

A CEREMONY OF OBLIGATION RENEWAL

FOR MASTER MASONS

The ceremony is to be conducted in a tiled lodge opened on the third degree. There should be an exemplar and acting Master for each of the three obligations. All participants are in at least coat and tie with the appropriate regalia. Exemplars are dressed likewise; not clad as they would be in the actual degrees. Except for the obligations, the script need not be delivered from memory. The ceremony shouldn't take more than 45 minutes or so.

1. The lodge is opened on the third degree.
2. An introduction is delivered by the Master who opens and closes the lodge. This section should set the stage for the meaning and purpose of the ceremony by providing a summary of the phases of life represented by the degrees, and what it means to take an obligation and to be a Freemason. **The participants include a Presiding Master who remains in the East; a brother to deliver the introduction of the 1st degree; a Master at the altar for the 1st degree obligation, preferably the JW; a brother to deliver the introduction of the 2nd degree; a Master at the altar for the 2n degree obligation, preferably the SW; a brother to deliver the introduction of the 3rd degree; a Master at the altar for the 3rd degree obligation, preferably the M; a Junior and Senior Deacon: and at least one obligation exemplar.**
3. The obligation of the Entered Apprentice.
 - 3.1. An introduction is delivered by a brother which highlights the key components of the obligation and their meanings as well as indicating the phase.
 - 3.2. An exemplar is presented at the altar accompanied by the Deacons and Senior Warden as would be the case in the actual degree.
 - 3.3. An acting Master (JW) delivers the obligation.
4. The obligation of a Fellowcraft Mason.
 - 4.1. Proceed as described in step 3 (SW).
 - 4.2. In addition to others, the introduction should include comments regarding the values of a Masonic education and the journey up the winding staircase.
5. The obligation of the Master Mason.
 - 5.1. Proceed as described in step 3 (M).
 - 5.2. The introduction should emphasize commitment, spiritual beliefs, and the conduct of an appropriate lifestyle.
6. The lodge is closed.

The ceremony should be considered masonic education and used at the discretion of the individual lodges. The ideal would be that it is conducted annually at the Division level and, perhaps, occasionally at an Annual Communication.

One concern to be addressed is defining an incentive for the conduct of the ceremony. What, in addition to the experience, would motivate Master Masons to participate?

This is a simple skeleton. The challenge is to dress it with the appropriate material to turn it into a meaningful experience.

CEREMONY OF OBLIGATION RENEWAL

FOR MASTER MASONS

The ceremony is conducted in a tiled lodge opened on the third degree of Masonry. In addition to the presiding Master, three Past Masters will work as acting Masters in obligating an exemplar candidate for each of the three degrees. All in attendance, including exemplars, will be clad in business dress with appropriate regalia. Except for the obligations themselves, the ceremony may be read or delivered from memory.

- I. *The lodge is opened on the third degree of Masonry, for the purpose of obligations renewal*
- II. *Introduction delivered by the presiding Master in the East:*

MASTER- Brethren, we gather as Master Masons this evening to demonstrate and reinforce our commitments to our Craft. Who we are, what we do, and how we do it are all defined by what we have learned as Masons: it is what sets us apart from the rest of the world. Making commitments is easy; keeping them tends to be difficult. We, as human beings, fall prey to forgetfulness and the forming of contrary habits with the passing of time. What was important to us early on fades and what we owe to others is less frequently considered. As husbands who are dedicated to our spouses for a lifetime often choose to renew their vows, so we as Masons should occasionally and ceremoniously repeat our obligations seeking to renew our understanding and increase the Light which we were given while kneeling at the altar.

As Masons, we passed through three degrees that taught us valuable life lessons and brought us the Light that we sought when we first knocked at the door. Each degree progressively provided us with the knowledge and tools to

make ourselves better equipped to be aware of and take care of those around us; whether they be brethren, family, friends, widows and orphans, or anyone in need of our assistance. In each degree, we took an obligation, a contract between us, the Great Architect, and our brother Masons. An obligation, distinct from an oath, holds one to higher standards and eliminates the option of failure. Where an oath is a promise that binds temporarily, an obligation is a lifelong commitment. Of that we were reminded by the penalties stated in each obligation. But the memory of what we agreed to may have faded and, if so, can be easily reinforced by once again committing to the words we declared and the responsibilities that we bound ourselves to.

This ceremony is about living up to our obligations and keeping the promises we made. We gather to refresh our memories and renew all that we agreed to in each degree because for us failure to do so is not an option lest we invoke serious moral harm to ourselves and those around us. So now listen, my brothers, restate and reaffirm what should define your actions and live in your hearts.

