



The Classical Orders of Architecture and Consciousness

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There is a wealth of sapiential knowledge hiding within the Staircase Lecture, a great lecture in Masonry. Within this lecture are contained secrets about the nature of architecture, Masonry, and the increasing levels of consciousness experienced by the Masonic initiate. First, an understanding of the word consciousness is needed. Our modern perspective has clouded our view of the Traditional understanding of consciousness, both linguistically as well as the essence of the meaning. The modern view has reduced consciousness to the state of being aware, or the common waking state. This view defines dreaming or deep sleep as unconscious states, and defines both these unconscious as well as conscious states as being a product of the human brain. The Traditional view is contrary, and Traditional Man would understand the modern view as an inversion of the reality of consciousness. Traditional Man knows that the state of conscious awareness, as well as the other so-called unconscious states (which are nothing of the sort) are aspects, or rather extrapolations of the Ultimate Reality, infused, so to speak, into the universal manifestation. The True Man¹, or the real Master Mason (or in the Hindu context, *jivamukta*, or liberated soul), understands his true nature as an aspect of that divine consciousness, sheathed and veiled by manifestation. Realizing this practically, not just theoretically, is to reach what is called true union, or Yoga, which is "the supreme goal of metaphysical realization."²

As an individual grows in his spiritual practice, he comes to slowly experience more and more aspects of consciousness, and may even experience higher states of consciousness. These states are explained as a beginning of the union of the influences of *Purusha* and

¹ "This realization of the integral individuality is described by all traditions as the restoration of what is called the 'primordial state', which is regarded as the state of true man and which already escapes some of the limitations characteristic of the ordinary state, notably those due to the temporal condition. The being that has attained this 'primordial state' is still only a human individual and is without effective possession of any supra-individual states. Nevertheless he is henceforth liberated from time, the apparent succession of things having been transmuted for him into simultaneity; he is in conscious possession of a faculty unknown to the ordinary man, which might be called the 'sense of eternity'." (Guenon, Rene. *Studies in Hinduism*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.95-96.)

² Guenon, Rene. *Studies in Hinduism*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.99.

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Prakriti, where *Purusha* becomes more and more evident. Becoming more and more aware intuitively with the surrounding environment, results in a greater appreciation of beauty. Beauty is the experience of seeing manifestation, for what it is and experiencing a union of observer with observed. *Purusha* is observer and *prakriti* is observed. Your own *jiva* experiences its own balance of *purusha* and *prakriti* and thus begins to see the beautiful manifestations of *prakriti* elsewhere. Being moved by a beautiful sunset is to fully appreciate the world as it is, and demonstrates an internal situation in the viewer of greater union with one's individual drop of consciousness through the veils surrounding it. To finally then become the True Man, and realize the fullness of being, is to allow this internal splendor to shine through the layers of *prakriti* and animate them in a harmonizing rhythm of sat-chit-ananda, or existence, consciousness, and bliss. Existence suggests *Prakriti*, consciousness suggests *Purusha*, and bliss is the experience when *Prakriti* and *Purusha* are united. This is the true *Shiva-Shakti* union.

This view of consciousness and manifestation is rooted in the *Samkhya* perspective. The *Samkhya* view is not dualistic, as *Purusha* and *Prakriti* "are not derived from nor reducible to one another, but they both proceed from Universal Being, in which they constitute the first of all distinctions."³ This view is not meant or found as an independent system of understanding, but rather is expanded upon by the system of Yoga, specifically Raja Yoga, or the royal eight-fold path codified by Patanjali. This authentic Yoga, which is misrepresented and inverted through the modern fitness fad, and the *Samkhya* view, are complementary and together represent the Traditional view, as "through true metaphysical realization, detached from all contingencies and therefore essentially of a supra-individual order, the yogi has become identical with 'Universal Man'."⁴

We cannot realize our inward divinity, our own individual consciousness, without also discovering our own integral being, which is to realize the 'Universal Man'. This is done by exploring the intelligible universe while at the same time delving within for a greater understanding of ourselves.

