

**MASONIC MANNERS, LODGE ETIQUETTE,
CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES**

By Paul Weathers, PM Oasis 52 Tucson AZ

www.Oasis52.org

It would be nice if we could just say, “use common sense”. But in Masonry it has to be more specific, as Masonic conduct is different from those of the “regular work a day world”. And if we practice conducting ourselves in certain ways in lodge, we will develop ways of conduct in our daily lives that will make us stand out as having something slightly different from others, and hopefully entice good men to pursue the degrees of Masonry.

Feelings and opinions on these subjects vary by different jurisdictions of the United States, and even to a greater extent by other cultures around the world. But with practice, some things just seem to fit in the SAME CATEGORY as “common sense,” and they render respect for the Masonic way of life, especially in Lodge while it’s in session. We must keep in mind that what may appear customary to us may appear strange or improper behavior when traveling abroad. But, if we do as we are taught, we may readily excuse and explain our conduct among our brothers, wherever we may travel.

Some things we take for granted in the lodge, such as not passing between the Three Great Lights of Masonry and the Masters pedestal in the East, except when conducting candidates. But, even these rules must be taught to the newly obligated brethren, and reminded in a gentle way when they are forgotten. The Master or one of the Wardens should usually do this, not by a sideliner with an excited warning. New brothers must be taught with respect, never in a way that would embarrass the new brother.

In some jurisdictions, the Three Lesser Lights are set a little way from the altar. Should you happen to be in a lodge with this arrangement, remember to never pass between the Three Lesser Lights and the Three Great Lights, as the Lesser Light must shine on the Great Lights, as much so as the Light of the Holy Writings must shine on the Worshipful Master for his Wisdom.

Now, on the subject of conduct on the sidelines; personal conversations between brothers when above a whisper, even for a couple of words, distracts the brethren from the lodge proceedings. So unless it's very important, it should wait. When sitting with a new member or a visiting brother, we may need to whisper some explanation. But it should be brief and in a low tone of voice, as in a whisper as much so as possible, as not to distract others.

And on the same subject, no one should speak aloud directly to anyone other than the Presiding Master, without his permission. And when arising to speak to the Master on any subject, we should be considerate. If what we have to say is going to be long winded; it may distract from the Master's agenda. Therefore, asking for permission to make your presentation should be approved by the Master in advance whenever possible. We should limit our words, especially on subjects of our personal interests.

After giving the DG&S's, give proper respect by looking directly to the Master for the first few words. Then, and only then, if it is for the benefit of all present, it is acceptable to look around the lodge room. Then when you're finished speaking, you should turn back to the East momentarily before sitting, in case the Master wishes to follow-up with questions or comments. If our speech goes longer than acceptable to the Master's agenda, he may rap us down. Should this be the case, we must accept it without question, as it is HIS lodge to rule and govern at his will and pleasure.

And while on the subject of saluting the Master, or the Senior Warden when the Master is distracted with lodge proceedings, it should be done properly. Use the count of 5 as you may have been taught, using sharp and distinct moves. (Demonstrate) Always complete the salute before speaking. To speak while we are giving the DG&S is showing disrespect to the Master and to the meanings of the act, which is recalling the obligations we took while kneeling at the Masonic Altar.

In most cases, once the Master raps the gavel, all speaking, movement and activities are to stop, and full attention directed to one in the Oriental Chair of the East. The Master should allow time for officers to return to their places and stations before the rap. But as with most rules, there are exceptions. Orders of the Master may require

movement after the rap of the Gavel. One example would be, when the master declares the lodge open he directs the Junior Deacon to inform the Tyler, then he raps the gavel. The Junior Deacon still must obey the direction of the Master and the Senior Deacon must return to his place.

At times, a Warden may use the gavel with directions of or for assistance to the Master. Deacons or Stewards may direct by the authority in their duties with the rods or the Marshal with his baton. Attention is then directed to that person for directions of action and conduct, as they are then representing the Worshipful Master.

Our Masonic Code doesn't require the Master to wear headgear. However, hats or other headdress worn while others present are not covered, grants attention to that person as being the one of authority. When covering is worn by the Master, he should know when to uncover such as at the mention of the name of the Supreme Being, during prayer, respect for the flag of the country, pledge of allegiance, and at other appropriate times.

The Master may choose not to wear the covering. But it is more proper that he wear it for opening and closing of the Lodge, when speaking to a candidate, making presentations or greeting guest at the altar. And at other times when it should be stressed that he is the one in charge, especially when he's not physically in the East.

When worn, the headdress should be appropriate to the rest of his attire, and never a cap unless it is part of a military uniform. No lodge officer or member should attempt to indicate to the Master, by word or gesture, to put his headgear on. He directs, and his will and pleasure is not to be questioned. Therefore, a brother should never presume to "correct" him. Remember that the Master of a Lodge has limited superiors. They are God and the Masonic Code. He should consider asking for God's guidance and assistance, and study the Masonic Codes so as not to violate them. But he is the sole authority on how he conducts himself in his lodge without question.

