



A Faithful Middle Way

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A Thoughtful Faith

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A world of extremes

- ““Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”
- George W. Bush, September 20, 2001
- “Every nation has to either be with us, or against us.”
- Hillary Clinton, September 13, 2001
- “Whoever is not with me is against me”
- Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:30)
- “Whoever is not against us is for us”
- Jesus Christ (Luke 9:50; Mark 9:40)

A church of extremes

- “Each of us has to face the matter—either the Church is true, or it is a fraud. **There is no middle ground.** It is the Church and kingdom of God, or it is nothing.”
– Gordon B Hinckley (2003)
- “We cannot be neutral; **there is no middle ground.**”
– Thomas S. Monson (2010)
- “That is the genius of the Book of Mormon – **there is no middle ground.** It is either the word of God as professed, or it is a total fraud.”
– Tad Callister (2011)

The Gauntlet of “No Middle Ground” about the Book of Mormon – Tad Callister’s quote

- That is the genius of the Book of **Mormon**—**there is no middle ground. It is either the word of God as professed, or it is a total fraud.** This book does not merely claim to be a moral treatise or theological commentary or collection of insightful writings. It claims to be **the word of God—every sentence, every verse, every page.** Joseph Smith declared that an angel of God directed him to **gold plates**, which contained the writings of prophets in ancient America, and that he **translated** those plates by divine powers. If that story is true, then the Book of Mormon is holy scripture, **just as it professes to be**; if not, it is a sophisticated but, nonetheless, diabolical hoax.

What happens when “Every sentence, every verse, and every page” does not prove to be the “Word of God” exactly as it professes to be?



Emotions in Tension in the Mormon Mind

- Certainty

- Comfort

- Sense of Self
Ego-Identity

- Sense of Belonging
(tribal identity)



- Cognitive
Dissonance

- Fear

- Diffusion of
Identity

- Loss of Tribe
Excommunication
Disfellowshipping

Fear Response in the Mormon Mind

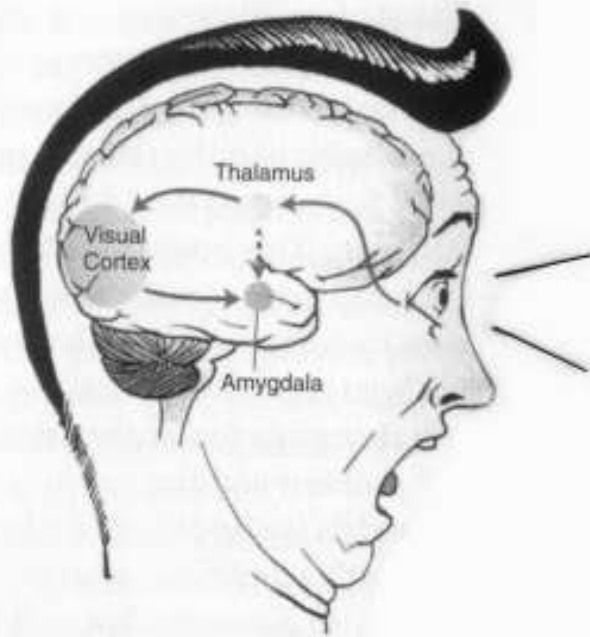


FIGURE 7-3 Visual input to the amygdala.

R F Thompson & S A Madigan, Memory, 2005

- Two roads:
 - High Road – cognitive response to stimuli
 - Low Road – emotional response to stimuli
- Fear Conditioning trains the mind to use the “Low Road”

The Mormon Mind and Middle Ground

- Fear-conditioned, emotional splitting responses (All or nothing propositions) are mediated in the limbic mind, specifically the amygdalae (“low road”).
- Key emotional responses both mediate memory (formation of cognitive schemas), as well as disrupt cognitive processing.
- Emotional response in the amygdalae exhibit lateralization: Negative emotions and positive emotions are processed independently, as are conscious as well as nonconscious processes.
- There is no “Middle Ground” in high emotional states nor in imperative emotional response.

**Ok, there's no middle
ground... now what?**

Hypothesis: There is a viable and stable “Faithful Middle Way” within the Mormon faith.

