

**Other Sheep Indeed
with Q&A session following**

Sunstone Symposium

July 29, 2017

Denver Snuffer, Jr.

Micah Nickolaisen: Welcome to Sunstone, everybody, and for attending session 331 titled, *Other Sheep Indeed* with Denver Snuffer. My name is Micah Nickolaisen. I will be moderating this panel. Before we begin we ask that cellphones are turned off and that those attending will be respectful and attentive. It is the mission of Sunstone to host thoughtful and respectful dialogue, please keep that in mind when in engaging in the Q&A portion of the session following the remarks of Mr. Snuffer. Those who cannot abide by those guidelines should refrain from commenting and will be asked to leave, should they become disruptive.

As you listen today we invite you to explore what it means to be Mormon. Who gets to carry that label? What does the history say? What does the theology say? At this conference we encourage you to explore what it means to be Mormon. We don't like labels because the reality is there are as many labels as there are people, which is why you'll see that in our name badge sleeve we have allowed you to label yourself the kind of Mormon you are or want to be. If you have not yet, you are welcome to grab a Sharpie at the front desk to help disrupt the narrative of the "one true Mormon" and instead tell us who you are.

This session is being recorded and you will be able to purchase it after the presentation ends at the registration desk on the main floor. Take advantage of our symposium special by subscribing to Sunstone magazine, seven issues for the price of six, at the registration desk as well.

This session is 60 minutes long and we ask both audience and presenters to keep within the framework of that time so we can allow everyone enough time for lunch. We invite you to purchase your lunch from the cafeteria one floor beneath us following this session. Sunstone is required to meet a food minimum so purchasing food at the cafeteria is strongly encouraged.

A little about this session: Christ's "other sheep" are mentioned in the New Testament and Book of Mormon but remain unidentified. There are important things known to the "other sheep" but still unknown to Mormons. "The least of these" may not be our inferiors but may be needed to complete Mormonism. Mormonism welcomes all truth, wherever it is found, and cannot allow itself to become self satisfied or unwelcoming to new and important ideas from outside. No Mormon should be willing to ignore scripture to conform to orthodoxy. This paper will defend taking a much broader view of the unfinished "restoration of all things".

Denver Snuffer, Jr. was an active member of the LDS Church for 40 years until he was excommunicated in September 2013 on the 40th anniversary of his original baptismal date.

Denver has asked that I leave ten minutes for Q&A at the end of this session, and so I will turn the rest of the time over to him. If you want to present any questions to Denver please come up to this mike towards the front of the room just so we can make sure we hear your questions and that it gets recorded for posterity. All right Denver, the time is now yours.

Denver Snuffer: I can't remember a Sunstone Symposium I have participated in that had so overtly religious a theme as this year. This year's topic is:

The Least of These: Embracing All

Exploring how Mormonism and the Restoration address the invitation of Matthew 25: 40, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me".

With such a theme I feel inspired to wax scriptural, and do a little preaching as part of my contribution this year.

Mormonism announced in its founding book of scripture that it is an incomplete, markedly unfinished religion searching for more truth to achieve its destiny. The completion is to be accomplished primarily by two means: restoring lost scripture and continuing revelation. But even the concept of "continuing revelation" has been institutionally curtailed. The only institutionally authorized source for revelation is a single leader.

Of all faiths, Mormonism has the greatest canonical incentive to search for and embrace truth known to others. The "keystone" of Mormonism is the Book of Mormon. That book alerts its readers that there are many others from vastly different places with vastly different scriptures who are nonetheless Christ's sheep. Book of Mormon readers are expected to search for, welcome and learn from them. In contrast, institutional Mormonism of all stripes confine trustworthy new religious ideas to their authorized leaders. Early in the text we learn that our faith, like our scriptures, is unfinished, and to anticipate a flood of additional sacred texts to help remove our ignorance. The portion of the Book of Mormon translated by Joseph Smith is carefully censored, with its greater content withheld.

2 Nephi 29:11-12 states: *For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; ...* Obviously the Gods of Mormonism view Their role as all-inclusive. The entire world and all mankind belong to Them. Their global audience has received and recorded sacred words directly from the Gods' "one" mouth. We have no way to define the extent to which that has happened. Nor do we have any concept of the number of sacred records that exist somewhere among unknown others, nor any idea what truths they were given that we lack.

Mormonism cannot, or at least should not, consider itself the exclusive possessor of THE sacred canon or that there is only one canon containing *the* Gods' teachings. There are words from heaven spread throughout our world by deliberate planting of the Gods.

