**The Graveside Address**

**(Ecclesiastes – chapter 12 Verses 1-7))**







**[Ecclesiastes chapter 12](http://themasonicsecret.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/ecclesiastes-chapter-12.html)**

Brethren,

We are told that Freemasonry is a philosophic system comprised of allegory and symbolism; the three degrees, Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason, reflecting the stages of our birth, life and eventual demise and rebirth.  Our beautiful ceremonies are filled with philosophic truths and are times to quietly reflect upon our own lives and our responsibilities to ourselves and to others.

Much of our quiet and dignified ceremonies is hidden in allegory.  The use of allegory to hide meaning from the unqualified or undeserving goes back well into ancient times.  By veiling spiritual truths in poetry or symbols, man has found that some of the highest truths could be placed out in the open to become part of history, while protecting there hidden meanings from people who would denigrate or ridicule things that they were not ready to understand.

As the Freemason candidate circumambulates the lodge – making the same allegorical journey as the sun, moon, and stars-- marking the passage of time, we are allegorically reminded of our own journey through life – marking time, and passing from one stage to another.

One of the most beautiful allegorical illustrations of our life journey is familiar to all of our brethren and is taken from the 12th chapter from Ecclesiastes.  This beautiful and allegorical poem is said to be written by King Solomon himself and depicts the last stages of our journey here on earth.  It is a stark and hauntingly realistic account of our passage through the stages of old age.

As it is written:

**Verse 1:**  “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

**Verse 2:**  While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

**Verse 3:**  In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened.

**Verse 4:**  And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low;

**Verse 5:**  Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

**Verse 6:**  Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

**Verse 7:**  Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

This poem from Ecclesiastes is powerful and memorable as it is, but is there a deeper hidden meaning to it?  Many believe that there is, and once known, the verses carry an indelible message to all that hear it.  There are several interpretations, but most are similar to what follows.

Verses 1 and 2 (reread) admonish us to recognize and know the G.A.O.T.U. while we are still young, before we age and lose our joy of living – while our thoughts are clear and sound.

Verse 3 (reread) begins the depiction of our journey into old age with references to our youthful posture now bowing in age, and our teeth (grinders) and eyesight (windows) failing.

Verse 4 (reread) continues with mans’ aging by reflecting upon the loss of his hearing and the changes which occur in the timber of an elder’s voice.

Verse 5 (reread) refers to the unsteadiness and loss of balance to which we will eventually succumb.  The reference to the Almond tree, which blossoms white, is thought to be a reference to the graying of the hair.  The reference to the grasshopper is thought to be symbolic of mans struggles to overcome diversity – now more of a burden than it was when he was youthful.  “Man goeth to his long home” is a thinly veiled allegory not needing interpretation.

Verse 6 (reread) depicts the final stages when our minds and thoughts are affected.  The “silver chord” being our spinal column, the “golden bowl” being our minds, the “pitcher” being our heart, and the “wheel broken at the cistern” being our ability to control our bladders.

This allegorical journey into old age, this admonition to know the G.A.O.T.U. now while we still have time, is harsh and cold – but it is an admonition that, to my eyes, is filled with compassion and love.  This journey into old age is not a solitary journey; it is a journey which we must all take; a journey made necessary simply because we have been given life.  It is an admonition that life is precious and we must not wait to know the G.A.

Verse 7 (reread) – the final verse, holds the most mystery.  It says that all of us sitting here in this lodge came from the soil of this earth – “out of dust” – and that we shall return to it, and that our spirits shall return from whence they came.

I’d like to end with a favorite quote of mine from a spiritual writer, Brian Swimme, that encompasses both the mystery of life and its inherent beauty and love.  As you read this, remember verse 7 from the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes:  “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was.”

*“You have molten rock,*

*and then, all by itself, it transforms into a human mother caring for her child.*

*That's a rather astounding transformation.*

*Of course, it takes four billion years.*

*You've got silica, you've got magnesium.*

*You've got all the elements of rock,*

*and it becomes translucent blue eyes and beautiful brown hair*

*and this deep sense of love and concern and even sacrifice for a child.”*

(From Brian Swimme)

Brethren, I hope that you take from this little essay how sacred and mysterious life is, and how reverently each day that we have been given should be treated.  As Freemasons, we are reminded in symbol and allegory that life is precious, and that we are continually on a journey to the East, to Light, back to the G.A.O.T.U.

Respectfully submitted,

Brother Tavit Smith