

Jan 1998

"Voices of the Little Ones": Readings and Discussion

When Marilyn Jones entered therapy to deal with the bewildering and frightening effects of long-suppressed childhood sexual abuse, part of what she did was to listen to the stories of her fragmented personalities created under the stress of abuse. This creation of new personalities (called Multiple Personality Disorder) is characteristic of severe childhood trauma of any sort but particularly in cases where sexual, ritual, or Satanic abuse is involved.

Now a warm, grandmotherly psychiatric nurse and therapist in her own right, living in Mendon, Utah, Marilyn calls this process "listening to the little ones."

She will read some of the poems and stories told by the "little ones" at an evening sponsored by the Mormon Alliance Wednesday, January 14, 1998, in the third-floor auditorium of the main library, 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., also explaining the dynamics of abuse from a therapist's perspective. Questions from the audience are welcome.

Marilyn grew up in what she thought was a loving "normal" Mormon family. She assumed that all families had a "daytime" and a "nighttime" side. She did not begin recovering memories of incest and ritual abuse until after she was an adult with children and had left a physi-

cally and emotional Mormon marriage. The fact that she had always hated going to the dentist was just an odd quirk in her personality, she thought, an unexplained oddity considering that her dentist was truly almost painless, always considerate. But one day in the chair, "mouth propped open with a big block and rubber dam, mouth filled with fingers, his face in my face, panic rising in me, my mind saw a man sitting on the old wooden basement stairs. A bare bulb hung by the octopus of a furnace. He was wearing khaki work clothes and I, no older than three, was wearing a red dress. I knelt between his legs one step below, choking and gagging, my mouth filled with something large and hard. His heavy hand held down my little head."

It was her first recovered memory but not her last.

To survive abuse, a child copes by dissociation, splitting the unthinkable memory into manageable parts, some of which become personalities who re-emerge to handle repeated or similar traumas. In adult survivors, surfacing memories recur as flashbacks, acute and specific physical pain for which there is no recognizable cause (feeling smothered, for instance), depersonalization, or chunks of time in which the individual cannot remember what she or he just

did, or behaving uncharacteristically.

"The task of reconstructing all of the parts and pieces is monumental," she said. "But it can be done."

Nursery Hims

*I can make him dead
as dead as he makes me
I float up to the ceiling
and all that I can see
is patterns lying on the floor
and none of them is me*

*I can make him dead
as dead as he makes me
I close my eyes
and say goodbyes
and never ever be
-- Marilyn Jones*

ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

The Mormon Alliance was incorporated on July 4, 1992. Its purposes are to identify and document ecclesiastical/spiritual abuse, to promote healing and closure for its survivors, to build more sensitive leadership, to empower LDS members to participate with more authenticity in Mormonism, and to foster a healthier religious community.

By Common Consent is the quarterly newsletter of the Mormon Alliance. Comments, articles, and items for inclusion are welcome, if they are submitted thirty days before the mailing deadlines, which are the first weeks of January, April, July, and October. Please send them to Mormon Alliance, 6337 S. Highland Drive, Mailbox 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

Subscriptions are \$30 for each calendar year. At any point during the year that a subscription begins, you will receive the four newsletters of that year and the Case Reports volume for that year. On request, you may receive meeting notices at no charge. Copies of earlier Case Reports, 1995 and 1996, are available from Signature Books for \$20 apiece (price includes shipping) at 564 W. 400 North, Salt Lake City, UT 84116. The order line is (801) 531-0164.

To report cases of ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse, contact Lavina Fielding Anderson, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115 (801) 467-1617. Please report changes of address here as well.

Uncommon Dissent

Gene Mahalko

Over the recent holiday season, I found myself involved as a dice-rolling participant in a Book of Mormon board game with several of my pre-teen relatives. Hearing some of the "eternal truths" presented to children was a mildly shocking experience.

One of the questions in the game was to name one of the other two women named in the Book of Mormon besides Sariah. The game designers seemed totally unashamed of the fact that it takes fewer words to name the entire female contingent of the book than it takes to say "And it came to pass . . ." It doesn't occur to them that some child might ask why women don't count. Not to mention the fact that a mother gets named recognition only if she marries a prophet, while a prostitute gets named recognition in her own right, not through "her man." Some dangerous lessons there.

