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### The ancient temple is a place of sacrifice

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## **16. “The temple is a place of sacrifice”<sup>105</sup>**

In our everyday language, sacrifice means something different from what it means in the scriptures. The way we usually use it, sacrifice means to give up something that is of worth. We equate that word with the Old Testament’s burnt offerings when an entire animal was consumed on the altar. But a burnt offering and a sacrifice were not the same thing. Often in a sacrifice, only some of the blood and fat of the animal were sprinkled on the fire, the meat of the animal was eaten during a sacred meal that had much of the same symbolism as our sacrament.

Sacrifice and sacrament come from the same root, so do sacred, and sacral. It has the same connotation as sanctify. Sacrifice means to make something sacred—to set it apart and use it for a sacred purpose—but it did not mean to lose something or give it up. Thus, in the sacrifices of the Law of Moses, the animal was not given up to be consumed by the fire, but it was set aside, made sacred, dedicated to the uses and purposes of the Lord, and often eaten by the person who dedicated it to sacred purposes. Eating it with a priest at the table symbolized that God had accepted the sacrifice. In somewhat that same way, tithing is a modern-day sacrifice. It is not something we lose, but rather something that we set aside, and dedicate to sacred purposes. Throughout the scriptures—even during the time when animal sacrifices were still performed under the Law of Moses—the sacrifice the people understood to be most acceptable to the Lord was not an animal, but one’s Self—a sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. The psalms they sang during their temple services acknowledged the principle.

34 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psalm 34:18).

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalm 51:16-17).<sup>106</sup>

Because much of the Old Testament was either written or edited after the Babylonian captivity, during a time of apostasy, the Old Testament does not give us a full understanding of the Law of Moses.<sup>107</sup> However, one of the great blessings of the Book of Mormon is that it contains the pure religion that was practiced in conjunction with the Temple of Solomon under the Law of Moses.

<sup>105</sup>Lundquist, “Common Temple Ideology,” 59.

<sup>106</sup>See D&C 56:17-20, 3 Nephi 9:19-20, D&C 59:8.

<sup>107</sup>For a discussion of the Jewish apostasy see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 47-65.

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Like so many other things, the Book of Mormon gives us a context into which to put this idea of sacrificing one's Self. Lehi taught:

7 Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered (2 Nephi 2:7).

Nephi expanded that meaning when he incorporated the concept into his psalm:

31 O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?

32 May the gates of hell be shut continually before me, because that my heart is broken and my spirit is contrite! O Lord, wilt thou not shut the gates of thy righteousness before me, that I may walk in the path of the low valley, that I may be strict in the plain road! (2 Nephi 4:31-32)

Six hundred years latter, when the Lord spoke out of the darkness to the Nephites, he said,

18 I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

19 And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

20 And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 9:18-20).

As in much of the Savior's ministry, he used their understanding of the psalms as a foundation for his teachings. This practice also gives us the advantage of understanding what is meant by many of the Savior's teachings in the Book of Mormon. In the ancient world, the heart was the seat of our intellect as well as of our emotions.<sup>108</sup> Nibley and Rhodes explain:

That for the Egyptians the heart was "the seat of all human existence." "It represents," wrote Adriaan de Buck, "the totality of life and the manifestations of life, the essence and personality of every man." It is the most intimate part of the individual "the center

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108Strong, # 3820.

of life, ...the seat of feeling and intellect, of decision-making and conscience.”<sup>109</sup>

That is important. In our current-day usage, the brain is the seat of our intellect and the heart is the center of our emotions. But that was not true in the ancient scriptures. In the Old Testament the heart did the things our brains do. If one got a great idea, his head did not feel any differently, rather, the enthusiasm for the idea was felt in our chest. Therefore, the intellect was thought to be there, in the heart. In Old Testament usage, they thought in the heart (Genesis 6:5-6) and made decisions in their hearts (Genesis 8:21).

Both memory (Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:5-6) and imagination (Genesis 8:21) happened in the heart. Integrity was a function of the heart (Genesis 20:6; Exodus 25:2, 35:5), as was wisdom. (Exodus 36:2) They prayed in their hearts. (Genesis 24:45)

The heart was also the seat of the emotions—all emotions except pity and empathy. If you saw a puppy dog hit by a car, you would feel it right in the pit of your stomach, and so it was with them. Thus the phrase, “bowels of mercy” acknowledges that the emotions of pity and empathy are found there in the center of our being.

The emotions of the heart ranged from laughter (Genesis 17:17) and gladness (Exodus 4:14), to sorrow (Leviticus 26:16) and discouragement (Numbers 32:7-9); fear (Genesis 42:28, 45:26), to hatred and the desire for revenge (Genesis 27:41, Exodus 4:21, Leviticus 19:17).

The most important function of the heart was this:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (Deuteronomy 6:5).

