

# Have I Received an Answer from the Spirit

By Jay E. Jensen

*The Holy Ghost manifests itself in many ways. If we are attentive, we will recognize its promptings.*

Following the Prophet Joseph Smith's martyrdom, President Brigham Young reported that Joseph visited him a number of times. On one occasion, President Young said, "Joseph stepped toward me and looking very earnestly, yet pleasantly, said, Tell the people to be humble and faithful, and be sure to keep the Spirit of the Lord and it will lead them right. Be careful and not turn away the still small voice; it will teach them what to do and where to go; it will yield the fruits of the kingdom. Tell the brethren to keep their hearts open to conviction, so that when the Holy Ghost comes to them, their hearts will be ready to receive it. They can tell the Spirit of the Lord from all other spirits; it will whisper peace and joy to their souls; it will take malice, hatred, strife and all evil from their hearts; and their whole desire will be to do good.' "

(*Juvenile Instructor*, 8 [1873]: 114.)

The principle of following the Spirit is so important that on several occasions President Ezra Taft Benson has said, "The Spirit is the most important matter in this glorious work."  
(Mission Presidents' Seminar, 1975, 1986, 1987.)

Although the Spirit may be the most important aspect of our latter-day work, many of us do not know how it functions; too often we are worked upon by the Spirit and do not even know it. (See 3 Nep. 9:20.)

As a branch president at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, I have heard several missionaries say in their initial interviews that they did not have testimonies or that they could never remember a time when they had had a spiritual experience. After talking about how the Spirit works, they realized that they had, in fact, had a number of spiritual experiences but had not realized it before.

Perhaps this lack of awareness is fostered in part by hearing or reading about spectacular spiritual experiences. Frequent exposure to such experiences may lead some to believe that if they haven't experienced some similar kind of outpouring or manifestation, they haven't had a spiritual experience.

A number of years ago, in a meeting of returned mission presidents, we reviewed different ways to improve missionaries' spirituality. One person said, "We need to help all missionaries experience and recognize the 'burning of the bosom' taught in Doctrine and Covenants 9:7-9. " A member of the First Quorum of the Seventy then shared the following experience:

One of the Quorum of the Twelve came to tour the mission over which the Seventy was presiding. As they drove to the next zone conference, the Apostle turned to him and said, "I wonder if you might have left an impression in the missionaries' minds that has created more problems than you can resolve. As I have traveled throughout the Church, I've found relatively few people who have experienced a burning of the bosom. In fact, I've had many people tell me that they've become frustrated because they have never experienced that feeling even though they have prayed or fasted for long periods of time."

He explained that Doctrine and Covenants 9:7-9 was given in response to the process of translating sacred records. There the burning of the bosom was appropriate. The principle can apply to personal revelation, he said, but more precisely it related, to the translation of the Book of Mormon. He counseled the mission president to refer missionaries to the scriptural references about the Holy Ghost. For example, he cited the verse "Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?" (D&C 6:23)

Over the years, I have tried to learn the different ways in which the Spirit of the Lord works. Surely God does speak from heaven, but he manifests, confirms, or gives direction in a variety of ways. Consider the following:

### **The Spirit Speaks Peace to the Mind**

The feeling of peace is one of the most common manifestations of the Spirit. Feelings associated with peace are calmness and tranquility. Antonyms are war, contention, turmoil, and anxiousness.

When my family lived in Mesa, Arizona, our one-year-old daughter became ill with viral meningitis. When the doctor diagnosed the illness, he told us that we would know within the next twenty-four hours whether she would live or die. We began to fast and pray for her recovery. She lingered near death for a week, much longer than the doctor had expected in terms of seeing some kind of change.

After that week of struggling, we again fasted, and the ward joined us. When we prayed, fasted, and said to the Lord, "Thy will be done," a peace as tangible and real as anything we have ever experienced came to our minds. We were not in turmoil, nor were we anxious about the matter. We did not know whether she would live or die, but we were at peace. Happily, she began to recover.

### **The Spirit Causes Our Bosoms to Burn**

After one exceptional sacrament meeting, my fifteen-year-old son mentioned, "Dad, during the talk I felt a warm feeling." We discussed what it means to have a warm feeling and related it to the burning of the bosom mentioned in scripture: "You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right." (D&C 9:8.)

The burning varies in intensity—to my son, it was a generally warm feeling in the chest. In the account of the two disciples who met the resurrected Savior on the way to Emmaus, one of the believers said, "Did not our heart burn within us?" (Luke 24:32.) This feeling may not occur frequently in our lives, but when it does, it is a tangible manifestation that confirms truth or answers prayers.

### **The Spirit Tells Us in Our Minds and Our Hearts**

It is not uncommon for the Spirit to speak directly to the mind and the heart together. The Lord told Oliver Cowdery, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. "Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation." (D&C 8:2 - 3.)

