

## **Consider How the Entered Apprentice Obligation Affects our Behavior**

Remember your anticipation of the night and ritual before undertaking the First Degree? As we, in our hearts, prepared to become Masons, many of us searched for information on the course of action we were taking and what would befall us as we began what was promised to be a long and fulfilling journey. As the night of our initiation was quite suspenseful, and perhaps a little overwhelming, I know we have all reviewed, considered, and even reconsidered, what actually happened that night. This introspection of the events and, most especially, of the meaning of the obligation we then accepted created changes not only in our perception of ourselves, but in our deeper understanding of our obligations to family, our fellowman, and of the world around us as well.

Let us reflect on some of these personal changes as discovered through the purpose and meaning of the Entered Apprentice's obligation. A solemn purpose of Masonry is "to make good men better." How do we make good men better?

We all know --that is, we are all told and believe from personal experience and perception of those around

us-- that taking the obligation as an Entered Apprentice started us upon a new path in life of “being a good man and true.” Why is that so?

To understand more fully, we begin with a brief review of the history of the Entered Apprentice Degree. The degree of Entered Apprentice, like the other two degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry, dates from the Middle Ages, when the Masonic Fraternity was actually an operative guild of architects and builders. The medieval Entered Apprentice was a young man or boy actually engaged to learn the trade of an operative stonemason. Such apprentices were carefully selected, only freeborn youths of good character, respectable parentage, and sound physique being accepted. Those chosen were apprenticed to a Master for a term of seven years during which time they were given thorough instruction, not only in both the practical and the theoretical phases of operative masonry but also in moral deportment, in good manners, and in their religious duties.

In particular, they received careful instruction in geometry, for the geometrical principles underlying Gothic architecture constituted the real secret or “mystery” of the medieval cCraft, whereby the Masonic guild

enjoyed a tight monopoly in the construction of such major buildings as castles, cathedrals, monasteries, guildhalls, and defensive walls.

For the reputation and good standing of the operative craft, these apprentices were, of necessity, under rigid discipline. Their moral conduct was strictly supervised. They were forbidden to play at cards or dice, and were not allowed even to enter a tavern or public house unless sent there on business by their Master. When off duty, they always traveled in pairs, so that each could have a witness that he had indulged in no forbidden conduct.

In Symbolic Masonry, the Master and members of the Craft take “*good men*,” men who have not transgressed society's bounds, men who are on the right “path” and make them “*better men*” by providing a symbolic roadmap of understanding of the teachings and wisdoms found in the great cultures and philosophies of the world. Through this process and knowledge building, we encounter an emblematic guide for an Entered Apprentice to become that “*better man*.” It is that journey that each of us is on, that quest we seek, through the many different paths before us. We learn that for all Masters of Symbolic Masonry, their trade, their duty is to

be mentors for those entering the Craft, acting as guiding lights along the candidates' paths, shining so they will see the way. We are, therefore, also charged with the search for "*good men*" along the way, so they too may be instructed to build for the tomorrows of our Fraternity, community, our society, and our world.

As speculative Masons, more of the discipline, good manners, religious duties and moral conduct are emphasized, by that symbolic roadmap, rather than the practical phases of operative masonry. Just as our Brethren of old, operative masons, selected and cemented good stones together to build a foundation for their order to build upon, we Symbolic Masons select metaphorically better stones, and cement these with Masonic light to produce our brotherhood and Fraternity. In the ritual, an Entered Apprentice comes to understand that his guides, educators and mentors employ the tools of education and ritual as Masters once employed the ancient tools, materials and disciplines of the operative Craft. Most seriously, the Entered Apprentice will realize that a breach of the ancient disciplines has consequence for the Craft and himself just as in days of old.

As we took our Entered Apprentice obligation, one of the first things we did was promise and swear before the Supreme Architect of the Universe.

