



LODGE VEGAS # 32

FREEMASON RITUAL TECHNIQUES For Masons EverywhereFreemason Ritual Techniques

TO GO THROUGH THE SAME PERFORMANCE OVER AND OVER, TO SAY THE SAME WORDS IN THE SAME WAY, AND NOT EVEN TO KNOW THE MEANING OF THESE ACTIONS AND THESE WORDS, IS THAT NOT RATHER CHILDISH?

This question, I take it, must have come to most of you. We Americans have so prized originality, novelty, and individuality that we all have a tendency to despise and even fear ceremonial.

Repetition is the essence of ritualism; and since nothing can grow staler or more inept sooner than repetition, we find many persons thinking of ritual as meaningless stage play. This being so, let us reflect a little on ritual, what it is, what it does for us, and why we may all, individualistic as we may be, frankly and intelligently uphold it as having a just right to a major place in the functionings of any Masonic Body.

Man's being has been shaped by a Universe that loves repetition and ceremonial; the inspiration to ritualism is everywhere. Night and day everlastingly succeed each other; the four seasons continue their endless circumambulations, like the candidate about the lodge room; the stars move about in their fixed orbits, the tides rise and fall, moons wax and wane, seed-time and harvest come and go, growth is followed by decay, birth is succeeded by death. Early man in his rude ritualisms has taught us that to ritualize is in mans nature, and that no amount of rationalizing will ever eradicate from his soul his penchant for thus expressing his thoughts and his emotions. The enlargement of the individual consciousness into a group consciousness, that, my brethren, is the secret of the prevalence of ritualistic ceremonies. If we will apply this fact to the use of ritual in our Masonic Bodies we shall be better able to appreciate and to understand its practice there. But, it must not be supposed that a ritual, especially our Masonic Rituals, excludes novelty, and the opportunities for the individual to add to the richness of it all, for there is always room for the member of a degree cast to improve the work by his better rendition of it, by his vocal interpretation, by masterful gestures, by superiority of costume and make-up, and every York Rite Body has opportunities to show its own genius to the full

by way of better equipment and furnishings; moreover, for those who are able to give a good account of themselves orally there is plenty of opportunity.

Speaking in a Masonic Body resolves itself into two main forms - (a) Rendering the Ceremonies and ritual; and (b) Discussion of matters of Business. Each of these forms requires from the speaker knowledge, skill, tact, and preparation, if he is to be effective and the hearers edified, convinced or impressed. Any single requisite is not enough, they are all needed; and perhaps the first and last most of all.

Nearly every Mason is called upon to speak on occasion but to a larger extent he has in York Rite, as elsewhere, to keep silent, for the Motto of the Craft, AUDI, VIDI, TACE (hear, see, and be silent), applies very strongly, and it is most important from many points of view that when his duty is to hear and at the same time to be silent, he should at least hear something which, NOT IN WORDS ONLY, will elevate his thoughts and attract and hold his attention.

IT IS TO THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THIS END THAT THIS PRESENTATION IS BEING MADE.

GENERAL:

The rendering of ritual or ceremony does not present such a varied field for consideration as an ordinary speech because the verbal portions are already in being; the phrases, sentences, addresses and so forth have been composed, correlated, and balanced. But here is the great pitfall, far too often the Ritual is regarded as something to be committed to memory, and fired out in a word-perfect manner without any reference to the actual impression which is made on the Candidate or those in the audience.

OH! YOU SAY YOU DONT RENDER IT LIKE THAT; VERY WELL! BUT ARE YOU SURE YOU COULD NOT DO IT BETTER THAN YOU HAVE DONE? SEE IF YOU CAN SAY THAT AFTER YOU HAVE LISTENED TO THIS ENUMERATION OF SPECIFICS.

KNOWLEDGE:

Usually Masonic Ritualistic knowledge is garnered from schools of instruction, where no doubt the actual words are committed to memory, and regularly rehearsed. So far, so good. But has there been instruction in the meaning of the actual ceremony in total or of the words, phrases, and so on? You have no doubt been well oriented and trained, but there are many words in the Ritual which are not in the vocabulary of most people. If they are in your vocabulary (they may not be in that of the candidate and others), have you grasped the import, open and concealed, of the whole, or parts, or even words, so that you can discard all self-consciousness, coldness of manner, and unconcern of mind, and enter into the very spirit and life of the ritual, and render it with sincerity and effect which will awaken responsive chords in the hearts of all who hear your effort? If you cannot do this your knowledge is incomplete, and you have much to learn, for, as it has been well

said, words are instruments of music; an ignorant man uses them for jargon; but when a master touches them they have an unexpected life and soul. It is that life and soul which you will have to bring out of the words you may know so well. How can you best do it?

UNDERSTANDING:

By understanding I mean that is to obtain by study, examination, and reflection the real purpose of what you are going to repeat. Go over the ceremony part by part, consider its meaning and the lessons it is intended to teach, then go over the whole, taking care to consider and give the appropriate force to the particular phrases, sentences or words, so as to exhibit an evident sincerity and deep personal conviction of what is the apparent objective of, and a pervading vitality in, what is said; and a delivery which corresponds therewith. This can only be achieved by patience and concentration, and by your own personal effort. It sounds like a large order, but you can fill it if you are really imbued with the desire to do your best and to make that best better.

