



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
<http://internet.lodge.org.uk>

Short Papers Competition 2009

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Paper 13/2009

Title
Author

To Learn
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As the Worshipful Master opens or closes a Masonic Lodge of Entered Apprentices, he performs a ritualistic catechism of sorts, whereby he asks questions and receives responses from various other Lodge officers. At one point he inquires, *Brother Senior Warden, what came you here to do?*¹

With an almost monotonous tone that comes from pure repetition, we have all heard the Senior Warden drone a response: *To learn to subdue my passions* [followed by a short pause] *and to improve myself in Masonry.*²

While this response is ritualistically correct, I propose for your consideration, that this response is essentially erroneous. The essence and the nature of the lessons that are being presented have become blurred. I offer a respectful argument that, through our well-meaning intentions to convey a uniform wording in the ritual, the Senior Warden is not communicating the intended message.

Masonry knowingly accepts no man into its ranks who is not a moral and upright citizen and of good repute before man and G-d. Any acceptable candidate for Masonry must already possess and practice such traits. While it is the intent of Masonry to make good men better, it is not the design of Masonry to convert immoral or corrupt men into moral men, who, after Masonic initiation, are then capable of subduing their passions. Masonry rejects any candidate found lacking in virtue, morality or the ability to subdue his passions. This would likely occur during the early stages of his candidacy, and any man found wanting of these traits would be quickly exposed as unworthy of efforts to make him a better man. So therefore, it would be logical to construe that a worthy Mason does not need *to learn* to subdue his passions — he instead observes the practice of subduing his passions.

These passions come in various forms, and are not limited to the obvious example of sexual lust — although he must keep that emotion in proper bounds as well. He keeps his passions for the rhetoric of religion and politics in due bounds so as to allow no discord to exist between his Brothers with differing and opposing views. He is free to remain passionate about such beliefs outside the walls of the Lodge, yet he subdues them inside the Lodge so that peace and harmony prevail.

Given such circumstances, this almost demands the questions: Is “subduing passion” all that Masonry teaches? Is that enough? If a Mason subdues his passions, is there nothing more to learn?

More often than not, events in Masonry occur and present themselves in sets of 3’s: There are 3 knocks, 3 degrees, 3 stages of life – youth, manhood and age, 3 ruffians, 3 Great Lights, 3 lesser lights, and so on. There are a few other recurring numbers in Masonry, but it is hard to ignore the repeated and intentional use of the number three. Likewise, there exists a possibility that the Senior Warden’s response is also a set of three separate tasks, and there exists the likewise probability that by the simple omission of a discernable pause in the wording, they become to be interpreted as though they are only two.

I will submit for your consideration that a Mason is not a man who comes to a Lodge *to learn* to subdue his passions. A Mason is the man who *has already learned* to subdue his passions. The subduing of his passions is something that a Mason puts into practice in the Lodge, so it is more accurate to say that a Mason comes “to subdue my passions” and it is equally true that he also comes “to improve myself in Masonry.” This leaves only the first part of the statement unresolved, which is “*to learn...*”

¹ http://www.scripturecatholic.com/apprentice_opening.html

² *ibid*



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By acknowledging these three logical and separate tasks, it becomes accurate to say that a Mason comes to Lodge in order to learn, to subdue his passions, and to improve himself in Masonry. Not only does this wording better meet the common theme of the recurring number 3, it also seems to be a more accurate assessment of the goals, and equally, a more realistic assessment of the Masonic ideals.

A Mason has an intrinsic desire to learn. His knowledge naturally increases through the study and application of ritual, and through his innate curiosity about Masonry's more esoteric interests. The "Search for Light" itself becomes a passion, and it is a passion he subdues or at least suppresses in the presence of Brothers having a differing opinion, in the presence of a more learned teacher or when in the company of the profane. Masonic knowledge is ever abundant, and holds no limits. His desire to learn will never be fully satisfied. The search for the light of knowledge can never be fully obtained, but learning and the pursuit of knowledge remain among the most noble of our earthly endeavours.

I continue as a firm believer that we absolutely must convey Masonic ritual as correctly and precisely as is humanly possible. It should always be done in strict accordance with all appropriate Grand Lodge laws, rules and regulations for the various jurisdictions. Having said that, I would also propose that to better convey one of the often-overlooked lessons in Masonry, we can practice a smidgeon of creative license and yet not technically change it or violate any rules or obligations.

If you disagree with my arguments, then you should continue to do as you have always done. If you have discovered that you are in agreement with my assertion that the response would best be given in 3 parts, and if you find yourself seated in the Senior Warden's chair, you might simply pause to take a breath in the middle of the response at the appropriate point.

I do again wish to point out that it is not my intention to suggest that we make any change to our ritual, or in any way propose that it be done by others. My only desire is to better convey the meaning of our ritual, and to suggest that we should often pause to reflect upon those great lessons.

Brother Senior Warden, what came you here to do?

To learn...

To subdue my passions...

And to improve myself in Masonry!

*Short papers are intended to be read aloud in lodge meetings as a form of Masonic Education.
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