

# Circle Of Perfection

## Of Masonic and Self Perfection

*By Cameron S. Ellis*

*Grade IV Philosophus*

Golden State College, Societas Rosicruciana in Civitatibus Foederatus

### The Masonic Circle

The Circle of Perfection is a term shrouded in mystery that appears once you enter the realm of the York Rite. Yet, for many of our brothers, it remains hidden, still waiting to be discovered. Its focus is the Lost Master's Word, chosen by a brotherhood of three: King Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abiff, and lost due to a promise left unbroken. During the building of King Solomon's Temple, these three chose a secret word to reveal to the builders when the time came for them to advance in their craft. In doing so, they entered into a solemn covenant never to give that secret until the temple was completed.

We all know the story of our dearly departed Grand Master, Hiram Abiff, slain with a setting maul and laid in the rubbish. Because of this tragic event, King Solomon proclaimed the Word lost, symbolizing the loss of knowledge or spiritual understanding. In the 3rd degree, the Word becomes an object of further search. Before we delve deeper, let us read from *Cryptic Masonry: A Manual of the Council* by Albert G. Mackey to understand the scope of this Circle of Perfection.

*“The idea of comparing the progress of Masonic science to a circle, with whomsoever it originated, is a good one. The true signification of the phrase may be readily illustrated. Let us, then, suppose that the science of Freemasonry, or, in more definite words, the science of Masonic symbolism, is represented by a circle. This circle will be divided into three portions or arcs: One arc will be occupied by the degrees of the Lodge, or Ancient Craft Masonry; another by the degrees of the Chapter, or Royal Arch Masonry; and the third by the degrees of the Council, or Cryptic Masonry. Now, if a neophyte begins at any point of the circle, and passes over one-third of its circumference, he will arrive at the Master's degree, and will then discover that, so far, the consummation of his Masonic labor is to know only that that for which he has been striving has been LOST, and, instead of the key to all Masonic science, he receives only a substitute for truth.*

*Dissatisfied with this, let him, in his further search, proceed through another arc, or third of the circumference of the Masonic circle, and he will arrive at the Royal Arch degree. Here, in this second arc, that key which had been LOST in the first arc is FOUND.*

*But the circle has not yet been completed. It is true that the neophyte now knows that the lost has been found. He is perhaps even put in possession of the sacred treasure. But the process by which the restoration was accomplished is still unknown to him, and all the events of Masonic mythical history which form the links between the loss and the recovery, and all the sublime symbolism, which is connected with these events, are*

*withheld from him. He knows what he has obtained, but he knows not why nor how he obtained it. To acquire this knowledge, he passes through the remaining arc, and, by arriving at the degree of Select Master, consummates and perfects his knowledge of the representative symbol of Divine Truth, and thus passes the circle of perfection in Masonic science.”*

As one continues to ponder and progress on our Masonic journey to the Royal Arch Chapter, he comes to discover that Lost Word when he reaches the Keystone of our journey and becomes a Royal Arch Mason. The Royal Arch degree is one of the most important degrees in American Freemasonry. It focuses on the themes of searching for the Lost Word, spiritual enlightenment, and the completion of Masonic knowledge. The central motif of this degree is the Lost Word. According to Masonic lore, this word was the key to unlock the full understanding of the mysteries of the universe and Divine truth.

In the Royal Arch degree, the brethren are portrayed as searching for this Lost Word, and their journey symbolizes the mason’s spiritual quest for light, truth, and divine wisdom. At the end of this journey, they come to discover the Lost Word, which represents spiritual rebirth, enlightenment, and the restoration of ancient knowledge. Ultimately, this journey leads to a greater understanding of humanity and the Divine.

In the Cryptic Council of Freemasonry, one learns to preserve the Word. In the Cryptic degrees, the focus is on preserving or protecting Masonic secrets, delving into the concept of the Vault—a hidden repository housing important information and knowledge. The Word is concealed to protect it from those who are not yet ready or worthy to receive it, emphasizing that true knowledge must be earned through inner growth and great study. Great knowledge is hidden to be discovered. Like an epic story, one must start at the beginning to truly understand the end, what’s happening throughout and why. Preserving truth and protecting knowledge from those who may do harm with it, is the diligent responsibility of all good men. This truth is committed to you in the Charge to the Select Master which completes this circle.

