

Reform Freemasonry!

A Vision for the Future of Freemasonry

by

Richard A. Graeter

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Dedication

In 2001, within weeks of his 70th birthday, my father was diagnosed with a particularly nasty form of cancer that had a very low 5-year survival rate. In spite of this bleak prognosis, seven years later, my father is still with us, healthy, happy, and cancer-free. His survival is by no means a miracle; rather, his cure was due to a radical and severe treatment regimen involving chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. The treatment regimen nearly killed him. And, if he had not been an exceptionally strong man, possessed of a good heart and fighting spirit, he would surely have died. Yes, he suffered. The treatment made him ill, and he lost a great deal of weight very rapidly; but he survived. And while his experience with cancer changed his life, it did not change the man. My father remains at his core, the same man I always knew him to be; but now he revels in his time, has a newfound perspective on life, and looks forward to a bright future. The treatment regimen was painful and severe, but his courage in facing the brutal truth that confronted him allowed him to prevail. Although my father is not a freemason, he has been and remains my guide and inspiration, and I dedicate this work to him.

Author's Note

There is a substantial and growing body of work addressing the decline of Freemasonry in the 21st Century. The decline has been so painfully obvious for so long that the body of work analyzing its causes stretches back decades. With the advent of the Internet and online publishing, forums, and BLOGS, the growth in the conversation of this topic has become exponential. Over the years I have added my voice to this cacophony as well. My favorite target to blame for all our misfortunes was failed leadership, particularly at the grand lodge level. But I was wrong. I have come to understand that I had mistaken what was merely the symptom of the disease (failed leadership) for the disease itself.

The good news is that I believe that the disease afflicting Freemasonry is curable. But treatment will not be easy. Like a radical treatment regimen for cancer, it will be painful and may even cause the patient to become more ill over the short term. But, the patient is still strong; is possessed of a good heart and a noble spirit; and, if it can face the brutal truth with courage, it will prevail.

Introduction

This work is divided into five sections that look towards the future of Freemasonry.

The first section, *Voices in the Wilderness*, reviews four selected publications from the current body of work that addresses the future of Freemasonry.

The second section, *How to Preserve and Stimulate Freemasonry*, applies the discipline of the *Business Week* best-selling book, *Built To Last*, by authors Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, to Freemasonry as an organization. Jim Collins is a student and teacher of enduring great companies—how they grow; how they attain superior performance; and, how good companies can become great companies. His books have been fixtures on the *Business Week* bestseller list and have been translated into 25 languages. His work has been featured in *Fortune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Fast Company*.

The third section, *Something To Believe In*, explores the three building blocks that are essential for building an organization that can move the hearts and minds of its members and some of the reasons behind the failure of our grand lodge organizations from being able to accomplish this goal.

The fourth section, *The Grand Hairball*, adapts the sage advice of corporate gurus Dr. Oren Harari and Gordon MacKenzie to the masonic context, and presents some conclusions on one possible root cause of the disease afflicting Freemasonry, as well as proposing some chemotherapy for grand lodges that *could* help lead to a cure.

The concluding section, *Freemasonry 3.0*, closes with a radical vision for the wholesale reorganization of the body of Freemasonry should grand lodges fail to take progressive action to respond to the needs, hopes, and aspirations of today's young Freemason. Freemasons were meant to be great *innovators*, and *it's about time* that we restore this legacy.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Author's Note	iii
Introduction	iv
Table of Contents	v
Table of Illustrations.....	vi
Preface	vii
Voices in the Wilderness	1
Introduction	1
It's About Time.....	1
Laudable Pursuit	4
Voting With Their Feet	5
What Are We Trying To Save?	7
Conclusion	8
How to Preserve <i>and</i> Stimulate Freemasonry	10
Change	10
Preserve the Core (What not to change)	11
And Stimulate Progress (what to change).....	16
A Willingness To Experiment	19
Something To Believe In	21
1. Freemasonry's Inspiring Story	21
2. Freemasonry's Culture of Identity.....	22
3. Freemasonry's Organizational Structure	23
The Grand Hairball.....	25
Grand Illusions.....	25
Orbiting the Giant Hairball	27
The Pyramid & The Plum Tree.....	28
A Radical Idea	41
Freemasonry 3.0	44
Afterword.....	50
List of Authorities Cited	53
About the Author	55
Endnotes.....	57

Table of Illustrations

Freemasonry.....	15
The Masonic League.....	48
Caliburn Lodge.....	52

Preface

Freemasonry liberates man from superstition and dogma so that he can embark on an unfettered quest for the Truth. For centuries, this core aspect of Freemasonry has resonated with the greatest minds of the ages. The enlightenment thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries, America's Founding Fathers, philosophers and scientists, astronomers and mathematicians all have found meaning in Freemasonry.

Freemasonry first declared itself to the world with the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England in 1717, and since that time has enjoyed phenomenal worldwide growth. At the center of almost every major American city stands a substantial masonic edifice. These magnificent masonic buildings, located on prime downtown real estate, stand shoulder to shoulder with cathedrals, museums, centers for the arts, and towers housing the headquarters of global corporations. It is also noteworthy that these buildings were financed in large part though cash donations from members of a fraternity who felt that Freemasonry was worth their sacrifice.

So important was Freemasonry to our forefathers that at one time it was not uncommon for a lodge's annual dues to be the equivalent of a week's wages or more. Membership in a colonial lodge was often so highly prized that joining fees could even exceed a month's wages. In addition to paying dues to cover annual operating expenses, these Freemasons also donated extensively to capital funds to raise their masonic edifices.

Today, however, many of Freemasonry's once elegant buildings are in a state of decay while the masonic organizations that own them struggle to meet mounting repair and maintenance expenditures with dwindling revenue streams. In the midst of this crisis, the typical freemason today bristles at paying meager annual dues that are usually less than a month's cable bill. Consider: 30 days of television means more to our members than an entire year of Freemasonry. Why does the typical mason today no longer feel obligated to support his lodge? Perhaps a better question is what has changed—or failed to change—about Freemasonry that it no longer commands the enthusiastic support of its members nor appeals to the young men of today?

Freemasonry in the United States is locked in a steep, half-century-long decline in membership. Even the inventive one-day classes have done little to reverse this trend. In the last 45 years, the Grand Lodge of Ohio has lost over 160,000 members, and every year suffers the net loss of another 5,000. Typical lodge attendance rarely exceeds a small percentage of a lodge's membership. Lodge buildings crumble as lodges struggle to bear increasing property costs with decreasing resources. Freemasonry's public image is more due to popular novels like *The DaVinci Code* and movies like *National Treasure* than the truth. Young men, inspired by these fictions, are finally seeking out Freemasonry, and some

even join our fraternity in one-day classes chasing these fantasies, but then only discover the truth about Freemasonry today and quickly melt away.

The question is: can we reform Freemasonry so that it can once again offer those young men who actively seek involvement *something to believe in?*

Voices in the Wilderness

Introduction

The debate over the symptoms, causes, and cures for the long decline of Freemasonry has endured for so long that it now practically a Landmark of the Fraternity. These following four voices, taken from this debate, provided the inspiration for this paper on “change” and its relationship to the state of Freemasonry today.

The first work reviewed is *It’s About Time*, published in 2005 by the Masonic Information Center (MIC), which is part of the Masonic Service Association of North America. The MIC initiated this study following their 2004 report to Conference of Grand Masters in North America (COGMINA) that focused on the need to raise the public’s awareness about Masonry. With the overwhelming approval of COGMINA, the MIC steering committee formed a special task force to study the issue of masonic public identity.

The second paper is *Laudable Pursuit: A 21st Century Response to Dwight Smith*. A shadowy group calling itself the Knights of the North originally published this paper online in 2005. This paper is an excellent and comprehensive review of the issues facing Freemasonry and offers many insightful proposals. It was recently republished in installments in *The Philalethes Society* magazine in 2006.

The final papers reviewed are *Voting With Their Feet* by S. Brent Morris and *What Are We Trying To Save?* by Thomas W. Jackson. Both authors were also members of the MIC Task Force that authored *It’s About Time*; and, interestingly, some of the perspectives they offer in their private writings differ from those presented by the MIC Task Force.

It’s About Time

The Masonic Information Center¹

“When memories exceed dreams, the end is near.”

—Michael Hammer

It’s About Time opens by observing that, in spite of numerous initiatives adopted by its leaders, membership in Freemasonry has been dropping for the past 50 years. The MIC Task Force that authored the paper noted that even in the face of successful one-day class initiatives, the increasing number of demits and NPD’s show that “clearly, Masons were not satisfactorily addressing the ways of keeping our members involved and enthusiastic about Masonry.” They conclude that the “time had come for us to take full responsibility for our sad state of affairs and begin to move forward, embracing the fact that we have a lot of work to do.”²

To underscore the gravity of their message, the Task Force highlights the following quotation by business organization consultant Michael Hammer from Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat*:³ "When memories exceed dreams, the end is near."⁴ They should be congratulated for finding what is probably the single most apt quotation available to describe Freemasonry's current state of affairs. Truly, Freemasonry, more than any other organization, revels in the faded memories of its past glories. But, when young men pass through the West Gate looking for these great leaders and fabled stories, they find only empty seats and faint echoes of that faded glory.

Recognizing this, the Task Force makes a dramatic statement that gives the report its title: "*It is about time* we brought our actions in line with our aspirations."⁵ They characterize their report as a "fraternal call to action . . . communicating to our fraternity the need to focus on making Masonry relevant to our changing communities and our 21st century lives."⁶ They implore that we ask the "tough question:" "Who are we as a fraternal organization within the context of the 21st century?"⁷

To begin to answer this question, the Task Force reviews the statistical decline in membership over the past century, observing that "Freemasonry is at its lowest membership level in at least 80 years."⁸ They identify four common reasons given for this decline: 1) that we are in a "downward cycle"; 2) that we "lost the Vietnam generation;" 3) that people are just "too busy" to participate; and 4) that "people no longer join the way they used to."⁹ The Task Force deftly dismisses these feeble excuses stating "that any organization wishing to attract members must offer something of great interest to even be considered worthwhile."¹⁰

They correctly point out that our decline is not due to a shrinking pool of potential members. In fact, the pool of potential members has grown dramatically. It is not that people and society have changed; change is inevitable. It is that Freemasonry as an institution has failed to adapt. Put simply, Freemasonry fails to offer "something of great interest" to young men today to "attract" their time and money. "This can only mean that Masons have simply not kept pace with our changing lifestyles."¹¹ The Task Force continues, stating that "membership loss is *not* the major problem . . . [but] merely a *symptom* of the problem."¹²

Next, the Task Force provides a brief historical analysis which reviews how the fraternity evolved with each succeeding generation. Two points stand out from the analysis. The first is that, at its inception, Freemasonry "**attracted** leaders to its membership" (emphasis added).¹³ The second is that Freemasonry "provided a moral philosophy relevant to the individual and to communities."¹⁴

The Task Force then identifies some of the weaknesses within the current Fraternity, the two most pertinent of which, in my opinion, are that "Masonry is no longer identified as an elite organization" and that "current Masons do not understand the true meaning of our fraternity."¹⁵ Continuing, the Task Force asks

a series of probing questions about the existing and desired public perception of Freemasonry—the benefits that the Fraternity offers in a 21st century context; who needs to hear our message; who we should attract as potential members; and, what is the core of our identity.¹⁶ All are good questions.

According to the Task Force, “Freemasonry wants to attract fellow journeymen who are seeking enrichment in body, mind, and spirit through participation in a brotherhood committed to good works and personal growth.”¹⁷ Attempting to identify the core of our identity, the Task Force states that Freemasonry must be “lodge-centered” and that we must make it an experience that is rewarding, enriching, and **relevant** to its members, their families and the greater community.¹⁸ The question left unanswered is does merely being “relevant” offer a compelling enough vision to attract the great men of the 21st Century?

In the report’s closing sections, the Task Force begins to outline some action steps. First, it states “we must look squarely into the challenge of performing Masonry to the betterment of our fraternity and ourselves.”¹⁹ Next, it admonishes that we should break out of our lethargy, and “exercise the same determination that we admire and celebrate in our heritage.”²⁰ Finally, it details a laundry list of tangible as well as intangible assets that Freemasonry possesses and suggests that it is our management of these resources that has failed, concluding that: “Our Masonic resources are great! Our resource management skills are rusty.”²¹

After doing an admirable job of analyzing the reasons for our present difficulties, and recognizing the many resources at our disposal, the Task Force limps to a disappointing conclusion that utterly fails to deliver an actionable plan for renewal. First, it lists 10 suggestions to help lodges “take action now” to “plan meaningful activities that put Masonic values into action.”²² None merit specific mention here.

