

WHAT COME YOU HERE TO DO?

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Tonight I bring to you some thoughts for consideration. Some thoughts on a question asked in Freemasonry. Tonight's discussion is based upon an article published in 2016 by Rt. Illustrious Bro. Richard G Davis 33° on the Laudable Pursuits Website¹

The question is the second question of the Entered Apprentice Catechism: WHAT COME YOU HERE TO DO?

This is a simple question with a well known answer. But what do we know about the question's origin, and its intended role in Freemasonry? I think you will be somewhat surprised.

The earliest ritual reference this question is found in Samuel Prichard's Masonry Dissected, which was written as an anti-Masonic exposure of Freemasonry and its rituals.² In studying this exposure and the many early rituals that have come down to us from history, scholars note that this question, and the subsequent answer, are not found in the so called "gothic constitutions" and pre-Grand Lodge era ritual workings. The question and answer therefore are believed to be early creations of the Grand Lodge of London.

In the single ritual text in which it does appear³, the answer is given thus:

NOT TO DO MY OWN PROPER WILL,
BUT TO SUBDUE MY PASSION STILL;
THE RULES OF MASONRY IN HAND TO TAKE,
AND DAILY PROGRESS THEREIN MAKE.

Scholars next find the question and answer in a 1738 French translation of Prichard's exposure. This time the question is worded WHAT DO YOU WISH TO DO HERE?; and the answer given is; I DO

¹ This paper draws much of its inspiration and text from the following 2016 internet posting.
<http://www.thelaudablepursuit.com/articles/2016/3/24/what-come-you-here-to-do>

² The book was published in 1730, and although written as an attack on Freemasonry, it was purchased by many Masons and used as an early monitor. For modern scholars this usage by early Masons is interpreted as a sign of the book's validity in presenting the English Craft degrees as they existed at that time.

³ Prichard's Masonry Dissected.

NOT INSPIRE TO FOLLOW MY WILL, BUT RATHER TO SUBDUE MY PASSIONS, WHILE FOLLOWING THE PRECEPTS OF THE MASONS AND MAKING DAILY ADVANCEMENT IN THIS PROFESSION.

It appears the consistent theme in these exposures is that the primary task of an Entered Apprentice is to subdue his passions and then, using the lessons of Masonry, to make progress in his life.

The answer given in these 1730 era catechisms is not the answer taught today. In fact, Robert G. Davis posted on an internet blog that today's answer very likely has a much deeper meaning because it was developed during the early 19th century; when Masonry was far more of a philosophical undertaking.⁴

In many Grand Jurisdictions the question posed is: WHAT COME YOU HERE TO DO? And the answer is often given as: TO – LEARN - TO – SUBDUE – MY – PASSIONS – AND – IMPROVE – MYSELF - IN - MASONRY.

I am informed that in most Grand Jurisdictions, there is no punctuation within the answer, and the phrase is read without any particular emphasis on any part or parts.⁵ If however, if you added punctuation to the answer (as in the 1730 exposures) you arrive at a different answer:

TO LEARN, TO SUBDUE MY PASSIONS, AND IMPROVE MYSELF; IN MASONRY.

Listening to it this way, the new Entered Apprentice (and therefore every Mason) is introduced to three Masonic duties: First to learn, Second to subdue our passions, and third, to improve our selves in Masonry.

I think the post 1730 addition of the imperative to “Learn” first, helps us find the path toward our development and improvement!

To “learn” is defined as: acquiring knowledge of a subject or skill as a result of study, of experience, or teaching; to receive instruction; to find out about, or discover; to be informed of, or learn about; to teach or inform a person of something.

⁴ This section through the completion are inspired by, and liberally use the text from the following 2008 Blog posting by Bro. Robert G. Davis, 33; <http://robertgdavis.blogspot.com/2008/07/what-come-you-here-to-do.html>.

⁵ No Monitors were consulted for this assertion. Several internet exposures purported to represent Grand Jurisdictions of Maryland, Indiana, Arizona, Colorado and British Columbia were reviewed on line.

Before we can subdue our passions we have to study and learn about Masonry so that we can understand it. As Rt. Illustrious Bro. Davis tells us, we have to discover that there is an allegory before we can interpret it. We have to be informed of its history before we can comprehend its societal relevance. We have to detect its symbolic associations before we can grasp its spiritual nature. We have to contemplate its meanings before we can experience its insights. We have to be informed of its rules and laws before we can act within the due bounds of fraternity. We have to understand the meaning of manhood before we can grasp the unique power of fraternity.

So, what about the second part, “Subduing our Passions”? As Entered Apprentices, we are taught that we cannot improve ourselves without first subduing our passions--without releasing ourselves from our own ego so that we can feel the brotherhood of man. Then as Fellow Crafts we learn that we have to comprehend the seven liberal arts and sciences, then transcend them and the logic of human education. We have to journey beyond the paradigms of human awareness and go beyond the sciences and senses of man to erect our perfect ashlar. As Fellow Crafts our ultimate goal is to get in touch with divine truth--which is metaphysical and it surpasses human understanding. Then, as Master Masons, we learn that we have to finally overcome ourselves before we can achieve peace and harmony within ourselves, and in our lives.

The “improvement in Masonry” we seek is found in the journey of our degrees. We learn that Divine truth can’t be understood by education, or dogma, or rationale thought, or by the evidence of the senses—it has to be perceived directly. And, my Brothers, it enters into us through the path of initiation. Each and every time we witness the ritual of our degrees, our journey progresses, allegory and symbolism are perceived and understood more clearly, and our journey’s goal comes closer and closer.

Men come into Masonry to learn to improve themselves. WHAT COME YOU HERE TO DO BROTHERS?

I thank you for your kind attention.