

Further Symbolism and Teachings of the Degree of Fellow Craft

The symbolism of the Degree of Fellow Craft allows us to further our understanding of the sciences, continue to see the influences on our character and the perfection of our nature. As we explore the meaning and teachings of the some of the tools and other symbols experienced throughout the Degree of Fellow Craft, we can all see how our minds are challenged.

The Square is the symbol of morality, truthfulness and honesty. The direction of the two sides of the Square form an angle of 90 degrees, or a right angle, so-called because this is the angle which stones must have if they are to be used to build a stable and upright wall. It symbolizes accuracy – not even varying by a single degree. When we part upon the Square, we go in different directions, but in full knowledge that we will proceed in accordance with the angle of the Square on a course that is moral and proper until we meet again.

The Level is a symbol of equality. We do not mean equality in wealth, social distinction, civic office, or service to mankind; but, rather, we refer to the internal and not the

external qualifications. Masonry believes that every man should be able to aspire to any height, no matter how great, but it recognizes that some may have greater potential in life, service, or reward, than others. However, it holds that each person is endowed with a worth and dignity which is spiritual and transcends these man-made distinctions. Thus, the Level acknowledges that all men are equal without regard to station. It also symbolizes labor and the man who performs it, as well as the passage of time.

Two pillars were placed at the entrance to King Solomon's Temple, and are symbolically represented within every Masonic Lodge. These pillars are symbols of strength and establishment – and by implication, power and control. We are taught to understand that power without control is anarchy and that control without power is futility. To varying extents we all have power and we must exercise control. For our lives to be successful we must be able to match one to the other.

Some researchers have suggested that the two pillars before Solomon's Temple represented the Pillar of Cloud and the Pillar of Fire which led the Israelites through the desert to the Promised Land. It was their guide in the light

as well as in the dark. Other researchers suggest that the pillars represent the kingly (earthly) and priestly (heavenly) aspects of creating and maintaining the “Kingdom of Heaven” by means of the great archway with its keystone. And the globes on the columns are said to be the celestial and terrestrial spheres representing heaven and earth.

The two pillars also correspond to the Three Great Supports of Masonry. The columns of Wisdom and Strength are emblematically represented by the pillars in the East and West, respectively. The candidate, as he is brought into the Lodge, comes to represent the third column of Beauty or Balance.

The Winding Staircase is a symbol of ascension. The number of steps has changed over the years. Sometimes there were only five and at others seven. Some listed thirty six, dividing them into one, three, five, seven, nine and eleven, and other lectures listed the number at twenty-five. American Freemasonry has kept the number to fifteen being described in the lecture as consisting of three, five, and seven steps. We should note the connection between this number of steps and the number of Fellowcrafts in the Degree of Master Mason.

The significance of the number three has already been mentioned. We have the three Degrees, the three Great Lights, the three Columns, the three principle officers, the Three Grand Masters and the three Principle Tenets of Freemasonry.

What we want to emphasize in the Degree of Fellow Craft are the Three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. These virtues were considered a ladder to heaven, another symbol of ascent paralleling our own efforts to perfect our nature. The Four Cardinal Virtues of the Entered Apprentice compliment these in the sense that the Four Cardinal Virtues are symbolically horizontal (representing our earthly actions) while the Three Theological Virtues are symbolically vertical (referring to our method of ascent to further light). And our Masonic Aprons are composite of the triangle and the square – the three and the four making seven.

The Five Steps in the Winding Staircase relate to the geometrical symbol of five which is, of course, the pentagram. The emblem of Pythagoras' fraternity was the five-pointed star. The pentagram is a symbol of the Microcosm, that is, of Man.

The Seven Steps symbolize the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. Christian scholars adopted them and we find them fully embraced in 12th Century France at the Cathedral School of Chartres. There the study of the Seven Liberal Arts was considered a means to the knowledge of God. This principle was actually expressed in the construction of the Gothic Cathedral of Chartres where we find sculpted representations of the Seven Liberal Arts on the West Door of the Cathedral.

