

Mosaic Pavement

The Mosaic Pavement or checkered floor has black and white squares like a chessboard. It can be seen on the floor in the center of many lodge rooms, where it's role is to make us think about opposites, how they contradict, yet compliment each other at the same time. The symbolism of opposites is repeated over many times in Masonry; light and dark, day and night, sun and moon, good and evil. The contrast goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. We have always associated knowledge with good, and that from ignorance springs forth evil, yet it was from the taking of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge that the history of evil takes root. Apprentices are generally asked to study the subject of contradiction in their own lives.

Masonic texts of the 18th century refer to the Masonic pavement as "Moses' pavement" or the Lodge's marvelous floor. In Pritchards Masonry Dissected (1730) the mosaic square is considered to be both the floor of the lodge and the paving stones of the temple. Other texts claim , 'It is the tiling on which the priest walked in Solomon's temple" However the allusion can be disputed for the mosaic pavement does not have Hebraic origins.

It first appeared in the 1st century BC in Rome. At that time, the term was used for mosaics decorating natural or artificial caves and fountains. Dedicated to the Muses, the nine goddesses of the arts, such places of rest and relaxation were called musaea. The decorations found here were known as museum opus, abbreviated to mussinum. This is where the word mosaic comes from, not to be confused with Moses. In the past, a tracing board would be drawn on the floor with chalk when work began. The modern tracing board is a painted canvas, and since it was often rolled out onto the floor, it is often referred to as the carpet. It shows all the Masonic objects in the temple: two pillars topped with pomegranates framing a rough stone called an ashlar; a square

stone with a point; the Moon and the Sun; a square and compasses; a plumb line; a plumb rule; a gavel and chisel; and the trestle board. Around these symbols is a knotted rope.

Mosaic work consists properly of many little stones of different colors united together in patterns to imitate a painting. It was much practiced among the Romans, who called it *museum*, whence the Italians get their *musaico*, the French their *mosaique*, and we our mosaics. The idea that the work is derived from the fact that Moses used a pavement of colored stones in the tabernacle has been long since denounced by etymologists. The Masonic tradition is that the floor of the Temple of Solomon was decorated with a mosaic pavement of black and white stones. There is no historical evidence to substantiate this statement. Samuel Lee, however, in his diagram of the Temple, represents not only the floors of the building, but of all the outer courts, as covered with such a pavement. The Masonic idea was perhaps first suggested by this passage in the Gospel of Saint John xix, 13, "When Pilate, therefore, heard that saying; he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment-seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha." The word here translated Pavement is in the original *Lithostroton*, the very word used by Pliny to denote a mosaic pavement.

The Greek word, as well as its Latin equivalent is used to denote a pavement formed of ornamental stones of various colors, precisely what is meant by a Mosaic Pavement. There was, therefore, a part of the Temple which was decorated with a mosaic pavement. The Talmud informs us that there was such a pavement in the Conclave where the Grand Sanhedrin held its sessions. By a little torsion of historical accuracy, the Freemasons have asserted that the ground floor of the Temple was a mosaic pavement, and hence as the Lodge is a representation of the Temple, that the floor of the Lodge should also be of the same pattern. The mosaic pavement is an old symbol of the Order. It is met with in the earliest Rituals of the

eighteenth century. It is classed among the ornaments of the Lodge in combination with the indented tassel and the blazing star. Its parti-colored stones of black and white have been readily and appropriately interpreted as symbols of the evil and good of human life.

The mosaic pavement is 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. According to occult researchers, the checkered mosaic pavement has historically represented the House of the Mysteries and its origins can be traced back to ancient Egypt and the Dionysiac rites. 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). While the pavement of most lodges consists of a black and white checkered pattern, the colors might vary. Lozenges might also be used instead of squares

“La Papesse” is card number two of the tarot, a number symbolic of duality. Notice the Ying Yang symbol on the Priestess's book representing the same dualistic principles of the mosaic pavement. The juxtaposition of opposing colors on the mosaic pavement is a visual representation an important principle of hermetism: duality. The pavement, alternately black and white, symbolizes, whether so intended or not, the Good and Evil Principles of the Egyptian and Persian creed. It is the warfare of Michael and Satan, of the Gods and Titans, of Balder and Lok; between light and shadow, which is darkness; Day and Night; Freedom and Despotism; Religious Liberty and the Arbitrary Dogmas. 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 tessellated 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 colors, 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, (save to clairvoyant vision), and like the fragrance

thrown off by a flower. 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 (1) 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. According to the Third Degree Ritual, the Square Pavement is for the High Priest to walk upon.

“Why is the chequer floor-work given such prominence in the Lodge-furniture? The answer is to be found in the statement in the Third Degree Ritual: “The square pavement is for the High Priest to walk upon”. Now it is not merely the Jewish High Priest of centuries ago that is here referred to, but the individual member of the Craft. For 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.”

Let’s discuss duality further in our own lives. It is all around us. It shows up in Gothic classical literature. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is an example of literal immortality, as the major antagonist is a vampire. The Count represents immortality, as do the three female vampires in his castle, and he tempts the other characters with it. Eventually he even brings Lucy Westenra across to the vampire side. For the count to remain immortal, he must drink blood and therefore must kill. This process is sensualised, the drinking of the blood becoming a powerful sexual process. This brings in the aspect of desire. The desire for the Count can be seen as a desire for eternal life.

This particular aspect of dualism can best be seen in Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*’. The story has been described as the “most vivid late-century work exposing the criminality of human nature” (Kalikoff, 166). Indeed, nowhere is the criminality or duality clearer than in this particular work. In Jekyll’s final confession he states, “I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either it was because I was radically both” (Stevenson, 42). It is from this conclusion that he develops

the need to separate his good and evil sides, despite the fact that the very same conclusion should have told him this was impossible. Stevenson was playing on the knowledge that every individual is a mix of good and bad. Jekyll is a stereotype of the respectable Victorian gentleman, and, as he is a part of the Victorian society, he is a metonym. Thus, he is a representation of the society of the time.

Important also in this story is that toward the end Hyde begins to manifest himself without Jekyll drinking the chemicals. In fact it seems that whenever Jekyll's unconscious is allowed to reign, when he is asleep for instance, Hyde appears. Thus, the dichotomy of conscious and unconscious can be brought into play. What is really being said is that it takes a conscious effort to repress the evil side of human nature, and when that effort lapses, or is neglected, corrupt things will occur. Stevenson's view of society then is that a person is a balanced but requires an effort to maintain that balance. This generally reflects the ideas of the society as a whole during the era when Gothic Fiction was produced.

Consider then duality in your life. Consider the role of the father, who must on one hand protect his children at the risk of his very life, while at the same time he must prepare them to go out of his control into the harsh world. Consider the duality of the masculine and feminine form, of creator versus destroyer, of the many various roles that you may play in this world, and how they may be forced to conflict with another.

Whatever the origin of the mosaic pavement is within Masonry, the importance is the symbolism of opposites. For how can we fully appreciate the light of day without the knowledge of the blackness of night?