- **A “Way” is not the “Ground”.**

More than a semantic distinction, the “Way” is about process, ground is about a static position.

Hence, a Faithful Middle Way is not a static position, but rather, an approach to being, truth, and life as a Mormon.

- **Faithful Middle Ways exist in many faith traditions.**

Anglican/Episcopal “Via Media”, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Hinduism all have faithful middle ways.

- **LDS Scripture and Joseph Smith’s approach to syncretic exploration support a Faithful Middle Way.**

All truth is integral to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Faith Journey along the Middle Way

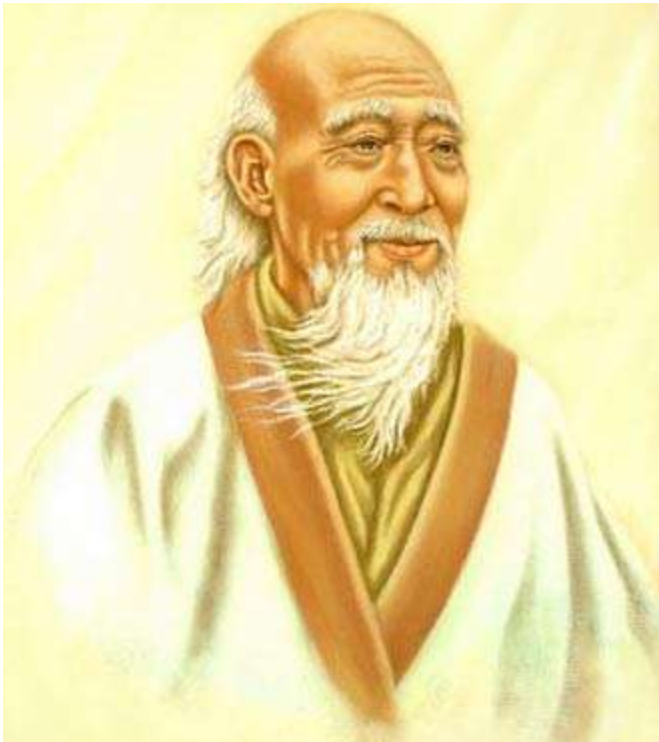
For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and **I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.**

And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews. (2 Nephi 29:13-14)

Where are these scriptures from all the nations of the earth?

The Journey begins in China

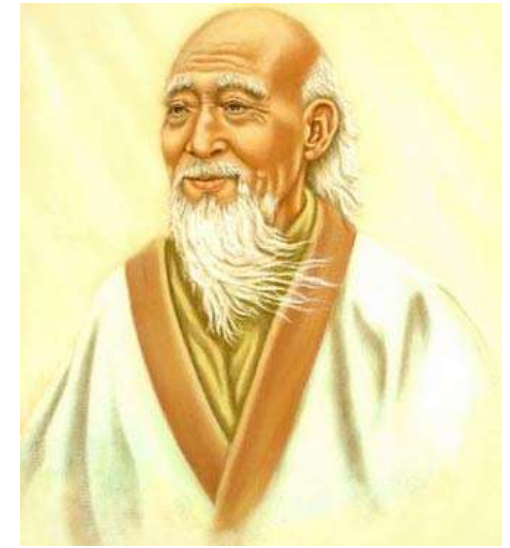
What is “The Way”



“The Way that can be traversed is by no means a constant Way.” Lao Tzu



“One Yin, One Yang, This is called ‘the Way.’”
Confucius



The Way of Lao Tzu

- Not complicated, not “ineffable”. It’s simply how things work in their most natural form.
- Not God, but precedes “the gods”.
- Not “a force”, but may describe how forces work.
- Not one, single “The Way” that transcends all, but rather, everything has a Way.
- Mormons have “a Way” about them. Everyone does.

The Way is a process, not a position.
It is how, not why or what.

Quotes Describing the Way

Zhuangzi:

Master Tung-kuo asked Chuang Tzu, "This thing called the Way - where does it exist?"

Chuang Tzu said, "There's no place it doesn't exist."

"Come," said Master Tung-kuo, "you must be more specific!"

