

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1992**

**Grand Orator  
Harold S. Stein, Jr.**

To the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, F.& AM. of California

My brethren, every year at the Annual Communication of Grand Lodge your Grand Orator has presented to the members of that august body some topic appropriate to the moment. Indeed my first assignment to this office last October was to attempt to memorize the minuscule portion of official ritual, which described the specific duties of the Grand Orator, and so doing directs him to "Deliver at each Annual Communication an address to the Grand Lodge on matters appertaining to the Craft..."

"Matters Appertaining to the Craft"

Alas, this phrase so briefly describing my assignment gives hint to my quandary and substance to my indecision. Namely, what do I feel are topics so vital for our reflection that I place them before you at this very special time. I must confess my problem in preparation was not that so often faced by anguished authors, namely, the stubborn silence, the inability to bring forth some cogent thought, some single word, some black upon the glaring white of empty page. No my brethren, quite the contrary. I was then as I am now immersed in limitless thoughts that I wish so much to share with you before this magic moment, this brief but oh so rewarding time for me is done. And so my theme is not a single note but rather a melody that though brief in passage pays homage to that symphony we call Freemasonry! If I have worked my craft correctly perhaps some of you will leave this assembly with bits and pieces of the turn upon your lips! In any case I pray not to offend your senses with even a single discordant note!

Let me begin by clarifying for the record the use or misuse of the term "oration" as it pertains to modern Masonry. In the vernacular of "today" it has been the victim of "bad press." Among most of us it has taken on a negative aspect like "advice from one's mother" or medicine that everyone takes but doesn't really believe in. But in ancient times it was the practice to honor a glorious event with a laudatory address given by someone who would frame the remarks with "high language." We have permitted this practice to deteriorate into an imagery of pomposity at worst and boredom at best.

Well hopefully this past year in the Grand Lodge we have attempted to modify this image. Masonry is after all at least in its roots a very ancient structure. Furthermore, regardless of the busyness we ascribe to the daily problems of management, membership and lodge mechanics that occupies most of our conscious energies - there is something quite individual, quite personal and consequently rather sacred in its essential character. We who become occupied with the leadership of the Fraternity are understandably guilty at times of forgetting the fact that our Masonry, regardless of its outward emphasis upon fellowship and good works, deals primarily with the individual candidate and calls upon the Great Architect to witness all of our transactions. In short, at the heart of it, ours is a very sacred and personal work.

It is in this context that our Grand Master interpreted the role of his Orator this year and permitted him at each ceremonial occasion to bring us back to that thread of spiritual continuity that like an underground spring, silently and without fanfare nourishes all that resides above it. I wish personally to acknowledge this fact and to thank the Most Worshipful Stan Cazneaux for not only permitting but directing us in these labors. In fine, Masonry deserves an oration as a means of brief reflection, even if those of us who are so assigned fall short in fulfilling our tasks.

But let us move on now to our present assignment, the message for today. I do so by stating at the onset my conviction from which I derive no small measure of energy, namely that:

Freemasonry represents a task, which is to date, not only unfulfilled yet holds within its boundaries the destiny of the human race.

As such and in keeping with the spirit of our Grand Master's emphasis this year on renewing interest and seeking excellence, we must conclude that our role or duty is once again to become "operative Masons" in every respect! Operative Masons again!

Therefore, there is for me no validity whatsoever in questioning Masonry's relevance. Indeed, there is rather a concern along with a touch of sorrow that too many of our members are still unaware of their heritage and consequent duty. Like young Prince Hal early in his career in Shakespeare's Henry IVth, most Masons do not know the role that is theirs to play. The difference is that the young soon-to-be King of England was unaware of the great domain over which he would reign while I suggest that most Masons mistake the boundaries of the lodges to which they belong and over which they preside! And I feel it is only proper at the convening of the Grand Lodge of Masons of California, when the leadership of our august body meets to deliberate and plan for a new Masonic Year, for a new cycle of service, that we pause to reflect again upon our sacred origins. And by origins I do not mean our history in terms of days and years, but rather principles, those fundamental dynamics that have always been the source or basic breath of our lives.

I suggest that every Mason carries within his very being his own lodge room, his own corp of officers, his own work, and that our duty, my brethren, our assigned task given to us the moment we first knocked at the outer door of our material "mother lodge," is to remain at labor! If no other point be made let it be this: it was ordained that the Temple be completed not by angels and not by a stroke of Divine Magic but by the hands of man, and that work has not yet been done! Until it is, we need never question the purpose or timeliness of our Institution!

