

Mystic Masonry: In Symbol, Ritual, and Allegory

Symbolism of the 1st Degree

By W. Bro. Rob Lund

Freemasonry is regarded by Masons as the science of knowing oneself. As far back in time as the ancient Greeks, the ancient Egyptians, even to Atlantean times, Mankind has sought to acquire knowledge of human nature, and the purpose of human existence. This has always led to an orientation of the seeker towards the Creator.

The body of knowledge accumulated by Mystics, over time, is generally known as “The Mysteries”. This knowledge has been perpetuated through the millennia by various Mystery Schools, who impart this knowledge only to those who seek it. Part of this knowledge includes a greater understanding of the world and the universe. This covers not only the material world, but the vast non-material realms that exist beyond those of normal perception. In the past, this was generally understood by all, but in our modern material-oriented world, such concepts are ridiculed by many. The mystery schools teach initiates: how to come to know one’s true self (one’s highest consciousness at the centre of our being); the purpose of one’s life; the true nature of the universe; and the development of faculties to enable the perception of the non-material realms.

Freemasonry is *not* such a mystery school, but it is an offshoot of one or more of them. It does *not* teach the mysteries but does, through ritual, symbol, and allegory, strive to make Masons *aware* of these mysteries, to those who seek the light of truth.

Let us now look at some of our ritual and symbols and try to determine what hints of hidden knowledge are concealed within them.

[The Three Great Lights](#)

The Three Great Lights of Masonry, namely the Square, Compasses, and Volume of the Sacred Law, represent the main focus of the aim of Freemasonry.

The Square represents the Psyche, that part of us that is directly linked to the material or physical aspect of mankind.

The Compasses represent the Spirit, the higher aspect, or true self, of mankind.

The Volume of the Sacred Law represents Deity, the Creator, the Great Architect, the universal source of all.



In combination, they show the progressive path to be taken by Masons.

Through the three Degrees, the relationship between the Square and compasses changes. The position of the compasses, initially situated beneath the square, and progressing to covering the square, reveals the intended progress – the material aspect overlaying all, initially, is gradually changed to the Spirit overlaying all, as it develops.

The Volume of the Sacred Law, being connected to the Universal Spirit, is the foundation of the process of transformation. It also represents the Cosmic Law, or Universal Law, or Natural Law, by which the spirit, acting in accordance with these Laws, will influence development and help the spirit grow.

The Universal Masonic Symbol

This symbol as displayed outside Lodges, worn on rings, and generally recognised as a symbol of Freemasonry reflects the Three Great Lights – the Square, the Compasses, and the letter “G”. The “G” replacing the Volume of the Sacred Law as the symbol of connection with the Great Architect. The meaning is the same as the Great Lights, and should ever remind us of our purpose as Masons.



The First Degree Tracing Board, or Trestle Board

This Tracing Board is seldom used today in Ontario Lodges, but is still used in some jurisdictions.

The First Degree Tracing Board may seem like an eclectic collection of Masonic symbols. However, it is a diagrammatical representation of the Junior Warden's lecture, which illustrates the general theme of the Western Mystery tradition, and shows the place of the individual man within its precepts.

Let us take a look at each of the symbols depicted.

The East

At the top of the Tracing Board can be seen an "E" for East, representing the source of light. Just below are the sun, moon and stars, and the blazing star, also sources of light.

In a Lodge, the Master sits in the East. The Master (who rules, governs, and instructs the lodge), represents the Master Principle in each man. This master principle is the true self of every individual and is the highest part of each one's consciousness. It is that *still small voice* within that will not be heard unless it is *listened* to. In the Mystery traditions, it is the spirit within which can only be attuned with through deep meditation.



“As mystics throughout time have found, the road to discovery, to peace and enlightenment is a journey into Self.

There is more to our conscious being than we realise and it is from within that we find the keys which unlock our inner wisdom. It is from within that we can connect with the source of knowledge that lies beyond the limits of our five senses.

