

The Hippocratic Oath, the Nightingale Pledge, Masonic Obligations and Rosicrucian Rules

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Hippocrates of Cos Medal (front)

The taking of honorable oaths is a time-honored custom whereby a person makes solemn promises before Almighty God and our fellow men. Nearly all Oaths are held to be sacred, binding Vows ---they are proclamations made by an individual stating their desire to do faithful performance or accomplish a stated goal. The purpose of this Presentation is to illustrate that honorable Oaths can be (and should be) positive reinforcement to rise above their mortal failings --- and, thus: rising above procrastination, avoiding self-interest, as well as shunning temptations toward various biases or other deviating short-cuts. In essence: An honorable Oath aids a moral man's conscience. It gives him moral backbone "to do that, which is Right and Just." It parallels the old-time saying: "My word-of-honor is my Bond."

Hippocrates of Cos was an ancient Greek physician born circa 460 B.C. in Kos, Greece. He died circa 370 B.C., also in Greece. Hippocrates is credited by students of Pythagoras of allying the two separate subjects of Philosophy and Medicine. Above all else: Hippocrates was concerned with the alleviating human suffering, while simultaneously inculcating ethical virtues of Integrity and pledging high levels of upright Moral Conduct. The Hippocratic Oath was, (and in some places, still is) taken by new physicians and other healthcare professionals swearing to practice Medicine ethically. Unfortunately, in these "politically-correct times" the oath has been shortened, condensed, or watered-down in some localities to conform to the whims of modernists who want shortcuts. However, true commitment requires hard-promises; unwavering-commitment; and solid adherence to keep themselves steadfast toward doing their duty, without laxness nor interjecting personal prejudices. It is comparable to the imagery in the practice of Law whereby "Lady Justice" is blindfolded to ensure fairness and impartiality. The Hippocratic Oath takes that concept one step further by symbolically removing-the-blindfold and enabling the pledging person to see the pathway of the "straight and narrow" which directs them to adhere to that path of ethical Justice in the arena of Medicine and health-care. It removes uncertainty, chaos, misunderstandings....and instills good, smooth professional ethics that attempts to ensure good Order and reliable care.



The classic translation of The Hippocratic Oath (translated into English) is as follows:

"I swear by Apollo the Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods, and goddesses, making them by witnesses, that I will fulfill according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant.

To hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents, and to live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine and to regard his offspring as equal to my brothers in male lineage and to teach them this art --- if they desire to learn it --- without fee and covenant, to give a share of precepts and oral instruction and all the other learning to my sons and to the sons of him who has instructed me and to the pupils who have signed the covenant and have taken the oath, according to Medical law, but to no one else.

*I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment. I will keep them from harm and injustice. (** The Ionic Greek version, translated into English is similar, but reads: "I will prescribe regimens for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone").*

I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. In purity and holiness, I will guard my life and my art. (Again, the Ionic Greek version is similar, but it reads: "I will not give a lethal drug to anyone if I am asked, nor will I advise such a plan, and similarly I will not give a woman a pessary to cause an abortion").

I will not use the knife, not even on sufferers from stone, but will withdraw in favor of such men as are engaged in this work.

Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice and in particular of sexual relations with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves.

Whatever I may see or hear in the course of treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep myself holding such things shameful to be spoken about.

If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot."

Various translations include slight variations...but the sentiments retain the same pledge, promise, and vow to Act Uprightly...and "DO NO HARM" to anyone. The same high-standards are imposed: regardless of which variation of wording is laid-forth in the Oath itself. For centuries, the great majority of doctors, physicians, and other health-care workers have faithfully and steadfastly adhered to their solemn Vows. In similar fashion: Nurses often voluntarily assumed a comparable Oath....commonly referred to as "The Nightingale Pledge" (named after the noted and dedicated nurse Florence Nightingale) and composed in the year 1893, which reads as follows:



"I solemnly pledge myself before God and presence of this assembly; to pass my life in purity and to practice my life faithfully.

I will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous and will not take or knowingly administer any harmful drug.

I will do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping and family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my calling.

With loyalty, I will endeavor to aid the physician in his work, and devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care."

In a similar vein is, "the Veterinarian's Oath". It was adopted by the American Veterinary Medical Association in July 1969 and amended in December of 2010. It reads:

"Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge. I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics. I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence."

