

## ESOTERIC SYMBOLISM OF THE MASONIC TWO ST. JOHNS

### The Solstitial Gates

In our Western tradition, beginning with Pythagorus, then Plato, then the neo-platonists, Numenius, Macrobius, Proclus, and Porphyry, we have an esoteric tradition about the divine purposes of the winter and summer solstices. The Greeks described the "descent into generation" into re-birth, by the tropical gate of Cancer and the "ascent to god" of the soul after death, by the tropical gate of Capricorn, in which the soul ascends into the spiritual ether of the planetary spheres.

Also, the traditional symbolism of the gate of god to the north in Capricorn and the gate of men to the south in Cancer represents the actual physical astronomy of our annual ascending and descending phases of the tropical zodiac as symbolized by the winter and summer solstices.

Traditionally, the Gate of Man was that zodiacal house where the soul, before birth and intended for incarnation on earth, would descend into the moon sphere waiting for re-birth. The Gate of the Sun was that zodiacal house wherein the human soul, after death, would ascend into the planetary spheres beyond the moon sphere, for its sojourn thru the spiritual worlds, to meet God.

After a lifetime on earth, the human soul exits thru the gate of the sun in Capricorn and to begin its journey after death. After its return from the celestial spheres, the human soul will then re-enter the earth sphere for re-birth thru the gate of man in the sign of Cancer.

The Ancient Wisdom taught that the soul after death, traveled first, to the successive spheres of moon-mercury-venus-sun on its outward journey. During this ascending stage, the soul reflected on and paid penance for the sins of the past life. This ascending stage ended with what was called "cosmic midnight."

Thereafter, the second half of the souls journey began wherein the soul descended thru the same spheres again on its downward path into incarnation on earth and passing thru the Gate of Man to enter the moon sphere to await rebirth with millions of other souls. While during the first half of the journey, the soul reflected upon and suffered for the sins of its past life, during the second half, the soul takes in those forces necessary to build up his future astral, etheric and physical bodies. These forces include both preparing its future karma and learning the wisdom taught by the spirits residing in the different planetary spheres. For example, if one's future karma demanded a person to become a physician, he must learn medicine and spend time within the sphere of Mercury with the archangel

Raphael.

In the Hindu tradition, from which the western tradition is derived, these two gates were called in Sanscrit, *PITRI-YANA* and *DEVA-YANA*. The gate of Men and the Gate of the gods, must correspond to the two solstices. The first, *PITRI-YANA* corresponds to the summer solstice, or to the sign of Cancer and the second, *DEVA-YANA* to the winter solstice, or the sign of Capricorn. In order to understand the reason for this, it is necessary to refer to the division of the annual cycle into two halves, the one ascending and the other descending. The first is the period of the movement of the sun towards to the north, going from winter to summer solstice,; the second is that of the movement of the sun towards the south, going from the summer to the winter solstice. In the Hindu tradition, the ascendant phase relates to the deva-yana and the descendant phase to the pitri-yana which coincides exactly with the designations of the two gateways we have just mentioned.

#### THE SOLSTITIAL SYMBOLISM OF JANUS

This esoteric tradition, that of the two solstitial gates has its symbolism in the Roman tradition in the two faced god, Janus, also called the janitor. Janus is the god who opens the doors (januae) of the two gates with the two keys, which are his principle attributes. The doors are the same as the solstitial gates and the two keys open the thresholds leading from one sphere to another. Both the doors, as a circle of the sun with tangent lines and the two keys, have been preserved in Masonic symbolism and seen on every lambskin apron of old.

Janus gave his name to the month of January in the Roman calender, which is the term of the winter month following the winter solstice and of the astronomical sign of Capricorn, which is the sign of the Gate of the gods.

It is interesting to note that Janus is also the god of initiation who presides over the COLLEGIS FABRORUM. This college was also known as the Guild of the Artisans, which presided over the craft guilds. These craft guilds, by regular transmission of secret practices, later evolved into craft masonry in the Middle Ages, which by its nature retained its initiatic character. So we have here the correspondence between the god of initiation and his craft guilds which maintained and retained

the initiatic signs and symbols of masonry. This is particularly true of the masons building trades, the builders of the great cathedrals of Europe, who adopted as their patrons the “two St. Johns.” The so-called Lodge of St. John preserved by masonic traditions has its direct filiation from the COLLEGIS FABRORUM, with each John representing one of the two faces of Janus, which in turn, represents one of the two solstitial gates.

### THE CHRISTIAN FEASTS OF ST. JOHN

In Christianity, the symbols of the solstitial feasts of Janus became assimilated into the two feasts of the two St. Johns. These feasts are always held at the same time, at or near the winter and summer solstices. In the traditional roman calendar, these feast dates of December 27 and June 24, were celebrated as the dates of the respective solstices. In actual fact, the solstices occur a few days earlier, which respects the astronomical facts, that the sun’s ascent and descent have actually begun by the feast dates.

The summer solstice marks the start of the descending one-half of the calendar year, while the winter solstice marks the beginning of the ascending half, of the sun’s path on the plane of the ecliptic thru 12 constellations. Thus, there are two phases of the sun’s movement, an ascending one and a descending one. What motion that has once attained its maximum, can only diminish in strength to its minimum. Thus, it is said of St. John the Baptist, whose birth day feast day is the summer solstice, “He must increase, but I must decrease”, since he was 6 months older in the womb than the infant Jesus.