Continuing, *for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.* These "books" hold terrible importance for Mormons because we are going to be judged by the Gods based on a comparison between our "works" and "that which is written." With such a warning we Mormons ought to be humble about our claims to know more than other faiths. We should be modest in thinking we are especially graced by the Gods' words and should be anxious to scour the globe to discover the sacred texts of other cultures. In humility, we should invite them to share the truths they value most with us because we have shown that we will respect what they regard as sacred.

To clarify this further the record continues, *For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; ...* So far this describes a welcome Judeo-Christian boundary because the ancient Israelites are the backbone of the Gods' dealings with mankind. The Lost Ten Tribes continued to compose scripture, and their records will in time be recovered.

This passage continues by including yet others who are disconnected from any disclosed connection to Israel: *and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.*

Who? When? What was said?

"All nations of the earth" is broad enough to raise the troubling possibility that the Gods have spoken to others in India, Japan and China – to the peoples of Persia, Africa, and Native peoples of the Americas, Hawaii, Polynesia, and Australia. The Jaredite prophet, identified as "the brother of Jared," had some of the greatest revelations in all history. He lived many centuries before Abraham, and therefore before there were Israelites. We know Egypt was founded "seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the first fathers in the first generation, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam[.]"

If we take the Book of Mormon seriously, the ecumenicalism of the Gods may have no recognizable or comprehensible limits. The Gods of Mormonism are far more pantheistic than Trinitarian. What a cruel embarrassment that proves to be for any sect that proselytizes primarily among other Christian denominations. Imagining Gods who speak to everyone is troubling enough, but for the Gods to expect Mormons to give high regard, even canonical credibility to the records of these truly "others" begins to buckle the knees and mangle the mantras of today's Mormons.

An unfortunate Mormon truism is the mistaken idea that we have a better and more complete religion than *all* others. 'WE have the most recent revelation, because the Gods

spoke last to us' (...uh, well, so far as we know). Therefore, we can be prone to think of "the least of these" as all others who have failed to embrace Mormonism. This paper explores the possibility that we have vastly overrated the scope of our religion, and underrated our ignorance. Perhaps we have no reason to ever consider those outside of Mormonism as "less than" Mormons, or "the least" worthy before our Gods.

This humbling revelation of the Gods' universal attention to all mankind is reinforced by Christ's words to the Nephites at Bountiful. He declared to them in 3 Ne. 16:1-4: *I have other sheep, which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.* His declaration was every bit as disorienting to the Nephites as was His mention of "other sheep" to the Jews. Both the Bible and Book of Mormon make it clear that bodies of sheep who have the Great Shepherd standing before them are perplexed at the idea that He has yet others He loves as much as them. Are there no favorites? The sheep probably considered, at least passingly, "You MUST love us best because you're here visiting us, right?" But any thought that audience was special is dashed by the Lord's next sentence:

For they of whom I speak are they who have not as yet heard my voice; neither have I at any time manifested myself unto them. But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them, and that they shall hear my voice, and shall be numbered among my sheep, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; therefore I go to show myself unto them. Christ was interested in unifying His sheep. He sought for "one" fold that followed only Him. There is no "Number One" fold among them. No upper class, or special distinct body towering above others.

Our gentile culture is stratified. We divide into haves and have-nots, upper class and lower class, winners and losers. Everything is ranked, from sports teams to television shows, mileage to price-per-ounce. We WANT to have comparisons made: to be more and have more. That is one of the most persistent character flaws of 'gentileness.'

Gentile Mormons were not at Bountiful when the Lord appeared and taught the Nephites. But we would like to have at least a derivative advantage by assuming the Nephites were more special than all the other sheep. We hunger for prominence, and our ambitions extend into all things, even the Gods' regard for us. We reason that the Nephites were apparently visited first after the Jews. And the Jews killed Him, so really the Nephites were the first worthy audience and therefore more special. And this matters because we gentiles are the ones to whom the Book of Mormon was given. So we are sort of first and therefore more better, or Mormon. And, ipso facto, all others are less to the Gods.

That line of reasoning comes to naught when we realize Christ's visit to the Nephites was over eleven months after His crucifixion. He ministered for 40 days around Jerusalem after His resurrection, but He had nearly eleven months to visit undisclosed other sheep before the people of the Book of Mormon. We have no basis for thinking we have the record of those the Lord visited first, after His resurrection. For all we know we have the record of

those He visited tenth, maybe eleventh. If He took as long with each group as He took with the Nephites, He had time to visit with dozens of other unidentified flocks of His sheep.

