

January - March 2000

# Masonic Symbolism

Symbol (n.) An object associated with and serving to identify something else.



The Committee on Masonic Education  
The Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M.  
of  
North Carolina

Lodge Night  
**P**ROGRAM

JANUARY -  
MARCH 2001

**Masonic  
Symbolism**

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## **1<sup>st</sup> Stated Communication in January 2001**

Our series of programs for the first **quarter** of the new year deal with the symbolism associated with the three degrees of Masonry. During January, we will be looking at the symbols of the First Degree.

We learned early in our Masonic journey that Freemasonry is “a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols.” What is a symbol? We generally think of a symbol as a thing or word that represents something else. We also know that a symbol can have different meanings from person to person.

Let’s look at some of the symbolism that we associate with the Entered Apprentice Degree.

- A. An entered apprentice is a candidate beginning his **journey** in search of Masonic light.

### **Discussion:**

1. Why do you think we call our new candidates “Entered Apprentices?”
2. What does “light in Masonry” mean to you?
3. How do you get “light in Masonry?”

- B. We teach our -candidates that they have come to the lodge “to learn to subdue my passions, and improve myself in Masonry.” If **we place** a comma **after** the word “learn,” the meaning of this sentence changes.

### **Discussion:**

1. The OSW does not contain punctuation. Do you think it would make sense to put a comma after “learn?” Thus, the candidate would come **to learn, to subdue my passions, and improve myself in Masonry.**
2. What do we want the candidate to learn? What passions should he want him to subdue?

- C. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

**Discussion:**

1. Do you think it is good that we cannot discuss religion or politics in open lodge? Why?
2. What can we discuss in open lodge? Do we have to avoid all topics on which there might be some disagreement?

- D. The Holy Bible is the rule and guide of faith.

**Discussion:**

1. We have the Holy Bible on our altar. Does this mean that Freemasonry is a religion? Why?
2. Is the Christian Bible found on Masonic altars in all parts of the world?

- E. We use the square to “square our actions.” When traveling about the lodge, we move in straight lines and right angles.

**Discussion: .**

1. What do you think it means to “square our actions?”
2. Do you think any useful purpose is served by emphasizing precision in our floor movements?

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<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Stated Communication in January 2001</b>
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Tonight, we will continue our examination of some of the symbolism associated with the First Degree.

- A. The compasses are identified with Masonry in the minds of many people. In school, we learned to draw circles with the compasses. Masonry teaches us about “a certain point within a circle.”

**Discussion:**

1. What do you think we mean by “circumscribing our desires?”
2. The point within a circle represents an individual brother. This puts the emphasis on YOU. What are some things you can do as an individual member to make a positive difference in your lodge?

- B. The lambskin or white leather apron is an emblem of innocence, and the badge of a Mason. An Entered Apprentice is presented an apron on his first admission into the lodge.

**Discussion:**

1. We promise our Entered Apprentices that they can be buried with their Masonic apron, yet we do not allow Masonic funeral services for anyone other than Master Masons. What do you think about this?
2. What do you think about the idea that although we physically remove our aprons when we leave the lodge, we symbolically wear them wherever we go?

- C. One of the working tools of an Entered Apprentice is the twenty-four inch gauge. We can use the twenty-four inch gauge symbolically to measure the time allotted to each of us.

**Discussion:**

1. We are told in the charge that Masonry should not interfere with our other duties. How do you personally decide how much time you should devote to Masonic activities?
2. What are some things a lodge can do to make sure that the time allotted to meetings is time well spent?

- C. Jacob in his vision saw a ladder extending from earth to heaven. We say that the three principal rounds of this ladder represent faith, hope, and charity. The lesson of charity impresses upon the candidate the importance of showing compassion toward all mankind.

**Discussion:**

1. It is often said that charity begins at home. Should your lodge undertake any charitable undertakings in your community not related to Masonry?
2. Do you know the procedures for placing children in the home at Oxford? For being admitted into the home at Greensboro?

In olden days, the operative workman laid the cornerstone of a building in the Northeast corner. It is in the Northeast corner that we instruct the candidate on the true meaning of Masonry and our expectations of him for the future.

**Discussion:**

1. Knowing the significance of a **cornerstone**, why do you think we place the candidate in the Northeast corner?
2. What can we do as a lodge and as individual members to help our candidates meet our expectations?

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Stated Communication in February 2001</b>
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In February, we continue our study of the symbolism of the first three degrees with the second degree. We occupy our **entire** lives gaining an education and putting that education to work. Often times, we forget that in the game of life, we are the fellowcraft struggling to learn, questioning our existence, and the meaning of life. When all is said and done, we hope to have lived a life that will have had meaning. To have lived respected and die regretted is our purpose.

The second degree is usually viewed as a “throwaway” degree, one given, and then forgotten. Usually, the degree is not well attended by brethren; yet, it has some of the most meaningful teachings. A proper description would be that of a system for education. It has even been described as the education degree. Many symbols pertaining to education are contained within this degree, and each could be a topic for discussion. For tonight, we will focus on two of the symbols: The Square and the Plumb line.

