

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

MASONIC APRON

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The Masonic Apron is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason - the distinguished badge of a Mason. The opening of the Apron Lecture the Worshipful Master states: *My Brother, I now present you this lambskin or white leather apron. It is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason - the distinguished badge of a Mason.*

With these or similar words every Mason is presented one of the most visible signs of Masonic membership, the lambskin or white leather apron. In this, the newly made brother receives the first tangible evidence of his acceptance into the Masonic fraternity and the one perpetual emblem of his Masonic affiliation. This badge, the "essential" apron of an Entered Apprentice, will figure predominately throughout his career in Masonry from the first lesson in the Northeast corner of the lodge room until both his Masonic pursuit and life's span is ended, and he is duly called from labor.

The "Right of Investiture," the ceremony of emblematically clothing the candidate, is neither original nor unique to Freemasonry. Use of the apron in the Hermetic ceremonies of ancient Egypt is evident. The apron was worn as a symbol of priestly power in the Levitan economy. The Persian mysteries incorporated the white apron, and in the Hindustan, the investiture consisted of a scarf being tied around the candidate's waist. Without question, the Operative Masons used the apron as an item of protective clothing.

The origin of the apron and its early development and character in Freemasonry is obscure. The leather apron of the operative mason found its way into Speculative Masonry along with other symbols of the Craft. Over time, it became an emblem and a badge, recognized as a symbol of antiquity and was presented to the new Mason as a paramount honor. There is not the slightest hint that operative masons used the apron as a teaching tool. Moreover, there is little evidence that there was much more than a tenuous allegorical

inference involved in the presentation during the formative stages of Freemasonry in the early 18th century. As the Masonic ritual went through the development and evolutionary processes, the apron progressed to a place of prominence by the 1760's that the Mason recognizes today.

The symbolical wearing of aprons by Freemasons in imitation of operative masons would require little explanation, as the workman wore the apron as a protective covering. However, the modern Masonic apron is a white lambskin apron, which adds two specific qualities. First, the color white is a ritualistic development to represent purity and, second, the lambskin material is emblematical of innocence. No better explanation of the Masonic apron can be found than that provided in the Apron presentation to the new Mason. By stating:

My Brother, I now present you this lambskin or white leather apron. It is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason - the distinguished badge of a Mason. It may be that, in the coming years, upon your head may rest the laurel wreaths of victory; pendent from your breast may hang jewels fit to grace the diadem of an Eastern potentate; nay, more than these, with light added to the coming light, your ambitious feet may tread round after round of the ladder that leads to fame in our mystic circle, and even the purple of the Fraternity may rest upon your honored shoulders; but never again from mortal hands, never again until your enfranchised spirit shall have passed upward and inward through the pearly gates, shall any honor so distinguished, so emblematical of purity and all perfections, be conferred upon you as this which I now bestow.

It is yours; yours to wear throughout an honorable life, and at your death to be deposited upon the coffin which shall enclose your lifeless remains, and with them laid beneath the clods of the valley. Let its pure and spotless surface be to you an ever-present reminder of a purity of life and rectitude of conduct," a never-ending argument for nobler deeds, for higher thoughts, for greater achievements. And when at last your weary feet shall have come to the end of life's toilsome journey, and from your nerveless grasp shall drop forever the working tools of life, may the record of your life and actions be as pure and spotless as this fair emblem which I place

within your hands tonight; and when your trembling soul shall stand naked and alone before the Great White Throne, there to receive judgment for the deeds done while here in the body, may it be your portion to hear from Him who sitteth as the Judge Supreme the welcome words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things! Enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord."

It is in this apron presentation the new Mason receives a wonderful and most profound lesson and gains an understanding of the symbolic importance of his Masonic Apron. In this presentation the Mason is told that whatever he does, wherever he goes, the apron should remind him of his Masonic obligations. He is told that the apron is not only important as a symbol of his Masonic membership, but it is also a symbolic reminder to follow the noblest pursuits in life.

The apron reminds the Mason to do his duty to God, his country, his neighbor and his family. Every time he puts the apron on, he should be reminded of his obligations to God and of that purity of character and behavior necessary for his proper relationship with God. The Masonic apron is symbolic of the Masonic teachings designed to make men better citizens and servants of God. Though Freemasons are not builders of great buildings, they are builders of men. As such, the Masonic apron is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason. May the Mason ever strive to fulfill the tenets of Freemasonry in heart, mind, and soul.

The Apron is not a modern invention, in fact it is the most ancient of all garments. In the 3rd Chapter of Genesis these words are written: *"and the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons."*

Although this reflect evidence of Adam and Eve's apron, we attempt to understand the apron's Masonic history. Ancient writing regarding the building of King Solomon's Temple, state: *"When the construction of King Solomon's Temple was commenced, workmen were selected to carry out the different trades. Hiram, the widow's son, proclaimed that before entering upon the undertaking the aid of God should first be invoked, and as the Temple was to be God's Holy*

House and erected to Him, each workman having a part in its construction should offer a sacrifice to God on the Altar of Burnt Offering. The Lamb had in all ages been deemed an Emblem of Innocence and was offered as a sacrifice. Except for the skin, the whole of the lamb was consumed. The skins were properly prepared, and Hiram caused aprons to be made of them. One apron from the skin of each lamb sacrificed, one apron for each mason under him."

