

The 20-Mark Note

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Why did this young elder hand me a 20-mark note? If you understand that, you will understand how our lives are really not our own. They are governed.

Over 30 years ago I was assigned with then-Elder Thomas S. Monson to organize a servicemen's stake in Europe. We met at Berchtesgaden, Germany, high in the Bavarian Alps. Originally it was a headquarters built by Adolf Hitler in an incomparably beautiful place. Seldom has there been on this earth anyone who has duplicated in personality and purpose the adversary quite as much as did Adolf Hitler. I thought that we had come full circle where that had taken place on that site, and now we were gathered there to organize a stake of Zion.

After we had finished setting apart and completing that organization, we were assigned to go to Berlin for a stake conference. We needed to get from Berchtesgaden high in the Alps down to Munich to the airport.

We got to the airport in ample time for our plane, which was scheduled to leave at about 10:00 in the morning, but it was fogged in. We sat there listening to the announcements for nearly 12 hours. They kept saying they thought the fog would clear. It did not clear.

That night near 10:00, two missionary elders came to the airport. We knew then that the planes would not fly. They told us there was a train leaving Munich for Berlin

at midnight. The elders took us to the train station, helped us buy our tickets, and saw us aboard the train, which would take from about midnight until about 10:00 the next morning to arrive in Berlin.

As the train was pulling out, one young elder said, "Do you have any German money?"

I shook my head no.

He said, "You better have some," and, running alongside, pulled from his pocket a 20-mark note. He handed that to me.

At that time the Iron Curtain was very "iron." The train stopped at Hof on the border between West Germany and East Germany, and the crews were changed. All of the West German crew members got off the train, and the East German crew got on the train. Then the train set out across East Germany toward Berlin.

The U.S. government had just begun to issue five-year passports. I had a new passport, a five-year passport. Before our trip, we went to have my wife's passport renewed, but they sent it back saying that the three-year passports were honored as a five-year passport. She still had more than two years left on her passport.

At about two o'clock in the morning, a conductor, a military-type soldier, came and asked for our tickets, and then, noting that



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we were not German, he asked for our passports. I do not like to give up my passport, especially in unfriendly places. But he took them. I almost never dislike anybody, but I made an exception for him! He was a surly, burly, ugly man.

We spoke no German. In the train compartment, there were six of us: my wife and a German sitting to the side of her and then almost knee to knee in a bench facing us were three other Germans. We had all been conversing a little. When the conductor came in, all was silent.

A conversation took place, and I knew what he was saying. He was denying my wife's passport. He went away and came back two or three times.

Finally, not knowing what to do, I had a bit of inspiration and produced that 20-mark note. He looked at it, took the note, and handed us our passports.

The next morning when we arrived in Berlin, a member of the Church met us at the train. I rather lightly told him of our experience. He was suddenly very sober. I said, "What's the matter?"

He said, "I don't know how to explain your getting here. East Germany right now is the one country in the world that refuses to honor the three-year passport. To them, your wife's passport was not valid."

I said, "Well, what could they have done?"

He answered, "Put you off the train."

I said, "They wouldn't put us off the train, would they?"

He said, "Not us. Her!"

I could see myself having someone try to put my wife off the train at about two o'clock in the morning somewhere in East Germany. I am not sure I would know what to do. I did not learn until afterwards how dangerous it was and what the circumstances were, particularly for my wife. I care a good deal more about her than I do for myself. We had been in very serious danger. Those whose passports they would not accept were arrested and detained.

Our Lives Are Guided

All of this comes to this point: the elder who handed me the 20-mark note was David A. Bednar, a young elder serving in the South German Mission, who is now a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

So why was it that this young elder from San Leandro, California, handed me the 20-mark note? If you understand that and understand what life is about, you will understand really all you need to know about life as members of the Church. You will understand how our lives are really not our own. They are governed—and if we live as we should

live, then we will be taken care of. I do not think he knew the consequences of what he was doing. That 20-mark note was worth six dollars, and six dollars to an elder is quite a bit!

