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The Delivery Of The Ritual

By RWBro Peter Verrall, PJGW (Western Australia)

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We are told in the Second Degree's Charge after Passing that: *The study of the liberal arts, which tends so effectively to polish and adorn the mind, is earnestly recommended to your consideration.*

The Liberal Arts comprise Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. On this occasion, we will be talking specifically about Rhetoric, which is described by Mackay in his *Encyclopedia of Masonry* as *the art of embellishing language with the ornaments of construction so as to enable the speaker to persuade or affect his hearers.*

Affect our hearers. This is what we should try to do, brethren, when we deliver the ritual. Affect those who listen and watch us. The men who gave Speculative Freemasonry its present formal dress were very wise. They gave us orderly ceremonies with a discipline that meets the needs of the brethren. It is an effective way of impressing upon us the tenets of Freemasonry. But the teachings are not straightforward, like school lessons, for we are told that Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.

Allegories are parables and as Speculative Freemasons we are expected to speculate on these parables, not according to today's meaning of the word, but more to contemplate or to consider the meanings and essentials of Freemasonry.

Let us consider the background. The delivery of the ritual is one of the most if not the most important part of the ceremony, for it is the catalyst of our knowledge of Freemasonry: yet we receive little or no tuition in it except perhaps for injunctions to adhere to the words themselves. Our ritual is a fine work of art, worthy of the craft. It was not written overnight, but is based on development over a period of more than 600 years. It is written for speaking and hearing and not reading. For many years it was passed from brother to brother by word of mouth. It is the responsibility of those who speak it to understand it and to endeavour to interpret it. So often it is delivered without any understanding or meaning and all the hours that the brother has taken in learning it are wasted. A Brother wrote, *one of the proofs of the stature of the ritual is that it can still live even after a brother has done his best to murder it.*

There is a great similarity between our craft and the theatre. Speculative Masonic ceremonies are based on the early stonemasons' operative lodges. Likewise in the theatre, the stage presentation is generally based on real life situations and draws attention to one particular aspect of it - very often moral. Freemasonry uses the artisan mason's work as a parable and derives a lesson in the fundamentals of life. Our ceremonies are equivalent to stage productions. In fact, the Western Australian Lodge of Research presented a number of stage productions including the *Four Faces of Freemasonry; A Masonic Pageant* in 1996 at the Burswood Theatre in Perth to an audience of 1,400 Freemasons, their wives, families and friends.

Both our ceremonies and the stage have rehearsals, a most essential ingredient; a script which, in our case, is the ritual; a producer, who is our Director of Ceremonies; the stagehands, our Deacons; the props or properties, the objects required on stage - our symbols and ornaments; the actors, our participating masons and our audience, our Brethren.

In any production, whether it is on a stage or in the lodge room, the essential ingredient is to get the message over to those present. In our ceremonies, first and foremost, it is the candidate who is the most important member of the audience. He should be hanging on every word spoken and must be made to feel at all times secure in the warmth and individual concern of the speaker.

The speaker must anticipate the candidate's nervousness and help to allay it. So often a brother is more concerned with memorising and getting through his charge as soon as possible that he forgets the effect he is having on both the candidate and the brethren. To the brethren present, the charges should be a continuing and lively reminder of the ritual and they should be given the impression of never having heard it before, or at least gain a meaning from the rendition they had not previously realized.

How often, brethren, have we sat up and listened when a charge has been delivered in a different way with feeling and obvious understanding? The same words, yes; but having a new meaning. We are not all budding Richard Burton's or Laurence Olivier's but we have a duty, as Masons, to perform to our best ability.

There are two great dangers in delivering ritual. Firstly: a tendency to regard the ritual as an irksome routine, to be rattled through parrot fashion with only one thought in mind, to get it over. Secondly: to regard it as an opportunity for a full reign of histrionics. The first makes a farce of our ritual and the second, a melodrama. Sincerity is the answer. A sincere performance is always more effective. Remember that each of us has some point of strength, whether it is a deep or impressive voice, a quiet persuasive manner, modesty, or a transparent honesty. Search for your own strength and build on it. Try and project your own unique personality. Like a good Boy Scout, be prepared.

