



NUGGET

The Cable Tow

One of a series of twelve short talks about the Royal Arch

Summary: The Cable Tow - one of a series of short talks for presentation at Craft Meetings, to introduce members to the Holy Royal Arch and encourage them to join.

Before you were initiated, you were prepared, including having a cable tow, or noose placed around your neck. This can be scary – one Brother said it made him think of the Ku Klux Klan – especially when he was blindfolded! But each of us was prepared in the same way. Here are a few thoughts about the cable tow.

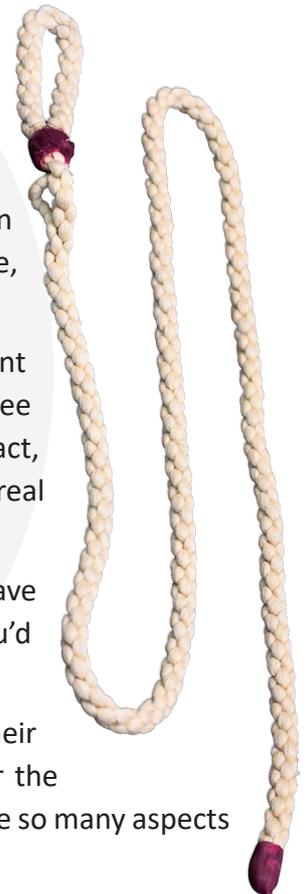
It's hardly mentioned in the ritual, except in the old penalty once included in the obligation for violating the vow of secrecy: that your body be buried 'a cable's length from the shore, where the tide ebbs and flows twice a day'.

As a nautical unit of measurement, a 'cable' is around 200 yards/metres in length, dependent upon the standard used. However according to the 'Old Charges' a cable's length is three miles, and the cable tow placed round your neck was certainly not three miles long. In fact, a 'cable-tow' is purely Masonic in its meaning and use and is a symbol of brotherhood; real measurement is almost irrelevant.

The other mention in the Ritual is that it was a means of restraining you, should you have attempted to retreat, reminding that you would have been in imminent danger if you'd rushed forward or turned back.

In some rituals, Brethren promise to attend all Lodge meetings within the length of their cable tows, but neither the actual length of the cable tow used in the ceremony, nor the three-mile explanation would appear to fit here, so its meaning is obviously symbolic, like so many aspects of Freemasonry.

The first Biblical reference to wearing a rope or noose around the neck is in the First Book of Kings, when Ben-Hadad, dressed in sackcloth and with a rope round his neck, pleads for mercy from the King of Israel. Here the rope is a sign of humility. In Hindu Brahmanical initiations, the removal of the rope from around the initiate's neck is symbolic of freedom and an escape from death, a feeling perhaps shared by many of us at our Initiation Ceremony. It has been likened by some commentators to an umbilical cord, but that may be stretching the symbolism too far.



The 1843 Baltimore Convention, which reformed American Freemasonry, defined the cable tow as '*the scope of a man's reasonable ability*'.

A more poetic American Brother wrote:

*It is as long as the arm that stretches out a helping hand,
It reaches as far as a Brother's cheering voice,
It can travel as far as goodwill can reach*

The cable tow is used in the Second and Third Degree Ceremonies in some American workings.

In Ancient Egypt, candidates for the priesthood wore ropes around their necks to symbolise the link between heaven and earth, and their humility towards, and dependence on, God. In this symbolic sense, we are all still wearing a cable tow. And we need to remain humble as we advance.

The Royal Arch helps us seek after spiritual truth, and Chapter members will recognise the use of a rope in another context here. It is a reminder that, wherever we are, it is dangerous to advance or retreat without a guide.

Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version. Any reference to ritual will be from Emulation and Aldersgate unless otherwise specified.

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