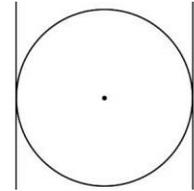
By going within and attuning with this source of knowledge we may experience a transitory illumination whose impact may remain forever.

But the mystical experience does not have to be accompanied by flashes of lightning or the ringing of bells. It can be a very simple experience, an intuitive impression, a hunch, an idea that helps us in our life, our work, or whatever we are planning to do. It can be the finding of peace within, a deepening of compassion, and an understanding of our personal value in life.” Rosicrucian Manuscript

This is what Mysticism is.

The Point within a Circle

In the tracing board, near the foot of the ladder, you may see a circle bounded by two parallel lines and with a point at the Centre of the circle. This concept is not covered in the Ontario first degree ritual but the circle is expanded on in the Third Degree. It is mentioned in the American or Antient rituals. The parallel lines are not



covered in Ontario ritual, but it should be understood that they mark the summer and winter solstice, which can be seen as representing death (Winter solstice) and rebirth (Summer solstice). Mystically, they represent one of the Cosmic Laws, the principle of rhythm: *“Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates.”*

Here, the point within the circle is intended to introduce the Mason to the concept of the Centre, representing the Centre of our being. This has a very deep and profound mystical significance. It is in our Centre that we find our true selves (our spirit), and it is only from the Centre that one can truly communicate with the divine essence.

The Ashlars

In the background, can be seen the rough ashlar and the perfect ashlar. These square stones represent the spiritual condition of the candidate when he first enters Freemasonry and that to which he should strive.

The Rough Ashlar, although having now being cut away from the bedrock (the general mass of humanity), is not yet in a form to take its place in the Temple. The Temple, it should be understood, represents one’s own being—a place of communion with the Great Architect of the Universe.



Creating a perfect ashlar requires the chipping away of coarseness, and repeated effort is required in order to create its fine finish. The candidate requires knowledge *and action* in order to achieve this for himself. He requires knowledge, not just of moral values, but of the universe and his place in it, his purpose for being, and how to fulfil this purpose. However, knowledge alone is not

sufficient (as the Emulation 1st degree working tools lecture states: “*the heart may conceive and the head devise in vain if the hand be not prompt to execute the design*”). The candidate needs to take action and *apply* the knowledge (*to execute the design*), and perseverance is necessary to achieve perfection through repeated effort.

To transform the rough ashlar into the perfect ashlar, tools are required. These are all illustrated in the Tracing Board diagram.

We will examine each of these tools and determine what they represent from a mystical viewpoint.

Let us take a look at the tools that are used to transform the rough ashlar into the smooth ashlar. These are the common gavel, chisel, twenty-four-inch gauge, square, level, and plumb rule.

As operative Masons used these tools to build a temple, we use them figuratively, in a mystical sense, to build our own spiritual temple within.

The use of tools also implies that some labour is required, and it is important to note that no spiritual construction can occur without effort, i.e. “*indefatigable exertion*”.

The Common Gavel, the Chisel, and the twenty-four-inch gauge are also the working tools in the emulation ritual.

The Common Gavel

The Gavel represents the *force of conscience* (the will), to keep down all vain and unworthy thoughts, and the driver of the effort required to engage in the labour of perfecting the soul. Without this driver, nothing can be achieved.



The Chisel

The chisel receives the power from the gavel and directs it to specific tasks in a very precise way. It represents rational thought as applied to the way in which self-mastery and spiritual work is to be carried out. It is involved in the perfection of the rough soul. It looks for and



identifies the rough parts and helps smooth them. It is the intellect that looks for the ways to accomplish the tasks.

The Twenty-Four Inch Gauge

The Gauge is used for measuring time and labour, and helps bring the other two tools (Gavel and Chisel) into balance. As many other symbols show, balance is very important when embarking on the task of spiritual



development and growth. The gauge directs us to apportion the right amount of time and effort in our pursuits. We cannot go into a Monastery to dedicate ourselves to spiritual growth when we have work and family and responsibilities to take care of.