Preparation, this is of prime importance. Firstly, read through your charge or duty many times and make sure that you understand it. If you do not understand a word, look it up in the dictionary or ask an experienced brother. Learn the charge carefully and exactly, referring constantly back to the book. If you learn it incorrectly, after a time you will find it almost impossible to correct yourself. Learn it by sound rather than sight. If possible, get another brother to hear you and mark your mistakes lightly in pencil in your copy so that you are always aware of them. Some find learning easier than others, but set your mind to it. It is a good personal discipline.

There are different ways of memorising. A tape recorder can be invaluable where the ritual involves other officers such as an exchange between the Master and Wardens. Put the opposing words on the recorder, naturally leaving out any secretive ones; words such as "beetroot, beetroot" can suffice. Hold the pause button, speak your part, and then hear the reply before speaking again.

This will allow you to learn the responses by sound rather than sight. If the charge is long, learn it in sections. RWBro Lionel Mears, in his paper *The Preparation and Presentation of a Charge* (WALoR 1966), calls it the "**Part/Whole method**". Divide the charge into parts; learn part one to perfection, then part two the same way, before combining them as a whole. Follow with parts three and four in the same manner before joining them with parts one and two. Treat the whole charge in this form finally combining all parts together in the finished product.

Try and get peace and quiet for your learning. The car can be a marvellous place for rehearsing because one can speak out aloud although passing drivers may think you somewhat strange. Give yourself plenty of time. You cannot learn a charge the night before giving it. Analyse the charge; find the climax and the important message it is conveying.

Charges tend to fall into different categories: -

- a) **Instructional** charges, which includes the Secrets, the Charter Charge and the Charge after Passing.
- b) **Educational** charges, such as the Lesser Lights, Working Tools and the First Degree Tracing Board.
- c) **Narrative** charges, like the Traditional History and the Second Degree Tracing Board and, finally
- d) **Inspirational** charges, such as the Charge in the NE, the Reasons for Preparation and the Charges after Initiation and Raising.

Attend every rehearsal you can and, if possible, go down to the lodge room on your own, or with a brother, and run through the charge in the actual position that you will be delivering it. Having learnt your charge, you are now ready to deliver it.

The main title of my address is *The Delivery of the Ritual*, but I would like to subtitle it with the old maxim: ***Stand up to be seen, speak up to be heard and shut up to be appreciated.***

The first necessity is of course to **STAND UP**. There are four different sections to this maxim - Pre Delivery, Visual Projection, Gestures, and Facial Expression.

Pre Delivery - Seat yourself; if possible, close to your delivery position to avoid having to move unnecessarily across the lodge room, thus breaking the continuity of the ceremony. Immediately prior to your time to deliver, take a few deep breaths and try to relax.

Visual Projection, or how you should appear - Stand relaxed and comfortably. Do not slouch nor stand stiff as a ramrod. Keep your feet a few inches apart with one foot fractionally ahead of the other. Be well balanced with your body slightly forward so that if you were shot, you would fall forward rather than back. Do not rock or roll. There is always a tendency to be very conscious of one's hands. The easiest way is to let them hang loosely and relaxed at your side. Do not clench your fists for this expresses tension, which can be transmitted to the candidate. Please do not place them in front of your apron or in your pockets, as can be seen on occasions. If you have them behind you, do not twiddle your thumbs. It is most disconcerting for those brethren sitting behind you. Do not fiddle with objects such as keys or money: especially the latter when the candidate has been divested of all valuables. Look the candidate straight in the eye: not at his feet or over his shoulder. Finally, if you are required to change your position during the charge, please do not speak when moving.

