

The 16th Scottish Rite Masonic Degree: Prince of Jerusalem

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The 16th Degree of Scottish Rite Masonry continues the legend of the rebuilding of the temple, a parable well known to all studious Masons. Among the College of the Consistory research opportunities which have been provided me, this has proven to be one of the most thought provoking topic areas. I selected topic number three for this essay from those provided by the College: "What does it mean to be an autonomous adult? How can autonomy "fit" with social responsibility? What does it mean to be in control of your own life?" Much thought is required in order to give adequate verbal and written consideration to these questions from the Masonic perspective, and more particularly, from the perspective of the Scottish Rite Mason.

Within the well known symbolic temptations of wine, women, and the king (the Masonic triad of considerations for unsuccessful influences on human behavior) is the final, or fourth element, in short, TRUTH. The foregoing three elements are mitigated in our ritual, and the fourth element is ultimately emphasized. Persons whose behavior is controlled by any of the first three of these elements (in all of their respective meanings) will certainly not arrive at the fourth. Thus a prime Masonic axiom is truth in all of its potential life modifying meanings. Serious study of the Scottish Rite clearly does assist all members in arriving at this profound truth.

Living the Masonic life correctly and with discipline actually forces the answers to the foregoing three questions which serve as the basis for this paper. In the first instance, to be an autonomous adult, the Masonic man must be self directed, and must not accept temptation from the wine and/or women dyad. Thus he is not, in the "wine" sense, lazy and not involved. He does not choose to behave in any specific manner at all due to following the behavioral patterns of others, simply because it is the manner in which any particular group suggests or demands that he behave in order to be popular or acceptable. In Masonry, the more politically inclined men often seem to others to be influenced by the "wine" symbolism, and to the extent that they succumb to this temptation, they may be elected or disdained, depending upon their level of manipulative political skill. Often these persons do not produce any positive outcomes with their life effort (or lack thereof) during their earthly life experience. Thus, they become persons who fail to improve the world in which they live, and they avoid duty again and again habitually. Autonomous adults who are self actuated, diligent, and who consistently seek high levels of physical, mental, moral, and spiritual development, become purveyors of the self invoked life task of the autonomous adult man and Mason.

In the indigenous temptation for all "normal" men, represented by the "women" symbolic term in Masonic litany, is included all of the human/animal pleasures. The "eat, drink, and be merry" cliché fits this temptation area closely. An autonomous adult certainly experiences these temptations, yet resists the natural tendency to let them take over his personal behavior. In the Masonic context, one is reminded that hard work, honesty, caring for others, and assisting them at

all times, will extend the meaning of life beyond its earthly bounds. Herein I immediately remember the scout master, the teacher, the minister, and many other adults who did self actualize Masonically when I was a boy, and are thus never to be forgotten. Further, their wise teachings, and the examples set by them have been carried on to other boys as I have attempted to emulate their very positive effects on me during that important formative period of terrestrial life. Their genuine effort as autonomous men, thus has a lasting meaning on earth, as such traits are transmitted from adult to boy from generation to generation. Thus the autonomous adult leaves a permanent legacy in terms of future human behavior (though their names, and thus their fame, may be lost forever, though the behaviors live on through others).

The supplication and/or bending to supposed authority represented by "the king" symbolic terminology is often clearly apparent in Masonic politics. Often we will witness the "bowing and scraping" of inarticulate and unskilled men as they attempt to gain Masonic fame through political apple polishing with those in the offices above theirs. They aspire to attain higher offices even though they may be quite incapable of being effective in advanced posts. This tendency has become more profound as the fraternity has for many decades now, attracted fewer and fewer professional, highly educated and/or skilled members. The pins, titles, cordon chains, aprons, certificates, and other accolades available in the fraternity milieu have led men of reduced intellect, energy, ability, experience, education, etc. to seek, and in many instances gain, the highest offices in the fraternity matrix. As this has occurred over time, the number of physicians, C.E.O.'s of major companies, attorneys, university faculty members, Olympic and professional athletes, and other men of note and accomplishment, has radically diminished, and continues to do so.

Consider the reason why the above observation is rendered as you attend meetings wherein correct speaking of the English language is not heard from the Worshipful Master or the man occupying the seat in the East in any appendant body. A highly educated professional may become a Master Mason, and then never return to the Lodge (after experiencing several meetings), as he does not choose to associate with those who cannot speak correctly. Persons who are members of the less accomplished legions who are now members in the fraternity, typically do not take responsibility for their own actions, with the obvious result that their tenure in elected positions is unremarkable in terms of lasting positive effect(s). These men most often ascribe their mediocrity to other members of the fraternity, rather than working hard to upgrade their performance as an officer or organization head. These men let others "run the show" rather than doing positive good with their time in the august chair to which they have been elected. To do solely the will of others, when such a will is demeaning, and not of high quality, simply to gain personal advancement is the hallmark behavior of such non leaders, and is a prime current problem in the fraternity world wide. In other words, to merely "fill a chair" is not the task of the autonomous adult. To fill a chair in an autonomous manner is the task of the correctly performing individual.

