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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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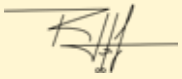


From the Chairman's Desk

by WB:. Dr. Bernard Davis Jr., Chairman- Masonic Education Committee

THE MEANING OF OBLIGATION

Brethren,

As we continue our shared labor in the quarries of moral and spiritual refinement, I invite us this month to reflect on a principle that stands at the very heart of our Craft, the meaning of obligation. In Masonry, obligation is far more than a ceremonial requirement, it is the conscious act of binding ourselves to a higher pattern of life. It is the moment when a man moves from interest to responsibility, from curiosity to commitment, from admiration to duty. Obligation is the spiritual anchor that steadies our steps and shapes our character.

Obligation is the discipline that keeps us faithful. It reminds us that the Light we seek is not given casually, but entrusted to those who are willing to uphold its demands. When we take an obligation, we declare that our words, our actions, and our intentions will be guided by the principles of the Craft. We acknowledge that our conduct carries weight, that our choices influence our Lodge, and that our character reflects the teachings we have received. Obligation is the quiet force that calls us to live with integrity, even when no one is watching.

In leadership, obligation is essential. It teaches us that authority is not a privilege, but a responsibility. It encourages us to act with fairness, to speak with honesty, and to serve with humility. A leader who honors his obligation does not rely on title or position, he relies on character. He understands that leadership is a sacred trust, and that every decision he makes must be aligned with the values he has sworn to uphold. Obligation keeps the leader grounded, reminding him that he is accountable to the Craft, to the Lodge, and to the Great Architect who sees all things clearly.

In our Lodges, obligation strengthens harmony. It guides us to treat one another with respect, patience, and brotherly love. It helps us navigate disagreements without bitterness, and responsibilities without complaint. It reminds us that our fellowship is not accidental, but intentional, built upon shared promises and mutual commitment. When we honor our obligations, we create a Lodge environment where trust can flourish, where service is sincere, and where every Brother feels valued and supported.

And in our personal journeys, obligation keeps us aligned with the divine pattern set before us. It teaches us that growth requires discipline, that refinement requires consistency, and that true mastery requires devotion. Obligation is the virtue that steadies the hand, strengthens the will, and clarifies the mind. It is the reminder that the work of self improvement is lifelong, and that every day offers an opportunity to live more fully in accordance with the Light we have received.

As we move forward this month, I encourage each of us to honor our obligations intentionally. Let us act with greater mindfulness, speak with greater sincerity, and serve with greater devotion. Let us remember that our obligations are not burdens, but blessings, guiding us toward the best version of ourselves. Let us be mindful of the example we set, not through grand declarations, but through quiet consistency. Every act of fidelity strengthens our Lodge, enriches our

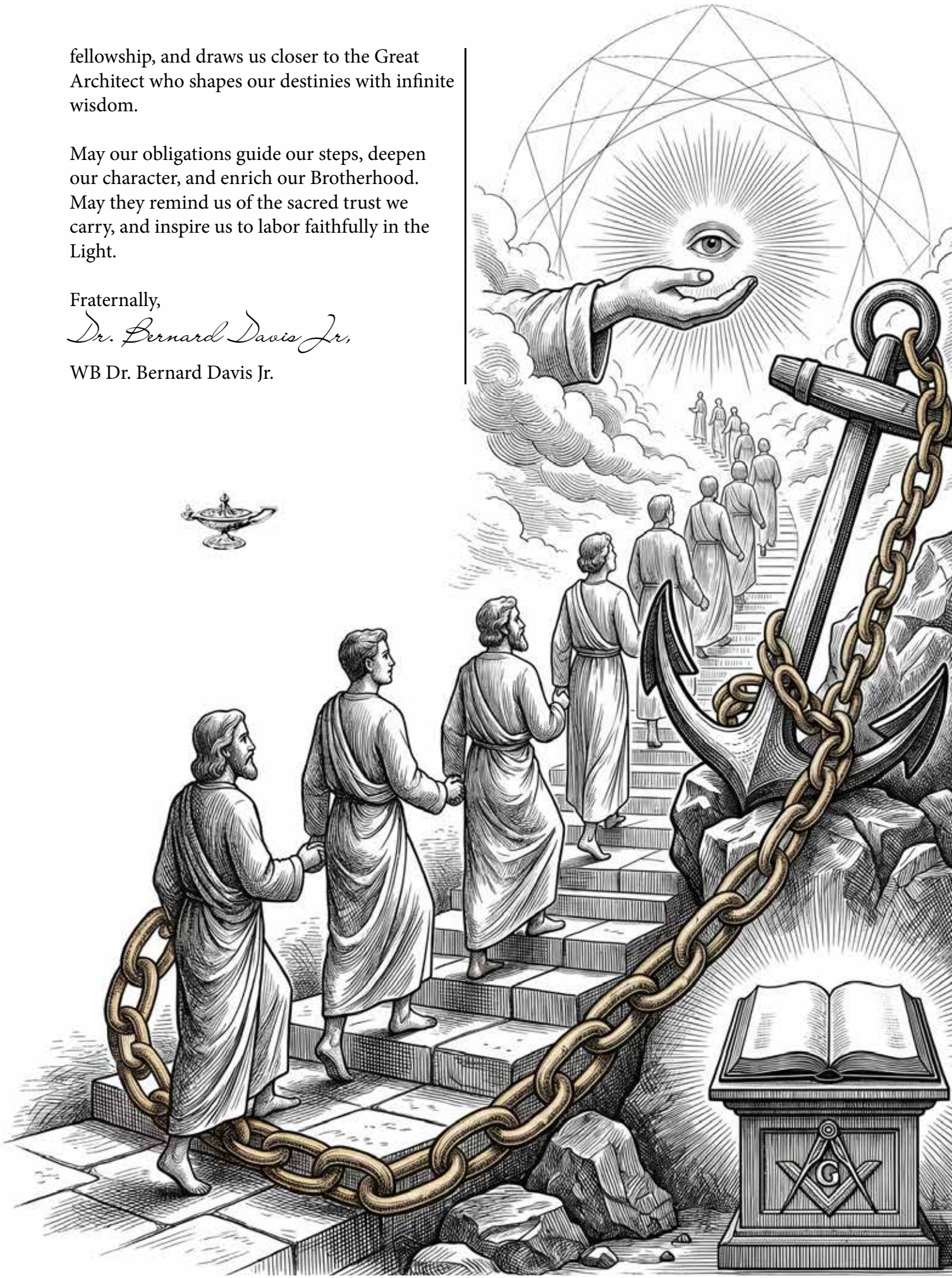
fellowship, and draws us closer to the Great Architect who shapes our destinies with infinite wisdom.

May our obligations guide our steps, deepen our character, and enrich our Brotherhood. May they remind us of the sacred trust we carry, and inspire us to labor faithfully in the Light.

Fraternally,

Dr. Bernard Davis Jr.

WB Dr. Bernard Davis Jr.



The Word Kept

On the Meaning of Obligation

by Brother Kaleem Kamboj, 32

I. THE BANQUET AT CRANNON

The art of memory begins with a broken promise.

The story comes down through Cicero, and Frances Yates places it at the head of her history because everything afterward depends on it. A Thessalian nobleman named Scopas hired the poet Simonides of Ceos to sing his praises at a banquet. Simonides wrote the ode, but gave half of it over to Castor and Pollux. Scopas, offended, told the poet he would pay only half the fee and could collect the remainder from the twin gods. Then word came that two young men were waiting outside to see Simonides. He rose and went out. There was no one there. While he stood in the empty air of the courtyard, the roof of the banqueting hall came down and crushed every man still at the table.

The bodies were unrecognisable. Families came for their dead and could not tell which was which. Simonides could. He had been looking at that room; he remembered where each man had been sitting, and by the order of the places he restored the order of the names. From this he drew the principle that would govern the memory arts for eighteen centuries: fix your places, set your images in them, and the sequence of the places will hold the sequence of the things.

I want to dwell on the shape of this story rather than its technique, because we usually read it as the origin of a method when it is also the origin of something else. A man refuses to pay what he agreed to pay. The roof falls. And the only faculty that survives the

collapse is the one that can still say who was who – which is to say, the faculty that can still discharge an obligation to men who are no longer in a position to demand it. Memory is not born in that room as a convenience; it is born as an act of fidelity, performed on behalf of the dead, in a house where a promise had just been broken.

Obligation and memory are twins. They enter the world together, in the same collapsed hall, and neither is fully intelligible without the other.

II. SIXPENCE

Consider a fact that ought to be more embarrassing to us than it is.

In 1923 Lionel Vibert, then editor of *Miscellanea Latomorum* and a Past Master of Quatuor Coronati, produced a descriptive catalogue of the rare books of Freemasonry. It runs to forty pages and functions, among other things, as an inventory of betrayals. Under the heading Exposures he lists the broadsides and pamphlets in which our ceremonies were printed for the amusement of the public. The Whole Institutions of Free-Masons Opened, 1725, a single folio sheet. The Grand Mystery of Free-Masons Discover'd, 1724, twelve pages, printed for T. Payne near Stationers' Hall. Samuel Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* of 1730, which by Vibert's count went through twenty-one editions in fifty-seven years. *Three Distinct Knocks*, 1760. *Jachin and Boaz*, 1762, which reached twenty-six editions before the Union of 1813 and went on selling afterwards, with American printings in 1793 and 1803. A 1730 broadside called *The Mystery of Freemasonry* was reprinted in the *Daily Journal* that August and then, in December, carried across the Atlantic into the columns of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* – a paper whose editor at the time was Benjamin Franklin, who would reprint Anderson's Constitutions in Philadelphia four years later, by special order, for the use of the brethren in North America.

The *Roberts Constitutions of 1722*, our first printed book, sold for sixpence.

So the arithmetic is not in doubt. Within seven years of the first Grand Lodge, and continuously thereafter, a curious man with small change in his pocket could buy the words. He could learn the questions and the answers, the postures, the knocks. Whatever the obligation was protecting, it manifestly failed to protect it, and it failed early, publicly, and repeatedly, for the better part of three centuries.

And nothing happened.

The Craft did not dissolve when its ceremonies appeared in the newspapers. Lodges did not close because a pamphlet could be had for sixpence in Warwick Lane. The exposures are now, as Vibert dryly observes, of purely antiquarian interest – collectors' items, valued precisely because so few copies survive of books that were printed to destroy us and were instead read to pieces and thrown away.

René Guénon states the principle exactly. Writing of the Masonic high grades, he observes that what is essentially inexpressible cannot be communicated, and therefore that true secrets are their own defence against indiscretion. Elsewhere, discussing the lost word, he puts it more sharply still: anything that can be handed over in outward speech was never the word to begin with. The published exposures did not fail because our security was good. They failed because they were the wrong kind of instrument aimed at the wrong kind of object. A man may read every syllable of a ceremony and possess nothing, in the way that a man may read the score of a fugue and not have heard music.

This clears away a persistent confusion about what a candidate actually undertakes. He is not being enrolled in an information-securi-

ty arrangement. He is not the custodian of a datum. He is promising to become a certain kind of person, and the promise itself, not its contents, is the thing being transmitted.

III. THE PART THAT WAS NEVER WRITTEN

There is a stranger entry in Vibert's catalogue, and it is the one I keep returning to.

After the Union of 1813, the two rival Grand Lodges had to produce a single Book of Constitutions. The Regulations were drafted by a joint committee without much difficulty. The history was another matter. The Antients and the Moderns had held sharply divergent views about where the Craft came from, and no committee was going to reconcile them. So they did something remarkable: they held the historical section over. The *Charges and Regulations* were published in 1815 as "Part the Second," with the promise that the first part would follow with as little delay as possible.

It never followed. The designation "*second part*" was carried through three editions and then quietly dropped. Vibert, writing a hundred and eight years later, notes that no official history has ever been promulgated, and that enquiries are still occasionally made for the non-existent first parts of the sixth, seventh, and eighth editions.

Sit with that. At the moment of reunion, the Craft discovered it could not agree on what it had been, and proceeded anyway on the strength of what its members were willing to swear. The book of our origins is a blank. The book of our duties runs to eight editions. Two bodies that could not compose a shared past composed instead a shared undertaking about the future, and it held, has held now for two hundred and thirteen years, which is longer than most nations have managed on considerably more history.

Promises define the Mason. Not lineage, which we cannot establish; not the ceremonies, which have been in print since 1724; not a common account of where we came from, which we conspicuously lack. What we have is a body of men who have each said the same words in the same posture and then arranged their lives, more or less, around having said them.

The operative trade from which we take our name had already discovered this, and Richard Sennett has put numbers to it. Tracing the medieval workshop in *The Craftsman*, he observes that guilds routinely privileged the sons of masters and that the privilege routinely failed to hold. Across the dense European belt of workshops from Bruges to Venice, roughly half of family businesses passed from one generation to the next in the fifteenth century; by the close of the seventeenth, only about a tenth of artisans' sons took their father's place. Half the sons of the barrel masters of Bruges succeeded their fathers in 1375; by 1500 almost none did. What did not fail was the oath. The master was bound by a religious undertaking, sworn in words no natural father ever had to say, to improve the skills of the boys in his house, and Sennett's conclusion is that this sworn bond proved the surer guarantee of the two. A trade with every reason to descend by blood descended instead by promise. His summary of what actually held the workshop together is a sentence any Master would recognise: the essential ingredients were religion and ritual.

Even the old manuscripts point this way. Vibert notes that nearly a hundred versions of the Old Charges survive, so closely allied in their wording that they must descend from a single lost original. They open with a prayer – usually The Almighty Father of Heaven – and then, after an introduction beginning Good Brethren and Fellows, our purpose is, comes the history, and after the history the Charges themselves. Prayer, story, duty. When the

story became unsayable in 1815, the sequence simply closed over the gap. What remained was invocation and obligation, which turn out to be the load-bearing members.

