

## Master Craftsman II 18<sup>th</sup> Degree Essay

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### The 18<sup>th</sup> Degree and Its Lessons toward Tolerance of Beliefs

#### **Introduction**

The 18<sup>th</sup> degree calls the masonic initiate to a higher plain of understanding and thought. It calls for us to implement in our lives the noble virtue of tolerance. In the preceding degree, we were introduced to the symbiotic relationship between tolerance and persistence. In this degree we are instructed that our entire teaching hangs on the hinge of toleration. We cannot proceed without toleration. Toleration is in essence a gate, represented by the Pillars in Masonry, between or through which, we must pass in order to accomplish the work of progressively improving our inner nature and our world. Without toleration we work in vain, and the work that we do, we are told by McClenachan, is no longer Masonry. Without toleration we are unable to enter into the teaching of the Great Law of Love.

#### **The Bridge**

In this degree the symbol of the eagle is used. The eagle according to the ancient Egyptians was representative of a wise man. Wise because its wings bear him above the clouds, into the purer atmosphere and nearer to the source of light, and with that light his eyes are not dazzled. It is also representative of the sun, itself a type of the Infinite Supreme Reason or Intelligence. (Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide, Third Edition pg 167). The mason and in particular here the Scottish Rite Mason, is instructed to rise above. To breathe the clean air of toleration. To live differently than the many surrounding him. All the while not becoming enamored with or proud that he is living in or toward a higher calling. But his true goal in life is to draw near to the Divine.

The wisdom that we seek as masons must be accompanied by the humility that comes from understanding that whatever good we begin to see happening within our character and lives comes both from the Divine spark residing within us and simply from the Divine Itself. This understanding helps us to know that the Divine spark is not unique to us as an individual. That is the mistake of arrogance. Arrogance says that one is special and that others are not. Intelligence says, I am special and so is my brother. Masonry teaches that all are special and that that specialness comes not from the individual alone, but simply because the individual contains the seed or spark of the Divine. We become good by drawing near to the light or to the Infinite Divine Creator. A spark of the Divine Creator lies within each and every member of the human race. And so, similar to the story told by Russell Conwell, in his book titled "Acres of Diamonds" we are shown that we have within us, right now, the capability for goodness.

So the journey of self improvement outlined by the degree's of Masonry continues here. We as Masons are again, called to live to a higher calling. This calling is made possible by our ability to draw near to the Divine. Drawing near to the Divine empowers us to have both the courage and the ability to find ourselves living in a manner that would be reflective of a life of good. We are reminded however, in this degree that evil has still not been overcome in this worldly existence. While all men (women) possess the Divine spark, not all will choose to live toward the Divine and the higher nature that is

hidden within the bosom of all humanity.

And so here in the 18<sup>th</sup> degree we are introduced to the ancient concept of the messiah. The figure of Jesus is highlighted in this degree. Jesus is the most understood messiah of the Western World. Masonry does not go so far as to say that Jesus is the ONLY messiah, but that he is a messiah. A man who understood his possession of the Divine and gave his life for his people. Jesus is a type or an example of the idea that God, in order to bridge the distance between himself and his creation would take the initiative to approach His children by becoming or living within humanity. Jesus as the man allowed the Father to so possess him that he gave his life as a sacrifice for his people. In his words, Jesus, made his sacrifice with the entire body of humanity in mind.

### **The Application**

In the scenario described in the 1<sup>st</sup> essay question the teaching of this degree is quite instructive. The issue of toleration is obviously of preeminence, but other teachings of charity, sacrifice and the reconciliation of opposites outlined in this degree come into play. One could imagine a muslim family moving into a predominately Christian neighborhood in America. Part of toleration is going to be, in this scenario, toleration of the Muslim family and beliefs but also having empathy (toleration?) for the fear of the neighborhood.

The role of the Masonic Initiate in this case will be to try to point the nervous neighbors not toward the muslim family and the similarities of our faiths, but towards the teaching that has been reinforced in this degree and found in our legal system. The focus of the approach of the Masonic teaching will be to, as the emblem of the eagle, to draw closer to the light of the Divine and attempt to call others to rise above their fear, and to look toward the teaching of our founding documents. The Constitution does not protect Christianity, it protects the individuals right to worship the God of his or her choosing in his or her way. It may be a difficult endeavor to convince society that we worship the same God, but we definitely can point to the tolerance built into our founding legal document. In this country, we guarantee our God given right to worship Him in the way we see fit.

Now. As I mentioned in the previous essay, the difficulty comes in, when the guarantee of certain rights is not accompanied by a desire to guarantee those rights by another. Whether a state, philosophy, religion or individual. The question to be answered is does a philosophy, religion, govt or individual have the protection of our constitutional rights, when it is their intent is to implement a system that does not guarantee those very same rights to others that they are enjoying. Does Islam have constitutional protection, when its intent is the implementation of a system of religious law for civil society called Sharia?

Our Masonic teaching informs us as to the necessity of the separation of church and state. So does our Constitution protect the right of a Muslim to worship God as a Muslim, the obvious answer under our system is yes. However, the Islamic religious system does not have protection if their intent is the subjugation of our system of individual liberty guaranteed by our Constitution. Brother Franklin D. Roosevelt once stated' "yes, all men are created equal, but the quickly outgrow that" He was saying that yes, we all possess at birth the equality of being human, but that our actions are critical in determining who we are. Some choose to pursue good others not. One cannot deny that there is an abundance of religious liberty in the US given our separation of church and state. That CANNOT be said of many if any, Islamic countries. So in our given scenario, being empathetic to the feelings of distrust among the neighbors must be understood as a legitimate concern. But the focus of discussion must be on the goodness of our system and our desire as a nation and people to be an example of right in this world.

So in this scenario we have to instruct and “sell” the neighborhood on the concepts of our individual liberties that are guaranteed not only to us as christians, but to members of all religious faiths. We are instructed in Masonry to defend, not a particular religious belief or faith that we may hold to, but the universal right of all to choose to worship God in their own manner. The christian is not to infringe on the rights of the muslim for personal worship, nor is the muslim allowed to infringe upon the rights of the christian. So the situation becomes the opportunity to talk about civics, our national history, our legal system and ultimately Masonic principles. All parties in this scenario are called to look to masonic principles incorporated within our constitution and legal system. A mason may not be so free as to divulge specifics of masonic degree work as such, but the outworking of those truths in the law of our country should be the focus of discussion in this scenario.

## **Conclusion**

This degree ultimately is attempting to expose us to the universal law of love. Much of our teaching thus far has centered around the great law of cause and effect, and its effect upon our existence. In this degree we are introduced to the higher law of love and idea of a messiah who, comes from God, and gives his life on behalf of God's children in order to bridge the divide between God and man. The essay question in this degree brings up many interesting points of discussion. However, let us never forget that whatever we do we are instructed in this degree to do so under the law of love. Greater love hath no man than he lay down his life for his friend. This is the message of the 18<sup>th</sup> degree. Let us draw closer to the light and the Divine and incorporate within our thinking and our actions the idea of sacrificing our interests for those of others. Begin to live and work with the other person in mind. Do what you do out of love for God and express that love by doing good for others. Understand that by doing good to others, you are by extension doing good to yourself for we are all one.

The many seeming contradictions of the sayings of the Christian messiah, Jesus begin to become clearer with the teaching of this degree. The first shall be last, it is better to give than to receive, whoever does unto the least of these has done unto me, are understood under the law of love that is outlined in this 18<sup>th</sup> degree.