



Lodge Presentation:

The following short article is written with the intention to be read within an open Lodge, or in fellowship, to all the members in attendance. This article is appropriate to be presented to all Masons and Entered Apprentices should be invited to attend the meeting where this is presented. Following this article is a list of discussion questions which should be presented immediately following the presentation of the article.

The Three Principal Rounds

One of the predominant symbols of the Entered Apprentice Degree is Jacob's Ladder. The symbol appears once in the picture lecture of this degree with specific note made to the Three Principal Rounds being Faith, Hope and Charity.

The use of a ladder as a symbol is not unique to Freemasonry and as such is much older. It has long been a symbol of progress - of ascending from one realm, or state of being, to another. It is only natural then that Freemasonry would adopt a ladder as a symbol of ascent. The idea of ascension is critical to the lessons of Freemasonry. You need to look no further than our system of Degrees to find an example of it: learning the content and lessons of each degree and proving our understanding of it before ascending to the next.

The story of Jacob's Ladder that is referred to in our ritual appears in the book of Genesis. Jacob, the son of Isaac, left Beersheba and came to a place and stayed there the night. He laid on the ground and used a stone from the place as a pillow. He dreamed of a ladder extending from earth to heaven. There were angels ascending and descending on it. God stood beside him and spoke to him and said: "behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it." Later, Jacob named the place "Bethel".

In terms of the application of Jacob's Ladder within Freemasonry, our attention is drawn to the three principal rounds, or steps of the ladder. Though some Masonic scholars believe Jacob's Ladder of our ritual originally consisted of seven steps: Faith, Hope and Charity along with the four Cardinal Virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice, it is those first three that are of preeminent importance to the life of a Mason. These theological virtues are interwoven through the system of Freemasonry. Sometimes confused with the pillars of our Fraternity, the ideals they represent are at the core of our beliefs.



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Faith is the first of the rounds. It is not placed as the first because it is any less important than the others, but I believe it is there to serve as a foundation. Of these three rounds, faith is a requirement to becoming a Mason. Civilization as we know it could not exist without faith. Freemasonry could not have been born without it. Faith in its structure, effectiveness, leaders, principles and practices has kept it alive. To the candidate without faith, the degrees will be words with no meaning. Faith in each of us and faith to all mankind stands at the foundation of our Masonry.

Hope is the second round of the ladder. The dictionary definition fails to express the mental and spiritual importance of hope. The poet Samuel Johnson says: "Where there is no hope, there can be no endeavor." All ambitions, all human actions, all labors are founded on hope. Hope may evolve into a firm faith but in a world where nothing is certain, much of what we do is fueled by hope. As Masons, we work toward being better men with the hope of the future forever in our hearts.

The top round of our ladder is charity. Charity is more than the donation to someone materially less fortunate than ourselves. Though when viewed this way, it can be difficult to understand how it is greater than faith and hope. When we expand the definition of charity to mean "love" then we begin to understand its significance. We can understand then that "love" can "extend through the boundless realms of eternity". We understand that the "love" we extend to our fellow man and Brother can sustain them long after we receive the call from the Grand Architect of the Universe.

This Charity of our selfless actions to our Brothers in need: whether it is a simple thought or a prayer, a sympathetic ear, or a promise to care for his widow and family, is "the greatest of these" and what may "extend through the boundless realms of eternity."

Fraternally,
Patrick D. Cholka – Grand Orator
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Discussion Questions

The following discussion questions are written to be presented immediately following the presentation of the topic above. There is no right or wrong answers to these questions, they are designed to promote thought and engage all the members that are present in conversation. Take care that the presentation of the topic and the discussion questions does not exceed 30 minutes. The presenter can present any part of the questions below, or any additional questions, he feels is appropriate.

- What are other examples of Freemasonry's belief of ascension?
- Who was Jacob? Why was he deemed important to Masons and various religious faiths?
- The story of Jacob's ladder is one the few direct references to the Bible in our ritual. Does this violate the notion that Masons do not discuss religion in Lodge?
- What other direct references to the Bible or any holy scripture are made in the ritual?
- Jacob named the place he had his vision "Bethel". Is this why Jobs Daughters meet in a "Bethel"?
- Why would Masonry talk about a "vision", angels and a prophet? How does this type of symbolism help Masons in their "everyday" life?
- In what ways are the three theological virtues used throughout Freemasonry?
- How are the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice related?
- Throughout our ritual, there are many places where the need for faith is emphasized. What are some of them?
- In what ways is the candidate's faith necessary in the Entered Apprentice Degree?
- What are some ways that hope is expressed in our ritual?
- How has the application of "hope" helped in your life and labors?
- If Charity in this sense can be read to mean "love", is the last round of Jacob's ladder synonymous with the first principal tenet, Brotherly Love?
- If Charity in this sense can be read to mean "love", does this mean Freemasonry is a charity?
- Why is Charity so important to a Mason that it makes it the "greatest" of the rounds of Jacob's ladder?