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## Second Principle: One Must Learn How to Recognize the Feeling That Identifies the Holy Ghost

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## **SECOND PRINCIPLE:**

### **ONE MUST LEARN HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE FEELING THAT IDENTIFIES THE HOLY GHOST**

#### **JOSEPH MEETS MORONI**

Joseph was almost eighteen years old when he met Moroni. It was a Sunday evening in September 1823, three and a half years after the First Vision. Perhaps inadvertently, Joseph told a great deal about those years when he recorded that on that Sunday evening he began his prayer with “full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation.” (J.S.-History 1:29).

Whatever else he had done in those years, he had been preparing himself, and he now felt ready for additional instruction from the heavens. And—and this is important—it was he who, responding to the Spirit, recognized that he was ready, and it was he who asked. Asking questions—especially when the Spirit suggests the questions—is a necessary prelude to knowing the answers.

The rest of the family had already gone to bed when Joseph knelt to pray. As he prayed, he noticed the darkness of his room gradually displaced by a light that grew brighter and brighter until his little room was “lighter than at noonday” (JS-H 1:30). Within the light he saw an angel standing in the air beside his bed.

[The angel wore] a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had ever seen.... Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning.” (J.S.-History 1:31-32).

That was a more dramatic answer to Joseph’s prayer than he had expected—or else it was just that there was something really awesome about the angel. Joseph’s first reaction was to be afraid. But when Moroni spoke, Joseph’s fear went away and their friendship began. (J.S.-History 1:32).

## **WHO WAS MORONI?**

We need to stop here, freeze time at the moment Moroni stood before Joseph and ask ourselves: “Who were these two men whose lives were separated by about 1,400 years, but whose missions were so tightly interwoven by the responsibilities the Lord had given them? How much did they know about each other?”

Part of that second question can be handled very readily. Because Joseph chose to tell very little about the First Vision and almost nothing about what had occurred to make him confident that he would receive an answer when he knelt to pray that night, one does not know whether Joseph knew anything at all about Moroni. But the other part of that question, “How much did Moroni know about Joseph?” has a very different answer.

Since before his own death, more than 1400 years earlier, Moroni had read the record that identified Joseph by name,<sup>28</sup> and had looked forward to this time when they could work together.

As a young man, Moroni may have spent much of his time watching or even helping his father, Mormon, prepare the Book of Mormon. When Moroni wrote the conclusion of the Book of Mormon, he had been so aware of the person who would eventually translate his writings that he actually wrote a short note to him. Moroni was then abridging the book of Ether and had just finished explaining that the brother of Jared had seen a vision of the whole history of the world. (Ether 3:26). To that explanation he added, “I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw.” (Ether 4:4). Then, Moroni penned this note to the future prophet:

1 And now I, Moroni, have written the words which were commanded me, according to my memory; and I have told you the things which I have sealed up; therefore touch them not in order that ye may translate; for that thing is forbidden you, except by and by it shall be wisdom in God.

2 And behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist to bring forth this work;

3 And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God; wherefore they shall know of a surety that these things are true.

4 And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established; and the testimony of three, and this work, in the which shall be shown forth the power of God and also his word, of which the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost bear record—and all this shall stand as a testimony against the world at the last day. (Ether 5:1-4).

Moroni had devoted the last part of his own life to completing the book and hiding it where Joseph could find it. After his death, Moroni remained responsible for the plates, waiting for the time when he could turn them over to young Joseph.

Moroni obviously knew the scriptures about Joseph's mission; he quoted many of them to Joseph during their interview that night. The Book of Mormon itself contains several. Among them are rather general ones that tell about the last days; more specific ones that tell about the coming together of the scriptures of Joseph and Judah and the story of Martin Harris going to Professor Anthon; and very specific ones which deal with Joseph himself: "Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (J.S.-History 1:38).

Moroni would have known all of that about the young prophet, but it seems likely that he knew much, much more. It seems to me that in the spirit world they would have discussed their missions at great length.<sup>29</sup> The difference now was that Moroni could remember those conversations and Joseph could not.