The interesting thing about that scripture is that Moses made a distinction between the heart, which is the seat of our physical intellect and emotions, and our soul, which in ancient Israelite religion had an intellect and experienced emotions of its own.<sup>110</sup> When the Lord said we must sacrifice a broken heart and a contrite spirit, he was making that same distinction—the heart, the physical seat of our emotions and intellect, and the spirit, the seat on our spiritual intellect and emotion.

If almost all of our academic and emotional attitudes reside in our physical heart, then we must ask, “What is a broken heart—what does ‘broken’ mean?”

“Broken” means broken. If a plastic pot falls from a shelf and hits the ground, it has enough cohesive strength to retain its

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<sup>109</sup>Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Deseret Book and FARMS, 2010). Their second quote is from Erika Feucht.

<sup>110</sup>For Abinadi’s discussion of the dualism in each individual see Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord* (2011 edition), 500-01

shape, and it remains a pot. However if a clay pot falls from the shelf, it shatters—is broken—is no longer a pot—but has become only disassembled bits of clay potsherds. That happened because the clay pot did not hold its parts together: breaking was a function of the pot, not of the ground it collided with. How does that apply to the sacrifice of a broken heart? Very simply: If our attitudes (either intellectual or emotional) are as well established as the plastic pot there is no place for change. Then prejudice, bigotry, and academic pride get in the way of repentance and testimony—and so preclude us from becoming a part of the kingdom of God. If our heart is broken, then there are no ideas or prejudices in this world that are so important that we cannot let them go if the Holy Ghost teaches they are wrong. A broken heart is a necessary prerequisite to repentance, to intellectual growth, and to personal perfection.

“Spirit” means spirit. It is that part of our Self that gives animation and life to our body and eternal continuity to our cognizance and personality.

“Contrite,” as we usually use it, means to be downcast or subdued, but that is only part of its meaning. In both Hebrew and English, the word means to be pulverized, turned to dust. Contrite is what happens to the clay pot if it is beaten with a hammer, or to wood if it is attacked by sandpaper, or to our foot when a poorly fitting shoe rubs on it until it becomes blistered and develops a raw sore.

Broken is a function of the pot itself, but contrite is the kind of breaking that requires something else to beat it to dust. Contrite is what happens to the soul of a parent who is hurt by the words of a rebellious child, but who absorbs the pain and loves the child as though the pain were never delivered. It is being kind when no kindness is given in return. It is standing between the gossip and the person gossiped about. It is being:

...willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light...to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life— (Mosiah 18:8b-9).

It is taking onto one's Self someone else's pain—sometimes even the consequences of someone else's sin.

In terms of the Savior's Atonement, a broken heart was what happened to him on the cross when everything he held dear in this world was taken away, even though legions of angels might have prevented his losing anything he wanted to keep. A contrite spirit was what happen to him in the Garden when his taking upon himself our pains and our sins nearly crushed his mighty soul.

We are required to sacrifice a broken heart and contrite

spirit, that is, we are required to do—within the limits of our mortal ability—the same thing the Savior did: let no treasured thing, or favorite bit of academia, or prejudicial attitude stand between our Self and our covenant responsibilities and relationships (*hesed*); and whenever possible and appropriate absorb the pains and sorrows—even the sins—of others through the power and integrity of our own love. But there is one further implication rooted in the notion of this sacrifice.

The sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (as were the blood sacrifices of the Law) is associated with ancient priesthood covenants and ordinances. That temple relationship is emphasized by the phrase “in righteousness” [*zedek*<sup>111</sup>] in the following verse.

Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (D&C 59:8).

In America, after the Savior had spoken the Beatitudes, he placed that sacrifice in its appropriate temple setting:

19. And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.

20. Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (3 Nephi 12: 19-20)

Just as animal sacrifices had to be made with proper priesthood authority and in the correct places, so this sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit also must be made in conjunction with priesthood ordinances performed in righteousness—enabling us to come to where He is.

15 Behold, when ye shall rend that veil of unbelief which doth cause you to remain in your awful state of wickedness, and hardness of heart, and blindness

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<sup>111</sup>Righteousness is translated from the Hebrew word *zedek*, as in Melchizedek which means king of righteousness. *Zedek* means correct, precise, square. The same word, only spelled Zadok was the name of the high priest who anointed Solomon to be king, and presided over the Temple at Jerusalem. After that, until the high priesthood became a political appointment, descendants of Zadok were the only legitimate high priests. So the word *zedek* not only means correct, but also has a highpriestly connotation that might mean “temple correct.”

of mind, then shall the great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world from you—yea, when ye shall call upon the Father in my name, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel.(Ether 4: 15)

The ultimate acceptable sacrifice to the Lord is our broken heart and a contrite spirit. Even though no three dimensional sacrificial altar can be found between the covers of the Book of Mormon, the book remains the best place where can be taught the meaning of a broken heart and contrite spirit. No one who has read the Book of Mormon with prayer and real intent will question the book's power to transport his soul to the sacred space where he can make that sacrifice.