Following His resurrection, as Christ visited with the Jews and Nephites, none of them had enough curiosity about “other sheep” to inquire about them. The account continues, *And I command you that ye shall write these sayings after I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem, they who have seen me and been with me in my ministry, do not ask the Father in my name, that they may receive a knowledge of you by the Holy Ghost, and also of the other tribes whom they know not of, that these sayings which ye shall write shall be kept and shall be manifested unto the Gentiles, ...* It is perhaps a good thing Christ commanded them to “write these sayings” so we have a record clarifying that “other sheep” are indeed people completely out of view from any scripture in our possession. They exist. They were visited by Christ. They were taught by Him. They recorded what He taught. And we know nothing about any of it, apart from Christ confirming that He did visit and minister to scattered bodies of other sheep post-resurrection. He wanted them to become “one” and understand “plain and precious things” that have been lost from our present, limited version of scripture.

What if they are also all gods to whom the word of God has been given? What if the Gods intend to spread knowledge of how to attain divinity among all peoples? That would indeed be a task worthy of the Gods!

Consider that for a moment. Have we gentile Mormons been told of Gods’ other sheep for some important reason? If so, is it to alert us that we are no more special, nor in any greater possession of Gods’ words, than many others who have been scattered around the world and are known to the Gods, but unidentified to us? Is it to make us more careful about how we regard strangers? Ought it to suggest there are other religious equals in the world? May it suggest there are perhaps religious superiors in the world? In other words, have we received news of other sheep to help keep Mormons humble?

If these words from Christ are not enough to make us cautious about dismissing others, in the Book of Alma there is another reminder of how the Gods deal equally with all mankind. Alma 29:8 states, *For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; ...* The Lord is concerned about “all nations” and not merely Israelites in their scattered condition. Each nation, in its own tongue, has been given a portion of His teachings. It is measured according to what He “seeth fit that they should have.” I do not believe this means that ‘while God gives everyone something, we have the most.’ I think it instead means, ‘everyone is remembered by God, and when you close down revelation, you get less—humble people get more.’ This more probable meaning is suggested by Alma 12:10 which explains, *he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God, until he know them in full. It is abundantly clear that Mormons do not know the mysteries of God in full.* The farther back we look in human history the more appears to have been lost. Earlier stages, including the patriarchal era, knew God and

therefore understood His path better. How else would Enoch and Melchizedek have achieved their heavenly breakthroughs? Like mankind, institutional Mormonism continually atrophies, knowing less and less, year by year. However significantly this may impact the truth-claims and arrogance of Mormonism, we must at least allow for the possibility that there are “other sheep” who are much better informed than are any of us Mormons.

The Alma 12 material helps clarify the remaining statement in Alma 29:8: *therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.* The Gods’ wise counsel does not regulate dispensing truth on things external to us, but on what is internal to us. We determine whether we have hard hearts or open hearts. One of the ways to determine if our hearts are open and not hard is the degree to which we regard those who are “other,” not only with respect and charity, but also curiosity.

Mormon revelation helpfully defines knowledge of the Gods’ mysteries as “riches.”²¹ That definition helps explain a prophecy about the coming return of other sheep. Newly awakened dormant prophets in the north countries will lead scattered flocks to the boundaries of the everlasting hills. They will bring with them “rich treasures unto the children of Ephraim” who will welcome them. This will not merely be a reunion, but an exchange of treasured wisdom, or in other words revelation, between those who have preserved sacred knowledge. That reunion, however, will depend on a body of believing Ephraimites established in the everlasting hills that will welcome such riches. These prophetically described people must be humble enough to be taught, and willing to appreciate sacred information from outside.

Think of Mormonism more expansively and you may begin to share its founder’s vision for the faith. Joseph Smith explained to the editor of the Chicago Democrat that Mormons “believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous and in doing good to all men.” Joseph’s list compares favorably with the five traditional Buddhist vows of non-harm to others, truthfulness, non-theft from others, sexual propriety and avoiding intoxicants. Buddha confronted the issues of life by segregating our challenges into “the truth of suffering.” Life is filled with suffering from birth until death. Struggling vainly to relieve ourselves from suffering causes us yet more suffering.

To understand our suffering we need to recognize the true “cause of suffering.” The cause is found in our desires, appetites and passions. We cause our suffering by what we seek.

This leads to the way to “cease suffering” by forsaking our desires. Or, in a rather Buddhist mantra found in the Mormon temple ceremony, our “desires, appetites and passions are to be kept within the bounds the Lord has prescribed.” Buddha would welcome the Mormon temple mantra as part of the third great truth.

Buddha offers us a final solution found in the noble path: the right view, right thought, right speech, right behavior, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right

concentration. Or, if you are a Mormon, the 13th Article of Faith. Apparently all truth *can* be circumscribed into one great whole.

