

Reform Freemasonry?

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A Question for the Future of Freemasonry

by

Richard A. Gaeter

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard A. Gaeter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	4
Dedication	5
Author's Note	6
Preface	7
Introduction	8
Three Voices	9
What Are We Trying To Save?	9
It's About Time!	11
Voting With Their Feet	14
Conclusion	15
How to Preserve and Stimulate Freemasonry	16
Preserve the Core (What not to change)	17
And Stimulate Progress (what to change)	19
A Willingness To Experiment	22
Cult-Like Culture-Something To Believe In	24
1. Freemasonry's Inspiring Story	24
2. Freemasonry's Culture of Identity	25
3. Freemasonry's Organizational Structure	26
The Role of Grand Lodges	27
Orbiting the Giant Hairball	29
Conclusion	31
Afterword	32
Appendix	34
List of Authorities Cited	45
About the Author	47

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, he recovered his health and lived another 13 happy years. His survival was by no means a miracle; rather, his cure was due to a radical and severe treatment regimen involving chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. The 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. He suffered. The treatments made him ill, and he lost a great deal of weight, but he survived. And while his experience with cancer changed his life, it did not change the man. My father remained to his core, the same man I always knew him to be. After his recovery, he reveled in his time, found a new perspective on life, and looked forward to a bright future. The treatment regimen was painful, but his courage in facing the brutal truth that confronted him allowed him to prevail. My father just recently passed away, peacefully in his sleep, not from cancer but from old age. Although my father was not a freemason, he has been and remains my guide and inspiration, and I dedicate this work to his memory.

Author's Note

Freemasons have been fretting about the demise of Freemasonry for over half a century. The causes blamed for its decline are seemingly endless; the solutions to address it, sadly few. Many changes—reforms—have been tried in a desperate attempt to reverse the perceived problem of membership losses. But have these reforms helped . . . or harmed Freemasonry?

I first offered Reform Freemasonry! with an exclamation point back in 2007, but in this final revision I have changed the punctuation to a question mark. Do we really need to Reform Freemasonry to keep it relevant and make it successful in today's society? I now think not. With the benefit of a few years of reflection, I have come to understand that I had mistaken the symptoms of the disease afflicting Freemasonry as the disease itself. Declining membership is not our problem.

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.

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, from America's Founding Fathers, to the philosophers, scientists, astronomers, and mathematicians of The Royal Society, all 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 stand shoulder to shoulder with cathedrals, museums, and the world headquarters of global corporations. Notably, these buildings were financed in large part through 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 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 some of our members than an entire year of Freemasonry. Why does the typical mason today no longer feel obligated to support his lodge or grand 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. Over the last 50 years, the Grand Lodge of Ohio has lost almost 200,000 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 Lost Symbol* 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 in America today and quickly melt away.

The question is: do we need to **reform** Freemasonry so that it can once again attract young men actively seeking an organization that offers *something to believe in*?

Introduction

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

The first section, *Three Voices*, reviews three selected publications from the current body of work that address 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, *Cult-Like Culture—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 Role of Grand Lodges*, applies the same questions asked about Freemasonry in the second section to Grand Lodges, 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, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*, challenges grand lodges to create an environment that encourages creativity within their subordinate lodges.

In summary, this paper challenges our grand lodge leaders to imagine a dynamic future for Freemasonry. Grand Lodges officers need to lead with 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 pick up our working tools and begin to labor to restore this rich legacy.

Three Voices

Introduction

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

In the first work, *What Are We Trying To Save?*, Brother Thomas W. Jackson blames societal changes for Freemasonry’s membership losses, and questions the need or advisability for any changes whatsoever.

The second paper, *It’s About Time*, was published ten years ago by the Masonic Information Center (MIC)(part of the Masonic Service Association of North America) as a result of its 2004 report to the Conference of Grand Masters in North America (COGMINA). That report 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. *It’s About Time* was the product of this special Task Force.

The final paper is *Voting With Their Feet* by S. Brent Morris. Interestingly, both Jackson and Morris 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.

What Are We Trying To Save?

