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## KnoWhy #467 - Why Does the Book of Mormon Say We Must Worship God with Our Whole Soul?

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**Abstract:** The phrase “whole soul” appears seven times in the Book of Mormon and seems to be an important concept in the text. However, when read in light of the Old Testament, this phrase teaches us about dedicating ourselves to God. Omni 1:26 encourages all people to offer their “whole souls as an offering” to God. This statement relates to the Law of Moses, and is a reminder that we should give ourselves as an offering to the Lord through a life on consecrated service. We should give ourselves to God symbolically, as animals were literally offered up to God under the Law of Moses.

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Photograph taken by Daniel Smith

## WHY DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON SAY WE MUST WORSHIP GOD WITH OUR WHOLE SOUL?

“Ye must bow down before him, and worship him with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul.”

2 Nephi 25:29

### THE KNOW

In 2 Nephi 25:29 we learn that we must worship Christ with all our “might, mind, and strength” and our “whole soul.” The phrase “whole soul” appears seven times in the Book of Mormon and seems to be an important concept in the text.<sup>1</sup> At first, it is hard to know exactly what this phrase might mean. However, when read in light of the Old Testament, this phrase teaches us about dedicating ourselves to God.

One way to understand how we can to give our “whole souls” to God comes from Omni 1:26. This verse encourages all people to come unto Christ and offer their “whole souls as an offering unto him.” This is similar to an ancient Jewish text which states that when someone gave a grain offering, God would “account it as though he had offered his own soul to Me”.<sup>2</sup> This invokes the image of giving ourselves to God as though we were putting ourselves on the altar and consecrating ourselves to Him.

## THE WHY

This connection is strengthened by other uses of the phrase *whole soul* in the Book of Mormon. Enos 1:9 and Mosiah 26:14 state that people *poured out* their whole souls to God. As used in the Book of Mormon, this refers to a person praying fervently to God. However, it can be understood in another way as well. The idea of a person pouring out their whole soul makes sense when understood in light of the grain offering. As an essential part of this offering, the worshipper had to “pour” oil onto the pile of flour (Leviticus 2:2).<sup>3</sup> Thus, a person pouring out their soul to God fits with the imagery of the grain offering.

There is another sacrifice in the Law of Moses that helps to explain the idea of offering your *whole soul* to God. Leviticus 1 describes a sacrifice that the King James Translation calls a “burnt offering,” but which can also be translated as a “whole offering.”<sup>4</sup> This is because the priest would offer up the entire animal as a burnt offering, rather than saving some of the meat as food, as they were sometimes required to do.<sup>5</sup> The command in Omni 1:26 to “offer your whole souls as an offering” to God may connect to this type of burnt offering. Just as the whole animal was offered, we are to offer our “whole souls” to God.

Deuteronomy 6 may also help to explain what this phrase means. Nephi’s statement that you must worship Christ “with all your might, mind, and strength, and your whole soul” is similar to Deuteronomy 6:5: “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” The phrase “all thy soul” could also be translated as “your whole soul,” exactly the same phrase that appears in the Book of Mormon.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that loving God with all our might, mind, and strength is part of how we can worship God with our “whole soul.”

This interpretation is supported by Words of Mormon 1:18, which states that, “king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.” This verse states that King Benjamin *worked* with all his might and his whole soul in order to bring peace. As in 2 Nephi 25:29, working with all your might is part of worshipping with all your might and dedicating your whole soul to the work of God.

God commands us to dedicate our “whole souls” to Him because He is willing to do the same for us. In Jeremiah 32:41 God states, “I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.” We are asked to symbolically put ourselves on the altar and offer ourselves to God, but Christ literally “offereth himself a sacrifice for sin” (2 Nephi 2:7) for all of us through his atoning death.<sup>7</sup> In His life, He gave all the faculties of His “might, mind, and strength” for us, and dedicated the energies of His “whole soul” to other people and to God.

Giving our *whole souls* to God in whatever small ways that we can, brings us closer to Him. As Brigham Young stated, “When the will, passions and feelings of a person are perfectly submissive to God and his requirements, that person is sanctified. It is for my will to be swallowed up in the will of God, that will lead me into all good, and crown me ultimately with immortality and eternal lives.”<sup>8</sup>

In relation to offering ourselves to God, Neal A. Maxwell stated, “We tend to think of consecration in terms of property and money ... but there are various ways of ‘keeping back part,’ and these ways are worthy of your and my pondering.”<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, “there are a lot of things we can refuse to put on the altar. This refusal may occur even after one has given a great deal.”<sup>10</sup> Sometimes, “we may mistakenly think, for instance, having done so much, that surely it is all right to hold back the remaining part of something. Obviously, there can be no complete submissiveness when this occurs.”<sup>11</sup>

He continued, referring to Mosiah 15:7, “as I have thought about consecration, it has seemed to me that ... it’s related to the Atonement in a way that is quite profound. ... Perhaps the ultimate demand made by discipleship [is our] willingness to have ourselves and our wills ‘swallowed up’ in the will of our Father.”<sup>12</sup>

Elder Maxwell also offered a caution, “There’s an almost infinite variety in the number of ways you and I can hold back a portion.”<sup>13</sup> One individual, “might be very giving as to money, or in even serving as to time, and yet hold back a portion of himself or herself.”<sup>14</sup> Another person “might share many talents,

but hold back ... a pet grievance, keeping himself from surrendering that grievance where resolution might occur.”<sup>15</sup> Yet others “hold back by not allowing themselves to appear totally and fully committed to the Kingdom, lest they incur the disapproval of a particular group wherein their consecration might be disdained.”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, “some give of themselves significantly, but not fully and unreservedly.”<sup>17</sup>

May we all give of ourselves, “fully and unreservedly” and offer our “whole souls” as an offering to God, remembering that He has offered Himself for us.

## FURTHER READING

Daniel C. Peterson, “[Elder Neal A. Maxwell on Consecration, Scholarship, and the Defense of the Kingdom](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): vii–xix.

Neal A. Maxwell, “[Discipleship and Scholarship](#),” *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992): 5–9.

Gary R. Whiting, “[The Testimony of Amaleki](#),” in *Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 4, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 299–301.

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## NOTES

1. See 2 Nephi 25:29; Enos 1:9; Omni 1:26; Words of Mormon 1:18; Mosiah 2:20–21; 26:14.
2. See b. Menah 104b, referred to in Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary, Volume 3 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 179.
3. See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 179.
4. See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 172–173.
5. See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 172–173.
6. The King James version of [Jeremiah 32:41](#) renders this Hebrew phrase as “whole soul.”
7. Book of Mormon Central, “[How the Law of Moses Teaches about the Atonement](#) (Alma 34:14),” *KnoWhy* 424 (April 12, 2018).
8. *Journal of Discourses* 2:123 (1853).
9. Daniel C. Peterson, “[Elder Neal A. Maxwell on Consecration, Scholarship, and the Defense of the Kingdom](#),” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): xv. This article was published in abridged form in Neal A. Maxwell, “[Discipleship and Scholarship](#),” *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992): 5–9.
10. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xv.

11. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xv–xvi.
12. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xvi.
13. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xvi.
14. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xvi.
15. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xvi.
16. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xvii.
17. Peterson, “[Consecration](#),” xvii.