

"As to the processes affecting the life-flux which the human eye cannot see, the exoteric teaching coincides with that of the ancient Greek and Egyptian

mystics; 'As below, so above', which implies that there is one harmonious *karmic* law governing with

unwavering and impartial justice the visible as well as the invisible operations of nature."

-THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD
(Evans-Wentz 1960:43)

53. PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

CHAPTER CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	547
WHAT IT IS	547
CONSEQUENCES	548
INTERNAL SINS	548
SECOND COST OF SIN	550
CONCLUSION	550

INTRODUCTION:

If I am ever given the opportunity to rephrase any of Brother Joseph's Articles of Faith, I would choose his fourth for modification.^{1} I would restate it thus:

"We believe the first principles of the Gospel are: first, free agency, second, obedience, third, faith and fourth repentance."

These are actually the basic elements on which the entire POS is predicated. The only other 'principle' that need be included to make the POS work is the priesthood, because the priesthood subsumes all of the laws of heaven from which flow all of the ordinances and commandments. We are required to exercise faith and free agency to obey them. However, if we fail, there is a remarkable provision that allows us the try it again. Truly remarkable in the eternal perspective. And the manner of its operation may be guessed at, though it is a profoundly deep matter which ties into the atonement in some way. The first three of these four principles have been dealt with elsewhere, so we need to take up this fourth item now, the business of repentance.

WHAT IT IS:

According to SMD, there is a tidy little set of steps one has to follow to repent. Its called the "four R's": recognize, remorse, restitution and refrain. Neat little process, and the formula sounds so simple that one easily concludes that there is not a great deal of significance to it. However, that probably isn't the intention of the formula. The formula is given to simplify the whole matter for us.^{2}

The truth is deeper. Repentance does require as many of these

¹ These Articles of Faith, which are canonized by the LDS Church and placed at the end of the Pearl of Great Price, seem to be regarded in SMD as fairly profound doctrine. However, Milt Backman pointed out that there was little in these 13 statements prepared in response to a newspaperman's inquiry regarding the basic tenets of Mormonism, that is unique to this faith. Belief in a trinity of three separate individuals, belief in various ordinances, the gathering of Israel is not unique. In fact, Backman contends that the restoration could not have occurred until there was a religious milieu that already contained most of the basic tenets. He suggests that if it had been otherwise, the fragile fledgling faith would not have survived the tremendous persecutions that resulted after it was organized. The only elements in these articles that are unique pertain to the Book of Mormon, the peculiar doctrine of polygamy not being noted.

It is interesting, in fact, how contradictory one of these articles today when it is compared to the current emphases in SMD. The eleventh articles claims the privilege of worshipping God as we see fit, and "allow all men the same privilege, let them worship, how, when or what they may." SMD today has created a bit of dissonance between this belief and its fervent pressure to proselyte any and every one. This subtle contradiction is smoothly rationalized by reference to the obligation to "spread the gospel", as was done even in Christ's own time when he sent the seventy out, but this rationalization appears to be an obfuscation. There is a contradiction, though not be a significant one when we each stand in the judgment spot. a contradiction.

² It is one of the little things that dulls the mind to the intricacies of gospel principles, though that dulling is not intended. This formula is given to kids as a means of helping them gain a basic concept of the process which one must go through when repenting. And it is generally satisfactory. But it nonetheless can create the impression that there is little else to it. That's the sad, though understandable, thing.

steps as are appropriate to the mistake, but there is another layer that one must operate on to succeed, which is actually the most essential of them all, though it is not noted in the formula. Repentance must be a sincere, intentional act of the spirit. It must be an unconditional and it must be an unqualified act of free agency. This is the level at which the judgment will work on us. The inner workings of our thoughts will be evaluated.

CONSEQUENCES :

There are two consequences to successful repentance. First, an injured party will be made whole, if possible, and second, the individual himself will be freed of the burden of the sin. Let's explore these glib comments with the tools of this model.

When an individual is wronged, the wrong doer can sometimes replace or restore things to reverse the mistake. Examples of this type of error would be theft or destruction of another's property. This property can be replaced and the wronged person is made whole. However, there are some wrongs that affect another person in a manner that no reversal or compensation can occur. Some of the most insidious of this second type of wrong are gossiping and sexual errors. In these cases, the victims experience something in their spirit that cannot be reversed or neutralized. These behaviors are both destructive of spirits, regardless of how the mortal body of the persons appear. And within this model, there is no expectation that repentance by the sinner will necessarily restore the injured parties to their pre-injury state. Such recuperation, assuming the admission of guilt by the wrongdoer to the injured party, is an internal process that the latter works out variously for him/herself.

The second consequence occurs to or in the spirit of the wrongdoer. Recall that wrongs done intentionally by an individual require the willful exercise of agency. One of the results of that willful error, within the framework of this model, is a change in the spirit matter of the wrong doer, a change that resulted from the exercise of that spirit matter to choose and execute a wrong. With this change in mind, it becomes clear that repentance must somehow reverse that effect on the spirit matter. One's spirit molecular structure is returned to some degree closer to the ideal structure of celestial bodies.

