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PRIVILEGE

P.D. MALLAMO'S ARTICLE, "ANYTHANG Will Help" (SUNSTONE, September 2006), has lingered with me. I skimmed it while visiting family in California and sat down to read and digest it fully once my issue arrived in the mail.

Mallamo captures the tension between Christian belief and practice. *To give or not to give? That is the question.* Despite clear scriptural instructions, more often than not, I've clutched my purse closer and kept walking. I can't count the number of times I've gone blind, deaf, or defensive when faced with a street person's extended hand.

Instead, I've counted on someone else to do good—maybe someone who's less judgmental or less of a bean counter than I. My dad's generosity on the street and his volunteer work at the homeless shelter offsets my tight-fistedness, doesn't it? I'm chagrined to know the answer to that question and to persist in thinking I'm off the hook.

Ever notice that when you really need to learn something, the way is made clear for it to be knocked into your thick skull, regardless? When I got home from California, my husband said we would be picking up a man from the local veteran's home and bringing him to church. Indefinitely.

Last Sunday was my first time meeting Richard. He was quick to tell his story: divorced, lost everything, ended up homeless. He's never been baptized—said the missionaries want him to quit smoking first—but going to church gives him a place to belong.

To echo Mallamo's question, what good things could we bring to each other's lives? I'll get to find out on the way to and from church every week. That feels not like a duty, but a privilege.

MARY ELLEN ROBERTSON
McAllen, Texas

NOT LOOKING AWAY

P.D. MALLAMO'S PIECE PERCHED LIKE one of his subjects in the middle of my path through the September 2006 SUNSTONE. Its title, like a message scrawled on a section of cardboard box, flashed through my preconscious mind, firing a neural warning and activating the avoidance ganglia. I danced a succinctly preventative jig step around it and moved on to other articles.

But like the blue-shirted father who returned to give "Heather" some money, I came

back. I read it last, but I read it. It wasn't a pleasant experience, but it was instructive. Mallamo's journalistic realism does justice to a subject all too often addressed with glib sentimentality or righteous self-justification.

As a Mormon missionary, I spent two years in Peru. The teeming number of street beggars was a shock with which I was emotionally ill-prepared to cope. I tried at first to give a little something and was mobbed. It seemed an impossible situation, so I shut down. I told myself I was there to feed the spirit and not the body.

Here at home, as a graduate student at the University of Utah, I lived in a small, downtown apartment and daily negotiated the same streets Mallamo frequents. But seduced by idealized notions of self-reliance and free will, and armed with a self-serving adoption of the philosophy of "tough-love," I avoided seeing what Mallamo regards with existential discipline.

I don't know what I can do to help solve the problem of homelessness. I am not much of a joiner; besides, I am uncomfortable with do-gooders. (They so often do more harm than good.) I only know that I can no longer look away.

SCOT DENHALTER
Syracuse, Utah

RECOUNTING BLESSINGS

IMMEDIATELY UPON READING IN your September 2006 issue Ken Driggs's article about his years, experience, and feelings as a public defender, I gave it to my husband, Glen, a retired attorney. When we lived in Connecticut many years ago, because of our Church membership, he inherited similar cases. Although he practiced real estate and property law, he was the only Connecticut-licensed attorney in our stake. Other LDS attorneys were licensed across the border in New York. So Len got the calls to represent "members" who'd been caught shoplifting, abusing or abandoning spouse and/or children, assaulting someone—any non-Christian, non-humane behavior.

Glen often said, preferably when our six children were present, "As I walk into prisons, I know I can go right back out. My business card is a "Get Out of Jail Free" ticket. Officials always treat me with great respect. I'm given translators. At least one guard and other security are always there. But when those gates lock behind me, I always have a terrible, evil feeling." He would swallow.

“And when I hear the people’s awful stories—well, I just pray none of you will ever experience it!”

Of course, while reading about Driggs’s clients and their needs, their lacks, I’d cried about my too often forgetting God’s blessings of physical and mental health, family, education, Church and other good teachers and guides and material comforts.

After Glen read, tears started down his cheek. He nodded and gulped as if having like feelings. When at last able to speak, he said, “That man is truly a Christian. A Saint”

JOAN CARROLL
Salt Lake City, Utah

RESTORED PERSPECTIVE

I FEEL LIKE I AM WRITING A LETTER TO the *Ensign* or *LDS Living* in saying the September 2006 issue of *SUNSTONE* “touched my heart.” From the first page to the last, it spoke to me about my small role in this sometimes cold, cruel world in which we live.

One of my favorite quotations comes from the epigraph to Kurt Vonnegut’s novel *Bluebeard*. The quotation is from a letter to Vonnegut from his son Mark, who had suffered from schizophrenia. The younger Vonnegut said, “We are here to help each other get through this thing, whatever it is.”

I’ve often thought that a difference between the Vonneguts and me as a Latter-day Saint is that I know what this “thing” is; we call it the Plan of Salvation.

I’ve spent the last twenty years working in the welfare/child support system in New York. Because of the bureaucratic mazes and rules and regulations, it’s hard to come home feeling as if I helped, that I lightened a fellow sojourner’s burdens. Clients tend to become a case number rather than a person. It becomes easy to lose perspective.

The September 2006 issue was an impetus for self-evaluation to see if I am really “willing to mourn with those that mourn” and “comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:9). Sadly, I must say that I fall short.

My thanks to the good people who put this issue of *SUNSTONE* together. The articles pointed out to me personal deficiencies and provided insights that restored lost perspective. I thank all who contributed articles to this issue. I appreciated this issue enough to order extra copies to share with others.

JIM HARRIS
Saugerties, New York

OPPOSITE OF EMPTY

IN HIS LETTER IN THE SEPTEMBER 2006 *SUNSTONE*, Max Rammell indicates that he sees little value in what he called my “take on President McKay’s thoughts on meditation” in my article, “Mormon Mantras: A Journey of Spiritual Transformation” (*SUNSTONE*, April 2006). As a clarification, my use of President McKay’s comments on meditation wasn’t really a “take on” as much as it was a “take off on” his thoughts, particularly where he attributes two key elements to spirituality: consciousness of victory over self and communion with the Infinite. In the article, I deal with both of these in detail and share techniques that have the potential to lead one to greater awareness and increased ability to live a godly life.

How Rammell can claim to have “carefully” read the article several times and then conclude that I was advocating “emptying our minds and thus becoming an inert and useless person” is a mystery to me. In the article, I advocate for

transformation, awakening, expanded free agency, direct-conscious communion with God, and the nourishment and unfolding of Christlike qualities in our day-to-day living. One of the section headings is, “True meditation is not a blank mind but an awakened spirit”!

I can understand a Latter-day Saint not being comfortable with a classic meditation technique, as it is foreign to typical Mormon spiritual practice, but I don’t understand the compulsion to distort the clear focus and purpose of the article. I encourage Rammell to re-read the article, looking past his pre-conceived notions about the nature and practice of meditation.

PHILIP G. MCLEMORE
West Point, Utah

Letters for publication are edited for clarity, tone, and space. Send them to <editor@sunstoneonline.com>.

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HONEST JON by Jonathan David Clark



A message from a semi-convert