

The Pythagorean Tradition in Freemasonry

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Over the Gates of the ancient Temples of the Mysteries was written this injunction, "Man, Know Thyself". It meant that each Candidate must try to contact that Inner Self which is the only Reality, - Paul Brunton calls it the Overself, - that Self which lies at the very Centre of his Being, in the Silence and Darkness of the Holy Place which, to those who have penetrated to the Sanctum Sanctorum, becomes the deafening Music of the Spheres and the blinding Light of Truth. As the DORMER is the window giving light to the Sanctum Sanctorum, it is but right that here, among your members who have chosen to work under that name, one should attempt to find some light upon the Secret of Secrets, which each must ultimately solve for himself, which "no man knoweth" save "he that overcometh", he that has mastered it for himself. It "passeth all understanding" and is the mystery of his own being.

Freemasonry is closely allied to the ancient Mysteries and, if properly understood, and in spite of repeated revision and remoulding at the hands of the ignorant and sometimes the malicious, it contains "all that is necessary to salvation", salvation from the only "sin" that ultimately matters, that which lies at the root of all other sin and error, the sin of ignorance of the self and of its high calling.

The First T.B. opens with the statement that "the usages and customs among Freemasons have ever borne a near affinity to those of the Ancient Egyptians; The Philosophers of Egypt, unwilling to expose their mysteries to vulgar eyes, concealed their systems of learning and polity under hieroglyphical figures, which were communicated only to their chief priests and wise men, who were bound by solemn oath never to reveal them. The system of Pythagoras was founded upon similar principles and maintained under the same conditions."

We might, therefore, reasonably expect that a study of the system originated, or adopted, by the great teacher, Pythagoras, would tend to throw some light upon this Masonic Craft of ours. There are four questions which we might put to ourselves in this connection:-

1. Who was Pythagoras?
2. What was the basis of his philosophy?
3. What are his and its connections with Freemasonry as we know it?

4. Can we from a study of these, formulate a code, and by following it, open up a path, whereby, if trodden by the individual student, he can, and should, reach that state, which, for want of a better name, we may call "Realisation", - the full knowledge of that which alone is real, - The Oneself?

I believe that all these questions can be answered and, tonight, I am going to make an attempt to condense the answers, as I see them, into one short paper. It would be impossible to go into each one fully, and, in process of condensation, the answers will overlap; but I will try to state them as simply as possible and I hope I may succeed in making the general outline, at least, clear. It can only be an outline, for that which must ultimately be sought is beyond form, formless. It can never be filled in fully in words. The connection with Freemasonry will, I think, make itself clear, if we attempt to answer the other three questions.

First, then, just who was, or rather in, Pythagoras. As the most famous of Greek Philosophers, he was born at Samos about 586 B.C. His father was Mnesarchuss, a man of learning and of noble birth. As a boy, Pythagoras had every advantage of education and, later, seems to have travelled all over the world and to have formulated his philosophy upon basic principles culled from the various systems to which he gained access. Thus he studied Astronomy and Astrology both in Chaldea and in Egypt, and the Esoteric Sciences among the Brahmans of India. To this day his memory is preserved in India under the name of Yavanacharya, the Ionian Teacher. Returning to Europe, he settled at Crotona, in Magna Grecia, where he established a School, which were attracted all the best intellects of the civilized world. He left no writings himself, so we have to piece together the details of his philosophy from the writings of his followers. To him we owe the word Philosopher. He was the first to teach the heliocentric system in Europe and no one of his time was so proficient in Geometry. Not only was he the greatest mathematician, geometer and astronomer of historical antiquity, but he also held highest place among scholars and metaphysicians. His fame cannot perish. He taught much of the Ancient Secret Wisdom, the truth of re-incarnation, the necessity for return to a natural system of diet, the rule of Justice in the whole Universe and the certainty of ultimate attainment of perfection by all beings. He realised that the solution of the great problem of Eternity belongs neither to religion,