The Masters of Chartres taught that the proper study of the Seven Liberal Arts guided the intellect to approach the hidden light behind the world. The invisible underlying structure of Reality, or Truth, could be apprehended in this way. And it was in the mid-thirteenth century that the humble mason who had mastered the Seven Liberal Arts was entitled to the designation of architect.

Corn, Wine, and Oil are symbolic wages earned by the Fellowcraft Mason who arrives at the Middle Chamber. These not only symbolize wealth in the physical world but also help us to deal with the mental and spiritual aspects of our being.

Corn represents nourishment and the sustenance of life. It is also a symbol of plenty, and refers to the opportunity to do good, to work for the community, and to perform service to mankind. Of course, the Corn referred to in this Degree is actually what we now call wheat.

Wine is symbolic of refreshment, health, spirituality, and peace, while oil represents joy, gladness, and happiness. Taken together, Corn, Wine, and Oil represent the temporal rewards of living a good life.

But for Freemasons, the actual "wages" are the intangible but no less real compensation for a faithful and intelligent use of the Working Tools: fidelity to one's obligations, and unflagging interest in, and study of, the structure, purpose, and possibilities of the Fraternity.

Such wages may be defined in terms of a deeper understanding of brotherhood, a clearer conception of ethical living, a broader toleration, and a more resolute will to think justly, independently, and honestly.

Corn or grain has also represented the concept of resurrection. Wine has symbolized mystical attainments, divine intoxication, and ecstasy. Oil is one of the elements

of consecration, and as you know, perfumed oil was used to anoint.

Why the letter “G” is so prominently displayed in Masonic Lodges is a mystery to many Masonic historians. Like the sphinx before the pyramids, it stands before us in silence and mystery. It is not consistently displayed throughout the Masonic world and there are Masonic scholars who feel it should be removed.

The reason that it is so prominently displayed in American Freemasonry is plainly given to the candidate in this Degree. They are told that it is the initial of Geometry as well as the initial of the name of the Supreme Being. The synonymous nature of Geometry and Masonry is clearly stated from the time of the “Old Charges” and manuscripts up to the present. It is also obvious that “G” is the initial of God. This alone may be sufficient reason for its presence.

The importance of Geometry to a full understanding of Freemasonry becomes apparent to the candidate as he progresses through the Degrees, and he is unequivocally informed that Geometry is the basis or foundation of Masonry.

Clearly geometry was of critical importance in the ancient world. The Egyptians became skilled at surveying because the annual flooding of the Nile obliterated boundary markers in their fields and they had to set out and recalculate new boundaries each year. The Greeks, who named this skill Geometry or “earth measurement,” advanced the art by using deductive logic to expand the knowledge into a theoretical science, and as Masons we are aware of Pythagoras’ work in this regard. Thus, the groundwork was set for the development of the sciences, with Geometry considered the first science.

As speculative Masons we are concerned not only with the physical applications of geometry, but with its moral meanings as well as we establish the contours of our own actions and the ethical boundaries within which we will operate. This moral geometry is the basis for character development, and we are encouraged to pursue a fuller study of this important science.

The great teachings of the Fellowcraft Degree revolve around the importance of the Masonic study of number, order, symmetry, and proportion and the Masonic use of the term Geometry includes all of these.

Nature is the true temple of the Deity. If this is so, then cosmic and natural laws are like a trestle board governing our actions. Therein are found the essential laws that can be discovered in the practice of the Seven Liberal Arts. They were called liberal arts because it was felt that their practice liberated the mind, and the ancient philosophers considered that Geometry, in particular, had the power to lead the mind from the world of appearances to a contemplation of the divine order of the universe.

As we broaden our understanding of the meanings of the Degree of Fellowcraft Degree and its symbolism, we further our enlightenment and the perfection of our nature. The teaching of this Degree prepares our minds for the more rarified teachings and symbolism of the Degree of Master Mason.