Movable Jewels

In the First Degree Emulation ritual, the Square, Level, and Plumb Rule are described as the **Movable Jewels** and represent the three Principle Officers. In the Second Degree, they are shown as the working tools. The moral lessons from these jewels are obvious: *“square conduct, level steps, and upright intentions”*. But what are the mystical implications of these items?

Square

The Square, in this context, is not the same as when it is part of the Great Lights. The Square is worn by the Master, in the East, which is the source of light. In this context, the Master represents Spirit. In the Hindu Brahminic initiations, the principal Hierophants, or explainers of the Mysteries, were Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, who were placed in the East, South, and West: *“when the sun rises in the east, he is Brahma; when he gains his meridian in the south, he is Shiva; and when he sets in the west, he is Vishnu”*. Brahma is the creative aspect of deity, and also represents birth.



Level

The Level is the jewel of the Senior Warden, in the West. It represents equality and fairness. The Senior Warden also represents the Soul or Ego. Vishnu represents the setting sun and is the destructive aspect of deity, and also represents death.



Plumb Rule

The Plumb Rule is worn by the Junior Warden, who sits in the South. It represents uprightness. The JW also represents the body. Shiva is at his meridian in the South and is the preservative aspect of deity, or growth and development.



Together, these three jewels represent the unending cycle of life: birth, growth, and death. They are also indicators of the themes of the three craft degrees: 1st is birth, 2nd is development, 3rd is death.

In these, we see three levels of consciousness: Body, Mind, and Spirit: the Master, whose chair is raised by three steps, is Spirit; the Senior Warden, whose chair is raised by two steps, is Soul (or Ego/personality/intellect); the Junior Warden, whose chair is raised by one step, is Body. Each Degree ceremony also has these three levels embedded within them.



Tracing Board

We have already dealt with the Ashlars, which leaves only the Tracing Board. Not to be confused with the Trestle Board above, this is *“for the Master to lay lines and draw designs on”*. As the building of the temple requires plans and designs, so we need the same if we are to build a spiritual temple. It represents those plans and designs laid down by the Great Architect of the Universe in the form of moral and cosmic (or Natural) law.

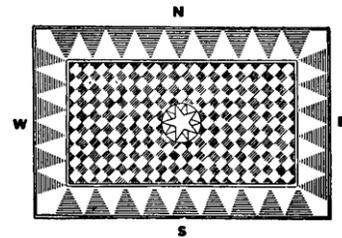
The Ornaments

The ornaments of a Lodge, according to the emulation ritual, are the Mosaic Pavement, the indented skirting, and the star in the centre.

Mosaic Pavement

The black and white chequered floor is a symbol of the duality of all things. One of the Cosmic Laws is the principle of Polarity, which states that everything is dual, everything has its pair of opposites. There is a mystical understanding that opposites are identical in nature but different in degree.

If you look at your thermometer, can you see where “heat” terminates and “cold” begins? The same Principle operates on the Mental Plane. Take as an example Love and Hate, two mental states apparently totally different. And yet there are degrees of Hate and degrees of Love, with somewhere in-between being Like or Dislike, which merge into each other so gradually that sometimes we not sure whether we “like” or “dislike”. They are still just degrees of the same thing. It is possible to change the vibrations of Hate to the vibrations of Love, in oneself, and in the minds of others. I’m sure that many of you have had personal experiences of the involuntary rapid transition from love to hate, and the reverse. You will, therefore, realise the possibility of this being accomplished by the use of the Will.



Spirit and Matter are the two poles of the same thing, the intermediate planes being merely degrees of vibration. By understanding this principle, one can, by the exercise of will, move from one state to the opposite.

The Blazing Star, or Glory

The ritual states that the Star in the centre of the mosaic pavement represents Divine Providence. In the Christian religion, Divine Providence is granted through requests in prayers. The scriptures state: *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours”*.

