

The Emblems Belonging to the Third Degree

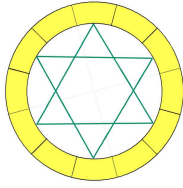
It has been said that the purpose of Masonry is the improvement of the world, one man at a time. A great part of this work is enabled by expressive symbolism. Of the interpretation of symbols, there is no ending. This is a good thing! On the one hand, it means there is no end to our capacity to grow in knowledge and improve ourselves in Masonry. On the other hand, it means that no man knows all there is to know about Masonry, and no man or body of men is the final arbiter of what it is and can be.

Of the interpretation of symbols, there is no ending. This is because symbols and emblems provoke thought, evoke ideas, and suggest insights. They also shed light on each other, especially when they are interrelated within certain organizational frameworks that exist for that purpose. In this essay, we will explore all three of these—the evocative and suggestive power of symbols, their mutual illumination of one another, and one particular organizing framework that has been universally used for millennia. We will apply these principles to the emblems belonging to the Third Degree.

Until a scant dozen or two generations ago, it was mostly through stories, pictures, and symbols that learning was preserved and taught. Thus have ancient symbol-systems ever been preserved through the generations. Our Masonic brethren in earlier times were more conversant with these than are we today. The modern spread of literacy through all classes of people has diminished the esteem in which symbols are held today, and the tricks of advertising and propaganda have exploited and debauched their potency. Symbols and emblems can nevertheless still communicate wise and serious truths when we are willing to work with them. From a simple hint, matters of weight and consequence may yet unfold to the attentive mind.

The emblems which we encounter near the close of our Third Degree ritual seem at first to have been selected at random, but on reflection we can discover evidences of purposeful choice and arrangement.

To begin with, they are exactly 12 in number. This can hardly be accidental. The number 12 recurs with symbolic significance throughout history. The Greeks hailed 12 gods on Mount Olympus, Norsemen the 12 sons of Odin, Israel its 12 tribes, each descended from one of the 12 sons of Jacob. So important was it to the apostles of Jesus that, after the disgrace of Judas Iscariot, the remaining eleven added Matthias to restore their number. *Revelation* describes 12 gates of Jerusalem, “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head”, and in many other places gives peculiar emphasis to 12 or a multiple thereof. A Jewish girl comes of age and celebrates her bat mitzvah at age 12. The number 12 figures in many folk tales, as when 12 brothers are turned into wild geese and restored to human form by the heartbreaking labors of their young sister. The number of labors that Hercules had to performed was 12. There are 12 days of Christmas. King Arthur—a solar king with 12 knights at his round table—subdued 12 rebel princes and won 12 great battles against the Saxon invaders. There are 12 hues in the color wheel, 12 inches in a foot, and in civilizations ancient and modern 12 is the number of months in a year and hours in a day. In short, there are *dozens and dozens* of special symbolic uses of this specific number that are deeply embedded in our history and culture. Are the 12 emblems of our third degree likely to be an exception?



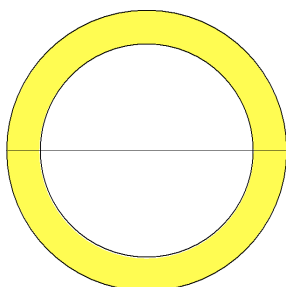
There are other reasons to suppose that our forefathers in Masonry had some design on their trestleboard when they formulated this part of our ritual. Recall that the basis of the entire superstructure of Masonry is Geometry. Since before the time of our ancient friend and brother, the great Pythagoras, the wise have taken note of special mathematical and geometrical properties of the number 12, springing from its divisibility by five of the single-digit numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, and 6). For example, a circle inscribed with the Seal of Solomon or Star of David is implicitly divided into twelve equal parts.

The last section of the Third Degree ritual gives us an account of our 12 emblems that suggests the archetypal cycle of birth, growth, death, and renewal. The simplest image for it is a circle in which the ending point is also the beginning. This image is found in one form or another cross-culturally in all times and places, not least in the teachings of our ancient writers and philosophers. This cycle of life is sometimes represented as Ourobouros, the world-serpent swallowing its own tail.

Another and more obvious association with a cycle of twelve phases is the ancient folk science of astrology. Representations of the 12-part division of the heavens pervade our history and culture. Countless writings and works of art and architecture of earlier ages incorporate or refer to astrological imagery, and to the arcana of alchemy that are so closely intertwined with it. Although it is often the butt of scientific derision today, and routinely dismissed as pseudo-science, astrology has been until quite recent times understood to be inseparable from astronomy, in fact the interpretive branch of that science. Our erudite 18th century Brethren who formulated the particular forms of ritual which we now enjoy can hardly have avoided being conversant with this symbol-language. It is irrelevant here whether we “believe in” astrology or not, whatever that might mean, or even whether or not they did. This discussion depends not at all upon character analysis or predictions of the future, which are, after all, what the skeptics dispute. Rather, it depends upon that familiarity which our predecessors in Masonry had with astrological symbolism, a part of the context of their efforts to transmit, unimpaired, the most valued tenets of our Fraternity.

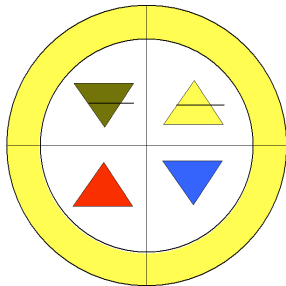
Most readers know at least a little about the signs of the zodiac, if only from newspaper astrology. It is less well known that the symbolism of astrology has its roots in geometry, and in the number symbolism of our ancient friend and brother, Pythagoras.

