



THE JOURNEY OF A FREEMASON

Presented in Open Lodge to the Brethren of Oracle Lodge 1003

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Front page image: The Tarot Card - 0 - The Initiate as The Fool

Interpretation: The first step of a journey that may lead to great things but there also looms dangers. Armed with nothing more than a bag filled with material essentials, enthusiasm and a naive admiration for the mysterious and unknown, he sets off with the persistent 'dogging' of temptation biting at his heels, painfully reminding him of what he is about to give up and tempting him back to the corporeal comforts of his now past life. His dress reflects the material wealth he leaves behind but the white rose symbolises the great mystery he cannot yet comprehend but also cannot help pursuing at the risk of all. There is a vagueness and blindness in his gaze that suggests he must quickly overcome and find meaning in his new pursuit or he will fall back into the pit of ignorance and materiality. The cards number, 0, represents the beginning. The sun and clear sky the mental clarity and guidance afforded to a willing candidate.

The Journey of a Freemason

Brethren, this evening I would like to attempt a sort of experiment. I would like to consider the body of the Three Degrees of Irish Craft Masonry as one evolving journey, the 'Journey of a Freemason', on a path of purposeful and intentional learning and personal growth, one that can, for some, lead to a fuller understanding of oneself and their purpose. In doing so I will limit myself to one reference only - the official Irish Constitution Book of Craft Ritual as is available to all Master Masons. Having said that I have read numerous books on Freemasonry and related subjects over the years and so it is inevitable that my own interpretation of the ritual will be somewhat coloured by this 'other knowledge', albeit modest. It is unlikely that I will say much that you have not previously heard but maybe I will present it in a way that you may not have thought of before.

What I will present is my own insight and interpretation of what I have come to understand over my nine years as a Mason and I support it by making reference to a limited number of symbols within the ritual. Further development of this work will mean a fuller consideration of these and other symbols contained within the ritual and so may or may not support this my initial interpretation. So be it – this is called learning.

It has also been my observation that many Masons view each Degree as a stand-alone, a single piece of ritual work just as they are delivered in Open Lodge. In this paper I hope to demonstrate the importance and relevance of seeing all three as one, as one single and on-going journey.

I would like to begin by making a statement: It is my belief that Craft Masonry, as has been hand down from one Mason to another, is a triune initiatory tradition based on a ritual imbued with and delivered in a rich symbolic language and built upon a well crafted allegory based on the profession of Stone Masonry and building. Fundamental to its interpretation is a comprehension of the meaning and significance of the three names of the Deity as found in the Degrees of Craft Masonry, the Three Great Lights and their respective arrangements and the symbolic and allegorical meaning of the Working Tools.

Craft Masonry is an initiatory tradition (tradition meaning handed over or passed on) and like others that have gone before it was designed with the clear intention of introducing the candidate to a morally based symbolic language of personal growth and development. It might be described as a supportive system and one hidden, in part, by allegory so as not to intentionally or immediately reveal its whole nature but rather to support the candidate until such time as he is ready to discover it on his own. Learning is as much about the journey as it is reaching the destination.

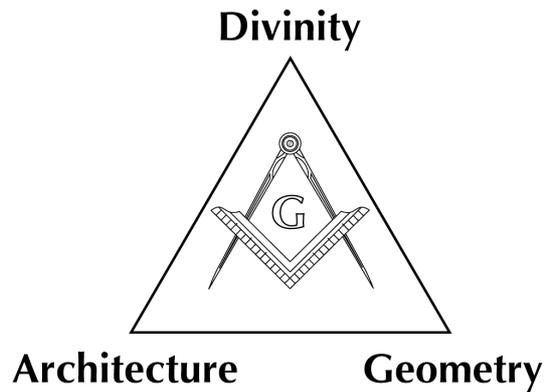


Figure 1. The triune disciplinary focus of the Three Degrees of Craft Masonry

The Deity

We will first consider the Deity and its triune representation. The Entered Apprentice is Initiated under the watchful eye of the M.H.G.T.G.A.O.U., the Fellowcraft Passed in the presence of the M.H.G.T.G.G.O.U. and the Master Mason is Raised in the presence of the M.H.G.T.G.G.O.U.

