



CORNUCOPIA

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Of Good Report

WHEN SAW I THEE AN AWKWARD PRE-TEEN?

Following is a revised version of a reflection posted 9 September 2008 on the LDS group blog BYCOMMONCONSENT.COM.

I HAVE A SON NAMED PETER WHO IS MAGNIFICENT. He is also complicated. The diagnoses are varied and not often terribly useful: bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, sensory integration dysfunction, non-verbal learning disorder. The alphabet soup of diagnostic acronyms mostly means that some things most of us do without thinking are hard for him, things like finding a shirt that he can bear to have touch him, or shoes that fit exactly right. Even little tasks, such as taking a shower, going to a movie, or packing a school lunch, require medicine and a lot of hard work. He is prickly and odd sometimes—the effort of living in his body leaves him little energy to spend on social niceties.

Peter is one of two Boy Scouts in our ward's troop, and the other one doesn't come very often. But the Scoutmaster is there every week, and not just there, but well-prepared, with a new skill to impart, a challenge, a treat.

Tonight he pulled into the church parking lot with a half-dozen 12-foot-long poles tethered to the top of his Civic. My boy came home a few hours later, his face shining with joy, to tell me about the suspension bridge (!) they were working on.

It was the perfect activity for the boy who can make anything—ANYTHING—out of cardboard and duct tape, who loves to work hard and will cheerfully carry boxes for eight or ten hours when drafted by the Elders' Quorum Moving Brigade. Clearly, this Scoutmaster knows my boy as well as he knows his knots, and lovingly untangles the essence of my child—and God's—from the encumbrances of a quirky body.

I paraphrase:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me an ice cream sandwich; I was bored, and ye took me camping; I was a little uncoordinated, and ye played a dozen games of PIG with me; I was sad, and ye taught

me to tie knots; I was lonely, and ye knew that building a suspension bridge would be just the thing. Blessed are the Scoutmasters.

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Scripture Notes

THE UNSPEAKABLE VOCABULARY OF JESUS' PRAYER

And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; and no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak . . . —3 NEPHI 17:16–17

I HAVE SOMETIMES WONDERED WHY THE RECORD keeper of Third Nephi didn't chronicle the words of Jesus' prayer as he spoke—after all, he or she was there. Did his chisel break? Did the Golden Plates' spellcheck go on the fritz? Did nature call? It had better be a good excuse because I would really have liked to read what Jesus actually prayed.

Obviously, I can't reconstruct Jesus' prayer. But I wonder what the next best thing might be. For example, what might Jesus pray about me if I could hear him?

Would his prayer be brutally honest? "Father, forgive him, he's impatient behind old people at green lights when they don't step on the gas right away. He's selfish too, hiding treats in the kitchen so he doesn't have to share." I suppose if Jesus' prayer with the Nephites were like this tattle-tale version, and I were scribe, I might commit a few journalistic omissions myself in order to save face.

Or would Jesus' prayer for me be more like that of an advocate, where he would magnify every good act and excuse every bad? "Father, he honked at the old couple at the light because he wanted to prevent a rear-end collision; and he hid the treats to keep his children from ingesting too much sugar and developing diabetes later in life." But it is difficult to imagine this prayer as doing anything other than encouraging me to continue my sinful ways, as if Jesus were unable to allow me to suffer the consequences of my choices.

Interestingly, there are at least two other tongue-tied scriptural references like Third Nephi. In D&C 121:26, the Lord refers to the "unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost"; and in the New Testament, Paul tells the Corinthians that he was caught

up to Paradise and “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:4).

The phrase “unspeakable words” points to a time deep in our spiritual history when words were imbued with such holiness that to even utter them aloud would profane them.