"It is in the ant."

"As low a thing as that?"

"It is in the panic grass."

"But that's lower still!"

"It is in the tiles and shards."

"How can it be so low?"

"It is in the piss and shit!"

Master Tung-kuo made no reply.

Joseph Smith:

He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth;

Which truth shineth. This is ... in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made.

...in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made;

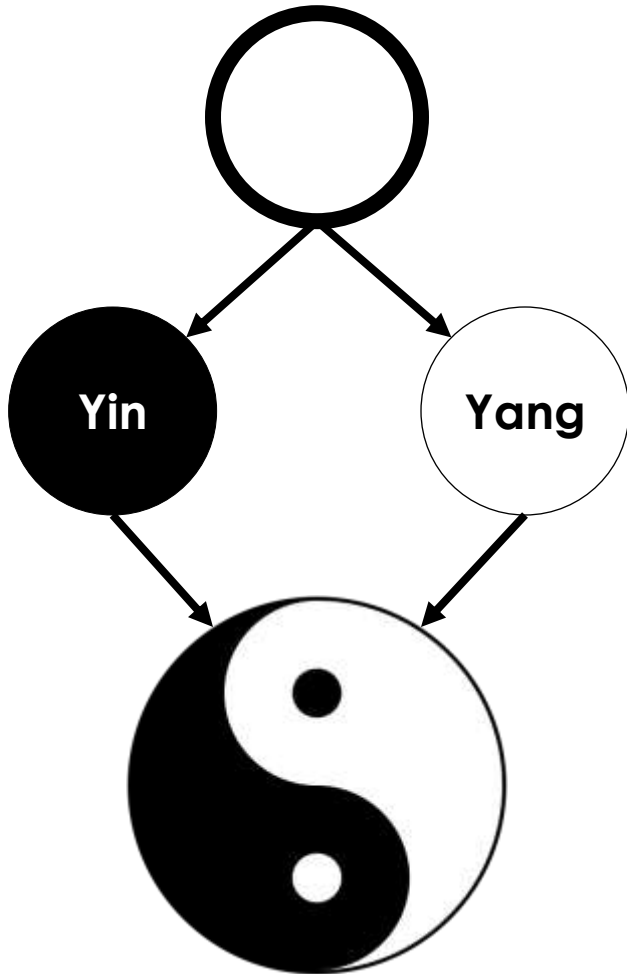
As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made;

And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand.

And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings;

The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.

“One Yin, One Yang, This is called the Way”



From Laozi:

Dao gave birth to one
Wuji – “Without Limit”

One gave birth to two
Yin and Yang

Two gave birth to three
Yin + Yang + the unity of both
Taiji – “The Supreme Ultimate

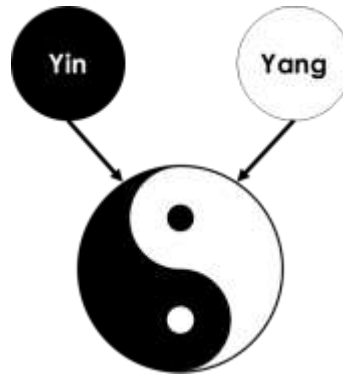
Three gives birth to
All Things.

Yin and Yang

Attributes of Yin

- The Receptive
- The Female
- The Black
- The Negative
- The Valley

...



Attributes of Yang

- The Creative
- The Male
- The White
- The Positive
- The Mountain

...

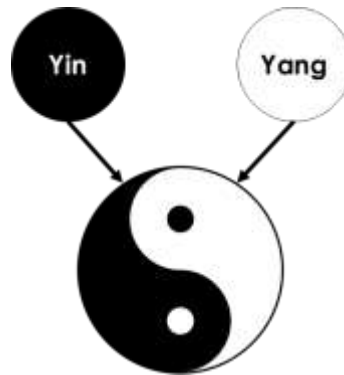
WARNING

Yin and Yang should not be considered stereotypes. They cannot be considered independently. One yin one yang is “Dao”/The Way, and the Way creates life, meaning that everything has both yin and yang attributes.

