

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MASTER MASON

The constant and incontrovertible duty of every Master Mason is “to preserve the reputation of the fraternity unsullied.” Leading a good life is the best means of carrying through the individual Mason’s responsibility to his lodge and the Craft. The conduct of each Master Mason is his own responsibility, and he must always strive to choose that course of moral action which will bring credit to himself and honor to the fraternity.

In his actions toward his brothers, Masons must always practice Brotherly Love. If your brother in Freemasonry should stumble or slip, offer your hand to him without judgment or harsh criticism, and remember that if tempted in the same way, you yourself might have fallen.

A Master Mason is also responsible to educate, guide and mentor his Fellow Craft and Entered Apprentice brothers in the ways of the Craft. In operative Masonry, the master taught and supervised his younger, less skilled guild members, teaching and guiding them to maturity as master craftsmen worthy of the name. Without a master, the student might not learn the craft correctly, and much valuable time would be wasted on trial and error. In speculative Masonry, Master Masons are expected to be exemplars to the younger brethren in both an ethical as well as a moral sense. One great benefit of teaching is that the teacher very often learns as much as or more than the student from the unique synergy of the student/teacher relationship. Master Masons are expected to provide the same moral and ethical leadership in their families and their communities.

LODGE ATTENDANCE

There are no mandatory attendance requirements as there were in ancient craft lodges and no specific penalty for not attending (short of ignoring a formal summons from the Master as you swore to observe in your various obligations). However, every Master Mason has a moral obligation to be loyal to, and support by active participation, a lodge, as through it Masonic Light is made available as well as the other benefits which come with his membership in the Fraternity.

You should attend lodge as often as possible and join in the fellowship that is a

significant part of Freemasonry. Having a large number of Brethren present to witness and assist in the degrees of new Masons makes the experience more meaningful for them. For you, experiencing a degree over the years, from either the sidelines or as a member of the degree team, brings new insights. We take from Masonry what we need. As our needs change over time, we discover answers in the work which we may not have seen or heard before.

THE MASTER MASON AS MENTOR

When Odysseus left for the Trojan War, he placed his friend Mentor in charge of the education and welfare of his young son, Telemachus, as reported in the *Odyssey* by Homer. Thus, the term Mentor has come to signify one who teaches and guides the younger person along the correct paths of morals, ethics and philosophical knowledge. Aristotle, for example, was a mentor to Alexander the Great.

A mentor is a trusted friend, counselor or teacher, usually a more experienced person in both knowledge and experience, who shares his knowledge and experience through good examples and advice to the student. Master Masons should assume responsibility for training the next generation of our fellows in the ways of the Craft. This training includes not just the ritual but also the moral and ethical considerations of Masonry. Assist as mentor for the younger brothers and build the future of Freemasonry by your efforts.

MASONIC RELIEF

Masonic Relief in time of need may be applied for by any Master Mason—either to his own lodge or to an individual Master Mason. In every case, the individual asked has the right to determine the worthiness of the request and whether such aid can be granted without material injury to his family. Relief is a voluntary function of both the lodge and the individual. If the lodge's financial condition will not allow it to help, a distressed brother can apply to the Grand Lodge for help. The widow and orphans of a Master Mason, who was a member of the lodge at the time of his death, are also entitled to consideration if they apply for assistance. The same conditions as to worthiness and the ability and willingness of the lodge apply in these cases. The Grand Lodge of California maintains two facilities, one in Union City and one in Covina, California, which are supported by Masons through donations, bequests and investments. They provide excellent and complete care for our senior members and their wives and widows. Your Master or Secretary can provide you with more information on the Masonic Homes if needed.

MASONIC VISITATION

Before you can sit in another lodge, you must prove yourself to be a Mason in good standing and have permission from the Master of the lodge to enter. In order to attend another lodge, you must have your paid-up dues card with you and either pass an examination in the modes of recognition or be avouched by a brother who has sat in lodge with you previously. One way to keep the modes of recognition fresh in your mind is to attend regularly degree conferrals and participate in the work.

During the examination, the examining committee should ask to see your current dues receipt. You may be asked to give the Test Oath which is found in the *Monitor*. The examining committee should also verify that you are in possession of the secrets of Freemasonry. This may be done by using the question and answer sequence at the end of the oral proficiency which begins with "I hele."

When visiting, you should be sure that the lodge you would like to attend is either part of our California Grand Lodge or another Grand Lodge which our Grand Lodge recognizes. This information is available in the *List of Lodges Masonic*, a volume published annually which includes a comprehensive list of every Grand Lodge recognized by the Grand Lodge of California, together with the constituent lodges of each. Every lodge Secretary should have a copy of this book in his office and at the Tiler's desk as well.

EXAMINING VISITORS

The responsibility for examining Masonic visitors to your lodge is delegated by the Master to a committee of Brethren. The committee members must satisfy themselves that the visitor is indeed a Mason in good standing in a regular lodge, recognized by the Grand Lodge of California. The Master may call upon any member of the lodge to serve on the examining committee. Kindness and courtesy should be shown to all visitors, Masonic and otherwise, at all times. If you are asked to serve on an examining committee, do so with respect to the visitor and with due knowledge of the fact that if you do not conduct a proper examination, a cowen or profane may be granted admission to the lodge.

