

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE VEILS

By Dennis Dyer

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Freemasonry has been often described as a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. An allegory is a story within a story, as in Milton's Paradise Lost, Gulliver's Travels, and the Hiram Legend. A symbol is a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially when a material object represents an abstract concept. In Masonry we are surrounded by symbols, and yet we rarely seem to try and look beneath the surface for the abstract meaning. We look, but do not SEE the moral lesson intended – let him see who can see, and let him hear who can hear.

Such is the case with the symbolism of the four veils of the Royal Arch Degree. These veils allude to the four principal tribes of Israel, whose emblems were the Lion, the Ox, the Man, and the Eagle. Let us look a little deeper than the obvious meaning seen by the majority of Royal Arch Masons. The same four creatures are present throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments alike. They appear in "Ezekiel's Vision" and again in the Book of Revelation.

Further symbolism of the four creatures is noted by Edward R. Graham in his book "The History and Symbolism of Royal Arch Masonry". The four signs of the Zodiac are associated with these creatures, the Lion (sign of fire) representing LEO; the Ox (sign of Earth) representing TAURUS; the Man (sign of Air) representing AQUARIUS; and the Eagle (sign of Water) representing SCORPIO. In addition, biblically it has been said that the four principal Banners have the following associations:

Dan: Blue- Friendship- Eagle- Gospel of John- Passage through the symbolic degrees

Reuben: Purple- Union- Man- Gospel of Matthew- Mix of spirit and emotion

Ephraim: Scarlet- Zeal- Ox- Gospel of Luke- Patience and Self-Control

Judah: White- Purity- Lion- Gospel of Mark- Cleansing from Sin

The signet of the Royal Arch represents TRUTH and its possession indicates one is in search of Divine Truth. The names Jeshua, Zerubbabel and Haggai are emblematic of the complete Man, consisting of Body, Soul and Spirit. Passing the fourth Veil symbolizes that one is entering the Holy of Holies, where abides the perfect Man of divine truth. The four creatures are represented on church portals and apses as surrounding Jesus.

According to Mackey, the Veils present obstacles to the neophyte in his advance to the most Holy place, where he may receive spiritual illumination and be invested with the true Divine Name. Mackey summarizes by saying that passing the Veils represents the laborious, but at last successful, search for TRUTH. Hence, with a little effort we can now "see" or understand that the Veils, which we casually observe as Chapter ornaments, actually hold great significance – if we are prepared spiritually to receive the messages.

To conclude, www.masonicworld.com offers the following about the meaning and purpose of Freemasonry: Although Freemasonry is in essence a ceremonial method of approach to Truth, the meaning and purpose of its ritual is but little understood by the majority of our brethren. Many brethren treat the Lodge as a mere social club with quaint little rituals and costumes, rather than a hallowed shrine of wisdom in which the deeper mysteries of nature and of life are unveiled to the earnest seeker. We forget the third grand principle of Freemasonry of search for the truth and the study thereof. ... Freemasonry has been transmitted to us through the operative guilds of the Middle Ages; has a spiritual lineage traced back to the ancient mysteries which is found in the heart of every great religion of the world including Christianity. The goal of the study of the mysteries was deification, where man was led step by step from the ordinary life of the world until finally raised into the conscious connection with the Almighty.