

# *Education & Enlightenment*

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## **A Masonic Moment – The Letter ‘G’**

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What does the letter “G” in Freemasonry mean? Our fraternity which is illustrated by symbols has countless different ones and one that is often misunderstood and which has over the centuries been debated over and over is the letter “G”. It appears in the middle of our most widely recognized symbol of Freemasonry, our Square and Compasses. While the Square and Compasses symbolize virtue in all our actions and wisdom of conduct respectively, the meaning of the letter G is quite often unclear to many.

No one knows exactly when the letter “G” became part of the Square and Compasses but it is believed to be somewhere between 1730 and 1768 in the United States. It is worth noting though that the “G” is not used in the centre of all Square and Compasses in all jurisdictions around the world.

In the early 1700’s it was usually on the floor in the middle of a Tracing Board, either drawn in chalk or laid out in templates. In such cases it would certainly have been laid on the floor so as to be readable from the West. It is perhaps necessary to add that there is no uniformity of practice in relation to the use of the “G”, or the Blazing Star, with or without the “G” at its centre, which has the same significance.

In many lodge rooms around the world, including here in Canada, the letter "G" can be seen hanging in the centre of the ceiling and is also seen on the second degree tracing board. In most American lodges it can be seen over the Masters chair in the East. In other English speaking lodges it can be seen in other places represented by a triangle containing the Hebrew name for God. It should be one of the most obvious and prominently displayed symbols in a lodge room, and as stated, you will find in most lodge rooms the letter "G" will be facing West.

The letter "G" as most Masons know has a dual meaning, one being GOD and the other being Geometry. The non-Mason would most likely not know the full import of the letter, much less how old it is, and you will also find that very few Masons are aware of all that it implies, either as a symbol or its history. An old Masonic writer once said that much of what has been written concerning the letter G in Freemasonry is far more imaginative than useful. A wise view being that God himself and Geometry have much in common, and that today we regard the symbol as standing for each and both of them.

The letter "G" was at one point a symbol of a Fellowcraft Lodge. In May 1742 there was a newspaper article stating for the first time that the letter "G" signified Geometry, or the fifth science for which all Fellowcrafts were made. The Fellowcraft Mason back then was so closely associated with the letter "G" that they were referred to as a "letter G-man".

The letter "G" is regarded as one of the most sacred of Masonic emblems. It conveys to the minds of the brethren the idea of God and of Geometry. it binds heaven to earth, the divine to the human and the infinite to the finite.

Thus God and Geometry, the material and the spiritual, were constantly united in the thoughts of the ancient Masons, they labored

hard, not only to construct magnificent structures but also to build a temple of divine thoughts and of ever growing virtues for the soul to dwell in.

In Hebrew, the language that our Bible was originally written in, the letter "G" is called Gheemel or Gimel and coincidentally has a numerical value of 3, an important and symbolic number in Masonry when we speak of the Great Architect of the Universe. Gimel, in slightly different forms, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter of many Semitic languages including Phoenician, Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew and Syriac.

The number three is not only the number of where you will find "G" in the Hebrew alphabet, three is also the age of an Entered Apprentice, the number 3 degree is the highest degree that you will find in the Craft Lodge. In Scottish Rite Masonry the honorary highest degree of the Supreme Council is the 33<sup>rd</sup> degree, which is  $3 \times 3 = 9$  which is the power of creation and the God of All or Truth.

Three is seen in Genesis that describes "The Fall". Jesus was crucified at Golgotha (place of the skull) at the age of 33 in the year 33AD. 33 is the number of the God Amon (Amen) which is the numerical equivalent of AMEN (1+13+5+14=33). Amen is the God of Truth and God corresponds to 1/3 (33.3%) as seen in Revelation 12, where the great Red Dragon is sweeping 1/3 of the stars and heaven.

Albert Pike, a 33<sup>rd</sup> Degree Scottish Rite Mason agrees with the Masonic facts that the letter "G" in Freemasonry signifies Gnosis, Generation and the Grand Architect. Gnosis is Greek for knowledge in its simplest form is "knowledge of thyself". Gnosis and Generation are two sacred words of the ancient Kabala. It is worth noting here that the letter "G" is the 7<sup>th</sup> letter in the English, Latin and Romanic alphabets.

The letter "G" by many is believed to stand for God, but seeing as

Freemasonry is not a religion and does not force its members to have certain beliefs the letter "G" more specifically then would stand for the Great Architect of the Universe. Here the letter "G" reminds us all that we

are under the eye of this Supreme Being and that we must always be virtuous in our actions and act wisely as the Great Architect is omnipresent and is constantly watching us.

Another possible meaning of the letter "G" is Geometry. In both Operative and Speculative Masonry the use of math and mathematical symbols has always been at the forefront in the teachings of the Craft. Therefore it would only be natural for people to assume that the "G" would possibly represent Geometry since it is one of the most ancient and noblest of sciences. Freemasonry was born from this science and all its symbols are ultimately based on Geometry. In the past, Geometry helped the Mason obtain perfection when building. Today, its symbolically indicates that we must strive to make ourselves as perfect as possible, always improving and becoming more wholesome. Geometry, according to most Masonic writers, is the meaning most often attributed to the letter "G".

A few Masonic writers have noted that Greek letter "G", or Gamma as it is called, is represented by a symbol that looks very much like our symbol for the Square. This is curious because the Square does not represent God, although it represents many other things, god is not one of them. Some Masonic writers have believed that, because the word for God only begins with the letter "G" in Germanic languages that it would be meaningless in places like France or Spain where the words for God are Dieu and Deus respectively. These languages evolved from Latin (Deus) and Greek (Theos). However, the writer Jacques Huyghebaert points out in "Reflexions Regarding The Three Pillars" that the word God written g-o-d is formed from the initial letters of the Hebrew words Gomer, Oz and Dabar meaning Wisdom, Strength and Beauty.

In conclusion the very widely accepted meaning of the letter "G" incorporates both the meanings we have looked at. Freemasonry is based on the science of Geometry which cannot be left out of the equation and believing in a Supreme Being is what is required to join the fraternity and become a Freemason, all of this therefore is englobed in the letter "G". Men of different faiths have different names and different symbols for God and in some countries where the language does not permit G to represent God, the All Seeing Eye is often substituted over the Masters chair often within a triangle or pyramid. The letter G is used to avoid any specific, sectarian representation of a deity, so that all Masons, regardless of their personal religion or faith, may all stand side by side and refer to the Great Architect of the Universe.