

Reflection on Symbolism in the Senior Deacon's Lecture

*Sir Knights Benjamin F. Hill, Knight Templar Cross of Honor
Grand Commander, Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Virginia 2020*

“Thus, he shewed me: and, behold, the LORD stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line. Then said the LORD, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.”¹ The Bible is open at Amos, Chapter 7; the tools of a Fellowcraft are the Plumb, Square, and Level—the degree is about building. It is about using the Craftsman's operative tools to build a speculative temple, a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Freemasonry is not merely speculative, nor is it merely theoretical, rather it is experimental. Today's global environment has more pronounced the experimental nature of Freemasonry; not sentimental, but practical. Each of us pledged to look beyond the surface of things, to seek, and search out the hidden secrets of nature and science.

Freemasonry has been described as a “system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” Of the first degrees, the Fellowcraft Degree is wholly symbolic to aid the Mason's journey for Light, to increase his knowledge and understanding, and to help him rise to the state of a Perfect Ashlar for his Temple worthy of God.

The setting in the Fellowcraft Degree is King Solomon's Temple, built for the Lord², and the Senior Deacon meets the new Fellowcraft on the portico at the front of the main hall of the temple. Before entering the hall, they stop at “two pillars of brass, of 27 feet high apiece³ -- the right pillar is called *Jachin* and the left pillar is called *Boaz*.”⁴

Freemasonry did not just appear on the World Stage - it evolved over decades of influence. During the Craft's early years, Kabbalah was in its European renaissance and under the influence of Masonic reformers James Anderson, John Desaguliers, Elias Ashmole, and John Montague the Second Duke of Montague. Albert Pike, a Masonic philosopher and reformer of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite, and Albert Mackay, Masonic author and scholar, both influenced American Masonic thinking on the Ancient Mysteries, Symbolism, and Cabalistic Numerology. Brothers Walter Leslie Wilmshurst, Arthur Edward Waite, and Manly Palmer Hall were Masonic

¹ Amos 7:7-8, NIV

² 1 Kings 6:1-38, NIV

³ 1 Kings 7: 15, NIV

⁴ 1 Kings 7:21, NIV

authors and lecturers who devoted their time and talents to the fields of philosophy, comparative religion and psychology and their influence on Freemasonry.

In Kabbalah, Jachin and Boaz are the left- and right-most pillars of the *Tree of Life*: Jachin represents the male polarity of the universe, light, motion, action while Boaz represents the female polarity of the universe, darkness, passivity, receptivity, and silence. The left pillar (Jachin) is a Doric pillar, the oldest of Greek orders of architecture and known for its strength and stability; the right pillar (Boaz) is a Corinthian pillar, the last of the Greek orders of architecture developed and known for its ornate and beautiful capital. In Freemasonry, the two pillars represent the spiritual development of man.

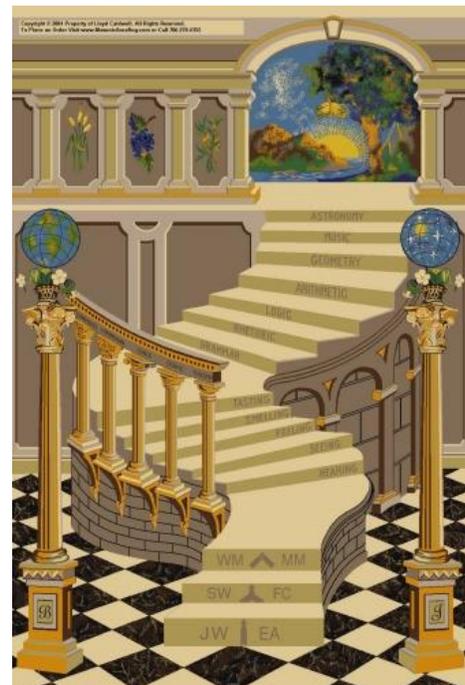
“And they went up the winding stairs into the middle chamber.” (1 Kings 6:8)⁵

The *Winding Staircase* is one of the greatest symbols of the Fellowcraft Degree. William Preston, father of the Fellowcraft ritual, used the ceremony to create a desire for a liberal education, thus the emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences, the orders of architecture, and Masonic philosophy.

