

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1982**

**Grand Orator
Melville H. Nahin
"We Are Our Brothers' Keepers"**

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

At the beginning of this Masonic year, one of our former Grand Lodge Officers approached me and said, "During the year you're Grand Orator you are going to find that the officers and ladies of the Grand Lodge form a true Masonic family." I wasn't quite sure what he meant since certainly all of us in Masonry have a bond of friendship and brotherly love; all of us are taught to regard each other by our individual worth and by our respect and honor for one another.

I was soon to learn what, in fact, he did mean, for during the past twelve months, the officers of our Grand Lodge and their lovely and supportive ladies have indeed grown to be a close knit unit, and I can honestly say that I have yet to hear a cross word among them.

But all of this did not come to pass by itself; it required two wonderful people, the stars of our show, to give it the perfect example. Of course, I refer to what I consider one of the finest couples the Great Architect of us all has ever permitted me to know, Bob and Jean West.

This year, unlike previous years, your Grand Master made two trips to Hawaii. I was pleased to be included in both of these journeys, but only one at Grand Lodge expense you'll be happy to know. If I did not know before, I learned during those beautiful days on the Islands of our Fiftieth State the true meaning of the "Aloha Spirit." I learned that the word "Aloha" not only means "hello" and "good-bye" but embodies the beautiful word, "love." As I considered the words which I was to deliver to you today, I thought how well that word epitomizes and describes our Grand Master, Robert O. West. I became aware that "love" is indeed the watchword for the 1981-82 year of the Grand Lodge of California.

Our Grand Lodge Officers have demonstrated, on a daily basis, and in the purest sense, the love of man for man under the aegis of Bob and Jean West, and we are most proud of them and indeed we are most in love with them. They have set the pattern and we have followed, and so if I may take this personal moment, on behalf not only of the Grand Lodge Officers of this Jurisdiction, but also of every Mason and man, woman and child with whom the Wests have made contact in California and Hawaii this past year, may I dub our Grand Master, the "Aloha Grand Master of Freemasonry," because he and his lovely wife are truly the symbols of love. Aloha Nui Loa.

One of the keynotes of the Grand Lodge of California this past year has been a true recognition of the brotherhood of Masons. Isn't it beautiful that we as Masons can gather together as Brothers and observe the religions of each other, observe the ethnic backgrounds and cultures of each other, and do so in a spirit, in a true spirit of brotherhood. We are Brothers. We do practice brotherly love. Let there be no mistake about that.

Oh, I am not naive. I know that there are those in our Fraternity who besmirch the very tenets of our beliefs by their bigotry and prejudices. They haven't learned the very simple premise that where there is no freedom, there can be no Masonic Lodge. They haven't learned that where there is bigotry there can never be Freemasonry. Those concepts are incompatible.

We are all Brothers. Whether we are Christians, Moslems, or Jews- we are all Brothers, as the Great Architect of us all has made us.

This past year I had the privilege and honor of representing the Brethren of the Scottish Rite in Southern California who received their 33rd Degree as what is called the active candidate. As I knelt at the altar, taking the obligations given to me by our Past Grand Master, Henry C. Clausen, who is the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Scottish Rite Masons for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, I had before me on my left, the Five Books of Moses, the

Pentateuch-in Hebrew. In front of me and a little above rested the King James version of the Holy Bible-in English. To my right, the Koran-in Arabic. I later learned that in other parts of the world Holy Books of other religions would be available to the candidate at his desire. This to me was and is what the universality of Freemasonry is all about. All of these religions and more gathered together to exemplify a Masonic ritual, gathered together as Brothers.

