

## **Transition to Age: The Masonic Third Degree**

*Richard H. Ryder, 2016)*

The meaning of one's life has challenged mankind for millennia and our conclusions are as varied as the numbers of times we ponder the thought. At some point in our lives we all struggle with the age old question, "Why am I here?" As if that is not a hard enough query we also ask, "How will I be remembered?" In our later years the frequency of these questions may increase as we face our fate at the hands of our creator.

The third degree symbolically marks our transition from manhood into age, where the lessons learned and applied come to fruition in the symbolic completion of our internal edifice. We are given a rare opportunity to improve upon the lessons of the previous degrees. Wisdom replaces inexperience, reflection displaces dreams, and thoughts of immortality diminish as one contemplates his personal legacy. The internal temple is nearly complete, yet in some respect the biggest challenges await. What shall we do with the lessons of our lives? How will we be judged? Is mankind better because we exist? At the portals of the celestial lodge stands our creator, ledger in hand, judging our actions and tallying the score.

Yet this degree is also filled with optimism, for the Master Mason now has the tools and the experience to masterfully complete his internal structure in the remaining years of his life. The measure of success is not internal, but external; not what's in it for me, but how can one translate industrious work into charitable relief for others.

To illuminate his way during this degree, Freemasonry offers the new Master Mason a multitude of symbols, each carefully selected to impart useful truths. With this knowledge he is able to enter an introspective period of his life where careful reflection and applied wisdom can positively shape his destiny and the lives of others. Among the brethren, he is taught to spread brotherly love and uncontentious affection; with all mankind he is encouraged to industriously relieve the burdens of those less fortunate.

The relentless passage of time leaves no man immune from the elapse of this precious and finite resource. We all view the hourglass differently, each from the perspective of our cumulative experiences. The choice is both personal and revealing. As the sands steadily flow, some fear the loss as time wasted and resign in its wake, while others see opportunity and the possibility of new beginnings based on new perspectives.

Permeating this degree is the concept of renewal and rebirth; a powerful message that should not be overlooked or discounted. We are symbolically given a new chance to shape our remaining time. What we do with this opportunity will be a true measure of our commitment to the tenets of this degree.