

The Square – Its History & Morals

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The square, to which we refer so often in Freemasonry, is described in the "Working Tools" as an instrument to try and adjust rectangular corners of buildings, and to assist in bringing rude matter into due form. This dispels, at once, the common conception of a four-sided figure whose sides and angles are equal and throws us back on the instrument which may be described as a base with a perpendicular forming an angle of 90 degrees. With very few exceptions, the square, when referred to in Freemasonry, means an instrument forming an angle tested to 90 degrees.

The frequent mention of the square in the Masonic ritual, and the moral significance which the Free and Accepted Masons associate with the working tools in general, and the square in particular, makes us desire to know its origin, to better enable us to understand the application of the instrument to the spiritual side of our Masonic lives.

There is no word in our mother tongue where the etymology of such exhibits such a glorious array of fine attributes as does the word square. Looking up the word in a dictionary we find amongst its many meaning namely the following: a mathematical instrument for measuring right angles, forming a right angle, true, upright, honest, just, to adjust, and to regulate. Such a record must commend the word to our special attention. The understanding of the word and its attributes must make us feel the reality of its use, not only as an instrument used in architecture, but as one of the most important of the working tools of the Craft as used in the Masonic ritual.

There is no wonder that the square with such glorious traditions should have been selected as the emblem of the Worshipful Master. Every sentiment of our ritual and every act of, our Masonic lives is controlled by the square.

That the candidate for initiation is taken from the rough quarry of the world and after being selected as a fit and proper subject and passed through various trials, he comes to that beautiful obligation. Unknown or unrealized at the time he stands on the square, and in a square, for the arms of the square, as it lies on the Volume of the Sacred Law appears to embrace him during the utterance of this solemn obligation.

What more fitting attitude and place could be found for so solemn and intense a ceremony? He is then entrusted with certain sign, tokens and words, and these are given to him as he stands on the square, his first step in Masonry is also on the square.

The charge after initiation is always an impressive item to the Entered Apprentice, for it is doubtful whether, in the whole Masonic ritual, there is any sentence which expresses more fully and establishes more firmly the bond of brotherly love and fellowship, than the opening words of the "charge" of his duty to his neighbour by acting with him on the square.

The rude matter of the Enter Apprentice is thus brought into the form of the rough ashlar, ready for the greater trials, before he represents the smooth, exact and perfect one, to be tried by the square and compasses before being raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason.

Nor is the square used on the candidates and initiates only. In opening the Lodge in the various degrees, the Worshipful Master interrogates the Junior Warden, and he has to rely on the square to satisfy the Worshipful Master, before the opening of the Lodge into a higher degree is proceeded with. And so throughout the whole conduct of Masonic business, the square is evident in many and various ways, and the frequent casual enquiry "Are you on the square?" means, in the fullest sense are you a Freemason.

The square is the only instrument which may be termed universal. A square, namely, a right angle is always a right angle and consequently, every object, whether a stone, wood, iron, brick, or anything else when trued to the square, will fit with its fellow, which has also been brought to perfection by the use of the same instrument. Hence every Freemason trued to the square, will be able to take his place in the Great Brotherhood, composed of other men who have been perfected by the instrument. The square, as a symbol in speculative Freemasonry, has presented itself from the very beginning of the revival period. In the very earliest catechism dating back to 1725, we find the answer to the question. How many make a Lodge? God and the square, with five or seven perfect Masons. God and the square, religion and morality, must be present in every Lodge, as governing principles. Signs at that early period were to be made by squares, and the furniture of the Lodge was declared to be the bible, compasses and square. In all rites and in all languages where Freemasonry has penetrated, the square has preserved its primitive signification as a symbol of morality.

Finally, when it comes to your time, and mine, to face the Great Judge of the Dead, on His square seat of judgment, we shall not be able to plead that we were ignorant. Our Freemasonry teaches us what to do, and how to do it. We shall be judged by the way in which we have carried out the great tenets of Freemasonry in our daily lives, and we shall know that whatever sentence is meted out to us then, it will be the squarest of all square judgments, and given on the square. May the G.A.O.T.U. grant that when the summons comes for us to attend the Great Lodge above, that we may be found in possession of the password, which will admit us to the presence of the Great Architect, and there, with him, to shine as the stars for ever and ever.

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