



The Lord communicates through dreams. Here Joseph of Egypt is interpreting the dreams of the chief butler and the chief baker.

Quiet Slumber: Revelation through Dreams

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“For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction” (Job 33:14–16).

“We Have a Right to Revelation” through Dreams

Near the end of his Liberty Jail ordeal, the Prophet Joseph Smith conveyed to Isaac Galland: “We believe that we have a right to revelations, visions, and *dreams* from God, our Heavenly Father; and light and intelligence, through the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . on all subjects pertaining to our spiritual welfare; if it so be that we keep his commandments, so as to render ourselves worthy in his sight.”¹ Joseph Smith experienced and understood revelation, and the Prophet’s life teaches us that as we live in righteousness our Father in Heaven will communicate in a variety of ways and in unique circumstances.

Sometimes references in the scriptures to visions and dreams are used interchangeably.² Elder Bruce R. McConkie made the distinction: “An

inspired dream is a vision given to a person while he sleeps. . . . All inspired dreams are visions, but all visions are not dreams. Visions are received in hours of wakefulness or of sleep and in some cases when the recipient has passed into a trance; it is only when the vision occurs during sleep that it is termed a dream.”³ Sleep is something we all have in common. What satisfaction or level of enjoyment we gain from the experience varies, as does the effect it has on our mind and heart. Most of our subconscious state goes without memory. Irrational and absurd dreams are easily dismissed by an individual who has the Spirit of God. But on occasion the Lord judiciously issues dreams for his divine purposes and an individual’s personal growth.⁴ Elder Parley P. Pratt, who was himself given to prophetic dreams,⁵ described:

In all ages and dispensations God has revealed many important instructions and warnings to men by means of dreams.

When the outward organs of thought and perception are released from their activity, the nerves unstrung, and the whole of mortal humanity lies hushed in quiet slumbers, in order to renew its strength and vigor, it is then that the spiritual organs are at liberty, in a certain degree, to assume their wonted functions, to recall some faint outlines, some confused and half-defined recollections, of that heavenly world, and those endearing scenes of their former estate, from which they have descended in order to obtain and mature a tabernacle of flesh.⁶

Elder Pratt alluded to instructions and warnings as the purpose for God giving dreams to individuals at times. He also suggested that dreams are sometimes for “recall” or divine recollections of our origin and purpose as we journey in the flesh and develop a “mature tabernacle of flesh.” Dreams may also confirm premonitions or show something that is about to happen. An inspired dream might entail a warning—a rebuke for course correction—it might convey a direct command to do something, or it might serve as spiritual assurance or bestow a promise. In every dispensation dreams have been a prevalent spiritual gift, and the gift is validated in scripture.

Dreams in the Standard Works

That our Father in Heaven communicates through dreams is indicated early in the standard works. For example, in the Old Testament we read of dreams given to Abimelech, Jacob, Laban the Syrian, Joseph, and two men—a baker and a butler—from Pharaoh’s court. In the New Testament, the book of Matthew identifies six dreams: four to Joseph, one to the Wise Men, and one to Pilate’s wife regarding the Savior’s innocence. In the Book of Mormon, Lehi took his family into the wilderness based upon a divine dream. It was

a dream that sent Nephi and his brothers back for the brass plates and most likely for Ishmael’s family. Lehi also had a dream (vision) regarding the tree of life.

Four significant individuals given to dreams stand apart in the scriptures: Joseph of Egypt, Daniel, Joseph the carpenter, and Lehi.⁷

Joseph of Egypt. Around the age of seventeen, Joseph had two dreams, the imagery of which varied. But the meaning of the dreams was one and the same. In them obeisance, an act of reverence by bowing in honor, was made to young Joseph (see Genesis 37:7–9). The fact that he conveyed the dreams to his family suggests that he felt the dreams had significance and were sent by God, but doing so elicited his brothers’ envy and his father’s rebuke. We do not know from the text how much he understood the meaning of the dreams or the timeline for their fulfillment.

Joseph exhibited the gift to interpret dreams as well,⁸ a gift the Pharaoh’s chief butler came to appreciate and the Pharaoh’s chief baker to loathe. Furthermore, this gift helped Joseph gain audience in Pharaoh’s court. When brought before the Pharaoh, Joseph was presented with two dreams of proportioned imagery. He interpreted the Pharaoh’s dreams of kine and ears of corn and explicated the foreshadowing of seven years of plenty and seven years of drought. Joseph assured the Pharaoh of the interpretation by noting, “The dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (Genesis 41:32). It was a precedent or pattern he understood from personal experience.