The orders of architecture symbolize the individual progression through a series of states of understanding, or levels of consciousness. The orders of architecture represent the veils of *prakriti* that cover individual consciousness, or *Atman*. An interesting corollary to this progression through these levels of awareness, or veils of understanding, is found in associations with the human body. The Masonic Lodge room is a symbolic representation of the cosmos, but it is also a representation of the microcosm of the human experience.

The journey through these levels of understanding is represented in the orders of architecture as well as in certain centers of consciousness within the human body. These centers are sometimes called *chakras*, such as in the Indian context, but are found expounded upon in numerous Traditional revelations. In Christianity, for example, you find the sacred heart and religious art showing glowing at the head of the saint. I recall even seeing an early Christian icon depicting Christ with a cross at the place between his

³ Guenon, Rene. *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.182.

⁴ Ibid. p.189.

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two eyebrows, similar to the red dot you find many Hindus still wearing today. Islamic Sufism also considers centers in the human body, especially the heart where they explain three to four subtle centers at this metaphysical axis of Man. Sufism is a Tradition of the Heart, so it is no wonder that Sufis have discovered multiple levels of consciousness within the human microcosm at the heart center of the body. Incan spirituality and other Native American Traditions also depict centers of consciousness throughout the human body. The point is, many Traditions depict sacred centers of consciousness that are corresponding with parts of the body, and this understanding of internal science is not to be confused with its pseudo interpretation today in popular, yet un-Traditional, literature.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes in *Knowledge and the Sacred*, "...the Hindu *chakras* as centers of the subtle bodies and energies, the *okhema symphyes* ("psychic vehicle") of Proclus or the *lata'if* or subtle bodies of Sufism, all refer to the immense reality unto which the human microcosm opens if only man were to cease to live on the surface of his being."⁵ Nasr also writes, "... there [are] levels of consciousness and degrees of descent of the Intellect... Perhaps the most immediate experience of man is his subjectivity, the mystery of inwardness and a consciousness which can reflect upon itself, opening inwardly onto the Infinite which is also bliss."⁶

Guenon refers to the *chakras* by saying they "are nothing other than the 'forms of consciousness,' through which the being passes to the corresponding stages."⁷ Although, it is worth noting that these represent growth and maturity as an individual being, they are not limited to the linear perspective, and each work in tandem with each other, and "by reason of the correspondence existing among all states of existence, each of them contains a reflection of all the others in a certain way."⁸ Growth is not necessarily always linear.

The understanding of the Masonic pillars begins first with an exposition of the two primary pillars in Masonry, through which the Fellow Craft must pass. These two pillars, representing the terrestrial and the celestial, are symbolic of the balance evident within all Traditions. They are the *yin* and *yang* of Masonic lore. They represent the balance of the masculine and feminine principles within the individual and which we find balanced in the natural world. They represent our dualistic nature. They are one representation of the *Shiva* and *Shakti* of Masonry.

Yoga Science talks about two primary energy channels within the human body, consisting of *Ida* and *Pingala*. These two primary *nadis* travel through the body from the base of the spine to the crown of the head. They wrap around the spinal column. When these two channels are balanced, or in a sense the experience of the androgynous state, the conscious energy in our bodies is then capable of causing the transcendence of the primary energy channel, *Sushumna*, from the base of the spine through the crown of the head along the spinal column.

⁵ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Albany: State University of New York, 1989. p.173.

⁶ Ibid., p.147.

⁷ Guenon, Rene. *Studies in Hinduism*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.21.

⁸ Ibid. p.18.

