

SYMBOLISM IN THE CONSECRATION CEREMONY

by

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The Ceremony of Consecration of a Lodge is always carried out by the Grand Master, assisted by the Active Team of Grand Lodge Officers. The ceremonial is magnificent and the ritual very splendid: so much of it comes from the deep past of the human race yet its symbolism is quite modern in its meaning. Freemasonry may be historically only a few hundred years old, but the meaning of its teachings goes well back into the beginning of human society.

Before the Grand Master and Grand Officers enter the Temple, much preparatory work has been done, and Brethren have already assembled in the lodge room. The Lodge Board (table in the centre of the pavement) has been furnished with vessels of gold in which are contained the symbolic substances of corn, oil, wine and salt, and all is covered by pure white linen cloths. At the East end of the pavement is the station of the Grand Master; opposite, at the West end, is the Senior Grand Warden. On the South side is the station of the Junior Grand Warden while the Grand Secretary is stationed on the North side. The station of the Deputy Grand Master is at the North-east corner. The Grand Master and the Deputy Grand Master are brought under the wands to their respective stations. When all are at their stations they turn left and perambulate the Lodge Board for the first time when the Deputy Grand Master addresses the Grand Master while handing him the golden Cornucopia: "In the ceremony of consecration it has been immemorial custom to scatter corn upon the Lodge as an emblem of nourishment..." The Grand Master then scatters corn from the Cornucopia on the floor with appropriate words.

This vessel, the Cornucopia, "The Horn of Plenty," is shaped like a spiraling horn was in great use in the early centuries. Its symbolism is derived from Greek mythology: the goat Almathea sucked the infant Zeus who became the king of the Olympian gods. The Cornucopia has ever been the symbol of abundance and as such has been adopted as the jewel of the Stewards to remind that it is their duty to see that the tables are properly furnished at refreshment, and that every brother is suitably served.

Corn from which bread is made has always been considered "the staff of life" and is frequently mentioned in the Sacred Volume. In the ceremonial it symbolizes plenty and abundance and a grand blessing on the new Lodge.

After the Lodge is perambulated the second time, the Senior Warden presents the Grand Master with a cruet of wine saying: "Wine, the emblem of refreshment, having been used by our ancient brethren in the ceremony of consecration, I present to you this vessel... to be used according to Masonic form." Wine makes glad the hearts of men: it has been used for millennia in religious ceremonies as a symbol of joy and cheerfulness. It offers us good company and friendliness. In

the Jewish religion it is used in the ceremony of welcoming the Sabbath. In the Christian religion it is associated with Bread in being basic to the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. So out of the past we gather up links of symbolism in the bread and wine, symbols which are vital and very near to us.

At the completion of the third procession, the Junior Warden presents a cruet of oil to the Grand Master, who pours oil on the Lodge, anointing it, saying: "I sprinkle oil as a symbol of peace and unanimity." We have heard and used the saying, "pour oil on troubled waters." In the hurly burly of life we have to learn to live in peace, harmony and unanimity with our fellow man.

The Hebrews anointed their Kings, Prophets and High Priests with oil. We read in Psalm 45: "... God has anointed thee with the oil of gladness...."

The Tabernacle in the wilderness and all its holy vessels were anointed with oil. There is also the well-known story of David being chosen of all the sons of Jesse when Samuel heard the word of the Lord: "... anoint him, for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brethren" (1 Sam. 16:12-13). David sings of "wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart" (Psalm 104).

The rite of anointing with oil has descended to us from antiquity. During the coronation ceremonies of various nations, oil was poured out of the horn and the king or queen was anointed. This is so with the Kings and Queens of England. For Freemasons, all symbolizes that peace and harmony which guarantees the good order and life of society.

At the conclusion of the fourth procession the Grand Secretary hands to the Grand Master the cellar containing Salt and says: "Most Worshipful Grand Master, I present salt as an emblem of hospitality." The Grand Master then scatters salt on the floor of the lodge and says, "I scatter salt on this Lodge as an emblem of hospitality and friendship and may the All-Bounteous Author of nature bless the Brethren with an abundance of corn and wine and oil, and grant them all the comforts and conveniences of life, and may every Brother visiting this Lodge be received with friendship and hospitality."

To us, for whom salt is one of the commonest and cheapest of commodities, the importance attached to it by all peoples of antiquity seems disproportionate. Yet, throughout recorded history, salt has played a prominent part in social life, in magical ceremonies, and in religious ritual.

The Bible has many references to salt. Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" (Matt. 5:13). Ezra (4:14) speaks of eating "the salt of the palace" as a synonym for hospitality. The "covenant of salt" represents a binding agreement (Num. 18:19). This idea of salt as a seal set to a compact is all pervading in Middle Eastern literature and

legend. It is a symbol of preservation. In the consecration ceremony, it reminds us of the preservation of the way of life we follow as Freemasons: the flavouring of our Lodge and life with the spirit of friendship, hospitality, and true brotherhood.

Immediately after the sprinkling of salt the Grand Master says: "To God and His service we consecrate this Lodge; also to the memory of the Royal Solomon under whose auspices many of our Masonic mysteries had their origin."

Then follow the perambulations of the Lodge three times by the Grand Chaplain swinging the censer. The use of incense as part of divine worship and as a symbol of cleansing was common to all nations of antiquity. In scripture Incense is continually spoken of as a symbol of prayer: "Let my prayer be set before thee as incense" (Psalm 141:2). In Freemasonry, incense has a similar connotation and also symbolizes the complete acceptance of our offering of the ceremony and the cleansing of all evil.

Finally, the Grand Master constitutes the Lodge and the ceremony is concluded with the Great Blessing: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace" (Num. 6:24-26).

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