SEER STONES

Joseph Smith wrote that in 1823 an angel told him about “two stones in silver bows . . . fastened to a breastplate . . . the possession and use of [which] constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times” (JS—H 1:35). Joseph used these and other seer stones that he found in various ways (occasionally referred to by the biblical term URIM AND THUMMIM) for several purposes, primarily in translating the Book of Mormon and receiving revelations (see HC 1:21–23, 33, 36, 45, 49; 3:28; 5:xxii; CHC 6:230–31).

Historical sources suggest that effective use of the instruments required Joseph to be at peace with God and his fellowmen, to exercise faith in God, and to exert mental effort (CHC 1:128–33). Otherwise, little is said authoritatively about their operation. Occasionally, people have been deceived by trying to use stones to receive revelation, the best-known latter-day example in the Church being Hiram Page (D&C 28:11–12).

While useful in translating and receiving revelation, seer stones are not essential to those processes. Elder Orson Pratt reported that Joseph Smith told him that the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim when he was inexperienced as a translator but that he later progressed to the point that he no longer needed the instrument (“Two Days’ Meeting at Brigham City,” Millennial Star 36 [1874]:498–99).

RICHARD E. TURLEY, JR.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY (SELF-RELIANCE)

The term “self-sufficiency” refers to a principle underlying the LDS program of welfare services, and to an ideal of social experience. Self-sufficiency is the ability to maintain one’s self and relates to women and men being agents for themselves. Independence and self-sufficiency are critical keys to spiritual and temporal growth. A situation that threatens one’s ability to be self-sufficient also threatens one’s confidence, self-esteem, and freedom. As dependence is increased, the freedom to act is decreased.

Church writings often use the terms self-sufficiency and “self-reliance” interchangeably. Teachings pertaining to Welfare Services emphasize and place considerable importance on both individual and family independence. Six principles form the foundation of the infrastructure of the welfare program. Three of these principles emphasize responsibility to care for one’s own needs: work, self-reliance, and stewardship; the other three focus on responsibility to others: love, service, and consecration (Faust, p. 91).

President Spencer W. Kimball defined Welfare Services as the “essence of the Gospel . . . the Gospel in action” (Kimball, p. 77). Within the context of welfare, the term self-sufficiency also includes an emphasis on prevention, temporary
assistance, and rehabilitation. Self-sufficiency is helping oneself to the point of reliance. Welfare, a program based on self-sufficiency, helps individuals to help themselves. Home industry, gardening, food storage, emergency preparedness, and avoidance of debt reflect the applications of self-sufficiency (Welfare Services Resource Handbook, p. 21).

Since the inauguration of Welfare Services in 1936 by President Heber J. Grant, self-sufficiency has continued to be refined and clarified by Church leaders. This focus has remained as the Church has expanded to countries outside the United States and Canada, and most recently to developing countries of the world. While the Church responds to crises and natural disasters abroad, it is still in a planning stage regarding the tremendous cross-cultural challenges pertaining to the principle of self-sufficiency (International Welfare Services, p. 1).

As a social ideal, self-sufficiency includes spiritual, intellectual, and emotional dimensions. Just as the world is economically interdependent, agricultural communities and enterprises have been interdependent; families, farms, and other units have specialized in a product or service with the intent to engage in trade for the additional necessities of life. Self-sufficiency is central to such interdependence and is necessary for one to be in a position to assist others, beginning with one’s own family, neighbors, and ward. A universal concern of individuals can be personal integrity and identity within the larger social systems. A responsible, productive, and integrated life in a varied and changing world is desirable and exemplified by Christ and others of integrity discussed in the scriptures.

New Testament teachings conceive of liberty as a person’s relationship to God and others (Buttrick, p. 121). Christ gave his followers sacred charge and opportunity to serve the poor, needy, sick, and afflicted. Rather than looking on God as the only one able to provide, individuals as self-sufficient beings work together in mutual responsibility, compassion, gentleness, and love.

Perspective on the balance between an individual person’s being totally self-sufficient and also needing assistance comes from the understanding that everyone is self-reliant in some areas and dependent in others. Latter-day Saints accept the observation that everyone is flawed and imperfect; everyone experiences human limitation or poverty. Scriptures recognize that poverty resides in both temporal or spiritual matters. In fact, all are “beggars” for a remission of sins (Mosiah 4:20). Nevertheless, a certain equality emerges from human interdependence, noted in the counsel to be equal in both heavenly and earthly things: “For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things” (D&C 78:6). From one’s strengths, each should endeavor to help another; on the other hand, one should accept the help of another. “If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; . . . bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1-2). Interdependence, then, creates the opportunity to participate in the sanctifying experience of giving and receiving (Romney, p. 91).

In a gospel sense, there exists an interdependence between those who have and those who have not. The process of sharing lifts the poor, humbles the rich, and sanctifies both. The poor are released from bondage and limitations of poverty and are able to rise to their full potential, both temporally and spiritually. The rich, by imparting of their surplus, participate in the eternal principle of sharing. A person who is whole or self-sufficient can reach out to others, and the cycle of equality and giving repeats itself.

Without self-sufficiency it is difficult to exercise these innate desires to serve. Food for the hungry cannot come from empty shelves; money to assist the needy cannot come from an empty purse; support and understanding cannot come from the emotionally starved; teaching cannot come from the unlearned. Most important of all, spiritual guidance only comes from the spiritually strong. Indeed, self-sufficiency forms the basis to bear one another’s burdens and to live interdependently.

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VAL DAN MACMURRAY