

## **An Introduction to the Royal & Select Masters Degrees of Cryptic Council Freemasonry**

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Freemasonry is a centuries-old fraternal organization steeped in tradition, symbolism, and moral teachings. Within this rich tapestry, the Royal & Select Masters Degrees, often referred to as Cryptic Masonry, occupies a unique and revered place. This particular degree serves as an extension of the lessons taught in the Craft Lodges, providing deeper insights into the values of friendship, loyalty, and the pursuit of knowledge.

### **Historical Context**

The origins of Cryptic Masonry can be traced back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, evolving from the Medieval Guilds and societies that laid the groundwork for modern Freemasonry. In England, the degrees we recognize today were formally organized in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, while American Freemasonry saw the rise of the Royal & Select Masters degrees as a complementary order to Craft Masonry. The degree was established to provide Masons with a fuller narrative concerning the completion of the temple of King Solomon, thus tying together important biblical and historical themes.

### **Structure of the Degree**

The Royal & Select Masters Degrees is conferred in a Masonic body known as a Cryptic Council. Membership in a Cryptic Council typically requires the candidate to have completed the three degrees of Blue Lodge Freemasonry (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason). It is through this degree that individuals are introduced to allegorical teachings based on the legends of the Ancient Craft.

The Royal Select & Masters Degrees features a dramatic ritual that unfolds as the candidate is taken on a journey of discovery and enlightenment. While the specifics may vary between different jurisdictions, the core themes remain consistent. The degree places a significant emphasis on the moral and ethical implications of one's actions and the importance of integrity and charity in a Mason's life.

### **Symbolism and Lessons**

Central to the teachings of the Royal & Select Masters Degrees are three key symbols: the Royal Arch, the Square, the Compasses, and the Ark of the Covenant. Each symbol carries profound significance, offering lessons on the nature of duty, loyalty, and the quest for truth.

1. The Royal Arch: Represents the culmination of a Mason's journey, emphasizing the importance of seeking knowledge and understanding.
2. The Square and Compasses: These fundamental tools of stonemasonry symbolize moral and ethical behavior – a reminder that one's actions should align with the principles of truth and justice.
3. The Ark of the Covenant: Serves as a potent symbol of faith and the divine connection between humanity and God, reminding participants of their responsibilities to both themselves and their community.

These symbols are woven into the narrative and teachings of the degree, reinforcing the Masonic ideals of brotherhood, charity, and moral rectitude.

### **Conclusion**

The Royal & Select Masters Degrees of Cryptic Council Freemasonry invites its members into a deeper understanding of the principles that guide Freemasonry. As a bridge between the Craft Lodge and more advanced Masonic bodies, it offers an enriching experience that fosters personal growth and spiritual enlightenment. For those who choose to embark on this journey, the Royal & Select Masters Degrees promises not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the opportunity to forge lasting bonds of friendship with fellow Masons devoted to the same quest for truth and self-improvement.

As a vital part of Masonic tradition, the Royal & Select Masters Degrees continues to inspire and educate those who seek to delve deeper into the mysteries of Freemasonry and the lessons it imparts.