

THE WEARING OF MASONIC EMBLEMS

James A. Marples

Many Masons like to wear Masonic pins or rings. When done modestly, these emblems can sincerely display a man's dedication to those associations he values or holds most dear. In a few cases, it is sad that our card-carrying members display the emblems for selfish motives, often hoping to generate some type of business gain from publicly trumpeting who they mingle with. In most cases, wearing Masonic emblems is a positive thing, IF done modestly and with respect to our gentle Craft.

Tradition holds that a man's left lapel is suitable for a membership pin or button. I applaud former astronaut and Senator, Bro. John Glenn for regularly wearing the Masonic Square and Compasses on his lapel. I think it is imperative that this basic emblem of Craft Masonry be the pin chosen. I will confess, I have worn 4 lapel pins to Shrine meetings ---in the hope of promoting Masonic Education and unity. I always wear the Square & Compasses on the top....in the middle two pins ---one a Scottish Rite Double-Headed Eagle and the other one a Knight Templar Cross and Crown of the York Rite. The final pin on the bottom would be the Shrine's famous scimitar and crescent. I try to treat both Rites equally...and even in conversation, when I mention one Rite, I like to mention the other. Although not a prerequisite for today's Shrine membership, the original Shriners in the year 1872 felt that BOTH RITES were vital to one's overall understanding of the whole Masonic Fraternity. I totally agree.

I have seen other Masons adopt an even better way of showing Masonic unity: A tie-clasp or tie-bar with all 4 emblems side-by-side. That gets the point across without going overboard. I have adopted this idea as well and have a 4 emblem tie-bar myself which shows the Blue Lodge/York Rite/Scottish Rite/Shrine emblems. For those who utilize the 4 emblem tie-bar, I still recommend that they stick with the Blue Lodge lapel pin on their suit jacket.

Some Shrine Potentates promote their own "Potentate's Pin" to celebrate their year in office. I would prefer that they develop a commemorative coin to mark their year instead. It seems to me that Masonry and Shrinedom is getting too splintered with sub-groups, committees, clubs, and units. There simply is no substitute for the Square & Compasses that bind us together as a fraternal band of Brothers. We need to display Masonic Unity at the most basic level. Furthermore, the public needs to see one constant image that they can link to our Craft.

I don't care whether you wear one lapel pin or 15 lapel pins (that choice is up to you). However, I hope the primary one which stands out among your selection will be the Square & Compasses. I belong to many groups (perhaps too many). I enjoy my membership in my High-12 Club and my Grotto.... I just try to promote the



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overall Masonic Fraternity with a pin and praise fine groups such as these by my favorable words and actions. Our various organizations should not be treated like "notches on a gun-belt." Their Masonic heritage is the anchor which enables them to prosper. Our Lodges are the foundation of the whole superstructure.....if we promote the "entrance gate", we will nurture the seeds of future growth. And, whenever the Symbolic Lodges prosper, the Rites will prosper, and so on.

When I joined Masonry at age 18 (permitted in Kansas), my Dad gave me a ring with a red stone featuring the Square & Compasses. He gave a little speech in open Lodge and he hoped that I would always wear that ring with all the honor and dedication that the emblem denotes. I wear it on the ring-finger of my right hand. I wear my 14th degree AASR ring on the ring finger of my left hand (At times, I have people ---including girls -- ask me if that gold band is a wedding ring. Presently I am still single; but if I get any proposals I might entertain a wedding ring on that finger!!) I have read where the ancient Knights Templar wore their KT ring on the index finger of the right hand. I wear my KT ring on that finger to honor their legacy. Since I equate the level of the Knight Templar order/degree, roughly comparable in level to the Scottish Rite's 32nd degree.... I wear my 32nd degree Double-Eagle ring on the index finger of my left hand. Interestingly...on the side of it is the numeral "32" within a triangle. It looks as if it was "meant to be" in that position on my hand....although I am probably the only one to utilize historical accuracy in the placement of my rings. If I recall correctly: The 33rd degree ring of the Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction is traditionally placed on the little finger of the right hand. In the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, it is placed on the little finger of the LEFT hand.

I hope that all Masons reading this article will wear a Masonic pin or ring or utilize some other suitable way to promote our Fraternity. Again, I hope the Square & Compasses will be the primary pin chosen. However, don't abandon the other pins...you can display them on your office desk, or pin them to a window curtain or your ball cap where visitors will see them. Whatever emblems you display to the public...please be prepared to tell people how that particular emblem fits in to the overall Masonic organizational chart. As I say, "If you have the fundamental Square & Compasses displayed, you will have an easy point-of-beginning." Let your light shine.

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