

# INTRODUCTION TO FREEMASONRY

## The Fellowcraft Degree

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### Table of Contents

[Working Tools](#)

["Amos, What Seest Thou?"](#)

[Corn, Wine, And Oil](#)

[The Two Pillars](#)

## *Working Tools*

The working tools of a Fellowcraft are the Plumb, the Square, and the Level. The Entered Apprentice has learned of them as the Immovable Jewels, but in the Fellowcraft's Degree they have a double significance. They are still the Jewels of the three principal officers, still immovably fixed in the East, the West, and the South, but they are also given into the hands of the Fellowcraft with instructions the more impressive for their brevity.

The tools represent an advance in knowledge. The Entered Apprentice received a Twenty- four Inch Gauge and a Common Gavel with which to measure and lay out a rough ashlar and chip off its edges to fit a stone ready for the builders' use. But that is all he may do. Not with gauge or gavel may be build; only prepare material for another. He is still but a beginner, a student; to his hands are entrusted only such tasks as if ill done will not materially affect the whole.

The Fellowcraft uses the Plumb, the Square, and the Level. With the Square he tests the work of the Apprentice; with the Level he lays the courses of the wall he builds; with the Plumb he raises perpendicular columns. If he use his tools aright he demonstrates that he is worthy to be a Fellow of the Craft and no Apprentice; that he can lay a wall and build a tower which will stand.

Hence the symbolism of the three tools as taught in the monitorial work. The Plumb admonishes us to walk uprightly; that is, not leaning over, not awry with the world or ourselves, but straight and square with the base of life on which we tread. We are to square our actions by the Square of Virtue. Every man has a conscience, be it ever so dead; every Freemason is expected to carry the conscience of a Fellowcraft's Square of Virtue in his breast and build no act, no matter how small, which does not fit within its right angle.

The operative Fellow of the Craft builds his wall course by course, each level and straight. We build upon the level of time, a fearsome level indeed. The Fellow of the Craft whose wall stands not true on a physical level may take down his stones, re-temper his mortar and try again. But the Freemason can never unbuild that which is erected on the level of time; once gone, the opportunity is gone forever. Omar said, "The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on." The poet Oxenham phrased it ... "No man travels twice the great highway which winds through darkness up to light, through night, to day."

Therefore, does it behoove the Fellowcraft to build on his level of time with a true Plumb and a right Square.

In its interweaving of emblem with emblem, teaching with teaching, symbol with symbol, Freemasonry is like the latticework atop the Pillars in the Porch of King Solomon's Temple, the several parts of which are so intimately connected as to denote unity. Here the Plumb as a Jewel, the Plumb as a working tool of the Fellowcraft, and the Heavenly Plumb in the hand of Jehovah, as told in Amos vii, are so inextricably mingled that while references to them occur in different parts of the degree, symbolically they must be considered together.

## ***"Amos, What Seest Thou?"***

Thus he shewed me; and behold the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a plumb line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will not again pass by them anymore.

This passage from the Great Light is as much a part of the ritual of the Fellowcraft's Degree as the 133rd Psalm is of the Entered Apprentice's Degree, and has the same intimate connection with the teachings of this ceremony.

The vital and important part is this: the Lord set a plumb line in the midst of his people Israel. He did not propose to judge them by a plumb line afar off in another land, in high heaven, but here – here in the midst of them.

This is of intense interest to the Fellow Craft Mason, since it teaches him how he should judge his own work – and, more important, how he should judge the work of others.

Presumably plumb lines hang alike. Presumably all plumbs, like all squares and all levels, are equally accurate. Yet a man may use a tool thinking it accurate which to another is not true. If the tool of building and the tool of judging be not alike either the judgment must be inaccurate or the judge must take into consideration the tool by which the work was done.

By the touch system, a blind man may learn to write upon a typewriter. If a loosened type drops from the type bar when the blind man strikes the letter "e" he will make but a little black smudge upon the paper. It is perfectly legible; in this sentence every "e" but one has been smudged. Would you criticize the blind man for imperfect work? He has no means of knowing that his tool is faulty. If you found the smudges which stand for the letter "e" in the right places, showing that he had used his imperfect machine perfectly, would you not consider that he had done perfect work? Aye, because you would judge by a plumb line "in the midst" of the man and his work. If, however, the paper with the smudged letters "e" were judged by one who knew nothing of the workman's blindness, nothing of his typewriter, one who saw only a poor piece of typing, doubtless he would judge it as imperfect.

The builders of the Washington monument and the Eiffel Tower in Paris both used plumb lines accurate to the level of the latitude and longitude of these structures. Both are at right angles with sea level. Yet to some observer on the moon equipped with a strong telescope these towers would not appear parallel. As they are in different latitudes they rise from the surface of the earth at an angle to each other.

Doubtless he who engineered the monument would protest that the monument to Washington was right and the French engineer's tower wrong. The Frenchman, knowing his plumb was accurate, would believe the monument crooked. But the Great Architect, we may hope, would think both right knowing each was perfect by the plumb by which it was erected.

