

## HOW TO PLOW A STRAIGHT FURROW

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Plowing a straight furrow is important. If the furrow is crooked, the rows of corn sprouting from the seed planted in it will be crooked, and difficult to cultivate. A crooked furrow will also make a persistent public statement about the plowman.

The plowman controls the furrow by several means. He has his hands on the turning plow, and by steering the plow he can affect its direction to some extent. By lifting or pushing down of the handles he can affect the depth of the furrow, and the quantity of earth that is turned over. But in the long term, it is the direction that the horse or mule takes that determines the path of the plow and the straightness of the furrow. The plowman walks with the horse's reins tied around his waste, so he has little immediate control on the direction that the horse takes. He can call out GEE or HAW to the horse. If he were to turn loose of the plow handles to grab the reins, all would be lost.

The surest way to make a crooked furrow is for the plowman to keep his eyes on the plow share as it turns the earth. The furrow will wobble all over the place.

The first furrow is of the greatest importance, for all the following furrows should be laid off parallel to it.

The best way to plow a straight furrow with that all important first one is to avoid looking at what is happening at the present, and for the plowman to keep his eyes off of the share as it slices the ground. He should, instead, pick a target on the far end of the field, say a fence post or a cedar tree in the fence line, and to steer to that. He will have a straight first furrow.

The following furrows are made by the plowman keeping his eyes on the first furrow. An experienced horse will do it for him. The second furrow will be laid off next to the first, and at an even proper spacing.

So, to plow a good field, the plowman sets an appropriate distant goal, and ignoring the present, progresses steadily to that future goal. With his subsequent furrows he keeps his eye on both the distant goal, but also the past furrow, ignoring the present. Thus by keeping his eye on the future and the past at the same time, he plows his field. The present takes care of itself.

Is this not an allegory for life itself? The best way to screw it up is to focus on the present, and to ignore the future and the past. May your plowed fields always have straight furrows.

With appreciation to my father, who taught me with this story when I was a boy.

