

“Abide Ye in the Liberty Wherewith Ye Are Made Free”

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I take my title today from D&C 88:86: “Abide ye in the liberty wherewith ye are made free.” I want to consider liberty for a moment, then observe how it is obtained, and, finally, look at how it is that we abide in it.

Liberty Considered

Liberty is essential to the Lord’s plan of happiness. The scriptures we see evidence of the Lord’s deep commitment to liberty. Take King Benjamin for example. He said:

I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man.

But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people; and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me.

I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you;

Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of

another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you —

And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne — and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day. [Mosiah 2:10–14]

King Benjamin emphasized three forms of liberty: economic, political, and spiritual. His commitment to the economic liberty of his people was so deep that he took no wages to serve as king, neither would he impose taxes on the people. His commitment to political liberty was such that there were no political prisoners kept in dungeons, no second-class citizenry, no castes, and no slaves. His commitment to spiritual liberty was evident as well. He would not suffer any manner of wickedness, theft, or adultery. He did it all so “that there should

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nothing come upon [them] which was grievous to be borne." He wanted his people to be free.

You are familiar with the effect of King Benjamin's address on the people. They recognized their sins. They repented. They entered into a covenant to be obedient to God's commandments. They said, "We are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days" (Mosiah 5:5).

And now, these are the words which king Benjamin desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant.

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. [Mosiah 5:6–8]

King Benjamin was foreshadowing a conversation that Jesus would have years later on another continent:

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.

And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. [John 8:31–36]

Liberty is clearly an essential feature of the Lord's plan of happiness.

Liberty Obtained

How is this great economic, political, and spiritual liberty obtained?

Liberty is always *obtained by sacrifice*. Sometimes the sacrifices are palpable and sometimes they are more subtle. Nevertheless, you can always trace the reception of any liberty to a sacrifice.

Let me illustrate this by relating a part of my own family history. I do this so that it can be real to you. I asked my son when he returned from serving a mission, "What was the most important lesson you learned?"

His answer surprised me. He simply said, "People are real." He explained that every person he taught had ideographic trials and hopes and strengths and weaknesses and fears. They weren't two-dimensional images in a photograph from an exotic country. They were real.

I have snippets from census records, ship manifests, family lore, and film images with which to piece together a story of sacrifice and liberty. In an old photograph of my great-great-grandparents taken in 1905, they are surrounded by their surviving children and the fiancés of the two eldest children. They wear the typical formal clothing for a family portrait taken in 1905, with heavy fabric, high collars, and lace for the girls. The men wear stiff white shirts, collars, and heavy coats. As in most such old photographs, none of them are smiling. However, if you look closely in their eyes, you will see a peace, a hopefulness, and a sense of satisfaction.

The parents are Shulin and Pesse Blumenfeld. Morris is the eldest son with his wife-to-be, Eva. Schaindle is the eldest daughter with her husband-to-be, Morris Schreiber. Schaindle is her Yiddish name. It means "pretty girl."

Schaindle was my great-grandmother. In the picture she is 19 years old with a young face, dark eyes, and thick hair piled high on her head in the mode of the day. The other children are Fanni, Mordche (whose name was Americanized to Max), Chai (whose name was Americanized to Ida), Golda, Mala (Mollie), and Bela (Belle).

Not pictured are Anna and Tobie, who would be born later, and Charlotte and Isadore, who were buried back in Botosani, Rumania.

These people were eastern European Jews who immigrated to the United States. But they did not come all at once. I have no documentation about when the eldest son, Morris, entered the country. I know far more about Schaindle and the others. Schaindle told this story, which I have only partially proven through my research. It is a story of sacrifice bearing the fruit of liberty.

When Schaindle was nine years old, she was sent to live with and work for a tailor threading needles and caring for his children. She sent her wages home. At age 16 she was sent to America with her uncle in a group of nine extended family members to work, send money back to Rumania, and prepare the way for her family to come to America. She said that they were very frightened because they didn't know if an extended family group like theirs would be allowed to enter the United States. She said she lied about her age and her name to enter. When her uncle was confronted by an immigration official who asked, "Are these all your children," he pretended not to understand. He said, "Ve are nine people." The official held them on the ship and continued to ask them questions. The only answer her uncle would give, pretending not to understand, was "Ve are nine people." Eventually the official grew tired, and, probably not seeing a threat of anarchy in a group of so obviously ignorant immigrants, he let them in. I can hear him in my imagination: "Yes, I know you are nine people. Enough already, just get off the ship. Go stand in that line." One of these days I'll ask Schaindle to tell me the whole story because I'm having a tough time documenting and trian-

gulating the details of her entry in America. (It doesn't help genealogy research when you lie about your name and age on official documents.)