Take, for instance, the Jews of antiquity, for whom the name of God in the Hebrew Bible was one such restricted word, usually referred to by scholars today as the tetragrammaton. Josephus, the first-century A.D. Jewish historian, recorded that Moses first learned the true name of God (Exodus 3:14-15) “so that he might invoke him by his name in his oblations . . . concerning which it is not lawful for me to say any more” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 2:12:4). The surviving Hebrew letters, YHWH, are only consonants because the reader was supposed to supply the vowels. Since anciently, there was no such thing as reading silently, the reader of the text would have to insert another word in place of the name of God.

This word in Hebrew was generally Adonai, or Lord; but sometimes Memra, or Word, was interpolated. In the temple prayer, called the Amidah, the high priest would actually say the true name of God on the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, but outside in the synagogue, a substitute would be used.

For the Jews, after the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, the pronunciation of the real name of God was lost. Today in Jewish texts printed in English, references to Deity are sometimes spelled G_d to honor this tradition.

Even in the King James Version, the translators used LORD (spelled with small capitals) in the Old Testament in place of the tetragrammaton. Interestingly, the word Jehovah is actually a mistransliteration of the tetragrammaton interposed with the vowels from Adonai (which Christian students of Hebrew first did during the Middle Ages).

Despite losing the name of God, today’s Church may have recovered a “lost language of salvation.” In LDS temple cere-

monies of the past, a phrase was uttered which was identified as part of the “pure Adamic language” (Moses 6:5–6), and the tradition of an unspeakable name uttered only in the temple continues today (Revelation 2:17; D&C 130:11).

Mircea Eliade proposed the term “hierophany” to describe an event or place where the sacred is made manifest. If we think of Jesus’ prayer for those gathered at Bountiful as an hierophanic event, it becomes interesting to note that each time the chronicler of Third Nephi mentions “hearing” the words,

he precedes it with “seeing” Jesus pray. We usually think of prayers as something we hear while our eyes are closed, but the Nephite and Lamanite witnesses apparently *watched* Jesus pray.

What were they seeing? While only speculating, it is interesting to consider Jesus’ prayer as observable ceremony (as, for example, in the temple).

With all this in mind, I wonder: even if we had heard and written the marvelous phrases of Jesus’ prayer, might we still be unable to record what he was really communicating? Might we find ourselves falling back on the same reason as the writer of Third Nephi: “words cannot describe it”?

Perhaps this is what John the Evangelist had in mind when he wrote that Jesus was the most important part of the vocabulary of salvation: “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1).

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That Thy Vocabulary May Increase

PIKUACH NEFESH

THIRTY ONE AND A HALF YEARS AGO WHILE I WAS recovering from brain surgery, my neighbor gave me a copy of Chaim Potok’s *The Promise*, which I read that summer as my parents and I wended our way over Donner

 Pontius' Puddle



Pass and down the coast of California.

The Promise is about a Bible scholar excommunicated for his work and the effect that excommunication, and other verbal violence toward him have on his family, particularly his son Michael. When Michael becomes psychologically disturbed, Danny, an Orthodox Jewish psychiatrist, breaks the ban of excommunication by treating Michael.

Reuven (from whose perspective the story is told) asks if Danny is breaking the ban because of *pikuach nefesh*, and Danny says yes. Reuven then explains to the readers that one must break a religious law if breaking it is necessary to save a life (*pikuach nefesh* meaning “to save a life”).

I remembered the term again when Jim Siebach from BYU’s philosophy department was giving a lecture at Utah Valley State College, where I was teaching. He said, “Life is the highest human value. Why? Because if you are not alive, you can’t practice any other human values.”

Six or seven years ago, I attended the monthly roundtable for Scout leaders. This particular time, we all met together for a panel discussion on preventing suicide. One speaker, an evangelical pastor from Provo, asked us to be aware that when you live in a culture with very high moral standards, violating those standards can cause a person to feel that he or she has done something irreparable. We need to be careful how we talk about high standards, he said, because the words we use can contribute to the feelings that drive someone toward suicide.

