

An Oration on The Significance Of The Masonic Temple

By W. Bro. Rev. J. K. Davies P.A.G.C

Provincial Grand Chaplain of the Provincial Grand Lodge of South Wales Western Division

Before considering the significance of the Masonic Temple we should first establish the origin and source of our Lodge rooms.

According to research made by W.Bro.Rev. Neville Barker Cryer, the first source of our Lodge room was an open yard, which was used by working or operative masons. Some Lodge rooms today portray an open yard by having the ceiling painted blue and then placing stars thereon to represent an open sky.

If you look around the Lodge you will see signs of a workman's yard; for example, we have the rough ashlar for the Entered Apprentice to work on and the smooth ashlar for the Fellow Craft. We also see the various tools used by the mason - the mallet and chisel; the square, level and plumb rule; and the skirret, pencil and compasses. These tools and many other objects constantly remind us of the original workplace of the operative mason.

As it was not practical to work in an open yard in inclement weather, a lean-to was built against the wall of the building they were working on, be it a castle, church or cathedral. In mediaeval times, this lean-to was known as an 'allodgement', and it is from this word that the word 'Lodge' is derived. In time, the temporary shelter was made stronger and more secure, with stone walls, a door and a tiled roof. It was in that room that masons held their private meetings; and that is what we do today. Freemasons meet privately, not secretly, in a lodge and a tiler keeps it secure.

The second source of our Lodge rooms may be found in the Mediaeval Guilds. It is from these Guilds that we get the names of most of our officers. Also derived from the Guilds is the banner, the alms box, the ballot box, the candlesticks, the wands, and not least, the Bible, which, with their chaplain, reminded the guildsmen that they were ultimately in the presence, and acting with the guidance of God. And so what we do in a Lodge room today is to combine the old yard and the Guildhall, by putting the square and compasses on top of the open Bible whenever the Lodge room is used for a Masonic meeting.

The third source of our Lodge room is no less than the Temple of Solomon, and this is where we find the origin of the Mosaic pavement of black and white squares. This became the norm in all lodges as the old engravings and paintings of Solomon's Temple show the floor as being composed of black and white squares. Thus, the floors of our Lodges, be they carpet or tiles, are a representation of Solomon's Temple. When a new Lodge is consecrated, or a new Lodge room dedicated, the ceremony takes place at the centre of such a carpet. It is called 'Mosaic' because the Temple design was derived from the Tabernacle in the wilderness made by Moses and his associates, Aholiab and Bezaleel.

If we look around our Masonic Temples we will find further examples which originated from Solomon's Temple. We see the 'throne' of Solomon, on which the Worshipful Master sits; the pedestals, and the two great pillars, which once stood in the west of a lodge, and still do in some Lodges; however, nowadays they are relegated to the Wardens' pedestals and called columns. The columns belong to the portico of King Solomon's Temple and may also be seen on the First Degree Tracing Board. So when a Lodge is opened, the Temple is symbolically present. This dedication ceremony should rekindle within us the ideals and principles of Masonry. It should also take us back, in our imagination, to that great ceremony when the Temple at Jerusalem was solemnly dedicated by King Solomon to Almighty God.

A Lodge, however, is not a material thing, of stone and metal and wood. It is composed of the living souls of men who are bound together in the ties of Speculative Masonry. The Lodge is the past and present members, as well as those who are to come. The Masonic Lodge is the outward means through which the great principles of Freemasonry may influence the lives of all those who could learn to know their truth and their meaning. When we look around us in the world today, we cannot doubt that the need to practice the sound principles of Masonry is greater than ever before. Therefore, brethren, we face a challenge. The work within our Masonic Temples, by its very nature, fosters and develops our great traditions, thereby rendering an incalculably important service to the brethren and, through them, to society in general. As in the case of King Solomon's Temple we, as Freemasons, can withdraw into our lodges from the rush of the busy world, and in a quiet and solemn atmosphere, find inspiration to put into practice, in the world outside, the lessons we derive from our Masonic principles.

May the blessing of the G.A.O.T.U. rest upon you, and inspire you to strive for the most complete fulfillment of the task which faces you, and strengthen your ability to carry out the tenets of our Craft – the practice of every moral and social virtue, and our great principles of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth prevail.