I spoke a moment ago of the great love and affection that we of the Grand Lodge Line, and our ladies, have for each other, as symbolized by our great Grand Master and his lovely first lady. I would suppose that our Grand Lodge Line typifies the very things to which I am referring. The Officers of our Grand Lodge each year have formed a closeness and each in turn calls itself "a family" and we have learned to love each other as, of course, men love men. We have shared joys. Regretfully, we have also had our sorrows to share in the loss of a dear friend to us all, a dedicated Mason and a fine man, our Grand Bible Bearer, Kermit McCullough. But let me tell you, my Brethren, in the Grand Lodge Line of California and Hawaii this year, we have a practicing Catholic. We have Protestants of different denominations. We have men of the Jewish faith. We have men whose ethnic backgrounds are English, Irish, Scottish, Swedish, German, Armenian, Greek, Russian, Portuguese, Mexican, Korean, Spanish. American Indian and-if you will, even an Oklahoman. You name it. We've got it. And I suppose you could say that's pretty nice. It shows that Grand Lodge is really respecting each and every religion and each and every ethnic origin. You could say it, but it would not be true, because when Bob West appointed each of us he didn't know the religions and backgrounds of us. And he didn't care. Frankly, we don't talk about these things because they're unnecessary. I had to do a little research to find out myself. What our backgrounds are, where our families came from, what church or synagogue or mosque we worship in are completely irrelevant to our Masonic involvement. Our Grand Master did not know. He chose us because he thought we were the persons for the jobs; he chose us because he felt that we were worthy of consideration as men and as Masons-and that's the sole criteria, and that's the way it should be-and that's the way it is in Freemasonry in California and Hawaii. We are Brothers. Make no mistake about that. We do practice what we preach.

Having made this pronouncement that we are Brothers, what is it that makes us so? From what emanates this feeling of love? Who are Masons? What are we?

Our Grand Master, this past year, has urged that we publicly wear our pins, that we establish signs, clear, clean notable signs on our Masonic Lodge buildings and at the outskirts of our communities, so that the world will know that we exist. It isn't necessary to hide our light under a bushel. We have much to offer and we want the world to know about it. The great newspaper supplement, of which we have heard so much, has produced favorable comment, not only among the Masons throughout the world, but among those non-Masons whom we have desperately sought to reach, so that they truly may know who and what we are. But it is important not only that we display ourselves by pins and rings and signs. We must display ourselves by how we act, how we affect other people. Therein lies the true secret of our public relations story. Therein also lies the growth and stability of our Lodges.

The argument over quantity versus quality continually rages. Some say we need large numbers. Others say, by way of rationalization perhaps, that it isn't the numbers that count, but the quality. I submit to you, my Brethren, that we can have both, that we can have a large influx of members into our Fraternity, and along with the numbers by thorough investigation and inspection will come quality.

As Freemasons indeed we are known by the way we affect other people. In the New Mexico Freemason, I read a story some months ago which I would like to share with you. A young man was passing a pawnbroker's shop. The moneylender was standing in front of his shop and the young man noted he was wearing a large and beautiful Masonic emblem. After going on a whole block, apparently lost in thought, the young man turned back, stepped up to the pawnbroker and addressed him, "I see you're wearing a Masonic emblem. I'm a Freemason, too. It happens that I am desperately in need of \$25.00 just now. I shall be able to repay it within ten days. You don't know me; but I wonder whether if the fact that you're a Mason and I'm a Mason is sufficient to induce you to lend me the money on my personal word?"

The pawnbroker mentally appraised the young man, who was clean-cut, neat and well dressed. After a moment's thought, he agreed to make the loan on the strength of the young man

being a Freemason. And within a few days, the young man, as promised, repaid the loan, and that seemingly ended the transaction.

About four months later the young man was in Lodge receiving the Entered Apprentice Degree. He had not really been a Mason when he borrowed the \$25.00. After he had been admitted for the second section of the Degree, he looked across the Lodge room and saw the pawnbroker from whom he had borrowed the \$25.00. His face turned crimson and he became nervous and jittery. He wondered whether he had been recognized by the pawnbroker. Apparently not, so he planned at the first opportunity to leave the Lodge room and avoid his benefactor. As soon as the Lodge was closed, he moved quickly for the door, but the pawnbroker had recognized the young man, headed him off and, to the candidate's astonishment, approached him and greeted him with a smile and an outstretched hand.

"Well, I see you weren't a Freemason after all when you borrowed that money," the pawnbroker commented.

The blood rushed to the young man's face as he stammered, "No, I wasn't. But I wish you'd let me explain. I had always heard that Masons were charitable and ready to aid a Brother in distress. When I passed your shop that day, I didn't need the \$25.00. I had plenty of money in my wallet. But when I saw the Masonic emblem you were wearing, I decided to find out whether the things I had heard about Masons were true, and I found out that they are charitable, that they do aid their Brethren in distress. That made such a deep impression on me that I presented my petition to this Lodge and here I am. I trust that you will forgive me for having lied to you."

