

Color Symbolism And Freemasonry

By

John Shroeder, PM

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We all know that Masonry employs symbols to teach moral lessons. One definition of Masonry frequently used is that it is a beautiful system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. Our lectures give explanations of those symbols. Some believe that there is much to be learned from the symbols which is not included in the lectures, that the given explanations are but the tip of the iceberg.

Our Virginia Mentor's Manual contains a section saying that it is unknown where, when or why the name Blue Lodge originated, but also pointing out that blue is generally regarded as the color of truth and fidelity, basic teachings of our craft; that blue is the color used to characterize friendship, one of the jewels of a Mason. It also tells us, "some have found some symbolism in the blue arch of the heavens and have urged that for a Freemason the virtues of friendship and benevolence must be as expansive as the heavens." It concludes with the reminder that the proper term is "Symbolic Lodge" rather than "Blue Lodge" although blue as a color and symbol is prominent in our teachings.¹

The Masonic Services Association distributed a Short Talk Bulletin in April 1994 which addressed the views of Brother Leon Zeldis, Honorary Assistant Grand Master, and Past Sovereign Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, of Israel, condensed from his paper in *Quatuor Coronatorum Transactions*, vol. 105, 1992, concerning the Masonic meanings of the colors blue, white, purple, red, green, yellow and black. Brother Zeldis quotes the Masonic author, A. E. Waite, as writing, "There is no recognized scheme or science of colors in Masonry. Here and there in our ritual we find an 'explanation' for the use of a certain colour [*sic*], but this usually turns out to be merely a peg on which to hang a homiletic lecture about it, having little if any connection with the origins of its use." Brother Zeldis also quotes Brother Chetwode Crawley, "The ordinary prosaic enquirer will see in the selection of blue as the distinctive colour of

Freemasonry only the natural sequence of the legend of King Solomon's Temple. For the Jews had been Divinely commanded to wear a 'riband of blue' (Numbers 15:38, 'You are to take tassels on the corners of your garments with a blue cord on each tassel').² Brother Zeldis does not mention, in this article, the description in Exodus 28:31 and 33 respectively, "And you shall make the robe of the ephod all blue.", "On its skirts you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet stuff ...". The pomegranates are, of course, another familiar Masonic symbol on the chapters of the pillars.

The Masonic Service Association of North America publication, "EMESSAY NOTES" of February 1997, also has this to say about the Masonic symbolism of the color blue, " Blue: having the color of clear sky, the sapphire, the turquoise. There is nothing of this hue about a 'Blue Lodge' except the colors on aprons, collars, etc. of officers. Blue was adopted as the official color of the Symbolic Lodge by the Mother Grand Lodge, which first proclaimed white as the color and then changed it to blue. Various theories account for the color as that descriptive of a Symbolic Lodge; it came from the blue vault of heaven; blue was the color of the steel points of the compasses, contrasting with the yellow brass of the hinged part of the instrument; blue was the official color of the Order of the Garter and was adopted for lodges in an attempt to add the dignity of that decoration to the Fraternity. Blue Lodge and Blue Masonry are other names for Symbolic Lodge and Symbolic Masonry. (From the MSA Digest *Masonic Vocabulary*)"³

I noted with interest, in some of my non-Masonic reading, several references to color symbolism and thought that it might be of interest to others as well.

The renowned Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, took a great interest in the folk legends and symbols of earlier ages as he felt that they contributed to an understanding of the changes which he felt had taken

place in man's understanding of himself and his role in the Universe over eons of time.⁴ Jung felt that early man had not originally had a clear consciousness or rational thinking capability but, over centuries, developed such a capability and now has come to know only the conscious, and not the unconscious, which was layered over by the development of the conscious. He believed that earlier man had been governed by instincts, much as we think about the animal mind today. He felt that the earlier instinctual mind is still with man today but it is as a shadow behind or beneath the conscious mind. He felt that the integration of that shadow mind with the conscious mind results in the enlightenment or individuation of the individual.