At Crannon a company survives its own collapse because one man holds the order of the places. In 1815 a company survives its own disagreement because two bodies consent to the same order of duties. Neither is carried forward by the account it gives of itself. Both are carried by the word kept.

IV. MEMORY, INTELLIGENCE, FORESIGHT

Why should a promise be able to carry that much weight?

Cicero gives the answer in the De inventione, and the answer is so old that we have stopped hearing it. Defining the cardinal virtues, he divides Prudence into three parts: memoria, intelligentia, providentia. Memory, by which the mind recovers what has happened. Intelligence, by which it makes out what is. Foresight, by which it sees what is coming before it comes.

Yates shows what the schoolmen did with this. Because Cicero had made memory a part of a virtue, and because the Middle Ages attributed both the De inventione and the Ad Herennium to the same Tullius, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas were able to move the whole apparatus of the artificial memory out of rhetoric and into ethics. Albertus takes up the objection directly, memory belongs to the sensitive part of the soul, prudence to the rational, so how can one be part of the other? – and answers that memory becomes a moral habit when it is used to hold the past for the sake of acting well in the present and providing rightly for what is to come. Memory, in other words, is a virtue when it is placed under obligation.

Now look at what a vow actually does. It takes something that happened – a night, a room, a posture, a set of words – and binds it to something that has not yet happened, across every present that will intervene. It is memoria reaching forward into providentia, with intelligentia standing in the middle doing the daily work of asking what this remembered thing requires of me here, in this argument, with this ledger, at this hour. An obligation is the whole of Prudence held in a single act. That is why it can bear weight. It is not one virtue among others; it is the form the virtues take when they are made continuous over time.

Cicero's triad is not merely a scheme. It has been watched in the field. Gary Klein spent years observing people who decide under pressure – fireground commanders, intensive-care nurses, tank platoon leaders – expecting to find them weighing options against one another. He found nearly the opposite. In four decisions out of five taken during non-routine incidents, his commanders compared nothing at all. They recognised the situation as an instance of a pattern they were already carrying, and the first course of action that came to mind was the one they took. Where they paused, it was not to generate alternatives but to run that single action forward in the mind and watch what became of it. Klein calls the first of these recognition-primed decision and the second mental simulation. Cicero, working from a different end of the problem, called them intelligentia and providentia.

The expert, on this showing, is not the man who has kept his options open. He is the man who has laid down enough pattern in advance that he does not need them open. And this is very close to what a vow does to a life. It is less a fence around the field of choice than a pattern set down early, so that the man who has taken it is spared the labour of reasoning from first principles, at three in

the morning and under load, about whether he is the sort of person who keeps his word. He settled that question once, in a room, with witnesses. What remains is recognition.

Yates goes further, and Royal Arch companions will want to sit up. Having traced the memory art from Simonides through the medieval loci to Camillo's Theatre and Bruno's occult wheels, she offers a hypothesis about the gap that no historian of the Craft has been able to close –how "*operative*" guilds of actual builders became "speculative" Masonry, with its columns and arches used as the framework of a moral teaching. Her suggestion is that speculative Masonry may descend not from real architecture at all but from the imaginary architecture of the memory art: a tradition of building in the mind, forgotten so thoroughly that the gap in our early history is exactly where it used to stand. She points to the Fama's sacred vault with its walls and ceiling divided into compartments, each with its figure or sentence, and to the old Royal Arch prints and banners with their arches and geometrical emblems, and says they look as though they belong to that lineage.

Whether or not she is right – she is careful to call it a hypothesis and to leave the proof to others – the reading illuminates something about our own practice. If the lodge is a memory palace, then the obligation is the image set in the first place, from which the order of everything else is recovered. And Simonides' principle applies: what is stored in a well-ordered place can be found again, in the dark, after the roof has come down.

V. THE FIDUCIARY GROUND

The modern objection to all this is not that obligation is difficult but that it is intellectually disreputable. A free mind should hold everything provisionally. To bind yourself in advance is to foreclose enquiry.

Michael Polanyi spent Personal Knowledge dismantling that objection, and did it from inside the physical sciences, which gives it force. His finding, in the chapter on skills, is that an art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, because no prescription for it exists, it passes only by example, from master to apprentice. And to learn by example is to submit to authority: you follow your master because you trust his manner of doing a thing even when you cannot analyse why it works, and by watching and imitating you pick up rules that the master himself may not know he is following. Polanyi's conclusion is unsentimental. A society that wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge must submit to tradition.

Submission is the word that gives offence, so it is worth noticing what the old craft did with it. In the medieval guild the apprentice swore to keep his master's secrets, but the master swore too, bound by a religious oath to improve the boy's skills, which on one historian's reading was precisely what protected apprentices from being kept on as cheap labour and taught nothing. The obligation ran both ways. It was not extracted from the weaker party as the price of entry; it was the instrument by which the stronger party was made answerable. The same trade made its central technical act an oath: by the thirteenth century the gold assay had become a religious rite, the purity of the metal sworn by a master craftsman in the name of God. Our forebears took it that a man's given word was what made a material claim trustworthy. The operative oath certified the metal. The speculative one certifies the man.

Polanyi presses the point into the theory of knowledge itself. The apprentice, he writes in the chapter on conviviality, must believe before he can know; the whole immense transmission of learning from one generation to the next depends on a prior act of affiliation

by which the novice accepts apprenticeship to a community, trusting that what it does and says has a meaning he will eventually find satisfying. And at the crux of the book, defending his fiduciary programme:

"We must now recognize belief once more as the source of all knowledge."

No intelligence, however critical, operates outside such a framework.

Polanyi accepts what follows. An enquiry into ultimate beliefs, he concedes, can be consistent only if it presupposes its own conclusions, it must be intentionally circular. To the objectivist this is a scandal. To anyone who has knelt at an altar it is a description. You cannot fully know what the obligation means until you have taken it, and you cannot take it responsibly until you know something of what it means. There is no vantage outside the commitment from which the commitment can be assessed. You go in, or you do not, and the going in is itself the instrument of understanding. Guénon says the same thing from the other side when he insists that real initiation must in large part be personal, and that the most an organisation can do is supply the keys and the conditions.

Our own tradition knows this knot. The Arabic for a contract, *'aqd*, comes from the root for tying – the same root that gives *'aqīda*, creed, the thing knotted fast in the heart. Belief and bond are one word at the root, as they are in the Latin: *obligatio*, to bind toward. And the Qur'ān places the first of all contracts before memory rather than within it, in that verse where the descendants of Adam are drawn forth and asked, Am I not your Lord?, and answer, Yea, we bear witness. Every subsequent act of *zhikr*, of remembrance, is on this reading a recollection of a yes that precedes the self who is remembering. The covenant is not an event in the life; it is the condition of there being a life with a shape. Nor is it incidental that the *bay'ah*, the pledge of allegiance, is sealed by the clasping of hands – that the bond is made in the body, by touch, between two persons, and not by the exchange of a document. The French journeymen understood this so well that they simply named their societies after the thing itself and called their brotherhood the Devoir: the Duty.

What these languages share is not a doctrine but a grammar. Latin knots the same two ideas that Arabic does: fides, the faith one keeps, and *foedus*, the covenant one enters, come up out of the same root. Belief and binding are not two things that a tradition later decided to associate. They arrive in speech already fastened to one another, and every tradition that has thought carefully about either has ended up saying so.

VI. THE SUBSTITUTED WORD

There is one more turn, and it is the honest one.

Guénon, writing on the lost word, observes that the sacred word of the Master's degree is plainly a substituted word – and, he adds, is given as such. We are not deceived about this. The ritual is candid that what it hands over is a stand-in, held in trust against a recovery that has not occurred, by men who will not live to see it.

I can think of no better description of what it is to keep a promise across a life. You are given something you know to be provisional. You did not receive the whole of it; the whole of it may not be receivable in this state. You are asked to hold it faithfully anyway, to hand it on unbroken, and to conduct yourself as though the thing you are guarding were the real thing, because your fidelity to the substitute is the only road by which anyone gets nearer the original.

This is why obligation is not a burden laid upon a life from outside. A burden is a weight the structure carries. An obligation is the member the structure is built around. Remove it and nothing is lightened; something falls. The candidate who imagines he is surrendering a portion of his liberty has the geometry backwards – before the obligation he had motion in every direction and travel in none, and what the vow gives him is not a smaller field but a bearing.

Which is the question the obligation actually puts, and it was never a question about information: what will you do with yourself when no one is watching, when there is no enforcement but your own memory?

It is worth saying how unusual a room has become that still asks it. Sennett, following the sociologist Elliott Krause, observes that the modern professions have grown steadily stricter and more expert while shedding almost every ritual that once bound a practitioner to his colleagues and to the town he worked in. We have more expertise than any age before us and fewer institutions that ask a man to swear anything he will still be held to in twenty years. Krause called his study of this The Death of the Guilds. Whatever else a lodge is, it is one of the few rooms left in which the older arrangement is still in force.

Joseph de Maistre saw the principle in 1782, arguing against a proposal to abolish the Masonic oath. The civil power, he grants, is the only authority that can prescribe and administer oaths in the ordinary business of society; but no one can deny an intelligent creature the right to attest, by oath, an inward determination of his own free will. Then the sentence that ought to be carved somewhere:

"My arm is his; my will is my own."

To swear is not to give the will away. It is the only way of exercising a will over time rather than merely in the moment.

Which returns us to the fallen hall at Crannon. The families come, and the bodies cannot be told apart, and one man in the courtyard still holds the order of the places. He did not stay for the money. He was owed and not paid, and he stood outside in the dark while the roof came down, and what he carried out of that night was not a grievance but a method, a way of holding what has been given so that it can be found again when everything else is rubble.

We do not keep our word because the secret would otherwise escape. It escaped in 1724, for sixpence. We keep our word because the keeping is the thing itself: the place in which everything else we have been given is stored, and from which, in the dark, it can still be recovered in order.

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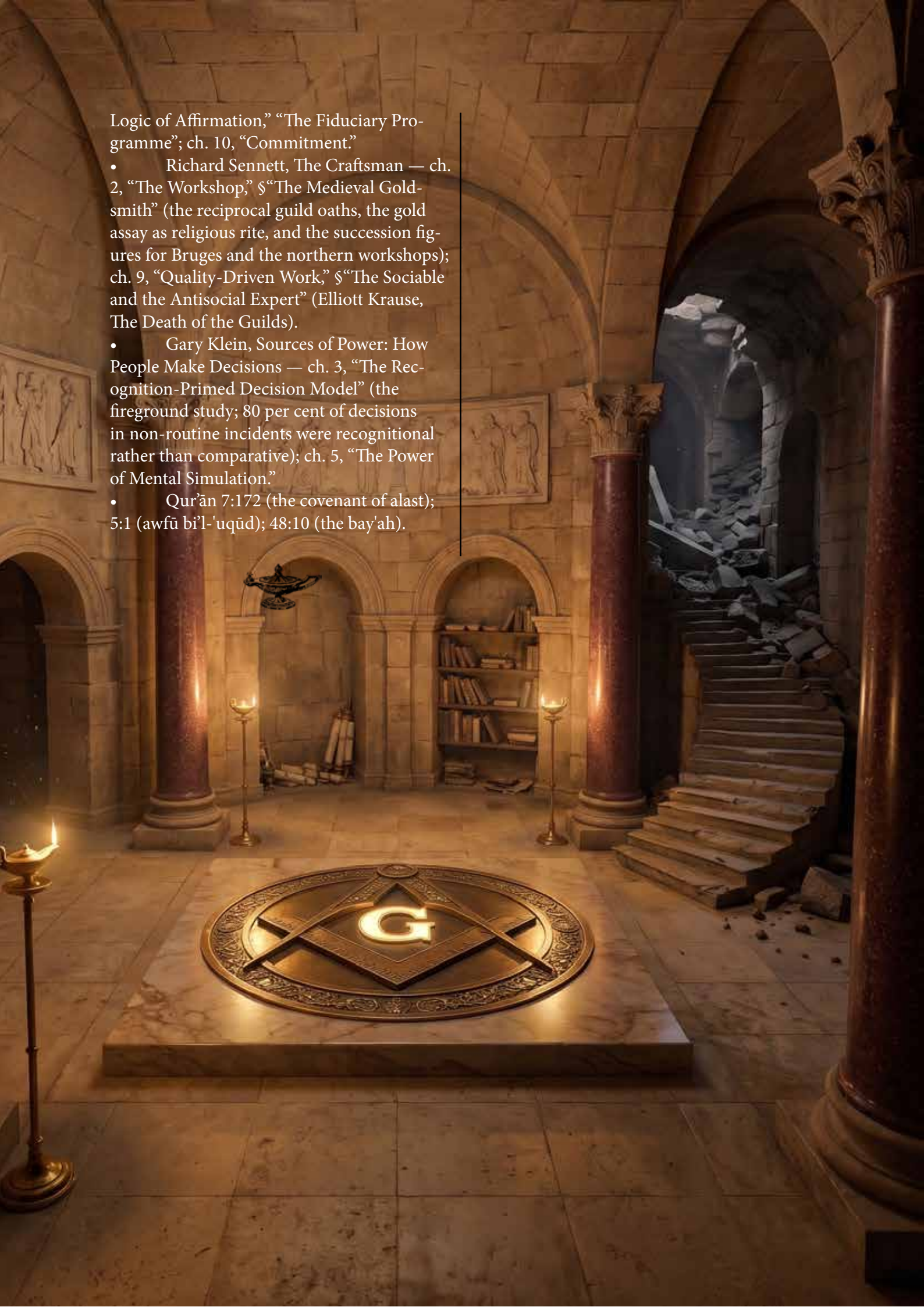

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2ND AND 4TH
WEDNESDAY EACH MONTH

Forget Me, Not My Obligation

by Bill Hosler, PM †

As anyone who has ever donned a Masonic apron knows, Freemasonry has a long and rich history. No one truly knows where Masonry started. Many legends claim to explain its origins. But we have no actual written record we can point to as evidence.

