**The Three-Fold Temple**

**By**

**Nate Coulombe**

**Preface**

**A**s I close in on my one-year anniversary of joining the Fraternity of Freemasonry, I find myself, more and more, contemplating the symbolism of the Craft. As I believe a major part of being a Mason *is* that very contemplation. The dinners, gatherings, and fellowship are all wonderful and important parts of the Fraternity. However, I feel those things should be balanced with the deeper, contemplative, and more esoteric side of Freemasonry. The latter statement contains what I feel are the ingredients which bring Masonry more intimately into the life of the individual Mason.

This is the way that Freemasonry becomes not just a Fraternity, but a personal practice. It is in this way that each of us can implement Masonic teachings into our daily lives. In turn, benefitting not only ourselves, but the world around us. It is in this spirit that the focus of my own recent contemplation has been The Temple. More specifically, the symbolism of The Temple, and how I see it containing a three-fold nature. The basis of that three-fold nature being: Mind, Body, and Spirit.

Now, while that is the basis, there are certainly numerous concurrent meanings such as: The search for and acquisition of knowledge, The ownership and execution of our duties & Death and leaving of a legacy. As well as: Youth, Manhood, and Age; Entered Apprentice, FellowCraft, and Master Mason; and so on...

What follows will touch on each of the three base aspects of The Temple, some of their concurrent meanings, and the significance they hold for each of us.

**The Temple of Mind**

**T**he great majority of our youth is spent learning. As young children, we develop our basic motor skills and foundational communication. As we grow, we discover more about the world around us through direct experience. We dig in the dirt, interact with family & friends and observe their interactions with each other, and perhaps cause a bit of mischief; all the while developing our own individual personality. There is a certain magic about the world in those early years. I believe it is in those years that we begin to build the Temple of our Mind. I do feel though, that many of us lose that feeling of magic about the world as we go through our later school years and transition into adulthood.

For now, I’d like to keep the focus on those earlier years – or at least the feeling of those years – because it is with that youthful exuberance that I myself have entered Freemasonry. Tapping into that sense of discovering some previously occulted part of the world, helps to reinvigorate the magic. As Dr. Justin Sledge once said, “Awe, is probably one of the most important, least felt things that human beings can get access to in modernity.”

While we do begin to build the Temple of Mind in early youth, as we progress through the ages of grade school, high school, and college, the Temple can go through many renovations. Multiple tear-downs and rebuilds as we move through life; shaping and re-shaping our ideas and beliefs. I find a special area of significance, as we build in those early years, is that a major part of the Temple’s foundation is Curiosity. A hunger for discovery. A knowing that we don’t know it all yet, and allowing that to create a sense of adventure, exploration, and exhilaration in our lives.

Sometimes it is necessary to strip everything down to that foundation and build anew. It is always okay to allow old walls to be torn down. Often, that is precisely what is needed for expansion. In some cases, the very foundation itself may have been corrupted. In such cases, it may be deemed necessary to pull up stakes and begin laying a new foundation in a new place. There should be no shame in this.

When we come into Freemasonry as an Entered Apprentice, it is incumbent upon us to do the necessary work. Whether this means a minor or major renovation, or a complete overhaul of the Temple of our Mind. Difficult as it may be, it is a worthy burden to bear. We can begin to make improvements to our Temple using the working tools of the Craft. This process may seem daunting, but it can open up the world to us. Exactly as it should if we undertake the task with all the genuine alacrity of our youth.

As an Entered Apprentice, we are young in the Masonic sense. As we explore Freemasonry, we begin to build upon the Temple of our Mind in ways that we hadn’t before. Raising new walls and creating new rooms within our Temple as we uncover new information, and new perspectives. Masonic or otherwise. The Great Search will serve to enliven us. Always knowing from whence we came, but ever striving to set foot on new ground. Not creating expectations on where we may find wisdom, but rather being ready to accept wisdom wherever we may find it. Although, in itself, the act of *accepting* wisdom is not enough. We must *implement* that wisdom into our lives if we are to improve upon our Temple.

So much of this is inner work, and we must be diligent in doing it. We should always be watchful of our thoughts, words, and actions. This should be of significant interest to us as there are a great many ways in which we can be pulled away from the building and expansion of our Temple. Worse, if we allow it, our Temple can sustain damage. As Manly P. Hall wrote in his monumental work, The Secret Teachings of All Ages: “... for until man disentangles his reasoning powers from the web of venerated absurdities in which his mind has lain ensnared for centuries, how can Truth ever be discovered?”

In relation to Hall’s words, I feel that a quote from the initial chapter of Albert Pike’s, Morals and Dogma is fitting here as well. Pike says, “It is also most true, that Truth is a Divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue. To be true, and to seek to find and learn the Truth, are the great objects of every good Mason.”

In your individual search, you may travel a great number of paths. Do so with the joy and wonder of youth, as it will serve you well in the building and expansion of your Temple. Whatever path you find yourself on, may your way be lit by a Blazing Star.

**The Temple of Body**

**T**he body as a Temple has been popularized – and is most widely known – from a passage in 1 Corinthians, but this is an idea that spans cultures and belief systems. A sort of binding agent across faiths. Certainly, one of many such agents, but I’ll not go off on that tangent. Whether you believe that “your body is a Temple for the Holy Spirit; you maintain a physical Yoga practice, training the body to hold certain poses or postures to aid in mediation; or, perhaps, you feel that the keeping of proper physical health is what suits you best for the invocation of Deity, or deities of your choosing. I could go on, but you get the idea.

Whatever the case may be for you personally, the fact is, there is a long-standing belief that keeping good physical health goes much deeper than just the physical. There will inevitably be some crossover, but for the purposes of this writing, we will focus largely on the physical aspects of The Temple of Body. The model we strive for in the building and refinement of this Temple being Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. In addition to the body itself, this Temple is primarily concerned with the physical plane on which the body travels, and navigates with the five senses. These five senses being used to experience a physical plane comprised of glorious works of creation. Many things that should inspire wonder. Among the many components of this physical plane, those that hold special significance are the Arts and Sciences. Seven of them being especially revered in Masonry.

Taking a bit of a step back, we’ll begin at what feels like the most obvious place. A brief discussion of the body and health. In a similar vein as the idea of the body as a Temple, we find the idea that our bodies are “vehicles”. A vehicle used by spirit to traverse creation. I believe our bodies are more than just vehicles and will elaborate on that shortly, but I’d like to stay with the vehicle idea for a moment to make a point. I want to preface this by saying that I am not trying to preach. I am guilty of as much of this as anyone. We as humans also use vehicles to get around, and I don’t think it would be a stretch to say that many of us take better care of our vehicles than we do our own bodies. Never would we purposely put something into our vehicle that we know will clog up lines and impact performance. Yet we do this to our bodies all the time, and often with a smile on our faces.

There are myriad ways that we can break our bodies down. As many of us have had to learn the hard way, the biggest detriment lies in excess. Be it drugs, alcohol, sex, food, etc... For the sake of brevity, I want to focus on food alone. As a vehicle needs fuel to be operational, so to do our bodies use food as a fuel necessary for proper operation. Is it any wonder that if we have a continual intake of foods that do not serve the body’s highest good, we begin to see breakdowns? As I said previously, I am certainly not preaching here. About four weeks prior to writing these very words, I found out that – for the first time in my life – my cholesterol was significantly high. To put it succinctly, this was 100% due to improper/unbalanced diet and lack of exercise. I have had to own this and take the necessary action to turn it around. A shift in the Temple of Mind, initiating a choice, resulting in action in the Temple of Body. This must be a concerted effort between the two Temples in order to see the desired results. As Pike writes: “Devout enthusiasm is far easier than a good action.” Although a bit more heavily worded, this idea is also reflected in the words of the Apostle James...

