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Independent Faith

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Abstract: Relates his conversion relative to the Book of Mormon and explains how he applied the instructions to Oliver Cowdery to himself (D&C 8-9) when he was commissioned to translate the Book of Mormon into Japanese.

Independent Faith.

By Alma O. Taylor.

Paul says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." He also indicates that faith is a gift of God. He further declares that faith, as a special quality of some men, is one of the gifts of the Spirit. It is, then, not the outward experience so much as the Divine influence operating upon the light within that creates faith in the human heart. Experience alone will never produce faith. "Man by his own researches cannot find out God." But experience and serious research are the factors which prepare the way for the Divine revelation; they are the environment best suited to the bestowal of the Divine gift.

It is as much the mission of the Comforter to impart faith as it is for Him to give knowledge. Any feeling or conviction relative to Divine truth that is not created in our minds and hearts by the witness of the Spirit as we contemplate truth, cannot endure, for such is not the "Living faith" that bears perennial peace. Thus miracles, oratory, and profound human reasoning, unaccompanied by the voice of the Holy Spirit, never have and never will create in man a vital, eternally persisting faith. Earthly eloquence and beauty, impressive to the eye and pleasing to the ear of man, are as the mists of morn before the sun when compared with the eloquence and beauty of the Infinite when He speaks to our souls.

The witness of the Spirit, not the testimony of men, is the only sure basis of what we call independent faith—faith independent of the interposition of any human agency—

faith that is fed and sustained by the direct ministrations of the Spirit of Truth. I do not mean to infer that dependent faith has no place in life, for I acknowledge its need and potency where independent faith does not exist; it will lead to independent faith if persistently maintained.

An illustration of this thought appears in my own life. But had the editors not requested the recital, I would not impose my personal experiences upon the reader.

From childhood I heard the story of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Numerous testimonies to the divinity of Mormonism fell upon my ears and remained in my heart during the period of youth. I took an active part in the priesthood quorums and auxiliary associations. I never knew what the inside of a public school building looked like. I was educated in schools where Mormonism was the guiding light and all instruction given in harmony with its principles. This training and environment gave me a fair knowledge of the religion of my parents. Indeed, I became conscious of the fact that I was a Latter-day Saint, not only because I was born of Mormon parents and reared under Mormon influences, but because the study of Mormon doctrine had satisfied my mind regarding its rationality. By birth or nature I was a Mormon. By conviction of mind I was a Mormon. Among my experiences I counted several miracles wrought in the name of Jesus. I was often thrilled with the eloquence and logic of our religious champions. Still, now and again, with unwelcome

suddenness, I was harrowed with the thought: "Your faith is more sentimental than real. It moves in the current of others' faith, but contributes no force to the current. Yours is a carried faith, it walks not on its own legs." And yet, like the apostle who answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life," I could see no anchorage outside of Mormonism. So when the call came for me to take a mission, I responded cheerfully, and went forth with the hope that teaching Mormonism to others would be the exercise needed to vitalize my faith and make my belief as independent and sure as the belief of many venerable men and women in the Church.

On one occasion, while addressing an interested audience, my words seemed to run ahead of my thoughts and in positive, unmistakable terms I declared the divinity of Joseph Smith's call and the Messiahship of Jesus. But suddenly I became conscious of the assurance with which I was speaking, and began to doubt my right to attempt, in truth, such absolute declarations. But a voice, audible to my spirit, dispelled the doubt and witnessed, "Thou hast spoken the truth." Immediately the inner light seemed to burn brighter and I felt joy multiply in my heart. This testimony of the Spirit seemed to start my faith to walk alone and awakened my soul to the Divine influence. From this time on I knew a stronger faith in prayer and a less wavering faith in testimony. I did not feel again the chide, "You believe only because others believe," but I felt, "I believe though all other men may disbelieve."

I was called by the mission president and set apart to translate the Book of Mormon into Japanese. The work was fearful in its magnitude, but I loved the book, its doc-

trines, and its characters, so rejoiced exceedingly in my appointment. Before the decision to translate it had been reached, I fasted and prayed much for the day to be hastened. After the decision, I continued my fasting and prayer in the hope that God would help me, for my consciousness of the responsibility upon me was heavier than the work itself. At first, I asked for the gift of tongues, but this desire grew weaker as I contemplated and experienced the far greater blessing of the silent, faith-developing testimony of the Spirit. What this testimony is can best be explained by quoting the word of the Lord, through Joseph Smith, to Oliver Cowdery when the latter was asking for power to translate. The Lord said:

"Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which have been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit; yea, behold I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. Now, behold, this is the Spirit of revelation."

And again, after Oliver's failure, the Lord continues:

"Behold, I say unto you, my son, that because you did not translate according to that which you desired of me, and did commence again to write for my servant, Joseph Smith, Jr., even so I would that ye should continue. * * * Do not murmur, my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner. Behold, you have not understood: you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you

took no thought, save it was to ask me; but, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right, I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right, you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing that is wrong: therefore, ye cannot write that which is sacred, save it be given you from me."

This telling, by the Lord, through the Holy Ghost unto the mind and heart of the translator, this burning of the bosom within when the translation is correct, and the absence of the Spirit's burnings and the appearance of a stupor of thought when the translation is erroneous, are the witnesses, silent and faith-giving, which I learned to seek rather than any miraculous power. Perhaps my desires were righteous, as God, through His Spirit, did reveal the meaning of His word to me, and cause, at times, my bosom to burn with peace and satisfaction, and again, at times, to be irritated with doubt and questions. And these unpeaceful, dissatisfied feelings were not always easily replaced with the burning bosom. Sometimes long months and years of prayer, deep study and earnest research were necessary before the satisfying

witness of the Spirit came. These operations of the Spirit upon me and my work gave greater independence to my faith and increased the light of my understanding.

Aside from this, there was another way in which my faith was intensified. Often, when translating the sermons in the Book of Mormon or when studying the narrative of the remarkable incidents in the history, I have entirely forgotten the translation work, and have been so completely drawn to the scene of the text, that I seemed to experience the very presence and spirit of the characters. Especially in the consideration of sermons upon Gospel principles, was I favored with the Spirit's light to the extent that unbidden tears of joy and gratitude often filled my eyes, and an imperishable conviction of the truth and divinity of the record was engraved into my very being. The result is that I do no longer feel dependent upon the testimony of any human being for my faith in the Book of Mormon—I know that the Holy Ghost has borne me direct witness, and all questions as to the how of the original translation, and the wherefore of this or that in relation to the coming forth of the record are lost in the vision of the glorious reality of it all.

