

It is 165 years ago, and two Masons are traveling together to the state capital, to attend Grand Lodge. After spending the night at an inn, they find themselves faced with a serious problem: how will they know whose horse is whose?

“Easy,” says the first brother. “I foresaw this difficulty so I cut a swatch off my horse’s tail.”

“Aha,” said the other brother, “That is very wise. I should do the same thing.” The next morning they emerge from their lodgings and wonder again how to tell the horses apart.

“Easy,” says the first brother “I foresaw this too, so I marked my horse behind the ear.”

“What a great idea,” replied the second brother, “I’ll have to do that too.”

On the third morning, however, the first traveler has no solution. He hasn’t cut any more hair nor made any other marks to tell the horses apart. How will they tell the horses apart? They ponder their problem, worry and think, pacing back and forth until finally one of them comes up with the answer.

“I know,” he says. “It’s easy. You take the black horse; I’ll take the white one.”

Sometimes we look for a complex solution, when the simple one is right in front of us.

I want to talk to you tonight about the future of Freemasonry. I want to speak of maps and how we look at things. I want to speak of fire and rectification. Of historical obsession, of the Temple in Jerusalem and what happened after it was destroyed, and how we might learn today from the lessons learned 2000 years ago to ensure the healthy future of the Craft. I want to speak of going forward with a set of tools that is as old as Zerubbabel’s Temple, but is as fresh and relevant to young masons today as Facebook is. I’ll throw in some interesting but non-essential trivia. And I want to give you guys something to think about. So if you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with me -- that’s good. We learn by questioning. I’m here tonight to do the work of X-Oriente...and that is to use tonight to start a conversation.

Masonry is a kind of universal— in many ways it addresses universal aspects of the human condition, and this is one of the reasons that the Craft transcends any one religion, ethnicity or nationality. And when you think about it, the human condition hasn’t

changed all that much since Solomon's time. It's been said that "we don't need more members in Freemasonry, we need more Freemasonry in our members." And it's a nice thought. And so my next thought would be, "Great. So how do we get started?"

There have, in recent times been a lot of papers written on the problems of Freemasonry. There was the excellent "It's About Time" paper published by the Masonic Service Association. The Knights of the North gave us "Laudable Pursuits." There was Brent Morris' "Voting with their Feet," Tom Jackson's "What Are We Trying To Save?" and Richard Graeter's "Reform Freemasonry." All are excellent reads. All diagnose many of the problems in the craft and focus on what needs to change.

There are some common themes in all these papers:

- Freemasonry needs to be personally relevant to its members.
- Freemasonry needs to downsize in a meaningful way
- Freemasonry needs more rigor and discipline
- Masonic organization and infrastructure must flatten and attract competent leaders who are not afraid of flatter, more egalitarian governance
- Masonry will revive itself bottom-up, and not through top-down Grand Lodge membership programs, one day classes or other gimmicks

What we haven't figured out yet is HOW. HOW do we make this happen? Well one approach to the HOW is Traditional Observance. It strives to reverse the trend of the cheapening of Masonry. Making Masonry more expensive, more challenging, and with higher standards is a good thing.

But even as I read these papers I was starting to get a picture. I was seeing a pattern. I hear a lot about two Masonic polarities in North America. It's like there is this map, with the good ol' boy Pancake Breakfast, fish-frying, fundraising style of Masonry at one end, and something that looks very much like an idealized version of Continental European Masonry on the other. Flannel and overalls on one coast, white tie and tails on the other. And that map, like all maps, is a picture and not the terrain itself. And looking at the map, I couldn't help but realize there was something missing. For instance, I know of a "biker lodge" that does a lot of the fish-fry style Masonry, with members often showing up for degrees in a leather vest and no shirt underneath. Many in my lodge would see this style of dress as disrespectful. They would be aghast. Yet this lodge also has a high esprit d' corps, high attendance, high membership standards, and competent, if not excellent, ritual work. I also know of invitational bodies that have limited memberships,

fancy jewels, Latin mottos, and they are scarcely more than tired supper clubs where the only Masonic content is a short, tired, historical paper and several hours of Masonic gossip. The map is like one of those medieval maps that show Jerusalem as the center of the world. It reveals more about the thinking of the prevailing society than the actual geography.