Thomas W. Jackson

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

—John Robinson

In *What Are We Trying To Save?*¹, Brother Thomas W. Jackson explored the nature of Freemasonry and the issues facing it coupled with an admonition about efforts to change and adapt. Brother Jackson posited 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.”² He highlighted 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.³

He concluded 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.”⁴

Brother Jackson’s main thesis was that “we are making many decisions today” about changes “that seem to indicate a lack of interest in preserving the integrity of the Craft.”⁵ He opined 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.⁶

Brother Jackson insisted 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.”⁷ In effect, he exculpated the last 50 years of masonic leadership from responsibility for the state of our Fraternity today when he concluded “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.”⁸

Brother Jackson then pointed to the evolution of our Fraternity into “the world’s greatest charitable organization” and suggested 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.”⁹ Quoting author John Robinson, “the problem with Freemasonry is that it does not practice Freemasonry anymore,” he lamented “and how can we when the vast majority of our Members do not even know what to practice.”¹⁰ Preaching that our charitable works “must be secondary to our primary purpose,” Brother Jackson proclaimed 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.”¹¹

Brother Jackson concluded:

We are confronted today with monumental problems concerning our integrity as an institution. Many of the problems are originating outside the Craft, but, regretfully, 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.¹²

It's About Time

Moving Masonry into the 21st Century

"When memories exceed dreams, the end is near."

—Michael Hammer

*It's About Time*¹³ opened with the observation that, in spite of numerous initiatives adopted by its leaders, membership in Freemasonry has been dropping for the past 50 years. The report's authors noted that even in the face of successful one-day class initiatives, the increasing number of dimits and NPD's show that "clearly, Masons were not satisfactorily addressing the ways of keeping our members involved and enthusiastic about Masonry." They concluded 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."¹⁴

To underscore the gravity of their message, the Task Force highlighted the following quotation by business organization consultant Michael Hammer from Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat*:¹⁵ "When memories exceed dreams, the end is near."¹⁶ Truly, Freemasonry, more than any other organization, revels in the faded memories of its past glories. When young men pass through the West Gate, instead of wise leaders and fabled experiences, they find only empty seats and faint echoes of a faded glory.

Recognizing this, the Task Force made a dramatic statement that gave the report its title: "It is about time we brought our actions in line with our aspirations."¹⁷ They characterized 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."¹⁸ They implored that we ask the "tough question:" "Who are we as a fraternal organization within the context of the 21st Century?"¹⁹

To begin to answer this question, the Task Force reviewed the statistical decline in membership over the past century, observing "Freemasonry is at its lowest membership level in at least 80 years."²⁰ They identified 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."²¹ The Task Force deftly dismissed these feeble excuses pointing out "that any organization wishing to attract members must offer something of great interest to even be considered worthwhile."²²

They correctly pointed out that our decline was 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."²³ The Task Force continued, stating that "membership loss is *not* the major problem . . . [but] merely a *symptom* of the problem."²⁴

Next, the Task Force provided a brief historical analysis which reviewed 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).²⁵ The second is that Freemasonry “provided a moral philosophy relevant to the individual and to communities.”²⁶

The Task Force then identified 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.”²⁷ Continuing, the Task Force asked 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; whom we should attract as potential members; and, what is the core of our identity.²⁸ All were 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.”²⁹ Attempting to identify the core of our identity, the Task Force stated 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.³⁰ 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 outlined some action steps. First, it stated “we must look squarely into the challenge of performing Masonry to the betterment of our fraternity and ourselves.”³¹ Next, it admonished that we should break out of our lethargy, and “exercise the same determination that we admire and celebrate in our heritage.”³² Finally, it detailed a laundry list of tangible as well as intangible assets that Freemasonry possesses and suggested that it is our management of these resources that has failed, concluding that: “Our Masonic resources are great! Our resource management skills are rusty.”³³

But after doing an admirable job of analyzing the reasons for our present difficulties, and recognizing the many resources at our disposal, the Task Force limped to a disappointing conclusion that failed to deliver an actionable plan for renewal for the bodies best positioned to implement new ideas. First, it listed 10 suggestions to help lodges “take action now” to “plan meaningful activities that put Masonic values into action.”³⁴ None merit specific mention here.