In some ways, our Craft is a collection of legends, stories, anecdotes, and histories woven together into a patchwork quilt, much like Fraternity itself. From the legend of the third degree through the allegories down through the Grand Lodges and their histories, each lodge and the individuals that comprised each square tell a story of a memory of a Brother or a lodge event that made the Fraternity what it is today. Hearing these stories, or recalling an event you witnessed, can give a just and upright Mason the warm feeling of brotherly love and affection.

As most of us know, not all these stories and legends are true. Some of these legends were created to illustrate a point or tell a story. And some, sadly, were created out of thin air to give the Craft some "street cred" it truly didn't need or wasn't worthy of.

One of these legends is the well-known "Forget-Me-Not" legend. I really was heartbroken when I discovered the truth about this story. In my first few years as a Mason, this story gave me a really warm feeling. The thought of men risking their lives to aid and assist each other while in the shadow of a murderous regime seemed to me like one of the purest forms of Fraternity, so when I read the works of Most Worshipful Brother Bradley S. & Jean Rickelman, "The Myths about Forget-Me-Not Flowers," appearing in The Oklahoma Mason Vol 2 May 2013, and a lodge devotional titled The Forget-Me-Not Flower – a growing Masonic Myth, https://www.lodgedevotion.net/devotion-newsletter-content/editorial-educational-articles/the-forget-me-not-flower-a-growing-myth, I can honestly say, I was truly broken-hearted. I really wanted the story to be true.

We as Masons want it to be true. We need it to be true in our hearts to remind us we are all a band of brothers and we are all there for each other, through thick and thin.

Another legend that has been sadly debunked in recent years is the story of General Lewis Armistead in the book "The Better Angels of Our Nature: Freemasonry in the American Civil War" by Most Worshipful Brother Michael A. Halleran https://amzn.to/3BfXjSk.

Another debunked Masonic tale is "*The lodge over*

Simpkins store." The sentiment behind this poem, beautiful as it may be, has recently been proven fictional by Brother Patrick Dey in Episode 536 of the Whence Came You? Podcast https://wcypodcast.libsyn.com/whence-came-you-0536-the-lodge-that-wasnt-over-simpkins-store

One thing these stories have in common (besides not being true) is that they illustrate Masonic principles each Mason cherishes: faithfulness to your Brethren, dedication to your Masonic obligations, and spreading the cement of friendship and brotherly love. Just a few of the "rights, lights, and benefits" a candidate is looking for as he knocks on the door to a lodge room.

The Forget-Me-Nots and the story about General Armistead are placed in times when Masonry wasn't just about ritual and reading minutes or worrying about the lodge building's roof. It was a time when men who made a Masonic obligation showed their true character and lived out the words they repeated while kneeling.

So many times, we look to Masonry's past to try and build our future. We love to point out that George Washington and John Wayne were Masons, or someone else a young man may have read about in his high school history class once, hoping that fact might impress him enough to sign a petition to join.

Sometimes I don't think we realize how powerful these legends really are. Think about how many times you visit a lodge and see a brother wearing a Forget-Me-Not lapel pin or necktie. The same with General Armistead. That legend is so powerful and influential to Freemasons that the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania created a monument at the Gettysburg Battlefield featuring it. The Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite even uses the story to teach a lesson in one of their degrees. In many ways, these legends are as powerful and as essential to American Freemasonry as the legend in the third degree.

If the craft has any common sense left, we should find a way to use these stories to our benefit while also pointing out their origins, to teach Masonic brethren to fulfill their obligations, not in a memorized allegorical way where a man will tune it out, but in a way that will truly motivate him and at the same time make him proud of his membership.

Think of it this way, brethren: No one ever erected a statue or wore a lapel pin memorializing the reading of the minutes or of a pancake breakfast no more than anyone ever wrote a poem to commemorate a fish fry or a treasurer's report.

187th Annual Grand Lodge Communication

October 9-10, 2026 Crowne Plaza Springfield – Convention Center

Most Worshipful Grand Master Joseph B. Ferrell welcomes you to attend the 187th Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of the State of Illinois. **LEARN MORE BELOW!**

As required by Code 100, this year's Grand Lodge Annual Communication will be held at the Crowne Plaza Springfield - Convention Center on Friday, October 9th and Saturday, October 10th, 2026. Lodge representation at the Grand Lodge session each year is mandatory. An absence of two successive years could result in the loss of the Lodge Charter. Representatives must be present and remain during each session in order for the Lodge to receive mileage and per diem.

Registration will begin an hour and a half prior to the opening gavel each day. Lodge representatives with credential/proxy cards should report to the Credentials Committee at the appropriate table in the lobby of the Crowne. Please allow time to be registered and in your seats prior to the session's opening.

Schedule

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9

7:00 a.m.

- Coffee, Tea, and Donuts in Plaza A

8:00 a.m.

- Grand Lodge Session Opens on Plaza Level

12:15 p.m.

- Men's Luncheon in the Crowne Plaza Ballroom

MEETINGS AND SEMINARS

1:30 p.m.

- Membership Development Workshop*
- Illinois Masoinic Charities*
- Illinois Masonic Family Identification Program*
- Groupable/M2 Training*
- Cyber Security Training*
- MSA Field Agents*

3:00 p.m.

- Grand Lecturer/CLI Meeting*
- Leader Development*
- Groupable/M2 Training*

- Cyber Security Training*
- Lodge of Research*

5:00 p.m.

- "No Host" Reception in the Crowne Ballroom (Attire: Black/Dark Suits; Ladies dresses or pants suits)

6:30 p.m.

- Grand Banquet in the Crowne Ballroom (Attire: Black/Dark Suits; Ladies dresses or pants suits)

**Room locations for these meetings have not yet been assigned. Locations will be announced at a later date.*

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10

8:00 a.m.

- Coffee, Tea, & Donuts, Plaza A

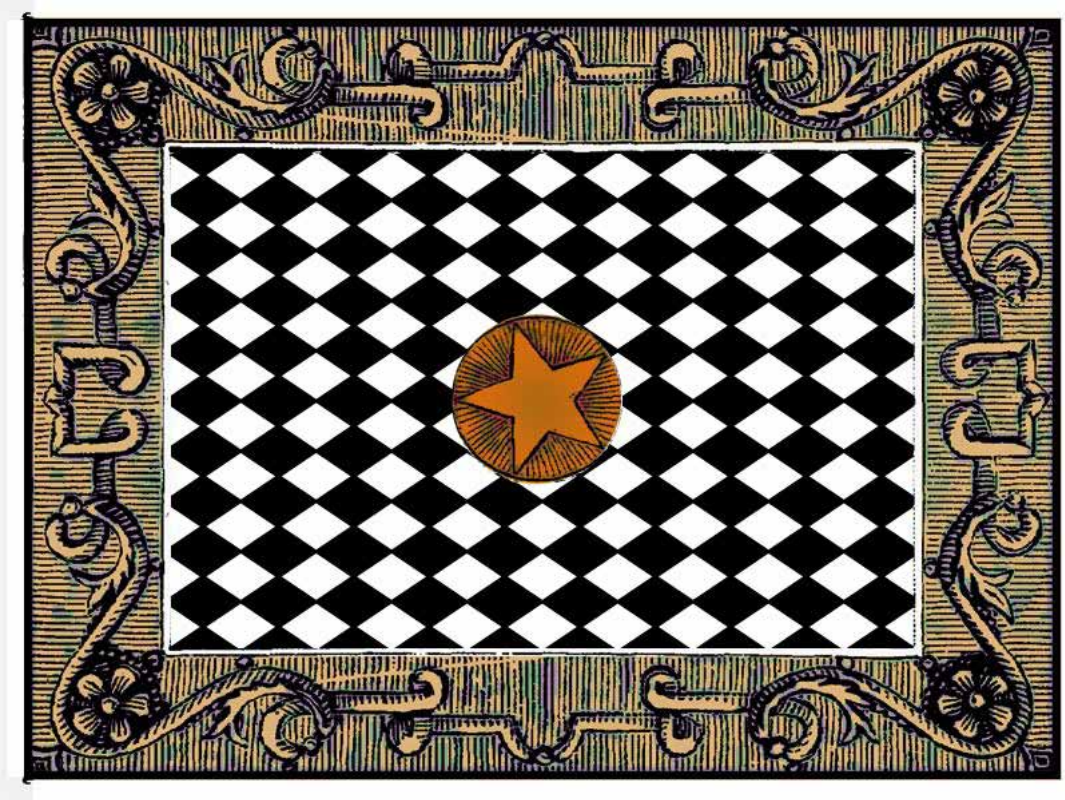
9:00 a.m.

- Grand Lodge Session Opens, Plaza Level

12:00 p.m.

- Completion of Business

Additional meetings and seminars will be announced during Grand Lodge Sessions. Times of some events are subject to change.



SEQUOIT LODGE ANNUAL OUTDOOR DEGREE

Join us to confer a third degree and commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States in Masonic fellowship.

SEPTEMBER 12, 2026
GAVEL AT NOON
DINNER AT 3:00 PM

LOCATION: THE ILLINOIS CONSERVATION CLUB
41081 IL-83, ANTIOCH, IL 60002

THE THEME THIS YEAR IS “THE LIVING STONES OF THE REPUBLIC”

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION AND UPDATES!

outdoordegree.com

Obligations

by J.P. Flemming, PM

"*Your regular and punctual attendance is requested*"

"The Duties you have to perform are as such…."

"Furthermore! I will answer all due signs and summonses.."

"Furthermore! I will aid and assist all worthy Brothers…"

Obligations, we take them at the altar during our degrees. We take them when we stand up and volunteer for an officer position. They are the foundation of our fraternity. Some of us have endured to take them in front of God, our friends, and loved ones when we entered the perilous journey of Holy Matrimony. Now, some of what I say here may not please some of you. It may downright anger you and stir up strong emotion. I am willing to accept that wrath, as I have taken an obligation myself, one to whisper good counsel. I have also made an obligation to myself as an education officer/ committee member and so forth to bring the craft knowledge, whether it wants it or not. You see, there has been much concern of late with the craft and its dwindling numbers. Some concern extends to lodges that have recently purchased new buildings or attempted other monetary ventures, with the thought that it may gain membership. The main question on the trustees' minds and the brotherhood's lips would be "*Will this (insert expense) be enough to bring in the new masons, to carry on this legacy?*"

I am here as a younger mason, as a millennial, as one of the "*new generation,*" to tell you that, as I see it, the answer is, "*No*." Not just a regular no, but a resounding "*No*." Younger, newer masons that have never heard of the craft will not join a lodge long-term. I am not speaking of the legacy of old members, the generational masons that have family lineage. I mean the new blood. You may ask, "*How is new mason retention and obligations related?*" That is fairly simple; it's what we are offering. That said, "*What are we offering?*" To make good men better? A social club where you can meet men of a higher caliber? Brotherly Love? Relief? Truth?

Or are we offering three to four worn-out masons who have done 90% of the work for so long that they have become jaded from constantly picking up the slack because "S*omeone forgot?"* Generally, someone who forgot- this isn't their first, second, or third time- and from what I have been seeing

lately, these forgetful brothers are also officers. However, these now jaded, tried-and-true masons not only took those obligations seriously; they believed in them. I don't have to tell you, brothers, though; you're the ones who are attending your lodge's activities as I write this. You're actually attending, and frankly that's the sad part. Not that you are attending, of course, but that those who need this message are the ones who are absent, because they "*Had other things on their plate*," "*No slack left in their cable tow*." Being one of the members that shows up, it puts you in a bit of a position of choice- well, choice and burdensome guilt, for which I apologize. Your choice is to put in the work, or you can sit on the sidelines enjoying the fruits of everyone else's labor.

Back to those new masons: if they are coming in to make themselves better, but they see no one holding themselves to a higher standard, why would they stay? If they are coming in for the social aspects, do they want to be around people who break promises? Is it brotherly love they are seeing when everyone leaves their work for another brother to pick up the slack? Because it is definitely not Relief! That's how we get grumpy past masters that give you the evil eye when you step wrong. As for truth, if a brother makes an obligation, a promise, and does not fulfill it, he lied not only to himself, but to the Grand Architect. Would this not be akin to breaking one's marriage vows, because they "*forgot*"? Not sure that one is going to hold up in divorce court, let alone the aftermath when you reach your final destination.

Anyone who thought they signed up to the craft and thought they were getting something for nothing is so very wrong. We all signed up to Work! That's the voluntary part of our organization; this is something we wanted. Not only did we want it, but we paid money every year for the privilege of doing it! There is a saying in the military: when you take your oath, your obligation to the country, I am sure many of you have heard it. They say you are writing a blank check to Uncle Sam, for up to and including one life. My brothers, this is an obligation made to our government. We all made an obligation at the altar to God; what does that check say? "*Up to and including one soul?*" The work never ends; our work never ends. After many years it may slow a little, but it doesn't end. Many an old-timer will claim they have put in their work, but that obligation doesn't have an expiration date. Many things can be done, need to be done, and in my personal opinion, mentorship is at the top of the list. Words of wisdom don't expire either.

