

Chapter 5

OFF TO “THE OHIO”

The mind can do strange things. It can be difficult knowing whether dreams or feelings are simply the product of the moment and anxieties of the mind, or if they're some type of visceral warning system against the unknown. In a dream I had while moving to Kirtland, Jeff seemed to be in charge of the group of people we had just met. At the time, I was not aware that those who studied with him in Kirtland were a “group” in the conventional sense. But in my dream, they were organized and quite militant; like nomads with no fixed residence. They seemed to be in an active state of combat with authorities in some small town. Guns were being fired from the sides of buildings and it was as though I was, and yet was not, a part of it. Though nothing in the dream seemed to display it, I felt as though the women might be prostitutes.

I don't claim to know why dreams like that happen, but upon waking that winter morning in a motel somewhere between our past home and our home-to-be, I dismissed it as anxiety or perhaps even an evil influence trying to discourage our trip. While I forgot the dream almost instantly, the memory of it would come back years later in the Lake County Jail. The dilemma we face is whether, in failing to listen to a warning like that, one loses the opportunity to prepare, or by investigating every passing thought and dream, one ends up losing his mind in the resulting chaos.

In September, an event occurred that would have far-reaching effects. Jeff's approach to his unorthodox teachings had so incensed the church officials that they promptly revoked his ministerial credentials. Angered, Jeff retaliated by withdrawing his membership. Of course, he could no longer live in the church housing, so he had to start looking for a new residence. We stopped in Kirtland and saw Jeff, who was, at that time, on his way to his new residence, a large farmhouse on acreage at the outskirts of town. He asked if we needed anything and wished us the best at finding a place to live.

We needed a map so we might more easily find our way around the new surroundings. In any experience with relocating, I'd found that real estate agencies usually had the best maps; most gasoline stops don't give that kind of service anymore. As we drove back through Kirtland, Susie noticed a real estate office. Ron, the agent, was a very friendly, helpful individual. He wanted to know why I was seeking a map and where I worked. I'd seen the East Lake power plant exhaust stacks in the distance and knowing what they were, told him I hoped to find work over there. I told him I had no job and that we needed a map in order to help us find our way around as well as a place to

stay. I'd left a good job and a nice home near family to relocate to an area of strangers; no job and no place for my family to live. Yet even in such a time as this, God was merciful to us. He began taking notes of my naval and power plant experience.

I had no idea why he was so interested in my credentials, but we were quite literally living on faith, and I sensed that a door of opportunity was opening, though I had no idea how. After leaving the office for a moment and going to his car, he came back with an application for employment for CEI (Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company). As it turned out, he was a supervisor at one of the CEI plants and he worked real estate part time. I was to fill out the application and he would see what he could do for me. Ron went on to say how lucky we had been to run into him that night, because it was his night for going to an evening class, but he'd stayed behind to meet a client who never showed. Coincidences such as this began to validate that we, along with the others, were now exactly where God wanted us to be.

Receiving a blessing is not always a reward for the path we have taken. With so much instability in our lives at the time, we interpreted anything good to mean we were doing God's will and that He therefore blessed and watched over us. I'm getting ahead of my story now, but within four months I was working for CEI at the very plant that I had pointed to on Day one. Was God meeting the desire of my heart? Whether He actually was didn't matter, because we believed that He was.

But that first day we still had to find a place to live so the hunt began. Our first night was spent in a vacant rental apartment Ron had arranged for us, saving the cost of a motel room. After that, Greg offered to let us stay with him for several weeks. On my way to a job interview one day, I noticed a school bus unload in front of an apartment complex. Even though both our children were still very small (ages 2 and 5) we wanted, but couldn't afford, a three-bedroom home. When I saw all the children getting off that bus that day, I thought that perhaps these apartments might not be so restrictive about children, so I pulled in. The application was full of background questions about employment, income and local references but I never had to fill it out. I had the amount needed for the deposit, almost to the penny, and we made plans to move in as soon as our apartment was ready.

We were excited as things seemed to open up for us. We shared our good fortune with Jeff and Alice, who confidently responded in a way that said, "See what happens when you move out in faith?" Their assurance seemed to crystallize the conviction within us that we were where God wanted us to be and that He was watching over us.

