



# **A Brief Study of the Rose Cross Symbol**

by

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The obvious major symbol of our Society is the Rose Cross. Indeed it is within the very title of the foundation manifestoes from which we derive our purpose as a Masonic body. Those manifestoes being the Fama Fraternitatis (1610) and the Confessio Fraternitatis (1615) or basically, The Fraternity of the Order of the Rose Cross and The Confession of the Rosicrucian Fraternity. The very core symbol of our Society is the rose flower attached to the center of a cross. This paper will concern itself with that symbol, how it has evolved and what it has meant. I will also explore its relationship to our soul, much like the lambskin apron: it is at once the symbol of the journey and the goal.

First of all, let us explore the symbolism of the rose and the cross individually.

The cross is a symbol that is about as universal and ancient as any symbol that has emerged out of man's psyche. The cross symbolizes the meeting at right angles of horizontals and perpendiculars. Forces going in quite opposite directions but meeting at a central point, a common ground. It can symbolize the union of opposites and the dualism in nature. It can be the outstretch archetypal man with the infinite possibilities of growth being immortal. It represents eternal life. The cross can symbolize the descent of Spirit into matter. It is the intersection of the level of time with the Eternity of the Spirit.

The cross is the axis of the cycle of the year whose spokes are the equinoxes and solstices. It is the crossroads where the four directions meet. In a Christian sense the cross signifies acceptance of sacrifice, suffering, and death as well as immortality. There is a legend that the cross of Christ was made out of wood from the Tree of Knowledge, the cause of the Fall, making it the instrument of Redemption. In the Egyptian mythos the crux ansata or - a type of cross - was a symbol of life, immortality, and health. It is held by the gods and goddesses. It also represented the union of Isis and Osiris.

Numerologically, the cross is sometimes represented by the number four. Within our own teachings: "No.4 is the Mystic number, and indicates the operative influence of the four elements. Under this number, or the geometrical square, Pythagoras communicated the Ineffable Name of God to his chosen disciples." In the Hebrew alphabet the last letter is called Tav. And Tav means "mark" or

“cross” and its original form was written much like ankh or cross. I could go on with many more examples but I think we can see that the cross transcends human culture in both time and space. It is a symbol that ties us all together as a Brotherhood of Mankind. It is a symbol that goes to the very root of our being.

The rose (Latin, *rosa*, in Greek, *rhodon*) also is a symbol that has a rich and ancient history. And like the cross, it can have paradoxical meanings. It is at once a symbol of purity and a symbol of passion, heavenly perfection and earthly passion; virginity and fertility; death and life. The rose is the flower of the goddess Venus but also the blood of Adonis and of Christ. It is a symbol of transmutation - that of taking food from the earth and transmuting it into the beautiful fragrant rose. The rose garden is a symbol of Paradise. It is the place of the mystic marriage. In ancient Rome, roses were grown in the funerary gardens to symbolize resurrection. The thorns have represented suffering and sacrifice as well as the sins of the Fall from Paradise.

The rose has also been used as a sign of silence and secrecy. The word *sub rosa* “under the rose” referring to the demand for discretion whenever a rose was hung from the ceiling at a meeting. In the Mysteries roses were sacred to Isis. It is also the flower of her son Harpocrates or younger Horus, the god of silence.

Numerologically, the rose represents the number 5. This is because the wild rose has 5 petals. And the petals on roses are in multiples of five. Geometrically, the rose corresponds with the pentagram and pentagon. Our teachings state: “No.5 is the emblem of Health and Safety; ...it represents Spirit and the four elements.” The Pythagorean brotherhood used the pentagram as the symbol of their school.

The number five being associated with the rose has linked them with the 5 senses. In an absolute sense the rose has represented the expanding awareness of being through the development of the senses.

### **Some Background on the Societas Rosicruciana**

The initial Rosicrucian manuscripts began to be circulated in Germany around 1610. They were published in 1614. Since that time there have been no shortage of fraternities, organizations, and groups of all kind claiming direct lineage to the unknown authors of the documents. The truth or falsehood of these various societies does not concern us here. It is enough to say that the most legitimate fraternity is that one which most seriously studies and practices its own doctrine. So I proceed with the beginnings of our Society - our Society meaning the original S.R.I.A.

The main personality in our beginning is Robert Wentworth Little (1840 - 1878) who basically founded and organized the Society in 1866. R.W. Little became the first Supreme Magus and his certificate is dated December 31, 1866. (The minutes of the first meeting however are dated June 1, 1867.) He undoubtedly had counsel from others including Kenneth Mackenzie. There are many names associated with the beginning years of our Society that have contributed much to Masonic history. The grade structure seems to go back to a society founded in 1757 by Hermann Fictuld (*Gold- und Rosenkreuz*). The structure was first published in 1781 in the book *The Rosicrucian in his Nakedness (Der Rosenkreutzer in Setner Blossen)*. It is thought that the rituals were found in the Grand Lodge library and translated from the German by William Henry White for

Robert Little.

