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### **THE VOLUME OF THE SACRED LAW -Its Forms and Usages-**

Adapted from a paper by  
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If you ask 99 Masons out of 100 what is meant by the Volume of the Sacred Law, they will tell you it means the Holy Bible, and by that they mean the Protestant Bible, which is not identical to the Roman Catholic Bible.

We are all aware that previous to the establishment of the Grand Lodge of England the generally accepted obligation of candidates was to profess adherence to the Christian Church. In 1723, the new Grand Lodge declared that "it is now more expedient to oblige them in that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is to be good men of honour and honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished." Also in 1723, a previous mention of the Christian Trinity disappears from the introduction to Anderson's Constitution.

Before 1760, there was no approved ritual using the word "bible". The general usage was to refer to the volume on the altar as the "librum", i.e. the "book". The Book - surely in most cases, was indeed the Bible, but it might be a prayer book, or the gospels, and in the case of the Templars in the 13th and 14th centuries the gospels were used and opened at the beginning of the mass.

The eminent mason, Brother Harry Carr states in his book, "The Freemason at Work", "We are bound to obligate a Brother on the Holy Book which is sacred to his faith. In the Lodge at Singapore, the altar has, apart from the Bible, the Holy Books of the Jewish faith, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Parsee. The Lodges in Iran, for example, have on the altar the Bible, the Koran and the Zend Avesta."

The custom in Lodges using several Holy Books is to have them open on the altar with the square and compasses lying on the book corresponding to the religion of the Worshipful Master. In degree work, the Holy Book corresponding to the candidate is placed at the West side of the altar, and the book corresponding to the Worshipful Master placed on the East side. No Holy Book should be placed on another

What are these Holy Books? -- Since the Roman Catholic Church now allows its members to join Masonic Lodges it is presumably correct to use the Bible with the Old and New Testaments plus the Apocrypha. To devout Jews the Volume of The Sacred Law would properly be the Torah, i.e. the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament.

For a Muslim candidate the Koran is needed. This book comprises in its 114 chapters all the revelations believed to have been communicated to the prophet Mohammed as a final expression of God's will and purpose. It may surprise those that are unacquainted with the Koran to know that it contains passages referring to Abraham, David, Solomon, Mary and Jesus

The Muslims believe that the Korean is untranslatable if the original purity of meaning is to be maintained. So this Volume of the Sacred Law, as well as the Torah, should be offered in the original text

Members of some Eastern religions require that the candidates be admitted in formal procession, with a member carrying the Koran or other Holy Volume, on or above his head, where it is retained until the candidate takes his obligation, which many do standing. Afterward they often bend down and touch the volume with their foreheads, but do not kiss it. Some require the Koran to be opened on the altar and covered with a veil.

The Torah says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The Amidah says: "Grant Peace, welfare, blessing, grace, loving kindness and mercy." The Koran says: "Give to kinsmen and orphans, the needy, the traveller, beggars, and to ransom the slave." Are not these Jewish and Muslim words close to the precepts of Freemasonry?

For a Hindu candidate the Volume of the Sacred Law is the Bhagavad Gita [Baghav-ad Geet-A], the Celestial Song. This book is a dialogue between the Lord Krishna and the warrior Arjuna. It is said to present the eternal dialogue which goes on in the recesses of every striving soul. It is a part of the Mahabharata [Ma hab har ata), the longest epic poem in the world. But the Bhagavad-Gita should be used separately for Masonic purposes. Mahatma Ghandi was inspired by the Bhagavad-Gita. He wrote of his involvement with it: "To see the all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who inspires after that cannot afford to keep Out of any field in life," Surely this also follows Masonic principles.

Sikh Masons require their Volume of the Sacred Law to be the Guru Granth Sahib. This religion believes in one God, prohibits idolatry and abolishes caste. They prefer their book to be covered when not in use.

The least likely candidate would be a Parsee, but there are Parsee Masons in Iran and in India, around Bombay. Their bible is the Zenda Vesta. These writing emphasize the existence of a Supreme Being, Ahuramazada [A hur a maz da), Lord of the whole Universe.

While English and American lodges have received petitions from Buddhists, the Hinavana Buddhists, originating in South India, Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Malasia and Cambodia, profess no belief in a Supreme Being, and so cannot be approved for membership in a Masonic Lodge.

The other main group is the Mayahana Buddhists. These originate in north India, Tibet, China, Korea and Japan. These do believe in a Supreme Being, and they will obligate themselves on a Christian Bible or the Dhairnapada [Dham ma pad a], which is a collection of miscellaneous pieces occurring at the end of the Sutta, or sermons and teachings of Buddha. They are regarded by some thinkers as among the most sublime of scriptural writings, and there is no doubt that Buddhists can subscribe to Masonic tenets. Note two stanzas from the Tripitaka:

No Brahmin is such by birth  
No Outcaste is such by birth  
An Outcaste is such by his deeds  
A Brahmin is such by his deeds.  
Never in this world is hate  
Appeased by hate  
It is only appeased by love.  
This is an eternal law.

So mote it be.