



AN EXPLORATION OF WORDS & WIDOWS

discovering more light within the 1°

Lecture by Brother Jason W. Short

February 23, 2023

INTRODUCTION

I want to start by acknowledging our newly initiated, Entered Apprentices. Many people are aware of this fraternity, but you have decided, of your own free will and accord, to obligate yourself into our ranks as a Brother Mason. One of the fascinating things I like to keep in mind in regards to Freemasonry is how the journey up to this point has been traveled by millions of men and, God willing, millions more will take the same steps into this world of sacred symbols, rites, and mysteries designed with the glorious purpose of making good men, better men. So, my new Brothers, welcome to your craft.

With this lecture, I hope to inspire all Brethren present to adventure out and seek more light in Masonry, to teach you an approach to the craft that's a more personal and hands-on way. Keep in mind this is my interpretation of our speculative craft. Though I've done extensive research to bring you what I've discovered herein, it is all open for debate. I want to encourage Brethren to approach the work in a similar manner. Allow your minds to travel outside of what we may see as definitively right or wrong, and be bold enough to then come together and discuss how and where the craft has taken you.

We learn by doing, by participating in the rituals and in Lodge, and by applying the lessons imparted there into our daily lives. Perhaps one of the most important lessons we are given as Entered Apprentices becomes quickly overshadowed by our modern lives and easy to forget or miss altogether. We are all asked to dig just a little bit deeper into the significance of our degrees, and by doing so will unlock for ourselves the greater wisdom our craft has to offer.

I believe that encoded within the lines of our degree are lessons that the forefathers of our craft carefully implanted for us to extract. The rituals are not only rites of passage but a treasure map leading us to better understand ourselves, the Great Architect of the Universe, and the knowledge needed to advance to the proceeding degrees. In our present-day practice of the craft, there is often a mad dash to advance to the gates of the following degree as quickly as possible. This practice is a significant departure from the traditional approach that was observed by our Brothers well into antiquity and obscures the greater value of the lessons we receive.

Today, many newly obligated Brethren diligently approach the work of memorizing the questions and answers in order to be proficient for the second degree as quickly as possible. Some may even be asked to take part in conferring the first to a proceeding class, and this, coupled with an already busy life and schedule, becomes easily overwhelming. There seems to be a lack of emphasis placed onto understanding what the words and ritual actually mean, and the tip of the iceberg becomes accepted as the whole. When we stand too close to a tree, it's hard to appreciate the magnitude of its canopy or understand the depths of its roots. In being hyper-focused on committing the cipher to memory by rote or attending to the additional labor asked of us, it's easy to lose out on what's actually said, and the more profound wisdom imparted in the degrees.

To extend past our surface understanding and embrace the divine, ineffable wisdom of the Supreme Architect, we must dig just a little bit deeper beneath the surface of our ritual to discover the hidden treasure within. We should take time to examine the words and symbols presented to us, not merely to parrot them back as a testament to our "proficiency" but as a means of discovering the greater light contained within our degrees. In approaching the ritual as not only a ceremony of instruction but an adventure in uncovering a hidden treasure, we can take pleasure in this journey of becoming better men.

Now, it is wise to acknowledge that the ritual takes on various forms across Grand Lodge jurisdictions. Standard practice in one part of the world may be presented differently elsewhere.

However, across the globe and throughout time, many elements have been preserved that maintain an overall continuity in the craft. These elements are symbolic breadcrumbs that every initiate into our fraternity should pay special attention to. I've been calling these symbolic breadcrumbs Masonic Keystones. Keystones, like that which sit at the apex of an archway, lock the structure together. Masonic Keystones in that they connect the exoteric and esoteric, the known to the unknown, and our modern understanding to the lessons of our ancient ancestors.

As a mystery school, Freemasonry shares in the tradition of self-betterment through the alchemy of the soul. It imparts upon its initiates the learned wisdom and teachings of our predecessors through this process of inculcating knowledge as one advances through successive degrees. Back before Freemasonry became a wholly speculative craft in 1717 with the foundation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England, it shared in the operative Masonic guild's tradition of instructing new brethren on mastering their craft in the very same way, though, not only were these operative masons imparting the tricks of their trade onto the newly initiated brethren, but a very cool tradition of teaching moral and spiritual lessons through the symbology of the operative craft had become coupled into the work of masonic guilds well into antiquity. This tradition of the operative guilds and ancient mystery schools share the common theme of a tiered progression from apprentice to mastery and is marked by rituals for initiation, instruction, and then mastery.

I ought to note, that before the founding of Premier Grand Lodge, there were only two masonic degrees, that of the Entered Apprentice and then that of Fellowcraft. A Fellowcraft would only become a Master of the Lodge after progressing through the positions of the two deacons, secretary and treasurer, and then junior and senior wardens, where they would only then be qualified to take the seventh seat in the East as a Master of their craft.