The zodiac is a division of the heavens into twelve equal parts, based upon the equinoxes and solstices. About 2000 years BC, the Vernal Equinox (the point where the Sun is on the first day of Spring) coincided with the constellation named Aries, the ram. At that time, according to a tradition with which I am familiar, the names were assigned to those constellations as a teaching device. Since that time, because the earth wobbles very slowly, like a huge top in its spinning about its poles, the equinoctial point has shifted all the way through the constellation Pisces to the constellation Aquarius. For this reason, the twelve phases of the earth’s year (which may be thought of as an energy field around the earth) no longer align with the constellations bearing their symbolic names.



A single line between the equinoxes divides the circle of the year into a summer half and a winter half. Likewise, a survey of our

twelve emblems quickly discloses that the descriptions in the ritual fall naturally into a waxing half and a waning half. The descriptions of the first six emblems—the pot of incense, beehive, Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tyler's sword, sword pointing to a naked heart, anchor and ark, and 47th problem of Euclid—emphasize our involvement with the business of life, while the Hourglass, Scythe, Gavel, Spade, Coffin, and Sprig of Acacia all refer to the relentless passage of time toward death and that which comes after.



An obvious example of the cycle of life is our experience of the four seasons. New life emerges in the Spring, blossoms in summer, goes to fruit and seed in the Autumn, so that in the fallow time of Winter what has been produced can sustain our preparation for a new cycle. The solstices and equinoxes divide the circle of the year into four quadrants. From time immemorial, these four quadrants have been associated with the four elemental qualities that our forbears named *Fire*, *Water*, *Air*, and

Earth.¹ The Fire of Spring is symbolically represented by an upward pointing triangle ▲. In psychological terms, this represents Will, the inspiration and initiative to get things started. But just as the heady onrush of Spring subsequently slows and spreads in the lazy re-establishment of Summer, even so, at the beginning of the second quadrant our ancient teachers saw the *Water* element ▼, symbolized by a downward pointing triangle, checking and tempering the Fire element. This elemental quality represents Mind or memory, the matrix of eternal patterns or archetypes of things as they are, always have been, and ever will be. The third quadrant corresponds to the busyness of the Fall harvest time. Here, the *Air* element ▲ denotes those processes and activities by which the purposes of the first quadrant and the available resources of the second are wrought into useful form, the art of the possible. At the beginning of the fourth quadrant, where tangible results are stored up for Winter, the *Earth* element ▼ represents “Matter,” physical embodiment. To the sages of old, these were the four stages of any creative process: the inspiration of what is desired, the perception of what exists, the processes to reduce the difference between them, and the tangible result. All four are necessary. The symbolism of the Seal of Solomon is related to this.

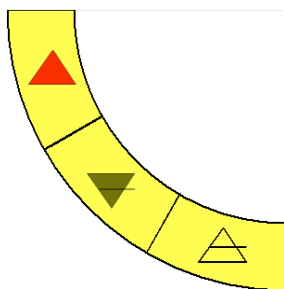
We may also draw an analogy to the three principle stages of human life that are delineated in the Lecture. The first quadrant may be thought of as *youth*, and the fourth or last as *age*. The intervening stage of *manhood*, being generally the greatest in extent of years, extends through two quadrants. Thus, in the more youthful portion of manhood, our life’s direction is still emerging, and the second half, after about age 28 or 29, is a period of greater maturity and effectiveness.

According to this analogy, in *youth*, we establish the fundamental tone and quality of our life (the Fire quadrant). As we enter early *manhood* (the Water quadrant), we encounter more and more fully the limitations of the world as it is, and such as it has been made by

¹ These are qualities found in all phenomena, and bear no slightest comparison with the elements identified in modern physics and chemistry, such as oxygen and cobalt. The sequence of phases in this diagram runs counter-clockwise (*widdershins* in archaic language) because that is how the Moon and planets progress through the heavens as the days, weeks, and months pass. The point of view is looking south toward where the Sun stands at high twelve.

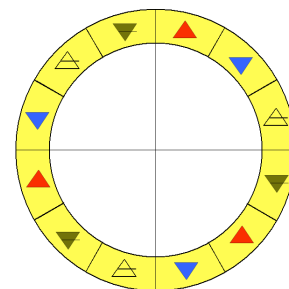
our ancestors. Then in growing interdependence with our peers we work out ways more or less to thrive in this world (the Air quadrant). In *age* (the Earth quadrant), we survey the fruits of our labors, enjoy the benefits of whatever station we have attained, and reconcile the various accommodations that we have made to the inevitable conflicts and contradictions of life. Thus, as Oliver Wendell Holmes observed, “The young man knows the rules, but the old man knows the exceptions.” Or to quote the physicist Werner Heisenberg, “an expert is someone who knows some of the worst mistakes that can be made in his field, and how to avoid them.” It is by learning from mistakes, both our own and those of others, that we grow in wisdom during the phase of manhood, represented by the third and fourth quadrants of our cycle diagram.

The number 12 is of course the product of multiplying 3 times 4, and, as the geometry of the Seal of Solomon suggests, we arrive at 12 phases in our cycle by dividing each of the four quadrants into three parts. In astrology, these are traditionally termed cardinal, fixed, and mutable. Here we find another and more subtle analogy to the three principle phases of life. The cardinal phase (*youth*) says “I want this,” and the fixed phase (*manhood*) says “This is the way things are,” the immovable object confronting the irresistible force. Then the third or mutable phase (*age*) says “we can make this work.” *Thesis* and *antithesis* are reconciled in a new *synthesis*, out of which emerges the *thesis* of the next quadrant.



For example, the first quadrant begins with cardinal Fire, the most ebullient and zealous mode of this elemental quality. Following the cyclical pattern that you can see in every quadrant, the second or *manhood* phase is the fixed mode of that elemental quality—Earth, in this case—which was in the cardinal mode at the beginning of the previous quadrant. According to our analogy, this represents the challenges and opportunities of manhood. Here in the first quadrant, the zeal of cardinal Fire

must express itself through the Earth element in its frozen and most resistant mode. Working to reconcile these with the wisdom of *age* is the Air element, which is all about process and manipulation and making connections. Here in the first quadrant the Air element is in its most adaptable and conciliatory form, the mutable mode.



