

# Undeception, Wisdom and the Second Birth

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Do you have faith, or does faith have you? Anon

## Introduction

Where do we find wisdom? How do we decide what to believe, and hence determine how we will make our important decisions? These two questions are central to life, and go mostly unexamined as we skim across the surface of our existence. However, I was recently reminded of a mostly forgotten religious controversy that sheds some interesting light on this topic. This controversy highlights the difficulty of the "undeception" process required to shed cherished, but erroneous, beliefs and hence to open ourselves to greater wisdom. After considering what amounts to a case study in that regard and commenting respecting it, I will offer some ideas as to why this process is so difficult, and also why the pain that results from it is worthwhile.

## What is "undeception" and how does it relate to wisdom?

My review of what many of the worlds greatest minds have come up with related to the idea of truth provides more than enough evidence for me that "truth", the "ultimate reality" or whatever you wish to call it will remain hidden from our view during my life time, and probably forever. Hence, I should not hope for an understanding of truth or even the principles on which all truth will be discovered, and I should not plan my life on a basis that requires or assumes that understanding.

I am also convinced that anyone who tries to persuade me that he has the truth or can relied upon to provide it as we go along should not be trusted. History is replete with accounts of the suffering that this kind of trust or belief has caused, and I have experienced it myself. However, I have become familiar with countless examples of people who have improved their lives by identifying errors of various types and getting rid of them. This I have also experienced. It harnesses the scientific process, forms the backbone of much of human progress, and is responsible for most of what makes our lives comfortable, and relatively long and healthy, today. I am capable of better using this idea in my life, and so I am trying to cultivate attitudes and abilities that will help me to do this.

However, the process of identifying and rooting out error is more difficult to use than to talk about, particularly when the errors are entwined with cherished, long held beliefs. The process of discarding such beliefs is aptly described by Hans Georg Gadamer as "undeception". Andrew Lough summarizes Gadamer as follows:

"... the truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experiences. The perfection of this experience, the perfect form of what we can 'experience', does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is readily undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them.' (See Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 319) This growth in experience is not primarily an increase in knowledge of this or that situation, but rather an escape from what has deceived us and held us captive. It is learning by suffering, suffering the process of undeception, which is usually painful." (See Lough, Discerning the Mystery, p. 37)

That is, humble, undogmatic people are more capable of perceiving reality than those who believe they already have the answers. And even for the relatively humble and undogmatic, it is painful to go through the undeception process, for we all are affected by a lack of humility and an abundance of dogma.

### **The Controversy – Was Joseph Smith a polygamist?**

Most Mormons and others who know anything about Mormonism will ask themselves when reading this, "What controversy?" However, a controversy it was.

Joseph Smith ("JS") was the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the "Church", "LDS Church" or "Mormon" Church). The historical record is quite clear as to the fact that he married many women, and consummated at least some of those marriages. However, JS's first wife Emma and other members of her family insisted after JS's death that he was not involved in polygamy, and several of the Mormon splinter groups that formed after JS died held the same belief. Emma did, however, acknowledge JS's sexual indiscretions. That is how she characterized what the record shows to have been polygamous marriages.

The best known of the relatively small groups that separated from the Church JS founded was the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ("RLDS"), which was eventually led by JS's eldest son, and was heavily influenced by Emma Smith. The largest post-JS Mormon group, led by Brigham Young, migrated to Utah and encouraged polygamous marriage there until the early 1900s.

I know something of polygamy as a result of my heritage. My great grandmother, Catherine Love Paxman, was the third wife of William Paxman, a British convert to the LDS church who rose to some prominence in the Nephi, Utah area. Upon

William's untimely death, Catherine moved to Alberta, Canada to take up homestead property. She did this of necessity. As the third wife, she had no claim over William's substantial estate, and had to find a way to support herself and her three small children.

In any event, LDS historians and leaders insisted that polygamy was initiated by JS. RLDS historians insisted that it was initiated by Brigham Young and others, and blamed on JS. Heated rhetoric was exchanged by these parties for many decades on this point, affidavit evidence was collected by both sides while JS's alleged multiple wives and others involved in early Mormon polygamy were still alive, and many newspaper articles, scholarly articles and books were written by both camps to support their positions.