The Fellowcraft learns to judge his work by his own plumb line, not by another's; if he erects that which is good work, true work, square work by his own working tools – in other words, by his own standards – he does well. Only when a Fellowcraft is false to his own conscience is he building other than fair and straight.

## *Corn, Wine, And Oil*

The wages which our ancient brethren received for their labours in the building of King Solomon's Temple are paid no more. We use them only as symbols, save in the dedication, constitution, and consecration of a new lodge and in the laying of cornerstones, when once again the fruit of the land, the brew of the grape and the essence of the olive are poured to launch a new unit of brotherhood into the fellowship of lodges; to begin a new structure dedicated to public or Masonic use.

In the Great Light are many references to these particular forms of wealth. In ancient days the grapes in the vineyard, the olives in the grove and the grain of the field were not only wealth but the measure of trade; so many skins of wine, so many cruses of oil, so many bushels of corn were then as are dollars and cents to-day. Thus when our ancient brethren received wages in corn, wine, and oil they were paid for their labours in coin of the realm.

The oil pressed from the olive was as important to the Jews in Palestine as butter and other fats are among Occidentals. Because it was so necessary and hence so valuable it became an important part of sacrificial rites.

Oil was also used not only as a food but for lighting purposes within the house, not in the open air where the torch was more effective. Oil was also an article of the toilet; mixed with perfume it was used in the ceremonies of anointment and in preparation for ceremonial appearances. The "precious ointment which ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard" was doubtless made of olive oil suitably mixed with such perfumes and spices as myrrh, cinnamon, galbanum and frankincense. Probably oil was also used as a surgical dressing; nomadic peoples, subject to injuries, could hardly avoid knowledge of the value of soothing oil.

The corn of the Old Testament is not the corn we know. In the majority of the uses of the word a more understandable translation would be "grain." The principal grains of the Old Testament days were barley and wheat and "corn" represents not only both of these but all the grains which the Jews cultivated.

An ear of grain has been an emblem of plenty since the mists of antiquity shrouded the beginnings of mythology. Ceres, goddess of abundance, survives to-day in our cereals. The Greeks called her Demeter, a corruption of Gemeter, our mother earth. She wore a garland of grain and carried ears of grain in her hand.

The Hebrew Shibboleth means both an ear of corn and a flood of water. Both are symbols of abundance, plenty, wealth.

Scarcely less important to our ancient brethren than their corn and oil was wine. Vineyards were highly esteemed both as wealth and as comfort – the pleasant shade of the vine and fig tree was a part of ancient hospitality. Vineyards on mountain sides or hills were most carefully tended and protected against washing by terraces and walls, as even to-day one may see on the hillsides of the Rhine. Thorn hedges kept cattle from the grapes. The vineyardist frequently lived in a watchtower or hut on an elevation to keep sharp look out that neither predatory man nor beast took his ripening wealth.

Thus corn, wine, and oil were the wages of a Fellowcraft in the days of King Solomon. Freemasons receive no material wages for their labours, but if the work done in a lodge is

paid for only in coin of the heart such wages are no less real. They may sustain as does the grain, refresh as does the wine, give joy and gladness as does the oil. How much we receive, what we do with our wages, depends entirely on our Masonic work. Our ancient brethren were paid for their physical labours. Whether their wages were paid for work performed upon the mountains and in the quarries, or whether they received corn, wine, and oil because they laboured in the fields and vineyards, it was true then and it is true now that only "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." To receive the Masonic equivalent of the ancient corn, wine, and oil, a brother must labour. He must till the fields of his own heart or build the temple of his own house not made with hands. He must give labour to his neighbour or carry stones for his brother's temple.

If he stand and wait and watch and wonder, he will not be able to ascend into the Middle Chamber where our ancient brethren received their wages. If he works for the joy of working, does his part in his lodge work, takes his place among the laborers of Freemasonry, he will receive corn, wine, and oil in measures pressed down and running over and know a fraternal joy as substantial in fact as it is ethereal in quality; as real in his heart as it is intangible to the profane world.

For all Fellowcrafts – aye, for all Freemasons – corn, wine, and oil are symbols of sacrifice, of the fruits of labour, of wages earned.

## *The Two Pillars*

And King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, [v] and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass; and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to King Solomon, and wrought all his work. For he cast two pillars of brass, of eighteen cubits [vi] high apiece; and a line of twelve cubits did compass either of them about....

And he set up the pillars in the porch of the temple; and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. And upon the top of the pillars was lily work; so was the work of the pillars finished. (I Kings vii, 13-22.)

Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapter that was on the top of each of them was five cubits. And he made chains, as in the oracle, and put them on the heads of the pillars and made an hundred pomegranates and put them on the chains. (II Chronicles iii, 15-16.)

From the dawn of religion the pillar, monolith or built-up, has played an important part in the worship of the Unseen. From the huge boulders of Stonehenge, among which the Druids are supposed to have, performed their rites, through East Indian temples to the religion of ancient Egypt, scholars trace the use of pillars as an essential part of religious worship; indeed, in Egypt the obelisk stood for the very presence of the Sun God himself.

It is not strange, then, that Hiram of Tyre should erect pillars for Solomon's Temple. What has seemed strange is the variation in the dimensions given in Kings and Chronicles; a discrepancy which is explained by the theory that Kings gives the height of one and Chronicles of both pillars together.