Alice A. Bailey, recognized as one of very few female Freemasons, is quoted as saying, "Initiation is the process of undergoing an expansion towards higher levels of consciousness." Your entrance through that sacred door marked the beginning of your journey toward enlightenment through this speculative craft. We were not just traveling workers but craftsmen on a more noble and glorious purpose along the road to salvation and the redemption of man. Or, to quote John Beluci's character from the 1980s comedy classic *The Blues Brothers* "Me and the Lord, we've got an understanding. We're on a mission from God."

The word enlightenment is itself one of these keystones of our craft, a derivative of the word light. In the far eastern Vedic Indian traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, enlightenment is considered this harmony of life and spirit. It's a divine state of consciousness free of suffering and desire. This term is explored through Islam as an elevated state of wisdom obtained through understanding religion and logic, where one maintains a clear connection to Allah. Mohamed achieves enlightenment in this sense and, as a prophet, delivers messages from God to his people. The term is a little more obscure to extract within the preceding Abrahamic religion, Judaism, yet interwoven throughout their epic scripture and texts. We find the symbolic significance of God's temple on Earth and see that by learning to listen and love the world in accordance with God's will, humanity may be one day delivered from evil. The prophecy in this scripture is that one day a King will rise as the savior for the people of Israel, delivering a sort of mass enlightenment where it would be recognized that the temple of God exists within each of us. The modern Abrahamic Christian tradition explores this prophetic tale through the story of Jesus of Nazareth, who is embraced as God's son on Earth, and the great prophetic Savior-King of Israel. Enlightened with the spirit of his father, Jesus brings light to all who follow his teachings and listen to the word of God.

Although the terminology may differ across cultures, the essential meaning here is the same. The principle of enlightenment can be seen as a sort of unification of mind and spirit; a harmony struck between man and the magnificent force that binds all things together. To be enlightened as a divine state is one part of this. But enlightenment, the word itself, is defined as the act or means of enlightening. Enlightenment becomes more of this journey of seeking and receiving light. Why does the candidate leave the West and travel East? Because they are in search of light in Masonry.

With this *exploration of words & widows*, we will first need to identify the key to unlocking the deeper mysteries of our degree. From there, we can then examine seven of the first most Masonic Keystones every newly initiated Brother is presented within their first degree.

This *key* has been presented in plain sight to all Brethren and even placed directly into the hands of many. In this exploration, we will also examine one of the most central stories about the lessons imparted within our degree. A story that without our craft would never have come into existence as we know it today.

THE KEY

The newly obligated Brother's attention is particularly directed to the Great Light of Masonry, the Holy Bible. We know it explained as a rule and guide to our faith and practice. In this section of the degree, it is acknowledged Brethren may practice their own creed and theology but that it can be agreed upon by all good men that within the covers of *this book* are found those principles of morality which lay the foundation upon which build a righteous life. It is so central to our craft that it is even defined as one of the core Masonic beliefs that, *The Holy Bible is the great light in Masonry, and the ruling guide for our faith and practice.*

This book, our Great Light, contains lessons that all of us Brethren should be familiar with as they lay the foundation of how to live a righteous life and the blueprints of how speculative Masonry is designed. How I interpret this section after the obligation is that the progenitors of modern Masonic ritual are explicitly saying there are lessons and instruction encoded within our degrees that are to be deciphered by the aid of this one specific Great Light, the rule and guide of our ancient craft. And, as we journey outwards from the lessons found within this Great Light, behold many of the other great religions and sacred rites that connect in some shape or form to this excellent book and craft Masonry as we observe it today.

We know that the twenty-four-inch gauge, one of our first degree's working tools, is used by operative Masons to measure and lay out their work. A twenty-four-inch gauge is also known as a twenty-four-inch rule. And just as this working tool is used to measure and lay out their work, so too was the Holy Bible used to lay out the work of our degrees and measure its significant teachings for ourselves.

To me, this is very exciting. Here, the Bible not only becomes a symbol of one's own personal devotion to a volume of sacred law but a working tool in its own right by which to uncover the mysteries carefully implanted by the forefathers of our craft. So let us travel now, equipped with this great light as our guide through the story of man while we discover more light within the first degree.

Now, in the essence of time, this lecture will only explore one point of the entire degree's ritual, how a candidate is prepared to be made a mason. The rabbit hole is deep, and the great well of knowledge and wisdom everlasting, so if we were to dissect all that there is to uncover here, it would take quite a while, and even then, we'd perhaps only just be scratching the surface.

I hope this presentation inspires every Brother on their own to dig a little bit deeper beneath the surface of our degrees using the Holy Bible as an instrument of understanding, as a key to uncovering all the lessons and light there is to convey within our craft.

MASONIC KEYSTONES

Again, I want to clarify what I mean by Masonic Keystones and how it relates to this lecture. I classify "Masonic Keystones" as words or phrases that connect our ritual with the Great Light or ancient mysteries that laid the foundation of our craft. Things that, like a keystone in the operative craft, help bridge the gap between our modern understanding to that of the ancient world. For this lecture, the section of the degree we'll be examining tonight appears rather consistent across jurisdictions; how a candidate is prepared to be made a Mason.

