

The Rope of 81 Knots

We know that Freemasons learn through unrevealed allegories and through the illustration of symbols.

A Lodge is the society of Masons which is a speculative organism of moral and social construction. In the Lodge, brethren meet for their fraternal work and in benefit of humanity. Because of that, a Mason will also seek to enrich his knowledge and spirituality, aiming at improving his relationship with his family, his community, and the world. In other words, a Mason will spread the Light.

The word Lodge derives from the Sanskrit, Loka, which means world, masonically, however its meaning is much more complex. In some places the Masonic Temple contains some architectural aspects of Solomon's Temple built in Jerusalem at Mount Moriah, which means ordained, considered by God. Solomon, David's ninth (3x3) son with Bathsheba, was the third king of the Hebrews, having succeeded his father. His name comes from Shelomoh, which derived from Hebrew, Shalom which means peace.

The Masonic Temple is made up of three parts: the waiting room, the atrium, and the Temple. The waiting room is where brethren meet informally. They greet each other and chat. It is typically a social place where the fraternal atmosphere already starts to work. The atrium or vestibule (Exodus 27:9-19) is the antechamber which gives access to the Temple where, theoretically, the two columns should be placed. They are called Solomon's columns and are named J and B. It is in the atrium that all brethren are properly dressed and adorned with their insignias. The master of ceremonies asks for silence and says a prayer so that everyone is ready to enter the Temple. The Mason will then enter the mystic and symbolic world where he will find himself and relate to his brother with a pure heart.

A Mason understands that the "Sanctus Sanctorium" which exists esoterically in the Temple can only be seen, felt and activated if he visits, first, his own interior Temple and, there, he will find his own "Sanctus Sanctorium". Otherwise, he will only cross the physical door of the Temple. It's in the Temple that Everything exists. It's the whole world represented by symbolism. It's there that we will constantly lapidate the Rough Stone.

In some Temples we see symbols of various origins - among them is the Rope of 81 knots. Rope, *chorda* in Latin, means vegetal fibers united and twisted. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Rope would be drawn around the brothers before the meetings and erased after they were finished. The Rope, as we know it today, is an item composed of different materials which serves to unite. In Ecclesiasts 4:12 we read: "And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A rope of three strands is not quickly torn apart." New American Standard Bible, 1995.

In Egypt, land surveyors used Ropes to set construction limits. In middle Ages, constructors of the operative Masonry also used knotted Ropes. Their ends were tied up to two columns leaving a loose lace and making this way a curve with a desired angle. They would put a candle in calculated distance and height so it showed its correspondent on the opposite side. Thales of Miletus (624-547 BC) applied this technique of candles by making use of a rod instead of a Rope to measure the height of a pyramid.

One of the possible origins of the 81 knot Rope dates August 23, 1773 when the first secret word was instituted – it is used by some Masonic institutions to confirm a member is in good-standing and is changed every six months. This happened at the house of “Folie-titan” in Paris, where Louis Felipe de Orleans was sworn in as the Grand Master of the Masonic Order in France. Eighty-one brothers were present for that event.

The Rope’s laces resemble an 8, that is, two interlaced zeros symbolizing the fraternal laces which unite brethren. In addition, number 81 represents the mystic principles in all esoteric philosophies as it equals nine squared which, in its turn, equals three squared.

Number three represents a great amount of mystical meanings:

- _ Noah had three sons – Shem, Cam and Japheth. (Genesis 6:10)
- _ Three men appeared to Abraham. (Genesis 18:2)
- _ Esther instructed the Jews to fast for three days. (Esther 4:16)
- _ Three times Peter disowned Jesus. (Mathews 26:34)
- _ Three are the theological virtues - faith, hope, and love. (Corinthians 13:13)
- _ Three Wise Men visited Jesus - Melchior and Gaspar and Baltasar. (Mathew 2:11)
- _ There are triads in many religions: Shamash, Sin and Istar (Sumerian); Osiris, Isis and Horus (Egyptian); Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (Hindu); Yang, Yin, and Tao (Taoism); The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the three Holy Family members, Jesus, Maria, and Joseph (Christian).

Here are a few examples of when number three appears in other forms of knowledge:

- _ Three are the dialectic moments: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.
- _ Three are the verb tenses: past, present, and future.
- _ Three are the stages of life: birth, apogee, and death.
- _ Three are the characters of the oedipal triangle: Oedipus, Laius, and Jocasta.
- _ Three are the perspectives of the human being: body, mind and soul.

In Masonry, we see number three in several occasions: the three Great Lights, the three Columns which sustain Solomon’s Temple, the three Symbolic Degrees, three are main characters of Hiram’s legend and three are his assassins, too.

The Rope is seen on the top of the vertical walls, with one single knot above the Worshipful Master's Throne. On each side, there are 40 knots which stretch to the North and to the South. The extremes end at both sides of the occidental entrance door with tassels representing justice and prudence. This opening on the Rope means that Masonry is dynamic, progressive, and open to new ideas which will contribute to the man's evolution and to the rational progress of humanity. From an esoteric viewpoint, the rope's end fringes extend down to the floor giving a releasing effect as the floor serves as negative pole.

The forty knots represent the symbolic number of penitence and of expectation.

- _ The great flood lasted 40 days. (Genesis 7:4)
- _ Moses was at Mount Horeb in Sinai for 40 days. (Exodus 34:28)
- _ Jesus fasted for 40 days. (Mathew 4:2)
- _ Eli led Israel for forty years. (1 Samuel 4:18)
- _ Jesus was on earth for forty days after the resurrection. (Acts 1:3)

The knot above the Worshipful Master represents the number one, the indivisible unit, God's symbol, and principle and fundament of the universe.

In conclusion, the Rope of 81 knots not only symbolizes the fraternal and spiritual union of the brethren in the entire world but it also represents their communion of objectives and ideas.

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