This 'progression' in title, from one Degree to the next, is far from a casual choice and tells us much about the intended nature and philosophy of the Masonic tradition. It reveals a peculiar view of creation. When the three are considered in reverse - Divinity, Geometry and Architecture - it suggests that the material world in which we exist is derived from Divinity through the philosophical understanding of original truth as represented by numbers and its manifestation in form through geometry as applied in Architecture. Today we see numbers as nothing more than a measure of quantity. But in the past numbers have been used to represent a philosophy of universal truth, one untainted by social, cultural, religious or other human limitations. It remains pure throughout time and is believed to be derived from the Supreme Being, our Creator. In the establishment of a tradition such as Freemasonry what better and more stable a philosophical foundation could one choose to ensure its unaltered perpetuation through the ages, protected from the imperfections of corporeal existence and time itself.

In a system that employs the craft of building as its exoteric expression then the use of the progression from Divinity to Number to Geometry and finally to Architecture as its

philosophical or esoteric expression of creation is both convenient and complete. Number is used to represent the whole of truth as originated from the Supreme Being. Geometry is the first step in bringing that knowledge into existence – perfect geometry representing divine truth. I have spoken on this subject before. Briefly, the number one is used to represent Divinity itself while two represents the first creation – duality or the line. Three represents the first two-dimensional form, the first surface – the Triangle and the gateway of creation. Four is the first three-dimensional form, the tetrahedron or first solid – the material. And so on . . .



Figure 2. Perfect man built from the embodied wisdom of the Masonic Tradition

Of course, as Masons, we start with Architecture and progress to Geometry and then approach Divinity. Exoterically Architecture is used in the Entered Apprentice Degree to describe the construction of a durable, useful and beautiful building or edifice. The philosophical meaning, of course, is the 'building' of man. It supports the 'building' of a useful, intelligent and morally upright person. We must first master our day to day corporeal life so that we can then pursue knowledge as represented by the seven liberal arts as expounded in the Fellowcraft Degree. Only then are we ready to begin the creative process of advancing and evolving in a moral, just and upright manner. So, when the three names of the Deity are considered together we see that the building of the perfect man can be achieved by the successful advancement through the triune Degrees of Architecture, Geometry and eventually approaching Divinity as symbolised by the Master Mason approaching the East. Freemasonry maps out for us a picture of not only from whence we have come but how we might return. It achieves this elegantly and subtly and, most importantly, without dogma.

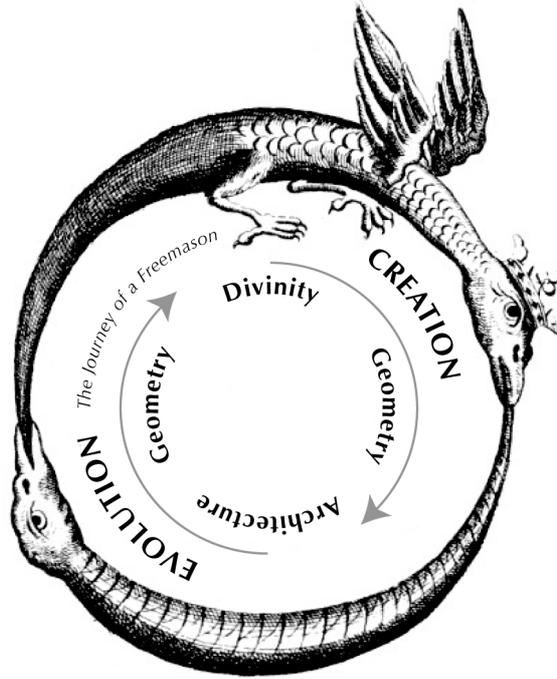


Figure 3. The cycle of creation and evolution as symbolised by the Degrees of Craft Masonry

Calling Up and Calling Down

Before moving on to consider the Three Great Lights I would like to refer to the language used in our ritual to describe how we move from one Degree to another. We either 'Call Up the Lodge' or 'Call Down the Lodge'. When we 'Call Up the Lodge' we are, in effect, raising it to a 'higher place'. So, we call it up from the First to the Second and from the Second to the Third. This in itself is revealing and further supports the contention of this paper. Additionally, when we do this we also demonstrate physically exactly what is intended when the Director of Ceremonies rearranges the Three Great Lights.

The Three Great Lights

A small and often rushed or even forgotten part of the closing phase of the Sublime Degree of Master Mason is the explanation of the positioning of the Three Great Lights. Each position is explained and when taken in the context of this paper they begin to reveal a very important dimension to Craft Masonry. Revealingly, the candidate is told that in the final position that he has now received '*all the secrets of the three Degrees of Craft Masonry*'.