So are the Buddhists in possession of truths Mormons ought to consider acquiring? Do they have sacred texts they have guarded for generations that will be brought to the attention of Mormons only if we show enough respect and restraint so that their owners share their pearls with us? Does our swine-like arrogance and conceit prevent them from casting their most valuable pearls our way?

Why aren't people from around the world eager to teach Mormons? What would it be like if Mormons sent out missionaries to inquire if others had any great truths to share with us? We cannot learn anything new when the only sound in the conversation is our own voice. Mormons are a very hard audience, hard of both head and heart. Most Mormons "know the church is true" and so what else could possibly matter to them? It calls to mind Hugh Nibley's observations about BYU's students. This is Nibley:

Our search for knowledge should be ceaseless, which means that it is open-ended, never resting on laurels, degrees, or past achievements. "If we get puffed up by thinking that we have much knowledge, we are apt to get a contentious spirit," and what is the cure? "Correct knowledge is necessary to cast out that spirit." The cure for inadequate knowledge is "ever more light and knowledge." But who is going to listen patiently to correct knowledge if he thinks he has the answers already? "There are a great many wise men and women too in our midst who are too wise to be taught; therefore they must die in their ignorance." "I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them . . . [that] will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all [If I] go into an investigation into anything, that is not contained in the Bible . . . I think there are so many over-wise men here, that they would cry 'treason' and put me to death." (That is Hugh Nibley quoting Joseph Smith.) But, he asks, "why be so certain that you comprehend the things of God, when all things with you are so uncertain?" True knowledge never shuts the door on more knowledge, but zeal often does. One thinks of the dictum: "We are not seeking for truth at the BYU; we have the truth!" So did Adam and Abraham have the truth, far greater and more truth than what we have, and yet the particular genius of each was that he was constantly "seeking for greater light and knowledge."¹

Think about the impression we have made upon the Native Americans with our traditional Christian rivalries and contentions. It was Christian behavior that provoked Nez Perce Chief Joseph to declare: "*We do not want schools: They will teach us to have churches. We do not want churches: They will teach us to quarrel about God. We do not want to learn that. We may quarrel with men sometimes about things on this earth, but we never quarrel about God. We do not want to learn that.*" Mormons have not distinguished themselves as being any

¹ See, *Zeal Without Knowledge*, originally published in *Dialogue: Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1978, subsequently republished in Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless (1978).

more tolerant or interested in learning Native American wisdom than the contentious general rank of Christians out of which Mormonism emerged.

I have been greatly impressed with Hinduism. There is a significant overlap in beliefs shared by Mormons and Hindus. But it would be almost impossible to have the average Mormon-in-the-pew acknowledge such overlapping beliefs. Many Mormons won't investigate to discover truth if it isn't correlated and approved by the top leaders. Institutional Mormons trust leaders to tell them everything worthy of notice. Their leaders, however, demonstrate every six months just how utterly incomplete and superficial their command of the restoration gospel remains.

Hinduism teaches, *The knowing Self is not born; It does not die. It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from It. Birthless, eternal, everlasting, and ancient, It is not killed when the body is killed.* This compares interestingly with Joseph Smith's statement found in D&C 93:29: *Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth was not created or made, neither indeed can be.* There may be important potential Hindu contributions on the topic of the eternal nature of man's existence that could be of worth to Mormons—if we did not regard them as deluded pagans. Rather than invite a Hindu over to listen to our family home evening lesson, we may obtain greater benefit by asking them over to teach us a lesson.

Long before the Sermon on the Mount taught us to bless those who curse us, and do good for those who hate us, The Dhammapada taught, *Let us live in joy, never hating those who hate us.* And when Christ said in that same Sermon on the Mount: *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?* Several centuries earlier the writings of Buddha put it this way: *Do not give your attention to what others do or fail to do; give it to what you do or fail to do.* What higher light illuminated Buddha when he spoke these words? Was it the same light that illuminated our Lord? Well, our Mormon scripture puts all light and truth into one, singular source for this world. That source is God the Son.

Consider the very ecumenical nature of the following revelation given to Joseph Smith: *For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.* Notice this is without any restriction on who can receive the light of the Spirit. "Every man that cometh into the world" receives equally. There is no individual, in any corner of the world, who does not have equal access to obtain "truth" and "light" from that same source, who is Jesus Christ. If any soul in any age hearkens, or listens and follows the "voice of the Spirit," they are in communication with Jesus Christ. To them He bestows light.