Introduction regarding the first degree is read/delivered by the Junior Warden or another brother

JUNIOR WARDEN-In the Entered Apprentice degree, unprepared, poor, and ignorant, we knocked at the door of Freemasonry and it was opened to us. Entering the Lodge for the first time was symbolic of a rebirth that was initiated in our heart. In search of Light, we put our trust in a

stranger to guide us in the pursuit of truth. We learned that we were about to become members of a worldwide brotherhood.

“Obligation” comes from the Latin *obligare* which means “to bind”. In taking our first obligation we were united to our brethren through solemn promises and a covenant to be true to both God and man.

After proving our worthiness to wear it, we were given a lambskin apron, the emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason, and committed ourselves to maintaining its purity and wearing it with honor and pleasure to ourselves. It became our duty to practice the teachings and philosophy of our Craft.

Finally, we were charged with being faithful to the trust to which we committed with the caveat that we are not to recommend anyone to join us unless we have strong reason to believe that he will ultimately reflect the honor of our ancient institution.

Let us now recommit ourselves to the obligation of the Entered Apprentice degree that we accepted before God and man.

The exemplar for the degree takes a position in the West facing the East. The Deacons and Senior Warden escort him to and position him at the altar as they would in the degree ceremony and are met by the acting Master for the degree. The acting Master (JW) instructs the exemplar and all in attendance to repeat after him as he delivers the obligation of the first degree. At the completions of the obligation, the acting Master and exemplar return to their seats and the Senior Warden and Deacons return to their stations.

The acting Senior Warden or another brother reads/delivers an introduction to the obligation of the second degree.

SENIOR WARDEN-In the Fellow Craft degree, symbolic of manhood, you were called upon for the first time to prove your worthiness to advance; the first clear indication that you were engaged in a process of continual learning.

Your obligation as a Fellow Craft broadened your awareness of the requirement for secrecy and brought to your attention your duty to attend to the needs of your fellow human beings.

To emphasize your ongoing process of learning, you were given the opportunity to ascend a winding staircase. Of your own free will you passed through two great pillars representing strength and self-control. As you moved on, you received instruction regarding the three pillars of the lodge, the five senses and orders of architecture, and in the seven liberal arts. At the end of your ascent, you received just wages, became a builder of a spiritual temple, and learned the significance of the letter "G" suspended in the East.

Finally, you were reminded that the ceremonies you experienced have been designed to convey the importance of continued learning and attainment of knowledge, especially a working knowledge of the Liberal Arts with Geometry being the most important of those as it is of a Divine nature and forms the basis of all Freemasonry.

Let us now recommit ourselves to the obligation of the Fellow Craft degree that we accepted before God and man.

The exemplar for the degree takes a position in the West facing the East. The Deacons and Senior Warden escort him to and position him at the altar as they would in the degree ceremony and are met by the acting Master for the degree. The acting Master (SW) instructs the exemplar and all in attendance to repeat after him as he delivers the obligation of the second degree. At the completions of the obligation, the acting Master and exemplar return to their seats and the Senior Warden and Deacons return to their stations.

The presiding Master in the East reads/delivers an introduction for the third degree obligation.

MASTER-In the Master Mason degree, we reached the pinnacle of Freemasonry, the highest and most meaningful degree that could ever be conferred upon us. We came to Masonry seeking Light and in this degree we received all of that Light that can be conferred in a Lodge of Master Masons.

Our obligation laid out our responsibilities to ourselves, family, the needy, and the human race in general in no uncertain terms. Our eyes were opened to, what for us, was a new world; clean and fresh and ready for us to strengthen and maintain.

We witnessed the recreation of a great dramatic tragedy that embodied everything we would ever need to know. It impressed upon our minds and hearts all of the tenets, tools, and symbols that would forevermore be necessary and instrumental to living a Masonic life.

Finally, the charge we received praised our progress and reminded us of what is expected: to be always worthy of the honor of being acknowledged as a Master Mason.

Let us now recommit ourselves to the obligation of a Master Mason that we accepted before God and man.

The exemplar for the degree takes a position in the West facing the East. The Deacons and Senior Warden escort him to and position him at the altar as they would in the degree ceremony and are met by the acting Master (M) for the degree. The acting Master instructs the exemplar and all in attendance to repeat after him as he delivers the obligation of the first degree. At the completions of the obligation, the acting Master and exemplar return to their seats and the Senior Warden and Deacons return to their stations.

The presiding Master reads/delivers a summary and proceeds to close the lodge.

MASTER-Brethren, all of us knocked at the door of Freemasonry seeking Light. Through the progression of the degrees, all of the knowledge that could was given to us and entrusted to our care with the understanding that we would use it to improve ourselves and care for those around us. As was said in the opening remarks, it is too easy for us to forget our commitments over time, especially if we do not make the effort to attend degree conferrals. Thus, the ceremony we have witnessed this evening. It is hoped that as you once again repeated the words of your obligations, the fire in your heart was fanned and made to burn brighter. It is our duty to keep that light aglow under all circumstances, to go back out into the world and practice what we have learned to the benefit of ourselves, our families and neighbors, and our country, all with the blessing of the Great Architect of the Universe. The eyes of the Fraternity are upon us. We are expected to do no less than to prove by our acts that on becoming Master Masons, we have indeed become better men.