Once the apartment was available we moved in, quite excited to again be in a place of our own. Within only a day or two of moving, I found a job in the want ads for an evening supervisor at a petroleum testing laboratory. I had very brief experience with that type of work while in the Navy and felt vastly under-qualified for the position they were seeking to fill. Nevertheless, the job was offered to me and I took it. I enjoyed the work there and it gave me an

opportunity to learn a number of test procedures and to place them into written job descriptions so that novices such as myself could be more easily trained. I worked the night shift at the laboratory for approximately four months, during which time CEI contacted me regarding a position at the power plant.

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WE HADN'T MOVED TO OHIO because of any particularly strong desire to be there, geographically speaking, and it certainly didn't place us nearer our family. We moved to Ohio to assist in the building of Zion. We had already given away a great many pleasures and securities. Being the newcomers placed us in the position of needing to catch up on lessons the others in the group had been taught. It soon became common practice to go to Jeff's home and talk with him individually about the pattern and how to apply it, along with what had been learned already. Greg had extensive notes from previous classes that Jeff had taught, so I reviewed those as well. But the real learning came during one-on-one study times with Jeff. Others in the group had day jobs, so while they were at work, I could get more individual attention, which once again seemed to be the blessing and opportunity to get caught up.

As Jeff, his family, and the single people in the group settled into their new home at the farm, the energy of a common goal became visible. Everything was organized and everyone had a function. Coming from six years in the Navy, orderliness and structure was not new to me. And in reality, there was a sense of security in its rigidity. The view of the group as a “family” with much structure came slowly. In fact, not until I began work at CEI, which required a change in my working hours, did I begin to see how tightly knit this group really was.

I recall being impressed by Danny Kraft one Saturday while we worked together in the barn. With all still fairly new to me I saw the people in the group as individuals rather than as the collective subjects of Jeff they had become. Danny showed me a book containing sketches of the human brain and an area called the optic chiasma. I was intrigued to find that our own vision is produced, or relayed, by a process of mirror imagery. Evidence supporting chiasmus seemed to be an integral part of all nature. There seemed to be this essential truth, and process to the perception of it, resident throughout all nature. As I later expressed to Jeff how impressed I was with what Danny had shown me, Jeff supported the inference to chiasmus as a key element of nature, while at the same time downplaying the ability of Danny to adequately see it or convey its existence. Slowly, surely, and subtly, Jeff became the sole source of all our information gathering. Anything worth knowing came either by way of or directly from him.

I soon arrived to study with Jeff in the mornings before I went to work, my hours at the farm increasing as the weeks and months went by. Jeff took Susie and I through previous class topics, partly for receiving information, but

primarily to see that we embraced the pattern. It was essential to Jeff that we have complete and unwavering confidence in the pattern as the language of God and the manner by which we cannot err. Later he would openly state that if we did not accept the pattern as the only way to communicate with God, then God could not communicate with us. It was essential to Jeff during these early days of exposure to his teachings that I not only see the pattern, but that I be able to use it with proficiency and without hint of disagreement. Jeff was very efficient; anything he taught would be of use to him down the line. I wouldn't find out exactly how extensively he'd planned his agenda until after I left the group, which, by then was far, far too late.

He brought us to the point where he allowed no other way to see words on paper but by the chiasmic process. During this time my parents came to spend Christmas with us. In just the few short months we'd been gone, they noticed changes in our religious principles and became decidedly opposed to them. They could not accept Jeff's teachings on prayer, previously explained, and this created a great deal of friction. As a result of the tension that arose, they cut short their visit and returned home earlier than planned. They had no idea what was happening to effect such a change in us—but for us it meant that we had to study all the harder so that this truth we had could more clearly be imparted to our loved ones and the rest of the world. It also meant, as Jeff suggested, that we would need to reduce or completely sever any communication with outsiders. He explained how difficult he'd found it to stop writing or phoning his family in Independence, and how they, too, could not let go of their traditions and embrace the truth he had found.

It's good to question tradition, but what we find by our questioning does not necessarily guarantee truth. However, this is not about the reason behind tradition—rather it's about the loss of reason altogether, thereby creating a new means of rationalization which is quite irrational. What Jeff taught about prayer seemed to be logical and have a great deal of scriptural support as well. But that didn't make it true. While truth may seem elusive, relative to individual perspective, it is immutably consistent. It is our *perception* of truth that is forever changing, and it is in the existence of that changing perception of truth that makes us vulnerable to deceptive interpretations.