Remember what you have to perform is good, and therefore nothing short of your best efforts will suffice. Remember also, that in our ritual, there are words used of an archaic and medieval character, and others which like these have a meaning today in common usage which they did not formerly possess, which points up to a need for careful:

EXPRESSION AND EMPHASIS:

Both of these are needed for the proper rendering of ritual. They can only be acquired in the first place by the use of the knowledge you have gained by study, and in the next place by careful attention and practice; without which the diction, pronunciation and virility of your effort will fail; for the result will be a cold passionless and ineffective travesty of what should be an appealing, forceful, and vivid claim upon the mind and heart of the candidate. There are many examples which will present themselves to your mind on study and reflection and by comparison, which can be rendered effective by practice. Try one or two at a time, especially if you are learning Ritual, or even if you do it well, and the result will be very encouraging and someday lead to further progress. Gesture, which in ordinary speech may be, and in many cases is, exceedingly useful, is not so needful in Ritual work, but there are parts where the effect of sentences, charges, and lectures will be largely more apparent by the use of meaningful and germane gesture. Closely associated with gesture is Attitude which counts for a great deal, and a careless posture has a disturbing effect on the hearers. I have a vivid recollection of a presiding officer who lolled back in his chair, extending one foot encased in a white sneaker, which he apparently contemplated with satisfaction, without once glancing at the Candidate to whom his remarks were addressed, the result being that the Candidate was looking about and inattentive. I have another recollection of a Worshipful Master, while not ritualistically letter perfect, yet with easy grace, graceful posture and conversational mode, gave effect to his words by looking straight to the eyes of the Candidate, and by the use of voice variety and meaningful gesture, held the Candidates rapt attention. In any case try rehearsing before a large mirror to see in which of these two classes you find yourself.

I come now to two most important points for consideration; both under the heading of Audibility. Some rooms are well proportioned and possess acoustic properties of a high order, others are so constructed as to militate against the voice being heard at the other end of the room. Notice these things before you begin. Remember that a loud, shouting style is not needed, neither is a conversational tone given with the head down. When not addressing the Candidate, remember to direct your voice to someone at the end of the room. Clearness of utterance, the finishing of words, not cutting or clipping the ends off, and a delivery which does not, by being too fast, make words trip over each other - will all be found very material in the effect to be produced. Allied to these is the phrasing, or division of sentences. One can often tell the effect of the effort to memorize by the jerky way in which words are delivered. Where you have printed matter available, observe the punctuation; where not, then in effect mentally punctuate your sentences so as to pronounce those intervals which will add to the emphasis or force of the words, as well as to give you the opportunity to breathe properly.

I know of no School of Instruction, save workshops like this, where the requirements I have mentioned are to be learned or practiced. While you may pick up a point or two from this session, remember you must teach yourself, unless you have a Masonic friend of like intention who will work with you and strive to attain the same degree of proficiency. But I am sure that with care, and with concentration much can be done. It is only necessary to add that such essentials as voice variety, voice production and control, delivery, diction, eye contact and effective pause will be extremely useful, if put into effect, as an aid to you becoming better ritualists.

TECHNIQUES OF RITUALISM

CHIEF POINTS TO BE INVESTIGATED, OR RESULTS TO BE AIMED AT:

1. KNOWLEDGE: This includes as complete acquaintance as possible with subjects likely to be dealt with - as regards Masonry - its history, in general, the specific Body in particular, ritual, customs and usages, symbolism and secret teaching, the laws and constitutions and an extensive and exact vocabulary understanding of the meaning of the application of words.

2. INTELLECT: By which I refer to the fluency of ideas, thought, clearness of apprehension and facility of expression derived from the practice of the faculties of imagination, vitality, and observation.

3. METHOD: The arranging of thought and speech on definite well-ordered lines, for which a good cultivated memory will be found very useful.

4. EXPRESSION: One wants the power of infusing the charm of ones expression into his delivery of even the highest thoughts when clothed in the most appropriate form of words. This is gained by careful attention to the modulation and intonation of the voice, action of the hands and body, and the visual portrayal of feeling and emotion in the eyes and face.

5. PREPARATION: Under this heading it is well to concentrate on and practice some of the following:

ELOCUTION: Any speaker who has acquired the power of speaking well, must also have some knowledge of the principles of elocution. Some points may be helpful:

- **BREATHING CONTROL:** Few people know how best to produce the voice, or control breathing. The lungs should be well inflated, and the bases of the lungs expanded. Inhaling air through the nostrils without noise, and expiration of breath by mouth quietly and regularly, will be found of great use and enable tonal volume.
- **VOICE PRODUCTION:** A closed or partially closed mouth in speaking results in poor and imperfect utterance and resonance. Muscular ease is important.
- **VOCAL POWER:** Remember the strength of the voice depends on the proper support given by well-controlled breath; and the large quantity of air in the lungs.

One last point I would like to put before you, and that is to try and elevate the tone and language of your everyday and ordinary conversation, especially in regard to its substance, subject and sentences.

The art of polite conversation is nearly dead, as you will realize if you listen to the modern youth, yes! and some of the older people. It need not be so among Masons, who have a great mission in life, the elevation and formation of character. If you really want Freemasonry to do this for you, and for others, it will be assisted by conversation of a considered and appropriate character.

Remember! it will do more than this, it will help you to speak well and clearly, and to clothe your thoughts and your ideas in language which will enable you to shine in Lodge and in the world.

Finally, it is well to remember this: You never get a second chance to make a good **FIRST IMPRESSION.**

Prepare By, Br. Florian for the benefit of the Craft, September, 2013