During the last several decades, after well over a century of professed unshakeable belief in JS's non-polygamy, the RLDS community has acknowledged the extremely high probability that JS initiated Mormon polygamy, and largely as a result of this and other belatedly realised realities respecting JS's role as the founder of Mormonism, the RLDS community is transitioning toward a position much nearer mainstream Christianity. One sign of this is that they recently changed their name to The Community of Christ. Among other things, this is intended to show their intentional divergence from LDS foundational claims.

The LDS Church, on the other hand, having won the debate over JS's polygamous practises, remains largely committed to the literal truth of most of the rest of the things he claimed to have done, such as translating golden plates into the Book of Mormon ("BofM"), having received a mandate from God the Father and Jesus Christ during a personal visitation to restore God's only true to church to the earth, having received God's authority to do so under the hands of Peter, James and John on one occasion, and John the Baptist on another, etc.

### **RLDS Undeception**

A few months ago I had the chance to visit with a respected LDS historian. Among the interesting things this scholar told me is the following. We were discussing the pain that people pass through as they are disabused of tenderly held but false beliefs, and of the human tendency to cling to such beliefs past the point where it makes no objective sense to do so. At one of the first serious meetings, probably 20 or so years ago, between LDS and RLDS historians and other scholars, during the course of that meeting the LDS participants (including my friend) watched the horrible light of objective reality respecting polygamy dawn in the eyes of several of the RLDS community's most prominent historians. The meeting was not a debate but rather a healing between the two scholarly communities. It had two parts. First came the intellectual, during which papers were presented and discussed in the usual fashion. The following day, a Sunday, a second meeting was held during which feelings about faith were

discussed. By the conclusion of that meeting, people were hugging each other, congratulating each other respecting their scholarship, and two streams of scholarship and faith took a significant step toward each other. The entire exchange was conducted in a loving, respectful and delicate fashion, since both sides recognized that they were treading close to heart of the other.

Prior to that meeting, the RLDS position respecting polygamy was that JS did not practise polygamy - the whole thing was a story made up by Brigham Young and his trolls to discredit "the Prophet". A great deal of effort for more than a hundred years had been expended by the RLDS community to collect evidence and develop theories to support that view. Almost all faithful members of that community believed that JS did not practise polygamy, and held that belief with every bit of the same well-intentioned fervour that is focussed in the LDS community on, for example, the historicity of the BofM. These two beliefs within their respective communities are very similar in formation and foundational effect.

The meeting I have referred to was close to the turning point within the RLDS community respecting acceptance of JS's polygamous habits. A variety of sources of information (original journals, etc.) were at that time brought to the attention of the RLDS scholars that their researchers had ignored up to then. Gradually after that meeting, the RLDS position changed toward where it is now. They now acknowledge the extremely high probability of JS's participation in polygamy, and largely because of this, they have abandoned most of their former faith claims respecting the BofM etc. That is, their faith in Mormonism's special, divine origins was shattered on the altar their predecessors had constructed respecting JS's non-polygamy, and as a result they moved off in a new and, I would say, more healthy religious direction.

### **LDS Undeception**

I found the RLDS undeception process particularly interesting, because it relates to my experience with Brighamite Mormonism. JS's non-polygamy was perhaps the defining feature of the RLDS movement. When that pillar crumbled, a reconstruction of the RLDS faith was required, and so we now have The Community of Christ that is blending into the mainstream Christian landscape. The 7th Day Adventists are going through a similar transformation, spurred on by the realization within their community that their founders' claims to unique divine revelation can no longer be supported in many instances. I have an ex-Mormon friend here in Calgary who is now a Mennonite. The Mennonites have a sort of Amish origin, and hence were at one time a radical sect. Now they are indistinguishable in this community from other evangelical Christian groups. The word "Mennonite" is heard no more than once a year within their congregation. They are Christians, not Mennonites.