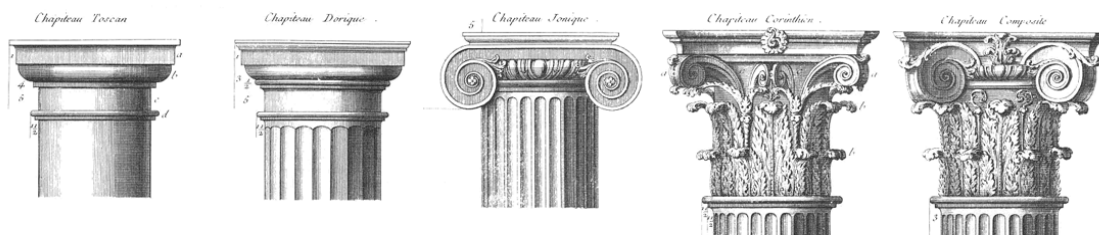
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These two pillars, or *Ida* and *Pingala*, represent the male and female aspects of our embodied spirit. These channels are associated with the Sun and Moon.⁹ The Male represents the Sun, or active aspect of our being. The Moon represents the female or passive aspect of our being. The most direct way of experiencing these aspects of our energy is through the balance of *prana*, or breath, that we experience in our nostrils. If we pay attention, we will notice that one nostril over the other allows for air passage with less obstruction at any moment. Periodically throughout the day in a healthy individual, the breath flow transfers from one nostril to the other. At these moments of transfer from *Ida* to *Pingala*, or from activity to passivity, we will notice the experience of balance, or moments of peace.

These two pillars represent the base center of consciousness, where all our latent energy resides. The balance of these two forces is necessary for the progression through the levels of being, or consciousness. This base center is associated with our embodiment and is called the *muladhara chakra*. It is here that we are connected to Earth. This base center is located on the human body at the base of the spine. When these two pillars are balanced, the energy at the base center of consciousness is elevated.

The second level of consciousness, or the *swadhisthana chakra*, is represented by the Tuscan order of architecture. This pillar is simple and utilitarian. It is smooth, and the capital is plain and not very ornate. This center is located at the bladder region along the spine. From this center comes the reproduction place, not surprising then that within Masonry, a Tradition limited to Men, that the pillar is perhaps the most phallic of the five, representing the sexual energy of consciousness.

There are three primary pillars within the Lodge, which are introduced initially to the Entered Apprentice: Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty, which could correspond metaphysically to the three primary paths to the divine (*jnana* or knowledge, *karma* or action, and *bhakti* or devotion). These three pillars are associated with the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders of architecture.



Following the Tuscan order is the Doric order, which in the ternary represents Strength. In this ternary of Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty, Strength corresponds with existence (*sat*), Wisdom corresponds with consciousness (*chit*), and Beauty corresponds with bliss (*ananda*). The Vedic phrase *satchitananda*, denoting the experience of Ultimate Reality, unifies these pillars into the three primary legs of the table that hold up Reality, and

⁹ It is worth noting a correlation between *Ida*, *Pingala*, and *Sushumna* and the three lesser lights of Masonry. Guenon refers to these as the "Greater lights;" however, some Masonic jurisdictions describe them as the lesser lights. (Guenon, Rene. *Studies in Hinduism*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.20.)

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correspondingly the Masonic Lodge. It is also worth noting that the pillar of Strength is affiliated with masculinity (*Shiva*) while the pillar of Wisdom is affiliated with femininity (*Shakti*), and the pillar of Beauty is truly the union of the two. These three sacred pillars of Masonry are also associated with the Master and Wardens; Strength and Wisdom are in the West and East, respectively, and Beauty is in the South, or between the two latitudinal directions.

The Daoist saying goes, "the one became two, the two became three, and the three became the ten thousand things." The un-manifested reality manifested into the dualism of Wisdom and Strength. First there was Wisdom to contrive, followed by Strength to Support. The two became three as the manifested world expressed infinite Beauty, and then there was Beauty to adorn. "And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night... and God saw that it was good."¹⁰ Beauty represents the comprehension of the goodness of manifestation. This ternary of Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty are together even though the two came from the un-manifested reality and the third is the union of the dualism of the two. "...Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there."¹¹ Our experience of Beauty is sourced in the One, and Beauty is truly both the mysterious and alluring illusion (*Maya*) while also being an aspect of the Divine. The Divine ascends and descends from Heaven, as is explained by the angels of Jacob's ladder. It is also worth noting that the Lord's Prayer alludes to Wisdom, Strength and Beauty as the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory.

