

Tips on Learning Ritual

One time when visiting the Lodge in Holbrook, I was sitting on the sidelines watching the Second Section of the Third Degree. The brother doing the First Fellowcraft suddenly had to stop when he was weary and worn out at the brow of the hill; for some reason, the brother could not continue with his part. I looked around and saw that no one else would step in, I had never performed the part. Suddenly I jumped into the part, and it just came to me. Of course I had heard it many times before. I do not know how well I did, but it must have been OK.

One of the best ways to start learning ritual is simply to be present and listen. Sometimes we get too dependent upon books that they become a crutch; therefore, having a book open during degree work is not a good way to learn ritual. If you are prompting with a book open, you need to know the work so that you understand the expected inflection changes in the presenter's voice. If you have an idea how a presenter's inflection should change during a part, you will know when they are getting into trouble sometimes even before they know it. Facial expressions are also keys to when a brother needs assistance. Therefore, for a prompter, an open ritual book is only a guide, no one else needs a ritual book open.

How do you learn ritual? I have no idea, I can tell you how I attempt to learn ritual though. The first step is to listen during lodge. When away from the lodge at home, read the part through it a number of times to get familiar with it. The first few times, you may not learn anything. Don't worry. A day or so later read it through again. Start trying to either summarize it or visualize it in your mind depending upon how you learn. Set the book down for another day or so. Start concentrating on learning one paragraph at a time, let your mind start selecting keywords as you try to recite while looking away from the book. As your mind develops these keywords, you will begin building a framework to learn the part. You also get a better understanding how your mind works.

I believe the steps to learning ritual from my experience is to:

1. Familiarize yourself with the part
2. Summarize or visualize the part in your mind
3. Start focusing on paragraphs or sections
4. Finally, start bringing the parts together

The most important thing to do between each of the above steps is sleep. Sleep between study sessions helps your brain consolidate learning.

I recommend the following things to be careful of:

1. Don't expect to learn a part in a single day or single sitting
2. Don't spend too much time at a single study period, when your eyes blur over, it's time to stop. A few minutes to an hour a day will work wonders
3. You may notice that one side of your mind will help you monitor the other side you as you recite. (Listening to ritual in Lodge will assist you to develop your ability monitor yourself, because your brain picks up more than you realize.)

You may not have a perfect performance the first time you perform the part in lodge because you have changed your surroundings from your home where you are by yourself to the Lodge where you are in front of brothers. Sometimes after you have done a part a number of times, you can get into trouble because you are having an off-day. Even if you know a part, it is good to review it a few days before giving it, so you have a chance to sleep between reviewing it and performing it.

I knew an older gentleman who did the Third Degree Charge for many years. He always used the word "Condensation" instead of "Condescension." After he passed way I learned the charge using the Arizona Monitor and was practicing it in front of brother who was laying in wait to see if I would use the wrong word, suddenly he said the word is "CON-DEN-SCEN-SION!" I could not get the wrong word out of my head. It is amazing what you can learn simply by listening.

Frank Edens

3/1/2015