

Thought's on Faith and Evidence

I recently read a talk from October of 2019 by Dallin H. Oaks (now President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), called "Trust in the Lord". In one part it addresses people who have had visions of the spirit world, or read a Near Death account, and from this believe some principle concerning the spirit world, or think they have an idea of how it is organized, etc. In the talk he mentions that it's fine to discuss items from these experiences with family or in private personal settings, but information gathered from such experiences shouldn't be considered doctrinal; and with the counsel to consider these things within intimate settings, he seems to imply that it's better not to make these experiences or considerations too broadly public.

I do admit that in addition to scriptures and personal experiences, some material from Near Death accounts was very helpful to me when I was uncertain about the reality of spiritual things. The stories make intangible things much more concrete, and with some veridical evidence pertaining to them, they bring spiritual truths such as the immortality of the soul into the territory of something that I believe can be proven with evidence.

I've of course considered that God may not want too much evidence brought into the realm of spiritual things, as that brings faith more out of the realm of private and personal experiences and confirmations, and into territory of concrete and verifiable evidence. To me this is a really interesting question and consideration, and one that I will try to address partially here. But first, I want to say that I've seen many good and honorable people who are skeptics that need more concrete evidence to believe, and met some equally good members who have lost their faith and left the Church without some concrete things to accompany more sensitive confirmations from the Holy Ghost.

Diligently reading and studying scriptures, can bring understanding and confirmation that feels unshakable, but like any type of life or live thing like a plant, relationship, etc., testimonies that come from these things have to be continually nurtured, rather than knowledge of a scientific fact which doesn't fade from belief in the same way. It may fade from memory, but not as much from belief. But at the same time it is more of a static thing than a live and growing testimony or relationship with God. The obvious reason to me why Faith is sometimes seen as contrary to seeking after evidence, is that if truth of all spiritual things was suddenly proven, it would make mortality much less of a test in choosing to do the right thing. There would still be some choice though, as in similar things like having knowledge of good principles of health and nutrition, where many people know them but do not follow them. But certain knowledge of spiritual truth would definitely make the test of mortality much easier.

After serving part of a mission in Albania, and as my conversion had many difficult intellectual obstacles along the way, I felt that part of God's requirement for my conversion was to try to write to a more intellectual and possibly skeptical audience, using persuasive logic and some evidence of spiritual things. When I started that project over 20 years ago, I didn't really know what leaders in my church or any church would think of that, I did it because it is what I felt I was supposed to do.

Everything I have released in terms of the books and every pdf or page on this website here, was done for the same reason- I felt, sometimes weighing things after much thought and consideration, that it was important to address or include. I also have the motivation to bear witness of God, and help the faith of others. But my primary motivation and drive, has always been to do the things I feel I am called to, or supposed to do. Even if they don't make sense to everyone else..

My short answer to whether it is a good thing to bring more evidence into the realm of spiritual things is that with items of faith, I think that like Thomas who needed to witness the marks in Jesus's hands, and put his hand in his side before believing, some of us need more evidence or a stronger confirmation before achieving higher levels of faith. And Jesus said to him, "[B]ecause thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believed." I think there are many reasons why people have a disposition to be more immediately believing versus need more evidence. And I do not want to explore those here. But I do want to note that for whatever additional material it may take to convince someone who is slower to believe, those people can become of the most faithful, committed and loyal believers once they finally get there. Paul could be considered one of these, as he is one that Jesus had to speak to out of the sky to get him to stop fighting against his church and followers, but once converted, Paul suffered and did many great things for the cause of Christianity.

But coming back to one of the original points of this supplementary comment- The evidence shared in the books and on this website, is never meant to establish any doctrine; it is all intended to strengthen and support understanding of the scriptures and spiritual truth that we already have. It is like putting additional support beams in for a bridge that is already in place. Many would say these beams are not necessary, but in difficult times I have found them helpful, and to carry me much further along this mortal journey.

The intention of the books, and work of the website, is also an attempt to bring principles of truth together- to unite perspectives, ideologies, principles, and evidence already in existence, with a few new concepts, just as one might take a thousand puzzle pieces and find their relationship to each other, linking single pieces as well as sections in which many connections have already been made. Where the boundaries of the pieces may have seemed to be in conflict, with the slight turn of a piece in one direction or another, or with a link added in

between, pieces can come together. Linking various pieces of truth can provide greater depth of understanding and in fact strengthen each individual principle. With a standard puzzle, the greater number of pieces that become linked allow for a greater vision of the whole; so too does piecing together principles of understanding begin to unfold a picture of the whole of existence, a picture of great beauty and purpose.

I also try to say very clearly in each book, and for all content on this website, that the thoughts presented are those stemming from the analytical reflection of the author and contributions of cited sources. The books, content and positions expressed on the website stand independent of any institution or organization and any claims or errors are the singular responsibility of the author and no other entity or individual.

The books and content given here are offered in respect to all those who give their time and resources to reading and pondering their message. We understand that choosing to give the time for such an endeavor, with all of the other demands life places, is a gift of the reader. It is our hope that the reader will receive as much from that investment of time in reading the books, as we have received in writing them.

In sincere thanks,

Ryan Umari

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