Under the heading “Move Masonry into the 21st Century,” we get the trite admonition to “cast off negativism” and make Freemasonry “the fraternity that you want—brother by brother, lodge by lodge.”²³ The Task Forces closes their report with the warning that “**We have not a moment to lose.**” (emphasis in original)²⁴ I would agree, but after 15 pages of insightful, scholarly, and sometimes courageous prose, the Task Force falls flat with a mere page-and-a-half of minor lodge-level suggestions and airy platitudes such as “cast off negativism.”²⁵

In the final analysis, *Its About Time* is all diagnosis and no cure. The anemic suggestions presented are all directed to fixing individual lodges and chiding individual Masons to be more enthusiastic. Not a single proposal for change at the grand lodge level is presented. Not one. Perhaps *it’s about time* that someone suggested to the Task Force that it might be attempting to cure the wrong patient.

Laudable Pursuit

The Knights of the North²⁶

“Keep the young generations in hail, bequeath to them no tumbled house!”

—Joseph Fort Newton

This well written paper is worth reading in its entirety. The paper discusses the changes that the authors believe Freemasonry must adopt to adapt to the 21st Century. Importantly, they also discuss the changes that in their opinion Freemasonry should **not** make.

Based on the decades-old writings of Dwight L. Smith, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana and published last year in *The Philalethes* magazine, *Laudable Pursuit* presents a bold agenda of impressive changes predicated on devolving power from grand lodges back to the local lodges, which its authors view as the “real hope for our survival.”²⁷ Smith’s early 1960’s writings were collected in two short booklets titled *Whither Are We Traveling?*²⁸ and *Why This Confusion In The Temple?*²⁹ The authors point out that Smith’s “questions and observations are as valid today as they were when he wrote them, perhaps more so, given the current atmosphere within Freemasonry concerning declining membership numbers.” Smith’s *Ten Questions* and *Ten Pitfalls*, reprinted on pages 3 and 4 of the paper, are worth a careful reading by anyone interested in the future of Freemasonry.

Ten recommendations for change proposed by the authors of *Laudable Pursuit* are of interest to those dedicated to the future of Freemasonry. Beginning on page 11 with the familiar line from our ritual “to be reinvested of what were divested” and continuing through page 28, the authors recommend the following reforms:

1. Abolish the progressive officer line for both lodges and grand lodges, and permit nominations for grand lodge officers, including Grand Master, to be made from the floor. In short, institute free and fair elections for our leadership positions, and provide meaningful checks and balances on the power of those leaders.
2. Guard the West Gate by insisting that serious investigations be conducted on all those who would be potential members.
3. Increase degree fees and annual dues and strengthen proficiency requirements, recognizing that when we make becoming a freemason “cheap and easy” we strip from it that which any man of integrity would value.
4. Encourage the formation of new lodges and give them more freedom to conduct their affairs, while at the same time cut back on the existing inventory of lodge buildings.
5. Make concordant bodies wait a year before soliciting newly raised Master Masons.
6. Focus charitable works on local communities rather than big, distant charitable institutions.

7. Restore conviviality to masonic fellowship and end the prohibition against alcohol at Festive Boards. We are Masons and adults, not religious zealots or children. We can trust ourselves to raise a glass of wine to toast Craft and Country.
8. Allow lodges to meet and work in the inferior degrees and stop the mad dash to be raised. By eliminating “velocity panic” we can improve the overall initiatory experience and improve the opportunities for a more in depth masonic education program.
9. Take Freemasonry seriously, but don’t drive out joy. Degree ceremonies should be solemn, business meetings brief, and the feast that follows its centerpiece.
10. And finally, in their insightful conclusion, the authors recommend simply that “Let’s Try Freemasonry.” To find out what they mean, see pages 25 to 28 of their article.

In closing, the following paragraph taken from *Laudable Pursuit* illuminates the path that Freemasonry must take to regain its footing.

The real hope for our survival lies at the doorstep of the local Lodge, not the halls of grand lodge. No one idea, plan or program will be the magic bullet that saves us from a slow death. The time has come to devolve power into the hands of the local Lodges, so they may better serve the needs of their local members. Instead of central planning, we have hundreds of laboratories to experiment in, within the confines of the Ancient Landmarks. Instead of demanding “cookie-cutter” one-size-fits-all Lodges, each Lodge should have its own distinct personality.³⁰

Voting With Their Feet

S. Brent Morris³¹

“I love Masonry. Its Grand Lodges I can’t stand.”

—A Mason who voted with his feet

In *Voting With Their Feet*, Brother S. Brent Morris begins his analysis by pointing out the seeming paradox that, at least in Maryland “Masons have no interest in forming new Lodges” but at the same time appear enthusiastic about forming new masonic groups at the fringes of Masonry.³² He proposes that the reasons behind this phenomenon are that these “fringe” groups are both “easier to set up and maintain” as well as being “perceived as more prestigious and exclusive than Lodges.”³³ He then asks the question that we all should be asking: “why can’t we generate that sense of exclusivity and recognition in a Lodge?”³⁴

Brother Morris then identifies what I denominate as the unholy trinity of reasons for the root cause of all our woes: (1) we are “overburdened with constricting rules and nitpicking regulations;” (2) we have a “massively centralized authority” that is inflexible and unresponsive to the needs of its members; and (3) our organizational structure provides “short-tenured leaders who are given almost limitless power and no time to use it effectively.”³⁵ The net effect of this unholy trinity is to suck the joy and fun out of the local lodge experience. Grand lodge leaders should remember that Freemasonry is a **voluntary** association.

Brother Morris closes by asking:

What if Lodges were given the flexibility and responsibility to make decisions for themselves? And what if Masons were encouraged and rewarded to form and participate in new Lodges?³⁶

* * *

Masonry is declining in membership as are nearly all other voluntary associations. Our members continue to be enthusiastic about the Masonic experience, just not in Lodges. There is hope for the Craft if we can focus our members’ enthusiasm back at the main body of Masonry, but this will require difficult changes. Some of the most urgent changes are administrative, but they strike at the heart of our Masonic culture as it has evolved over centuries. Our rewards structure is predicated upon presiding, and no one wants to reduce rewards. There is no reason why accepted management techniques cannot be used in Masonry, nor any reason why control cannot be returned to local Lodges. If we are not willing to put changes to a vote in our Grand Lodges, then our members will continue to vote with their feet and move their Masonic energies to more rewarding activities. And if we could conduct post-election polls, we’d probably find a lot of these voters saying, “I love Masonry. It’s Grand Lodges I can’t stand.”³⁷

Whereas after 15 pages of analysis the MIC Task Force advised an anemic treatment regimen for the wrong patient, in less than seven pages Brother Morris is well on the way to prescribing the right cure. The clear implication is that the cancer on the body of Freemasonry is our bloated grand lodge system, and the treatment advised is to substantially shrink that bloat and devolve power back to the subordinate lodges.

In order to execute the changes Brother Morris recommends, as well as those suggested in *Laudable Pursuit*, grand lodges must return to an organizational model in which individual lodges are primary. Brother Morris points the way by suggesting we apply “accepted management techniques” to Masonry.³⁸ But he stops short, correctly identifying the problem, but not daring to do more than hint at the fundamental change that is required to achieve the organizational breakthrough we need to successfully enter the 21st Century. And, given the treatment typically meted out to those who question grand lodge authority and preach change, who could blame him?

What Are We Trying To Save?

Thomas W. Jackson³⁹

“The problem with Freemasonry is that it does not practice Freemasonry anymore.”

—John Robinson

In *What Are We Trying To Save?*, Brother Thomas W. Jackson explores the nature of Freemasonry and the issues facing it coupled with an admonition about efforts to change and adapt. Brother Jackson states that one of the reasons for Freemasonry’s growth in the past was that we “projected to the world an image which good men wanted to be part of.”⁴⁰ He highlights three reasons that he believes explain why Freemasonry became as great as it did:

Reason #1 it was probably the first organization to accept, at least philosophically, men from all stations of life as equals.

Reason #2 it attracted some of the greatest minds that ever lived.

Reason #3 it remained selective on the quality of the man it would accept.⁴¹

He concludes that the “deletion of any one of these reasons would have prevented the Craft from becoming what it did or remaining as it has, and I am convinced that the loss of any one will also destroy it, at least in the historic form for which it is known.”⁴²

Brother Jackson’s main thesis is that “we are making many decisions today” about changes “that seem to indicate a lack of interest in preserving the integrity of the Craft.”⁴³ He opines that we have changed Freemasonry more in the past 20 years than in the prior 250, and that the cumulative effects of these changes have not only failed to arrest the rate of our decline, but have been detrimental to the long term health of the body of Freemasonry.⁴⁴

Brother Jackson insists that “the loss in membership can neither be blamed solely on inadequacy of leadership or failure of our system” and that “it is time for

us to recognize that our decrease in numbers is due to a sociological condition of the time and not to our inability to cope with change.”⁴⁵ In effect, he exculpates the last 50 years of masonic leadership from responsibility for the state of our Fraternity today when he concludes “My Brethren, I honestly do not believe that any difference in our structure or our leadership would have shown results much different than they do today.”⁴⁶

Brother Jackson then points to the evolution of our Fraternity into “the world’s greatest charitable organization” and suggests that by “concentrating most of our efforts on raising money to give away” we are distracted from the “avowed purpose” of Freemasonry “to take good men and make them better.”⁴⁷ Quoting author John Robinson that “the problem with Freemasonry is that it does not practice Freemasonry anymore,” he laments “and how can we when the vast majority of our Members do not even know what to practice.”⁴⁸ Preaching that our charitable works “must be secondary to our primary purpose,” Brother Jackson says that “quality will attract quality, and quality will ensure survival. We must always remember that Freemasonry was never meant to be an organization for every man. We cannot hope to grow or even remain the same by lowering our standards.”⁴⁹

In his concluding paragraphs, Brother Jackson states:

We are confronted today with monumental problems concerning our integrity as an institution. Many of the problems are originating outside the Craft, but, regrettably, most originate from within. Those from within should be more readily solvable but we as leaders must be willing to sacrifice our egos for the welfare of the Craft. We must be willing to surrender personal ambition for the sake of the future of Freemasonry.⁵⁰

Conclusion

At first blush, the four papers appear to reach some conflicting conclusions. One says that change is inevitable and that Freemasonry has failed to adapt to changing people and society, while another says that change is inevitable, but we must hold fast in the face of change. One faults inflexibility in grand lodges; another suggests that they have been too flexible. One even seeks to lay blame at the foot of individual lodges and fault individual Masons for their lack of enthusiasm! Most worrisome of all is the belief shared by all that most members today do not adequately understand the true meaning of Freemasonry.

When you boil them all down, however, they all really say the same thing: Freemasonry must attract quality members to survive. In order to attract quality members, it must provide a quality experience. To provide a quality experience, it

must stay true to its principles. And to stay true to its principles, our members must know what those principles are and our leaders must place the good of the organization before their own personal ambition.

All four papers make one point abundantly clear: the individual local lodge is the single most important element to our future success. We cannot succeed on any level if we do not first succeed on the individual lodge level. To answer Brother Jackson's question "what are we trying to save?" . . . The answer is nothing less than our local lodges. And in the end, nothing more.

The next section, *How to Preserve and Stimulate Freemasonry*, addresses the issue of **change** in the masonic context.

How to Preserve *and* Stimulate Freemasonry

Change

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”

— Charles Darwin

“Change” is the bogeyman that ceaselessly plagues Freemasonry. Depending on whom you ask, either society changed and Freemasonry failed to adapt, or Freemasonry changed too much and compromised its traditions. Here is a little secret: both statements are true. The correct question, however, is not **should** we change, but **what** should we change.

Change is simply a brutal fact of life, and Freemasonry must face the brutal facts and learn to adapt if it expects to survive. But, in adapting, we must also have a firm grasp on what not to change. And, to do this, we need to articulate what it is about Freemasonry that should never change; for, once knowing this, we are then liberated to aggressively change everything else.

Without question, we should never compromise on our principles, and this is what I believe Brother Jackson meant when he wisely questioned why we should attempt to change into “something someone else wants us to be.”¹ Our core principles should be, by their very nature, timeless and unchanging. But Freemasonry, like every institution, must always grapple with the difficult question of what we should change in response to a changing world, and what should never change no matter the cost. We must know the difference between what is sacred, and what is not; between what should never change, and what should be always open for change; between, quite simply, “what we stand for” and “how we do things.”²

In spite of that now mythical Landmark³ to the contrary, “change and innovation” have been hallmarks of Freemasonry from the very beginning. In fact, its willingness to change has been a source of its strength and vibrancy for over 300 years. Change was the very essence of Enlightenment philosophy; and, it is upon this philosophy that Freemasonry is founded. It is bitterly ironic that a society founded on a new style of thinking that dramatically changed the world is now itself a prisoner of its own dogmatic and stagnant traditions.

