

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 2001**

**Grand Orator
Larry Adamson**

GRAND LODGE F. & A. M. OF CALIFORNIA

Wow!!! Twenty-nine years, 2 weeks ago, a then 21 year-old had just become new Entered Apprentice Mason in a lodge in Venice, CA. While sitting next to his Worshipful Master, having refreshments, the Master rose and informed him he now had 30 minutes to address his new brothers. After nearly experiencing his first cardiac arrest, he stood and uttered some senseless mumblings, sat down and wondered if his new brothers would ever allow him back. Well 29 years and 2 weeks later, he now stands before you as your Grand Orator, and the only thing that I can say is "WOW." Now I know my father is sitting in the audience with you, thinking, "What? Thirty thousand dollars for a college education, and all we get is a 3-letter word? That's \$10,000 a letter, and two of the letters are the same!!" Well, Dad this is a "wow" moment. And Dad, don't worry. I do have something more to say.

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished and Honored Guests, my fellow Grand Officers and my brothers.

Before commencing with my oration, I ask your indulgence for a short moment, while I acknowledge, on behalf of all my fellow Grand Lodge Officers, our sheerest "thank you" to Most Worshipful Decker for granting us the privilege to have served you and this Grand Jurisdiction. During these past twelve months, we have observed first hand your love and devotion and personal sacrifice for our craft. Let there be no doubt, my brethren, this Grand Master has been the steward of that sacred trust. Be proud to know that the integrity of our selection process has again brought strength to our great fraternity.

And on a personal note, I thank you. Most Worshipful, for allowing me the opportunity to participate in the process, and for providing me with the opportunity to share my thoughts this year with the great people of California. To my fellow Grand Lodge Officers and their ladies, your encouragement and acknowledgement were truly inspirational, and your friendships will, I'm sure, be ever lasting.

As I look out over the audience, I recognize a number of my brethren who have, in the past, been called upon to deliver this Jurisdiction's Grand Oration, and I know that they can relate to the experience I've had these past few months, when many of the brethren have asked "the" question, "Well, Larry, do you have your Oration written yet?" Consistently, I responded that I had, early on in the year, developed the structure for this oration, and the only thing that remained was the written task. Well, my brothers, I must admit to you, that Oration never made its way to the scribe's tablet, and therefore will be the subject for another day.

You see my brothers, the events of 28 days ago have not only changed the world forever, but they have also forced me to refocus my thoughts of our craft. Those events of September 11th, I believe, have placed renewed importance to us, and all Masons, whither so dispersed around the globe. We have now experienced first-hand the evil that man can do unto his brother. We see directly the result of power that is based on force, fear, intimidation and hate. A system of rule that repressively demands blind and total allegiance and denies it's people education, medical treatment, and even worse, the basic right of free expression and thought. But what we are all a part of this day, here, in this great hall, under the canopy of the Great Architect of the Universe, stands in direct and absolute defiance to the cowardly and despicable acts of those who live by terror and hate. Evil, no matter how man attempts to disguise it, is still evil.

But as the events of that day unfolded, I found myself reflecting upon the principles and values of our great fraternity: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, and then there's Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice. Those simple, but so very profound lessons that I all too often

take for granted, somehow have a new sense of meaning. For the first time I truly believe that I felt, as King Solomon must have felt, his Hiram Abif multiplied 5,359 times.

It was then that I realized how many times over the years that I had lost my sense of the relevancy of our Craft. How I had fallen into that trap of believing that society's intellect no longer looked for answers that we, as Masons, seek. How many times have all of us had the opportunity to expose our friends, good men, to the virtues of our Craft, but didn't?

Well, my brothers, what more vivid reminder do we need, than those images of September 11th, to re-commit ourselves, and every Mason to carrying forward our philosophies and principles to our communities and to the world? Ask yourself this, "If the world and all of its people understood and shared in these simple, fundamental principles of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth, wouldn't September 11th have been just another day? If Masonry could be carried to those in the world who suffer from the tyranny of the immoral, wouldn't it be a better place for all?"

My brothers. Masonic teachings are as relevant to us today as they were to the operative stonemasons of our yesterday. In the late 1700's, Worshipful George Washington witnessed first hand, man's challenge to oppression, as he led our forefathers against their native land in order to establish freedom for America. He, too, understood human values. Masonic values, when he said, "If freedom of speech and thought is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter." Carried through the generations, and entrusted to our care, is the duty to strengthen and guide this great fraternity in the new millennium. Recently, I had occasion to read a book by Harvard Professor Robert Putnam, entitled "Bowling Alone." In it, he chronicled what, in his opinion, is the collapse of American communities. He showed how Americans have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors and social structures. He concluded that shrinking access to these great institutions that promote communal activity and community sharing, is a serious threat to civic and personal health. One of those institutions he referenced is the family of freemasonry. Our fraternity was built around the principle of commitment. Our ancient craft was committed to fulfilling the dreams and desires of its rulers. They were not just merely interested in the principals of building great edifices... they were committed to their promises. For many, the duration of the project far exceeded their own earthly existence. Many never got to see the final results of their life-long commitment. Our Senior DeMolay, Walter Cronkite, must have shared the belief of those great stonemason masters when he said, "There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you're merely interested in something, you do it only when it is convenient But when you're committed to something, you accept no excuses...only results."

You know, this makes me wonder if, over the past four decades, California Masons are guilty of only an interest in our craft, instead of a commitment. Since 1965, we've seen our craft's numbers diminish by an astounding 67, and lodges now number 376, from a high of 720.