What I find so fascinating in investigating this section is that contained therein, when a candidate hasn't even been admitted through the door of the Lodge, are lessons that illustrate and allude to all three degrees of Craft Masonry. As this is a lecture intended for our newly initiated Entered Apprentices, I have been careful not to reveal too much, as it's not my place to do so. I agree with Hermes Trismegistus' philosophy that spiritual knowledge cannot be taught outright; the answers must come from an awakening within. Now, I caution you newly initiated Brethren not to drive yourselves crazy trying to crack any codes or go off your rockers here. Instead, carefully study and reflect upon the teachings you find in the degree and observe what treasures it unlocks within.

So, how is a candidate prepared to be made a Mason?

*Dvstd of a mtlc sbs, nth nkd nr clthd, bf nr shd, lf k & bst b, hwkd
& a ct abt m n; I wh cnd I ws cndcd t a dr of th L & csd t gv t ds ks,
wch w rans b t withn.*

In looking at the section on how a candidate is prepared, we can identify several keystones to explore. I personally identified seven:

METAL
NAKED NOR CLOTHED

BAREFOOT NOR SHOD
LEFT
HOODWINKED
CABLE-TOW
THREE DISTINCT KNOCKS

This, again, is my interpretation. I'm encouraging you all to bear with me and open your minds to discover the significance of this buried treasure. Masonry is what we make of it, and I hope through investigating these keystones with the aid of our Great Light, we can all become the better men we've obliged ourselves to be.

METAL

I find metal to be one of the first keystones of our craft. There will be many times metal or metallic objects present themselves from this point out, but this is our first encounter with it. Masonry is very much akin to alchemy, where it was practiced the ancient philosophy of refining base metals into gold; Masonry is the art of making good men better, the alchemy of the soul. We'll take it another step deeper here and examine metal with the assistance of our Great Light. Front to back of the King James Bible, the primary translation the forefathers of our craft used to design our speculative work, the word metal does not appear once. However, that doesn't mean it's not in there; when we dig just a little bit deeper, we uncover a number of occurrences metal makes an appearance. The first key moment I'd like to direct your attention to is Genesis 4:22, where we find one of *the offspring of Cain* as an artificer and instructor of brass and iron. This is the first Craftsman we meet in the Bible, well, second really, as we see the work of the Great Architect themselves in Genesis 1. Gold also appears early in the Bible as something of value, along with silver and cattle. But then takes on a more noble and glorious purpose when it becomes a central element in the Supreme Architect's design for the Tabernacle dictated to Moses at Mount Sinai. For those unsure of what a tabernacle was, it was a portable tent temple where God was to dwell on Earth among the Israelites. The Tabernacle is a prototype version of King Solomon's Temple, with an Outer Courtyard, an inner Holy Place, and the innermost sanctum called the Holy of Holies. This is where they kept the ark of the covenant. And yes, for those wondering, this is the same Ark of the Covenant from *Indiana Jones*.

A little side note here, the ending of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* shows this ancient relic melting the faces of the greedy and corrupted antagonists who believe that they have won over Indiana's attempt to thwart their conquest. Interestingly enough, this is based on, though a rather dramatic interpretation, the power of the ark itself. Now, as a place where God would dwell on Earth, this is a tremendous amount of energy. Think of the supreme power of the Great Deity like that of the power of the sun; one would have to be very careful how they were to approach such a brilliant force, or else, like the tragedy of Icarus, burn up in its amazing presence. We find that Moses wasn't able to initially approach God in the Tabernacle because of a sin committed by the Israelites who turned to worship a molten idol, a golden bull, while Moses was up on the Mount. Then later, two High Priests, and the oldest sons of Aaron, are immediately consumed by God's fire after they disobey the sanctity of this Tabernacle by offering a sacrifice of impure flame.

The Book of Leviticus, Latin for "of the Levites," who were the chosen tribe of Israel to become the first High Priests, described how to correctly approach God in a pure and reverent way within the Tabernacle and then again at the temple of King Solomon. In Leviticus 19:4, we find metal mentioned when God instructs Moses to tell his people not to turn unto idols nor make themselves molten gods, the sin that Moses finds the Israelites committing upon his return from the mount. Molten is a translation of metal pertaining to casted metal objects and appears to be the preferred vernacular in the King James Bible whenever metal needed to be translated.

