



Sussex Freemasons - West Group

'The West Wing'
(Bognor, Chichester, Clapham, Littlehampton,
Midhurst, Pulborough, Steyning and Worthing)

'The West Wing' Learning and Development Team.

'The West Wing' Lodge of Instruction.

Lesson 4:

'Morality, Allegory, Symbols'

Preceptors Notes



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Lesson 4

Objectives.

By the end of this lesson/tutorial the student will be able to:

- Understand the meanings of Morality, Allegory and Symbols in relation to Freemasonry.
- Apply those meanings to personal development.

Video & Article.

<https://www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202111morality-allegory-symbols/>



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Morality, Allegory, Symbols.

“Morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols”. A phrase that immediately comes to mind when describing Freemasonry –Let us have a look at what this phrase actually means.

Morality, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, “is a set of personal or social standards for good or bad behaviour and character”.

Immorality is “Behaviour that is morally wrong, or outside society’s standards of what is acceptable”

So, what is acceptable behaviour? Society is ever evolving and social standards change to reflect that cultural movement. For example pre 1967 it was illegal to be a homosexual and as late as 1989 in Scotland, rape within marriage was not a criminal offence. Is there, therefore, a difference between personal morality and public law?

In the 1950’s Lord Devlin, a leading judge, envisaged that law and morality are “fundamentally interconnected” arguing that “the law had a right, in fact a duty, to uphold common morality” Hart, a leading academic at the time, disagreed arguing that law enforcing moral values was unnecessary. He argued that law enforcing morality “infringes the liberty of the individual” Even today the Hart–Devlin debate continues over legislation regarding assisted suicide.

As Freemasons we do not have to go deep into the academic realms of law and social justice to understand what is good and bad behaviour or good and bad morals for it is in our ritual. However, Freemasonry being universally spread over the globe and embedded within various cultures with different social outlooks on life what may be good behaviour or good morals in some communities may not be so good in others.

In Freemasonry a universal standard of morality is taught within our rituals and by the symbols within our Lodges. Having been “restored to the blessings of material light” in the first degree ceremony our attention is drawn to the first of those visual symbols, the ‘three great emblematical lights’, the Volume of the Sacred Law (VSL), the Square, and the Compasses. “The Sacred Writings govern our faith, the Square to regulate our actions and the Compasses to keep us in due bounds with all mankind.” All are symbolic representations that give a Freemason his ‘strength’ and his desire to be the best person he can be.



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Volume of the Sacred Law.

"The 'Sacred Writings' govern our faith". It is our faith which is the guide to our morality. Within the Sacred Writings there is an answer to all the moral dilemmas that we may come across in our life. For example on the question of 'diversity' the VSL of various faiths are unanimous in their answer.

'You shall love thy neighbour as yourself' there is no other commandment greater than these". (Holy Bible, New Testament: Mark 12:31)

"O mankind, your Lord is One and your father is one. You all descended from Adam and Adam was created from earth. He is most honoured among you in the sight of God who is most upright. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, no coloured person to a white person, or a white person to a coloured person except by Taqwa (piety)."
(Islam: Prophet Mohammad)

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (The Jewish Torah: Leviticus 19:18)

"Do not believe you are above or below anyone. Keep a humble spirit" (Buddhism)

"The God-conscious being looks upon all alike, like the wind, which blows equally upon the king and the poor beggar". (Sikhism. Guru Granth Sahib 272)

For a Freemason, who by definition is moderate in his attitude, it is his 'faith' which is his moral compass and that, brethren, is universal.

The Square.

"The Square regulates our actions." A symbol that our actions or behaviour are dictated by our attitude. Our attitude is influenced by our faith and the teachings within the Volume of the Sacred Law. The teachings of morality and a way to live a virtuous life.

Bataris Box – *"My attitude effects my behaviour which effects your attitude and your behaviour"*.

The Compasses.

"Keep us in due bounds with all mankind". We are once again drawn to the Sacred Writings on how we treat our fellow man. It is a wonderful reflection that all faiths teach the same with regard to the diversity of man. In fact all faiths teach their followers to live a virtuous life.

It is important that Freemasons are in touch with the ever evolving values of our cultures and communities. For if we do not, Freemasonry becomes irrelevant. But,



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most importantly, we must adhere to and promote those great Masonic values of "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth" or in more modern terms, "Integrity, Respect, Friendship and Charity".

