

# ON THE ORIENTATION OF KING SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

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In the lecture pertaining to the Fellowcraft degree, the newly-obligated Fellowcraft is conducted to a site representing the porch of King Solomon's Temple. Thereupon, the first objects to which his attention is drawn are the brazen pillars, Jachin (Hebrew, יָכִין, *yakin*) and Boaz (Hebrew, בּוֹאֵז, *bo'az*), which are said to be representations of those that stood on the porch, flanking the entrance to the Temple. The word Jachin is said to denote establishment, and *Boaz* signifies strength. Taken together, they may be read as "In strength shall this house be established." During the lecture presentation, it is further explained that Jachin is on the right and in the south, and that Boaz is on the left and in the north – though this is in opposition to how the pillars would have stood on the porch of King Solomon's Temple. The most conclusive evidence for an eastern orientation of King Solomon's Temple may be found in Ezekiel:

"And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

[*The Holy Bible KJV*, Ezekiel 8:16]

The porch of the Temple was on the eastern side of the edifice while the Holy of Holies lay in the west. This would have allowed the rising sun to penetrate the Temple through the east gate and illuminate the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, or Holy of Holies. In other words, one would have been facing west and had their back to the rising sun if one were knocking on the door of the Temple at dawn. Ergo, the pillar Jachin, which is said to have stood on the right, would have been on the north side of the door, and Boaz, on the left, would have stood on the south side. That the orientation of a Masonic Temple is diametrically opposed to that of King Solomon's Temple is an interesting problem. We know that the Masonic Temple is a place where men develop and apply moral and ethical principles that they may become more perfected by virtue of their own good works – thus fostering humanistic endeavors – and is thereby a Temple of Man. We also know that King Solomon's Temple was the House of God, wherein man's fate is strictly governed by the Will of YHVH (יהוה, the *Tetragrammaton*). This discrepancy causes one to wonder whether the opposition in orientation was indeed deliberate and meant to serve as a partially concealed commentary on man's station vis-à-vis Deity.

The idea that man is instrumental in, and ultimately responsible for, his own personal salvation is considered heretical by most denominations of Christianity. This is an aspect of the greater Gnostic heresy. The early Gnostic sects believed that man could reach salvation and union with God through the direct experience of *gnosis* (Greek, γνῶσις – a knowledge of the Divine spark in man). This is in direct opposition to the central Christian tenet that salvation is only possible through faith and the intercession of Christ. Similarly, in the Hermetic and Neoplatonic traditions, it is believed that man may attain henosis (Greek, ἕνωσις – a mystical "oneness" with Reality) through the practice of theurgy (Greek θεουργία – a magical practice involving ritualism and invocations designed to secure the favorable intervention of preternatural, cosmic or divine entities). There are those who interpret Freemasonry's emphasis on personal development as fundamentally being a survival and extension of Gnostic, Hermetic and Neoplatonic philosophies. A notable example of this principle in Masonic ritual may be found in the Entered Apprentice degree, wherein the recently-obligated apprentice is told that, "Accepted Masons [...] are taught to make use of [the Common Gavel] for the more noble and glorious purpose of divesting our minds and consciences of all the vices and superfluities of life, thereby fitting us, as living stones, for that spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." [Duncan, *Duncan's Masonic Ritual and Monitor* (1866), Three Rivers Press, 1976] Ergo, the implication is that the Freemason may, by the application of the Working Tools of the craft, prepare himself for his ascent into Heaven – and this, by the actions of his own will and intellect. Another example of this may be found in the mason's desire for Light. Masonic Light is not differentiated as being either intellectual or spiritual in nature, though both are implied. However, as is the case with many of the symbols we encounter in Freemasonry, the individual is left to make sense of this enigma for himself.