



The Heart in Freemasonry

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The heart is a symbol of the center. This center may be described through a multitude of words, but it is, in its true essence, the Supreme, the Infinite, the Full Realization, which is beyond the limits of the human state. "...Anyone who, having arrived at total realization and the 'Supreme Identity',"¹ is the transcendent man; the man who has reached the center, which is the full realization of the heart. He knows his heart, and the Universal Heart. He knows the Sacred Heart of Mary, the mother of God. The heart is so pervaded by the infiltration of the higher realities, that it too, cannot but denote the end goal, and is both the metaphysical as well as physical center of man.

One finds the heart symbolized in all Traditions, including Freemasonry. It is not possible for an authentic Tradition to ignore its center, symbolized by the heart, as it owes its being to the center, the same as the circumference of a circle cannot exist without a center², and so the heart is found universally. In Proverbs it says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life."³ The heart as a symbol and the heart as the realized center permeates the Masonic Tradition, both from the first entrance into the Masonic Initiation to the last exit. The Candidate is first received with a sharp instrument at his naked left breast, the physical heart center. Hiram Abiff, that great Master Mason, was buried in a grave six feet East and West and six feet perpendicular, a grave which represents man who is likewise six feet from hand to hand and six feet from head to foot. Hiram Abiff is metaphysically buried in the heart, or center, of man. Until we have truly realized the heart, or the center, we are dead, like Hiram Abiff, but dead to the higher realities. The three ruffians symbolize those vices and veils that separate us from realizing the higher realities. The ruffians with their greed and impatience murdered Hiram Abiff, just as our access to the center is limited by our own selfishness and self-imposed barriers. When those ruffians are caught and served justice, which in the individual realm is the work of the spiritual path, we can realize the heart and then ascend and arise to the super-human realities, rising from this dead level to a living

¹ Guenon, Rene. *The Great Triad*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.113.

² Guenon, Rene. *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*. Cambridge, UK: Quinta Essentia, 1995. p.47.

³ Proverbs 4:23.

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perpendicular, just as all Master Masons are raised in Masonic ritual. Hiram Abiff himself is a symbol of the heart.

The most public and most pronounced symbols in Freemasonry are the square and compasses, which represent Heaven and Earth; the compasses represents the circle, and hence the center, Heaven, while the square represents Earth, with the blazing star, the Master Mason, or true man, in between the two.⁴ "...The compasses are normally placed above and the square below,"⁵ corresponding to Heaven above and Earth below. A real Master Mason⁶ has realized the "invariable middle", and "[exercises] the function of 'mediator'."⁷ It is worth noting the difference between 'true man', the Master Mason, and 'transcendent man'. "...True man' has only reached the fullness of the human state, and only what is above this state can be truly called 'transcendent'."⁸ True man represents the completion of the Lesser Mysteries, and transcendent man represents the completion of the Greater Mysteries. The Master Mason comprehends the middle chamber, the heart, and the manifested world, which is a reflection of the reality known in the heart. From the human point of view, however, there can be no distinction "between 'transcendent man' and 'true man'"⁹ because "from the human state 'transcendent man' can only be perceived by his 'trace', and that 'trace' is identical with the figure of 'true man'."¹⁰ The ways of the Master, or the Guru¹¹, are mysterious, and often it is difficult to comprehend the actions of a great Master, as is well known from stories of the great Sages of India, as in Ramakrishna, for example. In Ramakrishna's case, it is clear that the 'trace' that is found in the man is only a piece of the 'transcendent man' who occupied Ramakrishna's mortal body.

Guenon writes of the heart:

"Man, separated from his original Centre by his own fault, finds himself henceforth confined to the temporal sphere; he can no longer regain the single point from which all things are contemplated from the aspect of eternity. The terrestrial Paradise was, in fact, the true 'Center of the World', which is everywhere symbolically assimilated to

⁴ In many Lodges the blazing star is not used, but rather the letter G.