to superstition not to gross materialism. The harmony and balance of the two-fold evolution - of Spirit and of Matter, - have been made clear only in the Universal Numerals of Pythagoras, who built his whole system entirely upon the so-called "Metrical Speech" of the Vedas. In both Pythagorean and Brahman Philosophy the esoteric significance is derived from numbers. One of the few commentators who have paid just tribute to the high mental development of the old Greek and Latin writers, Thomas Taylor, says "Since Pythagoras, as Iamblichus informs us, was initiated in all the Mysteries of Byblus and Tyre, in the sacred operations of the Syrians and in the Mysteries of the Phoenecians, and also that he spent two and twenty years in the adyta of the Temples in Egypt, associated with the magicians of Babylon and was instructed by them in their venerable knowledge, it is not at all wonderful that he was skilled in Magic, or theurgy, and was therefore able to perform things which surpass merely human power, and which appear to be perfectly incredible to the vulgar."

For entrance to the School of Pythagoras the qualifications were high and rigorously enforced and, once entered, the candidate came under very strict rules as regards diet, exercise and study. Besides this outer discipline there were pledged disciples who were expected to pass through three degrees, during a probation of five years. Of the outer disciples, leading an ordinary family social life, G.R.S. Mead says, "The authors of antiquity are agreed that this discipline had succeeded in producing the highest examples, not only of the purest chastity and sentiment, but also a simplicity of manners, a delicacy and a taste for serious pursuits which was unparalleled. This is admitted even by Christian writers". The three degrees of the Inner School were:

HEARERS, who studied for three years in silence.

MATHEMATICI, learning Geometry and Music, the nature of Number, Form, Colour, Sound.

PHYSICI, who learned to master Cosmogony and Metaphysics. They were then prepared for the Mysteries.

The School at Crotona was closed at the end of the sixth century B.C., being persecuted by the Civil Power; but other communities carried on the tradition.

Mead

says that Plato intellectualized it to protect it from profanation, which was on the

increase, and the Mysteries of Elusis, although they had lost its spirit and substance, still preserved some of its rites.

The root of all such teachings seems to have lain in Central Asia, whence Initiates spread to every land, carrying the same doctrines, using the same methods, working towards the same final goal. There was a common language and symbolism which served for intercommunication. Pythagoras in India received a high Initiation and later, Appolonius of Tyana followed in his steps. Typically Indian are the dying words of Plotinus, noblest of the Neo-platonists "Now I seek to lead back the self within me to the All-self." One great teacher has said, "The end of knowledge is to know God - not only believe; to become one with God - not only to worship afar off." We gain a hint in the Kathopnishat (VI- 17) "Let a man with firmness separate it (the soul) from his own body, as a grass stalk from its sheath," to which point we will return later.

Pythagoras gave the "knowledge of things that are" to his disciples and his knowledge of Music is said to have been such that he could use it to control men's wildest passions and to illuminate their minds. Iamblichus quotes instances and advises Porphyry to remove from his thoughts the image of the thing symbolised and to reach its intellectual meaning. Of the use of symbols Proclus remarks, "The Orphic method aimed at revealing divine things by means of symbols, a method common to all writers of divire lore." Great stress was laid upon the fact that numbers should be studied for the better comprehension of life, and not or use in commerce.

I am tempted to think that Pythagoras is a title, rather than a real name and it is significant that his father Mnesarchus, the nearest translation of which is "Ruler of Memory." Pythagoras, as a title, is identical, in root meaning, with Hiram Abif and with the Egyptian Thoth-Hermes. The root Pytha is the Sanscrit Pitta and the Latin Pater and the Greek, , all meaning Father. It is again the same root as the Egyptian Phtha, one of the names of Thoth and Abif also means Father. Goras is the Sanscrit root Guru meaning Teacher, and the same root is found in Hiram or Hiram. The Egyptian root is ChR Horus. ChR-Mes or Horus-Moses means Son of Horus. We may note here that Mercury, the latin equivalent of the Greek Hermes is a corruption of the Syrian Mar-Kurios meaning Son of the Lord.

