

MORMONISM

By JOHN A. WIDTSOE

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Dr. John A. Widtsøe, member of the Council of Twelve Apostles, Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) church, was a native of the Island of Frøyen, Norway. His family came to America while he was a child, and he received his education for the most part in this country. In 1891 he was graduated from the Normal department of Brigham Young College in Logan, Utah, in 1894 from Harvard University, and he won a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Göttingen in 1899. He was traveling fellow of the graduate school of Harvard in 1898-1900, studying at the Polytechnicum in Zurich in 1900. He was honored with the Doctor of Laws degree by Utah State Agricultural College in 1914 and by the University of Utah in 1921.

His major interest lay in the field of chemistry, which subject he taught for a time in Utah State Agricultural College. He was at one period director of the Utah Experiment Station, and became principal of the agricultural department of the Brigham Young University in 1905; he served as president of the Agricultural College of Utah, 1907-16. Dry farming and irrigation naturally engaged his interest and to the solution of the problems in this field he gave years of study. He was president of the International Dry-Farming Congress in 1912 and three of his books relate to the subject: *Dry Farming*, 1911; *Irrigation Practice*, 1914; and as late as 1927 he wrote *Success on Irrigation Projects*. From 1916 to 1921 he was president of Utah University. Since 1921 he has been a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He served as President of European Missions for his church, 1928-33, and is at present Commissioner of Education for his denomination.

Like many of the lay leaders of the Mormon church, he has written and lectured widely on his faith. Among his best known religious books are *A Rational Theology* and *In Search of Truth*.

THE welfare or happiness of mankind — the eternal quest of man — is the goal of religion. It cannot be otherwise. Religion exists to supply the needs of man. Indeed, in the words of the Nephite prophet, "Men are that they might have joy." This objective must color and explain every doctrine and activity of religion.

Happiness as the aim of life may be defined as the increasing joy of living that comes from robust health of body, mind and spirit. It is far from the selfish satisfaction of unnatural appetites. It is rather the normal unfolding of the natural, in-born powers of man, together with the recognition and wise use of the immutable laws of progressive existence. It represents man's adjustment to his environment. Complete health — the full possession of our powers, a correct realization of the issues of life, and an unyielding endeavor to obey the laws of life — can alone yield complete happiness. It is the function of religion, which exists for human good, to provide the means for such development.

Happiness must be continuous, else it is incomplete. Religion is as necessary on weekdays as on Sundays. Different days may command different duties, but all must lead to joy in life. Days are holy when devoted to the legitimate needs of man. Now and here is the place of religion. Salvation must be a daily affair.

Such a religion must be more than a lifeless system of ethics, designed for outward human needs. It must provide the sustaining hope and life-giving power which come to

him who knows his place in a universe directed by intelligent beings far above him in the scale of progression. "Man does not live by bread alone," for the greatest sorrows and joys are always from within.

Nevertheless, though spiritual concerns are vastly more important than material things, both are necessary in filling man's cup of joy, and neither must be excluded. Man is not wholly satisfied by the promise of heavenly rewards. Provision must be made in an acceptable plan for human welfare for the needs of today on earth, as of tomorrow in another world. Man needs food and shelter today; he needs congenial employment and refreshing recreation today. He can find full enjoyment and make the most of his life, whatever his situation in life, only when temporal as well as spiritual wants are satisfied. Such practical service touching all human needs makes religion real, breathing, alive, and points the way to secure happiness.

The world-wide aim of religion should be to help all men. It is unthinkable under the doctrine that all are children of God that one man can find full happiness in a world where other men and women are unhappy. In religious perspective the individual looms large and is of first importance. Lifting the individual is the best method of lifting the group. The happiness of humanity is attained with greatest certainty by making every man and woman happy. The measure of the success of religion is the small number of unhappy persons, rather than the average condition of the group. Religious activity should be directed toward group contentment through happiness for every person. The ultimate aim of religion is to develop a strong people made up of strong men and women, all of whom are vigorous in body and soul, of righteous desire and disciplined will, temporally prosperous

and spiritually enlightened. Religion should project an illimitable, satisfying future for every member of the human race.

To achieve its goal, religion must enter into every concern of human life. It must resolutely set about to serve the many needs of man — physical, economic, social, mental and spiritual. It has too long specialized in spiritual aid and therefore often failed in its dear desire to bring full happiness and comfort to mankind.