When Little died at age 39 in 1878 he appointed Dr. William R. Woodman (1828-1891) to succeed him. And when Woodman died in 1891 he in turn appointed William Wynn Westcott (1848-1925) who held the office till his death in 1925. These latter two, Woodman and Westcott, along with another S.R.I.A. member, Samuel L. Mathers (1854 - 1918) founded another society in 1888 designed to take these rites to an even deeper and more symbolic level. This society was called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. By 1893 there were 5 temples in operation. Many of the members were drawn from the S.R.I.A., but they also allowed women members.

My purpose in mentioning the Order of the Golden Dawn is that the symbol of the Rose-Cross emerged from that Society in a much more profound way than ever before. It becomes the symbolic embodiment of much of the Rosicrucian Order's teachings. And I will consider that form later in this paper. But before I can do that I want to review the basic teachings of our First Order, the first four grades: Zelator, Theoricus, Practicus, and Philosophus.

### **The Aims and Teachings of the Societas Rosicruciana**

For the aims of our Fraternity of the Rose Cross I can quote from from our Monitor:

“The aim of the Society is to afford mutual aid and encouragement in working out the great problems of Life, and in searching out the secrets of Nature; to facilitate the study of the system of Philosophy founded upon the Kabalah and the doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus,... and to investigate the meaning and symbolism of all that now remains of the wisdom, art and literature of the ancient world.” (page 5)

Therefore, our main study consists of the material we call Kabalah and Hermetics. It is the foundational studies of the philosophy “inculcated by the original Fratres Rosae Crucis.”

These teachings are presented to us in a graded structure of degree work. The work is delineated as follows:

**Zelator** (I°): “Is recommended to study the powers and properties of Numbers, and the philosophy of the Hebrew Kabalah, in which the relations between Numbers, Letters, Words and Things are defined.” In this grade we are introduced to the Four Ancients - the elements, the Cross, the Pentagram, and the symbol LVX

**Theoricus** (II°): “...the mysteries of Nature, of mineral, vegetable, and animal life are proper studies, and its ritual of admission teaches you that beyond the colors, as well as the forms of objects, there are occult relations which need investigation.” We also hear doctrines on the Elements, the Zodiac, the Hebrew Divine Name IHVH and the four worlds of the Kabbalistic philosophy.

**Practicus** (III°): “The Grade of Practicus has special relation to the ancient art of

alchemy and the modern science and art of Chemistry." In this grade we hear the alchemical terms of Sulphur, Salt, and Mercury. The terms "the Black Dragon" and "Solve et Coagula" are also referred.

**Philosophus** (IV°): "... teaches the need of the highest mental culture in order to comprehend the works of the philosophers, and the sacred volumes of the World Religions."

These are the teachings of the First Order which culminate in the entrance grade of the Second Order - **Adeptus Minor** (V°) which relates to the center of the Tree of Life - the Sphere of the Sun, sphere six.

It is to these grades of Adeptship that the Rose Cross lamén corresponds in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It is to that symbol that we can now turn our attention; for, that symbol is the symbol par excellence of the synthesis and attainment of all the Work in the First Order.

### **The Symbolism of the Rose-Cross**

The basic rose cross symbol is that of a rose appended to the junction of the two lines of the cross - the center point. But the traditional Rosicrucian symbol is a cross of 6 squares whereon is a red rose of five petals. The cross is of 6 squares for a number of reasons. It relates the cross to the number six which is the number of the Tree of Life Sphere to which it corresponds, (See the Tree of Life diagram in the appendix) that is, the Sphere of *Tiphareth* (Beauty) also known as the Sphere of the Sun. The cross of six squares is also the unfolded cube of six faces. The perfect cube has been used to represent the Holy of Holies since Old Testament times. We know the tabernacle was 10 cubits in length, breadth, and height. The Sanctum Sanctorum of Solomon's Temple likewise was cubically shaped using the measure of 20 cubits. In Revelation (21:17-18) the New Jerusalem is likened to a perfect cube of pure gold. Gold is related to the cube, cross, and Sun sphere for a number of reasons. Gold is the metal associated with the sun. But also Qabalistically, the cube unfolds to a cross of six; this means that the units around the cross (the perimeter) add up to 14. The Hebrew word *zahab* means gold and the letters of the word add up to 14 (Zain + Heh + Beth or 7 + 5 + 2 = 14). In addition, all these symbols that correspond to six correspond geometrically to the hexagram.