Because of his keen interest, Jung read widely in science, literature, history, philosophy and also folklore and found, in literature from ancient civilizations and religions, parallels in symbolism which he reasoned showed that these arose from a common thread in the instinctive minds of ancient men. In this regard, he adopted the Eastern philosophy that if things repeatedly occur together, it is more than coincidence even if a causal relationship cannot be conclusively proven through scientific methods. He called this synchronicity. Worshipful Brother Kirk MacNulty, author of the beautiful work, Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol,⁵ is quoted by Wallace McLeod in his book, A Quest for Light,⁶ as also using Jungian concepts in explaining how the three Craft degrees recapitulate the development of the individual person. "The Entered Apprentice degree, (or the Ground Floor of the Temple), represents the physical or material being, Jung's 'individual consciousness'. The Fellow Craft, (or Middle Chamber), represents the soul or psyche, Jung's 'personal unconscious'. The Master Mason degree, (or Holy of Holies), is the spiritual being, Jung's 'collective unconscious', one step closer to the Divine." Similar parallels in the symbolism of peoples very far removed from each other culturally, geographically and in time have been noted by Fraser in his seminal work, The Golden Bough,⁷ and more recently by Joseph Campbell as reported in his many books, especially his series on the nature of the gods in various cultures.⁸

This is interesting but, you may be asking, what does it have to do with the subject of color symbolism in

Freemasonry? Perhaps these parallels in symbolism have also occurred with the selection of blue as the color of the symbolic lodge. Perhaps the uses of the symbolism of blue in other cultures can provide insight into its use in Freemasonry. Because of Jung's detailed research into symbolism, his works may be of more than passing interest to the members of this Craft founded upon the use of symbolism to teach moral principles. The Mason who is willing to expend the effort to glean his writings for the kernels of particular application to the ancient evolution of symbolism used in modern Freemasonry will find it rewarding.

For example, there is no proof that our use of the square and compasses as Masonic symbols has a direct lineal descent from their use as symbols of moral instruction in ancient China, which is evidenced by ancient writings, or from their use in ancient Egypt, as indicated by archeological findings. The creation myths of the Dogon tribe of Mali in Western Africa offer some striking parallels with the penalty of the Entered Apprentice⁹ but there is almost certainly no very direct lineal relationship. Jung would say that these things arose independently (but synchronistically) from man's common unconscious. Jung's reasoning may offer a logical framework for a theory of common threads of symbolism where evidence and proof of direct relationship is lacking.

Among other symbols he researched, Jung found that the color blue of the heavenly sky has been in many cultures and beliefs a symbol of spirituality. He contrasts this with red as a symbol of emotion. This equates with our feelings about these colors, I believe. Blue is the coolest of colors and we equate spirituality with a cool, detached, or other-worldly orientation or philosophy. Red is the warmest of colors which we equate with the heat of anger or passion. Our everyday language, for example, includes the well known phrase, "seeing red", to dramatically convey the concept of anger. Jung points out that the combination of red and blue provides purple or violet which he says is the symbol of mysticism. He feels that this is a good illustration of his concept, to which I alluded earlier, of the integration or individuation of the personality which he concludes has a duality similar to his concept of the conscious mind and shadow mind or psyche. When the dual parts of the personality,

which he equates with the spiritual aspect of the conscious mind, as represented by the color blue, and the emotional, instinctual aspect of the shadow mind, which he equates with the red, are combined or integrated, he feels they bring the individual to his highest potential, symbolized by violet.

I found this of interest Masonically since blue is the color of the symbolic lodge which, in Jungian terms, represents the spiritual values to which we aspire. That seems to me to be closely aligned with the moral lessons taught as we progress through the three degrees from the physical man, or Entered Apprentice, to the mindful man, or Fellow Craft, and ultimately to the spiritual man, or Master Mason. This is also evidenced by the symbology [*sic*] of the changes in mode of wearing the apron while progressing through the degrees where the triangular flap, which triangle, Masonic scholars tell us, represents deity, is first separate and above the rectangular apron representing worldly, or base, things. Secondly, the triangle or spiritual symbol is imposed upon the worldly form in the Fellow Craft's apron, and thirdly, the two are integrated into one triangular form, as a Master Mason, symbolizing spirituality.