So how does all this relate to my experience with Mormonism? Mormonism's special faith claims relate to the historicity of the BofM and JS's experiences with

the divine. As that pillar crumbled in my life (See "American Apocrypha", "An Insider's View of Mormon Origins" for a representative sampling of recent writing on this subject, and for an internet accessible summary see "Why I no longer believe" by Michael White at [http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/no\\_longer\\_believe.htm](http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/no_longer_believe.htm) ), I felt the need to find something to replace it. However, my experience of having trusted those who clung to the final, most Christian and most fantastic version of the changing stories JS told while struggling to preserve the movement he (inadvertently in my view) started, made me unwilling to accept uncritically the stories told by any other faith. This launched me into a paradigm more informed by science and moral philosophy than anything else, while being enriched by mythologies of all stripes, including those that come to me through my Christian faith. And because of my upbringing, the basic lens through which I see all of this could fairly be described as liberal Christian, and resembles what many of the scholars at the liberal edge of the Lutheran, Episcopalian, United Church of Canada, and many other Christian denominations believe.

This approach to life recognizes, and causes me to daily wrestle with, the fragile, uncertain nature of our existence. This is the most healthy, joyous, spiritual thing that has ever happened to me. Here we find a real, and constructive, paradox - less certainty = more comfort and joy. Try that one on, and see where it takes you.

The main RLDS pillar crumbled more quickly than the main LDS ones because the tide of evidence in the RLDS case was historic (did JS or did he not marry and co-habit with more than one woman?), focussed largely on one issue, was relatively recent, and had been thoroughly explored by people of both sides of what was a raging debate for decades between the LDS and RLDS communities that commenced almost immediately after JS died. Hence, most of the key data was in a long time ago. But note that it still took over a hundred years, by the most conservative measure, for that data to penetrate the walls the RLDS community had built to protect their faith.

Much evidence respecting the non-historicity of the BofM and problems with other LDS foundational faith claims is already in, and has been in for a long time, but it has not been as conclusive as the evidence respecting JS's polygamy. Hence, the walls the LDS community built to restrain faith-threatening data have been largely effective. However, two relatively new elements are now on the playing field. First, the evidence re the BofM and other matters continues to come in. The thing that grabbed my attention in that regard (or perhaps the straw that broke the camel's back) was the DNA evidence against any material migration between the Semitic world and the Americas - that is, it is now virtually certain that Israelites were not the primary ancestors of the BofM's "Lamanites" as JS claimed they were and as the cover page of the BofM itself indicates, and it is highly doubtful that any migration occurred from the Near East to the Americas during the time indicated in that regard by the BofM. As a BYU microbiology

professor giving the "pro-LDS" presentation at last summer's Sunstone conference respecting this issue intimated, while there is not enough evidence yet to be practically certain that the Church's critics are correct on the DNA point, if the current trend of evidence continues the time will soon come when the Church will have to choose between addressing the divergence between physical reality and its faith claims respecting the BofM, and intellectual isolation. While he did not indicate this, I note the analogue to what the RLDS church went through as summarized above, and other well known cases where religious faith has collided with physical reality, such as that of Galileo v. the Catholic Church, and science v. the "young earth" creationists. In each case, faith eventually caves in. Religions tend to deal with this by talking as little about the past as possible. Numerous writers have pointed out the anti-historical nature of most institutional religious bodies.

The second relatively new element on the playing is the Internet. It has become a powerful purveyor of information, creating breach after breach in the walls built to buttress ephemeral Mormon and other faiths. So, it makes sense to me that the revolution that has gripped the RLDS community would not come so quickly to the LDS. But now it is clear that pressure is increasing within the LDS community to deal with the things with which the RLDS church has already dealt. The recent publication of "An Insiders View of Mormon Origins" by a recently retired CES Institute director, and the fact that he has not yet to my knowledge been excommunicated is an interesting sign. Many other similar signs surround us that are easily visible to those who care about these things.