A study of the Winding Staircase is an intriguing and exciting element of Freemasonry and the central theme not only the Second Degree, but the entire masonic system. It suggests the Winding Staircase is an esoteric link to early mathematical concepts.

The Fellowcraft Degree is a preparation for manhood. It does not take course to climb a straight stair for you can see where you are going and where you were. But on a winding stair, one or two steps ahead are visible, but what is around the corner? It also takes courage to ascent a winding stair because of the danger in the next bend.

In the same way, he achieved the top of the Winding Staircase, the Fellowcraft must meet life's problems with courage and wisdom, fortified by God's plan for the Universe. Each of us must climb his own staircase to his own destiny.



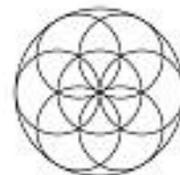
⁵ Unknown, *The Winding Stairs*, Short Talk Bulletin, January 1932, No. 1

There is no mention in the Sacred Law of any numbers, but Pythagoras believed there was a system of principles existing behind numbers and one of his most basic notions revolves around the symbolism and beauty associated with the Divine Proportion. His number symbolism had a marked influence on Plato, and through him, all Western philosophy. The steps up the winding stairs to the Middle Chamber are steeped in symbolism as they contain **three** steps symbolic of the Deity, **five** steps symbolic of man, and **seven** steps symbolic of time.

The first three steps represent the officers of the Lodge and therefore the three stages of human life - youth, manhood, and old age. They also represent the ways in which we should approach knowledge or information - with a willingness to hear and learn, a willingness to share what we have learned, and the ability to keep confidential those things which should be confidential. Pythagoras taught that the number three was the first true number; three is the first member that forms a geometrical figure—the triangle. Three is the number of time: past-present-future; birth-life-death; the beginning-middle-end. The number three is sacred in many religions. Three is an ancient symbol of the deity in Babylonian religion where it represented the triad *Anu, Enlil* and *Ea* who comprised the parts of the universe: the heaven, the earth and the region between. In Egypt, triad was *Isis*, a goddess, *Osiris*, her husband, and *Horus*, their son. In Christianity the Trinity is God the *Father, Son,* and *Holy Spirit.*

The five steps represent the five human senses and the five *Orders of Architecture*—Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite. The five senses represent the physical ways in which knowledge and information come into our minds - we hear it, see it, smell it, taste it, or touch it. Five is the number of balance. The five orders of architecture are one of the classical systems of carefully proportioned and interdependent parts which include a *column* and *entablature*.⁶ Pythagoras thought it was the marriage between heaven and earth. The number five represents the human being: it symbolizes the four limbs and the head that controls the limb and the five senses. Manifestations of the Deity are expressed in the five phases of the Tree of Life: Infinite Light, World of Emanation, World of Creation, World of Formation, and the World of Action the world of man. In the Old Testaments God's Covenant with Abraham was the number of five for Divine perfection: a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, a dove, and a pigeon.⁷

The seven steps represent the seven *Liberal Arts and Sciences*: *Trivium* is the center of daily knowledge—Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic; and *Quadrivium* is the mathematical arts—Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. The number seven is the number of perfection, security, safety, and rest. There are seven colors in the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The



⁶ Pierce, James Smith, *From ABACUS to ZEUS: A Handbook of Art History*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1977, p. 37-38

⁷ Genesis 15, NIV

symbol of six circles within a larger circle is called the “Seed of Life” and represents creation: God created the earth in six days and in the seventh He rested.⁸ In the Book of Revelation, seven is again, found as a prominent and symbolic number, in the seven churches, seven stars, seven spirits of God, seven golden lamp stands, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven plagues.

Thus, the first three steps are the mental attitudes or equipment necessary for knowledge, the next five steps show us how knowledge reaches the mind, and the last seven steps tell how we should evaluate the knowledge we acquire—they are ‘tools’ of thinking. The *Winding Staircase* is a journey toward a knowledge of *order* and *harmony*.