Again and again, this passage of Leviticus is recalled as the condemnation of molten gods in Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Judges. But then, there is a shift, and we see in 1st Kings metal takes on a new meaning, a more noble and glorious purpose, as a material used in the construction of King Solomon's temple. 1st Kings 7:23 reads, *And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: it was round all about, and his height was five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass around it.*

I find a couple of interesting things to note in this passage of 1st Kings 7:23. First is that the math of the diameter to the circumference of the molten sea is off. Why is that? The circumference equals the diameter, ten cubits, multiplied by pi, approximately 3.14. Shouldn't the line that compasses around the sea be 31.4 cubits, or is there another reason this was recorded this way? This may be a topic for a separate lecture, but we do gain an insight into the measurement of the cubit here, being the average length of a man's forearm. It would be

uncommon to measure a partial cubit as it would be unusual to partition one's arm. So, our ancient Brethren rounded to the nearest whole cubit. The other fun takeaway from this passage is the reference to one of our other Great Lights, the compass. Pretty neat, but to me, what's even more fascinating is two verses prior, 1st Kings 7:21, depicting the two molten pillars at the porch of King Solomon's temple, the left of which is named Boaz.

In exploring this Great Light, it would be perinate to point out that within the Bible, and traditionally all books of religious scripture, the names of the central characters and places all translate to reveal a deeper meaning. Here, we understand this name, Boaz, in the original Hebrew, means "in him is strength," while the right pillar's name translates as "He will establish." "He," in this instance being God.

I like to embrace the idea these molten pillars when viewed together and interpreted as one would read Hebrew, right to left, translate as "He will establish strength within." Every initiate into our craft passes between these pillars, as did all who entered the first temple of Jerusalem. Symbols are what built up our system of writing, and when examining them, we should remember to consider them in relation to their surroundings. This also goes for studying the Great Light; what do the names of people and places mean? How do they relate to the broader text, and what information is buried below the surface for us to uncover and explore?

Leviticus in Latin translates to "Of the Levites," but in the original Hebrew Torah, from which this book was derived, the name of this chapter is Vayikra, meaning "and he called." Moses comes from the Hebrew verb meaning "to extract," as we see Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt. This practice extends throughout the book, and it's essential to then understand that sometimes to get to the root meaning, we need to go beyond just the surface text; identify the original language they were translated from and the cultural significance that they may have had when they were first written. Hebrew and Latin are not the only two languages used in the compilations that made up this volume of sacred law. I encourage you all to acquaint yourselves and study some of the root languages and translations that have existed to get a stronger sense of the ancient wisdom being communicated therein.

Notice what we've discovered by examining this one keystone. We're learning that sometimes it's not the words themselves, but the deeper meanings that should be understood. We've also traveled to several key moments within the Biblical Epic that seem to complement our craft. Certainly metal as a Keystone has much to offer.

NAKED NOR CLOTHED

Through the lecture of reasons, we find an explanation for this described beautifully as how Masonry regards no man on account of his worldly wealth or honors. Through our Great Light, when we examine this keystone a little closer, we find in the story of Genesis that Adam, which by the Hebrew translation means Humanity, and Eve, the Hebrew word for Life, are naked in the Garden of Eden, and all is well with that until they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had commanded them not to do. After this, the story goes that they develop shame and hide from each other and God, fashioning garments from fig leaves covering their nakedness. It's interesting to me that Adam and Eve's initial bad decision of eating from this sacred tree is then followed by a further act of defiling the garden by taking for themselves leaves from a fig tree to fabricate crude garments. God comes to find them in this state, neither naked nor clothed, and upsetting the sanctity of their beautiful garden. Seeing that Humanity and Life no longer trust in the divine definition of right and wrong and instead choose to make this distinction themselves, They exile the pair from Eden.

The story of humanity here really just starts to spiral out of control. Genesis, in particular, repeatedly explores humanity's folly is due to the greedy pursuit of wealth and honor and making decisions not in accordance with God's will and nature, but with humanity's corrupted nature and desire. And unfortunately, this becomes a significant theme throughout most of the Bible. People's greed and ambition lead them to make some pretty awful decisions, and God gets pretty upset because of it. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and on all share in this. So the lesson, time and time again, is that it's not wealth, favor, power, clothing, or status that makes any person more dignified in the eyes of God than the next, despite what humans would like to believe. It's what's contained within our hearts that God sees in us all. The internal qualifications that the Great Architect of the Universe judges us by. Our duty as Freemasons is to embrace this lesson and live a pure and just life while not passing judgment on our fellow man based on their outward appearance, status, or bank account. It is the internal, not the external, qualifications that recommend a man to Freemasonry.

BAREFOOT NOR SHOD

This next keystone, I feel, is perhaps the most important to embrace from this section of the ritual. I want to point out the timing between Moses's reception of the Torah in about 1450

BCE to 550 BCE and the building of King Solomon's Temple. This is a whole 900 years. That's a lot of time to have passed, and many changes have affected the Israelites. Humanity had some pretty low points in this transitional period between Moses and King Solomon. One of the most ruthless of these is accounted for in the book of Judges, where the majority of humanity fails to follow the orders of the Great Architect as communicated to the Israelites by Moses from Mount Sinai and then Josuah upon their arrival into the promised land. We see how these Israelite Judges, who are not like *Judge Judy* judges but are ruthless warlords, notably Gideon, Jephtha, and Samson who gradually lose touch with God in their conquests over the Canaanite nations and lead the people of Israel astray. I think the best summary of this section would be Judges 21:25 *In those days Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.* Yet, through this tragic account of Israeli corruption and degradation, hope remains, and one extraordinary account rises out of the bleak setting. The story of a man and a pair of widows who, through their loyalty to God and love for one another, eventually bring about the salvation of the Israelite nations and, according to prophecy, the eventual salvation of humanity itself.

