

The Symbolism on Our Lodge Officers

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It is often said that symbolism is carried too far and this is difficult to deny when I think of Freud and other psychiatrists and psychologists who seem able to find strange and often erotic meanings in all they see. The meanings given to every image based on repetition makes the lay-person feel at a serious disadvantage when they wish to contradict anything that is given a meaning by such "Specialists." The symbolic object, which is dredged up by the mind, seems to have no great pattern of consistency in the case of psychiatric symbol definition.

We are more fortunate in Freemasonry because we possess a body of ritualistic work which defines many of our symbols in at least one way. This allows us to look at our symbols in two distinct ways, the first being in the way our teachings say and secondly at the common meaning given to the same symbol by the profane. The similarity is usually very close but the range of meanings in the outside world is frequently much broader.

When a new mason asks the question about symbols, "what is that?", or "what does that mean?", do we tend to back off? Do we have the feeling that these are 'old' symbols, that really have no meaning in our modern world? If this is the case, then we are in very serious trouble within our Lodges because the Charge at our installations very clearly states that "...it inculcates principles of the purest morality, though veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." We are also told in the same Charge that to penetrate through the veil of the allegories and symbols is to understand the mysteries. While there is a far deeper meaning in the overall pattern of the craft, it is of great value to find some meanings of the individual symbols and to attempt to recall that meaning on each occasion that we see them. This creates the 'repetition' form of learning that begins to modify our life style to become that "better man" we all strive for.

One of the problems with the human mind is that it tends to ignore items which it registers frequently. We are the last ones to see our children grow, and need a visitor to bring this to our attention. So it is, with the jewels worn by the officers of our Lodges. How many of you have looked at your officers jewels - really looked. Firstly they are quite detailed, secondly they frequently have things on them that you were totally unaware of. There are different companies producing jewels and each may embellish the jewels differently, but you can be sure that there is meaning behind practically every identifiable whirl and loop.

In addition to the symbols on the jewel, each of these is suspended from a collar which may also have symbols upon it. Then the Officers also have an apron, often the same as yours, and this has detail on it that we tend to observe when it is first presented to us, but then we never consider it again.

What I hope to do in a short period of time, is to look at some of the jewel, collar, and apron symbols and consider some of the meanings that are taught us and then also some of meanings which are known to be fairly common in the everyday world. There will be areas where we skip over areas lightly, there will be a few diversions, but I hope that you will consider your Lodge jewels a little differently in the future.

A final point before starting is that all masonic symbols are positive, none are aimed at anything that is not for the good of the mason as an individual, and through him, for the world at large. We degrade no symbol and none can ever be considered to be contrary to the high principles we extol. Remember that there is no right or wrong to symbolism - it is what you accept as meaningful to you as a Craftsman. The following are my findings and interpretations and it is quite likely that you will have different interpretations, but I wish to share my findings with you.

The Master carries with him, a great symbol. If you are of a York Mason you will learn that it is immovable, whereas if you use the Canadian Work, that it is moveable. The square is the symbol of regulated life and actions. It is the masonic rule for correcting and harmonising conduct on principles or morality and virtue, and as a symbol, it is dedicated to the Master. We also identify ourselves with this symbol, because we are taught that squares, levels and perpendiculars are the proper signs to know a mason.

We are surrounded by squares in our Lodge for every mason wears at least one although the Immediate Past Master and the Past Masters wear it most obviously. It stands, as one of the Great Lights, in the centre of all our activities and its legs constantly embrace the Worshipful Master. It is repeated in our F.C. salute, our feet positions, our way of moving around the Lodge and our legs when at the altar in our initiation.

History tells us that the square, which is an upright with a right top arm, is the Greek letter gamma. Each one of us knows the meanings associated with the letter G. In the construction trade, the square is used for "trueing" stones and "proving" them correct. We can see how easily, the association with truth and virtue could arise. There was the historical belief that the shape of the ancient world was an oblong square and this is represented in our "squared Lodge."