Any one of the seven liberal arts and sciences can be a lifelong study for any man to tackle, more especially “the fifth Science, *Geometry*, which treats of the powers and properties of Magnitudes in general, where length, breadth and thickness are concerned, from a point to a line, from a line to a superface, and from a superface to a solid.”⁹

The *Middle Chamber* is where Fellowcrafts receive their wages: *Corn*, *Wine*, and *Oil*. In ancient times, they were used for money in the world’s barter system. Corn has been a symbol of plenty since the beginnings of mythology;¹⁰ it represents nourishment. Wine comes from the *Feast of Tabernacles* or *Offering or the First Fruits*¹¹ and it represents refreshment. Oil, especially olive oil, has long been important as a food, lighting, and anointments and represents joy and gladness. The true wages of a Freemason are knowledge—he is taught to measure the esteem and stature of a man through his knowledge and understanding of the Craft. Corn is substance of nourishment of a serious Masonic student of today’s knowledge of the principles and teaching of Freemasonry. Like wine, Masonic education is refreshing and rejuvenating of excitement in the Craft and like oil, Masonic education brings joy to the life of those who pursue it. Together, the wages of a Fellowcraft must symbolize industry.¹²

The *Jewels of a Fellowcraft* are the *Attentive Ear*, the *Instructive Tongue*, and the *Faithful Breast*—all remind the craftsman that the time-honored and valuable method of instruction is one on one, master to student, by word of mouth to the ear of the student, and always held in strict confidence from the profane and the coven. The Attentive Ear



⁸ Genesis 1, NIV

⁹ *Presentation Volume*, Grand Lodge of Virginia, A.F. & A.M., 1996, p.84

¹⁰ Roberts, Allen E., *The Craft and Its Symbols: Opening the Door to Masonic Symbolism*, Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, Virginia, 1974, p. 54

¹¹ Leviticus 23: 9-14, NIV

¹² Roberts, Allen E., *The Craft and Its Symbols: Opening the Door to Masonic Symbolism*, Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, Virginia, 1974, p. 55

receives the sound from the Instructive Tongue, and the mysteries of Freemasonry are safely lodged in the repository of a Faithful Breast. They are the tools of communication: we must listen if the work is to be properly transmitted from generation to generation; Masonic knowledge must be conveyed accurately; and the repository for those few Masonic secrets must be safe.

The Fellowcraft is a builder; he has been given the tools to build his spiritual temple; and he has been taught the value of his work and importance of acquiring knowledge. In his book *The Search for Leadership*, Brother Allen Roberts writes “*there can be no dedication without education.*” While Brother Roberts believed that education begins with the ritual, he also believed merely parroting the ritual does not educate a man in the teachings of Freemasonry or the meaning of its symbols. Today’s ritual is based on Seventeenth Century curriculum for a liberal education and concepts have changed: electricity, chemistry, and biology were unknown when Masonic ritual was born. While the ritual has not changed, our thinking must change and look beyond the surface of things, to seek, and search out the hidden secrets of nature and science. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but a deeper study of the surface of things expands the intellect and leads man toward an understanding of what is true.

A Mason remains a Fellowcraft as long as he lives. Draw a circle and name it Entered Apprentice Degree; draw a circle around the first circle and name it Fellowcraft Degree; and draw a third circle around the other two circles and name it the Master Mason Degree. Being a Master Mason includes being an Entered Apprentice and a Fellowcraft—you do not leave behind the lessons and responsibilities from the first two degrees when you start your journey for Light; rather they are to be preserved and incorporated in the Master Mason's Degree and form the foundation on which it rests.

Freemasonry has many aspects. The Entered Apprentice Degree appeals to the conscience, and teaches obedience, apprenticeship and industry necessary to become good men and true. The Fellowcraft Degree exalts the intellectual, paying tribute to knowledge and wisdom. The Master Mason Degree is the soul of Freemasonry. Running through all three degrees is the Masonry of fellowship, good will, kindness, loyalty, tolerance, brotherly love.