In the April 1985 World Mission Presidents' Conference, Elder Boyd K. Packer spoke about the spirit of "Box B" putting spirit into missionary calls and not overlooking the sacrifices missionary service requires. During his presentation, he paused and commented about the importance of the Book of Mormon. The peace and clarity of mind I experienced and the joy I

felt were confirmations from the Holy Ghost that what Elder Packer was saying was true, and was from God.

When the Holy Ghost speaks, our minds may be struck with insight and clarity akin to sudden light. At the same time, our hearts may burn or we may feel flooded with joy or deep gratitude or love. Whatever particular feelings occur, they occur simultaneously in the mind and in the heart.

Some common expressions investigators often use during missionary lessons are "That makes sense," "I've always believed that," "Of course." Sometimes, it may be a simple affirmative nod. At these times, the investigators are experiencing "enlightenment." When we recognize the truth through the Spirit, we understand things—they become clear to us. As the Lord promised, "I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind." (D&C 11: 13.)

That feeling of understanding is always accompanied by some type of positive emotion. In the scripture just cited, after the words "enlighten your mind," the Lord adds the phrase "which shall fill, your soul with joy." Alma describes this process of enlightenment and its effect on those who experience it:

"We will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, *that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord*, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say ... It beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, *it beginneth to enlighten my understanding*, yea, *it beginneth to be delicious* to me." (Alma 32.28; Italics added.)

Not only is our understanding affected, but our souls seem to expand—the whole experience is delicious to us.

Time after time, in meetings or by myself, my soul has filled with joy at what I have experienced. One sacred occasion occurred during and after a high council hearing to consider a recommendation to rebaptize a brother who had been excommunicated. I was in the stake presidency then. During the hearing, we listened to the man bear testimony and express his desire to be rebaptized. I understood his longing to come back, and my soul was filled with joy to hear of his faithfulness in making his situation right. When he finished, he was excused from the room, and the court deliberated briefly, deciding to recommend rebaptism. The stake president asked me to share the decision with the brother.

I went through the side door into the waiting room where he was seated alone, anxiously awaiting the decision. I took him by the hand as he stood and said, "My dear brother, the decision of the court is that you be rebaptized." He fell into my arms, and we wept. How can I describe the joy that filled our souls as we felt the loving influence of the Spirit?

The Lord explains immediately after the verse about enlightening our minds and filling our hearts with joy that "then shall ye know, or by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me. (D&C 11:14.) This union of mind and heart, then, is one means by which the Spirit teaches us.

### **The Spirit Comes as a Voice in the Mind**

President Marion G. Romney said that the Lord sometimes reveals answers to prayer in complete sentences. (See *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1961, pp. 947 - 49.) At times, a person may actually hear an audible voice; at other times, a person may have an impression or a

thought come into his mind expressed in one or more complete sentences. Enos reported that while he was "struggling in the spirit,

Behold, the voice of the Lord came into [his] mind." (Enos 1:10.)

One bishop shared a similar experience with me. One Sunday, he had had an unusually heavy day of interviews, meetings, and visits. It was near 10:30 P.m. when he had a chance to walk through the chapel past the pulpit. He felt so overwhelmed with the weight of his responsibilities that he dropped to his knees in the dimly lighted chapel and pled with God for strength to carry the load. While he was praying, a voice came to his mind: "Bishop, you're so tired! Why don't you go home and go to bed?" The thought startled him at first, but as he reflected on it, he knew it was as direct an answer to prayer as the ones he received when praying about whom to call to Church positions.

One of the most vivid experiences I've had with a voice to the mind came while I presided over a South American mission. I was studying the priesthood lesson for the following morning when the thought, "Call Elder \_\_\_\_\_" came unexpectedly to my mind. I stopped studying and thought it through. I had been with him that week and interviewed him. He had challenges, but he was making progress. I put the thought aside and resumed studying.

After a few moments, the Impression came again: "Call Elder \_\_\_\_\_" Again I reflected on it, then started to study once more. The voice came a third time: "Call Elder \_\_\_\_\_"

I put the manual down and dialed the phone number. It was past ten in the evening. His companion answered, obviously groggy with sleep, and I asked, "Where's Elder \_\_\_\_\_?"

At that point he saw the empty bed, then answered, "President, I don't know."

I said, "Lay the phone down and search in the patio area." (The missionaries were living in a building complex in which a series of rooms opened out on a common open-air patio.)

The missionary walked out to the patio and saw his companion in an adjoining room. He was talking to a young woman about the same age. No one else was in the room. The missionary who had answered my telephone call approached his companion and said, "Elder, President Jensen is on the phone. He'd like to speak with you."

When the elder came to the phone, I asked him where he had been. He replied, "Today two young ladies moved in next door, and one of them was having some serious problems. I was counseling her."

I strongly expressed my concern about where he had been, and he said that he was glad I had called, that he hadn't realized what a precarious situation he had put himself into until his companion interrupted him. We decided that they should move to a new apartment the next day.

