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Communion with Deity

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Abstract: This article discusses how Aaron chided Ammon for boasting, but Ammon reminded his brother that he did not boast in his own strength, but in the strength of God. Spiritual strength is needed to serve in our earthly missions, thus we must be attuned to God through repentance, faith, good works, and continual prayer.

God is not a partial God but is the same yesterday, today, and forever to those who love and sincerely seek him. Possession of the gift of the Holy Ghost is important and needful to the servant, the wage earner, the businessman, the farmer, the professional man, the scientist, the politician, the teacher, whether engaged in secular or religious teaching, and also to the rich and the poor alike. No one can afford to be without it nor devoid of its influence and power. It is sweet to the taste and satisfying to the soul.

The natural inclination of man is to rely solely upon himself and to ignore the purpose of his existence as well as his relationship to God, who is his spiritual father. If man will recognize his divine origin, he will then realize his Heavenly Father will not leave him alone to grope in darkness of mind and spirit, but will make available a power to influence him in right paths and into standards of good behavior. The Holy Ghost is that power.

It is the Holy Ghost, or the Comforter, that fills us with hope and perfect love. (Moro. 8:26.) Men find peace, contentment, and comfort when by the Holy Ghost they gain a testimony of the Christ. Without this spirit, one cannot teach correct doctrine.

This Church is directed by the Holy Ghost. Without the influence and directing force of this third member of the godhead, this Church would be just another church. True religion, with its standards, principles, and ideals interpreted, guided, and influenced by the Holy Ghost, is the basis for solving all problems, whether personal, national, or international.

I humbly pray, my brothers and sisters, that the Holy Ghost will always be our constant guide and companion, that we will listen to its voice and follow its guidance, for it will take us back to the presence of God, our eternal Father, and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, of whom I testify in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

"And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

"And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. . . ." (1 Kings 19:11-13.)

All too often when God speaks in this still, small voice, as he did to Elijah in the cave, it may not be audible to our physical hearing because, like a faulty radio, we may be out of tune with the infinite.

Nephi, of Book of Mormon history, speaks of this spiritual communication when he rebuked his brothers who had it in their hearts to destroy him:

"Ye are swift to do iniquity but slow to remember the Lord your God. Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words; wherefore, he has spoken unto you like unto the voice of thunder, which did cause the earth to shake as if it were to divide asunder."

In the Gospel of John is related a parallel experience in the Master's ministry showing how, out of a multitude, only a few—or none—may hear God when he speaks.

As the Master entered Jerusalem on this occasion, the people gathered around and heard him pray: ". . . Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

"Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

"The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.

"Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes." (John 12:27-30.)

Only the Master, apparently, knew that God had spoken. So often today, men and women are living so far apart from things spiritual that when the Lord is speaking to their physical hearing, to their minds with no audible sound, or to them through his authorized servants who, when directed by the Spirit, are as his own voice, they hear only a noise as did they at Jerusalem. Likewise, they receive no inspired wisdom, nor inward assurance, that the mind of the Lord has spoken through his prophet leaders.

The great law-giver, Moses, has given us the key to the beginning of heavenly wisdom. After he had sought God on Mt. Sinai, a soul-stirring vision was given him in which he was permitted to enter into the presence of the Lord. When the vision was ended

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Harold B. Lee

Of the Council of the Twelve

• This morning I will take as a text for my few remarks the statement of a great missionary as recorded in sacred literature. This is an incident in western hemisphere religious history in which a prophet-teacher named Ammon exultantly praises God for his missionary successes.

His brother Aaron chided him, saying: "Ammon, I fear that thy joy doth carry thee away unto boasting.

"But Ammon said unto him, I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom. . . .

"Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things. . . ." (Al. 26:10-12.)

Frequently the question is asked by those in and out of the Church: How do we develop the spiritual quality in our natures in order to serve our earthly missions more completely and thus become attuned with that infinite power of which the Prophet Ammon speaks?

Ammon answered that question in part: "Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually with-

out ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God. . . ." (Al. 26:22.)

For a few moments today, I would have you hear the testimonies as found in sacred scriptures of a few of the great leaders who learned how to tap the sources of divine power and became spiritual giants among the people of their day.

David, the psalmist, learned even as a young man the source of spiritual power. The spirit whispered, "Be still, and know that I am God. . . .

". . . the God of Jacob is our refuge." (Ps. 46:10-11.)

Prophets of old learned, as all must know, how to communicate with the Lord by prayer, to talk with and then receive answers in the Lord's own way. To know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3), as the Master told his disciples, is to begin on the sure course that leads to eternal life in the presence of these glorified beings.

The Lord told Elijah, the prophet: "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord;

and he was left unto himself, he made this profound statement: "Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I had never supposed." (Moses 1:10.)

That was the beginning of his wisdom unto the obtaining of the spiritual power necessary for him to perform his great mission. He had found himself by losing himself in the great work to which God had now called him.

