

The Four Cardinal Virtues

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I have been surprised how little commentary is to be found in Masonic literature explaining the Four Cardinal Virtues.

In the Entered Apprentice Masons degree the California monitor has the following:

Temperance is that due restraint upon the affections and passions which renders the body tame and governable, and frees the mind from the allurements of vice. This virtue should be your constant practice, as you are thereby taught to avoid excess or the contracting of any licentious or vicious habits, the indulgence in which might lead you to disclose some of those valuable secrets which you have promised to conceal and never reveal, which would consequently subject you to the contempt and detestation of all good

Fortitude is that noble and steady purpose of the mind whereby we are enabled to undergo any pain, peril or danger when prudentially deemed expedient. This virtue is equally distant from rashness and cowardice and like the former virtue, should be deeply impressed upon your mind, as a safeguard or security against any illegal attempt which may be made, by force or otherwise, to extort from you any of these valuable secrets with which you have been so solemnly entrusted, and which was emblematically represented upon your first admission into the Lodge.

Prudence teaches us to regulate our lives and actions agreeably to the dictates of reason, and in that faculty by which we wisely judge and prudentially determine on all things relative to our present. This virtue should be your peculiar characteristic, not only for the government of your conduct while in the Lodge but also when abroad in the world. You should be particularly careful in all strange and mixed companies, never to let fall the least sign, token or word, whereby the secrets of Freemasonry might be unlawfully obtained.

Justice is that standard or boundary of right which enables us to render unto every man his just dues, without distinction. This virtue is not only consistent with divine and human laws, but is the very cement and support of civil society; and, as justice in a great measure constitutes the really good man, so should it be your invariable practice never to deviate from the minutest principles

The reference to the Guttural, Pectoral, Manual and Pedal are in cypher are I am not at liberty to decipher.

Thomas Smith Webb 'Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Masonry' in 1797 states *'the observations upon the first three degrees are mainly taken from Preston's "Illustrations of Masonry", with some necessary alterations.'* Apart from punctuation the four Cardinal virtues are exactly the same as used in California. The only variation is the use of the first/third person i.e. California use 'you' Webb use 'him' or 'he'.

In William Preston's 'Illustrations of Masonry' first published in 1772 in Section IV Clause 3 the four cardinal virtues begin with a discourse on the Guttural (*Guttural*), Pectoral, Manual and Pedal as follows:

'The guttural (guttural) is intended to remind us of the dire effects of the breach of fidelity, in reference to the penalty of the obligation. The Pectoral is intended to shield the breast, which is the repository of our secrets, with the fence of honour against insidious attacks, and reference to the compasses presented to the n.l.b. The manual is intended to remind us of that truth and sincerity, which are to guide our conduct in conformity to God's law, and refers to the right hand voluntarily laid on the law as a pledge of our attachment. The Pedal is intended to remind us of the path we are to pursue in the journey of life, and refers to our position in the North East corner of the Lodge, and recommendation that is thereby given.'

These are then expanded as follows:

Q. *To what do they allude?*

The four cardinal virtues

Q. *Name them.*

Temperance – *By this virtue we govern our passions and check our unruly desires; the health of the body and the dignity of the mind are equally concerned in its observance.*

Q. *How is it applied in Masonry?*

To the guttural point it applies; for vicious habits and irregular indulgences might throw us off our guard, and by a breach of fidelity, subject us to the penalty of the obligation; to which that point more immediately refers.

Q. *Explain Fortitude.*

Fortitude – *By fortitude we are taught to resist temptation and encounter danger, with spirit and resolution; alike distinction from rashness and cowardice; when possessed of the virtue, we are seldom shaken, and never overthrown by the storms which surround us.*

Q. *How is this applied to Masonry?*

To the pectoral point it alludes, for true courage can only centre in the heart, where our treasure is lodged; and from which cabernet our

secrets can never be extorted, without the lasting pain to the mind which the pectoral point so strongly inculcates.