Under the circumstances it would be natural that Joseph would recall his own “doubled” dreams in which his family made obeisance to him. Dreams that have been doubled, or multiplied, should be given somber attention both in reflection and in writing, and the recipient should “[keep] all these things, and [ponder] them” (Luke 2:19). But it must be remembered that for an individual to pretend to have the gift of the interpretation of dreams, or for an individual to share nonsensical dreams as a divine message from God, would be detrimental—spiritually and mentally. The Lord has warned: “I am against them that prophesy false dreams . . . and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them” (Jeremiah 23:32). But such was not the case with Joseph, and there is solid evidence that Joseph was purposefully placed to fulfill his role in mortality. The Lord likewise inspired his interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dreams. It is safe to assume Joseph respected his gifts regarding dreams and acted with the

sanction of the spirit. Pharaoh himself exclaimed, “Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?” (Genesis 41:38).

Daniel. Like Joseph, Daniel was prominent among the kings of his day. He was also a recipient and an interpreter of dreams. Daniel’s youthful obedience resulted in God giving him “knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom,” with “understanding in all visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17). Daniel had “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8) with the king’s offerings of food and wine, and his exactness in honoring the laws of God blessed him with an illuminating spiritual and physical countenance. King Nebuchadnezzar and others in the Babylonian court recognized Daniel’s remarkable ability to know “of things both of heaven and in the earth” (D&C 88:79).

Calling upon three friends equal in spiritual stature, Daniel pleaded with the “God of heaven concerning [the] secret” (Daniel 2:18) dreams that troubled Nebuchadnezzar’s spirit. These noble young men desired not only the mercies of God for themselves but for the benefit of others; for the king’s hasty decree was to kill all the wise men. Daniel never failed to recognize that “wisdom and might” (Daniel 2:20) come from the Lord. He testified to Nebuchadnezzar that “there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets” (Daniel 2:28). Surely this wasn’t the first secret or revelation made known to Daniel. His confidence in inquiring of the Lord must have been preceded by individual moments with the Lord that gave him unflinching assurance that he could boldly declare to Nebuchadnezzar, “The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure” (Daniel 2:45).

Daniel was also the recipient of a dream detailing events in the last days. In this case we know “he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters” (Daniel 7:1). In general, recording dreams strengthens the relationship between the Lord and the individual to which the dream is given. As we record inspired dreams, we can more readily see the Lord’s hand in our life and his tender mercies extended in our behalf. The Book of Daniel provides several accounts wherein we see the Lord blessing Daniel with knowledge and wisdom through dreams and visions.⁹ In large part this is the result of Daniel’s inquisitive mind and heart and his desire to know the truth and interpretation of that which God was generously bestowing upon him (see Daniel 7:16).

Joseph the carpenter. Matthew, in his Gospel, identified the gift of dreams while narrating the Savior’s birth and later at his trial before Pilate. Matthew

recounts that “While [Joseph] thought” of his future wife’s pregnancy “an angel of the Lord appeared unto [Joseph] in a dream.” The angel’s declaration that the child was in fact Father in Heaven’s begotten son assured Joseph to faithfully enter into the pending marriage (see Matthew 1:19–20). Joseph’s logical and rational mindset as he pondered the news of Mary’s pregnancy prepared his mind and heart to be receptive to a dream confirmed not only by the Holy Ghost but by a heavenly messenger as well.

To counter the evil intentions of Herod after the Savior’s birth, the Lord warned the wise men from the East through a dream to depart out of the region “another way.” He furthermore told Joseph in a dream to “flee into Egypt.” After the death of Herod, Joseph was told in a dream to return to the “land of Israel.” His dreams, the angel’s directions, and his spiritual impressions led Joseph and Mary to Galilee. His obedience to spiritual impressions brought him into harmony with God and the prophecies of ancient patriarchs and prophets (see Matthew 2).

Matthew stands alone from the other Gospel writers in noting that Pilate’s wife “suffered many things” by a dream; having had it revealed to her that Jesus Christ was a “just man” (see Matthew 27:19). Her husband rejected her sufferings and pleas and did not concern himself with her dream. Pilate, much like Laman and Lemuel in the Book of Mormon, rejected his wife’s dream because he did not feel and understand the Spirit of the Lord and its workings upon God’s children. The Gospel of Matthew confirms the gift of dreams and contrasts how one man, Joseph, responded obediently while another man, Pilate, rejected the Lord’s intervention.