In one of the greatest religious motion pictures of our day, *The Ten Commandments*, we are given a dramatic portrayal by the great actor, Charlton Heston, of the Moses before and after he had been commissioned of God for his great ministry to become the mouthpiece of the Lord to all Israel.

Charlton Heston apparently studied and researched carefully in order to portray accurately the character of Moses. This actor has written of his spiritual experiences while filming this great epic drama:

He first takes us to Mt. Sinai for the filming of that tremendous experience as Moses was shown climbing that sacred mountain to commune with God.

Then, by contrast, this actor gives his impression of the Moses, now divinely commissioned, leading the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage:

"The last glimpse I had of Moses was at the edge of the desert not far from Cairo, where 7,000 Egyptians had assembled for the Exodus.

"I was lost, now, not in space, but in centuries. Surely, on the morning of that long-ago Exodus, these were the same eyes that followed Moses. The same skinny animals, the ragged clothes, the stink of poverty. I squeezed through the farthest rim of the crowd and out into the desert. Lifeless and endless it stretched to the horizon, while behind me the voices faded and swelled. These people trusted Moses, they had followed where he led—and where had he led them? Into this unspeakable wilderness?

"Of course Moses could not lead these thousands across the desert. He never would have tried. But God could do it. And Moses, this all-too-human man, this man, so much like the rest of us, had simply turned himself into the instrument through which the strength of God moved.

"With joy I cried out the words that Moses cried:

'Bear us out of Egypt, O Lord,
As the eagle bears its young upon
its wings.'

"Then I lifted Moses' staff and saw the multitude heave into a vast shudder of motion and walk out from bondage." (Charlton Heston, "My Three Meetings with Moses.")

Here again we have the testimony

of Jacob, son of Lehi, the pioneer of the Nephite dispensation, explaining how one can come to know God and to learn of his mysteries and to attain a state in which one may act in very deed as an agent of the Almighty.

"Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea." (Jac. 4:6.)

It was so with another of the Nephite leaders. Enos, grandson of Lehi, gives us to understand why some can receive a knowledge of the things of God while others cannot. Enos recounts his struggle to obtain a forgiveness of his sins that he might be worthy of his high calling.

He then concludes: "And while I was thus struggling in the spirit, behold, the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying: I will visit thy brethren according to their diligence in keeping my commandments . . ." (Enos 10.)

There you have, in simple language, a great principle: It isn't the Lord who withholds himself from us. It is we who withhold ourselves from him because of our failure to keep his commandments.

This "spiritual fitness program" must begin in childhood and youth. You parents of children and impressionable youth, may you teach yours to keep the commandments, that they may not fail their destiny.

Now, may I direct a few words especially to our younger people, to my grandchildren and yours:

You, the youth of today, are living in the midst of turmoil. In this militaristic age, most of you able-bodied young men may, at one time or another, be required to engage in military service. Do you know that in your day, the voice of the Lord has spoken to you words of admonition, of blessings, and of promise, through your Church leaders, the living mouthpieces of the living God today? Listen to this inspired utterance from the First Presidency of the Church, given to you who go into military service or elsewhere, for that matter:

"To our young men who go into service, no matter whom they serve or where, we say live clean, keep the commandments of the Lord, pray to him constantly to preserve you in truth and righteousness, live as you pray, and then whatever betides you the Lord will be with you and nothing will happen to you that will not be to the honor and glory of God and to your salvation and exaltation. There will come into your hearts from the living of the pure life you pray for, a joy that will pass your powers of ex-

pression or understanding. The Lord will be always near you; he will comfort you; you will feel his presence in the hour of your greatest tribulation; he will guard and protect you to the full extent that accords with his all-wise purpose. . . . Your faith and testimony will be strong beyond breaking. You will be looked up to and revered as having passed through the fiery furnace of trial and temptation and come forth unharmed. Your brethren will look to you for counsel, support, and guidance. You will be the anchors to which thereafter the youth of Zion will moor their faith in man." (Message of the First Presidency [April 1942 general conference], *The Improvement Era*, May 1942, pp. 349-350.)

And to you young girls, will you hear the voice of the Lord to you today from this same source, as a Prophet dedicated a beautiful new temple:

"We pray for the daughters of Zion. May they be preserved in virtue, chastity, and purity of life, be blessed with vigorous bodies and minds, and with great faith. May they develop into true womanhood and receive choice companions under the new and everlasting covenant for time and for all eternity in thy temples provided for this priceless privilege and purpose. May they too be privileged to enjoy as the fruits of their union a noble posterity which, we pray thee, may be taught at their mother's knee to believe in thee and in the divine mission of thy Beloved Son." (President George Albert Smith, dedicatory prayer at the Idaho Falls Temple; *The Improvement Era*, October 1945, p. 563.)

May youth of today never forget what our inspired leaders have counseled.

Even in times of great danger, moral or physical, when, like the Apostle Paul, you may be in danger of "shipwreck" either to your body or your soul, there can be standing by you, as there was by him, after fasting and prayer, an angel of God who whispered peace to his soul.

How is it done, you ask? The Lord answers:

"And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done."

