



“The Brazen Pillars”

Lodge Presentation:

The following short article is written with the intention to be read within an open Lodge, or in fellowship, to all the members in attendance. This article is appropriate to be presented to all Fellowcraft and Master Masons. Fellowcraft Masons should be invited to attend the meeting where this is presented. Following this article is a list of discussion questions which should be presented immediately following the presentation of the article.

The Brazen Pillars

In the Fellowcraft degree, we are introduced to the two brazen pillars in the middle chamber lecture. And while there are many details regarding the pillars and what is on them such as the lilies, and the pomegranates, etc., we will concentrate on the symbolism of the pillars themselves. (For details on what adorned the pillars, besides listening to or learning the middle chamber lecture, one can find the details in the Bible, 1 Kings 7 15-21 as well as 2 Chronicles 3 15-17, and 4, 11-13).

The pillars stood upon the porch of the temple of King Solomon. They were more for ornament than for actually supporting any structural part of the temple. Many temples in that day had two similar pillars. Likeness of these pillars goes back to the worship of the Sun God, Ra, of ancient Egypt, and the obelisks. The pointed part atop the obelisks was to symbolize the sun's rays spreading out in all directions.

In the Fellowcraft degree, we begin with the candidate standing or passing between the two pillars. In “The Symbols of Freemasonry” by Daniel Beresniak, he says, “The two pillars mark the passage from one place to a quite different one; they represent the mythological pillars of Hercules which were thought to stand at Gibraltar. They announce the departure from a familiar world to an unknown one.” This could mean that he is continuing his journey from profane to enlightenment. The familiar might be the life he lived before he came to be a mason, and the “unknown” may be the illumination that yet awaits him beginning with the winding staircase. He goes on to talk about the two pillars representing Duality. Insert your duality here – Yin and Yang, Light and Dark, Good and Evil, Physical and Spiritual. As the candidate stands between these pillars representing duality, it is for him to reconcile duality in himself.

What helps bring this to light to me is the two spheres atop the pillars, one terrestrial and one celestial. In the Emerald Tablet of Hermes, we see this depicted in the words, “As above, so below,” in Christian prayers we hear this as, “On earth as it is in Heaven.” Scientists might allude to this as a “microcosm of the macrocosm.” Symbolically, the candidate is reconciling good and evil, right and wrong, his physical desires and his spiritual aspirations within himself.

With the candidate standing between the two pillars, he now becomes that third pillar. There are many connotations here. Three is a very Masonic number. There is the youth of the Entered Apprentice, Manhood of the Fellowcraft, and Age of the Master Mason. The candidate is representing the second chapter on this journey, which is Manhood. The three pillars of Masonry



“The Brazen Pillars”

are Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. If Jachin and Boaz denote Wisdom and Strength, the candidate becomes the pillar of Beauty that adorns.

Timothy Hogan, in his book, “The 32 Secret Paths of Solomon,” examines the influence of the Qabalah in Freemasonry. The three pillars also exemplify the 3 pillars in the Tree of Life. He once again alludes to the two pillars on the outside representing opposite forces being reconciled by the candidate in the middle. “The events in the degree initiations of Freemasonry make it clear that the first degree emphasizes one side of the body, the second emphasizes the other side, and the third degree balances everything out... the Tree then, becomes a model of ourselves, and a model of our Lodge/Temple.” (For those interested in esoterica, this is an interesting read as it applies to Freemasonry.)

Both Claudy, in his “Introduction to Freemasonry” – Fellowcraft edition, and Roberts, in his book, “The Craft and its Symbols” allude to another interpretation of the pillars. They speak of the one denoting strength or power, and the other denoting control or choice. Roberts says, “If you passed these pillars with understanding, if you realize that Power without control is dangerous, you have learned the lesson taught by the symbolism of the pillars.” Claudy says, “Before him are spread the two great essentials of all success, all greatness, all happiness. Like any other power – temporal or physical, religious or spiritual – Freemasonry can be used well or ill. Here is the lesson set before the Fellowcraft; if he, like David, would have his kingdom of Masonic manhood established in strength, he must pass between the pillars with understanding that power without control is useless, and control without power is futile.”

He goes on to illustrate that fire helps to cook our food, and create steam and heat for good, but also can burn down houses and forests. Dynamite, while helpful in building tunnels and clearing stumps, also maims and kills in war. We have all heard the old adage, “with great power comes great responsibility.” This may be, for many, a new way of looking at the meaning of the brazen pillars, but it is one that has many real life applications. How often do we read about big business, politics and countries who abuse power for their own gain? Who do you know at work or in your community who could benefit from this principle?

So, as you have seen, there are many ways of interpreting the brazen pillars. As the candidate stands amid the pillars and reconciles the duality, so too, must each person interpret the symbols in a way that resonates with their own life journey. We are all vast enough to contain within us all of duality. It is our duty as masons to find that balance within us that allows us to be the best version of ourselves for our fellow man, our families and our community.

Written by W. Brother Todd Krohn for the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin Education Committee
Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of Wisconsin



“The Brazen Pillars”

Discussion Questions

The following discussion questions are written to be presented immediately following the presentation of the topic above. There is no right or wrong answers to these questions, they are designed to promote thought and engage all the members that are present in conversation. Take care that the presentation of the topic and the discussion questions does not exceed 30 minutes. The presenter can present any part of the questions below, or any additional questions, he feels is appropriate.

- What was your first impression when you first viewed the pillars in your Fellow Craft degree?
- What is your interpretation of the meaning of the Brazen Pillars?
- Beresniak talks about the pillars representing a “passage from one place to a quite different one... the departure from a familiar world to an unknown one.” How has your life changed since becoming a Mason?
- The idea of ascension is common in Freemasonry. What are some other examples of how this idea is represented in our ritual?
- The balance between the physical and spiritual is another representation of the pillars. What symbol or tool in the EA degree also addresses balancing these two as part of its message? (Hint: it addresses work/life balance)
- It has been said, “Freemasonry builds its temples in the heart of men.” Many of the most “spiritual” people I know, also take great care of the physical bodies. How do you (or how can one...) balance your physical needs with your spiritual aspirations in your personal life?
- Claudy said, “Power without control is useless (or dangerous). Control without power is futile.” In your interpretation, what does he mean by this?
- Hogan says, “The tree then, becomes a model of ourselves, a model of our lodge/temple.” Using your understanding of the three pillars, the Qabalah, or any of the related symbolism, express your interpretation of how this is a model of ourselves or lodge/temple.
- In what other ways has the symbolism of the Brazen Pillars affected you as a man and a Mason?