

THE TWO PILLARS

By John Shroeder*

Few of our Masonic symbols, other than the Square and Compasses, are as noticed and revered by Masons, or have received so much analytical attention from Masonic scholars as the two pillars. The Senior Deacon's Lecture instructs the Fellowcraft: "I call your attention to a representation of those two famous brazen pillars, placed within the outer porch of King Solomon's Temple: that on your right, Jachin, meaning "to establish," that on your left, Boaz, "denoting strength," taken together alluding to God's promise to David that he would establish his kingdom in strength." According to the Fellowcraft Manual, reference to the placement of the pillars outside of King Solomon's Temple remind the Craft laboring to complete the Temple that power without control is anarchy and control without power is futility, but what does that mean to the individual Mason?

The fog of history gives rise to divergent opinions about the origin, placement, shape, material composition, and functional purpose of pillars that may be the antecedents of the Masonic symbols.

Pillars are referenced in several Chapters of the Bible; specifically in II Chronicles Ch. 3, v. 15-17, and Ch. 4, v. 13 & 17; in I Kings Ch. 1, v. 15-22; II Kings Ch. 25, v. 17, and Jeremiah Ch. 52, v. 21. However, the Biblical dimensions of the pillars are not all in exact mathematical agreement with each other, or with the dimensions of our Fellowcraft Lecture, varying the pillars in height from eighteen cubits each in Kings and Jeremiah to thirty-five cubits in Chronicles and in our Masonic lecture. In 1904, the Grand Lodge of Iowa polled other Grand Lodges to see which height they used in their lectures. Fourteen replied that they used the eighteen cubits figure, while twenty-seven utilized thirty-five cubits as the total height, and one, curiously enough used thirty. The biblical references, as well as our lecture, say the pillars were made of brass. However, their erection at King Solomon's Temple preceded the development of the method of making brass so the pillars and other artifacts, such as the brazen sea, would actually have been made of bronze.

Clegg's Revision of Mackey's Encyclopedia informs us that the ancient historian Josephus provided a like description of the pillars in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, at Book I, chapter ii. The encyclopedia supposes that the two pillars had reference to the famous pillar of cloud and the pillar of smoke that led the Israelites in the wilderness. However, the legends of the pillars of Enoch also enter into the development of the Masonic symbolical concept of hollow pillars containing valuable secret information and protecting that information from threat of fire and flood.

Many other organizations also use two pillars, often topped by a joining arch, in their literature. Notice that many cemetery entrances are marked by two pillars surmounted by an arch. This may be more than just a way to suspend the name of the cemetery over the entrance driveway. It may symbolize an entrance into the land of the dead as some Masonic mystics have speculated our pillars do. Even St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome has bronze pillars around the high altar.

There is even disagreement as to just where these pillars were, in fact, placed at King Solomon's Temple. Some authorities have argued that they were placed outside of the outer porch. In the book, *Lessons of Capitular Masonry*, which provides many interpretations of Royal Arch Masonry, it is argued that the pillars stood just outside the Holy of Holies, in which case, only the High Priest would have actually passed between them on that annual occasion when he entered the Holy of Holies to utter the Ineffable Name of God. The shape is not agreed upon either. The pillars around the altars in St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, which were reported to have been brought there from the ruins of King Solomon's Temple, have spiral flutings reminiscent of large corkscrews.

Our Senior Deacon's Lecture says, "They were made of brass and cast in the clay grounds of Jordan ..." However, many contend that one of the pillars of the ages was made of stone or marble so that it would survive a flood, the other was made of brick which would withstand fire. The Senior Deacon's Lecture says, "They were hollow to serve as safe repositories for the records of Masonry, as well from inundation as conflagration." This seems parallel to the purposes of protection served by the pillars of marble and brick, but the latter pillars were legendarily said to have contained, not what we would probably expect to be the records of Masonry, but the wisdom provided by God to mankind, to perform all of the "sciences" or crafts of the artificers — not just building with stone or working in brass and other metals, but also weaving, farming, etc. These were reported to be lost during the Flood but later found by the sons of Noah, who were therefore enabled to start again a new civilization.