The other aspect of the game that floored me was how many questions related to Laban, the brass plates, his sword, and the kidnapping of his hired help.

I'm hardly the first person to wonder if murdering drunks and stealing their possessions is really the best way to solve a problem. It seems as if creating a second copy of the plates for Nephi would be pretty simple stuff, as miracles go. Even simpler would be for the Lord to tell Nephi to take the plates and get a move on while he kept Laban in a deep sleep for three or four days. That doesn't even qualify as a miracle, just a real serious hangover.

However, the part of the story that had never struck me as odd before was the passing down from prophet to prophet of Laban's sword. Think about that for a second. Suppose President Hinckley really needed something from Mark Hofmann (to pick an unsavory character) and was prompted to blow him away with Mark's own --to be nonhistorical--shotgun. Imagine this event canonized as scripture, duly reported in the *Ensign*. And imagine further that each time a new prophet is chosen to lead the Church, as part of the sustaining ritual at general conference, he is formally handed this shotgun, the barrel solemnly looming above the microphone. Photographs in the *Church News* factually document that the

transfer has taken place as ritually required.

This game was a Family Home Evening activity, and I didn't really have the nerve to bring up these thoughts. I was glad, however, that the invocation did not admonish us to apply these lessons to our daily lives.

Incidentally, my team came in last.

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MY NEW YEAR'S DECONSTRUCTION

TROY D. WILLIAMS

"Still, we will let all this be a thing of the past, though it hurts us, and beat down by constraint the anger that rises inside us. Now I am making an end of my anger. It does not become me unrelentingly to rage on. Come, then!" -- Achilles, The Iliad of Homer, bk. 19, ll. 65-68

If you are like me (and I know I am) sometimes the Church just pisses you off. There is always something asinine happening in Zion. It could be a recent inquisition, the Rodin censorship, the construction of a \$240 million dollar tabernacle--you name it! Whatever the Church is doing, I can find a reason to disagree with it! When I realized that this had become my attitude I asked myself a tough question: Could my biggest problem be me?

Deconstruction has become something of a personal hobby. I have this compulsion to endlessly challenge my testimony of Mormonism. I always ask myself the hazardous questions: (1) Was Joseph really a true prophet? (2) Did he invent polygamy to justify adultery? (3) Is the Book of Mormon historically accurate? (4) Was Jesus really resurrected? (5) Is there a God? (In case anyone is interested, my current answers to these questions are: (1) Sometimes. (2) Possibly.

(3) Maybe, but it doesn't really matter. (4) I really hope so. And finally, (5) Yes, I believe so.)

In Primary we learn the importance of avoiding negativity. "If you chance to meet a frown, do not let it stay." Heck, even pioneer children sang as they walked and walked. Mormons are always supposed to be happy, even in adversity, right? Wrong. A happy face doesn't always resolve the complex conundrums of life. Anger, sadness, depression, even fury, are God-given emotions that all have their place. Denying their legitimacy is to deny our purpose on earth. But it's also not healthy to get stuck in just one emotion. This includes the positive. Being in a perpetual state of "happy" can make you naive to reality and absolutely obnoxious to associate with. (I had a seminary teacher like that and flunked out as a result!)

Anger can be a positive, but only during a period of transition. We must transcend the scope of our disillusionment to experience the greater breadth of our spiritual lives. With this in mind, I decided to make a New Year's Resolution to deconstruct my anger as much as I disassemble my faith. Doing so reminded me of the good I experienced growing up Mormon.

I am grateful that God dropped me off in an LDS family. It was very empowering for me. I remember that my parents taught me the words to "I Am a Child of God" and cultivated in myself the understanding that I was a unique individual loved by God. During my angst-ridden teenage years I drew strength and empowerment from a patriarchal blessing that assured me that God was personally acquainted with me and loved me with all of his anthropomorphic heart. Naive,

desperate faith? Maybe, but it was also a faith powerful enough to succor a socially anomalous skinny kid through high school with a sense of self-worth still intact. During my fits of anger, it is important to realize that the Church is providing that same kind of sustenance for thousands of members today.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell helped me to understand my religious experience in a larger context: "All religions have been true for their time. If you can recognize the enduring aspect of their truth and separate it from the temporal applications, you've got it." (The Power of Myth, p. 182).