After the conversation, I pondered on what had happened. I realized that, in a small but significant way, I had experienced something similar to Enos's experience—"the voice of the Lord came into my mind again, saying. . ."

### **The Spirit Leads**

At no time will Satan lead someone to do good. Mormon said, "[The devil] persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him." (Moro. 7:17.)

On the other hand, Hyrum Smith was told, "Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good." (D&C 11:12.) We know by this that promptings to do good can be manifestations of the Spirit. Have you ever learned of someone in need, perhaps a close friend, and felt strongly impressed to help? Have you ever talked with someone and been led to say the right thing? Have you ever suddenly felt a need to fix something in the house or to weed the garden? This is how the Spirit can work—he leads us to do good.

Hyrum Smith also learned in this verse that the Spirit leads us "to do justly." (D&C 11:12.) There are several meanings for the word just, but I think the one most pertinent to this phrase is this: acting in conformity with what is morally upright, correct, or good. Satan may lead us to lie, or cheat, or take advantage of others. The Spirit, though, prompts a different behavior. Have you ever felt that you should forgive someone? Have you ever been prompted to pay tithing before you pay certain bills? Have you ever seen a child learn to share his toys? These are a few times in which the Spirit can prompt a person, even a small child, to do justly.

Hyrum Smith further learned that the Spirit leads us "to walk humbly." (D&C 11:12.) A proud walk or demeanor, by which people draw attention to themselves through arrogant speech or conduct, is the antithesis of the way in which the Spirit leads. Have you felt at times that, though you may be a teacher or a leader, you are really learning more than those you lead? Have you sometimes felt during a disagreement that your point should not be pressed any further? When several people, including you, have worked on a project, have you given them the credit? These are some of the ways in which the Spirit can lead us to walk humbly.

Hyrum Smith also learned in this one verse that the Spirit leads us "to judge righteously." Though we must curb the tendency to judge others, judgment is inevitable. Every decision we make requires a judgment. Have you ever helped to resolve an argument among your children and restored peace? Have you ever realized that your opinion of someone is incorrect? These are instances where the Spirit may be leading you to judge righteously.

### **The Spirit Occupies Our Minds and Presses upon Our Feelings**

One day, while I was reading the Doctrine and Covenants, one phrase caught my attention: "As that subject seems to occupy my mind, and press itself upon my feelings the strongest." (D&C 128:1.) I realized that this is another way in which the Holy Ghost works with us. A subject or thought will stay with us, and we may mull over it or reflect upon it again and again until we understand it more thoroughly.

Although Joseph Smith was being pursued by his enemies and faced numerous distractions, the subject of baptism for the dead had pressed upon him for some time. His experience differed from the one in which the Spirit enlightens the mind and brings joy to the heart.

This means of inspiration has often led to direct revelation, as with the subject of baptism for the dead. Doctrine and Covenants 76 (see verses 15 - 19) and 138 (see verses 1 - 11) and Official Declaration – 2 (see introduction) all came after three different prophets had been impressed to meditate for some time upon the subjects.

### **The Spirit Constrains**

Another way in which the Spirit operates is by constraint. To constrain means to impose stricture, restriction, or limitation; to confine, to hold back. When the wicked

inhabitants of Ammonihah were about to burn the believers, Amulek suggested that he and Alma exercise the power of God within them and stay the flames. Alma replied, "The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing ... that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just." (Alma 14:11.) The Lord held Alma back from doing something contrary to divine plan.

Wilford Woodruff related a similar encounter he had with the Spirit. He was bringing some Saints from New England and Canada to the West. They had scheduled passage on a boat, but the Spirit spoke to Elder Woodruff, "Don't go aboard that steamer, nor your company." He obeyed the voice. The boat departed and, some fifty yards downstream, caught fire and sank. (See *A Story to Tell*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1945, p. 320.)

Two missionaries related that one night they were walking a familiar countryside road. Suddenly, they both had an impression that they should go no farther in that direction. They retraced their steps and took another way home. The next day, they wondered why they had felt constrained to stop. They went back, this time in daylight, and found that, within a few feet of where they had stopped, a bridge had washed out. These are a few examples of the Spirit constraining people from doing something.

There are other means by which the Holy Spirit manifests itself in our lives. It may inspire other people to help us. (See D&C 1:38; 46:29.) It may give us specific gifts—abilities or knowledge. (See D&C 46:9 - 29.) It may bring things to our remembrance. (See John 14:26.)

We need not assume that the Holy Ghost works upon us only in dramatic or spectacular ways. The Lord has given to the members of his church the privilege of having the Holy Ghost as a companion. With that great gift, we realize that, as long as we are worthy, the Spirit will work with us in numerous ways. We would do well to recognize how often the Spirit inspires us and work to cultivate that special companionship.

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