

Masonic Minutes—March One

By the Plumb (Line)

Amos 7:7-8 (King James)

7: Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the LORD stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.

8: And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the LORD, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.

The plumb, as the working tool and jewel of the Junior Warden, is most often represented as a gauge with a vertical line to which is attached a string with a small weight. By holding the gauge against an object, the weight pulls the string straight downward, and the Craftsman can judge if the string is true to the line on the gauge. The operative Mason uses the tool to determine if an object is placed in the correct upright position, but we as speculative Masons are admonished to use the plumb to figuratively judge if our actions with our fellow Freemasons are properly founded.

The term plumb is a reference to the use of lead as the weight. Lead is one of the densest metals making its relative size-versus-weight an important feature. It is easily carried to the construction site or long distances without taking a lot of room. The name “plumb” is Latin slang, as the word Plumbum is the true word and was used by the Romans to describe any kind of soft metal. But lead was so plentiful and used so much by the Romans (80,000 tons per year), that it became synonymous with plumb. We might then call “plumb” a substitute word.

The use of the plumb as set in a gauge is helpful for determining the measurement that results from gravity pulling the weight and causing the string to provide a straight line. In this configuration the gauge itself only provides a framework. Experienced Craftsman can use the plumb line by itself to measure uprightness. In this form, the plumb line is arguably the simplest of the working tools for us to fashion. It doesn't need a perfect surface and a sight glass, or the perfection of the joining of two pieces of metal or wood to form a right angle. It is simply a weight attached to the end of a piece of string.

The operational use of the plumb line was primarily to make sure that a wall was straight up and down, and the ancients regarded something out of plumb as something that is not well built or well regarded. For our use as Speculative Masons, being “plumb” is a definition for our proper actions placed squarely on good foundations inferring that the way that we interact with one another is true, correct, and well regarded. What we must realize is that as we lower our speculative plumb lines toward the earth that the extension of this line stretches through this sphere upon which we live that is represented by a circle. If each Mason represents a point on that sphere and we each place our plumb line from our point to the ground, then somewhere in the middle of this sphere all the lines will meet at one point. Some say that this is a symbol of a circle with a point in the middle is the oldest known symbol of God, but remember, we only truly meet if our plumb line is true and straight. If we deflect the line, or distort the line we shall not meet; we will have missed the point.

The use of the plumb line in our interactions with our fellow man is reinforced by our obligations as Freemasons. Upon our obligations we approach each other with the assurance that we are bound together, but the use of the plumb line in measuring our uprightness to our obligations can only truly be used to judgment ourselves. This line is not accurate when we cast it toward each other; it only provides a true measurement when extended from Heaven to earth.

As Masons, we are admonished to reflect if our actions are upright and true to the plumb line that the Master has set among us, because as important as this line is to all of us meeting at the same point, the altering of the line extending downward will just as surely alter the line as it reaches upward, and as the line is distorted amongst us, it will distort our relationship with the canopy of Heaven. But, if we keep the plumb line of our actions true, then from that single point the extension of our actions will be deemed upright and true by our Creator.