

The Mystical Circle: A Personal journey

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Master: *The purpose for which all that exists [is] the knowledge of the world of the divine....* **Student:** *And what is the fruit that we will achieve with this study?* **Master:** *Release from death and adherence to the fountain and source of life”*

-Solomon Ibn Gabirol. The Fountain of Life.

The Mystical Circle: A personal Journey

Symbols and their uses in fraternal organizations have been scrutinized as part of a learning process by profanes, initiates and Aspirants who are searching for a particular meaning and significance. This acquisition of knowledge on symbolism and its use in ritualism is a long-term experience that requires many attributes, and intrinsic worth accompanied with the value of patience, fortitude, contemplation, analysis, discussion, interpretation, active participation, emotions, perceptions as well self-awareness. As Fraters and Aspirants for new knowledge, The Societas Rosicruciana in Civitas Foederatis (S.R.I.C.F) has provided to its Fraters the tools to succeed in this aim. As noted in our lectures the purpose of the Colleges are *“To investigate the meaning and symbolism of all that now remains of the wisdom, art and literature of the ancient world”*. In this paper, I want to express my experience in the value of *The Mystical Circle* and the journey experienced during my profane life as well during my Masonic journey.

Mystical has been defined from the Webster dictionary as “

1. Adj. spiritually significant or symbolic; allegorical.
2. relating to or based on intuition, contemplation, or meditation of a spiritual nature
3. mysterious, enigmatic

Albert G. Mackey defined *Mystical* as *“A word applied to any language, symbol, or ritual which is understood only by the initiated. The word was first used by the priests to describe their mysterious rites, and then borrowed by the philosophers to be applied to the inner, esoteric doctrine of their schools”*.

Different cultures have used the circle in their myths, as in the case of Vedic myth expressed on the “The Four directions of Space”, as representation of historical architecture. Also the circle has been used as an image of creation in poetic and metaphoric language. For example; the Syrian poet Abu l-Ala al-Ma’ (874-1058) in his book *Luzumu ma la Yalzam* (“The Necessity of isn’t necessary”). The circle also has been used for proposing scientific knowledge in biology as in the cell cycle, or in mathematical models.

Moreover, any mystical experiences convey a sense of pleasure as a described by the Greek philosopher Epicurus in his writings. From the Menocceus, Epicurus expressed the following *“Both when young and old a man must study philosophy, that as he grows old he may be young in blessing through the grateful recollection of what has been, and that in youth he may be old as well, since he will know no fear of what is to come. We must then meditate on the things that make our happiness, seeing that when that is with us we have all, but when is absent we do all to win it”*

During my childhood, my grandfather invited his grandkids as well part of my relatives during different tropical seasons of the year, usually at the spring, the summer and the autumn to walk around the tropical fertile plains during the day or at the nighttime. I still vividly remembered when my grandfather traced with the help a large stick a big circle in the ground and we were invited to fill the lines of the circle with our bodies by holding our hands. This event was covered by the zenith of the intense heat from a Tropical Sun. The shades from our bodies and hands were reflected in the ground as a crown like figure. Sometimes my grandfather had positioned himself in the center of the circle and remained in deep silence for a long period of time until someone from the circle adopted a face of curiosity and my grandfather was able to provide words of wisdom for this beautiful experience. In contrast, the same ritualistic experienced was performed during the nighttime and the circle was filled by holding our hands. It was really appreciative to perceive that the circle was covered by the silver light from the Moon in a celestial tropical night. Incandescent firewood was the object of our attention

instead of my grandfather of being in the center of the circle. Perhaps, the intention of my grandfather was to teach us on the values of the opposites, *day and night*, the symbolism of unity, parallelism, the representation of the center, and the principles from a beginning as well of an ending of any life process.

Or as a lesson of closing the gap created between a man and his own universe as an inclusion of the human being as part of a reference during the circle ritualistic practice. I regret that during my adolescence as well during my adulthood, I was not able to approach my grandfather with inquisitive questions for asking the reasons of why he performed such rituals with us. I still believe that his intention was to plant the seeds of the inquiring questions, and the initial tools for searching out the meaning of such experiences.