There are many temporal aspects of Mormonism that I have separated from my personal belief system. There are also many Mormon truths I still embrace. The gospel is "true" because it has (and in many ways still does) empower my life. I don't feel wronged by the Church. There is no life-motivating power in being a victim. Anger has served its purpose, but now I'm happy to move on in my progression.

Besides, if it weren't for the Church's efforts to excommunicate scholars, white-wash history, forbid unauthorized symposia, and ban statues, I never would have met those same excommunicated scholars, read the new Mormon history, attended Sunstone, and viewed the rest of Rodin's naughty naked men. The more Church leaders have tried to repress things, the more they have encouraged me to explore them. And I'm grateful to them for that! The more the Brethren say, "Come follow me," the more I say, "Nope. I just want to follow God."

I've also learned to step back and laugh at the general absurdity of my love/hate affair with the Church. Humor is

another God-given emotion that has its place. I make no apologies for being light-minded upon occasion. It has salvaged my sanity more than once.

At the end of the day, I hope in the atonement of Jesus Christ. I hope that the grace of God will cover me as surely as it embraces every member and leader of the LDS Church. I want to feel the unconditional love of Christ for every living being on earth.

1998 will no doubt be a banner year for controversy, scandal, and intrigue in the LDS community, just like 1997, 1996, 1995. Me? I'm not going to let it burn me up. It's time to move past the anger and deal with troublesome Church issues with maturity, compassion, and forgiveness. But also, if you chance to meet a frown, it's okay to let it stay for awhile. I'm sure that many of the pioneers bitched as they walked and walked and walked.

It's all just part of life, and I love it!
Happy New Year.

The Critique That Wouldn't Die

It was the October post-conference critique--theoretically the last of a four-year tradition.

Then Robert G. Vernon, showing an unexpected talent for rabble-rousing, skillfully led a successful movement to continue the conference critiques, despite the announced intention of the trustees to suspend the meetings. He suggested that, since the problem seems to be difficulty in finding panelists, arrangements for a less formal discussion would serve equally well. This suggestion met with enthusiastic approval from other attendees.

Janice Allred volunteered to continue to moderate the discussion, and the questions panelists are asked to consider in their preparations will appear in the March and September issues of By Common Consent.

To facilitate discussion, we decided to shift the meeting to the library's conference room on the

south side of the second floor of the library. **However, due to scheduling problems at the library, April's critique will be held in the third floor conference room on Wednesday, April 8.** The time will remain 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The address of the main library is 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City.

Two of the more interesting fantasies prompted by October 1997 general conference were these: "I'd like to see it like a Quaker meeting, with no assignments to speak, arranged list, with people testifying, preaching, praying, singing--doing what the Spirit tells them only if the Spirit speaks and only when it speaks."

"I'd like to hear a talk given in Spanish while anglos like me read subtitles off a screen."

The sky's the limit on fantasies, but how did the actual conference stack up? Opinions varied. One jaded conference listener quipped, "The General Authorities are engaging us in a meaningful monologue." Another listener found that the "hymns-only" policy had moved Sunday's music to a new excruciating level of boredom, "with all of the hymns being sung too slowly in tortured arrangements that didn't have much to do with the text." Moderator Janice Allred found the conference overall rather "ho-hum," but panelist Loraine Wilkins, who listened to conference for the first time in years "all the way through" this time found it "very healing."

Favorite talks were Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's and Elder Robert D. Hales's addresses about the Savior (particularly Elder Holland's comment that "succor means to run toward" and his testimony that the Savior had many times run to his aid"), the "real-life" feeling of Elder Carl B. Pratt, President Hinckley's priesthood meeting address (except for his comments on sister missionaries), particularly his acknowledgment for the second time that "an inactive person's gripe was legitimate, and Sheri Dew's address at the women's meeting.