Compare the following sample of Biblical Proverbs with corresponding quotes from Buddha:

Proverbs 23:7 – *For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*

The Dhammapada – *We become what we think.*

Proverbs 15:1– *A soft answer turneth away wrath.*

The Dhammapada – *Speak quietly to everyone, and they too will be gentle in their speech.*

Proverbs 16:32 – *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

The Dhammapada – *One who conquers himself is greater than another who conquers a thousand times a thousand men on the battlefield.*

The Gods of Mormonism literally mean it when they proclaim, *he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.*

I'm going to deviate from the paper and just add this thought: I think he's giving a descending order. I think when you get into scripture there are always orders when you get lists. I think he is giving a descending order in which he clarifies what seems superficially to be the most justified, and as he goes on in the list, what becomes truly petty. So let me read the list again:

- Black and white. Easy, divisive.
- Bond and free. Of course, you look down on those that are bond, if you happen to be free.
- Male and female. Now we're descending into the petty.

All, even those swarthy heathens, are included within the ambit of the Mormon Gods' concern. They speak through the Spirit the same truths to all mankind and have done so since the beginning of creation. To Mormons the Gods declare: *I am no respecter of persons.* To the Hindus the Gods declare: *none are less dear to me and none are more dear.* Both the Mormon and Hindu Gods respect all mankind equally.

At one time the account in Genesis read: *This is my work, to my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. The Gods of Mormonism take seriously their commitment to the eternal advancement of mankind.* That means ALL mankind, including the heathen, and none are above others.

This raises the question of "chosenness" of the Gods' special people. Israel, after all, was at one point "chosen" by the Gods as Their special people. But that does not mean what we think it means. Being "chosen" means we are put on display as either the faithful servant, elevating others, or the unwise steward who is condemned, beaten with a rod, and made the display of Divine ire.

Christ explained He was sent to serve, not to be served. Taoism makes the same observation about how "chosen" ones are to demonstrate their "chosenness" in words that parallel the Lord's.

The Lord:– *If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and **servant** of all.*

Tao Te Ching: – *If the sage wants to be above the people, in his words, he must put himself below them; If he wishes to be before the people, in his person, he must stand behind them.*

(I gave a bunch of other quotes but I'm not going to read them. You can read the paper.)

Interesting comparisons can be made between the Hindu belief in “karma” and the Mormon teaching of “pre-existence.” Karma includes the belief that what was done (or not done) both in this and previous states of existence will determine a person’s condition now and in the future existence. Whatever blessings or burdens you encounter are of your own creation by your deeds. Your suffering is merited and deserved. But by doing well, acting justly, and showing kindness you can deserve to inherit a better existence in the next state.

Mormonism includes the declaration that what we experience now and in the future is based on our heed and diligence to the Gods’ pathway. While the Hindu karma has a robust body of teaching, Mormonism’s explanation of pre-earth events is spartan: The spirits of all mankind lived as separate personalities before birth. This world was planned before it was created and people were assigned roles to fulfill in this creation. Some souls were more noble and great than others. Prophets were chosen to have a role to “rule” or to teach in this lifetime. Christ was chosen to be the Savior of mankind in the expected event they fell from grace and required saving. Lucifer rebelled and others followed him. All souls were free to make choices before coming to this stage of creation.

We can infer from these few, settled Mormon ideas that all our choices made before this creation mattered and affect us here and now. Likewise, all choices we make now will follow us into the hereafter and affect things there.

Both the Hindu teaching of karma and the Mormon teaching of “judgment” make us, not God, responsible for the outcome of eternity. Joseph Smith said plainly, “A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. ...The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone.” In the most expressive description of God’s judgment in Mormon scripture, God is doing nothing to cause the man’s suffering. Man is feeling the “torment of disappointment” Joseph described. Similarly, karma puts all responsibility for all consequences on the choices freely made by mankind. God is immune from responsibility for our self-inflicted fate. The Shawnee tribe also believed, *Each person is his own judge*. Egyptians conceived of a death interview, wherein the individual’s heart was weighed to determine where they would go next.

How much might Mormons yet discover if we are open to learn! The truth is or should be our goal.

We fear what we do not understand. Mormons derive security from knowing we are better informed about the Gods than others. No one likes the idea of being surprised by failure because we were too ignorant to avoid a cataclysm, particularly if our failure is because we

thought we understood what was on the test, but in fact never studied what we were being tested on.

John the Beloved explained the relationship between two opposing forces: *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* The opposite of faith and love is fear. Fear lies at the root of our hatred, our revulsion, and our unkindness to one another. We fear the “other” because we do not understand them. They are different and we fear they might even be toxic. It is foolish to assume we can be righteous when we allow fear to inform how we react to others.

(Talk, talk, talk. Read, read, read. I’m going to put it up on the website. There’s some interesting... this is interesting stuff.) [Audience laughter.]

