

The Fellowcraft Degree

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BASIC TEACHINGS OF THE SECOND DEGREE

In one sense the Fellowcraft Degree symbolizes the stage of adulthood and responsibility during a man's life on earth. In this stage, his task is to acquire knowledge and apply it to the building of his character and improving the society in which he lives. As the father of our Masonic lectures, William Preston saw Masonry as a means to educate men in the liberal arts and sciences. A Fellowcraft Mason is urged to advance his education in these fields during the ritual of this Degree.

Some view the three grade system of Blue Lodge Masonry as representing a progressive teaching directed toward perfecting human nature. It is a simple and straightforward view of human nature divided into three parts: body, mind and soul. Each Degree addresses and instructs one part. The First Degree encompasses the body and our faculties of action in the world. The four cardinal virtues are extolled as the proper guides to our action in the world that we may perfect our relation to it. The Second Degree addresses the mind and its faculties. We are instructed in the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences which were formulated hundreds of years ago in order to develop and perfect the mental nature. The intention was to prepare the mind for spiritual truths. The Third Degree confers the central Mystery of Freemasonry; that is, how the soul may be brought to its perfection.

If we accept the view of Masonry's purpose given above, then it is obvious that the Fellowcraft Degree encompasses much more than just gaining a broad-based education. The teachings of this Degree are extremely profound and surprisingly exact.

SYMBOLISM OF THE DEGREE

The symbolism of the Entered Apprentice Degree emphasized beginnings, spiritual birth, the first steps and youth, orientation to the Light, which are all consistent with a rite of induction into the Fraternity. The Second Degree of Fellowcraft symbolizes the methods of developing and progressing in the Craft; and, in a sense, the emergence into spiritual manhood. Therefore we find symbols of advancement, passage, instruction and elevation throughout this Degree. We find symbolism of taking the next step and a new way of approaching the East. What was considered in the last Degree to be our weaker nature has now been squared and elevated. While keeping our fidelity to the Three Great Lights, we deepen our connection with the Fraternity and take on new commitments.

Our Working Tools are now testing instruments. With them we try, square and prove. With them we learn to develop the faculty of judgment: what is valuable, what is true, what is real. The central motif of this Degree being one of advancement, we are presented with the symbol of the Winding Staircase consisting of so many steps and leading to the Middle Chamber of the Temple. Staircases, ladders, extended vertical ropes, and mountains are all symbols of ascending to new heights.

Gaining entrance to a new place symbolizes a distinct advancement in our work as Freemasons. Attaining this level gives us access to certain benefits that we were not entitled to before. Corn, Wine, and Oil symbolize these benefits. There are other things granted here as well. We become invested with the ability to hear the teachings of our

Fraternity and keep them close to our heart. Finally, we are reminded of our central focus in the symbolism of the letter “G” and the humility it should inspire.

DULY AND TRULY PREPARED

At the outset of this Degree, it should be clear to the candidate that although much of it seems familiar, it is also very different, and some aspects even seem to be in opposition to the previous Degree. There are certain avenues of further exploration that should be brought out here. We are usually given an explanation for most parts of the ritual in the various lectures. Some seem to allude to deeper interpretations. As we prepare to enter the Mysteries of Freemasonry certain things should be kept in mind. For example, the number three keeps emerging in the rituals in one way or another. Geometrically, three is the triangle. And in fact, there are three kinds of triangles: the equilateral triangle (all three sides equal), the isosceles triangle (two sides equal), and the scalene triangle (no sides equal).

