



# NUGGET

## Significance of Acacia

**Summary:** An exploration of the background behind the significance of Acacia, as used in the Third Degree.

Acacia plays a brief but important role in the Third Degree when we are told that the trusty Fellow Crafts, who found the temporary interment of our Master Hiram Abiff, placed a sprig of that bush at the head of his grave to distinguish the spot so that they could identify it in the future, though the use of Acacia for this purpose had an even more symbolic significance.

To understand that significance we must first know what Acacia is. It is a heat loving tree which thrives in desert conditions and which has various species. It produces both wood and the product known as Gum Arabic. It has yellow flowers between April and December, and it has been named for centuries in the languages of the near Middle East. In Hebrew it was known as *Sittim*, in Egyptian as *Sunt* and in Arabic as *Sant*, *Suweinat*, *Seyal* or *Tahl*.

It is mentioned several times in the ancient Hebrew scriptures, particularly in the Book of Exodus which tells of the journey of the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage to the promised land of Canaan, and how they conducted their worship in the time they were in the desert lands. The wood of the Acacia tree was especially important in this connection as the Ark of the Covenant (the promise given to the Israelites), which contained the tablets of the Sacred Law, was made out of Acacia. This Ark was located in the traveling tent or Tabernacle, which was also partly formed of Acacia and was also used to assist in the creation of the portable Altar used in worship.

The Ark was, in due course, located in the Sanctum Sanctorum, the Holy of Holies within King Solomon's Temple, which replaced the traveling tabernacle. This use of Acacia by the Israelites has Egyptian parallels, for the Egyptians also used Acacia to build small river craft, pots, hand tools and parts for the coffins of



*Acacia catechu*  
Franz Eugen Köhler, *Medizinal-Pflanzen* [Public domain]

Mummies. What is more, they used Acacia flowers in their funeral garlands. Thus, Acacia has many sacred associations, and not only in the Hebrew and Egyptian tradition, for the Hindu faith also reveres Acacia for its health-giving properties.

So we can see that Acacia had a spiritual significance for the ancient Hebrews and that the Acacia tree was set aside as a sacred plant more special than ordinary trees. It was that sacred significance which was seized on by the framers of the Third Degree Ritual to illustrate a great truth which could exist for men of diverse faiths and so bring them together.

The first aspect of the special significance of Acacia is that because it is an evergreen plant which can thrive even in adverse conditions it is symbolic of ongoing life and thus the immortality of the Soul. This is clearly alluded to in the Third Degree Ritual where there is a reference in the Charge to the continuing '*Vital and Immortal Principle*'. While it is also known that the ancient Hebrew custom was to place a sprig of Acacia at the head of the grave of a departed friend. Thus our current Ritual has an ancient antecedent. The sprig of Acacia reminds us that we are both body and soul, and that the soul, which is the better and spiritual part within us, is the great gift to all from the Divine Creator.

Acacia also symbolises innocence, in the sense of purity of heart, and the pure in heart are those who lead lives of integrity and fidelity. Thus, we are reminded of the great moral obligations we undertake when we become Members of the Craft. And that those Obligations should aid us to make our way through all the joys and sorrows, the pains and pleasures, the tragedies and triumphs, the good and the ills, of this transitory life. Using another analogy referred to in the extended explanation of the Second Degree Working Tools, to steer the ship of our lives through all difficulties and adversities without quitting the principle of moral rectitude.

Brethren, it is a hard road we commit ourselves to follow, and no doubt we shall not always succeed in our efforts, but let us at least in every Lodge Meeting we attend re-pledge ourselves to the great values and virtues for which Freemasonry stands.



### **Recommended use of Nuggets**

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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### **Acknowledgement:**

UGLE gratefully acknowledges David Hughes as the author of this document and for his permission to publish it in this form.

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