

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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the talk invoking the name of Jesus Christ and saying AMEN. The audience affirms agreement by uttering an audible “Amen.”

Latter-day Saints believe that admission to the Kingdom of Heaven is achieved through obedience to ORDINANCES and the development of personal perfection. Such spiritual growth comes in part from individual enlightenment, which is reason to receive the spoken or written word. Inspiration often derives from hearing the oral testimony of others, for if people do not nourish the word, they “can never pluck of the fruit of the tree of life” (Alma 32:40).

Thus, public speaking is a basic LDS exercise, for “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14–17). As opportunity allows, a speaker introduces the restored gospel to others and, significantly, preaches the gospel in the Church’s meetings. Speaking in church carries the responsibility of teaching and inspiring others. The speaker becomes a voice for GOD and is expected to prepare so that the word of God can effectively be expressed. The speaker is therefore admonished to use “great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12) and to speak as “moved upon by the Holy Ghost” (D&C 68:3).

Public speaking is periodically encouraged on a local level through speech festivals and contests. These events focus on the art of speaking, involve members in refining their speaking abilities in a Church context, and provide an appropriate arena for the enjoyment and appreciation of public speaking.

LAEL J. WOODBURY

PURPOSE OF EARTH LIFE

[This entry consists of two articles: LDS Perspective discusses the Mormon understanding of life’s purposes, and Comparative Perspective contrasts the LDS understanding with that of the major world religions.]

LDS PERSPECTIVE

Latter-day Saint prophets have affirmed the purpose of life within the framework of three questions: (1) Whence did we come? (2) Why are we here? (3) What awaits us hereafter? The scriptural context of these questions is assurance of the eternal character of the SOUL and of the creation of the earth as a place for the family of God.

All men and women have lived as spirit beings in a premortal state, and all are the spiritual offspring of God (Abr. 3:21–22). In that world all the family of God were taught his plans and purposes. “At the first organization in heaven we were all present, and saw the Savior chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it” (TPJS, p. 181). All the spirit children of God developed various degrees of intelligence and maturity. Those who voluntarily subscribed to the conditions of mortality were embodied and made subject to the light of Christ “that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (D&C 93:2). So that earth life may be a probation, a veil of forgetfulness has been drawn over the former life.

In mortality, at least six purposes are opened to mankind:

1. To be given a body, whose experiences and maturation, and eventual permanent resurrection, are essential to the perfecting of the soul. “We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom” (TPJS, p. 181; *see* PHYSICAL BODY; RESURRECTION).
2. To grow in knowledge, and develop talents and gifts (*see* INTELLIGENCE). “If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses, for if we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him and drawing towards the devil” (TPJS, p. 216).
3. To be tried and tested. “We will prove them herewith,” says the record of Abraham, “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25). Through mortality one experiences contrasts and opposites—health and sickness, joy and sadness, blessings and challenges—and thus comes to know to prize the good. “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Ne. 2:23). Such joy, as Elder B. H. Roberts of the Seventy wrote, can come only from “having sounded the depths of the soul, from experiencing all emotions of which mind is susceptible, from testing all the qualities and strength of the intellect” (Roberts, p. 439; *see* JOY; MORTALITY; SUFFERING IN THE WORLD).
4. To fill and fulfill the missions and callings that were conferred or preordained (*see* FOREORDINATION; PREMORTAL LIFE). Latter-day Saints often speak of earth life as a second estate and al-

lude to the promise given to and through Abraham that "they who keep their second estate [i.e., fulfill the purposes of mortality] shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever" (Abr. 3:26).

5. To exercise agency without memory of the premortal existence, thus to "walk by faith" and have the "realities anticipated in the spirit world renewed and confirmed" (see AGENCY; FAITH).

6. To establish the foundations of eternal family relationships, first as sons and daughters, then as fathers and mothers. The united family is the epitome of the fulfilled and saintly life (see MARRIAGE: ETERNAL).

The life to come is the extension and fulfillment of the mortal sojourn: to enter into and live forever in the presence of God. But probation does not end with death. Nor do opportunities to hear, accept, and apply the truths and powers of Christ. Indeed, Joseph SMITH taught that even for the faithful, "it is *not all* to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave" (TPJS, p. 348). He added that when the spirit is separated from the body, the process is somewhat impeded, hence the importance of using the time while in mortality, for redemption, and the folly of procrastination of repentance and renewal.

In all this, the continuity of the former life with this one, and in turn this life with the next, is clearly taught. The tendency of much religion, Eastern and Western—to divide life into two worlds and to hold that they are utterly distinct and unlike—is reversed. Life is change, transformation, and exaltation. Mortality is a dress rehearsal for the next world. There, light, glory, and dominion will be conferred in fulness on those who have fulfilled the words of eternal life in this world, and are therefore prepared for eternal life in the world to come.

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COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Religions tend to present life as meaningful when it conforms to a cosmic plan—a plan that is either

intentionally instituted by God or is grounded in the nature of a cosmos that is divine in origin. For Latter-day Saints, the divinely ordered cosmos is the tenor of all scripture. Within this context, latter-day scripture affirms the interrelated themes of the crucial importance of the PHYSICAL BODY, of trials, of the experience of opposition, of the eternality of family, and of the vision of joy and glory in the likeness of God (see PURPOSE OF EARTH LIFE: LDS PERSPECTIVE).

Alternative views move in two directions. Some hold that if there is no God and if the ultimate end of all human life is personal annihilation, life has no meaning. This is the position, for example, of Arthur Schopenhauer. Existentialists, who generally assert that humans create their own meaning in a godless and objectively absurd universe, take a similar stance. Others, including some naturalists and humanists, hold that life is worthwhile even if the claims of supernatural religion are false. Marxists, for instance, hold that a purposive society, if not a meaningful cosmos, emerges as an objective entity through the inexorable processes of history.