Lehi. Lehi’s dreams are an integral part of Nephite religious history. Over five hundred years after Lehi landed in the promised land, an anti-Christ named Korihor ridiculed the foolishness of Nephites who paid heed to dreams and visions. In his deceiving rhetoric, he said the priests “lead away this people after the foolish traditions of your fathers . . . and their dreams and their whims and their visions and their pretended mysteries” (Alma 30:27–28). Of course Korihor’s unbelief and cold-heartedness to the things of the Spirit mirrored the unbelief and cold-heartedness of Nephi’s brothers, Laman and Lemuel. Before coming to the promised land, Nephi’s two brothers could not see past the social standing and the material comforts of Jerusalem. Nephi noted, “They did murmur in many things against [Lehi], because he was a visionary man,” and claimed his exit from Jerusalem was “done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart” (1 Nephi 2:11). They could not

admit their materialistic inclinations and disinterest toward God’s commandments, and Lehi’s inspired dreams and visions could not reach their minds and hearts. Nephi summarized Laman and Lemuel’s rebellion and rejection of their father’s dreams matter-of-factly: “they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them” (1 Nephi 2:12). Their murmuring about “their father, because he was a visionary man,” led some family members to much sorrow, while other family members found great comfort in shared resentment. Nephi’s choice to exercise faith and to act on “great desires to know the mysteries of God” set an example for Lehi’s posterity (1 Nephi 2:16).

Comprehensive list of dreams in the standard works		
Individual	Reference	Purpose of Dream
Abimelech	Genesis 20:2–18	To <i>warn</i> Abimelech that his desire to take Sarah as a wife was contrary to the will of the Lord. Also, it shows Abimelech that God’s mercy protected “the integrity of his heart” and spared him from a grievous sin.
Jacob	Genesis 28:10–22 Genesis 31:10–11	To <i>assure and promise</i> Jacob that through him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The dream proved that the Lord not only was at Beth-el but also was intimately involved in Jacob’s life: “I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.” To <i>command or instruct</i> Jacob to leave the house of Laban, his father-in-law.
Laban the Syrian	Genesis 31:24 (see also Genesis 24:50)	To <i>confirm</i> that Jacob’s secretive departure from Laban’s household was approved by God and that Jacob was commanded to return to the land of Canaan. Also it could be argued that God gave Laban this dream to <i>restrain</i> him from doing Jacob or his daughters harm or injustice.
Joseph	Genesis 37:5–19	To <i>reveal</i> through imagery a future event. The fulfillment of the dream and its truthfulness would play out years later in Egypt.
Chief butler and chief baker	Genesis 40:5–23	To <i>reveal or prepare</i> them for the verdict of their fate in Pharaoh’s court. Without Joseph the men would have been void of an interpretation. Not only given to dreams, Joseph was an interpreter of dreams and knew that all “interpretations belong to God” (see v. 8).

Nebuchadnezzar	Daniel 2:1–45	To <i>reveal</i> unto Nebuchadnezzar the future kingdoms of the earth and their submission to the triumphant kingdom of God in the last days. To <i>trouble</i> the king so that he sought for a correct interpretation from an inspired individual, in this case Daniel.
Daniel	Daniel 7	To <i>reveal</i> significant future events. To <i>see and hear</i> saints of God from other realms. Daniel admitted that this dream “troubled” his thoughts, and his “countenance changed,” therefore keeping the “matter in [his] heart.”
Joseph the carpenter and husband of Mary	Matthew 1:20 Matthew 2:13 Matthew 2:19–22	To <i>comfort</i> Joseph regarding the news that his future wife Mary was with child. To <i>declare</i> the truth of the divinity of the child and his name. To <i>command</i> Joseph to go into Egypt to avoid the wrath and murderous spirit of Herod. To <i>command or instruct</i> Joseph to return unto the “land of Israel.” A subsequent dream led Joseph back to Galilee.
Wise Men from the East	Matthew 2:12	To <i>warn</i> the wise men not to return to Herod. We do not know to what extent they understood the dream, only that they faithfully responded to it.
Pilate’s wife	Matthew 27:19	We do not know the imagery or details of her dream, but it obviously <i>troubled</i> her soul. The power of her dream led her to confront her husband, who was deciding the fate of the Savior. Like Nebuchadnezzar, she was troubled, and she sought to alleviate the pressing feelings by speaking out on the Lord’s behalf. This shows that dreams may be troubling, agitating, or distressing for several reasons. They may also lead one to repentance.
Lehi	1 Nephi 2:2 1 Nephi 3:2 1 Nephi 8:2–34	To <i>command</i> Lehi to take his family into the wilderness. To <i>command or instruct</i> Lehi to send his sons back to Jerusalem for the “record of the Jews.” To <i>teach</i> Lehi visually the plan of salvation and the variety of lives individuals choose to live while in mortality.
Omer	Ether 9:3	Like Lehi, Omer was commanded to take his family out of the rebellious land. The Lord <i>warned</i> him through a dream. He too obeyed the revelation.

