

A Point within a Circle

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As

The Masonic Symbol - A Point within a Circle

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Respectfully submitted by

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The Masonic Symbol - A Point within a Circle

As I have contemplated and sought the meaning of the symbolism that is found throughout the Masonic Ritual and within the Lodge itself, I have found myself, more often than not, drawn to a symbol that seems to inter-relate with other symbols mentioned within the Ritual and symbols that are physically evident within the Lodge. My attention was first drawn the symbol of A Point within a Circle as I studied and learned the Lecture of the First Degree as a new Mason. I noted that the ritual of this lecture was very specific in stating that since the time of the Holy Saint Johns ... **there is, or should be, represented in every well furnished Lodge, a certain Point within a Circle,....** There was no such symbol of a Point within a Circle represented in my Lodge. I looked within the other Lodges that I frequently visited and found that several of them also were without this symbol. My curiosity thoroughly aroused I turned to The Craft and Its Symbols: Opening the Door to Masonic Symbolism by Allen E. Roberts. Here for the first time I was able to see a representation of the symbol of a Point within a Circle. (Pg.36)

Roberts addresses the meaning of this symbol as follows: “ The symbolism of the Point within a Circle has come down to us from time immemorial. No building can be properly built without an accurate square. Our operative brethren used the point to construct the circle. The knowledge of how to test a square for accuracy was the great secret of the master builder. The great secret of the Speculative Mason is the knowledge of how to use the teachings of the Craft to build a Spiritual Temple so that it will stand the test of time. This symbol becomes a test of our virtue.” (Pg.37)

This graphic illustration and explanation of the Point within a Circle symbol caused me to look for, and exam the relationship of, various other Masonic symbols to the primary symbol of the Point within a Circle. I have found that all three of the Great Lights of Freemasonry, the Holy Writings, which is indeed a part of the symbol, the Compasses which are used to construct a circle, and the Square which may be derived from the circle by use of the compasses are thus directly related. This relationship in and of itself suddenly caused me to consider the Point within a Circle with a much higher regard than I had previously. As I further examined the symbol of the Point within a Circle it became apparent from the description given within the Ritual that the Masonic use of Parallel and Perpendicular were directly related as are the teachings of Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. I present to you for consideration the following:

As a candidate kneels at the Alter of Free Masonry for the first time, he declares his first obligation to the Fraternity, is bound to the Fraternity by it, and he is asked **what do you most desire**, he declares **Light**, is brought from darkness and is then instructed that...

The first objects presented to your view on being brought from darkness are the three Great Lights of Freemasonry, the Holy Bible, Square and Compasses.

This passage is presented to the candidate as he, for the first time, is introduced to, and shown Masonic symbols. That he is told the Holy Bible, Square and Compasses are the three Great Lights of Masonry is meant to make a deep impression upon his mind that these symbols are the most important symbols within Freemasonry.

The three great Light of Freemasonry are then explained to the candidate and he is told how he is to regard them....

The Holy Bible is given us as the rule and guide of our faith, the Square to square our actions, and the Compasses to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds toward all mankind, particularly our brethren in Freemasonry.

While this may indeed make an impression upon the new candidate, his understanding of them, and their context is just beginning. In the lecture of the First Degree this is reinforced and expanded as he is later told, in part, their significance and their meaning...

Every well governed Lodge is furnished with a Holy Bible, Square and Compasses. The Holy Bible is dedicated to God, it being His inestimable gift to man as the rule and guide of his faith, and upon it all regular Masons have been obligated; the Square to the Master, because it is the proper Masonic emblem of his office; and to the Compasses to the Craft, for by due attention attention to its use we are taught to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds toward all mankind.

In this passage these Symbols are quantified for the candidate. The Holy Bible is designated as a gift from God to the individual Mason for the rule and guide of his individual faith, and he is informed it has been so given to all Masons. The Square is designated as an emblem belonging to the Master of a Lodge, The candidate understands it represents authority at this point, and does not belong specifically to him. The Compasses are dedicated to all members of the craft, for their individual use in circumscribing their desires and keeping our passions within due bounds toward all mankind. Latter in the lecture of the First Degree these great symbols, the Holy Writings, Square and Compasses are addressed again and reiterated when he is first told of the symbol of the Point within a Circle and it is described to him....

...there is or should be represented in every well furnished Lodge a certain point within a circle, the point representing an individual brother and the circle, the boundary line of his conduct beyond which he should never suffer his passions, prejudices, or his interests to betray him. This circle is supported by two perpendicular parallel line representing Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist, and on its top rest the Holy Writings. In traversing its circumference, we necessarily touch upon the parallel lines and also upon the Holy Writings, and while a Mason keeps himself thus circumscribed, it is impossible that he can materially err.

This passage and the symbol of A Point within a Circle, should continue to enter the forefront of the Masons mind. It is meant to bring clarity to the assignment, and inter-relationship of the three Great Lights. The point, which represents the individual Mason, by definition within Geometry, is the Radius Point of the Circle. From this point a circle may be constructed using the compasses. The symbolic representation this circle creates in Masonry is the Boundary of the individual Masons conduct, with which the individual Mason desires to circumscribe himself. The Holy Writings, which rest upon the circle he has created, guide him in creating, and are essential in establishing, the boundary of his conduct.