The physical welfare of man should be a prime concern of religion. All elements of human happiness lose their savor and value in a condition of physical ill health. Good physical health is a requisite for complete happiness. The great religious leaders from the earliest times have recognized this; and in this day, with its manifold offerings of things injurious to health, physical welfare should be doubly a concern of religion. Every new, tested principle of bodily welfare should, in the interest of the goal of religion, be taught from the pulpit.

Likewise, there must be no hesitancy on the part of religious leaders to attempt a solution of the economic problems of the day. After all, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ provides ample direction for economic prosperity, however difficult it may be to convert people to it. In this day, also, when hand labor has been so largely displaced by machine service, the wise use of leisure time, a modern type of recreation, occupies a new position of importance. The mechanization of our civilization raises social problems closely connected with family life, with courtship, marriage and divorce, with morality and spirituality, in the solution of which religion should and must take the lead.

In this new day of enlightenment, religion must support

and foster all means by which every man may share in the intellectual gains of the age; otherwise an aristocracy of learning will cause unhappiness among the masses of people who desire the satisfactions of the mind that our new knowledge has brought. Education — sane, rational, usable for all — must be included in the goal of religion. In short, as has been said, if human happiness be the goal of religion, then everything that bears upon human welfare must be actively the concern of religion.

A rational comprehension of man's relationship to the universe and its contents is the foundation of happiness. The spirit of man ever sighs for a knowledge of the meaning of life. Freedom from temporal anxieties does not relieve him of this desire. Forever he gazes back into the time before he came on earth and forward into the eternities that shall follow his earthly career. Whence did he come? Why is he here? Where is he going? Competent answers to these questions result in man's spiritual contentment. Religion has often failed of its duty by explaining life hereafter and leaving the past and the present unexplained. There can be no real happiness unless man possesses at least an outline knowledge of life, its meaning and purpose, into which may be fitted the experiences of the day.

Religion must begin its answer to the questions that come from within by declaring its fearless acceptance of the existence of an unseen universe, one greater by far than the visible world; an unseen universe which may be known in part by mortal man if he explore it honestly and intelligently. The reality of the unseen world is a foundation fact in a religion devised for human happiness. There is no real difference between the seen and the unseen worlds except in the states or

conditions of the eternal elements from which the universe, visible and invisible, is built. The mind of man finds peace in the unity of nature with respect to the origin of things.

So closely connected are these two worlds, the seen and the unseen, that every law for the guidance of man on earth has a spiritual equivalent or counterpart. The Lord has declared: "Verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal . . . for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal, neither carnal nor sensual." The humblest task, therefore, may be of value, through divine transmutation, in fulfilling the purposes of man's existence. We live and walk in the midst of spiritual as well as temporal realities. That thought again brings religion into everyday affairs.

There are personal, living beings in the visible earthly world. There are personal, living beings in the invisible spiritual world. From out of the unseen world man comes; into the unseen world he returns. Who shall deny the existence of personal, intelligent beings in the unseen universe? Who can deny that man upon earth may be helped and guided by beings of the unseen world?

In that other world is God, our Father, whose glory is intelligence, a compound of love and wisdom. Him we may approach in supplication, assured of helpful response. Prayer is ever the ready, certain means of securing revelations from the Lord for our help and guidance. There are no ultimate barriers between this and the other world. The joy of such association is unsurpassed. The questions which have always stirred the depths of the human soul can be answered satisfactorily only in terms of the living God. God does not forget his children. As he has communicated with

man in the past, he may speak to man today. The assurance of such constant communication between God and man opens the deep springs of secure happiness.

The origin of man is of equal concern in human happiness. Man is one of the eternal realities of the universe. Not only shall he endure after death; he lived as a spiritual, pre-existent being before he came upon earth. He "was in the beginning with God." Men and women of earth are spirit children of God, his very children, therefore brothers and sisters in a divine family. Who shall with convincing evidence deny man's existence before his earth life?

In that spirit world, in the pre-existent state, we were engaged actively, intelligently, in perfecting our powers. The idea of progression was paramount. Increase and development are key principles of the Gospel. In the past, the present or the future, progression with all that it implies has been, is, and will be the primary aim of intelligent beings. Intelligence is not static; it is alive, therefore active and progressive. Even such a glimpse of man's beginning removes the heavy pressure of the unknown.

