

Oriental—Martha's Vineyard Lodge



On the Fellowcraft Degree

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Masonic initiation is a progressive science: a man starts as Entered Apprentice, is in due course passed to the degree of Fellow of the Craft, and eventually is raised Master Mason.

This progression reflects how we acquire knowledge: in successive layers, or, to use the terminology of builders, by successive courses of stones or bricks, one layer building upon the previous. It is impossible to know everything at once. A man needs time to think over what he has learned, and so to prepare to receive more light.

Accordingly, the three Masonic degrees correspond to different tasks of the Initiate. As an Entered Apprentice, he must know himself, mending his flaws and strengthening his spirit. As Fellow of the Craft he will study various subjects which inform him of the governing rules of the Universe. In the Middle Ages, the seven liberal arts and sciences were considered the entire body of lay knowledge, as distinct from theological knowledge.

In 1623, Galileo Galilei wrote in *The Assayer*: "Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the characters in which it is written. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these one is wandering in a dark labyrinth." In the labyrinth of Nature and her Universe, the Great Architect of the Universe seemingly plays hide and seek, now revealing, now concealing His great truths. The Fellow Craft who learns to "curiously trace nature through her various windings to her most concealed recesses" is rewarded by the vision of the blazing star.

In 1872 Rev. William B. Green wrote: "Some men — not all men — see always before them an ideal, a mental picture if you will, of what they ought to be, and are not. Whoso seeks to follow this ideal revealed to the mental vision, whoso seeks to attain to conformity with it will find it enlarge itself, and remove from him. He that follows it will improve his own moral character; but the ideal will remain always above him and before him, prompting him to new exertions. What is the natural conscience if it be not a condemnation of ourselves as we are, mean, pitiful, weak, and a comparison of ourselves with what we ought to be, wise, powerful, holy? It is this Ideal of what we ought to be, and are not, that, is symbolically pictured in the Blazing Star."

The Blazing Star is represented by a five-pointed star overlaid on a burst of flames. The five-pointed star has long been an extremely important and rich symbol. Our ancient Brother Pythagoras taught about it in terms of numbers and geometry.

In Pythagoras' conception, the number ONE was not a number but, rather, a philosophical concept: the One, the Immutable Being. The numbers 2 and 3 were the first numbers and they were feminine and masculine, respectively, thus opposite.

Reality, in his view, was divided into pairs of opposites — light and dark, hot and cold, and so on — and life is essentially dialectic; the initiate's job is to restore unity by conciliating the opposites within himself, to discover how they are complementary, and to realize their unity.

The even numbers are feminine, for man can divide them exactly in half. In Latin, "to divide" is *dividere*, which is actually *duo-videre*, to see two: firstly man sees a pregnant woman, and then he sees her with her baby.

The five-pointed star is then symbolic of restored Oneness, at the human level. Recall the famous image by Leonardo da Vinci of a human figure whose hands and feet stretch to the lower four points of a five-pointed star, whose head (his mind) is called to fulfil the fifth point above, and whose heart is in the center where all five points are unified. The Star is blazing because it spreads joy, love and light.

The Fellow of the Craft is now ready for his last effort: to lift his mind and heart toward the Transcendent.

May the G.A.O.T.U. assist us all to accomplish this task, my Brothers.