Let's explore now the third keystone and, in doing so, also shed some light on the widows so sacred to our craft. Without their loyalty and love, our craft would have never come into existence today.

In the lecture of reasons, while exploring the significance of being neither barefoot nor shod, our attention is directed to the Book of Ruth. Note that although scripture and verses from the Holy Bible appear throughout the design of the first degree, this is the only time a specific Book is referred to by name outright.

Agreeably to an ancient Israelite custom adopted among Masons. We read in the book of Ruth concerning their manor of changing and redeeming that to "confirm all things, a man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbor." That was testimony in Israel, this therefore, we do, testifying thereby in the strongest manner possible the sincerity of our intentions in the work in which we are engaged.

For our Jewish Brethren, who have observed Shavuot, I imagine you are familiar with the Book of Ruth. For all the other brethren present, you may be a little less acquainted with the story, but it turns out to be quite a significant account of loyalty to God and royal lineage.

Before I get too deep into an overview of Ruth, let's first look at the significance of shoes and bare feet hold in the Bible; by doing so, we'll then be able to understand a little more about

this keystone's significance in connecting the book of Ruth to the very foundation of our craft. In Exodus 3:5, God instructs Moses to take off his shoes, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. I've heard it discussed how the symbolism of this keystone has something to do with standing upon holy ground or existing somewhere between. I believe this is incorrect and prefer to think it's in reference to Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This section accounts for God's instruction on redeeming a family's name after the death of a man who has left a widow without a husband or son. In this event, it would become the responsibility of a Brother, or Kinsman, a close relative of the deceased, to take up his Brother's wife and property as their own and maintain the family's name and lineage by honoring this law. Deuteronomy 25:9-10 reads *Then shall his Brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his Brother's house. (25:10) And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed.*

Being neither barefoot nor shod symbolizes the penalty for not marrying a deceased Brother's widow. That's kind of an obscure teaching, but there is another layer to this whole neither barefoot nor shod bit of a candidate's preparation I'm compelled to share with you here as well. Digging again a little deeper, one may wonder what reasons there are for not marrying a widow to redeem one's deceased Brother's name. We find one reason in the book of Ruth, a pretty shallow one if you ask me, but as it turns out, not the only reason within the Great Light that has to do with abstaining from marrying a widow. Where Deuteronomy is God's covenant with the people of Israel, Leviticus is God's covenant with the tribe of High Priests, maintaining both the Tabernacle and, later, the first temple. Leviticus 21 describes the holiness required of Priests, and 21:14 explicitly states how he shall not take a widow as a wife. We learn that all of Israel's Priests were to be Levites, but not all Levites were Priests. So, it would be possible within the tribe of Levi that one of these Priests may be faced with a situation where their kinsman may die, and the widow would approach them for redemption. The Priest would then have to pluck off their shoe and give it away as a testament, in the strongest manner possible, to the sincerity of the work in which they are engaged. Are we, in approaching the East, to hold ourselves to the same pure moral standards as the Levites or adhere to the laws of Deuteronomy?

Examining The Book of Ruth in more depth, it becomes apparent it is more than just an example of why we enter the Lodge without a shoe on our left foot. Instead, the investigation of

this keystone reveals it to be perhaps the most pivotal story pertaining to the origin of Freemasonry and the world as we know it today.

A brief overview of the story is in order for all who may not be familiar. Ruth is one of only two books in The Great Light named after a woman. The other is Esther. You may find it interesting to learn that Ruth and Esther are significant figures in our appendant body, the Order of the Eastern Star. The Book of Ruth is a wonderfully crafted story told in four parts. Set in the days when the Judges ruled, and famine plagued the land, the book opens with an Israelite family who leaves their hometown, Bethlehem, searching for food. They wind up settling in a neighboring land, Moab, which is a fairly desperate maneuver for Israelites because the Moabites and Israelites have had a very difficult time getting along over the years and hold a pretty big chip on their shoulders.

When they arrive, the father, Elimelech, which means "my God is King," dies, leaving his wife, the widow Naomi, and their two sons to fend for themselves. Naomi translates as pleasant in Hebrew. The sons eventually take Moabite women for their wives, Orpah and Ruth; Orpah meaning "the back of the neck" and Ruth "friendship." In a dark twist of fate, the sons also die, leaving their Moabite wives widowed along with their mother-in-law, Naomi. Word reaches the widow Naomi that God has blessed her hometown of Bethlehem with food, so she decides to pack up and return home to live again amongst her native Israelite kin. The widows, Orpah and Ruth, want to accompany the aged Naomi, but she warns them of how difficult it will be for them as Moabite widows to live according to Israelite customs and law. She tells them to return to their own families and start a new life in Moab. Orpah high-tails it out of there, but Ruth shows a powerful loyalty to Naomi, saying, "*Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.*" This is the first time in the entire Biblical epic that an outsider converts to Judaism and accepts Israel's God as their own. The chapter concludes with the widow, Naomi, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, on the road to Bethlehem, which translates to "the house of bread," at the beginning of the barley harvest; and in her grief, Naomi changes her name to Mara, which means bitter.