Mystically, the Star represents the entire Universe – the manifestation of the Creator, and its Cosmic Laws. In this case, we should refer to the principle of Mentalism (also known as the Law of Thought by some mystery schools):

“THE ALL is MIND; The Universe is Mental”.

The universe is simply a mental creation of THE ALL. The universe, as a whole, has its existence in the Mind of THE ALL, in which Mind we live and move and have our being. As in the Principle of Correspondence ("as above, so below"), this principle can be applied by humanity. The mind can be the origin of material manifestations, and can be used for well-being and advancement. This Principle shows that energy, power, and matter are subordinate to Mastery of Mind.

"While all is in THE ALL, it is equally true that THE ALL is in all. To him who truly understands this truth hath come great knowledge."

This statement conceals one of the greatest philosophical, scientific and religious truths. To sum this up in plainer terms: Divine Providence comes from a manifestation by the Universe of what you have in mind. As an aside, heed this warning: be careful what you put in your mind!

The Indented Skirting, or Tessellated Border

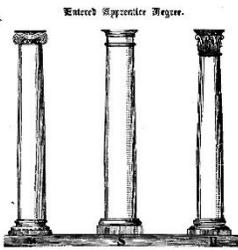
The ritual indicates that the border or skirting *is an emblem full of hope to those who trust in the Great Architect of the Universe*. On the Lodge floor, it is seen as binding together the mosaic pavement and blazing star. As it is shown surrounding the Tracing Board (Trestle Board), it should, from a mystical viewpoint, be seen as encompassing everything in it, binding all the elements that we are discussing into a single system where each element relates to, and interacts with, each of the other elements.

The Three Pillars

Our Lodges are supported by three great pillars, which are Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty. Wisdom to contrive, Strength to support us under all our difficulties, and Beauty to adorn the inward man.

They are a reflection of the invocation made when the Apprentice first enters the Lodge.

These pillars are of three different architectural styles: Doric; Ionic; and Corinthian. The ritual refers them to Solomon, Hiram of Tyre, and Hiram Abif,



who represent the three major aspects of the Creator: Omniscience; Omnipotence; and Omnipresence. They can also be seen to represent three metaphysical principles: Life-Essence (the substantial spirit of Wisdom); incorruptible Matter, serving as the vehicle of that Life-Essence, to give it form and object (Strength);

and lastly the intellectual principle or Logos binding these two together becoming an intelligent and functional instrument (Beauty).

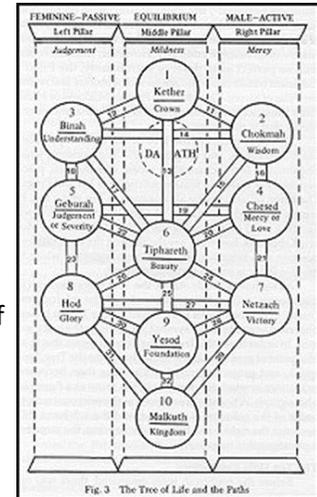


Fig. 3 The Tree of Life and the Paths

These pillars also allude to the three pillars of the Qabbalistic Tree of Tree of Life: passive, active and equilibrium.

The Lesser Lights

The Lesser Lights, symbolised in a Lodge by the three candles on the pillars, represent the Sun, the Moon, and the Master of the Lodge. In the Tracing Board, the master is represented by the Blazing Star.

The sun and moon, like the mosaic pavement, represent duality, but at the spiritual level. The sun is the giver of light and the major source of spiritual energy on earth. The moon receives the light and reflects it, as we should reflect our spirituality to others, to light up the path, hidden by darkness.

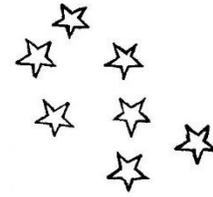
The Master of the Lodge represents the Master within all of us. The Master rules his Lodge, and so the Inner Master should rule us. However, one has to be aware of this Master at our centre, and listen to that still small voice within, which will guide us in all things.



