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Reflections and Revelations on Relationships: A Mother's Perspective

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This discussion is from the perspective of a mother. I would never presume to counsel counselors and therapists. But I would like to discuss the Lord's omnipotence to perceive our needs and His desire to be involved in the growth of His children through parents and therapists. My goal is to share experiences that might deepen our understanding in four important areas:

- How covenant therapists are assisting the Lord in bringing to pass His work and His glory
- How the scriptures can provide therapeutic guidance
- How the Holy Ghost can be a divine resource
- How counselors can help to make the atonement active in the lives of their clients

SEEKING TO ASSIST WITH HIS WORK AND HIS GLORY

How do covenant therapists assist the Lord with the growth of His children? I am here today because of a wise and caring therapist. About 20 years ago, our first child became a teenager. Almost overnight our perfect little daughter became not so perfect, and I panicked. A few years before this time I had worked on a Church committee with a member who was a professional therapist. My husband and I discussed the possibility of going to him. That decision was a major hurdle. No one I knew at that time had ever gone to a "shrink." To me, doing that meant you could not handle your own

problems. But my need surpassed my pride, and we went (humility is great preparation for being taught).

My Children and My Self

We chose this therapist because we knew him and also because he seemed to personify our values. As far as we could tell, he was endeavoring to live his life and nurture his relationships according to the will of the Lord. Our therapist did not waste any time telling me two things that shocked me:

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1. "You've got to get yourself together before you can expect your children to improve." (My internal response was, "Well! This certainly is uncalled-for; I want him to fix my daughter – it's not me that has the problem.")
2. "The controlling home you grew up in isn't working for your children." (My internal thoughts were: "Controlling home? My home was perfect, and so were my parents!")

But these two hard facts were presented with love, compassion, reassurance and hope, so I kept my thoughts to myself and kept coming back for more. It turned out my oldest child was not the problem – I was the problem: I needed to find out who I was, and be secure in that identity before my second child became a teen – or, as the Apostle Paul told his young missionary companion, I needed to "lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come" if I were to have a chance for eternal life (1 Timothy 6:19).

Rudy Giuliani, Mayor of New York City during September 11, 2001, expressed the perspective I was learning when he said:

The event of September 11 affected me more deeply than anything I have ever experienced; but the idea that I somehow became a different person on that day – that there was a pre-Sept 11 Rudy and a wholly other post-Sept 11 Rudy – is not true. I was prepared to handle Sept 11 precisely because I was the same person who had been doing his best to take on challenges my whole career. (Giuliani & Kurson, 2002, p. x)

Now, I am not comparing my difficulties with our second child to the trauma of the Twin Towers – but to me, it felt similar. Our wise and sensitive therapist helped me to be strong, and helped me understand who I was, so that I was somewhat ready for the "attack" of our second child. Thank goodness these children were 10 years apart; I needed all that time to prepare!

Our therapist explained, "You have got to become acquainted with who you are and what you are feeling." At that time I was a wife and mother, PTA President and Gospel Doctrine teacher. He assigned me to tell the people in each of these stewardships how I felt about them and about my position or calling. I remember sitting in the middle of a PTA board meeting and saying to the board, "I would like to tell you how I feel about

you and about being PTA President." My heart was pounding and I felt a little foolish, but I trusted my therapist, and I did it. The people were kind and responsive. I did the same thing in my Sunday school class and with my family. The therapist also counseled me to stop every 2-3 hours during each day and ask myself, "What am I feeling and why am I feeling that way?" At the time I thought this was pretty remedial advice, certainly not life-changing. But I was like Naaman wanting Elisha to perform some astounding miracle instead of simply telling him to wash in the river to be healed (2 Kings 5:11). But over the past 20 years, I have found that what I learned by acting on that simple advice still really helps to ground me.

And I have needed that grounding in order to put my relationship with my children in perspective. Mothers seem to have an inherently disproportionate investment of passion and of potential for guilt when it comes to their children. We become so caught up and emotionally welded to our children that it is difficult to tell where the mother ends and the child begins. Every choice a child makes can determine the mother's actions and reactions if she is not solid in her identity and values. For example, one day in a moment of frustration, I said to our son, "I want you to wear a sign that says, 'I've been taught better!'"

He laughed and said, "You make it, Mom, and I'll wear it!" I have had to learn that my identity and my wholeness do not depend on the behavior or the public image of my children.

My Husband and My Self

Imperfect family conditions are an aspect of a fallen world, and a difficult child can create chaos in the best of families, particularly in the marriage relationship. My husband and I were raised according to entirely different parenting techniques. Ralph's training was "casual, with high expectations." Mine was "controlled, with high expectations." Both approaches seemed to work reasonably well for us – at first. Then along came a child who challenged our mettle – and our marriage. Ralph's laid-back attitude caused me to think, "well, somebody has got to step up to the plate here," so I became much more controlling and manipulative out of fear of what might happen without the strong control that had been a part of my own upbringing. The Apostle Paul told his companion Timothy (2 Timothy 1:7) that fear is not from

God, but power and love and a sound mind are: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." This certainly applies to fearful mothers who may have a tendency to confuse love and power! The more fearful and controlling I became, the more Ralph backed off and eased up, to balance this foray. Consciously or subconsciously, we were working against each other in our common concern for our children. It was time to revisit our therapist.

Again our therapist understood what was happening and had the courage to tell us. He told Ralph to step up the level of control as a father and a husband. He told me to "chill-out" and quit being a "control freak." He didn't use those words, but I got the message. We took this hard medicine because we were desperate, and because we trusted him. Trusting our therapist was the first thing we had agreed on in months! He was the neutral compass for negotiating three separate disoriented individuals (mom, dad, and son) through the stormy sea of a very troubled relationship.

As precarious as we felt, we never got the impression that our therapist felt frantic or did not have ideas to help us. There was no double-mindedness in him. He was focused on us and was very clear about his role: he had to be the strong one. We were intense – our world was falling down around us. He would lean back in his chair or roll his chair right next to us, listening with his heart and his mind. He took us carefully from our slippery position to higher ground. Then he would tell a joke or get us to laugh at ourselves; he would say, "Sharon, the next time you have an urge to lecture your son, go in the bathroom and lecture the towels! Ralph, if you can't think of anything positive to say, tell him he has nice elbows!"

The help the therapist gave us was not merely additive, it was logarithmic. We could no longer justify our individual actions because of each other's actions or inactions. Our therapist was not hesitant in telling us what we were doing wrong and how we would have to change. We were grateful to know that there were reasons we were having difficulty. He was patient and only gave us a little to work on each time. These assignments brought us together, strengthening our individual self-reliance and reinforcing the unity of our marriage. He gave us hope that someday our son would come around – and in the meantime, that we could handle the wait and trust the process.

When our son was about 16 or 17, the therapist said he was very immature (he met with the boy a few times before our son quit going). He said our son would probably grow up (mature) around the age of 25 or so. I saw the therapist about a year ago and reported that nothing much had changed. He said, "Oh, well, he may not grow up until he's about 30."

I hit his chest and yelled, "You told me 25!"

He said, "OK, OK – 25!"

You LDS therapists and psychologists help us in the process of becoming whole. You are helping us to prepare spiritual and emotional reservoirs to carry us through the 9-11's of our mortal relationships. The resulting strength enables healthy and happy social relationships to continue for eternity. As LDS therapists, you are better equipped to help than any other therapists in the world because you not only have all the theories and studies available, you also have the scriptures and the Holy Ghost. As C.S. Lewis¹ said:

It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world [i.e., Heaven], that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven, and you will get earth "thrown in": aim at earth and you will get neither. (Lewis, 1943, p. 118)

When you consider the scriptures and ask for guidance from the Holy Ghost, you can contribute so much more, because you look to Heaven – not earth alone – to find truth.

APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES TO HELP INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Considering the scriptures, we see abundant evidence that the Lord and His prophets knew the principles of psychology and relationships long before Freud (1856-1939) or Frankl (1905-1997). Let's consider a few examples.