So when one considers what Moroni must have known, one also wonders what he must have felt and what he was thinking as he stood there, looking down at that seventeen-year-old boy who was kneeling beside his bed, full of wonder—a little bit afraid—and trying to discover if the angel was friendly.

### **MORONI'S MESSAGE TO JOSEPH**

Moroni introduced himself and told the young man that God had a work for him to do. The beginnings of that work would focus on ancient records written on plates of gold. They contained the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and were buried in a hill near Joseph's home. Joseph would also find the Urim and Thummim which would help the young and untrained prophet translate the Book of Mormon and receive and understand revelations from God.

Moroni then recited a number of prophecies from the Bible that foretold Joseph's work in restoring the gospel, gathering Israel, and establishing the latter-day kingdom of God. Some of these scriptures Joseph identified in his history. Others he concealed behind these words: "He quoted many other passages of scripture, and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here."<sup>30</sup>

After reciting the scriptures, and apparently while speaking within the context of their explanation, Moroni gave Joseph a stern warning. Joseph recalled, "He told me;... I should not show them to any person...only to those to

whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed.”<sup>31</sup>

While Moroni was telling Joseph about the plates, he showed him where they were hidden. Joseph saw in vision the Hill Cumorah and the place near its top where he would find a box made of stone and cement. Its lid was a rounded stone, shaped like a turtle shell and partly exposed above the ground. The treasures were in the box.

After the angel had delivered his message, the light gathered around him. Then Joseph saw “a conduit open right up into heaven.” The angel ascended through that conduit of light until he passed from view. The room was then as dark as it had been before.

Joseph lay there thinking about his visitor and what the angel had said, when his room began to fill with light again. Moroni returned and reviewed everything he had told Joseph.

This time when the angel left, Joseph was wide awake. As he lay there thinking, his room filled with light a third time. Moroni appeared and repeated it all again, adding this warning: Satan was aware of the importance of Joseph’s mission and would try to divert him by calling his attention to the worth of the gold. Therefore, the angel commanded, Joseph was not even to think about using the plates to get rich.<sup>32</sup>

As Moroni left the third time, the rooster crowed. That primitive but effectual alarm clock told Joseph that the three visitations from Moroni had lasted the entire night—suggesting that each visit lasted longer than two hours. One

could learn a lot from an angel in two hours. With the Holy Ghost to drive home his message, and with visions (like showing Joseph the box on the hill) as the ultimate visual aids, Moroni must have flooded Joseph's mind with new ideas.

One marvels at the intellect of that young man. The fact that he could assimilate so much new information so quickly, speaks of a quality of genius that leaves one in dizzied admiration.

## **MORONI'S FOURTH VISIT**

Joseph joined his family for breakfast as usual that morning. Then he, his father, and the rest of the older boys went out into the field to work. As the morning passed, Joseph's father noticed that his son seemed tired and weak, and he suggested that Joseph go back to the house to rest. This might have been Joseph's cue, but even though he remembered Moroni's parting instructions "to tell his father all which he had both seen and heard,"<sup>33</sup> he left the field without saying anything about it.

He got as far as the fence, tried to climb over it, lost his strength altogether, and fell to the ground. He lay there, under the shade of an apple tree, until he was aroused by Moroni's voice.<sup>34</sup>

"Why did you not tell your father?" the angel wanted to know.

Joseph replied that he was afraid his father would not believe him.

“He will believe every word you say to him,” was the angel’s response. Then, for the fourth time, Moroni repeated everything he had told Joseph the night before, including the vision and the warning. He told the boy to go back to the field where his father was and to tell him what he should have told him already.<sup>35</sup> This time Joseph obeyed.

When his story was finished, Joseph Smith Sr. told his son that “it was of God,” and urged him to go to the hill where the plates were hidden and do whatever else the angel instructed him to do.<sup>36</sup>

Joseph left the field again. This time he went directly toward the Hill Cumorah. Oliver Cowdery later wrote the story as Joseph told it to him. Joseph said that as he walked, he began to think about the plates, but more especially about the gold.<sup>37</sup> When he got nearer the hill, “it seemed as though two invisible powers” were contending with each other to see which could “influence his mind.” When he arrived at his destination, his struggle abated—but not in victory, for Joseph had lost the battle: when he found the half-buried box, he had “a fixed determination to obtain [the gold] and aggrandize himself.”<sup>38</sup> He had decided to sell the plates.

