

## **FORWARD AND INTRODUCTORY ESSAY**

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This book is about how spiritual knowledge is like a fire on the horizon. A fire on the horizon is a tremendous challenge. The horizon defines the boundary – the scope of what is accessible to us. It defines the limitation of what can be within our immediate experience by sight. The horizon is the edge of the world. Yet a fire on the horizon is something more. A fire on the horizon may be a dangerous messenger that we must heed. The fire on the horizon illuminates not merely where the horizon is located, but also portends an immense power to which we must pay attention. If we fail to do so, we could get burned.

I was struck by the starkness of the horizon in the pictures beamed back from the moon by the Apollo astronauts. The horizon on the moon is much more distinct and stark than the horizon on earth it seems to me. The brilliant white-gray of the moon's crust contrasts with the dark punctuated by stars and the gorgeous blue and white earth just above the horizon. The moon's horizon reveals the curvature of the moon's sphere much more noticeably than the curvature of the earth is available to us from where we stand – from the perspective of one bound to the earth. Yet the curvature of the earth from the moon is as plain as gazing at a glass sphere.

The horizon is a matter of perspective from where one stands. It changes depending on one's movement. Yet there is always a horizon – a limit to our knowledge no matter where we stand. Even on the moon. It is simply that what is on the horizon and above the horizon changes according to where we stand. The place that we stand gives us access to what is not available from a different horizon. This simple fact must be heeded when we approach spiritual knowledge because our commitments both make visible to us what we cannot otherwise see and hide beyond the horizon what another perspective reveals.

This book is about the revolution in the perspective on human knowledge that Immanuel Kant called to our attention. We all bring to our experience certain activities by which we literally participate in the creation of our experience according to Kant. We must create our experience in certain respects to be conscious of the world at all. Yet our experience is not merely a created simulation. The features to which Kant pointed are logically necessary to the ability to experience as a human. We assume such categories as time, space, quantity and so forth in the very act of experiencing the world. Yet the recognition that human experience involves our organizational input – a creative act of fashioning consciousness itself -- was a true break-through in human epistemology.

However, spiritual knowledge is not merely about what is universal in human experience (because inherent in the very act of experiencing at all); but what we each uniquely bring to our experience – ourselves. Each of us brings not only the logical conditions of possibly experiencing at all, but also our past experiences, our judgments and ways of being in the world that are unique to each. Spiritual experience is unique in this sense. We experience knowledge through the spirit as a single individual. Paradoxically, we all bring this uniqueness to every experience.

Soren Kierkegaard extended Kant's insights about the horizons of spiritual experience. After I had completed two drafts of this book, I re-read several of Kierkegaard's works. It dawned on me that in developing my epistemology of spiritual experiences I had recreated Kierkegaard's view in many respects (at least that is how it appears to me). I also believe that I followed the same trail that Kierkegaard did to come to the same place from which to stand to view the horizon of human knowledge. We both stood on Kant's shoulders and did our best to follow the implications of his view. For those standing on Kant's shoulders, the horizon appears very similar.

Knowledge conveyed by the spirit is an existential communication – a knowledge that communicates with and to our very being. What we know is imbedded within our very existence as an individual. We can only escape such knowledge through an act of hiding what we know from ourselves in act of self-deception. Yet such knowledge is a bit tricky because it is beyond the horizon of human language. It is experiential knowledge that can only be communicated by undergoing the experience in which the knowledge is imbedded within our very being. We could no more escape such knowledge than escape our own skin; yet, it remains hidden from us in the same way that our own eye lenses remain hidden from what we see. It is given to us; yet we cannot see it or experience it directly. We can write and speak about it; but we cannot simply convey such knowledge to another. One's own spiritual knowledge is always beyond the horizon of any other person.

Yet spiritual knowledge is a burning fire within. With spiritual experience, the horizon is our own hearts – the center of our being. It may be beyond the horizon of human discursive expression, but it is a power that must be heeded. The discovery of fire, though now well beyond any human memory, was undoubtedly a break through in human existence. The ability to create and control fire was necessary to human survival and the development of human civilization. Yet now and then we discover that we really cannot control it. The fire of the spirit that lights our horizons is not subject to human control – not really. It is like the wind that blows the fire unpredictably where it will.

This book is a meditation on the endowment presented in the temple. It will undoubtedly remain beyond the horizon of those who have not experienced the endowment. For them, rather than a fire on the horizon, I suspect that it will be merely prattle. That is intentional. For 20 years I attended the temple bored out of

my gourd. I kept going; but I did not get much out of it. The endowment was just the same endless repetition that held no meaning for me. The endless repetition is very instructive; however, because it mirrored my life. Kierkegaard has a book by this same name which is endlessly repetitive – *Endless Repetition*. An endless repetition is like a mirror for a life that is stuck in just going through the motions without meaning. However, the endless repetition is also the definition of the unrepentant life – the life lived in the doldrums of being controlled by the same events in the past every day. The unrepentant life is an unchanging life where we continue to do the same things that we have always done – and of course we still get what we always got as a result.

