

Chichester Chapter of Improvement.
Lesson 4. The Vaulted Chamber.

Lesson/Tutorial 4. The Vaulted Chamber.

(Educator 1)

By the end of this lesson / tutorial the student Companion will be able to:

- Examine and analyse the vaulted chamber.
- Consider the chamber's esoteric meaning.
- Analyse the purpose of the Sojourners actions with relation to the vaulted chamber.
- Analyse and explain the action of the 'Principles' regarding the discovery made by the Sojourners.
- Explain and demonstrate the five signs.

Recommended Ritual: Ceremony of 'Exaltation', part 2. The discovery of the vault; reporting the discovery to the Grand Sanhedrin and reward.

Distance Learning:

Mentors Notes: <https://thesquaremagazine.com/mentorsnotes/>

Solomon: <https://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

RITUAL (Educator 2.)

Open the Chapter

Designate Roles.

Lesson given by Educator 1, 'The 'Vaulted Chamber'.

Ritual (Educator 2) Ceremony of 'Exaltation', part 2. The discovery of the vault; reporting the discovery to the Grand Sanhedrin and reward.

Risings.

Close the Chapter of Improvement.

Next Chapter of Improvement to be confirmed.

The Sacred Secrets of the Vaulted Chamber

(Introduction)

Good morning, Companions.

Today, we embark on a journey into the symbolic heart of Masonry, exploring one of its most profound and central emblems: the Vaulted Chamber, often referred to as the Secret Vault. It is a symbol carrying deep meaning particularly within the ceremonies of the Royal Arch.

While the narrative surrounding the Secret Vault is grounded in the historical context of King Solomon's First Temple and its eventual rebuilding, its true significance extends far beyond mere history. Its power lies in its symbolical and esoteric lessons.

We will examine its historical account as presented in the Royal Arch, delve into its deeper, hidden meanings, and most importantly, discuss how these ancient symbols remain remarkably relevant for our own personal growth and our practice of leadership in the world today.

When researching ritual I like to try and get into the mind of the writers. What were they trying to convey? The probable writers of the Third Degree, Parts 1 and 2, Part 1 being the craft 'Raising' ceremony and Part 2 being the Royal Arch 'Exaltation' ceremony, were probably Dr. John Theophilus Desagulier and James Anderson. Desagulier was a clergyman and Anderson a Scottish minister, both of whom were associates of Isaac Newton who was President of the Royal Society.

It is quite possible that they came across the writings of the 5th Century ecclesiastical writer, Philostorgius, who wrote about the discovery of the 'Lost Word' in a cave under Solomon's Temple. In the writing of the ritual the cave became a vault and the labourers became the sojourners. This account was translated from Greek into English by Samuel Lee in his book '*Orbis Miraculum*' in 1659.

(Historical Meaning)

According to the Masonic traditions preserved in the Royal Arch ceremonies, which are allegories loosely based on Old Testament writings, the history of the Secret Vault begins during the construction of King Solomon's First Temple.

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The three Grand Masters: King Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abiff, being in possession of the writings of Moses and the Prophets, foresaw the potential destruction of the Temple and the nation's captivity should the Children of Israel deviate from God's laws.

To safeguard vital knowledge and sacred treasures, they agreed to construct a secret vault underground. This vault was planned to lead from King Solomon's apartment and end directly beneath the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies.

The allegory states that the vault was structured with nine arches. The ninth Arch being built by the three Grand Masters themselves. It was intended specifically as a secure repository for copies of Holy Vessels and Sacred Treasures and as a place for the Grand Council to meet once the Temple was completed. The other eight arches were constructed by selected skilled workmen, totalling twenty-seven men. Their work occurred at night, away from "prying eyes".

Within the Ninth Arch, they deposited an imitation of the Ark of the Covenant. Inside this Ark, they placed an imitation Pot of Manna, Aaron's Rod, and significantly, a true copy of the Book of the Law. The Book of the Law contained all the biblical writings up to that period and had been found by Hilkiah the High Priest when Josiah was King.