The second quadrant begins with Cardinal Water, the third with Cardinal Air, and the fourth quadrant begins with Cardinal Earth.

This wheel of twelve interlinked phases is an ancient framework for symbolic interpretation. Let us look now at what light it may shed on our 12 symbols. Other aspects of its geometry will come to our attention as we progress.

The First Quadrant – Spring (Youth)

The three emblems in the first quadrant are the pot of incense, beehive, and Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tyler’s sword. How are these related to the qualities

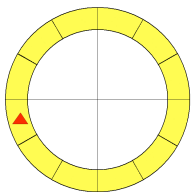
attributed to this quadrant, qualities that are brought to mind when we think of springtime, birth, and youth?



The pot of incense with its glowing coal is obviously a fiery symbol. This first phase of the cycle of life is that of self expression. The essential quality of successful self expression is joy. As a workman under the Supreme Architect you have the task and privilege of discovering your individual contribution to the building of the Temple. The wonderful thing is that it turns out to be your heart's desire. That which is the greatest possible source of joy and personal fulfillment that you might discover in the course of your life just happens to be the Will of the Supreme

Architect for your particular part of the Work. Then, even as the fragrance of incense fills the room, so does the joy of our hearts overflow to those around us. The affiliation of this symbol, then, with youth, and indeed with the joy of childhood, is obvious.

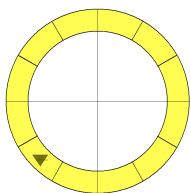
Joy is often confused with enjoyment (and its destitute cousin, entertainment). A Benedictine monk once commented that we usually expect gratitude to follow after our enjoyment of some experience. He observed that it really is the other way around: it is after we express gratitude that an experience of real joy follows. And so it is that, even as the incense burns with a fervent flame, sending its fragrant vapor toward heaven, just so should our hearts continually glow with fervent gratitude to the great and beneficent author of our existence.



The ritual says a pure heart is always an acceptable sacrifice to Deity. What is a pure heart? And is that what is sacrificed? One wise philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, said “purity of heart is to will one thing.” What is sacrificed is whatever is unnecessary to that one thing.

The task of this first phase for each man is to identify the true purpose of his life, which

marvelously turns out to be his innermost heart’s desire. The man who knows that one thing for himself willingly and joyfully sacrifices anything lesser that comes in the way. But as we know (and as we shall see presently) the world offers a lot of competition for our attention.

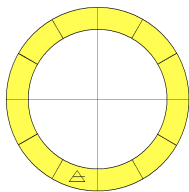


In order for even our most fervent heart’s desire to be anything more than dreamy vapor, like the smoke of incense, we must be industrious in applying our knowledge and skills to the materials that life brings to hand. In the second phase of the cycle, fixed Earth, we are concerned with our material environment and the personal resources at our disposal, where the manifold blessings and comforts that surround us are most immediate and tangible. It is out of this store of personal resources that we are able to relieve the distress of a friend or worthy Brother in want with little or no inconvenience to ourselves.



We think of these as our possessions—*my* house, *my* car, *my* bank account—seldom remembering how much they are the product of mutual aid. Even if you built your house yourself, and

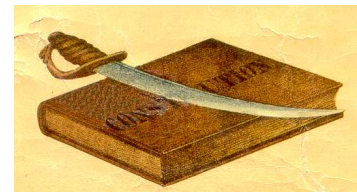
all the furniture in it, you did so with tools manufactured by others, purchased from stores run by others, the very energy of your labor fueled by food grown, harvested, packed, shipped, and displayed for sale by others, each participant in the interdependent chain drawing on a common stock of knowledge and understanding of how to do their part. The preparation of timber is very different from the quarrying of stone, and even within these distinct crafts each quality and grade of wood and stone has its characteristic affordances and resistances. “It might have pleased the Great Creator of heaven and earth to have made man independent; but as dependence is one of the strongest bonds of society, mankind were made dependent on each other....” Our ignorance of our place in the “hive of nature”, whether real or willful, cannot weaken our actual bonds of mutual aid, nor diminish our obligation industriously to add to the common stock of knowledge and understanding.



The third phase of the cycle, mutable Air, concerns personal communication. Those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection, obviously apply. Talk is an essential aspect of our serviceability to our fellow creatures, but as regards the mysteries of Masonry our loquaciousness must be circumscribed within due bounds.

The Book of Constitutions is not literally among those mysteries, of course. Our obligation identifies the secrets of Masonry as the forms and ceremonies, the manner of teaching, and the modes whereby one Mason may recognize another. Yet the symbolism of sword and book points to something more general and pervasive, and leads us to ask, what is it that constitutes Freemasonry? And how might loose talk put that at risk?

One hazard is superficiality. The uninitiated, on hearing a literal account of some of the external features of the Craft, may conclude that this is *all* of Masonry. His curiosity dulled, he inquires no more, forfeiting he knows not what, and we lose the likewise inestimable value that he might have brought to the fraternity as a



new brother. The great emphasis on membership in recent years brings with it the requirement for retention. If a man falls away, saying “this is not the Masonry I signed up for,” on what did he base those expectations which he felt that we did not meet? And how could he believe that he had come to the end of what Masonry might disclose to him? For the essence of mystery is not that we know it and keep it secret, but that we know it only in part, and that it keeps disclosing more of itself to those of us who persevere with inquiring into it.

