

Grand Oration
2008
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Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished and Honored Guests, members of the Grand Lodge and Brothers all.

I have been honored to serve as your Grand Orator for this past year. Honored to serve with an outstanding corps of Grand Lodge officers and their ladies who have exemplified the Tenets of Freemasonry in their every action, representing you well at the various Cornerstones and events this past year.

Our Grand Master Richard Wakefield Hopper, and the first lady of Freemasonry, Judi, have exemplified the principles of our Fraternity in word and in action. It has been my distinct privilege to serve with such dedicated, intelligent and committed leaders of our Craft and on behalf of all the Grand Lodge officers, thank you, Most Worshipful, for a once in a lifetime experience that we will never forget.

I was honored to speak at 19 Cornerstones this year and I endeavored to express California Freemasonry's commitment to a free public education, our appreciation for the hard work of our dedicated public school teachers and to share a bit about the history and principles of our Craft. I learned early on that the attention span of 50 third graders is somewhat different than the members of my Lodge, but probably not all that different from this Grand Lodge at this hour, so I promise to be brief.

A couple of years ago, I had a conversation with my Brother-In-Law and my best friend. I informed them about a local restaurant that had been closed and was in foreclosure. They had both been very successful in business and real estate and we bandied about ideas of what might be a good business for the location.

One idea that garnered the most enthusiasm was for a clubhouse. I suggested that it already had a kitchen, we could set up a big screen TV and surround system, watch movies with the kids or share in the big Game on Sundays, maybe put in a pool table and a card room. Because we wanted our families involved, it was suggested that, while we might invite friends to join us on occasion, only those we completely trusted, who were upstanding in the community and with their families could join the club, and then only when all the other members agreed.

They were enthusiastic, to the point of being willing to invest thousands of dollars to pursue this exciting enterprise.

Then I pointed out that we already had such a place, our Lodge, of which we were all members. It's just that we weren't running it that way.

Somewhere along the way we lost the vision of what it could be.

What happened?

The large influx of members in the late 40's and early 50's required that we emphasize ritual, and insure its accuracy. Because of the demands of initiation and precision, many of the traditional programs and activities of the Lodge became secondary as we endeavored to accommodate all who asked.

Along the way we seemed to lose fellowship and replaced it with ritual.

To this day the one codified requirement that we require of our senior Lodge leaders is proficiency in the ritual. There is no requirement of fellowship, or of our officers having any management or leadership experience. We have limited the definition of "Masonic Labor" of that of making Masons.

How many brethren do you know that joined the Craft because of a love of ritual?

That it is generally unknown to them, and reveals itself in degrees over time aside, that love is developed over many years, and partly because it has come to dominate so much of the time spent in Lodge.

Our ritual is a necessary and valuable part of the Masonic experience, with wisdom and teachings that continue to inspire and educate over a lifetime. And indeed it is our ritual that makes a man a mason. Our Ritual Committee, Inspectors and Officers Coaches teach and practice with enthusiasm and zeal, and the results are clear in that the ritual in California is among the best and most respected in the country.

But what of those brethren who do not have an affinity or an aptitude for the memorization and presentation skills so necessary to our initiative process?

Indeed, many Lodges have reinvented themselves in their member's image. Offering a wide variety of programs and activities that involve all the members and often their families.

But we are again on the cusp of a large growth in membership. Not a month goes by that there isn't some new television "expose", historical representation, movie or book capitalizing on the

public's interest in Freemasonry. And our Lodges have been capitalizing on this interest, through Lodge web sites, Information Programs and community involvement.

But are we prepared for the new interest and growth that we have so long awaited?

The average Brother who accedes to the Oriental Chair is generally of exceptional intelligence, but their intellect and qualification in the ritual does not guarantee the leadership experience necessary to deal with the challenges and interests of a lodge and its members today. Leadership training has been generally overlooked.

We are carpenters and mechanics, computer programmers, public servants and retirees. And sometimes we are managers or entrepreneurs who have some background in leadership, experience that may help in developing a vision for the future of the lodge and motivating our officers.

Many of our lodges have internal training mechanisms to ensure our leaders gain a variety of experience in lodge programs and management as they progress through the chairs. But the Lodge line of officers is not the multi-year commitment it once was. Often the new Junior Warden has recently been raised, and can be intimidated by the challenge of writing his first article for the Trestle Board, because his vocation or personal experience may have never required that skill.

We are experiencing a new renaissance in the craft, with members joining in record numbers, we must be poised to fulfill the promise of Freemasonry for these new and enthusiastic brethren. We cannot leave it to chance.