We are here to learn. We should rejoice at any chance the Gods give to us to become better informed about Their mysteries. But it is easy to become trapped by what we know to be familiar and to allow our fears to keep us imprisoned. The beliefs keeping us bound are like the old story of how the trainers control the elephant. A large, adult elephant can be controlled by nothing more than a small rope tied to its front leg. No chains or cages are needed. It is obvious that adult elephants trained this way could at any time break away from their bonds, but they do not. When they are very young, and much smaller, the same rope is used to tie them. At that early age it is enough to hold them. As they grow, they are conditioned to believe that they cannot break away. They believe the small rope is still enough to hold them, and so they never try to break free. The adult has the strength to be free at any moment, but their belief in their captivity keeps them under control.

One of Islam’s great thinkers taught: *We ought not be embarrassed of appreciating the truth and of obtaining it wherever it comes from, even if it comes from races distant and nations different from us. Nothing should be dearer to the seeker of truth than the truth itself, and there is no deterioration of the truth, nor belittling either of one who speaks it or conveys it.* This beautiful sentiment is the opposite of institutional Mormonism. Rather than truthful content, Mormonism has been led to believe the focus must be upon authorized sources. Mormon authorities, many of whom are devoid of understanding, vacuous in teaching, and unacquainted with God are trusted. And if truth dares speak up, the contrast it provides is condemned as a counterfeit.

I envision a future for Mormonism where some few believers are willing to seek diligently to recover the truth. That search begins by mining the lost truths of Mormonism itself, of which there are a surprising number of unrecovered teachings. When the effort to recover a lost and compromised “restoration” has advanced far enough, the search for the “other sheep” can begin in earnest. Eventually if those believers are true to Christ’s teachings, and open to welcoming all truths, wherever found, the truth will search out those Mormons. It will draw into it from every nation, kindred and people, and all nations will come up to the house of the God of Jacob. The truth, or “rich treasures” from around the world will come to those who will welcome it.

The seed for that new, more open body of believers is being planted. But until it has an opportunity to grow and take form, it is doubtful the larger body of Mormonism, much less the world will recognize it. But great things often have a small beginning. Like a stone broken out of a mountain that seems obscure and unimportant, until it triggers a greater landslide that eventually fills and alters the whole landscape.

There is a Cherokee prayer: *Oh Great Spirit, help me always to speak the truth quietly, to listen with an open mind when others speak, and to remember the peace that may be found in silence.*

We speak too much and too loudly and we listen too little. The restoration has filled Mormonism with factions holding unstable and shifting beliefs that are loudly declared in words of certainty. But fractious Mormonism has anything but a stable form. Today, every form of institutional Mormonism is hardly related to the faith practiced by Joseph Smith. These deformities and unhealthy mutations are explained as “continuing revelation.” While they do reveal a great truth about the instability of Mormonism, instability is no evidence of revelation. We can hope that somewhere in the bizarre assortment of mutated Mormon offspring there can be found a healthy descendant. However recessive that gene may prove, that hope ought not to be abandoned.

I have been laboring for years to attempt to reinvigorate the original. Thankfully institutional Mormonism is so well informed by their conceit that they doubt such a thing can be accomplished. Today’s Mormon intellectual cabals are bemused that the idea an original Mormonism has virtue. They assume wife sharing and bed hopping was a fundamental part of Joseph Smith’s legacy, ignoring all he did to denounce and oppose such things. Polygamy is Mormonism’s most revealing ‘inkblot test’.

The search for authentic, original Mormonism is the quest to find a belief system that confidently searches for truth, wherever found. It does not claim to possess all truth, only to be searching openly to find it.

The response of an authentic believer in Mormonism to the discovery of some new truth should be excited gratitude. There is too much fear in the world, and Mormonism has taken that spirit with gusto. A new revelation is greeted with suspicion and dread because the source from which new revelation springs is invariably considered heterodox. Those in control of the most successful brands of the faith are content to count their money. If the road from Jerusalem to Nicea was calamitous, the downward trek from Nauvoo to Salt Lake is typified by the barren landscape itself: from a watered paradise beside the largest river in North America to a desolate salt flat. That descent into desolation has been as much theological as environmental.

Institutional forms of Mormonism want to claim that God has finished His work for our day and given His authority to a select group of professional clergy. Their jealousy and envy keep them out of the kingdom, and those under their control are prevented from entering

in. What an odd outcome this is for institutional Mormonism when the religion was founded on the relentless search for truth, anywhere it may be found.