The Pythagorean system of Cosmology is based upon the Decad, 10, or to use the name of the symbol associated with its name, the Tetractys. This Tetractys is

represented in United Grand Lodge of England by a single great Hebrew Yod, or "I," placed immediately over the Grand Master's Throne, Yod being the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and that also being its numerical value. The "pillar and circle," also 10, the perfect number of the Pythagoreans became later, among the Jews, a pre-eminently Phallic number, among whom it represented Jehovah as Male-Female. This Decad, representing the Universe and its evolution out of Silence and the Unknown depths of spirit, was presented to the student in Dual Aspect. It applied first to the Macrocosm, from which it descended to the Microcosm. To-day, upon four-square bases, we have, in our Lodges, or should have, two pillars, each bearing aloft a circle in perpetuation of this symbolism.

Both the purely intellectual and metaphysical, or "inner science" and the purely materialistic or "surface science", can be expounded by, and contained in, the Decad, study being by the deductive method of Plato or by the inductive method of Aristotle. Plato commenced with Divine Comprehension, and multiplicity proceeded step by step from Unity, the digits appearing only to be returned to the Circle of the All-pervading Absolute. Aristotle started with perception by the senses, the Decad being regarded either as the unity which multiplies or as the matter which differentiates, its study being limited to two dimensions, to the Cross, or the 7; proceeding from the 10, the perfect number, on Earth as in Heaven. The whole conception appears originally in India, but we cannot go into that now. The Western Teacher who first formulated it was Pythagoras.

Primarily numbers are symbols of the beginning and development of a universe, so the simplest way of bringing home to you their significance will be to take the first cycle of Creation, leading to full manifestation of the ultimate physical atom, and the building therefrom of matter, as we know it. I shall run through the stages very rapidly and leave it to you to go more fully into the subject should it appeal.

First, then, we have the Zero, nought, the Circle appears the Point at the Centre, potentiality, showing the Circle as not barren. In Arithmetic "0" is nothing, but, added to other numbers, is all things. Without it multiplicity cannot go beyond 9. This Circle-potential is the first number of the Cosmos, symbol of the Unknown, the Illimitable, containing all numbers as possibilities, as sunlight contains all colours in

whiteness.

The 0 the Circle or Ovum is Passive, and requires vivification before it can fructify and produce. The point, or centre, then becomes active and from it arises the Line, - the diameter which bisects the Circle, thereby polarising it. This is the Monad, the First Power of the Universe creating Polarity, opposites in Unity.

Some ancient philosophers spoke indiscriminately of Monad and One, but the Platonists drew sharp distinction, speaking of the Monad as that containing distinct yet profoundly united multitude, whereas the One is the "summit of the Many" and simpler. One is the first of a series, non-existent unless followed by other numbers, whereas the Monad includes all numbers, holds division in check. One is the apex of all numbers which spread from it to the base, 10. Pythagoras realised the fundamental basis of numbers as Rhythm. In it was based the generation of all things. Numbers, to Pythagoras, were names and descriptions of Cosmic Ideas and Happenings. One writer quotes him as saying, "There is a mysterious connection between the gods and numbers, on which the science of arithmancy is based. The soul is a world that is self moving; the soul contains in itself, and is, the quaternary, the tetractys, the perfect cube, and another says "Pythagoras is not reported as saying that the gods are numbers, or that all things are numbers, as some of his followers and critics affirm." Everything with the Pythagoreans, ideas, injustice, separation, mixture and even man and his horse, were all numbers" according to Aristotle. When speaking of the Monad or One, they actually referred to that which was before Creation, and, if philosophically minded, referred to it as the "Primordial Cross," if religious, as God, both understanding the same thing. They had many names for such number. Their One corresponds to the Advaitya, the one without a second of the Hindoos, creator and cause of all numbers.