Time will tell whether the LDS community will transition toward the mainstream as those I mention above have, or whether it will go the isolationist route. At this point, Gordon Hinckley and others are making noises that point in both directions. Hinckley tells the world through Larry King and in other public fora that Mormons are de-emphasizing some of their distinctive claims and hence are becoming more like mainstream Christians. Recent LDS theological scholarship (see Stephen Robinson and Joseph McKonkie, for example) points in the same direction. And yet the talks at the Spring 2003 LDS General Conference by both Jeffrey Holland and Gordon Hinckley (see [http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/holland\\_critique.htm](http://members.cox.net/mcarr29/zarahemla/holland_critique.htm) for a critique of Holland's talk) contained clear injunctions against any questioning of LDS orthodoxy or leadership authority. This seemingly bipolar approach can be reconciled, perhaps, by being seen as steps that could enable LDS leadership to guide the community toward mainstream Christianity without noisy dissent from the fringes, thus minimizing those who will question leadership and leave the fold. I expect not looking at faith threatening materials and obedience to leadership mandates to receive continued and likely increasing emphasis within the LDS community as pressure builds to deal with the increasingly obvious cracks in the movement's foundational faith claims.

For the sake of my many LDS friends and family, I hope President Hinckley leads them toward the mainstream instead of toward increasing intellectual isolation. Many of them will follow him wherever he leads. He has an awesome responsibility, regardless of its divine or other origin.

## **The Psychology of Self-deception**

I have seen many examples, including the few referred to above, that make it clear that it is extremely difficult for human beings to deal with fundamental paradigm shifts. Why is this? The following psychological research is relevant this question, as it is to how anyone could now believe in JS's non-polygamy, as well as to the LDS belief in the historicity of the BofM, the popular Christian and Mormon belief in a proximate and literal end of days (several of my kids have recently been taught this in graphic terms during LDS Sunday services), the Muslim belief in god sanctioned terrorism, the Christian creationist belief in a flat or 6,000 year old earth, etc.

### *Confirmation Bias*

Michael Shermer in "Why People Believe Weird Things" notes that we are all subject to the "confirmation bias", which is that the first idea of which we become convinced tends to hold us. Research has shown that the higher your IQ, the stronger your confirmation bias is likely to be. That is, the researchers theorize, because smarter people are better at two things: First, they are better at finding patterns to support their initial belief in the data around them, and with enough research you can find patterns in most complex data sets to support your chosen position (see anything written by Hugh Nibley about the ancient world for exquisite examples of this genre); and second, that they are better than most at convincing duller souls, and hence create their own confirming audience. Related research also shows that high IQ people are more susceptible than low IQ people to being fooled by magic tricks because their ability to see patterns makes them particularly subject to the "misdirection cues" on which magic tricks are based.

As an aside, I note that the fact that I have changed my opinion respecting something as fundamental as the Mormon Church's faith claims will likely be taken as proof by my LDS friends and relatives that I am not very bright. Shermer's research would support that conclusion. If that is the case, I am grateful for my lack of intelligence.

### *Ownership Bias*

Another stream of interesting research referred to in Dr. Marin Seligman's "Authentic Happiness" showed that the fact of "ownership" increases perceived value even in simple commodities. One of the experiments conducted in this regard involved giving students different gifts, each of which was available at the

U bookstore, and each of which had the same \$5 value, which was not disclosed to the students. These were things like school pendants, coffee mugs, pens etc. All these items were then put into an auction. Lets assume I had been given a mug. I had to set the price at which I was prepared to sell my mug at the auction, and then I had to bid on the other items at the auction. On average, the sell price established was \$7 (that is, I will only sell on a bid for my mug of \$7), and the average bid price for all items was \$4 (that is, I will pay no more than \$4 for any of the other items in the auction). This and many other experiments support the conclusion that mere transitory ownership (this is far less then intellectual or "spiritual" conviction) creates a subjective mental state that distorts our ability to perceive value. This research was not cited by Seligman respecting religion, but rather to make the general point that we should be suspect of our own perceptions of value and should seek and rely upon objective data when ever we can. This has obvious (to me anyway) application to the well-documented and universal human tendency to cling to the religious belief with which they were raised or of which they become convinced at some point in their lives.