Dispensational Evidence of the Gift of Dreams

Prior to Joseph Smith's First Vision, the Lord prepared the mind and heart of his father, Joseph Smith Sr., to believe his son's vision. From 1811 to 1819, Joseph Smith Sr. received at least seven dreams,¹⁰ and his wife, Lucy Smith, detailed five of them. The first two dreams strike a peculiar familiarity to the dream and vision of the tree of life given to Lehi. Some authors have suggested that there could be as many as thirty correlations between the two dreams.¹¹ This level of correlation is interesting, considering Lehi and Joseph Smith Sr. were separated by 2,400 years. Another unique component of Joseph Smith Sr.'s first two dreams was the theme of apostasy in modern-day religions. It is no wonder that he distanced himself from organized religion prior to the First Vision, notwithstanding pressure from family and friends.

In the third dream, "the guide," or "attendant spirit," common in most of his dreams, directed Joseph Smith Sr. to a garden. Once he arrived in the garden he was healed of an infirmity and honored by twelve wooden images which made obeisance to him.¹² The fourth dream was more personalized and stressed the principle that justice must be satisfied and mercy is only granted when one pleads for the merits of Jesus Christ.¹³ The fifth dream Lucy recorded was the last of the seven dreams she said he had experienced. In this dream, his guide appeared to him and confirmed his integrity and character to be acceptable to the Lord, adding that this would be the last time he would be visited by the guide. Strikingly, the guide told Joseph Smith Sr. that "there is but one thing which you lack in order to secure your salvation."¹⁴ However, he awoke before discovering what it was that he lacked.

The forthcoming events of the Restoration through his son Joseph Smith Jr. would bring ordinances and covenants assuring the venerable patriarch of future salvation. These dreams prepared Joseph Smith Sr. for what was about to unfold in the latter days and, more intimately, among his own family. When Joseph Smith Jr. approached his father and told him what had transpired during Moroni's initial visits, his father counseled, "My son, these things are of God; take heed that you proceed in all holiness to do His will."¹⁵ A messenger coming to his son must have resonated with the messenger in his own inspired dreams. Though the dreams of Joseph Smith Sr. were not recorded in Book of Commandments, their validity and timing confirm the Lord's practice of reaching the children of men through this avenue of revelation.

Another significant reference to the importance of dreams as a source of revelation surfaced in the Prophet Joseph Smith's life. The Prophet recorded

two significant dreams in the last four months of his life. These dreams seem to have been prescient relief to a man bogged down by the constant fury of his enemies. In early February 1844, Joseph had a dream about overcoming troubled waters, which he related to Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, and W. W. Phelps:

I was standing on a peninsula, in the midst of a vast body of water where there appeared to be a large harbor or pier built out for boats to come to. I was surrounded by my friends, and while looking at this harbor I saw a steamboat approaching the harbor. There were bridges on the pier for persons to cross, and there came up a wind and drove the steamboat under one of the bridges and upset it.

I ran up to the boat, expecting the persons would all drown; and wishing to do something to assist them, I put my hand against the side of the boat, and with one surge I shoved it under the bridge and righted it up, and then told them to take care of themselves. But it was not long before I saw them starting out into the channel or main body of the water again.

The storms were raging and the waters rough. I said to my friends that if they did not understand the signs of the times and the spirit of prophecy, they would be apt to be lost.

It was but a few moments after when we saw the waves break over the boat, and she soon foundered and went down with all on board.

The storm and waters were still very rough; yet I told my friends around me that I believed I could stem those waves and that storm, and swim in the waters better than the steamboat did; at any rate I was determined to try it. But my friends laughed at me, and told me I could not stand at all, but would be drowned.

The waters looked clear and beautiful, though exceedingly rough; and I said I believed I could swim, and I would try it anyhow. They said I would drown. I said I would have a frolic in the water first, if I did; and I drove off in the raging waves.

