strengthening the virtues of the community. He later added the charge to save souls. During a particularly significant address on April 28, 1842, he cited 1 Corinthians 13, from which later members took their motto, “Charity Never Faileth.” He then pronounced the much-quoted statement, “I now turn the key to you in the name of God and his Society shall rejoice and knowledge and intelligence shall flow down from this time” (“Minutes of the Female Relief Society”).

The society grew quickly. During its first season, 1,189 women became members. The society received and dispersed money, clothing, provisions, and services to the needy. Its meetings were held first in the upper room and then, for lack of space there, outdoors in “the Grove” until September 28, 1842. When the society reconvened in the following spring, the presidency divided the membership into four wards, which then met separately. Each ward had its “necessity committee,” forerunner of the present visiting teachers, who canvassed their area in search of people in need (see Visiting Teaching). Meetings again ceased for the winter of 1843–1844, but presumably the charitable works continued.

Regardless of individual differences in age, culture, and language, such experiences enhance the underlying unity of the members of the Church, enabling them to feel one with each other and with the prophets. They recognize familiar religious experiences in one another’s words and actions and in the scriptures. While the transmission of these experiences is often oral (as in testimony meetings, classes, conversations), many are also preserved in diaries, journals, and family histories. Some of these have become widely familiar and almost normative.

At the core of a Latter-day Saint’s life is CONVERSION to the gospel. First impressions are often crucial. Converts frequently testify to feeling a divine assurance, an expectation and unheralded, that truth is to be found in the Book of Mormon and in the teachings of the Church. They also commonly speak of feeling clean, of being washed of their sins, and of being spiritually reborn with an infusion of new life, peace, joy, light, warmth, and fire (see Baptism of Fire and of the Holy Ghost). The experience of finding oneself, though a sinner, accepted by the Lord, often becomes the foundation of a lifetime commitment to God, because maintaining this feeling is desired above all else. Classic examples of this are found in the conversions of Alma 2 (Mosiah 27; Alma 36) and Joseph Smith (PJS 1.5–8).

Latter-day Saints believe that the divine love they receive in individual religious experience should be reflected to others as charity (Mosiah...
Baptized members are given the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, entitling them to the companionship of the Holy Ghost. President Lorenzo Snow described his reception of this gift as “a tangible immersion in the heavenly principle or element, the Holy Ghost” (Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, p. 8, Salt Lake City, 1884), saying that he “tasted the joys of eternity in the midst of the power of God” (Journal, p. 3, Church Archives, Salt Lake City). Alfred D. Young said it was “as if warm water was poured over me coming on my head first. I was filled with light, peace and joy” [Autobiography (1808–1842), BYU Special Collection].

Individual Latter-day Saints speak of being shown righteous courses of action by the Holy Ghost, being warned of dangers and evils, and being otherwise inspired and guided. One sister, reflecting on her life, wrote that the Holy Ghost “warns, counsels, reproves, commends, instructs, and when necessary commands” (YWJ 27 [Nov. 1916]:691–92). Motivational changes are chronicled, as are infusions of energy, compassion, insight, healing power, and beauty, and also refinement of talents, faculties of communication, and Christlike love.

Impressions of the Holy Ghost often come after much preparation in fasting, prayer, service, and study. At other times they come unbidden and arrive at unexpected moments as a “still, small voice” (1 Kgs. 19:12). The Prophet Joseph Smith observed that the word of the Lord “has such an influence over the human mind—the logical mind—that it is convincing without other testimony” (HC 5:526). Joseph Smith further remarked, “sudden strokes of ideas” from the Holy Ghost attend a flow of pure intelligence (TPJS, p. 151); “the answer comes into my mind with such a logical sequence of thought and ideas, and accompanied by such a burning feeling within, that I know it is of God” (cited in W. Berrett, “Revelation,” address to seminar and institute faculty, Brigham Young University, June 27, 1956, p. 9).

Such influences and impressions of the Holy Ghost may come as inspiration amid duties in the home, at work, or in Church callings, as well as self-knowledge in the most menial of everyday tasks. Typical reported examples include a glimpse of celestial origins and destiny (Heber C. Kimball); impressions of impending events (Wilford Woodruff); guidance and reassurance in emotional crises such as the death of a loved one (Zina D. H. Young); or insight and strength in pressing practical needs or predicaments (Amanda Smith). Many members of the Church attest to receiving inspiration in creative processes, such as when writing religious poetry, drama, music, or scriptural commentary, or when seeking a solution to a scientific or genealogical research problem. Personal revelation is probably the most widely shared and unifying form of religious experience among Latter-day Saints. It also helps explain the confidence with which many Latter-day Saints make religious decisions.

