

# Masonic Etiquette

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*(First of four installments)*

For the past ten years it has been my pleasant duty to visit our subordinate lodges in Manila and in the provinces where I had the opportunity to observe the ritualistic work performed by our brethren and to instruct or to give lectures on Masonic ritual.

Whenever the officers of a subordinate lodge would request me to help them solve certain problems pertaining to our ritual, I cheerfully give such assistance so that these brethren may be able to acquire the knowledge and to gain an understanding of our Masonic ritual.

With respect to our ritualistic work, we have been working earnestly and assiduously in order that our ritualistic work could be made uniform in all our lodges. Such objective, however, much as I regret to say, is still far from being realized. It is in this regard that I take the opportunity to mention certain facts gathered in my official visitations, facts that would reveal that there is a dire need of further dissemination of information relative to our ritualistic work.

Permit me to mention at the outset that the objective of this report is primarily to explain or to clarify certain aspects or parts of our ritualistic work in order that the commission of errors could be avoided. These if not properly corrected

would likely render our Masonic ritual undignified, unimpressive and meaningless. To exemplify or to reflect fully the aim, the spirit, the beauty and the wisdom of Masonry, I wish to suggest very strongly a Masonic behaviour for the exemplification of those brethren who have not as yet fully imbibed into their whole beings the Masonic truth.

With candor, I have yet to see a lodge wherein the work done is in strict compliance with our adopted work. I have yet to visit a lodge where proper Masonic behaviour is strictly observed. I refer to the observance of proper decorum in Lodge meetings such as in the conduct of lodge meetings, in the balloting of the candidates, in bringing in and in retiring the flag of our country and in performing other ceremonies in the lodge.

Every human association is governed by a code of etiquette without which such association will not function properly and efficiently. Masonry, like any other social organization, has its own code of etiquette. It is unique in the sense that if it were used outside of its own setting, it would lose its very essence, meaning, moral values and intrinsic beauty; within its own setting, such code becomes essential, beautiful and meaningful.

Masonic etiquette is a set of rules of convention, embodying the written and unwritten customs and tra-

ditions of Free-masonry, by which Masons are bound to govern their conduct when engaged in the rites and ceremonies of the Craft; also Masons would be able to equate properly their relationship with one another as well as Masons. In principle, Masonic etiquette belongs to the empire of good manners, a code by which gentlemen the world over govern their conduct.

Emerson, the great American transcendentalist and philosopher says that if good manners were lost it would be necessary for the next gentleman to rediscover it. This applies to Masonic etiquette without which our fraternal relations would be in a state of chaos.

Let us look into some of the most salient provisions of this indispensable Masonic code:

#### *Entering a Lodge*

The first duty of a brother before he enters a lodge is to sign the Tyler's book. When visiting a lodge, Masons should present their current year dues card to the Tyler, if such is requested by this officer. A brother should wear his apron on top of his outer garment. If he is late, he should ascertain from the Tyler what Lodge is open in order to avoid any embarrassment. Upon entering the lodge, the brother should go to the Altar and salute the Worshipful Master. If the Worshipful Master is occupied, this brother should go in front of the West and salute the Senior Warden.

This is done in order not to disturb the proceedings.

As a matter of courtesy the Master or the Senior Warden should nod as an acknowledgment of the salute and then indicate where the brother should take his seat.

No brother should enter during the opening and closing ceremonies and also during the time when a candidate is taking his obligation.

During degree work, a brother may enter and sit down quietly among the brethren.

#### *Lodge Meetings*

Whenever a Mason attends a lodge meeting, he should observe lodge etiquette and Masonic decorum. It is unnecessary for him to be reminded that during the time that the lodge is holding its meeting, he should conduct himself in a similar manner as when he is in the house of God.

Let me repeat the injunction of the Worshipful Master. He opens the lodge in this wise: "I now declare this lodge of Master Masons to be duly opened; requiring all herein assembled to conduct themselves with due order and propriety during the time the same may remain open." This injunction simply means that those present should act in a manner appropriate to the occasion. Those present should not hold private conversations without leave from the Worshipful Master, or they should not talk on anything impertinent or behave themselves in a ludicrous manner during the time when the lodge is engaged in its business.

In the discussions that may ensue, any reference to personalities, any bitter expression or manifestation of ill-will, any slur or aspersion upon the lodge or upon its officers and the Grand Lodge, or upon the fraternity itself, are condemned by the disciplinary law of the Craft.

Loud talking, unnecessary moving about the lodge, laughing, smoking, passing between the Altar and the East, omitting the sign when one

enters or leaves the lodge, attiring improperly, being inattentive to the business going on, reading the Monitor—for all these, no Mason need consult the book of etiquette to know that such indecorous manner is utterly improper; under such a condition or atmosphere nothing would conduce to the establishment of harmony within the lodge and certainly to the building of a strong moral, Masonic life!

A Worshipful Master should never permit the display of such behaviour nor should he countenance the show of ill manner in any form.

### *The Tyler*

Many of the Tylers, especially those who are not Past Masters, are not conversant with their duties. It is incumbent upon the Worshipful Master to instruct the Tyler on his duties. In addition to his duties, the Tyler should maintain order at the door; he should not admit visitors

without completely ascertaining whether they are in good standing; also, he should not permit anybody to enter the lodge at the time when the lodge is being opened or closed and during the time when the candidates are taking their obligations. A Tyler who understands and practices his art well keeps the Anteroom clean and in order; he piles neatly the aprons; and he never allows magazines, newspapers, books and similar objects to be scattered around.

A Tyler should not assume the responsibility and prerogative of examining a visitor and of administering the Tyler's oath, and later admit him to the lodge.

No visitor should be permitted to enter a lodge unless he has the permission of the Worshipful Master. Whenever a visitor seeks admission, the Tyler should notify the Worshipful Master through the Junior Deacon.

*(To be continued)*

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