

The Five Lectures
were created for five area conferences
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Moorhead, MN, August 20, 2011
Austin, MN, September 10, 2011
and
Anoka, MN, October, 15, 2011

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

These lectures are a 'work in progress.' That is, owing to their excellent reception and to the requests of members across the state for 'more', they are the first five in a series that will include more subjects of interest to Star members in the state of Minnesota.

It was at the suggestion and assistance of the Worthy Grand Matron of the Order, Doris Korthof (2011-2012), that the lectures were written. This, combined with expressions of interest by many members of OES, led to the publication of this booklet.

The author's aim for the lectures was (and still is) to clarify some of the richness and depth of meaning that exists in abundance in the Order's symbols, rituals and its three guiding principles of Faith, Hope and Charity.

FOREWORD

Years ago, soon after I joined Eastern Star, I began to search for greater understanding and deeper meaning in the Order. I had vague feelings that something was missing. When my sister came back to Minnesota from China in 2009, I was Associate Grand Matron, with the responsibility of organizing Area Conferences for the year 2009-2010. Because Drid is an accomplished researcher and writer, I realized that with her background as an academic and my knowledge of the Order, we could put together lectures that, in written form, might provide meaningful experiences for members of our Order throughout the state. It is my sincere hope that we have reached this goal.

Doris M. Korthof, Worthy Grand Matron

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LECTURE ONE

The Heroines

I wouldn't presume to speak about the symbolism of Eastern Star were it not for my sister, Doris Korthof, WGM, who asked me to do so with her usual charm and strength of purpose. She asked me to elaborate on major themes of the Order: the Star itself, the Star Points and the Labyrinth. My reaction was, "But I am a newcomer. How can I tell people who have been in Star for years anything about their symbols and ritual?" Even so, I was intrigued by the opportunity Doris offered: for many years I was a dancer. My specialty in social anthropology is the study of ritual and symbolism. My dedication to Eastern Star centers around the meanings of its ritual. I decided to take up my sister's challenge.

Martha



At Galilee chapter, I symbolize Martha, the image of an excellent sister, whose brother, Lazarus, was raised from the dead by Jesus. Martha's story deals with the problem of personal faith.¹ How can each of us, as individuals, achieve the faith Martha had in Jesus, whom she knew personally? We can know him through our meditations about Martha and the Green Ray. But why is it that personal faith is a *problem*? I think it's a problem because everything in life gets in the way; shopping, chores, children's needs, social obligations – the hundreds of things that occupy our minds everyday. Often, what happens to thought and meditation is that they disappear, or get put aside.

Besides personal faith, Martha's story embraces another problem: our mortality. We all know what it's like to lose someone dear, and we know that someday, sometime, we are going to leave this life too. How can we sustain ourselves through such loss, if not through Martha's faith?

In Eastern Star, we are lucky. Because of meetings and our ritual, the Order provides us with time we may not have otherwise. Galilee meets twice a month for about two and a half hours. This means that no matter how much we are distracted from thinking about our journey through life during the rest of the month, for at least 5 hours out of 30 days we can think about the Star Points and other symbols of the Order.

We are given 24 hours in a day. That's 720 hours in 30 days. Subtract the time we sleep, and we have 480 hours left. Our meetings give us about 5 hours out of one month to remind ourselves about what we are doing with our lives on a

¹ Plessner, Shirley. 1956. *Symbolism of the Eastern Star*. Cleveland: Gilbert Publishing Co.

larger scale. Thinking of *hours* instead of *days* in a month helps me get closer to spiritual issues, and there are other things that help too: I ask myself, "Who Are We?"

The Associate Conductress tells us who we are when she takes candidates through initiation. She says we are "seekers after light." She says that our journey through life is "a labyrinth" through which we can "wander blindly" were it not for our belief in a Supreme Being.² And please don't misunderstand me; Eastern Star isn't a religion, it is a traditional humanitarian organization. *Going to an Eastern Star meeting isn't the same as going to church*: it isn't a substitute for religion, and by the way, we say, "Supreme Being," so that members of *any* religion can join us if they wish.

The Associate Conductress also tells us that everything we hear in an initiation is a symbol to help us on the "road of life," the purpose of which is to assist in building our own individual personality and character. But who *is* the Conductress? At my initiation, I realized the Conductress was a helper -- a guide. In Eastern Star, we are never alone. When I go to a meeting and look at the Conductress or the Associate Conductress, I don't see Sue, Betty, Marilyn, or whatever her name may be, I see a person who stands for -- who *symbolizes* -- all the people who have helped and guided me along my "road of life" for the years I have lived so far.

I also see that I have assumed the role of Conductress along the way through life to members of family, acquaintances and friends. The Conductress's office and purpose is what I try to remember when I attend a meeting. Whoever she may be, she *becomes* that helper and guide. Knowledge of her office expands to include all who have helped and guided us on our way, and to all whom we have guided or helped. Finally, our Order, through the person of the Conductress, teaches that we are never alone as we journey on. So, I ask, "What Do We See?"

Electa



Because Galilee is a small chapter, we often have substitutes for the Star Points. A different person might be Electa for three or four meetings, but this doesn't matter, because Electa is a collective image of an excellent mother and widow³ whose story is one of sacrifice. The 8th Beatitude⁴ is associated with her: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the

² *Ritual of the Order of the Eastern Star*. 2000[1889]. Washington D.C.: General Grand Chapter. International Eastern Star Temple (Hampshire Avenue), pages 50-51.

³ Unlike the other Star points, Electa stands for the "elect lady" referred to in John 2: 1 (also see Plessner *op.cit.*: 55). There were many women like her in the early Christian church.

⁴ The Beatitudes are part of the Sermon on the Mount, given by Jesus to his disciples. They are written in the Bible in Matthew 5: 3-10.

kingdom of Heaven." Electa is also a symbol of courage. She lived in times when martyrs were made. She and her family were martyrs because, like Jesus, they were crucified. Even while dying, Electa told people to "love one another."

It is no wonder that our Order regards this "elect lady" as a heroine. Her life inspired many, giving them courage; helping them to prevail. When I think of Electa, I also think of these lines: "Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?" (Gibran 1963[1923]: 29).⁵ When I see Electa's cup or the Red Ray I see a personified symbol of supreme sacrifice.

Ruth



"The name, Ruth, means friend." Her love for Naomi "has become one of the world's greatest examples of the true meaning of real friendship" (Plessner 1956: 164). Her major attributes are the humility to do menial work and the loyalty to drop everything and follow her faith and belief. Ruth left her home and people to follow Naomi into strange and unfamiliar country. Her challenge is to extend friendship to anyone who has need of it. What she said to Naomi is well-known: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God." (*Book of Ruth: 16*). She gave up everything she had to follow Naomi.

Esther



Esther is an image of an excellent wife who fulfilled her duty to her husband, her God and her nation. She influenced Ahasuerus to act as a better man than he really was. He used his power to save the Jewish people. Because Esther's life was without blemish, her color is white -- associated with purity and peace. Her story is about intervention. She acted, but remained above reproach. She represents the use of power to achieve justice.

The Book of Esther is a complex tale of palace intrigue and decrees. Although Esther was Ahasuerus's wife, she was troubled because he didn't know about her Jewish ancestry. She was surrounded by political intrigue. She finally admitted her ancestry and told Ahasuerus that the Jews were in danger of being

⁵ Gibran, Kahlil. 1963[1923]. *The Prophet*. New York: Knopf.

destroyed. She defended Mordecai, and caused Haman's downfall. Through it all, Esther's character as Queen was never disputed, even by her enemies.

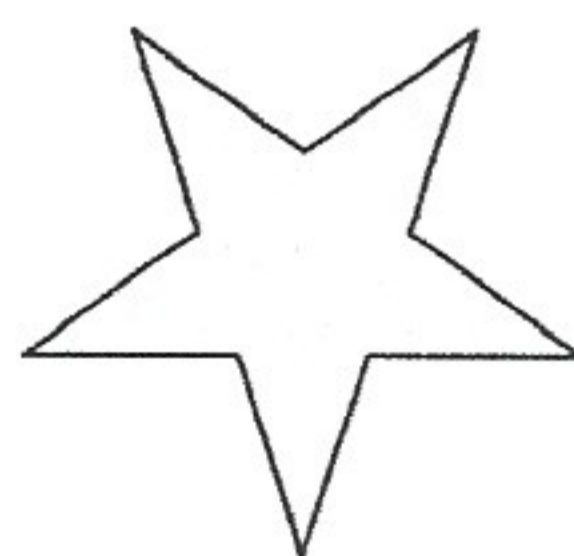
Adah



Adah is an excellent daughter. She is the essence of filial obedience. Her name doesn't appear in the Biblical story of Jephthah's daughter,⁶ but the role she played in her father's life is well-known. She symbolizes fidelity. In our Order, she is connected with the open Bible on the altar which represents a larger concept of Adah, because it stands for the Word of God. It was her father's promise to God and Adah's willing sacrifice so that her father kept his word to God, that forms the main lesson of her life.

Adah is also an image of virgin womanhood, for she was dedicated to the service of the tabernacle. The sixth Beatitude is hers: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Like Esther, who was associated with her husband, a king, Adah is associated with her father, Jephthah, who was a judge. Like Ahasuerus, Jephthah delivered the Jews, but when he did so, he promised God that "if he returned home safely from the wars, he would sacrifice whatsoever came out of his house first." Adah was the first to come out of his house to greet him. It is no wonder that Jephthah cried out: "Alas! My daughter!" It was her sacrifice that gave Jephthah's life the deeper meaning that it had.