These honorable Oaths (and others) mesh perfectly with our Masonic promises, vows, and Obligations ---- as well as with our Rosicrucian Rules. With regard to Masonic promises, vows, and Obligations, it is universally known among Masons (and almost universally known to non-Masons too) that men who join Masonry promise and vow (amongst other things):

-To believe in Almighty God (i.e. a "Supreme Being" or "Creator").

- To keep the particulars of the Ritualistic Ceremonies private or confidential, except to another Brother holding that same Degree.

- To help, aid, and assist worthy Brethren, if called upon (and if they are deemed worthy or legitimately deserving) and if the helping party is actually able to "help"--- within their own limits and capabilities.

- To be proficient in their own work or avocations.

- To help widows and orphans of deceased members, (if the helping party is physically and financially able to do so).

- And, to be good, upright men of proven (vouched-for) character... faithful in our thoughts, words, and deeds to God, Country and Family....and to be mindful that their own individual character is representative of the Fraternity as a whole.....To be on their best behavior at all times, and thus obeying the morals, customs, and laws of the land as good citizens. And, above all else: Honoring, Worshipping, and giving all credit and Glory to our Creator: Almighty God.



As Albert Mackey, 33° and a Knight Templar, noted in his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, that "an Oath or promise cannot, in itself, be sinful unless there is something immoral in the obligation it imposes". Any so-called 'penalty' for breaking one's oath or obligation, is not meant to be inferred as a literal 'blood-oath' ----but rather, along the lines of a true friend who might say to themselves: "I'd rather lose my left arm than break my promise to a friend, or to a spouse, or to a neighbor." Any penalty is reflective of the "sincerity of the intensity that particular person has of **KEEPING their vow.**" The objective is a self-imposed reminder of the importance of good ethical behavior. In Masonry the vows are reinforced by a circle-of-friends who have assumed the same responsibilities. Fellow Masons are fraternal "Brothers" in the highest, kindest, and best sense of the word. The members of our gentle Craft are a safety-net.....We are here to serve and protect not just ourselves --- but our whole communities. Masons are well-known for our good deeds and charitable acts. We must remember our vows and Obligations and keep those "high standards" alive and well. No person (in their right mind) (if they are faithful and true) thinks about betrayal or breaking their promise when they assume a serious or sacred duty. Their focus is on retaining their/our individual HONOR, with no schemes of equivocation or purposes of evasion of the duties which they/we pledge to perform.

It is sometimes colloquially said that Married Couples complete their vows or obligations when they say their "I Dos." Initially, a minister, priest, rabbi or Justice-of-the-Peace may say something to the effect of: "Do you take this person to be your lawfully-wedded wife (or husband)?"..... and the responding party replies: "I DO." And then, the reverse would take place with the other spousal party making a reciprocal response of "I DO". Just imagine the shock and horror if the reply was evasive or lukewarm? Suppose a betrothed person would casually reply: "I might" or "I'll try." More than likely, the other partner (as well as all witnesses present thereto) would have an indignant look on their faces --- if not a loud verbal outcry of dismay and/or objection. Even with extended or expanded clauses in Marriage Vows: too many modern couples will not take seriously the pledged provisions to stay-together "for richer, for poorer; in good times and in bad times; and in sickness or in health", etc. A vow, pledge, promise, oath or obligation means nothing if the pledging-party doesn't give it credence or won't stand-by it. Honorable vows, oaths, and promises are an AID TO THE CONSCIENCE, reminding the person that the tasks and duties continue long after the pledging-ceremony ends.

The Hippocratic Oath, the Nightingale Pledge, the Veterinarian's Oath, the oath of a juror or a governmental officeholder's oath-of-office ---as well as our Masonic Obligations and Rosicrucian Rules are all cheerfully and voluntarily assumed. Everyone that I know of (who has assumed these solemn vows and pledges responsibly and who has faithfully "done their best") is both happy and content. Those types of individuals are well-deserving of the compliment that The Lord gives; "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Faithfully keeping a vow gives a good person more inner-satisfaction; as contrasted with the inner-torment, guilty-conscience or gnawing-of-the-soul that would be far worse (for them) than any symbolic penalty or monetary penalty for forfeiting their duty or being labeled forsworn or unworthy of a position of Trust. An honorable promise or vow casually tossed aside, will bring shame to the violator. Honorable people are eager to pledge their faithfulness....and to keep their good reputations intact.