"It is not the most intelligent of the species that survive; it is not the strongest that survive; but the species that survives is the one that is able to best adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself." (Darwin: Origin of the Species)

When we look at morality we reflect upon who we are as Freemasons. Our behaviour both in and outside of the Lodge room which is influenced by those three 'great emblematical lights'. Society may change in its attitude to various moral concepts, which it should as humankind evolves, but a Freemason's guide to morality lies in the symbolism of those 'three emblematical lights' and the moral symbolism of each part of the Lodge furniture and working tools.

Everything within the Lodge room has a symbolic moral meaning. It would take too long to identify and explain each piece of Lodge room furniture and its moral meaning in this short paper, but the next time you are in your Lodge room take time to look at each part of it and identify its moral relevance. If you don't know ask, a senior brother would be more than happy to explain.

Allegory.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines an allegory as *"a story, play, poem, picture or other work in which the characters and events represent particular qualities or ideas that relate to morals, religion or politics"*.

Each degree ceremony in Freemasonry has a moral story to tell. It is a means of teaching morality in a way that involves the candidate. In education there is a phrase, *"Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand"*. It is not a new or revolutionary method of teaching for characters in the Volume of the Sacred Law told stories to highlight moral teachings. Within the degree ceremonies a playlet is acted out and at the end of the play it is explained by a senior member of the Lodge with the aid of the pictorial representation of the degree, the Tracing Board.

The Tracing Board is a pictorial explanation of the allegory of the degree and is a constant reminder of what has taken place. When in Lodge study the Tracing Boards as the repetition of doing so will remind you of the moral story of each of the degrees.

Freemasonry is not just the social aspect of meeting and socialising, although that is a very important part of it, it can be spiritually uplifting. The more you understand the ritual and the symbolism the more interesting the whole experience becomes.



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There is another educational phrase, "if you want to learn about something at a deeper level, teach it". Do not be afraid to ask senior members of the Lodge questions if you do not understand. They will be more than willing to share their knowledge with you and you, in turn, will be able to instruct others in the meaning of Freemasonry, thereby expanding the knowledge of the membership giving everyone the tools and the interest to be better people, for Freemasonry makes a good person better.

W. Bro. Stephen J. Goulding. ProvSGD, SLGCR.

'The West Wing' Learning and Development Lead.

Article published in the Square Magazine 11/21

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The Origins of the Species (Darwin)

Cambridge Dictionary

The Ritual of the Lodge of Union **No, 38.**



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Questions.

Q. Define 'morality'.

A. A set of personal or social standards for good or bad behaviour and character.

Q. Define 'immorality'.

A. Behaviour that is morally wrong or outside society's standard as acceptable.

Q. What did Lord Devlin envisage about Law and Morality?

A. The Law had a right, in fact a duty, to uphold common morality.

Q. What did Hart argue about the Law enforcing Morality?

A. "...infringes the liberty of the individual."

Q. What are the "three great emblematical lights" of Freemasonry and what do they mean?

A. VSL – "Sacred writings govern our Faith."

The Square – "Regulates our actions."

The Compasses – "Keep us in due bounds with all mankind."

Q. What is an 'allegory'?

A. "A story, play, poem, picture or other work in which the characters and events represent particular qualities or ideas that relate to morals, religion or politics."

Q. Where will you find a pictorial explanation of the allegory of the degree?

A. On the degree Tracing Board.

Q. Complete the following phrase.

Tell me I will forget.

Show me and I will remember.

..... me and I will"

Reflection

Look upon a degree Tracing Board and try to understand the symbolism within it.



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Analysis of the Text: "Morality, Allegory, Symbols"

The provided text, "Morality, Allegory, Symbols," serves as an excellent primer on fundamental Masonic principles, particularly how Freemasonry approaches ethics and personal growth. It directly addresses the core concept of "Morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols," offering a clear, accessible, and practically oriented explanation for both new and seasoned Masons.

1. Identification of Explicit or Implicit Philosophical Principles:

The text is replete with explicit philosophical principles central to Freemasonry.

