

Education & Enlightenment

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Another Word On Ritual

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Seneca, Plato, Plutarch along with others who have followed their ideal have given us a paradigm of communication which has stood the test of criticism and modification. That model simplified, says when we speak, content goes through noise before being received by the individual. Noise is all those things that conspire to block the meaning of our message. The noise of the degree for the candidate includes their apprehension, the newness of the situation, lack of understanding of the terminology and whatever they have been told by well-meaning but miss informed Brethren. Our own emotions, our thoughts, what we believe we are saying, the words we choose and in the case of our degrees memory work form the filter or noise for the transmission of the lessons of the degree.

George Oliver's in the "The Discrepancies of Freemasonry" addresses our single-mindedness on memory by suggesting an ignorant man, with a retentive memory, will often surpass the soundest and ripest scholar. Mackay suggests in Freemasonry there must be a realization our usages and ceremonies are "subject to extensive variations" and "are not the sum and substance" of Freemasonry. He advises the totality of our legends "is not to establish historical fact but to convey philosophical doctrines". He affirms the most important of these doctrines is the "immortality of the soul". The rest of the legend may

stimulate the Brothers curiosity as an antiquarian inquiry but the Brother who is prepared is content with the doctrine. Mackay submits that our symbols are simply visible signs and our lectures audible representations of our doctrine

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Albert Pike an ardent critic of the "schisms and disputes for power in Masonry, and of jealousy and dissensions between Masonic Rites" asserts Freemasonry is "morality founded in faith and taught by symbols" with its "purpose being to benefit mankind physically, socially, and spiritually; by helping men to cultivate freedom, friendship and character". It teaches "the reality of God, the moral law, and the hope of immortality"

These three scholars are advocates of the moral imperative as being the purpose of Freemasonry. As these intellectuals believe that as Freemasonry is the holder of the moral imperative it follows the Ritual in Freemasonry should focus on primarily preparing the Brethren to understand the philosophical doctrine and to embed our doctrines within their beliefs. Secondly to this our ritual should give Brethren an understanding of our physical and social benefit to mankind and only as a vehicle for the primary doctrinal preparation of the Brethren should we be concerned about how our Ritual is performed.

Oliver suggested in teaching the philosophical pillars of Freemasonry not to eliminate memory work. Rather, an approach which would simplify the language, so it is easier for a Brother to memorize and present would enhance the understanding of the lessons for the candidate. Not to change the lesson, the story or the intent but to put these into language that is comprehensible to the presenter and the candidate.

Oliver's solution for our degree delivery to enhance the lesson and learning for the candidate is;

1. Where there is more than one word in a sentence which means the same thing eliminate the unnecessary words.
2. Replace words that are no longer utilized in our vocabulary with words that we do use, and which have the same meaning.
3. Where there are run on and multiple sentences expressing the same thought reduce the phrase to one or two complete sentences which express the thought.
4. Where there are run on sentences expressing different thoughts make each thought into a complete sentence.
5. Make the language personal where appropriate.

Ritual is important as it passes on the foundations of Freemasonry, but the process or performance of ritual should not dominate meaning. For the philosophical lessons to be realized by the candidate with the purpose of incorporating these values into his life which is the object of our degrees requires preparation, delivery and enjoyment on the part of the Brother involved in the ritual.

Preparation

1. Understand the meaning of what you are about to say. It is not just the words that represent meaning, but meaning is a composite of the cultural context of the story. What is happening in the story and when was it set? What were the norms and values of the era in which you are relating?
2. Who was this person you are about to play? What do they mean to you? Are they saying things you yourself believe in? If not, it will be very hard to convince those who are listening what you are presenting is meaningful.
3. Empty your mind to memorize. There are many different methods of memorization and you may have your own technique. Look at all the different ways you can present your meaning.

Delivery

1. No Fear. We get concerned with parroting the words and from this we derive apprehension about the delivery. To deal with this anxiety prepare well. When you are about to participate in the degree concentrate on your role. For the evening of the degree that is all that matters. Enjoy the spotlight.
2. Beware of Overacting or Mechanical Acting. To portray the meaning appropriately be sincere in your emotion and belief while playing the part. You have probably experienced similar emotions to those you are speaking of. Tap into these memories. What was it like to feel this way?
3. Live the part and be creative. Our degrees are presented in make believe. For the few minutes that you participate in the degree be the person you represent.
4. Empathize. Understand the complexities, contradictions, agony and bliss of the person behind the part you are playing. Add them to the way you portray the person.
5. Degrees are not work they are the way we impart to our Brothers the culture, beliefs, understanding, and love of Freemasonry. Convey the enjoyment of being a Freemason.

Enjoy and have fun

1. It's about the Team. Do not prepare or deliver your part in isolation. The success of the degree will be directly proportional to how much you support your Brothers in preparing the degree and how much pleasure you and the degree team had in getting ready. Get to know the other parts in the degree. Rehearse individually and with other members

of the degree team before the entire team is together for the degree rehearsal.

2. For a few moments step outside your life and identity and live the life of another. Not only is it enlightening it is fun.

If we allow the noise of the degree to block the candidate from understanding the lessons and philosophical meaning of the degree, we have failed the candidate. If we allow the noise of the degree to block the candidate from seeing how the lessons of the degree apply to and should be practiced in his life we have failed the purpose of the Scottish Rite.