

T'.T'.G'.O'.T'.G'.A'.O'.T'.U'.

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A reflection on the symbolism of the Square and Compasses

Two of the three Great Lights in the Lodge. What do they represent? What ideas are being communicated by their presence?

In the world we often consider ourselves as different from other people. From one country to another we feel different, from one continent to another we even feel more different. We have adopted different languages, different cultures and different believe systems. It is, however, for one who is interested in understanding the roots of cultures sometimes amazing how much correlation there is in the fundamental thoughts on the world around us.

Between the ancient Egyptians and the Indian Hindus for example there are clear similarities in that the square represents earthly matter and the circle represents spiritual matter.

When I was recommended to read the works of Albert Pike as an introduction to Freemasonry, I found in his texts a similar hinting to the material and spiritual with regards to the Squares and Compasses.

When confronted with symbolism, the most obvious place to start meditating on the meaning of that which is communicated, is by looking at the original intent of the symbols used. In the case of the Square and Compasses that I was presented during my initiation it would mean to have an objective look at what the instruments are being used for under normal circumstances, to deduce from there a metaphorical suggestion.

When I look at the Square and Compasses I see in the first place an instrument that is active in drawing circles (trigonometry) and an instrument that is passive by measuring the angle of a corner (geometry). Measuring a straight angle, however, only gives me information about the outside surface, whereas the compass could tell me something more about the inside measurements of an object.

In short, at first glance I see Passive Outwards and Active Inwards.

I was presented by two ashlar as being Jewels of the lodge, a Rough Ashlar and a Smooth Ashlar. Defining that a person should always work on becoming a better part of the whole. Comparing the whole with the construction of a building it becomes clear immediately that if an individual (a stone) is of a smooth surface, it becomes a strong foundation to continue building onto.

But how to apply these two Great Light instruments to become a better person?

When I was preparing for the initiation into the Entered Apprentice degree I was asked to put all my belongings in a bag and leave them behind. Perhaps this was an example to me to leave the material world outside and step into the spiritual world?

Continuing on this I deduce that even though cultures seem different, their underlying architectural fundamentals are the same. Constructing on this requires the same strong building blocks as referred to earlier. And to achieve this, one should work on the spiritual inner self to obtain the perfect shape for the material world. So the whole is not just material, the whole is just as well spiritual. If the spiritual form is right, then the material form is also right.

If by working actively on the inner self, the outer self will follow suit?

I am recalling images of Leonardo da Vinci. Who drew a man, inside a circle that was inside a square. The perfect measurements, applied by the compasses and verified by the square.

But these Square and Compasses are just two of the Great Lights, the third being the Sacred Texts. I understand that the actual texts being used may differ from lodge to lodge. It makes no difference, they symbolize God. The Great Architect of the Universe. It adds up to the other two Great Lights. The material world and the spiritual world governed by God. Perhaps even combined into one and the same?

During the initiation I was asked to make a donation, but I was stripped of all my belongings. Was this a hint to tell me that leaving the material world behind totally is also not right?

I received my personal belongings back after the initiation, perhaps an indication of balance between the material and spiritual worlds. I assume that working on the inner and outer self, the spiritual and the material world, should also be in balance.

If the whole is governed by God, then this makes sense. But if, as the Hindus believe, the whole IS God, then it makes even more sense to have the material and spiritual worlds in balance.

Going back to what I read in the works of Albert Pike, in the Entered Apprentice degree the square is placed on top of the compasses. Then it moves to underneath as the degrees progress. So my objective is the square itself. In order to construct further on the ideas that found their way into my head I would need other instruments. But, at least the direction to work on my own smooth Ashlar is clear now.

In order to grow I shall continue to educate myself. I am happy to be able to educate myself within Freemasonry. I am also happy that my brethren asked for mercy when a knife was placed on my arm to cut me open. My material body was spared.

I said.