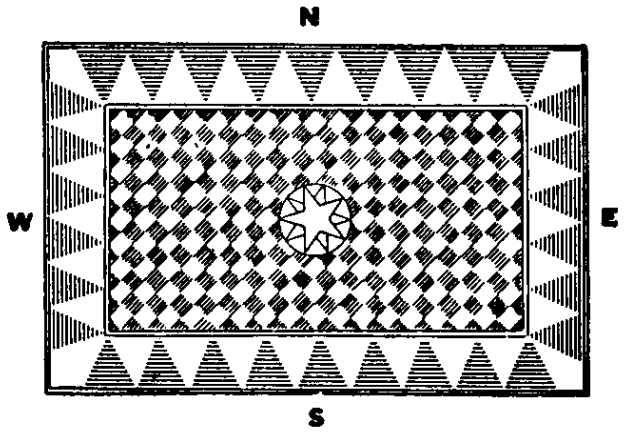


The Mosaic Pavement

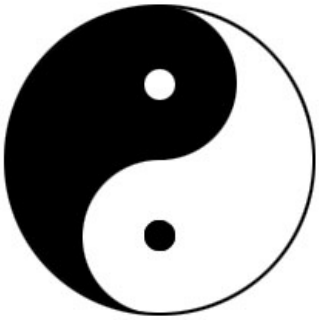
The black and white checkered floor has existed in temples since the times of ancient Egypt. More than simply decorative, the mosaic pavement bears a profound esoteric (special) meaning. Today it is one of Freemasonry's most recognizable symbols and is the ritualistic floor of all Masonic lodges. The pavement is the area on which initiations occur and is "emblematic of human life, checkered with good and evil."

"The mosaic pavement in an old symbol of the Order. It is met with in the earliest rituals of the last century. It is classed among the ornaments of the lodge along with the indented tassel and the blazing star. Its party-colored stones of black and white have been readily and appropriately interpreted as symbols of the evil and good of human life."

In the Entered Apprentice Degree, the mosaic pavement represents the ground floor of King Solomon's Temple. In the account of King Solomon's Temple in the Bible, the ground floor is said to be made of pine or fir, depending on the Bible translation (1 Ki 6:15).

"The checkerboard floor upon which the modern Freemasonic lodge stands is the old tracing board of the Dionysiac (Greek) Architects, and while the modern organization is no longer limited to workmen's guilds it still preserves its symbols.

When thinking of the idea of Duality and the concept of good and evil, black and white, sacred and profane, an image that immediately enters my mind is that of the Ying-Yang.



While this symbol has become a sort of pop culture icon in recent times, its symbolism is deep and its meaning applicable to this subject. While it has numerous interpretations the ying-yang demonstrates the concept of duality and balance. The synonym balance is an important term because of the position of the checkered carpet, the floor, where the foundation of the erect human body may be found. The mason is taught to avoid irregularity and intemperance and to divide his time equally by the use of the twenty four inch gauge. These lessons refer to the importance of balance in a Mason's life. Therefore the symbolism of the mosaic pavement could be interpreted to mean that balance provides the foundation of our Masonic growth.

Maintaining balance allows us to adhere to many Masonic teachings. By maintaining balance we may be able to stand upright in our several stations before God or man. The entered apprentice is charges to keep balance in his life so that he may ensure public and private esteem. It is also very interesting that the concept of Justice is represented by a scale which is balanced and that justice is described as being the foundation of civil society in the first degree of masonry

“The Floor, or groundwork of the Lodge, a chequer-work of black and white squares, denotes the dual quality of everything connected with terrestrial life and the physical groundwork of human nature – the mortal body and its appetites and affections. “The web of our life is a mingled yarn, good and ill together”, wrote Shakespeare. Everything material is characterized by inextricably interblended good and evil, light and shade, joy and sorrow, positive and negative. What is good for me may be evil for you; pleasure is generated from pain and ultimately degenerates into pain again; what it is right to do at one moment may be wrong the next; I am intellectually exalted to-day and to-morrow correspondingly depressed and benighted: The dualism of these opposites governs us in everything, and experience of it is prescribed for us until such time as, having learned and outgrown its lesson, we are ready for advancement to a condition where we outgrow the sense of this chequer-work existence and those opposites cease to be perceived as opposites, but are realized as a unity or synthesis. To find that unity or synthesis is to know the peace which passes understanding i.e. which surpasses our

present experience, because in it the darkness and the light are both alike, and our present concepts of good and evil, joy and pain, are transcended and found sublimated in a condition combining both. And this lofty condition is represented by the indented or tesselated border skirting the black and white chequer-work, even as the Divine Presence and Providence surrounds and embraces our temporal organisms in which those opposites are inherent."

Furthermore, the checkered floor is representative of earth, the material world and contrasts the ceiling, which is made to represent the heavens and the spiritual realm.

"The Covering of the Lodge is shown in sharp contrast to its black and white flooring and is described as "a celestial canopy of diverse colours, even the heavens.

If the flooring symbolizes man's earthy sensuous nature, the ceiling typifies his ethereal nature, his "heavens" and the properties resident therein. The one is the reverse and the opposite pole of the other. His material body is visible and densely composed. His ethereal surround, or "aura", is tenuous and invisible. Its existence will be doubted by those unprepared to accept what is not physically demonstrable, but the Masonic student, who will be called upon to accept many such truths provisionally until he knows them as certainties, should reflect

(i) that he has entered the Craft with the professed object of receiving light upon the nature of his own being,

(2) that the Order engages to assist him to that light in regard to matters of which he is admittedly ignorant, and that its teachings and symbols were devised by wise and competent instructors in such matters, and

(3) that a humble, docile and receptive mental attitude towards those symbols and their meanings will better conduce to his advancement than a critical or hostile one."

The mosaic pavement is a esoterically-charged space on which stands the ceremonial altar, the center of most rituals. The ceremony for the Apprentice Degree symbolically takes place in that location.

"Why is the chequer floor-work given such prominence in the Lodge-furniture? Every Mason is intended to be the High Priest of his own personal temple and to make of it a place where he and Deity may meet. By the mere fact of being in this dualistic world every living being, whether a Mason or not, walks upon the square pavement of mingled good and evil in every action of his life, so that the floor-cloth is the symbol of an elementary philosophical truth common to us all. But, for us, the words "walk upon" imply much more than that. They mean that he who aspires to be master of his fate and captain of his soul must walk upon these opposites in the sense of transcending and dominating them, of trampling upon his lower sensual nature and keeping it beneath his feet in subjection and control. He must become able to rise above the motley of good and evil, to be superior and indifferent to the ups and downs of fortune, the attractions and fears governing ordinary men and swaying their thoughts and actions this way or that. His

object is the development of his innate spiritual potencies, and it is impossible that these should develop so long as he is over-ruled by his material tendencies and the fluctuating emotions of pleasure and pain that they give birth to. It is by rising superior to these and attaining serenity and mental equilibrium under any circumstances in which for the moment he may be placed, that a Mason truly “walks upon” the chequered ground work of existence and the conflicting tendencies of his more material nature.”

There is a vast variety of symbolism presented to the new initiate in the first degree. It is easy for the symbol of the mosaic pavement and its several meanings to be lost in the sea of information provided upon our first admission to lodge. A deeper look demonstrates that this symbol serves to demonstrate the ideals which form the foundation of our individual Masonic growth, the Masonic fraternity, and even the entire human society.

Living in balance makes us healthy, happy and just. If our feet are well balanced, both literally and figuratively, we may be able to serve the purpose of the Fraternity better.

R.W. Bro. John K. Johnston