

Grand Council Short Talk # 1

WHY PURPLE?

As a man progresses through the various degrees in Masonry, he notices a theme and a means of identifying the various branches of the fraternity by name and color associated with the lessons of that particular Masonic body. For example, the Craft degrees are commonly termed "The Blue Lodge". When one thinks about the color connotation with a Royal Arch Chapter, the scarlet shade of red used to identify the purposes of this group is emblazoned on the hearts and minds of every companion of this Order. Masonic Lodges are Blue. AMD Councils are Green. So why do the Councils of Royal and Select Masters wear the color Purple? In this short essay, we will explore and discover the meaning behind the color Purple being an integral part to the overall themes and philosophy of Cryptic Masonry.

Purple is not a primary color as defined by science. Our modern education teaches that Purple is a result of mixing any shade of the primary colors blue and red. Thus, much like the compounding of Blue and Red produces Purple, the compounding of the narrative and teachings of the Blue Lodge degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason with the history of the Jewish people and teachings found in the Chapter Degrees of Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and Royal Arch produces the basis and connection for the degrees of the Council of Royal and Select Masters. So, one reason for Purple being identified with the Council is the fact that its basis is derived from two other systems usually identified by blue and red. Remember how this is even explained in the opening of a Royal Arch Chapter when the Master of the 2nd Veil is asked to explain the color of his banner. The Master of the 2nd Veil defines Purple as "*a duad mixture of blue and scarlet, ...placed between the first and third veil to denote that intimate connection which exists between ancient Craft*

(Blue Lodge) Masonry and this Sublime Degree. (Royal Arch-Scarlet) The Masonic technical and symbolic concept of Union is found Purple by the way it combines Blue and Red.¹

Purple is also alluded to in other parts of Masonic degree work. In an Entered Apprentice degree, the new brother is presented with the white lambskin apron, and also presented a second time an apron at the conclusion of his raising in the Master Mason's degree. In the apron presentation executed in the Master Mason's degree, the brother is told that *"in the coming years, upon your brow shall rest the laurel leaves of victory;....Aye! more than these, for light, added to coming light, may enable your ambitious feet to tread round after round of the ladder that leads to fame, in our Mystic Order; and even the purple of our fraternity may rest upon your honored shoulders."* So, Purple even symbolically denotes a position of high honor, rank, or status, as we use it in the conferral of our ancient craft degrees.

In the Bible, Purple appears in several different references. A common theme is to symbolize royal apparel and wealth. The Book of Numbers chapter 4, verse 13 says *"they shall spread a purple cloth (on the altar)";* in Judges chapter 8, verse 26 the text refers to the purple raiment of the Kings of Midian. Even the Gospel of John the Evangelist details in chapter 19 verse 2 that the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus when *"they put on Him a purple robe."* Across cultures, Purple is an emblem of royal grief and death with the additional ideas of royal position, justice, and temperance conveyed through history and literature.²

Yet of all the symbolism for Purple as it is associated with the degrees and lessons in the Council of Royal and Select Masters, the most important association is the idea that the Council is builds a bridge from the teachings of the Blue Lodge across the final exaltation in the Royal Arch degree.

¹ FREEMASONS' GUIDE AND COMPENDIUM; BERNARD E. JONES, P. 472

² FREEMASONS' GUIDE AND COMPENDIUM; BERNARD E. JONES, P. 472

Much like the story line in a great epic series, the use of a flashback or prequel completes the story, enriches characters, and clarifies missing details. The Royal and Select degrees in the Council give us a connecting story of how the treasures of King Solomon's Temple are preserved for future generations and ultimately discovered by Zerubbabel years later.

So, the next time you observe our Most Illustrious Grand Master of the Grand Council or any District Deputy or Grand Council officer, remember the deep, rich symbolism of their Purple blazer and regalia. Because without the narrative and completing story of Critic Masonry, where the Soul of Freemasonry lies, your Masonic knowledge would be as incomplete and imperfect as a half built bridge over a canyon.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Many people believe purple is a "rich" color. In what ways do you believe that our Council degrees are "rich?"**
- 2. List some of the ways that blue lodge Masonry and our sublime Royal Arch Degree, are "mixed," or interconnected.**
- 3. Considering our Texas Chapter and Council work, produce a chronology of events, beginning with the Master's degree, through the Select Master degree.**

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