We may bring this risk upon us with the best of intentions, perhaps to counter some of the misinformation that abounds around us. As Claudy says, “the new brother who rushes to the defense of an Order which needs none may easily do more harm than good.”²

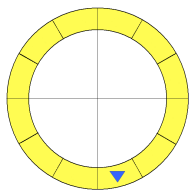
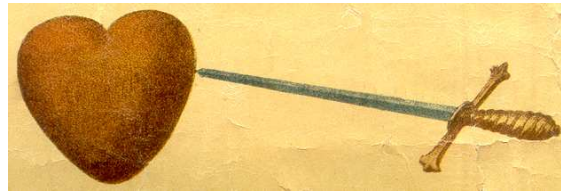
This first quadrant of the cycle, comprising these first three phases, corresponds to youth and to the first degree in Freemasonry, that of Entered Apprentice. We come into it prepared in our hearts for our new beginning, we are industrious in the acquisition of

² *Introduction to Freemasonry III, Master Mason*, p. 147.

useful knowledge, and we learn that circumspection which is an early hallmark of maturity.

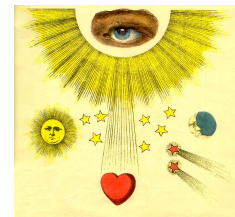
The Second Quadrant — Summer (Early Manhood)

The heart is where you were first prepared to be a Mason. You were hoodwinked, that your heart might be taught to conceive the mysteries of Masonry before your eye should discern anything of them. The heart of the Lodge is the altar with the three Great Lights, emblematical of the sanctum sanctorum or holy of holies of King Solomon's Temple, and of the corresponding adytum within the human heart.



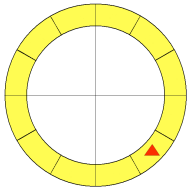
Home is where the heart is. This fourth phase of the cycle embraces the home and family, the seat of your emotional, gut-level security in the world. Home is where your heart is at ease and you are made whole and perfect. But perfection is not a state, it is a process. When we hear the word “perfect” in ritual, we should understand “complete,” its older and more etymological meaning. The scripture “be ye perfect, even as God is perfect” directs us to be whole.

The ritual refers to the inmost recesses of the human heart, where we are most deeply vulnerable, and tells us how the sword demonstrates that Justice will sooner or later overtake us even there. To demonstrate is to show or point out. The sword shows or points out our essential vulnerability, wherein nothing can be concealed from the All-Seeing Eye.



In this fourth phase of the cycle we are called to govern ourselves as though our covert actions, our whispered words, our inmost secret thoughts were published for all the world to know, for one day the hoodwink will be removed, you will be face to face with that Witness, and you will see that all has been known. There is One indwelling in your heart of hearts from Whom nothing is hid. Seek that Presence, and build there by prayer and meditation your true home, that sanctum sanctorum at the heart of the Temple of your being. The Greeks called it the Ἄδυτον or adytum, the “not-entered”. Post your Tyler against profane entry, and repair there daily to draw your designs upon your trestleboard.

Cardinal Water, the emotional and spiritual impulse of the Water of Life, touches not only on what nourishes and sustains us, but also on our capacity for giving from the heart to others. The opposite of charity is not selfishness, but indifference. There may seem to be nothing we can do for someone in distress without injury to ourselves or family, but this does not give us license to ignore them. We profess to be Masons. The tenets thereof are brotherly love, relief, and truth, and we are judged accordingly. If we do not relieve our fellow creatures who are in want, we will come to know it most keenly. That sharp sword will point out our lapses to us. The bite of conscience is but a foretaste. If we are not truthful to ourselves now, we surely will be then.



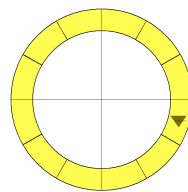
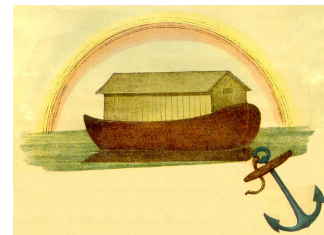
The Fifth phase of the cycle brings back the Fire element, that spirit of inspiration and initiative ever setting forth anew in the world. Fixed Fire takes form in all the products of our creativity, including our children. Where the fourth phase is turned inward to the Water of life, in this phase we put our best productions on stage for all the world to see. Our progeny—whether biological, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual—

embody our hopes for the future.

What Noah bore safely through the flood in his ark was not just those pairs of animals, but their future progeny. We cannot help but be creative, the work of that divine Fire through us must find expression, whether well or ill depends on how apt we make ourselves. But this is fixed Fire, Fire in perpetuity. Thought is father to words, words to deeds, which when repeated become habit, and habits constitute character.

Even so, all our creative products have further effects down the generations. For afterward Noah let the animals go. As Khalil Gibran said, “You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.” The bow must release the arrow, and likewise the arrow must release the bow. May the bow be stable (fixed). May our hope be well grounded. Albert Schweitzer observed that there are three ways to teach a child. The first is by example. The second is by example. And the third is by example. There is no better example than a life well lived.

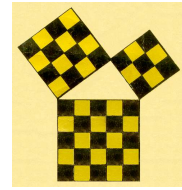
So also must we let all our creative products stand on their own merits. Pride goeth before a fall, it is said, but pride properly understood is a humbling sense of being honored. Whether it be pride in a child or a painting, in a well-turned phrase or a well-concluded contract, in a well-crafted building, a piece of furniture, or a piece of legislation—whatever it may be, that well-justified feeling of pride in it is the outward form of an inward sensibility of how great an honor it is to be a center of expression for that limitless creative Power which creates and sustains the universe. It is that understanding of our true roots in Life which safely wafts us over this tempestuous sea of troubles, rather than drowning in it, and it is our confident expectation, resting in the Author of our existence and the true Author of our children’s existence, that safely anchors us in a quiet harbor where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary shall find rest.



Just as the fifth phase of the cycle sets the outward projections of the creator and performer against the inward-turning virtues of home and hearth, so now the sixth phase brings this dichotomy down to the Earth element through work and service to others. Earth in its mutable mode is adaptable and conformable to need. This is where we put the impulses of the heart into practice, and where we demonstrate to our children how

best to live.