It is time that we also lay to rest the misconception that the essentials of our work are secret. Secret not only to those who are not members of the Fraternity but to many Masons not privy to some obscure and revealing text? The truth of the matter is that the tenets of Masonry along with their published symbols being in their essence dynamic reflections or expressions of the wisdom, power and justice of our Great Architect are by their very nature a secret only to those who will not ask; an enigma only to those who do not think; and a limitless yet unavailable resource only to those who will not serve! In the words of the great Mason and scholar Albert Pike: We are here to think, if we can think and to learn, if we can learn!

If we in the Grand Lodge have discovered anything during the past twelve months in meeting our brethren in both large and small communities throughout this jurisdiction as we joined to lay cornerstones, dedicate edifices, rededicate lodges, burn mortgages, open clinics, recognize as-sorted acts of community and social services, and yes perform degrees in the newest and most modern of lodge halls as well as open lodges surrounded only by mountains and trees, it is, my brethren, that Masonry is not speculative, it is operative! Operative! We labor today to build; to build an environment not only for our future generations but for today; a society which today cares for its indigent, today insists upon justice and equal rights for all of its citizens, today supports our public schools, and today pays homage to those laws and principles which guarantee us the essential civic freedoms!

To grasp the real essence of my message for us today we must look beyond the external "operative" mode that we observe by merely following the trestleboard of our respective lodges or as we interact with the community at large. Let me therefore guide us for a brief moment to the threshold of that inner lodge, that lodge which dwells within the breast of not only each of us as members of this honorable society, but all who in the Wisdom of our Great Creator, walk in His image. For it is neither you nor I but only the Grand Master of the Universe who determines membership in that lodge room!

Let us not be misled by this lack of our exclusivity my brethren. There is no loss in our personal prestige to recognize that in spirit "Masonry," as a moral science and an honorable Order dedicated to the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, has been practiced by albeit too few but nonetheless select groups in every society that has graced civilization independent of their physical membership into our Fraternity. Indeed all Masonic historians will avouch that it is precisely this fact, that is to say the universality and timeliness of our symbols and traditions, I stress again symbols and traditions we have shared with others, which gives credence to our claim that Masonry prevailed hundreds, indeed thousands of years before the creation of any Grand Lodge.

Remember this fact in all our dissertations; we daily justify our doctrines by proving beyond any question or doubt whatsoever, that our Masonic traditions rely upon, indeed are limited or edited expressions of all the great philosophic and religious systems that have punctuated civilization since the earliest age of humanity. This is one of the purposes of Masonic research, to discover and document the depth, vitality and richness of our family tree. This is an imperative point worthy of reiteration if for no other reason than that it answers in the affirmative the question whether or not our order is relevant to the present age. Let it be clearly understood that we are an oral textbook of the "Great Ideas" that have propelled the human race and this fact alone is sufficient answer to those recent few voices who with blinding passion accuse us of transmitting a questionable doctrine. Putting it bluntly and succinctly, Masonry is made of the stuff we collectively call civilization and culture. It is as much a part of that grand organism named "humanity" as are atoms to molecules and molecules to matter!

Let us continue our theme from a different perspective. Let us return to the subject of our personal, individual lodge. One of the most fascinating observations about primitive societies, both those in the far past as well as the present, is their need to create in their sacred life-cycle rituals what is defined as a "sacred space." By "life-cycle" rituals I mean the ceremonies associated with birth, adulthood and death and including events such as naming, circumcision, puberty rites, confirmation, marriage, and initiation into select groups such as elders, chiefs, or shamans, etc. Whether the ceremonies be held within a lodge hall, a cave, atop a mesa, or within a forest, the arena in which they recreate, as they all do, some legend of their birth or epic of their God or Gods, must be clearly defined and set apart as a special holy place. Tourists today travel to Greece to see the ruins of the Elysian Lodges, to India to visit the Elephanta caves, to the Outback in Australia and the highlands of New Guinea to glimpse a hint of where the Aborigines perform their rites, and trek the jungles of South and Central America as well as Southeast Asia only to learn that our native Americans were not and are not unique in setting apart a holy spot for the meeting - the all-important meeting - between mortals and the Great Creative Source. If that spot is not properly prepared, then the invisible spirit spirits which move the streams, carve out the mountains, and hold steadfast the heavens will not appear and grace the eyes of man with "its or their presence. Further-more, it is important for us to recognize that the liturgies of our most modern and sophisticated religious systems practiced by us today also share this same fundamental principle: the need for a sacred space, a "Holy of Holies," a Kadosh, Kadoshim." And I might add, it is this dynamic, this preparation and calling forth for a Divine Presence that innervates and gives meaning to our Masonic practices and ceremonies associated with "Dedications."

