

Our Rule and Guide

It's been nearly seven years since I received copies of a very old collection of Jewish literature from Brother and Rabbi Aaron Meyer of Tucson, Arizona. He spent nearly all of his time in retirement researching Masonic ties to his own Jewish heritage. Recently I received word from his family that Brother Aaron has entered the Celestial Lodge, and I thought it appropriate to now share some of the thoughts and information he shared with me. The packet of research he sent me originally was over four inches thick, with nearly a thousand handwritten notes and references scrawled in the margins of those old documents. He shared much of his 50+ years of Masonic research with me.

Buried in the depths of that stack of life long study documents appeared a statement by a teacher who lived in ancient times. It was not highlighted, nor was it underlined, but when I found it, it seemed to jump right off the page! Referring to the parchment scrolls of the Holy Bible, the teacher said this: "Turn it and turn it again, for everything is in it. Contemplate it and grow old and gray over it; stir not from it for you can have no better rule than what is found within it." What this teacher said is of deep meaning in Masonry, for he described one of the Great Lights of Freemasonry, the Holy Bible that is to be the rule and guide of our faith.

Our ritual makes good use of numerous individual verses and, of course, the Bible itself plays a vital and dynamic role in the degree work, as well as setting the foundation on which the basic concepts of Freemasonry rest. If we, as Masons follow the admonition and guidance to turn to the Bible, and turn to it again, we will find many concepts which will give us a much deeper insight into the real teachings of Masonry. Likewise, we'll find that the wisdom of Masonry adds yet another dimension of meaning to many passages of the scriptures. A great teacher of Judaism once described the Bible as 'God's blueprint for the creation and operation of the world'. So, we too, as builders of our moral and Masonic edifice, should consult the Master's blueprint.

Early in my career with the government agency I work for I served on the Commissioner's staff. At one of our regular Monday morning staff meetings a couple of other staff members raised ethical issues involving decisions that had been made regarding the work of our agency. That resulted in some rather spirited discussion among the staff present that morning. After settling into his chair, and listening to several more minutes of 'discussion' among his staff, the boss leaned forward at his desk, raised his hand to quiet the staff and announced that he had a manual that covered pretty much any issue that we could come up with. It got very quiet in that room, and several quizzical glances and raised eyebrows appeared...as we all focused our gaze on our leader. We were all waiting to see this all encompassing 'guidance manual' that he spoke of. I spoke up and noted that whatever document he could produce, it certainly didn't come from those in authority in Washington that would give us insight to solving this particular issue. After a momentary pause, he noted that I was correct, and from a corner drawer in his desk he lifted a large leather bound book and announced that he had 'all the guidance he needed, right here'...it was his 'owner's manual'.... a well used King James edition of the Holy Bible. That ended the discussion from the staff, and we seldom, if ever took issue with his guidance, again. That man is *not* a brother Mason, but the book he produced *is* indeed his 'rule and guide'.

There is a very natural tendency for the individual Freemason, once he has achieved the sublime degree of a Master Mason, to pay less attention to the insights and teachings of the two initial degrees through which he traveled in order to reach that great height. As Shakespeare wrote in Julius Caesar, "But 'tis a common proof that lowliness is young ambition's ladder, where the climber upward turns his face. But when he once attains the topmost rounds, he then unto the ladder turns his back, looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees by which he made his ascent." But our degrees are closely interconnected and mutually supporting, where one builds upon the other.

The Bible speaks in great detail of the construction of Solomon's Temple, that magnificent edifice, rivaling and perhaps even surpassing the greatest architectural wonders of history. The Bible also records a humble construction that held significance at least as great as that of Solomon's Temple. When Moses returns to his people, having stood at Sinai's heights, he is told by God to construct a sacrificial altar of simple and pure unhewn stone. The foundations of that altar are to be made of rock upon which no iron was used. I draw the parallel of that unhewn stone to the altar built by Moses as representing the foundation of the Lodge...that is, the Entered Apprentice.

The Volume of the Sacred Law likewise heightens the Fellowcraft Degree in significance and deeper meaning. The Operative Fellowcraft was instructed in the science of building and was entrusted with the working tools that required care, diligence, selectivity, and refinement in their use. We, as Speculative Masons, expect of the Fellowcraft some degree of proficiency in the builder's art, whether it be the physical building of the operative mason or the spiritual edifice of the Speculative Mason.

And so, we come to the sublime degree of Master Mason. We become part of a rather interesting moment when we concern ourselves with the loss of the master's word, and then receive great insight in the closing moments of our Masonic drama. Much as been written on this subject both from within and outside the confines of our Craft. Its symbolism is a deep and meaningful one, and there have been many scholars who have attempted to determine its origin. I, like every other Masonic writer, find it difficult, no, actually it's next to impossible to put those words and feelings to paper. But as brothers, we don't need the written words, because we have lived 'the experience'.

We speak, in Masonry, of the quest for light, to learn and understand. We know that the creation of light was the first great act of God as recorded in the initial verses of Genesis. And our continuing source of light is God. As Psalm 104 reminds us: "Thou cover thyself with light as with a garment, that stretches across the heavens like a curtain." It is the light from that celestial source that gives significance and meaning to our work as Masons. It guides and directs us in our labors as builders and designers of a better person in a better world. But as we strive for this better world, let us remember what was taught in the Song of Solomon, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman watches but in vain." (Psalm 127)

If our Masonic work is truly dedicated, that spirit will inhabit the structure that we are erecting. That's our goal...to erect a true and sturdy structure founded on the basic tenants of our Craft, a sanctuary in which God may dwell. Then we can be assured that in the end of our days, we will find our place in that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

This presentation is loosely based upon 'The Blueprint from the Master', a sermon by the late Brother and Rabbi Aaron Meyer of Arizona.