I had swam but a short distance when a towering wave overwhelmed me for a time; but I soon found myself on the top of it, and soon I met the second wave in the same way; and for a while I struggled hard to live in the midst of the storm and waves, and soon found I gained upon every wave, and skimmed the torrent better; and I soon had power to swim with my head out of water: so the waves did not break over me at all, and I found that I had swam a great distance; and in looking about, I saw my brother Samuel by my side.

I asked him how he liked it. He said, "First rate," and I thought so too. I was soon enabled to swim with my head and shoulders out of water, and I could swim as fast as any steamboat.

In a little time it became calm, and I could rush through the water, and only go in to my loins, and soon I only went in to my knees, and finally could tread on the top of the water, and went almost with the speed of an arrow.

I said to Samuel, See how swift I can go! I thought it was great sport and pleasure to travel with such speed, and I awoke.¹⁶

A year prior to this dream Joseph taught, "To dream of flying signifies prosperity and deliverance from enemies. To dream of swimming in deep

water signifies success among many people, and that the word will be accompanied with power.”¹⁷ So the dream appears to be a conspicuous compliment to his role as a dispensational head and to his being one who taught with power and authority.

The Prophet’s last dream came on his very last night of mortality. On June 26 in Carthage Jail, while Joseph was surrounded by murderous souls, the Lord painted the sad predicament of Joseph’s enemies. The dream also indicated the Prophet’s safe removal from their relentless torment. Joseph stated:

I was back in Kirtland, Ohio, and thought I would take a walk out by myself, and view my old farm, which I found grown up with weeds and brambles, and altogether bearing evidence of neglect and want of culture. I went into the barn, which I found without floor or doors, with the weather-boarding off, and was altogether in keeping with the farm.

While I viewed the desolation around me, and was contemplating how it might be recovered from the curse upon it, there came rushing into the barn a company of furious men, who commenced to pick a quarrel with me.

The leader of the party ordered me to leave the barn and farm, stating it was none of mine, and that I must give up all hope of ever possessing it.

I told him the farm was given me by the Church, and although I had not had any use of it for some time back, still I had not sold it, and according to righteous principles it belonged to me or the Church.

He then grew furious and began to rail upon me, and threaten me, and said it never did belong to me nor to the Church.

I then told him that I did not think it worth contending about, that I had no desire to live upon it in its present state, and if he thought he had a better right I would not quarrel with him about it but leave; but my assurance that I would not trouble him at present did not seem to satisfy him, as he seemed determined to quarrel with me, and threatened me with the destruction of my body.

While he was thus engaged, pouring out his bitter words upon me, a rabble rushed in and nearly filled the barn, drew out their knives, and began to quarrel among themselves for the premises, and for a moment forgot me, at which time I took the opportunity to walk out of the barn about up to my ankles in mud.

When I was a little distance from the barn, I heard them screeching and screaming in a very distressed manner, as it appeared they had engaged in a general fight with their knives. While they were thus engaged, the dream or vision ended.¹⁸

Joseph’s last dream resonates with Mormon 4:5: “The judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is by the wicked that the wicked are punished.” The Lord removed Joseph out of the reach of wicked and corrupt men, leaving them to fight and murder each other; it is important to stress that the Lord took him. So it can be viewed that the next day the Lord took Joseph to another sphere of existence to continue the work which leads to the salvation and exaltation of man.

This dream confirms what the Lord taught his disciples: “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do” (Luke 12:4; see also Matthew 10:28). Through Joseph Smith Sr. and his son Joseph Smith Jr. we see that the Lord comforted and prepared these men for events that were to come to them. Both men prospered despite their circumstances, were delivered from their enemies’ malicious behaviors, and were taught the word of God which was accompanied with great power—their dreams assured them it was so.

“*It is to teach us a principle.*” President Wilford Woodruff proposed that “we may have dreams about things of great importance, and dreams of no importance at all. . . . There are a great many things taught us in dreams that are true, and if a man has the spirit of God he can tell the difference between what is from the Lord and what is not. . . . Whenever you have a dream that you feel is from the Lord, pay attention to it.” He illustrated this truth by recounting an occurrence during a mission in England:

When I was in the City of London on one occasion, with Brother George A. Smith, I dreamt that my wife came to me and told me that our first child had died. I believed my dream, and in the morning while at breakfast, I felt somewhat sad. Brother George A. noticed this and I told him my dream. Next morning’s post brought me a letter from my wife, conveying the intelligence of the death of my child. It may be asked what use there was in such a thing. I don’t know that there was much use in it except to prepare my mind for the news of the death of my child. But what I wanted to say in regard to these matters is, that the Lord does communicate some things of importance to the children of men by means of visions and dreams as well as by the records of divine truth. And what is it all for? It is to teach us a principle. We may never see anything take place exactly as we see it in a dream or a vision, yet it is intended to teach us a principle.¹⁹

The blow of Wilford Woodruff’s heartbreaking letter was softened by the Lord preparing him through his dream. He was certain the communication was from God, and George A. Smith would stand as a second witness to the truthfulness of the account. However, Wilford Woodruff had to determine the principle the Lord was teaching him with this dream for himself. Likewise, we must wisely discern what we are supposed to learn from our own inspired dreams.