There have been references to the square's meaning as a symbol long before the start of Masonry, as we know it. The Egyptians believed that truth and justice were 'on the square', Confucius in about 500 BC referred to the squareness of actions. Mencius, the Chinese philosopher of about 372 BC refers to square actions. Simonides of Ceos, the Greek lyrical poet of about 600 BC and Aristotle in about 350 BC refer to 'square actions' and associate this with honest dealings, high morality and virtue. The symbol is not original, it is certainly far from new, but it seems to have a remarkable consistency of meaning.

If we move on to the Immediate Past Master's jewel for a moment we observe that it is identical to the Master's in shape except that pendant from it is the 47th problem of Euclid. It is important to remember that Euclid only proved the Pythagorean theorem of about 300 years earlier. When you consider what the

theorem shows it is a multitude of further squares. Squares on sides, mathematically 'squared' numbers and a central closed square, about which all the 'proof' stands. As an emphasis of the square symbol we could see nothing which could do it better. We should know that the properties of this triangular arrangement were first thought to be magical in the relationship they demonstrated. In addition, Pythagoras, being Greek, may have had the Greek letter/symbol Γ in his mind when he is reputed to have exclaimed 'Eureka' and it is for us to decide if the utility or the symbolism had generated his joy. We learn in our work that we are to be inspired to love the arts and sciences by this design and proof. We should always marvel that such a simple figure could have had such impact on our world.

You may think that we should move on to the next set of jewels at this point but hold ... there is more, much more that we can find at this time on the jewels that we have considered - look at the design on them. Now do not think that we will find new figures on all the other jewels but the jewels of the three principal officers are the most embellished and we will stay for a little longer here.

In the angle of the square is the sun, radiant with its beams and with a rather clear face on it. Was this doodling the work of a metal worker with time on his hands? Of course not, for the historical significance of the sun as a symbol is an integral part of all our Lodge work. We refer to the sun in many places and also copy it in many actions. At the opening and closing of the Lodge, all the officers relate their actions to the sun. We walk around our Lodge in the same direction as the sun appears to move across our earth. We travel towards the East, the place of light, after being informed that the Master rules his Lodge as the sun does the day. If you think and possibly are aware, that culture seemed to develop in the East, there was always the suggestion that the source of the sun had inspired this knowledge and culture.

Proof is readily available of the frequency of sun-worship as the first form of contemplation of a deity. Man has always looked upward for a "source" and the sun met the early criteria of "supporter" of the life of the world. It is fairly natural that this early god would be personified by the addition of a face so that the god could be given more of the human attributes. Even with our own concept of God, we find the degree of personification relates to the stage of understanding of the race or individual. Do we then have a reminder of that ancient worship on our jewel which is 'a reaching back' to give evidence, albeit erroneous, of the great historical past of the Craft? Perhaps it is also a repetition of the many death and rebirth mysteries and legends of the past and the present.

Perhaps for us we should remember more the sun as being the symbol of brightness, the opposer of evil. We know that we say in lodge that the rays spread their benign influence and we also must have a constant search for light. In fact the degrees seek 'light', 'more light' and 'further light', and this is given by our three lesser lights, one of which represents the sun as well as the Master. We are told also that the sun is the glory of the Lord, and it governs the day. There is another link in our lodge with the sun and that is a symbol designated as meaning something else, but the astrological sign for the sun is a point within a circle.

While the sun is one clear symbol, we also find the moon with a face on the jewel. Explain where it is. This symbol appears elsewhere in our Lodge as one of the Lesser lights and is represented by the Senior Warden. The moon and sun have many similar characteristics in symbolism, but regularity and stability have the approval of our teachings. These principles are desirable in life both in and out of Lodge, as our Warden states in opening and closing. It is natural that in the absence of the Master (the sun), the moon should rule in his place.

The symbol in the profane world has always indicated measurable states, regularity and is strongly associated with the death-rebirth mysteries that are continued as the principal theme and lesson in Masonry.