Latter-day Saints may receive individual blessings from a priesthood bearer in which they seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Father’s Blessing; Patriarchal Blessing). Through such personal experiences most Latter-day Saints have received needed direction, restoration of spiritual and physical health, or other divine aid. One Church leader describes the giving and receiving of blessings as vitalizing and enlightening, through “an essence of force or power” inherent in the holy priesthood. Diaries commonly report experiences such as this: “He blessed me. I felt the influence and power of the Lord upon him and upon me. I have never forgotten that blessing from that day to this and I never shall” (Ezra T. Clark).

A wide range of manifestations of the Spirit—visions, dreams, visitations, contact with the dead, miraculous aid in answer to prayer—is known in every LDS community, though not generally publicly heralded (see Gifts of the Spirit). For example, Karl G. Maeser reported experiencing the gift of interpretation where all language and cultural barriers were removed; Franklin D. Richards received the gift of prophetic dreams; James G. Marsh, the gift of visions; and Lucy Mack Smith, the gift of faith.

LDS religious experience also includes pentecostal outpourings, dramatic and overwhelming spiritual manifestations, witnessed simultaneously by many people and recorded privately. Of the foundation experiences of the Restoration the most crucial were shared, witnessed, and recorded. Each conferral of divine priesthood authority was shared by at least two persons (see Aaronic Priesthood: Restoration of; Melchizedek Priesthood: Restoration of) and included visi-
tations analogous to the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2–4). Here the experience was no less objective than the deliverances of sense-experience. Several hundred experienced the outpouring of spiritual gifts in the KIRTLAND TEMPLE dedication (see Backman, pp. 284–309). Several thousand, including many children, witnessed the experience in Nauvoo when the “mantle” fell upon Brigham Young and he was providentially portrayed in Joseph Smith’s likeness (see SUCCESION IN THE PRESIDENCY). Approximately 63,000 participated in the dedicatory sessions of the SALT LAKE TEMPLE, and many reported seeing visions and hearing heavenly music.

LDS journals are replete with testimonies that the Spirit of the Lord enlivens all of the senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching—and that one is more physically alive and aware when spiritually quickened. This illumination is more than an aid to physical perception; it is a medium of comprehension. Latter-day Saints sometimes speak of a “sixth sense,” interrelated with the other senses, that apprehends spiritual things. All things “are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all” (TPJS, p. 355). One may be lighted up “with the glory of [his] former home” (J. F. Smith, GD, p. 14) and be led to say with Eliza R. Snow, “I felt that I had wandered from a more exalted sphere” (“O My Father,” HYMNS OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, no. 292, Salt Lake City, 1985).

Many Latter-day Saints record such experiences in the setting of TEMPLE ORDINANCES, sensing a oneness with departed friends and relatives—“they are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith” (TPJS, p. 326)—and “seeming to see” and “seeming to hear” the realms of the spirit world (J. Grant, JD 4:134–36).

LDS spiritual experiences are often related to scripture study. One convert had mastered the entire Bible in Hebrew, German, and English. After receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, he found new meaning in familiar verses (O. Hyde, JD 8:23–24). Another who had memorized New Testament books found, after receiving the Holy Ghost, that “new light dawned upon” him in “bold relief,” which the Book of Mormon clarified and confirmed: “Truths were manifested to me that I had never heard of or read of, but which I afterwards heard preached by the servants of the Lord” (C. Penrose, JD 23:351). Still another, praying through his youth for some great manifestation, learned slowly and for a lifetime, “line upon line, precept upon precept,” until he felt his whole being was a testimony of the truth (J. F. Smith, GD, pp. 501–550).

Today, psychological, positivistic, and existential thought raises questions about religious awareness. There is much preoccupation with criteria of meaning and with the logic of religious discourse. The sum of LDS religious experience, however, suggests that anyone may appeal to the way of the prophets: Look and see.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

[Latter-day Saints have always been vigorous defenders of religious liberty and have frequently been the victims of religious persecution. For accounts of LDS beliefs concerning religious freedom see Church and State: Constitution of the United States; and Politics: Political Teachings. The history of the LDS struggle for freedom is summarized in Legal and Judicial History of the Church and in Politics: Political History. The efforts of the Church to be recognized and to enjoy religious liberty in new countries are explained in Diplomatic Relations. The underlying commitments to human liberty in LDS teaching are outlined in Freedom. Nephite traditions of religious liberty are described in Book of Mormon, Government and Legal History.]

REMISSION OF SINS

“Remission of sins” is the scriptural phrase that describes the primary purpose of BAPTISM: to obtain God’s forgiveness for breaking his COMMANDMENTS and receive a newness of life. It is fundamental among the FIRST PRINCIPLES AND ORDINANCES OF THE GOSPEL: FAITH in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, REPENTANCE, BAPTISM by immersion for the remission of sins, and LAYING ON OF HANDS for the gift of the Holy Ghost. To grant pardon of sins is one manifestation of God’s mercy, made possible by the atonement. It is the blessing sought by those who fervently prayed, “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that