Euclid performed a great service by gathering together the scattered works of many mathematicians of Greece and other nations, and organizing them in a single compendium that was easy to reference. Without his labors in the Royal Library of Alexandria, this proof of the ratio of the sides of a right triangle, which had been discovered by our ancient friend and brother, the great Pythagoras, might have been lost forever, as was so much else.

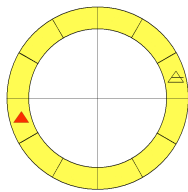


Originally the word geometry meant measurement of the earth.³ This science came evidently to Egypt from Babylonia, before that from Sumeria, and those mysterious tall northern people who the Sumerians declared had taught them all that they knew. However far this branch of mathematics has since been developed, its practical applications always recur to us. A geometric proof may be relied upon and put to service in other work, such as measuring from afar the height of a tree or a mountain, or verifying a true square for the work of architecture.

As the ritual tells us, geometry also has moral or philosophical applications that enable an aspirant to establish a metaphysical foundation under his thoughts, words and actions. In this essay we can only begin to touch upon this vast subject of sacred geometry,⁴ but hopefully in a way that encourages your further investigation.

This second quadrant is analogous to the first part of the phase of manhood, corresponding to the Fellowcraft degree up through the assiduous learning and growing experiences of the winding stairs, but not yet through the gates of the Middle Chamber. Ever mindful that even what we do in the bosom of the family is fully disclosed to that Divinity Who, though author of all that is, is nonetheless closer than breath to us—even to you, now, as you read these words—we stand upright as patterns and examples for our children, creatively applying such useful knowledge and skill as we have acquired, serving God and our fellows on this earth.

The Third Quadrant —Autumn (Mature Manhood)



With the Hourglass we enter the second half of the cycle, wherein all the symbolism alludes to the transience of life, and points toward death and beyond. This seventh phase is the opposite or complement of the first phase. We may term this polarity the axis of identification or identity. We see our reflection in the lives of others. We observe the stages of life in our fellows around us—some in the flush of youth putting forth the tender leaves of hope, some in the full blossom of adulthood, others

³ Greek γεωμετρία (*geometria*), compounded of *geo* “earth” + *metria* “measure”.

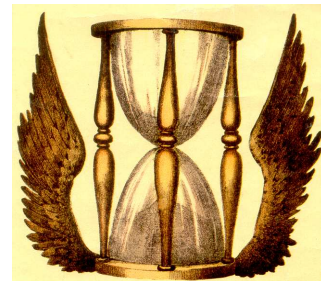
⁴ This includes more than geometry as we know it, even with its symbolic interpretations. In the Hebrew mystical tradition called Qabalah (signifying that which is received, *i.e.* mouth to ear), the pronunciation of Greek *geometria* changed to gematria by dropping the “o” sound, which is unstressed in Greek. Prior to the invention of Arabic numerals, letters in Hebrew, Greek, Phoenician, and other languages served double duty as numerals, and every word can be read as numbers. In addition to measurements, *e.g.* dimensions of the Temple or numbers fallen in battle, gematria discovers concealed meanings in equivalent numerical values of words, phrases, and names in scripture. Sometimes unusual spellings were introduced, perhaps during the Babylonian exile, to bring about a different numeration. In some of the rabbinical manipulations of these numbers we see the beginnings of what is now called number theory.

touched by the frost of advancing age. We recognize that we are on the same well-traveled path along the level of time. Knowing whence we have come and whither we are traveling helps us to make the best of our gifts and our opportunities in the time allotted to us.

These reflections direct our attention to those with whom we share our labors, knowing that we were made dependent on each other, and formed for social and active life. Independence is an illusion. The true virtue is not independence, but autonomy. Autonomy is mastery in one's proper domain. Such mastery requires us to manage with justice, that cement and support of civil society, the boundaries that join us with those around us, rendering unto each his just due without distinction.

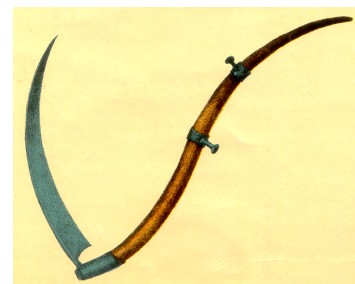
Each relationship holds up a mirror for us. It has become a truism of psychology that we project our "shadow self" onto despised others. The part of wisdom is to recognize ourselves in those aspects of others that we dislike as well as in what we like to see.

The hourglass, being formed of two equal containers fixed on either side of a center point, resembles the scales of justice, a traditional emblem associated with the seventh phase of the cycle and with the seventh astrological sign, Libra (a Latin word meaning a balance or scales). The reference is to one-on-one relationships, particularly in marriage. If we are fortunate, and cultivate wisdom, we discover how the personal initiatives of others, and their ways of expressing themselves, complement our own, so that together we who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance come together to comprise a whole far greater than the sum of its parts. This is the open secret of friendship and brotherly love, as well as of marriage.



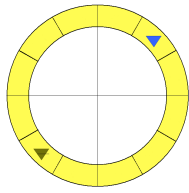
When the sands of the hourglass are exhausted, it is turned over to begin a new hour. The hourglass resembles a figure eight in shape, and 8 and 0 (zero) are the only two numerals that can be written over and over without lifting pen from paper, because the end is a new beginning. A figure eight turned on its side is the lemniscate, a symbol of infinity. Just so, when the hourglass is turned on its side, the sands cease to run. These thoughts, together with those of transformation and renewal, are excellent seeds for (and about) meditation.

