

Origins of the Law of one's own being, LeGrand Baker

Warning to my friends: You are about to enter a dangerous area in which I freely express my opinion on highly speculative matters. It is about our eternal nature, and it begins with a discussion of our origins as intelligences. I believe it is basically correct – but even that belief is only my opinion. Proceed at your own risk!!

There is no unanimity of opinion in the Church about what an intelligence is. The early history of the discussion about intelligences is briefly this:

Orson Pratt published a work called the *Great First Cause* (I read it for the first time when I was in the 8th or 9th grade and thought he must have been one of the smartest men who ever lived — that opinion has not changed, but I am not as sure about his ideas as I was then) He wrote that there were two fundamental elements: intelligences (plural) and matter. Intelligences were cognizant, which he defined as being at least able to tell the difference between me and not-me. This awareness of self and others developed into the ability to tell the difference between good and evil based on the relationships between one's Self and others, and that developed into the ability to love. The person who was the Great First Cause became the Father-God who learned how to love and to teach others how to love. He also learned that his powers of Self increased dramatically if he could unite himself with matter — therefore he devised a celestial body for himself and devised a way so other intelligences could obtain bodies also. That plan was the Plan of Salvation. It integrated the principles of love, progress, experience, and repentance, and consequently required an atonement by a Saviour who was as perfect as the Father himself.

B. H. Roberts wrote the next important essay about intelligences in a lesson manual which was used by the Church's quorums of seventy. (I read those at the same time I read the *First Great Cause*). Elder Roberts did not try to answer the question, "Where did the first God come from?" but limited his question to, "Where did people come from?" He said intelligences were individuals who had free agency as an integral part of their being. They were capable of making choices and therefore of progressing. He said God wanted them to have bodies like his own so they could experience joy like he does, so he and the Mother in Heaven provided spirit bodies which were made from spirit matter in much the same way as the next step was accomplished, which was for mortal parents to provide those same intelligences/spirits with mortal bodies. Under Roberts' definitions: if one is an intelligence, he is an unembodied individual. If one is a "spirit" he is an intelligence who was born a child to God and in consequence of that birth has a body made of spirit matter. If one is a mortal he is an intelligence with a spirit body who has been born into this world and now has an additional body which was made from less refined matter than the spirit bodies – the physical bodies we have now. When one dies he temporarily loses that physical body – but not his spirit body. So a dead person is a "spirit" again that is, an intelligence with his spirit body. At the resurrection, that spirit person regains his physical body – only now in a purified form. The resurrection is the sealing process which permanently unites the intelligence and his spirit body with his physical body. So a resurrected person is a fully cognizant intelligence who is permanently clothed with a body made of spirit element; and that,

in turn, is permanently clothed in a body made of physical element — which intelligence, spirit and physical bodies have been purified and empowered through the atonement of Christ. For some, that purification and empowerment includes the capacity to live in the Celestial Kingdom with God.

Elder Roberts' ideas about the pre-mortal world dominated that part of church thinking for about half a century until Elder McConkie suggested a much more simplistic version.

Abraham used the name intelligences to apply to the spirit children of the Eternal Father. The intelligence or spirit element became intelligences after the spirits were born as individual entities. The intelligence or spirit element became intelligences after the spirits were born as individuals.¹

President Hugh B. Brown, First Counselor in the First Presidency, seemed to harken back to the earlier ideas.

At a time far antedating Eden, the spirits of all men had a primeval existence and were intelligences with spirit bodies of which God was the universal Father.”²

My object in presenting the differing beliefs of the brethren is not to set up a conflict where one gets to flip a coin and choose a church leader to follow. I simply wish to point out that there is no unanimity of opinion on this matter. I also wish to emphasize that even though I happen to believe what I write, no one else has the right to believe it because I write it, and no one will have the right to assert that I wrote the following claiming that it is church doctrine.

Now let me explain myself: I don't agree with Elder McConkie as I understand what he wrote, but I needed to quote what he wrote, so as not to give the impression that what I am writing is an overview of the universally accepted, or even generally accepted, idea of what an intelligence is.

My own ideas about the origins of man are products of my youthful – and continued – acceptance of the basic ideas of Orson Pratt and B. H. Roberts – and of my thinking a great deal about it since then. Please remember as you read the following, that even though it is decorated with many scriptural references, the way those scriptures

1 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1958), p. 354.

2 *Conference Report*, October 1963, p. 92.

are put together and my interpretation of them is still only my personal opinion.

As I understand what Elder McConkie wrote: God used a quantity of a material called “intelligence” to make individual spirit persons who – for the very first time in their existence – had the capacity to think and act independently. I cannot accept that theory because it can not be used to address these two fundamental questions: “Why was Jehovah the First Born?” and “If he did not exist as an individual before he was born as a spirit, what had he done, while he was only a part of the universal element, to prove that he could be trusted?” To me, the fact that it is not possible to use Elder McConkie’s theory to answer either of those questions exposes the most obvious weakness of his argument. With all due respect to Elder McConkie, my primary problem with his idea is that the Jesus I worship is far too big to squeeze his entire pre-mortal existence into the finite mold Elder McConkie suggests. If the atonement is infinite and eternal, it seems to me that it must have been accomplished by someone who was also infinite and eternal. If persons first became cognizant when they were born as spirits, then both Jesus and those for whom he performed the atonement would have had a beginning and the atonement could only be infinite and eternal in one direction – which is a logical impossibility. Conversely, if the atonement of Christ is infinite and eternal, then Christ’s person, personality, and cognizance must also be infinite and eternal – so must the people for whom the atoning sacrifice was performed. Let me give you just one example of the problem: John’s testimony is “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:3, D&C 93:9-10) It seems to me that testimony could not be true if Christ had an origin as late in the history of “all things” as his birth as a spirit. It also seems to me that the only way one can approach the question, “Why was Christ the Firstborn,” is by first addressing the question “How

had he proven himself so that he qualified to be the Firstborn.”
Whatever else the answer to that question entails, it seems to me that it must include : “For all eternity he had never sinned, so was clean, so had proven himself entirely trustworthy, so was qualified to enter his Father’s presence as the Firstborn.” (That is such an understated synopsis of his early life that I apologize for even writing it, and ask that you consider it to be only my weak words, blundering their way through the single most deeply felt truth I have ever experienced.)
As I read the scriptures, when one considers the Saviour,³ there are

3 John’s testimony in John 1 and D&C 93; Isaiah 40:25-26; Ephesians 3:9; Revelation 4:11, 10:6; Mosiah 4: 2,9, 5:15, and many others say that the Saviour created “all things.” That would insist that he not only had personality, but that he also had untold authority before “all things” were created. (I suppose that would include Kolob, for it is a part of this system*) Those who wish to limit Christ’s cognizant existence to the time after he was born a spirit, may read “all things” as “all things since the Council.” For example Colossians 1:16 says, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” One might read that to be a reference to the creation that was accomplished by Jehovah and the Council and is described in Geneses, Moses, and Abraham.

But that reading is more difficult with statements like Lehi’s: “he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon. And to bring about his eternal purposes in the end of man, (2 Nephi 2: 14b-15a) It’s the “eternal purposes” that gets in the way. One has to put bounds and limits on “eternal” just as one puts them on “all things” in order to make it fit a Jehovah who did not exist as an individual before his spirit birth.