The Duad, 2, is termed the cause of dissimilitude, matter. It is considered to be feminine, as the matrix of all things, and is the symbol of growth. Two cannot be produced from One, so duality is considered as the actual beginning of manifestation; It is the drawing apart of God as Life and God as Substance, 1×1 is 1 and nothing but 1 so 1 needs 2, as Life needs Substance for manifestation and multiplication. 1 entering into relation with 2 gives rise to 3. Life, 1, ensouling Form, 2, becomes linked to it, 3, after being polarised, 2, from itself, 1. Opposites are essential to any creative

purpose. 2 is therefore called the "First Number". Cornelius Agrippa calls it so because

"it is the first magnitude and the common measure of all numbers, or, as the Pythagoreans term it, a confusion of unities. Thus, God, as One, the producer and

clause of Persistence, polarizes, His Unity and draws apart from His substance, Subsistence, and, then vivifies it, producing Existence. 1 is potentially 2 for polarity is everywhere, as are pairs of opposites.

Avicenna of Cordova (1021-70) speaks of the affinity between "to be" and numbers and

says 3 is the root of all things; for Spirit, 1, and Matter, 2, linked by Will, the bond

between, form the Triad. He says, "All existing things are constituted after the nature

of numbers.....The Highest Abstract God is the indivisible, metaphysical unity".

So 3, as

relating the action of the two opposites is rightly considered the number of true

beginning, without which no production is possible. One, potential, like a ring of

magnetized steel, is powerless until broken, or polarized, and the opposites are themselves useless until there is a relation between them. 3 is then the number of active

growth and production. There are three distinct steps to be taken by the student before

he can enter the "outer court" of the Mysteries:-

1. He must collect together his forces and prepare to learn.
2. He must eliminate and subtract gross matter.
3. He must amalgamate or synthesise the result.

or in more familiar words

1. He must come of his own free will and accord.
2. He must be deprived of all metals and material valuables.
3. He must be properly prepared.

The third step of apprenticeship gains approbation from a master and leads the student

to a position where he can grasp the work with his whole nature.

The number 3 is most important and, masonically, so far as the Craft is concerned, must be studied in conjunction with 5 and 7. I will return to this point.

The idea of the fundamental Trinity presupposes a condition of being before the worlds were created.

4 is significant of system and order. Plutarch states that it is because of 4 that every body has its origin. It is Foundation, and does not relate to the building of physical

forms and bodies, which is the function of 8, but to that of the Cosmic stones, the ultimate atoms out of which these forms will be built. Philo says it is the first number to show the nature of solidity. Mathematically it is Foundation, for, without it, no progression beyond 6 is possible, but with its completion in 10, that is, the complete cycle, can be reached. Three components blending equally gives 6 and no more but predomination of any one of them would lead to 7 or more, for 1 plus 2 plus 3 equals 6 and also $1 \times 2 \times 3$ equals 6 each of which requires the addition of 4 to complete the cycle (or circle).

5 has a root meaning of "harvesting", the arranging in sheaves of produced substance, hitherto potential, now becoming matter. Five forms are combined in the foundation of the chemical atoms. It is a matter of rebirth and actual material commencement. That matter should be ensouled is not sufficient. Both matter and life must be qualified that gradation and diversity may result. Each chapter of the first ten chapters of Genesis is said to refer to one of these numerical steps and it should be noted that chapter V contains a description of all emanated things and is devoted solely to generation. D'Olivet reads it as a story of Cosmic generation. The Pythagorean name was cardiatis or cardialts, as the heart of things manifest, change of quality, the fire which "changes all things triply extended or which have length, breadth and depth into the sameness of a sphere and producing light." It is eminently a "circular number" and spherical, restoring itself in every multiplication. Note here the F.C's steps. By 5 arranging matter ready for use, three fundamental qualities are produced in the prepared matter and the three aspects of Diety find reflection in them, Will or Strength to Create, Love or Wisdom to Preserve, and activity or Beauty to Transmute or to send forth Creation, producing 6, representing that period in the creative process in which Triple spirit enters into Matter, already prepared as a triplicity to receive it. The double triangle is its symbol. Allendy defines it as a static correspondence between two analagous terms and not a transitory action or passage from one state to another. It is the instrument of progression but not the progression itself."

