



Grand Lodge of Wisconsin – Masonic Study Series
Volume 2, issue 3
Special Edition Fall 2016

“The Cable-Tow”

Lodge Presentation:

The following short article is written with the intention to be read within an open Lodge, or in fellowship, to all the members in attendance. This article is appropriate to be presented to all Masons. Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft Masons should be invited to attend the meeting where this is presented. Following this article is a list of discussion questions which should be presented immediately following the presentation of the article.

The Cable-Tow

The Cable-Tow is unlike so many of our symbols in that the operative origins are not perfectly clear. It is commonly accepted that the word is a combination of two different forms of a rope. Anciently, the 'cable' is thought to refer to a strong, heavy rope often used to lash together heavy objects such as floats on a raft. The 'tow' is also a rope and was used to pull something like the floats lashed together with the cable. Together, the 'cable-tow' would have been a heavy rope that may have been used to bind and control something.

In British Lodges, the cable-tow was only used in the first degree, like the hoodwink, and has no symbolic meaning at all. It is only used as a means to control and guide the candidate. In our Lodges it is used in all three degrees and has various symbolic meanings.

The cable-tow is a visible symbol of a vow in which a man has pledged himself to that which he holds dear or of high esteem. Its length is determined by the ability of the man to fulfill his obligation to that which he has vowed.

If the Lodge is a symbol of the world, and the initiation is a symbol of our birth into the world of Masonry, the cable-tow is not unlike the cord which unites a child to its mother at birth. When that cord is removed at the child's birth, it is replaced by a tie of love between the mother and child. Similarly, during the initiation, the cable-tow is removed from the candidate because the obligation taken at the altar that binds us to the fraternity and each other is stronger than any physical tie. That physical restraint has become a moral constraint. That is to say, force is replaced by love and that is the secret of security and the basis of our brotherhood.

Not only does the cable-tow bind the individual Mason to Freemasonry, it also binds Freemasonry to the individual Mason. The Fraternity is also under obligation its members to guide, instruct and train them for the effective service of the Craft and of humanity. Control, obedience, direction or guidance - these are the meanings of the cable-tow.

Of course, Freemasonry does not control its members by force. It controls us as beauty controls the artist: it does not drive us, it draws from us. Its morality and beauty shapes us: it shapes our senses, our passions, our decisions through its moral lessons and beautiful maxims. By this method it gains guidance of our lives and provides us with direction, a point in the distance to aim at.



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As you reflect on the meaning of the cable-tow and apply it to govern your life and decisions remember that the bond between us and the Fraternity goes both ways, it is mutually inclusive. Also remember that the length of our cable-tow changes as our obligations, both within and outside of the Craft, require.

Adapted from the Short Talk Bulletin, “The Cable-Tow”, March, 1926 by W.: Brother Patrick Cholka for the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin Education Committee
Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of Wisconsin

Discussion Questions

The following discussion questions are written to be presented immediately following the presentation of the topic above. There is no right or wrong answers to these questions, they are designed to promote thought and engage all the members that are present in conversation. Take care that the presentation of the topic and the discussion questions does not exceed 30 minutes. The presenter can present any part of the questions below, or any additional questions, he feels is appropriate.

- The meaning of the cable-tow is applicable not only to Freemasonry, but in all other areas of your life. How have you applied it to other areas?
- How has the application of the meaning of the cable-tow helped you in your life?
- What other symbols in Freemasonry become more effective when used in conjunction with the cable-tow? (i.e. the 24 inch gauge, the circumpunct or point within a circle, etc?)
- The cable-tow may be one of the more difficult symbols in Freemasonry to use effectively, once you begin to consistently use the cable-tow, do you find it easier to use?