

Interview with Jean Wunderlich, LeGrand Baker

At the end of World War II, Jean Wunderlich was called to be the first post-war mission president in West Germany. His assignment would be to find the remnants of the Saints there and help them make the church a viable organization again. After receiving the call, Jean and his wife traveled to Salt Lake City, where he was to be set apart by President McKay. When they entered his office, the prophet stood, came from behind his desk, welcomed his guests, and invited them to sit down. Sister Wunderlich sat in a chair by the door. Jean sat in one which the prophet had brought to the center of the room. President McKay placed his hands on Jean's head and began to give him a blessing. Here, Jean stopped his narrative, looked at me, and said, "When the prophet has his hands on your head, you listen – and I listened!" However, Jean said that President McKay had spoken only a few sentences when he gave a command which introduced Jean to the most powerful spiritual experience of his life. He saw a beautiful light, and other things which he did not describe to me. Jean said he became aware of the prophet and the room only when he felt President McKay's hands lift from his head and the blessing was finished. Jean told me that was the most significant experiences of his whole life, and his telling me became one of the most significant conversations of mine. He said he was not telling me a story, he was giving me a gift. The gift he gave me was the words of the command which the prophet spoke, which initiated Jean's profound experience. Those words were these: "Be true to the Law of your own Being." When Jean told me the words, he commented that in LDS theology, "law" has an eternal connotation, and the command to be true to that law suggests that one might also apostatize from it – that one may be at variance with what one really is. Since that day, I have thought a great deal about what Jean told me, and have concluded that sin is simply one's acting or being in violation of the law which is one's Self – defying the eternal law of one's own being. There are some things which none of us can do without doing violence to our Selves, such as stealing, blaspheming, and hurting other people. These generic sins are all covered by the basic commandments. But there are also things that are specific sins to only one individual, and are not sins to everyone else. I believe that the chief function of the Holy Ghost is to help one bring his earthly life into perfect accord with the law of what one really is -- to make us one with the law of our own being by teaching us what that law is and helping us live it.

My favorite example is my friend Jim Cannon, who is a world class mathematician. I know Jim very well. To him theoretical math seems to be the balance between art, poetry, and music. I suspect if Jim had chosen to not be a mathematician that would have been a great sin. Now, I, on the other hand, can barely get by in arithmetic – never mind theoretical math. If, in my admiration for Jim, I tried to be a mathematician like him, I would not only be a failure, I would have to deny everything I am to try to be something I am not. That would also be a great sin. (Actually, I admit to finding some comfort in the notion that for me math might be sinful! :-)

As Jean understood it, "the law of one's own being" is simply what one *IS* – the individual personalities we each have developed and nurtured from the time we were intelligences. And I believe the assignments we received at the Council were consistent with our eternal personalities – the laws of our individual beings. But I also believe that there is one common foundation upon which every assignment given at the Council was predicated. Earlier I pointed out that the ancients thought of the "heart" as the seat of both our emotions and our intellect, and I concluded that the Book of Mormon's use of the word "mind" was a reference to that part of one's spirit with which one's "heart" can communicate. Abinadi made a great point of that idea, and I'll talk about it more in the context of his speech. For the present let me simply

suggest that a natural man is one who is controlled by his “heart” – his physical, academic, and emotional world. Consequently such a one is not equipped to keep the covenants he made at the Council until he lets that physical Self communicate with, and be directed by his “mind” – his spiritual Self which inhabits his body. If that is correct, then one would expect that the assignment given at the Council would have been consistent with the desires, interests, and talents of one’s “mind.” And that one’s responsibility to fulfill those assignments is seated, not in the “heart”(The place we call the brain), but in the mind – that is, the fulfillment of the covenants are the responsibility of one’s soul. It’s like this:

