

FORTITUDE

Corinthian Lodge - January 26, 2012

The EA degree introduces candidates to seven moral principles, which we group into three tenets and four Cardinal Virtues. The tenets are brotherly love, relief, and truth. These tenets are key to any organization, but especially to our fraternity.

Relief is practiced through our Masonic charities as an expression of brotherly love. If we are to become better men, we seek truth and enlightenment. These tenets are supplemented with four Cardinal Virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice.

The idea of four Cardinal Virtues comes from Plato. 'Cardinal' is derived from the Latin word *cardo*, which is defined as a hinge on which a thing turns. All moral virtues hinge on these four virtues. Plato writes in *The Laws*, (Book I, 631): "Wisdom is the chief and leader; next follows temperance; and from the union of these two with courage springs justice." Our present-day four Cardinal Virtues map directly into Plato's quartet with wisdom being associated with prudence, courage with fortitude, and the other two being kept intact.

To be a better man, we would want to improve in several dimensions: fortitude is just one dimension. The image of a limited amount of fortitude is inappropriate, as we have untapped fortitude that only becomes necessary in times of great trial. It should be one of our goals to achieve a greater reservoir of fortitude for when we will need it.

Fortitude is clearly an important virtue, but we may well ask why this moral principle was included in the four Cardinal Virtues and not others? There are many valuable moral principles in life. Some virtues include compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, righteousness, and long-suffering.

Virtues are often viewed as gifts or fruits given to us. On deeper introspection, it appears that some virtues are learnable and capable of being improved. As we seek to become better men, fortitude is a manly virtue that we should work to inculcate. It is not given as an inherent quality, but one that a lifetime of practice can perfect.

Masonry uses visual symbols to teach moral principles. The square and compasses are the most prominent Masonic visual symbol.

We see that fortitude is essential for true leadership. Without fortitude, no one can succeed. Life sometimes gets difficult. There is always the temptation to give in or to give up. When we show fortitude, we learn to "stick it out" and overcome obstacles to accomplish goals.

A man with fortitude masters his fickle mind. He stands for truth and does not suffer his own cowardice lightly. He enters his future bravely, whatever that future holds.

A door is functional as well as symbolic. We open doors to gain entrance to dwellings or symbolically to our future. We close doors to keep some things safe or private.

An EA candidate must decide by his own free will to enter the Lodge through a door. After entering, fortitude is associated with the first point of our entrance. Fortitude teaches Masons to have the strength of heart and mind to persevere in all noble endeavors.

Fortitude is an earnest enthusiasm that is disciplined by reason and ennobled by sincerity. It is a dynamic quality that is essential for all great achievement. Men with fortitude reject temerity and timidity. They have courage to match their convictions. They inspire confidence, invite action, and generate progress.

Temperance, prudence and justice lose much of their effectiveness without the driving force of fortitude. The greatest achievements of man are tributes to the blending of these virtues.

When we practice fortitude in little ways we will be better able to call up great fortitude when we most need it.

By standing firm for truth and growing in courage, we will also be improving in fortitude. Growth in fortitude fosters leadership roles for us in our homes and workplaces. We become leaders who embody fortitude in good times and in bad. Let us demonstrate brethren our courage and fortitude so that our actions match our convictions. For as we all achieve greater fortitude, we will indeed become better men.

Thank you Brethren for your attention.

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