To illustrate, consider that at its inception, the Craft was a rather informal affair, having no fixed meeting time or place, no grand lodge, or even a fixed ritual. This was Freemasonry’s *Time Immemorial* era. Then, on June 24, 1717, the landscape of Freemasonry was fundamentally changed by the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England.⁴ A second grand lodge followed in Ireland in 1725, and a third in Scotland in 1736, and, thus began the *Grand Lodge* era.⁵

The organizational structure was not the only aspect of Freemasonry to profoundly change during this period. Masonic ritual also underwent significant and repeated changes. Early records seem to suggest that there were only two masonic degrees. At some point, probably around 1728⁶, the Hiram legend was introduced to the third degree of Freemasonry. And it was not until 1772 that the degree lectures so familiar to American Masons were formalized⁷. To conclude, in little more than a few decades, both the organizational structure and ritual of Freemasonry in England changed considerably.

American Freemasons also had a penchant to innovate. Following the Baltimore Convention in 1843, American lodges kicked their Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts out of the fraternity altogether and began conducting business solely in the Master Mason degree. We in our time have also been witness to some fundamental changes, the most notorious of these being the introduction of one-day classes that can turn poor, blind candidates into 32^o Masons in the span of a few hours.

Whereas some changes made throughout our history were merely changes to “how we do things,” others (like the introduction of one-day classes) show an astounding lack of appreciation for the need to preserve our core principles. Inevitably, such ill-conceived changes result in a destructive misalignment between “what we stand for” and “how we do things.” It is absolutely essential to not confuse core ideology with noncore practices.⁸ Timeless core values should never change; operating practices and cultural norms should never stop changing.⁹ Again, change is essential for survival, but we must know **what** to change, and equally importantly, **what not to**.

Preserve the Core (What not to change)

*“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”*

— T.S. Eliot, *Four Quarters*

According to the Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, authors of the *Business Week* best-selling book, *Built To Last*, “a key step in building a visionary company is to articulate a **Core Ideology**.”¹⁰ Core Ideology is the combination of an organization’s **Core Values**, which are “the organization’s essential and enduring tenets, not to be compromised for financial gain or short-term expediency”¹¹ and its **Core Purpose**, which is “the set of fundamental reasons” for an organization’s existence.¹² Taken together, these concepts define “who we are” and answer the question “what is important to us?”

Like the fundamental ideas of a great nation, church, school, or any other enduring institution, core ideology in a visionary company is a set of basic precepts that plant a fixed stake in the ground: “This

is who we are; this is what we stand for; this is what we're all about." Like the guiding principles embodied in the American Declaration of Independence ("We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .") and echoed eighty-seven years later in the Gettysburg Address ("a . . . nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal"), core ideology is so fundamental to the institution that it changes seldom if ever.¹³

The great paradox of change is that the organizations that best adapt to a changing world first and foremost know what should **not** change; they have a fixed anchor of guiding principles—their *core ideology*—around which they can more easily change everything else. They know the difference between what is sacred and what is not, between what should never change and what should be always open for change, between "what we stand for" and "how we do things."

To articulate a core ideology for Freemasonry, we must first describe its core purpose—its "fundamental reason for being." An indication of a well-conceived core purpose is the ability to complete an "*onliness*" statement.¹⁴ Fill in the blank in the following: Freemasonry is the *only* organization that _____. If you are unable to complete the sentence, you probably have an inferior core purpose.

Ask the average Mason to explain what Freemasonry's mission is and you will invariably get the reply "to make good men better." Personally, I find this motto uninspiring. There is nothing "distinctly different" or uniquely masonic about seeking to make good men better. Churches, schools, self-help gurus, scientologists, "success" seminars, books about "The Secret" and a plethora of other fraternal societies all in one way or another seek *to make good men better*. In fact, contrary to prevailing dogma, I propose that *making good men better* was **never** Freemasonry's core purpose! We have simply been mouthing this vapid and vacuous platitude for so long that we no longer bother trying to say anything more profound, which should give us little reason to wonder why, as Brother Jackson laments, "the vast majority of our Members do not even know what to practice."¹⁵

If I were to capture Freemasonry's core purpose in a single sentence that truly distinguished Freemasonry from all other organizations, and would resonate with both its most luminary members of the 18th Century as well as a young prospective candidate in the 21st Century, it would look something like this:

Freemasonry is an elite order dedicated to an enlightened moral philosophy that teaches humanity to labor together in harmony.

To round out its “*onliness*” statement, Freemasonry is the **only** organization that can claim a 300-year tradition of attracting the finest minds from all races, faiths, creeds, and nations to lead the world to a better tomorrow. Now *that* sounds a little more exciting! It also sounds like something worth preserving, and in a nutshell, explains why I personally have continued to invest a substantial amount of my time and energy into Freemasonry.

The next step is to define our core values—those “essential and enduring tenets” and “guiding principles” that answer the question “what is important to us?”¹⁶ Core values cannot be dreamed up by a committee; you can only discover those values that already exist.¹⁷ It is equally important to understand that you cannot “install” new core values into people. Core values are not something people “buy into.”¹⁸ People must be predisposed to holding them. The critical key is that we must attract and then retain those people who share our values, and let those who aren’t predisposed to sharing them go elsewhere.¹⁹ This is why it is vital to properly guard the West Gate.

So what are Freemasonry’s core values? It stands to reason that they should flow from the unique moral philosophy of our core purpose: Belief in a Universal Creator; inclusiveness as well as selectivity; toleration that transcends partisan politics and sectarian religion; an educational tradition that teaches progressive thinking; integrity in thought, word, and deed. They are found in our cardinal virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. The simple words “brotherly love, relief, and truth” also elegantly capture much of our core values.

Once we have articulated a core ideology, it may be helpful to take the exercise one step farther and build a Brand Equity Pyramid for Freemasonry. A Brand Equity Pyramid is a one-page summary of a brand’s foundation; its essence, character, attributes—in short, the brand’s promise and the reasons to believe that the brand can deliver on its promise.

Now you may wonder what brands have to do with Freemasonry. The answer is plenty once you appreciate what a brand truly is. To begin, let’s try to better define what a brand is by first stating what it is not. A brand is not a logo. An example of a logo in our context would be the square and compasses. It is not a corporate identity. Neither is a brand a product or service. Stylized white letters in a red oval is a logo. The Coca-Cola Company is a corporate identity. Carbonated cola flavored beverage is a product. But none are a brand.

So what **IS** a brand? “A brand is a person’s **gut feeling** about a product, service, or company.”²⁰ “A brand is a kind of Platonic ideal—a concept shared by society to identify a specific class of things.”²¹ Finally, and most importantly, a brand is not what a company says it is . . . it is what the outside world **perceives it to be**. In other words, a brand is the nonverbal perception of an entity’s core ideology in the mind of the perceiver. Coke is a brand. Yes, to some it may mean just another cola drink, but to most of the world the word conjures up a vibrant image, taste, and style that an entire community of people identifies with on a personal level.

In the world of brands, perception is reality. If someone perceives us to be an old men's club, then to that individual, that is exactly what we are. If we focus most of our time and money on charitable efforts instead of our core purpose, then we should not complain if the world perceives us to be just another charity. We have confused the world about who we are, what is important to us, and what we came here to do. We have compromised our core ideology—our core values and core purpose—and in so doing diluted our brand. To restore our brand to its former prominence, we must reconstruct our Brand Equity Pyramid and rededicate our efforts to our primary core purpose. The following illustration puts it all together into an Equity Pyramid for Freemasonry.

Freemasonry

Overall Equity

An elite order dedicated to an enlightened moral philosophy that teaches humanity to labor together in harmony.

Benefit Equities

Teaches a unique system of morality.

Explores the philosophical interrelationships between science, religion, humanity, and God.
Offers fellowship with those who share masonic values in a universal order open to all.

Reason to Believe Equities

A 300-year-old tradition founded on the thinking of the Enlightenment Age.
Dedicated to the freedom of thought, expression, and belief.
Open to all persons of all races, faiths, creeds, and nationalities.

Organizational Character

A world-wide brotherhood that for centuries has sought to transcend the divisiveness of sectarian religion and partisan politics through a progressive science founded on the profound truth that we are all the children of one God, and as such, have an obligation to live together in peace, love, and harmony.

Position Statement

A convivial society that provides a close and intimate fraternal experience founded on ancient traditions and ceremonies that unite people in a harmony of enlightened Fellowship.

Key Attributes

Ancient Traditions Modern Organization Universal Brotherhood Convivial Fellowship

Tagline

Calling the best to labor for a better world.

And Stimulate Progress (what to change)

Brady: “Why is it, my old friend, that you have moved so far away from me?”

Drummond: “All motion is relative. Perhaps it is you who have moved away—by standing still.”
— *Inherit the Wind*

“But core ideology alone, as important as it is, does not—indeed *cannot*—make a visionary [organization]. An [organization] can have the world’s most deeply cherished and meaningful core ideology, but if it just sits still or refuses to change, the world will pass it by.”²² Collins and Porras note that they found that it is precisely when organizations confuse core ideology with specific noncore practices that they got into trouble. When organizations cling too long to noncore practices, they fail to adapt and move forward, and ultimately risk failing altogether.

What great organizations must do ***in addition*** to preserving their core ideology is stimulate progress. This is what the authors of *Built To Last* call the “genius of the **AND**,” which “is the ability to embrace both extremes of a number of dimensions at the same time.”²³ On the one hand, great organizations are guided by a set of core values and core purpose (which change little or not at all over time); and, on the other hand, they must stimulate progress (change, improvement, innovation, renewal) in all that is not part of the core values and purpose. Core values and core purpose in enduring, great organizations remain fixed, while their operating practices, cultural norms, strategies, tactics, processes, structures, and methods continually change in response to changing realities.

Once a core ideology is articulated, leadership becomes an exercise of aligning strategies, tactics, policies, operating practices, cultural norms, processes, structures, and methods with the organization’s core purpose and core values.²⁴ The key learning is that to maintain alignment, organizations must continuously adapt to a changing world by being willing to modify their noncore practices. You always *preserve the core*, but in so doing must never fail to also *stimulate progress*.²⁵

Collins and Porras offer five specific methods for organizations to both preserve the core and stimulate progress.²⁶ There are as follow:

1. Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGs), which mean organizational commitment to challenging, audacious, inspiring, but ultimately attainable goals.²⁷ The best modern example of a BHAG was President Kennedy’s 1961 vision to land a man on the moon and return him safely to the earth. In 1961, it was an audacious dream; on July 21, 1969, with one small step that dream was realized.²⁸
2. Cult-like Culture, which means that the culture energizes those who “buy into” the organization’s core ideology, and rejects all those who don’t—like

- a virus. In other words, protecting the West Gate with extreme selectivity.²⁹
3. A willingness to experiment, often in unplanned and undirected ways, to find new and unexpected paths of progress. This was Freemasonry's origin. The utter failure of grand lodges to allow experimentation today explains their modern decay.³⁰
 4. Homegrown management that promotes from within.³¹
 5. An attitude that good enough never is—the embracing of a continual, relentless, primal drive for organizational self-improvement.³²

In defining our core ideology, we made clear what were not on the list, and therefore, subject to change. Items not on the list include protocol, procedures, by-laws, practices, *and some* traditions: in short, anything that is not *core*. There are some non-core traditions that today are strikingly not aligned with our core ideology.

We should start with reevaluating practices that waste valuable time without providing a concomitant benefit. Many practices could be changed without legislation. For example, distributing minutes, committee reports, and grand lodge communications to members in advance (either physically or electronically) instead of reciting them aloud would save valuable time. Many such noncore practices have a life of their own because they “are the way things have always been done,” having gained a false aura of importance by the mere passage of time. Freemasonry should respect its members’ valuable time.

Is rote memorization and equating memorization skill with leadership talent truly the core purpose of Freemasonry? How many potential good leaders have we turned away because of our insistence that each leader must also be a proficient lecturer in order to be qualified to serve? Do lodge inspections facilitate our core values? What is more important: having lodge *officers* focus on performing at annual inspections *for grand lodge representatives and visiting masons*, or involving the most talented lodge *members* to portray the best possible degree *for the candidate*? Our core ideology provides clear answers to these questions, yet our cultural norms and practices are clearly ***not aligned*** with our core ideology.