The Doric pillar is more refined than the Tuscan; it is sturdy but still not ornate. This center is located on the human body at the navel along the spine, or the central fire in the abdomen, the solar plexus, and is called the *manipura chakra*. It is here that our food is digested, our vitality that sustains our body. It is here where our strong sense of ego resides. As a child grows in the first years of life, the child undeniably reaches this place when it develops a sense of self. As a baby, the mother is all, and in this center, or this stage of development the child begins to want things other than mother. The child begins to explore the world. This center is where we meet life within a dualistic perspective, me and the world, and thus the Doric pillar also represents Strength – self identity and self determination. We are the architects of our life, as Swami Rama of the Himalayas states.

Most people never really move beyond this center. Masonry is a spiritual science for those seekers for higher levels of understanding and consciousness. Sacred anatomy refers to the body in two parts, separated by the rib cage. The lower levels relate to the lower or base aspects of life. The upper half relate to the higher, or spiritual aspects. Thus the three pillars, Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty, include Strength, or our ego foundation in the world, with Wisdom and Beauty being our connections to the higher orders of reality.

¹⁰ Genesis 1:16-18.

¹¹ Gospel of Thomas, verse 77.

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From the Doric pillar, or Strength, we move on to the Ionic order, or the Pillar of Wisdom, which corresponds with the heart. "In the heart, knowledge and being meet and are one."¹² This center is called the *anahata chakra*. Wisdom of the heart is often referenced. We may know ideas, but to understand and experience wisdom requires knowledge of the heart. This center of consciousness is in the center of the chest along the spine and refers to the center of Man. The Ionic pillar is the middle of the progression through the orders of architecture. The Ionic pillar was allegedly developed after the inspiration of seeing a young and beautiful girl with the ringlets of her hair curled. This brings to my mind a remembrance of Debussy's beautiful piano piece called "The girl with the flaxen hair."

The Ionic pillar, Wisdom, also connotes a connection to the Sacred Mother. Wisdom is represented in numerous mythologies as the goddesses Athena, or Saraswati, for example. Devotees to the Divine Mother in the Hindu context practice many devotional rites associated with the heart. From the heart also flows Mercy, and there are numerous other examples of the feminine divinities, such as Guan Yin or Mary the Mother of Jesus. It is interesting to note that the penalty of the Fellow Craft refers to the heart. The manifested world is referred to as *Maya*, as already mentioned, and "*Maya* is also identified with 'Wisdom' or *Sophia*, understood in exactly the same sense in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and as such it is the mother of the *Avatara*."¹³ Coomaraswamy says that it is no "accident that the Buddha's mother's name was *Maya*," the mother of the Greek God Hermes was *Maia*, and even the name *Maria* may be related.¹⁴ To violate the oaths and the secrets of a Fellow Craft really imply losing our heart and falling from the Grace of the Divine. A lost Fellow Craft or brother results in an ache in the heart. People have been known to die of heartache. From this center originates our devotion, our love, and our compassion. There is the common phrase, "he has a warm heart."

The next center of consciousness is symbolized by the Corinthian order of architecture, which is located at the center of the throat pit and is called the *vishuddha chakra*. From this center comes creativity and expression. The Corinthian order is truly the most beautiful and ornate pillar representing the art of nature. This order was alleged to have come from the inspiration of seeing how ferns grew around a basket. This symbolism demonstrates Man's drive to imitate the divine plan and to create. The Corinthian order is the pillar of beauty, and the beauty of creativity and creation.

This concludes the three major pillars of Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty – the three primary pillars in Masonry, representing our connection with the world through strength, our love and comprehension of the world through wisdom, rising to beauty, and our own limitless potential of creativity. From here we rise yet higher to an even more initiatory center of consciousness which resides between the two eyebrows, or represented in the Masonic context as the composite order of architecture. It is composite because it incorporates all the orders of architecture below it. This center, in the Sanskrit called the *Ajna Chakra*, is said to be composite of all the other consciousness centers. It is said that if you open this *chakra*, referred to as the third eye, you can control all the other centers

¹² Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Albany: State University of New York, 1989. p.174.