Let's rotate the map and look at it from a different vantage point. In every lodge, in every Grand Lodge, in every Scottish Rite, in every Commandery, in every one of these bodies are two Masonries, that exists concurrently and sometimes compete with each other.

I'm speaking of the contrast between CORPORATE and INTIMATE Freemasonry. Yeah, Corporate and Intimate Masonry.

I first heard the term after several glasses of wine at a luncheon during Masonic Week in Washington DC. It helped me see the terrain in a whole new way. Upon discovering that map, it opened up a whole new world for me.

Let's think about this for a minute: Corporate vs. Intimate Freemasonry

By corporate I mean in the Latin sense -- "of the body." Corporate Masonry is about the Structure of Masonry. The body of Masonry. The line. The Grand Line. Advancing. Moving up the chairs. Performing ritual. It's about titles and awards. Special aprons and neck jewels, ribbons and silk cords. Rings and the endless supply of lapel pins. It's two and four-star generals, red hats and white hats and purple hats with gold braid. Of engraved swords and plumed chapeaux with gold shoulder braids. It's the letters after your name. Membership in invitationals.

Corporate Masonry appeals to the alpha-male in each of us. It's our "masonic career." in addition to reproductive organs on the outside of our bodies, the GAOTU endowed us with a drive to compete and succeed. To get ahead. To get to the top. It's natural. It's not evil. But c'mon, we're all brothers here. Let's be honest with ourselves. All of that schwag is hugely motivating. Without it masonry would be a lot duller.

And the hilarious thing is that we like to pretend it doesn't matter. I have a brother who wrote an article in a Masonic magazine, and he was trying to compose the little blurb at the end which editors call a shirt-tail. It's a little blurb that tells you something about the

author. Which is usually 1 or 2 lines long. In it, he included his entire Masonic resume, all 2 1/2 pages of it. When I suggested a reduction of about 95%, he said, "I myself don't care, but *others* are impressed." ... Riiiiight. Look, I know he meant well. He thought all that shmutz on his Masonic resume gave him credibility. He was young. But not at all unique. We all do that to some degree.

If we really didn't want anyone to know, we wouldn't wear the bling, we wouldn't wear the ring or the hat, or have the stickers on our car, or the vanity plate reading "33RD MSN."

On the other side of the map is Intimate Masonry. Intimate Masonry happens in the spaces between Corporate Masonry. It's the morning after the 1st degree when the new brother tries to make sense of what happened to him. It's beers and cigars after lodge. It's the study of Masonic symbols, their internal transformation into working tools, and the application of those tools to the hundreds of choices we make each day in our lives, outside the tyled lodge.

Once we had a chamber of reflection for our candidates, with the acronym V.I.T.R.I.O.L. written on the wall, for our candidates to reflect on. The acronym stood for:

VISITA INTERIOR TERRA RECTIFICANDO INVENIES OCCULTUM LAPIDUM

VISIT THE INTERIOR OF THE EARTH AND RECTIFYING YOURSELF YOU WILL FIND THE HIDDEN STONE.

How many of us know that? Know where it comes from? How many of practice that every day? How many of us know how to practice that every day? How many of us know what the Stone is? Intimate Masonry is Masonry applied to living stone. It's the meaning of the craft, not its form. It's about taking a bunch of tools and learning how to use them to create something special and eternal. Intimate Masonry is the mastery of the soft skills. Learning to help our brothers. To build them up. To shore up their weaknesses. To learn to forgive them, and forgive ourselves. It's not only receiving the light but learning how to use it -- learning what it's made of and how to direct that light into the darkness outside the door of the lodge. And Intimate Masonry is done not in solitude, but in a community. In a lodge.

For a long time in my jurisdiction our practice has been to give a catechism of memory work to the candidate and this is the work that qualifies them for advancement. I've always wondered if that was enough. I'm not sure how you do things here in Canada, but in other parts of the world, Apprentices and Fellowcrafts spend a year of study and present a paper in lodge before advancing. We kept the corporate stuff and left the intimate to each individual candidate. When discussing this with a friend at grand lodge one year I was told, "All we do is show him the tools. It's up to the candidate to learn to use them."

