The Point Within A Circle

by Wor. and Rabbi Irving L. Luchans

As a man goes through the degrees to become a Mason, the symbols of Masonry are presented to him and their meaning explained through lectures and rituals. None of the symbols he will learn about is more ancient, or thought-provoking, or more central to Masonry than the point within the circle. He is told that in every regular and well furnished lodge, there is represented a certain point within the circle embordered by two perpendicular parallel lines representing St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. Upon the top of the circle rests the Book of Holy Scriptures. The point represents an individual brother; the circle, the boundary line of his duty. In going around this circle we necessarily touch on the two parallel lines, as well as on the Book of Holy Scriptures; and while a Mason keeps himself circumscribed within their precepts it is impossible that he should materially err.

This explanation is the plain meaning of the point within the circle. This is excellent moral advice. One can go deeper if one wishes to and derive even greater meaning through speculating on the meaning of the position of the Holy Saints John or comparing the symbol to a lodge room.

There is, however, much more here to speculate and meditate on because this symbol of Masonry is very ancient. Stonehenge in England is constructed as a circle with a point in the center. Ancient temple ruins of sun and fire worshippers were built in circular form with an altar In the center. In ancient India, the ancient flood story relates that the essence of male and female floated together over the flood and came together afterwards to reestablish a new, untainted mankind. Together they are represented by a circle-woman and point-man. In ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, the symbol of God—Alpha and Omega—is positioned in the center of the circle with a serpent on either side representing power and wisdom. Jewish mystics, the Kabbalists, drew a circle representing the universe with the letter Yod representing God in the center. In Lost River in South America there are hieroglyphic narratives on the high walls of the canyon with periodic glyphs of the point within a circle. The point within a circle is found at Painted Rocks, 250 feet above the plains between Wyoming and Montana.

Evaluating all of these instances and variations of the point within the circle, a pattern begins to emerge.

Primitive peoples throughout the world placed their God in the center of the circle which represented the world and all creation. God in the center determined what happened in their lives, their universe. From this we move to the civilized society of Hindu India where the symbol of the male encircled by the female denotes the world in harmony. The Egyptians then emerged and placed God the Creator in the center of the circle with a serpent on either side. Pharaoh wore this symbol as a pendant around his neck as he, Pharaoh, was God incarnate on earth full of power and wisdom. Then came Judaism. While its mystics in later centuries placed the Yod in the center of a circle. Ancient Hebrews were already representing God with the Yod. The Yod in the Hebrew alphabet represents the number 10 which itself represented perfection to the ancient Greeks and Romans.

There is one more very important aspect to this point within a circle to be discussed: geometry and operative masonry. The lecture portion in the opening paragraph to this article is about the symbolic meaning of the symbol. Yet the lecture ends with a real-world, operative-mason precept that while a "Mason keeps himself circumscribed within these precepts it is impossible that he should materially err." This appears out of place until one discovers (or remembers) Thales Theorem. Thales of Miletus (d. 546 BC) said that any angle inscribed in a semicircle is a right angle. To prove this, we simply take our point in a circle, draw a diameter line through the circle; choose any point on the semicircle and draw lines from the point to the ends of the diameter line. We now have a right angle. Knowledge described in Thales Theorem gives the operative mason the ability to prove and repair working tools in the shop or in the field. If the angle is square, the workman cannot "materially err."

The universality of the point within a circle leads me to speculate that this knowledge of proving squares existed thousands of years before Thales and throughout the world in many civilizations. Masonry and its teachings are truly universal. s

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