

LIGHT AND DARK IN THE LODGE

North

My first wondering about the symbolism of the lodge directions began soon after being first brought to Light, when I was placed in the Northeast corner “as the youngest Entered Apprentice.” Why, I thought, have I been placed here?

A bit later, I studied the lectures, learning that there were no Lights placed in the North;”it being situated so far North of the ecliptic that the sun or moon, at their meridian height, could dart no rays into the northern part of it. “ I found this very confusing. Talmudic sources recount that there were indeed windows in the north of King Solomon’s Temple, the chief being called the “Golden Window”. And there were doors also, three, as I recall. Mackey says that in its progress through the ecliptic, the sun advances only to 23*28' N of the equator. Hence a wall North of that latitude can, at the Sun’s meridian height, receive no direct rays on its Northern

side. This did not seem to go very far to explain why North was, Masonically speaking, the place of Darkness.

It was obvious to me that, as the effusive beauty of the Sun arose in the East, East was indeed the seat and source direction of Light. I knew that I had been blindfolded to symbolize my own inner Darkness in respect to this Light of Masonic knowledge. I could see that, in the Northeast corner, I stood at the boundary between the Darkness of the North and the Light of the East. Yet I also realized that there had to be more, much more, to all of this.

An older lecture, the “L’Ordre des Francs-Macons Trahi et Le Secret des Mopses Revele, first published in France in 1745, puts a different spin on this same moment in our Ritual:

Q: Where stand the Apprentices?

A: In the North, except the last-received.

Q: Why?

A: Because they are still in darkness, & so that being in the North, which is the dark side, they examine the work of the Fellows.

What is left unsaid in this, and in our present Lectures, is that this arrangement of the Lodge, with its symbolism, is very old and rooted in folk tradition. It can be seen clearly in the traditional layout of the Cathedrals of old Europe. They were always rectangles, extending from East to West. The high altar was in the East, as the place of light, often with a large window allowing the sunlight during morning Mass to stream down upon the altar. In the West was the Baptismal Font, where those in the darkness of original sin were first cleansed and exorcized. Doreen Valiente, in her interesting little book "Witchcraft for Tomorrow", notes that the North side of the old churches "was anciently believed to be 'the Devil's side'. The northern door was denominated the "Devil's Door" and only those who were unbaptized used it. The Pagans had to attend service up to the consecration by law, but could only enter

by the North door. Similarly, to the North was the unconsecrated burial ground where those who were deemed to have died in mortal sin were laid, the certain doorway to Hell.

In the old days of Europe, among the Celts and kindred peoples, the North was considered the place of power. They looked upon the unmoving North Star as the proof of this power. In their mythology, North was where the dead traveled. The souls of the warriors dwelt in the “Spiral Castle” behind the north wind. But all others went to a land of eternal cold and darkness, the realm of the Queen of Death, Lady Hel. When Christianity came, the place of power was most significantly changed from the North, to the East. North was the place of the Pagan power, which to the Christians was of course the land of the Devil; the “place of Darkness” indeed.

Who knows how far back into the human psychic the association between darkness, evil, and death go? Perhaps the long nights huddled in the trees listening to the lion’s roar. Talmudic sources tell us that in Zerubbabel’s Temple the North

Gate was “ the gate of obscurity or privacy, it being used only by those who were ceremonially unclean and by mourners under the ban...” (Jewish Encyclopedia).

We enter the Lodge by the northwestern gate, both North and West being associated with darkness, ignorance. We receive light, but partially, and are advanced to the Northeast corner, the boundary between the Darkness and the Light. We have advanced across the Masonic pavement, checkered with good and evil. We stand in the same relation to the Lodge as the ancient criminal stood in the court of law, to the left of the judges at the bench. Our true Masonic advancement begins with our tracing of the Sun’s journey, from the dawn in the East, to its Glory and Beauty in the South, to its final end in the West at the brow of the hill where we are laid in imitation of our ancient master, Hiram Abif. At each step of the way, we travel thru Dark and Light in the Lodge.

