

*A Michigan Council of Royal and Select Masons
Confer the three Cryptic Degrees*

The Royal Master Degree takes the candidate back to the day before the death of the Builder, who once again is the central character, as he was in the Master Mason Degree.

The Select Master Degree also predates the Master Mason Degree and relates events, which occurred during the building of the first Temple.

The Super Excellent Master Degree deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and teaches a lesson in fidelity.

A quorum of Companions must be present to open a Council. Councils usually meet monthly. The state governing body is called the Grand Council. The national body, to which Grand Councils voluntarily belong, is the General Grand Council of Cryptic Masons, International.

The principal officers of the local Council are:

- * Thrice Illustrious Master
- * Deputy Master
- * Principal Conductor of the Work
- * Treasurer
- * Recorder
- * Captain of the Guard
- * Conductor of the Council
- * Chaplain
- * Marshal
- * Steward
- * Sentinel

Here we take another step in our Masonic education and progress to the Council of Royal and Select Masons known as Cryptic Masonry or the Purple Lodge. The Council degrees are largely an elaboration and explanation of the Royal Arch degree and, to a lesser extent, the Master Mason degree. The degrees of the Council of Royal and Select Masons are necessary to fully complete your education in Ancient Craft Masonry. The degrees of our Masonic system are not chronologically arranged and in the degrees of Royal and Select Master, which many believe, are the most beautiful and impressive of all, you learn of additional incidents in the building of the first temple. During these degrees you represent the Master Builder, Hiram Abif, and

learn why the word was lost and the secret of its preservation and recovery. The first Council degree, the Royal Master, develops more fully the story of recovery of the "lost" word and the Holy of Holies of the Temple of King Solomon. The Royal Master degree further explains the Master Mason degree by telling of a Fellowcraft, a workman in the quarries, who in true humility asked, "Grand Master, Hiram Abif, when shall I receive the Master's Word?" And after patiently listening to the explanation why he may never receive it, returns to his place in the quarries. The next degree, Select Master, concerns itself with the construction and adornment of the subterranean vault introduced in the Royal Arch degree of the Chapter.

The Select Master degree explains where and how the sacred treasures and the secret word were buried. Here we are taught fidelity to vows, the wisdom of worshiping GOD, and the punishment for perjury. Here we are welded into a circle of friendship, in an unending chain of fraternal union, as symbolized in the Blue Lodge by the point within the circle, which is displayed on our altars.

The last degree is that of Super Excellent Master, and tells the story of the Babylonian Captivity, and of Zedekiah and his perfidy. Council Masonry is also referred to as "Cryptic Masonry," in allusion to the continuance of the vault, or crypt. The Super Excellent Master degree, though having no connection with Ancient Craft Masonry, is a vivid dramatization of truth and fidelity and never fails to impress those who witness it, either for the first time or after many times. The degrees of the Council will enable you to more fully understand your third degree of Symbolic Masonry and the degree of Royal Arch. We will now examine these degrees in more detail.

ROYAL MASTER

This degree consists of three relatively brief sections: (1) An optional prologue, in which the tie-in of the events of the degree to the degrees which have preceded it are called to the candidate's attention; (2) a scene in the unfinished Sanctum Sanctorum (SS), which consists of a monologue by GMHA concerning death; (3) a third section in which the candidate is obligated, given the words and signs, and made acquainted with the furnishings of the SS, and especially the details of the Ark of the Covenant.

Let's consider (2) and (3) in somewhat more detail. In the second scene, as the candidate (representing a Temple craftsman, Adoniram) enters the unfinished inner Temple area, he observes GMHA deep in thought while working on some sacred vessels, and presents a piece of work for inspection. GMHA expresses his approbation of the work, and retires to the SS to render up his noontime prayer and then draw his designs on the trestleboard. Accosted by the candidate upon finishing these exercises, Adoniram demands to know when he can expect to receive the Master's Word. After demurring to this inquiry, GMHA conducts the candidate round the altar in the SS, commenting on each circuit on the nature of death and in his firm belief in a resurrection. At the end of each circuit, he stops, points to the altar, and informs the candidate that should he die, the Word will be found there. This soliloquy on death is one of the most impressive and stark expositions of the Masonic philosophy on that subject. It touches the reality of physical decay and death, but culminates in an unswerving and firm conviction in the certainty of a resurrection to eternal bliss. GMHA foreshadows his own demise, but tempers its horror and sadness by his expression of immovable faith in God. As Adoniram is evidently highly thought of by GMHA, he is made privy not only to Hiram's most private feelings, but also given a broad clue as to where the Master's Word will be located if Hiram should die before the Temple is completed. In the Third Part, during the circumambulations and the brief concluding lecture, the candidate receives an exposition of the adornment of the SS and particularly the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, which is the particular symbol of this degree. The grand sign and words of this degree further allude to the death of GMHA and of the reluctance of the two remaining Grand Masters to communicate the Word, even among themselves. The degree is readily seen to be a memorial to GMHA and a suitable lead-in to the one succeeding it. This Degree takes us backward in time to a day prior to the death of the builder, who is again the central character. He imparts sublime teachings of a useful labor on earth to the candidate and gives him instruction as to the preservation of our valuable secrets.