Q. Explain Prudence.

Prudence. By prudence we are taught to regulate our conduct by the rules of right reason; judge and determine with propriety, in every measure, with respect to the general good: this virtue therefore constitutes the best jewel that can adorn the human frame.

Q. How is it applied to Masonry?

To the manual point it applies; for where can prudence be more properly exercised, than when we pledge conformity to a solemn vow, with the right hand, which never ought to seal what the heart is not inclined to perform.

Q. Explain Justice.

Justice. By this virtue we render to every man his due without distinction; it is not only consistent with divine and moral law, but is the standard of cement of civil society, without justice universal confusion would ensue; lawless force would overcome equity and social intercourse no longer exist.

Q. How is it applied to Masonry?

To the pedal point it applies; for when placed at the north East corner of the Lodge, resting secure on the foundation stone of the building, that virtue is warmly recommended, in the prosecution of our journey through life to secure the esteem and approbation of man.

I have underlined the odd words that are common to both Webb's and Preston's rendition. However, by the 1796 edition the ritual is expanded and we see the emergence of that which we recognize in Webb's Monitor. Preston's 1796: 'To this illustration succeeds an explanation of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. - By **Temperance**, we are instructed to govern the passions and check unruly desires. The health of the body, and the dignity of the species, is equally concerned in a faithful observance of it. - By **Fortitude**, we are taught to resist temptation, and encounter danger with spirit and resolution. This virtue is equally distant from rashness and cowardice; and he who possesses it, is seldom shaken, and never overthrown, by the storms that surround him. - By **Prudence**, we are instructed to regulate our conduct by the dictates of reason, and to judge and determine with propriety in the execution of every thing that can tend to promote either present or future well-being. In this virtue all other depend; it is therefore the chief jewel that can adorn the human frame.- **Justice**, the boundary of right, constitutes the cement of civil society. Without the exercise of this virtue, universal confusion must ensue; lawless force would overcome the principles of equity, and social intercourse no longer exists. Justice in a great measure

constitutes real goodness, and therefore it is represented to be the perpetual study of the accomplished mason.'

Daniel Sickels 33^{o1}, (Grand Secretary of the A & A. Scottish Rite Northern Jurisdiction) in his publication 'The General Ahiman Rezon and Freemasons Guide' 1867 gives the order of the Cardinal Virtues as **Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance and Justice**. The book is considered to be a derived from the Antients Grand Lodge of 1751 where a similar named book was produced by Grand Secretary, Laurence Dermott in 1756.

Generally the text used by Sickels for the Four Cardinal Virtues is much the same as used by Webb but after each there is added an additional paragraph of ritual as follows:

Fortitude – *In the absence of this virtue no man can perform his duty, either to God, his neighbor or himself, in an acceptable manner. He will be too much overwhelmed with the cares and troubles of the world to find leisure or resolution to protect himself from the enticing machinations with which he will be continually beset during his progress through life; and may be led unintentionally to rend asunder the sacred ties of brotherhood which unite men of all parties, religions, or politics, by forfeiting the confidence trustingly imposed in him, and thereby becoming a victim of his own weakness.*

Prudence – *is among the most exacting object that demands every Mason's special attention, for it is the rule which governs all other virtues. She directs to the path which governs all other propriety, inciting us to the performance of worthy actions, and as a guiding star, lighting our steps through the dreary and darksome ways of life*

Temperance – *This virtue should be the constant practice of every Freemason while its opposite should be carefully guarded against. At the shrine of Temperance, how many victims are daily offered! – Blooming youth and hoary age have alike bowed before it. They continue offering libations on the unhallowed altar, until their fortunes are wasted, their lost. Their constitution impaired, their children beggared and that life which might have been usefully and honorably employed, becomes a burden to the possessor.*

¹ Had a remarkable life having served as a Confederate General at Gettysburg and failed to carry out orders he escaped being court-marshaled. He committed murder and avoided execution by pleading insanity. He was very influential and had many influential friends in high places. Worth studying!!