The fire on the horizon is the message that even though we cannot quite see it, we must get up and change our position to address the issues presented by the simple fact that a fire may be headed our way. Either change or confront the ever-growing destruction of a life that refuses to change its horizons. The endless repetition is the life lived in sin. We continue to do the same self-destructive behaviors that decimate our relationships and happiness. We know what makes us miserable, but we love our misery too much to give it up and move on.

One of the simple changes that revolutionized my life was the act of moving to see the fire on the horizon. In every event I inquire what part it may play in some higher plan. With every person I meet I ask why, of all the people and all the places on earth, I have encountered this person here and now? What is there here for me to learn? What has this person come to me to teach me? What does my way of responding reveal about my life?

In coming to this book, in bringing yourself to the task of encountering its message, I ask that you stretch to see the fire on the horizon. Why have you encountered this book at this particular point in your life? Why did you pick it up? How do you respond to what is written? What does it reveal to you about yourself? What part could it play in some higher plan? These are the questions that are illuminated by the fire on the horizon. It is quite possible that it will not mean anything. However, the meaning it will have for you is up to you. I cannot create that meaning.

All the boredom that I created in my encounter with the endowment changed with a change of my heart. Something changed drastically. Virtually every time I went, I began to experience break-throughs and insights and revelations and inspiration that I had longed for during those 20 prior years. What I broke-through was precisely my prior horizon. I began to question – why is it done that way; why is it said in that strange way, why do we do it that way and what does it mean about how I am now doing it right now? I asked questions about everything with the assumption that there was some deeper meaning to be revealed. What was revealed was almost never about the endowment per se; but about the status of my own heart and my ways of being in the world.

What I have written here is not a compilation of these particular experiences, but an extended meditation on what I came to experience in the act of at-one-ment. The atonement is the fire on the horizon that reveals the limits of what we can access, illuminates what is otherwise beyond us, warns us of what we must be aware and calls to us to heed its gift and the dangers of not doing so. However, the atonement is not about what it means for us, but about the meaning we create in the interaction. It is not about some great experience that has already been made for us, but about how we choose to experience union with others here and now. Atonement is not a subject but a creative act of the heart. The knowledge of the atonement is not found in reading a book, but in experiencing it. This book is written with the intent that it be read experientially – and I cannot tell you what your experience of reading this book means. However, reading experientially means to question every sentence for how it reflects on one's life.

Reading experientially is like the story of Adam and Eve. It is not a story about two characters who lived a long time ago, but about humankind and life itself. The creation is not a story about sequencing of events, but about building a temple in the cosmos that reflects the altar in one's own heart. The story of Christ's life leading to the events in Gethsemane and the cross are not about historical events, but about the life he gives to us here and now to share with him. It is about the fire on the horizon that calls to us, warns us, illuminates our limitations and seeks to enter our hearts to enlighten us.

I suspect that my changing horizons build upon my own life's experience. When I first saw *Casa Blanca* in my 20s I could not see why so many considered it a great film. The "big deal" about the movie completely escaped me. However, viewing the movie now, given my life's experience, I can see that the horizons of the movie are vastly different for me. I now can see the depths of forlorn love that can never be requited. I sense the pain of moral choices to sacrifice what one loves most for the greater good of others. I see the impossible moral struggle to almost, but not quite, choose to walk away from a call to higher duty. I now can bring within my horizon a tale of hopeless choices and impossible situations seeking to assuage the pain of years of yearning for one's love. My horizons at 55 are different than they were at 25 – and my experiential knowledge is brought to every new experience without thought. They are just part of me now. Horizons change as we change. We cannot encounter the fire on the horizon and not be changed by it.

I also acknowledge that my horizons have been expanded by standing on the shoulders of some wonderful mentors. My horizon is much more vast as a result of allowing me to mount to the heights with them. My horizons have been illuminated by David Paulsen, Truman Madsen, Neal Maxwell, Sterling McMurrin and Hugh Nibley. I have been blessed to interact and be taught by each of them on a very personal level. I was a teaching assistant to David Paulsen and Truman Madsen. I also co-taught several philosophy classes with David Paulsen. I assisted Sterling McMurrin to teach a class in the history of philosophy. I was a research assistant for Hugh Nibley. I was tutored carefully by Neal A. Maxwell. I not only greatly expanded

my horizons by sharing their world; but allowed the fire that burns on the horizons that they revealed to me to burn deeply within my being. They were not only mentors, but good friends. I believe that these men were the brightest and best of an entire generation of Mormon scholars. All except David Paulsen have now passed beyond my mortal horizon. I miss them.

I also express my love and gratitude to my parents, brothers and sisters, and especially my wife and children. Like the spirit that testifies in my heart, they are integrated into my being. No words could express the depth of my love for them. They have taught me many great lessons – many of which I did not want to pay the price to learn. They have expanded my horizons by stretching me beyond where I would have chosen to go on my own. Yet they have taught me about love and life and everything that I hold dear.