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightaway forgetteth what manner of man he was; but whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his work. If any man among you seems to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is in vain... Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being an abstraction. A man is justified by works, and not by faith only... the devils believe, and tremble... As the body without the heart is dead, so is faith without works.”

One of the most important and honorable things we can do is to create balance within the Temple of The Body. We can do this with physical activity, subduing harmful passions, eliminating excess from our lives and – perhaps most importantly – feeding the body that which will allow it to function at an optimal level. As I previously alluded, instead of the “body as a vehicle” metaphor, I prefer to view the body in a much more literal way. As that of a living ecosystem in and of itself. From we ourselves as human beings, to microscopic organisms that live on the surface of our bodies, to the microbiome in our gut. In nature, an ecosystem that is in balance, thrives. If an imbalance appears and is allowed to fester and spread, the ecosystem withers away.

I encourage everyone to make the effort to create balance, and promote proper function and development in The Temple of Body. To be blunt, this is not easy work, but it is absolutely worth it. Often, development requires a mallet and chisel.

As we enter adulthood and the Beehive, duty becomes a primary focus. As it is also a focus of the Fellow-Craft. We see our obligation compounded and our ties doubled. We must incorporate our own well-being into the discharge of our duties. To quote Pike once more: “The true Mason is he who labors strenuously to help his Order effect its great purposes.” As an addendum to Pike’s thought, I would say that a true Mason is also one who recognizes the need to labor strenuously to improve oneself. After all, if our health is failing, how can we be of service to others or our Order?

The ideas of duty and service are yet another aspect of the Temple of Body. They are the outward motion. Fulfillment of duty, service to others and honorable conduct are what we find at the confluence of the Mind and Body Temples. More on that in the final section. We enact the properly cared for Temple of Body to create that outward motion. Acting upon the Square to affect change in the world around us. On this physical plane. Let us not indulge in comfort or contentment, should any creature with whom we share this physical plane be in want, if it be within our power to provide them relief. It is that outward motion of The Temple of Body which is felt by the world around us.

It is our conduct by which that world will judge us. In fact, as a Mason, the entire Fraternity can be judged upon the actions of you alone. Something I frequently ask myself in any given situation: “Is this befitting of a Mason?” A favorite writer of mine named Mitch Horowitz wrote an essay with the title, “Is Magick Necessary?”. This is featured in his book **Uncertain Places.** The essay contains a wonderful line that I feel is quite appropriate here: “The only empirical measure of a spiritual, personal, or ethical philosophy is its impact on conduct.” If you are a Mason, it is your strict charge ever to walk and act as such. It is being strong and healthy physically, in addition to being strong and healthy in character and deed, that constitute The Temple of Body. Artist, Author, and Brother Mason, Angel Millar writes about the importance of not neglecting the physical body in his book, **The Path of The Warrior Mystic: Being a Man In An Age of Chaos.** Millar says...

“Part warrior, part philosopher, we must cultivate rational thinking. But we cannot withdraw from the world and into the intellect, neglecting the body. The real, after all, is mostly experienced in the nonrational: The physical body, our family, friendships, brotherhood, love, sex, a sense of exertion during physical training, a sense of wonder in looking out into the natural landscape, and so on. The essence and Mystery of life has been expressed, and deep meaning found in poetry and literature, in the simple act of sharing a meal, in tradition and custom, in painting, in music, and in the arts more broadly. Though the intellect is necessary, mere intellectualism does not satisfy us deep down.”

In keeping with that quote, I felt that one more was fitting. Jewish philosopher Maimonides said, “So long as one exercises and exerts himself vigorously... no illness will befall him and his physical powers will be strengthened.”

I encourage you once again, Mason or not, to deeply consider your own physical health, and the outward motion of your conduct. If you are a Mason, consider this: The tradition of Freemasonry will carry on, so long as there are Masons fit enough to carry it.

