

# Polygamy, Faith, and Reason

by Scott Stoddard

I wanted desperately to believe in the Order. Every dream I'd ever had, every plan, every thought, had been about the Kingdom of God, and where I fit in it. I grew up very much into the whole thing. At the time I felt that if the Order was not true, I had nothing to live for, and wanted to die. At the same time I could no longer believe. I would sit and think about what I should do. I wanted to know absolutely for certain the truth about the Order. I used to think that I should just fast until I either starved to death, or until God showed me the truth. This was kind of a fantasy thing because I knew I wasn't actually going to starve myself completely to death when it came down to it.

In June of 1980 I spent a sleepless night trying to decide what to do next. I decided that I would go up in the mountains and fast and pray for one week. I'd experienced intense indoctrination which I knew would cause guilt if I left the Order while I still held doubts about its truth. I decided that if God was going to show me, one week of fasting, prayer and study should be enough, and if not, he really couldn't expect me to put up with the injustice any longer. He would know what I was expecting, and if he still wanted me in his kingdom, he'd know what I needed in order to stay. If I would have known it to be right, I could have put up with nearly anything. At daylight I headed into the mountains.

The day was June 12 1980. I had recently turned twenty four years old. The entry in my journal from that day reads in part:

The main reason I am up here is because my testimony of the Order is gone and I don't even know if I believe in God...

Anyway either God exists or he doesn't and either the Order is right or it's not. I hope to find out.

...I hope one week of my life is not too much for the mine to spare me.

...The thing most people don't understand is that man needs something to believe in and most people just take what's there handy. I know how it is because I need to believe in the Order desperately and yet my mind won't really let me.

I spent a week up in the mountains with no food. I went several days without water. I went to a place we called "Up on top." It was sort of a high plateau with lots of roads going to the heads of many canyons.

I had the back seat of my Blazer unbolted so it could be pulled out. At night I'd build a fire and sit on this bench seat and stare into the flames, or up at the stars, thinking. I remember one night in particular was very clear, and up at the high altitude, with no light pollution, and clear sky, the milky way was just a brilliant blaze of light across the sky; so many stars that they couldn't even be individually distinguished. I thought about how what I could see was just a fraction of the stars in just one galaxy, and that there were more galaxies in the Universe than stars in the milky way. It made me feel infinitesimal; A speck on a speck on a speck.

I threw another log on the fire. This one had a spider living on it, and suddenly the spider had a existential crises of its own; running around, looking for a way out. I wondered if, in the grand scheme of things, this spiders plight had any more or less meaning than my own; Just another random, meaningless event, in the vastness of the Universe.

Maybe this scary sense of meaninglessness is exactly why people create these belief systems. Belief systems in which they are chosen, special, protected, and cared for by a omnipotent being. At the same time I was aware of how amazing it was that I had consciousness and could perceive the Universe in at least part of it's immensity, and scariness. These and many other thoughts of like sort swirled in my head; day after day; night after night.

I slept in the Blazer. With the rear seat out there was room to stretch out in a sleeping bag. I remember one night I was really hungry and found an old Reese's Peanut Butter Cup candy bar wrapper in the Blazer. There was a tiny bit of chocolate and peanut butter residue on the wrapper. Of course I wanted to lick this off, but that would have been a violation of my fast, so I just smelled it. It smelled wonderful.

During the day I drove around exploring. I had a hang glider at the time, and I'd taken it with me, but I didn't use it, partly because I didn't find a good place, and partly because after a few days, I was too weak from lack of food. I drove to the head of Trail canyon one day. Trail canyon is where the people from Co-op mine lived. I looked down and could see all the houses. They looked like little ant houses. I was thinking about how all those people were talking about me, wondering where I was. I wondered what is was going to be like going back.

For the first three days I went without water. On the fourth day I got rather ill, and started dry heaving. Almost nothing came up except a tiny bit of really vile nastiness. I'd located a spring which had a cattle watering trough. I went there, rinsed out my mouth, drank some water, washed up a little, after that I drank water.

There was one night in particular that I couldn't sleep, got really depressed, and nearly gave up and went home. I thought that if I did, however, I'd never know if I would have gotten an answer.

I spent a lot of time reading, writing, praying, and thinking. Nobody knew where I was. There were no miracles. It was probably the longest week of my life. After I came back down I never again seriously considered that the Order might be right.