The time came in our spiritual estate when we had developed sufficiently to enter upon a further education that would come from direct contact with the material things of the universe. Power to conquer and direct surrounding forces makes progress possible. Our Father knew this, and desiring, in his love for us, our further growth, presented a divine plan, known as the Gospel, by which we might secure this earth-education. The purpose of the plan was to provide for man's progressive, eternal happiness. There can be no sense of joy without progression. Rest is but as sleep, a preparation for action. Man must ever strive to progress, to develop, to gain greater power over himself and the forces

about him. Life is purposeful; and purpose gives definiteness to life and certainty to happiness.

The conditions of the proposed life on earth seemed severe: Forgetfulness of the happy days of pre-existence; toil and struggle with the new and stubborn elements of earth; obedience to certain requirements; subjection to death, by which the spirit would be separated for a time from its earth-won body. These conditions were really means to happiness, set up to assist us on our progressive path, for they would strengthen our wills, perfect our free agencies, and fit us thereby for greater conquests of truth. It was to be an education of the best kind from within, of doing and achieving. Only as man stands upon his own feet, conquers himself and directs his own powers, can he rise to greatest heights.

Man really earned the right to come on earth. He had fitted himself for the new adventure and accepted for himself the plan for an earth-life proposed by his Father. The plan was not forced upon him; he chose to come upon earth. Man may then amidst his earthly tasks hold his head high in courage and self-confidence. When the chance which seems to envelop the mystery of life disappears, even in part, the path to happiness is made clearer. Mortal man, with a memory closed against the events of the world from which he came, may not understand wholly the coming into earth of human beings in different countries, in riches or poverty, in health or disease, but he knows that all events are parts of a definite plan and that chance plays no real part in the appearance of men on earth. The intervention of man's will may give temporary direction to the plan, often to our confusion, but the end cannot be affected thereby. The supervision of the plan under which man lives on earth has never been surrendered by its Maker. The Lord directs the slow

unfolding of his purposes on earth among the children of men. He will see to it that the plan is finally consummated. He is at its head and his authority overshadows his children on earth. The actual operation of the plan, however, is in human hands. Men and women represent the Lord in developing his purposes.

All men live after death. Without that hope the goal of religion could not be happiness. The spirits of men enter after death into the unseen world out of which they came at birth. They return home, into the spirit world, with the powers possessed on earth and perhaps others. The spirit world itself is a place of action, growth and progress for all who care to use their opportunities well, and progression there is unending. Therefore, the destiny of man is infinitely great.

The Father's plan of salvation is for the progressive development of all members of the human family. The joys of salvation — of development and attainment — are intended for all. God is not a partial Father. The Lord said to Moses: "This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." It is doubtful if the Lord's plan can be completed before all his children have won the joys of some degree of salvation.

The conception of an actual relationship among all humanity places upon every human being a family responsibility. To help our neighbor is to help our own. Our hearts must beat toward our neighbor as toward a brother if we are to be truly happy. That is the spiritual meaning of the law of charity. The troubles of the world cannot be overcome until that brotherhood with its attendant obligations and consequences is accepted in practice. It is a false teaching which declares impractical, because of human na-

ture, the attempt to live up to the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. An exaltation of feeling follows the knowledge that every man is indeed a son of God, carries within his soul the elements of divinity, and may look forward into a distant, increasing future, throughout which his divine nature shall continually unfold. Then we look with new respect and love upon our fellow men, sons of God, with possible Godlike destinies before them.

What then would hinder all from winning the joys which the Father's plan provides? The answer is that different individuals use their free agencies unequally. The eternal will of man explains human history. Progress under the Plan requires obedience to several requirements. Some render such obedience fully, some in part, others not at all. It is so in daily life, with respect to mundane affairs.

It is a cardinal principle that as one sows so shall he reap. A person will be judged according to his works. The goodness of the Lord, the Great Judge, will temper the judgment; yet even he cannot ignore our works. Every man by his daily acts shapes his salvation. The principle of cause and effect is operative in the spiritual as in the material domain. Only when put into action does faith become irresistible.