Emotions within the Mind aligned to Yin and Yang

Yin Emotions

- Sadness
- Fear
- Doubt
- ...



Yang Emotions

- Joy
- Anger
- Certainty
- ...

- There is no “Middle Emotion”. What then constitutes the Middle?

The symbol of Tao is not grey. It represents both balance and interaction of yin and yang

NOTE: This approach differs from Traditional Chinese Medicine, which locates seven emotions with organs of the body rather than the mind. We represent an updated approach based upon current studies of neurology.

The Middle Way of Confucius

The Balance of Emotions

The mandate of heaven is called “Nature” (性 xing),
Following nature is called “the Way” (道 Dao),

The Way cannot be departed from for a moment
If you could depart from it, it would not be ‘the Way’.

When one sets aside extremes,
e.g. joy, anger, sorry, and pleasure;
this is called ‘The Middle’ (中 zhong).

In the Middle Way, one can express emotion
yet remain centered,
this is called “Harmony” (和 he).

The Middle Way is the root of all things under heaven.
Harmony is the realization of the Way.
When the Middle Way is actualized with Harmony,
All things thrive. (“Doctrine of the Mean”)



中
道

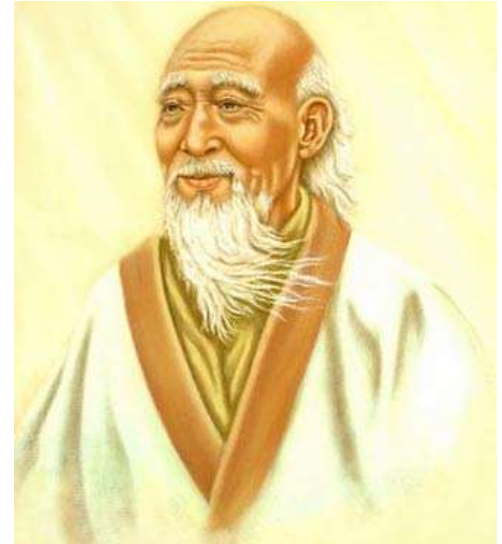
The Middle Way of Lao-Tzu and the Gita

Natural Action/Detached Action

Lao Tzu: “Act without acting
(無為 - wuwei/natural, authentic action)
and nothing will remain undone.”

Gita: “You have the agency to act,
but no right to the fruits of your actions,
So, don’t get attached to
rewards/outcomes,
Nor be attached to inaction.

“With a centered mind (yogastah – middle-
way mind), do what needs to be done,
renouncing attachment!”



無
為

The Middle Way of Buddha

The Noble Eight-fold Way of Balanced Faith

Balanced (“right”) understanding,
Balanced thought,
Balanced speech,
Balanced action,
Balanced livelihood,
Balanced effort,
Balanced mindfulness and
Balanced concentration



"Buddha Victoria & Albert" by Michel wal - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

The Middle Way of Advaita Vedanta

Non-Dualism in pursuit of identity

Adi Shankara: "The notion of "I am Brahman (awareness)" created by uninterrupted reflection destroys ignorance"



Ramana Maharshi: "Who am I?"

Key Learnings: as long as we are divided, labeled beings, we cannot be enlightened. The pursuit of the question of "Who am I" leads to the realization that my soul (the Atman) is one with the very god of the universe (Brahman).



The Anglican Via Media/Middle Way

The unity of faith and works

- Tension between Calvinism/Puritanism and Catholicism created numerous problems for the Church of England. Early Anglican theologians, such as Richard Hooker, sought to find a middle way between these religious camps.
- Hooker's theological approach to the particular doctrine of justification by faith was a middle way between the predestinationism of the extreme Calvinists and Lutheran and Arminian doctrines.



The Epistemic Middle Way of Descartes

Methodic Doubt



Cartesian Premises

- We should claim to know only that for which we have justification,
- We cannot appeal to anything outside of our ideas for such justification, and
- We judge our ideas using a method that guarantees that our ideas are correct.