7 represents the progressive atomization of matter, without which building is

impossible. The ancient Greeks called it Justice and represented it as a pair of scales, the bar pivoting about a point and supporting two hemispherical pans, each supported by 3 chains. 7 is to 3 as 3 is to 1. As 3 represents the development of a principle, so does 7 represent it doubly represented, that is to say not only manifested but objectively realised. Everywhere in nature we find this 7, in ourselves, in colour, music, the Arts, in healing and so on, balancing three on the life side against three on the form side with one giving synthesis.

Now, I think we may stop here, for this is the point to which the Craft of Freemasonry brings us. To complete the major cycle one has to consider the Holy Royal Arch and the Installation of W.M. which leads to it.

Before passing to one last point I want to take up, let me give the parallels briefly:-

In the making of a Freemason there must first be the man himself, the Circle, No-number. Next comes that preparation in the heart which makes him the Circle-potential. The Unknown God, transcendent within-all men has become immanent in him. Then he takes his first step towards the door of the Lodge, The First step of a Series, he separates himself from the vulgar crowd and becomes a free unit, "Free and of Good Report." He becomes polarized, realising dimly that to is not only Body but also Spirit, he gains forward "In Strength." The E.A. degree is founded upon the number 3, and in it, by the union of his opposites, he makes production possible, he reaches "Plenty". In the F.C. degree he is able "To Establish" himself upon a sure foundation, begins to realise his real self. He gains control of matter and of "Worldly Possessions", producing multiplication of parts. The M.M. degree is founded on the number Seven, which, so we saw represented full atomization. Here the One Rock of the Quarry has become the individualized multiplicity of prepared stones, ready for the building. Each is a complete work in itself but has to die as such in order to reach a reunion with the companions of its toil and take its place in the building of the Temple, the new cycle of 7 which it inaugurates.

Now for my last point. Several of the ancient Philosophers, including both both Plato and Aristotle, hint that man is something more than the three-dimensional being that he

appears to be, at first sight. We cannot go into full evidence here, but Plato's beautiful allegory of the men chained in a cave with the light behind them and seeing only their own shadows and those of the passersby, thrown upon the flat surface of the opposite wall, should be called to mind. He tries to show how difficult it would be for one who had escaped and returned to his chained companions to bring to them any realisation of three dimensions. This seems to be a clear hint, and a study of Dimensional Masonry bears it out.

Before entering the Lodge for the first time, the Candidate is symbolically unaware of the existence of Spiritual Dimensions: Yes, in this three-dimensional world of ours, he has reached a stage where the unfolding of spiritual consciousness has become for him a definite aim. He has, in this sense, become one-pointed. So, when he comes to the door of the Lodge, he enters upon an undimensional Euclidean Point, having neither length, breadth nor thickness. Only at a later stage, when he has been restored to light, is it revealed to him that this point was attached to and formed part of a straight line, a one-dimensional instrument, held by a brother whose grip was separated from it by a cross-piece, which, by its very position, indicated its two-dimensionality. Thus, the candidate transcended the first dimension of space and became a two-dimensional being.

Advancing to the E. he passes through a symbolic figure of 9, 12, and 15 units, indicating the Pythagorean proportion found in Euclid, 1, 47. Thus he surpasses the second dimension of space and becomes a three-dimensional being capable of ruling and preparing a plate surface by knocking off all superfluous knobs and excrescences, roughly squaring the faces of the Ashlar in its rough form and preparing it for the hand of the more expert workman. This stone is placed upon the pedestal of the J.W. and should appear in the Ceremony in the N.E. corner of the Lodge.

Proceeding onwards he enters upon the next stage upon an instrument which, although it is used upon three-dimensional work, is itself two-dimensional and which can be used to test the rectangularity of the previous advance. He then advances in a manner typical of three-dimensional motion. Under no conceivable circumstances can this advance

take place in less than three dimensions. Now he produces a smooth stone, the Perfect Ashlar, which has place on the pedestal of the S.W. and appears ceremonially in the S.E. corner of the Lodge.