Crucially, the Master's Word, which had been lost upon the death of Hiram Abiff, was placed on the top of the Ark, engraved on a triangular plate of gold. Mysterious characters were engraved on the sides of the triangle. A key to deciphering these mysterious characters was placed inside the Ark, in the Book of the Law. The three Jewels of the Grand Masters (squares) were also placed on top of the Ark to distinguish the deposit as the Master's Word. In the Royal Arch allegory the Ark is replaced by an Altar of Incense, a double cube.

The vault was closed after Hiram Abiff's death and lay buried in darkness for 470 years following the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian captivity.

The vault and its contents were rediscovered by three sojourners during the rebuilding of the Second Temple after the return from captivity. This discovery involved diligent labour among the ruins, finding an arch, and descending into the vault.

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The recovery of the Book of the Law and the Master's Word was a moment of immense religious significance, representing the restoration of sacred knowledge and divine revelation.

Esoteric and Symbolical Meaning.

Beyond the historical narrative, the vault carries profound esoteric and symbolical meaning.

Symbol of a Sacred Repository and Preservation of Truth: The most prominent meaning is the preservation of the long lost Master's Word and other sacred items. The vault represents a secure, hidden sanctuary for preserving vital knowledge and truth through times of potential destruction and loss. It symbolizes the enduring nature of divine truth and Masonic light, kept safe until it could be rightfully restored. The vault itself is described as securely guarded.

Symbol of Anticipating Calamity and Foresight: The decision to build the vault stemmed from the Grand Masters' foresight, recognizing potential loss and making provisions for safeguarding fundamental truths for future generations.

Symbol of Perfection and Completion (The Nine Arches): The division into nine arches symbolizes a journey or progression towards the central truth contained in the Ninth Arch. Passing the arches requires specific signs and knowledge, emphasizing qualification for advancement in understanding.

Symbol of the Journey Towards Truth and Light: The narrative of the sojourners' labour among the ruins symbolizes the diligent search for lost truth and light. The difficult journey and labour, described as toilsome and weary, over "rough and rugged roads", labouring among "broken columns and ruined arches", represents the challenges in the quest for understanding and recovery. Effort is rewarded with discovery. The aim is to receive "further light".

Symbol of the Recovery of Lost Knowledge: The discovery of the Altar, the Book of the Law, and the key to the Master's Word, represents the recovery of lost sacred knowledge and divine revelation. The Master's Word symbolizes the Divine Name, ultimate truth, or the key to divine mysteries.

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Symbol of Divine Providence and Guidance: The contents of the Vault connects to God's provision and validation. The narrative is framed within God's promise of restoration. The motto "Holiness to the Lord", proclaimed upon finding the Book of the Law, reinforces this divine connection. The phrase "I AM THAT I AM", and the biblical passages referenced anchor the degree in religious faith.

Symbol of Fidelity, Silence, and Secrecy: The guarding of the vault by individuals selected for their "fidelity and skill" underscore the importance of guarding sacred knowledge emphasizing discretion.

Symbol of Humility and Exaltation: True growth requires humility before one can be "exalted".

Symbol of Hope and Restoration: The vault's discovery after destruction and captivity symbolizes hope and restoration after devastation. It represents recovering what is most valuable and rebuilding.

Symbol of Labour and Diligence: The use of working tools (crow, pick-axe, spade) and the labour involved symbolize that the pursuit of truth requires persistent effort and appropriate means. The Sword and Trowel, symbolize the dual duty to uphold the secrets and to cement and complete the Secret Vault.

Applying the Lessons to Personal Development.

How can these ancient symbols from the vaulted chamber apply to our lives today? As the sources highlight, they offer valuable lessons for our personal growth and development.

1. **Diligent Search for Truth and Knowledge:** Personal development is a lifelong quest for self-knowledge and understanding. Like the sojourners, this search is often challenging, described as making a "toilsome and weary way—over rough and rugged roads". It requires perseverance through difficulties ("overcome every obstacle") and diligent effort ("labouring among broken columns and ruined arches"). The vault teaches us that effort is rewarded with discovery and finding "further light". It encourages us to be lifelong learners, seeking truth beyond surface understanding.