The above explanation of the symbolism of blue in the symbolic lodge is at least as intellectually and intuitively satisfying as the other explanations offered for the term "Blue Lodge". For example, Mackey says that blue is the symbol of universal friendship and benevolence, because, as it is the color of the vault of heaven, which embraces and covers the whole globe, we are thus reminded that in the breast of every brother these virtues should be equally as extensive. He says that blue, except for white, is the only color which should be used in a Master's lodge for decorations. Mackey relates that blue was to the Hebrews a symbol of perfection, to the Druids a symbol of truth, to the Hindus a symbol of wisdom, to the Babylonians and the Egyptians a sacred color, to the Chinese a symbol of divinity, and to medieval Christians, an emblem of immortality.¹⁰

Some of the Masonic degrees, some of which are called chivalric degrees, in both the Scottish and York Rites use red as the basic color, much as the symbolic lodge uses blue. In the case of the York Rite degree of the Royal Arch, this has been

explained by Mackey as the symbol of the ardor and zeal which should actuate all who are in possession of that sublime portion of Freemasonry.¹¹ Mackey also cites Portal's Symbolic Colors which states that red, representing fire, is the symbol of the regeneration and purification of souls. Mackey sees this as a logical reason for the Royal Arch to adopt it because the Royal Arch refers historically to the rebuilding or regeneration of the Temple of Solomon, and symbolically to the regeneration of life.¹² In the case of the use of red as the symbolic color for the heraldic degrees of the York and Scottish Rites, it fits well with the Jungian interpretation of red as the symbol of emotions, because courage, fervor, and zeal, when properly directed, are all noble emotions which are closely associated with the rituals of the heraldic degrees.

The combination of red and blue into purple or violet, is the color of the York Rite Mark, Past, and Most Excellent Master degrees which fall between the degree of Master Mason and that of the Royal Arch. Mackey says that the color purple in this case therefore symbolizes the close connection and harmony which should ever exist between these two portions of the Masonic System. This would indicate a transitional blending from blue toward red.¹³ Portal's Symbolic Colors states that purple, in the profane language of colors, symbolizes constancy in spiritual combats because blue denotes fidelity and red, war.¹⁴ We know that purple has always been an emblem of exalted office and purple the legendary color of the robes of kings and high priests. The purple dye at that time reportedly could only be produced by crushing a certain shellfish, *murex*, from Phoenicia, which made it very expensive and contributed to limiting its use.

Brother Zeldis, in the Short Talk Bulletin previously cited, points out that, in Hebrew, *tchelet* (light blue) and *argaman* (purple) have usually been mentioned together without scholars reaching satisfactory conclusions as to why. He found that the light blue, or *tchelet*, was produced from a short variety of the shellfish, *murex trunculus*, while the purple, or *argaman*, was produced from one of two other varieties, *murex brandaris* and *thais haemastoma*. He points out that some historians have concluded that, in the Middle Ages in Europe, blue was low in popular esteem compared with red because red dyes could achieve stronger shades which brought to

mind the prestigious purple of the ancient world. However, he says, blue gradually became recognized as a princely color replacing red at court because red was used by the masses and, hence, considered vulgar. Blue and gold then became the color for shields, banners and livery.

Nowadays, purple is used as such Masonically in the collars of Grand Lodge Officers in England and some other jurisdictions. The use of violet in the caps of the members of the Supreme Council of the Thirty Third Degree and those of the Sovereign Grand Inspectors General of the Scottish Rite is also thought to symbolize the use of the purple by the high priests and kings of ancient civilizations. Brother Zeldis feels that the explanation of purple as 'an emblem of union being composed of blue and crimson' in the Royal Arch is contrived.

