**Passage to Manhood: The Masonic Second Degree**

*Richard H. Ryder, 2016)*

Throughout history rites of passage have defined significant moments in our lives. Something as simple as a teenager getting one’s driver’s license or as momentous as a young man celebrating his bar mitzvah remains in our consciousness for a lifetime. This was also true when, after spending seven years as an entered apprentice, an operative mason, by virtue of producing his “master’s piece”, became a “Fellow of the Craft”. In speculative Masonry we celebrate this Masonic rite of passage from youth to manhood during our Second Degree.

Two themes permeate this ceremony: charity and work. However, the most prominent lesson concerns the application of accumulated knowledge in the exercise of our daily labor and the earning of life’s wages; health, plenty, and peace. Where the apprentice moves rough objects, the fellow craft begins to build and construct. Experience now manifests itself in newfound wisdom and the application of life’s lessons.

The pillars before Solomon’s temple teach us to demonstrate strength and wisdom, and thus stability. The winding stairs denote our constant effort to expand our understanding of the many worlds around us and encourages achievement through that knowledge, ever remembering that our journey is fraught with unforeseen challenges of illusion and obstructed views.

Additionally, we are taught to perfect our work with clarity of understanding and accumulated knowledge. The liberal arts and sciences, representing the entire body of knowledge, serve as our guide and are received through our combined senses. Through a lifetime of education we are better equipped to apply our trade.

We are no longer received at the door simply by our desire to enter, but also as a result of our proficiency.

As an Entered Apprentice we swore to follow rules that guide our actions, but now we are instructed to look outwardly to aid and assist others.

The cable-tow is no longer a means to potentially reverse our direction, but now pulls us forward toward a life of constructive labor and unbounded charity.

The construction of the temple is no longer just about the perfection of Solomon, but now inspires us to perfect ourselves in each of our many roles.

In summary, life is a series of passages. We begin as untried youth seeking experience. Passing through middle age we acquire wisdom and are filled with responsibility to ourselves and others. Sooner than expected we arrive at our final chapter reflecting back on what we hope is a life well spent. As Fellowcraft we are like curing cement with the appearance of a solid foundation, but still requiring strengthening and hardening before we are able to fully support our internal structure.

When all is said and done, it is this degree that matures us into the true person we will become and assures our legacy as men and as Masons.