Gestures - these must appear to be spontaneous and must not look planned even though very careful planning is essential and a lot of practice is required. They must relate to the words spoken at the time. If you are going to gesture, it must be for a reason, either towards or with something. Do not talk with your hands. Gestures should only add emphasis to your words and should not detract from the charge itself. All gestures should be full and always finish where they started. If you are going to gesture with objects like the Working Tools, do not fiddle with them, as this can be very distracting. Finally please try and leave all your bad mannerisms behind on your seat.

Facial Expression - this is important as it visually conveys your feelings directly to the candidate. There is always a tendency to be too restrained, too rigid or too controlled. Feel free to show expression in your face and at suitable times a faint smile can really give assurance.

SPEAK UP is the most important of all three, because if you cannot be heard, all your efforts are in vain. There are seven headings under this Section: - Vocal Projection, Verbal Projection, Thought Control, Pauses, Vocal Force, Voice Colour and Timing.

It all sounds rather overwhelming but be assured that you will find that, in all cases, you already actually practice them without necessarily being aware that you do.

Vocal Projection. Audibility is the ability to be heard. Every brother in the room has the right to hear you but not to be bellowed at. Try and speak out rather than up. Greater volume is not necessarily easier to hear. Good resonance is important with the voice cast upwards and outwards rather than being mumbled into the figurative, or as in many cases these days, the actual beard. There is no excuse for inaudibility and yet it is probably one of the major faults in delivering ritual. It breeds boredom and frustration in the lodge room and accounts for a lot of the absences from our meetings.

Verbal Projection is not the same as vocal projection but is the art of speaking clearly. A charge should flow with the minimum of apparent effort as a succession of words with meaning. If you have an accent, do not worry. It may be necessary to speak slower at the start of your charge to allow the brethren to become attuned to your voice. Try and follow the rhythmic pattern of the ritual. In some cases there are a series of short passages as in the reading of Ecclesiastes - *also when /they shall be afraid of that which is high, /and fear shall be in the way, /and the almond tree shall flourish /and the grasshopper shall be a burden /and desire shall fail.*

Our ritual has groups of two or three words with the same meaning, which also provide a pattern. This is especially noticeable in the Obligations: *worthy, worshipful and warranted Lodge / of / Antient, Free and Accepted Masons, / lawfully constituted, regularly assembled and properly dedicated / of my own free will and accord, / do hereby and hereon / most solemnly and sincerely / promise and swear / that I will always / hele, conceal and never reveal / any part or parts, / point or points / of the secrets or mysteries / of or belonging to / Free and Accepted Masons in Masonry.* Pronounce every word but do not over enunciate. If you have difficulty pronouncing a word, break it down into syllables but make sure that you put the emphasis on the right parts.

Thought Control. Not brainwashing, but interpretation. Speak by phrases and meaning and do not necessarily be controlled by sentences or punctuation although these are good guidelines. Think of what you are saying and what your feelings should be at the moment of utterance. Take this example when the Tyler announces the candidate at the door: - *Whom have you there?* (with warmth & concern), *Mr A, a poor candidate in a state of darkness* (with sympathy), *who has been well and worthily recommended* (with enthusiasm), *regularly proposed and approved in open lodge* (with approval), *and who comes of his own free*

will and accord (with enthusiasm), *properly prepared* (seriously), *humbly soliciting to be admitted* (with sympathy), *to the mysteries and privileges of Antient Freemasonry* (with pride).

Pauses. These are most important and are a chance to lend emphasis where required. Your first pause should be when you commence to speak. You may like to place emphasis on certain important words with a pause such as in the Charge in North East. *Indeed I shall immediately proceed to put your principles in some measure to the test, by calling upon you to exercise that virtue which may justly be denominated the distinguishing characteristic of a Freemasons heart ... (pause) ... I mean ... (pause) ... Charity.*

When answers are required, make sure that you pause sufficiently to allow the brother to respond. Pause clearly without ums or ahs and do not pause before unimportant words. There are two different types of pauses. One is when you have to take a natural breath and the other is a dramatic or suspensory pause, where you do not necessarily take a breath. Pauses can be of great help. They give the candidate a chance to absorb what he has been told. They give you a chance to concentrate on your next few words. They lend emphasis and meaning and they give you time to catch your breath.