Some thinkers affirm that life has purpose even if that purpose is shrouded in mystery. Hedonism typically maintains that questions of ultimate meaning cannot be answered and hence should be ignored in favor of calculating maximum pleasure and minimum pain. Confucianism tends not to speak to this issue. It asserts the existence of a spiritual order that is prior to, and superior to, the social order, but focuses on issues of a this-worldly character. Many strands of Judaism take the same approach, believing that the life to come is secondary to the task of establishing and maintaining a sanctified community in this world and looking to a day when, in the words of a venerable Hebrew prayer, "the world shall be perfected under the reign of the Almighty."

Latter-day Saints see life as a three-stage process—a premortal, mortal, and postmortal existence. All stages are essential to the unfolding and perfecting of the self, which is the work and glory of God. The process can be characterized as both this-worldly and other-worldly (see GOD: WORK AND GLORY OF; MORTALITY; PRE-EXISTENCE; RESURRECTION).

Plato's "myth of the cave" depicts the human condition as bondage to false beliefs and illusions, which the true philosopher aims to transcend. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates argues that the philosopher

“is always pursuing death and dying.” The wise man longs for the separation of his soul from his body; for freedom from illness, fatigue, and the deceptions of the senses; and for release into a realm of intuitive contemplation. Gnosticism, a movement akin to Platonism, shared the notion of the fall and hoped-for ascent of a divine soul, but frequently denied the goodness of both the physical universe and the deity who had made it. In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas offered a classical enunciation of the Catholic position that man’s highest goal, even in this material world, is the “contemplative life,” which will be perfected after death. The happiness of the saints will consist in an intellectual “seeing” of the divine essence, vision not in the eye but in the mind. Latter-day scripture affirms both the life of intelligence, defined as light and truth, and the redemption of the soul, defined as both spirit and body. The purpose of life is not escape but transformation—of man, of community, and of the cosmos.

In the major religious traditions of eastern and southern Asia, God (or the gods) sometimes has a marginal role. Hinduism teaches that the deepest human desire is for infinitude, for infinite being, knowledge, and joy. One must therefore seek *mukti*, liberation, from the finitude and limitations that seem to be humanity’s natural condition. The word “seem” is crucial because Hinduism insists that behind individual and finite personalities lies Atman-Brahman, the Godhead itself. Men and women are already infinite; liberation consists simply—although it is not so simple!—in recognizing that fact. Buddhism, springing from Hindu soil and often considered a kind of reformation of the older religion, essentially concurs in this diagnosis of the human condition, although its nontheistic forms differ in the way it explains human nature. The Buddha (the title comes from a word meaning roughly “to be enlightened”) held that the fundamental human problem is a desire to be separate and that life’s purpose is the extinction of that desire, thus enabling men and women to overcome, in this or a series of lives, the selfish cravings that are the chief source of their sufferings and woe. LDS thought rejects both reincarnation and the theory of human suffering as illusory (see REINCARNATION; SUFFERING IN THE WORLD).

The notion of soul liberation as the purpose of life is not uncongenial to religions of the Abrahamic tradition, including that of the Latter-day Saints, although it has seldom if ever become

the dominant paradigm. The declaration of the Hebrew scriptures that God pronounced the material cosmos “good” has remained normative. For this and other reasons, Jewish, traditional Christian, Muslim, and LDS thought unite in the view that the supremely good God is directly responsible for the general situation in which human beings find themselves. But no tradition emphasizes more than does the LDS that the conditions of mortality were “voluntarily subscribed to” by each individual (*TPJS*, p. 325; cf. D&C 93:30–31; see also THEODICY). Latter-day Saints likewise agree that eventual union with God implies no loss of finite individual identity, but rather a relationship with him.

A pervasive Christian view is expressed in the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647, which declares that “man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” God created us to bring glory to himself—which was not vanity on his part, since he fully deserves that glory, whereas human beings do not—and will reward those whom he saves with the enjoyment of himself. This can be compared with the position of Islamic tradition that attributes to God the words “I was a hidden treasure but wished to be known, and therefore I created the world.” The aim of human beings in Islam is therefore to submit (*aslama*) themselves to the will of God and to glorify him through their actions. Judaism and Islam are closely related in their emphasis upon law and right behavior and in their declaration that obedience to the commandments of God is the purpose of life. Judaism, however, differs from Islam in its belief that the full range of the divine commandments (*mitzvot*) is incumbent only upon Jews, with non-Jews subject to the few basic “Noachian precepts.” Islam, on the other hand, insists that God’s demands are identical for all human beings. “I did not create the jinn and mankind,” the Koran quotes Allah as saying, “except to serve me.”

Some Protestant thinkers have affirmed that human beings exist to manifest the divine attributes, to embody in their own imperfect lives something of God’s glory. A similar view occurs in the statement of the Catholic Baltimore Catechism that “God made us to show forth His goodness and to share with us His everlasting happiness in heaven.” Latter-day scripture affirms that God will share not only his gifts and blessedness but also his divine nature (see DEIFICATION). Catholic and Protestant forms of Christianity, however, part

company; the former holds that God's aims for mankind are ideally realized in a life of sacramental and liturgical worship, whereas the latter emphasizes acceptance of the free grace of Christ. Latter-day Saints affirm that saintly life is impossible without access to the grace of Christ; freely chosen obedience to divinely given covenants, laws, and ordinances in which the atonement and grace of Christ are manifest; and then the giving of oneself in whole-souled discipleship.

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