

Lodge Courtesy



Transcribed from the Lodge Courtesy booklet provided by the Alabama Grand Lodge

FOREWORD

This booklet has been prepared as one of a series of four to provide all Masons with a beneficial knowledge of an insight into the Fraternity as a whole.

The title "Lodge Courtesy" implies that in this booklet you will find some of the items helpful in your Lodge life and activity. Lodge courtesies, like those of the profane world, are founded wholly in the Golden Rule. They oil the Masonic wheels and enable them to revolve without creaking. They smooth the path of all and sundry the truth of the ritualistic explanation of that "more noble and glorious purpose" to which we are taught to put the trowel.

Many things will be herein mentioned only briefly and it is suggested that for a more fuller explanation of points that the Grand Lodge Constitution and Edicts and Lodge By-Laws be consulted. By no means is this booklet meant to supplement the Masonic Code but to be informative and create a further interest. While the material contained herein must of necessity be of an esoteric nature, it is not intended for it to be secret, yet it should be treated with the same confidence as the Masonic Manual.

It has been prepared by the Grand Lodge of Alabama through the Committee on Masonic Education for the use of the Subordinate Lodges and their members.

Whether you are an "old timer" or the youngest Entered Apprentice in the Lodge the information contained in this booklet is intended to add to the "Light" you are in search of. So that the Brethren and Candidates may receive more light and become proficient in the royal art, to better understand the meaning of the symbolism of the Rituals, Ceremonies, and Forms, you must yourself be WELL INFORMED. Recalling the words "and by the regularity of your own behavior afford the best example for the conduct of others less informed". The Fraternity is too big, its activities too complex, its teachings too profound, its laws, usages, customs, and traditions too numerous for any individual to make his way without help, aid and assistance. In proportion, as one understands Freemasonry and becomes informed, the Lodge and the whole Fraternity prospers.

As an older Mason, it is to re-fresh your memory and point out things that have-through error-been neglected and possibly forgotten. As a coach or instructor, a help for inspiring and maintaining interest to the candidate as well as a handy source for brief bits of information for the correction of "errors and irregularities of your uninformed brethren".

Masonry is a unique institution. It permits no man to make innovations in its body of principles and landmarks. It was never intended that it should move enmasse; nor have a patriotic, social, industrial, or economic program; nor engage in any political controversy; nor espouse a religious organization; nor harbor a political party; nor promote the interests of a philosophical sect.

As an organization, the world should know only that there is such a thing as Masonry; and no publicity should need be given to the fact that one is a Mason. Masons

should be foremost and preeminent in every activity of life. For leadership, the Mason should excel in government, social, business, industrial, club, fraternal, religious and home life. That a man is a Mason should be a guarantee of sterling integrity, and an honest and sincere faithfulness.

Conventions are the rule which society makes for itself, without the force of law, by which its members live together with the least friction. Masonry has developed its own conventions, by which its members should act in Lodge and the Anteroom. Not to proceed according to their dictates is not a Masonic offense; it is merely a lack of Masonic manners.

As you passed through the Degrees, you received instruction in the Ritual, Charges and other ceremonies. You were carefully taught those essential things which a man must know in order to be a good Mason. But unless you belong to a proficient lodge, or have a well informed brother for an instructor, it is doubtful if you will be told much about these little niceties of lodge conduct. With the aid of this booklet and regular lodge attendance you will cultivate good Masonic manners.

Although the section titled "The Instructor" is placed at this point in this booklet the information contained in that section is not considered as Lodge Courtesy but to inform the instructor that his duty will include explaining and instructing the candidate on "Lodge Courtesy" as well as in the requirements of the degree.

THE INSTRUCTOR

One of the most enjoyable duties and great privileges you might perform in Masonry is the Instruction of a candidate in his lessons. A desire to repay what your instructor gave to you by your time and talent to others. Whether this is done on a full time or part time basis is immaterial but there are certain requirements, considerations and qualities that an instructor must possess or at least cultivate. One of the main requirements is to be proficient in the degree you attempt to teach. If you are in doubt about a certain point, be sure you have it right before you attempt to teach it. It is easier to get it right the first time than "unteach" it from a candidate. The District Lecturer or a member of the Committee on Work is always available in your respective district if needed. District Conferences are held periodically for instruction and information. Faithful attendance will insure that we always maintain adopted work.