The Star

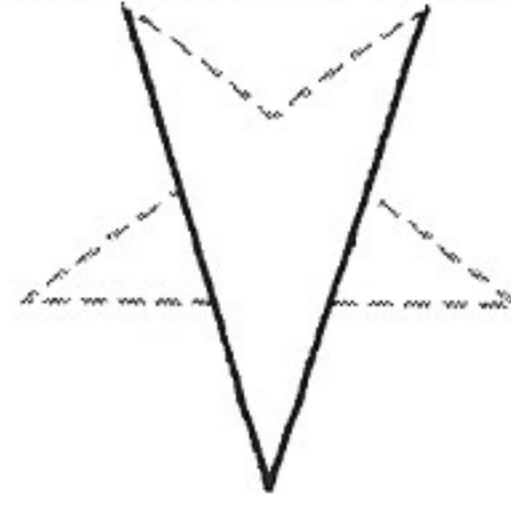


The Star of our Order is the emblem of five heroines: women whose faith (Martha), righteousness (Electa), Loyalty (Ruth), intercession (Esther) and sacrifice (Adah) form at least part of our understanding of the Green, Red, Yellow, White and Blue Rays of the single star. I haven't named the star points in their usual order, for a reason: the star points represent so many things and are connected in special ways. You may have wondered why, in the Ritual, that we don't go directly from Adah (fidelity) to Ruth (constancy); from Ruth to Esther

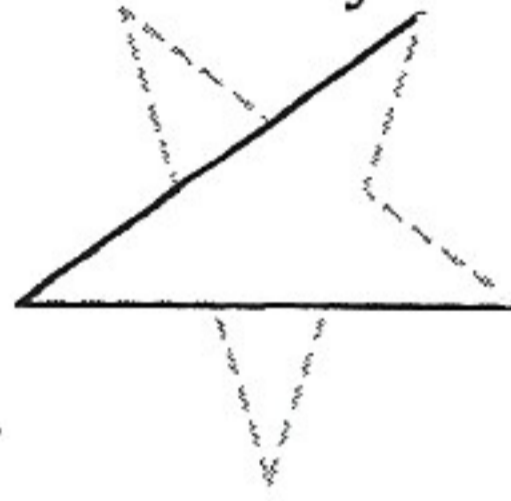
⁶ Jephthah's story can be found in the Book of Judges 11: 34-40. He was a judge, which meant that he administered God's Law according to God's direction, which meant, in turn, that he was invested with the spirit of God, and was considered a holy man. His daughter comes into the story when he returns home after many battles.

(loyalty), Esther to Martha (faith) and finally, from Martha to Electa (charity). It is because the Star has hidden triangles of meaning.

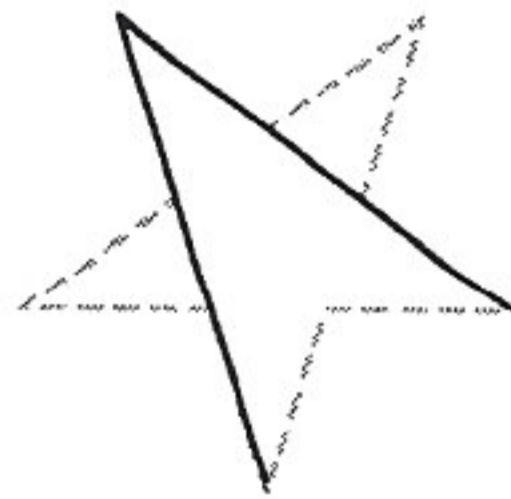
[The triangle of battle]. The triangle of battle is first and it is seen when we connect the star points of Adah, Electa and Esther.⁷



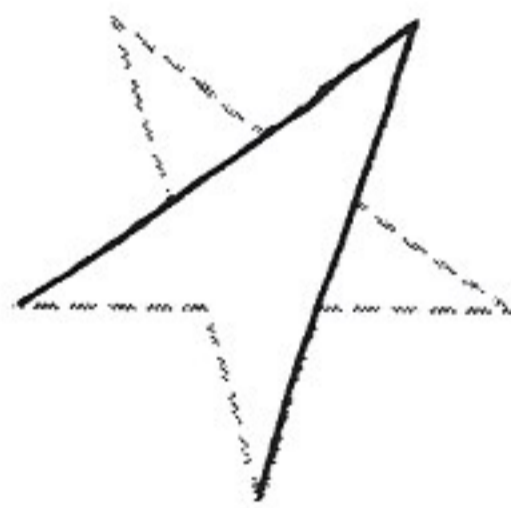
[Adah, Martha and Ruth]. I think the concept of the star points becomes clearer when we realize that, as in our initiation, we are meant to go *from* one point *to* another one, not in a "straight line" but *through* a third. This triangle tells us to get *from* the idea of fidelity, *through* our faith, *to* the idea of constancy: FROM one of them, TO another, THROUGH a mediary.



Likewise, when we connect Ruth to Esther, we go through Electa. **[Ruth, Electa and Esther].** That is, we get *from* the idea of constancy, *through* the idea of charity, *to* loyalty.

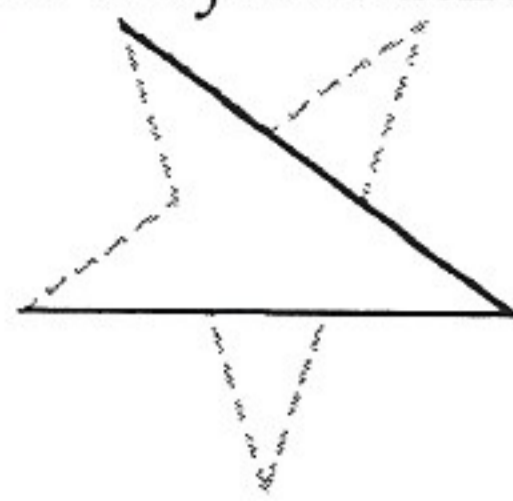


The fourth triangle **[Esther, Adah and Martha]** takes us *from* loyalty (Esther) *through* devotion (Adah) *to* faith (Martha).

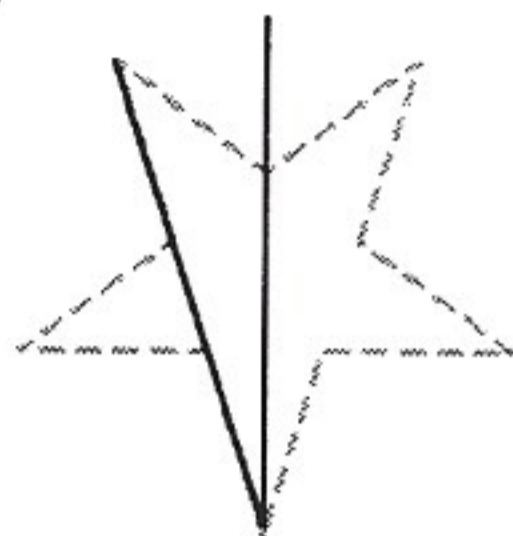


⁷ Life is a battle in the sense that it is a long, drawn out conflict between powerful forces of good and evil. Living itself is a life and death matter. Adah and Electa died. That's why their points are chosen; not Martha and Ruth. Esther is the peacemaker, the intercessor, the negotiator

[Martha, Ruth, Electa]. This takes us *from* faith *to* courage through *constancy*.



Next to last, **[Electa, Worthy Patron, Esther]** we go from Electa (courage), to the Worthy Patron (justice), through Esther (loyalty). That is, we go *from* the idea of charity, *to* Justice, *through* Loyalty.



Finally, we reach Knowledge in the person of the Worthy Matron, who finalizes the basic structure of our initiation and membership by establishing the circle of the "seeds" **[Circle of seeds]** of the flower that is center of our Order: the Star Points.



We don't have time for everything in one session, but a little more is possible. For example, the deeper meaning of Esther's story leads us to think of the sun – the source of light for the whole earth and all seasons, so we can think of the sun shining over Adah (spring); Ruth (summer); Electa (autumn), and Martha (winter).

In the winter of our lives – the end of our mortal lives – we keep faith in eternal life, remembering Martha's beatitude (the 2nd): "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Electa's life calls to mind autumn and the 8th beatitude: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Ruth calls to mind summer and the 3rd beatitude: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." And Adah, the 6th beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." And finally, Esther's beatitude (the 7th): "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

The Eastern Star encompasses the images of five extraordinary women who, taken together, signify seven roles women have always played in life on earth: sister, friend, widow, mother, daughter, wife and queen (Esther). These five women are connected to the "Five Gates," which may be an idea that developed

from images of gated cities in the ancient world. Wherever the idea originated, the metaphorical five gates of an individual human being are associated with them: sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste.

The "winding of the labyrinth," when the Conductress and initiate weave their way around the five Star points is important. We can understand the weaving of the Labyrinth as the wandering path of an individual's life during her or his earthly existence, and where does the labyrinth end? It ends at the altar of God.

NOTES:

LECTURE TWO

The Labyrinth: The Rosary of the Eastern Star⁸

I have said that I wouldn't presume to speak about Eastern Star symbolism or its rituals were it not for my sister, who persuaded me to do so. At the time, I wondered how could I talk about such things to people who had been in Star for many years. Fortunately, I had the sense to recognize her offer as a gift, and I hope that you, too, will see the meanings of the ritual as we look at them today, as a gift. I will start with the word, 'labyrinth' because that word best describes the ceremony of initiation.

In common English, the words 'labyrinth' and 'maze' are often taken to mean the same thing, but there is an important difference between them: a *maze* is a puzzle with choices of path and direction to its center. A *labyrinth* is a single, non-branching path that leads to a center.

