

Standard Of Masonic Conduct

Unknown

This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from a paper of the same title prepared by the Committee on Masonic Research and Education of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Minnesota.

It has been said that the purpose of Freemasonry is the pursuit of excellence. All of the teachings of Masonry are directed to excellence in performing our duties to God, our country, our neighbors and ourselves. The continuing effort to improve oneself is the true mark of a Mason. This principle was stated well by Grand Master Donald J. Flood at the annual communication of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota.

"We must constantly remember that in every moment of our life – in public – at work – at pleasure – with our families – even when you are alone – You are a Mason!

"The non-Masons who know us will judge each of US, and Masonry itself, by the way in which we conduct ourselves. We have in trust the reputation of Masonry. Let us not betray that trust! Masonry will flourish if we follow these precepts.

"Before we can expect to attract good men to the fraternity by our conduct and reputation in public, we must learn to conduct ourselves with propriety in the Lodge. One of our first duties shall be loyalty to the fraternity and obedience to its laws. This is a fundamental requirement.

"Propriety is not the result of law, but rather of tradition, custom and usage. Like good manners, it has behind it only the force of opinion. While there (may be) no penalties for breaches, there are tangible rewards for observance of the rules and ceremonies of good manners!"

An ancient philosopher advised "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." This also applies to your actions when you are visiting another Lodge, particularly in other states or countries. While the principles and ideals of Masonry are universal, social customs and Masonic traditions and laws differ from place to place. For example, all Masonic Lodges open with a prayer, and it is not surprising that the words of the prayer may vary from place to place. When we go to other states in our country we find that the attitude of prayer is not the same everywhere and in other countries the name of Deity may even be different. Likewise we find that the customs concerning such things as the proper way to address a Brother or a Lodge officer, the

appropriate dress for a lodge meeting, proper topics of conversation, and even the working tools and the Grand Masonic Word change as we go around the world. But wherever you may be, you can be sure that respect and honesty toward Masons and Masonry, as taught by the square and compass, will be the fundamental guide for your conduct.

In this paper we will discuss the principles, traditions and ideals that should guide our conduct as Masons. This paper does not present a list of Masonic do's and don't's. Such an attempt would fail for at least two reasons: first, no one would read it, and second, as Masons, each of us is expected to apply the tools and principles of our Craft to our own lives.

One of the most interesting experiences in Masonry is to visit a Lodge in another Grand Jurisdiction. Whether it is in a foreign country or just in another state, there will be interesting and surprising differences. But, a word of caution, you must comply with the laws and customs of the Masonic Jurisdiction in which you are traveling! Therefore, before you visit, find out what to expect. The List of Masonic Lodges, found in every Lodge, give the names and locations of all the Lodges in the world that are recognized by the Grand Lodge. Since there are clandestine Lodges, it is essential that this book be consulted. Finally, if you are in a foreign country, you should consult the Grand Lodge office in that country.

In the United States and Canada, a current dues card is required as proof of membership. However, there are countries where a dues card will not be accepted. In these cases a letter of introduction from your Grand Lodge is necessary.

Concerning appropriate dress, a dark business suit is often acceptable for a Lodge meeting. But, in some Grand Jurisdictions, formal dress is required even for side-liners. Outside of North America you will usually be expected to have your own apron, so carry it with you. Regarding Masonic pins, rings, etc., these are often worn only within the Lodge. Some Grand Lodges even have rules that prohibit wearing these in public. And then there are countries which have outlawed Freemasonry. It is not prudent to even carry a pin into those countries.

Lawsuits Between Masons – While this is not an area of strict Masonic regulation, it is a subject addressed by ritual, traditions and Masonic law. Our ritual states that "no contention should ever exist" between Master Masons. Tradition has interpreted this to include the subject of law suits, requiring that Brothers make every attempt to resolve such differences without recourse to the courts.

Business Advertisements and Contacts – The general rule in these matters is that you should not seek financial benefit from your Masonic membership. To do otherwise is considered to be in poor taste at the best and unmasonic or even criminal at the worst. Lodge membership lists cannot be used for business mailings. Masonic membership cannot be used in a commercial or political advertisement or sign. The square and compasses cannot be used for any commercial purpose, as a symbol or a design. This point has been tested in the courts and Masonry has the exclusive use of this emblem.

Respect – Every person has a basic need for both self-respect and the respect of others. When our friends show, by word or deed, that they hold us in low regard, we may react as strongly as if we were threatened. On the other side, we would do almost anything for a person who holds us in high esteem. Thus, respect is both the least honor that we require and the highest honor that we can hope for in our dealings with our fellow men.

The term "respect" includes courtesy, tolerance, kindness, sympathy, prudence, temperance, and a host of other concepts that refer to our relationships with people. It encompasses our words, our actions, our appearance and even our thoughts. Inside the Lodge and outside of it, we should strive to demonstrate in every way our respect for a Brother's honor, feelings, efforts, hopes and any other part of his life that we may contact.

While conduct within the Lodge is the concern of all Masons, it is especially important for the officers of the Lodge. Once again we quote from Brother Flood's comments:

"We can't expect our Brothers to know these principles if we don't teach them and practice them. This is Masonic education in its finest sense.

"It is not from the lack of desire to learn that the Craft suffers, but rather from the lack of instruction.

"Masonry does not exist for the mechanics of ritual alone. Just as important is the learning, interpretation and exemplification of that ritual and of the basic principles of our Order. Equally important, too, for the candidate and for every member is the need to fully understand these principles, as well as our responsibilities as Masons.

