

# *Education & Enlightenment*

*A Special Committee of*

*The Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry of Canada*



## **Whatever Happened To Memorization?**

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During the Conference of Grand Masters in Indianapolis one Grand Master stopped by our booth and asked, “Only one-third of our lodges can do the ritual, what can we do about that?” Well, good question!

Ritual presentation and memorization have actually been evolving for a long, long time. Originally, primarily because there was no option, all Masonic ritual was communicated mouth-to-ear. The next great innovation was the printed (usually in code) ritual, likely used, not only to standardize ritual but as a teaching aid to memorization. Wall and floor charts with pictures was another modification. It is unclear if these charts were introduced prior to or after the printed ritual came along. These charts served not only to prompt the presenter but the pictures served to dramatize the ritual and hold the interest of the observer. These charts were generally kept rolled up so as not to disclose any of our “secrets.” Electronics entered the picture next with the advent of machines capable of showing slides and, interestingly, a few of these are still in use—gosh, some of the slides are even presented on televisions instead of screens. You get the point; ritual has always evolved!

So why is memorized ritual becoming more difficult to have? First, with the decline in membership most lodges have fewer and fewer members who are either willing or able to memorize the ritual. Second, our schools seldom, if ever, require students to memorize. Why? With the advent of electronic communication virtually anything one needs to know is available at our finger-tips so why bother memorizing! Last, our candidates and members do live in a busy world. Besides making a living there is a host of other organizations and activities that demand their time.

Interestingly, during the survey conducted by the Scottish Rite for the Path Forward initiative we learned "...Scottish Rite members remain deeply committed to ritual and its value to the craft..." The question then is how do we present ritual that is well done and inspirational if we have difficulty finding competent members to present it? A couple of thoughts:

- Form ritual "teams" within the lodge itself or, if necessary, the teams could consist of members from several adjoining lodges.
- Other Masonic bodies, Scottish Rite, York Rite or Shrine could also form teams to confer ritual when requested to do so.
- Do those members who have always done a certain part in ritual continue to hang on never allowing a new member to perform the part? Under this circumstance why would anyone bother to learn the ritual if they are never allowed to use it?
- Recognize members or lodges that confer exceptionally good ritual. Some jurisdictions already confer "ritualist" lapel pins, etc. Any form of recognition might help. Poorly done ritual is, well, difficult to sit through and certainly not inspirational nor memorable.
- Resolve in our own minds, is the leadership of the lodge inextricably linked to the memorization of ritual? Do we lose good, potential leaders who don't have the time or ability to

memorize ritual? Do good ritualists tend to get pushed aside because they are not officers?

- Controversially, is it time to consider electronic ritual presentation? I can hardly wait to hear the response on this one! Reminds me of the old joke: “How many Masons does it take to change a light bulb? Answer-four. One to hold the ladder, one to change the bulb and two to debate whether they like the old bulb better than the new one!”

So, to answer the question posed by the Grand Master, there are six ideals suggested. There may well be others. Which is right for your jurisdiction, well, you will have to decide. Remember, ritual is important but it must be presented in an enjoyable and inspirational manner. Just as important, however, is what do you and your lodge do with the lessons presented in all of our rituals; are they merely words or are they put into practice?