

STUDY OUTLINE No. 12

As we advance we come in contact with 3-5-7.

"We travel up a winding stairs of life, and arrive, if we climb steadfastly, at the middle chamber of existence, which is removed from birth, babyhood and youth by the steps of knowledge and experience, but which is not so high above the ground that we are not as yet of the earth, earthy; not so high that we can justifiably regard it as more than a Stepping Off Place from which we may, perhaps, ascend to the Sanctum Sanctorum; that holy of holies, in which our troubled spirits find rest, our ignorance finds knowledge, and our eyes see God."—"Short Talk Bulletin", 3-5-7.)

Numbers are extensively used in Masonic symbolism. The emphasis placed on the number "three" is so great that there seems to be no monitorial explanation necessary for its use as a symbol. The fundamental nature of the number "3" was considered in "The Geometric Symbols of Masonry".

We have three constitutional questions, three preparatory forms, three degrees, three principal officers, three stations, three circuits, three steps on the Master's Carpet, the three columns, Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, and many other triads of equal significance. Many of the triads form triangles, such as the columns, stations, lesser lights. The oblong square or form of the Lodge is a symbol of the world. The triangle is, and always has been the symbol of the triune attributes of Deity. The comprehension of the Infinite by the finite mind was long ages ago found impossible. Striving for such comprehension accounts for religious beliefs, philosophical speculation and the highest type of symbolism. All great religions have endeavored to partially comprehend God through His manifestations. To these manifestations they assigned names, as in the Jewish religion we find Elohim, Adonai, Jehovah; in the Egyptian, Osiris, Isis, Horus; in the Brahman, Brahma, Vishnu, Siva; and the Persian, Ormuzd, Mithra, Mithras. The great search of mankind has ever been for

Infinite Truth—a journey back to the fountain head from whence we came. Placed as children in a great school of experience with only partially developed faculties, no individual has ever been qualified to receive more than his efforts have earned. He has mental faculties which have employed symbols only too sparingly to convey to him such lessons as he is prepared to understand. Hence the numerical symbolism early became an intricate and highly philosophical system. The Hebrews and Greeks had no special numerals, but used the letters of the alphabet, each of which had a numerical value.

The most extensive system of numerical symbolism is contained in that portion or subdivision of the Kaballa called Gematria. It is quite probable that when Freemasonry adopted some very ancient symbolism they borrowed freely from the Sephir Jetzira, a Kabbalistic work.

"That portion of the Kabbala known as the Sephir Jetzirah, has been attributed to Abraham. It first made its appearance about the Ninth century. It is said to open the literature of the Secret Doctrine in a very exhaustive manner. It has been translated into English by Dr. Wynn Westcott. It has for its fundamental idea that the ten digits and twenty letters of the Hebrew alphabet are supposed to be the origin of all things. The Sephir Jetzirah and the Apocalypse are beyond any manner of doubt, the masterpieces of Occultism. They contain more meaning than words; their expression is as figurative as poetry and as exact as mathematics. The Apocalypse or Revelation of St. John contains all the Kabbalistic secrets of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and it is a very obscure work. It is hieroglyphically written in numbers and images, and it was certainly not written to be comprehended by the average man. It completes and surpasses all the sciences and the wisdom of Abraham and Solomon.

"According to the teaching of the Jetzirah, the number ten is a repetition of the One, being its multiple only. Remove the one and there is no ten, signifying the Jod, from which all proceed. The Kabbalists multiplied the Divine Name by joining them all to the unity of the Tetragram, to the figure of the Triad or to the Sefiric scale of the Decade.

"The sum total of these Divine Names formed from the single Tetragram outside the Tetragram itself, is one of the bases of the Hebrew ritual and constitutes the occult force which the Kabbalists invoke under the name Shemhamphoras.