D&C 29:30- 35 is another one.

30 But remember that all my judgments are not given unto men; and as the words have gone forth out of my mouth even so shall they be fulfilled, that the first shall be last, and that the last shall be first in all things whatsoever I have created by the word of my power, which is the power of my Spirit.

31 For by the power of my Spirit created I them; yea, all things both spiritual and temporal——

32 First spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, first temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work——

33 Speaking unto you that you may naturally understand; but unto myself my works have no end, neither beginning; but it is given unto you that ye may understand, because ye have asked it of me and are agreed.

To me “eternal” and “all things” preclude drawing a line in time when Jehovah received his spirit body, and saying that neither his personality nor his power existed before that line. To me that

many indications that his personality and his inclination to serve God go back a very long way in his individual history as an intelligence. Some scriptures suggest that was true of others of us as well. As children of God, each of us are fundamentally an intelligence who is an individual with the ability to think, to love, and to hate, and therefore the ability to do good and do evil.

For example, Abraham 3-4 tells of a succession of visions (or a succession of scenes in the same vision) in which he was shown intelligences, spirits at the Council in Heaven, the expulsion of Satan and his followers from the Council, then the creation of the earth by that same Council.

That sequence is found no where else in the scriptures.⁴ In Abraham's creation story the members of the Council are called "gods." One of those was Abraham himself who came to this world, suffered as other men, but lived his life in strict accord with the revelation he received. He died "and hath entered into his exaltation and sitteth upon his throne." (D&C 132: 29) That sequence is the same as the personal history of all who were righteous members of the Council.

would be as irrational as drawing a line in time when Jesus received his mortal body and saying that neither his personality nor his power existed before that line.

* Kolob is described by the Lord as "near unto me," and "set nigh unto the throne of God." Abraham 3:3,9) I suppose that could be talking about geography, but I doubt it. A temple (which is geographically not close to God at all) should be described in precisely that same way. My assumption is that Kolob is the "temple precinct" of this universe or "age." That is, it and the temple on it are the connecting link between our universe (both the spiritual and the physical creation) and the place where God the Father dwells. If that is true, then Kolob and its temple would be among the "all things" created by Jehovah. Don't get upset with that idea. I warned you I was going to do some speculating. If you don't like that idea, disregard it as only that.

4 The information contained in that sequence alone makes the Book of Abraham one of our most precious documents. It was first published in the March 1 & 15 issue of the *Times and Seasons*. About two months later, on May 4, 1842, Joseph gave the first endowments of this dispensation to James Adams, Hyrum Smith, Newel K. Whitney, George Miller, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards.

Unless “star” is intended to be an actual description (and it may be), there is no physical description of intelligences in the scriptures. I suppose, if one were going to describe what an intelligence looked like, I would probably use the word “illuminare,” or perhaps a “spot of light,” or a “star.” In D&C 93 the people whom he was talking about seem to be divided into three categories: “ye” (members of the Council), man, and intelligence.

Ye were also in the beginning with the Father; that which is Spirit, even the Spirit of truth...

Man was also in the beginning with God.

Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. (D&C 93: 23, 29-30)

That statement about the relationship between intelligence and truth seems to be very important: As I understand it, it reads:

All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, [Truth is the knowledge of reality, and this seems to say that reality cannot be altered by disbelief or extenuating circumstances], as all intelligence also [Free agency comes into play here: An intelligence is a cognizant entity who is capable of knowing truth. His decision to know and to act on truth determines the quality of his greatness.]; otherwise there is no existence.

Elsewhere the Saviour said,

6 He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth;

7 Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. (D&C 88: 6-7)

The words remind one of the Secrets of Enoch, which describes a creation “before the very beginning.” If that is so, it may be talking about Jesus as an intelligence. One wonders if Lehi also saw “before the very beginning” as Enoch had done:⁵

9 And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noonday.

10 And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament. (1 Nephi 1:9-10)

The relationship between light, truth, and intelligence seems to be inseparable, as suggested by such phrases as: “Intelligence, or the light of truth,” and “Which truth shineth.” Truth is not a fact in the abstract. It is defined in that same revelation as “And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” (D&C 93:24) Knowledge cannot exist on its own – there has to be an intelligent entity who knows it – it is the knowing that constitutes knowledge, without someone to know, knowledge cannot exist. Implicitly, without someone to know, truth cannot exist either. Apparently, knowing truth is what makes the intelligent entity shine (That may be as true in this life as when we were intelligences –

⁵ See the Secrets of Enoch, 24:2 as quoted above.

only our eyes can't see the light any more.). So it appears that an intelligence is an individual who knows truth, and who shines by virtue of his knowing. That description sounds like a "star" to me.

As I understand it, some intelligences sought and received more truth so shone more. In time the great illuminaries were born to heavenly parents, and by that birth, received bodies made of spiritmatter. The very first to receive such a body was the Saviour. Others who received their spirit bodies early on in the history were the noble and great ones. As members of the Council, their primary purpose was to help others:

24 And there stood [past tense] one among them that was like unto God, and he said [past tense] unto those who were with him: We will go down [future tense], for there is [present tense] space there, and we will take of these materials [future tense], and we will make an earth [future tense] whereon these may dwell [future tense];

25 And we will prove them herewith [with the earth – future tense], to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them [still in the future];

26 And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon [that's also in the future]; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate [that's in the future]; and they who keep their second estate [that is the same kind of future tense, using exactly the same words as "those who keep their first estate" – both estates are in the future from the prospective of this story] shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever [still future]. Abraham 3: 24-26)

As “gods” they created the earth, and in the process of time came here to receive physical bodies. When they die their physical bodies return to the earth, but the intelligence and its spirit body remain intact. It was they, as spirits, who gathered to await the Saviour to come to them during the three days between his death and resurrection. (D&C 138, Psalm 22, Isaiah 61) After an appropriate time, those noble and great ones who had lived on the earth and died, regain their own physical bodies in the resurrection. Then the intelligence, his spirit body, and his glorified physical body are fused together, never to be separated again. It is that individual intelligence, now empowered with spirit and resurrected physical body, who enters the celestial kingdom to dwell with his Heavenly Father forever.

If that scenario is correct, then one must look to the time we were intelligences to discover the origins of our personalities and the laws of our own beings. The first place to look is in the book of Abraham.

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; (Abraham 3:22a)

Definitions work because they describe something in a large category in terms of its uniqueness from other things in that category. For example, a chair is a subset of furniture, distinguished by the fact that a chair is intended to be sat on. If all furniture were to be sat on, the “chair” distinction would be meaningless. One finds that same kind of distinction at the beginning of Abraham 3:22, “Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was.” From that we know Abraham is not talking about all intelligences, but only that subset of intelligences who were organized before the world was. So it appears Abraham has identified at least three groups of

intelligences: One is the large category of all intelligences, another is the subset: “intelligences that were organized before the world was.” Implicit in that distinction is the suggestion that there were also intelligences who were organized after “the world was.”

