

## NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

### The Honeybee/The Beehive as a Symbol of Virtuous Masonic Industry and Ethics

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Freemasonry, in its capacity as a fraternity of "Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons," has adopted various symbols, designed to remind the Mason—inside and outside of the Lodge—of his duties to himself and to mankind. Engaging in noble and industrious endeavors is but one example. Most of the symbols are architectural working-tools, such as the Level, Plumb, Square, Gavel, and other miscellaneous tools used by ancient stonemasons as literal tools {as described in The Holy Bible and other holy writs}, but now also employed as metaphors or inserted as honorable symbolic signs and symbols, used by modern Speculative Freemasons to illustrate "more noble and glorious purposes" befitting a moral code of conduct, in our modern world.

The rites of Freemasonry are filled with imagery, characters, and symbols designed to translate the core teachings and values of our fraternity to brethren. While all harbor their unique significance, some enjoy a greater place of prominence in Masonic discussion, lecture, and philosophy. Take, for instance, the **Beehive**, a symbol that maintains a position in the Master Mason degree yet receives little attention in the whole of Masonic ritual. Despite its inconspicuous place in the craft, the Beehive is a rich, ancient symbol worthy of examination. The **Beehive** is emblematic of the Masonic lodge and industriousness of Freemasons.

Oddly enough, "the Beehive" doesn't fit the category of an architectural working tool—yet it has a prominent place in Masonic allegory and symbolism....*The noted Masonic scholar, Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33° and a Knight Templar, notes that the Beehive was, among the ancient Egyptians, the symbol of an obedient people. Of all the insects, the image of bees buzzing around a beehive was seen as the sign of "regulated behavior, when congregated in their hive."* He also notes that Freemasonry likewise adopted the Beehive as a symbol of Industry. He notes that new Masons are taught that Master Masons work so that they "may receive their wages, the better to support {themselves} and family, and contribute to the relief of worthy distressed Brother Master Masons, and {their} widows, and orphans".... Using an analogy, groups of hard-working men who are Masons could be likened to "bees." While a Masonic Lodge is essentially the group of men themselves—actually, in bygone times, large Masonic Halls were built to accommodate the conferral of Degrees and other activities, as a known "hub of activity," quite similar to a "Bee-Hive."

Our **ancient operative brothers** who came from the guilds of the middle-ages, Industry in the old meaning was how things were accomplished without modern heavy machinery. Individuals were assigned specific tasks based on their skill level. Some simply carried stone or other materials. Often placing it in the care of their more experienced brothers who fashioned the proper piece for the structure. Others still put their skills to planning how the structure was put together. Assigning tasks to help complete the structure. No one group was the linchpin to the project or structure, yet all were critical to make the project a success.

Fast forward to the arrival of **speculative masonry** and you have a hive of a new kind. Still, you have a structure that requires workers on all levels to make the hive (in this case hive is a synonym for lodge) function and be successful. More experienced brothers in the craft share their knowledge with newer "workers" in the hive. All the while realizing they have their own task in the hive. Each doing their part to make the hive function properly. Working on projects to bring success to the endeavor and the lodge. There is also the leader of the hive, in the case of a Masonic lodge the Worshipful Master, who reads and creates the plans and guides the workers on all levels to a successful project.

Whether you are talking about our ancient operative brothers or the modern hive (lodge), the end goal is still the same. A group of individuals working together for a common goal, the success of any one individual is important since it helps the larger structure of the hive succeed. Even with the opportunity for individual success and growth we still see the need for the overall structure of the hive to succeed. The hive must succeed otherwise the individual accomplishment has a reduced meaning, possibly even making the individual success meaningless. The idea for the hive is to assemble those who can best work together and best agree on the common goal of the hive.

It is through this concept of Industry that our ancient operative brothers were able to create grand cathedrals and other enduring structures. It is also how modern Freemasonry makes successful lodges, some enduring for hundreds of years.

*In Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.*

As Masons, we must imitate the bee, be industrious, work with others and for others, take pride in our vocations, obey the rules of our society, and strive to add to our body of knowledge and understanding. Otherwise, we are useless members of society.

## References

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