In the second chapter, a new character is introduced, a relative of the widow Naomi's dead husband, a mighty man of noble status, and a farmer of the house of Elimelech. His name is Boaz. Ruth and Mara are in need of food, so Ruth tells Mara to let her go and collect the excess ears of corn from Boaz's field. Back then, it was tradition to not harvest your entire crop but

leave some remaining for the poor or misfortunate to glean or collect. Mara gives Ruth her blessing in doing this, so Ruth heads out to the field and follows behind the reapers to collect leftover crops for her and Mara, hoping that Boaz may notice her. This plan works out reasonably well for Ruth, as Boaz does notice the Moabitish damsel and, in learning of her loyalty to Naomi, tells her that she is safe in his fields to glean alongside his workers; he's instructed all the young men to leave her alone and to feel free to drink of his well if she is thirsty. Big win for Ruth, and that evening she returns to Mara with the good news and the barley she had collected. Mara is very excited about this because Boaz is a relative of her dead husband, and therefore according to that Israelite law, Deuteronomy 25:5, qualified to take Ruth's hand in marriage and redeem the lineage of the Elimelech name. She instructs Ruth to go back to the field the following day, and in the evening, when Boaz has gone to sleep after eating, drinking, and making merry, approach him, lay down at his feet, and that Boaz would then know what to do next.

In the next chapter, Ruth does what Mara has told her, and when Boaz wakes up in the middle of the night to find Ruth at his feet, she tells him that he's her kinsman. I don't know how you would react if you woke up in the dark of the night with a woman at your feet, but Boaz responds to this gesture with compassion. He commends Ruth for her kindness in coming to him and not some younger man, whether poor or rich. We should note here that when this story was written, Israelites considered Moabites to have a rather promiscuous reputation, which is one of the reasons Israel and Moab didn't get along. Yet, Boaz tells Ruth that he will make it known that she is a virtuous woman. However, there is another kinsman who is even closer related to her dead husband than him. She would have to approach this man first, but if he were to reject her, Boaz would take up the obligation of marrying the widow and redeeming the family name.

In the fourth and final chapter of this book, Boaz goes to his gate in the morning, where he finds the other kinsman passing by. He calls him over to join him and ten of the city elders to discuss how Naomi is selling a parcel of land that was their Brother Elimelech's and how it is this kinsman's responsibility to redeem it. If he chooses not to, Boaz must redeem it as the next of kin. The kinsman agrees to buy the land, but then Boaz informs him that along with buying the land, he would also have to marry Ruth, the Moabite widow, and raise the name of the dead upon his inheritance. With this information, the kinsman declines the deal, saying, essentially, this would tarnish his reputation and name. He tells Boaz to redeem *it*, the right to the property

and the widow, for himself. Ruth 4:7-8 states: *Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor: and this was a testimony in Israel. (8) Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.*

Giving the shoe to Boaz, Boaz then proclaims to the elders and the people of Bethlehem how they are all witnesses to his purchase of Elimelech's lands and Ruth, the Moabite widow. Boaz then takes Ruth for his wife, and the Lord blesses them with a son who Naomi then nurses. The son's name is Obed, which means "servant to God" or "worshipper." It's a happy ending and concludes with a record of genealogy. Obed goes on to father Jesse, the father of David, who becomes King David, who is the father of King Solomon, the great-great-grandson of Boaz.

This Keystone of neither barefoot nor shod directs our attention to all of this. We get such an amazing lesson on the values of love, redemption, and loyalty that ascertains, even in the most barbaric eras of man, it is important to be a man of good moral fiber and conviction. That all our words and actions have a direct effect on the future of humanity. Be good, and good will come.

LEFT

In the lecture on reasons, we are told that the left side has ever been deemed the weakest part of the human body. It's why we feature it so much in the first degree, to remind us that we are taking on the weakest part of Masonry, being only that of Entered Apprentice. In Hinduism, we find right and left as two opposite you can complementary forces. The Naya-Vaisheshik school of Hindu philosophy sees them as male and female principals. The male power "Purusha" and the female "Prakriti" are considered the active male power and passive female. These two forces are also observable in nature. They oriented themselves in line with the life-sustaining power of the sun rising in the East; the left and right became North and South. In fact, the Sanskrit word for the right, Dakshina, is also the word used for the direction South and is sacred, straightforward, impartial, and honest. The right is observed as the natural direction of rotation, or clockwise, and altogether considered a positive and powerful good force. The left, or Vama, is regarded as the opposite principle. Emblematic of the direction, North carries the meaning of reversed, crooked, and contrary though also beautiful, charming, and seductive. "Left" appears several times throughout the Great Light and does support our accepted reasoning. Ecclesiastes 10:2 reads *a wise man's heart directs him towards the right, but the foolish man's heart directs*