His point was not that LDS (or evangelical) standards are too high, but that we need to be careful about the language we use in presenting them. One of the major tasks we have in growing up—and then throughout our lives—is to understand the difference between rhetoric and speech we are to take literally.

It takes a certain spiritual and intellectual maturity to recognize when we should ignore rhetoric. Think of Pahoran’s reply to Moroni’s threat on his life for not sending reinforcements. Basically Pahoran says, “Moroni, I know you’re a hothead who didn’t stop to think that the capital might be under siege, but I love you and your great and noble heart anyway.” The maturity behind such a reply can take a lifetime to cultivate. And that’s what *pikuach nefesh* is about, life.

Several years ago I read an essay that haunts and moves me still. The author, a gay man, was talking to his bishop about the extreme difficulty of living without physical affection, and the bishop said, “If you have to go off and be gay somewhere, go off and be gay. But for heaven’s sake, don’t kill your-

self.” The author said at that point, he realized that God didn’t hate him, the Church didn’t hate him, his bishop didn’t hate him. The feelings of hatred were coming from himself.

Somewhere this young man had internalized some very strong rhetoric that it was better to be dead than unchaste. Whether or not his bishop was thinking about strong rhetoric, or was just acting as a humane being, he saved a life.

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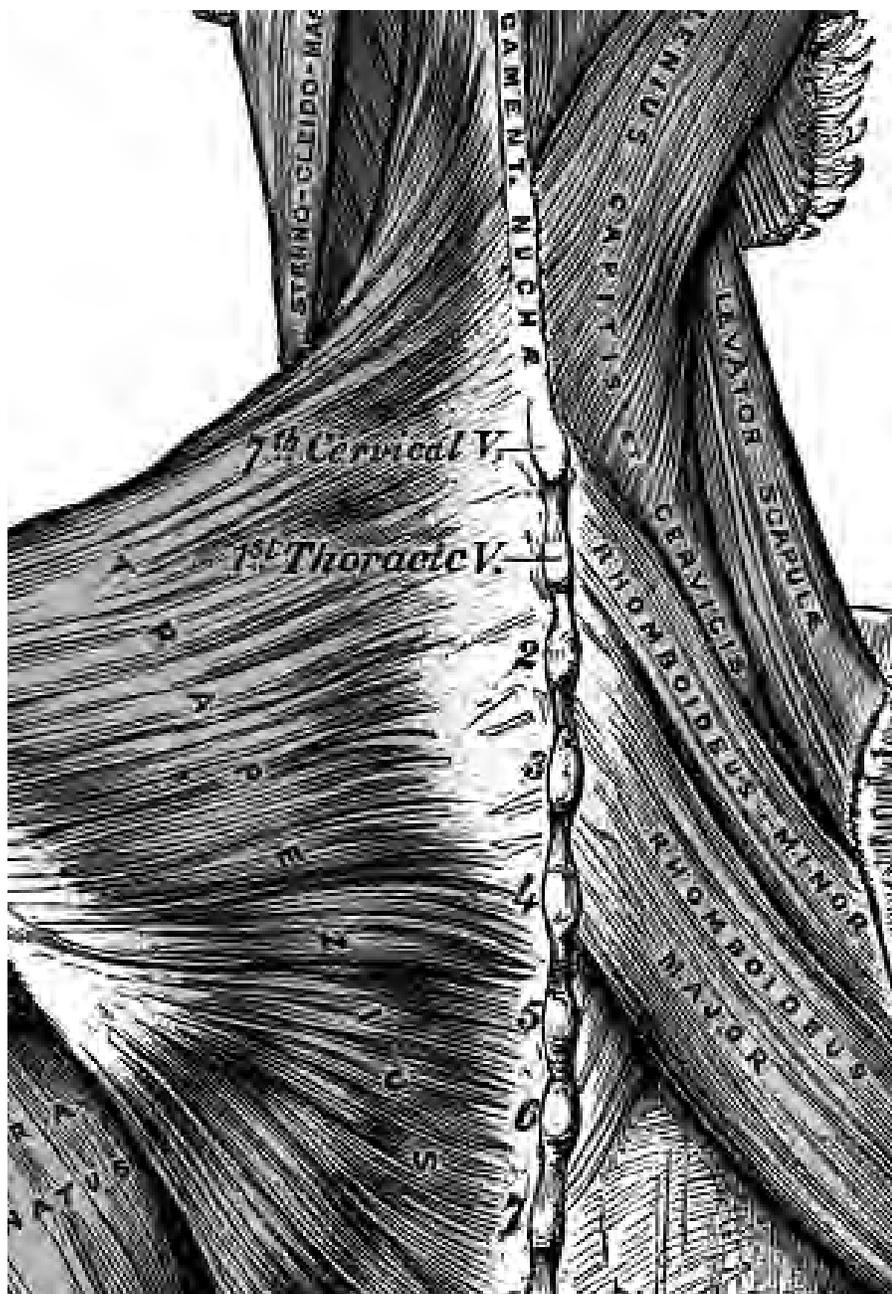
A Place for All Truth