Yet another symbol is found on the jewel in the form of a cluster of seven stars. These are specifically referred to in the Canadian teachings and are an important symbol in that they represent the ethereal mansion, veiled from human eyes but the York mason learns only of the star-decked heavens. The significance of these stars which adorn the ceiling of many Lodge rooms is very complex, in that the stars and the number seven are almost constantly in symbolism. The stars themselves, in clusters tend to be associated with order and destiny and so to some degree reinforce the symbolism contained in that of the moon symbolism. When we come to the seven we are almost overwhelmed with the many facts associated with it. The number seven was said to be 'perfect' because it contained the numbers 3 and 4 and was itself indivisible and could not be created by multiplication. This gave it the name of the virgin number. There were seven years to an apprenticeship, there were seven planets known to man of the middle ages, and there are seven days in a week of which the 7th is the sabbath. The days of the week are named after the seven gods of the Goths, a seventh son has special powers, the Jews swore by the number seven, there was a need for seven witnesses to agreements, and Solomon's temple was said to have been built in seven years. Jericho was encircled seven times by seven priests, and these were the seven liberal arts and sciences known as the trivium and quadrivium which were thought to contain the total sum of human knowledge. Seven represents symbolically the combination of the Trinity and four cardinal virtues, it is the number of the basic musical notes, of colours and of the spheres. Seven is related to perfection, to religious truth and also with knowledge. It is hard to find a more astounding mass of facts associated with a number until we observe that three and five are similar.

Within the Lodge we are reminded that it needs seven officers to open the Lodge and those seven steps of the staircase reminding us of the liberal arts and sciences. Jacob's ladder is usually shown with seven rungs of which 3 are considered most exemplary for masons. While then these seven small stars on the jewel are insignificant they are repeated as a symbol at least three times within our Lodges and give us much to think about.

Finally we can move on to the jewel of the Senior Warden, the Level. We meet upon this sign, and we have all been raised from the dead level to the living perpendicular. The symbol, we are taught, shows the principle of equality and reminds us that we are all descended from one stock and possess one nature and it thus justifies our organization as a fraternity of equals. At Pompeii it was discovered that a carving of a level with symbols of death demonstrated an early

belief in death as the great leveller. This, is our great experience. We are also told that we are travelling on a level of time to an undiscovered country from which no traveller returns. This also associates death with levels and this is patterned after associations which exist outside the craft.

We observe again on this jewel, the sun, moon and seven stars and as we move to the Junior Wardens Jewel will see them yet again.

The Junior Warden's Jewel is of course the plumb referred to in our lectures as the symbol of rectitude and uprightness. A fairly simple relationship to be sure. There is a link with this jewel and Jacob's ladder stretching between heaven and earth and stressing a morality which should be practised. We are instructed in our steps to stand erect and charged to act upon this symbol as we leave Lodge. This association is identical within and without the Lodge.

We now move to a few of the simpler symbols worn as jewels by our officers, and while some simply indicate their role they have a few meanings on which we may think.

The doves of the deacons have long had two symbolic meanings, that of a messenger and that of peace. The dove we see in Lodge has the sprig of olive in its beak and is clearly a representative of Noah who used it as a messenger of good tidings. The deacons jewel was, in an earlier period, a representation of the God Hermes or Mercury who was again the messenger of the ancient gods. In the Christian faith the dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. This jewel then is really a representation of the work to be performed but with overtones of the early church and the Bible.

The stewards wear and carry the cornucopia which is a representation of the horn of the goat which, in legend, suckled the infant Jupiter. The horn symbolises strength and abundance and suggests the supply of food as it is usually displayed full of fruits. In our Lodges this is associated with those responsible for satisfying the "inner man" after regular meetings are concluded. As in the case of Amalthea the goat with the "visiting Jupiter", the supply is supposed to be particularly abundant in the presence of visitors.

The organist wears the lyre, a six stringed instrument associated with Turpsichore, the Goddess of music and is the symbol of musical accomplishment. It should constantly remind us of the contribution that music can make to not only our Lodge but our total lives.

The chaplain wears what is perhaps the most important symbol within our Lodge, for his jewel portrays the open volume of Sacred Law, without which no Lodge can operate. This symbol expresses our dedication to the God in whom we have a personal belief. It guides us in the erection of our spiritual building and points out our whole duty. It is the rule and guide to our faith and is kept in our hearts between our meetings. The Bible on the jewel is open upon a triangle which has additional symbolism for the Christian mason in that it represents the trinity. For all masons the triangle can remind us of the three moral virtues, the principle tenets of our profession, the knocks, the ruffians, the Great Lights, the lesser lights, the three degrees, the three Grand Masters, God and the Holy St.'s John and the steps, both our individual ones and those upon which

the Master presides. There are so many references to the number three that it rivals the number s even for sheer volume. Suffice it to say that the symbolism of this particular jewel is particularly meaningful to masons, and each should have his own particular interpretation without any suggestion that this should be imposed on others.