Wallace McLeod, in his previously cited book, The Quest for Light, discusses the color symbolism pointing out that light blue is a color peculiar to the symbolic degrees and one of the most durable and beautiful colors of nature, an emblem of friendship and benevolence and reminds us that these virtues should be to us as expansive as the blue arch of heaven itself. His reasoning is a bit circular here as he says that blue is symbolical of friendship and benevolence because it is the color of the symbolic degrees and Craft Masonry is the ideal example of these virtues. He says that scarlet is emblematical of fervency and zeal but wonders if this might better be crimson than scarlet, an issue which Mackey prefers not to quibble over. McLeod repeats Mackey's statement about purple being an admixture of scarlet and blue and therefore symbolical of harmony and unanimity. He, like Brother Zeldis, seems less than convinced of the symbology here, however.¹⁵

Personally, I would prefer to go back to basics and to look on the use of these violet caps and purple collars as emblematic of the Jungian explanation of the successful integration within the personality of the spiritual mind and the zealous mind to attain a higher level of consciousness and self-knowledge. This would negate Mackey's concept that purple or violet is a transitional color from the blue of the Symbolic Lodge to the red of the Royal Arch with red being the ultimate color. In the organization of colors which I propose, the violet or purple would be the ultimate reflecting the whole, integrated persona.

Learning to read the symbols of ancient folk legends and finding parallels in distant cultures and distant ages led Carl Jung to a better understanding of the human mind. Study of his writings and study of explanations of our Masonic symbols can lead modern Masons to a better understanding of our Masonic heritage of symbolism and to a better understanding of our Craft and of ourselves. This latter meets the goal of the ancient mysteries, "First know thyself." In addition to the writings of Jung, I commend to your attention the writings of Joseph Campbell, the late professor of mythology at Sarah Lawrence College. Campbell's book, The Power of Myth,¹⁶ with Bill Moyers from the public TV series of the same title, discusses Masonic symbols used by our founding fathers on the dollar bill, the pyramid topped by the all-seeing eye. Brent Morris, in a 1995 Short Talk Bulletin, debunked this as a Masonic symbol but do not let that Campbell error turn you away from Joseph Campbell.¹⁷ The Power of Myth is available in the Fairfax County Library system or can be purchased in paper back. Other books of Campbell which will be of interest to students of symbolism include his multi-volume set, The Masks of God.

Notes:

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- ¹ Virginia Mentor's Manual, Grand Lodge Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the Commonwealth of Virginia, (contained within The Presentation Volume, 1977), p. 14
- ² The Short Talk Bulletin, "Colour Symbolism in Freemasonry, Brother Leon Zeldis, The Masonic Service Association of North America, April 1994
- ³ "EMESSAY NOTES", February 1997, The Masonic Service Association of North America
- ⁴ The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung, Carl Gustav Jung, ISBN: 067960071X, Random House, Inc., January 1977
- ⁵ Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol, Kirk MacNulty, Hudson & Thames Publishing
- ⁶ The Quest for Light, Wallace McLeod, Edited by Tony Pope, Australian and New Zealand Masonic Research Council, Melbourne, 1997, p. 65
- ⁷ Carl Gustav Jung, *op. cit.*
- ⁸ The Golden Bough, James George Fraser, ISBN: 1568495013, Buccaneer Books, January 1994
- ⁹ The Masks of God, Joseph Campbell, ISBN 0140194428, Viking Pen, June 1972
- ¹⁰ The Pale Fox, M. Griaule & G. Dieterlen, ISBN 0-939118-02-5, trans. from French by Stephen C. Infantino, Ph.D. © Continuum Foundations, 1986
- ¹¹ Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, Revised and enlarged by Robert I. Clegg 33°, © 1929, The Masonic History Company, Chicago, Toronto, New York, London, p. 141
- ¹² Mackey, *op. cit.*, p. 840
- ¹³ *ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Mackey, *op. cit.*, p. 822
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*
- ¹⁶ The Power of Myth, Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, ISBN: 03885247745, Doubleday & Co., May 1988
- ¹⁷ The Short Talk Bulletin, The Masonic Service Association of North America, 1995