As there is no further business to come before this Lodge of Master Masons, we will proceed to close.

The presiding Master closes the Lodge in due form.

NOTES

First Degree:

In the first degree, you knocked at the door of Freemasonry and it was opened to you. Your entrance into the Lodge was a symbolic rebirth that began in your heart. You were taught the value of the Sacred Law, citizenship, the practice of temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice; and, most importantly, the tenets of brotherly love, relief, and truth. We were committed to improving ourselves. Our membership is so valued that we were cautioned to recommend no one to join us unless we have strong reason to believe he will ultimately reflect the honor of our ancient institution.

You were invested with a lambskin apron; the emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason. You promised to maintain its purity and to wear it with honor and pleasure to yourself.

You learned that you were a part of a worldwide Brotherhood.

Psalm 133 symbolizes unity and brotherly love; both essential to the harmony which must prevail in every Masonic Lodge.

When we say we are seeking Masonic light, we are saying that we are seeking truth. The importance of light was demonstrated to you when your brothers assisted in bringing you into the Masonic light.

The Entered Apprentice quickly learns that God, country, and all human beings are important to Freemasons.

"Obligation" comes from the Latin *obligare*, meaning "to bind". In Freemasonry, the obligation unites its members with solemn promises, agreements, and covenants to be true to God and man.

An obligation is not to be confused with an oath. The obligation signifies promises and agreements made; and oath is a vow to carry out the promises and agreements of the obligation.

You received the lambskin apron after proving your right to wear it through being tried and tested. You must continue to prove yourself by practicing the lessons, teachings, and philosophy of our Fraternity.

FROM THE CHARGE

It is an institution having for its foundation the practice of social and moral virtues; and, to so high an eminence has its credit been advanced, that, in every age and country, men preeminent for their moral and intellectual attainments have encouraged and promoted its interests. Nor has it been thought derogatory to their dignity that monarchs have, for a

season, exchanged the scepter for the trowel, to patronize our mysteries and join in our assemblies.

You are to regard the volume of the Sacred Law as the great light in your profession; to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice...

Render everything that justice and mercy may require by relieving your brother's distresses and soothing his afflictions...

Obey the law and practice domestic and public virtues.

Be faithful to the trust committed to your care. Refuse to recommend anyone to a participation in our privileges unless you have strong reason to believe that he will ultimately reflect honor on our ancient Institution.

Second Degree:

What you learn as a Fellow Craft is symbolic of manhood. This was the first time you were called upon to prove to your brothers that you were worthy of advancements. Thus, your education is continuous.

You found your obligation as a Fellow Craft to be broader. In the Entered Apprentice obligation the need for secrecy was strongly emphasized. In the obligation of the Fellow Craft, the needs of your fellow man become more important.

The Fellow Craft is a builder both symbolically and factually. Symbolically, you initiate the building of a spiritual temple. Factually, you were presented with builder's tools and taught something of architecture.

You encountered two great pillars. Boaz, signifying strength, also symbolizes power. Jachin, meaning establishment also symbolizes choice or control. You passed between them of your own free will signifying your entrance into manhood.

You climbed a winding stairway to acquire knowledge without being able to see what was ahead.

Finally, you received your just wages and the Jewels of this degree becoming a builder in your own right.

FROM THE CHARGE:

Masonry is a progressive, moral science communicated by degrees. The ceremonies of this degree are calculated to inculcate in the mind of the novitiate the importance of the

study of the liberal arts and sciences, especially the science of Geometry which is of a divine nature and forms the basis of Freemasonry.

Third degree:

In the third degree, you reached the pinnacle of Masonry. Your reward is the opportunity to serve your fellow man. For you to be truly helpful, you need all the "Light" you can acquire.

The obligation that you took added to your responsibilities toward Masonry and mankind in general. You were once again given the opportunity to decide to accept or reject a life of Masonry. You declared your love and charity to be unbounded and your family, friends, widows, orphans, and your God became the focus of your efforts.

You witnessed the recreation of a great drama which embodied all that you need to know.

From that point on, you had everything you need to achieve that house not made with hands.

FROM THE CHARGE:

The Charge praised your accomplishment and reminded you of your duties and obligations. It authorized you to act in support of preserving the unsullied reputation of the Fraternity. Most of all, it directed you in no uncertain terms to always present yourself as worthy of the honor of being known as a Master Mason.