

The Obligation of the Fellowcraft

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We are all familiar with the obligations of the three degrees of the symbolic or “Blue” Lodge. From Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft to Master Mason, the overall pattern of preamble, oath, and penalty remain the same for all three degrees; however the content of each is changed as the new Mason increases in knowledge and responsibility.

The obligation of the Fellowcraft introduces the Entered Apprentice to the idea that as his stature as a Mason increases, so do his duties and so must his understanding. He is still bound by his previous obligation, but now finds himself with yet another tie to the Fraternity. This obligation further prepares the candidate by influencing his character development, expanding his understanding of the meaning of the symbols and teachings of Masonry, and thereby prepares him for what is expected of the Master Mason.

The essential lesson of the Fellowcraft’s obligation is one that expounds on the specific charge to be charitable, with the further instruction that one must prudently judge the worthiness of the recipient of such Masonic charity.

The obligation should cause the Fellowcraft, who as an Entered Apprentice; learned the principle of charity, to examine the credentials of those he assists. He must determine for himself both the worthiness of the recipient of his assistance, as well as the extent to which he will assist.

The idea of being found worthy is not unfamiliar to the Fellowcraft. He himself had to seek admission to the Fraternity, be properly avouched for, and found worthy by vote of the Lodge to receive the degrees in Freemasonry. In the lecture for the Entered Apprentice Degree, he is introduced to the blessing and obligation of charity and taught of its unbounded nature. As a Master Mason, he will help to decide the membership of his Lodge. The Fellowcraft should find the balance between boundless charity and, in its application, judgment by the rule of good conscience.

The Fellowcraft is further taught that by his obligation, even when he may disagree with the position of a Brother, he is not to be dishonest with him. Furthermore he is not to swindle, or defraud him, nor disrupt his lawful means of making a living. This mandate serves as further preparation for what is expected of the Master Mason as he participates and confers in unity with his Brethren, by avoiding contention and by further emulating the behavior of those who can best work and best agree.

The practices derived from the obligation undertaken by the Fellowcraft require self examination and reflection on our own behavior and actions and refer to geometry. The Fellowcraft is instructed that, as speculative Masons, we are concerned not only with the physical applications of geometry, but with its moral meaning to establish the dimensions of our actions and the ethical boundaries within which all Masons must operate. We have been taught that the Fellowcraft Degree is symbolic of manhood, a time for us to work and prepare for that time when we arrive at old age and get ready to reap our eternal reward. Moreover, the man in his middle years carries maximum responsibilities. It is he upon whom a family depends for support. He is the Atlas on whose shoulders rest the burdens of business. By his skill and experience the arts are sustained. To his keeping are entrusted the destinies of state. It is said that in the building of his Temple, King Solomon employed eighty thousand Fellowcraft or hewers on the mountains and in the quarries. This description is suggestive, for it is by men in the Fellowcraft period of life that the hewing is done on the mountains or in the quarries of life and it is the Moral Geometry of Masonry that forms the basis for the development of character necessary to bear the responsibilities of the Fellowcraft.

The Fellowcraft Degree teaches us lessons of morality learned from nature as expressed in the order, symmetry and proportion set forth as geometry, as well as from the liberal arts and sciences, to provide a gauge by which we may measure the success or failure of our own behavior.

The working tools of a Fellowcraft are the plumb, square, and level. Their significance is explained in the ritual. We are to walk uprightly before God and man, squaring our actions by the Square of virtue, remembering that we are traveling upon the broad Level of time to that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns. These emblems deal with human behavior. The plumb reminds us to be proud of who and what we are before God and our fellow man. The square reminds us to treat our neighbors as well as we would treat ourselves. The level teaches that all men are created equal in the eyes of our Divine Creator. We are all equal in the Masonic Lodge no matter what our social standing.

Let it be said in conclusion, that the Fellowcraft represents manhood in its most splendid conception and its greatest responsibility. The days of his disillusionment are past; he faces facts, not fancies. He understands the immensity of the tasks before him and approaches them with the joy of one who is competent and resolved to conquer. His family depends upon him for support. The business world looks to him for judgment and guidance. The community needs his aid and advice in promoting the moral and spiritual welfare of its people. He is a patron of the arts and sciences. He has faith in

God and believes that "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." He is untiring in his zeal to promote religion, freedom, and justice. There stands the Fellowcraft strong in body, soul, and spirit, and competent to cope with all of life's realities.

From this degree and its obligation, we realize the truth as given in its ritual, that Freemasonry is a progressive science, and as we advance in knowledge there is a corresponding increase in our obligations to ourselves and to our Brethren.

May we each remember the obligation we undertake as we become Fellows of the Craft. May we each apply the principles taught by that obligation, which expound our understanding of brotherly love, relief, and truth. May we ever increase in faith, hope, and charity; ever remembering that scriptural reminder that "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). May we then seek to be of greater service to our God, to our loved ones, to our Brethren, and to all mankind.