

**THE VOLUME OF THE
SACRED LAW**

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At the Official Visit of the DDGM

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THE VOLUME OF SACRED LAW

If you were asked, "What do you consider the most important feature of Freemasonry?"

you would undoubtedly say,

"The Volume of the Sacred Law is essential to the institution of Freemasonry".

The first condition of admission into, and membership of, the Order is belief in the Supreme Being; has he given that word to us, the Volume of the Sacred Law, is always open in Lodges.

Every candidate is required to take his obligation on that book or the Volume that is held by his particular creed to impart sacredness to an oath or promise taken upon it.

But you don't even need that, because our Ritual proves it for us. You will recall what it says about the VOSL.

- * It teaches us the all-important duties we owe to God, to our neighbours and ourselves;

- * Is to be regarded as the unerring standard of Truth and Justice;

- * Teaches us to believe in the wise dispensation of Divine Providence;

- * Is to rule and govern our faith;

- * May be regarded as the Spiritual Teachings of the GAOTU;

- * Is one of the Great Lights of Freemasonry.

Despite the importance we, as Speculative Freemasons, attach to the VOSL, we are surprised to learn that the records that have come down to us make no reference to the VOSL or sacred writings or whatever name it is known by

as occupying a particular place in Lodge ceremonial before the late 1600's.

This does not mean to say that there was no religious background to the ceremonies of our Masonic forebears.

In fact, we have proof that there was The Regius Manual Script, an operative document thought to date from about 1390, and written in priestly language contains charges and statements such as these:

- * He must love God well and Holy Church.
- * They loved God well and all His lore and were in His service evermore.

Similarly, the second oldest of the surviving early Masonic manuscripts, the Cooke Manual Script. (about 1420) refers to:

- * Man's debt to God.

* An invocation of the Trinity at the beginning, and a Closing Prayer.

and says a Mason is required:

* To love God and Holy Church and all Saints.

In addition to these, many of the old Manual Scripts, Constitutions, or "Old Charges" - documents concerned with operatives' practices and requirements –

"Then one of the elders holds out a book and he or they (that are to be sworn) shall place their hands upon it and the following precepts shall be read".

This is very much like our present-day practice of swearing on oath in Court, but it cannot be assumed that the "Book" here referred to is the VOSL.

It may be the "Book of Charges" – i.e.,
a copy of the Constitutions –

for it is to be remembered that the first complete Bible in Britain was not printed until 1535,
and only fifty years later would not have been
widely available.

Samuel Prichard's exposure,
"Masonry Dissected", of 1730, describes the taking
of the Obligation in somewhat similar terms:
'... my naked Right Hand on the Holy Bible;
there I took the Obligation (or oath) of a Mason'.
We can see from these the central place of the
sacred writings in the ceremonies of the early
Speculative Freemasons had thus been clearly
established by the first few decades of the 18th
Century.

A close reading of the Ritual reveals that the VOSL is referred to both as part of the furniture of the Lodge, and one of the Great Lights.

This apparent inconsistency reflects one aspect of the development of our ceremonies.

The first reference to the VOSL –

Square and Compasses as the Three Great Lights appears in English writings about 1760,

The presence of the VOSL, on the altar of a Lodge may, therefore, appear at first glance at odds with this basic concept.

Its presence is no more than a symbol, a representative of all the great books of the religious teachings, which have significance to particular groups of people.

In some Jurisdictions other works replace the Bible on the altar.

Singapore Lodge, a Lodge working under the English Constitution, uses no fewer than six Vs of SL of different faiths.

Hindu, the Zendavesta of the Parsee, or the Koran of the Mohammedan, Tenack/Torah, new testament, each typifies the Mind or Will of the GAOTU, As the VOSL is not read in our Lodges, its teachings per se are of no consequence. It is a symbol and a symbol only, and it is shown as supporting the other two symbols, the Square and Compasses.

...for us it is an open Book, with only one word written thereon, and that word is "GOD".