

The Masonic Apron

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The apron is a piece of clothing for a workman or tradesman which goes back in time to the very earliest periods of human civilization. It is even mentioned in the third chapter of Genesis with the words, "and the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves an apron"

Its uses go back to the Biblical stonemasons, who were not just stonemasons, but were also skilled like Tubal Cane as cunning workers in metals, as well as wood to construct frames. Additionally, they were sculptures who fashioned the shape of stone to decorate the edifices they built.

The use of the apron for ritual purposes goes back to these ancient times as it was the accepted garment of temple High Priests and was referred to as the Ephod. It was a linen apron, sometimes comprising of multicolored threads, worn in ancient Hebrew rites and as a vestment for the High Priest. In the Bible the Ephod is also referred to as the robe or skirt, and covered the body from the waist down almost to the feet. As with medieval aprons it's possible that it had shoulder straps and possibly a bib. In truth the Bible doesn't specifically call this an apron, but it seems to have similarity to one.

In ancient England the Arch Druid wore a white apron when he would cut the sacred mistletoe from oak trees. Roman Temple Priests wore aprons during sacrificial ceremonies. All these aprons were white or had elements of white in them providing the symbol that men should be pure of heart if they were to enter into the presence of God.

The Lamb Skin or White Leather Apron

In C. M. Boutelle's book, "The Man of Mount Moriah" in which he described the building of King Solomon's Temple, he tells how, Hiram, "the Widow's Son," proclaimed that before all the craftsmen could engage in their work they must invoke the blessings of God. Also, because the Temple was being erected to Him a sacrifice by each of them had to be made onto God on the Alter of Burnt Offerings. Because the lamb has for ages been considered the emblem of innocence it was offered as the sacrifice. The lamb was first skinned, but the rest of the body was consumed. The skins of all the lambs were then prepared and aprons for each of the masons were made. (Parenthetically, this has an allusion to Jesus being referred to as the Lamb of God offered by Him to expiate the sins of a guilty world.)

From the moment you take your first degree you start to realize that much of what concerns Masonry deals with renewal, growth, ascension, and self improvement. The idea of moving from darkness to light is one of the things signified by the lamb skin or white leather apron, as you come to wear it in different ways for each degree. As you recall from the ritual, "At the building of King Solomon's Temple there were three principal classes of workman and each as a distinctive badge wore their aprons in a peculiar manner." This same lambskin also serves in signifying resurrection and ascension. Symbolically those who live solely in a world governed by the physical senses and not also influenced spiritually would be termed as dead. The resurrection refers to the illumination of the spirit when one moves toward being governed by the spiritual than by the body and its senses. "Rising from a dead level to a live perpendicular.

In the ancient Mediterranean the birth of lambs were looked on in a spiritual way. The first lamb to be born in a flock, was believed to be spotless, white, and shinny manifesting the power of Spring. It was an embodiment of renewal, and victory of life over death.

(Russell Crowe – Robin Hood movie) "Rise and rise again, until lambs become lions and darkness becomes light." In the movie it is a saying that Robin remembers his late father making when he was a boy, meaning never to

give up. His father was suppose to have been a respected leader in his community, and a stone mason, and at the building of the town fountain and as inspiration he carved the saying on a slab of stone turning it over to be hidden until democratic change came to the land.

I have to confess I added the “darkness becomes light” myself borrowing it from Maitreya, The Friend of All Souls, The Holy Book of Destiny.

To be truthful I do not know if the writers of this story inserted this as part of the plot because they were Masons and were influenced accordingly. The phrase can be applied in different ways to different circumstances, but none more so than from the Bible. According to a sermon by Father Mark **S. Bialek**, regarding Ascension Sunday he states, “With the ascension of the Lord, the mission of the Church began. With the descent of the Holy Spirit, God took fisherman, tax collectors and persecutors of the Church and transformed them into her greatest heralds of the gospel. They were to be Jesus’ witnesses to the ends of the earth and to take his message to all people. Scattered disciples gathered in the upper room, a rock that denied the corner stone would become its strongest foundation and a persecutor named Saul would become an Apostle to the gentiles named Paul. Lambs become lions..... However, the Church is not a building made of brick, wood or stone, but the Body of Christ is made out of living stones as are the people of God who are called to embrace the responsibility and mission of their baptism.” However, this phrase to me is reminiscent of the third degree ritual when the candidate is raised by King Solomon using the strong grip of a Master Mason or Lion’s Paw on the five points of fellowship. As King Solomon does this he states, “There is strength in the lion of the tribe of Judah and he shall prevail.” In short the lambskin signifies regeneration or a new life. In the case of the movie Robin Hood to "rise and rise again until lambs become lions" it is a call for the citizenry to acquire a moral backbone and create a new democratic order in their land.

