

T.F.S.
Three, five, and seven
3 5 7

By Ed Halpaus, Grand Lodge Education Officer.
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“Prometheus is reaching out for the stars with an empty grin on his face.”

Arthur Koestler

Dear Masonic student,

We have another good article from our good Brother Elliott Saxton of Lake Harriet Lodge #277 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Brother Elliott is also a valued member of our Education Committee for the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Minnesota. Enjoy Brother Elliott’s article.

Where are the keys to your lodge?

By Elliott Saxton

In the earliest Masonic ritual, the Edinburgh Register House Manuscript, we read the following exchanges in the Q&A lecture, adjusted for modern English.

Q: Are you a mason?

A: Yes

Q: Where shall I find the key of your lodge?

A: Three foot and a half from the lodge door under a perpendicular ashlar and a green divot. But under the lap of my liver where all my secrets of my heart lie.

Q: Which is the key of your lodge?

A: A well held tongue.

Q: Where lies the key?

A: In the bone box.

A later version reads:

Q: Have you any key to the secrets of a Mason?

A: Yes.

Q: Where do you keep it?

A: In a bone box that neither opens nor shuts but with ivory keys.

Interestingly, later catechism (or Q&A’s) refer to a bone-bone box.

In the catechisms, we need to read between the lines to uncover what is meant. Can you figure out the puzzle? I’ll return to it later in this article in case you want to give it a try. In the meantime, if you’re familiar with the Scottish Rite degrees, you’ll notice that keys figure prominently in the degrees, they even have an ivory key in the fourth degree of secret master. Judging from the early rituals, so did blue lodge. They’re very Masonic, aren’t they? They hide and reveal, they’re lost and found, and since they’re dangerous if put into the wrong hands, you need to be careful to whom you give it.

All Masonic symbols are like this. They're riddles. When symbols are interpreted, you find an answer to the riddle. We need to be cautious, however, because not all interpretations are right. We often hear in masonry "Every man must interpret Masonic symbols for himself", this is true, but his interpretations can also be flat out wrong. I often give the example of the man that returns to his car after work and sees a ticket under his windshield. On the front of it, he sees "Parking fine". He takes this to mean that his parking was fine. This interpretation is flat out wrong. Here the writer's intent and the reader's understanding aren't the same, but sometimes, with the example of a riddle, the interpretation can be none-the-less true. Often times, an answer to a riddle can be better than the intended one. The same is true with symbols. They're so great because they can illustrate things in many different ways, and their anchored in reality, so their truth tends to be universal.

Now back to the riddle in the catechisms above. What does this mean? "Three foot and a half from the lodge door under a perpendicular ashlar and a green divot. But under the lap of my liver where all my secrets of my heart lie." Keeping in mind that the question was "Where are the keys to *your* lodge", not "*the* lodge", this is a personal question. The three and a half feet show that the keys are outside the lodge. Where would you find the secrets of masonry outside a Masonic lodge? Where would you find a perpendicular stone on top of loose green grass? Answer: The grave. The next part is puzzling, "Under the lap of my liver." It's been suggested that it's a nod towards hermeticism. It was anciently believed that the principal organs of the body were the heart, brains and liver. It seems to me, however, that it's referencing Prometheus, who revealed the secret of fire to humans. He was punished by having an eagle perpetually eat his liver. The liver was anciently seen at the seat of the passions. He later redeems himself by not revealing a secret that would have led to Zeus' downfall. When he's freed he eats the eagle (which also represented passion). Here we see passion being associated with secrecy, a possible reference to the entered apprentice degree and the ancient symbolic penalties.

In the second catechism mentioned above we see "A bone box that neither opens nor shuts but with ivory keys" We would think this "bone box" is a coffin. This bone box is a skull, the ivory keys are the teeth. The next few lines of the catechism makes this clear, Q: "Of what metal is it composed?" A: "Of none. It is a tongue obedient to reason, which knows only how to speak well of those of whom it speaks in their absence as in their presence"

It would seem that the symbol of the key now occupies the place where the instructive tongue and faithful breast now do. Freemasonry is at its core an initiatory society. Of course I don't mean that it exists only to bring in candidates. I mean to say all members are perpetual candidates to masonry. A candidate is "someone who aspires", and we all continue to aspire to many things in masonry, further light being chief among them. The symbol of the key can represent being unable to understand masonry and by having a deeper knowledge of the world, unlock it. Neither wisdom nor knowledge are on the surface of things. They take effort, experience and study. These are the keys to masonry.

"Education is not the filling of the pail, but, the lighting of the fire."

William Butler Yeats

Words to live by: "In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit." Albert Schweitzer

From volumes of Sacred Law:

The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of **fire** by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.
Exodus 13:21 Tanakh (Old Testament)

But the one who does not know and does things deserving of punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:48 New Testament

Weapons cannot hurt the Self and fire can never burn him. Untouched is he by drenching waters, untouched is he by parching winds. Beyond the power of sword and fire, beyond the power of waters and wind, the Self is everlasting ... never changing... ever one. Know that he is, and cease from sorrow.
Bhagavad-Gita

Please remember: if you would like to participate in the latest Masonic Monday Question, please go to <http://www.lodgebuilder.org> and click on the Lodge Education forum. When you have an answer send it to masonicmonday@gmail.com the Masonic Monday Question for the week of 08/02/10 is: **To whom is a Mason answerable to for his motives when casting a ballot?**

“This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.”
Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet

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“Our hands are the tools we use to create whatever we want in the types o work we do. The fingers represent life, unity, equality for eternity. When we extend our hands to reach out, we touch in peace.” Twylah Nitsch (Seneca)

The Education Videos of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota can be viewed at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om_yq4L3M_l#!q=glmned

T.F.S. & Masonic Matters can also be read on Ed's Face Book page; <http://www.facebook.com/ed.halpaus> - <http://halpaus.blogspot.com> - <http://www.mn-masons.org> - <http://sites.google.com/site/edsmasonicmatters/>

Please remember – Ed's new email address is erhmasonic@gmail.com the old one is all but gone.

With “Brotherly Love”,
Ed Halpaus
Grand Lodge Education Officer

Seek to mentor a Brother Mason:

It's good for him, it's good for you, and it's good for Freemasonry!