However, these two paragraphs only touch the surface of the matter. There must be an additional price that is paid by the wrongdoer when his wrong has directly affected the spirit of another person. And in the second case, the effect of the Atonement must be involved to effect the change granted by the process of repentance.

INTERNAL SINS:

So far we have ignored an important though perhaps subtle distinction between types of sins. To this point, we have discussed sins where there were overt acts on the part of the sinner, things which were "physically" done in this 3-d world. That covers a broad range of actions, but still leaves out the ones alluded to by the Christ when He spoke of thinking being the same as doing. And this problem has been alluded elsewhere in this work. The idea is that when our spirit thinks thoughts without performing the associated acts, we are in fact doing precisely what we would do if we DID commit the acts. We went through the precursors and - this is the point- as a result, our spirits have in fact been internally affected by the thoughts, just as we would have been if we had done the acts.^{3} How does this fit into this model?

It is believed here that, based on Christ's statement, these types must also be repented of in some fashion. So we must call them back to mind, consider them, determine that they were wrong and reconsider how to live and leave the behaviors behind. Recall Christ's admonition to the women taken in adultery: "Nor do I. Go thy way and sin no more." He doesn't specify a greatly detailed process of repentance. Just stop doing it and get on with life. The problem with these sins is that we are less likely to remember them and therefore will be less able to repent of them. So they will be hanging around for a long time.^{4}

Another problem for these internal sins revolves around how "real" they were to us. Were they actually precursors to action or were they some sort of stray thought that flitted across our screen, in the manner of dirty pictures on a television show we are watching. Are these non-internal thoughts exempt from this doctrine? We believe here that they are because they do not originate from our free agency, rather enter into our minds from outside through the agency of something or someone else. Since our agency was not involved, then there was no sin. This distinction, if it is real, is clearly not one that we will be able to make for ourselves. But the difference will be manifested in our spirits themselves. If we exercised our spirits in some manner, the

³ There is a most insidious consequence of this doctrine if one only thinks it part way through. If one takes the doctrine at face value, thinking that by thinking the thought, s/he has already earned the same punishments that would be assessed IF the acts were performed, then s/he will conclude that s/he may as well go on and do the act. There would be no reason to not indulge, if the penalty is already assessed.

However, here we believe that there is an essential difference that spares the doer of one set of punishments, as will be evident here.

⁴ Based on this reality, one is tempted to conclude that there may be some way to get blanket forgiveness. If we are going to be accepted into a celestial state, and we are not able to recall each one of these internal sins, then we must be forgiven in a general manner of them. This would be justified by the general set of our minds and the nature of our actions.

consequences will be apparent.^{5}

SECOND COST OF SIN:

In this model, it is believed that there are in fact two charges assessed on us for certain sins. We are in no position to understand all of the intricacies and subtleties of how these charges are assessed, but we can comprehend in general what they are. The first charge has been amply discussed in this text. It is the intrinsic change in our spirit matter itself that results from the wrong exercise of our free agency in violation of laws of heaven.^{6}

The second cost of some sins will be some sort of penalty exacted from us in some peculiar setting in the next worlds.^{7} Included in this class of sins must be those where we injured other parties, for example, cases where someone else was harmed. There may be penalties attached to those sins, penalties that will be exacted from us by the Father and justice. And we will only be freed of these costs after we have paid the price.

CONCLUSION:

Whatever the mechanisms are, repentance is the only way we will be able to get around the sins we commit here on earth. It is the only hope we have of being purified of our sinful lives. And it is tied into the atonement through some mystical-appearing mechanism.

⁵ Perhaps the most profound problem of these internal sins involves the Christ. We are told that He descended below us all, that He experienced everything we experienced, etc. That, ostensibly, was the manner in which he was able to learn and understand us. But the question is: if He did in fact think these sorts of thoughts and actions, then is He, too, responsible to pay the price? We must conclude that He did in fact experience them in some real sense, not merely as a TV show, else His experience with them would not have been efficacious in teaching Him what we experience. And this means, then, that He was committing these sorts of sins.

That doesn't sound right, does it? So we end up justifying or rationalizing this problem by claiming that He had special powers of observation and comprehension that precluded the necessity of committing the thought sins. That preserves His purity.

⁶ I'm not sure whether these negative changes simply result from the wrongful exercise of agency or whether the black priesthood is somehow activated. In the latter case, this priesthood would alter something in our spirits. A graphic example of this idea comes from the wonderful STAR WARS movies. In the situation where Luke Skywalker confronts his father in the presence of the evil leader of the black power. As Luke is seduced by the offer of power, his light saber hand starts to turn black from the hand upward toward the elbow. When he sees this physical changes, he understands his danger so throws down the light saber to interrupt the process.

⁷ It really isn't clear where this holding pen will be for us when we are working off these penalties. It sounds like this experience will occur AFTER the judgment, so we don't anticipate the process occurring before the resurrection. We don't, in fact, even know whether we will go through this process before or after the resurrection. But whatever the sequence, we don't know where the place will be. Nor do we comprehend what the mechanism will be that we are submitted to. There will have to be some sort of jailer, and there will have to be some sort of method to assess the price of the sin, and then we will have to be held somewhere until we have paid that price.