

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1995**

**Grand Orator
Auri Spigelman
"What Came You Here To Do?"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters, Grand Lodge Officers, visiting Dignitaries and my brethren all

Can a Grand Oration really make a difference to you? Could it modify your intentions and decisions at this Communication, so to characterize them as courageous and frame breaking? These are the imperatives of my message to you today.

Permit me, first, to set the stage with a history of the Grand Orator's office, and let us learn something of the rich heritage of wisdom and grace left by my predecessors, since the lessons of the past can teach us to adapt our actions to the demands of the present. With a complete set of the Proceedings of our Annual Communications at my disposal, I sequentially read all of the past Grand Orations. I discovered that it was not until 1856, at the 7th Annual Communication, that Grand Master William H. Howard appointed John F. Morse the first Grand Orator; that in 1857 authorization was obtained "to procure suitable jewels and regalia for the Grand Orator"; and that the 1859 revision of the Grand Lodge Constitution was the first to list the Grand Orator among other Grand Lodge Officers. Then, as still defined today, the Grand Orator's function was "to deliver at each Annual Communication an address to the Grand Lodge, upon matters appertaining to the Craft."

My 128 predecessors were very capable, even exceptional, men, ten of whom served in the position twice, and 32 of whom eventually became Grand Master. The only Past Grand Master to assume the office was James A. Foshay, in 1912. Two former Grand Orators are presently standing for Grand Line election (Charles Alexander and Melville Nahin). These highly educated men spoke with inspiring, and often sermoniac, eloquence. Many were politicians, professionals and clergymen. Those of the legal profession have predominated, and distinguished statesmen from among them have included a Governor and several Senators, Congressmen, and Judges. Only in a dream could my skills emulate the high oratorical standards set by such brilliant and talented brethren as Thomas Starr King, John Felton, Jacob Voorsanger, Francis Baker, James Foshay, William Rhodes Hervey, Samuel Burke, Ellsworth Meyer, Leo Anderson and many of the former Grand Orators sitting here with us today. As Antony explained in "Julius Caesar" (Act III, Scene 2):

"I am no orator, as Brutus is.
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
To stir men's blood. I only speak right on."

Reading these Orations was an ocular challenge, as well, for until the turn of the century they were printed in seven point type, with little space between the lines. Only in recent years have they been enlarged to ten-point type. The browning and brittle paper of older volumes was another hindrance. The Orations often ran to 14 or 18 pages, which, if delivered as such, probably required an hour or more.

James L. English authored the first published Grand Oration, in 1859. Of the subsequent 126 printed Grand Orations, that of 1900 was only a summary. Five were delivered ex tempore, and their manuscripts were never submitted for publication (1873, 1891, 1905, 1908 and 1928). Apparently, six Orations were never given (1857, 1858, 1864, 1870 and 1945), and there is always some lore about such occurrences. For example, Grand Orator James H. Hardy was not permitted to speak in 1870. During the course of the year, the charter of his lodge had been revoked by the Grand Master "for good and sufficient reason." Never citing that reason, Hardy's personal membership was restored at the Annual Communication of 1871. Speeches, printed in the Proceedings but not considered Grand Orations, were delivered at the cornerstone

dedications of the Grand Lodge Temple in San Francisco in 1860, and the Decoto Masonic Home in 1896. "Operative or Speculative" was the first titled Grand Oration, given by Brother Benjamin Bledsoe in 1909; but it was not until after 1935 that titles appeared more routinely.

These Orations constitute an exceptional Masonic education, and I suggest that for the purpose of study and discussion, they be published as a collection.

Within them is interwoven a panoply of Masonic information and American history: from the Revolutionary to Civil Wars, through the bereavement of President Garfield's assassination, through the terrible anguish of the two World Wars to the anxieties of the Depression years, and to the mounting concerns about the rapid and radical changes that pervade contemporary society. The emotional impact of the Orator's stories was often electrifying.

Throughout most of the 19th century, the Grand Orators eloquently portrayed several theories of Masonic origin. In what were attempts, perhaps, to justify Masonry's existence, they repeatedly expounded on its purposes and principles. They defined Masonic culture as the advancement of high moral and intellectual forces in an environment of harmonious social interaction. They opined on "what it means to be a Mason" and on the relationships of Masonry to religion and to politics. They chafed at, and passionately protested, the unwarranted and insidious accusations that were occasionally leveled against the Craft. In the 1920s and 1930s they seemed to be over concerned, perhaps to obsession, that Masons be perceived as loyal citizens of this country. They repeatedly expressed opposition to labor unrest, gangsterism, and the many other "-isms" of the day, such as socialism, communism, Nazism, agnosticism and atheism.