I would go so far as to maintain that the exact text of our ritual is also noncore. In fact, at the micro level, masonic rituals vary greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and even within the same jurisdiction (although all the variations are readily recognizable as fruit of the same tree).³³ Yet, some Masons become so fixated on the precise delivery of ritual that they seem to elevate the individual words (right down to pronunciation and punctuation) over the meaning behind the words. In *It's About Time*, The MIC Task Force noted that following World War II, “Masonic tradition became locked in ritual as an end, not as a process.”³⁴ It would be a mistake to gloss over this small phrase, for it illustrates the extent to which how far out of touch many of today’s Masons are with the core purpose and

values of our Craft, and goes a long way towards explaining why we are failing as an institution.

The exact phraseology and punctuation in our ritual is simply not part of our core purpose or values; it is the *moral code* that is found within and taught by our ritual that is our core. Esteeming rote memorization skills through annual inspections subordinates the importance of what we stand for—teaching, understanding, and living the unique moral code contained within our ritual—to how we do it. This system merely encourages the vanity of letter-perfect ritualists who seem more concerned with impressing other masons with their ritual prowess than instilling our core values into candidates.

Another practice of American grand lodges that is inconsistent with our core ideology is the insistence on obscuring our ritual in cipher books. In many American jurisdictions, it is a masonic offense for a member to possess any written ritual. Masonic Codes prohibit possession of the same plain English translation of our ritual³⁵ that any non-mason can purchase at the bookstore or find in the public library. Grand lodges seem to want to inhibit members from studying our ritual outside of the lodge room. Accurate versions of our ritual are readily available on the Internet; official European rituals are available to mason and non-mason alike; yet, we Americans cling to our ciphers and threaten members with punishment for possessing legally published books.

Another curiously American practice is the tendency for existing lodges to obstruct the formation of new lodges, which they selfishly view as competition. Masonic leaders bemoan our decline, and (even through one-day classes) willingly sacrifice our most fundamental traditions to grow membership, but then make it virtually impossible to form new lodges. Noted masonic scholar, Harry Carr, pointed out this oddity about American Freemasonry over 40 years ago, and it remains true today.³⁶ Our practices are simply not aligned with our goals. We want to teach men to be better through our ritual, but we won't let them place this treasure in their private libraries. Grand lodges want more dues paying members, but they make it difficult to form new lodges that could be homes to these new members. Our European brethren must look upon our odd American practices with a juxtaposition of disbelief, despair, and hilarity.

Perhaps the most damaging of all masonic practices, however, is the misunderstanding of the prohibition against *electioneering*. The word, *electioneering*, means to try to win votes in an election through unscrupulous means. An example would be bringing a large number of inactive members to a meeting to affect the outcome of a vote. It does not mean campaigning for office, nor for or against a legislative proposal. How can intelligent people cast an informed vote if they do not know anything about a candidate or the arguments for or against a proposal? The masonic practice to stifle campaigning and debate effectively preserves the position of those in power, turning the election process into a sham. But, protecting the present ruling class is decidedly not a core masonic purpose or value. It is this fundamental misalignment between grand

lodge practice and Freemasonry's core ideology that is perpetuated by those in power that is a primary reason for our organizational stagnation.

A Willingness To Experiment

The third of Collins and Porras' five methods for an organization to both preserve the core and stimulate progress was a *willingness to experiment*, often in unplanned and undirected ways, to find new and unexpected paths of progress.³⁷ This is the evolutionary theory, whereby progress is made by *undirected* variation and natural selection. This process can be likened to "branching and pruning." "If you add enough branches to a tree (variation) and intelligently prune the deadwood (selection), then you'll likely evolve into a collection of healthy branches well positioned to prosper in an ever-changing environment."³⁸ "If well understood and consciously harnessed, evolutionary processes can be a powerful way to stimulate progress."³⁹ Collins and Porras distilled tactics for instilling an evolutionary process down to five simple points.

1. Give it a try—and quick!
2. Accept that mistakes will be made.
3. Take small steps.
4. Give the people the room they need.
5. Mechanisms—build that ticking clock!⁴⁰

The fifth point bears some explanation, as it is often where leaders fail. It is not enough to merely "set the tone" but leaders must actively put in place practices that stimulate and reinforce evolutionary behavior.⁴¹ It is not enough to just tell members to "cast off negativism;"⁴² leadership must also take the affirmative steps to make it happen. The fourth point also bears emphasizing, for without the latitude to experiment, progress cannot happen.

A renewed willingness to innovate is essential to Freemasonry's revival and survival. Grand lodge leadership needs to empower local lodges to explore and find new ideas that work. Below is the beginning of a list of ideas. Some of these ideas are echoed in other publications, like *Laudable Pursuit*, while others are novel. The point is to preserve the core **AND** stimulate progress.

1. Encourage the birth of new lodges. Encourage these new lodges to meet in existing lodge buildings, and thereby breathe new life into our wonderfully constructed, but woefully underutilized, masonic facilities.
2. Allow old lodges to die. Not all lodges are capable of surviving indefinitely. Perhaps, for one reason or another, a lodge simply can no longer attract enough new young candidates to continue. Such lodges should either be encouraged to consolidate with other lodges, or (and perhaps preferably) be allowed to adopt a "retired" lodge status.
3. Drive decision making down to the local lodge level, decentralizing as much as possible the organizational structure of the grand lodge. The

- grand lodge should evolve into a supporting role, providing materials and assistance, *when and if asked*.
4. Establish a three-year leadership line, at both the grand lodge and local lodge level; permit nominations from the floor and the opportunity for nominees to briefly address the members to explain their vision for leadership.
 5. Separate lecturing from leadership. We need excellence in both, but not necessarily in the same individual mason. Leadership is about guiding the operation of the lodge. Lecturing is about conveying our fundamental teachings to our candidates. Both critical functions deserve to have the very best men dedicated to their achievement.
 6. Encourage candidates to take their time taking the degrees, presenting lectures at meetings following the conferral of the first sections of the degrees. This avoids overwhelming the candidate with too much ritual in one evening, and lets him ponder the experience before hearing a lecture explaining it.
 7. Institute rigorous investigations for all petitioners; increase degree fees and annual dues; and, strengthen proficiency requirements, recognizing that when we make becoming a freemason “cheap and easy” we strip from it that which any man of integrity would value.
 8. Allow lodges to adopt alternative ritual workings and design their own candidate education programs.
 9. Reform or eliminate lodge inspections.
 10. Revise or eliminate all time-consuming protocols and habits that do not add value to the lodge experience.

The above list is by no means exhaustive. It is merely meant to illustrate—and provoke—the creative thinking that can occur once you know what is core, and through such articulation, what is not and therefore open to change. It all comes down to knowing the difference between what is sacred and what is not, between what should never change and what should be always open for change, between, quite simply, “what we stand for” and “how we do things.” If we can effectively align “how we do things” with “what we stand for,” we should be able to motivate legions of enthusiastic members for generations to come. And, this is the topic of the next section, *Something To Believe In*.

Something To Believe In

“Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around.”

— Henry David Thoreau

Does Freemasonry offer the young men of today who actively seek involvement *something to believe in*? According to Don Schmincke, founder of The Saga Institute and author of *The Code of the Executive*¹, the secret to organizational success lies in belief. People act according to their beliefs. Passion lives in a man’s beliefs, and a man who truly believes in a cause will make sacrifices for it. Napoleon once remarked: “a soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon.” At first blush a crass statement, but a more thorough analysis reveals that Napoleon possessed a profound understanding of what drives men. Of course, it was not the worthless material of the ribbon; but, rather what the soldier believed that the ribbon symbolized for which he was willing to fight: Duty; Honor; Country.

John W. Gardner observed, “Men of integrity, by their existence, rekindle the belief that as a people we can live above the level of moral squalor. We need that belief; a cynical community is a corrupt community.” Henry David Thoreau said, “Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around.” So why should we work to build a better world for our children? Because we can. And, Freemasonry provides a vehicle to unite the very best men together to build that better world.

Adapting Schmincke’s analysis to Freemasonry, there are three essential building blocks that create belief. First, there needs to be an inspiring story; a compelling saga grand and supreme that illustrates an organization’s reason for being and resonantly answers the questions “who are we” and “why are we here” while at the same time is devoid of grandiose and unsubstantiated myth. Next, an organization must create a culture of identity, a tribal community with which each member strongly associates on a deeply personal level. Finally, Freemasonry must have an effective organizational structure that provides progressive and inspiring leadership that envisions, enables, and engages its members that in turn earns both their respect and enthusiastic support.

1. Freemasonry’s Inspiring Story

There are multitudes of charities that do good works. There are thousands of clubs and fraternities that provide social fellowship and thousands of church congregations that teach moral virtue to their members. But, nowhere is there an organization founded on the simple truth that everyone is part of the universal brotherhood of man. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists—all these good people work within their religious communities to improve the world. But, where do all of these groups come together in brotherly love for the betterment of all mankind? Nowhere save in a masonic lodge!

On September 11, 2001, Osama Bin Laden unleashed terror rooted in a culture of divisiveness and hate. The culture of Al Qaeda views the world as “us and them.” Sadly, belief systems built on divisiveness and hate are all too common in our history. As the great Scottish poet and Brother Mason, Robert Burns, penned, “Man's Inhumanity to Man, makes countless thousands mourn.”² Over and over, the world has borne witness to the horror of genocide throughout history: the Holocaust; Rwanda; the killing fields in Cambodia; the Armenian genocide; the Balkan ethnic cleansings; and, Stalin’s purges just to name a few. And it continues today in Darfur, and looms ominously in Iraq.

Nor are we Americans without guilt: our history with Native Americans, slavery, and our civil rights record serve as uncomfortable reminders of our own failure to treat our fellow man as our brother. The Saga of Hate that divides mankind into an “us” and a “them” is a powerful story, one that makes “man’s inhumanity to man” possible.

In stark contrast to this divisive philosophy stands Freemasonry. It teaches the Universality of God and the Unity of Humanity. It teaches an inspiring story of peace, love, and harmony. It is a Saga of Love and Unity arrayed in an epic and eternal battle against the Saga of Hate and Divisiveness. *This is why Freemasonry exists.* This is why men of integrity and good conscience seek to become Freemasons. This great truth, clothed in traditions with a history so ancient that its very origins have been lost to time immemorial, is Freemasonry’s inspiring story.

But even Freemasonry comes up short under close examination. No Freemasons from mainstream grand lodges accompanied Dr. King on his march from Selma to Montgomery. Clearly, as early as 1965, Freemasonry had begun to lose its moral compass. Curiously, or perhaps not so curiously, around this same time Freemasonry began its long decline. Where will Freemasons stand on today’s great moral issues? Today, a number of state grand lodges **still** refuse to recognize their Prince Hall brethren. It is not easy to claim the moral high ground, and harder still to hold it once claimed; but, to recapture its past glory and redeem itself, Freemasonry must once again embody the inspiring story of love and unity for all humanity. In the vernacular, we must walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

2. Freemasonry’s Culture of Identity

The second great building block of belief is crafting a culture of identity through the use of symbols, ritual, and custom. Symbols are the holders of an organization’s beliefs—they are the things that mean something. Rituals are the processes that mean something, and Custom is the intangible collection of moments, anecdotes and history captured in an organization’s mythology. Freemasonry has all these things. Masonic rituals rich in elegant symbolism and pageantry are practiced in every corner of the world forming a singular identity

culture. There can be no finer example of such a ritual than the masonic initiation rites whereby the values of our organization are instilled in neophytes.

Freemasonry uses the celebrated Temple of Solomon as a vivid symbol of all that can be accomplished when mankind works together in unity to the glory of God. When man cooperates with his fellow man, not even the visions in his dreams are beyond his grasp. Over 2,000 years ago, working with nothing more than his physical strength, mason's working tools, the ingenuity of his mind, and his indomitable spirit, mankind raised the most magnificent building that the world had ever known. Today, two millennia later only a portion of its foundation remains. Known as the Western or Wailing Wall, this last remnant of the once great Temple still inspires awe.

If the Temple symbolizes all that humanity can achieve when working together for the glory of God, then the murder of our Grand Master Hiram Abif, and the Temple's ultimate destruction, are disturbing symbols of the consequences of evil in man's heart. Jealousy, envy, greed, and murderous hate destroyed the innocent and noble, and ultimately led to the toppling of man's greatest triumph. This tragic story serves as a troubling portent: when man kills his brother for his own selfish gain, all is lost. This one symbol vividly teaches the lesson of good and evil. Freemasonry, so rich in symbolism and ritual, possesses all the building blocks necessary to create a strong culture of identity.

