

## Scottish Rite 18<sup>th</sup> Degree

One of the Scottish Rite degrees that bears the most symbolism and esoterism is the Rose Croix. The duties of this degree teach us that we have to be tolerant of the faith and creed of others.

I was born and grew up in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where my family and I lived in a big apartment building. My family was catholic. When I was about eight a new family moved to the front door apartment. They were Jewish. They had a son at my age named Elias who became my friend.

Following my father's example, I developed the habit of when arriving or leaving home, look at the image of Jesus Christ that was placed on the wall in front of the door, make the sign of the cross, and say: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Our next door neighbors, on the other hand, had the Mezuzah on their front door. Every time, Elias arrived or left home, he would kiss his own fingers and place them on the symbol. We never asked each other why we did those things differently, but without any plan, I started doing as he did every time I visited him, and in the same way, he would make the sign of the cross when coming to my house.

When I think about that childhood memory, I see how important my parents and his parents were. They taught us, through their example, about respect and tolerance. Elias and I understood that unconditional love and brotherhood were the most important part of our relationship. When my mom and dad passed, Elias stood by me. When his Grandpa died and other difficult times came, I stood by him. He gave me the opportunity to read the Torah and I gave him the opportunity to read the Bible. This has been a 40 year old relationship. I have been in America for over 9 years now, and he continues in Brazil, but I know our relationship is capable of crossing borders.

Having a neighbor, acquaintance, friend, or brother with a different religion should not be an issue but it should be seen as a possibility to learn more. As a Mason, I know that God can have different names but is "one" Creator. The 18<sup>th</sup> degree is a good opportunity to reflect upon and to put "LOVE" into practice. Love that is endorsed equally and extensively by all holy books, even if not everyone acknowledges that. As Masons, we are not taught to promote hatred, prejudice, and intolerance. On the contrary, as peacemakers, we connect the good parts of each religion and lay emphasis on them. We understand contrastive opinions as fundamental to reach equilibrium. And above all, Freemasonry, as well as the American Constitution promotes freedom of religion.

When the door of a Temple is open for the first time, each neophyte has a different perception based on his background, experience, beliefs, aptitudes, and limitations. Each one shall find the answers he searches for, at his own pace, and by himself. Freemasonry is a sacred institution which holds external truths, taught through symbolism and rituals, and internal truths, which are uncovered in profound contemplation and philosophical thinking.

Somehow, you have been chosen to help the Great Architect of the Universe to rebuild the Temple that has fallen inside the human being's heart. That Temple represents uncompromised and unconditional love, which is impregnated with tolerance and compassion. That temple is to be able to look at a brother and respect him and to feel gratitude for his history and for his contribution. May the Great Architect of

the Universe make us more and more fraternally united. May our reunion be a source of wisdom and joy. May the word Brother be uttered from the heart as it comes out of our mouth.

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