

My Obligation as a Freemason

By

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P.G. Repr.

Reproduced alongside is the Essay which won M.W. The Grand Master's Trophy in the Grand Lodge Masonic Essay Competition 1983 and its replica was presented to the author by M.W. The Grand Master at the Grand Festival Communication held in Calcutta on the 7th January 1984.

OBLIGATION is a *binding* agreement - moral, legal and even spiritual - between two entities. It can also be looked upon as one's bounden duty, a solemn pledge, a serious promise, an *oath* an act imposed by the relations of society, something one is *bound* to do as by law or *conscience*.

In Freemasonry this bond is symbolised by the C. T. . which has two ends - one representing the individual Freemason and the other the Fraternity as a whole. The body of the C . . . T . . . itself is the force *binding* together both the entities. It is the obligation of the Fraternity to *teach* the brother the tenets and principles of the order and that of the brother to *learn*, assimilate and actually weave them into the very web of his life.

In public life we see many top ranking men occupying high offices like that of The President, The Governors, Ministers of the Centre and the States, The Judges of the Supreme and High Courts etc. They are all administered an *oath of Secrecy* and an *oath of office*, before assuming the duties and responsibilities annexed to their appointments. The first oath is of vital importance in preserving the safety and security of the country in times of war, political or economic turmoil etc.,

Likewise Obligation is a very important aspect of Freemasonry. It is a solemn and binding duty and a sacred undertaking. It is by the undertaking of duty that one can advance and make progress and when once one assumes that duty, it becomes part and parcel of one's mundane and spiritual life.

In all the degrees of Freemasonry there is an obligation principally concerning **SECRECY**. However in the third degree in Craft Masonry, besides secrecy, the obligation makes a pointed reference to maintaining and upholding the F.P.O.F. 'in act as well as in word'.

Secrecy concerns the form, the details of the ceremonial, the manner of teaching and certain modes of recognition which will enable us to distinguish a genuine brother from a base impostor. In the obligation of the first degree, there is a short Anglo-Saxon word 'hele' which means 'to bury or cover up'. It connotes that away in the great store-house of memory, far out of reach of the profane, the brother will hide away all the affairs of the Lodge particularly those which are derogatory to its dignity. In a deeper sense Secrecy refers to spiritual and philosophical TRUTHS which can only be experienced but cannot be expressed. Unless one has a *prepared* mind and one cannot imbibe such Truths - Why throw pearls before swine!

The idea of an OBLIGATION of secrecy existed from time immemorial in many Ancient Rites and Initiations. In the Ancient Mysteries or Secret schools of Egypt and Greece, the obligation of Secrecy pertained to the inspired NEW Philosophy of the Unity of the Godhead (Monotheism) and the Immortality of the soul - a philosophy quite antagonistic to the beliefs of the common man of that age in the concept of Polytheism without any idea of a SOUL or its immortality.

It is interesting to note that while we take the obligation on the V.S.L. and sea! it with our lips, the initiates among the GOTHS took theirs upon a naked sword and sealed it by drinking mead (a mixture of water and honey fermented and flavoured) *out of a human skull*. In Scotland the candidate for initiation into the mediaeval guilds took his obligation by taking off a slipper and handing it over to the W. Master.

The candidate or the Brother has to take the obligation in front of the Altar, facing the W.M. and assuming a particular posture depending on the degree. He should place his hand or hands on the V.S.L. of his own religious faith that he may deem it more solemn and binding on his conscience.

The OBLIGATION has to be taken out of *free will* and accord. Free will is an essential part of our nature and we must see that it is preserved in the candidate if he were to use his powers unfettered in the fulfilment of his Masonic duties. The certainty of the obligation involves the corresponding certainty of free will.

Although the ceremony of obligation immediately concerns the Candidate, it should be clearly understood by all others that they too 'take' the obligation along with the candidate 'inwardly' so as to remind themselves of it once again.

The serenity, sublimity and solemnity of the occasion demands an *absolute* and *perfect* silence on the part of all the other Brethren assembled in the Temple. They stand 'to order' with military precision but not 'at ease'.

There is another facet of Masonic obligation - that pertaining to M.W. The Grand Master and his two immediate subordinate officers, R.W. The Regional Grand Master and his immediate subordinates - The Dy. R.G.M. and the A.R.G.M's. They take an obligation with regard to the duties and responsibilities appurtenant to their respective offices.

At the level of the daughter Lodges however, there is a variation. The ancient Charges and Regulations are read out to the Master elect at his installation and he is *obliged* to signify his unqualified assent to all of them. It is significant to note that while the candidates for the various degrees take the Obligation of *Secrecy* and the Officers at the higher levels of our hierarchy an Obligation of *duty*, the Master elect takes both. The W. Master while investing his officers enumerates their duties. Although they do not actually take any manner of obligation, it is understood that they are *bound* to perform their tasks faithfully and conscientiously.