Of the ritualistic explanation of the two brazen pillars it is not necessary to speak at length, since the Middle Chamber lecture is quite satisfyingly explicit regarding their ancient use and purpose. But their inner symbolic significance is not touched upon in the ritual; it is one of the hidden beauties of Freemasonry left for each brother to hunt down for himself.

It is a poor symbol that has but one meaning. Of the many interpretations of the Brazen Pillars, two are here selected as vivid and important.

The ancients believed the earth to be flat and that it was supported by two Pillars of God, placed at the western entrance of the world as then known. These are now called Gibraltar, on one side of the Strait, and Ceuta on the other. This may account for the origin of the twin pillars. However this may be the practice of erecting columns at the entrance of an edifice dedicated to worship prevailed in Egypt and Phoenicia, and at the erection of King Solomon's Temple the Brazen Pillars were placed in the porch thereof.

Some writers have suggested that they represent the masculine and feminine elements in nature; others, that they stand for the authority of Church and State, because on stated occasions the high priest stood before one pillar and the king before the other. Some students think that they allude to the two legendary pillars of Enoch, upon which, tradition informs us, all the wisdom of the ancient world was inscribed in order to preserve it from inundations and conflagrations. William Preston supposed that, by them, Solomon had reference to the pillars of cloud and fire which guided the Children of Israel out of bondage

and up to the Promised Land. One authority says a literal translation of their names is: "In Thee is strength," and, "It shall be established," and by a natural transposition may be thus expressed: "Oh, Lord, Thou art almighty and Thy power is established from everlasting to everlasting."

It is impossible to escape the conviction that in meaning they are related to religion, and represent the strength and stability, the perpetuity and providence of God, and in Freemasonry are symbols of a living faith.

Faith cannot be defined. The factors of mightiest import cannot be caught up in speech. Life is the primary fact of which we are conscious, and yet there is no language by which it can be fenced in. No chart can be made of a mother's love; it is deeper than words and reads in little, common things a wealth that is more than golden.

While we cannot define, we can recognize the power of faith. It generates energy. It is the dynamics of elevated characters and noble spirits, the source of all that bears the impress of greatness.

And we can realize its necessity. Without faith it would be impossible to transact business. "It spans the earth with railroads, and cleaves the sea with ships. It gives man wings to fly the air, and fins to swim the deep. It creates the harmony of music and the whirl of factory wheels. It draws man up toward the angels and brings heaven down to earth." By it all human relationship is conditioned. We must have faith in institutions and ideals, faith in friendship, family and fireside, faith in self, faith in man, and faith in God.

Freemasonry is the oldest, the largest, and the most widely distributed fraternal Order on the face of the earth to-day by reason of its faith in God. At one end of the Second Section of the Fellowcraft Degree are the Two Brazen Pillars – a symbol of that faith; at its other end is the Letter "G", a living sign of the same belief.

But there is another interpretation of the symbolism. The Entered Apprentice in process of being passed to the degree of Fellowcraft passes between the pillars. No hint is given that he should pass nearer to one than to the other; no suggestion is made that either may work a greater influence than the other. He merely passes between.

A deep significance is in this very omission. Masons refer to the promise of God unto David; the interested may read Chapter vii of II Samuel for themselves, and gather that the establishment promised by the Lord was that of a house, a family, a descent of blood from David unto his children and his children's children.

The pillars were named by Hiram Abif; those names have many translations. Strength and establishment are but two; power, and wisdom or control, fit the meaning of the words as well.

Used to blast stumps from fields dynamite is an aid to the farmer. Used in war it kills and maims. Fire cooks our food and makes steam for our engines; fire also burns up our houses and destroys our forests. But it is not the power but the use of power which is good or bad. The truth applies to any power; spiritual, legal, monarchical, political, personal. Power is without either virtue or vice; the user may use it well or ill, as he pleases.

Freemasonry passes the brother in process of becoming a Fellowcraft between the pillar of strength – power; and the pillar of establishment – choice or control. He is a man now and

no minor or infant. He has grown up Masonically. Before him are spread the two great essentials to all success, all greatness, all happiness.

Like any other power – temporal or physical, religious or spiritual – Freemasonry can be used well or ill. Here is the lesson set before the Fellowcraft; if he like David would have his kingdom of Masonic manhood established in strength he must pass between the pillars with understanding that power without control is useless, and control without power, futile. Each is a complement of the other; in the passage between the pillars the Fellowcraft not only has his feet set upon the Winding Stairs but is given – so he has eyes to see and ears to hear – secret instructions as to how he shall climb those stairs that he may, indeed, reach the Middle Chamber. He shall climb by strength, but directed by wisdom; he shall progress by power, but guided by control; he shall rise by the might that is in him, but arrive by the wisdom of his heart.

So seen the pillars become symbols of high value; the initiate of old saw in the obelisk the very spirit of the God he worshiped. The modern Masonic initiate may see in them both the faith and the means by which he may travel a little further, a little higher toward the secret Middle Chamber of life in which dwells the Unseen Presence.