



# PAPER

## A Living Perpendicular

**Summary:** An examination of some of the meanings and applications of the concept of 'perpendicularity'.



*'...for your general information that all Squares, Levels, and Perpendiculars are true and proper Signs to know a Mason by. You are therefore expected to stand perfectly erect, your feet formed in a Square, your body being thus considered an emblem of your mind...'*

*'You now stand, to all external appearance, a just and upright Mason and I give it you in strong terms of recommendation ever to continue and act as such.'*

This never to be forgotten advice is given to every Freemason upon his Initiation. It is a recommendation regarding his physical posture as a member of the Craft. At the conclusion of the Ceremony he is informed during a most beautiful and informative piece of ritual, of *'the practice of every moral and social virtue'*.

One of the first lessons to implement all this advice is given in the Second Degree when he is taught to make figurative applications of the builder's working tools in his progress towards moral and spiritual perfection on his journey through the Craft, whilst erecting that *'house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens'*. (2 Corinthians 5:1)

*'The square is to try, and adjust rectangular corners of buildings, and assist in bringing rude matter into due form; the level is to lay levels and prove horizontals; the plumb rule is to try, and adjust uprights whilst fixing them on their proper bases. In this sense the square teaches Morality, the level Equality, and the plumb rule justness and uprightness of life and actions.'*

From the very beginning the Freemason learns to think in terms of symbols derived from the noble and practical art of building and architecture. Amongst other things, he begins to recognise horizontals and perpendiculars. To examine some of the meanings and applications of the concept of 'perpendicularity' is the object of this paper.

Let us begin with a definition of the word Perpendicular: *'Perpendicular is a straight line, drawn vertically in the direction of gravity, and at right angles to another straight line along the plane of the horizon.'* This concept of a straight line is the oldest and most fundamental idea in the art of building. It has also always symbolised a moral principle that is easily understood by the uninitiated as well as by members of the Craft. *'... and the crooked shall be made straight'* (Isaiah 40:4).

*'One must not criticize other people on grounds where he cannot stand perpendicular himself'*, Bro. Mark Twain. Mencius (372–289 BCE), the famous Chinese Philosopher, taught that men should apply the square and compasses figuratively to their lives, and the level and the marking line besides, if they would walk in the straight and even paths of wisdom and virtue.

In the last century, writer Edward Everett Hale, applied this concept:

*'Though a hundred crooked paths may conduct to a temporary success, the one plain straight path of public and private virtue can alone lead to a pure and lasting fame and the blessings of posterity.'*

Even in today's vocabulary the term *'straight up'* means honestly. Similarly, *'Are you being straight with me?'* poses the question *'Are you telling me the truth?'* The expression *'to go straight'* is also a description of the transgressor's return to a mode of living and to standards of conduct that are approved by the great institutions of civilised society.

Reverting to the perpendicular, this is also a straight line said to be raised upon a horizontal line which is defined as parallel to the horizon. From this simple geometrical relationship there evolved the primitive builder's plumb-line and square, the tools by which he tried and tested the true verticality of the structural component parts that he was erecting. The moral significance of these tools is obvious, and from 'time immemorial' work of the highest standard has been 'square work'; the moral significance of 'being square' was honesty. To be involved in business today which is described as 'a square deal' implies conduct of strict integrity.

Even in the days of the Old Testament, the symbolic use of the builder's tools had been so thoroughly infused into the thinking of mankind that the great moral issues and common problems of life at that time were commonly illustrated by references to the Mason's art. In Amos 7:7-8, the Lord compares the poor conduct and behaviour of the children of Israel to a wall that is straight and level that was built using a plumb-line to keep it true:

*'...behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.*

*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'*

This passage demonstrates that God held a plumbline in his hand to test the rectitude of his chosen people. As living perpendiculars, they were tried by the plumbline of righteousness and found to be *'out of line'*.

So, on the next occasion that we see the presentation of the working tools in the Second Degree, we can with confidence remember that they have been handed down to us from time-immemorial and well established by ancient usage.

We can therefore establish that even the earliest builders regarded perpendiculars as mysterious tokens of man's divine origin. Pillars became symbols of strength and durability. The column was in itself an acceptable monument to last forever, and thus a symbol of man's spiritual nature. At the building of King Solomon's Temple, the two great pillars at the porchway or entrance that are so revered by members of the Craft are perpendicular examples of uprightness and strength.

The erection of vertical columns revealed to the early builders this important principle of architectural science being the arrangement of a pillar as a true perpendicular to the horizontal base. Any slight deviation from the correct right-angled position of the component rendered the structure weak and imperfect. In fact, as Architecture progressed through the ages covering the period of 1380–1525 CE, the classic style was known as *'Perpendicular Gothic Architecture'*, and represented the final stage in the architectural development of the Gothic style; King's College Cambridge is a magnificent example. Gigantic windows are the hallmark of Perpendicular Architecture, which incorporated the use of massive pointed arches and supporting elements such as flying buttresses, which carried the observers eye up vertically towards the heavens which the groping intelligence of mankind is always attempting to reach.

Such is the thrilling revelation which makes the Master Mason's degree sublime. The Craftsman has been raised from a level of ignorance and materialistic concerns to become a *'living perpendicular'*, which reaches and towers to a boundless domain of wisdom and truth.

## Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
  - Followed by 'any questions'
  - As a precursor to a discussion (in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself)
  - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand).

\*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

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## Acknowledgement:

UGLE gratefully acknowledges Ray Hollins as the compiler and editor of this document, which is an extract from his series of ten volumes, collectively titled 'A Daily Advancement in Masonic Knowledge' and for his permission to publish it in this form.

He wishes to acknowledge the assistance of RW Bro Richard Fletcher, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Vermont in The United States of America, and the Masonic Service Association of North America (MSANA) who gave their permission for the use of a wealth of interesting and informative material within their publications known as 'Short Talk Bulletins' and MSANA references are made at the end of each Short Talk in full copyright acknowledgement. Each 'Short Talk' has been carefully re-written by WBro Hollins PAGDC, to provide supplementary information from a wide variety of sources used for the benefit of Freemasonry in general.

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