

Why Ritual?

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How many of you are privileged such that you have been chosen to help confer any of our many of our grades or degrees and have struggled to memorize the ritual? We require our Brothers just entering our Craft to memorize their ritual – a feat most challenging for the common denizen of today's society where all of our info is readily at hand in our phones or some other instantaneous information source. Memorization of even the simplest bits of information is no longer a necessity for us; frankly, I can still immediately recall my phone number from when I was a child 45 years ago – but I sometimes stall when I try to remember the phone number that I have today. But I pose the question: why is memorization important for our Craft? Wouldn't it be easier to just hand the candidate a copy of some short story about a worker on a construction project who knew a secret about how to earn journeyman wages but when he wouldn't give up that secret, was murdered by his coworkers who were later arrested and brought up on charges by the foreman for the crime? Wouldn't that be much easier and allow us to more promptly get to the real Masonic business of raising money for charity and handling other Lodge affairs?

The Noise Within

Let's start with the inner noise that most or all of us deal with on a daily basis. We all have hectic lives. Money, our professional concerns, politics, societal pressures, Masonic duties, the mental candy of social media, and the list goes on. We are constantly bombarded by all sorts of noise that prevent us from connecting with the true discernment and peace that reside within us naturally. Meditation is a means by which one might quell that noise by repeating a mantra over and over – which does a great deal in helping us to find inner peace. Meditation, in itself, does nothing more than distract our minds from our sources of noise and gives it something else to do other than obsessing on our stressors. Meditation is typically based on repeating some mantra, which is usually a word or a few syllables that have no meaning or phonetic similarity to anything that might trigger cognition or thought. Mantras are often repeated with controlled breathing exercises, or gazing at some peaceful, hypnotic image, such as

a burning candle, with the result being a sense of peace and harmony descending on the person meditating.

Now, after we've gained a little bit of mediative peace and quieted down our mind, we have a clean slate with which to work. But what do we do with that? At the very least, we now have reached a place mentally where we can selectively discern which thoughts or concerns that we should focus on and are able to rationally direct our energies towards dealing with them. In my opinion, the effect of meditation seems much like the foundation of the Serenity Prayer:

> God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Hypnotherapy

Cleveland Clinic describes the term hypnotherapy as a heightened state of concentration and focused attention. The notion is that, guided by a trained, certified hypnotist or hypnotherapist, hypnosis allows a person to be more open to suggestions to making healthful changes in their perceptions, sensations, emotions, memories, thoughts, or behaviors. We have all heard, or perhaps experienced the positive effects of hypnotherapy for such ends as weight-loss, smoking cessation, behavioral adjustment, success in business or love, or whatever. The process of delivering hypnotherapy is essentially that of quieting down the noise in our brains, then adding suggestion into that space created by the mental silence – with those suggestions typically injected repeatedly.

So, let's reflect -- with a meditative exercise based on the endless repetition of rote words, we have reached a point of peace and serenity. Now, if we could inject some suggestions into that focused, impressionable mind, we can achieve potentially fantastic feats. Here's an idea: perhaps we inject some mysterious symbols that have pedantic extrinsic meanings, but sublime occult meanings, and see what happens. Hmmm. Sounds almost like memorizing ritual…

The Power of Prayer

We can now make a small leap and consider how this basic model is applied in other areas. In an effort to shorten and clarify the words of Albert Pike, I now paraphrase a passage from *Morals and Dogma* on the Degree*, Knight of the Sun, or Prince Adept*, where he states:

> God alone is all-powerful, but the human soul has, in all ages, asserted its claim to be considered as part of the Divine. God, by the agency of an infinite will, created the Universe, and that same sort of power, in an inferior degree, exists in all spiritual beings. The higher we ascend in antiquity the more does prayer take the form of incantation. In that form it is considered not merely an expression of trust or reverence, but as a real spiritual act, the effect of which is looked for not only in the mind of the worshipper, but also from which some direct, outward result is anticipated[1].

What if our spirit, soul, and mind were not just merely gifts from God, intended for us to glorify His work and diffuse brotherly love and charity, but what if they actually were a ray of that Divine light emanating from the source? If you choose to agree with this notion, it offers an explanation of why and how prayer works, in that it consciously directs Divine energy towards a particular object.

Why Memorization?

Now, of course, possessing innate Divine essence within our being is surely a double-edged sword. Each coin has two sides. Our Lodge rooms are furnished with black and white pavement to remind us of this truth. Darkness is a lack of light, so when a space (such as our consciouses) is without Light, the darkness fills a larger portion of it. Even worse – when dark or evil suggestion makes its way into our consciouses, that darkness is strengthened; deepened. In a world with watered down intellectual

[1] Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, 2nd annotated edition*, 2nd printing, (Supreme Council, AASR SMJ, Washington, DC, 2016) p799

requirements and “conveniences” that handle things like memorization and thinking for us, our malleable minds are softened and susceptible to suggestion and evil without a filter of critical thought, or Light to diffuse the darkness. Think about how effective television can be in influencing people. Think about what might happen when a mantra, or prayer is infused with dark messages. What kind of result do you think comes from that? I think that this is where much of the deviance and evil we see rampant today originates: weak, susceptible minds repetitively barraged with negative images. On the other hand, reflect on how good you feel when you successfully meditate on and memorize uplifting content such as our ritual. It can be argued that the act of memorizing and mastering our ritual to the degree necessary for delivery within our degrees is tantamount to reaching a meditative state where the mind is susceptible to suggestion, and into which we then inject positive symbols and beautiful concepts of the Divine. Author Hank Kraychir of the St. Columba School of Theology, supports this notion when he states:

> When the divine presence fills the void within, an iridescent luminosity radiates from the core, dispelling the lingering shadows of uncertainty and apprehension. Within this divine radiance, individuals unearth their authentic purpose and establish an unbreakable link to the boundless universe, a connection that makes us feel significant and part of something greater. Conversely, in the absence of this divine fulfillment, the encroaching darkness casts long, foreboding shadows that distort the very essence of the soul. Amid this darkness, one might find themselves entangled in a labyrinth of doubt and indecision, a state of confusion and uncertainty, unable to discern a clear path forward[2].

One of our Degrees posits that the inner light leads us on, or in Latin, “lux inens nos agit.” God *is* within us, and we wake that essence up when we dedicate our consciousness to rote invocative ritual imbued

[2] Hank Kraychir, *Divine Light or Encroaching Darkness*, Immortal Light Facebook group, October 20, 2024

with images of the Divine. That effect is multiplied many times over when there are many of us engaging and driving to the same end simultaneously, such as when exemplifying a degree. So, the next time you feel like you're struggling with memorizing the degree work, remember why we're doing it, and don't just give up in frustration and turn on the television. Spread that light to your brethren so that we may collectively burn brighter.

Bibliography

Hank Kraychir, *Divine Light or Encroaching Darkness*, Immortal Light Facebook group, October 20, 2024

Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, 2nd annotated edition, 2nd printing, (Supreme Council, AASR SMJ, Washington, DC, 2016)