

## The Importance of Ritual Work

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Too many, the ritual work performed within our lodges is of minimal importance, and arguments are advanced from time to time that too much importance is placed on it. It is certainly true that the ritual is not the most important aspect of our Craft, but it is basic to a genuine understanding of our mysteries.

The ritual is the fundamental vehicle by which we convey our secrets and hidden mysteries. It is by means of the ritual that we communicate the symbolic legend and the allegories of our teachings. It is as necessary to our Craft as a music score is to an opera or a playbook to a football team. Indeed, parts of our ritual in use today are as ancient as the Craft itself, and have been preserved with little change from our earliest recorded history. When a candidate first passes through the tiled portals of a lodge, hoodwinked and unenlightened, it is by means of the ritual that he gains his first real impressions of our fraternity and it is by this means that we hope to convey to him some understanding of our purpose, our philosophy and our objectives. If our presentation is mumbled or garbled, delivered without expression or meaning, or constantly interrupted by prompts from the Secretary's desk, it might be just as well or better were we to hand him a book and say, "Read this, because we don't have the interest in communicating it to you in such a manner that you can readily grasp it."

I often wonder to what extent lodge attendance is a reflection of the quality of work done within it. It stands to reason that a brother who is not holding an office and thereby participating in the regular ritual work is going to become extremely bored if he has nothing to look forward to but the reading of minutes and the passing of bills. If he must also suffer through constant repetitions of shoddy openings and closings and half learned pieces of work, what inspiration can there be for him and how can we as an organization hope to compete for his time and support against other worthwhile endeavours where he may feel his time might be better spent?

The Ritual, being our prime means of communicating our mysteries, ought to be an inspiration and an invitation to us to delve deeper into the symbolic aspects of our Craft. Yet so often our work is recited without us even understanding the meanings of the words we are using. It becomes obvious, when words are constantly mispronounced, or emphases put in the wrong place, that the brother doing the work has no real understanding of what he is saying. The work to him has no real meaning and therefore it becomes mere form and ceremony without purpose.

Good ritual, learned well and delivered with expression and feeling, conveys the essence of our Order to our candidates. It demonstrates pride in our lodge, and serves as a stimulant for us to look deeper into the symbolism it contains. Let us not, therefore underestimate its importance recognizing at the same time that Freemasonry does not begin and end there.