I'm sorry but I reject that. If I were to teach my son the ins and out of using a chain saw simply by showing him a chain saw, I would be at best a horribly negligent father. We need more group study, more instruction, more mentoring, more intimate masonry, not less.

So by now it probably sounds like Intimate masonry = good, corporate masonry = bad. But it's not about good or bad. It's about balance. The truth is, you need both. There's a trend I've seen in online forums and blogs to denigrate the role of Grand Lodges and question their necessity altogether. But Grand Lodges are important. They create standards for our communities, keep us regular and together, and help manage that regularity across our lodges, between us and other Masonic jurisdictions. Now the wisdom of specific Grand Lodge programs or actions -- that's a topic for a different day. Grand Lodges are what make us a community. Without them, we'd just be a bunch of lodges. It would be chaos—not an Order.

Progressive lines have gotten a bum rap of late, but they are important too. Progressive lines when managed well, train Masons in the management and leadership skills needed to lead the lodge as Worshipful Master. Having just emerged from my year in the East, I know that the time I spent in the line not only prepared me, not only made me learn the ritual, but it gave me the kind of commitment and sense of stewardship that spending years as part of an officer corps can provide. Being master taught me a lot about leadership and compassion, but it was for me a progressive journey to have its full benefit. I am much more clear now about what Masonry is and what it isn't.

Without that training in a progressive line, I would not have been as prepared to take the East. I've heard stories of new mason who soon after being raised are placed in a dais station. I'm sure many fulfill their duty well but I can't help but think they've been somehow cheated out of a first-class education. Progressive lines when they are active

training grounds and not just a game of musical chairs is a great education in leadership. And those are just some of the gifts that Corporate Masonry bestows.

The problem is when corporate masonry becomes all-consuming. We live in a time of obvious Masonic downsizing yet we maintain our organizations as if they were the monoliths they once were. Blue Lodge. Chapter. Council. Commandery. AMD. Rosicrucians. KCYH. Scottish Rite Bodies. Shrine Temples. Shrine Units. Grotto. Sciots. Red Cross of Constantine. Knight Masons. Royal Order of Scotland...the list goes on and on and on. And all those bodies need committed bodies to run them and keep them alive. If you are fully vested in what I've heard called the Masonic Family then you are BUSY. You could be out every night of the week. I know guys who are members of several Blue Lodges, in the Scottish Rite, York Rite and many of the invitationals. Of course most of the guys who do this are single with no kids, or retired empty-nesters with grown kids. Many are in several lines simultaneously, and if they're not attending a Masonic event, they are preparing for a meeting, memorizing ritual, organizing programs or serving on committees.

The activities and obligations are never-ending. We publish masonic resumes. We compete for the top spots. We politic. We collect jewels, rings, hats, badges, cordons, ribbons, sashes, swords and endless parade of lapel pins. "Meliorating badges whores," is how one brother described it to me. When I heard that I laughed hysterically. But comedy comes from truth, right? While a little harsh, it was more than a little true. We want to earn that stuff. We compete for it.

And Masonry rewards that competition. And in rewarding it, we incent that kind of behavior. I'm told that the Supreme Council of the NMJ in Lexington MA awards our Scottish Rite Valley one 33rd coronet for every 75 new members in the Valley. SR masons fight to be the top-line signers of petitions, as they are rewarded for bringing in new members. They get mentioned at meetings, in the magazine and they get...you guessed it—lapel pins with a diamond added each time they bring in a multiple of new members. Watch the newly raised mason. Watch the Scottish Rite petitions whipped out like ninjas whipping out their shuriken. To many in the Scottish Rite, the new Mason isn't so much an opportunity for mutual education as he is fresh meat. The message is clear—growth = good. For a large appendant body like the Scottish Rite, it's about membership numbers, and while I gently mock it, I totally understand why it happens.

Corporate Masonry needs those numbers. Buildings need to be maintained. Programs need bodies. Magazines and websites need to be paid for. Grand Bodies need funding. And with the rate of membership churn, if you want 10, you've got to recruit 100. Nobody wants to be that Master who says, "Yeah, we had to suspend half our members," or the grandmaster who reports a large number of arrested charters. Can you blame them? So I'm not here to condemn it. I understand and I have sympathy. I get it.