When it was announced that Steve Jobs was returning to the Chairmanship of Apple Computer, their stock tripled overnight. Not because he was a good manager, but because he was known as a great leader. Jack Welch at General Electric, Lee Iacocca at Chrysler, are not known as great managers, but great leaders who have a vision of where to take their companies. Even in our current candidates for the US Presidency we look not for management but for leadership and a vision of where we are headed and how they will take us there.

Leaders are often made rather than born. We promise to provide those skills to our brethren, but are we fulfilling that promise?

Our Grand Lodge recognized that Leadership training is one of its core obligations to our Lodges, and while the Lodge Management Certification Programs conducted throughout the state and on-line, and our Leadership training through the Warden's Leadership Retreats have received universal acclaim, only half of all Lodges in California participate in these programs.

Woody Allen said that “80 percent of success is showing up. We know this is true because that is how many of us have come to be here, we showed up, had an aptitude for ritual or an interest in the education or fraternity of the lodge, and someone said, “here take my seat, there’s not much to it”. The next thing we knew, we are entrusted with the care and future of our beloved Lodge.

But what are we willing to do now that the responsibility of the Lodge is entrusted to our care?

What skills do we expect our Lodge leaders to express and what do we look for in Leadership for our Lodges?

We need them to understand Freemasonry’s greater purpose and develop a vision of where they want their Lodge to go and develop a plan to reach that vision or goal. They must have a full understanding of the membership’s needs and desires, not just the 10 to 20 percent that attend regularly, but the desires and interest of all the members, particularly new members who have made significant effort to become a Brother, and have expectations that their interest and effort will not be in vain. They need to know what programs work, which ones don’t, and yet be willing to try new ideas.

Too many of us take pride in the Craft, not for anything we have done or contributed, but because of the achievements and successes of others in by gone generations.

We brag about our historical Masonic heroes and celebrities. We pat each other on the back and tell ourselves how well we are doing, we give ourselves grandiose titles that mean nothing to our outside friends or anyone else, and the light of Freemasonry remains hidden within the walls of our Lodges, never to enlighten those who would knock on the door.

And all too often we are said to be “Drinking from wells that we didn’t dig and eating the fruit from trees that we didn’t plant”.

Many lodges have significant investments and endowments. While some members feel that the membership themselves have an obligation to support the Lodge, without relying on previous donations or investments, many Masonic Halls and Centers are paid for, by the toil and efforts of those who have come before us. Although I doubt that many deceased members left a financial legacy to their Lodge in order to underwrite their successor’s dues or provide discounted dinners, if that is what the Lodge decides to do, at least they should be doing it with their eyes open.

We expect that our leaders will have a complete understanding of the finances of the Lodge, where the money is coming from and where it is going. Only then can they ensure that their Lodge will be a going concern for future generations.

We need them to be trustworthy and inspire others to service. Knowing where the talent in the lodge lies, and where it may be lacking, developing future officers and leaders, motivating them through leadership and example, is crucial to the long term and continued success of the Lodge.

And they must fully understand the teachings and meanings of our symbolism and degrees. They must instill a culture of Masonic Education in all the workings of the Lodge.

Conrad Hahn, the Masonic poet and scholar once observed *“The lack of educational work in the average lodge is the principal reason for the lack of interest and the consequence of poor attendance in Masonry over which spokesmen have been wringing their hands for at least a century”*. We must teach the meanings of the degrees, the often lost symbolism that has been removed from our lectures and ceremonies over the years. We must foster and feed the curiosity that brings new members to our door.

It is often said that one should “lead, follow or get out of the way”. Hence many of our experienced lodge leaders disappear after the installation of their successor. It is this leadership and experience that our Lodges now require, by developing Degree Teams to assist the Officers with an overwhelming influx of applicants. By sharing previous successes and challenges and participating in the education of new members and leading social and community programs.

Each of us has a responsibility to steer our fraternity into the future, calling on our own spirit rather than deferring to those of the past. We must, each of us, celebrate and foster the same leadership that we admire and celebrate in our heritage. Only then can we fulfill the promise of Freemasonry.

I would like to acknowledge and credit several sources of inspiration and information used in this Oration: Norman B. Leeper, President of the Southern California Research Lodge 2004, Jim Collins book “Good to Great”, Robert Davis book “Understanding Manhood in America”, Cheryl Gidley’s “Tenets of Leadership” and Right Worshipful Larry L. Adamson, Chairman of the Leadership Development Committee 2004-2005.