It was not until the mid-1880s that organizational problems began to surface, and by the 1890s reproach became a more frequent Oration tactic. In 1892, Grand Orator Reuben Lloyd discussed some very familiar-sounding practical problems of the day. Why was lodge attendance decreasing? Education lacking? Social programs poor? Admission standards inconsistent? As to why only 1/10 to 1/7 of lodge memberships were attending meetings, he cited business pressures; lack of interest, boredom and unfriendliness; self-serving motives; non-adherence to Masonic principles outside the lodge; poor ritual performance; no educational discussion groups; and the attractiveness of the social activities of other societies. Through the years, the exposition of problems became a dominant theme of the Orations, accompanied by a litany of suggestions that "we should", "we ought to" and "we must" adopt, at least theoretically. Solutions and schemes for their implementation were poorly defined, however, and it would not be until the late 1980s that the deliberations of the Long Range Planning Committee would set the stage for Masonic Renewal efforts.

What was Grand Orator Eugene N. Dueprey's focus of concern in 1895, exactly 100 years ago? Interestingly, Masonic education! He mentioned that the expression "knowledge is power" was well known even to ancient civilizations, and that the development of mind, so-called "enlightenment", was a paramount ambition among them. Symbols of moral principle were clothed in "mysteries", in order to indelibly impress their lessons upon initiates to the philosophical orders. For similar purposes. Freemasonry's ritual has preserved the essence of these elegant traditions. Beyond the candidate level, however, it became a brother's duty to continually study and reflect and teach, not only Masonic history and philosophy, but also the liberal arts and sciences. Dueprey challenged the brethren to proudly discourse on Freemasonry's mission as an instrument of friendship, benevolence and compassion toward others; as a model for man's plans, purposes, hopes and strivings to be better; and as a platform to strengthen and express a belief and devotion to God. Such are the tenets of brotherly love, relief and truth! In his concluding remarks, Dueprey stated that consonant with the Masonic ideal, "the true purpose of education is to cherish and unfold the seed of immortality already sown within us; to develop to their fullest extent the capacities of every kind with which the God who made us has endowed us."

Brethren, whence came you? From the several lodges in the Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of California.

What came you here to do? To learn, to subdue our passions, and to improve ourselves in Masonry.

Oh, really? Can you assure me that this answer is not just speculative "lip service"? Do we emulate Dueprey's challenge today?

To learn? What substance have you learned here, or are you just having a good time? Do you read Masonic periodicals and books? As leaders of your lodges, what have you taught your brethren and candidates this year? Did you present Masonic education programs? Do you have a Masonic library, a study club or discussion groups?

To subdue our passions? Has your understanding and appreciation of our beautiful ritual enabled you to apply its lessons in your daily life at work, at home, and at leisure? Have you, as my friend and brother Ronald Koretz frequently writes and speaks, contemplated the impact of current events or celebrities in terms of the Masonic ethical imperative? Do you exemplify the four cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice, so that others notice behavioral changes in you?

To improve ourselves in Masonry? How else have you made yourselves better men? In an expression of brotherly love or caring, how many ill brethren have you visited this year? Have you personally transported a non-driving or inactive brother to lodge? Have you contributed to Masonic and community charities? How have you demonstrated that you are a good neighbor and a good citizen? How have you shown reverence for God? Are you active at your preferred Houses of Religious Worship? Does spirituality, other than the prayers prescribed by our ritual, enter your lodge? In your deliberations at this Grand Lodge, will you submit to emotion, or act courageously and decisively for its benefit?

It is obvious that I posed these rhetorical questions for nexus with the 1892 Oration's theme of reproach. And, by anticipating many negative answers, I can almost become a Masonic Ecclesiastes, proclaiming futility. As Ecclesiastes, King Solomon lamented that "All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers flow, there they flow once more. All words are wearying and one becomes speechless; the eye is never sated with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. Whatever has been is what will be, and whatever has been done is what will be done. There is nothing new under the sun." Are our reasoning processes irretrievably caught in such a circular, unfocused and unprogressive mode? Without intending to be disrespectful or antithetical to our Grand Master's enthusiastic report, my perch gives the perspective that little has changed since 1892. Anecdotal lodge successes and the exuberances of this Annual Communication makes us self-congratulatory and unrealistically complacent. I'm not losing sight of the successes of the Masonic Model Student Assistance Training Program or the Rose Parade Float; rather, I'm dealing with more fundamental and pervasive concerns. For example, I'm thinking of the more than 90 of our brethren who are inactive. Some are too old or ill, true, but most simply lack interest and pride in our Craft. Do we know if they are still real Masons?; for it is said that "you can't love a name in a roster!" We should critically question the strength of our Masonic commitment to these brethren. As representatives to this Annual Communication, we must all soberly assess our solemn responsibility to move the Masonic mission forward from mediocrity.

