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What’s in a Word? Tender and Chaste and Delicate Feelings Are Pleasing to the Lord

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The word *tender* is used repeatedly throughout the Book of Mormon, but the modern connotations of the term may skew readers’ understanding of what Book of Mormon authors intended to convey when employing it in their writing. By examining the etymology of *tender* and the etymologies of similar words, readers can better comprehend the intended meaning of the ancient Book of Mormon authors.
“Tender and Chaste and Delicate” Feelings Are Pleading to the Lord

The prophet Jacob frames one of the most powerful and poignant scriptures in the Book of Mormon when he addresses wayward Nephite men in the presence of their families:

And also it grieveth me that I must use so much boldness of speech concerning you, before your wives and your children, many of whose feelings are exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God; and it supposeth me that they have come up hither to hear the pleasing word of God, yea, the word which healeth the wounded soul. (Jacob 2:7–8)

Jacob further clarifies that the Lord is not pleased with those who disregard the tender feelings of others:

And I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people, which I have led out of the land of Jerusalem, shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts. For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction; for they shall not commit whoredoms, like unto them of old, saith the Lord of Hosts. (Jacob 2:32–33)

According to Jacob, those among God’s people who, through unworthiness, break hearts, destroy confidence, and wound others emotionally do more harm than outsiders who live unrighteously:

Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds. (Jacob 2:35)

Those who compromise standards or disregard covenants are often not capable of respecting or responding to the feelings of family members with tenderness. Those who are hardened may accuse the tenderhearted of being hypersensitive, sanctimonious, or self-righteous.

On the other hand, when we keep the commandments and set a good example, we can be sensitive to the feelings of others and thus be instrumental in healing broken hearts. An understanding of the word tender in the scriptures can help us nurture tender feelings in ourselves and in others. The WordCruncher version of the Latter-day Saint scriptures provides the following translations (listed first) and connotations (in parentheses) for the word tender in Hebrew, Greek, and English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affectionate (pleasing, delightful)</th>
<th>Merciful (kind, beautiful, pious)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cherishing (serving)</td>
<td>Nursing (fostering, supporting, quiet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate (sparing, sympathetic)</td>
<td>Sensitive (intelligent, perceptive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faint (relaxed)</td>
<td>Soft (secret, melting, fine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle (modest, humble, meek)</td>
<td>Weak (still)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Our capacity for tender feelings can give pleasure, delight, and beauty to our relationships, even though such feelings may likewise make us vulnerable to hurt and pain.

Some may wonder why the Lord would be pleased with “weak” or “faint” feelings in the hearts
of the Saints. While the words *faint* and *weak* often have negative meanings, they can also have positive senses in their etymologies. One of the positive connotations for the word *faint* is “relaxed,” that is, “compliant” or “not resisting,” as in Psalm 84:2: “My soul longeth, yea, even *fainteth* for the courts of the Lord.” Likewise, *weak* can mean “still” or “not aggressive,” as in the scriptures “Be *still*, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) and “God hath chosen the *weak* things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Tenderness does imply a kind of literal weakness or vulnerability, as we can see in the following translations of the Hebrew word *rak*: “Leah was *tender* eyed” (Genesis 29:17) and “children are *tender*” (Genesis 33:13). However, tenderness has positive connotations of softness or humility in translations of the same Hebrew root: “God maketh my heart *soft*” (Job 23:16) and “thine heart was *tender*, and thou didst humble thyself before God” (2 Chronicles 34:27).

In another Hebrew root, the word *tender* evokes sweet images of maidenhood, motherhood, and godhood. The Hebrew root *rhm* lies behind words rendered in the King James Version of the Old Testament as “bowels,” “compassion,” “damsel,” “tender love,” “great mercy,” “pity,” or “womb.” The literal meaning appears in 1 Kings 3:26: “her *bowels* yearned upon her son.” The figurative meaning with regard to the Lord’s compassion appears in Psalm 25:6: “thy *tender* mercies.”