What then ought we do? Can we still embrace an original once the original has been so deformed and disfigured? Can Mormonism, whose visage has been so marred by its adherents, yet bring Jacob again to God? Can Mormonism provide a covenant of the people for a light of the gentiles? Can it again be a marvelous work among the gentiles of great worth to both them and the House of Israel? Are there any with the inclination or desire to deal prudently with the marred visage of Mormonism so that some believers will yet see and consider the depth and breadth of the religion hidden from them? Will Mormonism ever arise from the dust and become evidence that the work of the Father has begun to prepare mankind for the glorious return of His Son? It cannot be done unless those who accept the challenge of Mormonism become as a little child. We must return to the innocent, child-like quest for the truth where “others” are not dreaded but welcomed with curiosity. We should attract, not repel others by the interest we have for discovering whatever truth they have to offer. Plato observed, *We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy is when men are afraid of the light.* How can Mormonism ever achieve its destiny if it fears both the dark and the light, insisting that it knows only it can be true?

There are indeed other sheep who belong to God; they should be welcomed, not scorned. If we do our part, we can awaken and arise and seek for a covenant from God, and then receive in turn from them “rich treasures” of knowledge.

In their present form, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Taoism have not preserved a Christ-centered tradition. Perhaps if we were to recover earlier writings from these faiths in an unaltered form we would find Christological centers were once part of them all. The post-resurrection visit to the Nephites suggests that possibility.

Avicenna said, *The world is divided into men who have wit and no religion and men who have religion and no wit.*

Mormonism is only a “starter” religion based on an incipient planting by the Gods. We Mormons should be people of wit and religion, willing to consider and value all truth from whatever source it springs. The greatness of Mormonism has not been realized in any of its past, and those who have managed to profit from organizing institutions based on its mere beginning are threatened by the idea that there is yet much more to be added.

Mormonism has been a dismal underachiever. Its most wealthy sect is riddled with errors, controlled by an oligarchy of priestcraft, jealous of their power, wealth and influence. It has a criminal past, an unstable present, and an insecure future. That empire is diversifying its portfolio into land development, banking and business enterprises to replace the now diminishing tithe cash stream upon which the empire was built.

The second largest sect has so watered down its teachings and principles that it can hardly be distinguished from any of the weak and diminishing liberal Christian sects. It barely gives lip service to Joseph or the Book of Mormon.

The scatterling polygamist sects are hardly Mormon at all, practicing what the Book of Mormon identifies as an abomination that has broken the hearts of wives and lost the confidence of their children. All forms of institutional Mormonism are easily compromised because they have adopted a structure engineered by Brigham Young. Joseph established at least four bodies equal in authority, making it impossible for one to rule and reign with blood and horror over others. Brigham destroyed that balance and promptly began to reign with blood and horror. He even succeeded in persuading Mormons to openly practice an abominable form of plural marriage as a sacrament in his deformed vision of the faith. With Brigham Young at the helm, the twelve traveling ministers assumed authority over organized stakes for the first time. It was only a matter of time before their ambition overtook their righteousness. Emboldened by isolation and under the leadership of Brigham Young, Mormons engaged in such excesses, abuses, whoredoms, murders and criminality that the heavens have stared aghast at the wretched spectacle Mormonism made of itself! Marred visage indeed!

The greatness of Mormonism has been hijacked. It is time for devoted believers to find the virtue, glory and aspirations of the original. The disillusioned critics do have a point. But their point is aimed in the wrong direction. Mormonism's institutional factions, critics, apostates, and activists all seem too distracted by what is now Mormonism to contemplate what Mormonism promises ultimately to become. It is that unrealized destiny that ought to fire our imaginations and thrill our hearts. Because of its self-declared lack, the original version of Mormonism, with its confidence and curiosity, remains the only faith with any potential to unite within it all truth; therefore, by extension, the unrealized potential to also unite all people. Thank you.

Q&A

[0:50:53] **Micah:** Thank you very much, Denver. We will now take eight [or] nine minutes to take questions from our audience.

Q: Admitting my ignorance up front with this question. In the effort to be more broad-minded, the rumor has it that you have spoken to Jesus, and by asking this question I'm not saying, have you spoken to Jesus in a vision or dream. Have you spoken to Jesus verbally or in his presence? Secondary question: How can I get it?

Denver: Yes. And, read the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is more or less a handbook on reconnecting to God. It tells history with one purpose in mind, and that one purpose in mind is to track the path that was walked by those who repeatedly wind up encountering the Lord. His original faith included a promise that He will not leave us comfortless but that He would come and ultimately take up His abode with us. That's as true today as it has been at any time.

Q: What's your stance on multiple mortal probations or reincarnation?