BALLOTING ON APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Only Master Masons in good standing have a right to vote. No member present can be excused from balloting on any applicant before the lodge. No member will be

permitted to retire from the lodge to avoid casting his ballot, and the lodge room will be sealed from the start of the balloting until the ballot box is cleared by the Master and the decision announced. In California, the white ball indicates an affirmative, or favorable, ballot, and the black cube indicates a negative, or unfavorable, ballot. If there is no reason to believe otherwise, the report of the investigating committee is usually accepted, and a favorable ballot is cast on an application for membership.

If there is an objection to an applicant, it should be raised *before* the ballot is taken. Every Mason has the right to speak to the Master privately and express any concerns or objections he may have about an applicant. If there is some legitimate reason to indicate that the applicant is unworthy, for strictly Masonic—*not personal*—reasons, a black cube may be cast to protect the lodge from an undesirable member. As you approach the ballot box, examine your motives and be sure that the ballot you are about to cast will do justice to both the candidate and to Freemasonry. The right to secrecy of the ballot is guaranteed by Masonic law, and custom allows each member full freedom in balloting on applicants without undue influence or prejudice. No brother should disclose how he voted, and no brother should inquire into how another brother voted on a particular candidate.

Balloting occurs at Stated Meetings. Once the ballot box is placed on the altar and the Senior Deacon has balloted, the Master will invite the remaining brothers to ballot. Each member then approaches the altar from the West, standing a few paces back from the brother casting his ballot. When it is your turn to ballot, you stop at the altar, give the due guard and sign of an Entered Apprentice Mason and then insert your hand into the ballot box, selecting a white ball or black cube which is then inserted through a hole inside the box. After withdrawing your hand from the ballot box, you return to your seat.

ENDORISING APPLICANTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Before endorsing the membership application of *anyone* for initiation into the Masonic Order, it is necessary to determine the applicant's true motives for initiation, his expectations of the Craft, and the quality of his character. A man must be of good moral character and show himself to be capable and desirous of intellectual and philosophical growth. He should be responsible fiscally to the degree of his station in life, and he should be in reasonable health and be capable of participating in the ritual and memorizing the required work. Provisions can be

made for those men with some physical or mental disabilities to partake of the benefits of Freemasonry, and your Master should be consulted if this situation arises *before* an application for membership is accepted. Remember that the avowed purpose of Freemasonry is to “make good men better,” not repair or resurrect bad ones. Not everyone is qualified by background or temperament to become a Freemason. Signing the application of a man who wishes to become a Freemason is a significant responsibility, and by doing so, be aware that you are committing yourself to assist and guide him as he grows in Freemasonry.

INVESTIGATING APPLICANTS

Investigating applicants is a very serious responsibility and should never be taken lightly. Serving on an investigating committee should be regarded as a mark of special trust by the Master of your lodge. Only those who can be counted on to make a complete and impartial inquiry into the applicant’s character and determine his worthiness to become a Freemason should be selected. The members of the investigating committee are known only to the applicant and to the Master who appoints them. The formal reports of these members are likewise known only to the Master and are destroyed after a candidate is voted upon. Three favorable independent reports are required for the Master to announce to the Lodge membership that a *full and favorable* report has been returned. In some instances, only two of the three reports will be returned to the Master. In that case, he will announce only that a *favorable* report has been received. If *any* of the reports are returned NOT recommending the candidate, his application shall be returned without action and his application fees returned.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Your financial responsibilities as a Mason are twofold. First is the mandatory payment of annual dues. Second are voluntary but very vital support contributions to certain charities, distressed worthy brothers, and other Masonic organizations, as you desire. By paying dues, each brother carries his share of the expenses to run the lodge and pays a portion of the expenses of Grand Lodge. Regarding voluntary financial support, you along must determine the extent of your participation, measuring the need against your financial ability. However, it is the contributions of California Masons which support our various Masonic charities, including our Masonic Homes. Remember the lecture on Faith, Hope and Charity – “and the greatest of these is charity.”

A Mason who fails to pay his dues for a period of more than twelve months is subject to suspension after appropriate notification by the lodge secretary. There is no reason, however, that a brother should be suspended for nonpayment of dues. Not being able to pay one's dues can be handled easily and without embarrassment. No lodge should suspend a brother who is financially unable to continue payment of dues. A distressed brother should privately inform the Master or the Secretary of his situation. One of these officers will take care of the situation so no record is shown on the books and no debt is accumulated. This is not Masonic charity, but, rather, Brotherly Love. In all cases, the other Brethren in the lodge will know nothing about the situation.

THE CALIFORNIA MASONIC CODE

California Masonic law is codified in the *California Masonic Code* (CMC). Every member of a lodge and every Masonic organization in this jurisdiction must adhere to the rules and regulations of the CMC. Failure to do so may be grounds for disciplinary action ranging from censure to expulsion. Every California Freemason is encouraged to become familiar with this document. The CMC is available on line from the Grand Lodge Web Site at www.freemason.org.