him towards the left. This, of course, is not some political slogan or jab at any left-handed Brethren out there but more of a lesson in unregulated force. When we use wisdom and love to direct our actions, we will often arrive at the right solution, right like the angle of a square. We found earlier in 1st Kings 7:21 the *left* pillar on the porch of King Solomon's temple is Boaz, which we've come to understand is translated from Hebrew as "in him is strength." Interesting how it gets turned around here as if this pillar of strength is placed on the left to help strengthen the weakness associated with this side. Another notable find that I want to share, though it may be a little bit of a stretch on my half, is in Revelation 10:2, *and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land.* I'd like to think there is a parallel between this passage and the step and due guard of the first degree. However, the EA advances on his left foot bringing the heel of his left into the hollow of the right, and this passage seems to have it in the reverse order; also, it says nothing specific of the orientation of the feet, so perhaps I'm speculating a little here.

One of my favorite interpretations of this keystone in our great light is actually not relating to the direction or side of the body at all. In the New International Version of the Bible, Genesis 7:23 states how *Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark,* after the great flood God had sent to wipe the wicked off the face of the Earth and begin humanity a new. Left here is described as that which is left over or remaining, much like what's left after using the other working tool of this degree, the gavel, to divest our hearts and consciousness of all those vices and superfluties of life, preparing ourselves as living stones for that house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

HOODWINKED

The hoodwink is a simple yet powerful symbol used in our ritual to place one into darkness. As Mason's, we are seeking light, seeking knowledge, and to symbolically be brought into the light, we must first be in darkness. This is why I see this keystone isn't about the blindfold but the darkness it represents. Lo and behold, darkness is a term frequently used throughout the Bible. It's one of the first symbols we find right at the beginning of the Great Light as Genesis 1 reads, *1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the Earth. 2 And the Earth was without form, and void; And darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. 3 And God said, let there be light: and there was light. 4*

And God saw the light and it was good: and God divided the light from darkness. 5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. For any of you newly Entered Apprentices, you may recall hearing part of this passage read to you right before the hoodwink was removed. Darkness, being the antithesis of light, also becomes emblematic of evil and discontent. In Exodus 10, God brings a plague of darkness over the land of Egypt. Darkness, seen as the opposite state of enlightenment, is also a common theme. Light, the keystone we explored earlier in this lecture, is that divine knowledge gained through faith in God. 2nd Samuel 22:29 reads *For thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness.*

CABLE TOW

This one is the most contended of the many symbols used in our craft. The cable tow is a relatively obscure term to describe the rope tied about a candidate's neck. Many practitioners over the years, Albert Pike included, have theorized that there is no good significance prescribed to the cable and discredit it altogether. In English lodges, the cable tow is only used in the first degree and is accepted to have no deeper meaning than to be a means of leading the blind candidate about the Lodge. Of course, there are accepted theories; some say it's three miles long and alludes to the distance an EA travels in an hour or that the three miles allude to the number of years one must remain an EA before progressing on as Fellowcraft. A popular belief is it is an emblem of the candidate's tie to the fraternity, and once obligated, the cable-tow is removed but remains symbolically binding. Another interesting theory, along this same vein is that it is an umbilical cord of sorts. Though I respect this interpretation, to me, it falls apart when trying to embrace its significance where extending out past the first degree.

There is an Israelite legend contained in the Zohar, an ancient Kabbalist text, that Aaron and the Priests who entered into the Holy of Holies to be in the presence of God would have a rope, or metal chain, tied around their ankle on Yon Kippur, so that if they were found to be impure upon entering into the Holy of Holies and struck down by God, they may have by the aid of this tow, been dragged out from the inner sanctorum of the Tabernacle without placing in danger those who were without. This, however, is not supported by what we find in the Great Light, so dismissed by many, but certainly worth examining.

The big question becomes to me why is there so much confusion regarding the cable tow? My theory is that because the term "cable tow" does not appear anywhere within the covers

of our Great Light, whatever the original meaning may be is obscured as there isn't anyone alive today who can tell us what the progenitors of our craft were going on about. There is even contention as to what the original name for the cable-tow even was. When we dig deeper into the subject, we find an early Masonic expose published in 1730 by Samuel Prichard refers to the cable-tow as the "cable-rope". Later in a rebuttal to this publication titled, *A Defense of Masonry*, believed to be penned by John Anderson, the guy who published the *Free Mason's Constitution* in 1723, the cable-tow is referred to as the "tow-line." Ultimately, where and when exactly this term cable-tow got set in stone is beyond me. However, I did find that one German word for a cord is kabeltauw, so, for any of you Mozart fans out there, it's possible we are using the same term as our beloved Brother Maestro had in his time. So instead of seeing this keystone as "cable-tow," we will need to find a way to interpret it to make any sense of it.