A glimpse of our glorious potential. Dreams can encourage us in the path of righteousness and sustain us in afflictions. While frustrating mortal concerns bear down upon us, we may receive eternal glimpses of our future state of existence. In the winter of 1831–32 while suffering from an illness, Parley P.

Pratt, who helped establish the settlement of the Saints in western Missouri, experienced the following dream:

I thought I saw myself dressed in a clean and beautiful robe, white as snow, and extending from the neck down-ward in beautiful folds. On either breast were lines of golden writing, in large Roman letters, about a third of an inch in length, and the lines extending from the center of the breast on each side six or eight inches long. The upper line on each side appeared larger and more beautiful or conspicuous than the others; one of these lines was: "HOLY PROPHET," and the other was: "NEW JERUSALEM." On awaking from this dream I immediately called to mind the words of the Saviour to John the Revelator: "*He that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the City of my God, which is New Jerusalem.*"²⁰

Oliver Cowdery had baptized Parley a year and a half earlier in New York and Pratt had already become a noticeable pillar in God's kingdom in the early days of the Restoration. He had quickly proven to be an avid missionary, exceptional teacher, and influential writer. Though Elder Pratt was sick and destitute in Missouri, the Lord permitted him a glimpse of his glorious potential (the purity and nature of his garments) and position (holy prophet/apostle) in the kingdom rolling forth. It is unlikely that it was a coincidence that the dream occurred on the very ground that had been declared six months earlier by the Lord as the land "appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the Saints, . . . the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion [New Jerusalem]" (Doctrine & Covenants 57:1–2). Four years would lapse before Parley P. Pratt would be ordained an Apostle, and the New Jerusalem he and the other Saints sought to establish has yet to be built. Pratt noted the significance of the 1831 dream: "[It] certainly encouraged me, and enabled me to bear my sickness, privation and long absence from the wife and former friends more patiently."²¹ Even today, dreams given to us as Latter-day Saints can encourage us as we face the vicissitudes of life.²²

To impel us to do that which is required. As a young Apostle, Spencer W. Kimball was privileged to learn from George F. Richards (1861–1950),²³ who was an alert man and attentive to God-given dreams. He did not think they were the least unusual for the faithful. While addressing the topic of dreams in a general conference, President Kimball referred to the following experience told by George F. Richards in council with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles nearly thirty years earlier.

I believe in dreams, brethren. The Lord has given me dreams which to me are just as real and as much from God as . . . any . . . that we might read in the scriptures. . . .

It is not out of place for us to have important dreams. . . . More than 40 years ago I had a dream which I am sure was from the Lord. In this dream I was in the presence of my Savior as he stood mid-air. He spoke no word to me, but my love for him was such that I have not words to explain. I know that no mortal man can love the Lord as I experienced that love for the Savior unless God reveals it to him. I would have remained in his presence, but there was a power drawing me away from him.

As a result of that dream, I had this feeling that no matter what might be required of my hands, what the gospel might entail unto me, I would do what I should be asked to do even to the laying down of my life. . . . If only I can be with my Savior and have that same sense of love that I had in that dream, it will be the goal of my existence, the desire of my life.²⁴

President Richards's dream influenced his heart to yearn for the Savior's love, it influenced his behavior to align his will with the Lord's, and it drew out of him a greater desire to give his life in the work of the Lord. It was not unusual for him because he saw "things both in heaven and in earth" (D&C 88:79). He saw and, more importantly, felt a sense of love more gratifying than anything under his current situation. He would "recall some faint outlines . . . of that heavenly world" and the right he had to be a citizen with the Savior in a holy city.

"It means God knows who I am." More recently Elder David A. Bednar shared an experience in general conference having to do with dreams. He spoke of an alert stake president who was prompted to know the names of all the youth in his stake. Shortly after learning all of their names from snapshots he had had taken, the Lord sent him a dream. Elder Bednar described the experience:

One night the priesthood leader had a dream about one of the young men whom he knew only from a picture. In the dream he saw the young man dressed in a white shirt and wearing a missionary name tag. With a companion seated at his side, the young man was teaching a family. The young man held the Book of Mormon in his hand, and he looked as if he were testifying of the truthfulness of the book. The priesthood leader then awoke from his dream.