"What is required of every single one of us is the dedicated and devoted application of the high moral principles of Masonry. By these simple methods, we develop the character that guarantees our own self-improvement and discharges the duties of God, our country, our neighbors and ourselves."

Since officers set the example for the whole Craft, before seeking or accepting a line position a man should be certain that he is willing to demonstrate the highest standards.

Dress – In many Jurisdictions there is no mandatory dress code, but this does not mean that we should disregard our appearance. Although as Masons "We regard no man for his worldly wealth... ", human society everywhere considers a man's outward appearance to reflect his inner self and attitudes. Your manner of dress reflects the respect that you have for the dignity of Masonry, its work, its goals, and its members. At all times your apparel should be appropriate for the occasion and those attending, remembering that the altar of Masonry is the altar of God. Thus the clothes you would wear for a golf tournament or a degree in an underground mine may not be appropriate for work done in the Lodge quarters.

At Tyled Meetings – At the sound of the gavel in the East, the officers and brethren take their places and the Lodge comes to order. This means that everyone is seated unless called up by the

Worshipful Master or unless rising to address the Worshipful Master. In most introductions all speaking is directed to the East. Therefore it is improper for two Brothers to speak to each other during an open discussion, unless directed by the Worshipful Master, and it is never proper for two Brothers to hold a private conversation (whispered or otherwise) in a Lodge at labor.

Each candidate at each degree is instructed in the proper way to salute. He is also told that he should salute when rising to address the Worshipful Master and when entering or retiring from a Lodge while it is at labor. These instructions remain in effect even after we have completed our degrees. Always rise when speaking, even if you are only giving a second to a motion. Give salutes that are accurate and precise. A sloppy salute is actually a sign of disrespect ! Finally, when referring to a Brother or when addressing him, courtesy requires that we use the term "Brother" followed by his **last name**. Of course, "Worshipful Brother Jones," "Right Worshipful Brother Smith," or "Most Worshipful Brother Flood" are also proper forms.

The proper way to enter or retire from a Lodge is not always clear to new Masons. When entering or leaving a Lodge at labor, the proper place to stand, while giving the salute, is at the west of the altar. Not at the door or at your seat. The salute is normally given to the East, but the Worshipful Master may direct these salutes to be given to the Senior Warden. Of course, everyone should enter through the Tyler's door. The preparation room door is for candidates only. Every member guards that door, and the ballot is the key that locks or unlocks it.

There are probably no other topics of discussion that have caused as much ill will, alienation and contention as have politics and religion. In the interest of harmony among Brothers, it is considered un-Masonic to introduce any religious, political, or other divisive topic into a Masonic discussion.

A final word for the officers of the lodge. The flag of our country and the Great Light of Masonry merit our utmost respect, both in their care and their handling. The Bible should be handled with reverence and care, the flag should be treated with honor and should fly freely when being carried. The other jewels, furniture, and regalia should be cared for and kept in good repair to demonstrate the high regard we hold for our Craft and its work.

During Degrees – One of the most solemn and meaningful events in a Mason's life is the time of his raising. Yet we often see this degree marred by laughter and inappropriate comments. The Grand Lodge of Arizona requires the following to be read at the beginning of the second section of the Master Mason degree:

"My Brethren:

"A candidate is about to be raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason. The Lodge room will be used as a stage to enact a drama which, symbolically unfolds the great lesson of the immortality of the soul.

"To properly impress the candidate with the seriousness of this ceremony, there must be no talking, whispering, laughing or other commotion during the conferring of the degree. Bear in mind the fact the Temple, for this portion of the degree, is supposed to be silent and unoccupied.

"Only the participants in the drama are to speak, and they are instructed to make no facial expressions, gestures or other unusual deliveries which might induce levity. The cooperation of each one here present is EXPECTED.

"An adherence to these instructions will help serve as an impressive climax to the candidate's progress in Freemasonry and this section of the degrees could well be one of the richest experiences of his life."

The principles contained in this statement are equally appropriate for all degree work, lectures, preparations and gatherings connected with the degrees. Nowhere does Masonry give any man license to take liberties with another. Comments that are intended to arouse a candidate's concern for his personal dignity or safety are among the most discourteous acts that can be inflicted upon a candidate. Such actions are a gross misrepresentation of the Craft and are disrespectful to all of its members.

There is one form of disruption of degree work which comes from the best of intentions – side-line prompting. How often have we seen a forgotten word, or even a dramatic pause, produce an uproar as a number of concerned Brothers attempt to help the speaker. Prompting should be done only by the Worshipful Master or the one designated by him. The Masonic virtues of silence and circumspection are nowhere more appropriate than in this situation.

The perfect points of our entrance, as reflected in the four cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice, provide us with a complete guide for truly Masonic action. It behooves each of us to periodically evaluate ourselves against these four standards, to see where we have those rough corners to which the common gavel can profitably be applied.

Am I temperate in my relations with others, or have I been excessive in my actions toward someone? Have I displayed fortitude in pursuing the excellence I can achieve, or have I chosen to do as everyone else does? Do I direct myself wisely and prudently, or do I sometimes go beyond the bounds of courtesy and good taste? Have I given to each Brother, candidate, friend, and associate the consideration, help, and respect which they justly deserve, or have I let my own pride, comfort, and desires blind me to their needs?

These are the standards of Masonry. It is not easy to apply them to ourselves. But then, being a master of any craft is never easy, and being the Master of oneself is perhaps the most difficult of all.

STB - June 1986