## **JOSEPH FINDS THE PLATES**

Joseph easily recognized the large, turtle-shaped stone concealing the golden treasure. He moved the soil from

around its edges; then, using a lever, he lifted the lid and saw the gleaming book.<sup>39</sup> Its pages measured about eight by ten inches and were about as thick as “common tin.” Ancient Egyptian-like writing had been engraved into each page, evincing the skill of the prophets who had cut the words into the metal. The pages were bound together by three gold rings, making a volume about six inches thick. Part was sealed, and Joseph would never be permitted to open those pages.<sup>40</sup> Beside the plates in the box lay the Urim and Thummim, which appeared to be two large diamonds set in a rim of silver bows and fastened to a breastplate.<sup>41</sup>

Joseph looked for a moment and then reached down to pick up the book of gold. When his hands touched it, he received a severe shock. Surprised and weakened, he tried again. Again he was shocked and rendered weaker than before. He decided this must be some device used by the angel to protect the plates; but then Joseph was strong and able, and just now he was very determined. He seized upon the plates with all his strength. This time the shock was so severe that he was hurled backward onto the ground. He lay there, stunned, but more puzzled than injured.

“Why can I not obtain this book?” he wondered aloud, even though he saw no one who might answer him.

“Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord.”<sup>42</sup> Moroni was standing there, looking down at him—still talking about obedience.

A clear recollection of the angel’s warnings came rushing in upon Joseph’s consciousness as he realized that he had done something terribly wrong.

At that instant he looked to the Lord in prayer, and as he prayed darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul was lit up as it was the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit; and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy: the heavens were opened and the glory of the Lord shone round about and rested upon him.<sup>43</sup>

“Look,” the angel commanded. Joseph saw a vision of himself, as he had walked toward the hill only a few minutes before. He watched as “the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates,” accompanied Joseph along the road and up the hill. The devil had spoken to his consciousness, and what had seemed to Joseph to be only the wanderings of his mind began to focus on the gold and then on the money it might bring. After seeing that vision, Joseph understood how the promised glitter of the gold had come to outshine his memory of the glory of the angel. Moroni explained,

All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one.<sup>44</sup>

## **MORONI SHOWS JOSEPH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL**

Moroni insisted that Joseph must never forget the difference between the feelings associated with the prompting of the devil and the feelings associated with the prompting of the Holy Ghost. He said that Satan “fills the hearts of men with evil,” and teaches them “to walk in darkness.” Moroni also explained, “the way of holiness is peace and rest.”<sup>45</sup>

The contrast was clear. There are three sources of the thoughts that seem to just pop into one’s head. The first is simply one’s Self. Some thoughts may be memories or a conglomerate of the things one has seen or read or experienced. The mind has the incredible ability to remember such things almost at will and sometimes to gather them in fresh bouquets and arrange them into what seem to be wholly new ideas. These sudden insights are often called “inspiration.” The feeling of exhilaration when that happens is something that has to be experienced, for it cannot be described, but it is wonderful.

The second source of one’s ideas is the devil. Those insidious notions are not so wonderful. They leave one frightened or angry or ill at ease—or prompt the more dangerous feelings of greed, thirst for power, or the need to get even. While these may come from one’s own mind, they may also be, like Joseph’s desire for gold, ideas planted by the devil. If so, one can always identify them by the dark feelings that accompany them.

The third source of ideas is the Holy Ghost. The feeling that identifies the Holy Ghost is like a harmony of one's most cherished senses of well-being: love, peace, and security all blended as one. Yet it is different from any of those. It "tastes" differently from the others—just as the taste of an orange is different from the taste of a strawberry or an apple. If one were asked to describe the tastes of those fruits, one would use the same words to describe each: "sweet, perhaps a bit tangy, very good." The words do not describe the differences: one must taste the fruits to know they differ from one another. But after one has tasted them, one can easily tell them apart. The feeling that is associated with the Holy Ghost is like that. With a little practice, one can easily recognize it and can distinguish it from any emotional feeling one might have—and fortunately, there is a way to practice. The Holy Ghost testifies that the Book of Mormon is true, so one of the very best ways to practice identifying it, is to read the Book of Mormon, pray, and pay very close attention to one's feelings as one is taught the truth of individual passages and ideas in the scripture.

