

## 16° Prince of Jerusalem

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Of Wine, Women & Kings: Truth is the best (Syllabus Item 1).  
by Yasha Beresiner 32°

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'Truth is the same always. Whoever ponders it will get the same answer.  
Buddha got it. Patanjali got it. Mohammed got it. The answer is the same,  
but the method of working it out may vary this way or that.'

*The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.*

The debate as to which is strongest, wine, women or kings takes place only incidentally in the ceremony of the 16° of the A&AR. It cannot be seen as an important part - not even a relevant part - of the overall ceremony and teachings of the degree. There is no reference to the debate by Pike in his writings, which I could find and Hutchens, whose *A Bridge to Light*<sup>i</sup> is the source reference for these essays, has no mention of it. Under the English workings of the intermediate degrees of the A&AR (which are communicated and not worked), although no reference is made to the debate, it is incorporated into the ritual of the *Red Cross of Babylon*<sup>ii</sup> in the Order of the Allied Masonic Degrees, and often quaintly delivered at the festive board after the meeting is finished.

The original source for the debate is taken from the bible *1 Book of Ezra 3* and attributed to a debate of three young bodyguards of King Darius who decide to impress their Lord with the overwhelming argument as to which is the strongest: wine, king or women, in the expectation that the best argument will win great favours. Zerubabel is identified as the third of the bodyguard who argues in favour of women being strongest but truth superseding all and he wins the favours of the King. The biblical story then continues with the familiar legend of the rebuilding of the second temple.

Before delving into the interpretation of the arguments, it is worth noting the events as they unfold in the ritual<sup>iii</sup>. King Darius invites Zerubabel to participate in the established tradition of debate on issues raised by the elders. The question posed by Satrap of Assyria is: '*What is that which holds the most powerful sway over mortals?*' [More blatantly in the English ritual of The Red Cross of

Babylon, the Thrice Illustrious Sovereign phrases the same question thus:  
*'Which is the greatest, the strength of Wine, of the King, or of Women?'* .]

The obvious and inevitable starting argument is that the king must be strongest as his will reigns and his word rules the world. A reluctant Satrap of Media ingratiates himself with the King before finally arguing that Beauty maybe stronger than the King because even the King succumbs to the whims of a beautiful woman. Now Zerubabel expresses his indignation at arguments that would take away from the absolute power and strength of the king, except . . . Truth. King Darius agrees with his friend Zerubabel and grants him the honours and privileges which the Jewish people sought.

So what are we to make of this parable, which includes in later rituals an argument favouring wine as the strongest of the three? Clearly the first striking elements in their common negativity are the temptations that are presented by the three unproductive themes and absent from Truth.

Wine erodes the mind and removes inhibitions, it instils a false sense of confidence and security. Drinking makes us err in our ways and kings and beggars, poor and rich and wise and foolish are all reduced to the same lowly state of mind when under the influence of alcohol. Life is incessantly mirthful, true responsibilities are rejected, friends neglected even enemies embraced.

As to Kings, whilst all agree that God has made man master of everything on earth, yet the King rules over man at his pleasure and subservience to him is unconditional. His influence symbolises obedience and absolute acquiescence without question or freewill.

Women corrupt our souls, enflame our primal passions and cause us to lose self control. We follow her blindly without comprehension, leaving behind us the country of our birth and infant nurture, family and friends, just to be with her. To live and die by her side.

It is only Truth, however, and that is stronger than all three. Truth promises a triumphant responsible life where good is chosen over evil and actions are dictated by positive needs and not materialistic and hedonistic considerations.

But what is Truth? Truth is what we, each one of us, knows it to be - without definition. The complexity of the question defies definition. There are so many aspects of truth, so many definitions of it that it has been expressed to be undefinable. Truth from a philosophical as opposed to an artistic aspect is as

diverse as night and day. Religious truth, some will say, is the opposite to scientific truth. Maybe defining truth as being the opposite of falsehood is the nearest to explaining the meaning of the term. Philosophers and great thinkers through the centuries have defined, analysed and debated Truth without a single and final conclusions. Theories abound and it would appear that truth is only to be found in one place: our own inner soul.

This appear to me to be the lesson of the 16°. To recognise our body as the temple within which Truth resides and seek less from the outside world and demand more from ourselves. In the 16° story Zerubbabel's efforts to rebuild the Temple, following permission given by King Cyrus, are being frustrated. The Holyland is surrounded by countries that do not want to see Israel as a powerful nation. Meanwhile King Darius is on the throne of the Persian Empire and the armed attacks on the Temple building site are incessant, so that the workers are often interrupted and have to fight in order to defend themselves. They are having to work with 'a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other'. Finally Zerubbabel attends the court of Darius and reminds him of the decree of Cyrus and is granted all his wishes.

Pike urges us to remain conscious that we are no longer in need of rebuilding a physical structure and the temple we can concentrate on is within ourselves. Not having a temple does not mean losing religion. To test ourselves and chose to act positively with beneficence is Truth.

In Zerubbabel's words, quoted from the ritual:

' . . . truth is great, and stronger than all things. The whole earth calls upon truth, and heaven blesses it. All God's works quake and tremble, and with him there is nothing unrighteous. Truth endures and is strong forever, and lives and prevails forever and ever. With it there is no partiality or preference, but it does what is righteous instead of anything that is unrighteous or wicked. Everyone approves its deeds, and there is nothing unrighteous in its judgment. To it belongs the strength and the kingship and the power and the majesty of all the ages. Blessed be the God of truth!'

Every Mason is able, if he is willing, to find Truth in himself.

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<sup>i</sup> Hutchens, Rex R *A Bridge to Light - A Study in Masonic Ritual & Philosophy* Supreme Council 33° Washington DC 2010 (4th Ed)

<sup>ii</sup> In US the degree known as 'Red Cross' is associated with the Knights Templar degrees and re-introduced to the USA from Ireland as the 'Knight Masons'

<sup>iii</sup> 'Scotch Rite Masonry illustrated The Complete Ritual of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite etc etc' Volume I Charles T Powner Reprint Illinois 1993 p203-6