



Nugget

Three Great Lights

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Three Great Lights: The Volume of the Sacred Law, Square and Compasses

Abstract

This Nugget gives a brief overview of the introduction to the Ceremony of Initiation, focusing upon the three Great Lights in Freemasonry (the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square, and the Compasses).

Keywords:

Freemasonry, Volume of the Sacred Law, Square, Compasses, Initiation



A Candidate's Introduction to the Three Great Lights

Stepping into a Lodge Room for the first time as a Candidate and moving into the 'Light of Freemasonry' is a serious act, which brings with it genuine consequences.

Before the Ceremony of Initiation, the Candidate is 'properly' prepared. He wears a blindfold and a noose of rope ('the cable tow') around his neck. His right-arm, left-knee and left-breast are bared and he is slipshod (his left heel is uncovered):

- the blindfold represents us before we are educated, not knowing where we are or where we are going;
- the cable tow represents a means of restraint and symbolises his bond to his conductor;
- the left-breast is bared to make it clear that the Candidate is male;
- the right-arm is bared, to make it clear the Candidate is not carrying a weapon;
- the left-knee is bared as the Candidate will kneel on this knee to take his Obligation;
- the Candidate is slipshod.

There are clear parallels here with a new-born child (we all enter the world naked with no possessions and we only learn with the help of others).

After the Candidate's entry, he is perambulated in view of the Brethren to show he is properly prepared. Eventually, he is advanced to the pedestal. The Candidate then kneels on his left knee and places his right hand on the Volume of the Sacred Law, while holding one point of the Compasses to his bared left breast, to emphasise the gravity of the promises he makes in the Obligation, whose wording has been handed down over the centuries.

For Lodges in England and Wales, the Volume of Sacred Law used is a Bible or the Holy Book of the Candidate's faith. (The precise wording in the Constitution is: *'The Bible referred to by Freemasons as the Volume of the Sacred Law is always open when the Lodge is open. Every Candidate is required to take his Obligation on that Book or on the Volume which is held by his particular creed to impart sanctity to an oath or promise taken upon it'*).

After taking his Obligation, the Candidate's blindfold is removed and he comes face to face for the first time with The Three Great Lights:

- the Volume of the Sacred Law reminds us to let our faith guide our conduct and our interactions with others. It also highlights the importance of our relationship with God.
- the Square symbolises honesty, truth, morality and fairness.
- the Compasses symbolise skill, knowledge and restraint. They are also a token of exclusion: harmful and selfish things are banished outside the circle, ensuring good faith inside.



The conjoined Square and Compasses is the most famous of all Masonic symbols. The Square can also represent stone and the earth, and the Compasses the arc of heaven, so, when combined, they symbolise God's creation of heaven and earth. Combined with the Volume of Sacred Law, the conjoined Square and Compasses create a tripartite symbol that reminds us of the three symbolic degrees of body, mind and soul.

Although the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and the Compasses had been used conjointly from earlier times, they only became known as The Great Lights sometime between 1730 and 1750, when they were associated with the words *'the Sacred Writings to govern our faith, the Square to regulate our actions, and the Compasses to keep us within bounds with all mankind, particularly our Brethren in Freemasonry.'*

##END##

Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

- Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; *though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.*
- Themed with the meeting or activity.
- Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.
- Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.
- Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

For further nuggets and other learning materials visit "Solomon" at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>



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