Under the heading “Move Masonry into the 21st Century,” we got an admonition to “cast off negativism” and make Freemasonry “the fraternity that you want—brother by brother, lodge by lodge.”³⁵ The Task Forces closed their report with the warning that “*We have not a moment to lose.*” (emphasis in original)³⁶ I would agree, but after 15 pages of insightful, scholarly, and sometimes courageous prose, the Task Force fell flat with a mere page-and-a-half of minor lodge-level suggestions and airy platitudes such as “cast off negativism.”³⁷

In the final analysis, *Its About Time* is all diagnosis and no cure. The authors proffer a few suggestions for individual lodges and chide individual Masons to be more enthusiastic., but—tellingly—they do not present even a single proposal for change at the grand lodge level. Not one.

Perhaps *it's about time* that we realize that, like the Task Force, we have been attempting to cure the wrong patient.

Voting With Their Feet

S. Brent Morris

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

—A Mason who voted with his feet

In *Voting With Their Feet*,³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰ 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?”⁴¹

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.”⁴² The net effect of this unholy trinity is to suck the joy 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?⁴³

* * *

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.”⁴⁴

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 for the right patient. 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, 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.⁴⁵ 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?

Conclusion

At first blush, the three papers appear to reach 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 the 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

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

— Charles Darwin

Change

Change is a brutal fact of life. If Freemasonry is to thrive in the 21st Century, it must face this brutal fact and learn to adapt. But, in adapting Freemasonry, 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, knowing this, we are liberated to embrace change without fear. The key question, is not **should** we change, but **what** should we change.

Without question, we must never compromise our core principles. Core principles are timeless and unchanging. But Freemasonry, like every institution, must grapple with the difficult question of what 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.”⁴⁶

In spite of the mythical Landmark⁴⁷ to the contrary, “change and innovation” has been a hallmark of Freemasonry since its inception. Freemasonry’s 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 ironic that a society founded on a new style of thinking that dramatically changed the world is now itself a prisoner of its own orthodox dogma and stagnant traditions.

Early in Freemasonry’s *Time Immemorial* era, it lacked formal structure, having no governing body, no fixed meeting times or places, no approved ritual, no list of recognized lodges. Then, suddenly, on June 24, 1717, four independent lodges fundamentally changed the landscape of Freemasonry by unilaterally declaring the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge of England.⁴⁸ Other masons soon formed other grand lodges, with a second in Ireland in 1725, and a third in Scotland in 1736, beginning Freemasonry’s *Grand Lodge* era.⁴⁹

In addition to the innovations in its organizational structure, numerous and substantial changes were made to the Masonic ritual. Early records suggest that originally there were only two masonic degrees. At some point, almost certainly by 1728,⁵⁰ the innovation of the Hiram legend was introduced as the third degree of Freemasonry. And it was not until 1772 that William Preston formalized⁵¹ the degree lectures so familiar to American Masons. In little more than a few decades, both the structure and the ritual of Freemasonry in England changed considerably.

American Freemasons were also great innovators. At the Baltimore Convention in 1843, American lodges declared that only Master Masons were members of the lodge, and excluded Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts from participating in lodge meetings. In many jurisdictions, Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts were even denied the privilege of a Masonic funeral service. Grand Lodges standardized and fixed rituals based on Thomas

Webb's work, and created grand lecturers to inspect the work of subordinate lodges, whose mission was to suppress all deviation from the official ritual. We in our time have also been witness to fundamental changes, the most notorious of these being the introduction of one-day classes that turn poor, blind candidates into 32° 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 one-day classes, show an astounding willingness to compromise our core principles. Inevitably, ill-conceived changes result in a destructive misalignment between “what we stand for” and “how we do things.” This is why it is so important to differentiate between timeless core values, which rarely if ever change, and noncore practices,”⁵² which are the operating practices and cultural norms that should never stop changing.⁵³ Change is essential for survival, but we must know *what to change*, and equally importantly, *what to preserve*.

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 its **Core Ideology**.”⁵⁴ It is essential to not confuse core ideology with noncore practices.”⁵⁵ 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”⁵⁶ and its **Core Purpose**, which is “the set of fundamental reasons” for an organization’s existence.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

But while Timeless core values should never change; operating practices and cultural norms should never stop changing.⁵⁹ The great paradox of change is that successful adaptation

begins by knowing what should *never* change. Organizations that have achieved long-term success 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.”⁶⁰ Again, change is essential for survival, but the key is to know *what to change*, and equally importantly, *what to preserve*.

