

HIDDEN TREASURES IN THE WORD OF WISDOM

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Mention the Word of Wisdom and most people think immediately of its prohibitions against wine and strong drink, its warnings that "tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly." Some members of the church have emphasized various aspects of the positive injunctions about the use of fruits, grains and the flesh of animals and birds. Yet, beyond these more obvious messages are spiritual treasures hidden like nuggets of gold in the revelation.

The revelation came at an important time in the early development of the church. The "Olive Leaf," Section 88, with its beautiful doctrine and great promises, had been given just two months previously. The Saints had been instructed to build the Kirtland temple (88:119-120), and the leaders had participated in the ordinance of washing of feet. It was a time of preparation for, and eager anticipation of, the great blessings and ordinances of the temple. Then as now, understanding the teachings of the Word of Wisdom played a significant part in preparation for the temple.

It does so for us today, as well. It behooves each of us to fully understand the teachings in the Word of Wisdom and the significance of this revelation to our own salvation.

Although the revelation may be read and fully understood in the customary printed format, rearranging the words on the page to reveal the thought patterns provides a vehicle for discovering some of the deeper meanings imbedded within the words. The text, reformatted to show the patterns of thought, is given in the Appendix. It is seen to possess an inverse parallel structure, characteristic of what is known as "chiasmus", with the concepts symmetrically placed about the statement, "All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life", located at the traditional point of emphasis of the chiasm.

The newcomer to chiasmus will note labeling of related elements of the structure with capital letters to guide the eye, with subscripts to show direct parallel relationships within matched major elements. A label is placed at the beginning of the element, and the element extends to just before the next label. Thus, the first **B₂** begins with "Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord..." and ends with "...hot drinks are not for the body or belly." Similar levels of indenting also are used to show parallelism.

The major elements of parallelism, as summarized in the table, are as follows. The first **A₁** mentions "the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days", while the second lists three pairs of blessings of that temporal salvation. The parallelism within the latter element is shown by equal levels of indentation of related phrases. Similarly, the Lord alludes to a promise in the first **A₂** which is specified in the second. The **B₁s** taken together identify the saints as those who remember "to keep and do these sayings". The commandments spoken of in the second **B₂** include the prohibitions in the first but, of course, extend much broader. Both **Cs** have to do with fruits, vegetables and grains, while the **Ds**, with their three parallel parts each, are concerned with the use of the flesh of domestic and wild animals and birds.

It is well recognized that the Word of Wisdom provides wise counsel for healthy eating and drinking. Modern medical science has corroborated all health aspects of the revelation pertaining to the consumption of grains, fruits, and vegetables, and the wisdom of restricted consumption of animal flesh and its associated fat and cholesterol. Indeed, the food pyramid issued recently by the US government could have been based upon the Word of Wisdom. Moreover, the world has come to realize the harmful effects of alcohol and tobacco, and is beginning to notice the harmful effects of caffeine, as well. But the Word of Wisdom goes far beyond the effects of what we eat and drink on our physical health. Interesting insights in this regard can be gained through consideration of the structure.

It is intriguing to find the use of grain as the staff of life at the turning point, the traditional point of emphasis of a chiasm. In contrast, how often our meals more typically are centered on some type of meat. What is the significance of this emphasis on grain? Is it solely for health reasons, or are there deeper symbolic meanings? We recall the statement in Doctrine and Covenants 29:34: "Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal...". Taking this as a clue, we ask, What are the spiritual implications of grain for the use of man?. Does grain signify the things of the spirit and meat the things of the flesh?

Grain, and bread made therefrom, appear prominently in both the New and Old Testaments. Christ referred to both grain and bread in his parables. Bread was central to the miracles of feeding the multitudes (Matt. 14:16-21, 15:32-38). Grain figured in his teachings about the Sabbath day (Matt. 12:1-8), and he taught us to pray for our daily bread (Matt. 6:11). Most of these, and perhaps all of them, point to Christ as the bread of life. Christ so identified himself (John 6:35), and carried this to the ultimate conclusion when he instituted bread as the symbol of his body at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26). Thus a well-known symbol of Christ appears at the point of emphasis of the Word of Wisdom, confirming our knowledge of him as the key to our temporal, as well as eternal, salvation. The Word of Wisdom is not only a word for physical health, but for spiritual health as well.