The scythe is a symbol associated with Death, the Grim Reaper, yet our funeral ritual assures us "There is no death! What seems so is transition." Indeed, every transition is death in small. We learn in time that the tools that we wield also shape us. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."⁵ Whatever informs your mind forms you. Thought becomes word, word becomes deed, deed becomes habit, habit becomes character. Thus are our very persons formed and transformed, clay subject to the Craft. In each imperceptible step an aspect of the old personality dies and is replaced by something new, until in a thousand small transitions,



⁵ More fully, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Here, "prove" is δοκιμάζειν, meaning to test (literally or figuratively), and by extension to approve, discern, examine, or try, in a process of trial and error.

like the scarcely perceptible dropping of grains of sand in the hourglass, that which we once were is no more.



Here, we see the eighth segment opposite the second, in what we may term the axis of resources. The crucible in which we are transformed is that “social and active life” for which we humans are innately suited. We saw the beginnings of this in the seventh phase of the cycle, as hidden or denied aspects of ourselves are mirrored in our relationships to others.

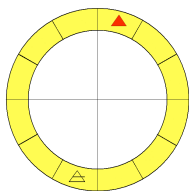
Here in the eighth phase of the cycle we are entangled with other people’s resources. What is mine and what is yours? What is ours together, and what is not ours but theirs? “Oh Death,” goes the old song, you can have my wealth, my lands, my worldly power “if you’ll spare me over to another year.” The Reaper turns a deaf ear to these pleas not only at the end of life but also in those countless changes and transitions in our fortunes that challenge us and change us. Ownership is as much a delusion as independence, and even as illusory independence is rightly understood as autonomy, just so ownership is transformed to stewardship. Mine, yours, ours, theirs, control, manipulation, loss, such are the flames that heat the crucible in which we are transformed.

More, all that is familiar in our material environment, whether treasured or casually used and disposed of, is part of a heritage built upon the industry of generations before us, of which we are temporary stewards, and what we make of it is what we shall bequeath to our descendants. Charity means caring—giving a damn, as the expression goes. Our care here and now reaches indeed beyond the grave.

The common gavel is said to be emblematic of that setting maul which figures so importantly in the story of Hiram Abiff. The setting maul is an implement used by operative masons to fix the stones of a foundation in place. As speculative Masons, we use it to firmly establish a foundation of principles on which

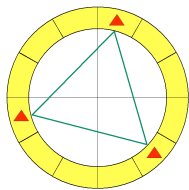


bring our thoughts, words, and actions into alignment with the unfolding design of the universe. Elsewhere in the ritual the common gavel is presented as an implement for shaping stones by breaking off their rough and superfluous parts, thereby disclosing the shape which is needful for the builder’s purpose. Bringing out what is latent is a function of education. Learning and education are in the 9th phase of the cycle, particularly philosophy, religion, and the broadening experiences that come with travel in foreign countries. These impart new information, but they also divest us of misconceptions and foolish prejudice.



The gavel is also an implement for asserting authoritative control over an assembly, as in a court of law or in a Lodge, curbing and directing talk in accord with guiding principles. Opposite this ninth phase, back in the third phase, the book of constitutions is guarded by the Tyler’s sword. We may call this polarity the axis of information. The Tyler governs himself and performs his office according to dictates laid down

by the Master with the gavel. A wider and deeper understanding of the symbolism of Masonry, its roots and history, enables us actually to convey even to the uninitiated a sense of the value of Masonry to a man and to mankind without disclosing the secrets of Masonry unlawfully, and in ways that invite further inquiry.

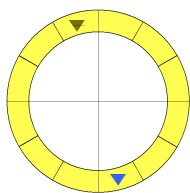


Phases with the same element work well together, and their characteristic activities support one another. This is the third and last of those phases that express the Fire element. Each has to do with the expansion, enrichment, and fulfillment of self expression, and tends to the realization of your best contribution to the improvement of the world, the benefaction of others, and your own satisfaction in life. They represent a fervent heart serving God and man, filled with gratitude for this life, well grounded in confident expectation of the future, and ever seeking deeper and broader knowledge and understanding. The Water, Air, and Earth elements each form a like triangle, each with its own particular qualities which in the interest of brevity we leave it to you to deduce.

The third quadrant is analogous to the second part of the age of manhood, corresponding to the completion of the Fellowcraft degree. Where the work of the First Degree, and even some of the Second, may be pursued as an individual brother in solitude, here we have seen emphasized the sense of the word “fellow”. Hewers in the mountains cannot work alone. The mountains are high and at times inhospitable places. The attainments of mathematics, science, and philosophy can seem too forbidding to undertake, and indeed one who is unprepared and without a guide may become lost in them, but the rewards to the serious worker are great indeed.

The Fourth Quadrant — Winter (Age)

Like the sword, the spade is also a sharp implement, one used in the work of construction, and like the gavel, it is used to remove that which is unnecessary. The gauge of what is necessary is the design drawn upon the trestleboard in the sanctum sanctorum. In the story of Hiram Abiff, the spade is used to dig a grave. The dimensions of the grave bear an obvious relation to the number 12. With or without an external marker or monument, the grave is an emblem of honorable regard, in obvious contrast to the dishonor of one’s body being given to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field as a prey.



Now we come to the axis of establishment. The tenth phase of the cycle is where we construct our outward achievements, our career, our position and status in the social and business world. It is opposite the fourth phase, your home, where you know in your heart what you have made of yourself. The man who lacks honest knowledge of himself as he is, naked before his Creator, has an unsure basis for what he makes of himself in the world. The result is a false self, a kind of masquerade or pretense. However grand his achievements in the eyes of the public, in his heart he feels himself an undeserving fraud, and all his works are unsatisfying to him. His career becomes a kind of grave in which his genuine identity and his highest purpose in God’s creation becomes buried. Many a man aspiring to some outward definition of greatness has constructed a public persona which, if he is fortunate, he comes to recognize, with a shock of awakening, as no more than a kind of mausoleum, a monument celebrating who he thought he wanted to be, or who someone else wanted him to be.

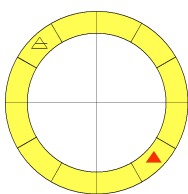
In the opposite phase, the fourth, we saw the sword of Justice. In medieval times, an actual sword of justice was purpose-made and reserved exclusively for the use of a sanctioned executioner.