Freemasonry’s Core Purpose

The starting point for articulating Freemasonry’s core ideology is to describe its core purpose—its “fundamental reason for being.” An indication of a well-conceived core purpose is that it is a compelling and unique statement⁶¹ that is only true for Freemasonry. Can you answer the following question? Freemasonry is the *only* organization that {fill in the blank}. Was your answer *compelling*?

Ask the average Mason to explain what Freemasonry’s mission is and you will invariably get the reply “to make good men better.” But is the generic mission to “make good men better” unique to Freemasonry? Of course not! Most human institutions seek to make good people better. But we have been repeating this convenient light-weight phrase for so long that we no longer try to say anything more profound, which should give us little reason to wonder why, as Brother Jackson laments in his essay *What Are We Trying to Save?*, “the vast majority of our Members do not even know what to practice.”⁶²

In contrast, if I were to capture Freemasonry’s core purpose in a single timeless sentence that distinguished it from 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 be this:

Freemasonry promotes a universal system of morality that prepares good men to build a better society.

This simple statement capture the essence of Freemasonry, and that it is *the only* organization that can claim a centuries-old tradition of attracting the finest men from across races, faiths, creeds, and nations to labor together for a better world.

Freemasonry’s Core Values

The next step is to define Freemasonry’s core values—those “essential and enduring tenets” and “guiding principles” that answer the question “what is important to us?”⁶³ Core values cannot be dreamed up by a committee; you can only discover those values that already exist.⁶⁴ It is equally important to understand that you cannot “install” core values into people. Core values are not something people “buy into.”⁶⁵ People must be predisposed to holding them. The critical key is that we must attract and then retain those men who already share our values, and let those who aren’t predisposed to sharing them go elsewhere.⁶⁶ This is what it means—and why it is vital—to properly guard the West Gate.

Freemasonry’s core values flow from its unique moral philosophy: belief in a Universal

Creator and a shared destiny; 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 the heart and soul of Freemasonry’s core values.

In conclusion, Freemasonry is a worldwide brotherhood that for centuries has sought to transcend the divisiveness of sectarian religion and partisan politics through a progressive moral science founded on the profound truth that we all share a common origin and destiny, and therefore have an imperative to live together in harmony. In practice, it is a convivial society that employs a unique initiatic experience to form a close and intimate fraternal bond founded on ancient traditions and ceremonies that unite brothers together in a harmony of enlightened Fellowship.

“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.”⁶⁷ 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.

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*

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.”⁶⁸ 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 stimulate progress through change, improvement, innovation, and renewal in all that is not part of the core values and purpose. Core values and core purpose remain fixed, while operating practices, cultural norms, strategies, tactics, processes, structures, and methods continually change in response to a changing world.

With a clearly articulated core ideology, 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.⁶⁹ 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*.⁷⁰

Collins and Porras offer five specific methods for organizations to both preserve the core and stimulate progress.⁷¹ There are as follow:

1. Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGs), which mean organizational commitment to challenging, audacious, inspiring, but ultimately attainable goals.⁷² 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.⁷³
2. Cult-like Culture, which means that the culture energizes those who "buy into" the organization's core ideology, and rejects those who don't like a virus. In other words, protecting the West Gate with extreme selectivity.⁷⁴
3. A willingness to experiment, often in unplanned and undirected ways, to find new and unexpected paths of progress. This was Freemasonry's origin, and the hesitancy of its grand lodges to give subordinate lodges the freedom to experiment is the primary reason for its stagnation and decay.⁷⁵
4. Homegrown management that promotes from within.⁷⁶
5. An attitude that good enough never is—the embracing of a continual, relentless, primal drive for organizational self-improvement.⁷⁷

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.

Practices that waste valuable time without providing a concomitant benefit are ripe for reevaluation. 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, saving 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.

Guiding members with talent towards those roles where their talents can most benefit the lodge also makes sense. Rote memorization prowess does not always correlate with good leadership skills. 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? And how many men with good presentation skills who could deliver an inspiring lecture sit silent on the sidelines because they do not wish to "go through the chairs?" Both men, and their lodges, and our candidates suffer by our non core practice of measuring the mark of a leader by the number of lectures he can recite from memory. Do lodge inspections truly facilitate our core values? What is more important: having lodge *officers* focus on performing at annual inspections *for grand lodge representatives and visiting dignitaries*, 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 not aligned with our core ideology.