"Tow" appears a few times in the King James Bible, but not in any way that complements our symbology. Tow, in those days, referred to a hard fiber that gets removed from flax that's easily flammable. It's referenced in Judges 16:9 and Isaiah 1:31 and, though interesting, is a little too much of a stretch for my taste.

Tie, or tied, seems to appear eight times in the King James Bible. Seven of those occurrences refer to animals being tied, and four of these are the same retelling of a lesson from Jesus; in Mark 11:2, Jesus sends out two disciples to the Mount of Olives, saying unto them, *go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never a man sat; loose him, and bring him.* Perhaps there's something here; the Worshipful Master sends his two Deacons out to receive a candidate. Worth pondering, but it still doesn't feel like a complete fit.

How about rope? Rope is mentioned seven times in the King James Bible, and though the story of Samson in Judges has Delilah using rope to bind his hands during feats of strength, it's also not the match I'm looking for here. However, there is another exciting passage with rope in 1st Kings, 20:31&32 where after King Ahab of Israel bests the Syrian King, Ben-Hadad's army, killing one hundred thousand footmen in one day before the twenty-seven-thousand retreating forces die when a city wall falls on top of them, Ben-Hadad's servants convince him to let them beg Ahab for mercy towards Ben-Hadad by girdling themselves with sackcloth and putting ropes about their heads. Whether or not this is the source material for cable-tow is open to debate, but something even more interesting happens here as well. The servants plead with Ahab in this

fashion to spare Ben-Hadad's life, and Ahab responds *is he alive? He is my Brother*. Then the following verse, 1 Kings 20:33, reads *Now the men did diligently observe whether any thing would come from him, and did hastily catch it: and they said, Thy Brother Ben-Hadad*.

Isn't it cool being a Mason and having this Great Light as a guide? It's not entirely known what is going on between Ahab and the servants here, but it seems to be referring to some form of recognition. Ben-Hadad's servants *diligently observe* Ahab waiting to see *whether any thing would come from him* before proclaiming, "Thy Brother." Is it possible this mode of recognition and the rope tied about their heads have some significance drawn from another ancient mystery school or fraternity? That the cable-tow may herald back to another secret society that was known to the royals of Israel. This is in the time after Solomon's reign; perhaps this is a connection to the very roots of our craft. However, it is also possible that this rope about the head is not cable-tow but rather an agal, a braided rope or corded headband that keeps a headscarf in place. Indeed, a topic I encourage all Brethren to explore further.

Overall, I think this keystone shouldn't be discarded; in fact, the contrary. Perhaps much of the contention among the speculative Brethren over the ages has been because this symbol is difficult to examine within our Great Light. But the absence of evidence is evidence in itself. We must not forget the cable-tow *is* a relic and symbol of our operative craft. Did not our ancient brethren labor in the quarries using cables and ropes to raise and transport their stones? Conveying them along and hoisting them into position within a temple, all with the aid of this modest implement? We ourselves are living stones raised from the quarries of man, conducted here by the aid of the cable tow to be refined for that house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. Perhaps sometimes we overcomplicate the interpretation of symbols for ourselves, and the truth is far simpler. The cable-tow seems kind of straightforward to me.

THREE KNOCKS

Our final keystone to explore here pertains to the three knocks, which are answered by three within. We know this keystone alludes to a specific passage of scripture, though unlike the Book of Ruth, which we are given the name of outright in the lecture of reasons, this one is left without a title. However, it does give us the words of this passage: *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened unto you*. I think this is done on purpose, and it's expected of Brethren to study the Great Light to discover this passage's origin.

We find this verse repeated in Matthew 7:7 and Luke 11:4. In both accounts, these disciples recount the lessons of their great teacher, Jesus Christ, the Savior King, who is also the descendant of the line of Boaz, King David, and King Solomon. I implore you all to seek out this section of the Great Light and find for yourselves the significance of the lessons contained therein.

CONCLUSION

With this exploration of words and widows, we've discovered more light within the first degree by examining it with the aid of our Great Light, the Holy Bible. By identifying the symbolic Keystones contained within the first part of the ritual, we are better enabled to bridge the gap between our contemporary understanding of Freemasonry and the designing principles that our forefathers may have used to lay out this speculative craft. Even cooler is that these teachings and passages will take on deeper and more profound meanings as you advance throughout the degrees. When we embrace this Great Light as our rule and guide, we not only become better acquainted with our ancient Brethren's customs, stories, and traditions but become better men in embracing those principles of morality that lay the foundation upon which to build a righteous life. I encourage you all to revere this book as more than just a symbol, but as a key to unlocking all the light, there is to be found within our craft. Wholly embrace the adventure of traveling out with your minds and consciousness across the vast sands of time and uncover what hidden treasures our noble fraternity has to offer. Travel safely to the East, my Brothers, and always let this Great Light guide your way.

