



NUGGET

Thanks for the Memory

Summary: More advice on memorising Ritual.

Jane Austen suggests, *'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'*. Another alternative truth universally acknowledged might be: *'that learning by heart gets twice as hard with each passing decade'* - what slips into the mind at 27 slips out (or becomes a very hard slog indeed) by 72.

The Schaw Statutes of 1598¹ required all Apprentices to observe the Principles of Hermes.² These noted that muscular development took place with hard physical exercise and therefore took the view that hard mental exercise would similarly develop the brain, to the advantage of the apprentice, his trade skills, the profits of his Master and in turn to the community around him. It concluded that learning lengthy tracts by heart would serve this purpose admirably. We can therefore blame William Schaw for the fact that from 1598 to the present day, all Masonic responses and Ritual have had to be delivered without the aid of any written source. DCs who urge you to *'put the ritual book away'* are not necessarily being officious, but rather observing a very ancient tradition!

As with most things in life practise makes perfect. Many Masons in their fifties have long lost school skills. While every one of us has a different approach to learning things by heart, there are certain basic principles that, adapted to your own technique, might make things just that little bit easier.

While they are listed in no particular order, there is one over-riding piece of advice: that sense is always more important than accuracy. In our Ceremonies, we are trying to explain our Masonry to the most important man in the room, the Candidate. If we don't understand the words or the passage ourselves just how can we hope to inform him? Therefore, let us keep the sense of the words we are reciting in the forefront of our minds and let any small variations in wording look after themselves.

1. Allow plenty of time to learn the meaning and the words, it always takes far longer than you think.
2. It is vital to understand the meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or passage before you even begin to think about learning the words.
3. Understand the general shape of the piece, the message, the key phrases and the conclusion first of all.



4. Good memory comes not from the frequency of repetition, by re-reading the book, but from the tiring discipline of trying to remember the words before you glance back at the book.
5. Do not attempt too much at one go.
6. Learn the beginning (where you are coming from), and the exit (what it has all been about), first. For those listening a faultless first half and a stumbling second half are not quite as persuasive as a good beginning and a good finale, either side of a so-so middle.
7. Once learnt, keep it in place by regular repetition; remember, easy-in, easy-out.
8. Look for personal cribs and make up your own mnemonics.

There are some more general hints. Spend a few weeks reading and re-reading the passage without any attempt to memorise it. The mind is fresher in the morning, but a glance late in the evening sometimes helps it stay in the 'overnight sub-consciousness'.

Once you are comfortable with what it is all about then and only then start the hard slog. Drag it out from memory each time. Don't be tempted to 'cheat' from the book.

Once both the meaning and words are in the mind, then start giving it the gloss, the body language, the shades of meaning, the pauses (for the Candidate to take in a change of theme) and other emphases. Repeat daily until fluent.

A few days before the Ceremony give it all a rest. Relax. Be confident that you are going to perform well.

Come to the Lodge fresh in mind and spirit, certain of success! You will assuredly be rewarded in the Temple by a Candidate who nods in pleased recognition that you have explained it rather well and you will have made his day. You will also have made your own day too; in the Dining Room fellow Masons will give you a round of applause, when the Visitor singles you out in his speech and, not least, your Lodge will be justifiably proud of you.

Endnotes

1. In 1598, William Schaw, issued the first of the now-famous Schaw Statutes which set out the duties of all members to the Lodge and to the public. It also imposed penalties for unsatisfactory work and inadequate safety during work. http://www.themasonictrowel.com/Articles/Manuscripts/manuscripts/shaw_statutes/shaw_statutes.htm
2. The ancient Greeks identified their god Hermes with the Egyptian Thoth and gave him the epithet Trismegistus, or "Thrice-Greatest," for he had given the Egyptians their vaunted arts and sciences. The Asclepius and the Corpus Hermeticum are the most important of the [Hermetica](http://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/ancient-religion-biographies/hermes-trismegistus), the surviving writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. Included with them are the seven Hermetic principles: Mentalism, Correspondence, Vibration, Polarity, Rhythm, Cause & Effect, and the principle of Gender. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/ancient-religion-biographies/hermes-trismegistus>



Recommended use of Nuggets

Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings.

They can be:

- Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.
- Themed with the meeting or activity.
- Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.
- Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.
- Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

For further papers and other learning materials visit *Solomon* at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

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