My best estimate at this point is that Schaindle entered America almost exactly 100 years ago on July 5, 1902. Schaindle immediately went to work in a sweatshop sewing clothes. After all, she had begun working for a tailor at age nine. She sent her wages home to her family in Rumania. She said that whenever she had the urge to purchase an apple, she would deny herself, take the coin the apple would have cost, place it in a jar, and add it to her total to send home to Rumania. I have documentation showing that eventually Salomon and the next oldest daughter, Fanni, entered the U.S. on February 15, 1904.

Seven months later, on September 2, 1904, Pesse arrive with Mordche, who, at 10 years old, was her helper to care for Chai (age 8), Golda (age 4), Mala (age 3), and Bela (9 months old). I was thrilled to eventually locate the ship's manifest. I didn't know them by their Yiddish names, and it was only through Golda that I eventually found them together as a group. They arrived on the steamship *Carpathia*, which you will recognize as the first ship to respond to the *Titanic*.

Imagine Pesse's 10-day voyage in the steerage of the *Carpathia* with five children ranging in age from nine months to 10 years old. Imagine Pesse's anxiety as she sent her eldest children and her husband to America. The baby Bela had just been born when Shulin began his trip to America. Any mishap along the way could have left her alone in Botosani with five mouths to feed and a 10-year-old boy to earn their daily bread. But the promise of liberty was so great that risks had to be taken and sacrifices had to be made.

Eventually they were all united in Chicago in late 1904. In 1905 the portrait was taken. When I look at Shulin and Pesse surrounded by all their surviving children, I sense the greatest relief, peace, hopefulness, and satisfaction.

What a travail it must have been! A course of self-sacrifice by many members of the family made it possible for this simple portrait to be taken. I imagine all the ways it could have gone awry through accident, iceberg, persecution, or bigotry. The risks and sacrifices obtained liberty for all of the children and eventually for me. If they hadn't obtained this liberty, imagine what would have been their course living in eastern Europe as Jews in the first half of the 20th century. But of course that is hypothesis contrary to fact. They did sacrifice and obtain liberty. I inherited this liberty from them, and I am grateful.

We have found Shulin's family on both the 1910 and 1920 censuses. In 1910, Schaindle and Morris and their two children were living with Shulin and Pesse in a group of 13 people in a Yiddish neighborhood in Chicago. The census records that Shulin was a peddler, and his product was listed as "rags." He and Pesse spoke only Yiddish. He could read and write, but Pesse could not.

Two of the older children, Max and Ida, were listed as working in a tailor shop. Max could neither read nor write, but Ida could. They all labored to support the extended family. Ten years later, on January 7, 1920, the family was enumerated on the next census. The household had shrunk to nine. Max was dead, having never married. He died in 1919 at age 24 or 25. Golda and her husband were living with Shulin and Pesse. They had a two-month-old baby named Max.

As I studied the census record, I pieced together a probable story. I suspect that Max probably died in the influenza epidemic that ravaged America from 1918 to 1919. Living in close quarters spread the disease quickly. I imagine how many other members of the family were fevered and near death. I imagine Golda, pregnant and cramped in a small tenement, fearful for her coming baby and for her family. In January 1920 the baby was two months old, and they named him Max. It is typical of

Yiddish families to name children after a dead relative who was beloved. Mordche, called Max, was the big brother, the 10-year-old helper from across the ocean, the presser in a tailor shop who never married whose wages were contributed to supplement the earnings of a father who spoke only Yiddish and peddled rags for a living. Mordche, who never learned to read or write, who never enjoyed the blessings of education but who cared for the family, had died in 1919, and Golda, six years younger, delivered her baby safely and named him Max as a memorial to her beloved older brother who had sacrificed so much to care for his father's family.

Schaindle and Mordche sacrificed for the sake of liberty. Look at how far-reaching have been the benefits of their sacrifices. For example, while my ancestors toiled under very limited education, I have been blessed by their sacrifices and have received an excellent education and serve as a faculty member at a precious university. I am grateful.

One wonders what the limits are to people's sacrifices. Is there a sacrifice that has the greatest cost and the greatest effect on liberty?

The Great and Last Sacrifice

Amulek was poignantly aware of this question. He taught:

And now, behold, I will testify unto you of myself that these things are true. Behold, I say unto you, that I do know that Christ shall come among the children of men, to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made.

For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither

of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. . . .

