

**GRAND LODGE F. & A.M.  
OF CALIFORNIA  
GRAND ORATION  
GRAND ORATOR  
H, John Fletcher**

*Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished and Honored Guests, my fellow Grand Officers and Brothers:*

This is about what I felt like when I sat down to write this Grand Oration.

First, I want to thank The Most Worshipful Fred Sorsabal for inviting me to participate with him in accepting this appointment as Grand Orator. I have had, without a doubt, the best appointment a Mason could ask for. It has been a privilege to serve, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and one I have enjoyed immensely. I have been able to share my personal thoughts with children, teachers, administrators, and our members, at school cornerstones this year; and with the superb people of California at other public cornerstone rituals

Fred Sorsabal is, without a doubt, one of the most caring persons I have ever met. He has the membership of the Grand Lodge of California on his mind in every action he performs. The Grand Lodge can be assured that this Grand Master has practiced the ideals of our Craft in every waking moment of his day-to-day stewardship.

On behalf of my fellow Grand Lodge Officers, I extend a thank you to the Most Worshipful Fred Sorsabal for allowing us the privilege to serve with you, and to serve Grand Lodge this year. We, too, love our Order, and take great pride in having served as your lieges during your term as Grand Master.

To my fellow Grand Lodge Officers and their ladies, your excitement and inspiration are tremendous and, at times, quite humorous. Our friendships will be unending and I am going to miss you tremendously.

What a year we've had learning the intricacies of the workings of Masonic lodges in the state of California! I've learned that only 10% of our members are active in their lodges. That, in 2001, the Grand Orator reported that between "1965 and 2001, we saw our craft's numbers diminish by an astounding 67%, and lodges numbered 376, from a high of 720." These numbers are now nearing zero. We have had more than 300 men entering their Masonic travels this year! And you should see the numbers in the waiting line!

I have also learned a few other interesting facts. The average age of today's California Mason is 66 years old, and we have raised to the Third Degree, 1,197 Masons this year. According to Brother Chad Marshall, some years ago, the Craft's tallest Mason was raised in Highland Park Lodge, in Los Angeles. At the time, John Aasen was eight and a half feet tall and weighed 536 pounds. Twelve craftsmen were required for certain parts of the ceremony. There were 1500 Masons present to observe the strain of the ceremony. I mention the tallest as a lead-in to the following observation.

The shortest Mason ever recorded appears to be Brother Charles Stratton, a midget, made famous by P. T. Barnum as "General Tom Thumb." He was first presented to the public in 1842; at the time he was two feet high and weighed 16 pounds. He was raised in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1862. And that's the long and short of it. (Look towards Fred Sorsabal) Interesting information, don't you think, Most Worshipful? Freddie? (Nod towards Freddie Davis)

Maybe. . . , This is actually more the way I felt as I got further into the writing of this Grand Oration

As a young man Sarkis Nahigian fled Armenia to escape persecution and arrived in the United States in 1890. He worked hard and became a successful businessman in Chicago and became a devoted Mason. In 1948 he presented a priceless Oriental rug, 46-1/2 feet long and 29-1/2 feet wide, to the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia. In presenting the gift he had this to say:

"I came to America believing in miracles. I say these words with gratitude, faith and pride. Gratitude—to the generations of hard-working and God-fearing men and women who came to this new country to make a home for freedom. Faith—in that the democracy they built will never die. Pride—in that my chance has come to show my appreciation for being an American. And believe me when I say, there is no finer title, no higher position than to be a citizen of the United States.

"He went on to say, "Here we have freedom of thought, freedom of the press, and freedom of speech. One does not appreciate what these freedoms mean, until one recalls what it was to be deprived of them. Now, again, in humble spirit, it gives me great pleasure to donate to our beloved George Washington Memorial Building, the largest Persian Royal Meshed carpet I have ever known. I donate this carpet in grateful appreciation of all the unlimited privileges and friendships and support I have enjoyed in this blessed United States of America, and not among the least of these is my privilege of being a Mason." WOW! What wonderful words! What a wonderful attitude! What a wonderful Vision this man had to have had, in order to leave his own country and begin a new life here in the United States!

What is so significant about Mr. Nahigian's story is this: In November 2005, the first lodge in California to utilize the Armenian language, in all three degrees, was established with the Constitution of Ararat Lodge in Sierra Madre. It was a

Vision of the Most Worshipful Howard Kirkpatrick, kept alive by the Most Worshipful David Doan, and Instituted by the Most Worshipful Fredrick L. Sorsabal. Men of Vision! . . . , all.