Once more he passes on his way and enters upon, another stage of his quest, this time upon an instrument which is used in the depicting and measurement of the three-dimensional advance he has previously made. He now reaches the supreme test. Three stops he takes, each indicating an advance in a different direction and together showing that conquest of the three-dimensional world has been achieved. Then, boldly he marches forward, and indicates, in a very beautiful piece of symbolism, his passage into a new world, a world almost inconceivable to our untutored finite minds, the FOURTH DIMENSION of space. The Stone he can now prepare is of a shape normally outside our consciousness.

It may be noted here that the W.T.'s in each degree of the Craft, and those of an I.M., indicate work in 1, 2, and 3 dimensions, the conquest, in each case, of the three boundaries of our three dimensional existence, length, breadth and thickness.

This third stone is one over which there has been much wrangling, discussion and wild speculation, yet its essential qualities would seem to be sufficiently obvious. Most writers tacitly accept the Perfect Ashlar as the last possible stage in the preparation of the stone, but this is true only of the three-dimensional world. If there are other dimensions, there will be further stages in the preparation, and it is significant that we find references to yet another stone, whose true place is on the Master's Pedestal, and, in its ceremonial position, "With the centre", perpendicular, perpendicular, or perpendicular, to three-dimensional space. This is the PERPEND ASHLAR, and the reason why it cannot be seen in its completeness in the Lodge is that, existing in the Fourth Dimension, the only part we could perceive would be a perfect cube, suspended in space, to ever point to which it would be perpendicular. Mr. C.H. Hinton (in "The Fourth Dimension" calls it the Tesseract. It is to be noted that each Regular step is rectangular, taken symbolically at right angles to the last position. We move a point to produce a line; we move a line at right angles to the previous motion to obtain a superficies. This is the First Regular Step and from it we obtain a rectangular plane figure, a square; we now move our square at right angles to both the former directions of motion and the result is a solid cube, the Second Regular Step; and now we move this cube at right

angles to all three directions of motion already used, and produce; by our Third Regular Step, a four-dimensional figure, the Tesseract. Even then the journey is incomplete, for, as an I.M., the zealous brother uses tools belonging to the three dimensions of our space to prepare himself to work freely in the four-dimensional atmosphere of the Holy Royal Arch, wherein the whole scheme of Creation of Man as a reflection or form created by God "in the image of His own Eternity" and the method of the return of that image into the substance of T.G.A.O.T.U. is unfolded in the consciousness of the Initiate.

Thus far I have tried to answer the first three questions put at the beginning of this paper. Pythagoras, is, we have seen, fundamentally involved in our symbolism. We have taken a very hurried glance at the relevant portions of his Philosophy, and we have seen the same fundamentals running through our rituals.

Now, very briefly to answer the fourth question.

We can, I think, say definitely that there is no Royal Road to Perfection. Each must find a way for himself. But signposts are not wanting, for to those who choose to raise their eyes from the plane of Matter, they point a clear way. The first and most important comes early in our Masonic knowledge." This can only come from the age-old three-fold method of advance being applied; CONCENTRATION, MEDITATION, CONTEMPLATION. These we must apply daily to some portion of our Ceremonies, Tools and other Symbols, seeking ever to find their inner significance.

At no time in the Era of Recorded History has the application of these methods been more difficult than it is to-day in the Western world, but at no time has so much help been available to those who conscientiously attempt to apply them. In this Machine-tyrannized Age it is difficult to attain the necessary leisure, peace, quiet, stillness and silence, and the forgetfulness of the rush and hurry of the world in its search for the transient and worthless. Yet, even now, there are many signs that the world is getting tired of its own shallowness and sensationalism and is turning to things that are more worth while.

Perhaps the time is nearer than we think when men will at last seek the Middle Chamber of their own Temple, to find the wages of Truth. Tired of chasing an illusion, they may seek the reality within, the Overself, which lies sheathed, as lies a grass-stalk in its husk,