### **The Charge to the New Select Master**

Companion, having attained to this degree, you have passed the circle of perfection in Ancient Craft Masonry. In the capacity of a Select Master, you must be sensible that your obligations are increased in proportion to your privileges. Let it be your constant care to prove yourself worthy of the confidence that has been reposed in you, and of the high honor that has been conferred upon you in admitting you to this select degree. Let uprightness and integrity attend your steps; let justice and mercy mark your conduct; let fervency and zeal stimulate you in the discharge of the various duties incumbent on you; but suffer not an idle and impertinent curiosity to lead you astray or betray you into danger. Be deaf to every insinuation which would have a tendency to weaken your resolution or tempt you to an act of disobedience. Be voluntarily dumb and blind when the exercise of those faculties would endanger the peace of your mind or the probity of your conduct; and let silence and secrecy, those cardinal virtues of a Select Master, on all necessary occasions, be scrupulously

observed. By a steady adherence to the important instructions contained in this degree, you will merit the approbation of the select number with whom you are associated, and will enjoy the high satisfaction of having acted well your part in the important enterprise in which you are engaged; and after having wrought your regular hours, may you be permitted to participate in all the privileges of a Select Master.

### **The Self-Improvement Circle**

In the Entered Apprentice degree, Masonry seeks to impress upon the mind the encouragement to develop a moral core that is unbreakable, so that we may never be led astray in our search for truth while exploring the mysteries and spiritual teachings of our world. Morality refers to principles or standards of right and wrong behavior as well as decision-making. It involves insight into a concept or situation, often through a combination of knowledge, experience, analysis, reasoning, or emotional understanding. Morality requires acting in ways that are consistent with ethical (Masonic) principles, which may include: respecting others, honesty, fairness, responsibility, compassion, justice, and integrity.

Morality allows people to navigate complex social interactions and make decisions that align with values and principles deemed important by their community or core beliefs. After we have gained the tools to build our moral compass and keep it sharp, we then approach our Fellowcraft degree by giving those three famous knocks without.

In the Fellowcraft degree, the candidate is encouraged to pursue Knowledge. Knowledge refers to the understanding, awareness, or familiarity acquired through learning, experience, observation, or study. It encompasses facts, information, skills, and insights about various subjects, phenomena, or domains. Knowledge can be acquired through direct experience, such as through personal observation or experimentation, or indirectly through sources such as books, teachers, experts, or digital media.

Developing knowledge also offers us insight and an awareness of our limitations. True knowledge involves awareness of the boundaries of one's understanding and the recognition that knowledge is provisional and subject to revision in light of new evidence or insight. Overall, knowledge is a fundamental aspect of self-improvement, allowing us to gain human cognition and the expansion of one's awareness. It enables individuals and societies to understand the world, make informed decisions, solve problems, and advance in various fields of endeavor.

The sublime degree of Master Mason is a significant moment in Masonry, where a candidate reaches a symbolic point in becoming anew. With its ritual of a symbolic death and rebirth, it is hoped that the candidate of our mysteries has gained an awareness and has elevated his understanding on this journey—from ignorance to enlightenment, from mortality to immortality, and from the profane brain to the divine Mind. For example, in the 2nd section the 3 ruffians represent corrupt thought, desiring emotion and destructive will, thus our candidate is shedding away those unconstructive attributes to take on morally sound

attributes like Right Thought, Guided Emotion and Correct Action. The 3 together hold the key to the resurrection of Hiram which is no one other than you. When the candidate symbolically undergoes a form of death representing the end of an old life, ignorance, and spiritual darkness, he is raised into a new perspective. This death is a metaphorical shedding of ignorance and the limitations of a profane life. When raised from that death, one personifies a rebirth, beginning a new life characterized by enlightenment, moral improvement, and spiritual growth. When the candidate rises from that metaphorical grave, he emerges from the experience subconsciously transformed, with a deeper understanding of Masonic teachings and a commitment to living a life guided by the principles of our ancient craft.

With the 3rd degree, a Mason steps into the light of our craft, equipped with tools to live his life a better way than before and in the light of love and truth. He has left behind his former self and embraced the journey toward enlightenment. In the 3rd degree, we gain a fresh perception, equipped with a moral compass and a mind on the quest for knowledge and understanding.

The keystone of the Royal Arch degree—the stone at the center of the peak of an arch between two pillars—has a hidden correspondence to the third eye in man. If the eyes, considered the windows to the soul, are viewed as the pummels or balls sat atop our Jachin and Boaz—serving as the polarizing pillars of our perception or the duality in man—they would support an arch peaking at the center of the forehead. The third eye is a concept that appears in various spiritual and religious traditions, often associated with enlightenment, intuition, insight, and spiritual perception beyond ordinary physical sight. It generally refers to an inner or metaphysical eye that provides a deeper understanding of reality or a higher level of consciousness.

In Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the third eye is often depicted as a symbol of enlightenment or spiritual awakening. Activating or opening the third eye is thought to lead to enhanced perception, intuition, and awareness of spiritual truths beyond the material world. In Western esoteric traditions, the third eye is understood metaphorically as a symbol of inner wisdom, insight, and intuition. It represents the ability to see beyond superficial appearances and perceive deeper truths about oneself and the world.

Overall, the third eye and spiritual sight are symbolic concepts that speak to humanity's quest for higher understanding, insight, and transcendence beyond the limitations of the physical senses.

