

What is Freemasonry?

STUDY OUTLINE No. 4

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NOTE—Let us not attempt to define Freemasonry definitely or completely, because Freemasonry comprehends such a vast field of speculation that the best any of us can hope is a continually improving conception of Masonry. The object of this outline is to develop thought and discussion, and it is the desire of the committee to have suggestions or criticisms brought to their attention.

In Freemasonry we perform many ceremonies according to "Due Form". The expression is used to signify that which is regular, or should be done. Certain positions of the body are employed to signify the sincerity of purpose and the intention of acting uprightly toward God, and on the level with mankind. The horizontal and perpendicular lines forming the angle of ninety degrees constitute one of the most pertinent geometrical and architectural symbols of Freemasonry. (See "Why by the Square"—Pamphlet No. 23.)

When we assume an obligation to improve ourselves in a moral science, and affirm our intention of being serviceable to our fellow creatures, we learn many details by help of symbols such as right angles, horizontals and perpendiculars. These figures are of no avail unless they continually remind us of the truths they symbolize. A Masonic symbol is only useful as a means of impressing certain wise and serious truths on the mind. The thing it symbolizes is the vital element, and must always be sought if we would know the "hidden mysteries" of this system of morality.

See Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, articles on:

Kneeling	Cable Tow's Length
Step	Perpendicular
Right Hand	Sign
Square	Mouth to Ear
Square & Compasses	Secrecy and Silence
Penalty	Speculative Masonry
Oath	Symbolic Degrees
Obligation	Due Form
Cable Tow	Symbol
Symbolism	

The Altar:

Our monitor tells us that "A Lodge is composed of a constitutional number of Masons, duly assembled, with the Holy Bible, Square and Compasses, and a Charter or Warrant empowering them to work." This clearly includes that most important Masonic equipage, the Altar. Even before men built temples of worship, they constructed altars to offer sacrifice to God. This was undoubtedly one of the first of formal customs of worship that has come down from a remote antiquity.

The ceremonies which are performed around the Masonic altar are mostly traceable to forms and ceremonies of the earliest peoples, and have always symbolized the highest ideals of pure religion.

Mackey describes two kinds of altars, one for blood sacrifice, which was outside the temple; and one for incense within the temples, and says:

"The Masonic altar, which, like everything else in Masonry, is symbolic, appears to combine the character and uses of both these altars. It is an altar of sacrifice, for on it the candidate is directed to lay his passions and vices as an oblation to the Diety, while he offers up the thoughts of a pure heart as a fitting incense to the Grand Architect of the Universe. The altar is, therefore, the most holy place in the Lodge." (Read all of article on Altar in Mackey's Encyclopedia; Symbolical Masonry by Haywood—Chapter 13, "The Altar"; Speculative Masonry by MacBride—Chapter 5, "The Ideal Temple".)

"Upon the altar of Masonry lies the open Bible which, despite the changes and advances of the ages, remains the greatest Modern Book—the moral manual of civilization." (The Builders, by Newton.)

"No Mason need be told what a large place the Bible has in the symbolism, ritual and teaching of the Order, and that it has an equally large place in its literature." (George Oliver.)

(Read Symbolical Masonry by Haywood, chapter 15, "The Three Great Lights"; The Builders, by Newton, chapter on "The Masonic Philosophy"; Mackey's Encyclopedia, article on the Bible, "Lights", "Circumambulation", "Book of the Law"; Symbolism of the Three Degrees, by Street, "The Bible".)

The Square and Compasses are used to square our actions and circumscribe and keep us within due bounds.

The Square is the most used of all Masonic symbols. Not only is it the emblem of the Master, a working tool of a Fellow Craft and one of the Great Lights; but it appears in all the ceremonies and work of the Lodge. MacBride, in "Speculative Masonry", has devoted an entire chapter to "The Law of the Square", in which he shows the law as applied to material building and as a law of moral conduct.

"In Speculative Masonry, as in Operative, there are two lines—a plumb line and a level line—to which we must work. The one is the Heaven-line of duty to the Divine, and the other is the Earth-line of duty to the Human. Towards our fellow-men we act on the Level, and the golden rule of the level-line of duty is, to do to others as we would that others should do to us. This has been the wisdom of the sage from the remotest time, and we know by experience that it is as true morally as the Law of Gravitation is physically. If we act unjustly to our neighbor, we wrong ourselves. If we wrong ourselves, we are not true to our neighbor; and we cannot wrong our neighbor or ourselves without being untrue to our Creator. Equipoise in the moral world is as inexorable a law of stability as in the physical. * * * The instrument called the Square, in operative building, has its counterpart in moral building, in the faculty called the CONSCIENCE.

"As the Square is applied by the operative to his work, so are we to apply our conscience to our work of life-building. It is true, theoretically, neither the Square or Conscience is perfect. But they are the best, and the only test we have, and are, in their respective spheres, indispensable to true building. Each represents a great invisible power to which they have been primarily adjusted—the one to the center of the material earth, the other to the moral center of the universe. They are both subject to deterioration and damage, and ought, therefore, to be preserved, with the utmost care, from all strain and violence, so that they may be true and reliable guides." (Read entire chapter on "The Law of the Square"; see Mackey's Encyclopedia article on "Square", "Plumb", "Plumb-line", "Square and Compasses"; "Why by the Square", Pamphlet No. 23.)

LIGHT:

"In the Beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth. And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said: 'Let there be light'; and there was light."

The full significance of Physical Light as a symbol of spiritual light may only be realized by considerable study and reflection. Its full significance is more than truth and wisdom; it comprehends the source of all truth and wisdom.

The whole of our Masonic endeavors are directed to the attainment of more of the Divine Light which will unfold our spiritual natures and raise humanity to more Divine attributes.

The true significance of light will be comprehended if we recognize how much darkness we are grouping in as a humanity at large. We need the light of Divine Illumination to make us see ways of bringing harmony and peace and love on earth. True light will reveal to us the ways of making "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."

Masonic light is not a mere intellectual light, but more a spiritual light which cannot be cultivated outside a pure heart. Masonic light will illuminate the duties we owe to God and His children, who are necessarily our brethren. Do we love them and always act as we should toward those we love? If not, we need more light.

Freemasonry, by the most efficient method yet discovered, is striving to impress on us the need of developing our higher nature to its utmost possibilities. "Be ye perfect; even as your Father in Heaven is perfect," is the task assigned us by One Who had the true light.

We have the symbolic light of the Lodge to help direct our efforts, but there is need to use them constantly in search of still further light.

Read Mackey's Encyclopedia articles on
 Light Wisdom
 Truth Shock of Enlightenment
 Ethics of Freemasonry

Symbolical Masonry, by Haywood—Chapter 17, "Lux E Tenebris".