My lesson is this: if you want your lodge, this fraternity, to survive, give those new masons something to look up to, something to look forward to. Don't give them a feast of hastily purchased fast food because you forgot and it was on the way. Don't give them exasperated members who are being pulled in every direction because no one else will volunteer for a committee. And for the love of all that is holy, don't give them broken promises. Give them mentorship. Give them aspirations to help others and continue this work that has been going on for three centuries. Give them Freemasonry, and do it by fulfilling your obligations, wherever, whatever your station, place, or folding chair.

TAKING AN OATH

by Greg Knott, PM, 33˚

Recently I attended an officer commissioning of new 2nd Lieutenants and Ensigns from the University of Illinois ROTC program. These young officers were graduating from the University of Illinois and officially receiving their commission to serve in the United States Armed Forces.

Part of the ceremony was the officers taking the Military Oath of Office. The Military Oath of Office is, "I, (state full name), having been appointed a 2nd Lieutenant or Ensign, in the United States (Army, Navy, Marines or Air Force), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take the obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter, so help me God."

The ceremony program noted that this Oath of Office was essentially the same as that taken by American officers since George Washington. Now over 240 years later this oath is still being administered in the United States.

I couldn't help but think of the similarities to the oaths taken by Freemasons, whether during a degree or upon being installed as an officer of the lodge. These oaths emphasize that you will fulfill your obligation or duty freely. They state the seriousness of the work you about to undertake and that you are committed to doing that work to the best of your ability.

Oaths in and of themselves are just words and are meaningless without actions behind them. They do not guarantee success and do not discourage failure. What an oath does is set forth an obligation and set of duties for you to strive for. They can serve as a reminder as they why you are doing what you do. They are a common bond that tie those together that have taken the same oath.

Are you upholding your oath?

Oration 1958

Masonry: Its Opportunity and Its Destiny

by Harrry X. Cole R .W . Grand Orator Before the One Hundred Nineteenth Annual Meeting of the Grand Lodge of Illinois at Chicago, October 11, 1958

An Important Note from the Editor-In-Chief

The address printed below was delivered to the Grand Lodge of Illinois in the late 1950s. Reading through it today, its era is unmistakable. The non-inclusive language, the dated framing of physical disability, and the sharp Cold War rhetoric reflect the specific cultural anxieties and social norms of a mid-twentieth-century audience.

If we look past the mid-century framing, however, there is a fundamental message here that we cannot afford to ignore.

At its core, this speech is a direct challenge regarding moral responsibility and duty. It serves as a reminder that taking degrees or wearing an emblem on a lapel means very little if we fail to put those principles into practice in our daily lives. RW:. Cole's defense of human dignity against raw materialism, alongside his call for genuine fellowship across religious divides, speaks directly to the work we are called to do.

We present this text not as a pristine artifact, but as a thought-provoking look at our duty to live with purpose, act with integrity, and answer the call of service.

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Grand Officers, Distinguished Guests and Members of this Grand Lodge:

To address this illustrious group is a tremendous privilege, and at the same time, a distinct challenge. I am filled with mingled emotions—humility and gratitude. The walls of this beautiful Temple echo the magnificent orations of my predecessors, all of whom more deservedly stood upon this rostrum. I am grateful to be a Mason, and to have an opportunity to serve the Craft in any manner possible. Our Grand Lodge has been blessed with sterling leadership by our loyal Past Grand Masters, and during the current administration by our Most Worshipful Grand Master, Bro. Harold R. Kopfman. He has been unstinting in his devotion to his duties and has made many personal sacrifices as our Ambassador par excellence to the Masonic world. Our outstanding Grand Officers, elective and appointive,

have collaborated in a manner worthy of the highest commendation. It sometimes is difficult for lay members to realize the time and effort involved in the modus operandi of our Organization. We are greatly indebted to the Board of Grand Examiners, Grand Lodge Committees, District Deputy Grand Masters, and Grand Lecturers. We must take cognizance of the fruitful seeds sown by the Committee on Masonic Education. How proud we are of the Boards of Managers of the homes at LaGrange and Sullivan, as well as the Officers of the Masonic Service and Relief Associations. We must note also the beacon lights of service beamed unofficially by our wonderful Illinois Masonic Hospital and Masonic Employment Bureau.

We acknowledge the honor conferred upon us by the presence in our midst of noted dignitaries of allied Organizations in our State and nation, and distinguished visitors who have held high the banner of Masonic leadership in other jurisdictions.

One of the significant things we learn in Masonry is the importance of the individual man—importance to himself and importance to God. How important are we as individuals? Ripley facetiously, yet accurately, pointed out that the chemical analysis of the human body is as follows: enough fat for six bars of soap; enough iron for a six-penny nail; enough lime to whitewash a chicken coop; enough phosphorus for twenty boxes of matches; enough potassium to explode a toy cannon; enough sugar for ten cups of coffee; enough sulphur to rid a small-sized dog of fleas; total value $87— less sales tax, withholding tax and Social Security.

You would be insulted if I said each of you was worth only $87 to the world—and rightfully so. What is it that makes us worth more than the chemical elements in our bodies? There is a story in the Jewish Talmud describing a vision of Pharaoh. He saw a rod with a pan of scales at each end. One was gold and the other straw. On the golden pan was the combined wealth and commerce of Egypt. On the straw pan was a child. As Pharaoh watched, behold the straw scales tipped downward. The child outweighed all the wealth and commerce of the country. Thus, we realize that a human being is more important in the sight of God than wealth, pomp, or power.

The Psalmist, meditating on God's goodness, lifted his voice in wonder and adoration, "*When I consider Thy Heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.*"

Many of you have heard the Sunday night television program conducted by John Daly called "*What's My Line?*" If we were participants, each of us would want to say "*My line is brotherhood. I was put upon this earth to serve, and in that service do I find the highest fulfillment.*" But is this the conclusion which the panel would reach? Here is where Masonry demonstrates its greatest glory and fulfills its highest destiny— by instilling moral principles and building sterling character in the individual man.

If I drop a silver dollar into Lake Michigan, it will have the same metal content as any other silver dollar. But the dollar in the Lake will have no usefulness, because it is out of circulation. No matter how well we know our Masonic ritual, or the teachings in the Bible, unless we put these fraternal and religious ingredients into our daily lives, they are out of circulation.

Have you ever seen a street car stop in the middle of the block and wonder why? Perhaps you noted that the motorman and con-

ductor were at their posts, and there appeared to be nothing wrong with the machinery. Then, perhaps, you saw the conductor jump off the car and jerk the trolley back onto the line. There had been no connection with the power above. The power above, my brethren, is God. No matter what education or training we have—no matter what activities occupy our attention—no matter how we conduct ourselves—unless we maintain a connection with the power above, we are unable to function usefully.

The papers today are full of articles about summit talks. When Moses went up into a mountain and received there the Ten Commandments, that was a summit talk. When the disciples heard the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes, that was a summit talk. When, in anguish and yet in the submission of sublime faith, Jesus said, "*Not my will, but Thy will be done,*" that was a summit talk. When Paul heard the voice on the Road to Damascus, that was a summit talk. When we lift up our hearts in prayer, that is a summit talk. A summit talk is made not necessarily on the top of a mountain. I t is as high as the human heart, yet it may reach its full stature in the very heavens above.

As we are gathered in this Convention, perhaps it is apropos for us to have a summit talk. We are dedicated, among other things, to truth. What is truth? Pilate asked this question of the Master. The search for truth has been one of the chief aims of mankind. For it, Abraham practically was exiled. Luther was excommunicated, Moses was almost murdered, Paul was beheaded, the Pilgrims were harried out of their land, and John Wesley was slandered.

What is truth? The truth is that taking the various degrees does not make one truly a Mason. Neither does the wearing of an emblem on a coat lapel designate one truly a Mason. We must wear an invisible emblem on our hearts. We must make Masonic ideals stand out in bold relief in our lives. As we give light, and more light, to our fellowman, so are we illumined within. A member who does not carry out Masonic principles, as he rubs shoulders with his fellowman, is like a person who is unemployed and is drawing Unemployment Compensation. He is getting the benefits without doing his job. He is enjoying not only Social Security, but Fraternal Security. He is paying no Withholding Tax, but is withholding from the Lodge of Life the fulfillment of his obligations as a Brother. He is failing to pay his membership income tax, and the Collector of Fraternal Revenue should send the Fraternal F.B.I. after him.

Being a Mason is an honor, an obligation, an opportunity, a challenge, and a destiny. It is an honor to bask in the light and prestige established by our forebears. It is an obligation to the founders of the Craft for creating and developing this great Fraternity. It is an opportunity to spread liberally the cement of brotherly love. It is a challenge to follow the two soul-stirring Commandments for happiness—first, "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*," and second, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" It is our destiny to lead the world. As Masons, we must kneel downward in recognition of our fealty to God, and reach upward to the stars which shine down upon us in blessing.

In advertisements, we read that a pill or vitamin is good because it is medicated. A Mason truly is good when he is dedicated. In the missile field, they use the terms "*activated*" and "*motivated*." Each of you, my brethren, at a certain time felt inspired to do good in this world, whereupon you were motivated to be a Mason. When you took your Degrees and were thrilled with your indoctrination into Masonic philosophy, you were activated. Now, when you apply Masonic principles in your daily life, you are dedicated. New sci-

entific developments make us think about the size of the world. Actually, it is no larger than the human heart. To reach the sky is no higher than to reach the soul.

Brother Andrew Caraker, R.W. Grand Orator last year, most beautifully and eloquently stressed the phase of Freemasonry in the business of character. How do we achieve character? We are not born with it. We cannot learn its technique just by associating with certain people, or living in a certain environment, or by working at a certain job. Goethe, the great German writer, explained it most succinctly in these words: "*Es bildet Talent sich in der Stille, sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt.*" In translation, "*A talent is developed in the quiet; a character in the stream of the world.*" Yes, it is true. You can learn how to dance, act, play a piano, become a doctor or lawyer in the quiet of the schoolroom or office. But you can learn to live only in the stream of the world—by meeting the disagreeable, discouraging, difficult, dangerous experiences of reality. You must face, rather than evade, consequences, in order to accumulate power and command respect. You may fake many things, but not character. You may quote rituals, spout sermons, give large amounts to charity. These are only gestures. You can learn how to be bright and nice by reading. But you can learn how to be a regular human only by being one.

A philosopher stopped at a stone quarry one day. He asked several of the workmen, "*What are you doing?*" The first said, "*Earning $10.00 a day.*" The second replied, "*Cutting stone.*" However, the third workman paused before he answered, and with a sparkle in his eye, proudly stated, "I am building a Cathedral." This man knew that the stone he was cutting would be used one day in the erection of a fine edifice. He realized that his little work was a step in a great program. What are we doing in our respective lives? As we work in our manufacturing plants, are we just performing menial duties, or do we have the vision that our corporations are making articles which will be useful to our fellow man? As we carry on our tasks in our various business and office projects, are we just handling correspondence, or filing cabinets, or typewriters? Or, are we recognizing that our businesses and offices are developing processes to increase the comforts and lighten the burdens of the human race? Whatever we do, we can think of the physical and mental operations, and complain about repeating monotonous chores day after day. Or, like the third man at the stone quarry, we can be building a Cathedral. We can be releasing beauty and wonder and ecstasy in the hearts of men. We can be clearing a way for God. Yes, the third man saw the truth and "the truth did set him free."

One of the most noteworthy works of art by Michelangelo is his statue of David. It is perhaps his most popular carving. The remarkable fact is that the piece of marble used had been rejected by another artist because it was too narrow. If you look closely at the statue, you can note that the right elbow hugs the side. The left arm presses against the side, and the left knee bends inward. Michelangelo took this rejected narrow slab of marble and out of it created a thing of beauty and joy forever. The matter of living a life is an art—and a most difficult one. We are restricted by the limitations of the material with which we have to work. Sometimes we have narrow and uneven blocks of marble out of which to carve our lives. We may suffer handicaps from accidents or physical disabilities. Like Michelangelo, out of the narrow confines of our little spheres, we can create for ourselves and our fellowman a life of service and a life of usefulness.

History is replete with examples of heroic figures who have overcome obstacles. Beethoven was born with a congenital ear ailment which developed into complete deafness.

Yet he gave to the world some of the sweetest melodies ever heard. Glenn Cunningham was injured in a fire while young. Doctors said he would never run again. However, he persisted in walking and exercising until he became the world's greatest halfmiler. Demosthenes, as a boy, was afflicted with a stammer, but he went into the woods, put pebbles in his mouth, and shouted to the birds and trees until he overcame his stammer and grew to be the most famous orator of his century. Thomas Edison was partially deaf, but that did not deter him from hearing and interpreting scientific messages that changed the history of the world. William Henley lost one foot because of tuberculosis. While awaiting an operation that might save him from amputating the other leg, he wrote his immortal "*Invictus*," and enhanced our literature with these words, "*I am the Master of my fate—I am the Captain of my soul*." Pasteur was a cripple, but he wrote his name indelibly in the field of medical science. Franklin Roosevelt—stricken with infantile paralysis in the midst of a brilliant career, utilized his tremendous reservoir of spiritual strength to become a great political figure. St. Francis of Assisi had tuberculosis, but his life of service earned him a place among the Saints. Robert Louis Stevenson was an invalid, but gave us stories that have delighted the world.

