

Short Talk # 7

ROYAL

Have you ever stopped to think about the reason that the Royal Arch is designated as "Royal?"

In this short talk, we will take a look at these two terms to better define the mystery behind our purpose, and how Royal Arch Masonry builds on and is different than the symbolism of the Blue Lodge.

Since the word Royal comes first in our name, we will contemplate this term first. Obviously, Royal refers to some kind of ruler or king. But how does Royal relate to our order's ritual? After close investigation, the Royal Connection becomes clear through three different sources.

The first source for this Royal Connection is the most central biblical character in all Masonic ritual and tradition. This character is none other than Solomon, King of Israel. Remember in the Mark Masters degree, he presides over the degree. Are we not seated in the Oriental Chair according to tradition in the Past Master's degree, thus alluding to King Solomon and his Royal and governing position among ancient brethren of the Craft? In the Most Excellent Master's degree, Solomon dedicates a Temple to almighty God and fulfills His plan. So, one aspect of the Royal Connection or Nature of this Masonic body has to do with the Kingship of Solomon.

A second Royal Connection is the biblical character whom we celebrate the memory of in the Royal Arch degree, Zerubbabel. The Texas ritual alludes to Zerubbabel several times, but never calls him a king. Yet, Zerubbabel is of Royal lineage and bloodline. An earlier version of the ritual states the fact in this manner:

"And Cyrus having constituted Zerubbabel, the son of Shalatheil (of the seed of David by Nathan the brother of Solomon, whose Royal Family was now extinct) the head, or prince of the Captivity, and the Leader of the Jews and Israelites returning to Jerusalem, they began to lay the Foundations of the SECOND TEMPLE and would have soon finished it if Cyrus had lived.

Further evidence of Zerubbabel's Royal Connection is introduced to you at the 3rd Veil. To gain passage beyond and to satisfy the Master of the 3rd Veil, the candidates must present the Signet of Truth; it is associated with Zerubbabel, thus demonstrating his Royal lineage. In ancient times, a signet was a ring that symbolized the power and authority of a ruler, much like the rings that our own Grand High Priest or Grand Masters wear today. The signet ring was worn by a ruler or may have been employed to show that anyone who possessed the ring itself, or the seal impressed in wax by the ring, carried the direct orders and fully represented the will of the ruler. This tradition is similar to our current system of District Deputies.

Finally, the third Royal Connection lies just under the surface of the degree work, like so much of our meaning and our philosophy. As you study the term "Royal" and explore its meaning, you come to realize that the founders of our work may have viewed the lessons of the Royal Arch degree to be a sort of Crowning achievement in a member's Masonic career. Remember, that in the 1700s & 1800s along with some modern European countries, the Royal Arch degree was conferred on a Past Master of a Blue Lodge only. That is one of the reasons we initiate all candidates in our modern-day degree work into a Virtual Past Masters degree to align our purposes with those of previous eras. Just as much as the EA, FC, and Master Mason's degrees symbolize three stages in life, our Royal Arch system elevates the initiate to a high level within himself and the fraternity when he receives the Royal Arch Chapter degrees. Reflect back to how the

candidates of the Royal Arch are qualified for initiation into the Royal Arch degree:

"Three Worthy Brothers who have been regularly initiated Entered Apprentice Masons, passed to the Degree of Fellowcraft, raised to the sublime Degree of Master Mason, advanced to the honorary Degree of Mark Master, regularly seated in the Oriental Chair, received and acknowledged Most Excellent Masters and now pray for further light in Masonry by being exalted to the sublime Degree of Royal Arch Mason."

Notice the language and intent of the verbs used to describe the past accomplishments and future desires of these candidates: Advanced, Received and Acknowledged, and above all, Exalted, which means to raise high, or to raise to power or dignity. These verbs all convey a sense of honor bestowed, most especially the concept of being Exalted.

In summary, a Royal Arch Mason has taken such a Masonic journey through his seven initiations from Entered Apprentice to Royal Arch that upon its completion he possesses many great mysteries of the Masonic Order and hold insights well beyond the limited view of his brethren of lesser knowledge. If a Royal Arch Mason truly mediates upon and applies the tools and level of knowledge strengthened in him by his gaining further light in Masonic tradition and thought, this honored position should enable him to look back upon his journey in the preceding degrees and see a type of foreshadowing that is so well employed in all great literature throughout History. Much like the maturity in life that guides us toward the meaning of Life, Truth, and an intimate knowledge of the Inner Self, the fully initiated companion has been crowned with an exalted position that honors him in the model of Prince Zerubbabel in the areas of Faith, Truth, and Wisdom.

Discussion Questions

- 1. List all of the links that you can think of between the Master Mason's degree and the Royal Arch degree. What does the candidate learn and become exposed to in the Master's degree that is expanded upon or completed in the Royal Arch degree?**
- 2. What personal meaning do you give to the term 'exalted,' both inside and outside of our fraternity?**
- 3. What symbolism is there to the 'signet of truth?' Why do you believe that our ancient brethren perceived so much power in the revelation of 'truth?'**

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2007-2008

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2007-2008