

## From the West

Why focus on learning about our craft? Masonic education and learning go hand in hand with the ritual. One is useless without the other. An expert orator can deliver the most well-rehearsed, flowery, and emphasized ritual during a degree, but if he doesn't understand what he is saying, is it as impactful? How many times has a candidate heard a great performance and then asked, "what does that part mean?"<sup>1</sup>. As a mason, I propose that learning is one of the important three tasks we are given when each of us were made a mason.

As most of you know, most stated meetings in the Grand Lodge of Utah open on the Entered Apprentice degree. All our degrees begin and end with a catechism-like exchange between the Worshipful Master and the Senior Warden—a reminder of the basic tenants and responsibilities of a mason for each of the three degrees.

In the Entered Apprentice degree opening and closing, an inquiry is given by the Worshipful Master to the Senior Warden. *What came you here to do?* The most monotonous response returned by our Brother Senior Warden is: *To learn to subdue my passions* [maybe a short pause is interesting here] *and improve myself in masonry.*

The response is ritualistically correct. I put to you, for your consideration, that we don't fully understand the weight of this response, nor are we fully realizing what we have been directed to do as masons. I offer you a possible new look at this line from our ritual and Entered Apprentice (EA) catechism.

In the Entered Apprentice degree, we were told by the Worshipful Master that we now stand as an upright man and mason. To continue to be exemplary, this response from EA catechism encompasses what we are to do. We are to subdue our passions and improve our craft on initial reading and recital. We are to keep ourselves within the due bounds of the circle at which we sit at the center of by setting limits, having boundaries, and learning from our Volume of Sacred law those things we need to improve ourselves. Remember that Freemasonry makes good men better. We follow this line from the catechism of 1<sup>st</sup> degree when we were made a mason. We always work to improve ourselves by learning from good brothers and taking our ritual seriously. But is that enough? Is subduing our passions and working on our ritual all we must do as masons?

As you know, the number three is significant in masonry. We have three degrees, three principal officers, three knocks on the door, the three stages of life are represented in each of the degrees, three greater lights, three lesser lights, three ruffians, and so on. I propose that the above line returned by our Senior Warden is a statement of three things we should be doing as masons. Three tasks we should take to heart as we make our plans for our temple on our tracing boards.

Here is my line of thinking. I feel the Senior Warden's response can be divided into three statements using the word to as the divider:

- To learn,
- To subdue my passions,
- To improve myself in masonry.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nhgrandlodge.org/why-masonic-education/>

Subduing our passions is almost second nature during our stated meetings and degree work. We respect the Worshipful Master by not interrupting and giving him or whomever he has directed to speak our full attention. We don't correct ritual out loud during a degree. We follow the rules of order of meetings. We don't talk about religion or politics in our meetings. We submitted ourselves to the rules and regulations of our lodge and grand lodge when we submitted our petition. We also improve ourselves in masonry by practicing and performing our best ritual and taking those lessons from the degree to heart to make ourselves better.

But what about learning? Masons come to the lodge to learn. Due to time constraints, learning has taken a backstage place in most of our meetings in recent years. Repeatedly, we have heard from studies and surveys that masons want more education and learning. Yes, there are places we can go to learn both practical and esoteric education. But are each of us taking advantage of the educational opportunities in front of us? I have been told that learning is a lifelong endeavor. It didn't end when I got my degrees, at the end of my college coursework, or at the end of my Master Mason degree.

This idea about this statement being three things' Masons are tasked with isn't my own. I learned about it while reading short educationals published by brothers of my lodge back in England<sup>2</sup>. I read a lot. I am always trying to expand my learning of our craft. I share my thoughts on Brother Richard Carver's paper to get you thinking about masonic learning and, by extension, reading masonic works. Look at Albert G. Mackey's essay to understand the importance of learning our craft<sup>3</sup>.

This is where I feel that our historic lodge can help with each of our efforts for this individual learning requirement. We have an opportunity to do research and share those ideas, do presentations at various lodge meetings, perform degrees in time-period regalia, and have deep intellectual discussions with each other to increase our understanding. Our lodge is in a great and unique position to share more light with others of our fraternity. If we take learning to be a serious endeavor, fully accepting the effort to heart, we can continue improving ourselves and those around us.

Speaking of learning, since becoming a mason, I have found that masonic lessons can be found everywhere. Not only from our ritual and our Volume of Sacred Law but everywhere as we are well informed when we became Fellowcrafts. Those liberal arts and sciences impart to each of us the wisdom of the universe and the wisdom of the Grand Architect of the Universe.

I recently was binging on the last season of Star Trek Picard. Admiral Picard (played by Sir Patrick Stewart<sup>4</sup>) was reflecting on a conversation he was having with a large group of cadets who had approached him asking for clarification and guidance. At the end of his reflection on recovering from a dangerous mission, he gave those young cadets some wisdom.

*"Y'know, there will be a time when you will need to remember that no matter how bleak or unwinnable a situation, as long as you and your crew remain steadfast in your dedication, one to another, you are never ever without hope."*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://internet.lodge.org.uk/images/docs/spc/SPC200913.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202309reading-masons-and-masons-who-do-not-read/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick\\_Stewart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Stewart)

<sup>5</sup> Star Trek: Picard, Season 3 Episode 4: "No Win Scenario"

Later in the episode, he imparts another tidbit of masonic light. *“You’re only ever really as good as those around you. Your crew becomes a part of you. Complete you. They lift you up to accomplish the things you never could do alone.”*<sup>6</sup>

I felt these were directly related to the struggles our historical lodge has had over the past several years as I reflected on them. Those of you who have served in the military, public safety, or even your team at work know what Picard refers to. Strength is given to a team when they have fought in the trenches, overcoming bad odds or challenging situations. A bond is created that can be as thick as blood, and the synergy that is created is greater than the separate parts. This gives the team great strength that can be used to overcome almost any obstacle and creates mystic bonds that last a lifetime.

Let’s form that brotherhood. We have some obstacles before us as we progress towards being that historical lodge we and our Grand Lodge need it to be. Let’s do the work, make the tough decisions, attend meetings, learn our ritual, recruit new members, shared newly learned knowledge, etc. Let’s become the band of brothers our historical lodge needs to make its future bright for us and generations of masons. Let’s fight together in the trenches and do the hard work. We are better together, working towards our ambitious goals, than we are trying to separately achieve this great endeavor.

I will end with another Star Trek quote that is apropos. I hope it motivates you as it does me. Let’s *“.. boldly go where no man”* or Mason *“has gone before!”*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Where\\_no\\_man\\_has\\_gone\\_before](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Where_no_man_has_gone_before)