Even the text of our ritual is noncore. Masonic ritual is not sacred script, and to suggest

otherwise veers dangerously close to blasphemy. It was written by men to teach a code of ethics and transmit our core values. And the text has been in a continuous state of change ever since the first word was writ down. In the rest of the Masonic world, 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.⁷⁸ 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 even punctuation, over the meaning behind the words. In *It's About Time*, The Masonic Information Committee Task Force noted that following World War II, “Masonic tradition became locked in ritual as an end, not as a process.”⁷⁹ 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.

The exact phraseology and punctuation in our ritual is not our core purpose or values; it is merely the means by which we transmit them. The *unique* moral code taught by our ritual is what is core to Freemasonry. 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 transmit 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 prohibition of the possession of “unauthorized” ritual books. In many American jurisdictions, it is a masonic offense for a member to possess any written ritual.⁸⁰ Masonic Codes prohibit possession of the same plain English translation of our ritual⁸¹ that any non-mason can purchase at the bookstore or find in the public library. 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.

But the most damaging noncore tradition of all, in my opinion, is the uniquely American practice of existing lodges obstructing the formation of new lodges. New lodges are the single, best, hope for the Craft. But older, established, and all too often decaying lodges, perceive new lodges—wrongfully—as a threat. Masonic leaders, lamenting our decline, are willing to significantly compromise our most fundamental traditions to grow membership through one-day classes, but then erect near insurmountable barriers to the formation of new lodges, in spite of the evidence that new lodges have proven to be a very effective means to attract new candidates to Freemasonry, candidates who otherwise showed no interest in joining older established lodges. Noted masonic scholar, Harry Carr, pointed out this oddity about American Freemasonry almost 50 years ago, and it remains true today.⁸² The great tragedy is that there are a growing number of young masons eager to form new lodges of their own, and these new lodges would be uniquely positioned to attract new young candidates, yet we suppress this enthusiasm—the very quality the authors of *It's About Time* challenge us to champion.

Each of us has a responsibility to steward our respected fraternity into the future, calling on our own spirit rather than deferring to those of our predecessors. We must exercise the same determination that we admire and celebrate in our heritage.⁸³

Our practices are not aligned with our goals. We want members to attend lodge, but we drive them away with tedious meetings. 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 more effectively attract new members. And again, ten years ago the authors of *It's About Time* challenged us to reexamine every program, meeting, or event, but what have we accomplished since their challenge?

As we work together, we must ask each other how a program, a meeting, or an event improves and demonstrates our experience of being a Mason.⁸⁴

A renewed willingness to innovate is essential to Freemasonry's survival and revival. Grand lodge leadership needs to empower local lodges to explore and find new practices that work better for today, while preserving the core purpose and values of our past. The point is to **both** preserve the core **AND** stimulate progress. 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 open for change; between, quite simply, "what we stand for" and "how we do things." If we can better align "how we do things" with "what we stand for," we can motivate legions of enthusiastic new members for generations to come. "***We have not a moment to lose.***"⁸⁵

A Willingness To Experiment

With a solid understanding of what is core, organizations become empowered to experiment, often in unplanned and undirected ways, to find new and unexpected paths of progress.⁸⁶ The *willingness to experiment* 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."⁸⁷ "If well understood and consciously harnessed, evolutionary processes can be a powerful way to stimulate progress."⁸⁸ In *Built to Last*, Collins and Porras defined five simple tactics for instilling an evolutionary process.

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!⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰ It is not enough to just tell members to "cast off negativism;"⁹¹ 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 survival and revival. Imagine the excitement, energy, and enthusiasm that would be created if Grand lodge leadership empowered local lodges to explore new ideas. Below is the beginning of a list of ideas. Some of these ideas are echoed in other publications, like *Laudable Pursuit*⁹², 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 retire. 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 needed.
4. Establish a shorter progressive 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. Replace mandatory ritual inspections with voluntary ritual competitions.
10. Revise or eliminate the 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*.

Cult-Like Culture: 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*,⁹³ 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 understood 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.

If young men again perceived Freemasonry as something worth believing in, the need for public relation campaigns and one-day classes would vanish overnight. 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 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, earning both their respect and enthusiastic support.