….. As the sands run, we move toward the Temple of Spirit. Like The Pot of Incense, may your Naked Heart glow with purity and gratitude as The Sword takes aim....

**The Temple of Spirit**

**A**s we explore this Temple we find that, inasmuch as it will concern our daily lives, much of it is abstract. It is largely unseen, residing in that unknown realm to which we will all one day travel. Although none of us knows the hour in which the Scythe will swing our way and bring our time to its end, we all hope to reach maturity in Age. That is my sincere hope for you, as it is for myself. A hope that the Ark on which we travel, delivers us to a peaceful harbor where we can drop our Anchor and rest easy.

As we strive to live our lives upright and in full measure, so to should we approach our end. Knowing that this is the balance of Nature. We find this Hermetic idea written of in The Kybalion. This being the Principle of Rhythm...

“Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates.”

Just as our life can be seen as a great out-flowing; our death is the great retraction. A drawing in on oneself. A line from Manly P. Hall’s **Initiates of the Flame** could be interpreted in terms of a death process. He writes: “... and the time will come when each person for himself will know the mystery of the Ark, when the student through purification shall be led through the door of the Holy of Holies and there be enveloped by the Light of Truth.” I’d like to focus in on the idea of a drawing in on oneself for a moment. I see it as a way of connecting with our Temple of Spirit. I don’t believe we have to succumb to physical death to have an experience of this. I suppose I should clarify and say that we can experience a *piece* of this without physical death. There are a number of ways to achieve this, but the simplest and certainly safest way, is through meditation.

I say simplest in the sense that we can all do it, and do it in the comfort of our own homes. Or, really anywhere that we are comfortable. This is not something that can be taken from us, and is something we can all benefit from. As Carl Jung said, “Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.” Whether it’s a little deep breathing to relieve a moment of stress, meditation in the morning for a boost of energy or to relax at night, or a highly serious practice to go deep into that silence and acess incredible bliss states; it’s all valid and it all brings us closer to the Temple of Spirit. One of the common threads here, is Silence. In the sprawling masterwork of profound insight, **Meditations on the Tarot**, the Author writes...

“For silence is the sign of real contact with the spiritual world and this contact, in turn, always engenders the influx of forces. This is the foundation of all mysticism, all gnosis, all magic, and all practical esotericism in general.”

To enter into the Temple of Spirit, we must embrace silence. We must embrace reflection. We must have a belief that we are more than what we see in the mirror. A belief that should, if we spend some time with it, lead to facing our own mortality. Facing the idea of letting go. The Buddhist idea of dying before you die. Meditation is our aid in this. For me, meditation reaffirmed that there is a component to each of us that is nonlocal. Our Temple of Spirit. Another common thread we find, is that of the breath, or breathing. Is it any wonder that one of the simplest forms of meditation is focused breathing, and our word for spirit is derived from the Latin “spiritus” (breath), and “spirare” ([to] breathe)? We also see this in the Hebrew word “Ruach” which simultaneously means spirit, breath, or wind. It was Ruach that gave life to dry bones in Ezekiel’s vision. The spirit enlivens the flesh. If we reflect on this connection between breath and spirit, we might see the act of focusing on the breath as a recognition of the spirit which animates us. Each breath, a connection to the Great Ruach that hovered over the surface of the waters. Our individual spiritus tied to, and one with, the Great Breath that flows through all nature and does not perish. Like the Sprig of Acacia, every breath should serve to remind us of this connection. It is in the striving for a deepening and furtherance of this connection that we enter into the Degree of Master. Knowing that the raising we undergo here, is a representation, or reflection, of the raising to come. As above, so below.

A couple final points on this connection before moving on. One on the recognition of it, the other, relating to the breath. Both points tied to **Meditations on the Tarot**. Each section of the book touches on a card in the Major Arcana, and is written as a Letter to you the reader. The portion I am sharing here, is in relation to the Emperor card and touches on how we can recognize and strengthen our connection to the Temple of Spirit.