Justice – *This virtue incites us to act toward others, in all transactions of life, as we wish they would act towards us; and as, in great measure it constitutes real goodness, it is therefore represented as the perpetual study of an accomplished Freemason. Without the influence of justice, universal confusion would ensue, lawless force would overcome the principle of equity, and social intercourse would no longer exist.*

I make no comment upon these extra paragraphs and leave that to your opinion! However the Sickels ritual is much later than the original Webb ritual. To what extent he borrowed from other rituals or this is his own creation I am unable to determine.

After the union of the Moderns and Ancients in 1813 much of the United Grand Lodge of England ritual was compromised by the Lodge of Reconciliation to the appeasement of the respective Grand Lodges. Regardless, many English Lodges retained aspects and variations of the ritual they had previously used. This accounts for the 20² or more different rituals found in the English jurisdiction.

In England, by the 1860's, the Lecture of the 1st Degree was often omitted and in some Lodges it was given once a year. Most Lodges finally resolved that the Lecture was not an essential requirement for conferring the degree of Entered Apprentice Mason. This made the conferral of the Entered Apprentice degree much shorter than the American counterpart. It also allowed more time for fraternal fellowship at the Festive Board which was much more meaningful to a new Mason.

The Emulation Ritual used in many English Lodges gives the lecture in an Appendix under 'Explanation of the Tracing Board of the First Degree'. The only reference to the Four Cardinal Virtues is at the end of this Appendix: 'Pendant to the corners of the Lodge are four tassels³ meant to remind us of the four Cardinal Virtues namely: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice, the whole of which, tradition informs

² Most popular rituals in use are: Emulation. Logic. Nigerian. Bristol. Stability. Taylor's. Oxford. Sussex. South London. Universal. West End
LONDON LODGES USE: Emulation. Logic. Taylor's. Stability. Universal. Poynters. West End. East End. Eastern Craft. Craft Guide. Schroder. Camden. Calvers. Loyalty. Newman. Goldman. Henley. Oxford. Paxton. Wanderers. Unique. Tredegar. Benefactum. Nigerian. Veritas. In addition there are two Lodges said to have their own ritual!

³ In my Lodge there were four large rope knots presumably made by one of the 'rigging' business for sailing vessels in the 1880's that were on the Isle of Wight.

us, were constantly practiced by a great majority of our ancient Brethren.....⁴

The Lectures of Emulation Ritual are based upon Preston's Lectures and were in a separate green ritual book. The ritual for Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice is almost identical to Webb's Monitor and possibly dates from before the formation of the Emulation Lodge in 1823. The ritual is believed to be derived from the Lodge of Hope No 7 in the late 1700's that was under the jurisdiction of the 'Moderns'.

In Carr's 'The Early Masonic Catechisms' there is a reference to 'Guttural (original spelling), Pedestal, Manual and Pectoral' found in "The Grand Mysteries of Free-Masonry Discovered 1724/5. There is no mention of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice. In Pritchard's 'Masonry Dissected' 1730 there is the following:

Q. How many principle signs?

Four.

Q. What are they?

Guttural, Pectoral, Manual and Pedestal.

Q. Explain them.

Guttural the Throat, Pectoral the Breast, Manual the Hand, Pedestal the feet.

There is no mention of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice.

One is reminded that many of the creators of Masonic ritual were scholars of the classical school. The Renaissance spread from Florence, Italy and travelled through the Middle East and Europe to about the time when Speculative Freemasonry came on the scene.

In Plato's 'Republic' circa 380 BCE in Book IV: 427 there is a discourse on a theoretical city that is being envisaged. I have only taken the relevant sections:

'Then obviously it is wise, and brave, and temperate and just?

Later there is: *'The city which we describe is, I think really wise. For it is prudent in deliberation. Is it not?'* Yes. *'As this faculty of prudent deliberation is clearly a kind of knowledge. For it is by reason of knowledge and not of ignorance that their deliberations are prudent.'*

Prudence.

Later in 429: *'Well, then it is not very hard to perceive courage and the part of the city in which it was found and from which the city deserves to be called courageous'* **Fortitude.**

⁴ View Tracing Board at the end of this Paper and note the four knots in the corners.