And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal. [Alma 34:8–10, 14]

What is the effect of that great and last sacrifice? What liberty is obtained by that sacrifice? In the BYU sculpture garden there is a piece entitled *The Grave Hath No Victory* by Franz Johansen. It is an image of the Resurrection. Inscribed at the base of the sculpture, quietly hidden, is the scripture from Romans 6:5: “We shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” Also at the base are found small flowers emerging from the rock, alive and growing out of dead stone. The image is of a body arising from the earth. The body is partially wrapped in burial windings. The death clothes made of gauze are unraveling and slipping to the earth as life is being restored to a powerful body.

This sculpture is an infinite art form in many ways. I love to observe how the light and shadows change on it from day to day and from hour to hour. The positive and negative spaces change as one circumnavigates it. In fact, if you walk around this sculpture, the body seems to elevate slowly in space. I invite you to take a moment in the garden to walk around the sculpture and see it move through space.

The scriptures teach us that “the dead had looked upon the long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage” (D&C 138:50). At the time when the Savior’s own body lay in the tomb, His spirit visited the spirits who had been faithful in mortality. Joseph F. Smith reported:

As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great.

And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just,

who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality;

And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name.

All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand.

They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death.

Their sleeping dust was to be restored unto its perfect frame, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh upon them, the spirit and the body to be united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy.

While this vast multitude waited and conversed, rejoicing in the hour of their deliverance from the chains of death, the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful. [D&C 138:11–18]

The Savior declared universal liberty through resurrection. As Paul indeed testified, “we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” For myself and my beloved ancestors, to be liberated from death is an amazing blessing that flows from that great and last sacrifice. It is given as a free gift to all of God’s children who pass through mortality. This is not an abstraction. Schaindle will be resurrected. Good, dutiful Mordche will be resurrected. These are not two-dimensional photographs. People are real. They are real people with hopes and fears and sorrows and joys. They currently experience the long separation of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage.

The prophet Jacob spoke of liberation from two forms of death:

O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of

this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit.

And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave.

And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel. [2 Nephi 9:10–12]

Liberation from sin through repentance also depends on that great and last sacrifice. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ we can be liberated from sin on condition of repentance. There is no greater liberation. As Jesus said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Abide Ye in Liberty

Once liberty is obtained, how do we abide in it? *We abide in liberty by keeping our covenants.* Moral agency and obedience are integrated in the process of covenant. You might hear people argue that either obedience or agency have primacy in the Lord’s plan and that one supersedes the other. Indeed, both agency and obedience are crucial aspects of the Lord’s plan of happiness. However, the putative tension between them is resolved by the transcendent term *covenant*. Under the rubric of covenant, agency and obedience are integrated into a peaceful whole. I think that is why the gospel of Jesus Christ is sometimes referred to as the new and everlasting covenant of the gospel. It was the Father’s plan from the beginning that agency and obedience should be integrated under covenant. If Lucifer presented a plan to the Father that separated agency and obedience,

he was creating a false dichotomy and presenting a false dilemma. To choose either, while excluding the other, would lead to failure of the plan. Lucifer was a liar from the beginning, and such a logical trap was characteristic of his sophistry. I don’t think that Jesus articulated an alternative plan that emphasized agency over obedience. To do so would be to accept Lucifer’s false dilemma. I believe the Father’s plan integrated both agency and obedience under the rubric of covenant. And the covenant depended on a great and last sacrifice and an infinite atonement.

We maintain our liberty by keeping our covenants. As we read in Mosiah:

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives. [Mosiah 5:7–8]

By our covenant at baptism and our covenants in the temple, we, of our own free will, choose to obey. And in doing so, we are kept free.

Conclusion

It seems apparent to me that liberty is a central feature of the Lord’s plan of happiness. It seems evident that liberty is obtained by sacrifice. It seems that liberty is maintained by covenant. These are nice abstractions, but what about the real people? There is a promise I need to keep. As Shulin and Pesse and Mordche and Schaindle are real

people who made sacrifices in mortality—the fruits of which I enjoy—I can reciprocate by making a sacrifice that will provide liberty to them. I made a promise to those people before this mortality that if they would come and prepare the way for me, then when I obtained the knowledge of the gospel I would search them out and perform vicarious ordinances that would liberate them. It is incum-

bent on all of us who have received the great treasures of the gospel to provide its blessings to our ancestors.

I bear witness that we are liberated from death and hell through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Our Savior was resurrected, and we will be, too. We can be freed from sin. And if the Son makes us free, we shall be free indeed. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.