A college sociology textbook I once read defined *authority* as “the legitimate use of physical force.” In other words, within the accepted guidelines of a given society, those in authority have the right to use physical force. War is perhaps the ultimate example of authority as an action within the heart and soul of a government's people. The authority of a nation both identifies the enemy and legitimizes that death.

Sometimes negative examples are necessary in order to convey a point to be made. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the close of World War II was accepted, legally and morally, due to the authority that dictated it. During the Gulf War, friendly fire destroyed two U.S. tanks. When the missiles were fired which destroyed those tanks, a serviceman shouted a sendoff salutation, “This Bud's for you!” But the expression used when the target was the

destruction of the enemy was far different from the one exhibited when it became evident that this target was not the enemy after all. A shocked voice was heard saying, “Oh my God!” What occurred in that brief span of time was that a target identified as the enemy, later turned out not to be the enemy. The ramifications of that changing identity involved issues of moral trauma and legality.

This is the power of authority. The tanks contained human life, yet when appearing as the enemy, the impact was far less, morally and emotionally, than once that identity changed. Whatever becomes the authority in our life will dominate our moral perspective of the world around us. Society cannot exist without authority, because without it we have no order, only anarchy. The cult leader, as the spokesman for God and revelator of His will, is the complete authority in the most totalistic and encapsulating way. The shifting, or transfer, of the working authority in one’s life is what cult mind control is all about. I’ve seen its results. It’s very powerful, very dangerous and very, very real.

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MY BROTHER RICK also came to visit. Employed by General Electric as a technical representative, he traveled a great deal of the time. After attending a training seminar in the state, he drove to stay with us for a couple of days. Concerned after talking with mom and dad, he hoped to understand some of the discord that our move to Ohio seemed to be causing within the family. In fact, so assured must we have appeared that he considered the possibility of moving to Ohio himself. The interest he displayed instilled passionate hope within Susie and me that one day we would be able to share this truth in full with our family members. Once he arrived back home, the influence of our convictions seemed to dissolve. Only recently, I learned that Susie expressed a desire to him to move back to Missouri on that trip. Whatever she said to him during that visit, I am certain that a schism had already developed between Susie and me. Completely overwhelmed now by the memory of her unwavering dedication, despite the numerous hardships and frustration we endured together, I am equally convinced that her convictions were as sincere as my own.

One night during that first four months we lived in Ohio, Susie and I lay down to sleep, and like two spoons in a drawer we were cuddled together. The cold winter wind was really active outside the window that night, and yet there we were, safe and warm. “God has truly provided,” was my thought that night. We had moved out in faith with no place to live and no employment to support a family. We left behind loved ones who had supported us when we needed help. Just like so many others we had read about in the scriptures or in church history, we had done it!

As Susie and I lay there that night feeling safe and secure, we had no comprehension of the agenda that was hard at work isolating our thinking and

destroying our happiness. We had no comprehension of how isolated our thinking had quickly become, and even less understanding of how limited it would yet become. In our minds, we had been blessed. We had become so entirely focused on preparing to come into the presence of Christ that any chronological importance regarding our activities seemed to blur into insignificance.

By the doctrines I believed, there was no reason for such good fortune not to be present with everyone. Anyone who's never known zealous involvement would find it difficult to understand such addiction. Our scriptures were everything to us—our link to God. We had experienced tremendous turmoil in our lives from new doctrines presented at the church World Conference in 1984. That conference had an impact on the lives of many people, and differing opinions split congregations, severed friendships, and ruined families. It was a very traumatic juncture in RLDS church history. As I look back now, I see where I not only made stands on issues that were not worth it, but were also very contrary to how I presently perceive them. It's shameful because of the tragedy that came from it and sad because of the distortion it created of some otherwise beautiful dreams, altruistic passions, and strong hope for the future. Unless such passions have been experienced, there's little hope of understanding the impact of their influence in the lives of those who function by them, in the belief that their hopes of ultimate truth are valid.