The group he is most interested in telling us about is the group who were organized before the world was. He will soon tell us these organized ones were “spirits” – which means they had spirit bodies, which means they were at that time spirit children of our heavenly parents.

and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; (Abraham 3:22b)

He has now identified three more subsets of intelligences. He says that among all the organized spirits there were many (but not all) of the noble and great ones. So the noble and great ones were divided into two groups: (1) the “many” who were among the organized spirits, and implicitly, (2) the remainder who were not among those who were organized spirits, so must have been among the intelligences who were not yet organized. That is important, because it says there were individuals among the unorganized intelligences who could be identified as noble and great before they were born as spirits. That would not be so, of course, if “intelligence” was simply the base element from which all spirits were made.

The organized intelligences were also divided into two groups. If “many” of the noble and great ones were *among* the organized spirits, then there must have been some organized spirits who were not noble and great. (These are soon identified to us when we learn that Satan and his followers were also in attendance in the initial meetings of the Council.)

Perhaps I could be clearer if I organized it into a kind of diagram.

All of the intelligences are divided into two groups:

(1) unorganized intelligences,

(1a) among whom are some of the noble and great ones

(2) organized intelligences, spirit children who are also divided into two groups.

(2a) “among them” were “many” of the noble and great ones

(2b) The “them” who are not noble and great. (Satan and followers)

and God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good.... (Abraham 3:22-23)

If he stood in the midst of these spirits, that probably means in the middle or center (not just milling about among them). If he were in the midst or middle of them, then they were probably standing in a circle surrounding him. These he appointed to be his rulers, and thereafter Abraham refers to them as “the gods.” It is the same story as Psalm 82. “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.”

One finds another version of that same story in Alma 13, where we learn how the noble and great ones came to be that way. Alma spoke of the time when they were ordained by our Father in Heaven to the priesthood “which is after the order of his Son.” Alma does not mention that they are members of Council in Heaven, but all other indications suggest the ordinations he talked about took place at that Council, so I presume the setting of Alma 13 and Abraham 3 is the same, and that each is simply a different version of the same story –

except that Alma 12 and 13 tell us more about intelligences – much more detail about who we were *before* we were spirits in the Council – than any other scriptures I know about.

1 And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

2 And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained——being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

4 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren

5 Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only

Begotten Son, who was prepared –

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest –

7 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things –

8 Now they were ordained after this manner – being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end–

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.

Let us now examine that very carefully:

And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, (Alma 13:1a)

This is the setting: The first OED definition of “forward” is the first

or earliest part of a period of time.⁶ So even though Joseph Smith’s translation does not use the phrase “in the beginning,” it uses the correct word to take us there. This is the time and place when the Father – the Lord God, Elohim – ordained priests. We know it is talking about Elohim because he “gave these commandments unto his children,” then “ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son.” In Abraham we are told that the Father chose the “noble and great ones,” who were at that time “spirits.” To be a spirit one must have received a spirit body from heavenly parents. Thus, “children” and “spirits” are the same thing. So Alma 13 is the same story as the same as Psalm 82, and the same as Abraham 3. “The Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son.” – “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods,” – “and he said: These I will make my rulers.” Alma said that the purpose of the ordination was so the “children” could teach the commandments of the Father to the “people.”

to teach these things unto the people.

Now the question is, Who are the “people,” and why are they not also called “children”? The answer seems straight forward enough: If “people” are different from “children,” and the children are those who have already received spirit bodies from their heavenly parents, then the “people” must be intelligences – those individuals who have not yet been born into spirit bodies. If that is so, then the purpose of the teaching would have been to prepare the “people” to enter the presence of God and be born as “children.” That interpretation is substantially strengthened as we continue in the passage.

⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*: The first meaning of the word “forward.” The definition reads: “The front part of (any thing material); the first or earliest part of (a period of time. etc.).”

And those priests [the “children’] were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people [intelligences] might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

If the non-children – the “people” – are intelligences, then this sermon by Alma gives us great insight about the meaning and extent of the atonement – about what it means to say that the atonement is infinite and eternal. That insight is this: Intelligences are represented here as being self cognizant, capable of learning and of interacting with others. They have free agency and are therefore capable of error. If they are capable of error – sin – they become unclean while they were still intelligences. Since no unclean thing can enter into the presence of God, no intelligence who had ever made a wrong decision could enter his presence to become one of his spirit offspring. (Only Christ had never sinned, so only Christ could – by right – enter the presence of God to become his Son. Therefore Christ was the “Firstborn” and “Only Begotten.”) However the intelligences could enter the presence of God on the same principles that one has always been able to do so. That is, because Christ’s atonement is infinite and eternal it has the power to reach back in time to where intelligences could be redeemed and brought into the presence of God. If I read Abraham 3 and Alma 13 correctly, some intelligences qualified to become spirit children of Heavenly Father before others qualified. Those who qualified first became members of the Council (Satan, who was a liar from the beginning, qualified by knowing the requisite things and performing the requisite performances, but when he was presented with a plan which would send him to earth where he would be judged by charity rather than performance, he realized he could no longer lie his way through the system, and tried to mess everything up.)

Abraham 3-5 tells about the Father’s spirit children (the gods) who

created the earth, while Alma 12-13 tells about the Father's spirit children who were ordained to teach the unorganized intelligences about the atonement. Of those members of the Council, Abraham wrote, "God saw these souls that they were good." Alma was much more explicit:

And this is the manner after which they were ordained – being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God,

Alma then says that "foreknowledge" was a projection of the past into the future – that is, God knew their works in the past; he knew their integrity, and therefore he knew their future.

being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works;

That says that because of their faith (pistis – tokens of the covenants) – and good works (in James, Paul, throughout the Book of Mormon and many other places in the scriptures, "works" refer to ordinances.), that they were called and prepared. That should come as no surprise, because that is always the criteria God uses. The surprise may come in the next phrase which answers the question, When?

in the first place being left to choose good or evil;

The phrase "in the first place" has one of two meanings: either it is a colloquial expression that is just stuck in there, or it means precisely what it says: "in the *first* place." If it is only a colloquialism one can make the chapter mean almost anything one wishes. However if it does mean "in the *first* place," then these statements describe the noble and great ones as intelligences, and tell why and how they

qualified to be among the earliest spirit children born to our heavenly parents. In this chapter, the phrase, “in the first place” is used twice. I take them to mean exactly what they say: in the *first* place – as intelligences they were free to choose good or evil –

therefore they [the intelligences] ***having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith*** [in Christ],

In this verse these “children” are described as having “exceeding faith and good works” and “exercising exceedingly great faith.” If “faith” means belief, that speaks highly of their conviction.

However, if “faith” means the same as *pistis* – tokens of covenants – that helps us understand how truly great these illuminaries must have been. Alma says that they –

are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

“Preparatory redemption” is another key phrase which helps us determine the time this was happening. “Redemption” is coming into the presence of God. In terms of this life, to be redeemed is to be brought back into his presence. (Ether 3:13-14, Helaman 14:17, 2 Nephi 2:2-4, 2 Nephi 1:15). The final redemption is being brought into the Celestial Kingdom where one may reside with God.

