

Short Talk #3

THE KEYSTONE

What is a keystone? Why is it different, special, or set apart? As all Mark Masters know, a Keystone is shaped differently than the type of stone used in the walls or foundations of a building. The keystone is used to complete an arch that is used in producing windows or doorways. The function of this unique stone as a treasured building material is in its shape and positioning. By its unique shape, it gives strength and durability to the arch. The purpose of a keystone is to impart to Royal Arch Masonry its vitality and perpetuity. Let us consider the peculiar characteristics of this mighty stone of singular form and beauty.

Each one of Freemasonry's various rituals is founded upon some remarkable epoch in human history and is usually communicated through the Holy Scriptures. Each of Masonry's various Bodies have chosen emblems for their moral teachings that have come to represent vital and enduring principles, not only to Masons, but to the world at large.

The Master Mason should be able to explain that Ancient Craft or "Blue Masonry" is founded upon that memorable period of history when Solomon, the wise King of Israel, erected his temple to the living God, and that traditions, symbolism, and ritual of the craft may be traced to that period. The square and compass, the distinguishing badge of Ancient Craft Masonry demonstrates virtue, morality, and rectitude of conduct.

Royal Arch Masonry bases its traditions, its symbolism, and its teachings on that memorable period of history when the Jewish people produced some of the most remarkable, interesting, and romantic art, literature, and architecture of any race upon the face of the earth. The Mark Master, Past Master, and Most Excellent Master degrees of Royal Arch Masonry deal with Solomon's time depicted in the Old Testament. The Royal Arch's context is within the historical timeline of the Persians, and later on the timeline of the Old Testament and the Jewish people.

The Keystone is used in different ways in the three of the four degrees governed by Royal Arch Masonry. The Mark Master degree is the chief treasure chest for the symbolism and meaning of this mighty symbol. The Most Excellent Master degree venerates the Keystone in its' ceremony, while in the Royal Arch degree, the keystone is rediscovered in the ruins of the Temple.

As all of Masonic ritual is built upon the preceding degrees, the symbolism of the keystone is shared in the Most Excellent and Royal Arch degrees with references to the Mark Master degree, which is the ceremony you were first introduced to as a York Rite candidate.

From the first knock on the door to the lecture, the Keystone is the heart and soul of the Mark Master degree. A keystone completes an arch which greatly and magically strengthens a building's design. The keystone was a revolutionary device for Ancient Builders because it made the edifice stronger, allowed in light, and beautified the interior. We are taught that Entered Apprentices carried stones, Fellowcrafts carved and chiseled, and Master Masons lead, taught, and designed. This was all done within the restrictions of squared stones. The candidate in the Mark Master degree is handed a copy of the keystone as he begins the Mark Masters' degree. He has no idea what the stone means, what its purpose is, or what he is to do with it.

Aren't we like this candidate with the ways of our Creator?

Have we not been given the Holy Scriptures, the mind of God?

Do any of us really know what do with this gift when we first receive it?

These are all true, but to truly unlock the mystery, we must discover its purpose through the aid of the designer and knowledge such as King Solomon in this degree.

The shape of the keystone makes it unique. It is neither oblong or square. It is unlike other stones. Our ritual tells us that it was personally designed by one of the greatest artisans of all times, Hiram Abif. He is remembered as one who had an extra proportion of God given talent in the art of stone building. This shows an extension from our Blue Lodge teachings, yet is also shows a new level of achievement, that of shaping stones for the building that were not square.

This shows us that sometimes in life we are able to take the knowledge of building, stones, and carving that we possess and make a new level of existence that enhances what was built in the past.

The keystone is critical to giving a building some of its' unique characteristics. Before the advent of electricity, the interiors of buildings were lite by candles. The arch, by aid of the keystone, allowed the possibility of more light to enter the building through windows and doorways. Think of the analogy for your own life. What does it mean for your spiritual temple? By using a keystone as a symbol, you can allow more light to enter your daily life. This can be accomplished through acts of charity, forgiveness to your fellow man, and using strength to hold up others around you. The portals that can be created in greater numbers allows easier access to the inside of the building, where arches and keystones are used in building, represent you as a Mason, allowing the cares and sorrows of hurting souls around you to penetrate your heart and cause you to be a source of Hope to your fellowman.

An Arch, by design reaches uptowrads the closest stone in the arch, the keystone. This is to reflect that we should build our Arch toward God, completing it with the keystone that we have created. This means that we should be using the knowledge of God and our Faith in Him to accomplish this task... to find our purpose in His Temple.

May each of us use the keystone to strengthen, enlighten, and improve our world, our country, our communities, families, friends, fellow companions, and lastly ourselves.

Source: Grand Chapter of Texas