You should take a breath regularly and few speakers in fact actually take enough. Keep your lungs full as it helps with your confidence, improves the quality and resonance of your voice and allows you to hold your chest up and improve your appearance. But remember, please, that pauses are not necessarily forgetful stops.

Vocal Force or volume. This is the art of using loudness to obtain the effect of giving stress or emphasis to individual words or phrases. In reverse, softness can indicate restraint or quietness. Vary the volume of your voice. You may need to start with a higher volume, not shouting, to combat background noises such as fans and, dare I mention it, brethren's background chatter and movement. Drop your jaw and tongue, open your lips and let the sound pour out.

Voice Colour or voice modulation. This is a variation in resonance: an inflection. It is this which gives music to our speech. It is used naturally and unconsciously in our normal everyday conversation but for some reason, is lacking in many ritual deliveries where monotone seems to become the normal routine. Raise your voice inflection for things that are high, cheerful and bright. Let it fall for lowness, sadness and drabness. Always keep the candidate in a state of anticipation by varying the rhythm of your voice.

Timing. Generally follow your normal rate of speech. Speak quickly enough to be interesting but slowly enough to be understood. Change the pace according to the subject: slower for thoughtfulness, deliberation and sadness and faster for joy, excitement and vigour.

Finally, our third maxim: **SHUT UP.** We always remember those awful moments when we had to shut up and stop whilst delivering the ritual because of a mind block or because we stumbled over words. It happens to the best of ritualists and even the best actors in the world are not free from it. Be assured that all the brethren present want to see you do well. They should at all times assist you, but should do so mentally and not audibly.

Only one brother should do the prompting and preferably directly from the ritual book itself, unless the prompter is well versed. The person prompting should be present at all rehearsals so that he is fully aware of how the charge is to be presented by that brother; where prompting may be needed, what length of prompt is required and where stops may occur for deliberate pauses. Nothing is more frustrating than when you wish to provide a dramatic pause, you find that an inexperienced prompter coming in at the wrong moment ruins it.

Prompt only if necessary, as in many cases a slight pause can be sufficient for the speaker to remember the words or in some cases, where brethren are able to ad lib before getting back on track. Sense of meaning and a dramatic flow are more important than complete word accuracy. Prompt with the minimum of words but with correct ones that have meaning. If you require a prompt, stand and wait for it without turning. If your prompter is on the ball, it will hardly be noticed that you have taken a prompt and can appear very easily as though it was a pause. On no account say: "thank you". It is the nominated brother's duty to help you, and certainly no apology is required.

The next and most important time of shutting up is when the brethren themselves should be quiet. This should occur at all times when other brethren are speaking, especially during the actual ceremony itself.

WM and Brethren; to sum up. Please remember to practice by sound and not sight. Good speaking looks so easy and natural to some people but be assured, it is not achieved by accident. It can only be made perfect by much practice, effort and expenditure of nervous energy. Strange as it may sound, one gives a better

performance if nervous and most outstanding actors experience first night nerves. The Master plays a very important part in our ceremonies. He is really the leading actor and can establish or destroy the mood of the occasion. He must try and appear relaxed whilst at the same time maintaining a feeling of discipline. During any recesses he should, with the aid of his Director of Ceremonies, ensure that they are kept to a minimum of time and that no unnecessary movement or excessive conversation breaks that mood.

Always accept the opportunity to give charges or to take part in the ceremonies. It is one of the great privileges that we have as Freemasons. Enjoy delivering our lovely ritual or at the very least please sound as though you are enjoying it.