So far, we have collected a firm moral compass to always remember what is good and what is not, a desire for a greater capacity for knowledge and understanding, a rebirth into a new set of eyes, and our spiritual sight to see within the material realm certain properties that are not material. Next, let us dive into our Crypt and approach the symbolic Vault.

In the body of our Cryptic Council, we find another hidden property: our subconscious mind. In his work *Psychological Aspects of the Self*, Carl Jung developed the concept

of the Shadow. Shadow work is a psychological and spiritual practice focused on exploring and integrating the unconscious aspects of the self, often referred to as the “shadow.” Jung described it as the hidden, repressed, or disowned parts of the psyche, containing aspects of ourselves that we may find unacceptable, shameful, or contradictory to our conscious identity. The shadow also contains our subconscious mind, which includes our beliefs, emotions, habits, values, long-term memory, imagination, and intuition—essentially, all the things hidden from the light of our conscious mind.

So much of Masonic ritual is subconscious, thus invoking unseen transformation in the candidate. Yes, much is surface-level and straightforward—such as teaching willpower, logical thinking, and knowledge of architecture, geometry, character, and conduct. Yet within that same work are unspoken and transformational lessons that birth within us these esoteric concepts if delivered in an unforgettable or inspirational way. These teachings leave our brothers pondering them for a lifetime. Shadow work begins with self-reflection and introspection, examining one’s thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and patterns to identify aspects of the shadow that can be brought into the fold of the conscious mind. The aim is for one to embody the greater moral principles hidden within our degrees, pursuing greater knowledge to grow into greater beings, with a mind’s eye that can see the unseen. This subconscious work brings forward a greater capacity for us to become more than we ever were.

Integrating the shadow involves bringing the unconscious aspects of the self into conscious awareness and incorporating them into one’s identity. This process can lead to greater self-awareness, self-compassion, and inner harmony. Our Cryptic Masonry concludes our circle of perfection, where we learn to preserve the Word, or ancient wisdom. Though the last stop in the York Rite also holds a valuable point of improvement.

### **Outside the Circle**

The Circle of Perfection ends at the Select Master of our Cryptic Council. However, there is a keynote on self-improvement, possibly even a point within this circle, to be found in the Commandery Order of the Knight Templar, which should be touched on during this discussion.

In the Knight Templar Order of the Commandery in American Freemasonry, there is a significant emphasis on spiritual purification, loyalty, and the pursuit of divine knowledge. Its secret becomes a treasure chest or a holy grail—an object to be safeguarded and protected from corruption by preserving it with honor. This emphasizes that true spiritual knowledge is hidden and can only be uncovered by those who have purified themselves and are spiritually worthy.

The journey through the Knight Templar Order is one of spiritual transformation. To apply its knowledge, one must undergo a process of moral and spiritual purification, which involves living out the values of truth, justice, faith, and honor.

This final stop in the York Rite journey holds the key to personal transformation, which gives all these concepts the power to change our lives. The Generative Principle, also known as True Care, is one of the most important duties of our Templar traditions. It is our duty to care for others—especially the vulnerable, like women, children, and those in need of a helping hand. True care is the core requirement for accomplishing anything. It requires True Care to harness your energy and focus on what you want to accomplish, to see it through to manifestation. One must truly care about something to give it their all. As Templars, we are taught to care for our brothers, the less fortunate, and humanity through acts of compassion, selflessness, and service. To truly care for ourselves, our fellow man, and the mark we leave in the world is of core importance for us as Masons.

All these components discussed are important aspects of our self-development and the perfection of self in mind and body. Morality, knowledge, the death of ones previous self in times of transformation, the taking on of a new outlook on life and ones part in it, spiritual sight in the physical world, shadow work integrating our subconscious lessons and darker aspects of self into the light of consciousness, and the generative principle of True Care, all come together to guide and shape a man, chiseling out a perfect ashlar from the rough rubble of the quarries of life. This shapes our minds as living stones for that spiritual building—a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

In the end, one must ask themselves, why the Mind? Why is it the Mind that the aim is to shape? Not the brain which is simply a tool for processing information and storing memories, but the Mind/Observer/Consciousness—from which all things are made manifest. The mind is the zero point from which all things emanate. By working on a depth of core values, collecting knowledge, seeing with a new perspective, activating the spiritual sight, purifying the mind in the deep cleansing of the subconscious, and truly caring about oneself, how we affect others, and our impact on the world around us, one empower themselves to make better choices. In the end, this will cause them to experience less pain and suffering in this world of sorrow, transforming them into a more perfect version of self. The goal is not only to improve oneself but to bring about a greater understanding of life, humanity, and the Divine. The journey through the Circle of Perfection and Commandery shapes the Mason into a living stone for the spiritual temple—an eternal building made without hands.