3. Freemasonry's Organizational Structure

The final building block of belief is a highly functioning organizational structure that provides leadership that works to envision, enable, and engage its members; and, it is here where Freemasonry fails. Our organizational structure has become a dysfunctional anachronism, and our leadership has become tired. Officer lines at most grand lodges are self-perpetuating, with the membership at large having little real choice in determining who will govern the grand lodge or how it will be governed. Men in positions of authority in an environment devoid of transparency and accountability have little motivation to risk their high status to embrace change.

Such men claim that our membership woes are the result of changing demographics so that they are not to blame. They point to diminished attendance at traditional churches to support this weak excuse. If true then the logical conclusion is that Freemasonry and religion are no longer relevant to young people today. But, should we accept this feeble excuse at face value? Has religion truly lost its relevance for young people today? A more accurate observation may be that their parent's church's practices have lost their relevance for young people, but the underlying core value and attraction of faith is as strong now as ever.

Breaking away from traditional mainline groups, many new churches have sprung up in recent years, some attracting congregations that count their

members in the thousands and their annual budgets in the millions. These new churches are flourishing in a time when mainstream churches wither on the vine. These “new” churches are able to raise millions of dollars in capital campaigns from congregations filled with young people. Why? Because their members believe in the church and more importantly ***they have faith in their leaders***. They are willing to make a personal sacrifice based on their belief and that faith. The fact is Generations X and Y are actively seeking new ways to belong, connect, and give back; Freemasonry simply is not meeting their needs.

Just imagine what we could do if we could fill our lodges with Master Masons who were passionate in their beliefs about Freemasonry and had real faith in their grand lodge leaders! Even in this time of diminishment, Freemasonry has millions of members, millions of dollars in wealth, real estate, magnificent buildings and worldwide recognition. An aspiring fraternity would look with envy at that which Freemasonry presently holds in its grasp. What we so desperately lack is effective, charismatic, unifying leadership capable of leveraging these extraordinary assets. But what if a lodge could free itself just enough from the weight of grand lodge bureaucracy to create and explore a new way to practice Freemasonry that could appeal to the young men of today? This possibility is explored in the next section, *The Grand Hairball*.

The Grand Hairball

Grand Illusions

“It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.”

— Aung San Suu Kyi

It’s about time for Freemasonry’s leaders to recognize that not only is the environment changing, it is changing at an accelerating rate. But while Freemasonry must constantly adapt to the continuously changing world to be able to compete, it must do so in a positive way that builds on the strengths of its ancient traditions and rich heritage, not destroys them. Many of our routine practices—which are very different from our ancient traditions—must be reexamined. Our rules, regulations, and, most importantly, our organizational structure and governing hierarchy must be reformed to meet the demands of the 21st century.

A good starting point would be to ask the same fundamental questions about the *core ideology* of grand lodges that we asked about Freemasonry in general in *How to Preserve and Stimulate Freemasonry*. As we learned from Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, the authors of *Built To Last*, “a key step in building a visionary company is to articulate a **Core Ideology**.”¹ Core Ideology is the combination of an organization’s **Core Values**, which are “the organization’s essential and enduring tenets, not to be compromised for financial gain or short-term expediency”² and its **Core Purpose**, which is “the set of fundamental reasons” for an organization’s existence.³ Taken together, these concepts define “who we are” and answer the question “what is important to us?”

So why do grand lodges exist; and what is their core purpose? I would posit that grand lodges exist to serve and support the individual lodges that together constitute the grand lodge. I would further argue that their fundamental purpose is to simply promote Freemasonry. But even a generous view of grand lodge doctrine belies the truth. Clearly, as any grand lodge officer will readily inform you, individual Lodges are subordinate, subject, and subservient to grand lodges and the whims of their edict wielding Grand Masters.

The obvious question posed is who exists to serve whom? What are the core values of American grand lodges: edicts; inspections; the Masonic Code; dues; and one-day classes? All sarcasm aside, I am earnest in this line of questioning. Why do individual lodges need grand lodges, and what do they receive in return for their dues and unquestioning fealty? Do grand lodges continue to serve the best interests of the individual lodges that created them, their members who are beholden to them, or even the Craft as a whole anymore?

Charles I, Louis XVI, and Nicholas II all failed to see until it was too late that their systems of absolute power were no longer applicable in the modern age.

Lord Acton famously stated that “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” But in another speech called simply “Freedom from Fear,” Aung San Suu Kyi, a democratic activist in Myanmar and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, with great insight said “It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.”⁴ It is this very fear that gnaws at the soul of Freemasonry today.

Grand lodge leaders fearing the loss of their revenue streams promote one-day classes to inflate the number of dues paying members to shore up their financial security. But, as authors Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras cautioned in *Built To Last*, an organization’s “essential and enduring tenets” must **never** be compromised for financial gain or short-term expediency.⁵ Yet, the grand lodges’ introduction of one-day classes that make it quick and easy to add a large group of new members makes this precise compromise. If telling the masonic story is one of the key distinctions of Freemasonry, then surely the one-day class is the single most destructive innovation in American Freemasonry since the changes adopted at the Baltimore Convention in 1843. An organization cannot effectively tell an inspiring story, invoke a man’s passion, and create a culture of identity in a few hours.

Over the long term, our grand lodge leaders’ desperate preoccupation with quantity over quality will have a corrosive effect on the very *core* of Freemasonry. At the same time, these grand lodge leaders have frustrated and obstructed the much-needed creativity that young men are bringing to the Fraternity today. It is as if grand lodge leaders want lemmings, bodies with full wallets and empty heads that will blindly follow their lead without question.

To be fair, not all grand lodges are so openly hostile to new ideas. Some are supportive of new lodges, new technology, and new concepts (such as Traditional Observance Lodges, which is more accurately described as the restoration of an old concept). But others are so hostile to new groups that may threaten their existing power structure that they will throw out the very enthusiastic young men they so desperately need (e.g. the Grand Lodge of Georgia’s erasure of Bro. Jeffrey Peace and others in 2005 without a masonic trial).⁶ Even the formal adoption of reform agendas by a majority vote at a grand lodge session is not safe from the whims of autocratic Grand Masters (West Virginia Grand Master strikes down 16 progressive proposals by edict and expels PGM Frank J. Haas and others).⁷ In these jurisdictions and others, fear pervades.

Rather than do violence to the best traditions of Freemasonry, our leaders ought to take a hard look in the mirror. Dramatic change is needed in how our leaders manage and regulate our lodges. We need to sweep away the stifling rules that inhibit creativity and replace them with a more flexible framework that encourages innovations not in our core ideology, but in how our lodges function and what they offer their members. Leaders who understand that they have a duty and responsibility to propel our Fraternity forward must replace those officers who view their role as one of privilege, prestige, and power. We need

leaders to fully commit to supporting local lodges in this effort. Fear should and must be driven out of the structure of Freemasonry.

In his work developing a new model of leadership, Dr. Oren Harari states that leadership starts with a dream, a bold vision that lays out audacious goals.⁸ But leaders must delve much deeper than merely laying out a big vision. The vision must be clearly communicated and pursued with both passion and precision. Our leaders must commit to this new vision. There is no alternative—and there can be no turning back. The new vision that can offer Freemasonry a future is not mobs of new masons raised in one-day classes, but rather new lodges. If given the freedom and latitude to discover new ways to connect with today's generations, new masonic lodges could bring in thousands of new Masons without the need to resort to one-day classes, and in so doing usher in a bold new age for Freemasonry.

Orbiting the Giant Hairball

Entropy, noun. The degradation of matter and energy to an ultimate state of inert uniformity.

In his exuberant *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*, author and corporate guru Gordon MacKenzie brilliantly re-imagines the traditional pyramid shaped organizational model and clears a path for those creative few who want to dream, dare, and do to escape the tangled, impenetrable mass of rules and systems based on what worked in the past and leads to mediocrity in the present.⁹ MacKenzie defines the Hairball as the collection of policies and procedures that have built up over time based on the lessons of past successes and failures, which form a “Gordian knot of Corporate Normalcy (i.e., conformity with the “*accepted model, pattern or standard*” of the corporate mind set).¹⁰ “Every new policy is another hair for the Hairball. Hairs are never taken away, only added.”¹¹ The fundamental weakness with the Hairball of Corporate Normalcy is that it “derives from and is dedicated to past realities and past successes. There is no room in the Hairball or Corporate Normalcy for original thinking or primary creativity. Resynthesizing *past* successes is the habit of the Hairball.”¹²

The following section adapts Chapter 18 (The Pyramid & The Plum Tree, pages 161 to 188) of Gordon MacKenzie's book to Freemasonry and grand lodges. Except for the opening paragraphs on the background of Freemasonry, the words are almost exclusively those of MacKenzie, modified only by the substitution of “Freemasonry” for “Hallmark” and with the Pyramid representing grand lodges.

The Pyramid & The Plum Tree

Adapted from Chapter 18, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*, by Gordon Mackenzie, ©1996

Freemasonry - The Beginning

The Bare Facts

The world's oldest and largest fraternity.

Its obscure origins have been lost to history, but it most likely arose during the enlightenment period beginning around 1600 C.E.

Masonic philosophy is described as a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.

Absolute secrecy was paramount in early lodges as the peculiar system of morality taught a universal understanding of the divine that was deemed heretical by the then-absolute religious authority; and, a natural law understanding of individual rights that was deemed treasonous by the then-absolute political authority.

After existing without a central organizational body for over a century, the Premier Grand Lodge of England was formed on June 24th 1717.

Today, members meet in local lodges that are chartered by grand lodges organized along national or state political boundaries.

Romanticizing the Bare Facts

Freemasonry is rooted in the building of King Solomon's Temple thousands of years ago.

The Knights Templar created Freemasonry in the early 1300s after being destroyed by Pope Clement V and King Philip IV of France in 1312.

The greatest men of the ages have been Freemasons.

The United States of America was founded by Freemasons.

Freemasonry still possesses secrets.

Freemasonry's mission is to make good men better.

Freemasonry – Middle Age Sets In

The Ascent of Formula

Freemasonry begot Grand Lodges,
which begot more new Lodges

The initial DYNAMISM brought by new Lodges brought
SUCCESS

That success begot success formula

Success formula begets isolation

Isolation from:

PASSION

VISION

INVENTION

Isolation begets:

ATROPHY

DECAY

A FADING AWAY

Old lodges never die, they just fade away.

What if a Lodge could DIE instead of just fade away?

?

The Death of a Lodge - A Fantasy

LISTEN!

Tic-toc, Tic-toc, Tic-toc, Tic-toc

DEATH'S FOOTSTEPS.

Tic-toc

READY OR NOT

WHAT LIVES
DIES

ANIMAL,
VEGETABLE,
LODGE.

NO ESCAPE.
NOT EVEN THE WISE

NONE!

But One . . .

propagation!

Conceive of This:

A stratified

calcified

Petrified

Lodge

In desperation,
forgoes habitual cloning

And Tolerates
(allows)

... genuine

birth

How To Achieve Entrepreneurial IMMORTALITY

(A message of Hope for aging lodges)

Propagate, lodge, propagate

Have young!
Raise a family!
Put your offsprings' needs ahead of your own.
Abuse them not
So they will not learn to abuse.

Inculcate values.

Then release your "Heirs of Enterprise"
To carry the torch as they see fit.

Old Lodge,
You can then do
What the old do best:
GROW WISE
Die in peace
And let the cycle begin anew.

PROPAGATION IN THE DESERT:

(A poem – sort of)

Behold! A Grand Pyramid
Mammoth blocks from solid rock cut with precision of plumb,
level, and square.
Each block fitted firmly against its neighbors in an
enduring pattern of unmoving presence.

Picture deep within this monument to reality past

A pocket of rich loam

Where NEWNESS . . .

(as yet undetected by grand weed pullers' dedication to
extermination of any and all affronts to stone tomb's barren
perfection)
. . . Germinates.

But alas, ultimate detection is inevitable
And NEWNESS,
Once discovered,
Will be pulled up by the roots . . .
Conscientiously.

And yet

What's this?

A miracle!

This one time,
Newness, upon discovery, is spared
And allowed to take root . . .
Unmolested.

vulnerably,
Tenderly
A shoot appears
In a tentative
Mystical
Dance of creation.

Yipes!