The pages of history are dotted, also, with tales of men and women who not only overcame, but actually converted their ailments and handicaps into phases of usefulness. Irving Berlin originally was a waiter in a New York restaurant. He had difficulty remembering the items on the menu because of his poor memory. In order to remind himself of the items, he began to hum or sing little ditties about each one. One day a Broadway impresario teased him and made him elaborate. It was not long before this impresario took Berlin to his office and started him on the road to success as a great songwriter. Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett fell in love. She had been confined to her bed for five years by a nervous ailment. Because of her love for Browning, she exerted the tremendous power with which God has endowed each of us, arose from her bed and overcame her ailment. They married, bore lovely children, and wrote delightful poetry together in Florence, Italy, for many years. Toscanini is so nearsighted that he cannot see a score of music more than four inches away from his face. Because of this infirmity, he is obliged to memorize every single score which he conducts. Thus, when he stands before an orchestra, he has no score to watch, but uses all of his creative energy in the interpretation of the music. These men and women have given proof of the fulfillment of the assurance to be found in Revelation 21:7, "*He that overcometh shall inherit all things.*" No matter what our station in life may be, no matter what afflictions seem to assail us, no matter what problems develop in our respective activities, we, as Masons, know that our faith in God will help us to overcome all obstacles and to convert seeming handicaps into instruments of utility.

God has implanted in each one of us an innate special ability. All we need to do is to look into our souls, ascertain what our particular forte may be, bring it to the sunlight of life, cultivate and nurture it. Ralph Waldo Emerson had this in mind in his essay about vocational guidance. He suggested that an individual must learn who and what he is—then, outline his education, capitalize on his environment, and develop himself according to God's plan.

Some years ago, before the Israelites took hold in Palestine and began their remarkable, unbelievable, and magnificent program of rehabilitation, Bruce Barton, the famous American writer, called attention to an interesting anomaly. He pointed out that there were two seas in Palestine. One of them, the Sea of Galilee, was fresh, with fish living

in it, splashes of green adorning its banks, with men building their homes, and birds their nests, near to it. Then, a bit farther to the South, there was another sea, the Dead Sea—with no splash of fish, no fluttering leaf, no song of birds and no children's laughter. Peculiarly, both of these seas received their water from the same source—the River Jordan. There was this difference. The Sea of Galilee received, but did not keep, the contribution from the Jordan. For every drop that flowed into the Sea of Galilee, another drop flowed out. The Dead Sea, however, had no outflowing process. It received and retained unto itself every drop of water that flowed into it from the River Jordan. Truly, we must realize that this anomaly is also an analogy. We receive many blessings from God just by being born, many blessings from our teachers in schools and colleges, many blessings from our membership in this great Masonic Order. We can be like the Dead Sea and keep all these blessings unto ourselves. Or, like the Sea of Galilee, we can pass on these blessings to our fellowman by being charitable, considerate, kind, helpful, and by making the words in the Bible and in the Masonic ritual living stones in our Tabernacle of Life.

In one of the many significant scenes in the Holy Book we see an aged father and a young son climbing a mountain. The father carries a bundle of wood and a torch in one hand, and with the other clasps the hand of his little son. We note that the father is weighed down with more than the burden he is carrying. Little Isaac looks up at his father trustingly and says, "*I behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the offering?*" And Abraham, with a tremor in his voice, replies, "*The Lord will provide.*" Yes, as you and I walk up the mountainside of life with our hand clasped in God's, and as we, too, lift up our eyes unto the hills whence cometh our help, we can face any problem because we know that the Lord will provide. A great and revered lady, Mary Baker Eddy, has infused us with confident assurance by her significant expression, "*Divine love always has met and always will meet every human need.*" Upon this rock, we, as Masons, are privileged to found the inner personal Church for our fraternal edifice.

Myriad members of the Craft, who possessed every essence of true character, as I have outlined it, have made a titanic contribution to the establishment and development of our Nation. It seems to me that in a Convention such as this one, we should pay tribute to these great Masons who helped to found and maintain for us our glorious freedom, and who vitalized the faith of our fathers.

What is the faith of our fathers? As the Magna Charta demanded rights which governments did not grant, so our declaration of freedom asserted the rights of men inherited from God—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—to secure which governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Upon this principle our republic rests, to enable men to stand erect, free and unafraid—equal before God and the law—each respecting the rights of others. It is liberty under law, molding individual initiative with social responsibility. By as much as we are true to this ideal of our fathers, do we fulfill our mission and destiny among the nations of the earth.

What is a nation? If poised in a skycraft, we could look down upon the whole of these United States, what a kaleidoscopic panorama would unfold before us—cities shining in the sunlight, parklike farms, lakes, mountains, plains, rivers running to the sea, school houses, sleeping places of the dead, temples of prayer, and trains moving to and fro like shuttles in a loom. But is this the nation? No, it is only the theatre in which its drama is being wrought out. To see the nation, we must envision the birth and bloom of hopes,

the dreams of mystic ties of memory uniting past and present, the growth and flowering of principles, the march of ideas, and the unfolding of laws. All that our fathers brought to these shores, all that has been achieved by our struggle for the advancement of mankind, all the ideals and affection which are spread upon the hearts of our people,—these, fused into a spiritual unity, make up the living reality of the nation.

A nation then is more than an artificial creation by which men secure safety and enjoy material prosperity. It is the embodiment and expression of the most intimate and sacred emotions of its people. It is the result of experience—spiritual, cultural and social—of generations of men—a repository of human values—a form of divine life. As many of our feelings about home, family and friends are too instinctive to be defined, so our feelings about our country are nonetheless potent because of their intangibility. They hold our hearts by ties more powerful than any political or economic ideas. They are woven around things so simple and heartfelt that they are seldom mentioned—if, indeed, we are fully aware of their meaning in our lives—the stir and hum of a village street in our rural Illinois, an old home vine-covered in Kentucky, a honeysuckle hedge in Maryland, a mountain vista in New England, a winding river in Ohio, an oak tree standing dark and stately aganist a violet sky in Texas, a Virginia lane in June. These are the things that grip the hearts of men— not, perhaps, at the moment of looking upon them, but long afterward in love and memory.

A philosophic poet, poignantly and sadly, has written,

"*And yet I think on Golgotha,*
When the Master's eyes closed in death,

He saw with love most passionate.
A village street in Nazareth."

Long ago, Burke said that a nation is a contract in which three parties are involved—the dead, the living and the yet unborn. It is thus a legacy, a trust, and a prophecy. Lincoln was true to his trust and kept his contract with Washington, and at the same time with us—foreseeing a time when more than a hundred-seventy million people would live under our flag. Looking forward, he saw that our task was to provide that the great common people, for whom the nation was established, working together through institutions devised to discover and make effective their collective will, might create and uphold a social order that is just and wise and free—an order in which, no man, by reason of his birth, race, rank or station is unfit to have a share. By as much as we keep faith with Lincoln, shall we bequeath to our sons no tumbled house.

Have we kept faith? Despite Armistices and Pacts of peace, we have had World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Country after country has been gobbled up by Eurasia. War clouds hover in the Far East, the Near East, and all over the globe. Unrest and uncertainty are rampant in the United States and throughout the world. Bombs seem just aching to fall. Explosions appear to be waiting for the match to set them off. Bigotry, prejudice, and hatred ruthlessly stalk the universe.

My brothers, the signing of an Armistice or a Pact of Peace does not end the battle any more than the signing of the Prohibition Law ended the skirmish with John Barleycorn. The pronouncement must be made in the secret places in the hearts and minds of men where God is known. It must echo in the little white crosses on the battlefields and among the grey solitudes of the sea, altering the inner ideal and attitude of mankind toward war. Nothing can defeat war, except the

will of man expressed from within.

We need more realistic friendships like that with the great land to the north of us—Canada. Do you know that on the entire 3000-mile frontier between our two countries, there are no fortifications? In some places, there is not so much as a wire fence. In a garden in Manitoba, there is a simple stone mound with this inscription on it: "*To God in His Glory, we two nations dedicate this garden, and pledge ourselves that as long as men shall live, we will not take up arms against one another.*"

In recent months, a number of men were under Congressional investigation in Washington. Was their plea patriotism, or loyalty to our country, or conviction of right and duty? No. They pleaded the Fifth Amendment. As we see the clouds of war, prejudice, and bigotry hovering everywhere, it is time for us, as Masons, to teach the world to plead not the Fifth Amendment, but the Ten Commandments.

It means much, and is necessary, that a group of high-minded statesmen meets, signs a pact, and outlines a plan for military peace. However, the fulfillment of all their pacts and plans must depend ultimately upon a spiritual faith and moral pressure arising out of your hearts and minds; the power of God-illumined religion, a will to creation in which the will to rancor shall be overcome by the will to fellowship. There must be a new spirit, a new mind, and a new faith, if we are to achieve the cooperation of all peoples. Plato told us twenty-five hundred years ago, "*That which men for the most part call peace is but a naked and empty name; for the truth is that there is ever between all States a secret war.*" I say to you now, my brethren, that military wars never will be ended until religious and spiritual wars are ended—until that inner secret war within our very souls has been melted away. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Religion as it is organized today is a medley of sects, divided about ancient issues in no wise related to the actualities of our time. Its symbolism is entirely alien to the forms of our generation. Protestantism is made up of more than four hundred groups, and the world is divided in its religious faith among Protestants, Jews, Catholics and hundreds of others. Our faith is so much a matter of amiable fluidity that easily evaporates in the hot blasts of temptation or else freezes up when the chill winds of financial and material difficulties blow.

Instead of religion uniting us all as children of one God into one universal brotherhood, we are divided into different groups with various names, just like college fraternities, and we use up all our energy in attempting to prove by hairline technicalities that our particular religious group is better than the next man's—losing sight entirely of our vision and our goal. There is absolutely no system of theology or doctrine to be found in the Bible. Jesus, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah preached no ritual. Their teachings were entirely spiritual and metaphysical. All doctrines and theologies in most of the churches today are human inventions built up by subsequent authors out of their own mentalities.

In ancient Jewish lore, there is a story of the family who lived in a large house beside a mountain. Each day, the children would look out of the various windows to gaze upon the beauty to be seen. In the evening, they would sit at their mother's feet by the fireside, and each would tell what he had observed from his particular window. One perhaps had seen a bird attempting to lift itself to the peak of the mountain. Another child from a different window perhaps had seen a flaming red flower growing from a crevice between the rocks. Perhaps a third child from another window

was sure that in a formation of a great rock, at a moment when the sun shone brightest, he had seen the face of God. Thus, from the combined views, the family would create together a loveliness of the mountain that was not to be seen by the eyes of any one of them. So it is with us as we look out of the windows of our respective existence and view the mountain of life. One of us from a Protestant window may have one view. One of us from a Jewish window may have another view. One of us from a Catholic, or Mohammedan, or any other window may have still another view. But, together, our united views make up for us the true picture of life.

When Rudyard Kipling was initiated in the Lodge of Hope and Perseverance in Lahore, India, in 1886, his First Degree was conferred by a Hindu. The Second Degree was conferred by a Muslim. He was raised by an Englishman. The Tyler was an Indian of the Jewish faith.

Most of the delegates traveled to this Convention by different roads. Some came by air, some by rail, some by automobile, and some by bus. But all of these roads and modes of travel led to the one place—Chicago. There are many religions, each following a different road, but they all lead to one God.

Since men of State have declared military war to be a crime in the public law of the world, it is time for the church to muster its greatest thinking and its finest moral insight and declare spiritual war to be a sin in religion—the supreme social sin of mankind. If the program of the United Nations encompasses the hope of a universal military armistice, then we, as Masons, should endeavor to lead the world to a universal religious armistice. We should be not simply peace talkers, but peace makers; men in whose hearts the law of love is a reality.

Unless the power of religion, as a law of love, fulfills itself in the life of every church, healing its schisms, rebuking the sin of sectarianism, and burning up the bigotries that blind us to brotherhood—how can the church influence the spirit and structure of the world? If the church is to take the line of greatest resistance, as it must do—if it is to meet its responsibility, which is also its august opportunity—it must bring the full force of spiritual life of the race to the service of goodwill and fraternal love among all mankind. We must unite in heart and spirit. We must feel and think we are brothers, rather than just say we are brothers. As we are told in Matthew 7:21: "*Not everyone that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.*"

Brother Whitfield W. Johnson, P.G.M. of Massachusetts, and our own Honorary Past Grand Master, once wrote, "*Whether or not we are Masons is not demonstrated by what we say about ourselves or by mouthing Masonic rituals and precepts. It is demonstrated by what our individual lives and conduct say about us.*"

My brethren, we must search our hearts on our knees. We must heal the delusions and manias which afflict us so tragically in our group relations— not only as nations, but also as so-called religious sects. Never are we so cruel, so automatic, so unreal, as in our relations with one another in religious affiliations. We base our faith in God according to certain ritual, certain physical technique, certain words, or certain manners. Our idealism has been made cloudy by a blurred cynicism. A spirit of lawlessness threatens our social order, while racial antipathy runs rife, and religious bigotry poisons our fellowship. Vulgarity has taken a huge place in our lives. We worship the gods of sport, speed, splendor, luxury and movies. We are more interested

in the quips of Charlie McCarthy or George Gobel than we are in the admonitions of the Master. We are more enthused about pictures of Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe, and Zsa Zsa Gabor than we are about the pictures of Esther, Mary, and Martha. We are more concerned about Grace Kelly's baby in the royal cradle in Monaco than the Christ child in the Manger in Bethlehem. We are more intrigued by the love life of Elizabeth Taylor than by the life of love taught by Gandhi. We are more regaled by a story about the traveling salesman stopping at a farmhouse than we are by the story of the Three Wise Men. We are more determined to live it up than to live up to it. We are more concerned with the materialism of profits in our business than we are with the spiritualism of the prophets in the Holy Book.

