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IBAN AND THEIR SYMBOLS (LANGUAGE AND ORAL TRADITION)

James Jemut Masing

"Language completely interpenetrates direct experience. For most persons every experience, real or potential, is saturated with verbalism ... It is this constant interplay between language and experience which removes language from the cold status of such purely and simply symbolic systems as mathematical symbolism or flag signalling."

— Edward Sapir, 1933

Webster's New World Dictionary defines symbol as: "something that stands for or represents another thing; especially, an object used to represent something abstract." Victor Turner in the *Forest of Symbols* (1967: 19) describes symbol in a ritual context as "the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour; it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context." Thus in a universal context of symbolism, dove is a symbol of peace, the cross is the symbol of Christianity. Symbol is used in the main, to capture feelings, emotions and abstract ideas to a physical visible object. In this visible object, ideas and human emotions are stored. A flag of a State, for instance, should denote and inspire the feelings of loyalty, a sense of belonging, and its subject on seeing that flag, should recall historical events which have influenced and determined the creation of that symbol. Thus a flag is not just a piece of colourfully designed cloth, but it is a symbol in which emotions, feelings and history of a nation is captured.

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by

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Similarly language is not simply a device for communicating ideas and feelings. It is more than that. In the words of Edward Sapir “language completely interpenetrates direct experience.” It is, in the main, an instrument for action. Thus we use words to comfort and cajole ourselves in fantasy and daydream, to let off steam, to spur ourselves into one type of activity and to deny ourselves another. We use words to promote our own purposes in dealing with others. We build up verbal pictures of ourselves and our motives. Even the most intellectual of intellectuals employ only a minute fraction of his total utterance in symbolizing and communicating ideas that are divorced from emotion. Very often what is said matters much less than that something which is said.