As you go through life, you will find that these things happen when you are living as you ought to live.

If you can learn what the Spirit is, then you never need to be alone. In Doctrine and Covenants 46:2, it says, "Notwithstanding those things which

are written, it always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit."

Your Spirit Body

The doctrine explained in the scriptures, the revelations, tells us that we are dual beings. We know there is a spirit and a body. "The spirit and the body [when they are eternally combined, become] the soul of man" (D&C 88:15). So there are two parts of you. There is a spirit inside of a body.

You have a spirit body; your intelligence existed forever (see D&C 93:29). That is hard to get through your mind. We are going to live forever. You believe that, don't you? In the Resurrection, we will live eternally. That cannot be unless that is true of the past too, that we lived eternally in

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the past. We are in the middle of something eternal here.

I have wondered about when the day comes that my spirit leaves my body. When that “unwrapping” takes place and your body is set aside and we are looking at your spirit, what are you going to look like? What will your spirit look like?

Some of you might be described as perfect athletes—perfectly coordinated, able to do anything! You have beautiful physical bodies. If we separated your body from your spirit, what would your spirit look like? You will learn, if you will study and pray and feel, that you could have a beautiful body and a shriveled, weak spirit. On the other hand, you can have a body that is limited in many ways, and yet in the eternal scheme of things, you can train and teach your spirit so that it becomes of imperishable worth.

You can look forward to the day when you are “unwrapped” and your spirit is separated from the body. Your spirit is young and vibrant

and beautiful. Even if your body is old and diseased or crippled or disabled in any way, when the spirit and body are put together in the Resurrection, then you will be glorious; then you will be glorified.

A man I knew—one of the great men I have known—was in a bunch of roustabout boys. They were always where they should not be and never where they should be. Finally, a wise, resourceful leader got them into a Sunday School class. The teacher was this old man—just an ordinary, homely old man. More than that, he was a convert from Europe, and he did not speak English very well. They giggled, “Our teacher? Him?” These boys, I suppose, had the reputation of running any teacher out.

Then my friend said that something happened. The teacher started to speak, and they all began to listen. This friend said, “You could warm your hands by the fire of his faith.” That meant that in that older, worn-out body that did not seem to be able to

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erase an accent, there was a powerful spirit.

In the Resurrection the body—the dust of the earth, the carnal part of us—can be renewed and made powerful if it is to equal the spirit.

The Holy Ghost Will Guide You

If you can understand how the Spirit operates, you will be all right. There is not enough evil put together—if it was all brought together as some kind of a dark, ugly laser beam and focused on you, it could not destroy you, unless somehow you consented to it.

In the course of your learning, “wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).

Make sure you learn the things that you are not taught overtly. If all you know is what you read or what you can hear, you will not know very much. Moments of reverence are so precious when you *think* and *feel*. That is

why temples are so important. You can go to the temple and be out of the world.

The promise from the Lord is that when you receive the Holy Ghost, “he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

You will be doing some things automatically, almost unwittingly. Without thinking, you will find you have been prompted and guided by the Holy Spirit. That is why this young elder, without knowing why, took a 20-mark note out of his wallet as he was trotting alongside the train and handed it to me as the train was pulling out. He saved us from great danger.

That is how you will do things and then later look back and know that you were guided. And also that is how you will be warned. You will be warned, “Don’t go there! Don’t do that!” You will be warned, “Don’t go with him! Don’t go with her! Don’t be with them!” And then, “Do be in this company!” You will be guided, and the Lord will watch over you.

I know that the gospel is true, that Jesus is the Christ, that He lives, that this is His Church. Find a place in the world where you can, without embarrassment, without any hesitancy, declare to yourself: first, that you accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and, second, that what you *are* is more important than what you *do*. What you do, if it is guided, will make you what you *are* and what you can *be*. **NE**

Adapted from a devotional address given at Brigham Young University–Idaho on March 12, 2002. For the full text of the address, visit www.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2002_03_12_Packer.htm.