

## A Clean Slate: or in Today's Jargon...A Blank Screen

As I sat in my favorite chair with my laptop, ready to put thoughts to the keyboard, I sat there staring at a blank screen.....desperately hoping for some spark of inspiration. After what seemed like a longer than usual time in serious thought, I still drew a blank - and that became my inspiration. It occurred to me that, just as this nugget of Masonic Education 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 meaning of coming from the West to East...from ignorance to knowledge. The more I thought about this transformation, this moving 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 referring to? And then I realized that we really don't come to our Masonic life with a clean slate, and that becoming a Mason does not give us one, and that we don't continue in our Masonry journey with a clean slate. Wait a minute!.....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 take a closer look at some of the evidence by looking at life's designs. We are born into this world in a state of purity...if emptiness is perceived as being pure... and while some religions may argue a different viewpoint about this, that's not my purpose here. To continue; our minds, our selves, are a clean slate; life will write upon us what it will, or more specifically, what God has planned for us. As we grow, God works through lesser architects to fashion the design he has imprinted on our life. Our parents put their designs on us: our families, our schools, our religion, society, and our day-to-day living. They all make an imprint on us, and our future.

Each one of these influences has a set of rules and guidelines, and consequences for our developing behavior and thinking process. How well these lesser architects draw their designs upon us and how well we follow the design determines what and who we are.....and it's the 'what' and 'who' we are that is the real 'stuff' of being a Mason. The fact that we are here in Lodge tonight, 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 in them. The fact that Masonry professes to make *good* men into *better* men, proves the first argument; we don't come to our Masonic life with a clean slate.

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, holding the Three Great Lights, upon which we all took our solemn obligations. It is well lit, centered, and raised as a constant reminder to illuminate, center, and raise our Masonic life by its furnishings. Every time we see it, it says 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 is the boundary of his conduct beyond which he should never suffer his passions, prejudices, or his interests, to

betray him. This tells me that *our* passions, prejudices, and interests are all potential character flaws. That encompassing circle represents the teachings of the Holy Saints John, and the Holy Scriptures. We were told early in our Masonic travels 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 guidelines as a reminder to reign ourselves in and seek improvement in our nature through our relationship with God. This proves the second argument...even as active Masons, we are in a constant battle with our inner design flaws. We wouldn't 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. So, we begin, and continue, in Masonry as flawed as when we came to it, but with this single difference: we are now in observance of the Three Great Lights of Masonry and have obligated ourselves to learn another life design, one laid down by the Master Architect. He has a higher set of rules and guidelines, as well as a different set of consequences.

So, as we reflect...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's in this process of seeking, in our striving to learn the designs that have been laid down for us by the Great Architect of the Universe, that we clean the only slate that matters - the one held for us, in the Celestial Lodge, above.

## Freemasons...Our principles make a difference

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