- A. The square is a symbol peculiar to masonry. It is contained in our logo; it is on the Bible or book of law when the lodge is opened. Certain aspects of the symbolism of the square have made it to the profane world.

**Discussion:**

1. What is the difference between a square and any other angle? Why is a square also known as a “right angle”?
2. What does the square represent to us?
3. Why is the square important to masons?
4. How do we use the square in relation to the point within a circle?
5. What is meant by “on the Square”?

- B. The square has become known in society and is used frequently, even by the profane.

**Discussion:**

1. In what context do the profane use the symbolism of the square?
2. Can we use this context to help explain the fraternity to potential candidates?

- C. The Plumb line is different from the square in the fact that few outside of masonry have heard of or use the symbolism. Perhaps, the admonition: “judge not, lest you be also judged” best represents the plumb line to some.

**Discussion:**

1. What does the Plumb line represent? What does a plumb line represent to an individual mason?
2. How should it be used? How can the plumb line be used in association with the point within a circle?
3. In context of last quarter's discussion of Masonic offenses, how should we apply the lesson of the plumb line? Have we, by our obligations, agreed to accept a more exacting plumb line?
4. Are we correct in placing a more stringent moral standard upon ourselves than the outside world places upon each other?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Stated Communication in February 2001**

Tonight, we will look why this is properly called "the education degree". In order to properly function as a human, one must learn. When man was created, his special gift was the ability to question.

- A. In some manner, it could be said that our sole purpose is to question. Louis Pasteur said: "Opportunity favors the prepared mind."

**Discussion:**

1. What does the second degree say about the prepared mind?
  2. How does a "prepared mind" aid us in our everyday lives?
  3. Why do we call the brethren of this degree "Fellowcraft"? Is it because of their struggle to learn a different system, or vocabulary?
- B. Anciently, a fellowcraft labored at least seven years to produce a body of work to place before the masters of the craft in order to be judged worthy of advancement to a master.



**Discussion:**

1. What are the professions today where this is still done?
  2. In this degree, we learn about the five human senses: hearing, seeing, **feeling**, smelling, and tasting. Why are these senses enumerated?
  3. What purpose could they have in our education? How would our education be affected if we did not have one or more of these senses?
  4. How would our view of the world be different without one or more of these senses?
- C. Before advancing to the next set of questions, let us think back to the last meeting when we discussed the square. To some, the square is a means to define the truth.

**Discussion:**

1. How is truth important in education?
2. We also learn about the seven liberal arts and sciences: grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Take each topic and ask: Why is it important enough to have been enumerated here? Why are all seven important together? Could one exist without the other?
3. How does an education affect the way we see the world? How about how we see our associates and our peers? How does it affect the way we view those not in masonry?

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Stated Communication in March 2001</b>
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## THE MASTER MASON DEGREE

Properly executed, the third degree is easily the most impressive of the candidate's Masonic journey. The degree starts off with a ritual which seems very familiar to the candidate, based on his experience in the first two degrees. He is then startled to find himself swept into the central legend of the craft, concerning the murder of H. A. and the Lost Word.

Any man experiencing this degree will find himself thinking about the meaning of the symbolism of the degree itself and its effect on him.

### THE OPENING AND CLOSING OF A MASTER MASON'S LODGE

- A. The ritual with which a Master Mason's Lodge is opened and closed **is very similar to that** of the first two degrees.

#### Discussion:

1. What are the differences in the opening and closing of a Master's Lodge as opposed to the first two degrees?
  2. What is meant by the term "Master's wages?" Do you think that money is meant, or something else?
  3. **Perhaps** you have heard the expression "traveling man" used to refer to a Mason. What does this mean and where does this term come from?
- B. **The second** part of the third degree contains a legend, the origins of which are lost in the mists of time, but which has been with us for at least three centuries.

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- B. The second part of the third degree contains a legend, the origins of which are lost in the mists of time, but which has been with us for at least three centuries.

**Discussion:**

1. What do we learn from the example of **H.** A.?
2. How is the degree different for you in watching it performed or participating in it, as opposed to experiencing it for the first time as the candidate? What effect did it have on you when you received it?
3. What is symbolized by the idea of the Lost Word? How are we to recover it?
4. Do you **think** that the quest for this Lost Word is really what freemasonry is about?

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**2<sup>nd</sup> Stated Communication in March 2001**

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**SYMBOLISM APPLIED**

The three degrees of freemasonry are ultimately intended as symbolic moral instruction. The reason that symbolism is used, rather than simply a series of lectures, is that symbolism is infinitely richer. The use of symbols permits each candidate to make the degrees **his** own. Each brother, **through** the process of **actually** experiencing the degrees, and in subsequently learning the work, will come to interpret the symbolism of freemasonry according to his own personal knowledge.

**Discussion:**

1. How do you think the three degrees fit together as a unified whole? What is it about the three degrees of **craft** freemasonry that make them special enough to have survived over the course of centuries?
2. What did the process of becoming a Mason mean to you? Is there anything in the **three degrees** that you still think about and puzzle over **today**?
3. Are you reminded of anything important during the opening and closing of a lodge?