

CONFIDENTIAL to Fellowcrafts

A lecture first given by W. Bro. Alan Branford in a Fellowcrafts' Lodge at the meeting of Brighton United Lodge No. 10 on Tuesday, 27 September 2016

Lecture: On the Hailing Sign or Sign of Perseverance

by W. Bro. Alan Branford (© 27 September 2016)

As part of opening in the Second Degree we gave the sign of the Degree, a trifold sign consisting of the Sign of Fidelity, the Hailing Sign or Sign of Perseverance and the Penal Sign. *<give the sign>*

The first part of the trifold sign, the Sign of Fidelity, is given by placing the right hand over the heart, with the thumb and the fingers forming a right angle, thus. *<demonstrate>* This is straightforward, as the placing of the hand on the heart is a well established cultural sign of fidelity. But let me go off on a tangent for a few minutes. (As a mathematician, I like tangents!) When the labours of the day have been ended and the Senior Warden, by command of the Worshipful Master, has closed the lodge, the Immediate Past Master gives a benediction, which reads in part "... uniting with the act Fidelity, Fidelity, Fidelity, ...". At each utterance of the word "Fidelity", all the brethren strike the left breast with the right hand in the *attitude of reverence*. *<demonstrate>* Why do the brethren not strike the left breast with the *Sign of Fidelity*? *<demonstrate>* *<pause>* The Sign of Fidelity is part of the Secrets of the *Fellowcraft* degree; the benediction is given in an Entered Apprentice Lodge.

The third part of the trifold sign, the Penal Sign, *<demonstrate>* is amply explained to the newly Passed Fellowcraft in the Ceremony of Passing.

It is the second part of the trifold sign, the Hailing Sign or Sign of Perseverance, that is the focus of this lecture. The Hailing Sign is given thus. *<demonstrate>* That it is the *Hailing Sign* is self evident. But why is it also known as the Sign of *Perseverance*? *<pause>*

In the Ceremony of Passing, the Sign of Perseverance is briefly explained thus: it "took its rise from that memorable occasion when Joshua, by command of Moses, fought against the Amalekites in the Valley of Rephidim". *<start jocular tone>* Ah, yes! Very memorable! Can't abide Amalekites! That's right, didn't we holiday once in the Valley of Rephidim? *<end jocular tone>* *<pause>* Did you know the story? Did you find out later what the story was? Do you even know the story now?

The Valley of Rephidim is in the Sinai Peninsula in modern day Egypt. The Amalekites were a local tribe. The story is part of the saga of the exodus of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage, and is told in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible in Exodus 17: 8 – 13.

<select one of King James Version, New International Version or Good News Translation>

Exodus 17:8-13, King James Version (KJV)

8 Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

10 So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

12 But Moses hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

13 And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Exodus 17:8-13, New International Version (NIV)

The Amalekites Defeated

8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 12 When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

Exodus 17:8-13, Good News Translation (GNT)

War with the Amalekites

8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Pick out some men to go and fight the Amalekites tomorrow. I will stand on top of the hill holding the stick that God told me to carry." 10 Joshua did as Moses commanded him and went out to fight the Amalekites, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his arms, the Israelites won, but when he put his arms down, the Amalekites started winning. 12 When Moses' arms grew tired, Aaron and Hur brought a stone for him to sit on, while they stood beside him and held up his arms, holding them steady until the sun went down. 13 In this way Joshua totally defeated the Amalekites.

Hence the Hailing Sign is also the Sign of Perseverance.

Now, many historians do not believe the literality of the story of Moses and the story of the liberation of the Israelites from an Egyptian bondage. Whether or not this story is historically true is irrelevant to the speculative Mason. In the Catechism administered to the aspirant Fellowcraft, he is asked "What is Freemasonry?", to which he must respond "A peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols". This well known story from the Old Testament is a convenient allegory for the importance of perseverance in the face of difficulty and danger. The men fighting in the field had to persevere to survive, and thus their perseverance is more immediate and instinctive. Moses, however, could have said to Aaron and Hur, "Let's get the hell out of here!" and done a bunk. The moral issue that is here being veiled in the allegory is *perseverance when it is simply the right thing to do*. And it is this to which Freemasons are called to display; perseverance in the face of difficulty and danger and the overcoming of the temptation of cowardly self preservation.