
TO LIGHT!

Bringing Masonic Education To Light

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Fides -The Right Hand

In the lecture of the first degree, it is said that “our ancient brethren worshipped deity under the names of Fides or Fidelity, which was said sometimes to be represented by two right hands joined, at other times by two human figures holding each other by the right hand.”

In the book *Masonry Defined*, edited by C.S. Lippincott and E.R. Johnston, we find the following written by Albert Mackey:

Fides. The deity here referred to was the goddess Fides, to whom Numa first erected temples, and whose priests were covered by a white veil as a symbol of the purity which should characterize Fidelity. The virtue of Fidelity is, however, frequently symbolized in ancient medals by a heart in the open hand, but more usually by two right hands clasped. There was among the Romans another deity called Fidius, who presided over oaths and contracts, Noel says that there was an ancient marble at Rome consecrated to the god Fidius, on which was depicted two figures clasping each other's hands as the representatives of Honor and Truth, without which there can be no fidelity nor truth among men. Her symbol was two right hands joined, or sometimes two human figures holding each other by the right hands, whence, in all agreements among the Greeks and Romans, it was usual for the parties to take each other by the right hand, in token of their intention to adhere to the compact. Masonry, borrowing its ideas from the ancient poets, makes the right hand the symbol of Fidelity.

Right Hand. The right hand has in all ages been deemed an important symbol to represent the virtue of fidelity. Among the ancients, the right hand and fidelity to an obligation were almost deemed synonymous terms. Thus, among the Romans, the expression, *to betray the right hand*, also signified *to violate faith*; and *to join right hands*, meant *to give a mutual pledge*. Among the Hebrews, the right hand was derived from *aman*, to be faithful. Among the Jews, to give the right hand was considered as a mark of friendship and fidelity. Thus St. Paul says, “When James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the *right hand of fellowship*.”

Since the introduction of Christianity, the use of the right hand in contracting an oath has been continued, but instead of extending it to heaven, or seizing with it a horn of the altar, it is now directed to be placed upon the Holy Scriptures, which is the universal mode at this day in all Christian countries. This constant use of the right hand in the most sacred attestations and solemn compacts, was either the cause or the consequence of its being deemed an emblem of fidelity.

It is thus apparent that the use of the right hand as a token of sincerity and a pledge of fidelity, is as ancient as it is universal; a fact, which will account for the important station which it occupies among the symbols of Freemasonry.

Now that we have heard what Mackey says about the history of fidelity and the right hand, how should we as modern Masons make use of this emblem. Three things come to mind. First when we take our obligation at the altar, with the right hand over the volume of sacred law, the use of the right hand is to remind us how important and binding our obligation truly is. Second, during the opening of every meeting, or when we enter a lodge and salute the Senior Warden with the due guard, what we demonstrate reminds us yet again of our obligation. Third, when we meet another Mason on the street and walk up to him, look him in the eye and greet him with a hand shake using the right hand, we are yet again affirming our obligation to that brother. So my brothers think about the right hand, what it means to you, and apply what it teaches to your daily life.