The journey of an individual through a *maze* – like any puzzle – is nearly always confusing. It easily leads to errors and mistakes. In contrast, the journey of an individual through a *labyrinth* is not so confusing, for it leads to a known end and there is usually a guide. The 'end' of the Star labyrinth has been described in many ways (perhaps there is no single correct definition), but I think of it as oneness with God, which means both inspiration and personal self-discovery. The Star ritual labyrinth is a transforming spiritual metaphor. It applies to (and can be used by) all who have chosen to travel within it. An unknown writer has said,

The labyrinth is a universal symbol for the world, with its complications and difficulties, which we experience on our journey through life. The entry to the labyrinth is birth; the center is death and eternal life. In Christian terms, the thread that leads us through life is divine grace. Like any pilgrimage, the labyrinth represents the inner pilgrimage we are called to make to take us to the center of our being. In some Christian circles today the labyrinth continues to be used as an instrument to facilitate meditation, prayer, and personal reflection (from the Internet's *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*).

Our initiation represents our birth into the Order of the Eastern Star. The labyrinth symbolizes our inner pilgrimage. Its forms are meant to be used for personal reflection and meditation.

⁸ The first Ritual was compiled and published around 1850 under the title, "The Rosary of the Eastern Star" by Dr. Rob Morris. In 1867 and 1868, Mr. Rob Macoy compiled and published a Ritual that was the beginning of the Chapters of the Order as we know them today (see *Ritual of the Order of the Eastern Star*. 2000[1889]. Washington D. C.: General Grand Chapter, International Eastern Star Temple, p. 8).

There are labyrinths from ancient times, but the ones best known to most people are those that survive today in Greece and the cathedrals of medieval Europe, such as the one on the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France. Our ritual is different from all of these, although it shares with all of them the idea of *meditation*.

Meditation is a concept that has always been strongly associated with the idea of a labyrinth. It is a broadly used word that signifies habits and customs used by solo or group practitioners *without external help*, nearly always for the purpose of self-transformation. Meditation is frequently done as part of a religious tradition, although the practice of meditation is not specifically tied to any one religion and can be practiced by anybody. The word 'meditation' comes from the Indo-European root *med-*, meaning "to measure." It entered the English language as 'meditation' through the Latin *meditatio*, which originally indicated any type of physical or intellectual exercise, but later evolved into more specific meanings connected with contemplation.⁹

In ancient times when there were walled cities, one entered a city through a central gate. The central gate was usually an impressive structure that could be closed and barred at will. The city-gate was opened only to people identified as known friends. Metaphorically, the 'open gate' of a walled city signifies a human heart or soul that can be affected by God's Word or, in general, "light." A 'closed gate' signifies a closed heart or soul that is unaffected by the Light.

A 'closed gate' may also stand for an unused faculty for obtaining knowledge, for example, eyes that will not see or ears that do not hear. In metaphorical language, the five senses are often referred to as *closed gates*. Therefore, "the individual should see that the gate of the heart, the gate of righteousness, etc., should always be open" (Plessner 1956: 100).¹⁰ Now, we will look at Eastern Star's Labyrinth.

"The [Eastern Star] labyrinth is a series of intricate passages through which it is difficult to find one's way. In our Order, the winding of the labyrinth represents the winding of an individual's life during earthly existence. Our labyrinth ends, as does life itself, before the altar of God. During the traversing of the labyrinth, the initiate is constantly sustained and supported by the comforting presence of a friend" (Plessner, *op.cit.*: 126). During the weaving of the labyrinth, the initiate is taught appropriate signs and passes which are used to open the Five Gates of the Order -- the Star Points.

Many labyrinths are round, but they can be based on a square, such as ours. The square form is meaningful to us, because in the Masonic tradition,

⁹ See *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, American Edition*, 1996.

¹⁰ Plessner, Shirley. 1956. *Symbolism of the Eastern Star*. Cleveland: Gilbert Publishing Co.

Hiram Abif's perfect construction of the Temple of King Solomon used the square as its basic geometric design. The sides of this square represent the four precepts of the Brotherhood. Two sides of a perfect square form a ninety degree angle. This forms the compass of honor and virtue. The combination of the square and compass form the insignia of the Masons (Plessner, *op.cit.*: 193).

The square (or a rectangle) encloses the Eastern Star points, which tells us that we are implanted in the Masonic Order.¹¹ The corners of a square or a rectangle signify the right-angled approach that Star members use to set about everything they do in life; that is, straightforward with no deviation. This idea is preserved in our meetings and rituals in the way we execute the corners of our coming and going. We make square corners, not rounded ones.

In any Eastern Star Chapter room, "the square of the ruling Power refers to the placement of the four highest officers in the four cardinal points of the compass" (Plessner *op.cit.*: 193). The "ruling power" lies in the east, the station of the Worthy Matron. It is thought that true knowledge and justice in this life are derived from deep abiding love and unwavering loyalty which are the combined attributes of the Star Points that protect the Ruling Power of the east. This idea brings us to "The Cardinal Directions."

North [Eagle]

The office in the North is the beginning of the Line that belongs to the Associate Conductress, who *prepares* a candidate for degrees. Thus, it is through the aid of this officer that the initiate has her (or his) first glimpses of the Light. The Associate Conductress's office in the North. The Treasurer is seated in the northeast.¹²

South [Animal with Human Face]

In early Hebrew history, the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad settled in the southern area of Hebrew territory. Because of this the South refers to this division. The south was symbolized by an animal with the face of a man. Like the north, the south is one side of the square of ruling powers.¹³ The Associate Conductress *prepares* the candidate in the north. The Conductress is the friend in

¹¹ Eastern Star was first known as 'Adoptive Masonry' (1712-1730). It morphed into 'The American Adoptive Rite' (1778-1855). The name, 'Eastern Star' was used for the first time by Rob Morris (From: Terry, Sarah. 1914. *History of the Order of the Eastern Star*. Grand Chapter Owensboro, Kentucky, p. 10). The Minnesota Grand Chapter began on October 18, 1878.

¹² Early Hebrews used North to symbolize the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphtali. In those times the north was symbolized by the Flying Eagle.

¹³ "In the . . . religions of the ancient Near East, animals represented divine powers and attributes, but the human form symbolized revelation and intelligence. According to the O. T., the definition of being human is to have understanding . . . which comes through the Spirit of God in a person . . . ; human beings, male and female together, are made in the image of God with dominion over the earth . . ." (Burridge, R.A. 2005. *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, pp. 67-68).

the south who *guides* the candidate through the Labyrinth, which includes all Star Points.

West [Ox or Ram¹⁴]

Directly opposite to the sun's rising in the East, the West symbolizes reflection. The Associate Matron and Patron reflect the dignity and authority of the west. The sun sets in the West, and with the sun's setting, the activities of the day cease. People are free to contemplate things of a spiritual nature, so the West symbolizes contemplation, meditation and thought.¹⁵ The badge of the Associate Matron is an emblem of the main principle of our Order -- an unfailing light that can shine throughout Star members' lives.

East [Lion]

To the Hebrews, the east stood for the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zabulon. The symbol of the east is the lion -- the expression of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ is sometimes referred to as the Lion of Judah. In Ezekiel 43: 2, we can read, "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory." In our Order, the woman in the east symbolizes knowledge. The man in the east symbolizes justice.

The four compass directions on earth are north, south, east and west. They apply to the whole planet and all known directions. In our Order, two specific *pairs* of these directions -- north and south; west and east -- hold great significance. In Isaiah 43: 5-6, we read, 5. "Fear not; for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; 6. I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth."

The Labyrinth: Beginning

The beginning of the labyrinth is to the left of the Associate Patron, in the west. The first figure that is traveled is the *north* side of the square; across the *east* in front of the Worthy Matron and Worthy Patron, then the *south* side of the square and finally, across the *west*, to stand in front of the Associate Matron and Associate Patron. The square is completed when the initiate returns to the starting point.