“Preparatory redemption” does not mean “preparing for a redemption,” it means a redemption which prepares one for something else – a redemption which is “preparatory.” In this case it would preparing intelligences to be redeemed the first time – that is, to be brought into the presence of God as his spirit children. It is preparatory because it is not permanent.⁷ As children we must leave

⁷ “Preparatory ... 1. That prepares or serves to prepare; preliminary; introductory, 2. Undergoing preparation, or preliminary instruction, ...” (Webster’s New World Dictionary of the

his presence again when we come into this world. When we return to his presence to stay, that will be a permanent redemption. So the first redemption when we became his spirit children is “preparatory” because it looks forward to the final redemption.

4 *And thus they* [the “children” – members of the Council] ***have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith*** [in Christ], ***while others*** [intelligences] ***would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts*** [That phrase is defined in Alma 12: 9-11 as refusing to know the “mysteries” of God.] ***and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this*** [their refusal to know] ***they*** [the “people”] ***might have had as great privilege as their brethren*** [the “children”].

That may be the most important concept in the scriptures. For, as the next verse makes it clear, the noble and great ones were not noble and great because they had some special advantages, but “on account of their exceeding faith and good works” – because of the way they exercised their free agency, their advancement as intelligences was an entirely individual matter. (Abraham 3:18-21 seems to confirm that.)

5a. *Or in fine, in the first place* [“In the first place” – when they were intelligences] ***they*** [the “people”] ***were on the same standing with their brethren*** [the “children”];

That is, at some point in time – in the very distant past – the intelligences who are here identified as the “people” were on the same standing as the intelligences who are here identified as “children.” There was nothing arbitrary about the selection of the noble and great ones. They were not noble and great because they

American Language [Cleveland, World Publishing Company 1959.])

were the among the first to be born to our Heavenly Parents, but they were among the first to be born to our Heavenly Parents because they were noble and great.

5b. thus this holy calling [the ordination mentioned in verse one] ***being prepared from the foundation of the world*** [that always means at or before the Council] ***for such as would not harden their hearts*** [when they were intelligences], [This priesthood calling] ***being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared –***

If I read that correctly it says that in the very beginnings of our beginning we were free to choose. Those who chose to have faith in Christ and follow him did so; those who chose not to, did not do so. To accept that notion, one must also accept the idea that the atonement reaches back forever (“Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” D&C 93:29), and continues forever into the future. I accept that as truth. But in my imagination, I cannot conceive of our origin being so two dimensional as to simply assert that one only accepted Christ or not accept him. My notion is that by the time one had matured sufficiently as an “intelligence” to be ready to be born a child in the world of the spirits, one had not only developed one’s inclination to love the Lord and his children; but one had also fully, or very nearly, developed the whole complex system of preferences and non-preferences which we call personality. I suppose also, that all the other attributes of personality were subsets of the most important one, which was (still is) charity – one's love for the Father and his children.

The first commandment is to Love the Lord. The second is to love your neighbor. If our this-physical-life experience was designed to see if one will love in an environment which is not conducive to love, then it was designed very well indeed. The farmer who beats

his dogs and children, and indiscriminately uses his chickens for a football is, at his core, not substantially different from the tyrant who over-taxes his people and oppresses them with unjust laws. Similarly the impoverished housewife who feeds the hungry neighbor child is not substantially different from the middle class Latter-day Saint Relief Society sister who looks after her ill neighbor because she chooses to rather than because she feels it is her duty. It seems to me that earth's experience was designed, not to show if we will obey, but to show why we obeyed – that is, so we can have sufficient opportunity to confirm to ourselves and all creation whether we obeyed in the spirit world because we knew which side our bread is buttered on, or whether we obeyed because we truly love the Lord and love his children.

In the Gospel of John, the beloved disciple, quotes the Saviour as saying,

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13: 34-35)

This does not imply that the command to love one another was never given before that time. In his letters John explains that the commandment is “new” because it is renewed in this world, but it was first given in the pre-mortal existence. He used the phrase, “from the beginning” four times in these few verses. (Later, I shall show how “new and everlasting covenant” has the same connotation.)

4 He that saith, I know him [God], and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. (1 John 2: 4-10)

and

1 The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth;

2 For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth

and love.

4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. (2 John 1: 1-6)

If the object of our earth life experience was designed to that end, then human and individual history takes on a whole new meaning. Whether in the extreme of poverty and utter obscurity, or in great wealth and reputation – or somewhere in between – the purpose of life is the same for everyone – only the specific assignment is different – in this life and, I suppose, in the spirit world which follows. Since “where much is given, much is required” is a true principle, for the rich and the poor, the well educated and the ill-educated, the opportunities for doing good in this life (and/or in the next), are ultimately worked out on a level playing field.

An example is one of the most moving autobiographies I have ever read. Martha Cox’s parents were among the first settlers in St. George, Utah. All of her life she was very poor. Near the end of her autobiography she wrote something like this: “I have always been grateful to the Lord that I had no money. I have noticed that rich people cannot give to poor people without the poor people being reluctant to accept, because they think the rich people are being condescending. But I have always been so poor that I could help whomever I wished, and they were always able to accept whatever I

had to give.”⁸

I believe that one's charity (in combination with other personality attributes) and one's priesthood authority, as they are described as a single unit in Abraham 1:2-4, constitute the 'law of one's own being.' (As I consider it, I think that the phrase “priesthood authority” is the right concept there, but as we use the words, probably not the right phrase – though I have no idea what a better one would be.

Considering the grand sweep and eternal scope of Abraham's statements, I think the concept is far too big for our gender oriented “priesthood authority” to say all that is necessary to say. But as I observed, I haven't the foggiest idea what a better phrase would be.)

As I read the story, Alma's purpose was to teach Zeezrom that the political coup he was preparing had not been approved at the Council, and therefore could not be valid. So at this point in his speech, Alma moves his discussion from the pre-mortal life to the callings of the members of the Council when they come to this world.

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest –

It sounds to me like that says the “children” are given the same assignment in this world that they had in the last one – that is to teach – earlier he had said they were to teach the “people,” now he says they are to teach the “children of men.” I think that, given the way he uses those words, he is making a very careful distinction

⁸ I apologize that I no longer have the exact quote or the precise citation. The original is in the Church Historical Department in SLC; a xerox copy is in Special Collections at BYU library. Her statement is somewhere near the end of her autobiography.

about when and where the teaching was performed – both in time and in space. Alma concludes his statement by summing up the eternal nature and authority of the priesthood.

7 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things –

8 Now they were ordained after this manner – being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end –

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.

The “Amen” concludes Alma’s comments about the eternal nature of priesthood and priesthood callings. He continues his sermon by moving on to the next question, which is about priesthood and kingship authority in this world, using Melchizedek as his example.

Now lets re-read the first part of Alma 13 without interruption:

1 AND again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

2 And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

3 And this is the manner after which they were ordained-- being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.

4 And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren.

5 Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren; thus this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared--

6 And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest--

7 This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in

other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things--

8 Now they were ordained after this manner--being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end--

9 Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen. (Alma 13:1-9)

Before we leave Alma, there is one more question which ought to be addressed: In verse one he says:

And again, my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people.

Our question is, what were “these commandments” which the “children” were ordained to teach the “people.” For the answer we have to go back to the commandments Alma had just talked about in chapter 12. The commandments have to do with accepting the atonement, and the context in which he places those commandments is the Adam and Eve story.