Many of the mythological gods or heroes that were smiths or artificers for the gods were lame. For example, the Roman god Vulcan and the Greek god Hephaestus. Vulcan was crippled as a result of being thrown down to earth. He is usually depicted with tools as he is patron of craftsmen. Scalene in one sense means unequal and used in another means limping. The most celebrated scalene triangle is, of course, the 3-4-5 right triangle, which is of special concern to Freemasons. We will cover this more fully in our discussion of the Master Mason Degree. There is an interesting story by the Roman poet Virgil in his epic *The Aeneid* that is highly suggestive. In Book IV he writes about Queen Dido who, because of her despair and anguish, commits to sacrificing herself. She performs various rites in preparation of that supreme moment and finally: “Dido herself with consecrated grain in her pure hands, as she went near the altars, freed one foot from sandal straps, let fall her dress ungirdled, and, now sworn to death, called on the gods and stars that knew her fate.” It is also noteworthy that she was supposed to be of Tyrian origin.

There is a Byzantine painting known as “Our Lady of Perpetual Help,” which pictures the divine child in his mother's arms. Angels are shown at either side with implements of the Crucifixion. The child is turning towards an angel, and one of his shoes is falling off.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A FELLOWCRAFT

In addition to the rights you acquired as an Entered Apprentice Mason, you have the right to sit in a Lodge when opened in the Fellowcraft Degree, when accompanied by a Master Mason who has sat in Lodge with you. You may visit another Lodge opened in the Fellowcraft Degree. You have the right to be instructed and examined. If found proficient, you may request advancement to the next degree. The responsibilities are found in part in the Obligation, and you should review these along with the Obligation of the Entered Apprentice. Finally, you are reminded that you are to acquire the special knowledge introduced in this Degree and seek to apply that knowledge to your duties in life so you can occupy your place in society with satisfaction and honor.

THE WORKING TOOLS

THE SQUARE

The Square is the symbol of morality, truthfulness and honesty. The direction of the two sides of the Square form an angle of 90°, or a right angle, so-called because this is the angle which stones must have if they are to be used to build a stable and upright wall. It symbolizes accuracy, not even varying by a single degree. When we part upon the Square, we go in different directions, but in full knowledge that our courses in life will be going according to the angle of the Square (which means in the right direction), until we meet again.

THE LEVEL

The Level is a symbol of equality. We do not mean equality in wealth, social distinction, civic office, or service to mankind; but, rather, we refer to the internal, and not the external, qualifications. Each person is endowed with a worth and dignity which is spiritual, and should not be subject to man-made distinctions. Masonry recognizes that one man may have greater potential in life, service, or reward, than another; but, we also believe that any man can aspire to any height, no matter how great. Thus, the Level dignifies labour and the man who performs it. It also acknowledges that all men are equal without regard to station. The Level also symbolizes the passage of time.

THE PLUMB

The Plumb is a symbol of uprightness of conduct. In Freemasonry, it is associated with the plumb line which the Lord promised Amos he would set in the midst of His people, Israel, symbolizing God's standard of divine righteousness. The plumb line in the midst of a people should mean that they will be judged by their own sense of right and wrong, and not by the standards of others. By understanding the Plumb, a Mason is to judge his Brothers by their own standards and not those of someone else. When the plumb line is thought of in this way, it becomes a symbol of an upright life and of the conscience by which each person must live. This idea is closely tied to the concept of Justice. For, in truth, Justice is giving another man his due.

OTHER IMPORTANT SYMBOLS

THE PILLARS ON THE PORCH

Two pillars were placed at the entrance to King Solomon's Temple, which are symbolically represented within every Masonic Lodge. These pillars are symbols of strength and establishment - and by implication, power and control. One must remember that power and control are placed before you, so you might realize that power without control is anarchy, or that control without power is futility. Man must have both if his life is to be successful.

The construction of dual pillars, obelisks, sphinxes and so on was not uncommon in the ancient Near East. It is not known what their exact symbolism was. Speculation ranges from their signifying duality (that duality or polarity are twin forces throughout Creation), guardianship of the temple, symbolic gateways, to the idea of being a connection between heaven and earth.

Some researchers have thought that the two pillars before Solomon's Temple represented the Pillar of Cloud and the Pillar of Fire which led the Israelites through the desert to the Promised Land. It was their guide in the light as well as in the dark.