### *The Brain Chemistry of Spiritual Epiphany*

Dr. Andrew Newberg and his co-authors, in "Why God Won't Go Away", show how the brain chemistry of spiritual conviction works. Their studies show that spiritual experience is "real" in the sense that while a person perceives herself to be having a spiritual experience the brain does things that are consistent with what neurologists would expect to produce profoundly moving mental states. For example, when we are faced with a situation like the death of a loved one that causes intense, existential anxiety and are provided with relief in the form of a religious insight, the parts of our nervous system that are responsible for arousal and relaxation are sometimes simultaneously activated in a way similar to that associated with sexual climax. As a result, we experience an intense, rare, mental state. Not surprisingly, the ideas that appear to have triggered that wonder are not easily abandoned. Given the attachment Seligman noted that transitory ownership of a mug will create, we should not be surprised at the power to twist our minds a powerful religious experience will wield. This idea has tremendous explanatory power for me. It helped me to understand why people in different places and times (including our own) have clung to the contradictory and in some cases from my western point of view, bizarre beliefs they do. We are all captive to our own experience, and have a need for certainty that causes us to consistently believe that fiction is fact.

### *Evolutionary Theory*

And all this is supported by recent biological and psychological research showing that it is consistent with the main tenets of evolutionary theory that natural selection would favour humans who tend toward religious belief (See "Why God

Won't Go Away" and "Why People Believe Weird Things") and who would tend to accept the belief system promulgated by the group that dominates their lives.

### **Undeception and the Connection to Reality**

As a result of the combination of my upbringing and the above factors, for years I clung to the ideas respecting JS that were required to support my LDS testimony. I note with interest that the RLDS scholars referred to above had done the same thing, but that the ideas they needed were different from those I needed since our testimonies of JS were different. This led them to believe some false notions that I did not need to believe, and for many years to assiduously collect and surround themselves with evidence to support those false beliefs, such as that JS did not practice polygamy. As long as the RLDS folk and I held our respective, differing ideas respecting JS, and hence believed his stories, that belief badly impaired our ability to perceive reality. The RLDS lost their belief in JS's stories over the polygamy issue, and showed an almost immediate (by historic time reference anyway) better connection to all kinds of other realities. A rough measure of this can be taken by considering how their faith community functions now, comparing that to what they did before they shed their belief in JS's stories, and asking yourself which makes the most sense. Most people (except perhaps most Mormons) would conclude that RLDS behaviour now is eminently more sensible than it was before.

As soon as I shed my belief in JS and his stories over the BofM issues, I evidenced an immediately improved connection to and appreciation of various types of reality. The adjustment took a matter of six months for the most important part of it to play out. Virtually the only ones who would disagree with this analysis in my case are faithful Mormons, whose judgement on this point is suspect for the reasons set out above respecting psychological research.

### **Undeception and the Second Birth**

I have studied polygamy and many other issues related to JS carefully, have gone through the extremely painful "undeception" process in that regard, and am now on to other for-me-more-productive areas of study. Most of the RLDS community also has done so, in a different way, as a result of their different faith claims respecting JS. The LDS community is, increasingly, now grappling with the process. "An Insider's View" eloquently addresses this issue, by stating that mature members of the Church must come to grips with the reality that many of the stories we have been taught from our mothers' knee up are false, and that we have therefore been innocently encouraged, and are innocently encouraging others, to build lives on foundations of sand.

As Lough said, "growth in experience is not primarily an increase in knowledge of this or that situation, but rather an escape from what has deceived us and held us captive. It is learning by suffering, suffering the process of undeception, which

is usually painful." (Lough, Discerning the Mystery, p. 37) This process is hard on everyone who passes through it. It is a birthing process – while painful, it can lead to the wonderful second birth spoken of in the mythologies of virtually all societies. The best-known archetype in our society for this process is Christ's death and resurrection itself. Let me summarize a few other second birth metaphors that are, to me, more evocative of my recent experience.

### *Societal v. Antithetical Masks*

Among the wonderful metaphors Yeats left us is that of masks. As we grow in a society it puts a mask on us that Yeats called the "primary mask". In some cases we are allowed to choose (to an extent at least) our mask. In other cases, such as within the Hindu caste system for example, there is little choice. The primary mask is designed to teach us our role, draw us into our society and teach us how to fit in and be productive. This mostly good for society, but has some benefits for the individual as well. We all have to start somewhere.