And we all know this. I have Masonic papers stacked knee high arguing for change. They all clear on what needs to happen and why, but not so hot on how to make it real. Steps. I want steps.

So while we wait for the big turnaround, we turn to what? Historical research. Or worse, History Channeling. We link ourselves with the Templars. The Alchemists, the Illuminists, Presidents, Kabbalists, Pharaohs, Mayans, UFO visitors. We endlessly explore our influence in the Enlightenment, debate the Morgan Affair, the first Grand Lodge, the Ancients and Moderns. We obsess over famous Masons, dead Presidents. We biographize prominent and obscure Masons. Our intellectual might goes toward researching what we once were. We were great. We were huge. We were rich. We had big buildings. Grand edifices. Huge rooms of fabulous treasure!

I know of few active organizations that are as obsessed about their history as we are. And again, I'm not criticizing it. I love history. I've been researching the history of my lodge for years. I'm even guilty of History Channeling too.

And why are we obsessed? I think it's because we yearn for better days. Days when we had intimate Masonry. We yearn for those feelings of true brotherhood -- when brothers would pledge their lives to each other. We yearn for days when being a Mason was a mark of respect in the community -- a status symbol. Maybe in our history we hope to find a secret that will unlock Masonry to show us the intimate Masonry we walked in the door for.

So let's start with a simple postulate: personal transformation must happen before institutional change can take place. If you want your institutional culture to change, you must first change the people in it.

Intimate Masonry is about transforming the individual through working in a group. It's the internal work of Masonic transformation -- turning symbolic tools into choices every day.

Intimate Masonry was the Craft that was practiced at great personal risk by prisoners in the Esterwegen Concentration Camp during the Second World War. It's in the march of brethren at a Masonic funeral that is proof to his astonished widow and children that her husband and their father *meant* something not just to to somebody, but to a community of distinguished men.

The truth is, we crave that experience. It's what we hoped to find as we made our progress from apprentice to Master. Freemasonry is not an organization. It is a mystery, and we are initiated into it gradually. First as we are introduced to our brothers, then as we learn about our Craft and wages, and finally as we are reborn into a world without intellectual constraints. And for too many of us, we are left after that transformative experience with a new ritual book, a seat on the sidelines, and a pancake breakfast to plan.

For many of us hungry for more knowledge, there is precious little outside of historical scholarship and the essays of Pike, Hall and the other reprints that Kessinger publishes. So we join appendant bodies which promise us more light but instead give us more degrees...more tools. That's a totally guy thing, isn't it? Got a hard job? I need more tools! Some of us wait a while and upon realizing that this great light isn't coming, we compromise—we go into corporate Masonry or they get bored and drop out, become dues-paying inactive members or worse, drop NPD—non payment of dues.

Some get more into esoteric societies, some of which, like the Martinist and Rosicrucian Orders, that had their roots in Freemasonry. Others promise deep occult knowledge but ultimately don't deliver much beyond what's already there -- more degrees, more titles, more grades to ascend to. Some of us, sick of how Masonry was becoming too easy and cheap, decided we needed to rediscover our standards. This led to the Traditional Observance movement. And Traditional Observance is a good first step. Dressing better definitely puts us in a better frame of mind. Traditional Observance is a flavor of masonry -- and it will be a lab to develop ways of doing things that can influence the greater body of the craft. Traditional Observance is the kind of flavor of Masonic practice that makes Masonry more aspirational and more special. An acquired taste. I am not convinced that every lodge should be a Traditional Observance Lodge. Yet I find it interesting that the group that started the Traditional Observance movement, the Masonic Restoration Foundation, even in its name, looks back to a Fraternity that I'm not sure every really existed. After all, what exactly are we restoring?

The challenge we face in the 21st century is creating a right-sized Masonry that can scale in both directions and fulfill its promise, irrespective of “style.” the characteristics of such a craft would be:

- Portable, not dependent on buildings or real estate
- Can engage on both corporate and intimate levels
- Provides intellectual fulfillment and social fulfillment
- Provides a structure for translating Masonic symbolism and morality into everyday behavior

We have to build Masonry around a culture of intellectual inquiry. A culture of study. It may seem like a daunting task, but it’s doable. We have to think different. It’s been done before, and I’d like to share the story with you, as it’s a great allegory to where we find ourselves now. The story itself is ancient -- more ancient than the ancients and moderns, more ancient than the Templars. You have to go back to the days of the Temple.

