

Why I No Longer Rage Against Mormon Idiocy

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<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

I am not looking for the answer, "Because you are a pussy." At some level it makes sense to rage at idiocy. But I recognized something that went way beyond normal in my reaction to Mormon idiocy. These were my people; my former idiocy; and it got to me so completely that I would rage. And especially when someone close to me rubbed my nose in it. I could feel adrenalin hit like a freight train, and off I would go.

But think about this. If a casual acquaintance bears serious testimony that God loves me so much that he planted dinosaur bones in a 6,000 year old Earth to test my faith or that if I changed the spelling of my name the course of my life will also change (I was told this - seriously - at a Christmas party a few weeks ago by a numerologist), I would have trouble not laughing out loud while changing the subject to "How about that amazing Vince Young in the Rose Bowl!" or something similarly innocuous, and then escaping to another conversation group as soon as I could. Then I would laugh out loud. Why then, until recently, would I be so upset when my loved ones insisted that Joseph Smith was commanded by God to have sex with other mens' wives and teenage girls, translated a book through the same peep stone he used to pretend to find buried treasure, etc.? And more importantly, why do I no longer feel the same degree of upset? How am I healing? What are the important things that have changed in my life to facilitate this healing?

I think most of the reason for this change in my experience is found in the branches of social science research related to attachment theory (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attachment_theory) and individuation as they relate to religious and other social groups (see Lee Kirkpatrick, "Evolution, Attachment and the Psychology of Religion" - <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593850883/103-9084403-8293454?v=glance&n=283155>). This theory suggests that we need attachment to certain kinds of authority or security figures starting as small children with a primary care giver and ending with intimate mates and various social groups. Mormonism supercharges our need for a social group, and so creates powerful attachments. This is one of the many things that makes it hard to leave Mormonism.

Until our attachment needs are met by a combination of finding another group or groups to meet our needs, and weaning ourselves from the unhealthy group dependency Mormonism has caused, we will react strongly to messages that

confirm the unwelcome fact that we are sans group. That is, each time a close friend or family member rubs information in our face that confirms to us that we are at complete odds with our group, our tendency will be to persuade the person who has approached us (or whom perhaps we have approached) that she is wrong and we are right. If we succeed, we will have company in our loneliness. But we almost never succeed, and so we panic and rage as a result of basic attachment needs that go unsatisfied.

As we become securely attached to other groups and have a healthy set of relationships that fill the need most of us feel for camaraderie, intimacy, identity with others, etc. (that is, our attachment needs) our reaction to Mormon family and friends changes in many ways. In particular, the desire to persuade them to our position declines. If they challenge us, we react less aggressively or not at all. In short, we begin to treat their idiocy with the same kind of understanding and grace (or lack thereof) with which we treat other similar kinds of lunacy. And we can take this as evidence that we are healing.

Relationships to parents and other family members are complicated by the way in which Mormonism uses parental and other forms of authority to control individuals and cause allegiance to the Mormon system. Hence, Mormon children do not individuate away from parental control to the same extent as do most other members of North American society. For some insight into how this likely works, see Richard Nesbitt "The Geography of Thought".

It is often necessary to radically restructure the parental relationship in order to get past the conflict that results when Mormon authority is rejected and the attachment tensions this creates. From the parents' point of view, the rejection of Mormon authority is also a rejection of parental authority since the two have been confounded. This is another example of the problems Mormonism causes by overlapping important aspects of life in order to prevent itself from being jettisoned.

For example, marriage is placed on a social and religious pedestal within Mormonism, and if you want to be at your grandchildren's marriages in the temple, you have to toe a certain behavioural (and financial) line. So, access to important family events is made contingent on obedience to religious rules. And disobedience to religious rules can appear to be a rejection of family values.

If you want to marry in the temple or go on a mission, both important rites of social passage for young Mormons, you have to promise absolute obedience to all kinds of Mormon authority while in a Mormon temple and that promise is sprung on you without warning in circumstances where it is highly probable that you will make it. Having made this promise, the psychologists tell us that it is likely to significantly influence behavior.

Having married Mormon, you have committed to be obedient to Mormonism as part of the marriage covenant. The marriage is hence based in large measure on a joint commitment to obey Mormon authority. To break that promise it hence to threaten the marriage.

So, to reject Mormonism requires the rejection of a system of behaviour, social connections and relationships that go far beyond what would be required to leave many other belief systems. This increases the attachment of family members to each other, as well as members of the Mormon social group to each other and to Mormon authority figures. You should have seen the fireworks that erupted on the few occasions when Mormon authority figures challenged me or attempted to lean on members of my family after I had made my decision to leave Mormonism.

During months of fighting with my parents over issues related to Mormonism we repeatedly agreed that we would not bring Mormon issues up and each of us broke that agreement many times in different ways. I think attachment and lack of individuation on all our parts mostly explains this. They are incomplete without me in the Celestial Kingdom and hence my rejection of Mormonism threatens them at an existential level that is beyond articulation. I was still dependant on them in many ways, though I would never have guessed that nor would anyone who knows me well. Disagreeing pleasantly in that situation was extremely difficult to do.

Finally, I withdrew from the relationship. While difficult, this has been far preferable to being engaged with them. And as my need for attachment to them and other aspects of Mormonism declines and other healthy relationships form, I suspect that reengagement will be possible. Whether I will pursue it is another question. My life is peaceful now to a degree that is both new and enjoyable. And going back to the cloister saddens me, much as I suspect would be the case for a Hutterite who has left the colony. I still love many people who are mired in pathetic circumstances. To be reminded of this depresses me.

I think that it is important to work at forgiving those who have harmed us as Martin Seligman (see www.authentic happiness.com) and other psychologists say is so important from a mental health and happiness point of view. However, the further down this road I go the more important I think it is to create a new life, think new thoughts, find new and more healthy relationships, etc. As our life brims with enjoyable, healthy activities, we feel more whole. We feel healed. But I am not sure that this is so much a function of healing as just filling spaces that must be full if we are to function normally.

In the long term, it makes sense to think about how large and of what shape those spaces should be. But in the short term, and particularly while in the midst of the trauma caused by leaving Mormonism, it makes sense to me to simply fill our emptiness with reasonable substitutes for what Mormonism did in our lives.

This is surprisingly easy to do. We are far more adaptable than we think. Most people are more kind, generous, ethical and enjoyable than as Mormons we were taught to believe. And there are far more ways to connect meaningfully with these people. At the kids' schools; at the kids' sporting activities; at community centres; through continuing education classes; through hobbies; through political or other "cause" oriented involvement; etc.

And art itself is a wonderful source of the perspective that in what seems a mysterious way causes us to heal. See <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.art%20therapy%20for%20recovering%20mormons.pdf>.

I think we can learn a lot about how well the recovery process is going by paying attention to our baseline behaviour when confronted by ideological idiocy exhibited by groups on which we are not dependant, and comparing that to how we react to Mormon idiocy. When our behaviour in each of these cases is similar, we will be well along the road in the right direction.

Life is good. This good surrounds us, flowing by up to our gunnels. We need do little more than reach out our humble bowls to see them filled with human abundance.