Wise Individuals

Remember when Lehi's sons went back to Jerusalem (1 Nephi 5) to get the brass plates and Sariah became frantic? From her perspective, four of her sons were either back in that wicked city or possibly worse, had perished in the wilderness; all she knew was that they had been gone a long time on a very dangerous errand –

at least it seemed like a long time to her as a mother. She panicked, in about the same way I used to panic when I didn't know where my son was or what he was doing: she turned on Lehi, blaming him as I used to blame my husband about his easy-going attitude. But they did not have a friendly therapist close at hand, so their relationship could have become precarious. But Lehi obviously knew how to handle a distraught mother: when Sariah was blaming him, telling him he was a "visionary" man and questioning why they had left their beautiful home in Jerusalem to wander in the wilderness, Lehi avoided being defensive. What did he do? He comforted her: instead of defending himself, he gave her what she needed – comfort and reassurance. I can see Lehi hugging his wife and saying, "dear Sariah, you are right – I am a visionary man, and because of that we will not be destroyed in Jerusalem. And I know the Lord will deliver our sons safely back to us" (see 1 Nephi 5). When I read that account, I want to cheer for Lehi. He knew how to listen with compassion and concern.

Another scripture that enlightens our therapeutic experience is in what has been referred to as the "Psalm of Nephi" in 2 Nephi 4. The relationship between Nephi and his two older brothers was a constant vexation for him; in fact, we know eventually the Lord told Nephi he would need to take his people and leave. But in this chapter, Nephi is lamenting and feeling unworthy because he is so angry. Then he stops – like my therapist asked me to do – and asks himself, "Why am I feeling this way? Why am I so angry?" He realizes he has been blaming his brothers for his anger (although most of us might think that being tied up, threatened with death, and ridiculed could be adequate justification for anger). But when he vocalizes his feelings, Nephi understands. He is angry with himself for the way he has been *reacting* to his brothers' abuse. He can't control the behavior of his brothers, but he can find the inner strength to deal with it – just as my husband and I needed to find the inner strength to deal with the behavior of our children. Nephi concludes that if he lets his anger control his behavior, he becomes his own worst enemy. That kind of introspection is very healthy – but it takes real humility and honesty. Ralph and I had to develop the humility to be honest, but we managed.

Another example of preparing a good foundation for relationships is recounted in Alma 42. Alma is counseling his son Corianton, who may have reminded Alma of

himself when he was a juvenile delinquent. Alma takes four chapters to counsel this son and then he says to him:

O my son ... do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but ... let the justice of God, and His mercy, and His long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility. (Alma 42:30)

Alma speaks directly and honestly to his son, encouraging him to stop making excuses, to repent, and get on with his life. After the rebuke, Alma shows forth the increase in love and trust that the Lord has instructed (D&C 121:43) us to give:

And now my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people ... go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. (Alma 42:30,31)

Alma knew the importance of getting beyond the difficulties of the past and approaching with gratitude the promise of the future. Corianton, who had been very immature, was finally growing up. I wonder if he was 25, or 30?

One of the best scriptures on strengthening relationships is D&C 121:41-43. After Ralph and I had tried all of Satan's ways to exercise power and influence over our son – coercion, bribery, manipulation, threats, etc. – we read that scripture and the light went on. Surely we wanted to have power and influence, and this scripture taught us how: "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of" – *parenthood* – the scripture specifies, "only by persuasion, by long-suffering." We never hear much about *short-suffering*, but that would really be easier for parents! The scripture continues, "by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" – that is really hard sometimes. And there is another verse: "by kindness and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile." Only after preparing ourselves with these emotional dispositions, then the Lord recommends "reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy."

Eternal Families

The Creator of heaven and earth knows human nature and even understands psychology – in fact, He invented it. I was recently reading about the studies done by Peter deVries², who is a disciple of the well-known German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger³. Under deVries' leadership, people come together to practice what is called “family constellations” in hopes of healing and strengthening family relationships. Hellinger (2003) teaches that families have a soul that is affected by injustices from past generations, and that past imbalances can entangle the lives of today's generations. But prophets have told us this for centuries: for example, when Moses returned from Sinai, he told the children of Israel that the sins of the parents would be upon their children “unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate [the Lord]” (Deuteronomy 5:9). But, there is good news about the soul of families and about building relationships for those who *love* the Lord:

The Lord thy God, He is the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments – to a thousand generations. (Deuteronomy 7:9).