Since we had already been questioned and responded as to in whom we put our trust, we started our obligation with those words we know all too well, as they begin each of the many obligations we take as we continue our search for light in Masonry. We surely take this part of the obligation seriously as we promise to do certain things later in the obligation. Our introspection of our obligation weighs heavily upon us as we know we have taken these actions as a promise to do on our oath to the Supreme Architect of the Universe, as well as to our Brethren and ourselves. When we fail to live up to our promises, we realize that we have failed most importantly in our promise to Him, and to our Brethren. Since we stated we were not coerced into these obligations, we should let the promises we have taken guide our actions and introspection of our daily actions be our “rule and guide.” In discussion with many of our Brethren, this introspective reflection of their actions is the primary change that many stated happened with the taking of the Entered Apprentice obligation.

One of the promises we took was to keep concealed the mysteries of Freemasonry. Over the ages and upon discussion with more learned Brethren, we have seen this promise upheld by Brethren from a very rigid interpretation to an interpretation more relaxed. The rigid interpretation was to keep “any and all” information about the Fraternity from the world at

large. Thus, we often failed to properly mentor a new Brother, and did not share general information about the Fraternity with potential members. The “more relaxed” interpretation has seen keeping to not reveal any “secrets” but the sharing of general information more freely and the greater mentoring of a new Brother. The keeping of this part of our obligation by our Brethren is most likely the part of the obligation that has great influence over the future of our Fraternity. We should also be apt to share the secrets or mysteries of Freemasonry with a Brother to fulfill that part of the charge we heard at the end of the Entered Apprentice degree, where we were instructed to improve in Masonic knowledge by conversing with well informed Brethren, who will always be as ready to give, as we should be to receive. Furthermore, the sharing of general information with the world at large, especially with potential new members, should be encouraged to keep the correct view of the Fraternity and its activities in the public light and dispel the constant negativism we encounter from various organizations.

The promise to conceal the secrets and mysteries of Freemasonry was further expounded in the latter part of the obligation. We all remember that we promised not to communicate the secrets in a variety of ways and

means under the canopy of heaven. We have often heard of a document being found that violates this portion of our obligation. Even as this talk was created or any other document is, one has to remember this portion of our obligation and ensure that the writer did not violate his obligation to “keep the secrets of Freemasonry.” This part of the obligation should also bring to mind the following two passages we find in the Great Light in Masonry, the first at Psalm 141, verse 3: “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” and the second, at Proverbs Chapter 21, Verse 23: “He who guards his mouth and his tongue, Guards his soul from troubles.” You can see by explanation of this part of the Entered Apprentice obligation that the constant reflection of our obligation is what becomes our rule and guide and affects our behavior daily.

As we finished our Entered Apprentice obligation, we affirmed our promise to uphold our Entered Apprentice obligation without any hesitation whatsoever. We also took upon ourselves the knowledge of a penalty, should we violate the obligation. The penalty we took upon ourselves was to show our seriousness in taking upon ourselves our obligation, as Brethren have over previous centuries. We know today that while we retain the centuries old statements, they are purely symbolic. However, the

penalty is carried out today for the violation of our Masonic obligation by a Brother being reprimanded, suspended or expelled from the Fraternity, and his Brethren consider him disgraced. As we gave much thought to petition to become a member of the Fraternity, we should ever be mindful of the consequences of the violation of our Masonic obligations. We should also remember and reflect on the fact that we once again called upon the Supreme Architect of the Universe to help us to be steadfast in the daily performance of the obligation we just took.

Just as the operative Masons of old were instructed in moral deportment, in good manners, and in their religious duties; today, we as speculative Masons should ever remember that the teachings of the Fraternity parallel the teachings of old. Our operative Brethren were taught to constantly reflect on the teachings they learned, whether in application of the trade, or in their daily behavior. We, too, as speculative Masons should reflect daily on our upholding of our obligations and how this impacts our daily behavior. Only through review and reflection of our daily behavior against our obligations and the Tenets of Freemasonry will we be able to fully realize “Discovering Our Potential.”



References:

Entered Apprentice Educational Proficiency Manual  
Ritual of the Grand Lodge as taught by the Committee on Work  
Grand Lodge of Virginia, A.F. & A.M.

Instructors Manual – Entered Apprentice  
Grand Lodge of Maine A.F. & A.M.