The pawnbroker responded, "Don't let that worry you too much. I wasn't a Mason either when I let you have the money. I had no business wearing the Masonic emblem you saw. Another man had just borrowed some money on it, and it was so pretty that I put it on my lapel for a few moments. I took it off the minute you left. I sure didn't want anyone else borrowing money from me on the strength of being a Mason. When you asked for that \$25.00 I remembered what I had heard about Masons, that they were honest, upright and cared for their obligations promptly. It seemed to me that \$25.00 wouldn't be too much to lose to learn if what I had heard about Freemasonry was true, so I loaned you the money and you repaid it exactly as you said you would. That convinced me that what I had heard about Masons was true, so I presented my petition to this Lodge. Incidentally, I was the candidate just ahead of you."

And this, my Brethren, is how two men may have become members of the Craft. What is Freemasonry? Is it the mere receiving of our degrees that makes us Masons or is it putting the lessons we receive into practical application-in our daily living and in our associations with our fellow men? We can no more become Master Masons by taking degrees than we can by picking up a baseball and automatically become a Fernando Valenzuela. Rather, the taking of the degrees puts each of us into a position, that by earnest study and application of the truths which we are taught, to make of ourselves, each of us, a Master Mason. And this, in turn, is the appearance, the real appearance we give to the world about us.

Never before have we passed through a period of greater challenge to Masonry. It is a challenge to those who recognize Freemasonry as a force to be used, and not merely as a forum to be served. No institution is better equipped in this worldwide ideological conflict to build bridges of understanding between man and man without regard to race or creed. We produce men who are Masons and we must be proud of that. In an age when it is difficult to seek and find the truths of life, we Masons have recognized that each man must search for that truth himself. We know that a man can be led to the altar of Freemasonry, that he can be shown the Great Lights, but if he refuses or makes no effort to search for the truths which they reveal to him, he cannot hope to find harmony, inner peace and the love of God. We cannot hope to stand as just and upright Masons unless and until we recognize that to do so we must each first be made a Mason in our hearts. And after we have taken the Degrees, we must live and act as such in all our waking hours. This premise is just as true today as it was when Freemasonry as we know it first was born. And this concept shall never change for it is the heart and guts of our beliefs.

As a result of the tremendous progress that we have made in the technological and communications areas, the advent of nuclear energy and our tremendous progress in the control of the physical universe with its increased speed of transportation and communication, our world has shrunk in size until today we are living next door to peoples who yesterday almost lived beyond the horizon of our imaginations. We are living next door to peoples who do not

understand us, and let us be frank, we do not understand them. Throughout the world we need what one Masonic writer called "bridges of understanding" between man and man and between one people and another. The tragedy of our progress in the control of the physical world is that we have not made corresponding progress in our understanding of human relations. This tragedy has brought us in the nations of the world and within our own Fraternity to a crisis. Although we are determined to be trigger ready in the defense of our freedom, we know that this is not the ultimate answer since someone, somewhere, may become trigger happy and bring us all to atomic annihilation.

Our Brother, General Omar Bradley, admonished us: "Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we do about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount." The burning issue, it seems to me, is whether the nuclear age will bless humanity or blast it to ruin. All our progress in the control of the physical world will indeed go for naught unless we build the bridges of understanding between man and man, unless we as Masons practice what we preach. and there is a great deal that we preach. This is the very price of survival, and it is a challenge to our Masonic Brotherhood, whose universality, based upon a belief in God, embraces-without destroying their individuality-all men without regard to their backgrounds.

We who are members of a free democracy can take comfort in the realization that we have not been subjected to any form of thought control, and our freedom of speech has been genuine. Because of this freedom, we have developed tolerance and restraint in evaluating the actions of other people. In the atmosphere of freedom, our judgment has ever become more discerning. We must take the time to build the bridges of understanding, we must act with reasonable deliberation in appraising our neighbors, whether they be in the vast continents across the seas or next door to us.