Where would this country be without the Vision of our Forefathers? Where would this State be without the Vision of our early settlers? Where would our Masonic Fraternity be without being founded by men with a Vision? Having a Vision means to have a definite view of the future.

A Vision Statement is sometimes called a picture of your Lodge in the future, but it's so much more than that. Your vision statement is your Inspiration, the Framework for all your strategic planning.

A Vision Statement may apply to the entire Fraternity or to a single Lodge within our Grand Lodge jurisdiction. Whether for all or part, of an organization, the Vision Statement answers the question, "Where do we want to go?" Think of it like this: The odds of hitting your target go up dramatically when you aim at it. If you haven't stated, or can't articulate your lodge's Vision of the future, it is going to be very difficult to make consistent decisions intended to assist your lodge in meeting goals you intend to fulfill.

The creation of a Vision Statement allows you to clearly articulate and communicate the hopes and dreams of your Lodge. It reminds you of what you are trying to build. Vision is a point on the horizon that will be reached only at some date in the future, a statement of what will be realized years, or even decades, ahead. The world of tomorrow belongs to the person who has the Vision today. If you don't have a personal Vision for your life, then you probably haven't ever focused in on anything. Vision is not so much what you think, as how you think. It is more a matter of process than content.

I like the story of the little girl who was drawing with her new set of 64crayons. Her mother asked what the picture was about, and the little girl quickly answered, "I'm drawing God." The mother, questioning her daughter' sartistic direction, responded with, "But honey, nobody knows what God looks like." The child continued drawing and then said confidently, "They'll know when I'm finished." People with vision already know what the 'just right' outcome will be, even if no one has ever seen it before. Our Grand Lodge Mission Statement communicates our Masonic goals and our Life Values; those concerning Ethics, Tolerance, Personal Growth, Philanthropy, Family, and Freedom. These values of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth are directly related to our Grand Master's project of funding the Masonic Education and Leadership Training program. The MELT program contains principles that are intended to promote growth in our membership and education and leadership in our Lodges. Our Grand Lodge Vision addresses attracting, developing, and retaining members of high quality who seek self-improvement, and opportunities to make a positive difference in their communities. Our Grand Lodge organization is well led and governed. As our Grand Master is fond of stating "Quality Attracts Quality." A very succinct, and true statement.

Our Masonic Family includes the Order of the Eastern Star, the Order of Amaranth, the Scottish Rite, the Shrine, and many others, including our Youth Groups; the Order of the DeMolay, the International Order of Rainbow for Girls, and Job's Daughters. Who can help but admire the adults who work with our Masonic Youth Groups. Through their communication and leadership, young men and women are learning lifelong lessons associated with Masonic ideals and values. These groups, more than any other, contain the future of our Masonic Family. Everyone in this room has heard an acquaintance tell stories about someone they know who was Masonically related. We know that our Youth Groups provide us with a continual supply of members. It is up to us to cultivate that membership, by sharing with them our Vision.

However, we should not limit ourselves to only our Masonic Youth Groups. The Vision of our Lodges should also include, not only our Youth Groups, but also community youth groups outside our order! Some Lodges meet this community activity by granting scholarships, or sponsoring a baseball league, or having student recognition programs. What a concept! Sponsoring programs for young men who are the source for replenishing our future membership! How much more exciting can you get than that? I know of a Lodge that was recently asked by a Boy Scout Troop for the use of their facility to hold meetings. A clear opportunity to provide a valuable service to members of our community, who are outside our Masonic walls, while providing them and their leaders, tacit information on Masonic values.

While this opportunity supports the fundamental values ascribed in our Masonic teachings, our Mission Statement and our Vision Statement, we must remain vigilant to avoid getting bogged down in unending discussions surrounding logistics and liabilities.

Look to the Future! It takes vision, on the part of all members, to see the far reaching results of this type of community service. Service that will benefit our Fraternity.

Communicating and sharing a Vision is a very difficult process. A person may be able to create his own vision with little difficulty. However, when attempting to get the members of a Lodge to take on the process from the beginning, getting a buy-in from your members may become one of, if not 'the,' single, most significant challenge of the journey.

Have a Vision. Communicate your Vision. Implement and Supportyour Vision. "United We Stand, Together We Can. . . , Make A Difference. The Family of Freemasonry." (Show slide #6)

Thank you, Most tfully H. John Fletcher, *Grand Orator*