The love of a Father for his children makes it necessary to believe that, despite the varying deserts of men, all shall receive in the life to come full and glorious reward for whatever good they have done. Provision is made in the eternal plan for graded salvation. He who has done best is placed highest — he will receive the highest glory and his power of progress will be the greatest. Those who have not done so well are placed lower, with lesser glories, and with diminished power for progress. The judgments given to men, based upon their acts, shall vary as the sun and the

moon and the countless stars in the firmament. "In my Father's house are many mansions." The lowest of these rewards, reserved for the vilest sinner, will be glorious beyond the understanding of man, though infinitely less than that of the highest. There can be no hell in the traditional sense if human happiness is to be preserved. God is love. Intolerable burnings do not comport with the feelings of an affectionate father for his children. The equivalent of hell is the unending regret of him who having had great opportunities finds himself by his own wilfulness in a lower stage of progress than he might have been. That is a heavy but inescapable punishment which can be forgotten only in resolute attempts to move onward in the days to come.

The mystery of God's punishment is not known to man. We can only make conjectures based upon general laws. But we do know that he is most merciful. In response to questions concerning this matter, light was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith: "I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore — Eternal punishment is God's punishment — Endless punishment is God's punishment." Many things have been withheld from the understanding of man, but our Father's loving gentleness is beyond debate. Looking thus into the future a new joy will follow man's eager struggle for righteousness.

So runs this conception of man's eternal journey. He existed before he came on earth; he was with God "in the beginning"; he accepted the opportunity provided by his Father to come on earth to be tried, refined and educated; he lives on earth under laws and regulations and the authority of the Lord; he shall die, but in time he shall regain his body, and because of his righteous endeavors shall go

on forever into eternal, active, progressive exaltation. Man's destiny is divine. Life on earth is but a chapter in an eternal journey. Man is an eternal being. He also is "from everlasting to everlasting."

In this manner of thinking, salvation acquires a definite meaning. Whoever is in process of development or progression is in process of salvation. Increasing knowledge, used in conformity with the plan of the Lord, becomes power to remove all obstacles to progress. In the words of Joseph Smith, to be saved is to be placed "beyond the power of evil." Clearly, then, our salvation began in the dim past, is being worked out by us on earth and will be approached in its greater perfection throughout the endless ages of future life. By that token all men may be saved but in degrees proportionate to their righteous works. Does a man then save himself? From one point of view, yes. However, it is only through the divine plan that salvation may be won; therefore, man is only a partner in the saving process. Salvation is a co-operative enterprise between God and man.

The Lord Jesus Christ, our elder Brother in the pre-existent world, is the Being from out the unseen world to whom the Father delegated the labors connected with the earth and its inhabitants. It was in his role of assigned leadership that he became "the lamb slain before the foundations of the world." He is the Redeemer of man, the central figure in the plan of salvation. Therefore we speak of the plan as the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It may not be overlooked that a religion the goal of which is happiness, and which strives to supply all needs of man, temporal and spiritual, must require something in return. There would be no personal development or progress if re-

ligion gave everything and required nothing. To be effective, any plan for human good must be accepted by those who are to share in its benefits, and they must give evidence of their acceptance by compliance with stated requirements. That is the logical method of winning the gifts of earth or heaven. One cannot at the same time accept a plan and be independent of it. A "free lance" does not belong to a group, accepts no plan, is lawless. Conformity to law is the evidence of the Christian life and the unfailing source of happiness. A religion worth the acceptance of intelligent man must be God-made and its requirements therefore of eternal character and ultimate human value. Such a point of view indeed makes formal ordinances indispensable in a religion with happiness as its goal. Faith and repentance, baptism and confirmation and the other required principles and ordinances of the Christian religion must be accepted in that spirit and with that understanding.

The goal of religion — happiness — can be attained only upon the condition of the love of and correct use of truth. True happiness, the greatest satisfaction, the product of complete health, is derived from the acceptance and practice of the principles of tested truth, and there is no other source. Disease was not under control when people believed that it was caused by the evil eye of a witch. Joseph Smith said, "A man cannot be saved in ignorance," and, also, "Knowledge is the pathway up to the Gods." As knowledge and the proper use of knowledge increase, man's power to win happiness is augmented, in both the physical and the spiritual domains. Religion must recognize and teach the supreme value of truth. It requires also of every man who seeks happiness that when truth is found he discard the clashing untruths that hoary tradition may have foisted upon him.

He must be as willing to forsake old fallacies as to accept new facts. He must feel as Brigham Young declared, "I will trade every error in the world for one truth." Without such an attitude of mind there is no saving grace in truth.

