

Compasses and Square

by **Sir Knight David P. McCash**

The compasses and square have practical meanings on many levels. Their uses can be seen throughout our universe and especially in our world. The point of the compasses directs the mind of a Freemason to the distance all men are from the divine. The point also reflects our earth within the vastness of our universe, where there is one place where all the necessary elements and conditions are concentrated to support life. Physicists have argued that there is no one center of the universe. For mankind, our earth is the center within the celestial sphere, the dome of stars that surrounds us in the sky looking outward from any location upon our globe.

In the days of the Roman Empire, the world was divided into four parts known as quadrata. The Roman quadrata represented the four corners of the earth, and it was always depicted as a circle divided into four parts with the crossed point being the center or the navel of the earth. Rome was the umbilicus of all the known world, dispensing its technology, laws, and culture throughout. Traditionally, Jerusalem is considered the navel of the world and the center point where God communicated with His prophets and where His statutes and laws were dispensed.

St. Augustine argued against pilgrimages to Jerusalem, because it diminished the importance of Rome as the new spiritual capital. Augustine argued, "there must be more than one center in the world, just as a fire sends forth sparks, and each new spark lands somewhere and starts a new fire, so did Jerusalem" (Schmidt, Books of Jeu).

At this center point (the axis mundi), the ancient Israelites, the Greeks, and the Romans set up their tents or tabernacles which later became temples. The holy space within these structures became the center of everything, the point to which members of the society made pilgrimages, where the nourishing and instructive knowledge of soul and mind were dispensed - a Lodge of perfection. Similarly, our Blue Lodges and the religious structures of our faith are placed in central locations in our neighborhoods.

These tabernacles were supported by a central pole, the point of the pole pointing to the polestar of the heavens above. In some tabernacles, the "tent poles sometimes represented the four cardinal points or the two turning points of the sun in the summer and winter solstice" (Nibley, Tenting, Toll, and Taxing pg. 604). The tent pole concept has been carried over "into the pillars of the temples and palaces, even into the columns of medieval churches and the stately facades of our own public buildings" (Trask, Shamanism).

We see the circular dome (the compasses) of the cosmos upon a single point within a squared tabernacle or temple. For instance, the Lord instructed Moses to make the tabernacle, a portable tent temple with wooden walls covered with gold. The Holy of Holies was a perfect cube of ten cubits while two similar cubes formed the Holy Place (Exodus ch. 26). The two tent poles of the tabernacle became pillars in fixed temple locations and have more meaning than just decoration. Modern scholars have described them as solstice suns and even petrified sunbeams, symbolic of the light coming down from the celestial realm to fill the Lodge and temple with heaven's light.

Interestingly, the Egyptians and even the ancient Maya constructed their sacred edifices to capture rays of the sun to fill designated areas with sunlight at certain periods of the solar calendar. Likewise, each Freemason, as a craftsman, should construct his sacred edifice, upon which he is called to labor, the very tabernacle and temple that we are, to receive and capture the rays of the sun or the light of our Creator (Isa. 60:19; John 8:12) and to fill his heart which, figuratively speaking, is the inner most chamber of his temple, his very own Holy of Holies.

The compasses and square have practical meanings on many levels. The two pillars found in every Blue lodge have meanings to each initiate in addition to those which are described in this article. Even with the unique uses of the compasses and square within the geometry of our cosmos and physical world, I would argue that the greatest use of the compasses and square is taught to the initiate of the Blue Lodge of ancient craft Masonry.

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