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2. **Preserving Core Principles and Values:** Just as the Grand Masters safeguarded sacred treasures, we must identify and consciously preserve our own fundamental ethics, values, and principles. The motto "Holiness to the Lord" serves as a reminder of this internal sanctuary. The vault is a metaphor for creating a secure inner repository for what is most true and sacred to us, especially amidst external pressures or turbulent times.

3. **Humility on the Path to Exaltation:** Humility is essential for personal growth and gaining deeper understanding. Recognizing our limitations and being open to learning allows us to learn and "be exalted". It's a reminder that pride can be an obstacle to development.

4. **Fidelity, Silence, and Secrecy:** The emphasis on guarding secrets and being "Select", underscores the importance, trustworthiness, and discretion in personal conduct. Knowing when to maintain silence and keep confidences, is a crucial aspect of maturity and building trust with others.

5. **Recovery and Restoration After Setbacks:** The rediscovery of the vault and its contents during the rebuilding of the Second Temple after destruction and captivity symbolizes hope and restoration after devastation. Difficult periods in life can feel like destruction or captivity. But the narrative offers hope that even after losses, it is possible to recover what is valuable, find guidance (represented by the Book of the Law), and begin a path of rebuilding and restoration.

Applying the Lessons to Leadership Skills.

The lessons from the vaulted chamber also offer valuable insights for effective leadership in today's world.

1. **Foresight and Strategic Planning:** The Grand Masters' foresight in anticipating destruction and planning to safeguard knowledge teaches leaders the importance of strategic foresight. Leaders must anticipate challenges and plan proactively to safeguard resources, values, and critical knowledge for long-term organizational survival and success. This involves thinking beyond immediate concerns.

2. **Guarding and Protecting Valuables:** The vault is described as securely guarded. Leaders are entrusted with protecting their team,

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organizational assets, and core values. This requires vigilance, security measures, and boundaries – the leader acts as a steward and protector.

3. **Selecting and Trusting the Qualified:** The selection of individuals based on their "fidelity and skill" for the vault work highlights the importance of discerning and selecting the right people for critical roles. Trust is earned through demonstrated capability and trustworthiness. Leaders must ensure those entrusted with responsibility are "duly qualified".

4. **Guidance and Transmission of Knowledge:** The Ninth Arch as a meeting place for the Grand Council and the Book of the Law representing guidance symbolize the leader's role in guiding the team and transmitting essential knowledge and organizational culture. Leaders provide vision and direction, like the sacred law. Mentoring ensures continuity ("transmitted to your successors", "transmitted to our posterity").

5. **Inspiring and Directing Labour:** The directing of the sojourners' labour among the ruins, demonstrates the leader's role in motivating and directing the team towards goals. This includes assigning tasks and inspiring diligence. The idea that labourers were rewarded for their efforts also suggests recognizing and valuing contributions.

6. **Accountability and Consequences:** There is the importance of accountability in leadership. Failure to fulfil duties, particularly guarding critical responsibilities, can harm the individual and the group. Leaders must be vigilant and hold themselves and others accountable.

7. **Rebuilding and Uniting the Team:** The Sword and Trowel, implements linked to the vault, symbolizing defence and the act to "cement and complete the Secret Vault" connects to the leader's responsibility to foster unity and cohesion within their team. Leaders defend the team from external threats while simultaneously building strong internal relationships and a collaborative environment ("unite and cement the brotherhood").

Conclusion.

The Vaulted Chamber, or Secret Vault, is far more than a historical anecdote within our degrees. It is a powerful, multi-layered symbol.

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It represents the secure repository of ancient truth, the diligent search required to recover lost knowledge, the fidelity and secrecy needed to guard it, and the ultimate promise of divine restoration and continuity.

By contemplating the symbols of the vault – the hidden truth, the journey, the labour, the guardianship, the recovery – we gain insights applicable to our own personal growth as a continuous journey of self-improvement and our responsibilities as leaders in protecting values, guiding others, and fostering resilience within our sphere of influence.

May we always remember the lessons of the Secret Vault, diligently seeking truth in our lives, preserving our core values, acting with fidelity and discretion, and leading with foresight, accountability, and a commitment to rebuilding and unity in our communities and organizations.