Compasses are used to draw circles, and are therefore essential in the creation of the circle that is to become the boundary of the Masons conduct. The Holy Writings guide the Mason in describing what will and should be contained within the circle by which his conduct is bounded. Using the compasses and the circle, we may also create a perfect square, or angle of 90 degrees, to be constructed of parallels and perpendiculars. Indeed the basis of Geometry itself may be found by use of the compasses, and the circle created by them. (see figure 1)

In the third degree the candidate is told.....

as the most vital parts of man are contained within the breast, so are the most important tenets of Freemasonry contained within the points of the extended compasses. They are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

This passage defines the symbolism of the compasses as a representation of the three principle tenets of Freemasonry, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, and alludes that these tenets should be a part of his boundary of conduct. The candidate is further instructed in the symbols relating to the Point within a Circle in the Lecture of the First Degree when he is told....

....the three immovable jewels of a Lodge are the Square, Level and Plumb ... the Square denotes Morality, the Level, equality and the Plumb rectitude of life.

This passage defines the Square as a symbol of morality, which may readily be graphically constructed from the point, circle, and compasses. The Level, which is used by operative builders to try horizontals, is defined as a symbol of equality, the basic instrument with which parallels are created, and the Plumb, used by operative workman to test the vertical, is defined as a symbol of rectitude of life and conduct, is an instrument to create perpendiculars to the earth. Geometry again teaches us that not only the square, but also parallels and perpendiculars may be constructed by the use of a circle and the compasses. (see figure 1)

In the third degree the Master once again reiterates the speculative use of the compasses to the candidate as he tells the candidate...

.... **That you are to never loose sight of this valuable instrument (the compasses) by which we are taught to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds toward all mankind, particularly our brethren in Freemasonry.**

The importance of the Compasses to the individual Mason is again clearly defined as an important symbol he should never loose sight of.

Having received these instruction from the degrees of Masonry, we now need to consider how they are related and what indeed constitutes the circle with which we are to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions in due bounds, or, of what then is our circle made?

The entire First Degree is devoted to the explanation of Freemasonry as ...**an institution having for its foundation the practice of the social and moral virtues.** Certainly we know that to establish a circle representing the boundary of our conduct requires the use of the Compasses, which we have been taught contain the Three Principle Tenets of Freemasonry, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. This alludes that a portion of our, circle or conduct, must be governed by the individual Masons comprehension of these Three Principle Tenets.

That the circle representing a Mason's conduct has resting upon it top the Holy Writings is symbolic that the teaching within the Holy Scriptures should also be a part of the boundary the individual Mason creates for his conduct. The Circle is supported symbolically we are told by two perpendicular parallel lines representing Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist, which alludes that the Mason should make the teachings of these Patrons of Masonry as part of his boundary of conduct. We understand now that indeed parallel and perpendicular lines may be created from a single point at the center of, and the circle itself, by aid of the compasses. These symbols are directly related to each other through the first and noblest of the sciences, Geometry.

Let us now consider other lessons contained within the ritual which we might consider as essential in the construction of the boundary of the individual Masons moral and social conduct.

The First Degree specifically addresses the four cardinal virtues, Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice, which also provide the individual Mason with guidance in establishing the boundary of his conduct.

We receive instruction in the First Degree through the symbolism of the Lodge itself that the Mason should have Faith and Hope and realize that Charity is the greatest and enduring trait a Mason may have. Wisdom, Strength and Beauty should be considered in all of our doings.

That the Mason should be constantly aware that there is both good and evil in the world, that each person is surrounded in some way with blessings and comforts in his life that he should enjoy by his reliance on Divine Providence. He should look to the perpetuation of Morality, the promotion of Equality and that he should act with Rectitude in his Life are essential to the Mason.

The Mason has been taught that he is by nature rough and unrefined in his infancy and that only by being industrious in his endeavors, seeking education and expanding his knowledge can he achieve and grow in manhood.

The boundary of an individual Masons conduct is for he to singularly determine with the aid of the Supreme Architect of the Universe. The lessons within the ritual of the fraternity give him guidance in establishing his boundary. However, how the individual Mason constructs his circle and applies the tenets of Freemasonry to that circle are for him alone to determine. It is evident that time; the continual study, comprehension and practice of the principles and tenets of our ritual will determine the extent of the individual Masons boundary of conduct. This will directly effect his interaction with his family, peers, neighbor, community and society, and their perception of him.

A Mason should consider the boundary of his conduct to be one that is ever changing, as his depth of understanding and application of the principles and tenets of the fraternity are continually developed through consideration and practiced within society.

Each Mason is the point from which his circle of conduct emanates. The circle and all that it represents is dependent upon the value the individual Mason places upon the principles and tenets contained within the Ritual of Freemasonry, and the way he practices them.

Thus the symbol of a Point within a Circle we have discussed in this paper becomes emblematic of the individual Masons personal growth in the practice of the social and moral virtues taught within our fraternity. The circle of his conduct should be ever broadening as he continues to expand his knowledge and recognize the intricacies and relationships of the symbols of Freemasonry and their relationships and practice.