

## **“An Examination of Duty”**

**By Michael A. Kupsch 32°**

I think what stands out foremost in the 4<sup>th</sup> Degree is the notion of Duty. In fact, the concept of Duty is the cornerstone of Freemasonry. We see this theme repeated throughout Pike’s “Morals and Dogma.” We see it as a running thread through all the degree work; in the Craft Lodges and as well as those of the Scottish Rite. It is our sense of duty that serves as our personal moral compass; guiding us through life in that we have a duty to the Supreme Architect, to our country, our fellow man, family, and even to ourselves. As we are the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God, then we are, in truth, are our brother’s keeper, and bear the Duty of well being. Even our obligations, taken in the Craft Lodges, are no more than enumerations of Duty.

But let us examine Duty even more closely. We need to differentiate Duty from Labor, Duty from Obligation, and what that means to us as Freemasons. Further, we must conceptualize Masonic Duty, how this idea of Masonic Duty has changed over time, how it relates to our journey through the Officer chairs of the Lodge, and how we can develop a model of Masonic Duty into our daily lives.

I would state that there is a vast difference between Duty and Labor. Labor is a process; the exertion of movement towards a goal. Labor can be thought of as the action of Duty, or the process of carrying out one’s Duty. Of course that does not mean that all Labor is the product of Duty. One can engage in Labor not out of a sense of Duty or obligation. Labor can be forced, and be either positive or negative depending on the Laborer’s perspective. As Freemasons, Labor receives exalted status within the Fraternity. This type of Labor can be as simple as improving ourselves as men and as Masons, helping the widows of our departed Brethren, or writing a check for a donation to a worthy cause (yes, even the act of writing a check is labor). Something guides these examples of positive Masonic Labors. It is like the three pillars of the Lodge; Wisdom, Strength and Beauty where Wisdom comes from the sense and understanding of Duty, Strength is the act of Labor, and Beauty is the positive result of the melding of the two; the positive result of intent and process.

So then, what is Duty? Essentially, Duty is the conscious understanding when an individual realizes that he should take action for the greater good. In some instances, Duty is governed by laws; failure to do one’s duty results in punishment. However, for the average person during the course of daily living, Duty is more of a cerebral notion of what the right action to take given a situation. For example, the cashier gives us back too much change. Now we have an ethical dilemma shadowed by our understanding of Duty. If we do not inform the cashier of the overage in change, we certainly will not receive punishment and we profit from the mistake. Yet, the cashier might lose his or her job because of this error. The ethical person “feels” that sense of Duty within himself; that is the right thing to do in informing the cashier of the mistake. Duty, in its purest form, is not doing something for profit, reward, notoriety, et al. Duty should be done because it is simply the right thing to do. It’s not so much what we have to do, but what we know we should do.

Duty and Obligation almost mirror each other. Whereas Duty is an individual's knowledge of what he should do, Obligation is the legal or formal agreement of what an individual states he will do in the performance of his duties. It is the Duty of every Freemason to attend Lodge regularly, but it is our obligation to aid and assist worthy Brethren, keep their secrets when entrusted to us, keep the secrets of our Fraternity and so forth. Is Obligation higher than Duty? Doubtless some would argue that it is. I see them as of equal importance. An Obligation formally ties you to a set of behaviors, an external force, if you will, regulating your conduct. The sense of Duty comes from within us; an internal force. Personally, I believe that this notion of "Duty" and "Obligation" makes the performance sound like more of a thing that has to be done rather than the individual's desire of simply wanting to do it as an act of the heart. The performance of duty and obligation should be something that is a natural internal instinct of the Mason; that he wants to do this whether it is framed as "Duty" or "Obligation." It harkens back to the concept that is so important to even becoming a Mason; that it is of your own free will and accord. We frame Duty and Obligation in definable terms, but just as where we were first made Freemasons, the desire to do these things has to come from the heart and done not from the sense that it is something we, as a Freemason, have to do, but what we feel compelled from our sole and our heart to do. Duty does not always depend on Obligation and can stand alone. To do one's duty, out of a sense that it is right and just, is sublime. It is what shapes us as Freemasons, and I think that is why Albert Pike stated that Duty was the one great law of Masonry.

Understanding Masonic Duty is relatively straight forward. It is simply doing the right thing for the greater good; something that is bigger than us. Paying our dues in a timely manner is a duty, so is our regular attendance in Lodge, continuing to seek Masonic light through learning the ritual work and reading Masonic works is also a duty. We can do our Masonic Duty by assisting our Lodge Officers in the performance of their duties, and of course, by doing charitable works in the character of Freemasons for our community.

Has the concept of Masonic Duty changed through the years? I would suggest that even though the basic elements of Masonic Duty, as a whole, has remained constant, some of its applications definitely changed. Looking back to the birth of our nation, many of our key founding fathers were Freemasons, and pressed for the creation of a country based on the ideals of freedom of speech, thought and religion. They saw their duty as fighting tyranny so as to create the foundations of this country. As the years have gone by, and our country grew solid in these freedoms, the sense of duty to insure the government, or any government that threatened these rights, has grown silent. That does not mean that we have grown less patriotic, just less vocal and active. In the Scottish Rite, we learn that as Scottish Rite Masons, we are the guardians of protecting these precious rights and to insure that ignorance, tyranny and intolerance never gain a strong hold and supplant the will of a free and democratic people.

Another observation regarding changes in Masonic Duty is a turning inward of attention. What I mean by this is that many Lodges do not involve themselves with bettering their community. As an example, most Blue Lodge does give monetary support to various charities; but do not make a presence in the community. Generally, most Lodges do not participate in parades, or anything external from the Lodge. And yet we wonder why we are not gaining or maintaining membership.

One of the most sublime duties a Freemason can do for his Lodge is to go through the line of Officer Chairs. Regardless of where one starts in the line, as we progress, we gain more responsibilities, and hence, greater duties. Our sense of duty matures, not only to the Lodge and its functions, but to the members. But this sense of duty is not restricted to the Lodge and the Brethren alone. We must expand it to our family, our community, our local, and national government. We must take what we understand as Masonic Duty and apply these to our everyday lives. Do what is right and just. Live by the golden rule. Do not stand on the sidelines and be a spectator. Involve ourselves in performing charitable works. Be living examples of moral rectitude and living for our children, and their children. Stand against the three enemies of freedom: tyranny, intolerance and ignorance.

In short, in doing our Masonic Duty, we are charged with leaving the world a little bit better than how we found it. Be a beacon to our Brethren, especially the newly raised Masons, so that they can clearly see their duty, whether that be in their travels to the East or in their daily lives so that the eternal flame of Masonic Light shall burn as brightly as it did for our ancient Brethren and for those Brethren yet to be.