This is one of the most beautiful Degrees in all Masonry. Its lessons are so impressive that they are seldom forgotten. It is especially illustrative of the Master Mason and Royal Arch Degrees.

SELECT MASTER

Historically, this Degree occurs also prior to the third Degree and deals with incidents that occurred at the building of the first Temple. It is closely connected with Royal Arch Degree and affords the explanation needed for its perfect understanding. It is highly dramatic.

This degree explains how the Subterranean Vault introduced in the Royal Arch degree of the Chapter came to be. A particular friend of King Solomon's, named Zabud, misunderstands a remark by the king and unwittingly gains entrance into a special construction project one night. Being detected as an intruder, he is almost killed by the guards but is spared upon intervention by King Solomon, influenced by the mild counsel of GMHA. Zabud is permitted to take the place of a guard found wanting in trustworthiness, and upon being duly obligated and instructed, Zabud gains admission to that point beneath the Temple chosen by the Grand Masters to conceal the treasures of the Craft and the Word. The candidate then witnesses the reenactment of the deposition of those treasures, which will not be recovered until the rebuilding of the second Temple as related in the Royal Arch degree.

This degree teaches attentiveness to duty, to setting a watch over one's words and actions, and to illustrate that zealous attachment to duty and to the principles of Masonry will result in advancement in its ranks as well as in life. This degree is the culmination of what has been styled Ancient Craft Masonry, or Masonry related to the building of the Solomonic Temple.

SUPER EXCELLENT MASTER

This degree deals with incidents in the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar when Zedekiah, the last King of Judah, was conquered and carried captive to Babylon. It enlarges upon the section of the Royal Arch having to do with the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonian King, and teaches in most dramatic fashion the lesson of fidelity. This optional degree consists of four sections. It is usually conferred at irregular intervals and/or on large classes. In the first section, the candidate assumes the obligation and is instructed in the signs, grips, and words, as well as in the symbolism of the special symbols of this degree: square, circle, and equilateral triangle. In the second sections, the candidate witnesses the desolation and sorrow of some Jewish captives in a grove in Babylon, who are subsequently given words of comfort by the prophet Ezekiel. In the third section, the scene shifts to the court of the dissolute and perfidious Jewish king Zedekiah who, influenced by two evil councilors, refuses to hearken to the voice of the prophet Jeremiah urging him to repent and return to God. Zedekiah, to his later grief, learns the answer to a riddle he proposes to Jeremiah, and immediately afterwards the king and his court are forced to flee before the besieging armies of King

Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. In the final section, the captured Zedekiah is brought before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, and receives a severe judgment for his past infidelities, misdeeds, and insensitivity. This degree is one of the most dramatic in freemasonry. It strikingly and forcefully teaches the great lesson of loyalty to friends and fidelity to promises and vows. Dry oral instruction is subjugated to teaching through observation of dynamic acting and dialogue. Few who see this degree done correctly and in full costume ever forget it.

THRICE ILLUSTRIOUS MASTER DEGREE

This is a side, or "chair" degree, and is conferred on present or Past Thrice Illustrious Masters, usually during the time of the state Grand Council Assembly. In some jurisdiction, including Michigan, it goes by the name of Order of the Silver Trowel. It consists of two sections, the candidate representing the young King Solomon in both sections. In the first section, the candidate learns of the conspiracy by his half-brother Adonijah, to wrest the throne by cunning from Solomon. He also learns of his mother (Bathsheba) interceding with the aged and ailing King David to prevent this. After securing David's approval, Solomon is symbolically conducted to Gihon by Benaiah where he is duly obligated, anointed and hailed as King by Nathan the prophet and Zadok, the High Priest. In the second section, the newly anointed king is brought before his father, David, who, in his dying moments, instructs him in moral wisdom and counsels him to govern uprightly and to serve the Lord with all his strength. Upon Solomon's assent to all this, the king expires.

To become a Royal and Select Mason in Michigan, it is Necessary to be both a Master Mason, and a Royal Arch Mason.

For more information, contact:

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AN INTRODUCTION

TO



ROYAL and SELECT MASONS of MICHIGAN