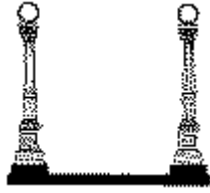


Two Pillars



Centennial Daylight Lodge No. 679
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Few references in Freemasonry are less understood than the two brazen pillars in the porch of King Solomon's Temple. Probably a greater mass of misinformation exists regarding these than any other symbol in the Craft.

Modern Freemasons have composite pillars, a fusing of the ancient and the mythical pillars on which were supposed to be engraved the arts and sciences of the time before the flood, and those which Hiram Abif erected - undoubtedly with Egyptian influences and memories of Egyptian Temples to guide him - before the great house of the Lord which Solomon built.

The fascinating, if wholly legendary, history of the Craft, repeated with variations in the majority of the old manuscript rolls, beginning with the Regius of 1390, is older than any Freemasonry we know in practice. The story varies from manuscript to manuscript, but in its essentials is much the same - it was evidently a tradition as strong in its day as is our legend of Hiram.

How high were the pillars? A question which has agitated Freemasonry - largely without reason - for many years! Some rituals state that they were thirty-five cubits in heights, some eighteen, some thirty. A few do not give the height at all.

To know the "actual" size of the pillars, it is necessary to know the length of a cubit. And here is room for speculation and many authorities! The Abingdon Bible Commentaries says: "The common cubit, equal to about 18 inches, the longer Royal cubit to about 20-1/2 inches." John Wesley Kelchner, whose restorations of King Solomon's Temple are to be found in Masonic Bibles, considers the cubit to be equal to two feet. The Standard Dictionary gives the cubit as the measure of length determined by the average arm from elbow to middle finger tip. The Britannica considers that the Temple cubit must have been in excess of 25 inches, Canon J.W. Horsley, Past Grand Chaplain, England, who has studied and written much upon the pillars, give a table of sizes in which the cubit is but 14 2/5 inches.

Many rituals set forth the fact that Hiram cast the pillars on the plains of the Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarthan, or Zeredetha. Both I Kings and II Chronicles are authority for the statement. But if there ever existed a "clay ground" in the location specified, it has disappeared and left no trace. Explorations (Lynch in 1847, Ridegway in 1874 not only found no clay ground, but no trace of smelters, furnaces, or other means of melting and casting brass. The point is of little importance - the pillars and the Temple vessels were cast, somewhere.

All this is more interesting than important. The symbolical meaning of the pillars is the vital matter to Freemasons. In the eyes of critical scholarship, the ancient meaning was of the might and majesty of Deity. From the dawn of religion the pillar, monolith or built up, has played an important part of the worship of the Unseen. From the huge boulders of Stonehenge, among which the Druids are supposed to have performed their rites, through East Indian temples, to the religion of ancient Egypt, scholars trace the use of pillars as an essential part of the religious worship; indeed, in Egypt the obelisk stood for the very presence of the Sun God himself.

The ancient believed the earth to be flat and that it was supported by two Pillars of God, placed at the western entrance of the world as then known. These are now called Gibraltar, on one side of the strait and Cueta on the other.

Some writers have suggested that the pillars represent the masculine and feminine elements in nature; others, that they stand for authority of Church and State, because on stated occasions the high priest stood before one pillar and the King before the other. Some students think that they allude to the two legendary pillars of Enoch, upon which, tradition informs us, all the wisdom of the ancient world was inscribed in order to preserve it from inundations and conflagrations. William Preston supposed that, by them, Solomon had reference to the pillars of cloud and fire which guided the Children of Israel out of the bondage and into the promise land

Therefore these pillars at Jerusalem, built, like the Temple itself, by Phoenician workmen, were probably intended to be symbols of the Deity; they were an artistic refinement of the Mezzabah, or stone obelisk which, at many Israelite sanctuaries, still stood beside the altar in much later days. But it does not necessarily follow that Solomon and his subjects so interpreted the significance of these novel and foreign brass objects: for them the Ark in the 'oracle' seemed to have symbolized Jehovah.

The Entered Apprentice in the process of being passed to the degree of Fellowcraft "passes between the pillars." No hint is given that he should pass nearer to one than the other; no suggestion is made that he either may work a greater influence than the other. He merely passes between.

Freemasonry passes a brother in the process of becoming a Fellowcraft between the pillar of strength - power; and the pillar of establishment - choice or control. He is a man now and no minor or infant. He has grown up Mosonicly. Before him are spread the two great essentials to all success, all greatness, and 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 the understanding that power without control is useless, and control without power, futile. Each is a compliment of the other; in the passage between the pillars the Fellowcraft not only has his feet set upon the Winding Stairs but is given - so he has eyes to see and ears to hear - secret instructions as to how he shall climb those stairs that he may, indeed, reach the Middle Chamber. He is to climb by strength, but directed by wisdom; he is to progress by power, but guided by control, he must rise by the might that is in him, but arrive by the wisdom of his heart.

So considered, the inaccuracies and misstatements of ritual regarding the pillars become relatively unimportant; whether eighteen of thirty-five cubits high, whether cast in one place or another, whether or not surmounted in Solomon's day with globes terrestrial and celestial, matter little. The lesson is there, the meaning of the symbol to be read. The initiate of old saw in the pillars the very spirit of the God he worshiped. The modern Masonic initiate may see in the two pillars the means by which he may travel a little further, a little higher towards the secret Middle Chamber of life, and in doing so he is indeed heading towards becoming a better man.

Thank you Brethren for your attention,

R.W. Bro. John K. Johnston