

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CIRCUMAMBULATION**

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The word "circumambulation" is derived from two Latin words:-"circum" meaning "around" and "ambulare" meaning "to walk" and literally means "to walking around". It is not only the name of part of the three degrees in Craft Masonry but it is also the name of a symbol.

Symbolism is a part of our daily lives. The characters which you are now reading are per se meaningless unless you are trained in the English language; they are simply the symbols of thoughts in the mind of the writer. The student in school learns certain mathematical symbols. The communicant at the Lord's Table or the Mass performs a symbolic rite which is capable of a variety of interpretations. The rings given at engagement or marriage are symbolic of something which it is difficult to express in words. Behind every symbol is an idea and it is familiarity with the idea which gives meaning and life to the symbol.

We all know that symbolism is the heart and soul of Freemasonry, but unlike mathematical symbols which are precisely defined and can bear only one meaning Freemasonry invites the initiate to speculate upon the meaning of its symbols. As Freemasons we have an important duty to perform - to try to penetrate through the symbolism to find its meaning. The Entered Apprentice charge urges the initiate to "endeavour to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge". All our ritualistic work is written in several of the books on Masonry, but the secrets of the Order are not capable of being written down. These secrets are concealed from both the members and the profane by the symbolism and it is the duty as well as the privilege of every Mason to search for the meaning underlying our symbols - a search for truth - a search that will never end, and no two of us will ever find the same meaning in the same symbol. Bearing all this in mind let us look at circumambulation as it is practised in the Lodge today. I am referring to the American or Antient form of ritual. The candidate for each of the three degrees is conducted around the altar, that is around the Lodgeroom, by the Senior Deacon, once in the E.A. Degree, twice in the F.C. degree, and three times in the M.M. degree, while the Chaplain recites the appropriate selection from the V.S.L. - Psalm 133 for the Initiation; Amos Chapter 7, verses 7 and 8 for the Passing; and Ecclesiastes Chapter 12, verses 1 to 7 for the Raising. All this is done for a reason explained later, but the inner significance of this ceremony is hidden and must be sought for himself by the fully-fledged Master Mason. Its deep significance unites the candidate not only with all who have gone this way before in a Masonic Lodge, but also with the countless millions of men who for thousands of years have made of circumambulation an offering of homage to the Unseen Presence.

We are told that among primitive man's first religions were sun and fire worship. This I cannot

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accept because I am old-fashioned enough to believe that man was a special creation of GOD and not descended from the monkey. Those who believe in Evolution have never satisfactorily explained away the enormous gap between consciousness as found in the lower animals and self-consciousness as found in man alone. That gap, I believe, was bridged by GOD when He made man as a special creation. Technically Darwin did not teach Evolution; he taught Survival of the Fittest which is a totally different thing. And I believe that

in his pristine state, fresh from the hand of GOD, man, though uncultured and uncivilized in the sense in which we use those words today, was too spiritual to worship the creature instead of the Creator.

We have today the written records of man, dating back 50,000 years - in fact some archaeologists are prepared to move that date back to 70,000 years - which give us a picture of a people, exceedingly ancient, who fifty to seventy thousand years ago had developed a civilization in many respects superior to anything that the twentieth century has achieved. We have on several of the Pacific Islands the remains of a system of canals, wonderfully engineered; also the remains of a network of roads paved with blocks of stones so perfectly fitted together that even grass will not grow in the joints. On many islands we have the ruins of titanic buildings, 400 feet by 150 feet, and on one island, Tonga-Tabu, they have discovered a cromlech, consisting of two gigantic uprights weighing an estimated seventy tons each which are bound together at the top with another stone estimated at twenty-five tons. When you remember that Tonga-Tabu is a coral atoll of which there is not a particle of natural stone, the nearest available stone being well over two hundred miles away, it leaves open a vast field for speculation what sort of ships these people had to carry such enormous weights, how they loaded them on the ships and afterwards unloaded them and what contrivances they used to set them up in place. On monuments, obelisks, monoliths, temple ruins and clay tablets, discovered in the isles of the Pacific; at Uxmal, Palenque and Chichen-Itza in Yucatan; in Egypt, for example the Great Pyramids; in Ur and Sumer in lower Mesopotamia; in India, Tibet, and even in the Gobi Desert, where Roy Andrews discovered the works of a highly cultured people of exceeding antiquity, we have the remains of ancient civilizations whose members chiseled on monolith and temple facades their history and philosophy. These early pre-historic men have left remains which leave no doubt whatsoever in our minds as to the advanced state of their civilization.

