

THE ANTHEM AND THE PLEDGE

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It is no coincidence that Masons are patriotic men. All of us have made solemn promises to respect God, and to do what we can to help our country, our family, and our fellow man. Our Masonic obligations (sometimes called Oaths) are our "pledge" to carry out those meaningful and honorable promises.

It was in a similar fashion that our National Anthem uses lyrics and melody to convey mental images of Bravery, Perseverance, Honor, Loyalty, and Solemnity before men; and above all: a Gratitude to Almighty God for the blessings He has bestowed.

These days, it is a rare event for some performers to sing the National Anthem totally and accurately from memory. I would much rather they have the written lyrics in front of them, rather than do a choppy and sloppy rendition. Most people do not know all the verses to "The Star-Spangled Banner," which are:

"O say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

"On the shore dimly seen, thro' the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the first gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected, now shines on the stream:
'Tis the star-spangled banner: O, long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

"And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion,
A home and a country should leave us no more?"



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Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave:
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

"O thus be it ever when free-men shall stand
Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation;
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land
Praise the Pow'r that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust!"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

The Pledge of Allegiance is a special Oath or Promise to honor the flag, and the principles for which it stands. It represents the character, strength, loyalty, and unity of the people who recite it. The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States, in its modern form, reads:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to The Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

When I attend Masonic meetings in Texas, the national Pledge of Allegiance is recited; then a pledge of allegiance to the Texas flag is subsequently spoken aloud:

"Honor the Texas flag; I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one and indivisible."

Shriners of North America hold dear the flags of 4 Nations: The United States of America; Canada; Mexico; and the Republic of Panama. Shrine Centers and other Masonic Bodies exist in all those countries. Therefore, every Shrine Honor-Guard should properly post all four flags, and all the members present recite the Shriners' Pledge of Allegiance. It accommodates the broad span of Brotherhood among members in all 4 Nations, yet it acknowledges that each Shrine is an individual with his deepest loyalty to the flag of his own country:

"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to the country for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Although each man holds dear the flag he claims as his own (hence, the words "my Flag") all Shriners wearing a fez execute the right-hand military salute to the



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4 Flags which stand side-by-side in harmony; reminiscent of the harmony among Masons of countries who meet upon the level to stand squarely side-by-side .

Before I was born, then U.S. Senator (and later President) John F. Kennedy read aloud the Declaration of Independence, in a radio broadcast over WXQR Radio station in New York City on July 4, 1957. I am always impressed by the last sentence in The Declaration: *"And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."* That sentence reveals that the pledge made by our forebears was a sacred promise or oath mutually made by Americans to band together in a compact or alliance to establish a sovereign Nation. In addition, that document's reference to Almighty God is compatible with verse 4 of The Star-Spangled Banner when it says our motto is: "In God We Trust."

We are fortunate that the National Anthem of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the Pledge of Allegiance dovetail together so magnificently. The messages conveyed by both mesh well with our nation's governing documents as well as our coinage, all the while acknowledging that we are a nation under God. The U.S. Flag is more than red and white stripes with a blue field and bright stars. It is our nation's standard. It is "Old Glory." It is the honorable blanket, which has covered coffins of our fallen heroes. It is a symbol of a nation, which is both a Constitutional Republic and also a Representative Democracy.

Reciting the Anthem and the Pledge are times which place us in an attitude of respect with hands-over-hearts. Just as fibers bind fabric together, the Anthem and the Pledge bind us together to instill what we stand for. We stand together as people. The Flag is raised. And our citizenry is elevated to a nobility of purpose.

Our Masonic Brother, Red Skelton, (who was a member of both the York Rite & Scottish Rite) had his own commentary on the meaning of the words & phrases in The Pledge of Allegiance. I think his comments at the end are very appropriate, "It's as much your country as it is mine." The Anthem and the Pledge are passages, which when sewn together, instill a feeling of "unity" which cements love of God, Country, Family, and our fellow man.

In the Grade of Philosophus, the Rituals of the Societas Rosicrucianas in Anglia (SRIA) tell members to "look around" after we have made our obligations. The Chief Adept says: *"Now look around you. Those whose eyes are directed toward you, are your Brethren; ready to discharge all the Offices of that intimate relation, they now bid you welcome to their number and fellowship; to their affections and assistance; to their privileges and joys; and through me they promise to protect you by their influence and authority, to advise you by their abilities and skill, to assist you in exigence by their liberality and bounty; and to cheer you at all times with their kindness and love."*



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In a similar fashion, after we hear The Anthem or say The Pledge, each of us should turn to our neighbor and remind him/her that, "We live in a great country where we care about each other." Let us make sure those sentiments continue forever.

Author's commentary on the Masonic relevance to The Anthem and The Pledge:

Francis Scott Key, who wrote the lyrics to The Star-Spangled Banner, was a Freemason and a member of Concordia Lodge No.13, in Maryland. The music itself was written by another Freemason, John Stafford Smith, a member of Royal Somerset and Inverness Lodge No. 4 in London, England. The melody had been used in a variety of other compositions -- one of which was a British drinking song. Francis Julius Bellamy, the author of the original unmodified Pledge of Allegiance, was likewise a Freemason who held membership in Little Falls Lodge No 181, Little Falls, New York.

Sources/ Recommended Readings:

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- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry
- Al Malaikah Shrine Center, Los Angeles, CA
- website: <http://www.shrineauditorium.com/shriners.html>
- The U.S. Declaration of Independence; severing political ties to Great Britain, July 4, 1776
- website: http://www.cs.umb.edu/~rwhealan/jfk/jfk_declaration_of_independence.html
- Los Altos Lodge No 712 trestleboard/newsletter, August 2005
- website: <http://www.calodges.org/no712/la-tb0805.html>
- Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon A.F. & A.M.
- website: http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/bellamy_f/bellamy_f.html
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