

# WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

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## THE PURPOSE OF INITIATION

Richard Hanson, PM, HMRMS, Presentation at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Episode of The Rubicon Masonic Society, Virtual Education Series, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conversations About Freemasonry, August 2024

**I** bring before you a presentation that has been a personal reminder for me, and I hope that it brings you personal light as well. In my Masonic travels throughout Kentucky and elsewhere, I've found that most Masons I encounter do not seem to have a real good grasp on why they were initiated, or even what initiation really means.

We are affiliated into the ranks of Freemasonry through Initiation and in many jurisdictions this is as deep as it goes. For this very reason, I have made it my mission to ask our members, why are we initiated? And what does this mean? And of course, as most of you know, the silence can be deafening.

So, that is why I have taken on the challenge to make sure that we, at the very least, have a fair understanding of why we may do what we do. I will begin by stating that this presentation could go much deeper; but for the purpose of not overwhelming a new Mason, it has been limited to what are, hopefully, a few thought-provoking basics that a new, or even a seasoned, Mason can contemplate if he desires to do so.

By initiation, I do not merely mean a simple ritualistic ceremony. The initiation I speak of includes the Light of the Qabalist, The Philosophers Stone of the Hermeticist, The Elixir of life of the Alchemist, the Central Fire of the Rose+Croix, and the Cubic Stone of the Freemason. These represent the ancient traditions that have been set forth in order to guide us to the light within ourselves.

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Henry Pirtle states in his *Kentucky Monitor*, "There you stood without our portals, on the threshold of this new Masonic life, in darkness, helplessness, and ignorance. Having been wandering amid the errors and covered over with the pollutions of the outer and profane world, you came inquiringly to our doors, seeking the new birth, and asking a withdrawal of the veil

which concealed the divine truth from your uninitiated sight. And here, as with Moses at the burning bush, the solemn admonition is given, 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' Ceremonial preparations surrounded you, all of a significant character, to indicate to you that some great change was about to take place in your moral and intellectual condition. There was to be not simply a change for the future, but also an extinction of the past; for initiation is, as it were, a death to the world and a resurrection to a new life.”<sup>1</sup>



Pirtle asks us to consider:

- Seeking a new birth.
- Withdrawal of the veil.
- Divine truth.
- Holy ground.
- Moral and intellectual condition.
- Ceremonial preparations of significant character.
- Death to the world and resurrection to a new life.

What is Pirtle trying to convey to us? Something holy? Something sacred and special? I would dare say, all of the above. Let me be very clear here, though, Masonry is not taking the place of your religion as some might say or think. Church invokes the love of God; Masonry invokes the love of Man. One of Masonry's core purposes, I feel, is to cultivate the mind (which in Greek is psyche-soul). It does this through initiation, symbols, allegories and education. In our many lectures it alludes to all the things we are to learn, not just memorize.

The initiation ceremony is a rite of passage marking entrance or acceptance into something "New." Its goal is to open you up to a new path, although it does not guarantee that you take the new path. The choice is always yours. In a more hopeful and extended sense, it can also signify a transformation in which the initiate is "reborn" into a new life. A spiritual initiation rite normally implies a shepherding process where those who are at a higher-level guide the initiate through a process of greater exposure to knowledge. This may include a revelation of secrets; hence the term secret society for such organizations as ours.

One famous historical example is the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Greece, thought to date back to at least to the Mycenaean period or "Bronze Age." The mystery represents the myth of the abduction of Persephone from her mother Demeter by the king of the underworld, Hades, in a cycle with three phases: The descent (loss), the search, and the ascent where Persephone is reunited with her mother. For those initiated into this Mystery Rite, Persephone symbolized the eternity of life which flows from generation to generation, and they believed that they would have a reward in the afterlife.

In the context of Western esotericism, an initiation is considered to cause a fundamental process of change to begin within the person being initiated, and its "evolution operates within both the material world and the spiritual world." The person conducting the initiation (the *initiator*), being in possession of a certain power or state of being, transfers this power, or state, to the person being initiated. Thus, the concept of initiation is remarkably similar to that of "apostolic

succession.”<sup>2</sup> The initiation process is also often likened to a simultaneous death and rebirth, because as well as being a beginning, it also implies an ending as existence on one level drops away in an ascension to the next.

