

To Learn

by Richard D. Carver

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

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

² Ibid

20 Masonry to convert immoral or corrupt men into moral men, who, after
21 Masonic initiation, are then capable of subduing their passions. Masonry
22 rejects any candidate found lacking in virtue, morality or the ability to
23 subdue his passions. This would likely occur during the early stages of his
24 candidacy, and any man found wanting of these traits would be quickly
25 exposed as unworthy of efforts to make him a better man. So therefore, it
26 would be logical to construe that a worthy Mason does not need *to learn* to
27 subdue his passions — he instead observes the practice of subduing his
28 passions.

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

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

39 More often than not, events in Masonry occur and present themselves in
40 sets of 3’s: There are 3 knocks, 3 degrees, 3 stages of life – youth, manhood
41 and age, 3 ruffians, 3 Great Lights, 3 lesser lights, and so on. There are a few

42 other recurring numbers in Masonry, but it is hard to ignore the repeated
43 and intentional use of the number three. Likewise, there exists a possibility
44 that the Senior Warden's response is also a set of three separate tasks, and
45 there exists the likewise probability that by the simple omission of a
46 discernable pause in the wording, they become to be interpreted as though
47 they are only two.

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

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

61 A Mason has an intrinsic desire to learn. His knowledge naturally
62 increases through the study and application of ritual, and through his innate
63 curiosity about Masonry's more esoteric interests. The "Search for Light"

64 itself becomes a passion, and it is a passion he subdues or at least suppresses
65 in the presence of Brothers having a differing opinion, in the presence of a
66 more learned teacher or when in the company of the profane. Masonic
67 knowledge is ever abundant, and holds no limits. His desire to learn will
68 never be fully satisfied. The search for the light of knowledge can never be
69 fully obtained, but learning and the pursuit of knowledge remain among the
70 most noble of our earthly endeavors.

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

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

83 I do again wish to point out that it is not my intention to suggest that we
84 make any change to our ritual, or in any way propose that it be done by

85 others. My only desire is to better convey the meaning of our ritual, and to
86 suggest that we should often pause to reflect upon those great lessons.

87 *Brother Senior Warden, what came you here to do?*

88 *To learn...*

89 *To subdue my passions...*

90 *And to improve myself in Masonry!*

91 **Biography:**

92 Richard D. Carver is the Secretary of Shawnee Lodge 54 and a Past Master of Inner Quest
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