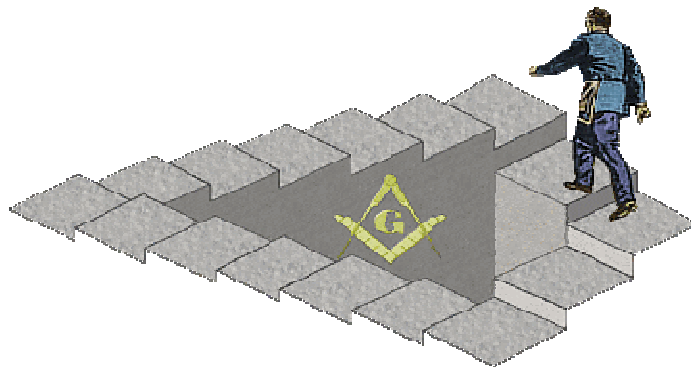


## What about Regular Masonic Steps?

I begin with a story that I'm sure some of you have heard before, but it fits nicely into my 'nugget', so please bear with me. The first time I heard it, it brought a knowing smile to my face. This is the version I recall: The condemned man stood facing the hangman, an imposing hooded figure attired in black, atop the wooden platform. The burning afternoon sun began to coax droplets of sweat from the condemned man's brow as he began to feel the uncomfortable weight of the massive length of hemp and the ever-tightening noose about his neck. "Have you any last request?" asked the hooded figure.

"You've got to help me, friend!" blurted the convict. "I didn't have a chance! The three cops that arrested me, they were all Masons. The state's attorney was a Mason, the judge was a Mason, and even my own lawyer was a Mason! You're my only hope!" The hooded figure nodded slowly and the muffled voice from within said, "Yes, I understand." Then with a long sigh the hangman quietly said: "Sir, it is time; if you will...just step off with your left foot."



The steps we as Masons take in the degrees of the Blue Lodge are perhaps the subtler of our signs, and yet very little is written about them. There are, to my way of thinking, two sets of steps for each degree: the *regular* steps in which position the ritual secrets of the degree are imparted to us, and then there are the *ordinary* steps we take as we move about the Lodge as we encounter the officers of the Lodge, and those steps we take to approach the altar where we are placed to take our obligations, and again in the Master masons degree when we offer up our devotions to the Deity. Lots and lots of steps...some of which, if you pay close attention, ultimately prove to be more significant than others in our journey to Light.

Freemasons are not the only group to use secret steps. Mackey informs us that the initiates of Osiris, known in old religious texts as 'the great god of the dead in ancient Egypt', used a rather peculiar step as a sign of recognition. Yet, at the same time Mackey he tells us that our 'steps' are not really secret, as such. Other than that statement, Mackey offered little enlightenment.

From my own observation, I note that the starting position of our feet, and the third regular step, each form squares, while those steps in-between form perpendiculars. I see the candidate's feet, in the form of a square as he begins his Masonic journey, as emblematic of the rectitude of his actions in life."

The poet Milton had the same sort of thoughts when he wrote:

"Yet some there be that by due steps aspire  
To lay their hands on that golden key  
That opens the palace of Eternity."

To find an appropriate comment on *steps* I considered the art of choreography, but not being a dancer, I then thought of 'steps in instruction', and 'steps on a staircase', but finally found the tone I was looking for as I stumbled across a rather obscure volume written back in 1947 by J. J. Rowlands, entitled "Cache Lake Country: Life in the North Woods." In this book, Rowlands describes his life in the woods with his two best friends, Hank the artist, and old Chief Tibash, a Cree Indian.

Rowlands provides good advice both at a surface level, and at one of analogy, which every Freemason should be able to easily recognize. From an early chapter in his book I discovered this: "An old friend of mine who lives in the city was here for a visit not long ago and we did some tramping about the woods. Now, I think nothing of walking over to Hank's cabin, which is only about two miles away, but the trip always made my friend tired, and that worried him. What he didn't realize was that a fellow who walks in the city on pavement doesn't use the same muscles that a man who walks in the woods. Here the trails twist and turn, rising suddenly, now dropping away over a ridge, with ruts and rocks waiting to trip him if he doesn't watch out.

On city pavements, which are smooth and mostly level, a man doesn't have to think very much about the ways of walking, but here in the forest, every step is a matter of balance, and you learn to feel the ground as your foot touches it whether you are walking in daylight or in the dark. The feet of a good woodsman will tell him where the trail is no matter how dark it is, for even in heavy boots, they become very sensitive to the lay of the land. The constant change in the trail is what tires the muscles of a city man. The woodsman develops an easy, effortless rolling gait that takes him over rocks and pitfalls without a lot of effort. He walks from the hips down, while the city man, as the Chief noted, walks from head to foot. The feet of a woodsman move straight ahead and not at an angle as many city folk walk, and the body above his waist leans slightly forward."

From these couple of paragraphs, I see a simple analogy; the trails of our life are much like those of the forest that "...twist and turn, rising suddenly, now dropping away over a ridge, with roots and rocks waiting to trip us if we don't watch out." Just as the woodsman develops an easy, effortless rolling gait that takes him over rocks and pitfalls, understanding and *living* *Freemasonry daily* can help us navigate the twists and turns of life, as well as dealing with our fellowman.

Brethren, as you come to Lodge many of you travel a distance to join your brethren. Many of us travel throughout the year sharing in the warm camaraderie of our Craft. I hope for each of you, that the meaning of the regular steps of our ritual will grant you that rolling woodsman's gait that helps you to walk straight ahead. I see that as the true symbolism of the rightness of our regular Masonic steps.



.....Another 'nugget from the quarry of Freemasonry'. TM

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Source: segments of Cache Lake Country: Life in the North Woods –Rowlands, J.J.