

LIVING THE SPIRIT OF AT-ONE-MENT

by

M. Catherine Thomas

*Selected Writings of M. Catherine Thomas,
Gospel Scholars Series, p. 189,
Deseret Book Company, 2000*

The Lord Jesus Christ's atonement for you and me made possible an at-one-ment society. The spirit of the Lord's at-one-ment is always seeking access to our relationships, but this spirit can seem very elusive in our personal and workaday worlds. The world we live in seems to have little relationship to a Zion society. Nevertheless, the powers in the atonement apply to our lives and are accessible to you and me right now. These powers have implications for every relationship we have and in every combination of people in which we find ourselves. They have implications for what we think and say, what we do, and how we feel. These powers may hold the secret to making right relationships endure and may help us to know what is wrong with potentially good relationships that are going wrong.

What are the principles on which a Zion society or a community of at-one-ment is established? First, we need a little background on the word *atonement*. *Atonement*, literally *at-one-ment*, is a word introduced into English in 1526 by William Tyndale as he translated the Greek New Testament into English; specifically, he created the word *at-one-ment* to translate the Greek word (*katalge*), which means *reconciliation or to come back into a relationship after a period of estrangement*. This word points to what has happened to man—he has fallen from a relationship, even many relationships, and from a knowledge of the oneness of the premortal children. The scriptures tell us that man came from a heavenly society and fell, by his birth, into a state of spiritual death (Helaman 14:16), alienated from his Heavenly Father by the nature of the Fall. Christ wrought the atonement to restore us to the heavenly society. So we might say that the word rendered *atonement* by the early biblical translators could have been more accurately rendered *re-at-one-ment* or *reunion*. Christ wrought the great Reunion.

Brigham Young, referring to the need for the reintegration of mankind, says that the Prophet Joseph showed him in a vision the premortal organization of the human family, then said: "Be sure to tell the people to keep the spirit of the Lord; and if they will, they will find themselves just as they were organized by our Father in Heaven before they came into the world our Father in Heaven organized the human family, but they are all disorganized and in great confusion."

Joseph then showed me the pattern, how they were in the beginning. This I cannot describe, but I saw it, and I saw where the Priesthood had been taken from the earth and how it must be joined together, so that there would be a perfect chain from the Father Adam to his latest posterity."¹

The work of Christ is the work of reintegration. Scriptural uses of *atonement* or *at-one-ment* suggest that Christ intends to bring us to oneness in heaven and to that social harmony that we experienced before the world was; a harmony, in fact, that still continues in heaven, and into which you and I seek to be readmitted; a society that the Prophet Joseph described as "sociality...coupled with eternal glory" (D&C 130:2). Preparation for that society is our goal.

We have imprinted on our spirits that the at-one-ment experiences from the premortal heavenly community, even though we do not remember the details. Parley P. Pratt wrote that after God's spirit children were born, they were "matured in the heavenly mansions, trained in the school of love in the family circle, and amid the most tender embraces of parental and fraternal affection."² Perhaps in this life we unconsciously measure every relationship against what our spirits remember. Perhaps we suffer at some level when we do not experience what we once knew.

¹ Brigham Young, *Journal History*, 23 February 1847, Salt Lake City, Church Historical Department, 2.

² Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 31.

Our present human sociality is only a shadow of that perfection that existed in the premortal world, where the heavenly society functioned by eternal principles of love. Through the gospel those principles are available to us here. It is one of the purposes of the gospel to help us implement those principles here in order to reclaim our place in heaven. Therefore, we might observe: things must be done on earth as they are done in heaven so that that which is earthly made be made heavenly. That which does not try to be heavenly must remain telestial and cannot be made heavenly or celestial.

At-one-ment is the condition in which heavenly beings live. If we want to live there with them, we can practice here and now the manner of emotional and spiritual life that they live. *This* life is the time for men to prepare to meet God (Alma 34:32). We want to live the spirit of at-one-ment in whatever ways we can on the earth. We may feel the Holy Spirit already working on us to live in at-one-ment, but we don't always know how to respond to the promptings.

