An Ear of Corn   Article by W.Bro. Rob Lund

Fellowcraft Masons will recognize the following quote from Judges 12:

"And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.

And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?

Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand."

For a long time, I was puzzled as to why this story would be included in our ritual. After reading more about Jephthah, I began to see the moral lesson that the story alludes to. To me, this story teaches me to be patient and tolerant in times of adversity and difficulty. It also tells me that there comes a time when a problem has to be dealt with, and dealt with thoroughly.

Jephthah gives us another moral lesson, similar to that of Hiram Abif, regarding the keeping of an oath, no matter what it costs us. In Judges 11, Jephthah vowed to God that if the Lord would grant him victory over the evil Ammonites, the first thing that came out to meet him upon his return home, would be Jehovah's, and/or it would be offered as a burnt sacrifice. When he arrived home, his daughter came out to greet him. He was devastated, but eventually he fulfilled the vow.

Let us now look at the word *Shibboleth* mentioned in the passage above.

The term originates from the Hebrew word "shibólet" (שִׁבֹּלֶת), which, according to Wikipaedia, literally means the part of a plant containing grains, such as an ear of corn or a stalk of grain or, in different contexts, "stream, torrent". Fellowcraft Masons will know the significance of both meanings.

The modern usage of this word derives from the account above.

JEPHTHAH MEETS HIS DAUGHTER.

A **shibboleth,** according to Wikipaedia**,** is a custom, principle, or belief, distinguishing a particular class or group of people, especially a long-standing one regarded as outmoded or no longer important. It usually refers to features of language, and particularly to a word whose pronunciation identifies its speaker as being a membe,r or *not* a member, of a particular group.

In numerous cases of conflict between groups speaking different languages or dialects, one side used shibboleths in a way similar to the above-mentioned Biblical use, i.e., to discover hiding members of the opposing group. Modern researchers use the term "shibboleth" for all such usages, whether or not the people involved were using it themselves.

Today, in the (American) English language, a shibboleth also has a wider meaning, referring to any insider word or phrase that can be used to distinguish members of a group from outsiders - even when not used by a hostile other group. The word is less well recognized in British English. It is also sometimes used in a broader sense to mean jargon, the proper use of which identifies speakers as members of a particular group or subculture.

"Cultural touchstones and shared experience can also be shibboleths of a sort. For example, people about the same age who are from the same nation tend to have the same memories of popular songs, television shows, and events from their formative years. One-hit wonders prove particularly effective. Much the same is true of alumni of a particular school, veterans of military service, and other groups. Discussing such memories is a common way of bonding. In-jokes can be a similar type of shared-experience shibboleth."

Shibboleths have been used by different subcultures throughout the world at different times. Regional differences, levels of expertise, and computer programming are several forms that shibboleths have taken. For example, during the Battle of the Bulge, American soldiers used knowledge of baseball to determine if others were fellow Americans or if they were German infiltrators in American uniform. The Dutch used the name of the port town Scheveningen as a shibboleth to tell Germans from the Dutch ("Sch" in Dutch is the sound "sk", while in German it is "sh".

Also during World War II, some US soldiers in the Pacific theatre used the word "lollapalooza" as a shibboleth to verbally test people who were hiding and unidentified, on the premise that Japanese people often pronounce the

letter R as L because the rolling R sound is considered rude in Japan, and that the word is an American colloquialism that even a foreign person fairly well-versed in American English would probably mispronounce and/or be unfamiliar with. Japanese spies would often approach checkpoints posing as American or Filipino military personnel. A shibboleth such as "lollapalooza" would be used by the sentry, who, if the first two syllables come back as *rorra,* would "open fire without waiting to hear the remainder".

The Hebrew origin of the word *shibboleth*, meaning "ear of corn", provides us with an allusion to growth. Of course, in Masonry this would indicate intellectual growth and spiritual growth, nurtured by the waters of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment, and should always be borne in mind during the Fellowcraft degree.

References:

King James Bible

Wikipaedia