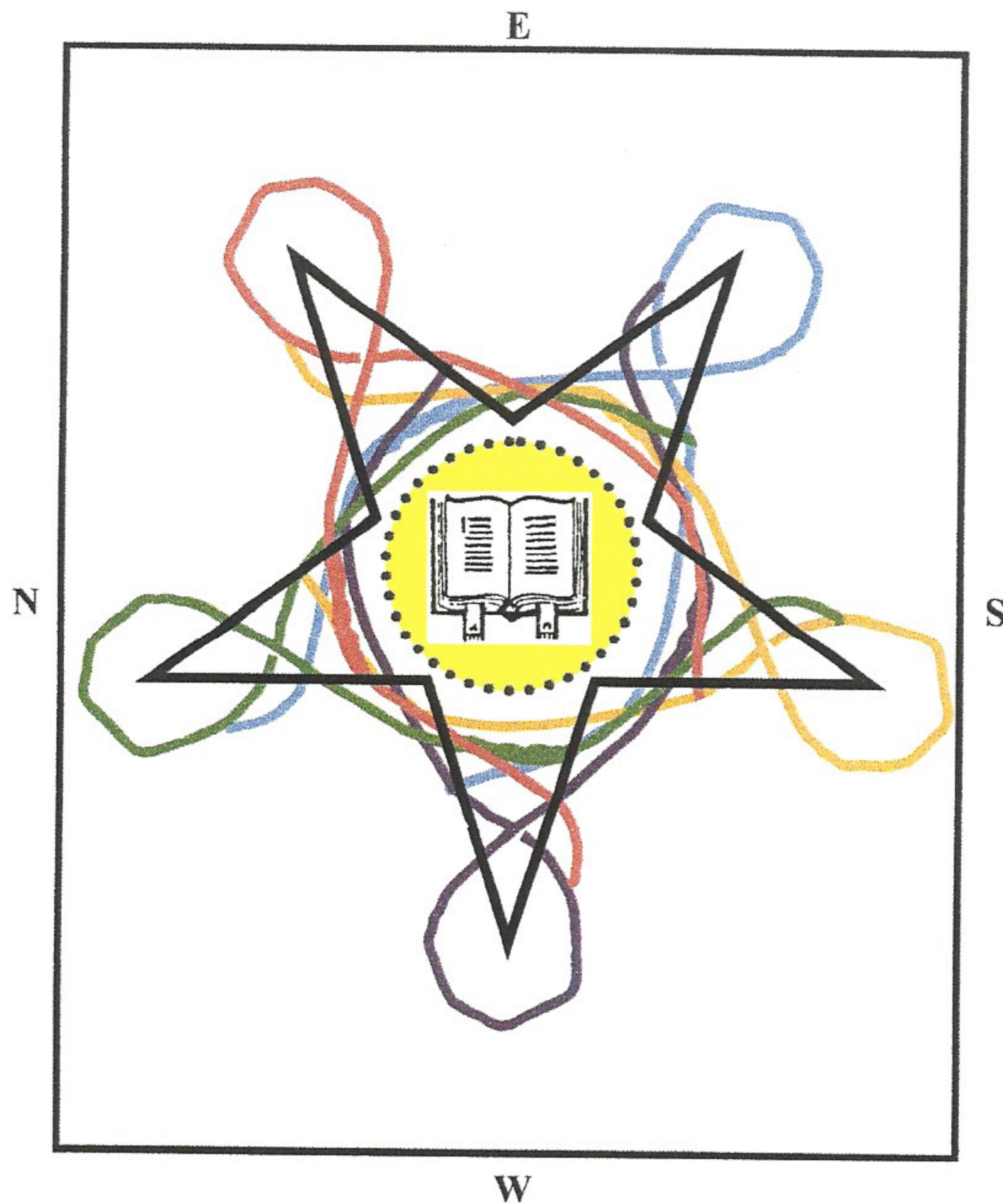
¹⁴ "Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." And there was a picture of a young deer [ram?] [originally to have been a calf, but changed because of the sin of the golden calf, hence the verse, with "rams" symbolizing Israel] on it..."

¹⁵ In Biblical times, the West represented the tribes of Ephraim, Manassah and Benjamin -- the tribes that occupied the western part the allotted territory. The west is symbolized by an Ox or Ram.

The second figure of the labyrinth takes the initiate across the south, then on a diagonal line to a position 'behind' the altar,¹⁶ facing east.

After the obligation, the initiate travels on the north side of the altar on a diagonal line past Adah to the southeast corner of the square, and for the *second* time traverses the square, going across the south, west and north, then on a diagonal line directly to Adah, where the first lecture is given.

The Petals (The "Floral Center"):¹⁷



1. Adah (Fidelity) to Ruth (Constancy) via Martha (Faith)

¹⁶ 'Behind the altar' is a somewhat misleading phrase, as the orientation refers to the Worthy Matron and Patron's station, which itself is 'behind' the altar because the Bible is open toward the west. Initiates thus stand in *front* of the altar because the Bible is open toward them. 'Front' or 'behind' denote differing points of view of the altar, therefore, "West of the altar" is the best expression.

¹⁷ To refer to the movement forms around each star point as 'petals' reflects the Installing Officer's words in the ceremony of installation, where the star points are referred to as *the floral center* of the Chapters (*Ritual, op.cit.*: page 119).

The second figure takes the initiate to Ruth – not directly, but through petal-like form around Martha, going west of the altar to Ruth, where the second lecture is given.

2. Ruth (Constancy) to Esther (Loyalty) via Electa (Charity)

The same petal-like form is repeated to take the candidate to Esther, around Electa, and back to Esther.

3. Esther (Loyalty) to Martha (Faith) via Adah (Fidelity)

¹⁸ The petal-like form is repeated as the initiate travels from Esther to Martha around Adah to get to Martha (Faith).

4. Martha (Faith) to Electa (Charity) via Ruth (Constancy)

The petal-like form is again completed, taking the candidate to Electa, who gives the last Star Point lecture.

5. From Electa (Charity) to the Worthy Patron (Justice) via Esther (Loyalty)

The final petal figure evolves into the *first circle* starting in the northeast, where the Conductress and the candidate travel through the north, to west and south, to end in front of the Worthy Patron.

6. The Prayer Circle: the Second Circle

After the Worthy Patron's lecture, the Worthy Matron (Knowledge) starts the second circle in the labyrinth – the Prayer Circle – with at least one new member. The *first circle* is made by the Conductress and candidate *walking* the circle. The *second circle* is made by people walking in to form a *standing* circle. They symbolize the “seeds” of the Order out of which grows the flowering center.

7. Prayer Circle to Signing the By-Laws

The labyrinth is finished when the initiate goes to the Secretary's desk located in the southeast. Once the candidate assumes the obligation, he (or she) is now 'brother' or 'sister' and are referred to as such because they have given their

¹⁸ The color purple was used for Esther, because white does not show well on a white page. Purple was used to signify Esther's royalty.

pledge. They now share equally the rewards and responsibilities of the Order of the Eastern Star (Ritual, *op.cit.*: 59).

What I have tried to do here is to increase your awareness of the whole movement of the initiation; to give you a sense of the "choreography" of the rite, which, as a whole, includes all of the meanings of the Order.

To see movement, not in sequences of bits and pieces, but as a complete design in space, is not easy, but I think it is well worth the effort, because it is in the *whole movement design* of the initiation ritual that the meanings of our Order are most clear.

NOTES:

LECTURE THREE

Colors and Gemstones

We come together today to share some of what I have learned about colors, precious stones and ancient history of the Eastern Star.¹⁹ We begin with colors. We can read that "Robert Morris selected five beautiful symbolic colors for our Order: blue, yellow, white, green and red" (Malone 1967: 156).²⁰ These colors belong, respectively, to Adah, Ruth, Esther, Martha and Electa.

Blue

Adah's color was utilized by early Christians because it signified divine intelligence and mental capacity. The color blue can be used to symbolize dignity, sadness or serenity. It is the color of the sky that embraces the entire planet. The ancient Hebrews used blue in the high priest's robes; the *ephod* (a vestment) was blue, as were the ribbons for his breastplate and the plate of his miter. It may be of interest to know that Adah is the first Eastern Star degree, "the daughter's degree," that illustrates respect to the binding force of a vow.²¹

Yellow

Ruth's color (sometimes gold or orange), connotes sincerity, affection and glory. In the Bible we find this color associated with divinity, anything that is precious and pure. The rays of the sun are yellow, producing wheat – the golden grain that sustains life. As we journey through life, we grow from within, making friends, sowing seeds, and rejoicing in the harvest – one of the lessons of the yellow star's ray. As the second of five Eastern Star degrees, Ruth is "the widow's degree, illustrating devotion to religious principles" (Macoy, *op. cit.*: 78).

White

We call Esther's white a 'color', but it really is not. White is the *absence* of color, reflecting *all rays of light*, but absorbing none. White was used by early Christians to signify the Lenten season. The Chinese still use white to symbolize mourning, and to many peoples of the world, ancient and modern, white symbolizes purity and peace.

¹⁹ I have drawn upon several sources for the explanations of color that are in this talk. I will add Terry, Sarah (Grand Secretary, OES, Kentucky). 1955. *The Second Mile*. Corpus Christi, TX: Christian Triumph Press, because her work has also inspired what I have to say.

²⁰ Malone, Beulah Haslit. 1967 (7th printing). *Let There Be Light*. Privately printed, copyrighted and sold by B.H. Malone, Tulsa, OK: Past Grand Matron and PG Secretary of Oklahoma.

²¹ Macoy, Robert. 1989. *A Dictionary of Freemasonry*. New York: Random House, p. 78.

White is sacred to Masons in the Apron and Gloves, symbolizing innocence and purity.²² In Eastern Star, Esther is "the wife's degree, illustrating fidelity to kindred and friends" (Macoy, *op. cit.* 78).

Green

The green ray of Martha represents Nature and its never-ending cycle of growth, death and regeneration. Evergreen trees, ferns, plant life in general – everything in Nature that appears to die, but continues on again and again. It is familiar to us through this color and this is why the color green symbolizes hope, immortality and regeneration. It is no surprise to learn that green was a sacred color in many ancient religions. As the fourth Eastern Star degree, "Martha [is] the sister's degree, [and] illustrates undeviating faith in the hour of trial" (Macoy, *op. cit.*: 78).

Red

Electa's color (sometimes scarlet), is often used as a symbol of fire and many other things; blood, passion, hatred, cruelty and sacrifice. The Chinese still use red as a main color in weddings. Crusading medieval knights wore red crosses on white tunics that signified their willingness to undergo martyrdom. Catholic priests still wear red vestments when they celebrate the lives of martyred saints. "Electa, [is] the Benevolent degree, illustrating charity and courage, with patience and submission under wrongs" (Macoy, *op. cit.*: 78). Together, the five degrees are the basis for our Order's ritual, which is a form of "Adoptive Masonry" – a name given to certain degrees resembling Masonry and Masonic in spirit" (Macoy *op. cit.*: 77).

Precious Stones

From this basis, it should not be surprising that the five jewels of the Order are a sapphire (blue), a topaz (yellow), a diamond (white), an emerald (green) and a ruby (red).