I'd like to interject something here about the Masonic Code. They are similar to military where regulations are law and manuals are guides. The Grand Lodge Regulations and Grand Masters Edicts should be considered as law, everything else is suggestions or guidelines.

Grand Honors are another matter of great importance. There are two types of Masonic Grand Honors. The DG&S's of the degrees are given only when within the tyled Lodge. Public Grand Honors of 3 X 3 may be used in lodge but especially before the public. And by customs and courtesies, we give applause after either.

These honors are for the Grand Master of our jurisdiction, Grand Masters of other jurisdictions, or Past Grand Masters, and in that order. However, when given to the one of higher ranking present, they must NOT be given to others unless agreed to by the highest and first one being honored. The same rule is used for inviting one to join the Master in the East. These honors are not to distract from the importance of the one of highest rank.

Punctuality is another matter of utmost importance. The Master should make an effort to open as close as feasible to the stated time, and by following an agenda, endeavor to close in reasonable time as determined by his agenda. More so importantly, the officers are to be properly prepared and in their respective places and stations on time, and the brethren properly attired and in their seats at the stated time for opening of the lodge. The Master should never have to wait for his officers to get in place to start a meeting.

It's understandable that on occasion, one is late for good reason, and that is forgivable, but it should not become a routine. Remember that unexcused tardiness is detrimental to the peace and tranquility of the lodge, and when it becomes a routine, it is disrespectful to the Worshipful Master and his Lodge. When coming in late we inadvertently cause some disruption, but every effort should be taken not to cause more disruption than necessary. Go to the west of the altar, not from the lodge room door or sidelines, give the proper salute and go to your seat. If the Master is occupied, step to the Senior Warden's front and slightly to his right and give him the proper salute for the degree and be seated. The same rules apply when excusing oneself from the lodge room.

Guest should be greeted cordially. Introductions should be made, especially to the Master and his officers. Make visitors and brothers, especially those not seen for a while, feel welcome and appreciated. Remember that first impressions are long lasting. We need to treat everyone in ways that will make them want to return, and they will probably speak favorably to others of their experience in our Lodge.

Proper dress for the occasions as well as proper conduct and stature is also a factor in making lasting opinions and impressions in the minds of visitors to our lodge. Movements done sharply by the officers and sitting uprightly with feet properly planted on the floor are also very impressive to observers. (Watch Brothers' Jason Petty and Ray Strong, they could be models for how we should sit and move. The sharp Marine image is imbedded in their posture and it is an impressive image for Masonic ritual and floor work. I think we all should try to emulate that conduct.)

Occasionally a brother works late or is held up in some way and can't change clothes before arrival. This is understandable, and no brother should be made to feel bad or embarrassed in these situations, not even with words in a joking way. We must remember that tolerance is an essential asset to good Masonic practices, and we should not judge a brother by his outward appearance but accept him for his inner self.

When balloting, approach the ballot box and give the DG&S to the ballot box. Remember that you're not saluting the East in this case, so don't wait for the Master to acknowledge your salute. And remember that the ballot is a secret vote and to discuss your intended ballot or how you balloted is a Masonic offense.

An example of a practice used in some jurisdictions is the sign of fidelity by placing the right hand over the heart, or even overlapping the left hand to the right when the 3 Great Lights are being arranged and rearranged and during prayer (demonstrate). My thinking on this is that should we not give at least as much honor to the Sacred Law as we give to the flag of our country? This practice, when or where adopted, shows special respect by the brethren of the lodge and admiration from visitors for how a lodge practices reverence.

While keeping these suggested rules in mind, laughter and friendly exchanges provide enjoyment in lodge and probably should be encouraged. But we must keep in mind to give proper considerations to candidates and other brothers at times when solemnity is required.

These are only a very few of the important points in Masonic manners, Lodge etiquette, customs and courtesies. They all have good merits and should be adhered to if we are to impress and show ourselves and others that Oasis Lodge # 52 is truly “The Place To Be For Masonry”.

Brothers, I hope none of you feel that this talk is meant to point out any particular thing you may have or have not done. It is meant to help us to learn and practice proper Masonic conduct and Lodge etiquette. It is given with the utmost respect for the Oriental Chair of the East and for my Brethren.

Finally, I am so proud of the progress this lodge has shown in these last few years. But we still can improve. I encourage all of you to continue perfecting your skills in the spoken rituals and sharpness in the floor work. We should have large turnouts of visitors due to talk of how sharp Oasis Lodge is. We already have other lodges asking for our help. But we should get so impressive that other Lodge Masters would ask us to demonstrate to their lodge how the work should be done. We have the ability in Oasis Lodge to achieve this proficiency.

My Masonic Brothers, the sun is rapidly setting in the West for many of us older Masons. The responsibility for carrying on the work of our beloved Craft and traditions must be entrusted to our younger Brethren. We must impart what we’ve learned to assist. But from what I’m seeing in the good brothers of Oasis Lodge, I know that our Lodge is in good hands and Masonry will continue to be well and alive with a great future.

Worshipful Master, I thank you and the brethren for this time and I hope my words today are helpful.

So mote it be.