Seven Stars

The ritual states that the Mason who has Charity in its most ample sense may be deemed to have arrived at the summit of Masonry, figuratively speaking, an ethereal mansion, veiled from mortal eyes by the starry firmament, emblematically depicted by seven stars.

In astronomy, the seven stars are the Great Bear (also known as the Big Dipper and Ursa Major). In Theosophy and other mystical traditions, these seven stars represent the Seven Rays, an esoteric teaching that has been around for millennia. The seven rays emanate from the spiritual “sun” (Universal Logos) and each has different characteristics. Time does not permit further explanation here.



The seven stars also allude to the seven planes of existence, and the sevenfold nature of Man, as taught by many mystery schools. The sevenfold nature of man is seven levels of consciousness: the physical; the etheric; the vital life force; the astral (emotional); the mental; the intuitional; and the spiritual. These levels reside in the first five planes of existence. The remaining two planes are the Monadic and the Divine. An understanding of these concepts is essential to all who wish to understand the true nature of the universe and their place in it.

Celestial Canopy

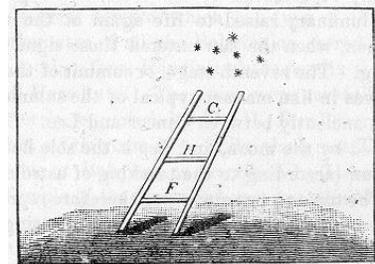
“The covering of a Masonic Lodge is a celestial canopy of divers colours, even the Heavens.” This can be seen as the universe, and its *diverse colours* representing everything in it. As light can be split into seven colours by a prism, these colours can also be a reference to the seven planes of existence.

Jacobs Ladder

As will be seen on the tracing board, the ladder rests on the Volume of the Sacred Law and rises up to the Blazing Star, moving from west to east. This shows the connection between ourselves and the Divine manifestation, and represents a path to raising consciousness. The ladder has many staves, but the three principle ones are Faith, Hope, and Charity.

In the British Emulation ritual, part of the definition of **Faith** is *“the evidence of things not seen, but the substance of those hoped for”*.

Hope is quoted as *“an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and enters into that within the veil”*. Also, *“If we believe a thing impossible, our despondency may render it so, but he who perseveres in a just cause will ultimately overcome all difficulties”*. This is another allusion to the Law of Mind.



Charity is assistance to those in need. However, the true mystical nature of charity is a benevolent, non-envious, non-prejudicial attitude, and the outpouring of charitable love to all.

Mystically, the seven rungs of the ladder also refer to the sevenfold nature of man, as described before.

The ladder can be associated with Mithraic, Kabbalistic, and numerous other mystery traditions.

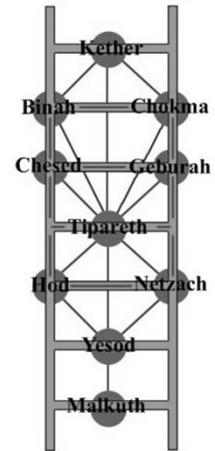
The Rosicrucians have a seven-runged ladder referring to the seven stages of the Atlantean Initiates on their journey up to receive the Word.

In the Mithraic tradition, the seven levels refer to the Chain of Being and are described as The First World, World of Pre-existence, Heaven, Middle World, World of Births, Mansion of the Blessed, and Truth. Each level has a metal symbolically associated with it: Lead, Quicksilver, Copper, Tin, Iron, Silver, and Gold.

This is almost identical to the ladder used in the Mysteries of Brahma.

These levels correspond to Spiritual Alchemy, the process of turning lead into gold, symbolically representing the stages of purification of the spirit.

The Kabbalistic Tree of Life presents a similar ladder, which represents the stages of spiritual progression.