Instead of listening for the tinkle of dollars in our cash registers, we should listen to the music from the messages of the prophets in our hearts. In our Lodge work, we go from labor to refreshment. In life, we should go from diversions to devotion. Our scientists are so concerned about reaching outer space that we are paying little attention to the reaching of inner space—the heart and soul of man. At the American Legion National Convention in Chicago last month, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge proposed a program for the international control of outer space to prevent exploitation for military rivalry. I propose to this Convention a program for international control of inner space to prevent exploitation for religious rivalry. As we have the United Nations striving for military peace, let us be the United Masons striving for spiritual peace.

Our task is not easy. We need more light, more love, and more understanding. It is like the kick-off in a football game—with many a scrimmage ahead of us before we can make a touchdown. Oh, if only we had more of the spirit of that sport—in which there is contest without conflict, and rivalry without rancor!

There must be a new dimension of evangelism, a new reach and range of fellowship, a new experience of God as the Father of all, over all, in all, and through all—whose children we are, and whose work we were sent to do. The whole faith of every church will be needed—its prayer, its power, and its patience. It can be done. It is written in the will of God that it shall be done. But we should not ask God to do it for us unless we are willing to try to do it for ourselves. Let us join hands with Him and with each other in one faith, and in one purpose—for the education of men in good will, for the fostering of religious unity, and for the encouragement of friendship and fraternal love.

I firmly believe that Masonry is the divine-inspired agency through which we can and must meet the present crisis. Our newspapers and air lanes were buzzing last month, with the election returns from the State of Maine. Immediately, many politicians took up the cry, "*As Maine goes, so goes the nation.*" Yerily, I say unto you, as Masonry goes, so goes the nation. Based upon all that is good and pure and holy in man, our Fraternity offers the way of building toward a spiritual standard of perfection. It is the Star of Bethlehem pointing to an everlasting inheritance, gained by moral upbuilding and spiritual progression. Instead of the guided missiles of our Armed Forces, let the Epistles of the Bible guide us. Instead of a rocket to the moon, let us have a Book of Ages in every man's heart. Instead of Hurricane Helene spreading destruction on the climatic horizon, let us have Hurricane Hiram disseminating fellowship on the fraternal horizon. Instead of Bussian Sputniks containing dogs, let us have Masonic sputniks containing the precepts of brotherly love, relief and truth. Bussian satellites are made of chemicals, fabrics and materials. Masonic satellites are made of the ingredients of brother-

hood. Bussian satellites send messages about the weather, hemispheric conditions, and geography. Masonic satellites send messages of citizenship and human relations. Bussian satellites are material. Masonic satellites are moral. Bussian satellites will disintegrate in time. Masonic satellites will live forever in our hearts, minds and lives, and with all the world about us.

Shakespeare said that life is a play and we each have a part. The trek to emancipation must start inside of each one of us. Let not any Mason believe that what he alone thinks or does is unimportant. When we stand at Niagara Falls, perhaps we wonder where and how this tremendous phenomenon was created. If we close our eyes, we can see raindrops falling upon fertile fields, snowflakes nestling along the hillsides, dewdrops flashing from fragrant flowers, rippling brooklets wending their way through leafy forest and grassy plain—each performing a modest part, but all converging into that mighty force—Niagara Falls.

At the opening of this Session, Bro. Henry J. Cooper, Most Worshipful Grand Master of Rhode Island, spoke on behalf of all the Distinguished Guests. In his eloquent message, he related an incident in which a man, whose son had been killed, not only refused to open the door when the Minister came to console him, but also cried out, "*Where was God when my son was killed?*" When the Minister replied, "*God was in the same place where He was when His Son was killed*," the man then opened the door. Bro. Cooper's illustration is a most timely one. When we open our hearts to God, He will open our eyes to the opportunity for each of us to blaze the trail to actual brotherhood.

I like to wonder how names are acquired. Somehow, it seems to me to be entirely possible that the founders of Masonry might have had in mind the Lord saying, "*My Son*," and they changed it to "*Ma-son*." We are His sons—particularly so as members of the Craft. When we receive our Degrees, somehow we can hear His voice saying, "*Welcome, My Son*." As we carry out Masonic philosophy in our daily lives, somehow we can hear His voice saying, "*Well done, My son*." Without being sacrilegious, may I paraphrase a bit? Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither be ye afraid. As Masons, be ye upright. As American citizens, be ye forthright. As Sons of God, be ye spiritually right.

I am sure Rev. Clinton C. Cox, our inspiring R.W. Grand Chaplain, would be glad to join me in this prayer. May our induction into Masonry purify our minds. May our study of its philosophy sanctify our hearts. May our practice of its teachings glorify our lives. May our aim be, individually and collectively, to lead the world in the building of true peace.

Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus said to His Disciples, "*My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you*." Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah exhorted and expounded the message of peace. David in the 37th Psalm sang, "*Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace*." As we leave this Convention and go forth into the world, let us gird on the armor of Masonry. By the spirit of Masonry, let us uplift man, and bring to all of us, our homes, our business and our activities, peace in our hearts and peace around the globe. As the glorious light of unfailing brotherhood sheds its radiance over the entire universe, may we create, encourage and sustain for ourselves and all mankind that inner peace—which is as soft as the gentle ripples of a summer sea, as sweet as the melodious strains of an organ playing a lullaby, as tender as a mother's love—the peace of Masonry, the peace of God, the peace that passeth all understanding.

When You Joined Freemasonry, Did You Take an Obligation or an Affirmation?

by Darin A. Lahners, PM, FILOR

According to Mackey's entry in his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences for Obligation, it is: *"The solemn promise made by a Freemason on his admission into any Degree is technically called his obligation. In a legal sense, obligation is synonymous with duty. Its derivation shows its true meaning, for the Latin word obligation literally signifies a tying or binding. The obligation is that which binds a man to do some act, the doing of which thus becomes his duty. By his obligation, a Freemason is bound or tied to his Order. Hence the Romans called the military oath which was taken by the soldier his obligation, and, too, it is said that it is the obligation that makes the Freemason.*

Before that ceremony, there is no tie that binds the candidate to the Order to make him a part of it; after the ceremony, the tie has been completed, and the candidate becomes at once a Freemason, entitled to all the rights and privileges and subject to all the duties and responsibilities that inure in that character. The jurists have divided obligations into imperfect and perfect, or natural and civil. In Freemasonry there is no such distinction.

The Masonic obligation is that moral one which, although the courts of law cannot enforce it, is binding on the party who makes it, in conscience and according to moral justice. It varies in each Degree, but in each is perfect. Its various clauses, in which different duties are prescribed, are called its points, which are either affirmative or negative, a division like that of the precepts of the Jewish law. The affirmative points require certain acts to be performed; the negative points forbid certain other acts. The whole of them is preceded by a general point of secrecy, common to all the Degrees, and this point is called the tie."

Under his entry for Affirmation, Mackey writes: "*The question has been mooted whether a Quaker, or other person having peculiar religious scruples in reference to taking oaths, can receive the degrees of Freemasonry by taking an affirmation. Now, as the obligations of Freemasonry are symbolic in their character, and the forms in which they are administered constitute the essence of the symbolism, there cannot be a doubt that the prescribed mode is the only one that ought to be used, and that affirmations are entirely inadmissible.*

The London Freemason's Quarterly (1828, page 28G) says that "a Quaker's affirmation is binding." This is not denied. The only question is whether it is admissible. Can the obligations be assumed in any but one way, unless the ritual be entirely changed?

Can any "man or body of men" at this time make such a change without affecting the universality of Freemasonry? Brother Chase (Masonic Digest, page 448) says that "Conferring the degrees on affirmation is no violation of the spirit of Freemasonry, and neither overthrows nor affects a landmark." In this, he is sustained by the Grand Lodge of Maine (1823).

On the report of a Committee, concurred in by the Grand Lodge of Washington in 1883 and duly incorporated in the Masonic Code of that State (see the 1913 edition, page130), the following was adopted: "The solemn obligation required from all persons receiving the degrees may be made equally binding by either an oath or an affirmation without any change in the time-honored Landmarks. " A decision of the Grand Lodge of Rhode Island on November 13, 1867 (see also the1918 edition of the Constitution, General Regulations, etc., of that State, page 34) was to the effect that "An affirmation can be administered instead of an oath to any person who refuses, on conscientious grounds, to take the latter." But the other Grand Lodges which expressed an opinion on this subject-namely, those of Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Delaware, Virginia, and Pennsylvania made an opposite decision.

During the latest revision of this work the Masonic authorities in each of these States were invited to give the latest practice in their respective Jurisdictions. Their replies are given substantially as below, and in the main the early custom has been continued.

Missouri has not recognized the word affirmation in the work, and unless the candidate is willing to conform to the wording of the obligation, the instructions have been to not accept him, and this has been the rule of successive Grand Masters in that State.
Tennessee has not made any change in the law, and in 1919 the Grand Lodge held that the Grand Master had no right to allow the Ritual to be changed in order to suit the religious views of a profane.

There has been no change in the attitude of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky in the matter of affirmation. That State has required the candidate to take the obligation in the usual manner. Delaware reported that there had been no change in the approved decision adopted by the Grand Lodge in 1890 which is as follows: "An applicant who desires to affirm instead of swear to the obligation cannot be received." The Grand Lodge of Virginia allows the use of an affirmation, not by the written law, but by the decision of a Grand Master of that State.

In Pennsylvania, a petitioner becomes a member of the Lodge by initiation and dues begin from that time. He may, if he desires, remain an Entered Apprentice Freemason, a member of the Lodge, or he may resign as such. There is only one way of making an Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, or Master Freemason, in this Jurisdiction, which is by use of the greater lights, without any equivocation, deviation, or substitution.

One decision of Grand Master Africa of Pennsylvania, on October 24, 1892, does not state precisely at what point the candidate for initiation refused to obey, and even the original letter written by Grand Master Africa does not show it.

Presumably the reference was regarding the candidate's belief in a supreme Being, yet it covers other points as follows:

"After having been duly prepared to receive the First Degree in Freemasonry, a candidate refused to conform with and obey certain landmarks of the craft. This refusal disqualifies him from initiation in any Lodge in this juris-

diction, and you will direct your Secretary to make proper record thereof, and to make report to the Grand Secretary accordingly.

Freemasonry does not proselyte. Those who desire its privileges must seek them of their own free will, and must accept and obey, without condition or reservation, all of its ancient usages, customs, and landmarks."
The general practice of Lodges in America is also against the use of an affirmation. But in England Quakers have been initiated after affirmation, the principle being that a form of obligation which the candidate accepts as binding will suffice."

I can safely state that I took an obligation, as in our degrees, when I was released from the cable-tow, I was told that I was bound by "*an obligation, a tie stronger than human hands can impose.*" However, did I also take an affirmation? According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, the definition of an affirmation is:

1. *a: the act of affirming, he nodded his head in affirmation*

   b: something affirmed : a positive assertion. His memoir is a reflective affirmation of family love.

2. *law: a solemn declaration made under the penalties of perjury by a person who conscientiously declines taking an oath.*

After reading this, I personally did not take an affirmation. If I had refused to take the oath, without claiming a religious reason for not being able to take one prior to the degree, I would have been led from the lodge room by my cable-tow. I actually know of one instance where this occurred. The candidate refused to take the obligation, and he was removed from the lodge room.

This being said, does the obligation change if we substitute the word "Swear" for that of "*Affirm*"? Some men, for religious reasons (such as the Quakers mentioned above), cannot swear an oath but are allowed to affirm it. Going back to Webster's Dictionary, we find the definition of swear to be:

1. to utter or take solemnly (an oath)

2. a: to assert as true or promise under oath sworn, ie: affidavit swore to uphold the Constitution

   b: to assert or promise emphatically or earnestly, ie: swore he'd study harder next time

3. a: to put to an oath: administer an oath to

   b: to bind by an oath; swore them to secrecy

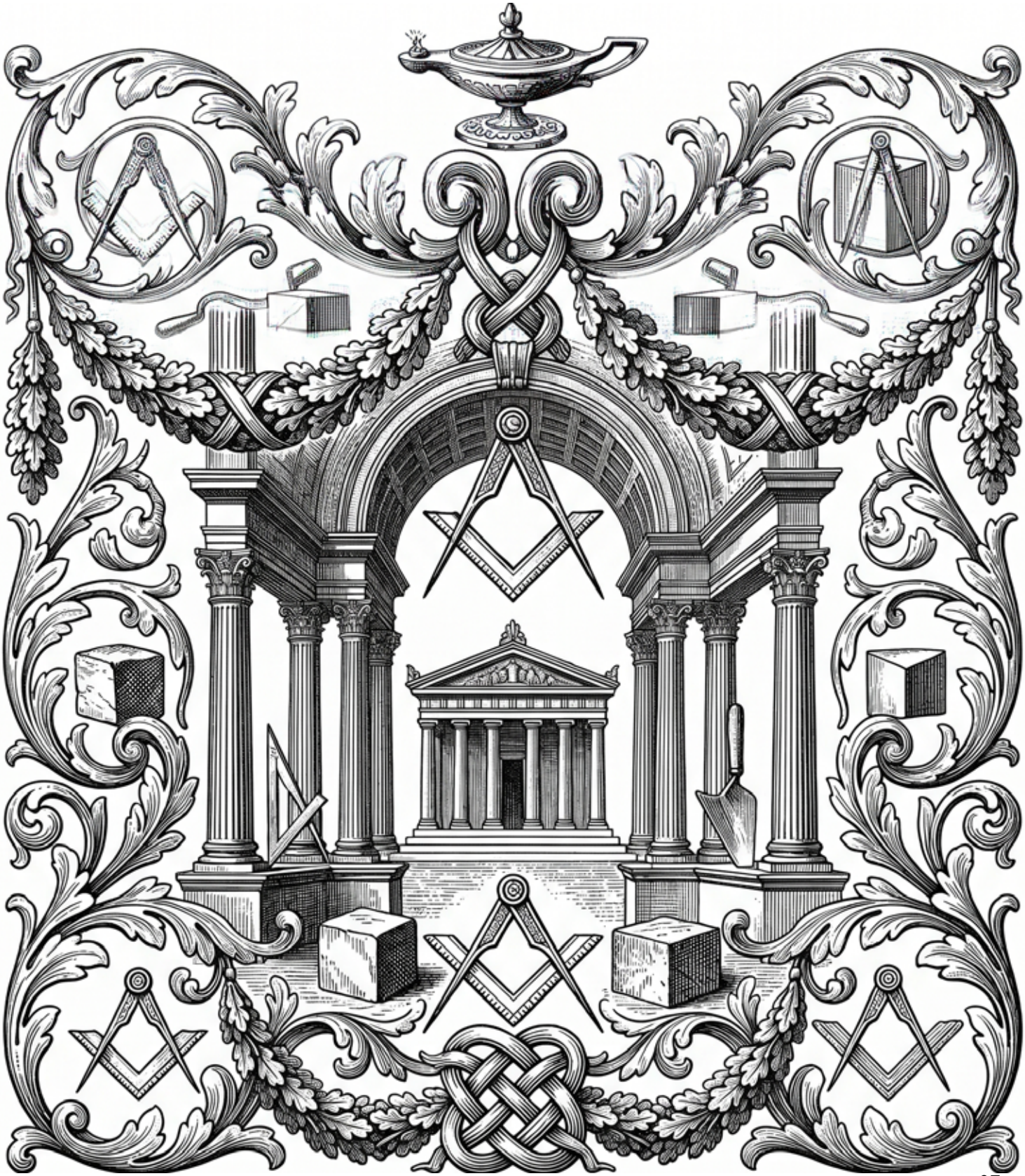
4. obsolete: to invoke the name of (a sacred being) in an oath