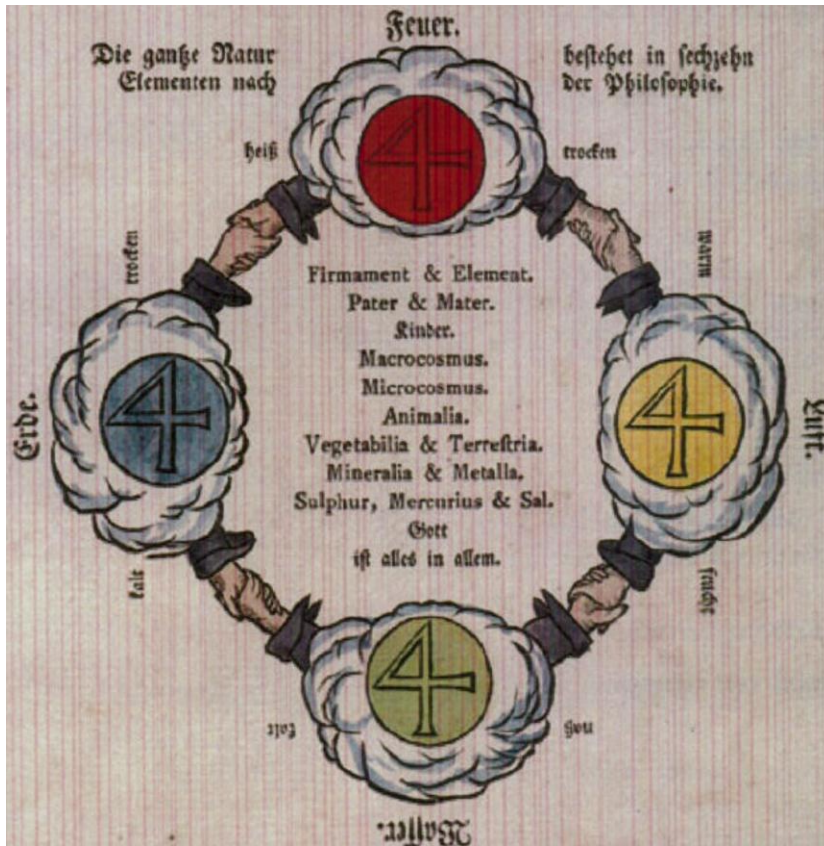
I had experienced another Mystical circle in my lifetime during a visit to a region of the Amazonian with the primitive culture of the Yanonami. During a bright night, I was invited by a Shaman to participate in a tribal ceremonial with members of his group. We held our hand again as it was indicated by my grandfather during my childhood ceremonials. The Shaman by using enchanted words invited us to elevate our head to the canopy of heaven by looking the sky covered with infinity number of brighter celestial lights. Following after such contemplation, he invited us to lie down in the ground still united by the hands and continuing to observe the sky and its infinite macroscopically spatial bodies. I still remember that I was awakened by the brighter sphere from the Amazonian tropical Sun. During this experience, I was able to appreciate the Natural order, as well to have references on the importance of the upper and lower world.

I have been impressed during my visit to foreign Masonic Lodges when the mystical circle is an active part in the Masonic rituals. Especially when the initiate is invited to participate from the privileges of being integrated into the mystical circle. This is a significant experience that has reminded me of the importance of the words "*We are united by a single band*". Such ceremonial is rich in symbolism where the brethren under the direction of presiding Master of Lodge invite the brethren to participate. Right hands are crossed over the left hands and the heels forming an angle by contacting the

feet of his neighbor. The mystical circle is performed in the center of the altar. Such ceremonial provide the sense of connection, unity, accompanied with a collective enchainment by asking for health for a sick brother, or for fraternal assistance for a brother in need, or for the recovery from a loved one. The Worshipful Master asked the brother into the circle to shake their crossed arms three times for each goodwill and then the circle is broken.

As a member of S.R.I.C.F, the importance of the mystical circle has been expressed during the Zelator Grade. I have not found yet particular historical documents that indicate the introduction of this ritual in the Masonic ceremonies. However, the meaning, interpretation and significance of the mystical circle vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction as well between Masonic Rites that it is not the scope of this presentation.

