

Have you ever wondered if you would sleep through the sound of the trumpets on resurrection morning (D&C 45:45-46)? Or have you ever considered that sleeping patterns of today may adversely affect you tomorrow? From a spiritual perspective these are essential questions about our personal salvation. Fortunately, the scriptures provide us powerful insights about the symbolic meaning of resurrection that teach us how to overcome and avoid an “endless sleep” (Moroni 9:13) that could befall us at any time.

Quite early the Book of Mormon exposes us to the idea of spiritual resurrection. Upon arrival to the Promised Land, and in preparation for his own death, Lehi gave counsel and blessings to each one of his children. His sons Laman and Lemuel had experienced considerable difficulty keeping the commandments, which left them vulnerable to the full measure of God’s justice. Lehi feared for their eternal welfare, so accordingly he exhorted them to repent using bold commands and figurative language.

“O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.” (2 Nephi 1:13)

For Lehi, it appeared that his sons had already fallen asleep spiritually and needed a good rousing. Lehi expressed “all the feeling of a tender parent” who desired that his children “would hearken to his words, that perhaps the Lord would be merciful to them, and not cast them off” (1 Nephi 8:37) because death was an approaching reality for him. Lehi understood the final totality of death “from whence no traveler can return” (2 Nephi 1:14) and knew that spiritual death was just as binding. So he continued to exhort them saying:

“Awake! and arise from the dust and hear the words of a trembling parent...arise from the dust...that ye may not come down into captivity... Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust.” (2 Nephi 1:14, 21, 23).

In essence, Lehi commanded his sons to spiritually resurrect. He made his message doubly clear by repeating themes of life such as “awake” and “arise” juxtaposed to themes of death such as “deep sleep” and “dust.” There is great power in Lehi’s approach. This pattern of speaking and awakening occurs in ancient literature such as the creation accounts where God speaks and creation responds. ((See Genesis 1; John 1:1-5; Moses 2-3; Abraham 4-5 (notice in Moses 3:21 & Abraham 5:14 that Adam was in a “deep sleep” before Eve was presented unto him). The theme of a god speaking and creation responding is also seen in Ancient Egyptian literature. The Memphite creation account records that all things were brought into being by the word of the god Ptah. *The Ancient Near East Volume 1: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Edited by James B. Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press; 1958. Pages 1-2.))

Years later this theme was picked up by Jacob and developed further, most likely based on his father’s teachings. Referring to the wickedness of the people of his own day, Jacob cried:

“O my brethren, hearken unto my words; arouse the faculties of your souls; shake yourselves that ye may awake from the slumber of death; and loose yourselves from the pains of hell that ye may not become angels to the devil, to be cast into that lake of fire

and brimstone which is the second death.” (Jacob 3:11)

Clearly Jacob and Lehi understood that “deep sleep” was the sleep of death and that one must always be spiritually watchful and vigilant (1 Thess. 5:6) so as not to succumb to the enticings and flatteries of the devil. To do so would bring about the “pains of hell.” That Nephi understood this principle of spiritual resurrection as well is evident through his own writings, which record his desire to not fall into spiritual sleep, “Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin” (2 Nephi 4:28).

It is significant that the Book of Mormon use of “deep sleep” may derive from the Hebrew word *tardemah*. ((*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc; 1996. Page 922.)) *Tardemah* is employed in a variety of ways throughout the Old Testament. For example, Proverbs 19:15 expresses *tardemah* as a consequence of spiritual slothfulness. The master poet Isaiah uses *tardemah* figuratively in Isaiah 29:10 to identify those who are insensible to the Spirit or past feeling. The Hebrew root word for *tardemah* is *radam* which Psalm 76:6 expresses as that sleep called death. ((*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 922.)) The polar opposite of “deep sleep” is to be “awake.” In their exhortations to the spiritually sleepy, Lehi and Jacob may have used the Hebrew root word *ur* which means to “rouse oneself to activity.” ((*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 734-735. It must be recognized that this is a different Hebrew root word for light *ur* which is found in the phrase *urim and thummim* (which means something like, “light and truth”).))

Yet, how is it that those with a full understanding of the gospel plan could fall into spiritual comatose? The nuances of the words *tardemah* and *radam* may suggest an answer. Those who have fallen into a deep spiritual sleep do so because they were insensible and past feeling to the Spirit of God. This state is a result of slothfulness, having their ears closed to the things of God which prevented them from putting on the armor of righteousness and shaking off the chains with which they were bound. ((*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 922. Arabic, the sister language to Hebrew, also has a word like unto *radam* which is pronounced *radama* and it means “to stop up (door, gap, etc.) whence perhaps *be deaf* (stopped up to sounds, etc.).”))

There is only one way to arouse those who sleep in spiritual death. Do as Lehi did and call the sleepers in a loud voice of admonition and warning to “awake.” Ultimately the responsibility lies with the deep sleeper to be the agent who actively responds to the call of spiritual resurrection. This is powerfully exemplified in the conversion story of Alma the Younger who was stopped in his destructive path by the voice of God’s angel (Mosiah 27). Perhaps it was God himself, since God is sometimes equated in the Old Testament with the phrase “the angel of the Lord.” Alma fell and became as if he were dead; and truly he spiritually was. During those two days his soul died and then resurrected as he responded to God’s call to “awake.” In a later account, Alma tells us that he experienced the “pains of hell” until he remembered what his father had taught concerning Jesus Christ who would come “to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17). Alma records:

“Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more...and oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold.” (Alma 36:18-20)

Alma had learned for himself through his own experience that spiritual death was real; but so was spiritual resurrection. He learned, as we must, that “now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for

now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:11-12).