The globes on the columns are said to be the celestial and terrestrial spheres representing heaven and earth.

The two pillars also correspond to the Three Great Supports of Masonry. The columns of Wisdom and Strength are emblematically represented by the pillars in the South and North, respectively. The candidate, as he is brought into the Lodge, comes to represent the third column of Beauty or Balance.

THE WINDING STAIRCASE

As we mentioned before, the Winding Staircase is a symbol of ascension. It is described as consisting of three, five, and seven steps. The number of steps has changed over the years. Sometimes there were only five and at others seven. Preston listed thirty-six, dividing them into one, three, five, seven, nine and eleven. The Hemming lectures listed the number at twenty-five. American Masonry has kept to fifteen. Note the connection between this number and the number of Fellowcrafts in the Third Degree.

Much of the symbolism of the Winding Staircase is explained in the ritual itself. There are some points to bring out that may lead one to further research and insight.

The significance of the number three has already been mentioned. We have the three Degrees, the Three Great Lights, the three Columns, the three Officers, the Three Grand Masters and the three Principle Tenets of Freemasonry. What we want to emphasize here is the Three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. These virtues were considered a ladder to heaven, another symbol of ascent. The Four Cardinal Virtues presented in the First Degree compliment these in the sense that the Four are symbolically horizontal (basically dealing with our actions here on earth) while the Three are symbolically vertical (referring to our method of ascent to further light). Our Aprons are composite examples of the Three and the Four making Seven.

The Five Steps are also explained in some detail. A few points for further consideration concern the symbolism of the number five. The geometrical symbol of five is, of course, the pentagram. The emblem of Pythagoras's fraternity was the five-pointed star. At each point of the star was a Greek letter which all together spelled a Greek word meaning "health" (*ugitha*). The pentagram is a symbol of the Microcosm, that is, Man.

Another avenue to explore is the ratio of the column height to diameter. They are approximately: Tuscan 1/7; Doric 1/8; Ionic 1/9; Corinthian and Composite 1/10. It is also worth studying which order of architecture was used to build a particular type of temple. The Parthenon on the Acropolis, dedicated to Athena, is Doric, as is her temple at Delphi.

The Ephesian temple of Diana, a moon goddess, is Ionic. The importance of the compass to the Ionic Order is also worthy of study.

The Seven Steps symbolize the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences. These were formulated as early as 330 CE. The Christian scholars adopted them soon afterwards and we find their full flowering at the Neo-platonic Cathedral School of Chartres in 12th Century France. The interesting work that came together here was the union of the philosophies of Neo-platonism and Christianity. The study of the Seven Liberal Arts was considered a means to the knowledge of God. This principle was actually expressed in the construction of the Gothic Cathedral of Chartres. We even find for the first time sculpted representations of the Seven Liberal Arts on the West Door of the Cathedral.

The Masters of Chartres taught that the proper study of the Seven Liberal Arts guided the intellect to approach the hidden light behind the world. The invisible underlying structure of Reality, the Truth, could be apprehended in this way. As another matter of interest, it was in the mid-thirteenth century that the humble mason who had mastered the Seven Liberal Arts was entitled to the designation of architect.

ADMISSION TO THE MIDDLE CHAMBER

The passage from the Outer Porch to the Middle Chamber represents a definite step in the journey to enlightenment. The wages received in the Middle Chamber come as a result of achieving this distinction. Remember that the candidate had to first ascend the Winding Staircase in order to gain admission. The Fellowcraft must become proficient in the Seven Liberal Arts. A regular study of the subjects is demanded to gain admission to the outer doors leading to this Middle Chamber. It is when the initiate begins to perceive the synthetic vision of this Masonic education and a special intuition begins to dawn within his mind and conscience that he knows the inner doors are opening to that Chamber within. Outside, the candidate was shown a symbol of plenty, but here it has been established in fact.

