



## What the Triangle Means

By Luther Gulick  
January 18, 1894



[www.ymcamission.org](http://www.ymcamission.org)

*compiled & formatted by Craig Seibert*  
Dale Fletcher – [www.faihandhealthconnection.org](http://www.faihandhealthconnection.org)  
© [www.ymcamission.org](http://www.ymcamission.org)



## WHAT THE TRIANGLE MEANS BY LUTHER H. GULICK, M. D.

**Dr. Luther Gulick** was born in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1865. In his growing up years, he traveled extensively because his parents were missionaries. Finally, in 1880, he was able to slow down his travels and go to Oberlin College. In April of 1886, he became the physical director of the YMCA in Jackson, Michigan.

In 1887, Gulick became head of the gymnasium department of the Young Men's Christian Education's Springfield Training School. In 1891, he assigned one of his students a set of rules to design a game around. The student was James Naismith. The game became known as basketball.

Luther Gulick believed the development of the whole person could be best achieved through proper training and development of spirit, mind, and body and to overcome the mind-body dualism in social thought and to understand human beings as holistic entities instead. As part of this, he campaigned to "Christianize the gym" and in turn reinforce the growing relationship between sport and Christianity.

This work then brought Gulick to the place of creating a new symbol for the YMCA - a triangle, inscribed with the words 'body,' 'mind,' and 'spirit,'. It was adopted as the YMCA logo in 1895 at the YMCA Convention in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Below is an address he gave January 18, 1894 about this new triangle symbol that was being proposed for the YMCA.

### What the Triangle Means to Me

*By Dr. Luther Gulick*

Association Training School, Springfield, Mass.  
(From *Young Men's Era*, January 18, 1894, Number Three)



**I**n view of the adoption of the triangle as an emblem by some **Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCAs)**, a concise statement of its meaning is perhaps in place. The following is offered, though the writer is aware of its incompleteness, and of the difficulty of speaking both intelligently and briefly on such a subject.

### The Triangle

The triangle stands, not for body or mind or spirit [*as detached pieces*], but for the [*integration of*] man as a whole. It does not aim to express these distinct divisions, but to indicate that the individual, while he may have different aspects, is a unit.

In emphasizing this, attention is called to the following points:

***First.*** The triangle is not simply three separate sides, but these three sides are so joined together as to form a triangular figure, which differs in shape absolutely and radically from any one of its sides. Thus with the individual man, he is not a body and a mind and a spirit, but a wonderful result of their union, something entirely different from any single aspect of himself.



**Second.** The triangle stands, not merely for symmetrical body, a symmetrical mind, a symmetrical character, but for the symmetrical man, each part developed with reference to the whole, and not merely with reference to itself.

*Thus the man who gives his time and attention largely to the education of his physical nature is violating the triangle idea no less than the man who gives his time entirely to the intellectual, ignoring the spiritual and the physical. Each part should be developed with reference to its proper place in the whole. Each of the three is absolutely essential, although each has a different value. Thus character is of more value than intellect, and intellect, than merely physical excellence. Still each is dependent on the others.*

### Scriptural Basis

What authority have we for believing that this triangle idea is correct? It is scriptural.

- *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." ~ Deuteronomy 6:5 [Moses speaking to the people of Israel]*
- *"And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to the law of Moses: neither after him arose there any like him." ~ 2 Kings 23:25 [speaking of King David]*
- *"And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." ~ Deuteronomy 10:12*
- *"And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" ~ Deuteronomy 30:6*
- *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." ~ Matthew 22:37*
- *"And He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." ~ Luke 10:27*
- *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." ~ Mark 12:30*



"In each passage referring to what; is involved in the service of the Lord, "heart" is always stated, but usually in connection with other elements. Thus such statements as,

**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength, "indicate that the scriptural view is that the service of the Lord includes the whole man.**

The words, which in the Hebrew and Greek are translated "strength," refer in both cases entirely to physical strength. Then we are told that the body is a member of Christ.

- "Know we not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I, then, take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid:"-- that it is "a temple of the Holy Ghost." ~ 1 Corinthians 6: 15
- "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own" ~ 1 Corinthians 6: 19 and "that it is eternal." ~ 1 Corinthians 15



This chapter deals very largely with the resurrection body, which is shown to be identical with our present body, although certainly not made up of the same material particles. I am the same person that I was twenty years ago, and yet there is not a particle of the same matter in me. It has all changed. A small scar on my finger, received seventeen years ago is the same scar as when first formed, though probably the substance matter of it has changed twenty or thirty times.

Thus we have the same scriptural warrant for believing that our physical characteristics will endure to eternity as we have for believing that our character will be immortal. We shall carry into the next world the one, as well as the other, and we shall in all respects be: eternally approaching the model of perfection that is before us. The difficulties in the one case are no greater than those in the other.

The scientific grounds for this belief are as certain and well formed as the scriptural. The modern psychology is all in the line of showing that body and mind are not two separate and individual essences, but that each is so wedded to the other that it is impossible for us to see where one begins or the other ends, or for us to trace anything which, affecting the one, does not also affect the other. The history of nations proves that physical welfare is always connected with the welfare of mind and spirit. In our own experience we know that times of physical depression often coincide with depression that is intellectual and spiritual. This argument might be discussed at great length.

### Why adopt the Triangle Symbol?

Why should this emblem be adopted by the Young-Men's Christian Association if it is a broad and generally accepted Truth?

*The Young Men's Christian Association is the only great institution of the world which, in a large way, is putting this belief into actual practice.*



It aims at the salvation and up-building of the whole man to a greater extent than does any other institution in the world, both in respect to unity and symmetry. The triangle, in symbolizing the man also symbolizes the Association.

*Our work cannot be represented by the physical, plus the intellectual, plus the social, plus the spiritual each one standing alone: for the relations that exist between them*



render each far more valuable than it would be by itself. It is by means of the physical that men are brought under the influence of the spiritual, and it is the spiritual that teaches men that their bodies are sacred to noble ends, and that the gymnasium is one of the means to the accomplishment of those ends.

We not only secure all that is of inherent value in our physical department, but by virtue of its relation to the others, we also secure that which is of far greater value, and thus the total of our results is greater than the sum of the results in each department

### Developing the whole person

And so we have our gymnasiums and our educational classes, our libraries, reading-rooms, and our religious work, a unit in conception, a complete rounded whole, that is invaluable now, and gives promise of becoming, *in the hands of God, the means of good far beyond our present thought.*



All this is in line with the laws of God which we find not only in the Bible, but in science; *in line with all that we are learning about man's nature, character and ultimate development, in line also with the still further perfecting of this wonderful, complete unit, this organism that God has put in our keeping.*

Too great attention to physical culture is as much to be regretted as too little, perhaps even more. The various departments of the Young Men's Christian Association are coming to bear the same kind of relation to each other that the various parts of man do, *so that the physical department is not a sort of separate institution off by itself, with different aims and ends, but is a part of the very institution itself, and in touch with the educational, spiritual and social lines of work, all aiming at the one thing, the salvation and up-building of the man.*

Sometimes the triangle is criticized in that it does not stand for the social and economic lines of work of the Young Men's Christian Association.

The answer is that the triangle does not stand for lines of work at all, but simply for the complete man. Under each department of his nature there may be as many lines of work as are desired. This conception of unity and symmetry we believe to be the most fundamental and distinctive fact of the Young Men's Christian Association. This is what the triangle stands for, and why we believe it to be distinctively appropriate to the Young Men's Christian Association.

