

Official Visit to Valley Lodge No. 100
February 10th, 2014

“Don’t hit your grandmother with a shovel, it will leave a bad impression on her mind.”

This indeed is an opening line that demands further explanation. I trust I need not remind you that hitting anyone with a shovel will undoubtedly leave an unfavourable impression. I am not advocating the use of garden implements as teaching aids, but I will give credit to my grandfather for sharing this useful piece of knowledge. Why would such a gentle soul as my grandfather share such a bizarre truth? Let me assure you, he was forever offering up little gems and one-liners to get you laughing or smiling, and definitely not to cause harm. He was I suppose...making an impression.

When my grandfather spoke, you listened. Not because you felt some obligation, but because you wanted to. His manner was animated and expressive and he could hold your interest with the sound of his voice alone. The disposition with which he expressed himself naturally elevated the subject of the conversation to a level that compelled your attention. He had found his voice and he knew how to use it.

Tonight we are going to explore how perhaps you might find a voice that is more compelling than you have imagined was possible. For those who wanted to know more about grandmothers and shovels, you will unfortunately be disappointed.

I know in the past I have stressed how important it is to deliver our Ritual as it is written and was intended, and I have not waived from that position. I would however like you to consider the following. Sometimes *how* you say something is just as important as *what* you say. Psychologists generally agree that people form 'first impressions' in a matter of seconds of meeting someone new and rarely does it involve a single word being said. So, if so much emphasis is placed on the non-verbal, then to my way of thinking, when the mouth is flapping, the '*how*' you say something should be given a considerable amount of attention. The impact of any communication is driven by both the content of what is being communicated and the emotional disposition of those engaged in the conversation. Do we take the candidate's emotional state for granted when we present Ritual or do we attempt by our words to influence the state we desire?

Consider the range of emotions as theorized in *Book Two of Aristotle's Rhetoric* that you might possibly experience in a single day; Anger, Friendship, Fear, Shame, Kindness, Pity, Indignation and Envy. As we all know, there are so many more.

There are elements of our daily speech, which give clues and are a strong indication of how we feel about what we are saying and how we feel in general. It happens so naturally we barely give it a second thought.

Yet, when a story so rich as our Ritual is being presented, often times the import of the message is not emphasized with the excitement and enthusiasm it deserves. The presenter is focused more on the ‘what’ and less on the ‘how’ and consequently, the message is somewhat flat or uninteresting and lacks the necessary emotion. Our Ritual is anything but flat. If we study the text of our Rites and Ceremonies, I know we will find a plethora of emotions to capitalize on and enhance our delivery.

Personally, over my Masonic career, I have been drawn to learn those pieces of ritual that were presented in such a way that made a profound impression. The lecture was inspiring in itself and that *caught* my attention, but the manner in which it was presented is what *kept* my attention.

Throughout our history, well-spoken orators have delivered impassioned speeches that have motivated men and women to take action or change our thinking. Let us consider The Gettysburg Address by President Lincoln, the Call To Arms by Winston Churchill, the “I have a dream” by Martin Luther King and who can forget “Ask not what your Country can do for you, but what you can do for your Country” by John F. Kennedy. Is it fair to compare our Ritual to these inspiring speeches that will live on in perpetuity? You bet it is.

Our Ritual through all vicissitudes has survived for more than 300 years and it will also live on in perpetuity for future generations.

The difference perhaps between John F. Kennedy and ourselves is that he passionately understood what he was saying whereas we might just be 'saying', without the passion.

To deliver our Ritual effectively we must first fully understand the message and content of the lecture we are presenting. If a particular word is unfamiliar, might I suggest we look it up? We have all heard a brother give a lecture and completely mispronounce a word or substitute a similar sounding word in its stead (*present company excluded of course*). Believe me, the candidate is paying attention as are the other brethren. A fumble in the wording can mean the difference between capturing your audience, and setting them adrift. For example, if anyone thinks immoral and immortal means the same thing, *please* stay after class.

So, to make a lasting impression, we first must fully understand what we are saying. Would you not agree? I cannot emphasize how important this is. Second, we must 'get into character'. We are teaching and what do teachers do? Of course they lecture and hand out homework (as we do), but beyond that, the good teachers leave an impression...they grab our imagination. They use the power of their voice through intonation, inflection and cadence. The intonation is the 'song' of your voice or the melody. The inflection is the emphasis and the cadence is the pace of delivery. Add this to the appropriate body language, and you have a *Method*.

'Method Acting' is a group of techniques created by Constantine Stanislavski, a Russian Actor in the late 19th century used by actors to create in them the thoughts and feelings of their characters, so as to develop lifelike performances.

Lee Strasberg later adapted Stanislavski's method for teaching American actors. You may know of Lee Strasberg as having played the dynamic character, Hyman Roth in Mario Puzo's, *The Godfather*. When you are comfortable in your role as *The Godfather*, sorry I mean educator, philosopher and intellectual, you will transcend the actual words of our Ritual and you will give a realistic performance full of passion, meaning and then have a candidate who will benefit immensely from *your* method.

Let's not kid ourselves. We are performers all day long and that is not a bad thing. We are constantly making adjustments in the way we act to suit the circumstances in our daily lives. Wife had a bad day; you are the calm Supporter and Listener. Your child fell off their bike; you are the Super Hero that came to their rescue with healing powers. Perhaps I exaggerate, but you get the idea. For the same reasons, we cannot present every piece of our dynamic ritual like Ehor, the monotone-talking donkey from *Winnie the Pooh*.

The messages communicated from our Ritual should be infectious.

Our Ritual should be enlivened with enthusiasm, excitement...and create in our candidates a thirst for more. If you are gregarious, the likelihood is our candidates will feel the moment and will regard it as memorable.

Now consider; “Would you give if it were in your power?” I don’t know about you, but when I was initiated, I was praying I hadn’t forgotten to use deodorant when I was asked that question. My time in the North East Angle seemed like an eternity.

A brother presented that question as though the consequence of my answer would mean the difference between life and death.

Not to mention the all sweat-inducing experience of having a plate placed before me to receive my offering. The plate was held for so long in front of me without anyone uttering a word that I contemplated offering one of my limbs to break the silence. That particular moment was so impactful for me that it was the very first piece of work I learned. I am hopeful this example alone communicates the message I am driving home.

There are so many other opportunities in our Ritual to make an impression. For starters, think of the numerous questions asked of the candidate during the first degree. Are these serious questions that deserve serious answers?

If you believe so, then ask them as such. Whether it be the Secrets, Obligation or a lecture from one of the Wardens, closely examine and study *what* you are saying and look for opportunities of *how* you might say it better, so as to make a lasting impression. As a word of advice, when I was learning Ritual early on, I ignored the published punctuation and inserted my own to suit my speaking style. This might just work for you.

It will take work and practice to master some or all of these techniques. In the meantime, remember imitating the style of a brother you respect and admire is a sincere form of flattery.

And one last recommendation, please present your work as though the Tyler was hard of hearing and needed to hear every word you utter. Your lectures are not just for the candidate, but should be enjoyed by all your brethren.

Finally, if you feel the need to use a shovel, hopefully it is not to make an impression. Thank you for your kind attention.

Presented by:

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