This scripture tells us that strengthening relationships can not only happen across the life-span but across a “thousand generations” (which seems to be pretty close to saying “eternity”). As LDS therapists and counselors, you can help your clients feel the grace and love of God, whether they fully understand the Gospel principles – or even believe in God. God believes in them and is still their Father; through your intervention, they can experience His love.

You have the power to nourish every soul who comes into your office, regardless of his or her faith. As you strengthen individuals and families, generations will be blessed, and you can help to break negative traditions, helping your brothers and sisters to establish a good foundation for eternal relationships. Satan opposes healthy and loving relationships, especially in families. As counselors and psychologists, you know that better than anyone. The Prophet Joseph Smith said,

The policy of the wicked spirit is to separate what God has joined together, and unite what God has separated, which the devil has succeeded in doing ... in the present state of society. (Smith, 1938, p. 103)

Where the joining and separating can have eternal consequences, eternal perspectives must be applied. As LDS counselors and therapists, you alone have the ability to do this, for you can perceive the family as an eternal unit on its road to godhood.

I have never had a more difficult assignment on my road to godhood than to keep the relationship with our son open and fluid, when my whole being cries out to run away – to cut it off and forget it. But I cannot cut off the relationship because I eternally love this boy. You counselors and therapists are the ones who can give parents of difficult children the motivation and hope to hang on (Sanchez, 2000); and you can share with us as parents the tools to be able to do this. Many of us want a “quick fix” – perhaps an angel like the one who appeared to Alma the Younger (36:6-9). And when the “quick fix” doesn't happen and we find ourselves faced with “long suffering,” we may feel that giving up on a child or a relationship is the only way for the rest of family to survive.

You, as our therapists and counselors, can help us to recognize who we are and what we need to do. Ralph and I were blessed that our therapist helped us to recognize our feelings, our backgrounds, and our weaknesses – and to become emotionally independent. We learned that we could not control our son's behavior, and we became strong enough in ourselves and confident enough that we could cease to manipulate; we could let our son take responsibility for his own choices. When parents can do this, the burden is literally lifted from their shoulders, and they can turn their attention to things and people they may have been neglecting because of the turmoil. Yet we should never withdraw our compassion or cease to offer appropriate help. We may have to wait until a child is 30, but we can “suffer long” if that is required.

Our son was in the Bahamas for over two years without contacting us. But he did call his sister, so we knew where he was. We continually sent boxes of goodies, even though we never heard if he got them. But, this way, he knew we wanted to stay connected. He needed the connection to be *his* choice as well. He is back in Utah now. Although I wish his choices had been what I would have chosen, I do not want to give up what I am learning from this soul-wrenching journey: I am learning that often the people in our lives are there to teach us, not necessarily to satisfy us. I don't want the Lord to

give up on me, as a daughter whose choices are not necessarily what His choices would have been. So I will suffer long and be kind where my son's choices are concerned. I keep hearing President Brigham Young's words in my ears, "We need to learn, practice, study, know and understand how angels live with each other" (*Journal of Discourses* 6:76). The members of our family are trying, but we still have a long way to go in order to be angels.

Thank you for your humility and preparation to learn wisdom from the One who knows all the answers. Thank you for your sincere concern for your brothers and sisters and for your desire to serve them in the Lord's way. You are dressing the wounds of those falling in battle. The Lord's work and glory is the saving of souls (Moses 1:39); everything else is mortal scaffolding that will eventually come down.

SEEKING THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY GHOST

Your academic training, research, and experience give you an elite status. Your studies have taken you far beyond what the average person knows. You undoubtedly can quote and expound on theories and cite specialists from a multitude of fields and sources. Your expertise is respected and sought by young and old, rich and poor, functional and dysfunctional. As the world continues in its free-fall, you are more and more in demand. But as trained and professional as you are, I would like to humbly suggest one more dimension for your preparation: the spiritual dimension of the Holy Ghost. Remember, the "clinical material" you are working with are the *divine children of God*. So it would only seem responsible for you to turn to their creator in your efforts to help His children find both themselves and the happiness he intends for them. As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, this is a necessity:

The reason why [seeking happiness apart from God] can never succeed is this: God made us, invented us – as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from

himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing. (Lewis, 1943, pp. 54, 69)

But many of us in our everyday pursuits, including working with troubled clients, do not make full use of this fuel that is freely offered to us. President Brigham Young (1856) said, "Do you not perceive that there is a lack of confidence in our God?" and then more pointedly asked, "Do you perceive it in yourselves?"