Our obligation alludes to two other excellences of character namely fidelity and obedience - Fidelity to the Constitution and ancient landmarks and to the laws and regulations of the order. No wonder, every time we close the Lodge either in the Craft or the higher degrees, we remind ourselves of the obligation to lock up our secrets in the safe and sacred repository of our hearts uniting in the act of F... F... F... --...

As every word and gesture in our ritual is meaningful, it is important to study the ritual with some *depth*, of understanding to see if we can perceive in the various words that are used, the gestures and the ceremonies that are performed, an ever deeper significance. It seems to me that this is what may be meant when we *obligate* ourselves to *make a daily advancement in Masonic Knowledge*. If we become aware, at every moment, of what it is we are doing, then we begin to see even outside the Lodge, the practical application of the lessons which we learn within the Lodge.

We have yet another aspect of Masonic obligation - the *Moral* aspect.

Morality has its axioms like the other science; and these axioms are justly termed *moral Truths*. They are as certain as Mathematical Truths. Given the idea of entrusting some money to a friend for safe custody, the idea to keep it

faithfully is attached to it even as to the idea of a triangle, the idea that its three angles make two right angles is attached. The friend may 'swallow' the money but it cannot be construed that he has *changed* the true nature of morality or Dharma. Thus it is that a Moral Truth is so supreme because like all Truths it is what it is and does not alter its values to please any caprice. Always the same and always present, it condemns the *guilty will* which pretends to deny its existence. To the necessity of *believing* the Truth, the necessity of *practising* it is added. The practise of the Moral Truth is OBLIGATION. There are degrees of importance among different obligations but there are no degrees in the obligation itself. One is not *nearly* obligated, or *almost* obligated but *wholly* so or *not* at all. Moral Truth (Sanathana Dharma) is *absolute, immutable and universal*.

The highest and most sacred facet of Masonic Obligation is however its SPIRITUAL aspect - that of treading the path of TRUTH, the path of *Light* or the path of *Knowledge* by:

1. Acquisition of *Moral Truth* (first degree).
2. Acquisition of *Intellectual Truth* (second degree).
3. *Reflection* on the "most interesting of all human studies" - the "knowledge of yourself." (third degree) and
4. *Introspection* ("digging" and "descending" into one's own self) and acquisition of Divine knowledge and coming face to face with the Godhead and becoming a Godman (H.R.A. Degree).

This is the course of action a True Freemason is *bound* to take by the force of his *conscience*.

Broadly speaking, all the above are *expressed* or overt obligations as indicated in the rituals of the various degrees in Freemasonry.

When we assume an expressed obligation. we also take in a host of IMPLIED obligations. The word 'implied' derives its importance and significance from the legal doctrine of "implied powers."

They form a separate but no less important a place and are evolved from our expressed obligations. Their number is vast but limited by the reflections of the brother enumerating them.

To begin with a man upon becoming a Mason should THINK and ACT Masonically. He must remember that he has FAITH in GOD, that he owes his allegiance to his country, that he must master himself by learning to control his anger, his strengths and weaknesses. Such thoughts should motivate him to lead a clean and virtuous life making the Tenets and Principles of Freemasonry the guiding factors in all his transactions with the outer world.

A second implied obligation is ATTENDANCE. Attendance at Masonic meeting is more than a privilege; it is an implied *obligation* of membership. One of the Ancient Charges regarding attendance is specifically printed on the summonses issued by all Lodges. If one voluntarily assumes the opportunities of fellowship, one is literally *obligated*, by implication, to share one's personal charm, wisdom and presence with one's brethren. By his attendance he converts his presence into action and Social Interaction. Action on his part must become an integral phase of his attendance lest these virtues be perverted into apathy and absence.

Masonry provides many opportunities to its members for reflective considerations. The moral and spiritual symbolism of our rituals is unparalleled and patiently awaits our study. Through such reflection will come SELF-DISCIPLINE - discipline in attire, punctuality, prompt payment of dues, behaviour in the Temple and the Ante-room, observance of proper etiquette in all Masonic duties, sobriety at the festive board and temperance in speech etc. The panorama of SYMBOLISM is so inviting that once a brother opens the door to this wonderful aspect of Masonry, he is incredibly intrigued and becomes a compulsive student. Try!

Unfortunately many of us regard Obligation as a duty, a dreaded drudgery, a burden which soon becomes oppressive. But we should regard the word as synonymous with OPPORTUNITY. Having assumed an obligation expressed or implied, you should consider it a challenge, an invitation – literally an opportunity which might have escaped you, but which now has assumed the importance which demands recognition in terms of specific achievement. The OPPORTUNITY should be a reminder to help those less fortunate than yourself, to correct some faults in yourself which irritate others or to improve yourself by broadening your horizon through study and self-improvement.

