

THE KEYSTONE

What is a **Keystone**? Why is it different, special, or set apart?

As all Mark Master Masons know, a **Keystone** is shaped differently than the type of stone necessary for walls and foundations. The **Keystone** is used to complete an arch used for producing windows and portals. The function of this treasured building material is in its shape and positioning. By its characteristics, 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 then explore, like our Ancient Companions, the mighty characteristics of the stone of singular form and beauty...the most important stone in all the building.

Each one of the **Grand Masonic Bodies'** ritual has been founded upon some remarkable epoch in the history of mankind usually communicated through the **Holy Scriptures**. Each one of these 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.

As the studied **Master Mason** should be able to explain to the youngest **Entered Apprentice**, Ancient Craft or Blue Lodge Masonry is founded upon that memorable period when Solomon, the wise king of Israel, erected his temple to the living God, and the traditions, symbolism, and ritual of the craft may be traced to that period, so remarkable in the history of the human race.

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The square and compass, the distinguishing badge of Ancient Craft Masonry, is today typical of virtue, morality, and rectitude of conduct.

Even so, **Royal Arch Masonry**, bases its traditions, its symbolism, and its teachings on that memorable period of human 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 history of the Jewish people.

The Keystone is used in different ways in the three of the four degrees governed by a Royal Arch Chapter. 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 where it is first introduced to a York Rite candidate. Since the Mark Master degree is the above mentioned treasure chest for the Keystone, let us focus our study there.

From the first knock on the outer door to the lecture, the Keystone is the heart and soul of the Mark Masters Degree. A Keystone completes an arch which greatly and almost magically strengthens a building's design.

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It 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. But this is all done in the restrictions of **squared work**. Think about it - the candidate (a Master Mason) is handed a copy of a Keystone as he begins the Mark Masters Degree. He has no idea of 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 Scripture**, the mind of God?

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

Yes, these are all true, but to truly unlock the mystery, we must discover its purpose through the aid of the Designer and knowledge people such as King Solomon in the degree.

The **shape** of the Keystone makes it unique. It is neither an oblong, nor a square. It is not like the other stones. Our ritual tells us that it was personally designed by one of the greatest artisans to walk the earth, Hiram Abif. He is remembered as one who had an extra proportion of God-given ability in the art of stone building. This shows an extension of knowledge from our Blue Lodge teachings, yet it also shows a new level of achievement, that of shaping stones for the building that were not square.

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This shows us that sometimes in life we are to take the knowledge of building, stones, and carving that we possess and make a new level of existence that enhances the previous work.

As mentioned previously, the Keystone is critical to giving a building some **unique characteristics**. Before electricity, large buildings possessed dark interiors and were candle-lit places day and night. The arch, by aid of the Keystone, allows the possibility of more light to enter the building because more windows and doors could be built into a wall. How does this affect your daily life? What does it mean for your spiritual building? By using a Keystone as a symbol, you can allow "more light" to enter into your life. This could be accomplished by acts of charity, a more forgiving attitude toward others, and using your strength to hold up or secure those around you. The portals that can be created in greater numbers allowing easier access to core of the building, when arches and Keystones are used in a building, represent you as a Mason allowing the cares and sorrows of the hurting souls around you to penetrate your heart and cause you to be a source of Hope to mankind.

An Arch, by design, reaches to the sky or upward the closest stone in an arch is the Keystone. This is meant to reflect that we should build our Arch toward God completing it with our Keystone that we have shaped. This further means, we should be using the knowledge of God and our Faith in Him we have attained to accomplish this task ...to find our purpose in His Temple.

On our Royal Arch Chapter coins, letterhead, and rings, we represent the essence of the **greatness** of Royal Arch Masonry be the use of a Keystone. May each one of us use the Keystone to represent our aspirations to strengthen, enlighten, and improve our world, country, families, friends, and ourselves.

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Portions taken from the Installation of Grand Officers of the Grand Chapter RAM of Iowa at Oskaloosa speech, October 5th, 1887 written by C. M. Harl.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What significance, if any, is there to the keystone being the last stone to complete the arch? How can you apply the unfinished condition of the arch to your own personal life?

Why did the Jewish people react with shouting and praise when the keystone was brought forth in the ceremony representing the final completion and dedication of the temple?

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