Adah, the blue sapphire, later called the turquoise, represent[s] the spring of life. Sapphire was defined by the ancients as an azure stone of fine color which has the appearance of being spotted with gold dust (see Job 28: 6) (Malone, *op.cit.* 160).

It may be of interest to know that "Prior to the time of the Roman Empire, "sapphiros" referred to any blue gem in general" (*Wikipedia*).

There are many varieties of topaz, but Ruth's yellow topaz is a symbol of constancy and wisdom. Like other precious gems, it had another name in the ancient world (chrysolite), and to them, it signified divine wisdom. Many

²² "The pure white lambskin apron of Masonry is an ancient and spotless emblem. Its investiture is the first gift bestowed upon a candidate and symbolizes the purity of the Order. It is given on behalf of the whole Fraternity, requiring the recipient to keep himself pure in all his actions" (Macoy, Robert. 1989. *A Dictionary of Freemasonry*. New York: Random House, p. 87.)

modern English translations of the Bible, including the King James Version, mention topaz in Exodus 28: 17 with reference to a stone in the breastplate (Hoshen): "And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this shall be the first row" (*Wikipedia*).

Esther's white diamond signified courage and purity. In earlier Biblical times, it was spoken of as 'jasper,'²³ symbolizing God's glory and perfection. Diamonds bear no resemblance to jasper as we know it today, because to us, jasper is not a translucent stone. However, in Revelations 21: 11 there is a reference to jasper as "clear as crystal." This stone was capable of engraving all other stones. We call this stone 'diamond' today. Diamonds are thought to have been first recognized and mined in India, where significant alluvial deposits of the stone could be found many centuries ago along the rivers Penner, Krishna and Godavari. Diamonds have been known in India for at least 3,000 years but most likely 6,000 years.²⁴

Martha's hopeful and eternal emerald is mentioned in Exodus 28: 18, Ezekiel 28: 13 and Revelations 43: 21. Sometimes, among the ancients, it was called 'beryl'. The emeralds spoken of in the Bible probably came from a few mines in Zabara, on the border of Egypt. To them, the stone meant the "love of the Father" and the best ones were free of all color except green, having no flaws. You may not know that there is an Emerald Township in Faribault County, Minnesota. The population was 228 at the 2000 census. My own favorite association with emeralds is the Emerald City in the land of Oz.

The red ruby of Electa sometimes has a shadow of purple mixed in. It symbolizes love, ardor and fervency, as well as sacrifice. It is mentioned in Job 28: 18 and Proverbs 8: 11. The ruby had a different name, 'sardius' as did the topaz (chrysolite), emerald (beryl) and diamond (jasper). The sapphire was the only one of the stones whose name appears to have remained constant, but even here, there is a problem regarding names, for the jewel of office for the Worthy Patron (Plessner 1956: 123) is listed as "Sapphire (White or Clear)."²⁵ An early recorded note of the transport and trading of rubies arises in the literature on the North Silk Road of China, wherein about 200 BC rubies were carried along this ancient track moving westward from China.²⁶

²³ It was also known as 'sardonyx'.

²⁴ Hershey, W. 1940. *The Book of Diamonds*. New York: Hearthsides Press. pp. 22-28.

²⁵ Plessner, Shirley. 1956. *Symbolism of the Eastern Star*. Cleveland, OH: Gilbert Publishing Co.

²⁶ C. Michael Hogan. 2007. *Silk Road, North China, The Megalithic Portal*. (ed. A. Burnham). (Google: www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=18006).

Foundation Stones

So far, we have learned that gemstones have long been considered to be symbols of spiritual qualities. When the stones were used in ancient writings, as in the Revelations of St. John, "these stones were selected as the foundation stones of the eternal city, first because they were suitably beautiful" (Plessner *op.cit.* 101). Second, seen as a vision of a spiritual place, "the stones were selected because of their connection with spiritual virtues, thus, in Eastern Star, each office was selected to represent such spiritual refinements [and they are] seen to be the foundations of a worthy human spirit." (*Ibid.* 102).

"But," we may ask, "where did those five stones first appear?" They were part of what Plessner calls, "Aaron's breastplate" (*Ibid.* 122), which the ancient Hebrews knew as "the breastplate of judgment." That is, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*²⁷ describes the breastplate as a

species of pouch, adorned with precious stones, worn by the high priest on his breast when he presented in the Holy Place the names of the children of Israel. The directions for the making of the breastplate (see Exodus 28: 15-30) are quite clear. "Foursquare it shall be, being doubled; a span²⁸ shall be the length thereof, and a span shall be the breadth thereof; thus before it was doubled it was a cubit²⁹ long and a half-cubit wide."

On the front face of this square were set, in four rows, twelve precious stones, on each of which was engraved the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. These jewels in gold settings were (Exodus 28: 17-19): in the first row, "a sardius [ruby], a topaz, and a carbuncle [emerald]"; in the second row, "an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond [sardonyx];" in the third row, "a jacinth [amber], an agate, and an amethyst;" and in the fourth row, "a beryl [chalcedony], an onyx [beryl], and a jasper" (*Ibid.*).



²⁷ Taken from an article by Morris Jastrow, Jr., Ira Maurice Price, Marcus Jastrow and Louis Ginsberg.

²⁸ The end of the thumb to the tip of little finger of spread hand.

²⁹ The tip of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

If you look at the illustration of the breastplate, you will see how the five foundation stones of the Eastern Star, are represented in the first two rows of the breastplate, i.e. ruby, topaz, emerald (first row) and emerald, sapphire and diamond (second row). You can also see, if you look at the names of the third and fourth rows,³⁰ the problem I've identified with the names of the stones – a problem that can not be solved here, as it would require months of linguistic research to carry out.

The Ephod

The breastplate was worn over and fastened to an *ephod* – a vestment worn by the high priest. The breastplate hung over the chest of the wearer, and was secured to the shoulders of the *ephod* by gold cords (or chains). In addition to the names of the twelve tribes, the stones also contained the names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and at the end the words: “[all these are] the tribes of Jeshurun” or “the tribes of God.”



The tribes and other words were inscribed on the breastplate because of its use as a kind of oracle, when the Jews wanted to obtain Yahweh's 'yes' or 'no' on matters of judgment. That is,

³⁰ Third row: jacinth [amber], an agate, and an amethyst; and fourth row: beryl [chalcedony], an onyx [beryl], and a jasper.

When Saul or David wished to question Yhwh through the oracle, they commanded the priest, "Bring hither the *ephod*" (1 Samuel 14: 18, 23; 1 Samuel 9: 30, 7). This connection between the *ephod* and the oracle may also be seen very clearly in the combination of *Urim* and *Thummim* with the *ephod* in the official robes of the high priest. It was the prerogative of the priests to carry and to question this *ephod* with the oracle (*The Jewish Encyclopedia, op. cit.*).

Urim and Thummim

Two stones, usually one white (affirmative) and one black (negative), were connected with the breastplate of the high priest, and used as a kind of divine oracle. 1 Samuel 28: 3-6 mentions three methods of divine communication, but the high priest only used the method of *Urim* (white; 'yes') and *Thummim* (black; 'no').³¹ "The only other mention of actual consultation of Yhwh by means of the *Urim* and *Thummim* found in the Old Testament is in Numbers 27: 21. Eleazar was then high priest. Moses was permitted by the Lord to address Him directly, but Joshua and his successors could speak to the Lord only through the mediation of the high priest" (*The Jewish Encyclopedia, op. cit.*).

Although Eastern Star does not consult oracles to settle matters of judgment, we do have a tradition that I believe relates to the *Urim* and *Thummin* in any matter that requires balloting for an answer. The method of balloting in Eastern Star requires two stones (one black and one white), associating our tradition with the ancient stones used by the High Priest. The breastplate and the *ephod* are the basis of the historical origins of the gemstones used in Eastern Star, and you have probably noticed how different the uses for them were in ancient times.

Today, we mainly think of gemstones as decorations, but in our Order, they play a larger part than that. The gemstones on Aaron's breastplate were inscribed with the names of each tribe of Israel – the tribes themselves being the *real* jewels that composed the breastplate. Likewise, we might imagine a sapphire inscribed with the name 'Adah'; a topaz with 'Ruth', a diamond with 'Esther', an emerald with 'Martha' and a ruby with 'Electa' – a kind of circular 'breastplate' that could assist us as we travel through our lives. And, we might ask, Are these heroines not the *real* jewels of our Order? Are they not symbolic of the spiritual values that are the degrees of the Order that we strive to make manifest in our lives?

In an essay written by Dennis Chornenky for the 2004 California Masonic symposium, we find these words:

All traditional societies and institutions are founded on a common human spirituality that seeks to return man to the center of his spiritual existence. The purpose of initiation is to move Man from the circumference to the center, from

³¹ Macoy (1989: 99) states that these stones signified "light" (*Urim*) and "truth" (*Thummin*), but I prefer the *Jewish Encyclopedia's* explanation.

the outer to the inner, in order to fulfill the function of 'unmoved mover' in relation to the world that is his [or hers].³²

Like the Masons, the Order of the Eastern Star is "founded on a common human spirituality" that seeks to return its members to the center of their spiritual existence. I want to ask: What better way to return to the center of our spiritual existence than through contemplation -- starting with the jewels of our Order and their beautiful colors, to assist us on our life's journey through the labyrinth?

NOTES:

³² Chornenky, Dennis V. 2004. *Freemasonry and Native American Traditions*. Paper for the Annual California Masonic Symposium, San Diego, CA.