In a beautifully and well preserved colorful plate from the anonymously document published in the early 18th century, *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer* or *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucian's*, digitally preserved by the University of Wisconsin and dedicated to the History of Science and Technology a plate presenting a circle with human figures is representing a mystical circle.



Here is briefly description; in the center of the plate the presence of four human figures that are holding his hands similarly to a mystical circle. Each figure is symbolized as the representation from the four elements *Air, Water, Earth and Fire*. The numeral *Four* is present on the top of the head of the human figures forming the circle. The value of the opposite as alchemist elements is present from the right arm to the left arm, *Warm and Moist, Wet and Cold, Cold and Dry, and Hot and Dry*. In the center, the plate contains a statement “All Nature consists of sixteen elements according to Philosophy”. On the top of the plate the words of *ELOHIM and JEHOVAH* are associated with Nature. At the bottom of the plate are two separate columns, The Ignis Philosophorum (honoring the Fire) and the Aqua Philosophorum (Honoring the Water). Each column contained 16 enchanted lines honoring the Water and the Fire as principal elements.

Another example of a mystical circle plate associated with the enhancement for ethical attributes is founded in the treatise titled “Tiqqun Middot HaNefsh” or “The Improvement of the Moral Qualities” written by the Andalusian poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Shelomon Ben Yehudah Ibn Gabirol (1021 or 1022- 1054, 1058 or 1070) was an eminent and controversial philosopher from the eleventh century born in Spain in the region of Malaga, Andalusia. [A Qabbalist?]

He proposed a decipherable scheme based on the senses consisted of four elements or four humors as he described; Blood or the equivalent to *Air*, *Yellow gall* or the equivalent to *Fire*, *Black gall* or the equivalent to *Earth* and *White gall* or the equivalent to *Water*. Note [Gall; spherical growth]. According to Peter Cole, Solomon Ibn Gabirol ethical treatise is indicative that “*The senses (impulses) can be mixed and matched so that the soul’s tendencies might be trained for wisdom*”. Knowledge of the soul is a prerequisite for its development (its ascent) and the soul can be known solely in a descent into physical details”. Solomon Ibn Gabirol played with the values of the opposites and the balance similarly to a medieval mandala like map.

