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The Modern Mystery School

The Modern Mystery School (MMS) is an esoteric seminar company that transmits the knowledge of King Salomon's unbroken lineage to followers who pay to advance through an ascending spiritual syllabus. It is arguably the world's most financialized contemporary magic order. In MMS self-fashioning, there are seven Mystery Schools in the world and MMS is the only one that advocates "no more secrets" and publicly recruits adepts. MMS, formerly known as the Rocky Mountain Mystery School (RMMS), was founded in 1997 by the Icelander Gudni Gudnason. His mytho-biography includes a childhood spent on the astral plane, an early adulthood in London studying Kabbalah, magic and alchemy in an underground bunker of the nineteenth-century British secret society the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (GD), and a sojourn to a remote Tibetan monastery (once the residence of Moses) where he studied martial arts and air-bending. Founder Gudni is a Sovereign Ipsissimus (a title derived from GD), a Guardian of the Holy Grail, an initiated Celtic Medicine Man, a Viking shaman, a Druid priest, a Knight Templar and an Egyptian high priest. His spiritual achievements are matched by secular ones, which in his public biography include being the recipient of several PhDs, an award-winning poet, philanthropist, actor, producer and co-founder of Aurora Borealis Entertainment Corporation.

Over the past two decades, MMS has fused an esoteric lineage with a for-profit business model that has structural similarities to multilevel marketing. The syllabus of seminars is remarkably diverse, drawing from neopaganism, Kabbalah, Theosophy, Wicca, Japanese tantra (*Mikkyō*), Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, ancient Egyptian and Norse cosmologies, Tarot and Reiki (among others). Tibetan ritual objects (*purbha*) and concepts (*Shambhala*) are central to ritual practice and MMS eschatology, as are ritual swords inspired by knighthood of the Late Middle Ages and associated ideas of chivalrous warriorhood. Seminars are offered at MMS headquarters and spiritual therapies are offered in hundreds of spiritual centers, called *saron* ("salons") in Japan. As initiates complete seven initiatory steps (Adept, Healer, Ritual Master 1, 2, 2.5, and 3, culminating with Guide), they are awarded certifications and are empowered by MMS to practice copyrighted modalities. MMS's system of spiritual credentialism, which allows students to become teachers (called Healers or Guides) who are then spiritually responsible to enlist their own paying clients, who are then encouraged to become teachers, complicates traditional ideas of "the religious" and blurs the distinction between belief and business. There is an ongoing debate, playing out on social media, traditional print media, and various online forums, about the impact of MMS's business model on the wellbeing of individual followers, especially women (Wilding 2021; George 2021).

MMS has headquarters in Toronto, London and Tokyo, emerging in Japan at the height of the "spirituality boom" and the proliferation of spiritual therapeutic techniques that are often associated with the eclectic categories of Western esotericism or New Age (Horie 2009; Christopher 2022; Gaitanidis 2011, 2022). Although MMS has "core teachings" that are similar throughout the world, MMS in Japan has unique modalities (such as the Channeling School) and teachings (sacralizing Japanese geography and training Japanese initiates to liberate Tibet) that distinguish it from western counterparts (Christopher 2024a). It also has fused MMS's spiritual path with several lifestyle, fashion and showbusiness companies that blur the line between entertainment and esotericism (Christopher 2024b), on the one hand, and practicing "rejected knowledge" (Hanegraaff 2012, 221) while seeking mainstream recognition, on the other. As Founder Gudni has officially stepped away from administration of MMS in Japan and adopted the title of Hierophant, the school is now operationally overseen by Sovereign Ipsissimus Hideto Nakagome, a businessman turned spiritual master with expertise in Tibetan and Japanese tantra. Together with Founder Gudni and Sovereign Ipsissimus Dave Lanyon in Toronto, they constitute the Third Order and stand at the pinnacle of MMS's social organization. Below them are (in Japan) the "Council of 12" women, six from the West and six from the East, who are deeply involved with the interworking of MMS; top leadership who were given the title of Ipsissimus in 2023 and oversee specific roles and high-profile centers; hundreds of certified Healers and Guides who may operate their own spiritual centers; and thousands of 1st-step Adepts, low-level initiates and followers who may receive counseling at MMS salons or attend workshops at the headquarters. Global membership is difficult to estimate; MMS leadership reported 20,000 Japanese people have completed the 1st-step Initiation since 1999 and many thousands more in the West. This number is unverified.

MMS teachings are diverse and have flexible canonicity based on the Third Order channeling new revealed modalities and making eschatological prophesies. There is no formal canon of scripture, although the Hermetica and Kabbalah are central. "The Cherubim's Flames" is a booklet of esoteric incantations and mantras published by MMS and used by initiates. MMS primarily gives oral teachings, available in headquarters in London, Toronto and Tokyo. Prominent teachings include both the universal realization of humanity's oneness as Galactic Beings and the self-realization of our own individuality. Through guided workshops with a focus on aesthetics, self-branding and self-based leadership (Knowing Thyself), initiates (especially in Japan) are encouraged to increasingly individualize: to discover their unique "channeling contract" with a specific deity; to be given a personalized Ritual Master name by a lineage Ipsissimus during the 2nd-step Ritual Master initiation ceremony that speaks to their unique mission on Earth; to increase success through Law of Attraction-style alchemy, magic and mental readjustments; and to "find joy" through reconnecting with sources of daily pleasure. Initiates are encouraged to become "Warriors of Light" and practice a form of martial arts derived from Founder Gudni's study in the Tibetan Mystery School. In Japan, initiates embrace royalty through a seminar offered by Ipsissimus Eiko Gudnason, Founder Gudni's wife, which help believers

to discover their truest self-presentation as embodied divinity. Initiates are also encouraged to realize their cosmic significance as part of En-sof ("The Divine Light") in spreading Light, combating Darkness, and helping to usher in the future of balance, peace and harmony (Shambhala).

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