Let us remind ourselves of what these are. They are the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and the Compasses. Without these items no work can be lawfully transacted in a Masonic Lodge. The Volume of the Sacred Law is like a '*light to your feet and a lamp to your path*'. It is the 'Moral Law' by which all men ought to rule and govern their entire course of life. The Square is emblematic of Morality and the standard by which we measure our actions and deeds

throughout our mortal lives. Finally, the Compasses, they are the symbol of virtue or, in other words the highest standards of Morality.

In our Working the Volume of the Sacred Law does not move. While we may, for the convenience of delivering Degrees and for the candidate, open to particular pages it is only necessary that it is open and to view. It is the unmoving and unchanging Moral Law.

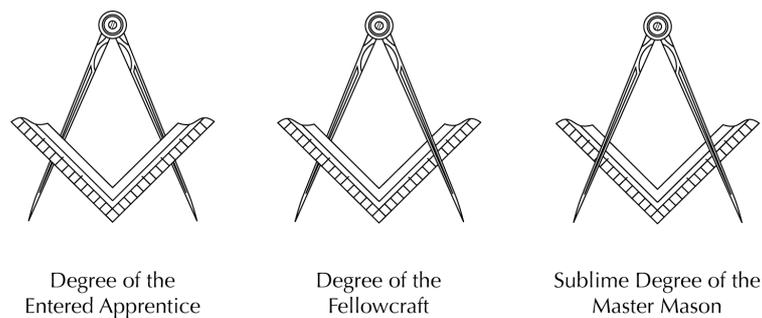


Figure 4. The Compasses and Square as arranged in the Three Degrees of Craft Masonry

Let us, for a moment, consider the Square and Compasses alone. From ancient times the Compasses and Square have been used to represent creation – in Ancient China they were the tools of creation. Together they are representative of geometry, the highest of the seven liberal arts without which none of the others can be operated, so it is said. The mastering of these tools represents the ability to test and prove a proposition by oneself therefore endowing an individual freedom. The Compasses and Square are therefore the tools of a free man. They provide a way of thinking which recognises the possibility of original thought, understanding its possibilities and using it for the betterment of mankind. In themselves they have no intrinsic power but in the hands of man they represent his creative potential.

However, each is different in its application. The Square as used by the Operative Mason is used for testing material, that which has already been created – designed, cut and carved and brought to its required shape and size – to borrow a phrase. It takes skill and knowledge but is still of limited use. In contrast, the Compasses are used by the advanced Operative Mason to design and ensure not only stability but also the proportions that endow beauty. So, two Working Tools symbolically representing morality but one materially based – our earthly corporeal existence – and one creatively based – our spiritual being or the Divine within. In summary, I am suggesting that the Compasses represent a higher moral than the Square, one that is spiritual in nature as opposed to that of the Square which is earthly. Looking at it geometrically, the Square is a product of the Compasses being the fourth part of a circle – matter is a product of the creative action of the Supreme Being.

So, we might revisit the Calling Up (and inversely the Calling Down) of a Lodge. The Volume of the Sacred Law remains unchanged throughout. However, when we open the Lodge we cover the points of the Compasses with the Square. The latter is the predominant, the corporeal and overseen by the M.H.G.T.G.A.O.U. – Architecture – the material and built form, aiming towards perfection, the potential beauty of Divinely derived proportion but ultimately imperfect as all material existence must be. At this level we are actively perfecting our earthly lives.

The Lodge is Called Up to the Second or Fellowcraft Degree. As the Lodge is declared to be at Labour by the Worshipful Master the point of the Compasses to the South is brought above the Square and we are now Working under the watchful eye and guiding hand of the M.H.G.T.G.G.O.U. We are told that this symbolises the ‘beginnings of knowledge’. Knowledge, experience and practice is required if one is to advance from simply expending our time correctly and following a basic code of morality to the practices of the Fellowcraft, learning, measuring and testing but not yet creating, still engaged in material tasks but all the time advancing. The Lodge is then Called Up to the Third or Sublime Degree of Master Mason. The Compasses are now entirely above the Square. We are now active on a creative and spiritual level and watched over by the M.H.G.T.G.G.O.U. We refer to this Degree as the Third or **Sublime** Degree.

When the Degrees are considered as three in one we can see how, through exercising knowledge, wisdom, and truth and living a moral life as marked out for us in the Volume of the Sacred Law, we can advance from a materially based life of earthly ‘building and architecture’ towards a spiritually based one of design and creation. We have become free to create our own destiny based on a Divinely derived morality of truth by which we cannot err. This is the journey of a Freemason. From the very first day of his Initiation to the day he was Raised and beyond he is instructed in the symbolic purpose of his earthly life, one in which he is given a framework upon which he can now move forward and build himself up to such heights that he may indeed achieve a deeper understanding of himself – he will, in the end, come to know himself and therefore his place and purpose in this life and in the next.

