temptations and realities of bad or dishonourable behaviour. As the opening prayer of the ceremony states: *'Endue him [you, the candidate] with such fortitude that in the hour of trial he fail not, but that, passing safely under Thy protection through the valley of the shadow of death, he may finally rise from the tomb of transgression, to shine as the stars for ever and ever.'* Freemasonry's central aim is to help you become a better person – to live a good life and end with a propitious death. To achieve this goal, you must first accept that you need to change, that you are able to change, that the goal is to live respected and die regretted and that the journey of discovery and change starts with the knowledge of yourself. Of necessity, these notes are short and incomplete – please look at *'Recommended Masonic Reading: A QuickStart Guide'*, which is on the provincial web site, for more sources to continue your research and make a further daily advance in masonic knowledge.

For more assistance and advice contact your Personal Mentor, Lodge Mentor, or The Provincial Mentor: pgm@berkspgl.org.uk .

You can also visit the Provincial web site: www.berkspgl.org.uk

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