DESIGNS

February 2, 2004

My Brothers,

As I sat down to write this education session and sat staring into a blank screen hoping for inspiration, I drew a blank - and that became inspiration. It occurred to me that, just as this education session began on a blank screen, our lives began with a clean slate, and I thought about how to apply that concept of a clean slate to Masonry. I thought about the symbolic meanings of coming from west to east, from barbarism to enlightenment, from ignorance to knowledge. The more I thought about these transformations, this coming from darkness to light, the more I wanted to say that we start with a clean slate at the moment we become Masons, otherwise, what’s all this ceremony and ‘light’ stuff about? And then I realized that we don’t come to Masonic life with a clean slate, and that becoming a Mason does not give us one, and that we don’t even continue in Masonry with a clean slate.

Wow!, what could I mean by that? How can we believe that our Masonic Initiation doesn’t give us a clean slate, that we’re not transformed when we become Masons?

Let’s examine some of the evidence for this by looking at life’s designs. We are born into this world in a state of purity (if emptiness can be pure - some religions may argue a different viewpoint about this, but that is not our purpose here. To continue,) Our minds, our selves, are a clean slate; life will write upon us what it will. As we grow, the GAOTU works through lesser architects to fashion the designs of our lives. Our parents put their designs on us, our schools, our religions, our society, our day-to-day living experiences. Each has a set of rules and guidelines, and consequences for our developing behavior and thinking. How well these lesser architects draw their designs upon us and how well we follow their designs determines what and who we are, and it is the what and who we are that is the stuff of being Masons. That we are here says that we have been thought of as being good men, by other good men. We don’t come to Masonry as perfect men; our original designs have flaws. That Masonry professes to make good men into better men, proves the first argument; we don’t come to Masonic life with a clean slate.

And now, let’s look at Masonry’s designs. The very first thing we see is in the center of the Lodge. It is the altar, which symbolically raises our Three Great Lights, upon which we have all been Obligated, up toward the Celestial Lodge, above. It is well lit, centered, and raised as a constant reminder to illuminate, center, and raise our Masonic life by its furnishings. It says, every time we see it, that there is more work for us to do.

Now look at our Trestle Board, our symbolic work slate. It is far from clean. Its design says that in every well-governed Lodge there is, or should be, a certain point within a circle, that point representing the individual Brother, and the circle, the boundary of his conduct beyond which he should never suffer his passions, his prejudices, or his interests, to betray him. This says to us that our passions, prejudices, and interests are all potential character flaws. That enclosing circle represents the teachings of the Holy Saints John, with the Holy Writings over all. We learn that while a Mason keeps himself within these boundaries it is impossible for him to materially err, or in other words, to act with any design flaw that is a natural part of him.

Masonry constructs these symbolic boundaries and illuminates these Divine guidelines as a reminder to reign ourselves in and seek improvement in our natures through the Divine. This proves the second argument; even as active Masons, we are in continual battle with our inner design flaws. We would not need these boundaries, these reminders, if we were already in a state of perfection; the Initiation ceremony and the receipt of Masonic ‘light’ is not a perfecting or washing of our slate. We begin, and continue, in Masonry as flawed as when we came to it, but with this difference: we are now in observance of the Three Great Lights of Masonry and have Obligated ourselves upon them to learn another life design, one laid down by the Master Architect, which has a higher set of rules and guidelines, and consequences.

In reflection then, we are not perfect; we are but good men, seeking to become better men. Despite our flaws, we can take heart in knowing that it is in this seeking, in our striving to learn the designs laid down for us by the GAOTU, that we clean the only slate that matters - the one held for us, in the Celestial Lodge, above.

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