



“The Lion’s Paw”

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 Master Masons**.*

***Master 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 following the presentation of the article.*

The Lion’s Paw

During the third section of the Master Mason degree, we are introduced to the Hiram Legend. The candidate, representing Hiram Abif, is raised from his make shift grave by the help of the strong grip of a Master Mason, or Lion’s Paw.

While it is unclear exactly when the term “Lion’s Paw” was first actually used in Masonic Ritual, the 5 points of fellowship are mentioned in the Edinburgh Manuscript from 1696. It is unknown whether the “Lion’s Paw” was part of those 5 points at the time. “Hand to hand” is mentioned, but there is no mention of how the grip was made.

What is the meaning of this Lion’s Paw, and when and why was it placed into the ritual?

To understand why they used the term “Lion’s Paw”, we need to examine one of the overarching themes of the 3rd degree, or Hiram Legend. The Hiram Legend is a story of “rebirth”. It is about the resurrection of Hiram Abif, as well as the candidate himself. The candidate symbolically “dies” to his past, the life of the profane, not knowing light, and is “reborn” into further light in Masonry. He puts his past life behind him and is now a seeker of enlightenment and moral rectitude.

Many sources relate the Lion’s Paw to the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah”. The Lion, a noble and strong animal, was part of the standard or banner of the Tribe of Judah. In the Holy Bible, Master Masons Edition, we are told that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah “is Messianic, and refers to Christ, the anointed of God, and royal head of God’s kingdom”. (Claudy, in his Introduction to Freemasonry series, also mentions that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah was also one of Solomon’s titles).

The Comacines, the great Cathedral Builders of the Middle Ages, who were always so loyal to the Scriptures, frequently used the lion in their sculptures. Of this, Leader Scott, the great authority on the Comacines, writes that, “My own observations have led me to the opinion that in Romanesque or Transition architecture, i.e., between A.D. 1000 and 1200, the lion is to be found between the columns and the arch—the arch resting upon it. In Italian Gothic, i.e., from A.D. 1200 to 1500, it is placed beneath the column. In either position its significance is evident. In the first, it points to Christ as the door of the church; in the second, to Christ, the pillar of faith, springing from the tribe of Judah.” Since it is possible that the cathedral builders were among the ancestors of Freemasons, it is also possible that the Lion symbolism was inherited from the Comacines.

Albert Pike, in his “Morals and Dogma”, gives this interpretation of our legend, saying “The Lion of the House of Judah is the strong grip, never to be broken, with which Christ of the Royal Line of



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that House, has clasped to Himself the whole human race and embraces them in His wide arms as closely and affectionately as Brethren embrace each other on the five points of fellowship."

The Lion’s Paw blog says, “Applying this symbolism to the candidate, it means that he entered the Lodge as a natural man, lost in sin and spiritually buried. By the strong Grip of the Lion’s Paw, he is raised again to a new life, or born again to spiritual righteousness, standing, again in a living perpendicular with a purified inner self accomplished through the direct action of the Redeemer, who was the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”

As to the actual form of the grip of a lion’s paw, H.L. Haywood, in his book Symbolical Masonry, offers this explanation,

“The crux ansata was, as Miss Harrison (J. E. Harrison, in her very interesting little book on "Ancient Art and Ritual) truly says, the symbol of life. Originally a stick, with a cross-piece at the top for a handle, it was used to measure the overflow of the Nile: but inasmuch as it was this overflow that carried fertility into Egypt, the idea of a life-giving power gradually became transferred to the instrument itself, in the same manner that we attribute to a writer’s "pen" his ability to use words. A few of our Masonic expositors, among whom Albert Pike may be numbered, have seen in the crux ansata the first form of that Lion’s Paw by which the Masonic Horus is raised. If this be the case, the Lion’s Paw is a symbol of life-giving power...”

So, the Lion’s Paw is about personal transformation. The candidate, in the third degree, is raised by the Lion’s Paw, “the symbol of life giving power”, by a trusted brother. While he has been shown more light in each step of his journey thus far, this “rebirth” or symbolic “resurrection” he goes through in the third degree is almost like a “Rite of Passage” in a way. While he has made smaller steps along the way, this is his bigger leap to really make that commitment that he will live his life in accordance to the principles of Freemasonry. He makes this commitment because he has symbolically “died to the past”, the way he used to talk, act and think, and is now surrounded by brothers and lodges that will help him to live a life that exemplifies moral rectitude and right conduct.

So the next time you see a brother getting raised by the Lion’s Paw (or if you think back to your raising), hopefully you will be able to have a sense of the rich history that went into why you were being raised by that specific grip and not just some plain handshake.

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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.

- We once again visit the notion that the candidate is moving from the darkness of the past to the light. Can you think of another time, (perhaps in the beginning of the second section of the EA degree), where the candidate symbolically begins his journey from darkness to light, even partially?
- We talked about personal transformation. However, this isn’t the first taste of personal development or transformation in the ritual. Starting back in the EA catechism, what did the Senior warden say he was here to do?
- Can you think of any other symbols or ritual that alludes to the candidate’s journey of self-improvement or personal transformation?
- The idea of personal growth and transformation is consistent throughout the Masonic degrees. How is this idea supported by the notion of Masonic education?
- In our ritual, the lions paw is given to the candidate by King Solomon. Do you think this was coincidental? If so, why? If not, why not?
- The use of the lion’s paw in our ritual may seem more functional than symbolic to the candidate and therefore the symbolism may not be immediately obvious. What are some other aspects of our ritual that the symbiology may not be immediately obvious?