Subtle but significant differences between the first and second **D**s are apparent. The first seems to have to do with domestic animals and birds, whose flesh is to be used sparingly, and preferably only in times of winter, cold or famine, while the second says God made wild animals for the use of man only in times of famine and excess of hunger. We recall the Lord's injunction in D&C 49:21 about wasting flesh when we have no need. Times of winter or cold would help minimize spoilage and waste of flesh; modern refrigeration probably removes this aspect of this restriction. The Lord's reverence for living creatures is manifested clearly in these verses. Hunting for sport appears to be contrary to the instructions given here, although he does permit consumption of meat from all sources (D&C 49:18-19, 59:16-20).

The reference to saints in the two **B**₁s almost provides a definition of the minimum requirements to be a saint: "adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of saints, who are or can be called saints." The statement in verse 2 about the revelation being given not by commandment or constraint, but showing forth the order and will of God, can be considered in this regard. We recall a similar statement in D&C 63:22: "As I said that I would make known my will unto you, behold I will make it known unto you, not by way of commandment, for there are many who observe not to keep my commandments." He gives related counsel in D&C 58:26-33 in saying "It is not meet that I should

command in all things." Thus, the saint is one who observes the will of the Lord, whether given by commandment or otherwise.

As noted above, the first **B**₂ contains the well-known prohibitions, while the second refers to walking in obedience to the commandments, which is, of course, much broader in scope. The substances named, as well as other commonly abused drugs, alter how the body feels, providing stimulation, or feelings of comfort and pleasure. Keeping the commandments stimulates the spirit and yields feelings of well being, confidence, and joy (see D&C 121:45-46). The drugs provide instant gratification of bodily demands, while sometimes the joys of keeping the commandments are deferred. The effects of the physical substances diminish in time, leaving the body depressed below normal levels and demanding to be picked up again, which leads to addiction. The joys of keeping the commandments are long-lasting and increase with time to the perfect day, which leads to devotion. Thus the chemical substances provide counterfeit feelings of well being while displacing the true joy of doing well.

The greatest blessings of the Word of Wisdom are presaged in the first **A**₁, temporal salvation, and **A**₂, a principle with promise, and elaborated upon in the second **A**₁ and **A**₂. It is instructive to examine the scriptural origins of the phrases in the promises in the second **A**₁. The phrase "health in the navel and marrow in the bones" is found in Proverbs 3:5-8, which possesses a form of parallelism in which the second set of phrases is related to the first set, but its elements are given in the same order, rather than in the reverse order of chiasmus.

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;

A and lean not unto thine own understanding.

B In all thy ways acknowledge him,

C and he shall direct thy paths.

A Be not wise in thine own eyes:

B fear the LORD,

C and depart from evil.

D It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Here each of the elements in the two **As**, **Bs** and **Cs** are clearly related, and the **D** is the point of emphasis to which they lead. The context indicates that the promise is spiritual in nature, and the aspects of physical health mentioned are symbolic of spiritual health. The symbolism of the navel is revealed in sacred places. Marrow is symbolic of one's life-force, or vitality.¹

Isaiah (40:28-31) uses the imagery of running and not being weary, walking and not fainting.

*Hast thou not known?
hast thou not heard,*

*A that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth,
fainteth not,*

B neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

C He giveth power to the faint;

D and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

E Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

E and the young men shall utterly fall:

D But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength;

C they shall mount up with wings as eagles;

B they shall run, and not be weary;

A and they shall walk, and not faint.

We see by examining the **A** and **B** elements of this chiasm that not being weary nor faint is a characteristic of the Lord, and is also of a spiritual nature. Thus, keeping the Word of Wisdom, along with the commandments, will tend to make people like the Lord, or godlike.

