



## “Circumambulation”

### **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. Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft Masons 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.*

### **Circumambulation**

To show they are duly and truly prepared to be initiated, passed and raised in the first three Masonic degrees, candidates for Freemasonry are caused to circumambulate the lodge, also referred to as a perambulation. It is fair to ask both why this tradition is followed and what it symbolizes.

The word “circumambulation” is derived from two Latin words; “circum” meaning “around” and “ambulare” meaning “to walk” and literally means “a walking around”. Too often in our degrees it is believed that we walk in circles just for time filler or a chance to read scripture but the good Mason knows it has to go much deeper than that. Although the Old Charges give no evidence of circumambulation in early Craft ceremonies, as a ritual practice it has a long history independent of the Craft.

The book called "Introduction to Freemasonry" attempts to answer the question why: *"among first religions were sun and fire worship. Prehistoric man found God in nature, worship of the sun was done symbolically by worship of fire upon piles of stones which were the first altars. Imitating God's creation of the sun, early man believed he could give light and heat by lighting fire upon the altar then further imitating Him by moving east to west as the sun does."*

Primitive people firmly believed that they could wield influence over a god by imitating his actions. To the primitive man, the sun was God. The sun traveled from East to West by way of the South. Hence, early man circled his stone altar on which was his imitation of the sun-fire- from East to West by way of the South, in humble imitation of the god in the sky.

In ancient religious practices, the circumambulation was believed to a necessary precedent to calling forth the presence of Deity. During ancient rites of the worship of Deity, designated holy men moved solemnly around sacred objects in a circular manner. In ancient Greece, when the priests were engaged in the rites of sacrifice, all walked three times around the altar while chanting a sacred hymn or ode. Among the Romans, the ceremony of circumambulation was always used in the rites of sacrifice, of expiation or purification. Such movement was an integral part of the ritual used by the Hindus and Buddhists. In Islam, circumambulation is used during holy services at Mecca. In each, the movement was intended to represent the spiritual transition of man from daily life to spiritual perfection. That transition was to be accomplished in



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stages as each man moved more closely in his life and education to the spiritual energy of the Deity. The faithful believe that God is at the center of our existence, so when we do circumambulation, we accept that our actions and thoughts are always centered on God.

Here's an example of a circumambulation from the holy writings: "March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in." Joshua 6:3-5. This scripture refers to the circumambulation by the priests prior to the collapsing of the walls of Jericho. Since it is not likely that mere trumpet blasts caused stone to crumble, either the trumpet symbolizes a much more powerful force, or the entire episode is intended to convey a wiser and more serious truth.

The York Rite Order of the Temple says that the circumambulation represents a Christian's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In the Royal Arch Degree, the circumambulation depicts the captives' return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Thirty-second Degree Scottish Rite Candidates circumambulate "the Camp," representing journeys or pilgrimages becoming perhaps an allegory for introspection and self-awareness and becoming closer to one's God.

The candidate's circumambulation of the lodge room is intended to symbolize the state of spiritual attainment associated with the degrees of Masonry. The newly initiated Entered Apprentice Mason learns to humbly submit himself to the fact that he knows little about what the Craft teaches. In his state of ignorance, the initiated candidate is introduced to the tools of learning that, when studied under the guidance of the more experienced brethren, will enlighten his spirit. A Fellowcraft is presumed to have mastered the rudiments of Masonic symbolism and be knowledgeable about the fact that Masonry uses symbols to impart wise and serious truths. His spirit is in need of solid food and he is led to the study of the liberal arts and sciences, which he is expected to read and understand through the prism of spirituality instilled by Masonry. While continuing to require spiritual food, the Master Mason is expected to take the lessons he has learned and usefully offer them to the community in which he resides by living the spiritual life he has been taught. The circumambulation not only symbolizes the candidate's spiritual state, but also the three stages of preparation necessary before the world may expect to benefit from that spirituality. In the ritual in which in a certain part of the Master's degree the circumambulation is in the reverse direction, Freemasonry imitates the ancient ceremony signifying death.

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Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of Wisconsin



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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 do you believe is the meaning of Circumambulation for us as Masons, and in our daily lives?
- With our circumambulation around the lodge during the degrees, and the holy writings on the altar as the center of our belief system, what could the Lodge room symbolize?
- Could our circumambulation be paying respects to the beliefs of our ancestors long past?
- We circumambulate while hoodwinked, does this provide other allusions?
- Reflecting on your Lodge degrees, how has the Circumambulation appreciate the deeper meaning of our degrees?
- How has the Circumambulation helped you to explain the lessons of Freemasonry to other Masons?