As we mature, there comes a time when it is healthy for us to reshape our mask, and in some cases to cast it aside entirely. Yeats calls this the creation of the "antithetical mask", and can be understood as a form of second birth. That mask represents the real us - the best we can be. It may have nothing to do with our society. We may identify wholly with the antithetical mask, or we may continue to wear the primary mask to an extent, recognizing it as such, and revert to the antithetical mask as often as we can. How we do this, the extent to which we do it, etc. is determined by our individual characteristics and the nature of our society. Many individuals feel stirrings of this sort, but are of a disposition such that they do not act upon their feelings.

The creation of the antithetical mask involves much undeception, and as a result, tension with our society. Joseph Campbell talks about "fighting through" this process, "for good or ill". Early in my creation of my antithetical mask I perceived the process to be a fight. However, I now understand that this is not as it must be. Once we place this process in context, we can understand it as a necessary, healthy part of our development. The tension with our society, family etc. itself is a healthy part of the process if it is used properly.

Youth is the time during which the primary mask is fashioned and placed on us. As we reach adulthood and become independent beings, we have the chance to create our own antithetical mask. The use of this mask – playing the role this mask casts for us – is what should power the most creative, wonderful and useful part of our lives: that of middle age. Eventually, our creative powers and other energies decline and the antithetical mask becomes less important. The antithetical mask is what drives change and allows all of our self and creativity to engage with the world around us. When this is no longer possible, the primary mask begins to reassert itself in the sense that progress stops. The primary mask, in my view, is the return to that state of stasis in which society tells us we

should remain. Our passions do not burn as brightly. We prepare to fade into the night. If we have experienced the second birth (leapt from the moon to the sun – see below) this physical decline will be experienced with a healthy, bemused detachment, and the fruits of wearing the antithetical mask can continue to be enjoyed, although perhaps not much new fruit will be created.

Modern Western society encourages the antithetical mask. This is how progress is made so quickly within our society. People reach beyond themselves and what their primary mask has taught them. As they venture into the dark forest to make their antithetical mask (this is the primary second birth motif of the Arthurian legends), they find all kinds of things they would not have otherwise encountered. From the primordial brew into which one generation of Western man after another is thrown to make his antithetical mask, have come the ideas that now power our world. Such creativity is not possible in a static society where we are told what we are, and are required never to step outside of that prescribed state. Hence, we explain much of the difference between the degree of creative power found in the modern East and West.

As an aside, I note that this is consistent with evolutionary theory. Jared Diamond in his wonderful book "Guns, Germs and Steel" suggests that it was not a coincidence that modern civilization emerged in the Fertile Crescent – that is where the earth hosted the largest number of what turned out to be domesticable plants and animals. That confluence created the best conditions for civilization to form and then evolve. Joseph Campbell indicates the same thing respecting the development of the idea of the individual, democracy and other trademark Western cultural traits. These concepts emerged from the centuries of interaction between the different cultures of Europe and the Near East, whereas the cultures of India and the Far East were isolated enough that they did not experience the same kind of productive interaction.

It is not surprising, hence, that our modern Western culture is so dynamic. This is where, more than in any time in human history, the creation of the antithetical mask is encouraged and hence a constant creative tension is maintained as new ideas clash against those supported by the establishment. In my reformulation of my religious faith and worldview, I am a tiny actor in this endless, productive drama, as are the religious functionaries and their followers who provide the resistance necessary to maintain the creative tension I feel. This tension has propelled me far beyond the boundaries of my former faith, and while I would not wish it upon myself or others, just as perhaps a mother would not wish the pangs of childbirth on her daughter, I am grateful for what it has caused me to do.

The traditional East is the world of the primary mask. The West, in varying degrees, is the world of the antithetical mask. The antithetical mask might also be viewed as a metaphor for the use of the scientific method paradigm in material and spiritual life. It requires that we remain open to change and improvement for as long as possible in our lives. Change requires energy. Once

energy has declined to the point where change is no longer feasible, the process stops. In that sense, the primary mask returns.