- **Truth and Virtue:** The entire discussion around "morality" aims at defining "good behaviour" and a "virtuous life." While acknowledging the evolving nature of societal morality, the text firmly grounds Masonic morality in a "universal standard" derived from the Volume of the Sacred Law (VSL), implying an objective and enduring truth. The VSL is presented as the ultimate guide to "all moral dilemmas," signifying an appeal to a higher, unchanging moral order.
- **Divine Architecture/Natural Law:** The reliance on the VSL from various faiths as a universal moral compass ("love thy neighbour," "do unto others," humility, equality) implicitly points to a belief in foundational, divinely-inspired or naturally occurring ethical laws that transcend cultural differences. The agreement across diverse sacred texts on these core principles suggests a universal moral architecture.
- **Pursuit of Wisdom:** The encouragement to "understand the ritual and the symbolism at a deeper level," to "ask senior members," and even to "teach it" explicitly promotes the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge as a continuous journey for a Freemason. This reflects the Masonic emphasis on intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.
- **Liberty of the Individual (within bounds):** While not explicitly discussing the Hart-Devlin debate in detail, the text, by emphasizing the VSL, Square, and Compasses, implicitly navigates the tension between personal liberty and societal standards. The Compasses, specifically, are presented as keeping us "in due bounds with all mankind," suggesting that individual freedom is best exercised within a framework of respect and responsibility towards others.



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2. Themes of Personal Development and Self-Mastery:

The text strongly emphasizes personal development and the continuous journey of self-mastery, aligning perfectly with the Masonic ideal of 'hewing the rough ashlar.'

- **Refinement of Character and Overcoming Vices:** The core purpose of the "three great emblematical lights" is to guide a Freemason to "be the best person he can be." The Square "regulates our actions," ensuring that behaviour is "dictated by our attitude," which in turn is influenced by faith and moral teachings. This directly addresses the need to align one's actions with virtuous principles, moving away from "immoral" or "bad behaviour." The "Bataris Box" anecdote ("My attitude effects my behaviour which effects your attitude and your behaviour") highlights the personal responsibility in cultivating a positive character that influences others constructively.
- **Cultivation of Virtues:** The text directly links the VSL to "teachings of morality and a way to live a virtuous life." It cites specific virtues like love, humility, piety (Taqwa), and universal respect for others as taught across different faiths, all of which Masons are encouraged to embody. The later mention of "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth" (or "Integrity, Respect, Friendship and Charity") directly names cardinal Masonic virtues that are essential for personal and communal well-being.
- **Squaring Our Actions/Hewing the Rough Ashlar:** The symbol of the Square is explicitly stated to "regulate our actions." This is a direct metaphor for 'squaring our actions,' ensuring that one's

conduct is upright, consistent, and in harmony with moral principles. The entire process of engaging with ritual, symbols, and allegories is framed as a means to "be better people" and that "Freemasonry makes a good person better," directly speaking to the process of transforming the 'rough ashlar' (the unpolished self) into the 'perfect ashlar' (a refined individual).

3. Discussion of Symbolic Language and Allegorical Structures:

Symbolism and allegory are not just discussed but are the very framework through which the text explains Masonic philosophy.

- **The Three Great Emblematical Lights (VSL, Square, Compasses):** These are presented as foundational "visual symbols" that provide a Freemason with "strength" and the "desire to be the best person he can be."



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VSL: Symbolizes the divine source of moral guidance and faith, acting as a "moral compass."

Square: Symbolizes the regulation of actions, dictating upright conduct and alignment with virtue.

Compasses: Symbolize keeping oneself "in due bounds with all mankind," emphasizing moderation, self-control, and respect for others.

- **Lodge Furniture and Working Tools:** The text states, "Everything within the Lodge room has a symbolic moral meaning," encouraging reflection on each piece. This generalizes the concept of symbolic instruction beyond just the 'great lights,' encompassing the entire Lodge as a moral landscape.
- **Allegory as a Teaching Method:** Allegory is defined as a "moral story" that "involves the candidate," illustrating the pedagogical power of narrative in conveying complex moral lessons. The quote "Tell me and I will forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand" encapsulates the effectiveness of the allegorical approach in Freemasonry, making learning experiential and profound.
- **The Tracing Board:** This is explicitly identified as a "pictorial explanation of the allegory of the degree and is a constant reminder of what has taken place." It serves as a visual aid and a mnemonic device, solidifying the moral lessons learned through the allegorical drama.

4. Implications for Conduct and Brotherhood:

The text clearly outlines implications for conduct, harmonious living, and the bonds of fellowship.

- **Right Action and Harmonious Living:** The combined guidance of the VSL, Square, and Compasses directly promotes right action. The VSL guides faith, the Square regulates behaviour, and the Compasses ensure one stays within "due bounds with all mankind." This tripartite structure is designed to foster a life of integrity and respect, crucial for harmonious interaction within society and the brotherhood.
- **Bonds of Fellowship:** While not explicitly mentioning "charity" in this section, the emphasis on "love thy neighbour," "do unto others," and keeping "due bounds with all mankind" inherently speaks to the foundation of "Brotherly Love." The later mention of "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth" directly

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underscores these core values as essential for Masonic fellowship. The very structure of the Lodge, with its senior members explaining ritual and the encouragement to ask questions, promotes a supportive learning environment within the brotherhood.