There are several types of Initiation: Adulthood, Christian Baptism, Bar-Bat Mitzvah, military, college fraternities and even gangs have paths of initiatory rites. Since the earliest days of the ancient mystery religions, the ancient Vedists of the East, the Egyptian, Chaldean, Orphic, Pythagorean and Platonist Schools, attempted to study and conceptualize the most profound spiritual experiences in order to re-connect and reunify themselves with deity, and they did this by the act of initiation.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main goals of Masonic Initiation is the purification of the natural human being—that is, the extraction of the pure gold of spiritual “selfhood” from the husk of the outer personality. AKA: We are taking something of value and increasing it is worth. Mastering the utilization of our working tools is one way we do this. The result is controlling our passions, desires, behaviors, walking upright, being true, straight, and honest.

Wilmshurst states, “There is much to be learned regarding the secrets of a man’s own nature and gradually the result of patience and experience can become revealed to his view. There is a superstructure to be raised, perfect in all its parts; a work involving much more than is at first supposed. There are tests and ordeals of a searching character to be undergone on the way.”<sup>4</sup>

As most of you know, each detail of the Masonic Ritual itself, including circumambulations, evocations, and invocation, plays a role in our initiations. It also serves to remind you that each of our five senses are deliberately mobilized, and the whole individual soul (mind) of the operator must enter the act. You are bringing your soul (mind) from worldly darkness to Masonic light. Once again, not saving it! That is God’s gift. But we enlighten ourselves through education, study, contemplation, memorization and finally application.

Keep in mind that the Masonic Initiation is just a preliminary step. A true initiation is the inner and hidden *essence* which pushes the apprentice to seek the Path of Further Knowledge. Masonic Initiation, in general, is a wonderfully fulfilling experience; it is really like very few experiences you can get anywhere else in the world. A candidate entering the temple for the first time is in a heightened state of awareness; adrenaline is pumping through his body, the senses are amplified; the whole being of the candidate is poised and ready to receive a transmission of energy; He is taking in every word, every movement, sound, and smell. All of this is brought about by the conscious decision to be initiated. And it changes you, if you are duly and truly prepared, worthy and well qualified.

This change has moved candidates and initiators to tears with joy from the energy of an initiation ceremony. This is the power of the Masonic ritual that can take place upon a willing vessel. Pirtle states that, “Before initiation, Masonry demands that a candidate be duly and truly prepared. This preparation should be mental and moral as well as physical. Our order subscribes to no system of religious doctrine, but it requires that every man who presents himself as a candidate for initiation to declare a belief in God, all-wise, all powerful, all-good, who reveals

Himself to mankind. It also teaches that there is life beyond a grave – which alone is a topic worthy of some deep contemplation.”<sup>5</sup>

So, if our Candidate should be duly and truly prepared, shouldn't we, as the initiators, be the same? Should we not bring the most profound experience possible? And I am not just speaking on ritual performance alone. I am speaking on our actions and behaviors as citizens, humans, and Masons. Every time we enact or experience one of our degrees, we are living and moving together in sacred time and space. We are being initiated again-and-again, renewing our obligations every single time.

Please take a moment and think back to the day you were initiated. Did the experience match your expectations? What elements of that day have been permanently impressed upon your mind? Are there aspects of the Degree that fell short? If so, why? Think about the ritual that you last performed or witnessed. With what *intention* was the ritual given? Did it feel serious,

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solemn, important, or transcendent? Did it invoke emotion? Did it illuminate the wisdom within you? Was Masonic Light transmitted? This is the purpose of initiation!

Without this change in us, we cannot transmit it to our candidates. Who, in turn, are thus unable to transmit it to the world. And if this is the case, we just become another social Fraternity, who, like many others, perform in the outer courts of the world. And we never enter the Sanctum Sanctorum (the Holy of Holies) of our craft; we fail to receive the most out of our Masonic journey, and if we fail to receive, we shall most definitely fail to pass it on to others.

In conclusion, by now you are beginning to understand that initiation is a sacrifice; a sacrifice of who you once were into, hopefully, someone you have been called to become. Initiation is meant to be taken with all seriousness and solemnity; it has the ability to transform your life if you are ready to travel the path. The quarries are yours. The tools are yours. The work is now upon you!

## NOTES

1. Henry Pirtle, Kentucky Monitor, Nineteenth Edition, 1990, 26.
2. Western Esoterism, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\\_esoterisicis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_esoterisicis), accessed June 15, 2024.
3. W.L. Wilmshurst, The Masonic Initiation, 1957, 3.
4. Ibid. p.3
5. Ibid. p.22

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