⁵ Guenon, Rene. *The Great Triad*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.94.

⁶ It is worth noting that although there are many Masons who have been raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason, very few, if any, are real Master Masons in the true sense, which the Masonic Ritual represents. A Mason may be at any place in their spiritual journey when receiving their initiation and degrees. It would seem that earlier, before Masonry became popular and modernized, and given the fact that no evidence of the Master Mason degree is found until the mid 18th Century, that the Master Mason degree may have been given only to a select few. Lack of evidence of Masonic Rites does not mean they did not exist, or were created later, as many historicists might suggest, but rather those initiates were highly qualified for the Mysteries of Masonry and were able to keep a secret.

⁷ Ibid. p.95.

⁸ Ibid. p.113.

⁹ Ibid. p.116.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.115.

¹¹ From the Sanskrit, Guru is often translated as "the dispeller of darkness".

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the Divine Heart; and can it not be said that Adam, as long as he was in Eden, truly lived in the Heart of God?"¹²

Great Sages, such as Ramakrishna, lived unceasingly in their center, although they may have moved and acted in the world in specific ways. St. Teresa of Avila wrote, "The soul always remains with its God in that center."¹³ At the center one reaches the seventh room of St. Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle, about which she says, "despite the trials she underwent and the business affairs she had to attend to, the essential part of her soul never moved from that room."¹⁴ This is what is meant by the understanding that 'transcendent man' is really only seen as 'true man' from the human perspective, and thus one can never really know if the Mason one meets is who he seems. The best judge is to look for the 'trace' of Mastership, which in the Masonic context would be the expression of the tenants of the institution, primarily Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty complemented with Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth, in short, true virtue and selflessness.

The other primary reference to the heart within Freemasonry is the penalty of the Fellowcraft. This penalty, referring to the heart, also refers to the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air. The beasts and the birds have traditionally been known as symbols of great seriousness and auspicious or inauspicious signs. The shaman acts according to the flight of the birds, and understands its revelations from the higher realms. Man, in between Heaven and Earth, chooses how to act, while the birds and beasts act according to their nature, and in a sense are communed with the way things are at a higher order of reality. The animals respond to the world at its level and remain there, balanced. It is man who may slip down or ascend higher to the realms. Since the beasts and birds act in accordance with the nature of manifestation, they are also reflections of the higher realities, comprehensible by the 'true man', because "the reintegration into the centre of the human state, that is, into the point where communication is established with the higher states of being,"¹⁵ that is into the heart, is where 'true man' resides while upon the Earth. "It is this communication which is represented by the understanding of the language of the birds; and in fact birds are frequently taken as symbols of the angels, that is precisely, of the higher states."¹⁶ The 'true man' can thus understand the communication of the Divine through the birds and the beasts. A Fellowcraft who violates his oath faces perhaps the toughest penalty, a full alienation from Divine communication, a fall from Grace, as also symbolized by the fall of Satan in the Christian Tradition.

There is a beautiful representation of both the heart and the birds in the *Story of the Grail*, written by Chretien de Troyes. Perceval arrives at the king's camp, which was on a frozen snow-covered meadow. "But before he reached the tents, a flock of geese that had been blinded by the snow flew over. He caught sight of them and heard them honking, for they

¹² Guenon, Rene. *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*. Cambridge, UK: Quinta Essentia, 1995. p.18.

¹³ St. Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979. p.179.

¹⁴ St. Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979. p.176.

¹⁵ Guenon, Rene. *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*. Cambridge, UK: Quinta Essentia, 1995. p.39.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.39.

