

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1974**

**Grand Orator
Walker S. Kisselburgh
"A Flickering Flame?"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Grand Lodge Officers, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished guests and my Brethren

Last year at this time you listened to an excellent Grand Oration entitled "The Time is Now." This message stressed the point that there have been critical times in our American Masonic History when our forefathers rose to the occasion and brought our esteemed institution out of atmospheres of despair.

Let us, at this moment, continue on with this subject because one year later we are still in a critical era so far as our honored fraternity is concerned. This critical era concerns every one of us and we, like our forefathers, are going to have to do what they did. They did not sit idly by and allow their honored fraternity to die. They rose to the occasion, rolled up their sleeves and went to work. In reality they became "operative" Masons who built their Lodges.

Our Masonic forefathers have left us a tremendous heritage. The Masonic heritage that we leave to our children and the Masons of the future should be held in the same reverence with which we hold our Masonic forefathers.

The events that have transpired these past few months have shocked and saddened all of us. We have seen men in our government who have abused their power and thought they were above the law. And yet, as in the past, we will overcome these setbacks and go on to greater heights, because this is the American way. Now, more than ever, we must arise to the occasion and provide leadership -the likes we have never seen before.

Our fraternity, like our government, is indestructible and we will provide leadership in our Lodges to continue this indestructibility.

You Brethren sitting in the Grand Lodge Communication today are the ones to whom we are addressing our remarks. You are the leaders of our Lodges and it is on your shoulders that rest this tremendous responsibility of providing the leadership we need.

Our Lodges are crying out for inspired leadership. If you can provide it for them, they will respond. They will respond so enthusiastically that you won't believe it.

To provide this leadership, you must have confidence in your ability to lead. You must pass on your enthusiasm and leadership to your junior officers so that when they occupy the station of Worshipful Master, they will have been properly indoctrinated .

My Brethren, along with leadership will come pride. Pride in your Lodge, pride in your work and most important, pride in yourself. With pride and leadership you will be able to perform miracles. Our Masonic forefathers had a great deal of pride in their Masonry and furnished leadership that is an inspiration to all of us.

In the early days, the Masonic Lodge was the focal point or hub of social activities. And Masons looked forward to attending Lodge every week because they enjoyed the fellowship and activities that it provided. However, this attendance has suffered drastically this past 25 years due to competition from other interests. And when these other interests become more important than the Lodge, then it is only natural that our fraternity will suffer.

To improve attendance in your Lodge today is a mountainous task and yet it must be done to stimulate the Masonic spirit and to keep our institution in a healthy and enviable condition. This can be done with proper leadership. We must be constantly on the lookout for future leadership in our Lodges because it is most important that we have continuing leadership. Not all members of our Lodges are leaders, and we must make a diligent search for this leadership.

Perhaps he might be a Brother who joined your Lodge several years ago and was too busy to become a junior officer at the time he joined the Lodge. Contact this brother and see if he is available today.

There have been isolated cases where a Brother was put into line as Senior Deacon or Junior Warden, when he did not have eight or nine years to devote to his Lodge as an officer because he was too busy at the time. Of course, this must be done with the cooperation and complete harmony of your fellow officers. But the important thing to remember, Brethren, is the best interest of your Lodge. If you can get an outstanding Brother with excellent leadership qualities to agree to go into the line and become Worshipful Master in three to four years, you should make every effort to encourage him. This can be the first step in bringing your Lodge up to its capabilities.

The second step deals with the most important word in the English language - communication. Somehow, in the past, it has been communicated to us that Masonry is a secret society and that all of our work is done in an atmosphere of strict secrecy. First of all, let us remove from our minds that Masonry is a secret society. It is not. We must remove this stigma if our fraternity is to properly grow, and Brethren, it must grow if it is to survive and remain in a healthy condition.

Let us go back, for a moment, to the coaching of our three degrees. If you were like me, your coach impressed upon you that what you are learning should not be revealed to anyone. Because you believed your coach, who most likely was a newly raised Master Mason, you have not revealed anything to anyone. In other words, we are never told what we can reveal, so for the fear of revealing something, we don't reveal anything.