Four Tassels

The British Emulation ritual talks about the original forms that we have in Freemasonry: the Guttural; the Pectoral; the Manual; and the Pedal. In the American ritual, these are called the perfect points of entrance. The guttural (throat) refers to the symbolic penalty of the Degree. The Pectoral (breast) refers to keeping the secrets safe and secure. The Manual (hand) is a token of assent to the obligation of a Mason. The Pedal (foot) formed in a square denotes a just and upright Mason.

These forms or points also allude to the four cardinal virtues, denoted in a Lodge by the four tassels. These are temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice.

Temperance

Temperance is the due restraint of the passions, which renders the body tame and “governable”, and should be practised constantly in order to avoid excess or indulgence which may lead one to betray one's trust, and limit spiritual growth or to a break in communication between the mind, and the spirit. It is also a reminder of the penalty referred to in the obligation, which alludes to the Guttural.

Fortitude

Fortitude is the noble and steady cause of the soul whereby one is enabled to undergo any pain, labour, danger, or difficulty when deemed necessary, as a safeguard against attacks made to extort Masonic secrets entrusted to one, emblematically represented by the point of a sharp instrument against the left breast, which alludes to the Pectoral.

Prudence

Prudence teaches us to regulate our lives and actions according to “the dictates of reason”. It is the habit of mind by which we judge wisely and prudently things related to our present and future happiness. It is to be borne in mind in mixed company never to let slip any signs, tokens or words, remembering the obligation with hand on the VSL, which alludes to the Manual.

Justice

Justice is the standard of right where we are to give every man his due, without distinction. This is consistent with Divine and moral law. It should remind one of the Charge at the north-east angle of the lodge when placed upright with the feet in the form of a square, alluding to the Pedal.

North, South, East, West

A description of East was covered earlier but, to summarise, East is the place of the rising sun, where the Master of the Lodge sits, and is considered the source of spiritual light. It also signifies birth and the creative aspect of Divinity (Brahma in the Vedic tradition).

The West is the place of the setting sun. It signifies death and the destructive aspect of Deity (Vishnu in the Vedic tradition).

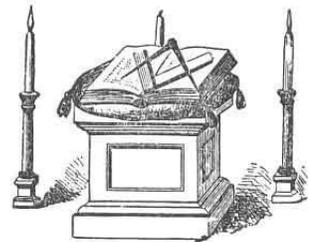
The South is the place of the sun at its highest point. It signifies growth and development, and the preserving aspect of Deity (Shiva in the Vedic tradition).

The North is a place of darkness. It represents the darkness of ignorance.

As the Lodge is always traversed in a clockwise direction, the Mason is travelling from West to North to East to South and repeating the cycle again and again. This represents the cyclical nature of human existence, and the cycle of the soul repeating the human experience over and over again until perfection is achieved allowing it to advance on its path back to the creator.

Altar

Altars used in religious practices are for offerings and communion and are usually situated in the east of a building. In Freemasonry, however, the altar is seen as a sacred place where any vows or commitments taken on it are regarded as solemn and binding. It is in the shape of a cube and situated in the centre of the Lodge. Remembering that the Lodge is representative of an individual, the altar, therefore, represents the sacred place at our own centre.



Egyptian Philosophers

The Junior Warden's Tracing Board lecture makes reference to the Egyptian Philosophers and indicates a correspondence between our usages and customs. The Egyptians had Initiatic practices when inducting their Neophytes into the ancient knowledge and mysteries. This is an indication that our ritual is based on ancient knowledge.

Pythagorean System

As with the Egyptians, the Tracing Board lecture indicates that the Pythagoreans used a similar method of using signs and symbols to conceal their principles and more recent systems have copied these practices. Again, this is an indication that Masonic ritual conceals ancient mysteries.

Holy Ground and Three Grand Offerings

All Lodges are consecrated before being instituted and are considered to be sacred ground. Therefore, Masons should be very conscious of all that they think and say and do, while in a Lodge.