5. to bring into a specified state by swearing; he swore his life away

   Intransitive Verb:
   1: to take an oath
   2: to use profane or obscene language: CURSE

Based upon the above definition, I don't think that affirming one's oath is the same as swearing. I say this for one reason, and it's given in the obsolete definition of the word (#4 above), to invoke the name of (a sacred being) in an oath. In Illinois, we finish the oath with "*So help me, God, and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same.*" Although a man can believe in God, if he is unable to swear upon his name, then he might as well be an atheist. So we are in a dilemma, as one of the arguments against allowing Atheists into Freemasonry is often based upon them not being able to promise and swear on a book of holy scripture, because they have nothing binding them to their obligation short of their promise to God in the obliga-

tion. I would argue that any man that cannot swear an oath should also be excluded from Freemasonry for the same reason.



Beginning Is Half the Deed

by RWB:. Chad M. Lacek, 33°

During the first initiation into our Fraternity, I thought it was unusual to kneel at an altar and swear an obligation that I had no knowledge of until the words were leaving my mouth. The oath came first, then we're expected to live up to it. Freemasonry teaches us that commitment comes first. A man does not wake up one morning to discover that he has become wiser, stronger, or more disciplined. Growth is the result of effort, and effort begins with a decision. Before the goal is achieved, the work must begin.

There is an old Latin proverb: Initium est dimidium facti. It means, "*Beginning is half the deed*," or more simply, "*Once you've started, you're halfway there*." The wisdom in this phrase is timeless because it recognizes something fundamental about human nature. The hardest part of almost any task is usually not the labor itself. More often, it's getting started.

We often imagine that great works are accomplished by men seized with inspiration, filled with energy, and carried forward by motivation. This is a comforting myth because it excuses delay. If inspiration has not yet arrived, then perhaps the time is not right. If the energy is lacking, perhaps the task should wait. But this way of thinking is backward. Inspiration is not usually the cause of action. More often, it is the result of it.

A man waiting to feel motivated before he begins may wait forever. The energy he seeks is often created in the doing. Motion generates momentum. Effort encourages more effort. The act itself creates the desire to continue. This principle can be observed in nearly every part of life. A man may wish to improve his body, but if he waits until he feels like exercising, he may never leave the chair. Yet once he begins, once the body is moving and the blood is flowing, the resistance fades.

The effort itself creates the energy that was absent at the start.

The same is true of study. An unread book resting on the table can feel like a burden. The mind resists it. The opening of the cover feels heavier than the pages themselves. But once the reading begins, the mind engages, and what seemed difficult becomes absorbing. The same pattern repeats itself in labor, writing, prayer, reflection, and every meaningful discipline. Even your mood obeys this rule. Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.

The obstacle is rarely the work itself. The obstacle is crossing the threshold that separates action from inaction. Freemasonry understands this principle deeply. Our ritual is filled with beginnings. We begin in darkness. We begin in ignorance. We begin as rough ashlars. At every stage, the first step matters more than the later ones because without it, none of the others can follow. The first knock at the door sets these things in motion. It is the necessary condition for everything that follows.

This is one reason our obligations carry so much importance. An obligation is a beginning made permanent. It is a declaration that the work will continue whether the mood supports it or not. It removes the question of whether one will act and replaces it with the expectation that one must. This is one of the great powers of making a promise. A promise binds the future self to the intention of the present self. It acknowledges that there will be days when enthusiasm fades, when energy is low, and when excuses are abundant. The promise exists precisely for those days.

It is easy to act when inspired. Character is measured by action when inspiration is absent. To take an obligation and then live up to it is one of the highest forms of discipline. Freemasonry teaches this repeatedly. The obligations we take are not symbolic in some shallow sense. They are practical commitments. They shape conduct. They direct action. They remind us that a man's word must carry weight, especially when carrying it is inconvenient.

This principle extends far beyond the Lodge. A man may promise himself that he will rise early, study more, eat less, speak more carefully, or spend more time with those he loves. These promises matter, but only if they survive the moment in which they are made. The danger is always delay. "*I'll start tomorrow*." "*I'll begin when things settle down*." "*I'll do it when I feel ready*." These are the familiar phrases of stagnation. Tomorrow is often a more comfortable word for never.

The Latin proverb cuts through this hesitation with brutal simplicity. Begin. That is half the work already done. Not because the labor disappears, but because the greatest resistance has already been overcome. The mind tends to exaggerate unfinished tasks. It inflates them, making them seem larger than they are. A project delayed for weeks can feel monumental. Yet once started, it often reveals itself to be manageable. This is because uncertainty carries weight, and action removes it.

A man staring at a rough stone may feel overwhelmed by the work ahead. But the first strike of the chisel changes the relationship. The stone is no longer untouched. The process has begun. However small the progress, it is progress. There is a lesson here that applies to the whole of life. Do not wait for motivation. As the Mental Toughness coach Chris Dorris is fond of saying, "*Create the State, Don't Wait*!"

This is difficult because we tend to think of

motivation as a prerequisite. In reality, it is often a reward. It follows action, not the other way around. The man who waits for the wind before raising the sail misunderstands how movement begins. Raise the sail first, then the wind can do its work.

Freemasonry is not a passive system. It does not reward idle intention. It rewards labor. The tools of the Craft are not decorative. They are instruments of action. They remind us that transformation is achieved by work, and work requires beginning. A rough ashlar is not shaped by wishing. A temple is not built by discussing architecture. A promise is not kept by admiring its virtue. All of these things require the same first act.

There will never be a perfect moment. Energy will fluctuate. Inspiration will come and go. Circumstances will rarely align themselves neatly around our ambitions. If we make our actions dependent upon ideal conditions, we surrender our lives to chance. The disciplined man acts first and feels later. He trusts that the energy will follow the effort. He understands that the beginning itself has power. Each task started weakens the hold of hesitation. Each promise kept strengthens the habit of integrity.

Over time, this becomes character. Not because the man always feels ready, but because he has learned that readiness is often a by-product of movement. The wisdom of the proverb is not merely that beginning makes the work easier. It is that beginning transforms the man himself. It teaches him that he is capable of acting without waiting for anything external and creating momentum where there was none. Begin now, and you're halfway done. It's downhill from there.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: LISTEN TO IT:

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Binding Myself Under No Less Penalty

by WB:. Darin A. Lahners, PM, FILOR

Historically, the first recorded mention of a penalty appears in the Edinburgh Register House Manuscript of 1696, which alludes to part of the penalty for violating the obligation of the First Degree of Freemasonry. Two other manuscripts, the Chetwode Crawley Manuscript and the Sloane Manuscript No. 3329, both appearing circa 1700, also had similar allusions. We know that by 1730, when Samuel Prichard's Masonry Dissected was published, there was a tie between being at the altar to take your obligation with a hand on the Volume of Sacred Law. Masonry Dissected also reveals that all the penalties were in place, even though they appear together as part of the First Degree obligation. It is only in 1760, with the expose, Three Distinct Knocks, that we know factually that the penalties as we know them are part of each degree. Interestingly, the other penalties entered Freemasonry at the same time the Hiram legend was being developed. We know that before 1726, when the Graham Manuscript was published, the 3rd Degree involved Noah and his sons, but in 1730, when Masonry Dissected was published, the Hiramic Legend had replaced it.

It's a curious thing. We're told right before taking our obligation in each degree that there is nothing in our obligation which will conflict with any duty that we owe to God, our country, our family, our neighbor, or ourselves. We then take our obligation and bind ourselves under no less penalty than having horrendous things take place to ourselves should we knowingly violate the obligation we just took. We understand that those penalties are symbolic, and that should a Mason knowingly violate them, nothing is going to happen to them. They are symbolic in nature, to remind the candidate

that our modes of recognition should be kept sacrosanct. The horrendous penalties imposed by the obligations should be enacted by the individual Mason themselves upon themselves. If you look at and study this part of the ritual, without getting into detail, you can tie the penalties to the points of our entrance, and their representation of the four cardinal virtues.

Yet, I worry about the candidate. I worry about them because Lodges and the members that constitute them are often not very forthcoming about what is about to happen to them. This communication matters, and we should be forthright in telling them that the penalties are symbolic only. Why? Allow me to explain.

Think of a deeply religious candidate who embodies that holy book of scripture as the rule and guide of their faith. He is at the altar, kneeling, his hands placed in a certain position upon the Bible or other Volume of Sacred Law. He then learns that, should he violate the obligation of that degree, bad things will happen to him. Those bad things, no matter how you put it, would cause the candidate to lose his life if acted upon. Swearing to have yourself killed if you violate an obligation while your hand is placed on a holy book, which in almost all cases has a little bit to say about how Murder is a violation of Divine law, might cause such a candidate to walk away.

Couple this with the penalties being revealed after the candidate is specifically told that there's nothing in the obligation which would conflict with any duty we have to, most importantly, God and ourselves. It could be argued by such a deeply religious candidate that by taking an Obligation containing statements they know cannot be enforced, that they are violating the third of the Abrahamic Ten Commandments, which is taking the name of G-d in vain. If I didn't know any better when I was a candidate, I might have felt concerned, bewildered, or thought that hypocrisy was afoot.

All of the above being said, it is difficult to imagine the obligations without the penalties, yet there can be compelling arguments for removing them. First of all, if they are only symbolic, why keep them so gruesome? While you might think that they're gruesome because they were inherited from the Medieval Masonic Guilds, you would be wrong. There is no mention of any penalties in the Regius (Halliwell) Manuscript of 1390, nor in the Cooke Manuscript of circa 1410 – 1450. The first mention of any penalties comes about with the Shaw Statutes in 1598 and 1599, but these penalties are financial and administrative. The penalties therefore seem to have been invented in the 17th century.

Secondly, in token of our sincerity, we kiss the Volume of Sacred Law, after asking God to help us and keep us steadfast in due performance of the obligation we just took. As we are taught that the Volume of Sacred Law is one of the three greater lights and the rule and guide of our faith, shouldn't that be enough? It seems that instead of the current penalties of our obligation, we could swear fealty to our G-d and ask that he punish us if we knowingly violate the obligation. The argument for the allegorical penalties currently in place loses validity when it's stated that they're just a reminder to us to keep our secrets. The above could be, and I argue would be, more effective. I feel that personally violating a promise made directly to the Grand Architect directly before kissing a Volume of Sacred Law carries more weight than the threats of violence upon our person.

Lastly, we are instructed in the First Degree that at the building of King Solomon's Temple, there was not heard the sound of axe, hammer, or any tool of iron. While the degree does not explain this explicitly, it was because

the Temple was a house dedicated to G-d, and tools of iron were used to spill blood in times of war. It was therefore wholly inappropriate to use such tools in the construction of the Temple, as the temple would then be tainted. Since we are to understand that through the Masonic allegories, we are building ourselves as a temple, or at the very least, shaping ourselves as fitted stone to make up that house not made with hands eternal in the heavens, is it not therefore inappropriate to threaten to use tools of iron upon ourselves? Considering the Old Testament also states that altars were not to be fashioned with iron tools (Deuteronomy 27:5 and Exodus 20:25), it seems to violate the Volume of Sacred Law to swear our penalties at an altar, upon such a book. Couple this with the argument used by some religions to forbid membership that our oaths are "*Blood Oaths*," and we might be in a better position to appeal to more potential members by eliminating them.