A good deal of consideration should be given the candidate. Remember this will be a new method of learning for him. As the proficiency in the degree is one of the requirements for advancement, the need to keep him interested and active will improve the learning process but the instructor may have to vary the technique with the individual. Keep him informed of Lodge activity, introduce him to brethren he does not know, take him to neighboring lodges to witness the degrees, show him how he will turn in his proficiency in the Lodge room, etc. One quality that an instructor must possess is "Patience". For an instructor to become impatient with a candidate would be most uncomplimentary to the Fraternity. To the Candidate the effect of the degree is

perplexing, the atmosphere is new and inviting, the ancient landmarks, usages and customs are strange. It takes time and patience to explain and help one to understand.

Some Lodges conduct scheduled classes of instruction. This not only promotes good fellowship between the brethren but also gives others in the order a chance to become more proficient by visiting and participating in the sessions.

Whatever the method, it should be conducted in those conditions conducive to good learning-quiet, secluded and void of interruptions. The length depends on the individual.

TITLE

In the usages of Freemasonry, "Brother" is neither a sentimental nor a familiar form of address, but is a title-a distinction and an honor. A member does not attend a Lodge meeting in his capacity as a private individual, but is there in his capacity of the Degree through which he has passed-Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, or Master Mason. For this reason, in open Lodge always refer to "Brother A" in the same manner as any other officer in Lodge or Grand Lodge. Harmony as well as dignity would result if these facts were better understood and more faithfully recognized in the conduct of Lodge affairs.

MASONIC CONDUCT IN THE ANTEROOM

As soon as a Brother enters the Anteroom of a Lodge to attend a meeting, he should subject himself to all the requirements of a most exacting Masonic conduct. At no time, and particularly if he is late, should he indulge in loud talking that may be heard in the Lodge. His demeanor toward other Brethren in the Anteroom should be courteous, respectful, and gracious, as Masonry does not give any man license to take personal liberties with another. While this should be the rule of his conduct always, it is especially true if a candidate is present, awaiting a call to the preparation room. To give candidates, or other Brethren, the impression that vulgar conduct, obscene stories, levity, practical joking, or other forms of disrespect are countenanced by the Craft, is a misrepresentation of that for which Freemasonry stands.

ENTERING & WITHDRAWING

The Brother who enters Lodge after it has been opened should advance, on the square, to the Altar and salute the Worshipful Master. If the Worshipful Master is engaged, it would be proper to wait until acknowledged by him before being seated. Salutations should be given accurately, not in a perfunctory or slipshod style, but in a manner to show respect for the office to which the salutation is made. You are not to withdraw from the Lodge without permission from the Worshipful Master and this should be one in the same manner as one entering the lodge.

THE APRON

The White Apron is the badge of a Mason. It should be worn outside the coat in Lodge meetings and in the manner you were instructed in the respective degrees. Brethren who respect the formalities of their lodge will not enter it undressed; that is, without their apron, or while putting that apron on. The spectacle of a brother walking up to the Altar, tying the strings and adjusting his apron while the Worshipful Master waits for his salute, is not a pretty one. The strangeness of the new badge of a Mason and unfamiliarity with its meaning causes many to forget that it is as important to a Mason in Lodge as clean clothes properly adjusted, is to the man in the street.

OPENING & CLOSING

The opening and closing ceremonies¹ are required at each lodge meeting. The duty of closing the Lodge is as imperative, and the ceremony as solemn as that of the opening. It is here brought to the attention of those who are called upon to attend at the Altar, that in handling the Holy Bible one should show a real feeling of reverence, not only for the Great Book of Books, but to those Great Writers who were inspired by God, to pen its Sacred Words.

In opening candidates should be seated where they have been instructed to sit at the conclusion of their respective degree. The Worshipful Master should begin meetings punctually at the time provided in the By-Laws, or set for special meetings. It is extremely discourteous to the Worshipful Master for officers and members not to be present at the appointed time.

THE MASTER

While there is no written law requiring a Worshipful Master to wear a hat, it is taken as superiority of rank of office, a visible and conspicuous sign of his position as presiding officer and actual head of the Lodge. It is generally recognized as a symbol of that office. The adopted work requires it and it is imperative that he do so.

The Worshipful Master is all powerful in the Lodge. He can put or refuse to put any motion. He can rule any Brother out of order on any subject at any time. He can say what he will, and what he will not permit to be discussed. Brethren who think him unfair, arbitrary, unjust, or acting illegally, have redress; to the Grand Master or to the Grand Lodge.

