

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1999**

**Grand Orator
Melvyn B. Stein
"The Choir Isn't Singing"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren:

As the butt of many attorney jokes, I will try to be mindful of the statement of Thomas Jefferson who said, "It is the trade of lawyers to question everything, to give nothing, and to talk by the hour." Others, in referring to lawyers statements have said, "We heard him, but what did he say?"

Hopefully, this afternoon some questions will be raised and your thoughts stimulated over a short period of time at the conclusion of which you may answer "I will join the choir."

In the early 1700's Masonry was primarily composed of men of means and political power. Younger men, such as George Washington, who wanted to move up into a higher social-economic level would join our Fraternity in hope of greater achievement. Masons were visible in public life and virtue was their cornerstone.

From the building of King Solomon's Temple, Masonry has used the working tools of the stonemason and mixed them with a metaphorical journey from darkness to light in which all mankind could live in peace and harmony.

The true history of Masonry prior to the Grand Lodge in 1717 is clouded. Masonic tradition is portrayed no more eloquently than in the DeMolay Degree and its lesson of refusal by Jacques DeMolay to submit to tyranny and his refusal to accept the bondage of men to a lack of free thought. In the Third Degree, we are taught that the Master's word was lost. Further study reveals that the true word is contained within our own hearts and minds.

Where and how does all of this fit within our social-economic fast-paced, high-tech, communication driven, televised internet society?

While we in this land of freedom pay little heed to the Masonic principles that were once revolutionary, of the freedom of thought and the right to express that thought, it remains a goal sought by many in countries throughout the world. It still remains a primary task of Masonry to promulgate these principles. Masonry has the overriding responsibility to assure the survival of such free thought and expression.

Masonry and the academic community is the first to be attacked by the dictator who cannot condone the freedom of man espoused by Masonry. From the days of the inquisition to the days of Hitler's Germany and the closure of Masonic Lodges throughout the then conquered Europe, the sign of the yellow poppy was the only emblem of living free thought. The eastern European countries and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic purged all Masons from the era of Stalin to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today, the hunger for Masonic philosophy has caused it to again emerge in places like Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and as well as in South America.

In this country, we are the bastion for Freemasonry. Even in England the Lord Chancellor has decreed that those seeking government positions should list their Masonic membership on their application This alone should cause us great concern. Our own California judicial council has asked California Judges who were members of the Masonic Fraternity, what they intended to do in light of the fact that women were not permitted to enter the craft, thereby constituting d^crimTnaSon1 Some Judges-have not returned to our Lodges and their activities have diminished. There are some well-known exceptions.

While Masonic principles have remained steadfast, we hear all around us the call for change, particularly in light of declining membership which is interposed with the question of the relevance of Masonry in today's society.

At one time the first three degrees of Masonry were committed to memory from mouth to ear without a cipher ritual book and usually required the candidates coach to explain the meaning to

the novitiate of that which was being memorized. Now most of our candidates' coaches are reduced to assisting a candidate memorize an obligation and certain grips and words; but the lessons taught by the degrees are not required to be known or learned by the candidate, and subsequently, may be lost except to the studios.

When a man has completed his first, second or third degree and he walks out of that Lodge room (sometimes to infrequently return) is it clear to him what we have said and done? Does the novitiate leave confused? Does he understand the allegories and hidden meanings? Are we imparting useful knowledge and a way of life by which that candidate can pattern his own life? Some jurisdictions have addressed this problem, not by memorization, but by open booklet examinations

Only a small portion of our obligation has been adopted by the "promise keepers groups" which has drawn men in large numbers to stadiums. Masonry has much more to offer. By our eloquent verbiage, do we communicate directly to the candidate or do we even communicate to the general public that which we have been taught or that which we would teach?

It has been said that possibly Masonry has lost the baby boomer generation. This ship has not yet gone down like the Titanic. It is the largest demographic group of men and the greatest potential source of Masonic candidates. We speak of 21 year olds as active members. This group still faces a tough period of finding a job and keeping it, trying to make a living, getting married, raising children and seeking some form of stability within a family structure. On the other hand, the baby boomer generation has attained stability in their income and employment, their children are over 16 and are looking beyond mom and dad, and more free time is available to them. These men in their fifties are looking for something beyond the television and are not ready to simply put on their slippers, sit in a rocking chair and eat T.V. dinners. These men are looking for something to associate with that has meaning, substance, creates a group of social friends and provides service to the community. These are the very attributes that Masonry has to offer. These men, however, are still time conscious and demand to easily understand what it is that we or other similar groups have to teach or to offer them.