It is also interesting to note that in the history of Christianity, there are two churches. To Peter was given the exoteric church, the church the masses of people, representing the body of Christ. To John, was given the esoteric church, representing the head of Christ, by the words, “I wish Him (John) to remain until I come.” The so-called Johannine church derives from the Gospel of John and maintains the esoteric tradition of wisdom imparted to Jesus’ disciples after the resurrection and until the ascension. This secret Christian tradition takes as its patron, St. John the Evangelist and the Gospel of John, as the greatest spiritual text in western civilization.

## MASONIC SYMBOLISM OF THE SUN

I just saw the apron collection in the Scottish Rite museum in Lexington and every apron bore such a symbol of the sun with tangent lines and also a symbol of the two keys. These symbols are related to this subject matter as follows.

A symbol special to masonry is the circle with a point in the center placed between two parallel tangent lines. These tangents are said to represent the two St. Johns. What makes this symbolism complete is the fact that the circle represents the annual cycle of the sun thru the zodiac, the point being the sun and the circle being the zodiac. In addition, the age old astronomical sign for the sun is such circle with a center point.

The two parallel lines are tangents of the circle at the solstitial points of cancer and capricorn. They represent limit points beyond which the sun can never pass in its journey thru the ecliptic plane, in its ascent and descent. Because these two tangent points are symbols for the two solstices, and respectively, the two gates, they also are symbols for the two St. Johns.

When in a vertical position, these two tangent lines also represent the two “Pillars of Hercules.” Historically, the gate of Hercules was placed geographically on either side of the Straights of Gibraltar. The south pillar was in Africa and the north pillar located in Europe. Each pillar representing the column of the south and the column of the north. These two columns have a relationship with the two solstices and the limit of the suns journey.

## MASONIC SYMBOLISM OF THE TWO KEYS

In the ancient roman coins, we often see the two sided face of Janus, each facing in the opposite direction. In each hand, he holds a key. This double key symbolism has also been transmitted by the catholic church and a good example can be found in the French Basilica in Montreal. These two keys, when folded over each other, are depicted on virtually masonic apron of old.

Now it is easy to understand that the two keys represent the keys to lock and unlock the two solstitial gates of the winter and summer solstices. Remember Janus was the janitor who opens and closes the doors of the sun’s annual cycle.

When Janus is considered as the god of initiation, the two keys, one of gold and one of silver, represent the keys to the so-called greater mysteries and lesser mysteries. The names of this two fold designation has been borrowed from Greek esoteric tradition, taken from in the Greek mysteries of Eleusius, but they have a general application to mystery centers around the ancient world.

The so-called lesser mysteries were concerned primarily with what is called the restoration of the primordial state, the state of mankind in paradise before the fall. They contained three degrees, as in blue lodge masonry. They were concerned with a knowledge of nature and emphasized learning of the seven sciences, as recapitulated in the seven steps in the masonic second degree.

The greater mysteries were concerned with knowledge that is beyond nature, what is universal truth and metaphysical knowledge and the supra-human states of consciousness. They consisted of four more degrees. Using the example of the seven degrees of Mithras, these higher degrees put an initiated free soul in connection with the nations group soul and archangel, so as to guide the nations cultural development, such as with Daniel during the captivity; in higher degrees, in connection with the nations archon angel, so as to guide the nations destiny, such as with Moses and the archon, Michael, and in the highest degree, that of the father, where the initiate becomes the father of the nation and bears its racial karma, as in the case of Elijah and the nation's father spirit, Jehovah. Other great fathers of nations were Krishna, Zarathustra and Hermes.

The initiate who passed thru the lesser mysteries could be called primordial man while the initiate passing thru the greater mysteries could be called universal man or transcendent man. The three degrees of the lesser mysteries have been transmitted and retained by the masonic tradition. The four degrees of the greater mysteries are probably in occultation, like Merlin frozen in his island cave or the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam in Islam.

The gold key is related to all the mysteries of the sun and, of course, the silver key is related to the moon and all of its mysteries.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is appropriate to quote from Albert Pike and his Monitor, MORALS AND DOGMA from the 25<sup>th</sup> degree-KNIGHT OF THE BRAZEN SERPENT as follows:

“The galaxy, Macrobius says, crosses the zodiac in two opposite points, cancer and capricorn,

the tropical points in the sun's course called the Gates of the Sun. The milky way crossed at the signs of cancer and capricorn.”

This quotation refers to the symbolism referred to as the masonic symbol of the sun and the two tangent lines. The points of the tangent lines are the two Gates of the Sun, in the macrocosmic sense.

In the microcosmic sense, the symbols of the two faces of Janus, the two keys and the two St. Johns refer to the two gates. Albert Pike continues as follows;

“Through these gates souls were supposed to descend to earth and re-ascend to heaven. One, was styled the Gate of Men, and the other, the Gate of the Gods. Cancer was the former, because souls descended by it to the earth. Capricorn the latter, because by it they re-ascended to their seats of immortality and became gods.’

And finally, from Pike,

“ Thus the secret science and mysterious emblems of initiation were connected with the heavens, the spheres and the constellations, and this connection must be studied by whomsoever would understand the ancient mind and be enabled to interpret the allegories and explore the meaning of the symbols.”

Respectively submitted,  
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