Joseph Campbell also notes that heresy is the lifeblood of any mythology. Heresy is what enables mythologies to change and so remain relevant to their host societies. Heresies, usually, are also closely connected to the undeception process and the creation of the antithetical mask.

### *The Moon to the Sun Metaphor*

Yeats had another great idea that is related to that of the masks. Yeats relates the primary and antithetical masks to the phases of the moon. The ascending and descending phases correlate to the primary mask, and the mid-phase of high energy to the antithetical. These phases are used in many cultures to explain different aspects of life.

The lunar cycle is 28 days. From days one through 15, the moon increases. At the 15th day, it reaches its full reflective power. From there on, it declines. The 15th year was, in many primitive cultures, the time for a young woman to marry. Dante set the mid-point in life at 35. This was in the 1300s. Today it might be later, but let's not quibble. This is mythology. I personally set the mid-point at 45 (coincidentally, my own age). From there on, life is downhill in terms of physical and mental prowess in many senses.

On the 15th day of the lunar cycle there is a moment at which the sun sets and moon simultaneously rises, and while both are visible on the horizon they are exactly the same size and color, the moon reflecting the sun. At the equivalent moment in our lives, we can jump from the moon to the sun – take off the primary mask and replace it with the antithetical. We are invited to leave our lunar, reflective, cyclical selves and become part of the eternal energy source. We are invited to leave the provincial for the general and transcendent. We are invited to move from the vehicle to the power source; from the body to the consciousness or spirit. Having done our work – having produced the best that is within us – we can then watch with contentment as the "vehicle" declines in power and finally falls apart. As Joseph Campbell puts it, when a light bulb burns out, we are not concerned – we are interested in light, not bulbs. Our light does not go out when our bulb is finished. We can feel the light continuing, or even increasing in strength, as the bulb declines in various ways and we gradually merge with the source itself.

### *The Revolution v. Evolution Metaphor*

As noted above, in the West the idea of the antithetical mask is encouraged. This means that it is expected that people are going to fight institutional control. While elements in society try to quell dissent, it is clear that our society sees value in this kind of diversity and encourages it. Campbell points out, however, that this is a process of evolution, of becoming, not of smashing things up. He

points out that some people get stuck in what they perceive to be a fight with forces that are trying to hold them back and that as long as we fight with something, we focus on it and hence are bound to it by a negative force.

We need to stop fighting and simply move on in our evolutionary process. We need to seek harmony within change. This is particularly the case when the force we perceive ourselves in opposition to is a large institution. We have no realistic chance to change such a thing. We are far better off creating whatever space or distance we require to feed ourselves and continue to develop, have the courage to recognize that we do not need the institution to do that, and move along in our evolutionary process. We will find joy and wonder along the way, and if it later becomes possible for the institution to fit comfortably back into our lives, so be it.

### *Wings of Art*

Campbell quotes the motto from the cover page of James Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man", and indicates that it comes from the story of Dedalus. The quote is in Latin. It says something like, "and his mind turned to new forms of art". This, according to Campbell, is an oblique reference to Dedalus, the creator of the Labyrinth on the island of Crete, deciding to fly to the mainland on "wings of art". King Minos would not allow him to leave since he was such a wise and useful man, but he had decided to leave in any event. His "wings of art" were the only thing that could carry him over the nets that Minos had set to prevent his passage.

Campbell said that this was Joyce's personal myth. He "flew" from Ireland to the mainland on his wings of art. He flew from the rich, but limiting, Catholic symbolism and its orthodox interpretation in which he was well trained as a youth, to mythology and a broad understanding of humanity. This was his undeception, his second birth. Campbell said that this evolution was visible in Joyce's writings.

The renowned religious historian Karen Armstrong's book "Through the Narrow Gate" explores a similar theme as she discusses what amounted to her second birth as she left the Catholic convent to pursue a secular life.