Many authors have attributed the philosophical origins of our pillars to the Egyptian culture in which large, often intricately decorated, monolithic spires, similar to Cleopatra's Needle in Central Park in New York, were placed, frequently in pairs, outside of their temples. Some believe that all initiates into the mysteries passed between these spires just as ours do between the pillars. Some have believed that these Egyptian spires were phallic emblems. Others have speculated that they represented rays coming down from their sun god, and frozen in stone, and some speculate that such pillars are the philosophical forerunners of steeples on churches.

Yet, despite all of this widespread attention, there is no widely agreed upon interpretation of their role in our Masonic ritual and philosophy. What then, can we as Masons learn from our pillars? Placement, shape, material and function are only the factual and physical aspects of the pillars. Since the scholars cannot agree on these matters, we must look to the symbolism of the pillars. Just as in the parables of the Volume of the Sacred Law, the actual facts may be considered of secondary importance to the lessons which can be learned from thoughtful analysis of the symbolism of the artifact.

There is more than one lesson and more than one symbolic reference that may be attached to the pillars, but this discusses one general interpretation or association and several applications

we may make of it. This interpretation may not be the one, which you prefer. Each Master Mason must develop his own understanding and interpretation of symbolic meanings as the quest for understanding is the greater part of the value of the symbol. If one is handed a ready-made answer and seeks no further insight, the greater value of the instruction is lost.

The name Jachin, meaning “to establish,” suggests the mental tasks of planning; the who, how, where, what, and when of managing, developing, encouraging and overseeing others to accomplish the establishment. The term Boaz, “denoting strength,” provides a connotation of action, of doing. Of the two terms, Jachin is the more passive, and Boaz is the more active concept.

We place the candidate midway between the two, that is, midway between passive and active. This can teach us the importance of having balance in our everyday professional, family, social, and personal lives and in our innermost small, quiet voice. The pillars can remind us at each meeting where we see them of that wise prayer, “God grant me the patience to accept the things I cannot change, the strength to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Psychologists say that as we age, we tend to become much harder on ourselves and when we bumble something we say to our inner self, “You fool, can’t you ever do anything right?” The psychologists tell us that this can lead to depression and to a more rapid aging and loss of strength and capabilities than is experienced by the person, who consistently strives to have positive self-reinforcement. So the pillars can remind us that we need to be more passive in acceptance of our own shortcomings and concentrate on our strengths, not our failures. Anyone who plays golf knows the importance of not letting a single bad stroke on the golf course cause us to become negative about our future efforts, or it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we think we are going to get worse, in golf or in life, the chances are good that we will.

Also, the historical theologically-argued contrasting ways to find eternal life were by Faith and by Good Works. Theologians find verses from the VSL to support each of these concepts. Those who report having experienced an epiphany, meaning an instant flash of insight or intuitive understanding, frequently report that it resulted not from striving or studying and working for it with strength but from becoming passive to receive it. Sometimes these reports come from those who have had near death experiences and received that peace which passeth all understanding while in a coma. Nonetheless, we often tend to work and study as if our own efforts could produce the results desired.

These distinctions of the passive and active nature of the pillars at the door parallel the distinction between the Senior Warden, who represents the pillar of strength or Boaz, and the Junior Warden, who represents the pillar of Jachin. The Worshipful Master representing the pillar of wisdom again reminds us of that prayer, “God grant me the patience to accept the things I cannot change, the strength to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Some may contend that, since we are told that the pillar of beauty is located at the meridian, or highest point of the sun at mid-day, and the pillar of strength is placed where the sun has spent its energy and is low at the end of the day, that the pillar of beauty should receive more of our attention and emulation than the pillar of strength.

Perhaps our pillars teach us that in order to achieve enlightenment in the development of Masonic character; we need to turn neither to the left nor to the right but to follow a sure path that maintains equilibrium by treading the middle ground, accepting of those things which we cannot change and striving with strength to change those we can. Strength and control; we must have both to develop in the Craft and in life.

*Revised and edited by David Bernabucci