¹³ Guenon, Rene. *Studies in Hinduism*. Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001. p.74.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.74.

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of consciousness. The All Seeing Eye resides here, consisting of all other centers of consciousness. Meister Eckhart says "The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one, one seeing, one knowing, one love."¹⁵

It would seem that it ends there, because here the pillars end. Perhaps this is as far as Masonry is meant to take the initiate, and that is where our symbolism ends, leaving the next just too sacred to even symbolize. It is my conviction that the next center, referred to as the *Sahasrara Chakra* or Crown *Chakra* at the top of the head is more elusively hidden in the symbolism of Masonry. This center is represented in sacred art by the halo, or glowing from the head of saints. This is seen both in East and West through the glowing head of Buddhas, Hindu deities, and Christian saints. On my journey to Europe I felt as I saw sacred art that certain older artists represented this center more authentically by a true glowing head, while later and more recent art only depicted a halo – no doubt evidence of the spiritual decline in the West in conjunction with the material ascent.

This crown *chakra* is hidden in the mysteries of the Master Mason. Hiram Abiff was slain by blunt force striking his head, killing him on the spot. This symbolism refers to the crown center of consciousness. The Sages of the East say that when we die, or rather our bodies die, one way for the soul to exit the body is through the top of the head, the same place that a baby has the soft spot after birth. Grand Master Hiram Abiff was slain at the crown and exited this world for the next through this sacred center.

The penalty of a Master Mason refers to our body being severed below the ribs, further demonstrating our separation from our mortal self to our immortal self. The lower centers of consciousness are surpassed, and our spirit being rises through the eye brow center out the crown, and the dead body is all that's left. We become solely spiritual beings, and so to say, return to the One.

It is peculiar that the orders of architecture become ever more complex as we advance, yet the physical locations of the penalties of Masonry, from the Entered Apprentice through the Master Mason, descend through the body. There are perhaps several reasons for this. First, the Divine both ascends and descends Jacob's Ladder, as is referenced in the Entered Apprentice lecture. We advance and so the penalties, and the Divine, descend. This is one interpretation. Another is that as an Entered Apprentice we are bound to secrecy, and thus are limited in our creative abilities as it relates to Masonry. Controlling our throat center, or creativity, is vital to the new initiate. Then as Fellow Crafts, the heart interacts with the world, and violating the oaths of secrecy removes our love and devotion, closing us to wisdom. As a Master Mason we finally exit this world, severing our body in half, leaving our mortal lower centers of consciousness and uniting our love or heart, our wisdom, and our creative potential to rise up to the sacred One.

The pillars of Masonry, and the consciousness they represent at one level, are likewise symbolical of a multitude of realities. As the pillars progress from west to east, they increase in complexity and beauty, and likewise symbolize the progression and the improvement a Mason makes as he grows in Masonry. This progressive movement of

¹⁵ Meister Eckhart

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the pillars toward the East is also symbolic of the increasing levels of awareness the spiritual traveler experiences along the path. In one sense, they are benchmarks for spiritual growth. The levels of consciousness within the Yogic and Tantric perspective are represented through the *chakras*, yet these *chakras* are symbols themselves. The *chakras*, or these centers of consciousness associated with specific areas in the human body, represent growing awareness and the experiences of the initiate as he progresses toward *moksa*. The *chakras*, being their own symbols of a higher order of reality, are tools within Yoga Science, and share a parallel type of symbolism within the orders of architecture in Masonry. The pillars themselves, like all symbols, are multi-dimensional, and the parallel relationship with the *chakras* is merely one possible understanding.

The symbolism of Masonry really represents many other unspeakable truths. No matter how much we try to intellectually understand these mysteries, the true comprehension can only really be experienced. Once this happens, the secrets become known and can never truly be divulged, and are strictly locked in the repository of a Mason's faithful breast. True faith is the certainty of direct and incommunicable experience.