

The Cabletow

Brother _____ before you were allowed to enter this Lodge for your initiation, you were prepared in the usual Masonic manner. Much of the reasoning for this was already explained to you, but I would like to add some details about one piece, that rope around your neck. It is called a Cabletow, which is a purely Masonic term.

Like almost all things Masonic, it can be explained on multiple levels, the physical, the symbolic, and the philosophical. The easiest is the physical, which was described in the Explanatory “... and thirdly, had you refused to submit to the several forms and ceremonies attending your initiation or had you been found unworthy to be taken by the hand as a Brother you might, with the assistance of the cabletow, have been conducted out of the Lodge ...” So here it is just a rope to lead you from the Lodge if you had shown yourself unsuitable to become an Entered Apprentice.

For its symbolic meaning we can look to the ancient Mystery Schools, “*In India, in Egypt and in most of the ancient Mysteries, a cord or cable was used in the same way and for the same purpose.*” An example of which is even given in the bible at 1 Kings 20:31,32. That symbolic meaning, my Brother, can best be described by a quote from an old Masonic educational piece that I found, “*The cable-tow, then, is the outward and visible symbol of a vow in which a man has pledged his life, or has pledged himself to save another life at the risk of his own. Its length and strength are measured by the ability of the man to fulfill his obligation and his sense of the moral sanctity of his obligation - a test, that is, both of his capacity and of his character.*” Unfortunately, the author of this piece is unknown.

For its philosophical meaning, I will again quote from the same article just mentioned above. “*If a lodge is a symbol of the world, and initiation is our birth into the world of Masonry, the cable-tow is not unlike the cord which unites a child to its mother at birth; and so it is usually interpreted. Just as the physical cord, when cut, is replaced by a tie of love and obligation between mother and child, so, in one of the most impressive moments of initiation, the cable-tow is removed, because the brother, by his oath at the Altar of Obligation, is bound by a tie stronger than any physical cable. What before was an outward physical restraint has become an inward moral constraint. That is to say, force is replaced by love - outer authority by inner obligation - and that is the secret of security and the only basis of brotherhood.*”

One thing that you will hear multiple times as you progress through the degrees of Masonry is “*if within the length of my cabletow*”. That begs the question, How long is a cabletow? As a nautical term, a cable is 100 fathoms, or somewhere from 169 to 220 meters. But we are Masons, not sailors, we do not assign it any physical length. For us, the length of our cabletow means what ever is within our power or our ability.