

Early Magic Practices

(February 20, 2007)

So we continue with an examination of LDS Church history.

We left off with a summary of Joseph Smith Juniors early life.

I have to admit, I have been a little troubled as I was preparing this show over the last week.

Part of it is due to the fact that it is tough to address this topic fairly and in the context of early 19th century rural America **and** partly because I'm not certain that what I will report will be taken in the way that it should.

Let me explain.

You're all aware that we offer a meeting called "Heart in the Home" or "Heart in the Church" where we come out and talk about our ministry as it relates to Mormonism.

I have noticed that as we've done more and more of these meetings that there is a growing desire on the part of many people to hear nothing but the salacious stories and events about Mormonism and NOT the things that might, in the long run, help bring Mormonism to a regenerative relationship with the Lord.

I suppose it can be far more entertaining or exciting for people to hear about temple secrets or mystical black magic practices of Joseph than about how to reach present-day members with messages of the Lord.

I understand why this is so. We are humans all. Flesh and blood.

As the author of the title of our show title once said, "We want dirty laundry."

The question we must constantly ask ourselves as we seek to reach our LDS friends and family with the Lord is "What will this information do to teach Jesus better to the LDS?"

"Does this information help me understand Mormonism and its members better or does it make things worse?"

"Will this piece of information be used improperly, and then reused in order to win an argument rather than offer Him as the true replacement to a faulty theology.

Sometimes it seems like there are people out there who, because they can't feel enough joy in their own relationship with the Lord, spend all their time relishing in the dirty details of other aberrant faiths.

I am constantly accused of this very thing.

But my motives are to paint a correct picture so the Church and its doctrines can be understood as they stand next to Biblical Christianity.

I am not providing factoids like munitions.

I am providing shades of light and dark to bring forth dimension.

As Christians, we cannot be like the empty housewife who focuses on micromanaging her daughter's marriage because hers is so abysmal and she's got nothing better to do.

We examine Mormonism because we want

Our topic tonight is about the magic practices of the Smith family prior to and around the time of Joseph receiving what the LDS call “the first vision.”

In the context of rural 19th century early America – like in and around the Palmyra, New York area – folk magic practices were common.

to understand Mormons NOT because we want to feel better about our own walk, but because we want to share what we have with the LDS who are in lack!

The evidence and information on the Smith families involvement in folk magic is substantial.

If you take the time and read a book like early Mormonism and the Magic World View by D. Michael Quinn, you will be blown away.

But in my opinion, it must be taken in and digested properly if it is going to be of any use to your understanding the religion to which you belong or in your efforts to bringing Latter-day Saints to the Lord.

Listen,

I do not think that the magic practices of the Smith’s condemn them as people nor prove Mormonism false.

There are far more important and substantive things that do this.

In fact, to focus on the magic is to reduce the impact the other more significant themes have on the counterfeit gospel.

Why do I say this? Isn’t the fact that the Smith’s were involved in magic prove they were charlatans from the get go?

Not completely.

As mentioned, D. Michael Quinn, who wrote *“Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* said:

“A very important factor in Palmyra’s treasure-digging of the 1820’s is that the local newspaper endorsed it.”

What did the local, and even the national newspapers, say about such practices?

The same paper reported that another Vermonter dug up treasure in the “sum of fifty-thousand dollars.”

Even a national science journal in 1826 reported on folk magic activities as though they

In an 1822 column titled, “Money Diggers,” the local newspaper in Palmyra, speaking of money-digging, reported:

“Much, however, depends on the skillful use of the genuine mineral rod.” The paper then told of a man in Vermont who, *“after digging with unyielding confidence and unabating diligence for ten or twelve years, found a sufficient quantity of money to build him a commodious home for his own convenience, and to fill it with comforts for weary travelers.”*

A Massachusetts magazine, published an article on folk magic in 1833 which read:

“Men of reputation and character, whose intelligence would prevent a deception upon their own minds, and whose known honesty forbids the suspicion of any attempt to lead others into error, have used the . . . art of discovering streams of water

were an accepted ubiquitous practice.