The Lord’s tenderness is also conveyed in the translation of the Hebrew root *ynq*: “he shall grow up before him as a *tender* plant” (Isaiah 53:2; Mosiah 14:2). In this case the Hebrew root carries connotations of suckling, nursing, and giving milk, showing that the Messiah would be raised up by a loving mother but also implying that he would develop nurturing qualities such as tenderness and compassion.

In Greek the noun *tender* appears as *splanchnon*, probably derived from the word for spleen. The figurative connotations of *splanchnon* include pity, sympathy, inward affection, and tender mercy, as in “the *tender mercy* of our God” (Luke 1:78) and “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted” (Ephesians 4:32). The very essence of the word *tenderness* lies in positive aspects of family life: our desire to become as little children (see Mosiah 3:18) and to nurture as mothers and fathers (see 2 Nephi 6:7).

Chastity and virtue are also “clear and precious” to the Lord and his children (see Moroni 9:9). Jacob warns the unfaithful Nephite men that the Lord is not pleased with those who deprive others of chaste feelings:

But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. . . . This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms. . . . For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me. (Jacob 2:23–28)

Jacob is loath to discuss violations of the law of chastity in the presence of those who are morally clean, but he must warn those who stray:

But, notwithstanding the greatness of the task, I must do according to the strict commands of God, and tell you concerning your wickedness and abominations, in the presence of the pure in heart, and the broken heart, and under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God. (Jacob 2:10)

Jacob admonishes married men to be chaste, so the call to be chaste is not limited to those who are unmarried. Chastity is not the absence of intimate feelings; chastity is both the preparation for and the preserver of true intimacy in marital relations.

A study of the meanings and translations of the word *chaste* in the scriptures can help us nurture chaste feelings in ourselves and others:

| Blameless (clean, clear, free, innocent) | Modest (orderly, decorous) |
| Clean (fair, pure) | Perfect (true, full, complete, spotless) |
| Clear (bright, glorious) | Pure (clean, clear) |
| Consecrated (clean, dedicated, holy, sacred) | Religious (reverent) |
| Innocent (not guilty) | Simple (plain, complete, consummated) |

While the word *chaste* means being clean and spotless, it also carries connotations of consummation and total fulfillment. The word also has figurative applications in the metaphor of Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as a bride:

For . . . I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a *chaste* virgin to Christ.
But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2–3)

According to Strong’s Greek dictionary in the WordCruncher scripture program, the word for chaste is related to Greek hagios, which is often translated as “holy.” It literally means “clean” and figuratively means “innocent,” “modest,” “perfect,” “chaste,” “clear,” or “pure.” Pure or chaste feelings will identify us when we meet the Lord in the second coming (see 1 John 3:2–3; Moroni 7:48).

A related Greek term is hagnos, which means “sacred, physically pure, morally blameless, religious, ceremonially consecrated, most holy, saint.” The word appears as pure in Philippians 4:8: “whatsoever things are pure, . . . think on these things.” Hagnos also appears as chaste in Titus 2:4–5: “teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands.” Forms of the word hagnos appear as the word throughout the English New Testament, so pure and chaste feelings are related to our identity as Latter-day Saints.

After addressing the wayward men, Jacob turns his remarks to those who are pure in heart:

Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction. O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever. (Jacob 3:1–2).

Jacob explains that Saints can keep their heads high, commune with the Lord, and feel his love if they will keep their minds firm. In English the words mind and music both have the same Indo-European root, so our mental and musical faculties are linguistically intertwined. Uplifting music is one way to keep our minds firm, our thoughts pure, and our feelings chaste, especially the hymns of Zion (see Boyd K. Packer, “Inspiring Music—Worthy Thoughts,” Ensign, January 1974, 25–28). K. Newell Dayley, dean of the Brigham Young University’s College of Fine Arts, reminds us that singing “can provide a conduit to spiritual enrichment for those who are seeking to purify their lives” (“Centering the Arts in Christ,” BYU devotional address, 6 March 2001).