THE WAGES OF A FELLOWCRAFT

Corn, Wine, and Oil are symbolic wages earned by the Fellowcraft Mason who arrives at the Middle Chamber. These symbolize wealth in mental and spiritual worlds. Corn represents nourishment and the sustenance of life. It is also a symbol of plenty, and refers to the opportunity for doing good, to work for the community, and to the performance of service to mankind. The Corn referred to in this Degree is actually what we call wheat.

Wine is symbolic of refreshment, health, spirituality, and peace. Oil represents joy, gladness and happiness. Taken together, Corn, Wine, and Oil represent the temporal rewards of living a good life.

The actual “wages” are the intangible but no less real compensation for a faithful and intelligent use of the Working Tools, fidelity to your obligations, and unflinching interest in and study of the structure, purpose and possibilities of the Fraternity. Such wages may be defined in terms of a deeper understanding of brotherhood, a clearer conception of ethical living, a broader toleration, and a more resolute will to think justly, independently, and honestly.

Corn or grain has also represented the concept of resurrection. Wine has symbolized mystical attainments, divine intoxication and ecstasy. Oil is one of the elements of consecration. Perfumed oil was used to anoint.

THE MASONIC LETTER “G”

Why the letter “G” is so prominently displayed in Masonic lodges is an enigma to Masonic historians. Like the sphinx before the pyramids, it stands before us in silence and mystery. It is not consistently displayed throughout the Masonic world and there are Masonic scholars who feel it should be removed. The reason that it is so displayed is plainly given to the candidate in this Degree. We are told that it is the initial of Geometry as well as the initial of the name of the Supreme Being. From the time of the “Old Charges” and manuscripts up to the present, the synonymous nature of Geometry and Masonry is clearly stated. It is also obvious that “G” is the initial of God. This alone may be sufficient reason for its presence.

There are other considerations that the Masonic student might want to take into account. The immediate question for some may be why is Geometry given such exalted status? One might also observe that the word “God” is not a name *per se*, but is a category of being - like “human being.” The name of the Supreme Being depends on what tradition a person follows, and it would not be incorrect to say that the True Name of the Supreme Being cannot be known. Obviously, then, the letter “G” does not refer to the common usage of that term.

These two issues have given rise to much speculation regarding the focus given to this one letter of the alphabet. We will offer a few of these speculations for your benefit.

The ancient languages of Phoenician, Hebrew and Greek all placed the “G” in the third place. In Hebrew, the order is *aleph, beth, gimel*. In Greek, the order is *alpha, beta, gamma* and so on. The Phoenician/Hebrew letter *gimel* means camel. There is an interesting passage in the Gospel of St. Matthew regarding our patron John the Baptist: “And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins.” (Matt 3:4) In both Hebrew and Greek, each letter is assigned a numerical value as well as a phonetic one, so that “G” is equivalent to the number “3” in both languages. The Greek letter *gamma* looks like an upside down “L”. It is two perpendicular lines forming the angle of a square. *Gamma* is also associated with Dionysus and resurrection.

The importance of Geometry to a full understanding of Freemasonry becomes apparent to the candidate as he progresses through the degrees. He is unequivocally informed that Geometry is the basis or foundation of Masonry. A full explanation for this importance is not forthcoming, just that it is very important to undertake the study. We would suggest that the Masonic student might follow some of the following lines of research, that he may come to his own conclusions.

It is thought that the Egyptians became skilled at surveying because the annual flooding of the Nile obliterated boundary markers in their fields. They had to set out and calculate new boundaries each year. The Greeks named this skill Geometry, or “earth measurement.” Empirical generalizations were derived, presumably, from their experience in field measurement. The Greeks, it is thought, made the advancement of using deductive logic to

expand the knowledge into a theoretical science, and Pythagoras is credited with this achievement. This actually set the groundwork for the development of the sciences. So we may consider Geometry the first science.