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IN MARCH OF 1988, I began work at CEI, the East Lake Power Plant. It meant more money and daytime hours, and Jeff had plans for both. The change in hours left my evenings free, so we were able to begin attending the regular classes that Jeff had all along been teaching the others. The “raising of the mountain” was a continually evolving plan. Prior to our move, Jeff taught that the mountain concept would be performed by a supernatural occurrence of an appointed man entering the temple and communing with God in quite a literal way after which we would simply go into the Temple at night and the great revelation would occur at dawn. Shortly after our arrival it began to take a different turn, Jeff teaching that we would be required to go in with this man at night and overthrow the Temple. Christ would then return with the coming of the dawn. That scenario quickly evolved to one of it becoming an issue of sneaking into the Temple and having to hold it by force from authorities as they discovered our presence and would order us to leave. The reason for this change, and the multitude of other changes to follow—was our sin. As Jeff gained control (which we gave him relative to our conviction that he was the seer spoken of in the *Book of Mormon*), his ability to define sin was as effective as any of his other forms of interpretation.

It's important to understand the passions of a large number of church members. The longed-for “choice seer” (also called “one like unto Moses”

and “Prophet Number Seven”⁵), is a key figure within the doctrine, history, and general literature of the church. The times in which we live have sent a number of people in search of this person who was to build Zion and prepare the world for Christ’s return. My present reality may be the future hindsight of a number of other people who, like myself, simply had a passion to serve God and became extremely misguided. There’s no way I could then have comprehended my present circumstances or believed that this is what my future would be.

A few days prior to my new employment at the power plant, Jeff did a division for me at a morning class. In the *Doctrine and Covenants* Sec. 98, there is a parable about a vineyard, some servants, and the failure to build a wall with a tower for defending the vineyard. This resulted in the vineyard being overrun by the enemy. Through chiasmus, Jeff identified the vineyard as being the Kirtland Temple and the surrounding garden area upon which it sits. The servants who were scattered he identified as the church member’s failure, at the time of the construction of the Temple, to build Zion then. He proceeded to further interpret our day and our mission regarding the retrieval of the Temple for God’s Holy purpose. Applied liberally was Jeff’s implication that we, in our day, had also failed to answer the call, or erred in our response to it. This meant that more sacrifice would be required. Within these scenarios, we all began to believe the assumption that the authorities would attempt to force us out of the Temple and we would have to withstand them.

With the beliefs and applications of Mormon doctrines blended into the existing text of the Bible, basic concepts became weakly interpreted. The precepts of grace and the full impact of the blood of Jesus’ cleansing power became more opaque as interpretations of works, and our necessity to accomplish them became paramount; we would not be able to simply sneak into the Temple, we would have to hold it from authorities who would try to force us out. This wasn’t in order to punish us. It was more closely related to a test or trial for purging any final dross before coming into the presence of Almighty God. After all, no one would want to enter the presence of God unworthy.

Such a stand against the world would provide the final preparation necessary for such an event. Jeff became more and more an accuser—keeping us reeling from one blow of guilt to another. Each time something detained us from our mission, more would be required. During that time, the concept of taking over the Temple evolved to the point of murder. Jeff defined murder as “to make war.” He began to reveal how we would need to cleanse the vineyard, (killing the enemy that had taken it over). This meant killing people living within the immediate vicinity of the Temple, specifically members of the church—it would be a Holy War. Verses like Ezekiel 9:4–6 became much

⁵ At the time this was written, there had been six RLDS prophets (Joseph Smith, Jr.; son Joseph III; three grandsons: Fred M., Israel A., and W. Wallace; and great-grandson Wallace B. Smith). Many RLDS fundamentalists believed that a seventh prophet would appear, greater than all the others. —*Editor*

more a part of our view of God and His purpose for us than any New Testament passages.

“And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.” (Ezekiel 9:4–6)

One thing that seems to be common in religious militant activity is the amplification of Old Testament law and rage, along with a misplaced value as to what the New Testament refers to as the fulfillment of these things through Christ. In other words, leaders like Jeff lead people backward from the “new” into the “old.”

It’s obvious I had no concept of grace. I now see precepts in the Bible differently. Inadequate interpretations to traditional passages fail to defend us from more subtle false precepts. Because of this, there are many passages that can be used to convince us of the need for works within our beliefs, even instilling guilt for things that have nothing to do with sin. Perhaps what I’ve come to appreciate least about the *Book of Mormon* is the way it merges Old Testament practice and ritual with New Covenant grace.