In 430: 'Then we still have two things to discover in the city – **Temperance** and finally, the main object of all our inquiry **Justice**.'

These Cardinal Virtues were absorbed into early Christian and Judaic doctrines. This is reflected in the Jewish philosophy in Wisdom 8:7 that reads, 'She [Wisdom] teacheth **temperance**, and **prudence**, and **justice**, and **fortitude**, which are such things as men can have nothing more profitable in life' dated circa C.E. 45. In 4 Maccabees I:18-19 (C.40 CE) 'Now the kinds of **wisdom** are right judgment, **justice**, **courage**, and **self-control**. Right judgment is supreme over all of these since by means of it reason rules over the emotions; claiming that the practice of these virtues would lead to heaven.'

The Stoic added the antithesis of folly, profligacy, injustice and cowardice and these together with the Virtues became absorbed into much of Greco-Roman culture of the period. St. Augustine (354-430 CE)⁵ was a strong advocate of Aristotelian philosophy, Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism and introduced many of these concepts into Christianity.

Plotinus (204-270 C.E.) developed the philosophy of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle omitting the political aspects and introducing Theurgy as a way of union with the One (God). Enneads I:2 refers to civic duties as **Prudence, Fortitude, Rectitude and Justice**. In his catharsis he explains how the ascension of the Individual soul can achieve unity or union with God through the practice of the these Virtues. The term Cardinal Virtues was first used by St. Ambrose (330-397CE). Philosophically, the Four Cardinal⁶ Virtues 'hinge' upon each other.

The hypotheses of Soul/World/Nous as revealed by Plato and later in Neo-Platonism are in three aspects: A. Intellect or rational. B. Spirit and C. Material or Individual.

- A. The **Intellect** perceives truth and falsehood and decides what should be the proper course in life. It creates Temperance and Fortitude. As defined by **Prudence**: '*..teaches us to regulate our lives and actions agreeably to the dictates of reason, and in that faculty by which we wisely judge and prudentially determine on all things relative to our present*'⁷.

⁵ See Papers on Neo-Platonism' and 'Hermeticism' by E.W. Fentum

⁶ Cardo - hinge

⁷ California ritual

- B. The **Spirited** aspect carries out what is and should be the right course with courage. '**Fortitude** – *In the absence of this virtue no man can perform his duty, either to God, his neighbor or himself, in an acceptable manner*'.
- C. Knowledge and reason is essential to channel the life forces of the Material World to suppress the physical desires and appetites. '**Temperance** is that due restrain upon the affections and passions which renders the body tame and governable, and frees the mind from the allurements of vice'.⁸

One Virtue cannot wholly exist without the other three. It takes Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude to create Justice and is the external application of Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude. They are therefore 'hinged'. It is for the individual to find the harmony and balance between these four virtues, without exclusion of any of them.

The three Theological Virtues are Faith, Hope and Love (*Charity*)⁹ which form seven attributes when combined with the tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth; supported by Wisdom, Strength and Beauty is the quintessence of Freemasonry.

In my diagram at the end of this Paper I try to show the stages of the process of the 'Ascension of the Soul' as related to the four elements: Earth (black), Air (yellow), Water (blue) and Fire (red).

The only explanation I can offer for the difference in order of the four Cardinal Virtues in Freemasonry from the order given by Plato is that Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice coordinates better with the four perfect points of Entrance i.e. Guttural, Pectoral, Manual and Pedal. One observation is that the points begin at the head and end at the feet.

Temperance may be considered to be created in the mind through the gaining of knowledge and discipline. Fortitude is said to reside, like courage, in the breast. Prudence may be centered in the abdomen as a 'gut' feeling and to the hand that was placed upon the V.S.L. to assume the obligation. Justice is regarded as a guide to life by setting the feet on the correct path.

From Preston's ritual given earlier in this paper it would appear that Webb absorbed Preston's 'Cardinal Virtues' and the 'Perfect Points of

⁸ California ritual

⁹ Corinthians I – 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Entrance' into Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice and separated the esoteric part into a cypher form. An interesting note: In the First Degree Charge according to the English Emulation ritual the given order is Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance and Justice whereas in the California ritual it is Temperance Fortitude, Prudence and Justice.

The Webb (1797) and subsequent derivations are closer to originality than many present day English rituals. California ritual is virtually 'cast in concrete' whereas English ritual has been modified and evolved over the years. It has removed the drama of Third Degree. It has re-phrased the penalties which were considered 'barbaric' and sacrilegious. The Christian reference were removed i.e. "Holy Saints John" is not mentioned and "Holy Bible" became the "Volume of the Sacred Law".

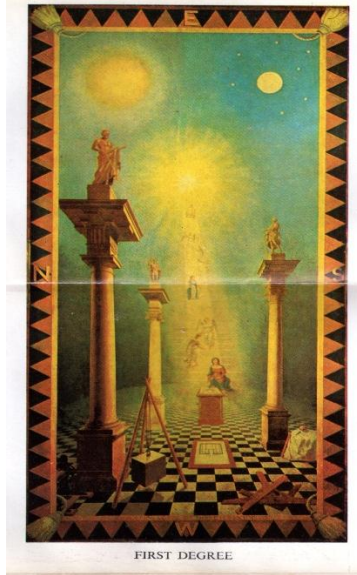
In England Lodge business is conducted by a Committee held prior to the Lodge meeting. Thus, English Lodges do not have a dedicated meeting solely for business as is the custom in California. As the degree conferrals are shorter it allows for a conferral of a Degree at a Stated Meeting followed by a Festive Board.

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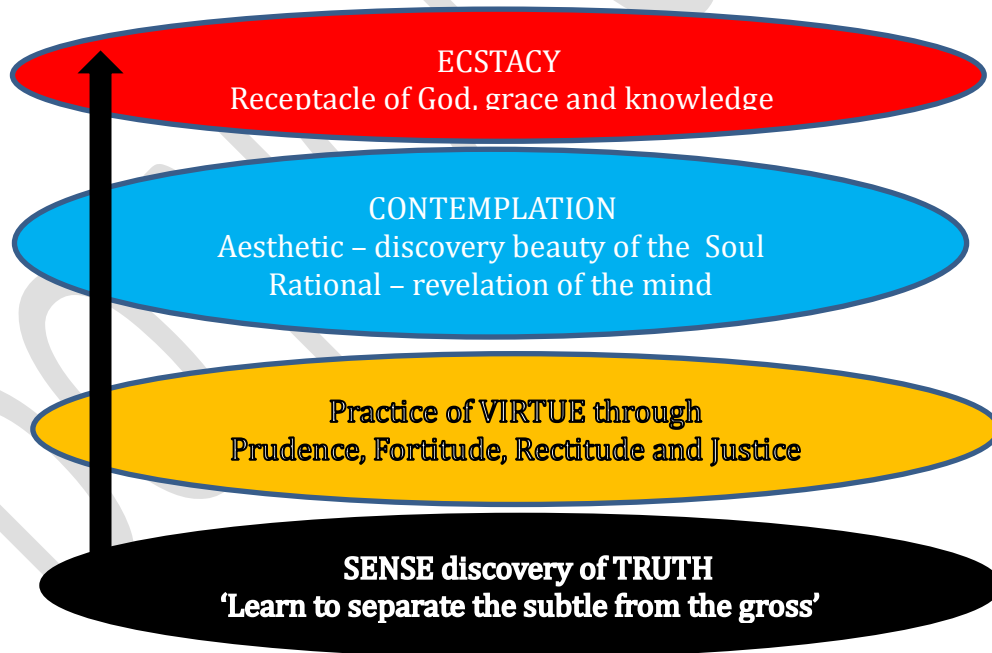
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'The Ascent of the Soul'

GNOSIS (*KNOGLEDGE*) - CATHARSIS (*CLENSING*)



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