As a child I still recall Dr. Seuss and his Horton the Elephant who said, "I said what I meant and meant what I said..." Masonry must learn to impart our concepts clearly and concisely.

Masons do not need to sell Masonry. Masonry can sell itself when it is clearly stated. A movie popular in the last few years stood for the principle that if you build a stadium (or in our case a great Fraternity), just wait, and they will come. In the case of Masonry, only a handful know that the stadium (or Fraternity) has been built. In the case of potential members Masonry is generally believed to be more appropriate for their fathers or grandfathers than for themselves. We must, therefore, actively promote a shared vision by a program of outreach to the community and let the general public become aware of our presence among them and what it is that Masonry stands for. Our stadium has been erected from the cement of fellowship and charity through individual and community service and the virtues which form the cement of peace and harmony among all men.

California Masonry requires an attitude adjustment. Each of us has heard of the loss of membership and where our Fraternity may be in 20 years. It is true that all fraternal organizations as well as service organizations in the United States are experiencing a decline in membership. We must approach those in our community with a positive attitude or what we have to offer that can draw men closer to us and cause them to join with us. We cannot accomplish our goals by an attitude of seeking to ask a neighbor to join a dying organization. Who wants to ask them to join a Lodge whose doors are likely to close? We must take the non-negative, affirmative high road to our great stadium and the principles upon which it is constructed.

Masonry is not in the 9th inning with 2 outs. Masonry still has the greatest and largest Fraternity the world has ever known with precepts that no man can fault with the Holy Writings as the rule and guide of our faith. A truly Masonic way of life is a minister's dream to build a congregation. Don't sell Masonry short, my brethren. Masonry in California is not sitting on its hands.

The Grand Lodge of California, through its California Masonic Foundation, provided over \$875,000 in scholarships actually paid between May and June of 1999. The students emanated from approximately 81 different California communities. No Masonic affiliation was required.

Over \$450,000 was provided this year to almost 800 elementary and middle school teachers and administrators for the purpose of a free two night, three-day training session at the Masonic Home in Covina, where they were taught to recognize children at risk due to alcohol, drugs or child abuse. More importantly, the program provides a solution as to what to do once a problem is recognized. No Masonic affiliation is required.

The California Scottish Rite Foundation supports 13 Childhood Language Disorders Clinics at a cost just last year alone of over 1.6 million dollars. Since the first clinic was created in 1970, here in San Francisco, approximately 750,000 child visits have occurred at a cost of approximately \$19 million dollars. No Masonic affiliation is required.

The California Scottish Rite Foundation also provides college scholarships as well as scholarships on the graduate level. Last year \$ 130,000 was so provided.

The Knight Templars and York Rite Bodies have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars for eye care, for mental disorders and for all types of treatment for which no Masonic affiliation is required.

The Shrine provides over 1.3 million dollars per day for the benefit of the 22 Shriner's Hospitals for Children. There are no insurance clerks or cash registers as all services are provided at no charge. No Masonic affiliation is required.

The California Masonic Foundation Child ID Program provides identification and a photograph of children for the assistance of their parents and law enforcement should they become lost or missing.

Substantial funds, clothing and toys are provided by many Masonic concordant bodies vigorously supported by our ladies.

On a community level, one need only to refer to our publication The California Freemason under the heading of "Freemasonry Serving the Community" and read of the thousands of dollars provided for scholarships, schools and community charities. Masonry certainly is not sitting on its hands. It is vibrant and contributing heavily to the needs of our society and our state.

We must inform the community of our efforts taken on their behalf. The membership has continually looked to the Grand Lodge for their only solution, and that somehow our San Francisco headquarters should magically emit a continuous light beam of communication to all citizens within our state.

This leads to what a Mason recently asked when he heard a presentation extolling the many attributes of Masonry and its public service, "Why are you preaching to the choir?" There is an answer for him - Because the choir isn't singing.

There are over 94,000 California Masons. What better means of spreading information throughout the state could any group or organization have than a choir of 94,000. All 94,000 strong need to start singing the praises of what we are doing for the benefit of our communities without any requirement of Masonic relationship.

Our stadium is planted firmly throughout this state of California, and they will come if you and all of our brother Masons and all members of our concordant bodies will join the choir, and all 94,000 sing loudly and clearly to let all know who we are, what we are and what Masonry is doing in service to mankind. So mote it be!