### *The Second Birth in General*

In the end, the second birth is not an event. Rather, it is a process that is experienced one event after another. It is the continual undeception through which we deconstruct that which we need to get rid of, and pass on our way toward wisdom, replenishing our supply of joy and wonder as the process moves along.

It is fair to say, based on my experience, that some events of undeception will be more profound, and hence more memorable and life changing, than others. It is to these that our great religious monuments are erected: Mose's encounter with the burning bush; Jacob's wrestling match with the angel; Christ's passion; Buddha's enlightenment; Mohamed's revelation of the Koran; etc. We may each experience something similar on a personal (ie. real, not mythic) scale.

I believe that during the last year I experienced the closest thing to this kind of spiritual earthquake that I will have during my life. It is not a coincidence that this occurred near mid-life. That is when these things tend to come, if they come at all. In my case, the process was somewhat delayed due to the conservative nature of my religious upbringing, and the fact that until recently I was so far inside the belly of the beast that I was numb to what was going on around me.

However, the fact that I have had my major second birth does mean that I have arrived in some sense. The process of undeception will continue, and occasionally I still expect to root something out of my life will cause enough pain and produce a significant enough change in perspective to be properly characterized as another birth. And there will be innumerable smaller occurrences of the same type that I hope will come to characterize my existence.

In his book "A Different Drum", Scott Peck describes his interaction at age 20 with a noted author of age 65 that occurred daily for a period of weeks during a summer vacation. This great literary man was, to Peck's surprise, genuinely interested in what Peck thought. They debated things for hours on end, and Peck's view sometimes prevailed. He said that he watched in amazement as this wise man changed his mind about important things several times a week. The idea dawned for Peck, as he watched this process, that it was not necessary to grow intellectually or spiritually old, and that the creative brilliance of which his friend was possessed was somehow connected to this openness to new experience. To this state I aspire.

I also note that the second birth occurs with respect to societies and institutions. I believe that what the RLDS church was forced through as it confronted the reality of its faith claims respecting JS's non-polygamy can fairly be described in this way. However, the LDS church as an institution and most of its individual members seem to me to still be in the "pre-undeception" stage described above regarding the RLDS scholars who attended the eye opening meeting respecting polygamy with their LDS counterparts. Perhaps birthing pangs have been felt in a few hearts inside the walls of LDS faith, but not in many, and as noted above LDS leadership seems intent on making this as rare an occurrence as possible.

While this is shame, we should not expect otherwise. As Yeats so eloquently pointed out, it is the nature of the group to impose the societal mask, and the nature of only some individuals to make an antithetical mask. The study of sociology indicates that in general, the group will not change the kind of mask it

attempts to put on people until its survival is threatened, as was the case with the LDS church when polygamy was done away with, and when the blacks were given the priesthood. And as was the case with the RLDS church when one of its foundational faith claim, that JS did not engage in polygamy, crumbled. In these cases, the institutions had little choice but to make fundamental changes. I do not expect the LDS church to change in a material way until much more pressure is exerted upon it by its members in the form of memberships surrendered, respected members called before disciplinary counsels, and letters from faithful, high profile members begging for change.

## **Conclusion**

Each of us wrestles with the powerful forces to which we are subject and that distort our perception of reality. It is my hope that as we do so, we will find ways to become more "undeceived". I again note that this is different from finding "truth". I long since abandoned my hope of doing that. The best I can hope for is to gradually remove some of the things from my life that impair my ability to apprehend reality.

Hence, I do not suggest that I have come out of some kind of fog and now see things clearly. Rather, I express my humility in the face of powers far stronger than I am, confidence that I will continue to err on a regular basis, and hope that I will grope along in a generally healthy direction as long as I leave my mind open to new ways of seeing things.

My greatest wisdom is the confession that I lack it, and my knowledge that virtually all those who claim to be sure guides should not be followed. This attitude or worldview is, in my view, the greatest legacy I can pass on to my posterity. Someone to whom I once expressed this feeling wondered whether I would hire a guide to climb Mount Everest who had not climbed it before. I responded that of course I would not. And in a world without sight, I prefer guides who acknowledges blindness to those who confidently proclaim they know the way while plunging rashly ahead.