

EMERGENCE OF THE SPIRIT: THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SQUARE AND COMPASSES

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Practically speaking, the Square and Compasses are tools designed to create and/or check geometric shapes; the Square draws right angles, squares, and rectangles, and the Compasses draws out circles. We recognize them as the working tools they are, and their importance to the Craft of our operative forebears. We attribute the symbolism of proper Masonic behavior onto these, as we act upon the square and keep ourselves within due bounds with all mankind.

There exists a deeper meaning to the Square and Compasses, however, which alludes to Deity, and the Mason's relationship with such. The key to decrypting the meaning is found within our Masonic Monitor. The Monitor advises us of the progression of Geometry: "from a point to a line, from a line to superficies, and from a superficies to a solid." The symbolism begins to emerge as we apply this geometric progression to the 2-dimensional product of the Square and Compasses, extrapolating them in to 3-dimensional objects. In other words, squares become cubes and circles become spheres.

Within the lodge, the most visible cubes (or, more accurately, three-dimensional rectangles) are the pair of ashlar. The most common explanation of the lesson of the ashlar is that of self-improvement. As a Brother Mason works to become a better man, he transforms himself, with the assistance of the brethren, leaving behind his "roughness" as he endeavors to emulate the perfect ashlar.

Bro.: Albert Pike, in his Morals and Dogma, offers another interpretation of the ashlar. Brother Pike identifies the ashlar as models of Democracy. A cube, he explains, has three visible sides at any one time, which allude to the three branches of a Democratic government. The three hidden sides allude to liberty, equality, and fraternity, the lifeblood of such a government. The transition from rough ashlar to perfect is made by a

citizenry shaping itself by force of their collective will (symbolically represented as the gavel) into a well governed society; when the Colonialists wished to become free under a Democracy, they—in a collective effort—created a government by, of, and for themselves.

In either lesson, the cube, the solid result of the superficies of the Square, represents man; either man himself and his improvement, or the construct of man, and how he chooses to govern himself.

With regards to spheres, there are two discernable pairs of spheres within the craft. Atop Boaz and Jachin rest two, one representing the celestial bodies, and one representing our mundane world. The other pair of spheres comprise two-thirds of our Lesser Lights, those being the sun and the moon. The various spheres in our arts, parts, and points—the moon, the Earth, the sun, the universe—are all creations of the Great Architect; they are all manifestations of the Divine, and surpass mere man. The fact that these spheres become increasingly larger may well suggest the potential for greatness implicit in spiritual advancement.

The third of the Lesser Lights, the Master of the Lodge, reinforces the notion of Square-as-Man. The Worshipful Master endeavors to rule and govern his Lodge as the sun and the moon do the 24-hour day; as a man, he strives to emulate the separate spherical creations of Deity. The demarcation of this is seen in the jewel that hangs about the Worshipful Master's neck, the Square.

And so: The Square begets a geometric square, which grows into a cube, which represents man. The Compasses create circles, which grow into spheres, which represent the Divine. Understanding the meaning of the symbols does not, however, constitute an understanding of the lessons imparted by these same symbols.

The lesson, then, under the model of Square=man/Compasses=God, can be found in each brother's progression through the degrees of Masonry. Certainly, the desire for light, and

later more and further light in Masonry, can be easily conceived of under the supreme command of “Let there be light,” and therefore the corollary to God is obvious. But the lesson is conferred on a more subconscious basis, and is one of our hidden mysteries, specifically using our own system of symbolism vis-à-vis the juxtaposition of the Square and Compasses upon the altar throughout the first, second, and third degrees of Masonry.

As an Entered Apprentice, the Square is placed firmly atop the Compasses. When the hoodwink is removed, the Fellowcraft sees the partial uncovering of the Compasses. By the time a brother is raised to the sublime level of Master Mason, the Compasses completely emerges from behind the Square. Whereas the Square once held primacy, eventually the Compasses become dominant.

Again, working within the Square=man/Compasses=God paradigm, how else are we to interpret this emergence of Compasses over Square than as a lesson that as a man progresses through the degrees, the spirit must attain dominance over the flesh? That what concerns the Great Architect must take precedence over what concerns ourselves? The purpose of learning to subdue our passions and improve ourselves in Masonry is reinforced by our symbolic representations of the degrees. If Masonry makes good men better, the gradual uncovering of the Compasses tells us that improvement comes with a greater understanding of, appreciation for, and connection with the spirit, with the divine, with our Great Architect.

It behooves us all, as people, to better acquaint ourselves with the higher power in which we believe; but perhaps the emergence of the Compasses over the Square tells us that as Masons it is our duty to do so.