

## Point Within A Circle

“In every Lodge there is a certain Point within a circle”

Let us talk about this important symbol in the first degree, “The Point within the Circle”. Any symbol may have many meanings, all of them right, so long as they are not self-contradictory. As the point within a circle has had so many different meanings to so many different people, it is only to be expected that it have different interpretations among Brother Masons.

We will discuss this symbol from three prospectives; historically it goes back to time immemorial, from its useful purpose as a tool of our operative Brothers, and the transition and interpretation into Speculative Masonry.

This ancient symbol, is Familiar to every Mason, and is often considered merely as one of many, not which it really is? It is among the most illuminating symbols of the entered Apprentice’s Degree. It is particularly important not only for its antiquity, and the many meanings which have been, and may be read from it by the student, but of the bond it makes between the old Operative Craft and the modern Speculative Masonry.

It is hard to determine how this symbol originated? Historically a closed figure has been symbol for deity, the triangle, the circle or either with a point in the center. The circle refers to, he who is before the beginning or after the ending, the triangle relates to the trinity. The circle having neither beginning nor end, is a symbol of the Deity and of eternity and it follows that the compasses have been valued as being a means by which that perfect figure may be drawn.

The circle is a symbol found in ancient religions and temples, where they worshiped the sun or fire, the altar being the central point or the “Holy of Holies”. It reaches far back into antiquity, of the Indian, and Asiatic Mysteries. Let’s look at some of the ancient understandings of this symbol;

The Point the sun and the circle the universe. (a dot within a circle is the astronomical symbol for the sun)

In Indian interpretation the Point is the phallus or male, the circle the female, which was associated with their understanding of deity.

Some hold that the point within the circle represented to the ancients the whole of the universe, the point being the individual, or contemplator, and the circle the horizon.

“The two parallel lines representing the Holy Saints John, two eminent patrons of Masonry”. This is a beautiful representation but is completely without foundation.

The two perpendicular lines are thought by some to be a typical representation of the Lodge, the point being the Brother at the Altar, the circle the Holy of Holies, and the lines are the Brethren waiting to bring the Brother to light. However this symbol predates King Solomon. On early Egyptian monuments we find it as the Alpha and Omega, or symbol of God in the center of a circle embroidered by two upright serpents, representing the Power and the Wisdom of the Creator.

Mackey interprets the symbol as an analogy to the Lodge by observing that as the Master and Wardens represent the sun in three positions in the Lodge, and as the Lodge is a symbol of the world (or universe) the circle can be considered as representing the Lodge, the point the sun at meridian.

So how did this symbol come to Speculative Masonry by way of the Operative Craftsman? To answer this question we need to picture ourselves with the Ancient Craftsman of the middle ages, try to picture how they lived, what was their level of education? They learned through apprenticeship and careful training of skills passed down from previous generations. The Masters however possessed knowledge and power and were the architects and overseers of the work. Essential to true work were true tools, oversight of which was important to the Masters of work.

The tools used by the cathedral builders must have been very much what ours are today; they had gavel, mallet, setting maul and hammer; they had chisel and trowel as we have. And of course, they had plumb, square, level and twenty-four inch gauge to "measure and lay out their work." The square, level, plumb, and twenty four inch gauge needed to be accurate. The square was of particular importance to be true. So here lies the connection of our symbol from operative to speculative Masons.

Today any school boy knows the simple "secret of the square" which was back then the closely guarded wisdom of the Masters; today a school boy can explain cyber space, and make and use a computer which was a miracle not that many years ago. It is no wonder that our ancient Operative brethren thought their secret of a square so valuable; let us rather wonder that time in which the vast majority of men were ignorant of mathematics, so many must have known and appreciated this simple, and marvelous, geometrical secret. Lay out a circle - any size - on a piece of paper. With a straight edge draw a line across through its center. Put a dot on the circle, anywhere. Connect that dot with the line at both points where it crosses the circle. Results - a perfect right triangle.

This was the Operative Mason's secret - knowing how "to try his square." It was by this means that he tested the working tools of the Fellows of the Craft; he did so often enough, and it was impossible either for their tools or their work "to materially err." From this, also, comes the ritual used in the lodges of our English brethren, where they "open on the center." Alas, we have dropped the quaint old words they use, and American Lodges know the "center" only as the point within a circle. The original line across the center has been shifted to the side and became the "two perpendicular parallel lines"

"The point represents the individual Brother, the circle the boundary line beyond which he will not suffer his passions, prejudice, or interest to betray him"

In freemasonry the interpretation that is given for the point within a circle, bounded by two erect parallel lines, clearly has its origin in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph and its interpretation. However, most of the original esoteric meaning has been overlooked and the identities of the two grand parallels have been changed, presumably in an endeavor to establish a setting that reflects the traditions of freemasonry. Moreover, in some respects the ancient symbolism has been reversed, insofar as the point is said to be that position which, if occupied by the individual freemason, is one from which he cannot err. In that context the

circle represents the boundary line of the individual's duty to God and to his fellow man, while the two grand parallels represent two human paragons of integrity, which is not the same as the union of emotion and wisdom by the encircling power of the Deity that was represented in the Egyptian hieroglyph. As a written hieroglyph, the point within a circle signified the sun and represented light, including the light of wisdom that comes from above. Used with appropriate determinatives, it also expressed many aspects of time and the seasons.

How do you relate to the following questions?

Q. What is your point, or center?

Q. What interpretations do you find in this symbol?

Q. If we refer to the square as "Square of Virtue", do we prove the square by the point within the circle embroidered by two perpendicular lines?

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In some jurisdictions at the closing of the Lodge the Brothers form a circle around the alter, in others they form a square with the alter being the central point. Thus it could be said to be a focus on the "Book of the Law" or the deity, in Brotherly love and Friendship. What focus do you see in this?

Source: Alaska Monitor, Mackey's Encyclopedia of Masonry