Least favorite moments were Joseph B. Wirthlin's announcement that "motherhood is the . . . highest, holiest service to be assumed by mankind" (he was quoting a 1942 First Presidency statement but his note cites only the quotation of that statement in April 1974 general conference by President Kimball, without identifying President Kimball as the quoter or the First Presidency as Heber J. Grant, J. Reuben Clark, and David O. McKay), the predictability of "1-2-3

principle" talks, and the fact that women heard six goals from Sister Smoot and three goals from President Monson ("it felt like usurping the authority of women")

Panelist E. Ann Warner observed that there seemed to be greater intensity of emotion in this conference, and viewers pointed out their favorites: comments on the weather, David Haight's unwritten talks, Elder Hales's sincere emotion as he expressed gratitude for Elder Maxwell's recovery from cancer, Elder Holland's testimony of the Savior, President Faust's tears as he expressed shame for his boyhood negligence in once allowing his grandmother to fill her own woodbox, President Hinckley's quips, and his unexpected emotion in his closing remarks as he confessed to the members, "I love you." Fred Voros pointed out that these "unscripted moments" were precious because of their rarity.

President Hinckley, it was widely agreed, provided a center of competence and strength for the conference in a way that has become increasingly rare among his ailing predecessors. "There was a strong sense that the church is at the cusp of a new era," as Loraine put it. "We saw what kind of Church we were going to be," said another and wondered if the forceful "internationalization movement" begun by President Kimball "but on hold for the last twenty years" will be resumed.

Several viewers, however, expressed discomfort with the "disingenuousness" of his reassurance to members of the Church that he was "misquoted" in the press on doctrinal issues considering that (1) he has sidestepped questions about or minimized the importance of the doctrine that human beings can become gods in three separate media interviews, (2) did not identify how he was misquoted and set the record straight, and (3) has tacitly encouraged members to pay attention to media statements by calling attention to positive coverage and quoted at length from his interview with Mike Wallace, including material that was not used in the final version.

"I'll bet Lorenzo Snow is doing a tailspin in his grave," commented one viewer, while another one sardonically proposed a new verse to "Old McDonald": ". . . with a blip, blip here, and a blip, blip there . . ." More seriously, a third viewer pointed out that President Hinckley's even taking the trouble to say he was misquoted suggests



that he senses some need to account for his statements to the press.

No one liked the "shameless brown-nosing" of Elder Russell Nelson's adulatory talk about President Hinckley though there was general consensus that President Hinckley's quipped challenge to a dual in the basement of the Tabernacle afterward was a graceful way of diffusing the tasteless presentation.

Panelist Joel Alfred commented on the uncomfortable split he found between "gospel-centered talks about loving and helping others vs. the self-righteous talks about how we're right and nobody else is."

Perhaps the most controversial point was President Hinckley's "clarification" of the policy that women missionaries are allowed but not encouraged to go on missions. One female returned missionary said she was "shocked and horrified" by this statement. One man whose daughter had been discouraged from serving a mission by the higher age said he feared that "over-zealous" bishops would use President Hinckley's statement to actively discourage young women from serving missions. A woman student in the audience said that for many of her friends used plans for a mission, even vague ones, as a technique for diffusing the relentless pressure to marry early. "Now it's been taken away from them."

Another viewer said, "I just plain don't get it. The General Authorities are worried about kids marrying too early, about husbands and wives who are immature, about scriptural illiteracy, about marriage out of the temple, and about the divorce rate. Women serving missions positively impacts all of these conditions. It seems like there are all advantages and no disadvantages to encouraging women to serve missions and encouraging more women to serve by equalizing the age." In response, another woman responded, "You're talking about having stronger women. I don't know that the Church wants to promote strength in women." A male returned missionary added, "In every way this policy treats women unequally and unfairly. What it shows to me is old male leaders who are obsessed with power and their insecurity about it."

1997 CASE REPORTS

Two separate individuals had heard rumors The 1997 volume of the *Case Reports*, originally scheduled to be mailed in November, is "in the works but not yet ready for mailing. Keep your mailbox alert in February for Volume 3, and meanwhile accept our apologies for the tardiness.

