

Teachings Concerning The Veil of Forgetfulness

Loss of Premortal Memory at Birth

Hugh B. Brown

Mortal birth erases recollection of that spiritual preexistence and the memory of premortal life is as a feeble echo, and yet, as we sometimes sing, "a secret something whispers you're a stranger here, and we feel that we have wandered from a more exalted sphere." (*Conference Report, October 1963*, pp. 92-93.)

Veil Defined

Neal A. Maxwell

We define the veil as the border between mortality and eternity; it is also a film of forgetting which covers the memories of earlier experiences. This forgetfulness will be lifted one day, and on that day we will see forever—rather than "through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12). [From "Patience," *Ensign*, Oct. 1980, p. 31]

The Nature of the Veil

Brigham Young

I say, the greatest good that could be produced by the all wise Conductor of the universe to His creature, man, was to do just as He has done—bring him forth on the face of the earth, drawing a vail before his eyes. He has caused us to forget every thing we once knew before our spirits entered within this vail of flesh. For instance, it is like this: when we lie down to sleep, our minds are often as bright and active as the mind of an angel, at least they are as active as when our bodies are awake. They will range over the earth, visit distant friends, and, for aught we know, the planets, and accomplish great feats; do that which will enhance our happiness, increase to us every enjoyment of life, and prepare us for celestial glory; but when we wake in the morning, it is all gone from us; we have forgotten it. This illustration will explain in part the nature of the vail which is over the inhabitants of the earth; they have forgotten that they once knew. This is right; were it different, where would be the trial of our faith? In a word, be it so; it is as it should be. (*Journal of Discourses*, 1:351-352)

Veil Necessary to Prove Mankind

Joseph Fielding Smith

This mortal existence is conclusive evidence that all who receive it kept their first estate. In our former, or spirit existence, we walked by sight. We were in the presence of both the Father and the Son, and were instructed by them and under their personal presence. In this mortal life, or second estate, the Lord willed that we should walk by faith and not by sight, that we might, with the great gift of free agency, be proved to see if we would do all things whatsoever the Lord our God commanded us. Therefore, he took away from us all knowledge of our spiritual existence and started us out afresh in the form of helpless infants, to grow and learn day by day. In consequence of this we received no former knowledge and wisdom at birth, and, as it is written of the Son of God, who in the beginning made all things, we "received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace." (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:60)

Dallin H. Oaks

Our understanding of life begins with a council in heaven. There the spirit children of God were taught his eternal plan for their destiny. We had progressed as far as we could without a physical body and an experience in mortality. To realize a fulness of joy, we had to prove our willingness to keep the commandments of God in a circumstance where we had no memory of what preceded our mortal birth. ("The Great Plan of Happiness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, p. 72)

Neal A. Maxwell

It seems clear, not only scripturally but logically, that this second estate could not include either the direct memories or the reference experiences of our first estate. If such were to impinge overmuch upon this second estate, our mortality would not be a true proving ground. (*We Will Prove Them Herewith*, p.3)

Brigham Young

It has also been decreed by the Almighty that spirits, upon taking bodies, shall forget all they had known previously, or they could not have a day of trial—could not have an opportunity for proving themselves in darkness

and temptation, in unbelief and wickedness, to prove themselves worthy of eternal existence. The greatest gift that God can bestow upon the children of men is the gift of eternal life; that is, to give mankind power to preserve their identity--to preserve themselves before the Lord. (*Journal of Discourses*, 6:333)

George Q. Cannon

It is not as it was before. We were then in the presence of God. Now there is a veil between us and our Father, and we are left to ourselves, to a certain extent. We are left to be governed by the influences that we invite, and there are any number of evil influences around us, whispering into our ears and hearts all manner of things. If we will open our hearts to receive them or allow them to enter our hearts, we will think evil of our brethren and of our sisters; we will have malice towards them; we will envy them; and we will say bad things about them. God will test us in all this. (*Gospel Truth*, 1:7.)