When the aprons had been presented to the workmen, Hiram is reported to have said: *"Masonic authority makes this, the snow-white lambskin apron, its first tangible gift to you and ordains that all Masons in all ages, wherever they may be throughout the world, shall ever receive it and always wear it."* The apron is an emblem of innocence. Innocent life has gone out of the world: for every man an apron - for every apron a life.

This sacrifice is typical of a greater sacrifice promised by the Almighty and prophesied by all the Prophets of Israel - the coming of the Messiah who shall be offered for the guilty world. This is the badge of a Mason. It sets the Mason apart from other men. There shall be many who seek to wear it and those to whom it is given shall exalt themselves because of possessing it. No other gift that mere man can bestow can equal this honor and dignity. Kings can bestow no decorations or titles so worthy as this.

The apron is a perfect square, its four right angles teach us that Purity, Truth, Sincerity and Honesty are the foundations of morality. Its four sides remind us to practice the four cardinal virtues - Temperance in word and deed; Fortitude in a noble purpose; Prudence in judging wisely; Justice to the humblest and greatest alike. The Square (or 'four') is the symbol of matter. Four was the emblem of matter to the ancients because they thought that the earth flat, square, and marked by the four points of the compass.

The flap is triangle whose three sides teach us to relieve a distressed brother. To be kind and friendly in dealing with our fellow men. The triangle is the threefold revelation for God, or Divine Wisdom. The circle formed by the strings is the symbol of Spirit.

The Aprons

The Entered Apprentice Apron should have the flap pointing upwards, indicating that Divine Wisdom has not yet truly penetrated the gross matter of our bodies. The Equilateral triangle made by the upper flap teaches us the threefold personal revelation of God. The triangle is the Symbol of the Deity for this reason. In geometry, a single line cannot represent a perfect figure, neither can two lines. Three lines, however, constitute the triangle, or first perfect demonstrable figure. Hence this figure symbolizes the Eternal God, infinitely perfect in his nature. But the triangle properly refers to God only in his quality as an eternal Being, its three sides representing the past, present and future. This symbolism of the Eternal God. The Greek character Delta is formed as an equilateral triangle and from the sacredness attached to the form of the triangle, this character was always known as the Sacred Delta. The Egyptians called it the Sacred No. 3, a number of perfection. It was an object of worship among them as a symbol of the Grand Principle of animated existence which extends its influences throughout all created matter the three sides representing the animal, vegetable, and mineral departments of nature. To the Jews the triangle represented the three periods of existence: the past, present and future. To the Hindus: creation, preservation, and renewal. To the Chinese: heaven, earth and water. The flap of the apron when raised forms a triangle standing on a square. This the Egyptians consider a most perfect figure because in the Egyptian ceremony of Initiation into their mysteries, the candidate, blindfolded and with a chain around his neck, is led by a brother to a door in the wall of the temple of the lodge-the door formed a triangle symbolizing Heaven and square representing the area of the entrance on which he trod symbolized earth, thus the entrance symbolized passing from Earth to Heaven. The granite triangle in the king's chamber in the Great Pyramid is said to represent the triune God of the Egyptians.

The Fellowcraft Apron has the flap pointing down and indicates (1) That wisdom has begun to enter and therefore control matter, and (2) that the Soul and body are acting in unison. The two

rosettes stress the dual nature of man and have a clear reference to the two Pillars. The two rosettes also point out that the Fellowcraft has not yet completed Freemasonry as it requires a third rosette to form a triangle. It is thought by some that the blue rosettes added to the Fellowcraft apron indicate the progress being made in the science of regeneration and that the candidate's spirituality is beginning to bud forth, also that the wilderness of the natural man is now blossoming as the rose, in the flowers and graces of his regenerated nature.

The Master Mason's Apron, the addition of the third rosette forms a triangle, pointing upwards. A triangle, point upwards, represents Fire or Divine Spark. It is the emblem of Shiva, the third member of the Hindu Trinity. It also represents spirit. The triangle of the flap and triangle of the rosettes form a square where they overlap. This square represents matter. Thus, we have the union of Body (square), Soul (top triangle) and Spirit (lower triangle).

The Tassels. The apron was at first fastened by strings passed around the back and brought to the front, with the ends hanging down. It became the custom to decorate the ends with fringes, jewels, etc., but the introduction of elastic bands did away with that idea and the pendants were added as a sort of "in memoriam" to the departed strings. Later, the design of the tassels was made with a symbolic background.