“The completely-manifested divine name signifies at the same time a *post*, the post of the Emperor or the state of consciousness of the complete synthesis which is *initiation*... initiation understood not in the sense of ritual nor in the sense of the possession of information to be held secret, but rather in the sense of *the state of consciousness where eternity and the present moment are one.* It is the simultaneous vision of the temporal and the eternal, of that which is below and that which is above.”

The second point touches on that of the breath. Although, in this case, it is not the breath in a literal sense. In the book, the Author refers to a “spiritual respiration” in the Letter dedicated to The Pope, now more popularly known as The Hierophant. This spiritual respiration happens horizontally and vertically. The Author writes...

“Thus, the first practical teaching of the fifth Arcanum – for the Major Arcana are spiritual exercises – relates to spiritual respiration.”

He further explains...

“There are two kinds of respiration, horizontal respiration which takes place between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’, and vertical respiration which takes place between ‘above’ and ‘below’. The ‘sting of death’ or the essential crisis of the supreme agony is the abrupt passage from horizontal to vertical respiration. Yet, he who has learnt vertical respiration whilst living will be spared from this ‘sting of death’.”

In that final sentence, we can see a clear correlation with the Buddhist idea of dying before you die. As we improve our connection to The Temple of Spirit, we put ourselves into a state in which “the transition will not be abrupt, but gradual” as the Author states. In the matter of vertical and horizontal respiration, I also find a correlation in the previously shared segment on The Emperor card. The idea that we are in a state in which we hold the eternal and the temporal in our vision simultaneously. Horizontal respiration being the temporal, and vertical respiration being the eternal. It is in this way that we can see how all three Temples are also one.

As I have sat in contemplation with this idea of spiritual respiration, I see the intersection of the vertical and horizontal respiration being at the heart. Our physical hearts also have a neural network like the brain, but independent of it. Our hearts being obviously located within our body, we can see a connection to both the Temples of Mind, and Body. We can see a path to the Temple of Spirit leading to and through, the heart. Not just the physical heart, but the heart in a more abstract sense as well. A spiritual heart. The subtle way in which we can feel things, and also the subtle ways we can interact with the world around us. In both respects, the heart is the center. Both receptive and generative. I could certainly continue on with this idea – we'll see these things come up again as we press on – but for the purposes of this writing, I’ll leave it here with this thought: Hidden Truths only remain so because we don’t want to make the effort.

“And bless me to cease attraction to false objects,

And through precise analysis of ultimate reality,

Swiftly to produce within my spiritual process

The integrated path of quiescence and transcending insight!”

-- Tsong Khapa

From: **Three Principles of the Path**

I felt the above passage to be appropriate in beginning to consider the spiritual aspect of our interactions with the world around us. What we experience, and how we react to those experiences, have an impact on our Temple of Spirit. This is the horizontal respiration previously mentioned. Also mentioned, was the idea that the Temple of Spirit is both receptive and generative. In keeping with this idea, I feel that through our lives, we make impressions upon our spirit that we carry on with us. What we choose to watch, read, who and what we surround ourselves with, etc... Impressions are also made by our thoughts and actions. If the Supreme Intellect pervades all of nature, should we not treat all of nature accordingly? This passage from the Bhagavad Gita seems fitting here...

“That knowledge by which one undivided spiritual nature is seen in all living entities, though they are divided into innumerable forms, you should understand to be in the mode of goodness.”

Whether a Mason or not, we should take care that our actions are reflective of our higher Nature. Are we going to be 100% successful in this? Of course not. If the genuine desire is there and we persist in strengthening our Temple of Spirit – and our connection to it – it only stands to reason that right action will follow. This, I believe, is part of the work of being a Master Mason. It is constant work. The outside world we occupy with much of our time is filled with distractions. A great many things that we can attach to ourselves. This can make the process of connecting with spirit, a process of stripping away all that has built up on us over time. We could also see this as a chipping away at stone. We may consider the Rough and Perfect Ashlars. This seems like a solid opportunity to pull in one more quote from Bro. Angel Millar. This time from his book, **The Three Stages of Initiatic Spirituality**. He writes...