The rose is, as mentioned before, related to the number 5 and the pentagram. It is the flower of Venus, the Goddess of Love. Also as mentioned before, it is a sign of secrecy (Cupid, Venus's son, is sometimes represented holding his finger to his lips as was the Egyptian Harpocrates.) Being the number five, it also is related to the hypotenuse of the 3-4-5 right triangle.

One of the earliest depictions of the rose and cross is in the manuscript titled the *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians (Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus dem 16ten und 17ten Jahrhundert)*, published in 1785. (Again, see appendix) Around the upper part of the cross is written: "This is the Golden and Rosy Cross, made of pure gold, which every Brother wears on his Breast." The Rose-Cross Lamén of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn may be derived from this figure as they have very many common elements as will be seen upon comparison. I have included the Golden Dawn Rose-Cross lamén in the appendix in both black and white and in color (the approximate correct colors). Also given is a front view and

the back view. Let us examine the Rose-Cross lamén in some detail.

The lamén is a cross with each arm representing one of the four elements: Fire - red, Water - blue, Air - yellow, and Earth - citrine, olive, black and russet. Each arm is depicted with an upright pentagram crowned with Spirit representing that he who wears this is Master of the Four Worlds. This is confirmed by the glyph of the hexagram surrounded by the planetary symbols with the sign of the sun at the center.

The ending of each arm of the cross is triple with each segment assigned to one of the three alchemical principles: sulphur, salt, and mercury. The three segments upon the four arms allude also to the 12 signs of the zodiac. At the center of the cross is the rose of 22 petals. The rose is divided into 3 petals at the center, 7 petals in the second circle, and 12 in the outer circle. They are depicted in the appropriate Hebrew letters and colors as such: the three so-called Mother Letters in the primary colors (yellow, blue, and red), the 7 double letters in the secondary colors, and the 12 single letters in the chromatic color scale. Of course they also represent the 3 elements (the fourth being an admixture), the 7 planets of the ancients, and the 12 zodiac signs. In the midst of this rose is another rose-cross. Behind this Rose-Cross lamén are rays of white light with the signs of L.V.X. and I.N.R.I. written thereon.

In order to strengthen the connection of this symbol with our Society's aims and teachings it might be helpful to go over some of the correspondences and qabalistic allusions. First let us consider that in the Rose-Cross we are looking into the Mysteries of the Pentagram and the Hexagram. The Pentagram is a symbol that relates the 4 Ancients or Elements in a proper perspective to the Spirit. The elements are depicted by the symbol of the fixed signs of the Zodiac which relate to each one. That is the following:

<b>Fire</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>Air</b>	<b>Earth</b>
Leo	Scorpio	Aquarius	Taurus
Lion	Eagle	Man	Bull
5 <sup>th</sup> Sign	8 <sup>th</sup> Sign	11 <sup>th</sup> Sign	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sign
Yod (10)	Heh (5)	Vav (6)	Heh (5)
Atziluth	Briah	Yetzirah	Assiah

(As an aside: Each side of the Vault is 8 x 5 or 8+5+8+5 = 26 which equals the Unpronounceable Name of God = Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh = 26) The hexagram represents all the cosmic forces because it not only depicts the planets but also the zodiac. But we must also consider that the planets depicted are also symbols of more esoteric doctrines. Some of the correspondences are as follows:

<b>Planet</b>	<b>Metal</b>	<b>Angel</b>	<b>Chakra</b>	<b>Location</b>
Mercury	mercury	Raphael	Sahasrara	Pineal gland
Moon	silver	Gabriel	Ajna	Pituitary body
Venus	copper	Anael	Vishuddha	Pharyngeal
Sun	gold	Michael	Anahata	cardiac plexus
Jupiter	tin	Tzadkiel	manipura	solar plexus
Mars	iron	Kamael	Svadhsthansa	prostatic
Saturn	lead	Tsaphkiel	muladhara	sacral plexus

At the end of the arms of the cross we have the alchemical symbols which mean

much more than their mundane meanings. Their associations are as follows:

<b>Mercury</b>	<b>Sulphur</b>	<b>Salt</b>
Superconscious	Self-conscious	Subconscious
Kether	Chokmah	Binah
Sattvaguna	Rasguna	Tamasguna

It should be apparent that great care was taken in the design of this symbol. And it should be clear how this lamén synthesizes the entire First Order teachings as well as embodies that of the whole Rosicrucian Fraternity as well. It contains the Kabbalah, numerology, the elements, the pentagram taught in the Zelator degree, the four worlds, the Hebrew Divine Name, the color symbolism found in the Theoricus grade, the alchemy taught in the Practicus grade, and alludes to the esoteric connections of the world religions, ancient philosophies and the deep mysteries of I.N.R.I.

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