Pythagoras and his Society, and later, Plato and his Academy, raised Geometry to a sacred science of discovering the nature of reality and through it the Deity. We have such statements from Plato as: “Geometry rightly treated is the knowledge of the eternal.” And also: “Geometry must ever tend to draw the soul towards the truth.” Later, Euclid systemically presented all the knowledge of Geometry in his work *Elements of Geometry*, beginning with five unproved principles about lines, angles, and figures, which he called postulates. Euclid uses only the compass and straight edge for all the drawings, proofs, and solutions.

There are some Masonic researchers who think that the letter “G” represents a little known method of Biblical interpretation known as *gematria*. One of the earliest known references to this method is found about 200 CE in the *Bariatha of R. Eliezer ben R. Jose, the Galiean*, which is a collection of 32 rabbinical rules. *Gematria* is listed within this treatise as a rabbinical method of biblical exegesis. As already mentioned, the Hebrew and Greek alphabets were also used as numbers. Therefore, every Hebrew word and every Greek word is the sum of the value of the individual letters. Exploring this technique of letter-number substitution, one looks for words, names, and phrases that add up to like values. Like values are thought to have meaningful relationships. For example, the Hebrew word for “heaven” (*ha-shamayim*) has the same *gematria* value as the word for “soul” (*neshamah*); that is, 395, derived by adding up each letter to arrive at a total. The Qabalist would say this means that the soul is identical with heaven.

Another example of *gematria* can be found by comparing the Hebrew words for “love” (*ahabah*) and “unity” (*echad*), both of which add to 13. Combining the values of these two words gives us 26, the number of the Hebrew word rendered in English as Jehovah, the principal Name of God. This is a clear intimation that the nature of God can be understood as Love and Unity.

This exegetical technique can be used with both the Hebrew scriptures and the Greek Christian scriptures. There are other texts that have been found to contain hidden *gematria* in Latin and Arabic, as well. From the practice of *gematria* have arisen extremely interesting techniques, which reveal a type of spiritual Geometry hidden within the Scriptures.

NUMBER, ORDER, SYMMETRY, AND PROPORTION

The great teachings of this Degree revolve around the importance of the Masonic study of number, order, symmetry and proportion. The Masonic use of the term Geometry includes all of these. Nature is the true temple of the Deity. If this is so, then cosmic and natural laws are like the Trestleboard. These laws are discovered in the practice of the Seven Arts (they were called liberal arts because their practice liberated the mind). The ancient philosophers considered Geometry to have the power to lead the mind from the world of appearances to the contemplation of the divine order. Further study would most certainly include a detailed study of Pythagorean number philosophy, the Golden Mean, Plato's work, the Neoplatonists, and Qabalistic *gematria*.

THE FELLOWCRAFT - QUESTIONS

1. Which part of man is dealt with in the Fellowcraft Degree? (Physical, Mental or Spiritual)
2. This degree depicts man in which period of his life?
3. What is the central motif of this degree, and what is its most prominent symbol?
4. How were you received upon first entering a Lodge of Fellowcraft Masons? What is this meant to teach you?
5. What are the four rights of a Fellowcraft Mason?
6. What are the responsibilities of a Fellowcraft?
7. What are the Working Tools of this degree and what do they symbolize?
8. Name the Three Jewels of a Fellowcraft Mason.
9. What do the Two Brazen Pillars represent?
10. Is there a third Pillar? Where is it and why is it significant?
11. How many steps are there on the Winding Staircase?
12. Give three examples of the number three in Freemasonry.
13. What are the Three Theological Virtues? Which Virtues do they compliment from the Entered Apprentice Degree?
14. According to Masonic Tradition, who fashioned the original Pillars at King Solomon's Temple?
15. What are the five Orders of Architecture?
16. Which three are particularly essential to Masons? Why?
17. Name the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences.
18. Which of the seven is most important to Masons and why?
19. Where is the Middle Chamber? How do we gain admission?
20. What are the Wages of a Fellowcraft Mason?
21. What do these Wages symbolize?
22. Which letter is suspended in the East, and what does it represent?

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