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BEFORE MOVING TO KIRKLAND, I prayed almost constantly throughout the day. With the passing of time and Jeff’s teachings, my prayer soon became limited to simply a phrase to God occasionally, without the method and constancy I had formerly practiced. Finally, I came to the point where I knelt and said one last prayer to the Lord, expressing that I was placing my life in His hands and trusted Him to protect my family and myself. I then ceased to pray in the traditional fashion, and I asked forgiveness if what I was doing was wrong, and for protection for us. For the first time since moving, I was apprehensive. There was so much evidence to support what Jeff was teaching and the pattern itself seemed to be validated by so many passages. Yet it was still very threatening to let go of my view of God and how I might best serve Him. While Jeff’s new method of teaching held the church as a whole responsible for the failure, ultimately, it held me individually responsible for not having achieved the goal. I would have to answer to God for my life. And I believed that I would come up lacking.

This more radical plan to cleanse the vineyard was cancelled in early April, soon after I became aware of it. While the takeover plan was one that both frightened and sickened me, I had come to believe that any form of postponement of God’s command would result in even more death and affliction

of every kind. I had moved to Ohio to prepare people for the return of Jesus Christ and to help build Zion—not to go to war, not to kill people. With no intention of disrespect to the Avery family, or lack of sympathy toward them, one might note that they were also participants in these classes. Though in time Jeff would mark them as the enemy, as far as I knew, there was never a time that they planned or even attempted to leave the group. On the last day of their lives, they enthusiastically spoke of the wilderness experience that we had all prepared for. They were a very gentle family who were, unfortunately, assigned a different role in Jeff’s game of madness.

The postponement of our mission to raise the mountain, along with the increase in my salary at CEI, created the need for new goals on which to focus our energies and money. Yet, our failures seemed to heap upon us even more condemnation. Not only upon us, but also upon all of mankind. I feared what would next become expected of us.

My free time was spent at the farm with either chores or workouts. Weight training was something I had done off and on most of my life, so Jeff developed workout schedules for the two of us that were different from the schedules of the others. I see it now as more of a ploy to create an illusion of secrecy, intimidating the other men in the group, thereby separating me from them.

At a workout one day, I asked about the “spokesman” Jeff mentioned in class the previous night. He then informed me what my position would be within the group: I was to be his spokesman, his “Aaron.” He was to be like Moses and I was like Aaron. He expressed that he had been waiting a very long time for me to finally start seeking the truth and therefore work with him, in our predestined positions of service. Each person in the group had an image created for them by Jeff for his own purpose. In this respect, he was definitely a creator. This allowed him complete control in our relationships with each other and within our families, eventually interpreting even our individual spiritual servitude to God. This control formed barriers around and through us that would eventually extend to a spouse’s necessity to keep secrets from the other.

Within a couple of days, he introduced the idea that he wanted his following to become a self-supporting community at the farm. He told me he had previously raised rabbits and that a living could be made with them. If I would be willing to give him \$350 per month, within a year I could have a good business. His position as seer was well established within our thinking by this time and to refuse such a proposal would have meant a denial that he was the great infallible seer that had been prophesied about. There was really no decision to be made about it, so from that point on I gave Jeff the amount he specified each month. Eventually all other monies (income tax refunds, overtime pay, even some gold and silver we had purchased years before) beyond the allowance he defined for us, went to him. The difference in gifts that his children received, compared to those received by other children, should have told the story, but perhaps I was too deluded to see it—or accept it. The

amount of rage that the public has expressed toward me in the outcome of all this is no greater than the self-hatred for what I have deprived my own family of, not to mention the impact on others.

The rabbit business never amounted to anything; however, it was quite useful to Jeff. Its continual failure was another of the affects attributed to our sin. We never had more than eight to ten adult rabbits at any one time because they were repetitively dying, we believed, due to our sin. Dennis Patrick had worked with Jeff at a boy's farm in Missouri several years before and he spoke of how successful Jeff had been at raising rabbits. I have to wonder now if Jeff wasn't killing them himself. Death didn't stop with rabbits. A puppy unfortunately hung itself in its leash looped over a fence rail, some kittens died, and even a deer landed in the front lawn after trying to cross the road. Looking back, I believe Jeff used these deaths to instill a deeper sense of guilt in us. He used the opportunities provided by these and many other events to make us feel responsibility toward the result of our sin. Time and energy continued to be more and more dominated by Jeff's agenda.