The Holy Ghost as a Teacher

We need to have confidence in what God will teach us. Our Father intends for us to turn to Him. We agreed to do so before we left Him to come into mortality. A dear friend who is a therapist has learned to seek His help as an integral aspect of her practice: she often prays for her clients by name. She also prays for herself, and tries to listen, to be taught by the Spirit to know how to counsel her clients and how to balance her personal life. She knows that sacrifice and obedience are required for "tuning in" to the Holy Ghost, and that sometimes we need guidance to know what to pray for. The Apostle Paul tells us that the Spirit will make intercession for us, whispering with "groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26).

Even some of the greatest of God's children need to know when to ask and how to receive. When Nephi was told to build a boat (1 Nephi 17), he really didn't know how to do it. He had never built a boat. There didn't seem to be a great need for boats in the desert wilderness. When he started the project, Nephi was mocked and ridiculed by his brothers. But Nephi knew that the Lord wanted that boat and would give him the help he needed. Consider the scripture:

And the Lord did show me from time to time after what manner I should work the timbers of the ship. Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men. And I, Nephi, did go into the mount oft, and I did pray oft unto the Lord – wherefore the Lord showed unto me great things. (1 Nephi 18:1-3)

You may have occasion to counsel some clients whose problems and needs will seem as far outside your arena of experience as boat building was for Nephi. The Lord

showed Nephi a better way of working timbers, and he may show you different ways of working with people – if you will pray to Him often, as Nephi did. Instruction may come directly from an omnipotent Father who sees perfectly the hearts and souls of His struggling children – and you may be the one who is privileged to hold the tools and apply what he teaches you. You will know when those times come, as you respond to the instruction that is given.

The Holy Ghost as a Tool

You have your five senses to help you to understand your clients: you observe their body language and try to listen beyond their words to what they are really saying. Maybe a cold and clammy handshake tells you something, or perhaps an odor reveals the presence of an addiction or medication. Your five senses are vital tools. But the most helpful, insightful, and honest tool you have to help your brothers and sisters is your access to the Holy Ghost. Revelation is indispensable to relationship work. A loving Father knows your clients' hearts, their motives, their weaknesses, and their circumstances. Even if you do not know a new client, the Holy Ghost can help you nourish that person.

The Holy Ghost can reveal a person's heart to your mind and help you to see the individual and the circumstances as they really are. You have probably had experiences when you were visiting with a client – and thoughts, feelings, and impressions came to your mind that you had never read about in your formal training. Whatever you have a question about, you know the Lord already knows the answer. Whatever you do not understand about your clients' feelings or worries, the Lord does understand. Your testimony that Gethsemane made their struggles His struggles helps you feel the Savior's love for each of His struggling sons or daughters, and you can be directed in conducting therapy (see Alma 7:11-12). The Spirit can work miracles in relationships, and thus you can recognize the divine solutions to even the most distressing dilemmas.

Elder Parley P. Pratt suggested that the Holy Ghost is a spiritual storehouse from which we can enlarge our understanding and thus enrich our service:

[The Holy Ghost] quickens all the intellectual faculties, increases, enlarges, expands and purifies all the natural passions and affections and adapts them by the gift of

wisdom in their lawful use ... It invigorates all the faculties of the physical, intellectual, and spiritual man ... 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. (Pratt, 1942, p. 61)

The Holy Ghost as a Source of Strength

Sometimes I think we underestimate the forces working for us on both sides of the veil, and we rely too much on our own human powers. Recall Moroni's well-known editorial comment in Ether 12:27. We can insert our own roles into this principle:

And if [therapists] come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto [them] weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all [therapists] that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27)

Our own abilities, however great, will not be enough to nourish our brothers and sisters. To try and live without the direction of the Holy Ghost is like buying tickets, dressing up for the show, going to the theater, and then sitting in the foyer throughout the entire performance. The show will go on, but all we experience is the furnishings in the foyer. With the guidance and encouragement of an experienced usher, we can walk into the theatre, find our places – even in the dark – and become full participants as we were intended to be. Help is available, but we do need to prepare ourselves and ask – and accept it when it is offered.

Two stories from the scriptures show how the Lord makes weak things strong. The first example is Enoch (Moses 6). Poor, insecure, hesitant, and fearful Enoch is surrounded by so much evil that the heavens weep. The Lord asks Enoch to tell the wicked people that His "fierce anger is kindled against them." You know Enoch's reaction, "Why is it that I have found favor, and am but a lad"? (which is a bit of an understatement; I've read that he was probably about 60 years old). But in his feelings of immaturity and fear, he continues, "All the people hate me; for I am slow of speech" (Moses 6:31). Then the Lord tells Enoch,

Open thy mouth and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance ... all thy words will I justify; and the moun-

tains shall flee before you, and the rivers shall turn from their course (Moses 6:32,34).

Enoch did what the Lord asked him to do, and the scriptures testify the result:

[Enoch] spake the word of the Lord, and the earth trembled, and the mountains fled ... and the rivers of water were turned out of their course ... so powerful was the word of Enoch and so great was the power of the language which God had given him. (Moses 7:13)

The very weakness Enoch worried about (his speech) became a great strength when he let the Lord make him strong.

Another example of strength through the Holy Ghost is the experience of the brother of Jared. After he had built eight barges according to the Lord's direction, he still had two problems – light and air. The Lord knew the brother of Jared would not be able to come up with a way to solve the air problem, so He told him (Ether 2:20) to make a hole in the top and the bottom of each barge, so when air was needed, they could unstop the holes. But there was still the problem of light. Because the brother of Jared did have the creativity to solve this one, the Lord said, "What will ye that I should do?" (Ether 2:23). Many of us have had the feeling of being in a "dark barge"; we may have felt like saying, "We are told to ask and we shall receive, so I am asking!"

Could the Lord have put light in the barges? Of course He could; He put light in the world. He intended to put light in the barges, but He also wanted the true light to be in the brother of Jared. We don't know what kind of research preceded this miracle: the brother of Jared probably learned all he could about ways of producing light. Surely he was praying, and in all probability he was circumspect in his own life, analyzing what more he could do to be in tune with the Spirit in order to receive direction. When he had worked out the plan for the illuminating stones, he asked God to touch those stones so they would produce the needed light. So when the brother of Jared got the light (faith) inside of him, then he not only got light for the barges, he received much, much more than he had ever expected: he saw the Lord (Ether 2-4). As the prophet Joseph Smith counseled (D&C 123:17), "Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the

utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for His arm to be revealed."

I suspect there may be times when you LDS counselors and therapists, like the brother of Jared, want more light than is found in your professional training and books. The Lord may test your desire and preparation – and, like the brother of Jared, you will need to look at your own life and see what more you can do to be in tune with the Spirit that knows all things. If you treasure in your mind continually the words of life as well as the words of your profession, guarding carefully what you let into your mind so that you preserve its purity, the Spirit can tell you what to say at the very hour it may desperately be needed (D&C 84:85).

At times like this, what we *know* is not as important as what we *are*. It is what we have become – i.e., a succession of acts that result in our becoming worthy servants of the Lord – that qualifies us for the Spirit to guide us (Oaks, 2000, p. 32). And invariably we will receive more insight and understanding than we hoped for. We are never diminished when we submit to God – we are enlightened.

It is a very serious undertaking to work with the inner life of another person. That is why the Lord is such a vital part of what you do as therapists. It is a gift, but also a responsibility, to feel and know what is inside someone else. Yours is the profession that works with the soul – the spirit and the body (D&C 88:15). You help another child of God become whole. What a trust your clients have in you! That elusive, invisible spirit life is far more real, far more important, than any visible activities – and yet all too often clients (and sometimes even therapists!) try to silence that shy, persistent inner voice. It is the Spirit that will help you to hear that voice. Doing this in your professional role, you are participating in the pattern stated so well by President Ezra Taft Benson:

The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. (Benson, 1985, p.6)

SEEKING TO ACTIVATE THE ATONEMENT

As members who have testimonies of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we turn to the atonement for strength and

for hope in our own lives. Can we activate the atonement to share strength and hope with our clients as well?

The Atonement in Healing

Isaiah describes the healing, liberating power of the atonement as he describes the mission of the Savior:

The Lord hath anointed unto me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives ... to comfort all that mourn ... to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

The atonement is pivotal in what you do as you work in therapy with those in need. On just our own power, life would be more than any of us could handle, and death would be more than we could face. The atonement unlocks the gifts of the Spirit. Because you experience those gifts in your lives, you can help others access them as well. We all taste the bitterness of mortality, from sin and ignorance to sorrow and disappointment. Without the atonement, that bitterness would drag us down, and we all would become as Satan is – miserable (2 Nephi 2:5,18,27). Or, as Jacob (2 Nephi 9:5-10) writes, as angels to Satan. Even though the atonement has cosmic implications, it also has the power to touch us personally – although it is *infinite*, it is also *intimate*. The atonement is the source of strength to deal productively with the disappointments and heartbreaks that occur in mortality. Recognize it, value it, and share it.

The word *atonement* comes from the Greek word meaning reconciliation or a process of coming back into a relationship after a period of estrangement. To *atone*, then, means to come back into a state of being *at one*. Spiritual estrangement, or separation, has happened to all of us who have left our heavenly home and are here on earth. Many suffer because glimpses of what they once had cause them to dearly miss that heavenly sociality; they search for celestial relations but experience only unfulfilled expectations. But all things are made new through the atonement, especially relationships. This understanding is a sacred gift you can give as therapists and counselors.

The Atonement and Forgiving

The atonement also applies to estranged relationships in mortality; it is the healer for all broken rela-

tionships. The principle that heals those relationships is at the heart of the atonement – the principle of forgiveness. The Lord forgave those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). You participate with that sacred principle of the atonement when you help those you serve to forgive those who have hurt them; also when you help those who have abused others to recognize their need for the atonement and to desire access to its healing power. Through the atonement forgiveness is *interactive*: we forgive each other and God forgives us – all of us are reconciled. We are cleansed, renewed, *at one* – as one. No matter how lost an individual may be, the Lord knows how to find each of His sheep. He has been where we are. He reaches across that everlasting gulf of misery and woe and brings us back into His arms.

Every disrupted relationship is an opportunity to practice the principle of forgiveness, to activate the atonement in our lives, and to lead us in the direction of celestial practices. On a particularly difficult day, with my finger pointed and my voice raised, I said to my son, “If I make it to the Celestial Kingdom, I will have you to thank!” I may have been speaking with more wisdom than I realized at the time!

Recalling the cycles of frustration and forgiveness I experienced with my son reminds me of a familiar parable in relation to forgiveness and oneness between a father and a particular son (Luke 15). This son wanted his freedom and his inheritance. Life with the family was too confining, and the pleasures he wanted seemed to be passing him by. The father could see trouble ahead, but he knew the son needed his freedom to choose, even if the freedom resulted in wrong choices. So the son took his inheritance and left the home and family. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland says in relation to this:

his money and his friends disappeared sooner than he thought possible – they always do – and a day of terrible reckoning came thereafter – it always does. (Holland, 2002, p. 62).

The son then asked himself, “How could I have gotten here?” The scriptures explain, “And when he came to himself,” he turned homeward. He was undoubtedly wondering and worrying about the kind of welcome he would receive. But when his father saw him, he ran to him and kissed him (Luke 15:20), and there was a great

celebration. The father said, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

The Atonement and Coming to Oneself

"Lost" souls have many ways of "coming to themselves." As counselors and therapists, you can gently help them in this process, so they can find their way back and heal their damaged relationships. In addition to losing his material inheritance, the son had brought spiritual consequences on himself. Many times, those who come to you counselors are experiencing both situational and spiritual confusion. They have strayed far from hearing the voice of the Spirit, and the voices of the world have begun to manipulate and confuse them. Soon your clients feel alienated and lost. They look to you to find the road back to where they belong. Robert L. Millet, in his book *Lost and Found*, says:

