

The Number Seven

Throughout Masonic ritual and throughout many cultures of the world the number seven is regarded as being the perfect number. It signifies perfection or completion and can be seen in many aspects of life and is prolific in the Masonic world.

This stems from the fact that many of our ceremonies are based upon incidents recorded in the bible and from this it must be appreciated that many aspects of Jewish culture, religion and history will be referred to.

In the natural world we have the seven known planets. There are seven colours in the spectrum. Many plants have either seven leaves or petals. A week is divided into seven days. The American game of craps is based upon the number seven, it being the most common number to throw with two dice. Being the seventh son is regarded to be most lucky. We have all been in "seventh heaven" at some time or other.

In literature we have many references to this number, the most popular being by Shakespeare in his "Seven Ages of Man". We have the seven deadly sins, the seven graces oft times referred to in literature.

In the bible stories we have David the father of King Solomon being the seventh son of the seventh son, how lucky is that! The world was completed in seven days. In Jewish culture no oath or promise was deemed complete unless made in front of seven witnesses. The world was created and deemed perfect in seven days. Aarons rod when it changed into a serpent devoured the serpents of the opposing seven wise men of the Pharaoh.

Masonically the use of the number seven is prolific, but is generally unappreciated. Seven make a Lodge perfect. You completed your Master Masons degree by seven steps. Similarly in the Chapter you advance by seven steps, halting and bowing at the 3rd, 5th and seventh. (This can be alluded to as a reference to the EA degree, the Fellowcraft and the Master Mason degrees as you progress by the steps of 3, 5 & 7 respectively.) You have the seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, if you have knowledge from each of the Arts and Sciences you are deemed to have perfect knowledge. The seven known planets. In the Rose Croix, the ladder in the Red Room has seven rungs. In Knights Templar you are sent on a seven year pilgrimage as well as seven years warfare. Solomon's Temple was completed in seven years. There are seven Officers in a Craft Lodge. There are many more examples if you care to look.

You can refer to yourselves as "Sherbangers" (my spelling), as in some Hebrew dialects, possibly more especially Yiddish, I believe the word for seven is "Sherbang" *sic*. And this is where our saying "The whole sherbang" comes from.

Over the centuries as our social attitudes change, so the meaning of words and interpretations change. I quote for example the words Gay and Wicked. So this understanding of Masonic ritual changes, and many ancient aspects of the ceremonies are changed for more modern reasons and the value of the original becomes lost in the mists of time. I have written many times on these misunderstood changes that proliferate the Craft and Chapter, and when the original reasons are explained things appear to make much more sense. For example, I have asked many times "why, in the preparation of the initiate, is the left breast made bare?" The answer I generally receive is "To prove you are not a woman." How ridiculous this answer is. In the days when the ritual was originally created the clothing was very different as to what it is now. They wore thick frock coats, frilly cuffed shirts, 3 cornered hats, buckled shoes etc. etc. In order to feel the point of the poignard, the left side of the coat would have to be drawn back. Otherwise the extremely important message that the WM delivers, quote, "**you would have been an accessory to your own death.....**" would be entirely lost if the Initiate could not genuinely feel the point of the poignard. It

has nothing to do with your gender. As, the proposer must have known the Candidate for 7 years, (*here is the use of seven again*), the seconder must have known him for 3 years, he should be interviewed by the Secretary who also should visit his home and talk with his wife or partner, and he is interviewed by a board of Installed Masters, and finally carefully prepared by the Tyler. Are they all blind!!!

Although our Order is young, it has fallen subject to similar changes and misunderstandings. Our ceremony throws more light on the Craft ceremony of initiation. In the old days the tracing board of the Craft once contained the Beehive, a very important symbol within Freemasonry, and indicated by the circular object that is on every Lodge Officer's collar, Provincial Officer's collar and Grand Officer's collar. Although not many Freemasons appreciate it. This symbol of the Beehive represents Industry and Cohesion and is amply exemplified in the discourse of the Certificate of our Order, but for one important aspect. In the old Craft tracing boards the beehive was shown with bees swarming around it, and to make the symbolism perfect and complete, there were seven bees swarming. Thereby making the Industry and Cohesion Perfect and Complete. The full implication and meaning of the symbol being perfect for the spectator.

This symbol in its proper form takes its origin from a degree that is in the Appendant degrees of the Knight Templar Priests, and is called Knight of the Master of the Blue, and I detail the Legend from that ritual:

“ Masonic legend informs us that the Queen of Sheba, having heard of the wisdom of King Solomon, determined to see proof of that wisdom with her own eyes, travelled from the uttermost parts of the Earth to test King Solomon's powers of discretion, and among other quests, adopted the following. One evening as Solomon and Sheba were walking in the garden of the King's Palace, Sheba stopped and gathered into her arms two bunches of lilies that had laid hidden. Sheba, who was well skilled in making artificial flowers, then twisted one bundle of artificial lilies with one of real flowers into a wreath and threw it on the ground before the King. She turned to Solomon and said to him, “Without touch which of these lilies are real and which are not?” So skilful was the work of the Queen that for a while Solomon could not determine the real from the artificial, but at length he advanced to one of the beehives kept in the garden, and overturned it. The bees, after swarming for a time, then settled on the wreath of lilies lying on the ground, but they only settled upon the real blossoms and avoided the artificial, thus enabling the King to determine the true from the false.”

When I received a copy of the new Certificate I immediately saw that it had eight bees swarming instead of seven, thus the significance and symbolism was lost. I then informed the Grand secretary and it has now been corrected and the full meaning has been restored.

So we must be cautious in changing ritual and ensure that the original meaning and intent is not lost.

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION.

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