

# Living the Journey: The Duality of Masonry

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An idea has emerged through several of my previous articles and I want to call that idea out and formulate it into its own subject and focus. That idea is what I call *"the duality of masonry"*.

Miriam-Webster defines "duality" as: "the quality or state of having two *different or opposite* parts or elements". The Cambridge Dictionary provides this: "the state of combining two different things". All of the variations I've found in other dictionaries are variations of these two definitions and I think each, either, or both of them fit nicely with the concept I want to present here.

I propose that masonry itself is structured and functions based on a duality that I can define and describe using the symbolism I discussed in a recent blog post where I referred to three structural relationships that I believe constitute our craft. I defined these *"three key relationships"* which are: our private relationships among brothers within the confines of our fraternal order, our public relationships with our neighbors, co-workers, and communities, and finally, our relationship(s) with God.

The first relationship, our private relationships with each other includes our ritual, our methods of identification, and our private masonic communications within tiled or closed gatherings. I assigned the "square" to symbolize these relationships to represent our internal relations as being "on the square". I also think it is appropriate because of its relationship to the compass which I will next describe.

I assigned the "compass" to represent our relations with the public which are open and, when appropriately arranged atop the square, it covers the hidden relationships within the fraternity. Our public relationships include our open activities in lodge and in public such as our officer installation ceremonies, cornerstone ceremonies, and masonic burial services along with our personal behavior in and around the public where we demonstrate our honesty, integrity, and trust, along with our principle fraternal virtues of faith, hope, and charity.



This leaves our relationship with God. Obviously "The Letter G" represents our individual relations with the Grand Architect of the Universe and we find it tucked safely in bosom of our square and compass where it is protected and cherished. I propose the square and compass also, with deeper and more precise adaptations of each, as the representative symbols of our fraternal duality.

When we read about and study the ancient mystery schools, we find that many had both public attributes and private or secret attributes. Just as we see today in masonry, the mystery schools exhibited public aspects such as worship, religious/spiritual practices, and perhaps some obvious association among members that was openly apparent. They also held private or secret aspects which usually included some type of an initiatic experience, many in fact requiring three initiations, levels, or “degrees” to reach full membership or full access to the knowledge of their particular association or craft. When we do a direct comparison between those ancient mystery schools to masonry as we practice it today, we do in fact find the duality of two “different or opposing parts or elements” as provided in Merriam-Webster’s definition – we find a secret element of masonry, and a public element.

Within our duality model, we can now clearly identify and differentiate between our two different elements. We have our private or secret element whereby our members are initiated, instructed on our ritual and esoteric lessons, and – importantly – we are encouraged to engage in “*the study of the liberal arts and sciences, that valuable branch of education which tends so effectively to polish and adorn the mind...*” It is through these private studies that masonry might open the mason’s mind to a spiritual path in reading and learning of the deep connections between the mason, masonic roots, and the ancient mystery schools and the crafts and sciences that originated within them.

The studious mason will be exposed to symbolism and concepts that engage his curiosity, freeing him to question the purposes, roles, and meaning of the principles that led to the birth, growth, and spread of our masonic ideals and principles. These esoteric studies can provide the mason the lessons of the nature of mankind and to ways to apply those lessons within his own life to strengthen his purpose and give direction to his journey – leading him forward along a path that he creates as he travels. Again I assign the square to symbolize this element of our duality; it lies quietly underneath and is protected or concealed by our open or public aspect and activities.

The open element of our duality is where we find and define the role of the lodge in our masonic experience. I again assign the compass to represent this, the open aspect of our fraternity which provides the open or public view of our masonic practices and brotherhood. If we remember our definition of a lodge, it is our brothers who are particularly assembled in a prescribed fashion, it is *not* the building, and it is not a room in a building. Within our lodges, we take our obligations, we learn our ritual and esoteric lessons of our degrees and we use the opportunities provided through our fellowship to practice them and improve. We use our lodges and our tangible lodge buildings as our bridges to the public, hosting public programs and holding charitable activities supporting and our neighbors and neighborhoods. It is this open aspect, offering the public a glimpse of our fraternity that I believe is properly represented by the compass, open, and resting atop the quiet, private masonic activities occurring beneath and on the square.

So, in practical terms and plain language, how does “duality” work? How does masonry use this duality to function?

When a man approaches our West Gate and we determine him to be both worthy and qualified, we bring him into our lodge and provide him his first lessons through our initiatic process which is

comprised primarily of the three craft degrees. Through these lessons, we teach the man to open his mind, to sharpen his senses and listen carefully to the words he hears. He is honing his listening skill, and learning to trust men as brothers, follow their directions, and respect their leadership.