- **Charity and Relief (Implicit):** The concluding mention of "Integrity, Respect, Friendship and Charity" as modern Masonic values explicitly highlights charity as a key tenet, suggesting that the moral framework leads to acts of benevolence.

5. Reflection on the Text's Potential as a 'Tracing Board' for Life:

If this text were a 'tracing board' for a Freemason's life, it would recommend a multifaceted and continuous journey of self-improvement:

- **Anchor to Universal Morality:** Constantly refer to the VSL as a primary "moral compass," seeking its guidance in all moral dilemmas and integrating its universal principles (love, humility, equality) into daily conduct.
- **Self-Regulation of Actions:** Regularly examine and "square" one's actions and attitudes. Be conscious of how one's internal state (attitude) influences external behaviour, recognizing its ripple effect on others ("Bataris Box").
- **Practice Moderation and Respect:** Utilize the Compasses to maintain "due bounds" in all interactions, fostering respect and understanding for all humanity, acknowledging diversity while upholding universal moral standards.
- **Continuous Learning and Reflection:** Actively engage with Masonic ritual, symbolism, and allegory. Do not just attend, but strive to "understand at a deeper level." Study the Tracing Boards as a constant reminder of moral lessons.
- **Embrace Humility and Seek Knowledge:** Do not be afraid to ask questions of senior brethren, seeing it as an opportunity to deepen one's own understanding and eventually to "instruct others," thereby expanding collective knowledge.



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- **Adaptability and Relevance:** Remain engaged with the evolving values of society and culture, ensuring that Freemasonry's principles remain relevant and impactful, all while adhering to the timeless core values of "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth" (Integrity, Respect, Friendship, Charity).
- **Introspective Examination of the Lodge:** Regularly reflect on the moral symbolism embedded in every part of the Lodge room, extending the lessons beyond the main symbols to the entire environment as a teacher.

In essence, the text serves as a robust 'tracing board' that encourages continuous moral self-assessment, intellectual engagement with symbolic wisdom, and the practical application of universal virtues in daily life, all geared towards making "a good person better."

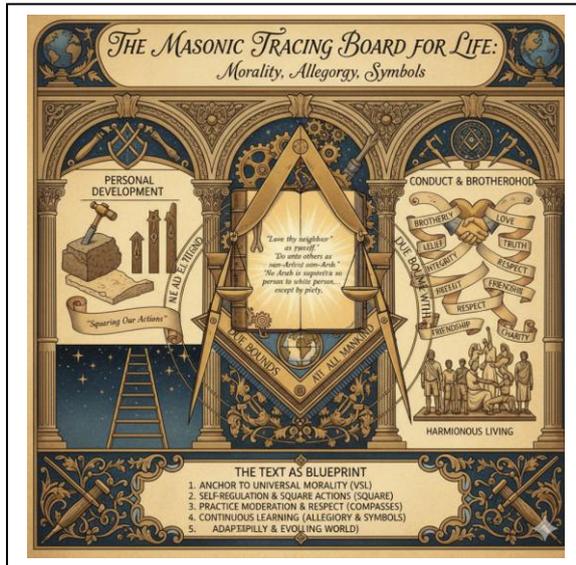


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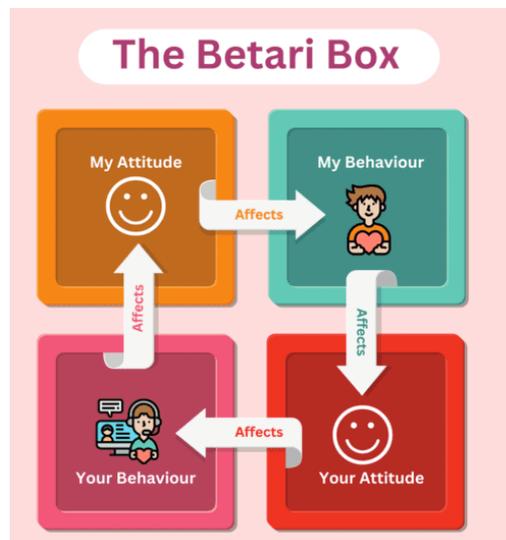
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