The Holy Ghost is important for at least four reasons:

(1) He can be trusted all the time, whereas one's emotions cannot.

(2) Because he can be trusted, his influence and the information he gives increases one's options, and therefore enhances one's agency.

(3) He heightens one's ability to experience joy.

(4) He makes repentance effective, and cleanses one from the effects of sin. These do not happen all at once, but

they develop slowly, with faith, repentance, prayer, and practice.

These ideas are so important that they need to be discussed in some detail.

*First: The Holy Ghost can be trusted all the time, whereas one's emotions cannot.*

Because the feeling that identifies the Holy Ghost can not be self-initiated—like happiness or excitement can be when one reads a good book or sees a movie—it cannot be counterfeited by one's own enthusiasm or sincere desire. But we can mis-identify those emotions for the Holy Ghost if we do not know what He feels like. For example, if we want something very badly, pray earnestly to have it, and in our enthusiasm are sure that God shares our desires, we may become convinced the Holy Ghost has answered, "Yes." Then, when one does not get it, one might say, "But I prayed, and I felt good about it." Just feeling good about something is not the same as receiving a revelation. However, when we learn to identify the feeling that is always associated with the Holy Ghost, we also learn to trust that feeling. Then the Holy Ghost becomes a source of strength, as well as of inspiration.

Before Joseph could be secure in his calling as a prophet—one who speaks in behalf of God—he had to learn to sort his ideas by recognizing their sources. He had to know by his feelings, and through his own experiences, whether an idea (or an emotion like joy, reticence, or fear)

was the product of his own mind or a suggestion from the devil or an instruction from the Lord. Until he could know that—unerringly, by being able to identify the feeling that comes from the Holy Ghost—he could not trust his own sense of revelation. Indeed, until he could make those distinctions with absolute certainty he would not really be free to know or to choose.

*Second: Because the Holy Ghost can be trusted, his influence and the information he gives increases options, and enhances agency.*

Freedom to choose can be a reality only when we can distinguish between our choices. If we do not know the source of our ideas, then we cannot know which idea we can trust, because unless we know the source of the ideas from which we may choose, we cannot accurately predict the consequences. If we do not know the consequences, then we are able to exercise no more real freedom of choice than one who is asked to choose when he has been blindfolded. Freedom to guess and freedom to choose are not the same thing. Freedom to guess is being given the right to choose while being denied the criteria upon which one may judge. That is only pretended freedom. It may look like freedom—we may even accept it as freedom—but in reality it is a kind of slavery instead. The inspiration from the Holy Ghost actually gives us freedom to choose. In asserting this, we must acknowledge that the temporary blessings of the Holy Ghost and the permanent gift of the Holy Ghost are not

the same thing, but they are of the same source. Thus, the testimony that comes to a new convert before baptism is as valid and as consistent with truth as the personal revelations received after baptism.

*Third: The Holy Ghost heightens one's ability to experience joy.*

Parley P. Pratt described this better than anyone else ever has:

The gift of the Holy Spirit adapts itself to all these organs or attributes. It quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections; and adapts them, by the gift of wisdom, to their lawful use. It inspires, develops, cultivates and matures all the fine-toned sympathies, joys, tastes, kindred feelings and affections of our nature. It inspires virtue, kindness, goodness, tenderness, gentleness and charity. It develops of person, form and features. It tends to health, vigor, animation and social feeling. It develops and invigorates all the faculties of the physical and intellectual man. It strengthens, invigorates, and gives tone to the nerves. In short, it is, as it were, marrow to the bone, joy to the heart, light to the eyes, music to the ears, and life to the whole being.<sup>46</sup>

*Fourth: The Holy Ghost makes repentance effective, and cleanses one from the effects of sin. These do not happen*

*all at once, but they develop slowly, with faith, repentance, prayer, and practice.*

In the Book of Mormon, Moroni explained:

And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ. (Moroni 6:4).

