

**WHY MASONRY MUST TEACH BY SYMBOLS**  
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Men come to Masonry from every walk of life and every level of education. They bring with them temperaments of every quality, from stolidity to high imaginativeness. Some have the spirit of genius and while fools are barred from the institution, along with atheists and some others, we must admit that none of us are as brilliant intellectually as other Masons we could name.

Yet each of us finds a message in Masonry. Each of us learns from Masonry what his mind is prepared to learn. And from time to time, as he progresses, he learns new meanings and new thoughts, as much as he is capable of absorbing.

How then, can Masonry speak to each of us, yet at the same time avoid boring the intellectual Mason with elementary truths he already knows and not offend the slower-witted man by offering him more than he can comprehend? Especially, how can Masonry teach us its great truths without dogmatically defining what those truths are? And of course, dogmatic is one thing which Masonry definitely is NOT and can not be. Our institution leaves every member free to find what light and truth he can, and if what he finds does not happen to coincide with what some other brother has found, that is all right with Masonry.

So, the problem is, how shall our Institution convey a meaning, or several meanings, in a way equally acceptable to the plodder and the genius. The only way this can be done is through symbols, to which each of us may attach such meaning as we see fit.

It is true that explanations of some of the symbols are given and that some of the explanations seem to fall short of what they should be. Yet in the sum total, the explanations of symbols given in the ritual and the monitor do add up to a code of morality on which we can all agree. In fact, they spell out such a code as anyone applying for the degrees ought to have beforehand. Thus, the task of Masonry is to teach us to go beyond this simple but important morality and make ourselves better than we were when we became members.

So we have these explanations, this code, as a foundation on which to erect our own superstructure of additional or different meanings, for there are many symbols which have more than one meaning and there are many symbols which are not explained anywhere. For example, the lodge itself is a symbol. Haywood, in his *SYMBOLIC MASONRY*, lists more than 100 symbols which are familiar to all of us, plus many more that are not so readily recognized. For a number of these he gives three, or even four, different explanations.

So it is easy to see why Masonry, in some lectures, is defined as "a beautiful system of morality, taught in allegory and illustrated by symbols." Also, the allegories themselves contain symbols.

Masonry is not alone in the use of symbols to convey truths; men have been using symbols as far back as we know anything about civilized peoples. All the early religions made use of symbols. Christianity makes liberal use of them today. When the cathedral builders, those operative forebears of ours, adorned their churches with figures of saints they were using symbols to recall in the observer's mind the things he had been told about those saints.

On the other hand, symbols are often used to conceal at the same time that they reveal! They may have a plain and open meaning to anyone who has taken the degrees, a concealed message for the more advanced student of Masonry, and no meaning at all for the profane. And sometimes hidden meanings are to be found in words which rhetorically convey quite another message.

If I may venture a personal opinion--and of course all that I am saying is merely my own opinion -- we speak of a certain instrument one way in the first and second degrees and quite another way in the third degree.

I feel that while both those explanations are correct and proper there is a hidden meaning. I also feel that I am far from knowing all that this valuable instrument could teach if only my mind were ready to receive the message.

Then notice the use of the word "conferred." Is not that a symbol of the search for further light which the candidate is expected to undertake and to carry on all his life ? And yet, it has a perfect, plain, open, meaning aside from its symbolical meaning.

To see how different Masonic scholars read different meanings into a single symbol, let us consider a single one, the Cable Tow.

The Standard Dictionary says the Cable Tow is a symbol of the bond which holds Freemasons together.

Albert Pike traced the word to the Hebrew Khabel, which meant "a rope attached to an anchor" and also meant "to bind as with a pledge." Haywood quotes unnamed other sources as holding the cable-tow to be a symbol of man's ignorance and lust, from which his Masonic initiation and progress are to free him. Arthur Edward Waite sees in the cable tow a reference to the umbilical cord which binds a baby to its mother. J.T. Lawrence sees it as a mystic tie binding the candidate to God, to Masonry and to righteousness. Churchward sees in it a reference to a chain which candidates for certain Egyptian mysteries were compelled to wear around their necks "to signify their belief in God :and their dependence upon Him." Who shall say which is right?

Or are all of them right, for whatever meaning a man may find in a symbol is true for him and the exact opposite of it may be true for the Brother sitting beside him. I never could understand this paradox until, a few years ago, I read a quotation from a professor of philosophy at, I believe, Columbia.

When this question came up in class, he asked his students to assume they were an art class, each one drawing a picture of a statue of Truth standing in the middle of the room. Naturally, as the students were ranged about the room, each had a different viewpoint and sketched a different picture. But though different, all the pictures represented Truth.

How wise, then, our early speculatives! How wise the men who seized upon the decaying and poverty-stricken guild of stone-masons and transformed it by means of its own and added symbols into an institution whose great aim is to make the whole world free! As free to think its own thoughts, choose its own God and worship in its own way as we are in Freemasonry. How wise they were not to attempt to fasten down, in precise terms, all that Masonry means, but gives us only enough to live by while we pursue Truth among the symbols.