Next we ask him to learn his catechisms. We deprive him of the written word and drawn or printed pictures and we open his mind to learning a new language and way of thinking consisting entirely of symbols and allegory. We teach him how to identify these symbols and describe the associated allegorical stories, and how to assign meaning to them. We teach the man that the story of the craft is conveyed almost entirely through this language of symbols and given life through the allegories of our degrees. Through these lessons, we improve the man's receptivity to a new way of thinking and learning, and we improve his self-discipline which is so essentially necessary to complete his catechisms and to launch and complete his journey. Above all, we help him build that first bond with that brother who will instruct him as a new mason and serve as his chaperone into the craft.

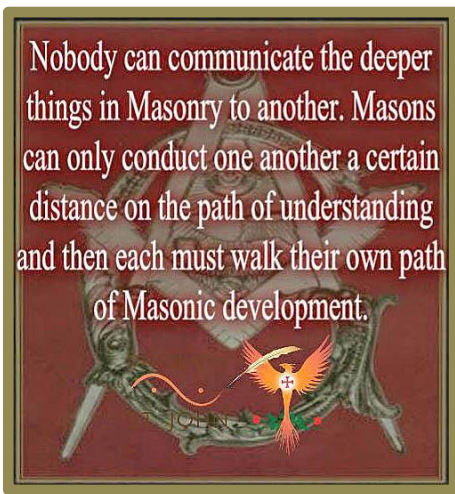
At the same time, the man learns and experiences the importance of commitment. His new relationships with his new brothers are strengthened, he improves his time management skills, public speaking skills, study skills, and he expands his mind to allow for new ways to learn and to see and understand the world. He refines his character and learns the importance in the value of his proffered word or promise.

It is through the ritual of completing his catechisms a man becomes the mason because it is these necessary lessons that provide him the key to the language of symbols and allegory, unlocking the mysteries of man's soul, man's spirit, and man's relationships with his fellow man, nature, and God himself. The catechisms bond the man to his instructor and to his brethren while confirming his status as an equal in lodge among his new brothers. The new mason establishes himself as both worthy and qualified to claim the title "Master Mason", not because he memorized several lines of script, but because he has received his lessons and shown his mind and self to be open and ready to learn and grow and that he is now armed with new, fundamental knowledge of how to read and interpret the symbols and the world around him.

He has learned those first covered or secret lessons communicated within the fraternity, and he has begun establishing those open relationships that grow from his new stature as a brother among brothers and a Master Mason of the world for all to publicly greet and acknowledge. With these relationships, exemplified by the square and compass in place, and his relationship with God secure within the bounds of his covered and public relationships, the man, the *mason* is now ready to begin his journey.

Do you occasionally find yourself wondering if there is something more to masonry than what you are currently experiencing? Do you know your degree work and ritual, but maybe have a difficult time explaining the meaning to a candidate or describing how the lessons of the degrees apply to a man's life? Or, maybe you have been studying the history, the ancient usages, the metaphysical aspects of masonry, but you aren't sure how it all connects to the ritual and to your own particular journey? Perhaps your quandary stems from the duality of masonry; you may have favored one of the aspects of

masonry over the other and, for some inexpressible reason, feel incomplete or that your journey may have stalled.



W.L. Wilmshurst

I share my thoughts here for those brothers who may find themselves in this predicament, knowing that yes, they enjoy their masonic work, but also knowing there is more to this thing we call “masonry” but are unsure what it is that might be missing or how they might find and tap into it. I once wrote about a “Masonic Bucket List” – it may just be time to either make or update your own Masonic Bucket List and then build the path that will lead you to that “other side” of masonry and a more spiritually fulfilling journey!

By joining the masonic society nestled within our larger civil society, we are afforded a safe zone, protected within our physical and intangible lodges where we can test our strengths, practice and increase our talents, and then see, feel, and measure our improvements. We are able to create and follow spiritual paths and study the ancient mysteries and philosophical works that we discover through interpretation and understanding of our symbols and ritual work. It is through the duality of masonry itself we can bring all of these lessons together to create our personal masonic journeys which give us purpose and direction while providing light to guide us as we move forward through our lives.

Never stop traveling my brothers, never! There is always one more mile, one more yard, another foot to travel until we all end up at that next, all-important gate where we will be ultimately judged one final time on our worthiness and qualification. Masonry can provide you the necessary opportunities and experiences to confidently meet that judgement and they are out there waiting for those who seek them – but seek them you must!

May brotherly love prevail!

Bro. Bill