LECTURE FOUR

Replies and Responses

Today, I want to discuss the five responses given by members of the Order after the star points reveal their signs in the opening ceremony. These five responses are of special interest by themselves because they evoke the Biblical origins of the heroines of the Order in meaningful and thought-provoking ways. When I began thinking about them, I realized that they are composed of the words of four men: Jephthah, Boaz, Ahasuerus, and Jesus.

Jephthah was many things, but foremost, a father. Boaz was a wealthy man of the family of Elimelech, residing in Judah; Ahasuerus was a king, and Jesus, the son of God. The Biblical references are these:³³

Jephthah (Judges 11: 35) "Alas! My daughter!" [Adah]

Boaz (Book of Ruth 3: 9) "Who art thou?" [Ruth]

Ahasuerus (Book of Esther 5: 3) "What wilt thou?" [Esther]

Jesus (John 11: 26) "Believest thou this?" [Martha]

Jesus (John 13: 34) "Love one another" [Electa]

In the five responses, we find two statements, one from the OT: "Alas, My daughter!" and one from the NT: "Love one another." There are three questions: two from the OT: "Who art thou?" and "What wilt thou?" and one from the NT: "Believest thou this?" The first statement and two of the questions are from the Old Testament. The third question and the final statement are from the New Testament. Before going on, though, we should ask, "What is so important about questions in general?"

If one of my favorite philosophers, Susanne Langer,³⁴ is right, then questions are really *unformed ideas that are put forward for consideration or discussion*. In three of the responses, we are faced with three of these "unformed ideas" that ask for each Star member's consideration, thought and reflection.

I think the three questions are in the opening ceremony because when making the response, each of us is meant to be reminded of his or her own thoughts about the question. Our individual answers to the three questions and two statements could be said to decide the depth of our understanding of what Eastern Star is all about. I believe that we are meant to be reminded of our

³³ All of the references and quotations from the Bible are from Scofield, C.I. [Editor] 1967. *Holy Bible*. [King James Version] New York: Oxford University Press.

³⁴ Langer, Susanne. 1951. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. New York: The New American Library -- A Mentor Book.

individual answers to these three questions and the two statements every time we give the responses in a meeting. In our daily lives, we tend to lose touch with the profound impact of questions. In the rush of everyday events, we lose sight of the fact that what questioners do when they ask a question is give responders the right to determine the situation, whatever it may be.

If you think about it, this is a wonderful expression of true freedom. We belong to an Order in which we are able to act and think as we choose without being subject to undue restrictions. We might go so far as to say that Eastern Star is an organization based upon free will; upon choice, independence and liberty. For example, we are not *told* who Ruth is. We are *asked*, "Who is this?" We are not told what to do. We are *asked* "What wilt thou?" We are not told "this is the truth." We are *asked* "Believest thou this?" Every time, the ball is thrown into our individual courts, except for one of the responses.

The Two Statements

We *are* bluntly told to "love one another" by Jesus, who said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13: 34). He says that this is the way that everyone will know that those who hear him are his disciples – if they "have love one to another." He says this after giving a morsel of food to Judas Iscariot, who will soon betray him. The context of the command to love one another is that of the Last Supper, where Jesus predicts his betrayal and foretells Peter's denial. He comforts the apostles, who seem somewhat confused about what he is saying, by talking about his relationship with God (the Father) and the "Comforter," the Holy Spirit.

The second statement of the responses recalls, not a heavenly, but an earthly, father. We think of Adah's father, Jephthah, when we say, "Alas, my daughter!" The writer of Judges says, "And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! Thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them who trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back" (Judges 11: 35).³⁵

More interesting to me, however, is his daughter's response. Even though Adah is not named in the Bible, she *says* a lot. For example, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions" (Judges 11: 37). When, at the end of two months, she returns: "And it came to pass, at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed; *and she knew no man*. And it was a custom in Israel, that

³⁵ Jephthah's vow to God and the reason for it is told in Judges 11: 29-34.

the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah, the Gileadite, four days in a year" (Judges 11: 39-40).

As many of you may know, problems arose about Jephthah's action because the story in Judges raises considerable doubt about what he *actually* did. Those who think that he really killed his daughter can find no divine approval of the act, because there were divine commands in Mosaic law against human sacrifice (see Leviticus 18: 21; 20: 2-5; Deuteronomy 12: 31; 18: 10).

Others believe that he set her apart to perpetual virginity, which in those days effectively "killed" her in the sense that she would never bear children and that meant that Jephthah's claim to the furthering of his blood-line was dead. The stress upon Adah's virginity rather than her death also reminds us of what Jephthah said in Judges 11: 31, that is, "Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me . . . shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judges 11: 31). This passage places the stress upon virginity – not death.

According to Louis Ginsberg and David Amram in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*,³⁶

The right of the father to kill his daughter is apparently not questioned in Judges 11: 34-39, though some commentators (e.g., Levi ben Gershon and David Kimḥi, also Nicholas de Lyra) hold that the passage must not be interpreted as indicating that Jephthah actually killed his daughter in this case. In later times this extraordinary power, more especially when used to offer up sons and daughters as sacrifices, is condemned (II Kings 23: 10; Ezekiel 16: 20, 21).

The point is that any way the story is interpreted, it is a remarkable, disturbing story of an important relationship; that of father and daughter, ultimately bringing all family relationships to our attention. But the two responses – for Adah and Electa – are also remarkable in that Electa's response reminds us of the heavenly Father, and Adah's reminds us of the earthly father and the rights, duties and obligations of one to the other.

The Three Questions.

In ordinary life, many questions are disguised compliments: "Where shall we go?" "What do you think about X?" "Is that a good (or bad) idea?" The person who *answers* the question is in a very real sense the decision-maker, because it is *the responder* who is asked to decide where to go, what to think, what is of value and so on. In other words, our opening ceremony asks each of us *who* is Ruth (and, by implication, the other Star points). Our ceremony asks Esther *what* do you want? Perhaps it asks each of us *what we* want as well. Finally, it asks Martha's question, "do you believe this?" showing us a simple triangle, to which

³⁶ The references to *The Jewish Encyclopedia* are taken from the internet version, easily accessed by entering that name into whatever search engine is available.

we look upwards – indicating that we are thinking on a spiritual, not the material plane.

Notice that there is no coercion in these questions; there is no bullying, intimidation or force. Eastern Star doesn't compel its members to give pre-determined answers. There is no pressure involved. All we know is that our answers are likely to give us concrete direction and awaken decisions that will affect the path that our lives will take, such as the decision to join the Order in the first place.

Be Like Little Children

We are all familiar with children, who ask hundreds (if not thousands) of questions because they rightly assume that adults know things that they do not. Children ask questions so that they can learn how and why their world is constructed the way it is. They want to know what power and authority mean. They often drive parents and teachers crazy when they ask over and over, "Why?" "What?" "When?" "Where?" and "Who?" and "What does it all *mean*?" Children ask questions because they are trying to form standards of judgment for themselves. In a way, they are like little cubs following Mama Bear around in a forest watching what she eats, so they will learn what is safe for them to eat; what to hunt, what to avoid and all the rest, but there, the analogy ends.

Unlike bears, human children live in a forest of words, ideas and images that by and large, they don't understand. Ideas are much harder to sort out than berries, grasses, animals and insects. Children want to know which *ideas* are harmful, which are wholesome; which are futile, or over-exaggerated. They want to know what ideas are interesting or boring, and so on – and on. It is through the questions children ask that a significant part of their identities are forged. It is through the questions that adults ask that a significant part of their spiritual identities are forged. We know about this because we were all children once and we all behaved the same way. But what about adults and their questions?

If we are asked: "Who made the world?" we may answer "God made it," "Chance made it," "Love and hate made it," or what you will. We may be right or we may be wrong. But if we reply: "Nobody made it," we will be accused of trying to be cryptic, smart, or "unsympathetic." For in this last instance, we have only seemingly given an answer; in reality we have *rejected the question*. The questioner feels called upon to repeat [the] problem. "Then how did the world become as it is?" If we now answer; "It has not 'become' at all," [we] will be really disturbed.

This answer clearly repudiates the very framework of [our] thinking, the orientation of [our] minds, the basic assumptions [we have] always entertained as common-sense notions about things in general. Everything has become what it is; everything has a cause; every change must be to some end; the world is a thing, and must have been made by some agency, for some reason. . . . [We are] not conscious [in this process] of assuming any basic principles. They are what a

German would call [our] "*Weltanschauung*," [our] attitude of mind, rather than specific articles of faith (Langer 1951: 15).

So, what about the questions that our Order puts to us? What is it about them that justifies our repeating them over and over, meeting after meeting, year after year?

"Who Art Thou?"

Without her mother-in law, the story of Ruth would probably never have happened. Naomi moved from Judah to Moab with her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons. While in Moab, her husband and both sons died, so she decided to return to Judah. Both of her daughters-in-law offered to go with her, but Naomi told them to stay in Moab because she was old, she would have no more sons and she was at the end of her life. One of the girls, Orpah, decided to stay in Moab, but Ruth said "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to turn away from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and whither thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God." (Ruth 1: 16).

Elimelech had a prosperous relative in Bethlehem whose name was Boaz, and who, like others, was engaged in the harvest. Naomi sent Ruth to glean in his fields, and, after he had spoken kindly to her and shown her some favors, she . . . approached Boaz at night and put herself in his power. Boaz asked who she was.³⁷ He was attracted to her, but he informed her that there was a kinsman nearer than he who had the first right to redeem the estate of Elimelech, and that . . . this kinsman [had] to renounce his right before he (Boaz) could proceed in the matter. . . . The kinsman . . . drew off his shoe in token that he had renounced his rights in favor of Boaz. Boaz thereupon bought the estate from Naomi, married Ruth, and became by her the father of Obed, who in due time became the father of Jesse, the father of King David" (George A. Barton, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*).