Let each of us here in this great Grand Lodge pledge that we will educate ourselves so that we, the leaders, will be able to communicate with our Brethren- especially the candidate's coach. Then they will be able to pass this communication on to the candidate. The Candidate's coach is the most important liaison between the Lodge and the candidate. Let us do everything within our power to remove the lid of secrecy concerning those Masonic tenets, which are not esoteric. In other words, if Freemasonry is good, let's talk about it. Past Grand Master William H. Price, in his message to the 1973 Annual Grand Lodge Communication said in part, "there is so little about Masonry which is secret, I cannot comprehend why this condition continues to prevail."

My Brethren, as you leave this hall you will be handed a pamphlet prepared by our Past Grand Master Theodore Meriam, entitled, "If Freemasonry is good, let's talk about it." Please, as leaders and future leaders of your Lodge, read this pamphlet. We urge you to distribute it to your members, especially your candidate's coaches. Additional copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from the Grand Secretary's office. As leaders of your respective Lodges, you owe it to your membership to educate them about what is secret and what is not. Let us all be knowledgeable about what we can talk about regarding our institution.

This leads to the third step, which is selling Freemasonry through our talk and actions. In other words, once again, we must communicate. To be able to communicate is an art and we must be artists at our craft. And we must work at our craft today more than we have ever done in the past. In this day and age of electronic communication, with the most sophisticated equipment ever devised by man, we Masons must be able to communicate better with our fellow man regarding the subject of Freemasonry. We must, if we are to survive as a fraternity.

Most of us are certainly knowledgeable about the fact that Masonry has been on the decline for the past several decades. Yet, we are reluctant to do something about it. Like our forefathers, we must accept the challenge, put our shoulders to the wheel, and reverse this downward trend. Each one of us must accept the responsibility of keeping our age-old fraternity in a healthy and prosperous condition. We can do this by communicating about Freemasonry. The foundation of Masonry is that you must be a good man to become a member. However, not all good men are Masons. We, therefore, are not communicating with these good men.

In our communications we must put across these several points. Number one - you will not be asked to become a Mason. How many times have we heard men say: "I would have become a Mason long ago but I was waiting to be asked." Number two - Our fraternity is not a religious organization. Our one and only religious requirement is that you must believe in a Supreme Being. Number three - Our fraternity is not a secret organization. There are many things that we can discuss outside of the Lodge room. For example, we can discuss with anyone that our

organization stands for everything that is good. The teachings of our craft should be well known to everyone- but in order for this to happen, we must communicate. However, in our communication we must be completely understood. Remember what happened to the village blacksmith who was holding a horseshoe with both hands and told his not-too-bright son-"when I nod my head, son, hit it with a hammer." My Brethren, this is communication but it is misunderstood. Let us not have any misunderstanding in our communications about Freemasonry.

Talking as Masons and acting as Masons is the most important way to get a friend or an acquaintance of yours to say: "How do I become a Mason?" or "I want to be a Mason."

We are judged by our words and actions. Therefore, let us, everyone of us, know by our words and actions that we are Masons.

Talk about your Lodge-brag about your Masonic beliefs. Let everyone know that all Masons are good men, and that we make better men out of these good men. Let everyone know that you stand for the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. In communicating with our friends, our next-door neighbors, our casual acquaintances, we can be so enthusiastic about being a Mason, that it could trigger a chain of events. Because you are proud and because you enjoy Masonry so much, and mostly by your upright and outstanding conduct, your exposure to your friends or neighbors could stimulate a desire in them to become Masons.

Therefore, we must constantly communicate. Know what you can talk about. Knowledge is power. Our great Masonic fraternity can be a powerful influence in the future, just like it has been in the past.

Masonry is the foundation of our government. Our Masonic forefathers, who were the signers of the Declaration of Independence, made sure that that document contained our Masonic principles. This famous document has survived for two centuries and just recently was tested and found to be unshakable. It has proven resilient, able to survive and eventually overcome the ordeal of recent scandals.

Many of our government leaders of today are Masons, and as long as we have that kind of leadership in our country, there is hope and trust that our government will endure. No other form of government has endured this long. And if we the people become concerned about good government - then we can endure for many more centuries to come. Our government may not be perfect, but it is the best that man has ever devised.

In closing, my Brethren, let me emphasize the seriousness of the situation. We must stop the declining membership and we must furnish our Lodges with inspired leadership. All over these great United States we are faced with the same problem. If our wonderful Masonic fraternity is to continue, we must, each one of us, pledge ourselves to do everything that we can possibly do to improve its condition. Let us, like our Masonic forefathers, make sure that the flickering flame of Freemasonry once again becomes a bright beacon for those who follow us.

Thank you.