Again at this point you should observe the positive nature of the symbols and the major influence they should have upon our thoughts.

The registrar has a simple scroll about his neck which signifies the historical record of events. This is a reminder to each one of us that our actions make an impression on the great record of existence and we should strive to keep our book in correct balance.

The secretary wears the crossed quills which seem to be the international symbol of a secretary. The saltire pattern, the bows and the trailing ends have no recorded significance, but, we all know this jewel indicates an onerous task performed by many sound Brethren.

The treasurer has crossed keys rather than quills and these are, of course, to the money chest of the Lodge. This is simply a role indicator but these keys should remind us of "that excellent key - a Freemason's tongue which should speak well of a Brother present or absent. When this cannot be done, adopt the excellent virtue of the Craft - SILENCE.

The secretary-treasurer has a combination of a crossed key and quill but I will not go into which one is on top.

The jewel of the Director of Ceremonies is the crossed batons. These are symbols of the batons of command which were presented on the field of battle to an outstanding survivor. Possibly this is why this office is held by Past Masters.

The Inner Guard and the Tyler both have swords, differing only in that the tyler has one whereas the Inner Guard has two. These have always been symbols of a protector and in particular have been associated with the defence of a faith. The sword has the reputation of warding off evil because in the inverted position it forms a cross. In addition, within the Lodge, we know that the Tyler's sword guards the Constitution and is a constant reminder to guard our thoughts, words, and deeds, remembering the masonic virtues of silence and circumspection.

Having looked at the jewels we should also observe the collars from which they are suspended, because these in some cases have symbols. The principal symbols are the blazing star the entwined snakes and knots. The blazing star pattern used, is usually that of the "pentalpha", or five pointed star with intermediate flames. This star is primarily the symbol of divine providence and can be found in our mosaic pavement. The five points should remind us also of other masonic "fives". The five orders of arch itecture, the five points of fellowship, the five senses and the five who must be present in order for a Lodge to be held. The star is also said to represent the Morning Star which is yet another symbol of rebirth which is so significant to each of us.

I should point out that there is a six pointed star or hexalpa which is also known as the "Glory". This six pointed star is the Seal of Solomon and also the Star of David. This star is also represented on the carpet at times and there is distinct confusion in the texts over which star is THE star to use. The primary symbolic meaning of the six pointed star is the universe as an entity.

Also to be found on the collar is this complex looping which shows a serpent swallowing its tail, a common symbol of eternity and in many cases associated with wisdom. The double entwined never ending loops are similarly symbols of eternity but have the additional meanings ascribed to them of vibrant energy and active life. These symbols are worthy of our contemplation in relation to the stability and teachings of the Craft.

We then hear the next symbol although modern methods sometimes deny us the sound which adorns the apron, the seven chained tassel. This is a fairly late addition and is thought to be more a decorative copying of the ends of the original longer and centrally tied ribbon or belt. The changing to tassels was slowly developed and perhaps we could turn our thoughts again to the symbolism of the number seven, already related for the Masters jewel. In addition to the tassels we have the buttons which contain our principal symbols again. Here the only addition is the compasses which I leave to your personal investigation for our teaching clearly suggests that they are for the craft.

Before closing we should end with a symbol of utility which would make Freud turn in his grave, for the standard hook on an apron is a snake. While we will accept 'wisdom', it is possibly simply a decorated, very functional 'hook', with no great thought put into it. We certainly do not all have one at any rate.

These are then the jewels of the Lodge, the collar and aprons worn by our officers and perhaps they have shown a little more than you have normally noticed. If you would look at the Jewels in the next few Lodges you attend, you will find similarities and differences. These will take on a new meaning because you have looked, and possibly you may find more meaning in various aspects of your personal masonry by contemplation of the new symbols you find or the old ones that you know. I sincerely hope so.