Orson Pratt

What person among all the human family can comprehend what took place in his first existence? No one, it is blotted from the memory, and I think there is great wisdom manifested in withholding the knowledge of our previous existence. Why? Because we could not, if we had all our pre-existent knowledge accompanying us into this world, show to our Father in the heavens and to the heavenly host that we would be in all things obedient; in other words, we could not be tried as the Lord designs to try us here in this state of existence, to qualify us for a higher state hereafter. In order to try the children of men, there must be a degree of knowledge withheld from them, for it would be no temptation to them if they could understand from the beginning the consequences of their acts, and the nature and results of this and that temptation. But in order that we may prove ourselves before the heavens obedient and faithful in all things, we have to begin at the very first principles of knowledge, and be tried from knowledge to knowledge, and from grace to grace, until, like our elder brother, we finally overcome and triumph over all our imperfections, and receive with him the same glory that he inherits, which glory he had before the world was. (*Journal of Discourses*, 15:245-246)

Joseph F. Smith

And yet, to accomplish the ultimatum of his previous existence, and consummate the grand and glorious object of his being, and the salvation of his infinite brotherhood, he had to come and take upon him flesh. He is our

example. The works he did, we are commanded to do. We are enjoined to follow him, as he followed his Head; that where he is, we may be also; and being with him, may be like him. If Christ knew beforehand, so did we. But in coming here, we forgot all, that our agency might be free indeed, to choose good or evil, that we might merit the reward of our own choice and conduct. But by the power of the Spirit, in the redemption of Christ, through obedience, we often catch a spark from the awakened memories of the immortal soul, which lights up our whole being as with the glory of our former home. (*Gospel Doctrine*, p.13)

Thomas S. Monson

How grateful we should be that a wise Creator fashioned an earth and placed us here, with a veil of forgetfulness on our previous existence, so that we might experience a time of testing, an opportunity to prove ourselves and qualify for all that God has prepared for us to receive. ("Invitation to Exaltation," *Ensign*, June 1993, p. 4)

Marion G. Romney

To obtain perfection, we had to leave our pre-earth home and come to earth. During the transfer, a veil was drawn over our spiritual eyes, and the memory of our premortal experiences was suspended. In the Garden of Eden, God endowed us with moral agency and, as it were, left us here on our own between the forces of good and evil to be proved—to see if, walking by faith, we would rise to our high potentiality by doing "all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command [us]." (Abr. 3:25.) [From "Prayer Is the Key," *Ensign*, Jan. 1976, p. 2]

M. Russell Ballard

We must understand the basic doctrines and receive the saving ordinances that are essential for our eternal exaltation and happiness. Our present mortal state places a veil of forgetfulness over our minds, allowing us to prove ourselves able to "do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command" (Abr. 3:25). But even though our present long-range view of eternity is limited, the Lord has not left us without direction. He has provided scriptures and Apostles and prophets through whom he has revealed his plan for our exaltation and eternal life. And we have the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, to guide us. ("Answers to Life's Questions," *Ensign*, May 1995, p. 23)

The Veil is Like Anesthesia

Neal A. Maxwell

In some ways, our second estate, in relationship to our first estate, is like agreeing in advance to surgery. Then the anesthetic of forgetfulness settles in upon us. Just as doctors do not de-anesthetize a patient in the midst of authorized surgery to ask him again if the surgery should be continued, so, after divine tutoring, we agreed to come here and to submit ourselves to certain experiences; it was an irrevocable decision. (“A More Determined Discipleship,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1979, p. 70)

The Importance of the Veil

Neal A. Maxwell

We define the veil as the border between mortality and eternity; it is also a film of forgetting which covers the memories of earlier experiences. This forgetfulness will be lifted one day, and on that day we will see forever—rather than “through a glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12).

There are poignant and frequent reminders of the veil, adding to our sense of being close but still outside. In our deepest prayers, when the agency of man encounters the omniscience of God, we sometimes sense, if only momentarily, how very provincial our petitions really are; we perceive that there are more good answers than we have good questions; and we realize that we have been taught more than we can tell, for the language used is not that which tongue can transmit.