It grows not as a little pyramid,
But as a Plum Tree!
Wondrous beyond the arid vocabulary
of mere Pyramid Reality

Lofty Grand Pyramid watches
In scandalized indignation
But . . . just this once . . .
Eschews to interfere.

Exquisite Freak!
Beautiful Mutation!
Awesome Newness!
You exist because the Grand Pyramid
. . . this one time . . .
has found the grace to make room
for something other than
the narcissistic echoes
of its own remembered past.

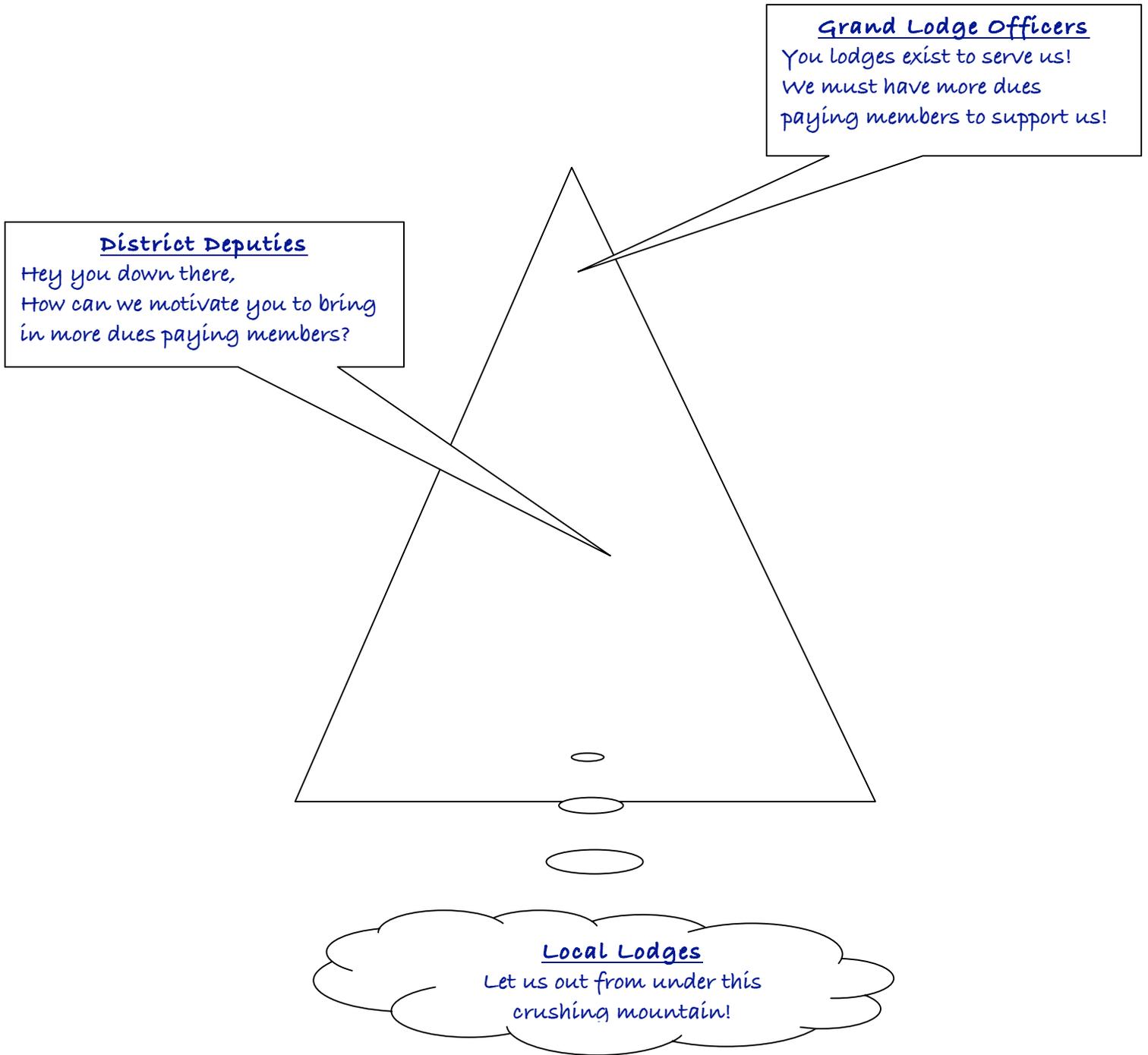
You live because the Grand Pyramid
. . . this one time . . .
has found the courage
to nurture something which has
the temerity to be unique.

Little Plum Tree,

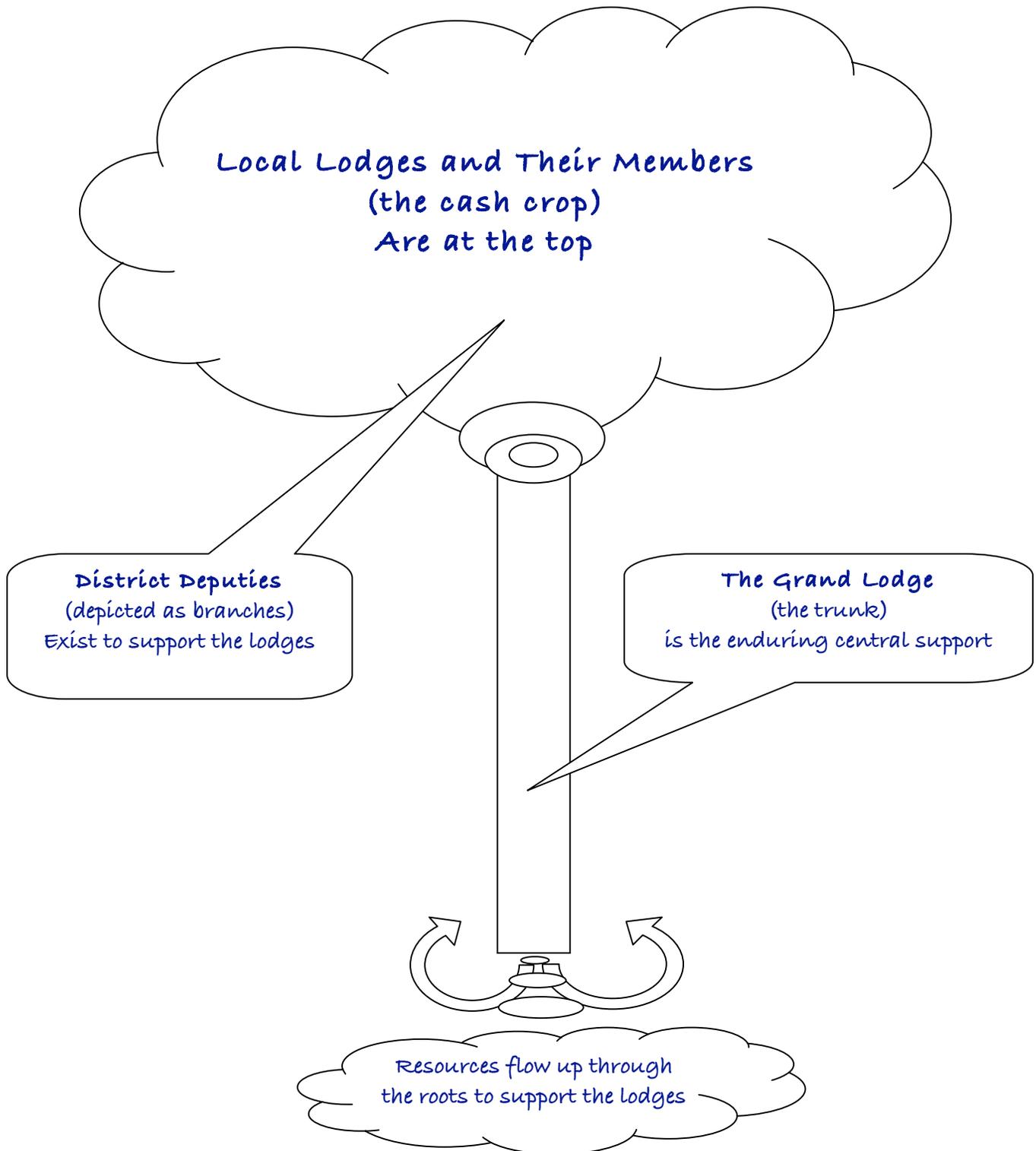
You are Newness
... and Nowness.

Rooted in the tomb
Of Yesterday,
You bear the fruit
That will see us though
Today.

The Grand Pyramid As Organizational Model



The Plum Tree As Organizational Model



A Semantic Comparison of Pyramid and Plum Tree Terminologies

A

Pyramid

Is a Tomb

Of rigid hierarchy

(Function follows Form)

Pyramids are rooted in the traditional

Traditional: The delivery of opinions, doctrines, practices,
rites, and customs from generation to generation.

A Tree

Is

A Living Organism

Trees are Holistic

Emphasizing the organic or functional relationships between
parts and wholes

(Form follows Function)

Resulting in an organic enhancement of collaboration

This is RADICAL

Radical: Going to the center, source, or foundation of
something; fundamental; Basic.

Radical is more FRUITFUL than Traditional.

Plum Trees are more bountiful than Pyramids.

A Radical Idea

Imagine, for a moment, a Grand Master armed with both the vision to dream an unbounded future for Freemasonry and the courage to pursue the dream. Looking around, he sees the glaring disconnect between the mindless repetition of today's rote "tradition" and the core purpose and core values that Freemasonry used to represent. Seeking to recapture that which was lost, he creates a new haven for experimentation—an at-large Grand Master's district. The purpose for this special district is to create a home for new lodges to creatively explore new and innovative ways to practice the timeless core of Freemasonry in a manner relevant to today. Freed (by special dispensation) from the weight of rules, regulations, and district deputy grand masters, these lodges answer only to the Grand Master himself, who in turn, wisely, benevolently, gives them the freedom to create, be fruitful, bountiful, and multiply!

Alas, we all know that the above scenario is all but impossible in the oppressive climate that governs grand lodges. So, if grand lodges will not suffer creativity, will not suffer successful lodges to orbit their Grand Hairball, then perhaps the time has come for those lodges that dare to accelerate to escape velocity and, following the challenge of Dr. Harari, start with a new dream, a bold vision with audacious goals.¹³

The challenge, according to MacKenzie, is to orbit the Giant Hairball, which means to actively engage in the opportunities that an organization presents without being sucked into the Hairball of the organization.¹⁴

Orbiting is responsible creativity: vigorously exploring and operating beyond the Hairball of the corporate mind set, beyond "*accepted models, patterns, or standards*"—all the while remaining connected to the spirit of the corporate mission.

To find Orbit around a corporate Hairball is to find a place of balance where you benefit from the physical, intellectual and philosophical resources of the organization without becoming entombed in the bureaucracy of the institution.¹⁵

The challenge to the Hairball is to allow people to achieve orbit. But the more massive the Hairball grows, the greater gravitational pull it exerts, sucking everything into the "nothingness of corporate normalcy made stagnant by a compulsion to cling to past successes."¹⁶ In such cases, orbiting may not be possible (nor tolerated by the Hairball), leaving one with the stark choice of remaining to be suffocated by the soul-crushing rule of what worked in the past or flying out into deep space, liberated, but alone.

A very recent occurrence provides an example of what can happen to lodges that dare try to orbit the Grand Hairball. A few years ago, a group of young men dedicated themselves to reinvigorating their local lodge in Cleveland, Ohio. The newly renamed Halcyon Lodge, #498 F & AM, beholden to the Grand Lodge of Ohio, has a rich history going back to 1877. They occupied a magnificent temple, which sadly, in a refrain all too familiar to most masons, was deteriorating due to lack of attention and money. The building was home to a number of non-productive masonic tenants and little else.

The men of Halcyon Lodge decided to take on their non-productive masonic co-tenants. They asked them to pay their arrearages and begin contributing to the restoration of the Temple building. Their masonic brethren answered this call by abandoning the temple to find cheap space in some other crumbling masonic edifice. Ultimately, the men of Halcyon were left in sole possession of a tenantless building that needed work. So they rolled up their sleeves and set to work!

First, they raised their outdated and grossly insufficient annual lodge dues to \$150. This caused a mass defection of “veteran” masons who apparently did not think that their masonic experience was worth 42 cents a day. Had any who were truly in distress asked for remission, it certainly would have been granted. None did.

Then they restored the grandeur of their lodge room, the elegance of their dining hall, and added amenities like wireless Internet, HDTV, and workout equipment. But they did not stop there. Seeing the opportunity in their underutilized asset, they endeavored to build out rooms to serve the non-masonic community as well. After meeting with their local youth boxing association (a 501(c)(3) charity), they built a boxing ring! Their aim was to reimagine their heretofore mostly empty temple into a vibrant community center that could once again teem with life.