22 Now Alma said unto him: This is the thing which I was about to explain. Now we see that Adam did fall by the

partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; and thus we see, that by his fall, all mankind became a lost and fallen people.

23 And now behold, I say unto you that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die.

25 Now, if it had not been for the plan of redemption, which was laid from the foundation of the world, there could have been no resurrection of the dead; but there was a plan of redemption laid, which shall bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, of which has been spoken.” (Alma 12:23-25)

He follows that concept all the way to the final judgement, then he again goes back in time and tells how the “plan of redemption, which was laid from the foundation of the world” was taught to the people.

Remarkably, the verses which follow may be read as a condensed version of the drama of the New Year festival. If read that way, “these commandments” mentioned at the beginning of chapter 13 are the endowment/enthronement principles set in the context of the Adam and Eve story. (It may be useful at this juncture to remind ourselves Joseph Fielding Smith used Ephesians 1:1-4 to show that there had been priesthood ordinances in the pre-mortal world.⁹)

Alma said,

28 And after God had appointed that these things should

⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Genealogical Society of Utah, 1949), p.50-1; and also his *Doctrines of Salvation*, Salt Lake City, 1954, Vol. 1, p. 66

come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them;

29 Therefore he sent angels to converse with them, who caused men to behold of his glory.

30 And they began from that time forth to call on his name; therefore God conversed with men, and made known unto them the plan of redemption, which had been prepared from the foundation of the world; and this he made known unto them according to their faith and repentance and their holy works.

31 Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal, and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good –

32 Therefore God gave unto them commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption, that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness; for on such the plan of redemption could have no power, for the works of justice could not be destroyed, according to the supreme goodness of God.

33 But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have

mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

34 Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.

35 And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest.

Lets go through that carefully. Alma began at the Council.

28 And after God had appointed that these things should come unto man, behold, then he saw that it was expedient that man should know concerning the things whereof he had appointed unto them;

That is almost exactly the way he began chapter 13. After it was decided how and by whom these things should be taught to “man,” the Father ordained priests to “teach these things unto the people.” (As far as I can tell, “man,” here, is a generic plural term, meaning the same thing as “people” means in the next chapter. If the teachers are the same in both instances, then “people” and “man” who are taught are probably the same, so “man” in these verses is also a designation for the unorganized intelligences. If that is correct, then we are about to read the commandments which were taught by the “children” to the “people.”

29 Therefore he [the Father] sent angels to converse with them [“man,” people,” “intelligences”], who caused men to behold of his glory.

The Father sent angels to converse with them and to teach them how to come into God's presence – how to receive their “preparatory redemption.” These angels appear to be the “children” ordained to that purpose in chapter 13.

30 And they [the intelligences who accepted the teachings] **began from that time forth to call on his name;** [Presumably, the angels taught the people how to pray.] **therefore God conversed with men** [God himself spoke to them – either symbolically or in fact. In the New Year festival drama, God's speaking to them would have been symbolic.], **and made known unto them the plan of redemption** [The plan that would enable them to come into his presence.], **which** [plan] **had been prepared from the foundation of the world [at the Council]; and this he made known unto them according to their faith** [tokens of their covenants] **and repentance** [repentance is always requisite to coming into the presence of God] **and their holy works.**

As already observed, in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and elsewhere, “works” usually refer to the ordinances. In this instance that is rather obvious as God is using their “holy works” as a means of instruction.

31 Wherefore, he gave commandments unto men, they having first transgressed the first commandments as to things which were temporal

“Temporal” has to do with time. (We often use “temporal” to mean time on this earth, but that is not necessarily so. Time is a way of defining sequence, so whenever our existence is sequential, we are in time.) It appears that somewhere in the beginnings of time these intelligences had transgressed the first commandments they received. (On the other hand, – it was probably keeping those early commandments that helped make the noble and great ones noble and great.)

and becoming as Gods, knowing good from evil, placing themselves in a state to act, or being placed in a state to act according to their wills and pleasures, whether to do evil or to do good—

That brings our attention back to the Adam and Eve story which appears to be the setting for these events. (That statement requires an explanation: The primary function of the New Year festival drama was to give the participants a sense of Self – as one’s Self related to Jehovah. One way it accomplished that was by giving them a way to orient themselves. That was taught them by their participation in the stage play which was technically about the king, but which was also about each person who watched the drama and internalized it. The orientation was achieved through the drama’s teaching the initiate: first – this is who and where you were; now, this is who and where you are; later, this is who you are going to become and how you are going to get there. It is apparent to me from Isaiah 61, Psalm 22, and elsewhere, that the ancients believed that after death, spirits would still need that same kind of orientation, and that it would be taught by using the same stage play.

It seems reasonable to me that spirits before birth, who are about to embark on the adventure that is this life, would also need that kind of orientation. And it appears to me that in Alma's discourse, if "these things" are what they appear to have been, then intelligences also received that same kind of orientation: that is, I suppose they would have been taught something like this: "This is who and where you are; this is where you are going next; this is where you are going after that; and these are the steps you will take to get there." An essential part of that orientation is the fact that in each step along the way, each individual is "independent" – free to make one's own decisions about how one will respond to those instructions – just as Adam and Eve were free. That, I suppose, is one reason the Adam and Eve story is symbolically the autobiography of every individual who sees it and applies it to an understanding of his or her own autobiography.)

32 Therefore God gave unto them [the intelligences] commandments, after having made known unto them the plan of redemption [how to enter his presence], that they should not do evil, the penalty thereof being a second death, which was an everlasting death as to things pertaining unto righteousness [being everlastingly cut off from things pertaining unto zedek – temple ordinances, covenants, and powers, and the full blessings associated with them]; for on such the plan of redemption could have no power [the object of the New Year festival drama was to teach people how to come into the presence of God. If one rejects those teachings, then one will not be clean, and will not know how to enter God's presence], for the works of justice could not be destroyed, according to the supreme goodness of God. [There is no provision made for the unclean to be in the presence of God – otherwise the place where God is would be unclean. (1 Nephi 15:33-34)]

If these are the commandments which the “children” taught the “people,” then their version of the Feast of Tabernacles drama extended in time from where they were as intelligences all the way to the final judgement. That is, it taught them the plan of salvation as it was introduced to the Council and as it would be played out in each of their lives in their future world as spirit children of God, in their mortal lives, and beyond.

33 But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

34 Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.

That is very important. In the same speech in which Alma asserted that they were once on the standing with their brethren (ch. 13), he quoted God as promising that there can be no external impediments to their ultimate salvation if they will repent and accept the blessings of the atonement. That was the conclusion of the portion of Alma’s speech which began with the Adam and Eve story.¹⁰

¹⁰ Alma introduced his next idea by reminding his listeners of the content of the 95th Psalm. The background of the psalm is that when the people of Israel were gathered at the foot of Mt Sinai, the Lord invited them to come into his presence and they refused. In the psalm, their refusal is called their provocation. Paul quoted the psalm, using it the same way Alma did, in Hebrews 3: 7-19. Jacob paraphrased it when he invited his people to “come unto Christ.”