At this point, some of you may be clutching your pearls and spouting the mythical idea that because the Antient Charges say so, there can be no innovations to Freemasonry. An informed Mason would know that innovations have been made since those Antient Charges were written. If you're a member of any appendant Masonic body, then you are a member of an innovation to Freemasonry. In fact, the Antient Charges might have been heavily edited. In fact, there is a relevant minute dated 23 June 1723 made by the Grand Lodge of England which states:

"*...And the question was moved; That it is not in the power of any person, or Body of Men, to make alteration or innovation in the Body of Masonry, without the consent first obtained of the Annual Grand Lodge. And the question being put accordingly, Resolved in the Affirmative."*

In the 1775 second edition of his book: Illustrations of Penalties in the Masonic Obligations Masonry, William Preston included the Charges and Regulations read to the master-elect on the night of his Installation. This is the first record of them in something like their present form. That part dealing with innovations read: *"No alteration or innovation in the body of Masonry shall be made without the consent of the Grand Lodge first had and obtained', wording very similar to the 1723 Grand Lodge Minute. The Grand Lodge expelled Preston because he believed that, since his mother lodge was older than the Grand Lodge, its rules did not apply to his lodge; and he omitted the last part stating: "Without the consent of the Grand Lodge first had and obtained."* Meaning that there was a mechanism for Grand Lodges to make innovations and alterations, but due to editing, the idea was removed. This means Grand Lodges could make the penalties obsolete and remove them altogether, should they choose to do so.

There may be a more esoteric reason for the penalties being in place. When you consider that the penalties were all together at one point in our Masonic History, then perhaps what Bro. Tim Hogan proposes in his work, The Alchemical Keys to Masonic Ritual, that the penalties, when taken together, reveal an alchemical process, hold some validity. Given that they were initially together as a part of the First Degree, and then separated into separate parts, there could be such an argument made.

Further supporting the argument is the timing of their appearance in 1696. We know that many members of the Royal Society were Freemasons, and that many associated with the Royal Society, such as Sir Isaac Newton, were obsessed with alchemy.

One only needs to look to the library of the flagship Public University in Illinois, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, to find proof of this. Within their rare book and manuscript department, they have a document written by Sir Isaac Newton, which is called Opus Galli Anonymi ("*Anonymous work of the Gauls*" or "*Work of an Anonymous Frenchman*"), an unpublished Latin translation of French instructions detailing how to create the philosopher's stone. I was honored to see the document in person. Some of my photos of it are below. Let me say, looking at the work of a genius and seeing his handwriting inches from your face is humbling.

IMAGE

If you are interested in seeing the document, you can

view it here:

https://digital.library.illinois.edu/items/88be5740-57a1-0136-502d-0050569601ca-8#?cv=13&xywh=-4089%2C317%2C35026%2C11332

Ultimately, because the penalties are symbolic, they have no bearing on whether a Freemason will keep his obligations. That is up to the individual Freemason. As I mentioned above, I believe that reminding the candidate that the obligations are sacred, as they are taken on a Volume of Sacred Law, and that the covenant being made is between that candidate and the Great Architect of the Universe, would be a more effective way to bind the candidate to them. While I understand their purpose and I support it, debating and re-examining them is worthwhile.

What is Masonic Week?

While active since 1932, the annual event known as Masonic Week first convened in Washington, D.C., on February 21, 1938. Since then, it has met continuously in the Washington D.C. metro area nearly every year. The event brings together several small and invitational orders of Freemasonry that host their annual meeting and other events during the week. Several of these organizations provide representatives to the planning committee which oversees the arrangements and schedule. Being the largest of the organizations, the Grand Council of the Allied Masonic Degrees of the United States of America has served as the lead organizer since the inception of the event.

Masonic Week 2027

Held February 3 to February 7, 2027
at the DoubleTree by Hilton Washington DC – Crystal City

Registration Information

All Masons attending any event during Masonic Week must complete and submit the Registration Form. Meal tickets may also be reserved and purchased using the same Registration Form.

Hotel Information

The Conference Hotel is the The DoubleTree by Hilton Washington DC – Crystal City 300 Army Navy Drive Arlington, VA 22202. Room block: Monday, February 1st – Monday, February 8th, 2027.

Go to www.AMDUSA.Org for more information
or Contact Robert H. Johjnson, Grand Superintendent for Illinois

The deadline for meal reservations is Sunday, January 31, 2027, at 5 PM Eastern Time.

After that date, additional meals may be purchased in-person at the Masonic Week registration desk. A surcharge of 25% per meal will be charged for in-person registrations.

The deadline for hotel reservations is Monday, January 11th, 2027.

2027 Schedule of Events

Unless otherwise noted, all events are only open to those individuals who hold a current membership with that organization.

Wednesday, February 3, 2027

Start Time	End Time	Organization	Event	Attendee Information
11:00 AM	12:00 PM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Laying of a Wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier	Open to the public for viewing.
3:00 PM	5:00 PM	Ancient Egyptian Order of Sciots	Conferral of the Degree of Membership by the Supreme Pyramid	Open to all Master Masons in good standing. Candidate registration from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM.
7:00 PM	8:00 PM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Rank of Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Order of the Red Branch of Eri	Private Conferral – **Strictly** By invitation only to eligible members. *Attendees must already hold the rank prior to the start of Masonic Week.*
7:00 PM	9:00 PM	Grand Order of the Sword of Bunker Hill	Conferral of the Order of the Sword of Bunker Hill by San Jacinto Order No. 128	Open to all Master Masons in good standing. Candidate registration from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM.

Thursday, February 4, 2027

Start Time	End Time	Organization	Unit	Attendee Information
8:00 AM	8:30 AM	Masonic Week Program Committee	Masonic Week Orientation	Recommended for first time attendees at Masonic Week.
8:00 AM	9:30 AM	Order of Holy Wisdom	Conferral of the Order of Holy Wisdom	Private Conferral – Strictly By Invitation Only
8:00 AM	9:30 AM	Ye Commemorative Order of St. Thomas of Acon	Grand Master's Council of the United States of America Rehearsal	
9:30 AM	11:30 PM	Ye Commemorative Order of St. Thomas of Acon	Annual Meeting of the Grand Master's Council of the United States of America	
12:00 PM	1:30 PM	Ye Commemorative Order of St. Thomas of Acon	Festive Board Luncheon	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to St. Thomas of Acon members and their guests.
1:30 PM	2:30 PM	Masonic Week Program Committee	Education Presentation by Dr. Heather Calloway of Indiana Universtiy	The Mission and Work of the Center for Fraternal Collections and Research
2:30 PM	5:30 PM	Masonic Order of Athelstan	Annual Meeting of the Grand Court of the Masonic Order of Athelstan for the United States of America	
5:45 PM	7:00 PM	Sovereign Order of Knights Preceptor	Annual Meeting of the Grand Chapter	
7:00 PM	8:45 PM	Masonic Order of Athelstan	Athelstan Banquet	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.
9:00 PM	11:00 PM	Masonic Order of the Bath	105th Annual Assembly	Candidate registration from 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM
9:00 PM	11:00 PM	Masonic Order of Pilgrim Preceptors	Mayflower Conclave No. 8 and the Annual meeting of the Region of the United States of America	

Friday, February 5, 2027

Start Time	End Time	Organization	Event	Attendee Information
7:00 AM	8:00 AM	York Rite Sovereign College	Annual Breakfast	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.
7:30 AM	8:00 AM	Masonic Week Program Committee	Masonic Week Orientation	Recommended for first time attendees at Masonic Week.
8:30 AM	9:00 AM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Knight Commander of the Royal Order of the Red Branch of Eri	Registration Information
9:00 AM	10:00 AM	Masonic Week Program Committee	Ladies Breakfast	RESERVE TICKETS Open to all ladies, free of charge.
9:00 AM	12:00 PM	Knight Masons	61st Annual Meeting of the Grand Council of the United States of America	
12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Knights Masons	Knight Masons Luncheon	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.
1:00 PM	3:00 PM	Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests	93rd Annual Ingathering of the Grand College of America	
3:15 PM	4:45 PM	Grand College of Rites	96th Annual Convocation of the Grand College of the United States of America	
5:00 PM	6:30 PM	Society of Blue Friars	81st Annual Consistory	Open to all attendees.
5:00 PM	5:30 PM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Installed Sovereign Master Degree	Registration Information
5:30 PM	6:00 PM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Degree of Worshipful Commander Noah of a Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners	Registration Information
6:00 PM	6:45 PM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Degree of Installed Supreme Ruler of a Conclave of the Order of the Secret Monitor	Registration Information
7:00 PM	8:45 PM	The Philalethes Society	Philalethes Banquet	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.
7:00 PM	8:45 PM	Chevaliers Bienfaisant de la Cite Sainte (C.B.C.S.)	Reception and Dinner for the Great Priory of America	Open to C.B.C.S. members only.
9:00 PM	10:30 PM	Allied Masonic Degrees	101st Annual Cellar of Ye Antiente Order of Corks	Open to AMD members only. Candidate registration from 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM.

Saturday, February 6, 2027

Start Time	End Time	Organization	Event	Attendee Information
7:00 AM	8:00 AM	Masonic Week Program Committee	All Masonic Breakfast	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.
8:00 AM	9:45 AM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the First, Second, and Third Grades of the Order of the Scarlet Cord	Registration Information
9:45 AM	10:45 AM	Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Fourth Grade of the Order of the Scarlet Cord	Registration Information
10:30 AM	12:00 PM	The Philalethes Society	99th Annual Meeting	
12:00 PM	1:00 PM	Convent General, KYCH	KYCH Luncheon	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.

2:00 PM	3:30 PM		Masonic Week Program Committee	Ladies Afternoon Tea	RESERVE TICKETS Open to all ladies, free of charge.
1:30 PM	4:30 PM		Allied Masonic Degrees	135th Annual Communication of the Grand Council of the United States of America	
15 Minutes Following the Close of the AMD Grand Council	6:00 PM		Allied Masonic Degrees	Annual Meeting of the Council of the Nine Muses No. 13	Open to all AMD members.
6:00 PM	7:00 PM		Allied Masonic Degrees	All Masonic Social Hour	Open to all attendees and their guests.
7:00 PM	8:45 PM		Allied Masonic Degrees	All Masonic Banquet	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.
9:00 PM	9:45 PM		Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Degree of St. Lawrence the Martyer	Registration Information
9:45 PM	10:30 PM		Allied Masonic Degrees	Conferral of the Degree of Royal Ark Mariner	Registration Information

Sunday, February 7, 2027

Start Time	End Time		Organization	Event	Attendee Information
8:30 AM	9:00 AM		The Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviors, Plaisterers and Bricklayers (The Operatives)	Washington Monument Assemblage	
9:00 AM	10:30 AM		The Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviors, Plaisterers and Bricklayers (The Operatives)	Lodge of Menatzchim V°	
10:30 AM	12:30 PM		The Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviors, Plaisterers and Bricklayers (The Operatives)	Lodge of Harodim VI°	
12:30 PM	1:30 PM		The Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviors, Plaisterers and Bricklayers (The Operatives)	The Operatives Brunch	PURCHASE TICKETS Open to all attendees and their guests.

Is this your first time attending Masonic Week?

Masonic Week is an amazing opportunity to further your Masonic journey and engage in fellowship. But, unlike a "Masonic Con" or educational event, the week is designed around several business meetings for groups with varying membership requirements. While there will be opportunities for individuals to learn and enjoy presentations, Masonic education is not the primary purpose of the event. If this is your first time attending Masonic Week, we invite you to the join us for one of our Masonic Week Orientation periods, available for one half hour each morning. The information provided is the same on each day, so you only need to attend one session.

Welcome! We hope you enjoy your time with us.

Masonic Conferences

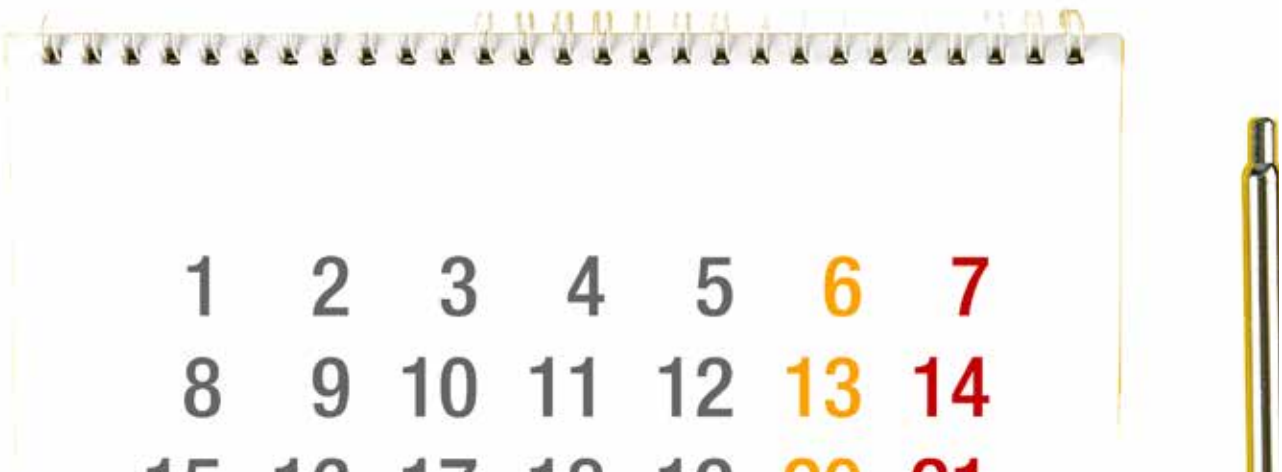
Grand Lodge Annual Communications (GLAC) – October 9th and 10th, 2026, Sprigfield Illinois.

Midwest Conference on Masonic Education – April 24-26 - 2026, Omaha, NE

Yes! **Masonic Con Chicago** will be back in Spring 2027.

If your lodge or organization is having an Educational Event (not related to instruction or charities), please let us know. Email the details to: Admin@wcypodcast.com

Please give us at least a month notice so that we can ensure it is added.



The Lyceum