“It is not, then, a matter of adding or enlarging, but of subtracting from one’s self **what one is not** in order to discover who one actually is. To discover one’s true Self and true Nature.”

When we are firmly rooted in our Temple of Spirit, and act in accordance with it, this is when we can do the most good in the world around us. In that vein, certainly a part of this Temple is the legacy we leave behind us. As was just stated, our spirit is – in a sense – tied to our works. We can view our legacy as a piece of our spirit that remains in the work we did, and the lives we touched. Our genuine efforts leave a lasting legacy behind us, and an imprint on our spirit that we can carry with us without fear of retribution. In **Morals and Dogma**, Pike writes about the kind of person and spirit we should avoid becoming at all costs...

“To steal the livery of the Court of God to serve the Devil withal; to pretend to believe in a God of mercy and a Redeemer of love, and persecute those of a different faith; to devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; to preach continence, and wallow in lust; to inculcate humility, and in pride surpass Lucifer; to pay tithe, and omit the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith; to strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel; to make clean the outside of the cup and platter, keeping them full within of extortion and excess; to appear outwardly righteous unto men, but within to be full of hypocrisy and iniquity, is indeed to be like unto whited sepulchres, which appear beautiful outward, but are within full of bones of the dead and of all uncleanness.”

With our Temple of Spirit being receptive and generative, we should strive for daily reflection on what we are impressing – or allowing to be impressed – upon our spirit. Conversely, we should also be reflecting on what we impress upon the world around us. Again, we must ask ourselves, if in fact we believe that the Divine permeates our existence, encompassing everyone and everything with which we share it, how should we proceed? How does this knowledge affect our daily conduct? With our inner and outer behaviors, are we strengthening our Temple of Spirit? Or are we tearing it down?

As I feel that this Temple requires the most personal reflection, I want to ask you – or urge you to ask yourself – a few more questions as I bring this to a close. Throughout our lives, we as individuals seek to express ourselves in many different ways. Are we, perhaps, but one piece of an infinite being playing out an ultimate process of self-expression? Are we a part of an infinite mind seeking to know itself in every possible way?

Continue to ask yourself these questions, without bias, and make time for silent reflection or meditation as you consider them. I’ll leave you with this: Too many, act upon what men – unknown to them – have reported God as saying, rather than to become silent and listen for themselves.

The Kingdom of God is ***within you...***

**Afterword**

It is my sincere hope that you will read this – perhaps more than once – and reflect on how it can apply to your own life. I truly believe there is something here for everyone, but if you are a Mason, think about how Freemasonry can become a daily practice, and not just something we do a few times a month. This writing is an encouragement, but your journey is your own. Please take from this what you like, and leave what you don’t. If nothing else, I hope I have impressed upon you the fact that you are a complex and unique individual, but also part of a greater whole. Just as three Degrees make up one Mason, so are the three Temples, One.

“If you have Eloquence, it is a mighty force. See that you use it for good purposes – to teach, exhort, ennoble the people, and not to mislead or corrupt them. Corrupt and venal orators are the assassins of the public liberties and of public morals.

The Will is a force; its limits as yet unknown. It is in the power of the will that we chiefly see the spiritual and divine in man. There is a seeming identity between his will that moves other men, and the Creative Will whose action seems so incomprehensible. It is men of *will* and *action* not the men of pure intellect, that govern the world.”

-- Albert Pike

From: **Morals and Dogma**

As you move forward, take time to look closer at the Grand Design within you and without you. Let it inform your conduct. Let it inspire you to become a vital force of Eloquence and Will, actively working as an integral part of that very Design. Believe that you are, and So Mote It Be!