Mackey also said, that in ancient times: "Sometimes (a person extended the right hand to Heaven, and swore by earth, sea, and stars".



The HAND of the human body is regarded as a vital part of human functioning. It lifts bread and water to our mouths; it opens doors, it cleanses our bodies from impurities. It is essential to performing almost any type of manual labor, and it grasps the hand of other people who either befriend us OR who are in personal Need or Distress. The hands can be folded in prayer; or clapped-together: signifying gratification or approval. The human touch is extremely vital in the holding a nurturing of a newborn baby; yet the hand can also be clenched into a fist of rage. It is a well-documented fact that certain "pressure-points" of the palm of the hand can pinpoint (and possibly relieve certain ailments) when done by a skilled practitioner. The palm and fingers of the human hand contain a unique set of human finger-prints that can precisely identify any given person's unique identity---as well as assisting law-enforcement-agencies in determining the same. The human hand is the most common means of pledging loyalty and devotion. School-children and civilian adults place their hands over their hearts when reciting "The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of The United States of America. Military Servicemen and Servicewomen, utilize the hand in executing the right-hand military salute. The human hand has the capability of being placed upon the Holy Bible or other sacred writ or Volume of Sacred Law, enabling the Attestation of an Oath to perform a duty and bear witness to tell the truth, to act accordingly, and to suffer ramifications ---- if untrue to their pledge.

Examples include:

--Potential Jurors in a legal proceeding placing their hand on the Holy Bible, pledging to tell the truth, under penalty of perjury.

--By the President, Vice President, governmental officers and military personnel to adhere to the U.S. Constitution, and its provisions.

Mackey continues:

"A modern continuance of the ancient ceremonial method of pledging future personal conduct is the coronation of a King. In England, the coronation oath is to be administered by one of the archbishops or bishops in the presence of all the people, who, on their parts reciprocally take the oath of allegiance to the Crown. The archbishop or bishop shall say: 'Will you solemnly promise and Swear to govern the people of this United Kingdom of Great Britain and the dominions thereto belonging according to statutes in parliament agreed on, and the respective laws and customs of the same?' The King shall say: 'I solemnly promise so to do'. After various other promises, the King, laying his hand on the Holy Gospels, shall say: 'The things which I have here before promised I will perform and keep, so help me God,' and then he shall kiss the Holy Book."

As far as MASONIC ROSICRUCIANISM goes, H.I.H. Prince Rhodokanakis, IX^o, of Greece wrote to Frater Albert Pike, IX^o of the United States, and urged him to contact Frater W.J.B. McLeod Moore, IX^o of Canada as to re-writing the Ritual and revising the Rules for our Rosicrucian Society.

Frater Moore cautioned Frater Pike to neither increase, nor decrease, the number of degrees or "Grades" in the Society --- and then Frater Pike began the task of composing the Rules which he termed Regulae.



The first Rule acknowledges that the Society is independent and built on its own foundation. The second Rule acknowledges that it is not a Masonic Society (*per se*) but a scholarly society composed exclusively of Freemasons.

Thoughtful and studious research was encouraged and "Papers" on subjects of significant issues were to be shared freely among the Fratres. This aspect of freely-shared knowledge is a throwback to the days of the founder of the Rosicrucian Society, Father Christian Rosenkreutz, IX^o (1378-1484) a Catholic Monk, who had the earliest Members of his Society of the Rose & Cross go out in pairs, seeking wisdom, and helping relieve the medical needs of people in distress freely = gratis.

Indeed, our hands are meant to be utilized whenever possible in actions of "goodness" and "charity"..... and Hippocrates of Cos (along with physicians, nurses, veterinarians, governmental officeholders, jurors, Masons, and Masonic Rosicrucians) indicate their steadfast loyalty and faithful performance by the hand placed as their 'sign' or testimony ----- that their current and future conduct will be pure, honorable, everlasting, and that it will "do no harm".



Hippocrates of Cos Medal (Reverse)

SOURCES / RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences, by Albert G. Mackey 33^o and a Knight Templar.
- General Histories, American Medical Association.
- American Veterinary Medical Association proclamations.
- History of the Canadian Masonic Rosicrucian Colleges S.R.I.C.

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