Psalm 82

A generic, but very powerful version of the instructions given by Elohim to the Council is given in Psalm 82. It was a scene in the same play as Psalm 45, and also takes place in the throne room of the celestial temple. The occasion represents the time when Elohim met with the members of the Council – when “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.” To “judge” means the same in our language as in Hebrew: i.e. it may mean to condemn, or it may mean to justify, or to choose (like in an apple pie contest). The story is familiar to us because of the Abraham account which reports, “God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers...” (Abraham 3:23a) They are the same story, except in the psalm we find more detail than we do in Abraham. In fact, one can drop the 82nd psalm into the Book of Abraham at that point without breaking the rhythm of the Abraham account. (I’ll show you that later on.) Lets first read the psalm, then analyze it.
Introduction by the narrator or chorus:

**1 God standeth in the congregation of the mighty;
he judgeth among the gods.**

Instructions given by Elohim:

- 2 How long will ye judge unjustly,
and accept the persons of the wicked?**
- 3 Defend the poor and fatherless:
do justice to the afflicted and needy.**
- 4 Deliver the poor and needy:
rid them out of the hand of the wicked.**
- 5 They know not, neither will they understand;**

**they walk on in darkness:
all the foundations of the earth are out of course.
6 I have said, Ye are gods;
and all of you are children of the most High.
7 But ye shall die like men,
and fall like one of the princes.**

*The members of the Council respond by making a covenant with
Elohim:*

**8 Arise, O God, judge the earth:
for thou shalt inherit all nations.**

Now let's look at it more carefully. In the first verse of Psalm 82, our narrator is on stage again explaining what is happening.

***1 God standeth in the congregation of the mighty;
he judgeth among the gods.***

The Hebrew word here translated "God" is Elohim, who is the Father of the gods who are the members of the Council. They are called the noble and great ones in Abraham 3, and "the gods" in Abraham 4 and 5.

After the narrator's introduction, the Father of the gods gives his sons instructions about how they are to conduct themselves when they go to the earth. He begins by warning them of a major danger they will face when they come go down to this world. As children, they will grow up in societies where they will be taught to pay homage to wealthy and powerful people. Human cultures teach that prestige, money, education, and fancy toys are evidence that one is in good with God. He warns them that they must shake off that teaching before they can fulfill their priesthood assignments.

***2. How long will ye judge unjustly,
and accept the persons of the wicked?***

The language implies they have already judged unrighteously, but if, as I believe, this was instructions about how they are to conduct themselves in this world, then implicitly what it says is this: "When you get to that earth your culture will teach you that you should judge people by the correctness of their speech, their wealth, and education, but you must learn that is not the way to judge." If this psalm was a part of a stage presentation, and represented instructions given at the Council in Heaven, then, for the audience, it would have been a symbolic *sode* experience. In that case the

question, “How long will ye judge unjustly,” may have been designed to evoke a response like Isaiah’s “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” (Isaiah 6:5) As I will discuss in detail below, to be a righteous judge is the greatest power and most lasting obligation of sacral kingship. These members of the Council were kings already – they are called “rulers” and “gods.” But when they get to the earth they will be as vulnerable as everyone else that worldly values will get in the way of their righteous judgements. In addition to the warning about how not to judge, the Father instructs his sons that they must judge in mercy, kindness, charity. Those are the things everyone must do, but for the gods, no matter what other specific individual assignment they might have, to judge righteously is the most important of all.

***3-4. Defend the poor and fatherless:
do justice to the afflicted and needy.
Deliver the poor and needy:
rid them out of the hand of the wicked.***

After the instructions came the reason: the gods will be expected to be spiritual and political anchors to the people, and as such they must first of all be servants. Like everyone else on the earth, the people whom they serve will have forgotten their glorious past in the pre-mortal world. They will stumble in the darkness of forgetfulness, and some will deeply resent the help the noble and great ones seek to give. But that resentment will not excuse the gods from doing their duty. The people on earth must be helped – but not just helped – helped with great compassion. The Father reminds his sons,

***5 They know not, neither will they understand;
they walk on in darkness:***

all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

Being one whose primary function is to show compassion can be scary – in fact it can be really dangerous. Elohim reminds his sons that in our world they will be subjected to persecution – even death – but their suffering those things may be an integral part of their assignment. They are gods, but they will all die: some will use up their lives in the service to others; while others, like Abinadi and the Prophet Joseph, will die like princes in battle, sealing their testimonies with their own blood.

*6-7 I have said, Ye are gods;
and all of you are children of the most High.
But ye shall die like men,
and fall like one of the princes.*

At this point in the play on the great stage on the hill near Jerusalem, those representing the Council respond. They invite their Father to stand as a token of the covenant they are about to make.¹¹ Then, in unison they each swear to fulfill his own assignment in order that the Father's purposes may be accomplished among all people. They say,

*8 Arise, O God, judge the earth:
for thou shalt inherit all nations.*

It is possible, perhaps probable, that speaking those covenant words was not limited to the people who represented the members of the Council on stage. There is no sure evidence, of course, but it seems likely that the people in the congregation who were participating rather than just watching, also spoke the last words of the psalm. If so, that covenant would have been made between God and every

¹¹ For an example of the practice of standing to make covenant see 2 Kings 23:1-3.

individual man – perhaps every individual person – in the congregation.

Another window on those same ideas about how one came to be chosen to be a member of the Council is found at the beginning of Abraham's autobiography.

Because Abraham began the way cosmic myths and epic dramas almost always begin – with his need to find a new home – it is reasonable to suppose that the way he expressed that need was a symbolic beginning of the cosmic autobiography he was about to tell.

1 In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence;

2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.

3 It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me.

4 I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood

according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed.

5 My fathers having turned from their righteousness, and from the holy commandments which the Lord their God had given unto them, unto the worshiping of the gods of the heathen, utterly refused to hearken to my voice;

One of the keys to understanding this passage is the distinction Abraham makes between “the fathers” and “my fathers.” He speaks of “my fathers” in verses one and five, but verses two, three, and four are about his relationship with “the fathers.”

v. 2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same;

This is one of those not-so-rare verses which simply says everything there is to say. A personal note: My trying to organize my thoughts while writing this little treatise has been an exceedingly difficult thing for me. If you have been troubled by my wandering all over the place and not sticking to the point, please know your frustration has not been any greater than mine. Take this verse as an example. If one were going to make a thorough comment about what it says, one would have to say everything there is to say about everything. Let me give you a quick overview to show you what I mean.

“finding”

suggests intelligent forethought, calculation, and study, the determination to exercise agency, personal and intellectual growth, and that whole business about the formation of individual personality. If one were to know the full meaning of “finding,” one would have to understand the discriminating

process by which an intelligence learned truth and assimilated its light.

“there was greater”

“greater” is relative. It says he was already happy as he was, but had the wisdom to know that more happiness was available. Again, we are seeing the most fundamental principles in the formation of personality – something far more sophisticated than just the creation of a considered opinion.

“happiness”

Happiness is probably the most evocative of all human emotions – not just because it must be experienced in the present in order to be real, but also because its continuance in an ever expanding present is perceived as the ultimate state of fulfillment. “Men are that they might have joy” defines the objective and consummation of one’s existence – and to achieve that end was Abraham’s first stated objective.