THE CHIROPRACTY
CONTROVERSY

This regular column features incidents from and glimpses into the life and ministry of Elder James E. Talmage as compiled by James P. Harris, who is currently working on a full-length biography of this fascinating Mormon apostle. The column title is adopted from the statement inscribed on the apostle’s tombstone: “Within the Gospel of Jesus Christ there is room and place for every truth thus far learned by man or yet to be made known.”

I N HIS JOURNAL ENTRY OF SATURDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER, 1930, Elder Talmage recorded the following:

It is with great difficulty that I am able to lift myself, even with the aid of a stick, which I have to use constantly as I move about, even though the step I take be but 5 or 6 inches; and descending steps is even more difficult and dangerous as the muscles give way without warning. This of course greatly restrains my moving about; and although I have been under hospital treatment for more than two years and a half, I have been growing steadily worse. After very careful consideration of the matter, and in line with what doctors have told me, I am convinced that the trouble lies in the inactivity of the motor nerves which should energize the muscles of the legs. Yesterday I consulted a chiropractor, Dr. William W. Seare, who, by the way, is a counselor in the Bishopric of the 14th Ward and



was formerly a member of my Prayer Circle. Today the doctor began his treatment, stating that he found a compressed condition of the nerves and he “adjusted” the spine accordingly. The orthodox medical profession is opposed to the chiropractors and the osteopaths; but from my own observation both of the classes have accomplished good. I hope to have some worth while results to record later.

Two days later, Elder Talmage reported that he sat with, “a committee considering the proposed Mutual Improvement Association Manual... [for the Young Men] ...entitled ‘Public Health and Hygiene.’” Talmage then reports that,

“A strong but respectful protest has been presented to the First Presidency and the General Superintendency of the Y.M.M.I.A. by a number of chiropractors

against certain disparaging sentences appearing in the Manual, which seem to cast ridicule upon chiropractors and osteopaths. We have to remember that both of these professions are licensed by law in the State of Utah.”

Further meetings on the manual were held on 11 and 12 September.

Another voice of confidence for chiropractors came from a fellow member of the Quorum of the Twelve, who had also sustained a medical injury. On 25 September, 1930, Talmage wrote the following account of Elder Stephen L. Richards:

“Brother Stephen L. Richards was present with us today after an absence of several weeks, caused by a very serious affliction. The treatment of an affected tooth brought on a state of paralysis of the left side of the face, the condition developing within one hour after the dentist had drilled into the tooth. He is unable to open or close the left eyelid and consequently the eye on that side has had to be sealed up. His face is very badly drawn.”

The next day, 26 September, at Talmage’s encouragement, Elder Richards submitted to chiropractic treatment from Dr. Seare. Talmage adds, “The doctors who have had his case in hand have given no encouragement of an early recovery, and his case appears to be one upon which chiropractic methods should have good effect if upon any. He and I receive treatments in my office.” Please note that his office was in the Church Office Building.