We experience this same close separateness when a baby is born, but also as we wait with those who are dying—for then we brush against the veil, as goodbyes and greetings are said—almost within earshot of each other! In such moments, this resonance with realities on the other side of the veil is so real it can be explained in only one way!

No wonder the Savior said that his doctrines would be recognized by his sheep, that we would know his voice, that we would follow him (see John 10:14). We do not, therefore, follow strangers. Deep within us, his doctrines do strike the promised chord of familiarity and underscore our true identity. Our sense of belonging grows in spite of our sense of separateness, for his teachings stir our souls awakening feelings within us which have somehow survived underneath the encrusting experiences of mortality.

This inner serenity which the believer knows as he brushes against the veil is cousin to certitude. The peace it brings surpasses our understanding and certainly our

capacity to explain. But it requires a patience which stands in stark contrast to the restlessness of the world in which, said Isaiah, the wicked are like the pounding and troubled sea which cannot rest (see Isa. 57:20).

But mercifully the veil is there! It is fixed by the wisdom of God for our good. It is no use our being impatient with the Lord over that reality, for it is clearly a condition to which we agreed so long ago. Even when the veil is parted briefly, it will be on His terms—not ours.

Without the veil, we would lose that precious insulation, thus interfering with our mortal probation and maturation. Without the veil, our brief mortal walk in a darkening world would lose its meaning—for one would scarcely carry the flashlight of faith at noonday and in the presence of the Light of the World!

Without the veil, we could not experience the gospel of work and the sweat of our brow. If we had the security of having already entered into God’s rest, certain things would be unneeded; Adam and Eve did not clutch Social Security cards in the Garden of Eden!

And how could we learn about obedience if we were shielded from the consequences of our disobedience? And how could we learn patience under pressure if we did not experience pressure and waiting?

Nor could we choose for ourselves if we were already in His holy presence, for some alternatives do not there exist. Besides, God’s court is filled with those who have patiently overcome—whose company we do not yet deserve.

Fortunately, the veil keeps the first, second, and third estates separate, hence our sense of separateness. The veil avoids having things “compound in one” (2 Ne. 2:11)—to our everlasting detriment. We are cocooned, as it were, in order that we might truly choose. Once, long ago, we chose to come to this very setting where we could choose. It was an irrevocable choice! And the veil is the guarantor that our ancient choice is honored.

When the veil which now encloses us is no more, time will also be no more (see D&C 84:100). Even now, time is clearly not our natural dimension. Thus it is that we are never really at home in time. Alternately, we find ourselves impatiently wishing to hasten the passage of time or to hold back the dawn. We can do neither, of course. Whereas the bird is at home in the air, we are clearly not at home in time—because we belong to eternity! Time, as much as any one thing, whispers to us that we are strangers here. If time were natural to us, why is it that we have so many clocks and wear wristwatches?

Thus the veil stands—not to forever shut us out—but as a reminder of God’s tutoring and patient love for us. Any brush against it produces a feeling of “not yet,” but

also faint whispers of anticipation of that moment when, in the words of today's choral hymn, "Come, Let Us Anew," those who have prevailed "by the patience of hope and the labor of love" will hear the glorious words, "Well and faithfully done; enter into my joy and sit down on my throne" (Hymns, no. 17). [From "Patience," *Ensign*, Oct. 1980, p. 31]

The Veil Will Eventually Be Lifted

LeGrand Richards

When we are born into this world, we only have a vague recollection of our preexistent life. By the inspiration of the Spirit "we see through a glass darkly" and we "know in part." Ultimately our previous knowledge will be restored to us, when that which is perfect comes, and then we shall know even as also we are known. Here we have the reason why the world did not recognize Jesus when he came in the flesh: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." (John 1:10.)

Ultimately the veil of darkness, or forgetfulness, which deprives us of the recollection of our existence in the spirit world before this earth was made and of the acquaintances we had here, will be lifted. Then we will see as we are seen and know as we are known and as we were known before earth life. (A Marvelous Work and a Wonder, pp.281-282)