The first offering was the “ready obedience of Abraham”. The stayed sacrifice of Isaac reputedly took place on Mount Moriah, the site which was to hold King Solomon’s Temple.

The second offering is made by King David, who was the father of Solomon.

The third offering is by Solomon himself, made at the completion of the Temple.

We should bear in mind that the Temple of Solomon is representative of our own self. We should, therefore, treat ourselves as a divine sanctuary.

Situated Due East and West

The ritual states that our Lodges are situated due East and West for which we, as Masons, assign three reasons: the sun, the glory of the Lord, rises in the East and sets in the West; learning originated in the East and spread its benign influence to the West; the tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon were so situated.

Christian Churches followed the practice of Jewish Synagogues of building temples to face the East and lie in an east to west orientation. In ancient Egypt, Ra, the principal god (actually the one God, as declared by Akhenaten) was represented by the sun. The Hebrews followed this designation also, as shown in Psalm 19: “The heavens declare the glory of God”.

The entrance of the buildings faced the east so that the worshippers could greet the sun, God’s representative, as it rose. Communicating thus with the Creator first thing in the day, and expressing thanks for all of creation, set the tone for the day. The sun is seen as the origin of light, of life, and of love. While we all know that the light from the sun is absolutely necessary for material life on earth, the Rosicrucians teach that it is also the main source of Vital Life Force, the source that animates our consciousness. It is also taught by certain mystery schools that the Christ consciousness had a previous incarnation on the sun. Thus the sun is of extreme importance to Mystics.

The Number Three

There are many instances of the number three occurring in the First degree, and a few of them have been covered previously, so we will look only at two of them here.

There are three principal officers in the Lodge: the Worshipful Master; the Senior Warden; and the Junior Warden. As the Lodge is a representation of our own selves, the three principal officers are three different aspects of ourselves: our master-principle within, or will-power; the psyche, calling us to attend to, and control, our actions; and the intellect, calling us to control our lower nature.

One could think of three as being used to achieve balance: two extremes and a point in the middle. The establishment of a relationship between two opposing forces becomes a third force, to provide balance.

The three steps to the altar.

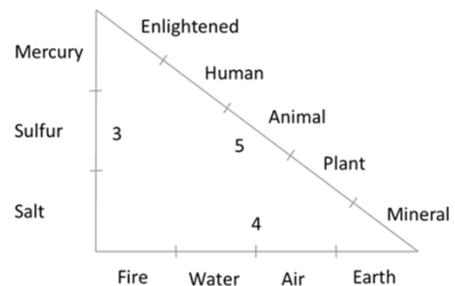
The ritual says that the way to approach the altar in this degree is by three steps, the first of about fifteen inches, the second of twelve, the third of nine.

Why fifteen, twelve, and nine inches?

Divide these numbers by three and you get five, four, and three, the sides of a Pythagorean triangle, used to construct a right-angle. The geometric formula representing the Pythagorean triangle ($a^2=b^2+c^2$) is also known as the 47th problem of the first book of Euclid. This triangle can also be used to determine Phi, the Golden Ratio. It shows the ratio of gnomonic expansion, the design pattern for most organic growth in the universe, e.g. seashells, flower petals, cell growth.

Pythagoras taught that the philosophies built around number, proportion, and harmony contained the secrets and mysteries of creation. The Egyptian 3-4-5 triangle is mentioned by Plutarch in *Moralia Vol.5* where he states that the upright is likened to Osiris, the horizontal base is likened to Isis, and the diagonal hypotenuse is likened to Horus. The upright Osiris represents the father, or the origin. The horizontal Isis represents the mother, or the recipient. The diagonal hypotenuse Horus represents the son, or the result. This corresponds to the Rosicrucian teachings of the Law of the Triangle: of two factors resulting in a third.

