

*Hail or Hele?* by Donald L. McAndrews, PM, PHP, PC, KYCH, KTP, MPS

One of the first ritual words we memorize as Entered Apprentices is, “I hail.” Most brethren take it at face value and consider it a greeting. However its roots go back in time to a somewhat different form of English. The original ritual, in this case, is considered by many scholars to actually be, “I hele.” This is a word which has vanished in modern English, but has many of its descendants still in use today.

The original word “hele” comes from Old English and means to hide or conceal. This understanding of the word gives us a considerably different view of that ritualistic interchange. Tracing the word hele to its ancient origins, we find a number of derivatives still in use in modern English.

The word “heall” in Old English referred to a covered place such as a roofed residence or temple. Our modern derivation “hall” refers most commonly to a covered or enclosed passageway. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we refer to a Music Hall, our Town Hall or Lodge Hall, that is, a spacious covered place or temple. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term “Hall of Fame” was coined to name a place which enclosed or enshrined the luminaries of music, a particular sport or other talent.

Another Old English derived word is “hell.” Hell is a place of concealment - in perfect accord with its root word “hele.” From Proto-Indo-European came the word “Kel” meaning a covered or enclosed place. The modern derivative of Kel is “Cell,” as in a jail cell or a monk’s cell, which are covered, enclosed places – even, at times, hidden places. From Proto-Indo-European “Kel” through Old French to modern English come the words color and cover, both consistent with the idea of concealing.

The modern word “hole” also derives from this same source and shows its earlier meaning when used to describe a small, dingy abode or “hole in the wall.” The phrase, “to hole up,” refers to concealing oneself, most fitting with the original derivation. The word “hollow” also belongs to this same group.

Our first teachings in Masonry instruct us that knowledge, light, the goal toward which we always strive, is almost always concealed or hidden. Armed with this valuable knowledge, we should certainly expect to dig, to explore, to examine everything and not simply accept things as they outwardly appear. Treasures are always buried in a hole, that is, concealed.

This is evident in our numerous Masonic organizations devoted to research: Research Lodges, Research Chapters, The Allied Masonic Degrees, and Rosicrucians to name a few. As your Lodge and District Education Officer, I recommend these organizations and their various publications. There are many good books on a wide array of Masonic topics. You can learn much from reading and listening to well-informed brethren.

Most important, use your mind. Don’t simply listen to the ritual, think about it and reflect on it. When something sounds funny, like “I hail,” let that be a clue to start questioning, start digging – because that’s what we as Masons do.