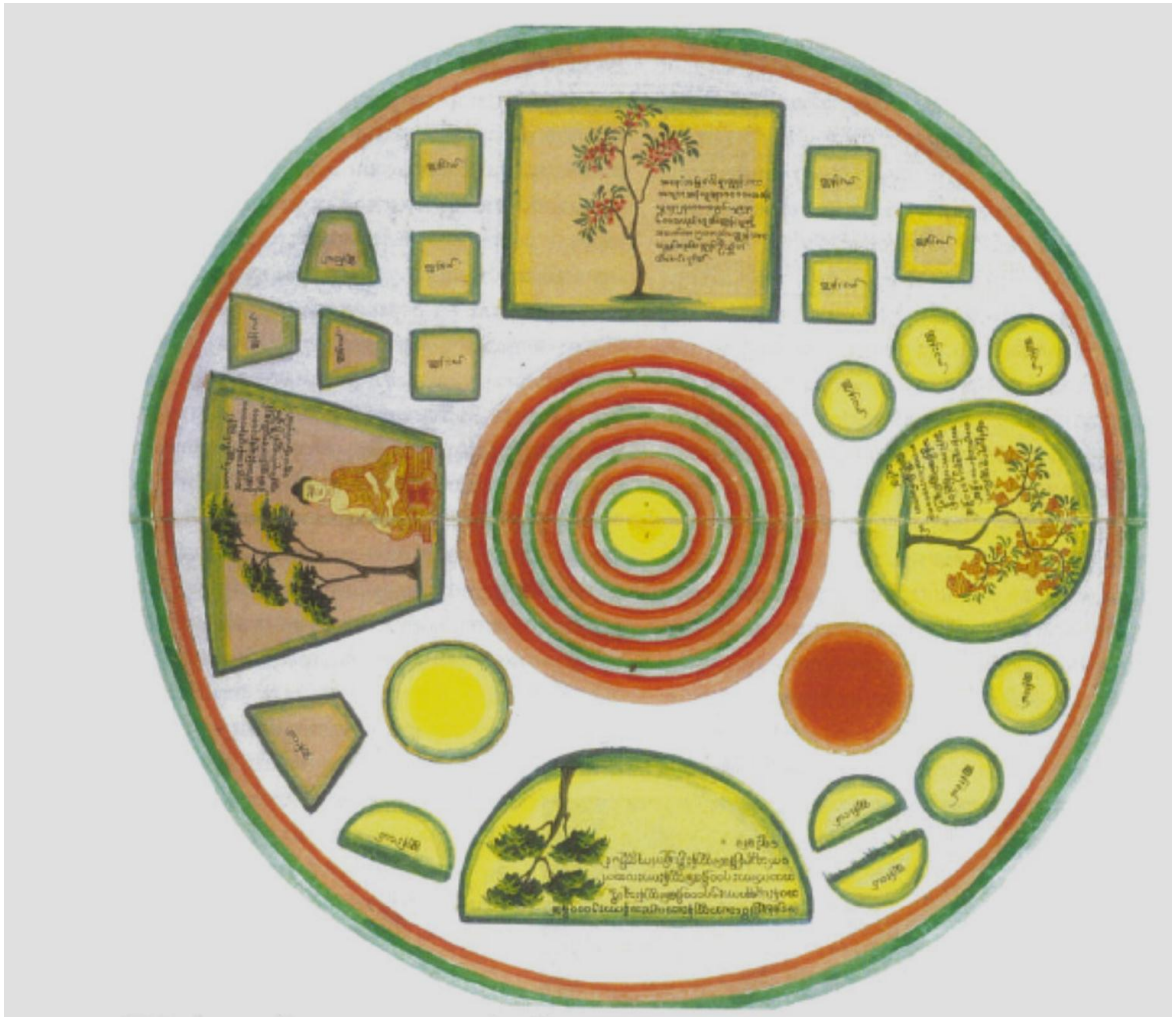
Briefly, he associated senses with impulses as is indicated in this chart:

Sight	Hearing	Smell
Pride	Love	Wrath
Meekness	Hate	Goodwill
Pudency	Mercy	Jealousy
Impudence	Cruelty	Wide-awakeness
Taste	Touch	
Joy (Cheerfulness)	Liberality	
Grief (Apprehensiveness)	Stinginess	
Tranquility	Valor	
Penitence (Remorse)	Cowardice	

Solomon Ibn Gabirol wrote the followed in his ethical treatise

“If a man be wise, he will employ [the senses] in the right place and restrain them for everything in connection with he ought not to use them. Let him rather be like a skilful physician, who prepares prescriptions, taking of every medicine a definite quantity”

Representations of mystical circle vary from culture to culture but the meaning remains the same. In a colorful plate from a Burmese chart the mystical circle is associated with the attributes for searching the path to Nirvana and the Enlightenment. The plate contains sixteen circles in the center of the chart. The four directions are represented by four geometrical figures; a semicircle, a rectangle, and sphere and vase like shape. Each geometrical figure contains inside a tree. Inside the circle are small different geometrical figures. This chart also represents the attributes and values within the circle.



Mystical circle attributes are associated with the number four or its correspondences. We have learned that *“Number Four (4) is the Mystic number, and indicates the operative influence of the four elements”* as it has been indicated in our Zelator lecture. Perhaps the source of wisdom and our personal transformation is associated with those attributes, emotions and values expressed by our ancestors as it has been described in the different mystical circles. The conjunction and association of knowledge and its association to the mystical circle would be speculative; however they are also a driven force for the generation of wisdom. Giambattista Vico defined *‘Wisdom is the faculty which commands all the disciplines by which acquire all the sciences and arts that makes up humanity’*

Our ancients had provided words and the power of rituals for enhancement and the mystical circle is likely an important symbol preserved in our Colleges. Umberto Eco, supported by the influence of Giambattista Vico indicated that language or the power of words “*are the reflections of the perceptive freshness of ancient peoples, not of their presumed occult knowledge*”

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