There is no coming to oneself without the memory of belonging. The self has been constructed in relation to others, and it can come to itself only through relationship to others. The first link with the other in a distant country of broken relationships is memory. The memory of sonship gives hope. (Millet, 2001, p. 43)

You give hope as you help to nourish the memory of "sonship." This is a fragile moment in the lives of your clients, and with the direction from the Holy Ghost and the forgiving, reconciling power of the atonement, you can pave the way for that reunion. Salvation occurs one soul at a time. Elder Boyd K. Packer has said,

Save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ. (Packer, 1995, p. 20)

Whether the individual has physically run off to the Bahamas, or to a bar or to a bedroom (and slammed the

door), you can help the "lost" one to come to him or herself and begin the journey home.

You are also the ones who help those waiting at home to forgive, accept, and love those who have strayed (see Luke 15:25-32). When I become impatient with our son and say, "when is he ever going to line up his ducks and quit shooting himself in the foot?" I can hear my Father in Heaven saying, "Sharon, Sharon – when are *you* ever going to line up your ducks and quit shooting yourself in the foot?" When I hear that in my mind, I become more patient and long-suffering. I don't want the Lord to give up on me, and so I won't give up on our boy. In the meantime, the atonement gives me the power to forgive and submit my will to the Lord's way, for:

Surely, He hath born our griefs and carried our sorrows.
He was wounded for our transgressions. And with His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5).

I testify that through the atonement of Jesus Christ, and after doing all we can do, all the children of God – including therapists and their clients – can be transformed beyond our mortal failings, can put off the "natural man" and become a saint worthy to be recognized as a son or daughter of God (Mosiah 3:19).

Our Redeemer is acquainted with all our weaknesses and infirmities, and with those of the strongest and weakest of any therapist's clients. Unpolished and inadequate as we may be, the Lord stands by to encircle us in His arms. He is on our right hand and our left, with His Spirit in our hearts and His angels round about us to bear us up (D&C 84:88). The Lord augments and supplements our efforts. With Him and through Him, healing is effected, and miracles do come to pass. I thank you, brothers and sisters – LDS therapists – for living lives worthy to call forth that divine power to bless those who need you, and I pray that the Lord will continue to bless you in your work.

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FOOTNOTES

1 Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963), the atheist scholar who became a devout Anglican and celebrated Christian apologist,

was a professor at Oxford and Cambridge from 1925-1963. An officer in the British army during WWI, he was wounded during the Battle of Arras. The watershed in Lewis' life was his conversion from atheism to Christianity in 1931, following deep discussion with his long-time friend J.R.R. Tolkien. He chronicled his conversion in *Surprised by Joy* (1955). Lewis was briefly married to Joy Davidman; their relationship was the subject of the 1994 film *Shadowlands* (directed by William Nicholson, starring Debra Winger & Anthony Hopkins). She died of cancer in 1960; Lewis' personal struggles during this period were published under the title *A Grief Observed* (1961). Lewis died one week before his 65th birthday on November 22, 1963 – the same day that Alduous Huxley died and President John F. Kennedy was assassinated (Green & Hooper, 1974).

- 2 Peter deVries is a California teacher and practitioner of the Hellinger approach to *Family Constellations*. He leads workshops throughout the U.S. and has a private practice in the San Francisco area. See: <<http://www.curezone.com/Hellinger/practitioners.asp>>
- 3 Bert Hellinger is one of Europe's most innovative and provocative psychotherapists. Described as the ultimate empiricist, Hellinger acknowledges several important influences on his life and work: his parents, whose faith immunized him against accepting Hitler's National Socialism; his 20 years as an Anglican priest, particularly as a missionary to the African Zulu; and his participation in interracial, ecumenical training in group dynamics. Educated in psychoanalysis, Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Analysis, and family therapy, he pioneered the *Family Constellations* that have become the hallmark of his therapeutic work and have propelled him to the forefront of contemporary family therapy (Hellinger & Weber, 1998).