Those vices and superfluities of life which we have not removed with the gavel cannot escape the sword. More than that, knowledge of immortality imparts a long perspective on this life, so that true villainy is only possible to one who believes that this short human existence is all there is.

A key to the polarity of these emblems is what is called a *gratitude attitude*. How much we owe to those who came before us! Think of our elder brethren in Masonry, who have so kindly preserved these signposts and landmarks for us. Think of those predecessors in business and society who established so many of the comforts and conveniences that today we take for granted as routine happenstances of life. Think of your personal ancestors, and all our ancestors of whose blood and toil we are beneficiaries. Thence surely comes a will to make of ourselves and of the materials that life affords us something for which those who come after us may be grateful, and this intention opens a path with heart.

In the eleventh phase of the cycle we come to the coffin (fixed Air), emblematical of that which held the remains of Hiram Abiff.⁶ This eleventh phase of the cycle encompasses those quintessentially Masonic virtues, friendship and brotherly love.

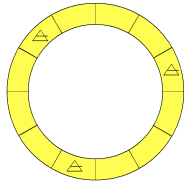


It corresponds to the zodiacal sign Aquarius, and indeed Masonry may be understood to be Aquarian in nature, working to build humanitarian, egalitarian, and democratic ideals into social institutions and practices. It is these great achievements in the amelioration of human social arrangements, so bravely set forth in the founding documents of the United States of America, which truly hold the worthy remains of great

Masons who have come before us, and which embody the virtues to which the Hiram legend emblematically alludes. Their achievements inspire us—and also enable us—to carry those ideals into more perfect realization.

For this is the polarity of inspiration, the social good above in the fourth quadrant in tension with personal creativity below in the third, mutually challenging and mutually inspiring, each at risk of becoming arid and meaningless without the other, the one a mere indulgence, the other an impersonal promotion of one or another idealistic “something-ism” without heart. The Air element may be thought of as the activities of spirit (from *spiritus*, the Latin word for breath) and of the mind. It is here in its resistive or fixed mode, Fixed Air. The mind is fixed, or stilled, in those states of meditation in which the virtues and spiritual remains of Hiram Abiff are discovered and best commemorated.

⁶ Elsewhere, we are told of an urn which is emblematical of that which held the ashes or mortal part of our Grand Master Hiram Abiff. There is no inconsistency; the value of the urn and the coffin as emblems requires no claim that they represent actual funereal practices in Solomon’s kingdom.



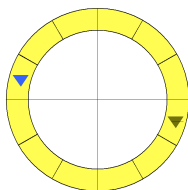
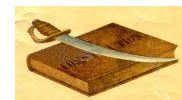
In the geometry of the symbolic circle of 12, our remembering and perfecting of these Hiramic virtues can draw on resources associated with two other emblems, the hourglass (cardinal Air) and the Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tyler's sword (mutable Air).

The seventh emblem, the hourglass, stands at the balance point where the waxing first half of the cycle turns to the waning second half. No man may corporeally diverge from the level of time, and we meet and work upon the level. We saw how the level scales or balance is associated with the seventh phase, as also with the zodiacal sign Libra. This cardinal Air phase of the third or harvest quadrant sets the theme of relationship with others, and the lesson of the pointing fingers—that even as we point our forefinger at another person, three other fingers of the same hand point back at ourselves.



With fixed Air in the eleventh phase, this self-awareness enables an objectivity and detachment from parochial prejudices that is essential for the cooperative creation and sustenance of humane customs and institutions, which are emblematically represented by the coffin commemorating those Hiramic virtues that we honor and celebrate.

And with mutable Air in the third segment, corresponding to talkative Gemini, we have seen in our consideration of the Tyler's sword guarding the Book of Constitutions the importance of disclosing only what is appropriate, only to whom, to a degree, and in a manner that is appropriate. To cast no pearls before swine is one reason, to be sure, but more importantly we each know from our own experience of improving ourselves in Masonry that the discovery of light is not suddenly and immediately complete, but rather is progressive with time and inward reflection. How foolish, then, to invite a superficial interpretation of our necessarily incomplete disclosure. A commitment must come first, a joining in our shared commitment to improve ourselves in Masonry. Then he may pass the Tyler's sword to where he may take in that light of which he is then capable, be exposed to further instruction, some of it probably corrective, and over time with the rest of us grow in capacity as well as in knowledge and even, as a certain blessing of Divinity, in wisdom.



The opposition of the Mutable twelfth and sixth segments we may call the axis of service. Whereas in the sixth (Virgoan) segment you create a social identity through work and service, this closing twelfth (Piscean) segment is all about selfless service, an aspect of what the Buddhists call

non-attachment.

The acacia or thorn tree has long been an emblem of renewal and immortality, not only because of its tenacity in desolate places, but also from the remarkable capacity of a cut branch or log of acacia to root and put out green shoots. Its North American cousin the locust tree is commonly used for fenceposts, which many a farmer has seen sprouting.

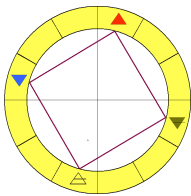
What is the nature of renewal? What is it to be made new again? Recall that the mutable segment of each quadrant assimilates and reconciles the



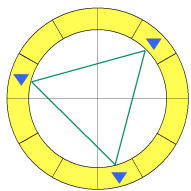
disparity of the cardinal and fixed segments that preceded it. Being in the last quadrant, this twelfth or Piscean segment in addition performs that service for the entire cycle. It completes the cycle and prepares for a greater one to be initiated in Fire. This is the tail of the serpent Ourobouros, which is swallowed up and consumed in its renewal.

Recall that in the first phase the ritual refers to a pure heart being an acceptable sacrifice to deity. This shows that the spirit of sacrifice does not die here, but is carried over to a new beginning.