1. Freemasonry’s Inspiring Story

There are charities that do good works. There are clubs and fraternities that provide social fellowship. There are church congregations that teach moral virtue to their members. But few organizations embrace 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? In an earlier age, one such place was a masonic lodge.

On September 11, 2001, the world bore witness to an act of terror rooted in a culture of divisiveness and hate. Sadly, belief systems that divide humanity into an “us and them” are all too common. As the great Scottish poet and Brother Mason Robert Burns penned, “Man’s Inhumanity to Man, makes countless thousands mourn.”⁹⁴ The world has borne witness to the horror of genocide throughout history: the Holocaust; the killing fields in Cambodia; the

Armenian genocide; the Balkan ethnic cleansing; Stalin's and Mao's great purges, and Rwanda, just to name a few.

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, and one that continues to play out today with unsettling images of beheadings and mass executions being carried in Syria and Iraq, all in the name of god.

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. And conflict.

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, tired. Officer lines at some 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 mega-churches are flourishing in a time when mainstream churches wither on the vine. They 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! 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, inspirational leadership capable of leveraging these extraordinary assets.

The Role of Grand Lodges

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—should be reexamined. Our rules, regulations, and, most importantly, our organizational structure and governing hierarchy, need to be reformed to meet the realities 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 in *Built To Last*, “a key step in building a visionary company is to articulate a **Core Ideology**.”⁹⁵ 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”⁹⁶ and its **Core Purpose**, which is “the set of fundamental reasons” for an organization’s existence.⁹⁷ 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 suggest that grand lodges exist to propagate, serve, and support individual lodges that together constitute the grand lodge. I would further suggest 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 and subservient to their grand lodge. The obvious question posed is who exists to serve whom? What are the core values of American grand lodges: edicts; inspections; rigid Masonic Codes; rising dues; and one-day classes? Why do individual lodges need grand lodges, and what do they receive in return for their dues and fealty? Are grand lodge officers working hard to serve the best interests of the individual lodges that they govern, their members who are beholden to them, and 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.”⁹⁸ And it is this fear that obstructs Freemasonry’s growth 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.⁹⁹ Yet, the grand lodges’ introduction of one-day classes that make it quick and easy to add a large group of new dues paying members makes this precise compromise. If telling the masonic story is one of the key distinctions of Freemasonry, then I would argue that one-day classes are 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 brief hours.

Over the long term, our grand lodge leaders’ increasingly desperate preoccupation with quantity over quality has had 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.

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 Observant Lodges). But others have proven to be hostile to any new group that may threaten the existing power structure. 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.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰²

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).¹⁰³ “Every new policy is another hair for the Hairball. Hairs are never taken away, only added.”¹⁰⁴ 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 of Corporate Normalcy for original thinking or primary creativity. Resynthesizing *past* successes is the habit of the Hairball.”¹⁰⁵

Chapter 18 of Gordon MacKenzie’s book, entitled *The Pyramid & The Plum Tree* (pages 161 to 188), is a remarkable fable on the struggle of the novel against the entrenched at Hallmark. I have reproduced this extraordinary chapter in the appendix to this paper, with slight changes to adjust it to the context of 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.

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. Sadly, because some grand lodges would not embrace creativity and empower young masons to try new practices, they lost the very constituency of young men that they are so desperately trying to attract with impotent one-day classes.¹⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁷

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.¹⁰⁸

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.”¹⁰⁹ 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 rule of what worked in the past or flying out into deep space, liberated, but alone.

Conclusion

So we return to the question: do we need to reform Freemasonry so that it can once again attract young men actively seeking an organization that offers *something to believe in*? Hopefully, by now the answer is clear: No. What we need to reform is not Freemasonry but how we govern Freemasonry. Again, with a clearly articulated core ideology, Grand Lodge leadership becomes an exercise of aligning strategies, tactics, policies, operating practices, cultural norms, processes, structures, and methods with Freemasonry's core purpose and core values.¹¹⁰ The key learning is that to maintain alignment, we must continuously adapt how we govern Freemasonry, and remain willing to adapt our noncore practices to a constantly changing environment. We must always *preserve our core*, but in so doing, we must never fail to also stimulate progress.¹¹¹ Freemasonry can succeed in the 21st Century, with enlightened and open-minded grand lodge officers leading the way, focused on serving their lodges and members, so that together, we can better serve the needs of today's young men.