Then, this lodge full of enthusiastic young men did the unthinkable: they gave their shining temple away! One of the largest budget items for any lodge that owns a temple building is real estate tax. Under Ohio state law, fraternal groups do not qualify for exemption from real estate taxes, but public charities are often able to obtain local property tax exemptions. So, in an inspired maneuver, the young men of Halcyon Lodge formed a charity for the community, transferred their interest in the corporation that owed the building to the charity, and gave the charity a start-up gift to serve not just masons, but the community at-large. Now they were in a position to seek an exemption from the heavy burden of real estate taxes. Also, as the Internal Revenue Service granted Halcyon Charities recognition as a public charity under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, donors are eligible to claim a deduction from Federal income taxes for donations made to the entity. And as their mission had expanded to serving the community as a whole, they could now solicit support from that community.

Along the way these young men also embraced the Traditional Observance Lodge movement, adopting TO practices like use of a Chamber of Reflection and an

intensive candidate education program. They created an impressive web site that quickly became recognized as being one of the best lodge-hosted web sites on the Internet.

So, these enthusiastic, dedicated young men: revived their lodge, attracting new young candidates to Freemasonry that had previously not found anything there to interest them; restored their magnificent temple building; invited the community into their newly restored building, turning a once mysterious building into a hub of community activity (and exposing many people to Freemasonry for the first time in the process); and solved the intractable real estate tax problem. Any one of these feats would be impressive, but the young men of Halcyon Lodge did them **all** in less than three years!

And what was the Grand Lodge of Ohio's response to their inspired success? Was their success acknowledged? Were they asked to share their model as a template for other lodges to follow? Were they even given an "atta-boy" from any grand lodge officer? No. They were investigated, intimidated, castigated, probated, and threatened. Why? Power and control, as always. In Ohio, the grand lodge tightly regulates temple companies that own masonic buildings. In the eyes of the grand lodge officers, the real estate transaction must have seemed like a plot to free Halcyon Lodge from the power and control of the grand lodge, and that they could not suffer.

Apparently, they did not care that the Halcyon Model made good sense or even that it was wildly successful; all that mattered was their power and control. Ultimately, on November 12, 2007, the brothers of Halcyon Lodge returned their charter to the Grand Lodge of Ohio following a visit by a delegation of grand lodge officers sent to threaten them into submission.¹⁷ Apparently, the Grand Lodge of Ohio will suffer no orbiting satellites, no matter how successful they may be.

Perhaps in the end, the need for grand lodges is more illusion than reality. Like the Wizard of Oz, grand lodges attempt to project an image of being great and powerful, but if you follow Toto and look behind the curtain, all too often you find petty men, frantically turning knobs and pulling levers in a vain attempt to appear more important than they really are. In order to encourage and organize the creation of new lodges, eliminate the artificial divisions of state boundaries, and liberate lodges from the whims of petty men vested with a little brief authority, perhaps *it's about time* we begin exploring a new organizational structure for the 21st Century that is independent of the antiquated grand lodge system. Exploring this new organizational structure is the topic in the next and concluding section, *Freemasonry 3.0*.

Freemasonry 3.0

In *The Starfish and the Spider*, authors Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom group organizations into two broad categories: starfish and spiders.¹ Spiders are coercive, centralized organizations with rigid rules and hierarchy, whereas starfish are open and decentralized organizations lacking a clear chain of command. To classify an organization as a spider or a starfish, Brafman and Beckstrom ask the following ten questions:

1. Is there a person in charge?
2. Are there headquarters?
3. If you thump it on the head, will it die?
4. Is there a clear division of roles?
5. If you take out a unit, is the organization harmed?
6. Are knowledge and power concentrated or distributed?
7. Is the organization flexible or rigid?
8. Can you count the employees or participants?
9. Are working groups funded by the organization or are they self-funded?
10. Do working groups communicate directly or through intermediaries?²

At first glance, spiders and starfish may seem to resemble each other, but in fact, they are very different.³ Whereas cutting off the head of a spider will kill it, a starfish does not even have a head to cut off. Not only will the starfish not die, its parts will regenerate. If you cut a *Linckia*, or long-armed starfish, into two pieces, you will get two starfish. Cut it into five pieces and you will get five starfish. This is the amazing power of an open, decentralized network.⁴ You can't kill it; and, attacking it only makes it stronger.

Open, decentralized networks have enormous power, and they are extremely resilient. A fundamental principle of Starfish organizations is that when attacked, in response they become even more open and decentralized, and therefore more resilient to attack.⁵ The Apache Indians, Napster and its progeny⁶, Skype, Craigslist, Alcoholics Anonymous, and even, ominously, Al-Qaeda, are all classic examples of Starfish organizations. The Apache outlasted the Spanish; Napster brought the major recording labels to their knees; Skype rendered the telephone industry's long-distance profit model obsolete; and, Craigslist eviscerated newspaper ad revenues. All these starfish all took on spider organizations and beat them.

My favorite starfish example is Wikipedia because it illustrates one of the best principles of starfish organizations: "put people into an open system, and they'll automatically want to contribute."⁷ Wikipedia is a multilingual, web-based, free content encyclopedia project, operated by the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit organization. Wikipedia's articles are written collaboratively by volunteers around the world and the vast majority of them can be edited by anyone with access to the Internet. Steadily rising in popularity since its inception, it currently

ranks among the top ten most-visited websites worldwide.⁸ This popular, comprehensive, dynamic, and constantly improving free resource is entirely the product of the undirected cooperation of people worldwide. Open systems have the capacity to bring out the very best in people, rewarding collaboration and community oriented thinking. Truly, this is a system made for Freemasonry!

There are several additional principles of starfish organizations that also help explain their success. Being decentralized, intelligence is spread throughout the system, often coming from the edges, closer to where the action is.⁹ Open systems can easily mutate to accommodate a changing environment.¹⁰ Starfish have a tendency to sneak up on you.¹¹ As starfish invade industries, industries become more decentralized, and overall revenue decreases.¹² The record labels never saw Napster coming, and their profits have yet to recover from their lack of vision.

The paradox of grand lodges is that taken together, they are the starfish that make up Freemasonry, but each individually is a monstrous spider within its own jurisdiction. Freemasonry is the ultimate starfish example. It is comprised of hundreds of grand lodges, so many that the exact number is unknown. There are traditional grand lodges, Prince Hall Affiliated grand lodges, co-masonic grand lodges, International grand lodges, and probably dozens more. The self-proclaimed mainstream grand lodges do not recognize many of these grand lodges, but this matters little to the amorphous body of Freemasonry. Kill any single grand lodge, another grows in its place, and the body of Freemasonry goes on with little notice.

But individually, grand lodges are classic spider organizations: highly centralized, extremely rigid, and cruelly coercive. They score a near perfect nine out of 10 on Brafman and Beckstrom's questions (the only exception being question nine). Grand Masters rule a rigid hierarchical structure with absolute authority. Grand lodges attempt to control communication among lodges (prohibiting the circularization of the lodges concerning any legislation pending before the Grand Lodge¹³) even among members (dissenting opinions are censored on heavily moderated online official forums). But, take away the Grand Master and his officers (thump it on the head), and the grand lodge dies.

Grand lodges need not be spiders, however. They could devolve power back to their constituent lodges and assume a more supportive role. They could become more democratic, flatten the hierarchy, and become less rule-bound. They *could* evolve back into the starfish that they once were; but, barring this unlikely change, of course, it is fair to say that since Freemasonry survived without grand lodges at one time in the past, it could probably survive without them at some point in the future.

In fact, Grand lodges are themselves an innovation to the body of Freemasonry. With the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England on June 24, in 1717, a new masonic institution was created. Originally created to restore the tradition of

an annual feast, this body quickly expanded in scope, which in turn led to the explosive growth in masonic lodges over the next two centuries.¹⁴

In the United States, mainstream Freemasonry is divided among 51 independent grand lodges. These grand lodges jealously guard their fiefdoms with a legal construct called *Territorial Exclusivity* (a construct also used to perpetuate the appallingly unmasonic characterization of Prince Hall grand lodges as irregular). The subdivision of American Freemasonry into absolute and exclusive state jurisdictions is an exception in the masonic world, and in my opinion, it is an exception that we ought to reconsider.

If however, we cannot reboot these old grand lodges, then maybe we ought to simply abandon their dysfunctional operating systems altogether and move to a brand new platform: Freemasonry 3.0.

Individual lodges, fed up with coercive grand lodge meddling, may soon begin to peel away from the grand lodge system. In fact, it is happening already. Quietly, in insignificant numbers (for now), existing lodges are leaving the grand lodge fold to form new lodges outside of the grand lodge system altogether. And this phenomenon is gaining momentum. It is one of the principles of starfish; they sneak up on you!¹⁵ Some may form a new grand body (e.g. the Grand Orient of the United States of America¹⁶ (formerly the United Grand Lodge of America)) while others may simply turn in their charters and walk away (e.g. Euclid Lodge¹⁷ in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Halcyon Lodge¹⁸ in Cleveland, Ohio, formerly beholden to the mainstream grand lodges in their respective states).

Perhaps these newly independent lodges may form a new organization altogether—an anti-grand lodge for lack of a better description. A new decentralized structure—a league of independent masonic lodges—could reenergize Freemasonry in America. It could make a clean break from the embarrassing racist past of many of the state grand lodges, liberating individual lodges from the Giant Hairball of 250 years of bureaucracy built up in 51 jurisdictions, reenergizing the Fraternity for a new period of explosive growth.

Such an entity would by nature rely on the flexible framework and decentralized organizational structure typical in starfish organizations. It would embrace technology and the Web 2.0, finding new ways to connect both its member lodges and individual Freemasons around the globe. Imagine turning the power of wikia communities to furthering masonic education, history, and research; a masonic Craigslist; and online masonic communities in Facebook and MySpace.

Already the Internet is full of unofficial masonic forums, blogs and web sites that teem with new and vibrant ideas. Today's grand lodges barely tolerate and mostly fear this technology. They don't want to empower their individual members to organize themselves. They view this connectivity as a threat to their grip on power, and rightly so. To date, the grand lodges have been successful in keeping

young men on the sidelines, but imagine the power that would be unleashed if these young men were to self-organize on a national (or even international) scale.

Imagine an organizational structure that turns the pyramid upside-down, where individual lodges are primary, having broad discretion to govern their internal affairs. The rights and immunities of lodges and their members would be expansive, whereas the power of any league officers would be strictly limited (and maybe even nonexistent). Each lodge could choose the ritual that best suited them; determine the manner in which their candidates would progress; in which degree to conduct business; what lodges offices will be elective and how to elect their officers; and, whether alcohol could be served on lodge property. The sole function of a Masonic League would be simply to function as a voluntary mutual support association to serve a vast and growing network of independent lodges and provide the means for interconnectivity among them.

Any masonic body professing allegiance to the fundamental core ideology of Freemasonry should be welcomed. Independent lodges, mainstream lodges, Prince Hall affiliated lodges, Le Droit Humain, women-only and co-masonic lodges, in short, any lodge that practices Freemasonry could join together under the big tent of a Masonic League. Isn't it about time to once and for all do away with artificial racial, gender, religious, and political distinctions among people, especially among Freemasons?

I do not suggest that lodges change their individual character (e.g. all-male or all-female), only that we abandon the antiquated recognition apparatus used to declare one group regular and disrespect another as irregular. Men-only, women-only, and co-masonic lodges could all exist side-by-side, meeting separately behind tiled doors, but always working together *outside* the lodge room to promote Freemasonry and benefit humanity. Likewise, lodges predominantly comprised of a single ethnic group would undoubtedly continue to exist, but they could, within this new decentralized context, also recognize and cooperate with one another as well, beginning at long last the hard work of chipping away at the cultural barriers that kept them separated for over two centuries. The following illustration shows a synopsis of the guiding principles for an imagined Masonic League.

The Masonic League

Overall Equity

**A network of sovereign and independent
Masonic organizations dedicated to
Freemasonry Universal and Triumphant.**

Benefit Equities

- Provides a support structure for lodges that wish to work independently of the grand lodge system.
- Links independent masonic organizations together in a mutual support network.
- Recognizes that each lodge is sovereign, possessed of the inalienable right to govern its own internal affairs
- Recognizes the individual rights of each Mason to be free from official intimidation.
- Restores the core promise of Freemasonry to be a convivial society founded on an ancient tradition that brings together persons of quality into a harmony of enlightened Fellowship.
- Encourages the formation of new lodges dedicated to bringing Freemasonry into the 21st century in a manner that will appeal to new generations of young people.
- Provides support materials for a comprehensive education program founded on natural law, progressive science, and enlightenment philosophy.
- Establishes a unifying identity for Freemasonry.