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had been scared by a falcon that had swooped down upon them at full speed until it had found one that had become separated from the flock. It attacked and struck her so hard that she fell to the earth; but since it was very early the falcon flew off without seizing his prey. Perceval began to spur his steed to where he had observed the attack: the goose had been wounded in the neck and bled three drops of blood, which spread upon the white snow like natural colour. The goose was not hurt severely enough to keep it lying on the ground until Perceval reached there, and it had flown away before he came. When Perceval saw the disturbed snow where the goose had lain, with the blood still visible, he leaned upon his lance to gaze at this sight for the blood mingled with the snow resembled the blush of his lady's face. He became lost in contemplation: the red tone of his lady's cheeks in her white face were like the three drops of blood against the whiteness of the snow. As he gazed upon this sight, it pleased him so much that he felt as if he were seeing the fresh colour of his fair lady's face. Perceval mused upon the drops throughout the hours of dawn and spent so much time there that when the squires came out of their tents and saw him, they thought he was sleeping."¹⁷ The King sent two Knights to bring Perceval back from his contemplation, both failing and being seriously injured in the process as Perceval unfailingly remained centered in his contemplation of the three drops. Then when the third Knight, Sir Gawain, goes two of the three drops had melted and Perceval responded, "'There have already been two,' said Perceval, 'who tried to take my life and lead me away as if I were a prisoner; and I was so lost in contemplation over a most pleasing thought that anyone who tried to make me stop showed no concern for his own welfare, for before me in this place were three drops of fresh blood that made the white snow sparkle. Looking at them, I thought I could see the fresh colour of my sweet love's face, and I never wanted to stop.'"¹⁸ Perceval was absorbed into the center, unaffected by the violence around him. He saw the birds, and was engulfed in the reflection of the Divine in the three drops of blood.

Guenon writes, "This direct perception of truth, this intellectual and Supra-rational intuition, the very notion of which modern man seems to have lost, is true 'heart knowledge'... It is on Supra-rational knowledge that 'sacred science' is essentially based; and all that we have said of the use of symbolism and of the teaching contained in it is related to the means which the traditional doctrines place at the disposal of man to enable him to attain to that knowledge par excellence, with regard to which all other knowledge is only a more or less indirect reflection, just as the light of the moon is only a pale reflection of that of the sun. 'Heart Knowledge' is the direct perception of the intelligible light, of that light of the Word of which St. John speaks in the Prologue of his Gospel, radiant light of the 'Supernal Son', which is the true 'Heart of the World'."¹⁹ This intuition is an intuition of the world, and heart knowledge is also wisdom of the world. To experience a profound love for the world is an experience of intuition of the higher states. The primary duty of the Fellowcraft is to experience in the human state aspects of the superhuman state, a fully integrated intuition and an understanding of the world itself as a

¹⁷ de Troyes, Chretien. *Arthurian Romances*. "The Story of the Grail." London, UK: Penguin Books, 1991. p.432.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.436.

¹⁹ Guenon, Rene. *Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science*. Cambridge, UK: Quinta Essentia, 1995. pp.293-294.

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"direct perception of the intelligible light" in the manifested world. And thus, the true Fellowcraft has come to see the cosmos as a theophany, and why the penalty of losing one's heart is absolutely accurate; it signifies a loss of access to the center, which is experienced in the human state as intuitive knowledge, and which are glimmers in the human state of the supra-human or super-conscious Light. Masonry is one avenue for this Light. The heart, being itself a symbol for the Sun, is the internal source of Light. Loss of the heart is a fall from grace, as previously stated.

Freemasonry still maintains a connection to the center, the heart, although it may seem rather faint in these troubled times of the Kali Yuga. Yet, "the spirit, which 'bloweth where it listeth' and when it listeth, can always come and revivify symbols and rites, and restore to them, along with their lost meaning, the plenitude of their original virtue."²⁰ And so, there is always hope, and thus we, the current protectors of the rite, should offer a pot of incense to the Great Architect in gratitude for the spark of Light still accessible in this dark age, because "the pot of incense is an emblem of a pure heart, which is always an acceptable sacrifice to the deity, and as it glows with fervent heat, so too should our hearts, continually glow with gladness to that great and beneficent author of our existence, for the manifold blessings and comforts we enjoy."²¹

²⁰ Ibid. p.42.

²¹ The Pot of Incense is one of the Master Mason's emblems.