Methodic Doubt

- All that we think we know is assertion – We base each of our neurological conclusions some a-priori assertion, such that everything we think we know should be doubted.
- This doubt is experimental – it cannot be the end of the game.
- Deconstruction of our knowledge schema must be followed by reconstruction

Descartes conclusions

- Cogito ergo sum – I think, therefore I AM.
- Senses can deceive, but god cannot – Descartes was a man of faith.

Approaching a Faithful Middle Way within Mormonism

Middle Way Approach	Mormon Parallel
The Way as the unity of opposites	"There must needs be an opposition in all things"
Confucius Middle Way of Emotional Balance	"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." – "Perfect love casteth out all fear".
Lao Tzu's Middle Way of Natural Action	"It is not required to run faster than your strength".
Buddha's Middle Way of balanced faith	We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul— We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.
Advaita's Middle Way of Non-dual identity	"Ye are gods, and all of you are children of god most high". "For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy;"
Anglican Via Media of faith and works	"Believe in Christ, and ...be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do."
Descartes Middle Way of Methodic Doubt	Alma 32

Applying the Middle Way to hard questions of Faith

Topic	Traditional LDS	Middle Way	Non-LDS
Revelation	Divine Dictation	Inspiration (D&C 8 and 9)	The bible is complete.
Scripture	Word of God	Inspired but fallible	Inerrant, or fiction
Prophets	Follow the Prophet – cannot lead astray	Prayerfully hearken to the prophet	Mormon prophets are false.
First Vision	Literal physical visitation	“Vision” – a private spiritual experience	Didn't happen
Atonement	Penal Substitution	Moral Influence	Absurd or penal substitution
Faith/Works	Works	Both	Faith

Alma 32: The Epistemic Middle Way of Faith

- To Alma, Faith is not a perfect knowledge, wherefore, if you have faith you hope for things which are not seen which are true.
- If I know something – I no longer have faith; therefore to Alma, faith and knowledge/belief are distinct.
- Implied is that we must explore our beliefs in order to determine that which we do not know – this leads to Cartesian Methodic Doubt.
- One can believe or claim they know something that isn't true, but according to Alma, one cannot have faith in something not true.
- Faith demands action – to Alma (and James), faith is action (a method, a Way), whereas belief is a position (a ground).
- Alma's method is to put our hypothetical beliefs to an experiment – a method of determining whether something is true (experientially it produces good results), or does not.
- Alma avoids fallacy by induction (if I have a good feeling about the book of Mormon then everything else ever said by any prophet must also be true).
- Alma's epistemic necessarily refines our knowledge, and holds in faith that which we cannot prove experientially.

First Principles of the Middle Way

- Philosophical First Principles:
 - Epistemology – the way we come to know things
 - Ontology – The nature of who we are and what how things exist.
- First Principle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ:
 - Faith... (pistes, in greek) – is not perfect knowledge, but rather, according to alma, a way we come to know things – and Epistemic method, including methodic doubt, deconstruction, and reconstruciton.
 - ...in the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus Christ? What is his “Name” – “I AM”. To realize Jesus Christ, especially in Mormon Theology, is to realize the divine nature within us – the I AM. We come to answer the ontological question “Who am I”, with “I AM”.
 - As well, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Is there a Faithful Middle Way within Mormonism?

- What it means to be “Faithful”
 - Rigorous in our Epistemology
 - True to the practices
 - Loyal
- What it means to be in the “Middle”
 - Dieter Uchtdorf: “We are in the middle of our glorious eternal lives”.
- What it means to be on the “Way”
 - The original Saints were called “Followers of the Way”
 - The Way is to live in harmony with all that is, and be one with the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

My Closing Thought and Prayer

- Thought:

οὓ γάρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα ἐκεῖ εἶμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν

For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, I AM in the Middle of them

This is the Middle Way: Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, is the Middle as we meet together -- the Love that binds us when we unify our collective diversity in a truly authentic, synergistic Way.

- My Prayer:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Sh'ma Ysrael, Yaweh eloheinu Yaweh ehad!

Hear oh Israel, I AM our gods, I AM ONE.

ॐ शान्ति शान्ति शान्ति ॐ

Om, shanti, shanti, shanti, Om



THANK YOU!

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A Thoughtful Faith Support Group
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<http://middlewaymormon.org>