In the light of our Masonic heritage, we approach the problems of this troubled world with an inspired hope and a determined courage. We are not afflicted with the pessimism of a Diogenes who constantly sought the honest man. When he was about to die, he asked to be buried face downward because the world would soon be upside-down anyway. We, with an inspired hope, shall convert the problems of today into the opportunities for human service. We shall imbue our membership with the courageous optimism. Leadership cannot go to the half-hearted. As Masons, we must bequeath the vision of the universality of our Brotherhood, and the courageous optimism of our spiritual inheritance. Let us remind each other that problems, however serious, are but opportunities for leadership in the cause of humanity. This is the requirement, this is the obligation of Masons the world over.

We live in a most dynamic period of the world's history. If we but enjoy the zest of living now, when significant history is being made, we will recognize that many of our problems are but opportunities-opportunities for leadership in the cause of humanity. At all times, whenever the banner of Masonry has been unfurled, it has had its enemies. Though its pathway down the ages has been strewn with the most fragrant flowers of brotherly love, relief and truth, and though the lives of the best and purest among the sons of men have really been magnificent monuments to the grandeur of its mission, yet its enemies have not failed to decry its merits, nor ceased their efforts to destroy its usefulness. While the Masons of this glorious century have the freedom to erect their Temples and worship at their altars, this spirit of enmity nonetheless still exists, in adverse criticism of our methods by those who are ignorant of our mission or blind to the rich fruitage of our labors.

When we consider the antiquity of Masonry, dangers through which I has so safely passed, the persecutions of bigotry, the superstition and fanaticism our order has so successfully met and repelled; when we behold it today with the glory of its centuries clustering about its brow, and the years of the labor of Freemasonry resting so lightly upon its unbowed form, we behold it standing upright and stately with all the vigors of its early youth, its feet as elastic to run errands of mercy, its knees as supple to bend in prayer for a Brother's need, the breast as faithful to receive and keep a Brother's whispered word, the hands as ready and strong to support a falling Brother, and the lips ever whispering words of cheer and comfort to the ear of distress. We stand with unshod feet and uncovered head at the mystic portals and would lay the laurel wreath of well-earned fame upon the pure white brow of that great institution which we call Freemasonry.

Freemasonry with its beautiful ritual, impressive ceremonies and the glory of rich centuries clustering about it, stripped of its moral character, would lose its greatest charm, its most precious jewel. For morality is our true foundation. Truth and virtue constitute the pillars of brotherly love.

We are taught that to be good men and true is the first and most important lesson within our sacred walls. Every step of the candidate, from his preparation to the last solemn scene, as he passes through the beautiful ceremonies and is inducted into our mysteries, leads along a pathway strewn with the fragrant flowers of truth, while diamonds of virtue sparkle about its feet illuminating the mind with moral light, and flooding the heart with the celestial goal of divine principles, while inspiring the soul and leading it to a higher plane of holy upright living. The trowels in our hands are rusty from lack of use for the cement of brotherly love has not always been spread with a generous hand. The hours of relief have been so destitute of service that we may well have lost the gauge's use, while from lack of labor our arms have become too weak to wield the gavel in preparing the rough Ashlar for the Great Builder's use.

The mission of Freemasonry in the world today, as never before, is to fight the wrong and defend the right. Is it needed? Is our mission ended? I submit to you, my Brethren, that until there are no wrongs to right, no sins to fight, no distress to help, no woes to heal, no lessons of purity and righteousness to teach, then, and not until then, will the mission of Freemasonry be complete. Let the prayer of every Mason's heart be that all men were Masons and all Masons true men. Then, indeed, the white winged dove of peace would hover over all men. Nations would not learn war any more. Swords would be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Brotherly love would prevail and every moral and social virtue would cement us. My Brethren, if we would so pray, let us in Freemasonry so live, renewing our allegiance to the grand principles of Masonry and studying more earnestly her Great Light, making it the only rule of our faith and practice, and the means of our counsel. May we move among Brothers in the world that they, here in our neighborhoods and throughout the continents, seeing the beauty of Masonic holiness as it shines in our words and our deeds, may be constrained to exalt Freemasonry to the high and honored place it so richly deserves. Thus we will cover the earth as the waters cover the deep, and the glorious way of its powers shall girdle the globe with kindness, love and truth.

This is the mission of Freemasonry. This is our goal. Let us practice outside the Lodge those great lessons which we are taught and Masonry will indeed flourish for we are our Brothers' keepers. May the God of Love and the love of God be with you always.

Thank you and God bless.