“From north to south, from east to west, the divining rod has its advocates. Men in various callings, men above the reach of mean arts, men of the soundest judgment, of large information, and of the most exemplary lives, do not disown the art, and when a friend demands their aid, rarely if ever, is it made the means of extortion.”

Quinn quotes from the same article, which was reprinted in a Vermont newspaper:

“We could name, if we pleased, at least five hundred respectable men, who do, in the simplicity of their hearts, verily believe that immense treasures lie concealed upon our Green Mountains; many of whom have been for a number of years, most industriously and perseveringly engaged in digging it up. Some of them have succeeded beyond their most sanguine expectations.”

or veins of minerals beneath the surface of the earth by the mysterious properties of the hazel wand.”

Maybe if you examine your own life in this day and age, you will discover some connection to folk-lore beliefs and magical ideation.

Several years ago, my father and younger brother and I tried our hand at farming.

Our small piece of land was in Hemet, California and one of the first things we

wanted to do was drill for water.

My Dad found a guy who came highly recommended by the farmers in the area to locate the spots where we should drill.

You know how he did it?

He took a metal rod in the shape of a Y, held it upside down and walked around for about an hour. When the thing dipped, he said water was there.

I was incredulous and mocking.

But we dug where he said, and struck water.

And he was paid handsomely for what seemed to me to be a ridiculous feat.

I'm not sure things have changed all too much.

Ever spill salt on a table?

Ever step on a crack and think of your poor mothers back?

Ever walk under a ladder or think twice when a black cat walks across your path?

The first week of my mission in Harrisburg Pennsylvania, my companion and I knocked on a members door and she arrived all freaked out.

She said that that afternoon a bird and flown straight into her living room window and she feared the sun to rise.

"Why's that?" I asked.

"Don't you know that when a bird flies into a window of your home and dies someone

<p>Most people, if they have been around long enough, are exposed to some very unusual folklorish beliefs and susperstitions.</p> <p>In rural America, even some of the best of men and women were convinced of the more unusual practices.</p> <p>This did not make them evil or failing. It just showed that they were susceptible to the mystical beliefs of their day.</p>	<p>you love will die within three days?”</p> <p>My comp and I had a great laugh as we walked home talking about it.</p> <p>A week later, as I sat in our kitchen reading the scriptures, a bird flew straight into the window over the sink.</p> <p>I ran outside and there it lay, dead on the ground.</p> <p>I remembered what the lady had said and kind of smiled to myself.</p> <p>That night my mission president called to tell me my grandfather died that day.</p> <p>I am going to describe several of the documented practices and stories about the Smith's and their back-wooded beliefs in magic practices.</p> <p>But try not to take the sensational path when you hear this stuff by pointing fingers at the Smith's and screaming, "Warlock", but instead ask yourselves:</p> <p>How did these practices contribute to the start of Mormonism?</p>
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Soon after moving into the Township of Manchester in 1820, Joseph Smith Senior, Alvin, and Joseph Junior developed a preoccupation with treasure seeking.

The two Joseph Smith's claimed to have the ability to locate treasure by virtue of divination and clairvoyance.

Present-day Mormonism often portrays Joseph Junior as passively participating in some youthful treasure hunts as a teen.

This is not an accurate depiction.

With his father, the boy prophet was very involved in a number of different mystical / magical activities and actually became well known locally for his abilities.

In 1822 a man named Peter Ingersoll, whose land bordered on the north of the Smith's property, was asked by Joseph Smith Senior (the prophet's father) to follow him to find buried treasure.

Supposedly they walked toward the Smith cabin where Joseph Sr. thought treasure was buried.

Joseph Sr. took a pocket knife and cut a forked rod, which he placed in Ingersoll's hands and instructed him to say to the rod "work to the money, work to the money."

Apparently, Ingersoll did not have the gift and at length Senior Smith began throwing himself all around

Ask yourself if the magic practices and beliefs of the founding family would in any way shape the way Latter-day Saints discern truth?

and in to different shapes to “encourage the rod.”

These actions did not convince Ingersol of anything and he reportedly quit his search. This caused senior Smith to say he thought “he had seen the rod actually move in his hand.”