Unfortunately, just a few days later, Friday, 3 October, 1930, the first day of the Church’s Conference, Talmage took a severe fall going between the Tabernacle and the Church Office Building between meetings. “It gave me a very severe shaking up,” he wrote.

On 4 October, he wrote, “Brother Stephen L. Richards and I received treatment from Dr. Seare last evening and again early this morning, in my office. I can clearly differentiate the little improvement I have shown in my ability to walk on the level, although I have been in considerable pain and have increased difficulty in stepping upward or downward. I had to be taken to the Tabernacle and brought back by auto both forenoon and afternoon, and again in the evening.”

Elder Talmage does not record the final outcome regarding the anti-chiropractic passages in the Y.M.M.I.A Manual, but it is safe to assume that the pro-chiropractic sentiment prevailed.



The Sugar Beet

“All the Mormon News That’s Fit to Print”

PROPOSED 2009 SUNSTONE SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

By Kynthia Taylor

(Originally posted on ZELOPHEHADSDAUGHTERS.COM)

- 112. Paper A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PEEPSTONES AND DIVINING RODS**
- Abstract* Tired of useless academic arcana on the application of magical accoutrements in Joseph Smith's era? Come to this interactive session, watch live demonstrations of divination and levitation, and find out how to make your peepstone work for you!
- 113. Paper ARMPIT HAIR AND THE GENDERED DYNAMICS OF THE BYU HONOR CODE**
- Abstract* Recognizing that armpit hair is a secondary sex characteristic not dissimilar to facial hair, our panel explores the following pressing issue: should female BYU students be required to apply for armpit-hair cards before being allowed to cultivate a (well-groomed) thicket of hair in the underarm region? What about males?
- 114. Paper CELESTIAL NUDISM: FACT OR FANCY?**
- Abstract* Do heavenly denizens, who after all no longer have anything to hide in their state of Edenic bliss, waste time with fine-twined linens and those pesky social inequalities they reinforce? Or are the suit and tie truly an everlasting signifier of all that is good and holy?
- 115. Paper MOTHERS WHO KNOW USE MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPER**
- Abstract* Mothers who know wear pantihose while scrubbing the toilet. Mothers who know crochet their children's diapers with thread carded from cotton they grew themselves. Mothers who know know the importance of relying on a Source outside themselves for emotional strength and stability.
- 116. Paper THE STAGES OF CRISES OF FAITH**
- Abstract* Never experienced that proverbial crisis in your belief system? Our experts in doubt and religious sabotage guarantee you'll leave this session in crisis or your money back! (Watch next year for our follow-up workshop: Six Weeks to Religious Apostasy.)
- 117. Paper WHO PRESIDES IN A LESBIAN RELATIONSHIP?**
- Abstract* Forget the supposed threat to traditional marriage that same-sex unions are said to entail. Let's explore the more vexing doctrinal issue gay partnerships present: Can two gay men mutually preside over each other as equal partners? And should lesbian lovers continually defer authority in a spirit of mutual nurturance?
- 118. Paper 006: LICENSE TO OFFEND**
- Abstract* Do your home or visiting teachers take umbrage at your strident and imperious efforts to dragoon them into heaven, or at your well-meaning explications of their personal sins? Do your associates resist your overbearing endeavors to educate them about the Church's shocking past, or your constant attempts to rescue them from Mormonism? We'll provide tips on how to stand your ground and remind others that when they choose to take offense, they are at fault.
- 119. Paper PERLOCUTIONARY INTENT AND THE HEGEMONY OF THE ABTRUSE HERMENEUTIC OF SCRIPTURAL USUFRUCT IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE: A RHESIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.**
- Abstract* If you think you understand this title, you're delusional. Academic pundits of the most solemn caliber will mince linguistic gobbledygook in this cook-off of pretension.