"Wherefore, I am in your midst, and I am the good shepherd, and the stone of Israel. He that buildeth upon this rock shall never fall.

"And the day cometh that you shall hear my voice and see me, and know that I am." (D&C 50:29, 44-45.)

How can you recognize the spirit of revelation when it comes? The Prophet Joseph Smith tells us:

"A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may

give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus." (*Documentary History of the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 381.)

Mother's intuition, with which most of you are familiar, is a form of divine guidance in its purest and simplest form. Can you now understand why we counsel you to heed the admonitions of your parents during your growing-up years?

In one of the Master's parables, he tells of the foolish rich man who laid up treasure for himself but was "not rich toward God." (Luke 12:21.)

In King Solomon's "personal diary," as someone has called the Book of Ecclesiastes, this wise king gives us an enumeration of the things he had acquired, but which did not make him rich toward God. All of such, he concluded, "was vanity . . . and there was no profit under the sun." (Ecc. 2:11.)

I heard an impressive testimony of a college student in a sacrament meeting in my ward. He had been warned not to take a certain course at the university because it had threatened to destroy the faith of previous students who had taken this course. He determined to take the course, and he determined also that he would not lose his faith. This was his testimony as to how he sidestepped this hazard: He kept active in the Church. He continued to pray. He kept himself clean. In a word, he kept himself rich toward God.

Then he bore testimony that these university courses did cause one to doubt; and if these doubts were aggravated by inactivity, the result could mean the loss of faith and possibly his standing in the Church.

Will you remember the great experience of Peter, the ranking member of the Twelve, whose loyalty to the Master seemed to have exceeded his courage when, in the face of physical hazard, he denied the Master thrice on the night of the betrayal? Compare this fear-torn Peter with the boldness he manifested shortly thereafter, before those same religious bigots who had so recently demanded the death of Jesus. He denounced them as murderers and called them to repentance, suffered imprisonment, and later went fearlessly to his own martyrdom.

What was it that had changed him? He had been a personal witness to the change that came to the broken, pain-racked body taken from the cross, unto a glorified, resurrected body that could pass thereafter unhindered through walls of mortar and stone, that could eat broiled fish and honeycomb, that

could appear and disappear suddenly from the sight of mortals. The plain and simple answer is that Peter was a changed man because he now knew the power of the risen Lord. No more would he be alone on the shores of Galilee, or in prison, or in death. His Lord would be near him.

There is the Lord's promise if we live worthily before him: ". . . let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

"The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever." (D&C 121:45-46.)

God grant that each of us may so live that we may enjoy that communion with Deity through the Holy Ghost, and know without doubt that he does live, and be prepared one day to enter into his presence, I humbly pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday Afternoon Session, October 2, 1966

Protecting Freedom— An Immediate Responsibility

Ezra Taft Benson

Of the Council of the Twelve

● Humbly and gratefully I take as my theme for these brief remarks the following words from the inspiring opening address by President David O. McKay at the Friday morning session of this great conference.

"Efforts are being made to deprive man of his free agency, to steal from the individual his liberty. . . . There has been an alarming increase in the abandoning of the ideals that constitute the foundation of the Constitution of the United States. . . ."

I therefore speak on the subject: "Protecting Freedom—An Immediate Responsibility."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that life is eternal, that it has purpose. We believe we lived as intelligent beings in a world of progress before this mortal life. Our life on this earth is a probation, a testing period, an opportunity for growth and experience in a physical world. It is all part of the plan of our Heavenly Father for the benefit and blessing of us, his children.

This is to be done through a great and all-wise plan—the gospel of Jesus Christ. This master plan, if lived, will build men of character, men of strength, men of deep spirituality, Godlike men.

Basic to this all-important plan is our free agency, the right of choice. Free agency is an eternal principle. We enjoyed freedom of choice in the spirit world as spirit children. In fact, a counterplan to the gospel of our Lord was presented by Lucifer, a plan

of force that would have robbed man of his freedom of choice. Lucifer's plan was rejected, and the scriptures tell us that he, with one-third of the hosts of heaven, was cast out; and they continue their opposition to God's plan, which is based on the freedom of the individual.

The scriptures make clear that there was a great war in heaven, a struggle over the principle of freedom, the right of choice. (See Moses 4:1-4; D&C 29:36-38; 76:25-27; Rev. 12:7-9.)

History, both sacred and secular, clearly records that the struggle to preserve and safeguard freedom has been a continuous one. Prophets of God, as watchmen on the towers, have proclaimed liberty. Holy men of God have led the fight against anarchy and tyranny. Moses was commanded to "proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." (Lev. 25:10.)

Why have prophets of God been commanded to proclaim liberty and lead the battle to preserve freedom? Because freedom is basic to the great plan of the Lord. The gospel can prosper only in an atmosphere of freedom. This fact is confirmed by history, as well as by sacred scriptures. The right of choice—free agency—runs like a golden thread throughout the gospel plan of the Lord for the blessing of his children.

To a modern-day prophet the Lord declared that "it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another." In a revelation to the restored