"The Kabbalists write the Tetragram in four ways. J H V H, which they do not pronounce, but spell Jod He Vau He, and we pronounce Jehovah; ADNI, which we pronounce Adonai, Saviour; AHIH, which we pronounce Eieie, Being, and AGLA, pronounced as written—hieroglyphically embracing all the mysteries of the Kabbala."—"Relations of the Kabbala to Masonry", Merz.)

After quoting Philolaus, "Number is great and perfect and omnipotent and the principle and guide of Divine and human life." Brother Blackmer says:

"Fantastical as it may seem there is a truth underlying the statement, for when we think that number is the definite mathematical relation that separates one thing from another, and so, in a sense, it makes them things. Without number and the limitation which number brings, there would be only chaos and the illimitable. Number is the principle of order, the principle by which cosmos and the ordered world subsists. These philosophers found the ground for this position in the regular movements of the heavenly bodies and in the harmony of musical sounds and the dependence of these sounds on regular mathematical intervals. They were apparently the first to discover this fact regarding musical tones and made much of it. They connected these seven tones with the seven planets of the old astronomy and deduced therefrom the theory of the music of the spheres, calling these planets the seven golden chords of the heavenly harp.

"Immediately connected with this theory of numbers was their theory regarding opposites, that everything was derived from its opposite, the limited and unlimited, odd and even, right and left, masculine and feminine, straight and crooked, light and darkness, good and evil. This represents a dual system. Unity was considered a thing by itself and was connected with the idea of the unity of God. It was in the unity of opposites wherein harmony existed, the neutralization of one with the other, the mystery of balance, as it was called. In the application of their system to geometry, one symbolized the point, two the line, three the surface and four the cube. Five symbolized marriage, for it indicated the union of the first even number (2) and the first odd number after unity (3). The one was considered the number of Deity or the Supreme Unity, and therefore left out of consideration in the addition. One was the symbol of wisdom and reason. Two symbolized opinion, because it was unlimited and indeterminate. Four was identified with justice, because it was the first square number, the product of equals. There was in all these ancient systems a very important trinity, which was the object of worship, making three highly considered. Even in the primitive phallic system the trinity represented the three essential organs of generation, as well the male, the female and the offspring. In the caves of Elephanta may be found a sculptured figure with three faces. This was called the 'Trimurti', or Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, which represented the creator, the preserver or form giver and the destroyer or transformer—perhaps the better understood as the builder-up and the tearer-down of the world, the rising, meridian and setting sun, the A U M or Alpha the beginning, Omega or end, and Mem, the middle letters of the alphabet."—("The Lodge and the Craft", Blackmer.)

In the ladder which Jacob saw in his vision there were three principal rounds, but the ladder is generally supposed to have had seven symbolical rounds containing the four cardinal virtues as well as the three theological ones.

If we may find in numerical symbolism any additional material with which to carry out the great design of receiving more light we may also profitably consider the high importance Plato gave the number three, regarding it as the symbolic number of the Supreme Being, because it included the properties of unity and duality, and the triune manifestations of that combination. The three degrees themselves are symbolical of the moral, intellectual and spiritual development

of the true searcher. The Master, Senior and Junior Wardens symbolize Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, which may function as Reason, Will and Volition in the active affairs of life.

References:

The Lodge and the Craft (Blackmer), page 115, The Winding Stairs.
Symbolism of Freemasonry (Mackey), chapter 26, The Legend of the Winding Stairs.

Symbolical Masonry (Haywood), chapter 36, The Ascent.

Symbolism of the Three Degrees (Street), pages 115 to 123.

Encyclopedia of Freemasonry (Mackey), articles:

Winding Stairs, Legend of the

Numbers

Three

Five

Seven

Middle Chamber

Man

Man, or Perfected Creation

Holy of Holies

Ho-Hi

Oblong Square

Triangle

Elohim

Adonai

Jehovah

Osiris

Isis

Egyptian Mysteries

Truth

Kabbala

Numeration by Letters

Mithras, Mysteries of