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## The Art of Intention

Through the peculiar imagery of our Craft's ritual we are directed to form a rich mental picture, with ourselves as stone craftsmen on a philosophical and spiritual mission. The world in which we are placed is an abstract, ancient realm, with its own unique challenges and dangers.

Fortunately, we each are blessed with a physical, mental and spiritual self, a smaller monolithic temple under our own personal charge. As individual Masons we are to contribute ourselves to a Lodge of Craftsmen, a guiding refuge for one another in seeking the necessary tools of our trade. Without these tools of Freemasonry our Great Work would stand as nothing more than a pile of rough stones haphazardly stacked, waiting for the first tremors of collapse.

Unfortunately, some of our ancient instruments necessary in constructing our temple have fallen into obscurity under the dust of aeons long past. Too often we may find ourselves poorly prepared, shaping the pillars of our temples with our bare hands and polishing the marble with nothing but our finger tips. We may repeat the motions of our ancient Grand Masters, but when our tools are missing progress is slowed.

I believe each of us must embody right action and thought if we are to successfully continue our paths through this progressive science. In consideration of these ends I've uncovered a technique we'll reference as the "Art of Intention", inspired by Frances Yates's book, *The Art of Memory*<sup>1</sup>, and a research paper I came across in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.<sup>2</sup>

First, let us review the two main sources of inspiration for this newly uncovered technique. The renowned Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero formally defined the Art of Memory long before Frances Yates's book on the same subject was ever written. In the year 55 BCE, Cicero wrote:

Persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yates, Frances Amelia. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1974. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Chartrand, Tanya L., and John A. Bargh. "Automatic Activation of Impression Formation and Memorization Goals: Nonconscious Goal Priming Reproduces Effects of Explicit Task Instructions." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71.3 (1996): 464-78.

<sup>3</sup> Wood, Douglas H. "The Art of Memory and the Masonic Craft." *Philalethes* Dec. 2012: 6. Print.

In his December 2012 *Philalethes* article “The Art of Memory and the Masonic Craft”. W.: B.: Douglas H. Wood, Past Master of Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22, further elaborates on this definition:

The two essential components of the Art of Memory are therefore selecting a set of mental places, which form the structure and sequence of the things to be remembered, and choosing mental images to fit within the places, which evoke particular things.

In summarizing the technique from the Art of Memory, we would then imagine a building containing different rooms and a guiding path to follow from room to room. Within each room would sit symbols, or words, representing specific text we wished to memorize. We would arrange each passage in order from the first passage of text found within the first room, the second passage of text found in the second room, and so forth. The imagery from King Solomon’s temple, with its courtyards, outer chambers, inner chambers, and “holy of holies”, could be ideal for this practice.

The second source of inspiration for the “Art of Intention” was a social psychology research paper from 1996 titled “Automatic Activation of Impression Formation and Memorization Goals”. The abstract of this paper explains:

According to the auto-motive model, intentions and goals are represented mentally and, as representations, should be capable of nonconscious activation by the environmental context (i.e., "priming"). To test this hypothesis, the authors replicated 2 well-known experiments that had demonstrated differential effects of varying the information-processing goal (memorization) on processing the identical behavioral information. However, instead of giving participants the goals via explicit instructions, as had been done in the original studies, the authors primed the memorization goal. In both cases, the original pattern of results was reproduced. The findings thus support the hypothesis that the effect of activated goals is the same whether the activation is nonconscious or through an act of will.<sup>4</sup>

This social psychology paper explains that memorization with goals, or intention, directly effects *subconscious* intention. The goals consciously followed in one task were shown to carry over into later, unrelated tasks, even though

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<sup>4</sup> Chartrand, Tanya L., and John A. Bargh. "Automatic Activation of Impression Formation and Memorization Goals: Nonconscious Goal Priming Reproduces Effects of Explicit Task Instructions." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71.3 (1996): 464.

participants did not consciously intend that goal later in the second task.

Memorization with intention later effects *subconscious* intention.

By combining techniques from the Art of Memory with the ideas presented in the research paper, I'm able to propose a method which may further support us in developing our own Inner Light. Instead of imagining symbols or text in rooms along a path, we will imagine specific scenes in which we purposefully act out the meaning of the passage we're memorizing. For example, in the beginning of our Entered Apprentice obligation we each took a solemn vow of secrecy to never reveal that which had been invested to us. To memorize this part of our obligation using the "Art of Intention", we could imagine ourselves in a dangerous place where someone is demanding from us the secrets of Freemasonry. We place ourselves in this situation and mentally experience the required intention to keep this obligation secret, avoiding the betrayal of our vows.

When performing this exercise, I *personally* imagined my arms and legs chained against a damp stone wall in a dark underground dungeon. A single torch against the far wall lit the room. I imagined an angry man standing before me wearing a black hood demanding from me the secrets we're obligated to keep. In this elaborate scenario I am refusing to divulge our secrets.

I created a detailed scene in my imagination representing the text to be memorized. In this scene I acted out my intentions within the basement of a

structure I'll continue to build as I progressively memorize my obligation. This new memory is primed with intention in order to have that same intention *subconsciously* triggered in real world situations. This "Art of Intention" follows the basic guidelines presented in the Art of Memory, but includes an extra layer of conditioning. By using the "Art of Intention" we are taking an otherwise rough ashlar of symbolic memory lacking greater context, and transforming it into a smooth and polished ashlar, representing both context *and* intention. My newly primed memory will now impact my choices throughout daily life, passively reinforcing my obligation.

The "Art of Intention" supplies us with a new tool that helps condition our subconscious, converting it from enemy to ally. We are replacing the conflict between our unconscious perceptions and our conscious goals with a tool that supersedes our own habits. In effect, we are substituting a vice for a virtue.

During the construction of our own sacred temples we often find ourselves standing before gigantic and seemingly immovable obstacles, with nothing but the noble tools of our trade in hand. We must each slowly chisel away the unnecessary stone from our sculpture, shard by shard, until our masterpiece is illuminated. It is my hope and desire that the ideas expressed herein will provide useful aid and assistance to each of our worthy brethren in furthering the completion of this glorious task.

From moment to moment we are reborn. With each breath we are given the opportunities of a new destiny. We may contort ourselves in the hell of a tormented mind, or thrive within the heavens of an illuminated Soul. Our memories and subconscious work against us though, and the great neurons which retain for us our individual histories, at the same time curse us with the burdens of an imperfect self. Our ideas of who we are and who we'd like to be are carried forward into our rebirth. Our unrecognized assumptions and a life of external influence threaten to trap us within our current perspective. Without recognition of this illusion we are caught in a never ending cycle of inner purgatory, to suffer our wants and desires anew. The Great Work each of us has thus undertaken is a complex, challenging, and lifelong project, defining both what we do and who we will become.

Thank you.