Set athwart the mirrored pair of the twelfth and sixth phases, at right angles to this axis of service, is what we called the axis of information, the Mutable opposition of the loquacious third segment and the expansive, self-aggrandizing ninth segment. Their essential impulse is not particularly subservient; hence, the former must be constrained by the Tyler's sword and the latter disciplined under the gavel. These are but two examples of how the ritual not only enjoins us to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds, but also teaches us how.



These mutable segments are aligned in a square. The Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tyler's sword (mutable Air) is opposite the common gavel (mutable Fire). This axis of information reconciles the tension between identity (the Cardinal axis of the first and seventh phases) and resources (the Fixed axis of the second and eighth). The opposition of 47th problem of Euclid to the sprig of acacia, the axis of service, reconciles the tension between establishment (the Cardinal axis of the fourth and tenth phases) and extension (the Fixed axis of the fifth and eleventh phases). It takes work to make them work together, but the emphasis on service gives meaning to what might otherwise be an empty recital of what is known (or perhaps only opined), and the engagement with information gives bite, traction, and social significance to what might otherwise be misdirected subservience.

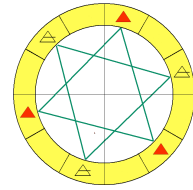


Look back now at the two phases that work best together with the twelfth, those of the Water element. Cardinal Water is the sword pointing to a naked heart in the fourth phase. The greatest secret hid from the eyes of man is our direct contact with the Divine. This is actually hidden in plain view, for though no man may look into the heart of another, yet each has only to repair to the sanctum sanctorum within his own heart to discover that whence we came and whither we are going. Fixed Water is the scythe in the eighth phase. "I die daily" said St. Paul. Each day the Scythe of Time harvests that which is ripe and lets the rest fall to nourish the black earth wherein we are nourished and grow.



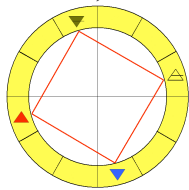
Geometry, the Basis of the Superstructure of Masonry

Other geometric relations follow from the properties of the number 12. Pythagoras taught that the odd numbers are masculine and the even numbers feminine, or yang and yin in the Chinese terminology. This is represented by the direction of the triangular symbols for the elements. Taken together, the Fire ▲ and Air △ elements, both masculine or Yang, form the two interlaced triangles that we recognize as the Star of David or Seal of Solomon. These all have a mutually supportive relationship to each other. The same principles apply to the feminine or yin Water ▼ and Earth ▽ elements.



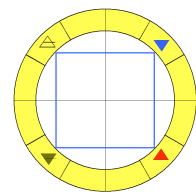
Each quadrant has a Cardinal, Fixed, and Mutable phase, in that order. We have just looked at the square formed by the Mutable phases of the circle. There are two other squares, the Cardinal square and the Fixed square.

Midway through the waxing half of any cycle, its initial inspiration (Cardinal Fire) meets with obstacles and challenges (Cardinal Water). Any achievements that weather that private, inward conflict become publicly evident at the “full moon” seventh phase (Cardinal Air), directly opposite the first phase. This opposition, you will recall, we called the axis of identity. Then midway through the waning half of the cycle, at the onset of the fourth quadrant, whatever it was that asserted that first challenge comes to its own full-moon expansion (Cardinal Earth), now presenting a second and more outward challenge. This opposition, we called the axis of establishment. (If these terms remind you of Boas and Jachin, you are on the right track, and should pursue your inquiry further.)



These two pairs of opposites, working at right angles to each other, suggest the dynamics of gender, which pervades all of creation. They are the diagonals of the Cardinal square, with its corners at the beginning of each quadrant. Among our 12 implements, the corners of this square are represented by the pot of incense (cardinal Air), the sword pointing to a naked heart (cardinal Water), the hourglass (cardinal Air) and the spade (cardinal Earth).

In the middle of each quadrant is a Fixed phase putting up resistance to the initiative of the Cardinal phase. The four fixed signs of the zodiac, Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, and Aquarius, are emblematically represented by the four creatures or cherubim of Ezekiel and Revelation, the bull or ox, the lion, the eagle,⁷ and the human or angel. These in turn are identified in Christian iconography with the four apostles Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Our emblems represent the bull by the beehive (fixed Earth), emblematical of industry; the lion by the anchor and ark (fixed Fire), emblematical of that which bodies forth our hopes for the future; the eagle by the Scythe (fixed Water), emblematical of transformation, including the great transition at the end of our earthly life; and the man or



⁷ The eagle represents a higher aspect than the scorpion. All of the symbolism of astrology figures strongly in works of the alchemists, viz. the “eagle-stone”. Their “interior stars” identified with the seven anciently known planets and the metals associated with them refer to what in the east are called chakras, a descriptive word which signifying “wheel” in Sanskrit.

angel by the coffin (fixed Air), emblematical of that which held the remains of Hiram Abiff.

The conflict of Cardinal and Fixed is reconciled by the following Mutable mode, preparing the way for the next Cardinal initiative.

In each of these square configurations, the opposite pairs are of the same gender (Fire ▲ and Air △, Water ▼ and Earth ▽), and the pairs that are not opposite each other are of opposite gender. The combinations in these square configurations indicate the work that is to be done, the challenges of life that require effort and attention. The triangular combinations, having the same element in common, are resources that we may draw upon as resources for this work.

By following the major geometric relationships in a cycle of 12 we have made a beginning at showing how the symbolism in the 12 emblems of the Third Degree inform each other and disclose further meanings to the inquiring mind. Some of the ideas and organizing principles may be difficult to integrate with what is already familiar to you. Take these as elemental Fire and Water, then, and with mental processes of contemplation and analysis (the Air element) may you extract substantial improvement in Masonry (Earth). May your further investigations into the symbol-language of our Masonic heritage be fruitful. So mote it be!