Operative Masons gave the world the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe. Their art was one of the highest and the most difficult practiced in their period. They were Masters of mathematics and Geometry, engineering, principles of design, carving, stained glass, and mosaic art. Speculative Masons gave the world their great intellectual traditions and stands today embodied in the Second Degree, which teaches love of the Liberal Arts and Sciences, and teaches Masons to apply them in their daily lives.

Whatever the term, "Fellowcraft" truly signifies, you are a friend of enlightenment and a champion of the mind's right to be free. Labor to translate the lessons of Freemasonry into action with the command "let there be light"—live the teachings of the Fellowcraft Degree.

Let me leave you with a thought: The ***Tree of Life*** as first described in Genesis 2:9¹³ "*And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.*" The concept of a ***Tree of Life*** has been used as a common design or pattern in various world in theologies, philosophies and mythologies for eons. But the Jewish tradition and its Kabbalistic ***Tree of Life*** seems the most pervasive to Masonic study."¹⁴ As a Fellowcraft you are a Builder; you must use the speculative aspects of the operative craftsmen's tools; and your mortar is knowledge. Each man must seek Masonry for himself; each must work out his own understanding, taking as much usable knowledge as possible from others, rejecting the rest, and building his own interpretations for that "Temple" of living "stone".

**God said, "Your task is to build a better world."
I answered, "How? There's nothing I can do."
God replied, "Just build a better you." (Anonymous)**

So, Mote It Be!



¹³ King James Bible, KJV

¹⁴ ¹⁴ Robert G. Davis, 33^o GC, *The Tree of Life is the Foundational Basis of Every Religion*, The Oklahoma Scottish Rite Mason, March 2015, p. 8

Bibliographic:

Carr, Harry (editor), *The Collected Prestonian Lectures 1925-1960*, Volume One, *Quatuor Coronatorum Lodge No. 2076*, A. Lewis Ltd., Shepperton, Middlesex, United Kingdom, 1984

Carr, Harry (editor), *The Collected Prestonian Lectures 1961-1974*, Volume Two, *Quatuor Coronatorum Lodge No. 2076*, A. Lewis Ltd., Shepperton, Middlesex, United Kingdom, 1984

Case, Paul Foster, *The Masonic G*, Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, Virginia, 1981

Davis, Loyd E., *The Winding Staircase*, *Scottish Rite Bulletin*, Valley of Alexandria, Orient of Virginia, May-June 2014

Henderson, Kent, *A Journey Through the Second Degree*, Online Masonic Education Course, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/journet2.html>

Hoff, Bernhard W., *Preston's Staircase: A Case Study in Changing Masonic Symbolism*, New Jersey Lodge of Research & Education No. 1786, January 2004

Horne, Alex, *Sources of Masonic Symbolism*, Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, Virginia, 1981

Kerkin, Gary, *The Lecture of the Tracing Bard of the Second Degree*, Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry, copyright 1996-2017

MacNulty, W. Kirk, *Kabbalah and Freemasonry*, originally presented at a conference on *Kabbalah and its Influence on the English Mystical Tradition*, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, England, 1999

Marcos, Richard D., *Reflections on the Senior Deacon's Lecture*, *The Virginia Masonic Herald*, Volume 110, No. 1, Spring 2017

Pierce, James Smith, *From ABACUS to ZEUS: A Handbook of Art History*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1977

Pound, Roscoe, *The Philosophy of Masonry: William Preston*, Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, 2015

Presentation Volume, Grand Lodge of Virginia, A.F. & A.M.

Roberts, Allen E., *The Craft and Its Symbols: Opening the Door to Masonic Symbolism*, Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, Virginia, 1974

Vosser, P. G., *An Explanation of the Winding Staircase*, presented to Camberley Lodge 5591, Agincourt Hall, 487 London Road, Camberley, UK, October 2, 2007

Unknown, *The Winding Stairs*, Short Talk Bulletin, January 1932, No. 1

Unknown, *Behind the Symbol*, Short Talk Bulletin, Volume XXXII, July 1954, No. 7