“peace”

I have chosen to delay a careful discussion of “peace” and “peacemaker” until I go through the Beatitudes with some care. Suffice it to say here that peace was both the object and the product of all of the ancient coronation rites, and is therefore the ultimate blessing of kingship and priesthood. (More about that later)

“rest for me”

To “rest” is to be in the presence of God. (D&C 121:28-32) That happens when one is born a spirit child of God, it may happen again intermittently before the resurrection, and it is the crowning glory of those who have become like him. (Moroni 7:47-48)

“I sought”

To seek is to be actively engaged – not just do the things one must do, but also be the person one must be.

“for the blessings of the fathers and the right whereunto I should be

ordained to administer the same;”

That is very important. The blessings he sought were the power and authority to both receive and give. The power to give some of those blessings is a legitimate function of an institutional structure. Blessings given in that manner are very important, but they may also be very hollow. For example, baptism and the authority to baptize are necessary, but one’s just being baptized is meaningless unless it initiates a fundamental change in one’s heart and mind, and more especially the empathy and charity attributed to the pit of one’s stomach. In other words, the ordinances are enabling and validating, but only if they become the springboards for actualizing the blessings promised – otherwise they are nothing. One has to be kind in one’s judgement; pure in one’s heart; to be a peacemaker – the very personification of charity; to endure hardships without transferring the pain to others; to introduce the gospel to those who do not know – and to be a light to those who do. In order to give such blessings, one must first receive.

That is only the barest sketch of the ideas that verse suggests to me: the full breadth and the depth of the words in that short verse are altogether too big for me to stretch my mind around.

And finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same;

Abraham’s use of “the fathers,” as opposed to “my fathers,” is the key to the way one looks at our story. This difference in terminology is not only a difference in perspective, it is a way of distinguishing

times. When Abraham was describing the vision in which he saw the Council and the creation (ch.3), he first referred to the participants as the “noble and great ones,” and then as “the gods.” But here he is telling his own history: he tells how he sought to be one like them, and he speaks of them with an almost subservient reverence.

having been myself a follower of righteousness [zedek – temple things], *desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness* [there are gradations of zedek !], *and to possess a greater knowledge,*

The grades of zedek seem to be associated with gradations of truth = knowledge = light – one is saved no faster than he gains knowledge – and one gains knowledge no faster than he is saved.

and to be a father of many nations,

That is the same as the blessing he ultimately received in this world – but it is also consistent with the blessings expressed in Psalms 25 and 45, which extend those blessings beyond this time.

a prince of peace

The apex of the beatitudes reads “blessed are all the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.” As I shall explain below, “the children of God” is simply a plural form of the royal covenant name of the king’s heir, “son of God.” So “a peacemaker who is a son of God,” and “prince of peace” apparently mean exactly the same thing.

*and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the
commandments of God,*

In Alma 12, instruction came “according to their faith and repentance and their holy works.” If one is to, first, “receive instructions” and then “keep the commandments,” it is likely that the instructions and the commandments are much the same thing. In other words, he was not necessarily talking about a desire to keep generic commandments, but to keep those commandments that were specific to the instructions he wished to receive. One gets the same idea in the sequence the Lord gave the Prophet Joseph.

**Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am.
(D&C 93:1)**

That can be read as a list, but it was probably intended to be read as a sequence: the conclusion which precedes redemption is: “obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments.”

I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.

Abraham achieved his goal and became “a rightful heir,” that is, he became a prince of peace. He also became a high priest. Thus he obtained both the sacral kingship and priesthood – “holding the right belonging to the fathers.”

v. 3 It [the kingship and priesthood right belonging to the fathers] was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto

me. [that reference to Adam will come up again later when he talks about the Council near the end of chapter 3.]

v. 4 I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed.

“The appointment of God”: if this translation is consistent with the Old Testament, “God” is Elohim, so it reads: “according to the appointment of Elohim unto the fathers.” That appointment occurred at the Council. It is the story in Abraham 3, Alma, 13, Isaiah 6, Psalm 45, 82, 1 Nephi 1 and every other scripture that talks about the *sode*. The last phrase, “unto the fathers concerning the seed” must contain all implications of the earlier phrase “a father of many nations.” That was the prize on which Abraham set his eyes from before the beginning – it includes the blessings of family in this world, then Celestial exaltation and eternal increase. Here is the entire text:

1 In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence;

2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.

3 It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me.

4 I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed.

It appears to me that this is Abraham's autobiographical account of his desires and preparations to receive blessings at the Council. I suppose that would make the earlier part of that account our only first-hand description of one's progression as an intelligence. If this is Abraham's pre-mortal autobiography, as it appears to be, and if ours is even remotely like his, then our progression here is only a reflection of what has come before – adding additional light to Joseph Smith's statement,

Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before this world was. I suppose I was ordained to this very office in that Grand Council.”¹²

I suppose that when we became spirit children of our Father, and received his commission in the Council, our individual assignment reflected our individual abilities and interests. In other words, the assignment one received at the Council coincided perfectly with the law which is one's Self. Thus, one's foreordination, and the covenants which were an integral part of it, became the product and consequence – the blessing and challenge – of the law of one's own

12 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 365)

being – and that suggests that the law of one’s own being was acknowledged as good, (sanctioned and legitimized, if you will) by the ordinances and covenants which were associated with one’s calling at the Council. (I suppose the phrase, “calling and election made sure” is talking about that calling – projected into this world and made sure by one’s works here – resulting in one’s election being made sure also.

In the scriptures cited above, the Saviour and the prophets say a good deal about their own individual callings at the Council, but there is also much said about the general nature of those assignments without specific reference to individual callings.

D&C 132

One of the most misunderstood passages of scripture (a misunderstanding that the polygamous fundamentalists base many of their claims on) is the first 15 verses of D&C 132. What it is NOT is a statement about polygamy. What it IS, is an affirmation that God keeps the covenants hemade at the Council.

1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines –

It is misreading that verse that causes the problems. Joseph's question was not about polygamy, it was about the *justification for* specific individuals having had more than one wife. So the Lord is now going to answer the question – the question is “wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants....” Verse 15 begins with the word “wherefore.” That is a conjunction which divides the rationale from the conclusion. So in the first 14 verses the Lord explains the rationale – giving the reason for the justification – and beginning with verse 15 he begins to apply that rationale to the principle of eternal marriage. That rationale is based on Covenants made at the Council in Heaven, and he talks about the importance of those covenants.

2 Behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter. [“This matter” is the question about their justification.]

A word about justification: It is a legal term that means

circumstances get in the way of normal lawful accountability. For example, in law, murder is a criminal act, but killing someone in self defense is justified. In the gospel there are two categories of justification: justification before the act, and justification after the fact. Both are dependent upon the atonement and on the Saviour as our “advocate with the Father.” Justification *after* the fact relies on repentance: If one sins, then repents, the Saviour takes the burden of the sin and leaves one as though the sin had never been committed. Thus one can learn by experience and observation about the differences between good and evil, and not have to spend eternity outside the presence of God because those experiences made one permanently unclean. Justification *before* the act is also dependent upon the Saviour’s atonement, but does not require repentance. The classic example is Nephi’s cutting off Laban’s head after a conversation with the Spirit in which Nephi learned that he would not be held responsible for Laban’s death. As far as I know that kind of justification is *very* rare – yet throughout history most crimes committed by religionists have been self-excused based on their claim of that kind of justification. The Spanish Inquisition and the present atrocities in the Near East are only two examples. So are the less overtly bloodthirsty crimes of intolerance and gossip. One’s self-justification based on religions claims are very dangerous because it leaves one blind to his own need to repent and vulnerable to repeated sin. Claiming that kind of justification without having it affirmed by revelation from the Lord is a sure way to open the gates of hell and jump in.

