

Civility for January 2020

As announced last month, this will begin a series of articles on Civility, whose intent is to open a dialogue or discussion in your lodge. This month's topic is **Tolerance** and **Patience**. These particular Masonic virtues are the very foundation upon which every Mason should build his personal and, thereby, his Masonic Character. Beyond politics and religion, and, oh yes, sports, a Mason has no other tenet to restrict his thoughts, words or deeds. If asked, we will individually declare ourselves to be tolerant of our Brothers opinions and patient of those whose actions don't coincide with our aspirations. But then, the Lodges may have need to discuss finance or a disputed project and where does that tolerance and patience go?

We all have knowledge where a mis-spoken word or attitude has caused the harmony of the Lodge to be discordant at best and just short of fisticuffs at the worst. Having trouble maintaining your tolerance? Lost your patience? These are not Masonic clothes that you can put on or take off at will. There is a word for this type of behavior – hypocrite. And I might add, UnMasonic.

Maybe I can help with your transition from mortal human being to be that better man that is a Mason. Let me introduce Chief Denny, the most crusty and salty career sailor that it has been my pleasure to meet. After copping an attitude when an ordinary seaman did not jump to my order to suit me, I was railing and ranting about the quality of our new recruits and the general decline of the Navy. Chief Denny asks if I want a philosophy that will help me live longer, happier and without my hair falling out with stress (so much for the hair). "Sure", I said. The Chief looks me in the eye and states, "Never worry about the Pi** ants while the elephants run free.", and then walks away. What the he**? Hours, days and weeks of deep thought and considerable ponderance came up with the same conclusion, Chief Denny was crazy.

Then the Chief approached and said, "I see you are stupid and still don't get it. It's so simple. Don't worry yourself about the little nits in life. They are mere annoyances and don't mean a thing to anyone, anywhere, anytime. In the long term, they will not alter or change the world. They will not make you or them a better person by giving false grandeur to such a small and insignificant thing."

CLICK! That seaman did not do the task fast enough or in a way that I would have done it. So what. The Lodge voted to raise dues, change the meeting date, sponsor a De Moly chapter. Brother so and so thinks we should cancel the dinner and begin selling fireworks. Elephants??

I'll give you the same test that Chief Denny gave me. The house is on fire. Ant or elephant? ANT! Nothing you can do to stop it. The best you can do is roast marshmallows. Test, the car won't run, and you are going to be late to Lodge. ANT! Call a Brother that infrequently attends Lodge, explain and ask for a ride. Worshipful Master is not the best at Ritual. ANT! Suggest that you want to brush-up on your own opening and ask him for help.

For me, life has been a big ant hill. They are everywhere and seem to get into everything. I do what I can to be tolerant and support other ideas, activities and people. Especially people because everyone of them is... well, different. I do my best to be patient with others faults (as I see them) as I would ask for their patience with my own shortcomings. In all my life I have met only ONE elephant, one thing actually worth worrying about. Ask me sometime.

Now if you are like me and haven't learned much since youth and need someone to explain the moral of the story, here it is. If you don't develop a broad tolerance and strong patience; people and things will always plague you with ants. Confronting someone to change their opinion by trying to convert them to yours will never succeed in accomplishing anything except an escalating argument and bad feeling all around. It only convinces them that you are argumentative, unreasonable, uninformed and a jerk.

We will continue the discussion of Tolerance and Patience next month. I hope that you take and read this in Lodge. If nothing else, it will help you with that character development we talked about.