From the psalms of David to the Teachings on the Mount; from the Tau of Lao-Tse to the meditations of Gautama Buddha; we are asked to "prepare ourselves" to receive a doctrine that is in essence the source of our being. I mention this only to call your attention to our Masonic lodge room and the preparation that it takes to bring our candidate to that special place, to that singular moment and to that proscribed process by which he alone hears, acknowledges, accepts, and in so doing "is made a Mason."

Do you see my brethren how the Masonic process works? It does not preach or dogmatize with man-made systems of thought that too often divide us with the illusionary wall of "separatism." Rather by a relatively simple yet profound act at the altar, has us perform a ritual which follows the life-processes that humanity takes, as it grows inward from ignorance and exclusivism to understanding, comprehension, and unification. You see brotherhood lives in the glory of knowing that in our hearts we are ONE!

The legends and symbols that we utilize are ancient and capable of lengthy dissection. A lifetime can be filled analyzing and peeling away veil after veil of meaning gleaned from meditating upon the square and com-compass, the Three Lights, the working tools, and the host of references included within the Hiram Legend. But so then is the Tibetan mandala the subject to millions of a life of meditation. Indeed according to Carl Jung, the eminent psychologist, religious symbolism, tribal folklore, and even the hieroglyphics of the alchemists are the stuff by which our unconscious attempts to speak to and harmonize with our conscious bodies. My point is that one need not knowingly be a student of Masonic lore or esoteric studies to be a good and true Mason! Nor are we as Masons the lone travellers journeying from East to West in search of Light! We

should be strengthened in our resolve by this very recognition that we are part of a grand and glorious "Brotherhood of the One Idea."

Masonry you see is not confined to the mind or to the intellect; it is more importantly a citizen of the heart and soul!

Within each of us is a holy altar at which we bow every time we care, every time we love, and every time we serve.

There is a Master and two Wardens and the attendant officers in full regalia, each with his jewel of office, each with his assigned part ready to perform his duties in due and ancient manner. But it is we who determine whether or not they remain at labor or fade out of view into the realm of idle refreshment.

And this is my message for the year dear brethren of the Grand Lodge. We should be aware of and glory in the recognition that: The great mysteries locked within the faithful breast have been written unashamedly upon every leaf of every tree, they have been proclaimed in the procession of the seasons, and echoed in the first cry of the newborn child. Each of us has a sacred source and an awesome responsibility. And we are blessed in our assignment in that the teacher is ready to heed our call if we are but prepared to knock! As builders of our own destiny we are truly operative Masons!

And so my brethren of the Grand Lodge of California I thank you for the labors you have and will continue to perform for our beloved Fraternity and for humanity. I bless the day that I met you. I greet you at this special moment; when we merge the efforts of one year into another and like the waves crashing upon some rocky coast, merge a succession of dramatic impulses of energy into a long continuous and harmonious movement, united in its purpose. Remember that as you have an agenda to serve on the level of this organization, there is a personal, individual trestleboard to which you must give the most sober and profound respect and attention.

As we leave this Grand Lodge Session or for that matter any Masonic lodge at any time to reconvene to work within our respective communities as citizens and neighbors, let us be reminded that no matter how ideal may be our intentions; no matter how passionate may be our cause; it is love and not hate, it is sympathy and not impatience, it is understanding and not disdain, and it is the embrace of affection and not the resistance of suspicion that are human reactions in harmony with the very laws that not only keep the galaxies in their orbits but also, I suspect, bring a smile to the Countenance of the Divine Author of the Universe!

May it be our reward that future generations will know a time when the lodge within each of us will bear strong resemblance to the societies at large; where brotherly love, relief and truth will be bywords not of our Fraternity alone, but the entire family of man. Where the Great Architect of the Universe may view the work and declare: It is Good. I find it True.

It is for that day my brethren that we meet today and labor tomorrow. It is for that day my brethren that our greatest purpose and fundamental destiny is to be Operative Freemasons! Let this knowledge be our reward as we again pick up our tools and with the most sublime joy in our hearts return to that glorious task of building our Temple. "God Bless our endeavors. Amen."