It might be noted that it would be unreasonable to expect a candidate to achieve this level of advancement in the three months required between Degrees as practiced by the Irish Constitution. Other Constitutions leave far longer periods of time and expect the Candidate to exhibit learning and measure advancement. I think this is too literal an interpretation of the intention of the Degrees. The Three Degrees as delivered will affect a Masons whole life and so one might suggest that the interval is irrelevant as the journey is one of a lifetime and nothing shorter.

If I were to look around the Lodge Room I would not be surprised to see sceptical faces. Maybe you think I am over reaching. There is one further strand of instruction to be considered, one which supports the upward advancement of the Degrees and all they represent. This is the symbolism of the Working Tools.

The Working Tools

There are three Working Tools in each of the Degrees with the exception of those of the Entered Apprentice. Curiously, in the Irish Constitution, we have only two Working Tools in the Entered Apprentice Degree; the 24-inch Gauge and the Common Gavel. Other Constitutions use a third, the chisel. Notwithstanding, the Working Tools of an Irish Entered Apprentice clearly instructs him to live a balanced life, one which includes the more mundane tasks of everyday life as one must but also emphasises the need to dedicate time to the '*service of our Creator*'. They are tools of action, skills to be acquired and applied in our daily physical and material lives.

The Common Gavel, we are told, is to be used to .. divest '*our minds and consciences of all vices and impurities of life, thereby fitting ourselves as living stones for that spiritual building, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*'. On his very first day the whole purpose of Freemasonry is revealed to the candidate, one in which he is only now embarking and clearly revealing a spiritual dimension. There is no ambiguity. This is just a start but its direction is clear.

In the Second Degree there are three Working Tools - the Square, the Level and the Plumb-rule. This is a very different category of operative tool. They are used for testing and correcting ones actions, a means of assessment. The Square of Morality, the Level of Fairness and of Equality among all men and the Plumb-rule of Uprightness, Judgement and of Rectitude of Conduct. The Second or Fellowcraft Degree is associated with learning, with the seven liberal arts. It is about impressing upon the candidate that he cannot advance to a truly moral and truthful life if he remains ignorant and immersed in a material and corporeal one. He has the potential to 'raise' himself to higher levels of intellectual and spiritual activity but only by his own efforts. Freemasonry is handing the candidate a way but the candidate must freely and actively accept and participate while, at the same time, making it clear that his destiny is in his own hands.

In the Third or Sublime Degree the candidate is, after his Raising, introduced to the three Working Tools of a Master Mason. The Pencil, the Skirret and the Compasses are clearly about overseeing, designing and creating. The candidate has now learnt the basic laws and precepts upon which a wholly moral life is based and so is now advanced to a position where he himself becomes the designer, the creator of his own destiny. What these tools suggest is that the candidate has now advanced to a point where he is no longer expected to follow a path marked

out for him by another but can now define his own, one based on a conduct as marked out for him in the Volume of the Sacred Law, as symbolised by the Skirret, and one which is both stable and proportioned as illustrated by the Compasses. However, he must always be mindful that he is still accountable for his actions and conduct throughout his mortal life as symbolised by the Pencil. He is approaching the East but not yet there. Having said that the distance between the limitations of an earthly life and that of one in unity with his Creator is all but closed. He now has all he requires to complete his journey.

Conclusion

While the names of the Deity used in the Three Degrees and the position of the Three Great Lights provide an introduction and the overarching philosophy of Freemasonry it is the Working Tools, together with the other symbols of the Craft, that provide the means by which its promised goal might be achieved. While this paper has only scratched the surface of the deeper significance of the symbolism and allegory of Craft Masonry it is hoped that it might provide the stimulus for others to further consider these and the many other dimensions of this beautiful tradition to which we are so lucky to belong.

Through the learning and giving of the Craft Degrees I have come to appreciate more and more the genius of the originators of the Masonic tradition whomever they may have been and, as such, I have become more indebted to their inspirational work. From the Charge to a newly made Brother:

*We have all been made '..... a member of our Ancient and Honourable Society; **Ancient**, as embodying **principles** that have existed from **time immemorial**; and **Honourable**, as tending to make all those **honourable** who are **strictly obedient** to its **precepts**.'*

They have borrowed from ages past to preserve for us a tradition of spiritual morality free from the interference of mans own limitations and provided a way by which we might make our own path back to a state of perfection. We own much to those who have worked to preserve this tradition. Now it is our time to do likewise.