I look around the world and see other people whom my eyes and ears testify to my brain are real. Experience has taught me to accept the testimony of my eyes and ears, and I believe the people are real. I can interact with them, as well as see, hear, and touch them. All of those sensations are in the “heart” – the place where the ancients assigned both one’s emotions and one’s intellect. But the heart/brain is not designed to be able to give its owner absolute proof of anything. (Food that tastes good may not be good for the body, people who look beautiful may not be kind.) All that I see, hear and feel are only my brain’s interpretation of electronic impulses. I get much the same kind of electronic information when I sit in a movie theater as when I watch a live theatrical production on the stage. Although I believe the latter is the more real, I have no better evidence than what my body and my experiences have taught me to accept. In fact, I have no compelling evidence at all. If one projects that argument to its logical conclusion, I have no absolute evidence that any of my family or friends even exist. That’s an age old philosophical question and I suppose I could go back to the primary question and suggest that I have no absolute evidence that I am real — I write that, and I suppose it sounds rational, but it is really quite silly. To begin with, I know that I am – not for the classic reason: because I think, but because I love. I know love is real because I know – *really know* – that Jesus is God: I have experienced his love for me and mine for him. That love *IS* reality – it is the ultimate experience which finds confirmation in the combined testimony of both my body and my soul. My having experienced that love is the only absolute proof I have that I am. I know that I am, because I know that He is. I see my family and my friends, and I love them. I know that kind of love is also real because it is like the love I have for my Saviour. They receive and reciprocate, therefore I know that they are real also. Through those experiences, I am also assured that the people whom I love, but who do not reciprocate, are also real. In that knowledge – the sure knowledge that I have the capacity to both love and be loved – is absolute proof that God is, that I am, and that other people are. In the knowledge of the reality of eternal love, is embedded in the foundation of the law that is me – the law of my being – just as it is embedded the foundation of the law that is you. Within the context of that knowledge – the knowledge of our relationship with our Saviour – and the knowledge of our relationships with other people – one may begin – in this life – to re-discover the eternal nature, quality, and origin of the laws of one’s own being. As one comes to know oneself, one discovers a window through which he can learn what truth is. The window is formed within the perimeters of one’s own truth – the law of one’s own being. It is there where one sealed the covenants made at the Council, and it is there that one must keep those covenants made at the Council. The implication is, if that is true then perfection is simply the maturation of what one is – the self-defined – and God approved – law of one’s own being. Sin is being something other than what one is; really serious sin is the maturation of what one is not. As I write that it occurs to me that it would be easy for someone to take that statement out of context and make it a self-justification for almost anything one wishes. But that won’t work – it is the “God approved” part that restricts one’s definition of one’s Self to the principles of

righteousness. So sin is simply the functioning, or seeking to function, outside the righteous law of one's own being.

If one is to consider one's identity in the Council, and about one's living to that identity in this world, one has to begin, as Abinadi insisted, by seeking to understand the intimate sonship relationship between the Saviour and his children.

The phrase "law of one's own being" is not found in the scriptures, but the concept is there, and the word "law" is used in connection with that concept.¹ It seems to me if one is to comprehend the law of one's own being, one must first seek to understand its origin, objective, and primary consequences – its relationship to the preliminaries of one's foreordination; its relationship to one's keeping the laws and commandments of the Lord while we were intelligences, then spirits, now in this life, and again in the next. Lets begin by looking at the origin of the law.

¹Many of these scriptures also emphasize free agency: D&C 88:28-33, 93:29-38; 2 Nephi 2:11-30, 9:14-16, 26:10; ; Alma 13:3, 40:24-26, Alma 42:7; Moses 4:3-4; Moroni 7:15-17; Ether 12:27-35; Moroni 10:32-33; 2 Ne. 10: 23-24 Abraham 3:22-28.

At the funeral of Jedidiah M. Grant, Heber C. Kimball reported.

He said that after he came back [from the spirit world] he could look upon his family and see the spirit that was in them, and the darkness that was in them; and that he conversed with them about the Gospel, and what they should do, and they replied, "Well, brother Grant, perhaps it is so, and perhaps it is not," and said that was the state of this people, to a great extent, for many are full of darkness and will not believe me. (*Journal of Discourses* 4:135-8)