Oneness is a comprehensive principle and of primary importance with the Lord. Speaking of those with whom he will one day "drink of the fruit of the vine...on the earth," he referred to those through whom he would "*gather together in one* all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; and also...all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world" (D&C 27:5, 13-14).³

Scripture abounds with references to being *one*, to crying with one voice to the Lord, to being of one heart and one mind. These references to oneness in the experiences of the people reveal that the spirit of at-one-ment is working upon the people to draw them to a higher spiritual plane, where the powers of heaven can be manifested to a greater degree. The scriptures use many at-one-ment words and phrases: oneness, in one, unity, united order, having things in common, gathering (versus scattering), equal, cleave, seal, welding link, embrace, consecration, marriage, restoration, resurrection. We do the work of at-one-ment in the temple when we seal our ancestors and posterity to us in great family chains. *At-one-ment* is another word for sealing.

Effective prayer in the temple requires feelings of love. The temple endowment itself is a progressive sealing of ourselves to the Lord until we are clasped in the arms of Jesus (Mormon 5:11). Considering how comprehensive the Lord's at-one-ment work is, we can see that it is physical, emotional, and spiritual.

But any work that involves gathering Saints together is at-one-ment work. The gathering of Israel by the missionaries is one example, as is organizing converts into the wards and stakes of Zion. Home teaching and visiting teaching all partake of the purposes of at-one-ment in Zion. Family home evening is at-one-ment work.

We want the spirit of the at-one-ment in our personal relationships, since the ordinances we receive in the temple are inextricably linked with the principles of love. We learn there that spirituality and spiritual gifts and sealings cannot be separated from loving behavior and feelings.

Consider the Zion society that resulted from the Lord's visit to the Nephites: "And they had *all things common* among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift....And it came to pass that there was *no contention* in the land, because of *the love of God* which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

"...They were *in one*, the children of Christ and heirs to the kingdom of God. And how *blessed* were they!" (4 Nephi 1:3, 15-18).

This description of the at-one-ment among the children of Christ illuminates compelling possibilities. How do we get to the heavenly Zion condition described in 4 Nephi? How do we learn how to feel the spirit of the at-one-ment? How do we bridge the gap between where we may now perceive ourselves to be spiritually and where we want to be? Will the Lord do something magical to us to make us ready for his coming, to make us ready to build Zion, to enter at last into the kingdom of God? How do we get there from here?

³ The emphasis in this verse and in subsequent scriptural passages in this chapter has been added by the author.

Many have gotten there and will get there from here (see, for example, Alma 13:12). A group of Latter-day Saints will yet prepare to build Zion and they will live in it. And one day the Savior will appear, bringing with him that heavenly society that has been engaged in the principles of at-one-ment for eons in the celestial world. When they come to the earth, they will find a society that has also practiced these same principles of union, a people that will have perfected themselves by living these principles. We will join societies and be one with them—and without doubt, they will teach us yet more about union and love.

So what can we do to ensure that we are prepared to participate in such a society? We realize that one of our purposes in life is to learn the principles that govern Zion societies and to take them with us into the kingdom. We knew these principles in the premortal world, but here we may have lost our sense of connection.

The opposition to at-one-ment can seem formidable when we realize how easily in times past we may have traded the spirit of at-one-ment for disturbance. We see what a challenge it might be for us to live in a Zion or heavenly condition where everyone will have learned, by desire and practice, to prefer the spirit of at-one-ment with each other to that of conflict or disturbance.

What is the nature of the negative energy that leads to conflict around us? It has something to do with what we think we need from other people in order to be happy. So we manifest the opposite of at-one-ment (disintegration, disconnection), by our un-peace, restlessness, imposing our own will; by criticism, anger, irritability, selfishness, failure to forgive, failure to revere another's agency, retaliation, moodiness, fear, worry—simply forgetting to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. All of these we have probably all experimented with to learn bitter and sweet. These are ways most of us act until we learn that there is a better way.

