

Twin Pillars

Lebanon Lodge No. 139 – May 8, 2012

Pillars are symbolic in Masonry. We as Masons take particular notice of the two pillars which stood at the porch way or entrance of King Solomon's Temple. These, we are told, represented the pillar of fire that led the Israelites out of Egypt and the pillar of cloud which proved darkness to Pharaoh and his followers when they attempted to overtake them. King Solomon ordered these pillars to be placed at the entrance of King Solomon's Temple to remind the children of Israel of their escape from the Egyptian bondage.

While we were travelling in Egypt in January of 2003, a common sight was to see two pillars connected with a cross bar on top. We often found them in the strangest places even standing together in the middle of a field. They gave the impression that they were all that was left of a previous building. The guide made reference to the pillars as representing Upper and Lower Egypt. However the image continued to haunt me as I thought of the connection with the importance of the twin pillars in Masonry and how they referred to Solomon's Temple.

According to Knight and Lomas the pillars had the function of reaching between the world of men and the world of the gods. Prior to the unification of the two Egypts approximately 5,000 years ago each land had their own pillar which connected the king and his priests with the gods. These pillars could be considered a spiritual umbilical cord between heaven and earth. Similarly one could draw a comparison with Jacob's Ladder forming a union between heaven and earth. After the unification of the two Egypts, the two pillars and the cross bar symbolized the joining of the lands within one kingdom.

The three parts formed an architectural doorway facing east to greet the rising sun. The right pillar representing lower Egypt, the left pillar representing upper Egypt; with the cross bar representing the heavenly crossbeam of the sky god Nut. Knight and Lomas suggest that the two pillars with a cross beam was to be adopted in many forms by later cultures including the Jews and, ultimately, Freemasonry.

There is reference even earlier to twin pillars. According to Knight and Lomas the pre-flood people had accomplished highly developed achievements in the seven liberal arts and sciences. These people foresaw the coming of the flood and preserved the technical information known at that time on two pillars. One was to withstand fire and the other to withstand water. There is some debate in writings as to who actually made the pillars and out of what material they were made, brick and stone or brass and stone. Moore gives the credit to Seth, the grandson of Adam for the construction of the pillars while Knight and Lomas are giving credit to Enoch who was five generations after Seth. Knight and Lomas also suggest that the Egyptians probably would not have developed their civilization on their own if they had not found these secret pillars and used the knowledge that the pillars contained to develop and create their vast achievements.

The Masonic Service Association writes "Some authorities believe that the Pillars of Hercules, natural rock monoliths which at Gibraltar and Ceuta stand guard over the Straits of Gibraltar, are anciently purported to be the end of the western world, suggesting – "guardian pillars in the porch" of any great temple." They go on to indicate that as the candidate stands before the pillars he has both power and control laid before him. "Power without control is anarchy." "Control without power is futility." "By implication, the two pillars of strength and establishment suggest that a grown man must have both for the completion of a successful life."

We have all either visited or seen pictures of Stonehenge which is the most famous of the many Henges throughout the British Isles. You will have noticed that there are many pairs of tall stones that have been placed in an upright position with a long horizontal stone as a cross piece joining the two upright stones. The reason for arranging these very large stones as two pillars are a cross piece is a mystery.

There was also the importance of the two pillars which held up the temple of the Philistines. The Philistine leaders had assembled in the temple to recognize one of their most important deities. They brought the prisoner, Samson into the temple for the people to see. Samson who had previously been blinded by a sword, and who was now forced to grind grain, was brought in as a captive so that people could gather on the roof to watch. Once inside Samson asked if he could be taken to stand between the two main pillars that held up the temple, praying for the strength to avenge himself against the Philistines and their rulers, he was successful as he pulled down the pillars and the temple collapsed killing a large number of those inside.

There are also interesting references to our delivery into this world. They refer to the two pillars that we pass through as a baby leaves the birth canal.

There are many other pillars that are joined together to which I could make reference. However I think that it is interesting to quote from Kahlil Gibran in his book "The Prophet" where he makes reference to the two great pillars of a husband and wife joined together in holy matrimony.

"Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.
And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow."

From all of these examples you can see the importance that many cultures have placed on the twin pillars and also the joining together of twin pillars with a cross bar. Consequently, it is not surprising that King Solomon would have the two symbolic pillars placed at the porch way or entrance of his temple.

You may now have a better understanding of the origin of the two Masonic pillars joined together.

A Guide to Masonic Symbolism – Duncan Moore

The Hiram Key – Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas

The Prophet - Kahlil Gibran

The Second Messiah – Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas

What? When? Where? Why? Who? – The Masonic Service Association – 1956

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