Let’s go back to the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, not long after Jesus was crucified. To ancient Jews, their faith revolved around the Temple. It was quite literally God’s house -- the throne of the Lord here on Earth. Just as the Greeks had Olympus, the Jews’ identity and religious expression was tied in large part to a set of practices that involved the Temple. The ancient Jews were regarded not as a religion but as a national ethnicity. Judeans throughout the world were regarded like Koreans, or Romanians today.

By the time of the Roman Empire, however, things were changing. Thanks to Hellenization and trade throughout the empire, there were large Jewish communities in Rome, Alexandria and elsewhere in the empire. Houses of Assembly (called *synagogue* in Greek) were built as places for Jews to get together, socialize, learn and pray. These assemblies evolved during the Babylonian Captivity and persisted even after the Second Temple was built by Zerubavel. These assemblies were very much like lodges — meetings were all men, with business, followed by ritual, followed by a meal and study. But the main focus of the Judean national religious life was the Temple and the litany of sacrifices that governed religious life for the Jewish people. It helps us understand why the Babylonian captivity, which only lasted about 70 years, was so devastating to Israelite culture. Without the Temple and the priesthood as their national and spiritual anchor, The Jewish sense of self was in danger of vanishing in a puff of

Babylonian assimilation. Before the Babylonians there were 12 Tribes. After the Captivity there were only 3 left to return to rebuild the Temple.

By the time of the Romans, Judean culture was corrupt and in trouble. The Romans running the place hand-picked the powerful Herodian High Priests, (Herod made sure to marry into the Annas, the High Priest's family) who politically answered to Rome and not to the Jewish people. And Obviously the Romans picked priests that were sympathetic not to Judean values but to Hellenic philosophies. Herod the Great had beautified Jerusalem but had pretty much neglected the countryside. The Romans taxed the land into a perpetual state of poverty for most in the countryside. Jewish thinkers had split into several factions or parties.

The Sadducees (also known as Zadokites) saw Judaism as revolving around the Temple. For them, no Temple, no Judaism. The Saducees came from the educated, Hellenized aristocratic classes and had connections to Rome. It was corporate Judaism to the highest degree. Like many Grand Lodges of today, the priests of the Temple relied on the Temple tax that Jews paid. Many synagogues also sent representatives to Jerusalem twice a year for the required sacrifices on behalf of their members. To the casual observer, the Temple was a vast religious and commercial center. It functioned as a national currency exchange, and of course the priests and Caesar each got their cut. With all that money flowing through the institution the Temple quickly devolved into a corrupt, political system that was becoming more and more irrelevant to educated Jews outside of the aristocracy. In fact it was this very corruption that Jesus of Nazareth was protesting when he threw the moneylenders out of the Temple, and was probably the crime that got the Romans upset enough to have him crucified. The Temple was an essential part of religious life but for most people it was increasingly irrelevant and spiritually unrewarding.

The Pharisees were another Jewish group of the time. The name comes from the word Pari'shah which means "to separate," as in to make oneself holy. Here's another bit of trivia: the word Kadosh is usually translated as "holy" but its root is really "set apart" or "separate." To be holy in Hebrew is to be set apart. The Pharisees had their philosophical roots in the diaspora of the Babylonian exile. Pharisees saw the whole temple system as outmoded and corrupt, since it was essentially a tool of a Roman control. They believed in a world to come and a continued existence after death, (the Saducees did not have that kind of belief.) They were critics of the system, who believed that God wanted change, not through sacrifices, but through moral behavior and prayer.

The Saducees saw the Pharisees as dangerous innovators who were inviting God's wrath because of their innovations. They also saw them as ignorant (by Hellenistic standards) of the world. In short the aristocracy looked down on the Pharisees as a bunch of liberal...well...hicks. The Pharisees for their part rejected all things Hellenic seeing the Greco-Roman cultural influences as impure and corrupting.