On a higher level, Alchemists used the same triangle to represent the all-pervasive First Matter: the vertical denoting the three vital principles, represented by salt, sulfur, and mercury; the base denoting the four basic elements of fire, water, air and earth; the hypotenuse denoting the five stages of the development of life – mineral, plant, animal, human, and Enlightened. Of the three vital principles, salt denotes balance and symmetry, and represents the ancient adage “As above, so



below". Sulfur is related to self-consciousness. Mercury represents the higher consciousness, which is the first emanation from the One source of being.

The four elements of fire, water, air, and earth, are the building blocks of all manifestation and represent all matter.

The five stages are: the development of life in the universe in its evolution toward light, and the return to the One.

The (spiritual) alchemical principle illustrated here is that of the vibrations of spirit manifesting in matter. In summary, when we see the candidate taking the three steps to the altar in the Entered Apprentice Degree, we should bear in mind the allusion to the ancient knowledge described above: of the evolution of spirit manifesting in the four elements of matter, producing life at the five levels of mineral, vegetation, animal, human, and finally enlightenment (achieved by the development of the three levels of consciousness).

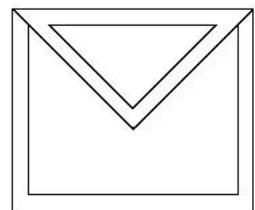
We should understand the base of the triangle to represent the physical aspect of ourselves. The vertical line represents the mental or intellectual aspect, and the hypotenuse or diagonal represents the spiritual side.

It should be noted that the steps to the altar are towards the East, which is defined in the mysteries as the source of light.

The Apron

The Candidate is invested with the Apron, which is one of the most important and comprehensive of our symbols.

"More ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle; more honourable than the Star or Garter; or any other order in existence, being the badge of innocence and the bond of friendship".



This is how the Apron first introduced to the new Mason, and so was it presented millennia ago to initiates of the ancient mysteries, as a symbol of the control and restraint of the animal passions, and freedom from the base nature of Man.

Its shape is that of a triangle superimposed on a rectangle. The triangle is the primitive and universal emblem of what is Spiritual, while the rectangle is that of what is Material and, since human nature is a compound of both, the Apron is a representation of the man himself. We should think of the triangular flap as a sign of the presence, in ourselves, of the Divine Essence: an Essence which comprises all the attributes of Divinity: all knowledge; all power; all wisdom, strength and beauty.

The Apron is made of white lambskin; an emblem of purity. In all ages and countries, the colour white has been seen to be symbolic of purity. For this reason, the Jewish priesthood was always clothed in white. The priests of the Romans wore white when they sacrificed. The Druids had different colours for each of their degrees – white being appropriated to the highest degree, the degree of perfection, and none was admitted unless they were cleansed of all impurities of body and mind. In early Christian rituals, white garments were placed on the newly baptized. Later, the colour blue is added – blue being a spiritual colour.

The four sides of the rectangular part of the apron bring to mind the four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. They also remind us of the four alchemical elements: Earth, Air, Fire and water.

The three sides of the triangle remind us of: the three great lights in Masonry; the three lesser lights; the three pillars (wisdom, strength, and beauty); faith, hope, and charity; the three attributes of the great Architect (omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence). It also represents the higher three-fold spiritual nature of man.

Counting all the sides gives a total of seven, reminding us of the seven who make a lodge perfect, and the seven liberal arts and sciences, as the ritual says. Also, according to ancient teachings, man is a seven-fold being. The mystery schools teach about the seven levels of existence. There are also seven stages in the alchemical process.

Even in ancient times, the rectangle has been regarded as the symbol for matter. So, the rectangular part of the apron represents the lower forms of our existence – our base physical nature.

The triangle has long been considered as the symbol representing Spirit, and there is so much behind this that one could write a whole book on this symbolism. So the apron shows spirit overlaying matter – spirit starting to dominate over our base nature.

Conclusion

There may be some symbols that I have missed. If you think of any, please tell me. However, what we have covered here should be enough to give you plenty of food for thought.