Allusions in the Presentation of the Lambskin

“More ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle.” We said earlier that the use of the workman’s apron goes back to the very beginning of human civilization. This phrase alludes to two famous symbols of antiquity to demonstrate how old the use of the apron is. As many of you know the Roman Eagle was the symbol and standard for the Roman Empire. The Golden Fleece has a bigger story and refers to Jason and the Argonauts who were persuaded by King Pelias of Thessaly to fetch the Golden Fleece, which was a magical source of power, and was hung in an oak tree at Ares in Colchis. The challenge was that it was guarded by a dragon. Jason met this challenge with the aid of a yoke of fire breathing bulls who ploughed under the dragon’s teeth which produced a crop of warriors who helped to assault the dragon while he stole away with the fleece. There was however an actual Order of the Golden Fleece founded by Philip, Duke of Burgundy in 1429 and was instituted for the protection of the Catholic Church and has evolved to be used as a civil order, recognizing those in Europe for outstanding service. However, it is not recognized in England.

“More honorable than the Star and Garter.” This refers to the Order of the Garter, which is the oldest and highest order of knighthood in the world. It was established in 1348 by King Edward III of Great Britain. The emblem of the order is a blue garter, represented graphically as a circular belt, on which is displayed the motto HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE. (Evil be to him who evil thinks, or let him be dishonored who thinks ill of it). The award for the order includes a collar from which is hung a figure of St. George the patron saint of England mounted in the act of slaying his famous dragon. In the center is an eight pointed star having a cross of four equal arms and angles in the centre, surrounded by the motto. Charles the first of England in 1692 added a Star to the design of the Order of the Garter, made up of eight silver rays. It is for this reason that we make the reference in the entered apprentice ritual “more honorable than the Star and Garter”.

The Order of the Star was created by King John II of France in 1351 at the beginning of the Hundred Years War and was an imitation of the English Order of the Garter formed three years before. It was to serve as an incentive to gather around him 500 of the best members of French Chivalry or knighthood. However, he was only able to attract 100 knights at arms. The oath of the order was to never retreat nor surrender before the enemy, which resulted in most of them dying within the year of its founding and consequently the order did not last very long.

Why White

As we have mentioned before the color white is the symbol of purity. Aaron who was Moses next in command and called by God to serve as High Priest was required when he entered the Sanctum Sanctorum, or Holy of Holies, to make expiation for the sins of the people, to be clothed in white linen. Disciples of Pythagoras who were candidates to enter the Pythagorean Society of ancient Greece were required to be clothed in garments of white. The Egyptian Priests decorated the head of their principal deity OSIRIS with a white tiara and the priests themselves wore robes of white linen. The word candidate is derived from the Latin word "candidus" meaning a "white man." As you can see the use of white through time is also a symbol of purity and innocence.

Parts of the Apron

Each part of the apron has a meaning. The four right angles or corners of the apron represent purity, truth, sincerity, and honesty, which are the foundations of morality. The four sides are reminders for us to practice the four cardinal virtues of Temperance in word and deed, Fortitude in a noble

purpose, Prudence in judging wisely and Justice to the humblest and greatest alike.

The triangular flap is symbolic of our duty to relieve a distressed brother and to be kind and friendly in dealing with our fellow man. It is also the threefold revelation for God, or divine wisdom. For that reason the triangle is the symbol of Deity and you will find it alluded to more as you progress into the concordant bodies of Freemasonry. The triangle also refers to God in his quality as an eternal Being with the three sides representing the past, present, and future. Also that God is Omniscient; all knowing, Omnipotent; all powerful, and Omnipresent; without limits and is present everywhere.

The circle formed by bringing the strings of the apron together is symbolic of spirit.

As an entered apprentice you have been instructed that when you labor among us as such you will do so with the flap of your apron turned up. We are lead to believe that this alludes to the bib of the ancient apron and being the bearers of burdens it would anciently serve to protect our clothing. However, it has a more symbolic meaning that by pointing upwards it indicates that Divine Wisdom has not yet truly penetrated your heart and mind.

The Fellowcraft Apron

The Fellowcraft Apron with the lower left hand corner pointing up indicates that wisdom is starting to be acquired, or should we say that more light in Masonry is being obtained. It also indicates that the soul and body are acting in unison. The Fellowcraft apron has a different symbolism in that the triangular flap and four sides of the apron comprise a total of seven sides, These sides are representative of the seven liberal arts; Astronomy, Music, Geometry, Arithmetic, Logic, Rhetoric, and Grammar.

The Master Mason's Apron

We also look at the triangular flap and its three sides as being representative of Faith – a belief in things yet unseen, Hope – the expectation of reward at the end for living an honorable life. and Charity – to have compassion, understanding, generosity, toward your fellow man.

My brothers the apron was a garment for practical use by our ancient operative masons to help protect their clothing during their labors. As speculative Masons the apron is our symbolic protection from being soiled by the world. However, it is us that must carry out the job of moral rectitude and in doing so keep our apron spotless before the world.

It is the symbol of honor and therefore we must treasure it as we treasure our membership in the great fraternity of Freemasonry. We are to keep it as an inspiration and a mirror of our soul and when we should become uncertain about our steps as men and Masons we should contemplate our apron, and the sacred book of law, in all that that they mean to determine our direction.

“And when at last your weary feet shall have reached the end of their toilsome journey, and the working tools shall have dropped from your nerveless grasp, may the record of your life and actions be as pure and spotless as the fair emblem which has just been placed within your hands. And when you stand before the Great White Throne, may it be your portion to hear from Him who sitteth as the Judge Supreme, the welcome words, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’ “