The cleansing does not happen all at once. It comes slowly, in stages, as one repents. In each stage, the other effects of the Holy Ghost are increased, until, as Moroni wrote,

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:33).

The lesson Joseph learned from that experience on the hill that day was prerequisite to his obtaining the plates—and to his becoming secure in his calling as a prophet. Only after he could, with absolute certainty, recognize different sources of his feelings, could he know when he was speaking and acting as a prophet of God; and only then could God trust him to be His Prophet. Moroni explained to him:

You have now beheld the power of God manifested and the power of Satan: you see that there is nothing that is desirable in the works of darkness; that they cannot bring happiness; that those who are overcome therewith are miserable, while on the other hand the righteous are blessed with a place in the kingdom of God where joy unspeakable surrounds them.<sup>47</sup>

Moroni cautioned that even though Joseph would learn to distinguish between the promptings of the Holy Ghost and those of Satan, this alone would not altogether remove the young prophet from the reach of the devil. The angel warned that notwithstanding Joseph had seen this great display of power, by which he might “ever be able to detect the evil one,” the fact that Joseph knew how to recognize and cope with Satan would not diminish the adversary’s ability to use other people as a tool by which he might hurt the young prophet. Moroni warned:

When it is known that the Lord has shown you these things, the workers of iniquity will seek your overthrow: they will circulate falsehoods to destroy your reputation, and also will seek to take your life; but remember this, if you are faithful, and shall hereafter continue to keep the commandments of the Lord, you shall be preserved to bring these things forth; for in due time he will again give you a commandment to come and take them....

You now see why you could not obtain this record; that the commandment was strict, and that if ever these sacred things are obtained they must be by prayer and faithfulness in obeying the Lord.<sup>48</sup>

That was why Moroni kept talking about obedience!

Before Joseph left the hill, Moroni cautioned him once more: this would not be Satan's last attempt to overwhelm the young prophet. "Forget not to pray, that thy mind may become strong, that when he shall manifest unto thee, thou mayest have power to escape the evil, and obtain these most precious things."<sup>49</sup> Buried in that promise was a loving, fearful warning: there would be a time "when he shall manifest unto thee."

In his first attempt to receive the plates of the Book of Mormon, Joseph was introduced to what would probably be the most important lesson of his life: his power as a prophet lay in his will to obey. Only he himself could choose how he would respond to his diverse feelings. He must be able to recognize their sources in order to choose intelligently and confidently between them.

A prophet must be a person of unbending integrity. But such a quality has little virtue if there is a gap between what is truth and what the prophet perceives to be truth. So, first of all, a prophet must be one who can know, through his own cognizance, that his own ideas, attitudes, and actions square with eternal truth. Then he must have the integrity to *be* what he *knows*.<sup>50</sup>

It may be that the kind of perfection to which each Latter-day Saint aspires will remain out of reach until one can identify with equal certainty the sources of the ideas that seem to just pop into one's head. The enticements of Satan are utterly ineffectual as a weapon against any righteous person who can identify the source of an idea and who,

through that identification, is free to choose whether he will act upon the idea or spurn it.

Before Joseph left the hill, Moroni explained to him that:

the time for bringing them [the plates] forth had not yet arrived...but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates.<sup>51</sup>

“And that I should continue to do so until...” implies that Joseph understood that there would be lessons that he could not learn in just one year. Indeed, it would take four years before Joseph was ready.

Even though Moroni told Joseph he must leave the plates in their box, the young prophet felt secure in what he had learned. Many years later, Joseph’s mother remembered:

While Joseph remained here, the angel showed him, by contrast, the difference between good and evil, and likewise the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to the commandments of God, in such a striking manner, that the impression was always vivid in his memory until the very end of his days; and in giving a relation of this circumstance, not long prior to his death, he remarked, that ever afterwards he was willing to keep the commandments of God.<sup>52</sup>