Reason to Believe Equities

- Publishes a written Charter that clearly enumerates and limits the powers and privileges of the League and its administrative officers, while broadly defining and protecting the rights of each individual lodge and Mason.
- Welcomes lodges and grand lodges that work a wide variety of ritual workings, bounded only by the requirement that the work respects the widely accepted Landmarks of Freemasonry.
- Welcomes lodges and grand lodges open to all persons, regardless of race, faith, creed, or nationality.

Grand Lodge Character

A league of independent masonic organizations that restores the ancient Craft rituals, provides a robust education program, and is operated in a decentralized, democratic, and progressive manner to reform and reinvigorate Freemasonry for the 21st Century.

Position Statement

A voluntary association of progressive, independent Masonic organizations.

Key Attributes

Voluntary Democratic Decentralized Flexible Modern Growth-oriented

Although it is also a spider organization, the Scottish Rite (here I must qualify that my comments apply only to the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, as I am unfamiliar with the Southern), of all masonic groups, is perhaps the best situated to face the challenges in the 21st Century. As an institution, it is the largest and wealthiest. Although its present organizational structure lacks transparency and accountability, and its leaders are not democratically elected, its leadership, on the whole, seems more aware of the necessity to modernize its organization. They preach change, and are conversant in the prevailing literature on organizational health and growth, but the question remains can they really *confront the brutal truth* and execute?

The brutal truth is that Scottish Rite is a stone giant with feet of clay. It is still strong, but it stands on the state grand lodge system upon which it is wholly dependent for its prospective members and therefore for its future. What the Scottish Rite needs to survive is a growing pool of Master Masons. Unless the Scottish Rite plans to start making new Masons on its own, its prospect for growth is not very promising. Where will the Scottish Rite find its candidates? New lodges could help address the membership gap.

But whether the Scottish Rite starts making its own Master Masons or finding them in new places, either road would lead to the same end: a growing body of Masons independent of mainstream grand lodges. If all concerned were willing to meet on the level, new systems could work in concert with the present grand lodge system. Nothing says that the systems must be mutually exclusive. In fact, a rational approach would be to encourage all alternatives and to let them compete with one another, and through the competitive process improve Freemasonry overall. Clearly the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite would be the primary beneficiary of this competition, and in fact, its survival may depend on it.

In conclusion, the great Temple of Solomon is the perfect symbol for Freemasonry. Like it, our Temple has been laid waste by the ruthless hand of ignorance, the devastations of war, and the unsparing ravages of barbarous force. But, the destruction of Solomon's Temple did not destroy the Jewish people or their culture; they and their culture thrive in spite of the loss. Their ultimate triumph serves as an example for the potential to build a growing network of new masonic lodges, all working to call the very best people together to labor for the betterment of all humanity. If the existing grand lodges refuse to take positive steps to address their own decline, then perhaps the time has come to leave their tumbled houses. Today's young Freemasons are poised to launch a new operating system, one capable of propelling Freemasonry forward into the 21st Century: Freemasonry 3.0.

Afterword

At the 2007 convocation of the Grand Lodge of Ohio, six legislative proposals that I authored were presented for consideration. Unlike the provocative proposals presented in this paper, the proposals before the Grand Lodge of Ohio were much more mundane. Although legislative proposals for change are generally not well received in Ohio, I thought that it was important to try, if for no other reason than to encourage a brief dialog about change. Big mistake. Not only did all the measures fail (as expected), but I was actually booed as I stood up to speak on their behalf. I was shocked not only by the lack of decorum exhibited by “veteran” masons at a grand lodge session, but also by the fact that the Grand Master, a man I have know for over 30 years, silently tolerated this most unmasonic conduct toward a fellow mason.

And what were these proposals that generated such mass hostility? Most were aimed at driving basic lodge governance decisions down to the local lodge level. One would have reduced the number of mandatory stated meeting per year from 10 to four. Another would have permitted lodges to rehearse degrees rather than mandate that each be conferred on phantom candidates twice annually. Another would have permitted each lodge to decide if alcohol could be served on its premises (at non-masonic events only). Another would have made it clear that members could possess masonic rituals from other jurisdictions without fear of being charged with unmasonic conduct. All in all, none were really that dramatic, and certainly none were hostile to the landmarks of Freemasonry. But the venerable old masons present did not want to hear about them.

The most important of these proposals was the one to reform the mechanism for forming new lodges. I am intimately familiar with this subject through my work with my home lodge, Caliburn No. 785, which was the first new lodge to seek a Dispensation to work from the Grand Lodge in Ohio in nearly 25 years. It was an unbelievably difficult process, even with the enthusiastic support of then-Grand Master, Most Worshipful Brother Jack Allen. Some lodges in our district looked at us as competition, and the way the rules are written, a small number of lodges can block a new lodge from forming.

The hostility that we encountered was breathtaking; I simply could not understand how my masonic brothers could view a group of enthusiastic young men as such a threat. I finally came to realize that they simply did not understand that we were not trying to take a piece of their pie, but, rather, trying to grow the pie bigger for everyone. They were looking at the pool of potential candidates as a fixed pie; and lodges as consumers of that pie. The more lodges (mouths to feed) the smaller the piece of pie each lodge got.

I look at lodges as bakeries, however, not as consumers. And, the more bakeries you have, the more pies you can bake! The logic is simple: the more lodges we

have, the more candidates we will be able to attract to the fraternity overall. Membership is **not** a zero-sum game! If existing lodges are not able to attract a certain segment of the population (e.g. busy young professionals with young families) then perhaps new lodges can. This has been exactly our experience at Caliburn Lodge. Caliburn has been successful in attracting candidates, who previously, had expressed no interest in Freemasonry. We did not steal candidates from the other lodges; we went out and found new ones. In effect, we began fishing in a new pond.

The principle that underlies Caliburn Lodge is simple: we strive to keep Freemasonry in perspective as an important **part** of our lives. Hence we have earned the derisive moniker from veteran masons as wanting to be only *part-time masons*. In a sense, this is true. We never hold more than one lodge meeting per month; we do not attend the monthly district meetings; we do not support the myriad York Rite bodies; we do not send representatives to the 30+ inspections in our district. We keep Freemasonry in perspective as only a part of our otherwise full and balanced lives. Our members have families with young children, often with a working spouse, and are active in their professions and communities in ways unrelated to the fraternity.

In short, we eschew the *professional mason* archetype: the man so dedicated to Freemasonry that he allows it to crowd out every other aspect of his life. In the end, Caliburn Lodge teaches that it is not the number of masonic meetings that a man attends that makes him a mason, but rather how he lives his life *outside of the lodge room*. The men of Caliburn Lodge are full-time husbands, full-time fathers, full-time professionals and business owners, and full-time members of their communities. And it is the way that we conduct ourselves away from lodge in our homes, careers, and communities that mark us as full-time masons.

Since receiving our Charter in 2002, we have almost tripled our membership. The following page shows a synopsis of the guiding principles for our Lodge. No, our model is not right for everybody; and, yes, there are many different ways to run a lodge. But for us, our program is working. We have successfully (for now) achieved orbit around the “Giant Hairball” known as the Grand Lodge of Ohio. All we ever asked, all we ever wanted, was the opportunity to apply the timeless precepts of Freemasonry in new and innovative ways. This we have done; and, we are happy with the results. The Grand Lodge should be pleased as well.

So Mote It Be!

Caliburn Lodge

Overall Equity

A small and intimate lodge for men who value fellowship and want to enjoy a Masonic experience in a convivial atmosphere.

Benefit Equities

A slow, deliberate initiatory experience fully integrates each candidate into the circle of brotherhood.
A curriculum of instruction that explains Freemasonry's unique moral philosophy and ethical code.
Festive boards and tavern gatherings provide a convivial atmosphere to enjoy comradeship.

Reason to Believe Equities

Membership has a balanced range of ages.
Open to men of all races, faiths, creeds, and nationalities.
Selective and limited membership creates a more intimate fellowship.
Education program goes beyond a simplistic review of Masonic symbols and history.
Ritual work is exemplified in measured doses to avoid overwhelming new candidates.
Higher degree fees, annual dues, and Steward's Fund contributions support high quality programs.
Limited number of meetings accommodates members with demanding work and family schedules.
Meetings are held at convenient times, organized to keep administrative matters to a minimum, and enjoy a high percentage attendance of the membership.

Organizational Character

A new, small, and intimate lodge founded specifically to transcend the time-consuming practices found in older lodges and focus on the convivial fraternal experience typical in an English Masonic Lodge, while at the same time remembering that the profound teaching of Freemasonry is that we are all the children of one God, and as such, have a moral obligation to live and work together in peace, love, and harmony.

Position Statement

A small, selective, and convivial lodge that provides a close and intimate fraternal experience founded on ancient Masonic traditions that unite men in a harmony of enlightened Fellowship.

Key Attributes

Intimate Selective Convivial Principled Progressive Innovative Intellectual

Tagline

Creating the Masonic Lodge for the 21st Century

Motto

Pax Caritas et Concordia

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About the Author

Richard A. Graeter resides with his wife and children in Cincinnati, Ohio. A graduate of Miami University in 1986, and the University of Cincinnati College of Law in 1989, he serves as the president of Graeter's Inc., a fourth generation family business renowned for making ultra-premium ice cream. Proclaimed by Oprah Winfrey as the best ice cream that she has ever tasted, Graeter's Ice Cream enjoys a national reputation as the finest ice cream in the world among connoisseurs and celebrities alike.

Bro. Graeter was initiated into the Order of DeMolay in 1977 in Western Hills Chapter, and served as master Councilor in 1981. He also served as the 7th District State Representative. He is an Active Member of the DeMolay Legion of Honor.

He was regularly initiated an Entered Apprentice by Mariemont Lodge #707, F&AM, beholden to the Grand Lodge of Ohio, Free and Accepted Masons, on March 7, 1996, passed to Fellow Craft on April 22, 1996, and raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason on June 28, 1996.

In a bold experiment, Bro. Graeter, with 11 other Master Masons, undertook to form a brand new lodge, the first group of masons to do so in Ohio in over 20 years. The Grand Lodge of Ohio granted a charter to Caliburn Lodge #785 on October 18, 2002. Bro. Graeter went on to serve as the lodge's Worshipful Master in 2004. Today, Caliburn Lodge is thriving in orbit, having trebled its membership by appealing to young professional men looking for a positive fraternal experience.

On April 26, 1997, Bro. Graeter joined the Valley of Cincinnati, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite and presently serves that body as First Lieutenant Commander of Ohio Consistory and chairman of the Valley's public relations committee. In 2003, he chaired the Valley's 150th Anniversary Committee that successfully scheduled a yearlong series of events celebrating the Valley's sesquicentennial.

From June of 2002 until October of 2005, Bro. Graeter served as the Chairman of the Masonic Education and Information Committee of the Grand Lodge of Ohio. During his brief tenure, he sought to liberalize masonic education in Ohio and embrace the technology of the Internet. A believer in open access to information, the search for new education materials, and free discussion, a hallmark of his chairmanship was a new education section on the Grand Lodge's web site which featured an unmoderated online discussion forum known for a free-wheeling and edgy exchange of ideas (the forum was restricted to Master Masons interested in masonic education and not open to the public). Shortly after midnight following his last day in office, the new chairman (a past grand master) deleted the new education web site and, without notice or explanation, terminated the discussion forum. Proper order was restored, free discussion silenced, and lodges were again

ordered to solely and strictly adhere to the published grand lodge education program.

In addition to his masonic involvement, Bro. Graeter is also active in his community having served on several professional, social, and charitable boards. He is presently a member of the board of trustees for Cincinnati Public Radio, Inc., which broadcasts WGUC and WVXU, serving as treasurer to the board. He is a member of the board of trustees for the Friends of the Public Library, a charitable organization dedicated to supporting the Hamilton County public library system. He serves on the Long Range Planning Committee of the Board of Directors for Ryland Lakes Country Club. He is also a den leader for the Boy Scouts of America, in which his son is a proud Wolf Cub.

You can contact the author at richard.graeter@gmail.com.

Endnotes

Voices in the Wilderness

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- ¹⁶ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 7-12
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How to Preserve and Stimulate Freemasonry

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² Collins, Jim and Jerry I. Porras. *Built To Last*. Paperback. New York: HarperCollins, 2002, 220

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