

# 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 one of the fathers 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 purpose given above, then it is obvious that the Fellowcraft Degree encompasses much more than just gaining a normal and 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. These benefits are symbolized by Corn, Wine, and Oil. 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 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 triangle the equilateral triangle (all three sides equal), the isosceles triangle (two sides equal), and the scalene triangle (no sides equal).

## **RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A FELLOWCRAFT**

In addition to the rights you acquired as an Entered Apprentice Mason, you now 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 honour.

## **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 labor 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 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 five steps. 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.

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' 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.

## **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.

## **THE WAGES OF A FELLOWCRAFT**

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 unflagging 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.

## **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. 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. 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.

## **GEOMETRY**

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". 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.

## 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*.