We all feel negative emotions, and sometimes they need to be expressed—carefully. But even when these negative-energy emotions are fully justified, they can constitute a spiritual burden. Our bad temper and bad moods become a form of abuse for us and those around us.

It may take more than a little humility to accept this truth. Perhaps we have not fully processed the idea that the Spirit flourishes in the peaceful atmosphere of at-one-ment. We may not have realized the spiritual value of inner peace (Mosiah 4:13). Mormon speaks to the followers of Christ, whom he recognizes because of their peaceable walk with men, people who have entered into the rest of the Lord (Moroni 7:3-4).

As I have watched myself and others, it is sobering to realize how readily we trade inner peace for something less, for some sort of upset; how readily we take offense and then escalate the disturbance around us—in home or office or even church. How easily we have unsatisfied expectations of how others should treat us or what they should be doing for us—and we grow cold or irritable to retaliate for this real or imagined slight. How eagerly we may insist on being right at the expense of precious relationships. Thus keeping the water rippling around us with negative energy, we are often not still and at rest in the principles of tolerance and love, of overlooking, of letting go, of forgiving.

I find that when I am not at peace inside, I make trouble around me. I even look for trouble, picking at this, complaining at that, practicing abuse. I may yield to self-pity that causes me to withdraw, licking my wounds, waiting for someone to put right what is really my responsibility to correct inside myself. It may be that self-pity is a sin because it violates the spirit of at-one-ment and faith. It sees life through the eyes of a victim rather than from the perspective of a disciple of Christ. I have asked myself, How long could I last in Zion? How long would it be before I single-handedly dismantled Zion?

Maybe I have thought that at the last judgment someone would wave a magic priesthood wand over me and I would suddenly acquire a heavenly personality. But it's clear now that the Lord expects me to practice at-one-ment here and to involve him in helping me in these kinds of personal challenges until the heavenly personality becomes mine.

A Zion society is the product of the personal choice of every person in it; it is also a function of the enabling power of the Lord Jesus Christ that shapes hearts to be like his. But first it begins with an individual choice,

independent of others' choices for something less. I have come to know that in any moment what I send out is my choice, and I can't blame it on a situation or on another person. "And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free. He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you" (Helaman 14:30-31).

The power of evil opposes at-one-ment. We mortals are not alone on this planet. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Ephesians 6:11-12). Brigham Young said in connection with the subtle works of Satan: "There are thousands of plans which the enemy of all righteousness employs to decoy the hearts of the people away from righteousness."⁴ The Prophet Joseph focused the idea: "The policy of the wicked spirit is to *separate* what God has joined together, and unite what He [God] has separated, which the devil has succeeded in doing to admiration in the present state of society."⁵

Satan seeks to rend the Saints' relationships—their marriages, their family feeling, their ward associations, their business connections—so that the powers of Zion cannot be established. We forget in the very moment that Satan and his followers promote contention (3 Nephi 11:29) by stirring around in the pride in the Saints' hearts. Consider these eye-opening scriptures:

--"But, O my people, beware lest there shall arise *contentions* among you, and ye list to obey the evil spirit" (Mosiah 2:32).

--"And [Alma] commanded them that there should be no *contention* one with another, but that they should look forward...having their hearts knit together in unity and in love" (Mosiah 18:21).

--"But behold, this was a critical time for such *contentions* to be among the people of Nephi...It was [Moroni's] first care to put an end to such *contentions* and *dissensions* among the people; for behold, this had been hitherto a cause of all their destruction" (Alma 51:9, 16).

--"And many more things did the people imagine up in their hearts, which were foolish and vain; and they were much disturbed, for Satan did stir them up to do iniquity continually; yea, he did go about spreading rumors and *contentions*...that he might *harden the hearts* of the people against that which was good" (Helaman 16:22).

--"For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of *contention* is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the *father of contention*, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another" (3 Nephi 11:29).

--"I...establish my gospel, that there may not be so much *contention*; yea, Satan doth stir up the hearts of the people to contention" (D&C 10:63).

--"There were jarrings, and *contentions*, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them [the Saints]; therefore by these things *they polluted their inheritances*. They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble" (D&C 101:6-7).