At an ensuing priesthood gathering, the leader approached the young man he had seen in his dream and asked to talk with him for a few minutes. After a brief introduction, the leader called the young man by name and said: "I am not a dreamer. I have never had a dream about a single member of this stake, except for you. I am going to tell you about my dream, and then I would like you to help me understand what it means." The priesthood leader recounted the dream and asked the young man about its meaning. Choking with emotion, the young man simply replied, "It means God knows who I am."²⁵

What is unique about this dream is that the stake president saw the young man's bright future and not the young man's current misdeeds. The

stake president shared the dream with the young man, an action that gave him hope and courage to make his life worthy of representing the Lord in the mission field. Elder Bednar explained that the boy and the stake president continued meeting and counseling together. Ultimately, the young man's life was positively influenced by a priesthood leader who was entitled to a dream for the welfare of those to whom he ministered.

Conclusion

Like the stake president in Elder Bednar's talk, it would not be out of line for those holding priesthood keys to receive dreams on behalf of those over whom they preside. Dreams concerning members of their ward or stake could help leaders guide individuals to salvation. They could also give the leader inspiration and direction as they counsel members of the Lord's flock in their personal matters. Cautionary counsel dictates that we understand the sacredness of this type of revelation and its purpose. Unauthorized individuals would not and should not take license to counsel, correct, or share advice with someone in spiritual trouble because they dreamt about it the night before. Exceptions may be limited to family members, particularly fathers or mothers who dream of their children.

More often than not it would be unwise to solicit interpretation of dreams from a family member or a best friend. We do believe in the interpretation of dreams. This article identifies two individuals that saved people from starvation and premature death because they exercised their gift to interpret dreams. But typically this is a spiritual gift reserved for spiritually mature individuals under ordination from God.²⁶ Remember Joseph of Egypt's interrogative: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (Genesis 40:8). Thus the Lord ought to be involved, and we ought to be desirous to "see, and hear and know" our own dreams "by the power of the Holy Ghost" (see 1 Nephi 10:17–19).

The Prophet Joseph Smith constantly urged the Saints to obtain knowledge of heaven for themselves: "It is a great thing to inquire at the hands of God, or to come into His presence; and we feel fearful to approach Him on subjects that are of little or no consequence, to satisfy the queries of individuals, especially about things the knowledge of which men ought to obtain in all sincerity, before God, for themselves, in humility by the prayer of faith."²⁷

Sharing inspired dreams (or any personal revelation) should be guarded by inspired wisdom (see D&C 63:64). As he addressed the newly formed Quorum of Twelve Apostles in 1835, the Prophet encouraged propriety with

sacred experiences: "Let us be faithful and silent, brethren, and if God gives you a manifestation, keep it to yourselves."²⁸ Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah had to confront people in his day who claimed to have inspired dreams or stole the words and revelations of others and manipulated them for their own dishonest purposes. Jeremiah declared: "I am against the prophets [false prophets or pretended prophets] . . . that steal my words everyone from his neighbor. . . . I am against [those] . . . that use their tongues and say, He saith. . . . Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams . . . and do tell them . . . and cause my people to err by their lies" (see Jeremiah 23:30–32).

In order to follow the Prophet Joseph's counsel and to heed Jeremiah's warning, consider the following three suggestions. First, keep the dream to yourself, unless impelled by the spirit to convey it in appropriate settings and at appropriate times (see Alma 12:9).²⁹ Recall Wilford Woodruff's suggestion in context that dreams are to teach *you* a principle. President Boyd K. Packer taught, "It is my conviction that experiences of a special, sacred nature are individual and should be kept to oneself."³⁰ Second, allow the dream to play out in personal records and in time. This course of action will protect the sacredness of the revelation, and the dreams may have more of an influence on future posterity. The Lord is gracious enough to give us further revelation, no matter the avenue, so long as we can be trusted. Third, do not steal someone else's spiritual experience and twist that experience for unrighteous purposes. President Harold B. Lee sadly observed, "It never ceases to amaze me how gullible some of our Church members are in broadcasting sensational stories or dreams or visions or purported patriarchal blessings or quotations . . . supposedly from some person's private diary."³¹ Verifying dreams or visions from primary sources and understanding the context and circumstances under which they were given is sound gospel scholarship. It is also pleasing to the spirit and honors the recipient of the dream and protects them from undeserved ridicule or negative coloring of character.