A radical group, the Zealots, emerged from the Pharisees. Zealots went much further politically than the Pharisees, and advocated the violent overthrow of Rome (with god's help of course), and they were as often at odds with their fellow Jews as they were the Roman government. The Talmud refers to these guys as *biryonim*, meaning "wild" or "barbaric." In our allegory, I liken these guys to Masonic splinter groups like Jeff Peace's Grand Orient of America or whatever he's calling it this week, or the RGLC across the pond. Maybe you've seen these guys on the Internet -- they are the ones who take over any and all discussion threads, turning even the friendliest of exchanges into a revolutionary call for the abolishment of Grand Lodges, The revival of Memphis Misraim, the admission of atheists and women, etc., etc.

There was one other party in the marketplace of ideas in Judea. This group had their roots in the original Zadokite high priesthood that was deposed around 150 BCE, when Hasmoneans took over the priesthood. If you remember your scripture or your Cryptic degrees, King David had granted Zadok and his descendants the High Priesthood in perpetuity because of his loyalty during Absalom's rebellion. Later, during the Maccabean revolt (Book of Maccabees), the Hasmoneans took over the high priesthood and installed a High Priesthood that quickly came under the influence of Hellenic ideas. What became of the original Zadokite priesthood? The original Zadokites became the *Essenes*. They felt God was punishing the Jews because they were failing to live by God's law. The Essenes retreated to a desert community where they practiced a strict, purity-obsessed form of Judaism in preparation for the day when God would restore them (they referred to themselves as the "Sons of Light") to the priesthood and return Judea to a "kingdom of God." For them the Kingdom of God was no spiritual realm...it was a real, political entity with King David (or his descendent) at its head. These guys were the Traditional Observance Jews. Their sect was hard to join, expensive, with lots of requirements, strict codes of dress and conduct—but also immensely creative and personally fulfilling for its members.

And the rank and file? They mostly looked backwards to a time when they were ascendant. They were like us, History Channeling. To the days of David and Solomon. They awaited David's return, calling him *Moshiach* —Messiah, the Anointed One.

All these influences percolated for years with each party criticizing the others until in 66 CE when it all came to a head. Rebellion broke out. The Zealots took control of Jerusalem and held off the Roman Legions for 4 years. The Romans under General Vespasian began a long siege of Jerusalem designed to starve the inhabitants. Meanwhile the Zealots and Essenes warred with the Sadducees, the Sadducees against the Pharisees, and the Pharisees with the Zealots. It was chaos.

It would have made sense if the Jews did not survive past this traumatic time. Like other lost cultures, the Hittites, or Chaldeans, the Jews should have simply been snuffed out, a victim of history. But something happened, something that transformed an entire culture from one based on a political nationalistic identity and a single building, to a smaller, nimble culture that could adapt to the challenges of a far-flung diaspora. What happened? This is the part of the story they *don't* tell you on the History Channel.

Well there was this guy. One guy. His name was Jonathan ben Zakkai. He was a Pharisee rabbi who was trapped inside Jerusalem during the siege. He noticed one day that people were boiling straw and drinking the water for nourishment. He realized at that point that it was game over. The Romans would win, the Temple would be destroyed, and a whole lot of people were going to die.

He went to the Zealots and tried to reason with them, but he had no success. The Zealots would fight to the death, die heroically and take Jerusalem, its inhabitants and the Temple with them. But really they were convinced that God would intervene in the last minute and destroy the Romans in a miracle of Biblical proportions. Ben Zakkai could clearly see that Jerusalem was on the crazy train, and his only hope was to get out and try and negotiate with the Romans to save lives. He had to get out, something the Zealots would never allow.

Ben Zakkai knew that because of the holiness of the city, the dead had to be buried outside Jerusalem's walls. Unable to leave the city alive, Ben Zakkai faked his own death. The Talmud describes the whole plot. It was quite ingenious with a short fake illness, fake visitations, even a fake corpse and fake coffin.

His students carried the fake coffin outside the walls in an elaborate funeral procession, and once he got out, he went straight to General Vespasian's camp. There he greeted Vespasian as the Emperor. The General was furious at such talk, especially in front of his men, as it was treasonous and could get the general in a lot of trouble.

But Ben Zakkai was insistent. "No, you *are* a great king, for it is written that only a great king can bring down the walls of Jerusalem," he said. Vespasian was about to lock up this treasonous crackpot when a messenger arrived with news from Rome. The messenger announced that the emperor Nero was dead by his own hand, Rome was now at civil war, and the "Great Men of Rome" the Talmud reads, (which historically were the powerful Armies of Syria and Egypt) had chosen Vespasian as the new Emperor. Vespasian stood there gobsmacked. Amazed, Vespasian offered to grant Ben Zakkai any wish he could -- except to call off the siege.

Ben Zakkai knew he could not save Jerusalem or the Temple. He saw the struggles between the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots and realized that compared to the destruction of Jerusalem these struggles were suddenly irrelevant. Ben Zakkai realized the Judeans needed a new way. A simpler way. A more intimate way. He asked Vespasian permission to establish a small school in the town of Yavneh, a tiny rural town near the Mediterranean coast. A small school. Not authority, money, or influence in Rome. Vespasian was puzzled as to why this nutty Jew just blew a golden opportunity. He said the Roman equivalent, of "sure kid, knock yourself out."

And Jerusalem fell, as did Masada -- which any regular watchers of the History Channel could tell you. And so thanks to either a stroke of luck or some crazy political shrewdness, the school was established.

It was a tiny, humble school. But the school did great things:

- . The canonized the books of what we know today as the Old Testament: the Tanach
 - . They adapted the priestly prayers that were said as part of the Temple sacrificial service into a prayer that individual Jews could perform themselves. These prayers are today still said 3 times a day, by Jews around the world.
 - . They introduced the practice of lighting candles on the Sabbath and salting the Sabbath bread as a substitute for the Temple sacrifice.
- They created rules requiring certain prayers to be said in a quorum or minyan, thus requiring Jews to be a part of a community.
- . They wrote down the Mishnah, which would become the first part of the Talmud.

- . They codified many of the earliest mystical texts, laying the groundwork for the development of Kabbalah.
- . And most relevant to us, they established a methodology of exegesis — a way of studying the sacred texts that kept it fresh relevant and alive. Methods of exegesis is called hermeneutics. The mystics at Yavneh developed a system of hermeneutics that integrated both critical and experiential aspects of understanding text and ritual.

The scholars at Yavneh took a culture and religion that was building-centered, and made it flexible, portable and adaptable to anywhere in the world Jews might find themselves. In other words, they successfully transformed corporate-dominated Judaism into intimate-dominated Judaism. And this remains as part of the fabric of Jewish culture today. While there are movements and communities, there is no central authority in Judaism. If we can ignore for a moment the religious aspects of Judaism, and focus only on the cultural dimension, like Freemasonry it is a set of common values and practices around ancient landmarks that revolve around a community and its ability to transform the individual.

So again, HOW did they do it? They did it on a foundation of two things: placing a high value on scholarship and study, and creating meaningful experiences that ordinary people could participate in, but that more learned men could find deeper meaning within.

Masonry is already more than halfway there. We have, in our degrees, the experiences and literature to create compelling experiences. What we lack is a standard hermeneutical methodology that allows us to continually examine our traditions, values, and literature to make the text and ritual relevant to today, this moment.

In the past, we've had some excellent commentary on Masonic symbolism. Authors such as Albert Pike, Manly Hall, John Fort Newton and others made serious and deep explorations into the meaning of Masonry. For their time and circumstances, they managed to create a rich semiotic link between their lives, society, values and masonic traditions.

In *Morals and Dogma*, Albert Pike baked a hell of a cookie. What he doesn't give us is the recipe. In my estimation, Pike is regarded as a great Masonic scholar because he worked the process. The process. I think that what's most important is not the commentary, the product, though it makes a hell of a fine addition to my Masonic

Library. Instead, it is the process—the journey. I have Morals and Dogma on my bookshelf. But the words while interesting aren't *alive* for me. They are history. A text to be studied. But when that text is subjected to active study in both a critical and experiential way, that's when it will come alive. That is one of the paths to the genesis of intimate masonry.

One of the important products of the Yavneh school was creating an expectation that all men — old, young, rich, poor, study Torah. They said at Yavneh that it was better to be a learned outcast--a bastard, than a ignorant High Priest. Of course not everyone can be a sage. But everyone can find a deeper meaning in the ritual and lectures for them. Study can bring Masonic tradition to life— it allows the text to become an active partner in what my Californian brothers would call Masonic Formation and it can help provide comfort, build stronger bonds between brothers and create a sense of understanding and governance over one's life.

Group study was another important aspect of Yavneh. Masonry is a group activity, and masonic study is best done in groups. Traditionally among the rabbis of Yavneh, study was done in small groups over a light meal. Members at a study group would break off into pairs and study one aspect of a text. After a time the group would come together and share their insights.

The best and most important characteristic of this type of study group is that it is continuous. When the group finishes the text, they start over. This ensures that the interpretation and application of the lessons of the text change as people, societies, and times change. It ensures that the result is always fresh, always relevant.

There are several aspects of Masonic study that are important. It is important to understand the text or ritual as it's written or performed. It's important to understand it's symbolism -- what ideas and concepts the symbols stand in for. It's important to understand how the morality imparted in the degrees is to be manifested in everyday life. Finally it's important to understand the deeper esoteric meaning behind the symbols. Four aspects: two are critical, and two are exploratory and when combined and integrated they provide a complete, holistic understanding of the degree.

There's a methodology that Kabbalists of Sfat (Safed) developed that can be applied to students who wish to create an integrated study of Masonic ritual and literature. (I plan to talk about it in an upcoming show.)

Masonry needs this integrated process of study as an additional tool to help the Craft to thrive and revitalize itself. Memorization of ritual is the first step. The Apprentice's step. Analysis of the ritual is the second step. The Fellowcraft's step. Finally delving into the mystery and esoteric meaning of the text is the third step. The master's step. Our lodges have mastered the first step pretty well. Now we need to assume mastery of the other two. Continuous regular study will help integrate the degrees. It becomes a key ingredient in creating the mortar.

So this is my proposal. A small, simple study group. One in every lodge, in every appendant body. A school of Masonry. A simple social get together -- once a month, once a week -- as often as fits for you lodge. A regular time to study the meaning of Masonry, not its storied history. A social community to teach a morality for everyday life. It doesn't have to be fancy. You don't have to be a recognized scholar, just a Brother hungry for more light. You don't have to know anything. You don't need to be a scholar. You don't have to have deep Masonic experience to participate. This is a journey of discovery that we will make together.

Start with a group of masons, your ritual, lectures and a few supporting texts. Pick a topic and then examine it. Why do we wear only one shoe? Why do we hold rods? How do the Five Arts and Sciences enable us to be better Masons? What is the significance of the pillars? Why do we pass between them? What is the best form of charitable giving? Who was St. John and why is the lodge dedicated to him? What does Masonry have to say about business ethics? Treatment of minorities? You could spend a year of weeks on the first degree alone. We'll talk soon about a good pedagogical structure that makes it easy to do in an upcoming show.

Ultimately that was my goal when I started X-Oriente...to start having the kind of conversations that were so rare and only seemed to take place when there were no degrees to perform, no meetings to run. I'll continue to explore, but it's time for all of us to start having these conversations... to start the exploration of the Interior.

Creating these small communities of study, in addition to a greater understanding of ritual, it will bring meaning and relevance to all walks of masonic and non-masonic life. It will turn our craft from "living history" into a living breathing way of life for all who take our degrees. It will create a level of engagement that will not supplant those who choose

to pursue corporate masonry but will provide meaningful work for those who choose not to take that path. And it will strengthen the bodies of Masonry for all of our brothers.

Think of it— study for the sheer joy of it. Study that brings us closer together as brothers. We can share our insights and commentary and share them with other lodges and learning societies like the Masonic Society and the Scottish Rite Research Society. This isn't hard. Don't wait. Just start. You need Masons, some pencils and paper, a table, and some time. You're all hungry for knowledge. Stop being hungry and *feed* each other.

We may continue to downsize. We may indeed lose more buildings. But from this tiny school, this tiny idea, we can transform Masonry in North America from a primarily corporate to a more intimate practice. And we'll start producing learned, motivated masons, first by the tens, then by the hundreds, then by the thousands.

Our light will grow strong once again, not by the splendor of our outer temples but by the light streaming from our inner temples.

Together, we will visit the interior of the earth, and rectifying ourselves we will find the hidden stone. Let's begin now.

Thank you.