Denver: Dude... Multiple mortal probations is probably... Let me put it this way—even if true, a distraction from the test that is presently underway. There are living today, that I've encountered, at least a dozen Peter's, like New Testament Peter, back here again doing his thing. None of them fish, though. I've met a handful of John's. I've met four or five Mary Magdalene's. I've met at least three Mother Mary's. Assuming one of them actually nailed it and they are that, what's that got to do with the price of cheese in Wisconsin? How is that going to help you? Are you honest, are you kind, are you charitable? *No dude, I'm Peter! Once, long ago and far away, I walked on water briefly and I sank. But dude, I did it and you haven't. So okay, watch me sprint into a pool and I'll accomplish kind of the same thing. I'll stay up for a little...* What's that got to do with anything? Yes, maybe there's something to it, probably not in the form in which most people who believe in it, believe in it.

What's the definition of a creation? How often in a creation does one appear? If you look carefully at the scriptures, the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, talking with Christ, are given a fulsome vision of everything that is now going to unfold on into the future. And these are the disciples; this is Peter, James, and John standing there on the Mount. They look at this, they look upon the long absence of their spirit from their bodies and they regard it as a form of prison, and so they figure out an escape route. It's in the scriptures. John says, "Don't send me there, let me stay in this arena and do battle here." Peter and James—it's actually Jacob—James say, "Let us come speedily into your kingdom," meaning, don't leave us there, resurrect us. They will miss the resurrection because the first resurrection was when Christ came out of the grave and they were going to die after that. Therefore, they were left there. They said no, don't leave us there, and so they secured an early resurrection, they're not in the spirit world. If a long time in the spirit world is not part of the agenda then they had no reason to take that up as an issue and have that discussion with the Lord and make the choices they did. Therefore, if multiple mortalities is like, on Wednesday I die and on Monday I'll be resurrected or reborn as someone else, then there is no long absence of the spirit from the body, there is a continual return. But then you get into the definition of creation, and how many creations have there been for this world, and topics about which even Joseph kept his mouth shut, and so I'll put a cork in it.

Q: Thanks for your talk. Curious about priesthood, either currently your views on that, and then if that ties in with the other sheep? I don't know if you've thought about that. Just curious about your thoughts on that.

Denver: At the time that John the Baptist visited Joseph and Oliver and conferred the priesthood, the form in which he conferred it was limited but it was durable, and he prophesied that it would not be taken again from the earth until—it depends on whether you read Oliver's words or Joseph's words—that they may yet, or until they do, the impression is still the same. There is some future sacrifice that's expected by the sons of Levi and that the priesthood will endure to then. There's a form of priesthood upon the earth that is remarkably durable. Even the Jews that killed Christ held it. Pretty durable

stuff. There is also, in scripture, a teaching that says that all priesthood is one, the original name for which was the Holy Order after the Order of the Son of God. It's all that, but there are different degrees or portions of that one unified priesthood. Therefore, if you have anything, if you have any priesthood at all, you have some portion of the Holy Order after the Order of the Son of God, however limited that may be.

I gave a talk in Orem in which I explained that the best way to regard priesthood is as a fellowship. You can have priesthoods among all kinds of people. Women can have priesthoods is a fellowship of women but fellowship determines priesthood. If you have a fellowship with men you have a priesthood of men. If you have a fellowship with angels you have a priesthood that involves something called the "keys of the Aaronic priesthood" because your fellowship with angels has extended into the angelic realm. If you have fellowship with the Son of God you have priesthood that is associated with that. And if you've been in the presence of the Father you have an association with Him, and you hold priesthood that is a Holy Order after the Order of the Son of God. The degree to which a priesthood conferral upon a person takes effect is dependent upon the heed and diligence that they pursue the things of God and the degree to which they acquire fellowship with such heavenly things.

(I think we're out of time. Do we have time for one more?)

Micah: Yes, I was going to say, let's do one more question. Sorry. If you have any other questions for Denver there's plenty of time after lunch, and you guys can linger longer in this room as well.

Q: You talked about finding truth in other cultures, other religions. You also touched on the idea that there may be truth but there is also error in all other religions. What keys of knowledge, what tools do you use to help discern between truth and error?

Denver: The most correct measuring stick, in my view, is the Book of Mormon. As long as you have the Book of Mormon you have the ability to make a comparison, and if something reaffirms something I find there then I regard that as having passed the test. If it contradicts that then I regard that as having failed the test. And if it harmonizes with it but it extends it beyond anything known to me then I've got something to pray about, because the ultimate arbiter of truth is God.

Thank you.

Micah: Thank you, Denver. [Applause]

[Transcript: Kiyoko Ball v1.1]