Thankfully there are scriptural accounts, diaries, journals, and personal writings noting the intervention of God through inspired dreams. They witness that God does know who we are and that he desires to help lead us through this mortal experience. The precedent has long been established that our Father in Heaven speaks to his children. And on occasion, at the appointed time, and when we least expect it, the Lord "in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, . . . openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction" (Job 33:15–16). In

the coming days, both old and young—both servants and handmaids—shall receive and be refreshed through the revelatory avenue of dreams (see Joel 2:28–29). **RE**

Notes

1. Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, March 22, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, published in *Times and Seasons*, February 1840, 54; emphasis added. A year previous to his letter to Isaac Galland, the Prophet outlined what we now call the Articles of Faith. The seventh article states: “We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.” The phrase “and so forth” may include several other gifts, including dreams.

2. For an example of a vision given in broad daylight, see Gwen Marler Barney, *Anson Call and the Rocky Mountain Prophecy* (Salt Lake City: Call Publishing, 2002), 217–19. This vision occurred at Chicken Creek, August 17, 1853, while Anson Call sat in the front seat of his wagon.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 208.

4. In many instances it is important to record dreams. The Prophet would record dreams in the *History of the Church*. Not only did the Prophet have a few of his dreams recorded but dreams of others as well—for example, Heber C. Kimball (see *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957], 4:203, 5:515–16) and Sally Knight, first wife of Newel Knight (see *History of the Church*, 1:101).

5. For a review of the dreams of Parley P. Pratt, see “visions” in the index of *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1874). Visions and dreams were a gift of this early Apostle (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 134).

6. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), 120. See chapter 13 for Parley P. Pratt’s essay on dreams as an avenue of revelation.

7. We could also note Jacob, son of Isaac. The Lord gave him a specific dream perpetuating the covenant and promises made with his grandfather, Abraham. Jacob’s dream caused him to state, “Surely the Lord is in this place” (Genesis 28:16). This is a memorial to not only the experience at Beth-el, but also to Jehovah (see Genesis 28:10–22). God also “came to Abimelech in a dream” (Genesis 20:3). This Philistine king had innocently sought Sarah, Abraham’s wife, being told she was Abraham’s sister. But the Lord spared Sarah and Abraham the sorrow and Abimelech the condemnation because all three exemplified integrity pleasing to God (see Genesis 20:1–7).

8. Perhaps in exercising his gift to interpret dreams, Joseph more clearly found the meaning, blessings, and imminent fulfillment of his own dreams.

9. Daniel 10 recounts the intimate experience of the Lord revealing himself to Daniel.

10. Each account stated that he had dreamed or had awakened out of sleep. Lucy’s recollection of these dreams, five of which she recorded, can be found in Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1853), 47–69.

11. See Lucy Mack Smith, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith By His Mother*, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 67, n. 10.

12. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 65. Recall Joseph of Egypt’s dreams wherein he saw images paying him obeisance.

13. This dream would be a great complement to teaching Alma the Younger’s conversion, found in Mosiah 27 and Alma 36.

14. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 68.

15. George Q. Cannon, *Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 38; Joseph Smith—History 1:50.

16. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:194–95.

17. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:255; see also Heber C. Kimball’s dream while in England in Stanley B. Kimball, *On the Potter’s Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 41–42.

18. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:609–10.

19. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1882), 22:333–34; see also *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 286.

20. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 56–57.

21. Pratt, *Autobiography*, 57.

22. The oft-quoted dream of Joseph F. Smith in Hawaii as a young missionary is a strong complement. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 542–43.

23. George F. Richards served as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from 1945 to 1950. President Spencer W. Kimball and President Richards served in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles together for nearly seven years.

24. George F. Richards, quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, “The Cause Is Just and Worthy,” *Ensign*, May 1974, 118.

25. See Elder David A. Bednar, “The Tender Mercies of the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 100.

26. Joseph Smith recorded that on the night of February 21, 1842, “Spent the evening in the office with Elders Taylor and Richards, interpreting dreams, &c.” (*History of the Church*, 4:501).

27. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:339.

28. Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:309.

29. Note that we are given the charge to impart. Spiritual maturity will help us determine appropriate times to share inspired dreams and manifestations.

30. Boyd K. Packer, “Revelation in a Changing World,” *Ensign*, November 1989, 14.

31. Clyde J. Williams, ed., *Teachings of Harold B. Lee: Eleventh President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 399.