Please look for my next work, *Governing the Craft*, which will explore how grand lodges can help lead Freemasonry to renewed vigor in the coming years.

Afterword

At the 2007 convocation of the Grand Lodge of Ohio, I presented six legislative proposals for consideration. Unlike some of the ideas presented in this paper, the proposals before the Grand Lodge of Ohio were rather tame. 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.

Most of the proposals were aimed at driving basic lodge governance decisions down to the local lodge level. One would have reduced the number of mandatory stated meetings per year from 10 to four. Another would have permitted lodges to rehearse degrees rather than mandate that each be conferred twice per year regardless of the presence of a live candidate. Another would have permitted each lodge to decide if alcohol could be served on its premises. Another would have made it clear that members could possess (but not work) 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.

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 could block a new lodge from forming.

The hostility that we encountered was breathtaking; I 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 could. This has been exactly our experience at Caliburn Lodge. Caliburn has been successful in attracting young candidates who had previously 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 new ponds.

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 some 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 by in large do not participate in the other myriad masonic bodies; we do not send representatives to the dozens of inspections in our district. We keep Freemasonry in perspective as 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 good mason, but 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 more than quadrupled our membership. At Caliburn, we endeavor to create a small and intimate lodge for men who value fellowship and want to enjoy a Masonic experience in a convivial atmosphere. We seek to transcend the time-consuming practices found in older lodges and focus on the convivial fraternal experience typical in an English Masonic Lodge, and put into practice the purpose of Freemasonry to promote a universal system of morality that prepares good men to build a better society. 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 found our place among the lodges beholden to 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.

So Mote It Be!

Appendix - The Pyramid & The Plum Tree

Adapted from Chapter 18, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball*, by Gordon Mackenzie, ©1996¹¹²

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 Lodges

The initial DYNAMISM brought by new Grand 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

Grand Lodge

In desperation,
forgoes habitual cloning

And Tolerates
(allows)

... genuine

birth

How To Achieve Entrepreneurial IMMORTALITY

(A message of Hope for aging Grand Lodges)

Propagate, Grand 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 Grand 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 unmov'ing presence.

Picture deep within this monument to reality past

A pocket of rich loam

Where NEWNESS . . .
(as yet undetected by deputy 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 Lodge Plum Tree,

You are Newness
... and Nowness.

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

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.

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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 and CEO of Graeter's Manufacturing Company, a fourth generation family business renowned for making handcrafted artisanal 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.

Brother 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.

Brother Graeter joined with 11 other Master Masons to form the first new lodge in Ohio in over 20 years. The Grand Lodge of Ohio granted a charter to Caliburn Lodge #785 on October 18, 2002. Brother Graeter went on to serve as that lodge's Worshipful Master in 2004, and continues to serve Caliburn as its Lodge Education Officer. Today, Caliburn Lodge is thriving with a growing membership of young professional men.

On April 26, 1997, Brother Graeter joined the Valley of Cincinnati, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite and served that body as Commander-in-Chief of Ohio Consistory. On August 31, 2010, he was made an Honorary Sovereign Grand Inspector General of the 33rd and Last Degree of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite for the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction at the Supreme Council session in Philadelphia. He currently serves on the Valley's investment advisory 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, Brother 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.

In addition to his masonic involvement, Brother Graeter is also active in his community having served on several professional, social, and charitable boards. He is recently served as Chairman of the Board of Directors for Cincinnati Public Radio, Inc., which broadcasts WGUC, WVXU and WMUB. He is a member of the investment advisory committee for The Cure Starts Now Foundation, which is searching for a cure to pediatric brain cancer as a key to the cure for all cancers. He also serves as President of the Board of Directors for Ryland Lakes Country Club.

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¹⁹ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 1

²⁰ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 3

²¹ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 4

²² IT'S ABOUT TIME! 4

²³ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 5

²⁴ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 5

²⁵ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 8

²⁶ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 8

²⁷ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 9

²⁸ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 7-12

²⁹ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 11

³⁰ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 12

³¹ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 13

³² IT'S ABOUT TIME! 13

³³ IT'S ABOUT TIME! 15

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