The tassels have seven strings which represent-

- The 7 liberal Arts and Sciences-Grammar, Rhetoric (the art and science of expression), Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, Astronomy.
- The number 7 appears in nearly every ancient institution.
- 7 or more the make a lodge perfect.
- King Solomon was 7 years and upwards in building the temple to God's Service.
- 7 was the perfect number of the Pythagoreans because it was composed of three and four-the sum of the points of the triangle and the square-the two perfect figures.
- The 7 steps.

- 7 Altars burned constantly before Mithra.
- The Hindus believed the world to be surrounded by 7 peninsulas.
- There are 7 spacious caverns in the Persian mysteries.
- The 7-branched candlestick of the Jews representing the Sun as the central light and six other planets.
- Jacob saw a ladder of 7 steps leading to heaven.

The sum of the strings in the two tassels is 14, which was the number of pieces into which set in the Egyptian mysteries divided the body of OSIRIS.

Whilst we are mainly concerned with the English Masonic apron (albeit Victorian and somewhat Scottish and Irish), reference to the Masonic clothing in other lands may be of interest.

- **Belgium.** - The Grand Lodge Aprons are of light blue silk, embroidered with gold fringe, without tassels. The collars are embroidered with gold with the jewels of office, and with acacia and other emblems.
- **Egypt.** - The Grand Orient uses the same clothing as the Grand Lodge of England, but the colors are thistle and sea green. The rank of wearer is denoted by the number of stars on his collar.
- **France.** - The Grand Orient has aprons very elaborately embroidered or painted and edged with crimson or blue. In the third degree, blue embroidered sashes are used lined with black.
- **Greece.** - In recent years the clothing has become identical with that worn in England, although formerly silk and satin aprons painted and embroidered with crimson were worn.
- **Germany.** - Aprons varied greatly in size and shape, from square to the shape of a shield. Some bear rosettes and others the level. There is no uniformity and German Lodges had jewels apparently according to the taste of each.

- **Holland.** - Each Lodge selects its own colors for aprons and the ribbons to which the jewels are attached. Individuals may use embroidery, fringes, etc., according to their own fancy.
- **Hungary.** - The members of Grand Lodge wear collars of light blue silk with a narrow edging of red, white and green-their national colors-from which are suspended five pointed stars. The Grand Lodge Officers wear collars of orange color edged with green and lined with white silk. They are embroidered with the acacia and the emblems of office. The aprons have a blue edging with three rosettes for a Master Mason.
- **Italy.** - The Entered Apprentice apron is plain white silk. The Fellow craft is edged and lined with a square printed in the center. The Master Mason wears an apron lined and edged with crimson, bearing the square and compasses. He also wears a sash of green silk, edged with red, embroidered with gold and lined with black on which are embroidered the emblems of mortality in silver. It must be remembered, however, that Freemasonry for some time past has been suppressed in Italy, the reason being that it intermeddled in national politics.
- **Iceland.** - Plain white aprons, edged with blue, bearing the number of the lodge. At the Annual Communication lambskins are worn with a narrow silver braid in the center of the ribbon. In former days, the Worshipful Master always wore a red cloak and silk hat.
- **Portugal.** - The apron of the Grand Lodge Officers are of white satin, edged with blue and gold and with three rosettes. The collar is made of blue silk with the acacia embroidered in gold.
- **Spain.** - The apron of the Entered Apprentice is of white leather, rounded at the bottom, with a pointed flap, worn raised. The Fellowcraft wears the same with the flap turned down, and the Mason (Master) wears a white satin apron with a

curved flap, edged with crimson, and embroidered with a square and compass, enclosing the letter G. The letters M and B, and three stars also appear. It is lined with black silk and embroidered with the skull and crossbones and three stars.

- **Switzerland.** - The clothing is simple. The Entered Apprentice apron is white with the lower corners rounded. The Fellowcraft has blue edging and strings, and the Master Mason has a wider border and three rosettes in the body of the apron, while the flap is covered with blue silk. The apron of the Grand Officers is edged with crimson, without tassels or rosettes, except in the case of the Grand Master, which has three crimson rosettes.

Thus, it will be seen that our apron is a very honorable garment, one that we should treasure. It is an apron made of lambskin, pure white, without fault or stain - the color of the Soul as mortal man sees it. It is ours and it now depends upon each of us to keep it without blemish - to keep it as a mirror of our soul that we may stand the final test when we reach into Life Eternal - which is just beyond.

Our Operative Brethren wore an apron to save their clothing from being soiled at work, so the Speculative brother dons it as a desire to be kept unsoiled from the world.

God's message to us is, "*Be faithful unto death, and I shall give thee a Crown of Life*". Thus, may the purity and whiteness of our apron reflect our Soul so that when our name is called on Judgment Day, we may look up to God and say, "*I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course and I have kept the Faith.*" And the Great Architect will say, "*Enter, free and of good report*".

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