Sometimes those who do not value chaste feelings label those who are seeking to purify their lives as being prudish or repressed. When the broken-hearted or the pure in heart face opposition because of their tender and chaste feelings, they can take comfort in beautiful music, now and in the world to come. Gustav Mahler uses a passage from “Des Knaben Wunderhorn” to describe heavenly music in the fourth movement of his fourth symphony. The soprano soloist sings the opinion of the little children in paradise that “Kein’ Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden, / Die uns’rer verglichen kann werden” (There is not yet any music on earth that can compare with ours).

Jacob teaches that the Lord is not pleased with those who wound the delicate minds of others:

Wherefore, it burdeneth my soul that I should be constrained, because of the strict commandment which I have received from God, to admonish you according to your crimes, to enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded, instead of consoling and healing their wounds; and those who have not been wounded, instead of feasting upon the pleasing word of God have daggers placed to pierce their souls and wound their delicate minds. (Jacob 2:9)

Each of us has a responsibility to treat the souls and minds of others with care. By “feasting upon the pleasing word of God” and searching out the meaning of words in scripture, we can nurture delicate feelings in ourselves and others. Surprisingly, the word delicate is not just a synonym for the words tender or fragile; it includes a wide range of positive connotations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakable (open)</th>
<th>Fair (goodly)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful (bright, glad, merry, joyful)</td>
<td>Playful (laughing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comely (beautiful)</td>
<td>Pleasant (delectable, precious, beloved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dainty (charming)</td>
<td>Refined (purged, purified, clarified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delightful (favorable)</td>
<td>Soft (gentle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In English the words *delicate* and *delight* have the same origin. In fact, the primary use of the word *delicate* in the Old Testament refers to women who live in wealth and refinement. For example, one Hebrew root underlying delicate is ‘ng, literally meaning “to be soft or pliant” and figuratively meaning “luxurious,” “delicate,” “delightful,” or “pleasant,” as in Jeremiah 6:2, “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman.” However, the same root also has meanings of tenderness and righteous joy, as in Micah 1:16, “poll thee for thy delicate children” and Job 22:26, “then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty.”

A set of similar meanings applies to the Hebrew root ‘dn, which means “voluptuously” in Lamentations 4:5: “They that did feed delicately are desolate.” The same root means “pleasure” or “joy” in Proverbs 29:17: “he shall give delight unto thy soul.” The root ‘dn also lies behind Eden, so to have delicate feelings can be likened to having paradisiacal joy, or the millennial joy of the Garden of Eden.

Just as the Saints may feel delight in the Lord, the Lord himself has delightful feelings of love for his children. According to Strong’s Hebrew dictionary in WordCruncher, the root hšq includes the meanings such as “cling,” “join,” “love,” “delight in,” “deliver,” and “desire,” as in Deuteronomy 10:15: “the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them.” Like the word *chaste*, the words *delicate* and *delight* imply a fulness of love rather than limitations on our ability to love one another.

Delicate or delightful feelings are pleasing to the Lord. The Hebrew root hps literally means “to bend,” but it implies being pleased with someone or delighting in something, as in “If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land” (Numbers 14:8) and “I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women” (Jacob 2:28). Several other Hebrew words for the concept “delight” also yield interesting insights.

In summary, the prophet Jacob teaches that tender, chaste, and delicate feelings are pleasing to God. We can develop such feelings in our hearts and minds by feasting upon the scriptures, which may include searching out the Hebrew, Greek, and Indo-European forms of key words in dictionaries and concordances. Tender feelings are intelligent as well as sensitive. Chaste feelings are fulfilling as well as clean and pure. Delicate feelings are refined and delightful as well as fragile and fragrant, like flowers in the Lord’s garden. We often associate such feelings with the role of women, as in Margaret Nadauld’s inspired counsel:

> The world has enough women who are tough; we need women who are tender. . . . There are enough women who are rude; we need women who are refined. . . . We have popularity; we need more purity. (“The Joy of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 15)

However, the Lord expects all of us to develop reverence, creativity, and sensibility in our lives, whether we are men, women, or children. Those who do not nurture such feelings may lose the capacity to heal, help, respect, and respond to the hearts, minds, and souls of others.

You are welcome to send comments, questions, and suggestions to Cynthia_Hallen@byu.edu.