The autonomous adult then, is the adult who is self actuated, not controlled from without by laziness, sensual pleasure, and is not controlled by others. These persons behave correctly and positively, and leave a lasting legacy because this manner of behaving is most meaningful and fulfilling for them. They are well respected in life and when they die, they are sincerely and universally regretted by all who knew and interacted with them.

The second question states, "How can autonomy "fit" with social responsibility"?, and is a question of great importance in the Masonic context. Certainly the autonomous man must be courteous, kind to others, and cheerful to all. On occasion, such men do not seem typical or average, however, they seem to be universally accepted, even if they appear different, in some behavioral environments. For example, to openly refuse strong drink when others are drinking to excess, to avoid pornographic exposure when others are experiencing it, and to fail to obey a person of low intellectual power who occupies a high office, will not often, among Masons, create an uncomfortable moment, or a lasting negative impression among others. Too often men "just go along with the crowd," while if they stood on Masonic behavioral principles they would be always remembered as good men and Masons. Social responsibility does not necessarily dictate the behavior of such men, rather, they may appear different in the positive (Masonic) sense.

Thus, one can be a Mason, can be autonomous, and can be socially responsible within the fraternity, as well as in the profane world. The fact is, that a man who lives by Masonic principles will in all cases be respected for his failure to be behaviorally influenced by the symbolic tenets of wine, women, or the king. Should this man choose the Masonic way, he will be viewed as a diligent, honest, and worthwhile person. Popularity, in the social sense, is not his behavioral mandate, yet he is, and will continue to be popular among those persons who are worthwhile in society. Those who imbibe in too much good cheer, womanize, or give in to other passions of the flesh, or who continually bow to an unsatisfactory higher authority, will in all probability, not be so remembered or so respected.

The final subject area for this discussion is the question, "What does it mean to be in control of your own life?" In a single word the answer is autonomy. The autonomous and self actualized man is assuredly in control of his life on earth. He is resistant to all temptations to be subservient, weak, lazy, and foolish, and to be, in a word, a nonproductive citizen. Interestingly, the fraternity is becoming more and more the refuge of persons who accomplished little during their working lives, and who gravitate to the fraternity in time during older age in order to gain acclaim and recognition via the archaic titles and accouterments available in the fraternal environment. Thus, with the passage of time, the erosion of quality from the fraternal membership ranks continues inexorably on. The degrees of the Scottish Rite do offer a reprieve from this downward spiral in terms of quality membership when properly and conscientiously studied and applied in life.

Personal autonomy can honestly and forthrightly assist good men to become good Masons. For the few undesirables who slip through this process of the degrees undetected, we must not elect them to office, and if their behavior is intolerable across time, we should take the steps to eliminate these men from fraternal membership. Thus, the ballot box and the Masonic vote are our tools for use in correcting past difficulties, and current problems, within our ranks. The politics of Masonic fraternal relations often cause major internal problems due primarily to ego driven, rather than service driven candidates for office. The autonomous adult concept coupled with truth can be the saving grace for the fraternity. All of us have been involved in election situations at all levels in the fraternity wherein a man is elected because he "has been through the chairs". We must overcome this outmoded concept and elect only those to higher office who are autonomous adults. This simple change in our modus operandi will enable us to begin to solve our leadership

crisis (which continues as this is written). Finally, if we can overcome our inertia (in these regards), we may be able to extricate ourselves from the current tailspin in Masonic membership, and reestablish the fraternity as a desirable place for professional, autonomous, adult men to join us, and to thus reside with us fraternally, being active with us in warding off the classic temptations.

As Masonry continues to dwindle in membership quantity and quality in the United States and worldwide, it is entirely appropriate for us all to reflect on the need for it to once again become the bastion of autonomous adult men in its membership, and to no longer appeal to, or accept, men of lower ability and aspiration, who seek only the titles, pins, cordons, and other artificial, and often superficial, recognitions provided by the fraternity. Ego enhancement is not a stated tenet of the fraternity, nor has it ever been historically. The reversal of this dead end trend which continues to eliminate the highest quality men in America (and thus those who are autonomous adults) from Masonic membership will be long and difficult, if it can occur at all.