SIGNS

Signs belong to the inner essence and esoteric life of the Craft. They will, therefore, always be given with careful accuracy and full decorum.

The Worshipful Master occupies the most exalted position in the lodge. A lodge which does not honor its Worshipful Master, not because of what he himself may be, but on account of the honor given him, is lacking in, Masonic courtesy. The position he

occupies, not the man, must be given the utmost respect, if the traditions of the Fraternity are to be observed. It is, therefore, to the Worshipful Master, not to John Doe who happens to be in that station, that you offer a salute when you enter or retire from Lodge. The salute to the Worshipful Master is your renewed pledge of fealty and service, your public recognition before all men of your fidelity. To offer your salute as if you were in a hurry, too lazy to make it properly, or bored with its offering, is to be highly disrespectful and discourteous.

THE GAVEL

In the Lodge, the gavel, emblem of authority, is supreme. Failure to obey the gavel at once is a grave discourtesy. One rap calls the Lodge to order, two raps call up the officers and three raps call up the membership.

CONDUCT IN THE LODGE

In Lodge meetings, conduct takes the form of proper decorum, loud talk, restless moving about, laughter, flippancy, irreverence toward the Worshipful Master and other constituted officers of the Lodge, omission of the salutations, giving no heed to the business at hand, improperly entering and leaving, are all unseemly and indecorous behavior.

Brethren do not pass between the Altar and the East in Lodge except those engaged in degree work. It is a convention; but there is no penalty for its infraction. It is a courtesy offered the Worshipful Master. It is rooted in the theory that, as the Great Lights are essential to the regularity of the meeting, as these are in the particular care of the Worshipful Master, and as their place is upon the Altar, He should never be interrupted in his plain view of them, even for an instant. You should not talk of anything impertinent or unseemly, nor interrupt the proceedings, nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious or solemn, but pay due respect to the Worshipful Masters, Wardens, and Brethren. All members should behave in a seemly, gracious manner regarding every Brother his peer; generous in attitude with the opinions of others, yet kind and firm in sincere convictions during discussions and conduct of business, always with regard for the regulations of the Lodge and the laws of the Grand Lodge; observing all signs and gestures of courtesy and respect that harmony and dignity may prevail.

When a candidate is turning in his proficiency, the undivided attention of every member should be given him because this is an essential and necessary requirement before proceeding to the next degree. Applause after such an examination in the Entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft Degree is definitely not in order. The candidates reward will be advancement to the next degree. The turning in of the Master Mason proficiency is time spent above and beyond necessary requirement of this state and applause following such would be appropriate.

DISCUSSION

It is a courtesy to the Worshipful Master to advise him beforehand that you intend to offer thus and such a motion, or wish to bring up thus and such a matter for discussion. You have the right to do it without notifying him in advance, just as he has the right to rule you out of order. But the Worshipful Master may have plans of his own for that meeting, into which your proposed motion or discourse does not fit. Therefore, it is a courtesy to him to ask him privately, if you may be recognized for your purpose, and thus save him the disagreeable necessity of seeming arbitrary in a public refusal.

THE BALLOT

With the exception of the Great Lights, the ballot is the most sacred thing in the Lodge. It is the only other object within the Lodge that shares a place upon our Altar. Every Mason owes his Lodge the duty of protecting it against unfit candidates and every Mason owes every petitioner a fair and impartial ballot. The upright man and Mason, true to the traditions of the Craft in casting a ballot, will never be actuated by prejudice, selfish motives, or vindictiveness, to influence his behavior at the ballot box. It is strictly forbidden for a Mason to reveal how he will or has voted or in any way to seek to influence the vote of other members.

In Lodge the Worshipful Master requires the satisfaction of the law which provides that all Brethren present must vote.

CONFERRING DEGREES

During the conferring of the Degrees, there should be silence and rapt attention to all that is said and done. Everyone present should have his mind centered on the work for further mysteries and lessons that will unfold themselves with each new witnessing of the Degrees. The ritual is a form but not a formality. Its function is to move profoundly the inner life of the candidate; to accord him a genuine moral and spiritual experience; to give him a vision of a new life; to use its potentialities; and zealously to perform its duties and make the necessary sacrifices.

It is important that all participating in the work of the Ritual be so imbued with its meaning that the spiritual atmosphere of a Lodge, during the conferring of the Degree, will be felt by all present.