The images of running and walking are common in the scriptures in ways that pertain to our actions with respect to the gospel. Thus, Paul says "I therefore so run, not as uncertain; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air" (1 Cor. 9:26). He also uses the imagery of running with patience the race that is set before us, along with not being weary and faint, tying the latter to looking to Jesus (Heb. 12:1-3). Walking is used to represent our course of action in life in numerous places and contexts throughout the scriptures, including the present verse 18. Paul's statement "For we walk by faith, not by sight" can help us understand that walking and not fainting is indicative of, among other things, maintaining our faith. Without that faith, we are left to our physical selves, which, as Isaiah says, "shall faint and be weary...and utterly fail". The **Cs** have to do with power and wings, commensurate with D&C 77:4. Although our youthful strength is transitory, both old and young alike who "wait upon the Lord", "shall mount up with wings as eagles...", ie. have power and be godlike.

It probably is no accident that these two pairs of phrases bracket the promise of finding "wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures." One might at first think only of receiving

personal revelation, which is indeed to be expected. But in addition, we are told that things kept hid from before the foundation of the world are revealed in the temples, both ancient and modern (D&C 124:38-41). Those who have received their endowment will recognize the language of the second A_1 . Thus, all three pairs of promises have deep spiritual connotations, closely associated with the temple, and living the Word of Wisdom will lead to strength in these spiritual matters. We can understand clearly the importance of living the Word of Wisdom as a prerequisite for entering the temple.

The second A_2 gives a specific promise to those who keep and do these sayings. The wording of this promise ties it directly to the Passover of the children of Israel in Egypt and, in a sense, the Word of Wisdom is a modern Passover for the children of Israel in these days. This has reference not only to the well documented health benefits of the principles taught in the Word of Wisdom but, perhaps more significantly, it also refers to the spiritual destruction that is avoided by keeping oneself open to reception of wisdom and hidden treasures of knowledge.

Thus, the Word of Wisdom may be understood on two levels. On the physical plane, it outlines what has turned out to be the optimal food and drink regimen for human beings, both in the things against which it warns explicitly and implicitly, and in the indicated balance of food obtained from grains, vegetables, fruits, and animal flesh. On the spiritual plane, it teaches us about the central place of the Savior, the bread of life, in our lives, and about both temporal and spiritual salvation, including the hidden treasures of knowledge obtainable only in the temple and by personal revelation.

6 October 1989; revised March 1994

Notes

1. E.C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, Thames and Hudson, Ltd., London, 1978, p. 104.

APPENDIX

The Word of Wisdom
Doctrine and Covenants Section 89

A Word of Wisdom, for the benefit of the council of high priests, assembled in Kirtland, and the church, and also the saints in Zion-- to be sent greeting; not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom,

A₁ showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days--

A₂ Given for a principle with promise,

B₁ adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints.

B₂ Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation--

That inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father,
only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him.

And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.

And, again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies.

And again, tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill.

And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly.

C And again, verily I say unto you, all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man--

Every herb in the season thereof, and every fruit in the season thereof;
all these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving.

D₁ Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly; and it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used,

D₂ only in times of

D₃ winter, or of cold, or famine.

E All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life,

D₁ not only for man but for the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and all wild animals that run or creep on the earth; and these hath God made for the use of man

D₂ only in times of

D₃ famine and excess of hunger.

C All grain is good for the food of man; as also the fruit of the vine; that which yieldeth fruit, whether in the ground or above the ground-- nevertheless,
wheat for man, and
corn for the ox, and
oats for the horse, and
rye for the fowls and for swine, and for all beasts of the field, and
barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks, as also other grain.

B₁ And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings,

B₂ walking in obedience to the commandments,

A₁ shall receive health in their navel
and marrow to their bones; and
shall find wisdom
and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures; and
shall run and not be weary,
and shall walk and not faint.

A₂ And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen.