



## “The Letter ‘G’”

### ***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 Letter ‘G’**

The letter ‘G’ would seem at first glance to be a fairly straight forward subject, but you would be surprised by the amount of papers and research on the topic. We are taught in our Fellowcraft degree that there are two meanings, the first being that it is the initial for Geometry, the first and noblest of the sciences, and a second that it alludes to the sacred name of Deity. In the mid 1700’s, the letter “G” was so closely identified with Fellowcrafts that you find them referred to as letter “G” men. But as you trouble yourself to do further research, you can find that the allusion to deity is a more recent connection.

Even the use of the letter ‘G’ embedded in the Square & Compasses symbol is more common to the Masons of North America. No one knows exactly when the letter G become part of the Square & Compasses, but many Masonic scholars believe it happened here in the United States somewhere between 1730 and 1768. There is evidence of Paul Revere having cast a brass specimen as early as 1796. This combination is not used in most other jurisdictions around the world. In fact, the interlaced Square & Compasses only surfaced during this same period, and before was most often shown as separate.

The fact that the letter ‘G’ is aligned to Geometry is disputed by no one and can be traced back to documents as early as 1410 and even to the Regis Poem. Secondary meanings though, have several paths of teachings and historical significance. The first time that the letter "G" was used as anything other than Geometry is in one of the early 18th century English Exposures (Richard), about 1727. The real story about the letter G is not so much where it came from but how it gradually changed its original meaning and how it is that this new meaning has now become the predominant one. Even Mackey, generally considered a conservative, wrote as Grand Master: "It is to be regretted that the letter G as a symbol was ever admitted into the Masonic system", and was inclined to throw the symbol out altogether.

Some believe that Freemasonry became less active in the seventeenth century, as the operative element of the Craft died out, and had fewer lodges in existence, so that Freemasons themselves lost the old explanation of the letter G. They retained the symbol though because it



## “The Letter ‘G’”

was a part of the system which they inherited. Here’s some of the existing theories of the letter “G”:

- Gimel (in slightly different forms) being the 3rd letter of many Semitic languages including Phoenician, Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Syriac. The number 3 is special in Masonry as well as in some religions. English, "younger" than the "ancient" languages, like others, had changes from the ancient languages moving the letter “G” from the 3<sup>rd</sup> position.
- The first letter of the G.A.O.T.U. (Grand Architect of the Universe). In some early works of Masonry, the reference is to the Grand *Geometrician* of the Universe.
- In early English Masonry, the letter G was taken to denote "glory, grandeur and geometry", Glory for GOD, Grandeur for the Master of the Lodge, and Geometry for the Brothers.
- In Ireland the letter "G" represents a word of importance to those who have served as Master of a lodge.
- By the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries in England, the letter G was more commonly taken to have a symbolic meaning of God as compared to Geometry.
- Another proposed hypothesis is based on the fact that three geometrical forms appear in the Greek alphabet, as we have seen; Gamma (G) is a square standing on end, the horizontal arm extended to the right. Omicron (O) is a circle, Delta (D) is a triangle. Writing one letter on top of another to form a monogram is very old. The three Greek letters may be combined in a monogram to form a very fair representation of our letter “G” inside a triangle which looks not unlike our modern square and compasses!
- It may originally be based on an old Egyptian snake emblem; others hold that it was originally the square made "gallows shape," and that this gradually became corrupted into a “G”.

In conclusion, Harry Carr, a modern Masonic scholar, believed there is a tremendous amount of supporting material that the Letter “G” originally meant Geometry and, gradually, when the new Second Degree was established in the eighteenth century and when the needs of the Craft required, “G” also came to represent God, although the original geometrical meaning has never disappeared, at least in our work.

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Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of Wisconsin



## “The Letter ‘G’”

### 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.*

- Is it appropriate for “G” to represent God when in very few modern languages does it start with the Letter “G”?
- With so many theories and no real documented history, did early Speculative Freemasons just need for the Letter “G” to mean something more than Geometry?
- Mackey had strong feelings that the Letter “G” and secondary meanings defocused the craft from roots of Geometry. They were unpopular views at the time. Why do you think he took this position?
- Of the two predominant meanings of the Letter “G” in our ritual, which do you identify with the most, and why?
- How has either meaning helped guide you in your life as a Mason?
- While the reference to the Letter “G” appears in the Fellowcraft degree, there are other references to its meaning throughout our ritual. What are some of them?
- It is easy to understand how the reverence for Deity is important to the lives of Freemasons. How does an improved understanding of Geometry help us to be better men?
- It is not uncommon for symbols to have multiple meaning in Freemasonry. What are some other symbols with multiple meanings?