It is regrettable that a few Brethren in some of our Lodges are inclined to mislead a candidate, by pretending to give him information designed to be of help to him during the conferral of the Degrees, such practices can only tend to confuse one taking the Degrees and in our opinion a member who indulges in such practices has not yet learned the lessons that were intended for him, when he took the Degrees.

A candidate should be in possession of all his faculties during the conferring of his Degrees and anything said, or done, by a Brother which can only deter his thinking, is

highly un-Masonic and should be deemed a shame on those who take part in such behavior.

Each member should strive to so perfect himself in the presentation of his part of the Ritual that he will be able to recite it accurately and impressively without conveying to the candidate the impression that it is something committed to memory.

An outburst of mirth has no place in the conferring of the Degrees, more particularly in the third Degree where, unfortunately, the solemnity of the occasion is sometimes forgotten.

A degree cannot be put on without the services of the brethren. When you are asked to take part in a degree you should not attempt a part which you do not know or at least have had some practice. Remember, you can find distinction in the degree work as readily as a candidate can in his proficiency.

THE LECTURES

The lectures are vital and an integral part of the degrees. They should be listened to attentively and thoughtfully and they will prove to be of great spiritual value as they are absorbed. Their lessons will involuntarily become the rule and guide of your conduct through life.

It is extremely discourteous to the Worshipful Master and officers and a Masonic affront to the candidate to retire to the anteroom before or while the lecture is being delivered. The high spiritual significance of our teachings will unfold and give a conception of Masonry that will afford deep personal satisfaction, and amply compensate for learning the lectures even though the need of delivering them may never arise.

VOUCHING

This area should be of concern to every Mason as he travels and meets with the many members of the Fraternity as well as those who may visit the Lodge. Avouchment may be made in several ways as pointed out in Edicts 176-181.

As outlined briefly for the purpose of this booklet-vouching may be done as follows-by personal knowledge which constitutes due trial and strict examination by a committee, or having sat in regular Lodge with the Brother. Presence In other bodies such as AASR York Rite Shrine, OES, etc; is not sufficient evidence for avouchment.

VISITORS

Every Lodge at some time has a knock upon the outer door by one or more Brethren wishing to visit the Lodge. This sometimes requires the services of an examining committee. It is then the duty of the Worshipful Master to appoint three Brethren to perform this duty the one designated as chairman, should be well qualified to conduct

the examination, but there should be no hesitancy on the part of the others to serve on such a committee.

Whenever a Lodge has visitors a special effort should be made by each member present to extend to them the utmost in Lodge courtesy, especially first time visitors and distinguished guests.

THE FLAG

The National Flag should be mounted on a stand and placed in the East of the Lodge on the right of the Worshipful Master. If and when the Pledge of Allegiance is given in the Lodge all the Brethren will rise, face the Flag, stand at attention and salute by placing the right hand over the heart. Each Lodge should strongly consider the act of flying the National Flag on all appropriate occasions.

SMOKING

The By-Laws or customs of your Lodge will govern your actions on this matter. It is strongly recommended that serious consideration be given to the sanctity and solemnity of the occasion to forego this habit particularly during the conferring of the degrees.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is hoped that some questions have been answered. Freemasonry solicits no man to join it. Its candidates must be good men and true and come of their own free will, having formed a favorable opinion of it through the good report of its reputation. Freemasonry's main function is to make good men better. Harmony is the first law of the Lodge. For one man to live in unity with another is the very essence of the Royal Art. Since it is the nature of decorum to nurture and protect harmony, good conduct is the bulwark of the Craft. It is also a guarantee of equality in which each man is treated with the same courtesy as every other.

NO LODGE CAN RISE ABOVE THE ENTHUSIASM OF ITS MEMBERS AND THE SKILL OF ITS OFFICERS. SEE YOU AT LODGE!

OUR NATION'S MASONIC LEADERSHIP

George Washington First President

Thomas Jefferson Third President

James Madison Fourth President

James Monroe Fifth President

Andrew Jackson Seventh President

James Knox Polk Eleventh President

James Buchanan Fifteenth President

Andrew Johnson Seventeenth President

James A. Garfield Twentieth President

William McKinley Twenty-Fourth President

Theodore Roosevelt Twenty-Fifth President

William Howard Taft Twenty-Sixth President

Warren G. Harding Twenty-Eighth President

Franklin D. Roosevelt Thirty-First President

Harry S. Truman Thirty-Second President

Gerald R. Ford Thirty-Eighth President