The whole domain of truth, new or old, is accepted and taught by true religion. Every scientific discovery is welcomed. Every new and more correct presentation of the nature of the universe is hailed. No limitations can be placed upon the search for truth. Religion demands of the truth-seeker only that he distinguish carefully between facts of observation and hypotheses of inference. The former, if correctly made, do not vary; the latter are bound to change as facts are multiplied. Since the body of truth is constantly increasing, there must be a continuous seeking and offering of truth within the field of religion. In addition, since the growth of knowledge is continuous, religion, the conservator of truth, though its foundations never change, must ever be enlarging its content and boundaries. Religion is a living thing, therefore always in a state of growth and increase.

There can be no happiness, even when possessing truth, unless it is accepted willingly. Freedom, the right to act for himself, is one of man's fundamental cravings. Slavery and happiness are incompatible. They cannot travel together. Men are not pawns to be moved about irrespective of their desires. Only those who can express themselves freely in thought and action rejoice in life. Free agency, held by true religion to be an inviolable right of man, makes every person accountable for his own acts. He cannot shift the responsibility for life's endeavors to other shoulders. A body of believers must be governed by common consent. This does not mean that men may be lawless. The supremacy

of law — natural, human and divine — remains whatever men may do. The whole matter is that those who choose to obey law gain thereby. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." By the use of his free agency man may move upward to freedom or downward to bondage. To use one's agency within the law is the high ideal set up by religion.

Control of self is a corollary of free agency. While the right to act as one chooses inheres in every human being, yet the desire for happiness requires that every man conform to law. Such conformity is the only method by which full happiness may be obtained. Self-mastery is an essential element of human happiness. People who choose to obey the law are happy. They develop their individual power to shape their own destinies. In modern revelation this thought is formulated as follows: "Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves." When that is done the goal of religion is within easy reach.

The philosophy sketched briefly above enables the Latter-day Saints to answer many pertinent questions concerning the goal of religion:

What is the object of religion? To make people happy in this life and in the hereafter. It is a truthful and complete compass or chart for life's voyage, and an effective guide for human effort, in every occupation, condition or need. It has common sense and is practical.

When is religion acceptable? When it conforms to the many-sided nature of man — that is, when it is complete and therefore satisfies the physical, economic, social, mental,

moral and spiritual needs of man. When it is the guiding philosophy and supporting power of all human actions.

What does religion offer men individually? It offers guidance in every affair of life; it presents the Gospel as a measuring stick by which the virtue of all acts may be determined; it explains measurably the mysteries of life in our vast universe; it holds out the promise of endless achievement, progression, proportioned to the efforts put forth; it gives understanding, contentment, love; it points to a divine destiny; it assures the right of freedom of choice; and declares that man must bear the consequences of the exercise of that free agency.

What does religion offer man socially? It offers to the social group all that it offers to the individual; it explains that men are true brothers, for all of whom the plan of salvation was devised, and that full happiness cannot be won so long as one of our kin fails to tread the road of progress; it declares that society is responsible for every individual.

What is salvation? It is the condition that results when a person is in harmony with truth. Man may ever be on the way to salvation, but in its fullness, salvation is the eternal goal. The law of salvation as of all life is eternal progression. One must grow daily and forever in righteousness and good works. Those who are in a state of salvation are in a constant state of progression; those who are static or who retrograde are "the lost." Even for the latter, the tender mercy of God provides a fitting place in his kingdom, and the opportunity for continuous repentance. Whoever has placed himself by obedience to divine law beyond the power of evil, to that extent is saved.

How may salvation be attained? By accepting the principles and practices of truth issuing from God and constituting

ing the plan of salvation; by the resolute use of the will to obey at any cost the requirements of the Gospel; and by constant appeal in prayer to God for assistance.

Does Christ do something for man which man cannot do for himself? Yes. He is our Redeemer; he leads us along the dim path; his sacrifice will enable us to recover the bodies we lay down in the grave; he is our advocate with the Father; he is our Captain.

Happiness as the goal of religion implies that religion will help provide for all the needs of man, will teach the meaning of life from the dim beginning to the vast future, will set forth the conditions of obedience upon which happiness is wrought, and will help develop in men love of truth, strength of will, love for fellow men and the other personal requisites to travel the way to happiness. Perhaps the greatest and the most difficult duty of religion having happiness as a goal is to help direct the stubborn human will into compliance with the requirements for achieving that happiness.