What shall we do? How often I've smiled during the second section of the third degree, when the triad of Fellowcrafts simultaneously exclaim "What shall we do?" They exemplify the importance of fraternal caring and concern, and promote their dependence upon one another in collective effort. But, as conversation proceeds, they remind us that ultimately we are accountable for our actions and must report to a higher authority. "Agreed!" The degree then teaches us the importance of independent thought and action. "Hold! Before we return and report, let us separate", ostensibly for individual experiences. But, "let us keep within hailing distance", that is, within the same context, so we may once again "meet and consult should any important discovery be made."

What shall we do? We have a Masonic Renewal Task Force that is composed of some of the brightest and most creative brethren in this jurisdiction. They have consulted and deliberated, and discovered a:

VISION FOR FREEMASONRY IN CALIFORNIA:

Freemasonry in California will be a preeminent fraternal organization of quality men, selected without regard to race, religion or creed.

Freemasonry will be dedicated to charity, true fellowship and brotherly love under the Fatherhood of God.

Freemasonry will embrace and spiritually enrich its members with an ethical value system that will contribute substantially to their personal happiness and satisfaction.

Freemasonry will be a relevant organization, dedicated to delighting, involving and educating members and their families; where the lodge will be a vibrant, respected, and contributing part of its community.

Freemasonry will be well led, financially secure, and distinguished from other organizations by the quality of the experiences it provides its members, in an environment of shared fellowship.

Freemasonry will be actively involved with youth in ways that guide and improve their lives as ethical and productive members of society.

A man who becomes a Mason in California will be proud of his membership and will radiate enthusiasm about his organization that makes a difference.

A man who is active in Masonry in California will find his lodge a place to learn and to lead, to respect and be respected, and to contribute in a way that brings him personal growth. .

The Renewal Task Force understands that "life is made up of effort and results" and that "the strength of the effort is the measure of the result." It realizes that attainment of its vision for the lodges and their members will require a proactive even aggressive, stance. It intends to learn from both the successes and failures of the past. Consultants need to be hired, products must be created, and experimental programs authorized. Excellent publications and practical seminars, besides our successful Wardens' Retreats, must be created to guide our lodge officers in administrative, educational, financial, membership, family, public relations and community programs. A modern "Table Lodge" protocol, Masonic plays and other meaningful materials must be written for the brethren to enjoy. We need to harness the technological revolution for our benefit: audio and videotapes, cable television, computers, CD-ROMs, and what is now known as "Masonic Cyberspace" on the Internet. To capture interest, we need to create interactive Masonic education courses and even Masonic video games; we might even explore "virtual reality." The Masonic Information Services Team has been established not only to formulate this information and these products, but also to efficiently distribute them. Internal marketing and communications among our brethren will be improved. Our community image and reputation will be polished brightly. The process to enable this vision has begun; the educational tools for the renewal solution are understood.

What came you here to do? To guarantee the future of this Fraternity.

First, there are several economic realities for you to consider:

1. Inflation has priced goods at 15 to 20 times that of 35 to 40 year ago.
2. Lodge dues have barely increased in that period; certainly not commensurate with the value of Masonry.
3. This is a time of diminishing membership and diminishing revenues.
4. Efficiency measures recently adopted by Grand Lodge have drastically cut operating expenses and committee budgets.
5. Although our Foundation and Endowment Funds are successful for their specific functions, we are severely constrained to enact any proposed new programs.

If there is any hope for successful Masonic renewal in California, you must be financially responsible to the process. My brethren, be cognizant of Cassius' admonition:

"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Collossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."
(Julius Caesar: Act I, Scene 2)

At this critical juncture of spiritual and financial crisis, we cannot behave as petty men, unable to govern the fate of our Craft and its extraordinary mission.

"Talk to me not of time, place or patience." I had three acquaintances who talked like that. They were petty men, victims of time and circumstance, who did irreparable harm to their task by demanding their rewards inappropriately.

The fault, indeed, will be in ourselves if we do not act with insight and courage during our deliberations at this Annual Communication. We must continue to build and renew, to conquer the ruffians of our day. We can actuate the words of Henry David Thoreau:

"If you've built castles in the air, your work need not be lost, for that is where they should be. Now put the foundation under them."

Most Worshipful, thank you for the honor and the opportunities that have been afforded me during the past year. It has been a pleasure to travel with you and our wonderful Grand Lodge Family, visiting many remarkable places and meeting many devoted brethren. Each one of us may take a fall, sooner or later, as I did from the lodge stage in lone. But, inspired by your firm, yet compassionate style of leadership I was able to overcome the adversity, get up, brush myself off, ascend the podium, quip a bit, and deliver the message. On that basis, and with the blessings of God, so may we recover the beauties and lessons of our Craft, and translate them to make Masonic Renewal a reality for all good men.

Brethren, "are you willing to proceed?"

Can a Grand Oration make a difference?

"Together, brethren!"