Star members ask, "Who is this?" which clearly indicates the necessity of knowing Ruth's story. The actions of Ruth, like those of Jephthah must be interpreted in the light of the customs of the days in which they lived, but more than that, I think the story of Ruth tells of faith and love that goes beyond the boundaries of birth and blood relationships -- a theme that enters, to a lesser degree in the story of the Jewish queen, Esther, who saved her people, after finding favor with Ahasuerus, a Persian king, who married Esther after his first wife, Vashti, fell into disfavor.

As was common in the life of Persian monarchs, two eunuchs formed a conspiracy against Ahasuerus, but a Jewish slave, Mordecai, discovers the plot and tells Queen Esther, who told her husband, the king. The conspirators were hanged and later on the king rewards Mordecai for his fidelity (Esther 6: 2-12). Haman now became the chief adviser of Ahasuerus (Esther 3: 1). Mordecai would not do reverence to Haman, who, scorning to lay hands on Mordecai alone, plots to destroy all the Jews throughout the

³⁷ This sentence was inserted, not taken from the *Jewish Encyclopedia* account. The Biblical reference is The Book of Ruth 3: 9.

kingdom. The king gives his consent (Esther 3: 11), but withdraws it on the intercession of Esther. He puts Haman to death, and raises Mordecai to the position that Haman held. Fresh proclamations are sent out ordering the Jews to defend themselves and to take vengeance on their enemies (Esther 8: 13).³⁸

"The king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the scepter. Then said the king unto her, *what wilt thou*, Queen Esther? And what is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom" (Esther 5: 2-3). Had Esther not succeeded with her request to Ahaseurus, Haman wouldn't have been defeated nor Israel preserved.

Jesus

was the founder of Christianity and was born at Nazareth about 2 B.C. (Luke 3: 23). He was executed at Jerusalem in March or April, in the year 29 of the Common Era. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the life of Jesus as presented in the Gospels is the utter silence about its earlier phases. He was one of a rather large family, having four brothers, Jacob, José, Simon, Judah, besides sisters. It is known that he earned his living by his father's trade -- that of a carpenter. According to Justin Martyr, plows and yokes made by Jesus were still in existence at his (Justin's) time, about the year 120. It is doubtful whether he received any definite intellectual training, the great system of Jewish education not being carried into effect till after the destruction of Jerusalem. It is probable, however, that he could read. He was certainly acquainted, either by reading or by oral instruction, with much of the Old Testament, and his mode of argumentation often resembles that of the contemporary rabbis, implying that he had frequented their society. Only a single incident of his early days is recorded: his behavior about the time of his bar mizwah (or confirmation) in the Temple (Luke 2: 41-52).³⁹

It is fairly well known that Martha told Jesus that if he had been there in Bethany, her brother, Lazarus, wouldn't have died (John 11: 21).⁴⁰ It was Martha who told Jesus that *she knew that whatever Jesus asked of God, it would be granted* (John 11: 22), and Jesus said, "Thy brother shall rise again" (John 11: 23). Martha said she knew he would rise in the "resurrection at the last day," but Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. *Believest thou this?*" (John 11: 25-26).

To say that Martha's story is as much about her brother, Lazarus, as it is about her would be true, but I think there is a more profound reality involved. We are told of this when she says to Jesus, "But I know that even now, whatever

³⁸ Paraphrased (and Biblical references added) to a much longer essay by Gerson B. Levi, Kaufmann Kohler and George A. Barton in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.

³⁹ Short notes taken from a lengthy article by Joseph Jacobs, Kaufmann Kohler, Richard Gottheil and Samuel Krauss in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*.

⁴⁰ Her sister, Mary, echoes this belief later on when Mary "fell down at [Jesus's] feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11: 32).

thou wilt ask of God, God will give it to you" (John 11: 22). Her statement of belief calls to mind the tripartite nature of divinity: in Christian terms, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Jews had great reverence for the triangle, believing it to be a symbol of their God, and we encounter the notion of trinity (or three) in many aspects of Eastern Star. For example, there are three words in each of the passes; there are three sides to a triangle; there are three important events in a human being's existence – birth, life and death. Trees have three divisions; root, trunk and branch, and time (in the English language) has three divisions; past, present and future.⁴¹ It has been said that three is

A sacred number in Freemasonry, with which all labour is commenced and finished. This number reminds us of the three great lights, the three kingdoms of nature, the Holy Trinity, or of the words of Christ: "Where two or three are assembled in my name, there will I be in the midst of you." We may also consider ourselves as the third party in unity and love, whose duty it is to exercise those two cardinal virtues. The Christian can also take the number three as the grand distinguishing doctrine of his faith. There are three principal parts in a [person]; body, soul, and spirit. Faith, love, and hope, support and adorn life.⁴²

I said at the beginning of this talk that the responses we make in our meetings are of special interest in themselves because they evoke the Biblical origins of the five heroines of our Order in meaningful and thought-provoking ways. I hope that I have convinced you of this. Thank you for reading.

⁴¹ Terry, Sarah. 1935. *The Second Mile: Illustrations and Explanations for Study Clubs of the Order of the Eastern Star*. Corpus Christi, TX: Christian Triumph Press, p. 53.

⁴² Macoy, Robert. 1989. *A Dictionary of Freemasonry*. New York: Gramercy Books, p. 685.

NOTES:

LECTURE FIVE Seekers After Light

One day a student of the great Master Nasrudin passes by his house and finds the Master on his knees, rummaging in the grass. "What are you doing, sir?"

"I'm looking for my key."

"But sir, didn't you lose the key in your house?"

"Yes," says Nasrudin, "but there's more light out here."

(Sufi Tale)

That story draws attention to the main distinction I will make during this talk about light: inside and outside. Nasrudin's problem in the story concerns light *inside* his house in contrast to light *outside* his house. My problem of communication is somewhat more complex because it is about the Eastern Star that is *made for us* (the light *outside* ourselves) in contrast to the Eastern Star *we make*: that is, the light *inside* ourselves.⁴³

The Eastern Star that is made for us is everything that can be written down, put into symbols, talked about – even as I am doing here. This is the Eastern Star of meetings and conferences; of charity and events of many kinds. We prepare food, we organize and attend gatherings. You all know what I mean.

The Eastern Star each of us makes for her or himself is more profound. It is a conception, an ideal, if you will; a longing for something that goes beyond our ordinary selves and all of the things that are made for us. The Eastern Star you make for yourself is above and beyond the meeting rooms, the words we memorize, the rituals we perform. It is the inner shrine where the light of the Star perpetually shines.

What do we know about this kind of light?

The presence of light as opposed to its absence (darkness) is a universal metaphor of good and evil. In the Masonic family, light is associated with understanding which can be achieved through knowledge, right-mindedness and compassion. Generally, darkness is thought to be ignorance which is believed to resist light.

These ideas are widely prevalent in both Eastern and Western spirituality. References to light are ubiquitous⁴⁴ in the Christian Bible from the beginning of

⁴³ The inspiration for "the Eastern Star we make for ourselves" comes from a short essay by Carl H. Claudy, in a small book published in 1924 entitled *The Old Past Master*. Washington D.C.: The Masonic Service Association of the United States.

⁴⁴ That is, present everywhere at once or seeming to be.

the Old Testament. I'm sure you are all familiar with Genesis 1: 1-4, which states: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."

Without light there is darkness. Without knowledge there is ignorance. Without understanding, there is discrepancy and misunderstanding. The world as we know it seems constantly to oscillate between pairs of opposites: day and night, light and dark, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, and there are many more. The western world is not alone in these perceptions. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a spiritual system that doesn't follow the doctrine of corresponding principles that are symbolized by light and darkness.

From the Jewish Cabalists (the esoteric⁴⁵ side of Judaism) to the great Persian philosopher Zoroaster, to Pythagoras and the Bhagavad Gita (a book of devotion that is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, a prince of India) to Black Elk, a shaman of the Oglala Sioux -- all major religions seem to be shaped by concepts of paired opposites -- the most significant pair to us being that of outside and inside.

Outer and Inner

From a paper given at the annual California Masonic symposium, we learn that "All traditional societies and institutions are founded on a common human spirituality that seeks to return man to the center of his spiritual existence. The purpose of initiation is to move [humankind] from the circumference to the center, from the outer to the inner, in order to fulfill the function of 'unmoved mover' in relation to the world that is his" (Chornenky 2004: 8).⁴⁶ The same paper quotes the Sioux holy man, Black Elk, who is known to have said,

I am blind and do not see the things of this world; but when the Light comes from Above, it enlightens my heart and I can see, for the Eye of my heart sees everything. The heart is a sanctuary at the center of which there is a little space, wherein the Great Spirit dwells, and this is the Eye. This is the Eye of the Great Spirit by which He sees all things and through which we see Him. If the heart is not pure, the Great Spirit cannot be seen, and if you should die in this ignorance, your soul cannot return immediately to the Great Spirit, but it must be purified by wandering about in the world. In order to know the center of the heart where the Great Spirit dwells you must be pure and good, and live in the manner that the Great Spirit has taught us. The man who is thus pure contains the Universe in the pocket of his heart (Black Elk and Neihardt 2000).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ That is, intended for and/or understood only by an initiated few.

⁴⁶ W. Bro. Chornenky, Dennis V. 2004. Freemasonry and Native American Traditions. Paper for the Annual California Masonic Symposium, San Diego, CA.