If we believe in the relevancy of our craft, and our principles of making good men better, then it is hard to understand that here in California, with a population numbering over thirty-four million, that there are no more good men of today's generation as there were in past generations.

I believe that we still have a valid, relevant and meaningful product today, as my father and his father realized in their time. So if the product is valid, why is it that we stand in bewilderment over the continued decline in interest? Well, I believe that we have forgotten an important ingredient in the formula for success. We forgot that for every great product, there must be a commitment to its marketing. And therein lies the problem. Over the past forty years we lost sight of how to market ourselves, and increasingly we turned to internal gratification. We boasted to one another, but we stopped reaching out to our communities, and our practices are a mystery to the outside world. For years, we hid behind a veil of artificial secrecy to the extent that we are viewed by much of the outside world as being occult-like. For forty years, most of our members have interpreted our non-solicitation policy to mean something very different.. .non-disclosure,

And what are we doing to embrace the changing make-up of our communities, and to provide access for those "good men" who would excel by the virtues of this fraternity? Masonic principles are not exclusive to those of only one cultural heritage. Good men come in all sizes and colors. How are we reaching out to offer access to those that reflect our community's rich make-up? How are we transforming our lodges and our members' perspective to begin to attract those who reflect our communities' diversity?

If we truly are committed Masons, then let us begin today, to market our craft and ourselves and begin building better men and better communities. You see, I don't accept that each of our 86,500 California Masons don't know at least one good man.

If you are looking at me right now from your seat and thinking that this challenge is just too hard, then ask yourself, "Am I merely an interested Mason or am I a committed Mason?"

So, how do we start? Well, would the officers from the following Lodges please stand?

South West #283	Live Oak #61
Pleasanton #321	San Diego #35
Moreno Valley #804	Tujunga#592
California #1	Home Lodge #721
Temecula Catalina Island #524	
Silvergate Three Star #296	

I ask you to stand so that those Lodge Leaders who think that my challenge is unrealistic, can remember your faces and perhaps, before they depart this communication, they just might want to talk to you. For my brothers, each of these lodges had the courage and commitment to extend Masonry in their community, and as a result have brought over 10 new members into our fraternity in just this past membership year. Thank you, brothers.

What is particularly interesting about these ten lodges, if you listen to the names and know their locations, you will see that they hail from widely different circumstances. From rural to emerging communities, from culturally diverse to center city, and each has found the way to attract those "good men" of their communities.

For a number of years I have sat in your seats and listened to those at this podium who have professed that it is quality, not quantity, that is the target of our craft. To those I say, remember that critical mass is important but more important is that the two need not be mutually exclusive. These lodges are showing that "good men" are there, and they will bring quality as their contribution. For them, quality and quantity are mutually inclusive.

For those lodges that have not set as a goal a net membership gain, I challenge you even further....At the completion of this Annual Communication, go back to your Lodge and convene a Lodge Renewal Committee, and staff it with the new and the old, but look to those who are willing to find a way, not an excuse. Have your committee address five essential plan elements—Membership Planning, Candidate Retention, Member Involvement, Lodge Activities and Community & Public Relations. Set one or two achievable goals in each area. My brothers, focus on bringing the Lodge out of the dining room and into the community.

Use those tools at your disposal; Grand Lodge's Child ID Program and Neighborhood Masonic Open Houses are excellent inroads to the community. Evaluate your communication methods and stay attached to your candidates; put their bios and photos on your Tiler's room walls. For your existing members, commit to regular communication and solicit their help with community events. Focus lodge activity to the community and think of each activity as an opportunity to attract those "Good Men." Find someone to be the liaison with your community's publications and use them often. And finally, none of us need to see the Past Masters listed every month in our Lodge's Tresleboards. Replace them with Masonic education, and feature a member of the Lodge each month.

I further challenge those who have served this Grand Lodge in years past, to stay committed to our Constituent Lodges and reach out to help them turn the tide. You are a rich and valued resource, and now, more than ever, we need you. But all this cannot be achieved by just those sitting here today or by our leaders of past and present, or the 10 of our members that regularly attend lodge. We must inspire those that are disengaged to re-join our effort. Some of you may remember an airline commercial from a couple of years ago. It featured Joe, a corporate CEO, entering the company's conference room, which was filled with his sales force. One of the salesmen asked Joe, "What's wrong? Why are we here?" And Joe related a telephone conversation he had just had with one of their oldest customers, who had just informed him that he was leaving them. And he went on to relate that the customer felt that they just didn't care about him anymore. So Joe proceeded to hand each of his salesmen a plane ticket, and directed them to go and visit every one of their customers, personally. And when he was through handing out the tickets, there was one he put in his own shirt pocket. That same salesman asked, "Where are you going Joe?" And Joe responded, "I'm going to win back that old friend."

My brothers, I'm confident that California and the world needs Masonry, and I'm equally confident that together we can grow our Craft. A strong and engaged California Masonry is essential to building a strong worldwide brotherhood. I pray for the day that Masonry can be freely practiced by all, that Grand Lodges like Iran exiled here in America, will see their dream of returning Masonry to Iran; I dream of the day that we can welcome and acknowledge as our new brothers, the new Grand Lodges of Iraq, and of Sudan and Pakistan, and yes, even Afghanistan. That day, my brothers, will be the day that brotherly love, relief and truth transcends all.

You see, I refuse to be a part of a California Masonry that has, as its legacy, decline or retreat. Together we will build for the future. Together we will make Freemasonry the cornerstone of the new millennium.

To every member of this jurisdiction, I challenge you. Please, don't let the chain of Masonry end with you.

My Brethren, so mote it be.