OBLIGATIONS and OPPORTUNITIES come in many varied forms. For the benefit of *your family* and loved ones, you owe them an *obligation* of keeping yourself mentally, physically, socially and spiritually fit – clean and healthy! For the benefit of *your Lodge* – you owe some measure of overt support in all its purposeful and laudable activities and for the benefit of *Masonry* you have the OBLIGATION and OPPORTUNITY to create a favourable image in order that the world may know that upon becoming a Mason, *you* have become a *better* man.

The Ancient and Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine - an organisation which has grown out of Masonry though not strictly and directly related to it ritualistically - are the first to admit that true Nobility of character can and should be developed by us, (the Blue Lodge Masons). They believe that all Masons who have reached a measure of NOBILITY are entitled to join their Order.

INTEGRITY for us is a close relative of Nobility. It is that virtue which comes from an honest pursuit of IDEALISM through a determined programme of IMPROVEMENT. In other words if we set for ourselves an objective which is idealistic and which we strive for, by improving ourselves every day in every way, we are *bound* to develop that outstanding trait of impeccable INTEGRITY. I have heard some men, upon applying for membership in our Order, admit they were impressed by the integrity of some of their friends and business associates, who happened to be Masons. Obviously this bespeaks the value of our lessons so beautifully expressed in our ritual. As such, INTEGRITY ought to rank high in the list of Implied obligations.

The Masonic lapel button worn on the coat collar is neither a decoration nor an exhibit. It carries with it a most profound *obligation*. Every Freemason has a dual role in life; he is an individual and a Mason. He has in his trust the honour and reputation of the Fraternity. The wearing of the button carries with it those qualities of honour, integrity and stability of Moral and Spiritual character the Fraternity expects of him in all his dealing with the community around him and the outer world.

Another implied obligation is PARTICIPATION. We owe it to ourselves to take active part in any organisation we join. There is nothing more deadening - more personally demolishing than sitting idly on the sidelines, watching others doing the work of the Organisation. This is true whether that organisation is our Lodge or a Social Service Club. Let us not cheat ourselves out of a pleasant and highly rewarding experience of PARTICIPATION.

RESPONSIBILITY is still another implied obligation. We as True Masons should exercise sound and acceptable judgement in all our actions and should be willing to be held accountable for all such actions. This obligation imposes a very weighty load upon all of us because it should impress us with the fact that we reflect Masonry to the public. If we are responsible citizens, responsible workers and responsible elements in our communities, we cannot help but raise the standards of Freemasonry wherever we are.

Two more obligations which, as good citizens we should be at the forefront to assume are INITIATIVE and INVOLVEMENT. In these days when the common man is silent and apathetic on such issues, we as good men must provide that nucleus of community leadership -- that example of good citizenship which will compel us to exercise our initiative in those projects and activities which contribute to the improvement of our homes, our communities and our country. Some may ask how do we do this?

The answer to this question is by the recognition of yet another implied obligation --- DEDICATION! Dedication to the principles and tenets of our great World Order - dedication to high standards which our senior brethren have set for us as noble legacies. It is such dedication that brings us together now in our earnest and sincere efforts to lead people from darkness to Light - (Thamasoma Jyothir Gamaya). It is also our bounden *obligation* to motivate others less interested to RE-DEDICATE themselves to the glorious Fraternity and act upon its basic tenets and lessons.

A very important implied obligation in any organisation is that of EXPANSION. No organisation can exist without the infusion of "new blood" (to replace the "tired blood") which permeates and overcomes a static institution. It is our *bounden duty* to EXPOUND the virtues of our masonic Fraternity. In a stirring and inspiring speech before Grand Lodge, M.W. The Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of California once proclaimed "If Freemasonry is good let us *talk* about it". We need not be obnoxiously aggressive about it but let us be sincere, earnest and *informative*. Let those outstanding men in our community, in public and private offices and business houses and men in many professions *know* that it is not *invitational* but *selective*.

The last and most important implied obligation is MASONIC PRIDE. If you spell the second word slowly and carefully, you will recognise that the letter 'I' is in the *middle* of that word. Translate that letter into the Pronoun, first person singular you will recognise the most important "person" in this whole concept of Implied obligations. Speak earnestly, sincerely, persuasively and forcefully to that , "person" because he is the most important person – the strongest link in our Fraternal chain.

Please develop Masonic Pride now and let that pride guide your every act! If you are truly proud of your Masonry, and if you demonstrate your pride by your conduct in life, then it *must* follow, as day follows the night, MASONRY will be proud of you!!

The GREAT WORK of Masonry "nothing less than a concerted effort to carry out the duty that is laid upon us, as those who strive for the possess the LIGHT, to spread that light abroad throughout the world and actually become fellow-labourers with the G.A.O.T.U. in His great plan for the evolution of mankind." (Annie Besant in her foreward to that monumental work "The Hidden Life in Freemasonry" by C.W. Leadbeater 33 degrees.)

So to earnestly endeavour to accomplish this great task is, at the highest level, MY OBLIGATION AS A FREEMASON.

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