⁴⁷ Black Elk and Neihardt, John G. 2000. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Finally, from the *Lexicon of Freemasonry*,⁴⁸ we can read:

Light was the object, and its attainment the end, of all the ancient mysteries. In the Grecian system of initiation, the hierophant⁴⁹ declared that all mankind, except the initiated, was in the darkness. In the Persian rites, the *Divine Lights* were displayed before the aspirant at the moment of illumination, and he was instructed . . . that, at the end of the world, the bad should be plunged . . . into a state of perpetual darkness, while the good should ascend . . . upon a ladder, to a state of eternal light.⁵⁰ The Persians consecrated fire, as containing the principle of light, and the Druids worshipped the Sun as its eternal source.

Freemasons, too, travel in search of spiritual light, which can be found only in the East from whence it springs, and having attained its possession, they are thenceforth called "the sons of light." But the light of masonry is pure, as emanating from the source of all purity and perfection; and Masons, remembering that they are brought out of darkness into light, are admonished to let the light which is in them so shine before all men, that their good works may be seen, and the great fountain of that light be glorified (Mackey 2004: 273).

Initiation

When we are initiated into Eastern Star, the Associate Conductress tells us that we are "seekers after light." She says an initiate's journey through life is a labyrinth through which they can wander blindly were it not for their belief in a Supreme Being.⁵¹ "So," an initiate might think, "I understand the difference between light and dark, night and day, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance. That's not so difficult. I can cope with that."

After my own initiation, however, I found myself wondering if the belief in a Supreme Being – in and of itself – was enough, because I wanted to know about *the role of the Order in relation to my life*. I asked, "what does Eastern Star offer its members that other organizations do not?" I have since learned that in Eastern Star, belief in a Supreme Being is only the beginning. This belief, taken by itself is worthy and blameless, but it is best thought of only as a foundation.

Again, the Associate Conductress says it well: "The lessons which you receive are given to assist you in building your own individual character" (*Ritual*, p. 51). It was only after I occupied the station of Martha that I was able to see more clearly toward greater knowledge of what being a 'seeker after light' truly meant.

⁴⁸ Mackey, Albert G. [M.D.]. 2004[1908]. *Lexicon of Freemasonry*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books.

⁴⁹ A priest who revealed the mysteries at the annual festival of Eleusis (honoring Persephone, Demeter and Dionysus) in ancient Greece.

⁵⁰ [Mackey's Note]: Oliver, Signs and Symbols, p. 107.

⁵¹ *Ritual of the Order of the Eastern Star*. 2000[1889]. Washington D.C.: General Grand Chapter. International Eastern Star Temple (Hampshire Avenue), pages 50-51.

In the Foreword to her small, but extremely valuable book, Sarah Terry⁵² remarks,

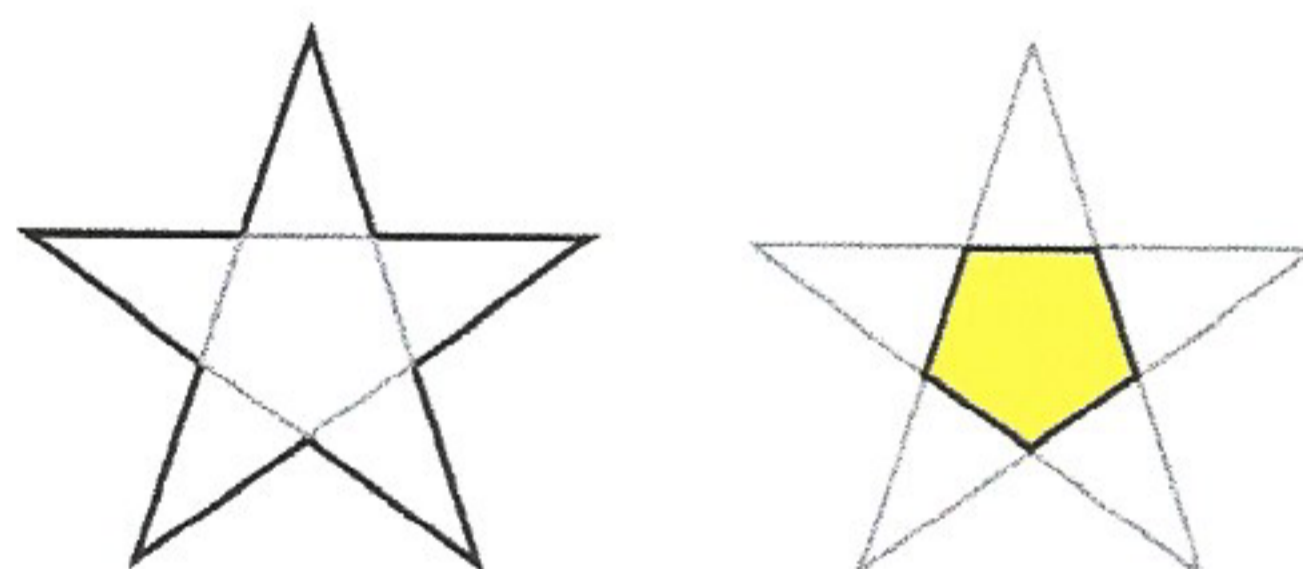
The reason [for] failure of all ritualism is because [people] cling too much to dogma, or tabulation, rather than to the deeper mysteries, or the spiritual side. A close study, therefore, is commendable and well worthy of our time.

The demand of the hour is not the idea that a mere *recitation* of the ritual is all there is to the Order, but to know what this ritual really means, and to create a feeling for the beautiful teachings the ritual portrays . . . is essential (Terry 1935: 3).⁵³

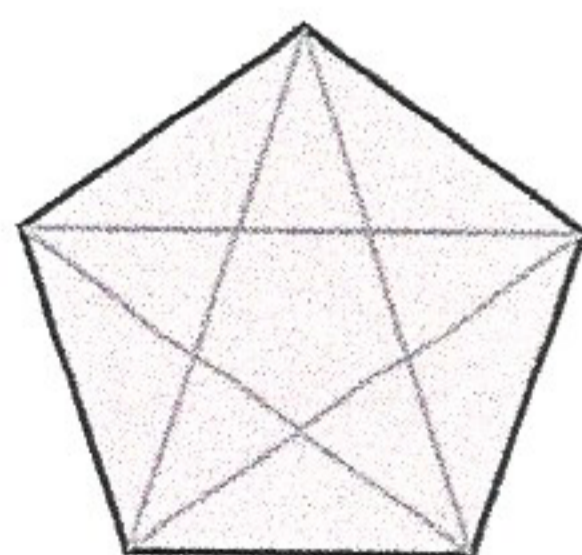
And what does the initiation ritual portray?

It portrays Adah, who argued with her father, removing her veil from her face three times because she was not afraid to die. It portrays Ruth, who engaged in menial labor to support Naomi, showing herself willing to endure whatever was necessary to provide for her. It portrays Esther, who risked royal favor and her life to save her people from death. It portrays Martha, whose unfaltering trust in Jesus resulted in the resurrection of her brother. It portrays Electa, who, in spite of bitter and unjust persecution, told us to "love one another." These are the star points, but the bases of the triangles that form the star points also suggest a geometric form: the pentagon.

[Look at the star, then locate the pentagon *inside* the star. A pentagon is a 5-sided figure, and the number 5 has great significance in our Order. Notice the central pentagon inside the star. This pentagon encloses the altar, upon which reposes the Bible – the word of God.]



[Imagine a pentagon that *encloses* the star. This pentagon represents the human body (head, arms, legs).]



⁵² Sarah H. Terry was the Grand Secretary of the Grand Chapter of the OES, Kentucky. She lived from 1911 to 1941.

⁵³ Terry, Sarah H. 1935. *The Second Mile: Illustrations and Explanations for Study Clubs of the Order of the Eastern Star*. Corpus Christi, TX: Christian Triumph Press.

From Sarah Terry, we also learn that the pentagon enclosing the star represents the human body. If we see the altar in the center of the pentagon, we see the word of God. By doing this, we create *a mental picture of a person enlightened by the word of God* – or Black Elk's "Great Spirit."

The outer pentagon is also thought to represent the five "doors" through which human beings receive education, namely, the five senses, i.e. sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Because it has five sides, the pentagon has also been used to call to mind the five stages of man: birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. Since the pentagon has five sides, it brings to mind the significance of the number 5.

The Warden and Sentinal use five raps at the door. The five triangles that compose the pentagon, *create* a star with five points, each having five representative colors associated with the five heroines who correspond to five symbols of 1. sword and veil, 2. sheaves of grain, 3. sword and crown, 4. broken column and 5. cup. There are 5 letters in the cabalistic word, i.e. F-A-T-A-L, and five words in the cabalistic motto. There are five degrees of relationship of women to a Master Mason, mother, sister, wife, widow and daughter.

The point is that it is more often by means of symbols, rather than words, that we can enrich our understanding about the meanings of things. *We can do this, but we don't have to. We have a choice.* Enrichment of our understanding only occurs through our willing participation, because it is just here that we encounter the conceptions, the ideals, the longing for something that goes beyond our ordinary selves and all of the things that are *made for us*.

We are led, in other words, to the realm of creation; to the eastern star that each of us makes for ourselves. To accomplish this, we need symbols because they are bridges from outer to inner; they are building blocks for the construction of that inner temple where eternal light is able to shine. The "tools" are made for us, but what we create – the star that we make for ourselves – is up to each one of us. We will not find the lost key by looking outside.

_____The End_____