

Three

By W. Bro. Rob Lund

As all Masons know, the number Three features prominently in all Masonic ritual. If you take but a moment to think about it, you will probably come up with a list of most of them.

Here are some of the most commonly remembered instances:

Three questions; three knocks; three principal officers (Master and Wardens); three assistant officers; three steps; three degrees; three positions of the sun (rising, meridian, setting); three working tools; three grand offerings; three pillars (wisdom, strength, beauty and three orders of architecture); three great lights; three lesser lights; three items of furniture (volume of the sacred law, square, compasses); three movable jewels; three immovable jewels; three sides of the flap of the apron; three Grand Masters (Solomon of Israel; Hiram of Tyre, Hiram Abiff); three parts of the temple (entrance or porchway, middle chamber, sanctum sanctorum); three rosettes or Taus on a master's apron; wages of a Fellowcraft (corn, wine, oil); three ruffians. I'm sure you could think of more.

You will also find that within the ritual and the lectures, there are divisions of three. For example, in the final charge in the first degree there are three major charges given (as a Mason, as a citizen of the world, as an individual). Furthermore, there are three important duties owed (to God, to your neighbor, to yourself). This applies to most parts of all the lectures and charges.

Why is the number three used so often?

I believe that there are a number of reasons, but I would not be able to cover them all here. I think

that this number appeals to the human brain in some way, psychologically. In music, three notes often appear together (as a triplet). We use the expression: "as easy as 1,2,3".

In paganism it was recognized as the principal of the sacred numbers, as it contains within itself a beginning, a middle, and an end. In many religions, there is a triune nature of the deity (for example: in Christianity: Father Son, Spirit; in Hinduism: creator, preserver, destroyer). The sceptre of Neptune was a trident, Cerberus, the dog of Pluto, had three heads,. There were three Fates and three Furies.

One could think of three as being used to achieve balance: two extremes and a point in the middle. I put it this way in a previous article on the Pythagorean number system: *The establishment of a relationship between two opposing forces becomes a third force.* It is explained as the number of *relationship or affinity.*

There is much that can be studied to find the meanings behind the number three in Masonry (read the works of Pike, Ward, Mackey, and others) and I'm sure that you will enjoy finding these.

For me, the most important meaning that I get out of the number three is the realization that there are three levels to each degree ritual: the physical, the mental (moral and intellectual), and the spiritual. It is this understanding that helps me to get the most out of Masonry.