Moments later, when Ingersol picked up a stone to throw at some birds, Joseph Juniors father declared that the stone he had picked up was in fact a seer stone.

Said Smith, “If you only knew the value that there is at the back of my house” and then he suddenly pointed to an area and said:

“There! There is one chest of gold and another of silver!”

Ingersoll said the Joseph Sr. then took the stone from him and placed it in his hat before walking about bent over toward to earth sort of like a pigeon.

He then pulled his face out of the hat, and looking exhausted said in a faint voice,

“If you had seen what I had seen, you would believe.”

Believing in what other mystics claim to have seen is not only vital to treasure seeking, it was vital to the establishment of Mormonism, and it continues to be vital today to the authoritarian leadership of the present-day Church.

The Chase and Smith families would often search for buried or lost treasure together.

Joseph was intrigued with Sally Chase's seer stone, even asking her to find treasure for him.

Soon intrigue turned to imitation as Joseph picked up the trade.

One day, while visiting with Sally, Joseph, asked Sally if he could look into her stone.

She agreed. And Joseph did what he did best – he out conned the con because he said he saw another magical seer stone buried somewhere in Western New York near Lake Erie “under the roots of a tree or shrub as long as his arm!”

He said that the stone “became luminous, and dazzled his eyes, and after a short-time became as “intense as the noon-day sun.”

Those of you familiar with the Church will recognize that the idea of “stones becoming luminous” and bright is a theme also found in the Book of Mormon.

In 1822 the Smith's had another set of neighbors who were equally involved in money-digging.

They were names Chase. The Chase's had a daughter named Sally who had, prior to Joseph, made quite a name for herself in being able to locate lost items in the neighborhood.

Sometime in the fall of 1822, Joseph and Alvin were hired by Williard Chase, Sally's brother, to dig a well.

In the hole, Willard found a unique stone that was "shaped like a baby's shoe, was about the size of a hen's egg and was dark brown."

Willard recalled that as they examined it,

"Joseph put it into his hat, and then his face into the top of his hat." Chase did not report what Joseph said he saw but did report that Joseph asked him if he could have the stone the following day.

Chase declined to give it, but agreed to loan it to the would be prophet. Over the next two years, Joseph built a large reputation as a scryer using the rock.

Remember, and be very clear on this:

Joseph Smith did NOT translate the Book of Mormon by looking at the many pages on supposed gold plates but by

- 1) By Joseph Smith looking into his favorite "seer-stone."

Ether 6:2-3

"For it came to pass after the Lord had prepared the stones which the brother of Jared had carried up to the mount, the brother of Jared came down from the mount, and he did put forth the stones in the vessels which were prepared, one in each end thereof, and behold, they did give light unto the vessels, and thus the Lord caused stones to shine in darkness, to give light unto men, women, and children, that they might not cross the great waters in darkness."

<p>2) By Joseph Smith looking into a hat and dictating what he saw.</p> <p>3) By Joseph Smith receiving revelation directly from heaven and reciting it to a scribe.</p>	<p>There are a few things to consider as we describe what we know about the Smith activities in these mystical arts.</p> <p>First, what treasure were they seeking? Was it money buried by fleeing families in the revolutionary war or was it Indian artifacts and gold thought to be immersed in the hills around them?</p> <p>Lorenzo Saunder's reports that when a group of men lead by Joseph Junior was digging on the "northeast side of a hill" in search of a hidden cave that young Joe would say "he could see a man sitting in a gold chair" and that old Joe would add "That the man was an old king from a Native tribe who was shut up inside during one of their big battles."</p> <p>Again, does this sound familiar?</p> <p>Could such a belief that such treasure did in fact exist lend to the developing story line of a set of Golden plates buried beneath the earth with a written history engraved upon it?</p> <p>Was treasure seeking an activity that actually "prepared Joseph to become a prophet of God," as LDS Historian</p>
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In addition to scrying, primary

<p>historical documents have Joseph Junior involved in a number of other magic or mystical practices before, during, and after the first vision and the announcement of there being buried golden plates.</p> <p>These activities included:</p>	<p>Bushman asserts, or was it merely early training in the art of convincing, manipulating, and even deceiving others to believe his far-fetched stories?</p>
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