--"Cease to *contend* one with another; cease to speak evil one of another...and let your words tend to edifying one another" (D&C 136:23-24).

--"And now my beloved brethren, I would exhort you to have patience, and that ye bear with all manner of afflictions; that ye *do not revile* against those who do cast you out..., lest ye become sinners like unto them; but that

⁴ Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:194.

⁵ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 103; emphasis added.

ye have patience, and bear with those afflictions, with a firm hope that ye shall one day rest from all your afflictions" (Alma 34:40-41).

"We must attend to the ordinance of washing of feet....It is calculated to unite our hearts, that we may be one in feeling and sentiment, and that our faith may be strong, so that *Satan cannot overthrow* us, nor have any *power* over us here....Do not watch for iniquity in each other, if you do you will not get an endowment, for God will not bestow it on such. But if we are faithful, and live by every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God, I will venture to prophesy that we shall get a blessing that will be worth remembering, if we should live as long as John the Revelator."⁶

Having discerned Satan, then, we can thwart the evil spirit in many ways. You and I have been endowed with the divine power to generate positive energy—spiritually, mentally, physically—by carefully choosing attitudes, actions, and words to promote a spiritually nourishing environment. Each of us has that power. We can choose to generate positive, spiritual energy, with which the Spirit connects and which he magnifies, creating daily miracles in relationships. Thus we learn to work as the Savior works and to become as he is, even as we walk this life.

But we may have many misconceptions about how to be happy and how to establish relationships of at-one-ment with others. We may think these relationships have to be ideal; we may think that the people around us have to be ideal, that they have to feel and think the way we do in order to be happy, or that we have to think as they do in order to have the spirit of at-one-ment between us. We may feel that many of the people around us do not value what we do, do not meet our hopes and dreams, and we may despair that we will ever experience at-one-ment with some of the people God has put into our lives.

Here indeed is the reality of telestial living—nearly every day someone will do to us one or more of the following: belittle, be insensitive to needs, show indifference, make us feel insecure, humiliate, frighten, abuse, inconvenience, demand, criticize, disappoint, lie, hurt, betray, try to seduce, misunderstand, resent, threaten, attack (verbally or physically).

So what shall we do about all that? What we do is important. We can't, before God, blame our response on what others do to us. In fact, our earth life was designed to make those abrasive experiences possible, as a sort of laboratory in which we could work out our salvation. It is in these daily abrasions that we find the imperfections in our own souls.

Maybe one of the purposes for such experiences can be answered with this question: How shall we ever learn Christlike love unless we have a chance to practice it in the face of the opposites? Every disrupted relationship, whether in our own home or within a particular group or community, is a chance to forge the divine nature in ourselves and prepare for that endless state of happiness.

It would appear that all the people in our lives are there for important reasons. We stand in a sacred relationship to them because we and they cannot be made perfect without each other (D&C 128:18—the Prophet speaks of a *welding link* that must be established). Nevertheless, we remember that seldom are they given to us to satisfy us. Rather, they are given to us to make possible a much greater love than we would have been capable of in a situation where everybody agreed with us, everybody loved us, everybody saw everything the way we do. These abrasive people in our lives are friends in disguise. They are there to teach us to perfect love in ourselves, not to perfect them. We don't need ideal relationships in order to be happy; we can live happily with less than the ideal because each precious relationship can be made more tender and sweet and can be enriched with that spirit of at-one-ment that changes everything around us.

All of us have experienced or are now experiencing troubled relationships. I know from my own experience that miracles often happen in troubled relationships. I grew up in a troubled family; each individual in that family was and is a good person. They were good people with very little understanding in those early years of how to be happy. But each of us has come a long way since then.

⁶*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 91; emphasis added.

In a troubled family one may learn a number of counterproductive behaviors: to try to control others; to be critical in order to feel more secure in one's own self-righteousness; to require satisfaction from others' behavior; to use anger as manipulation; to be very self-assertive; to try to prove oneself right in every situation; to make trouble by letting people know the various ways in which they are not meeting one's expectations; to get even by using irritability, cold silences, or not-so subtle barbed words; to nag people and try to talk them into things. The people we treat in these ways come to feel they are our enemies. Often we create these enemies within our own family circle. The results of these behaviors are that we experience a lot of unfocused fear and anger, as well as tendencies to depression, guilt, and feelings that life is meaningless.

I didn't know there was really anything wrong with me as I practiced some of these ways of treating people, but I did know I didn't feel good. I did not see a relationship between the way I treated other people and the way I felt inside: I thought that what they were doing made me unhappy; but actually it was how I was treating them that made me unhappy. Is it possible that much of the emotional pain we have comes not from the love we weren't given in the past, but from the love we ourselves aren't giving in the present?

We can get mixed up. We know that we are required to do all that we appropriately can to promote the well-being of those the Lord has entrusted to our care. But when older children and adults behave in ways that are very distressing to us, it is easy to become involved in ways of acting that do not help them or ourselves. We may be so emotionally entangled that we think obsessively about what the other person is doing, and this involvement only keeps us in turmoil. Sometimes our over-involvement is a blend of resentment, self-pity, and guilt. But we who wish to enter into at-one-ment must first learn a special detachment from others whose behavior we can't control. Detaching ourselves emotionally, ceasing to manipulate the other person's life, letting that person take responsibility for his or her own behavior—this release frees us from soul-sickening stress.

This detachment does not imply that we withdraw our love and compassion or any appropriate help. It means that we can turn our attention to the things we have neglected, the things that truly are our concern. Our detachment produces inner serenity as we take full responsibility for what we do, repenting and correcting ourselves as necessary, and giving others responsibility for what they do. This kind of detachment is essential to any healthy relationship.

It is not by accident that the Book of Mormon describes some dysfunctional families and troubled relationships. Nephi, for example, lived with abusive older brothers, receiving verbal and physical abuse from those who should have been his protectors and nurturers. Although on at least one occasion he is able to frankly forgive them (1 Nephi 7:21), he later reacts with anger, only he has turned his anger inward—a common source of depression. He sees that although his anger is 100 percent justified by celestial standards, for his own spiritual well-being he must let it go and turn to the Lord for release. "Why am I angry because of mine enemy? Awake my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. Do not anger again....Do not slacken my strength....Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord....Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?" (2 Nephi 4:27-31). Nephi teaches this powerful principle: Our happiness depends on what we do now, not on what was done to us.

Certainly we are not talking here about submitting to serious abuse. Forgiving people, acting kindly toward them, doesn't necessarily mean letting them abuse us. Sometimes relationships have to be severed to keep one of the parties from being destroyed. In Nephi's case, the Lord finally took him out of Laman and Lemuel's presence (2 Nephi 5). But Nephi waited on the Lord, teaching us that revelation is indispensable to relationship work.

Each relationship has a partly hidden history. What we do not know or remember is what we covenanted to do in the premortal world with respect to a particular relationship here. In some cases the Lord will take us out of a relationship, or counsel us to take ourselves out, but very often he will set about to work a small series of miracles in the relationship so that the spirit of at-one-ment can flourish. He is preparing us to live in a celestial society; therefore, it seems that usually he wants us to mend rather than sever relationships.

With respect to mending relationship trouble there is a stunning insight to process: if there is trouble, *each* person in the relationship has contributed to some part of the problem; therefore, *each* one has something to repent of as well as something to learn from the experience—and also some new choices to make with respect to the relationship. We can't begin to heal a relationship until we've acknowledged our own part in its dysfunction.

Truly we receive what we send out: "For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored" (Alma 41:15). If we don't like what we're getting in a particular relationship, we may need to check out what we're sending into that relationship.

Each relationship has a "measure of creation." If we have neglected to fill that measure with our own part, our spirit will smite us, usually at some lower level of consciousness. When our spirit is smiting us, we often start smiting others and projecting our own guilt onto them. We find all kinds of things wrong with them. Our own unconscious guilt causes us to be unduly affected by others. It is when we stop sinning against others with our neglect and unrighteous expectations that we come to view our relationships to others differently. We are less concerned with what others are doing; in fact, a lot of the old ego issues and offenses just come to seem irrelevant.

A quiet conscience seems to free up a lot of energy, as well as a desire to bless others with no other motive than to love. A person with a quiet conscience, one who is increasingly conscious of a sweet, divine presence, does not need others to satisfy him because he doesn't need much from others to be happy. His knows that his security and wholeness do not depend on what others think, say, or do; rather, these things depend on what he himself chooses to do. His choices either align him with the eternal laws of harmony or alienate him from himself and others.

We always have a choice. For example, when someone trespasses against me, I may feel a negative ripple through my being and I face a moment of decision: shall I return the assault, making a poor situation worse? Or shall I neutralize this assault by returning kindness, good for evil? Paul says, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45; for additional insight see D&C 64:8-10; JST, Luke 6:29-30; Matthew 5:39-40).

The Prophet Joseph's life reflects the relationship between the principles of forgiveness and the gifts of the Spirit. David Whitmer said: "He [Joseph Smith] was a religious and straightforward man....He had to trust in God. He could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings towards everyone. To illustrate so you can see: One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife, had done. Oliver and I went upstairs and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs, out into the orchard, and made supplication to the Lord; was gone about an hour—came back to the house, and asked Emma's forgiveness and then came upstairs where we were and then the translation went on all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful."⁷

These are the spiritual sensitivities by which Zion is established.

Brigham Young taught about being worthy to associate with angels—for that is indeed what we are seeking to do as we wish to establish a Zion condition. He said: "We need to learn, practice, study, know, and understand how angels live with each other."⁸ And Orson Hyde taught that if we will practice the way of life of the angels, they will indeed associate with and enlighten us: "The angels are not fond to descend to this world, because of the coldness of the spirit that reigns in it; they would rather remain in heaven around the throne of God, among the higher order of intelligences, where they can enjoy life, and peace, and the communion of the Holy One. [Nevertheless,] when they are sent, they will come...."

⁷ David Whitmer, in B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News press, 1930), 1:131.

⁸ Brigham Young, in *Journal of discourses*, 6:76.

"These are some of the reasons [wars, contentions, coldness of spirit, and so forth] why they do not mingle with us, why we cannot see them. But let me tell you, brethren and sisters, if we will be united as the heart of one man, and that general union of spirit, of mind, be fastened upon the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall draw down celestial intelligence by the Spirit of God, or by angels who surround the throne of the most High. It is an electric wire through which and by which intelligence comes from heaven to mortals; it is only necessary for the word to be spoken, and the power of it is at once felt in every heart."⁹

Consider these remarks from two prophets who had the vision of Zion.

Joseph Smith: "By union of feeling we obtain power with God....Nothing is so much calculated to lead people to forsake sin as to take them by the hand and watch over them with tenderness. When persons manifest the least kindness and love to me, O what power it has over my mind, while the opposite course has a tendency to harrow up all the harsh feelings and depress the human mind....It is the doctrine of the devil to retard the human mind and retard our progress by filling us with self righteousness. The nearer we get to our heavenly Father the more are we disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls, to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our back....If you would have God have mercy on you, have mercy on one another."¹⁰

Brigham Young: "If this people would live their religion, and continue year after year to live their religion, it would not be many years before we would see eye to eye; there would be no difference of opinion, no difference of sentiment, and the veil that now hangs over our minds would become so thin that we should actually see and discern things as they are....It is our privilege, for you and me to live, from this day, so that our consciences will be void of offence towards God and man; it is in our power to do so, then why don't we?"¹¹

"How prone we are to get out of the way, to depart from the love, enjoyment, peace, and light that the Spirit of the Lord and of our religion gives unto us. We should live so as to possess that Spirit daily, hourly, and every moment. That is a blessing to us, which makes the path of life easy."¹²

"We will so improve, that, when a man rises here to pray, there will not be a desire from the heart of a man or woman but what is uttered by the one who is mouth. When we come to understanding, there will not be as many desires and prayers as there are people, while one is officiating as mouth for the whole; but when he who is mouth prays, every heart will wait until he utters a sentence, and that embodies what they also desire. When the sisters meet together and appoint one of their number to pray, they will never let a desire escape from the heart until they know what the mouth is praying for. Then they all will desire the same and pray for the same. This people are hastening to that degree of perfection."¹³

President Howard W. Hunter described God's way of dealing with us and thereby describes by implication how we could deal with one another to bring angels and miracles into our relationships: "God's chief way of acting is by persuasion and patience and long-suffering, not by coercion and stark confrontation. He acts by gentle solicitation and by sweet enticement. He always acts with unflinching respect for the freedom and independence that we possess. He wants to help us and pleads for the chance to assist us, but he will not do so in violation of our agency...."

"To countermand and ultimately forbid our choices was Satan's way, not God's, and the Father of us all simply never will do that. He will, however, stand by us forever to help us see the right path, find the right choice, respond to the true voice, and feel the influence of his undeniable Spirit. His gentle, peaceful, powerful persuasion to do right and find joy will be with us 'so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved' (Moro. 7:36.)"¹⁴

⁹ Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:126.

¹⁰ *Words of Joseph Smith*, 123.

¹¹ Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:194.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7:238.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6:76-77.

¹⁴ Howard W. Hunter, *Ensign*, August 1994, back page.

When we live in patience and love with each other, in peace, meshing with those around us, not resisting them but supporting them, forgiving each other, speaking the words that evoke the Spirit, calling forth the divinity that lies in every person we know—no matter what his weaknesses—we live the spirit of at-one-ment with each other. The more we make each relationship sweeter and more tender and dear, the more we live at-one-ment. The more we lay down pride and old checklists of hurts and grievances, the more we send out healing, the more our relationships heal. Surely our personal connection with the Lord depends on our efforts toward resonance with each other.

If we absolutely knew that the Lord would send his Spirit any time that we began with thoughts, words, or actions, to generate the spirit of at-one-ment, why would we ever choose to generate something else? The Lord says, “Strengthen your brethren in all your conversation, in all your prayers, in all your exhortations, and in all your doings” (D&C 108:7).

What we find when we live the spirit of the at-one-ment is that it is a very empowering way of life. This mystery is not captured by words alone; it is experienced in spirit. We children of God already exist in a oneness with each other and with the Lord that is not apparent to the five human senses. The great majority of people in the world and even many members of the Church do not sense this oneness and live separated emotionally and spiritually from each other in spiritual death.

“I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now.

“But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are *full of all manner of evil, and do impart of their substance, as becometh saints*, to the poor and afflicted among them; and are *not united* according to the *union* required by the law of the celestial kingdom; and *Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom*; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself.

“And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer” (D&C 105:2-6).

But the enlightened person we are speaking of has been chastened enough. He’s tired of spiritual death. He finds that when he sends out with love that which empowers others, he himself feels empowered and connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. The principles work. Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote about the reality of this connectedness: “There may even be, more than we now know, some literalness in His assertion, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’ (Matt. 25:40). We lack deep understanding of the implications of that remark of Jesus. As with so many things, He is telling us more than we are now prepared to receive.”¹⁵

The person who has responded to the spirit of at-one-ment knows that he is living in spirit and participating increasingly in miracles. He has discovered a great secret that makes all the former pettiness and ego-striving seem far beneath his now higher purposes in life.

The Prophet Joseph taught the importance of being governed by higher purposes: “how vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations—too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God, according to the purposes of His will, from before the foundation of the world!”¹⁶

One day, when we seek, ask, and knock, and the heavenly gate is opened, and we ask permission to enter, I think we will have to present something in ourselves recognizably heavenly in order to gain entrance. Let us practice at-one-ment here so that we will know how to act should we be admitted to heaven.

¹⁵ Neal A. Maxwell, “Becoming a Disciple,” *Ensign*, June 1996, 12-13.

¹⁶ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 137.