

THE SQUARE, CIRCLE, TRIANGLE, SWORD AND TROWEL

The Sword and Trowel

The Sword and Trowel is a prominent symbol of the Cryptic Rite. Though it is not always the case, this symbol can be displayed with the crossed Sword and Trowel within a broken triangle, within a complete equilateral triangle, and within the circle contained within the square. The Sword keeps people away, and the Trowel binds people together, so these seem to fit the description. Most of the time it is seen as it is on the right. Let us delve into each of these symbols with the three exterior symbols: the square, the circle, and the triangle.

The Square, the Circle, and the Triangle

These three symbols have many meanings. The square is a symbol of security and protection. The hollow square (also known as the infantry square) was a formation assumed by the infantry when threatened with a cavalry attack. The square's four sides signify completion, balance, stability, order, endurance, and the many quadrants of nature (directions, winds, elements, moon phases, and so forth). The circle has no end and no beginning which represents infinity or eternity. It has been to many generations a representation of the celestial and Heavenly bodies. The circle also represents freedom, unity, completeness, and harmony. The circle is also restrictive though, as we are reminded in the 1st degree of Freemasonry and the Point within a Circle whereby we are taught to restrain our passions, our prejudices, and our interests from betraying us if we were to go beyond the bounds of this line. The circle, in some cultures, represents the union between Heaven and Earth as well as the psyche. The triangle signifies divinity, harmony, ascension, illumination, and gender (depending on positioning of the triangle). The triangle and the number 3 represents time: past, present, and future, or the beginning, the middle, and the end. Three is the first number to form a geometric shape -- the triangle. In Christianity, we see the 3 Wise men or Magi; the 3 realms of the afterlife: Heaven, Hell and Purgatory (Catholic doctrine); the Holy Family; and the Holy Trinity. In Masonry this number corresponds in the 3 Great Lights, the 3 Lesser Lights, the 3 Principle Officers, the 3 Great Pillars, the 3 Virtues, the 3 Principle Tenets, and the 3 Principle Stages of Human Life. The Broken Triangle represents mortality and death. This symbol is comparison to Craft Masonry is the Broken Column.

The Sword and Trowel

These implements, although not combined, are seen in Craft Masonry. The Sword reminds us of the Tiler and his duties to protect the bounds of the Lodge from the unworthy, uninitiated, and imposters. The Sword, an emblem of duality, not only symbolizes security, but also light, purification, righteousness, spiritual transition, and from its double-edged it shows us the defensiveness and destructiveness. The sword is like the mind and knowledge, without proper training and honing of skill, one can cause great damage and face many challenges. The scholar and the master swordsman alike must be well-trained and keep their metaphorical and physical sword sharp. The Trowel takes us to the Master Mason's degree where the trowel is used as the primary working tool of the degree from which we learn to spread the cement of Brotherly Love which unites all the stones (the Brothers) into one common structure (the Fraternity). The trowel symbolizes completion (whether completion to our spiritual or temporal buildings), spiritual work, and enlightenment.

With all this symbolic interpretations, one must also look at the basis of the degrees. In Royal Arch Masonry we learn of the Recovery of the Lost Word and in the Cryptic Rite we learn of the Preservation. These symbols represent Preservation through the interpretations mentioned above. Brothers, Companions, and Sir Knights remember to persevere by uniting the moral and righteous virtues that makes all men great and cutting away the vicious habits that will lead us astray and betray ourselves, and to ruin of our spiritual building!

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