The interesting thing is that the first hieroglyphic that these very ancient people used for GOD - Who among them was nameless out of reverence - was the CIRCLE, sometimes a plain circle, sometimes a circle with four dots signifying the four Great Primary Forces of the Creator; a Circle, the only perfect figure, having neither beginning nor ending. This suggests to me that they conceived of GOD as a Being, eternal, from everlasting to everlasting and this to my mind precludes the idea that they worshipped the sun or fire.

Of course primitive man found GOD in nature, thunder was His voice; lightning was His weapon; wind was His breath; rain was His fructifying power; earthquake showed His anger; fire was His presence.

You know how difficult it is for the average person even today to think abstractly; it is much easier and safer to think concretely. Ask any Roman Catholic friend and he will tell you that it is much easier to keep your mind on your worship of GOD if you have before you an image, or a crucifix, or a picture, or even a lighted candle. So with early man. He needed a symbol to represent the Infinite; and looking up into the sky he saw there the blazing orb of the sun, a Circle representing Infinity, and so the sun became his Symbol of the Unseen Presence. The sun gave light and heat, it kept the wild beast in his lair by day; it germinated his seeds in the spring; in summer it melted the snow on the mountains, filling again his rivers and lakes; it grew his crops; it ripened his harvest; it was a veritable source of life itself. So man made the sun his symbol of the Infinite, the Creator, the fountain of all life. With the sun before him he could more devoutly worship the Absolute, His God, the Unseen Presence.

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But there were days when the sun was not visible. Man saw that fire gave light and heat; it prepared his food; it kept the wild beasts away; it warmed him in winter; it too was a source of life. And so the symbolic worship of the sun in the sky was conducted by symbolic worship of fire upon piles of stones which were man's first altars. Heat and light man could produce by fire, so lighting the fire on the altar became an important religious ceremony.

We all knew that man is incurably imitative. The young people in the home love to strut in thier parents' clothes, playing grown-up. In their turn the parents play that game called "keeping up with the Joneses". The valet copies his master, the clerk imitates the office manager. So too, early man imitated the movement of his symbol of GOD. The sun seems to move from east to west by way of the south, and so early man learned to circle his altar on which burned the symbol of his GOD, from East to West by way of the south. And so circumambulation became an important part of all religious ceremonies. It was observed in the rites of the earliest inhabitants of Yucatan who have left us the marvellous ruins of the temple in Chichen-Itza; indications of its observance have been found in ancient Egypt; it was part of the Elusinian Mysteries which so largely influenced St. Paul's writings; it was practised in the rites of Mithraism, that worship of the Persian sun-god which rivalled Christianity for nearly three hundred years; it was practised also at Stonehenge and in a thousand other cults, and down through the ages it has come to us.

When the candidate first circles the lodgeroom, round the altar, he walks step by step with the shades of millions of men who have thus worshipped the Most High by humble imitation. When you view Circumambulation in this historic light, you find that it is no longer a mere parade, but a ceremony of the deepest significance linking all who take part in it with the spiritual aspirations of a dim and distant past.

But I have kept the best wine till the last. To the Mester Mason the really significant teaching of this symbolic act is its introduction of the idea of dependence. In the American or Antient work the candidate is admitted to the Lodgeroom hoodwinked and remains so until later kneeling at the altar he takes upon himself "a solemn oath and binding obligation" after which he is brought to light in Masonry. When he is first admitted to the Lodgeroom he is received in the E.A. degree on the point of a sword applied to his naked left breast. He is then requested to kneel for prayer, after which he is asked. "In Whom do you place your trust?" On answering: "In GOD", he is assured: "Your trust being in GOD your faith is well founded. Arise, follow your guide and fear no danger". The Senior Deacon then conducts him around the Lodgeroom from East to West by way of the South, first to the Junior Warden, then to the Senior Warden and lastly to the Worshipful Master when each satisfies himself as to the candidate's qualifications for initiation.

In this simple ceremony of reception Freemasonry speaks plainly to him who will listen. From the cradle to the grave man gropes his way in the dark and none could find nor keep his path without a Guide who can guard him from the ills, the perils and the pit-falls incident to human life. In spite of all our boasted knowledge and foresight we may at any moment be in the presence of danger if not of death. Truly it does not lie in the power of any man to direct his path, and without a true and trusted friend in Whom we can confide not one of us could find his way home. So Masonry teaches us on our first step within the body of a Lodge that we live and walk by faith, not by sight. This to my

mind is the deeper meaning and significance of the symbolism of Circumambulation, a meaning which at the moment escapes the candidate, under the stress of his novel surroundings and circumstances, not knowing what is to come next, as the Senior Deacon conducts him in his hoodwinked state round the altar of the Lodge. Since no man can find his way alone, in life as in the Lodge, we must in humility trust our Guide, learn His ways, follow Him and fear no danger. Happy is the Mason who has learned that secret.