In Section 132, What the Lord is about to explain to the Prophet Joseph is that the Patriarchs’ having multiple wives was a matter of prior justification, and that justification was based on assignments they received, and covenants they made at the Council in Heaven. So in the next few verses, it is the nature and importance of the law-of-pre-mortal-covenant that he talks about.

3 Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same.

“This law,” as he is about to explain, is the law derived from one’s eternal covenants.

4 For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.

When the Lord says “no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory,” that is serious business. If he were talking about polygamy, we would all be in bad trouble. But he is not, he is talking about the individual covenants we made at the Council. The covenants he is talking about are “new” because they are renewed in the world, and they are “everlasting” because they were made before we came here and their consequences reach into eternity.

On that same page in the Doctrine and Covenants, but in the previous section, one reads,

1 In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees;

2 And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; (D&C 131:1-2)

It is easy to transfer that statement found in section 131 to section 132 where the latter reads “new and everlasting covenant” so that

132 is changed to read, “meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.” But to make that change distorts the meaning of section 132. For example, the whole of D&C 22 reads.

1 Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning.

2 Wherefore, although a man should be baptized an hundred times it availeth him nothing, for you cannot enter in at the strait gate by the law of Moses, neither by your dead works.

3 For it is because of your dead works that I have caused this last covenant and this church to be built up unto me, even as in days of old.

4 Wherefore, enter ye in at the gate, as I have commanded, and seek not to counsel your God. Amen.
(D&C 22:1-4)

There, baptism is a new and everlasting covenant. That is easy to understand because baptism (either in person or vicariously performed) is a necessary prerequisite to justification. The point is that in the D&C there are three different pre-mortal covenants which are called “new and everlasting:”

- 1) baptism – D&C 22
- 2) “of marriage” [but not necessarily of plural marriage] – D&C 131
- 3) the “law” spoken of in section 132

To confirm the meaning and origin of the “law” which cannot be broken, the Lord ties it to the covenants made at the Council in Heaven.

5 For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.

In the next verses he explains what this “new and everlasting covenant” is.

6 And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.

7 And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.

That is one of the most legalistic passages in the scriptures. If one

temporarily sets aside the legal language and the part about there being only one prophet at a time on the earth who holds the keys, those verses read this way:

6 And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a fulness thereof must and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.

7 And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, ...that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead. [“unto this end” means mortal actions must accord with the pre-mortal covenants]

Then the Lord explains why that is so.

8 Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.

9 Will I accept of an offering, saith the Lord, that is not made in my name?

10 Or will I receive at your hands that which I have not appointed?

11 And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?

This is the way I read those last four verses. The Lord will not consider what one does in this world to be “good,” and therefore as

“acceptable,” unless what one does it in accordance with the covenants one made with the Saviour and his Father “before the world was.” And the Lord will require nothing of us in this life except those things which are inherent in those same covenants.

12 I am the Lord thy God; and I give unto you this commandment—that no man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word, which is my law, saith the Lord.

If he is still talking about the same law, it is one’s keeping those individual covenants which people made before they came here that qualifies one for the celestial world – that is, it is the meek who shall inherit the celestial earth.

13 And everything that is in the world, whether it be ordained of men, by thrones, or principalities, or powers, or things of name, whatsoever they may be, that are not by me or by my word, saith the Lord, shall be thrown down, and shall not remain after men are dead, neither in nor after the resurrection, saith the Lord your God.

None of these new and everlasting covenants are generic, but are all tailored to specific individuals. Even baptism, which is a universal commandant is an individual matter. The fact that these new and everlasting covenants were made in Heaven does not preclude one’s free agency on earth. Rather, keeping those covenants must be an exercise of one’s agency. One of the reasons we came to this earth was to discover whether we will keep those covenants in an environment which is not conducive to our keeping them – indeed, which offers rewards for our ignoring or violating them. Notwithstanding the covenants one made there, one has the option of not keeping them here – the rewards of not doing so are ephemeral – but they wear the cloak of reality. They include the

whole catalog of wealth and power to exercise are all sorts of governmental, commercial, institutional, and individual authority in the lives of other people. But all such advantages are tentative, and their only eternal consequence is the permanent loss of their temporary gain.

14 For whatsoever things remain are by me; and whatsoever things are not by me shall be shaken and destroyed.

God keeps his covenants but he will not be mocked. The terms of the covenant are negated by anyone who does not do their part, then they cannot receive the blessings which were guaranteed by the covenant.

After that introduction, the Lord opens the subject of latter-day celestial marriage.

15 Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world....
(D&C132:1-15)

“Therefore” is the conjunction between the principle of covenantal justification, and the specific question of why the ancients were justified in their practice of celestial marriage. The Lord, having established the principle of the importance of foreordination, will now show how that principle is applied to the question of how those men were justified in having more than one wife. The justification is simply this: that decision was made at the Council and was a part of their individual new and everlasting covenants. Implicit in that justification is another principle: if that arrangement was not part of one’s pre-mortal covenants, and if a man takes multiple wives anyway, he is in very bad trouble.

One more word about keeping one’s “new and everlasting

covenant.” Over the years I have heard many young friends wonder out loud: “How am I going to know what the Lord expects me to do in this life?” The consequences of one’s not knowing and not doing are very severe, yet we wonder about in this world of darkness, going through life half awake, and uncertain about where and how to walk. After much thought and a good deal of watching other people, I have found an answer to that question which I believe is true: One should seek to be happy -- that means live according to the law of one’s own being – be your Self and cover that Self with no facade which prevents family and friends from filling one’s life with companionship and joy – find a profession which gives one a sense of fulfillment, or if that is not possible (as it was not for my own father who was a laborer in a steel factory), then do what he did: use the fruits one’s labors to bless the lives of other people – find joy in seeing others discover their own sense of Self – and live close to the Spirit.

The reason I believe that is the correct answer is this: I do not believe the Lord would give us an assignment which conflicts with the fundamental law of our individual personalities – consequently, I believe our assignments were each designed to bring us maximum happiness, and at the conclusion of our lives, maximum fulfillment. (I can say from personal experience that when one reaches a critical juncture where one must make a life changing decision, the Spirit will tell one which path to take – sometimes with a still, small voice, sometimes with the proverbial 2x4 at the side of the head – but by whichever means, it will be sufficient for one to know what one must do.) I believe that by the time one gets out of this life,¹³ if one can define one’s Self in terms of charity and faithfulness, then the

13 That statement can only work if “this life” is considered to be all of our experiences between the time of physical birth and the time of our final judgement. Our “this life” must include both our life in this body and the one that follows when we are spirits waiting for the resurrection.

final “judgement day” will be a time of fulfillment – a time of rejoicing and of renewal.