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In my parents home there is a plaque that says: "As for me and my house; we will serve the Lord"

In the spring of 2018 my mom called me very distraught because my fathers health had taken a turn for the worse. I made arrangements to take off work and go back to Salt Lake City from Washington state, thinking that perhaps this would be the last time I would see my father. Within days I heard he had been rushed to the hospital. Shortly after that, he died. Now the trip became a trip to go to his funeral.

My father was an exceptionally lovable guy, and was loved by many people. While he was in the hospital they told me so many people came to see him that they plugged up the halls. The nurses kept telling them they had to clear the halls so they could get the carts through. They would clear the halls and then so many more people would show up the hall would fill again. Finally the nurses gave up saying: "Wow this guy has a lot of friends!" Meanwhile, I was told, there were other old sick people in rooms all alone.

My oldest daughter was away at college. She rode the bus all day to get to Portland, and from there the two of us made the approximately 800 mile journey to Salt Lake City. We moved to Washington when she was young and had only seen her grandfather a few times. On the way she asked me to tell her stories about him.

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I should perhaps pause here and give some background. I was born into a religious group that considers itself the Kingdom of God. It was rather extreme in many ways, very insular, an offshoot of the Mormon church. They believed that the Mormon church had lost its way when they gave up polygamy. They felt that Mormons had betrayed God and his commandments; that they had become more interested in acceptance by society, than in living the highest principles of God; that living these principles had become too hard, so Mormons took the easy way out and quit doing the hard stuff. They believed they were the true heirs of Joseph Smith's restoration of the gospel, and that they were destined to rule the world in the millennium.

Insiders refer to this group as the "Order," or the "Co-op". It's referred to in the press often as: "The Kingston Clan."

I grew up in this, believed in it very strongly through childhood and adolescence. In early adulthood I lost my faith, and left. At the time of my father's funeral I was 62 years old, so it had been almost 40 years since I left. My daughter was 21 at the time so she was born long after I left.

I told my daughter some stories on the way. I told her that he was extremely popular. He loved people and people loved him. He was the kind of person who would stop for a complete stranger, and spend all day digging them out of a snow bank. I told her that I had had a unique relationship with him because of being his oldest son. He expected me to be just like him. He thought I should be an extension of his will, and that I was there to make him look good. I wasn't like him. He was gregarious and outgoing while I was reserved and thoughtful, with very much a mind of my own. We butted heads a little.

My dad was very much into hunting and fishing. We didn't pay much attention to the laws about how many fish you could catch, or deer you could kill. We used to go up to a place called Scofield reservoir every year for opening fishing. There was a large group. It was a big deal. We had a fifty-five Chevy station wagon. My dad used to fill up the tail gate door with fish, because we had so many more than our limit. We missed a fish one year and of course it eventually caused quite a stink.

Later on my dad bought an old school bus and converted it to a camper. It said Notre Dame School on the side. Bruce and I got caught crossing out letters to make it say: "No \_\_\_ Dam\_ School." We got in trouble for that.

There was the idea that, being God's people, we didn't really need to follow the laws of the outside world. God's law was higher. This brings up ethical questions. If you're ethically supposed to follow the rules of the society you're in, what happens when you're in a sub society with rules that contradict the rules of the larger society?

One thing is that though the laws of what we called the "outside world" weren't followed, there were definite values about wasting meat, shooting wet dogs and etc. Hunters often killed more than the law said they could, but there were a lot of women, without provident husbands, with a lot of children to feed, so the meat went to good use.

There was a man who had a lot of children to feed. He was a bit eccentric. On one occasion he killed two cow elk, during deer season. His family lived in the Salt Lake City area and the elk were harvested near the groups coal mine, which was about 150 miles away. He decided he was going to drive to Salt Lake, with the two elk, knowing there was a checkpoint in Spanish Fork canyon, where they were checking tags. He would trust in the Lord to help him get the meat to his family.

Every few miles he would pull over, get on his knees, and pray to the Lord to help him get through the checkpoint. When he got there, because he had stopped to pray so much, the timing was such that the people at the checkpoint were on their lunch break, so he went merrily on his way.

My daughter and I eventually got to Salt Lake. We checked into the motel, and that evening went to the viewing. On entering the building we were immediately surrounded by a large number of family that hadn't seen us for many years, and in the case of the younger ones, never. There were hugs, hugs, and more hugs. The line before and after the casket was enormous. Well over a hundred people just in the line to greet people as they went past the casket. We went through the line, shaking hands and hugging. Some of the people I knew and some I didn't.

After this I was standing around, saying hi to various people when my daughter, who stood out a little bit because her hair had been dyed purple, said: "I think there's a competition going on here." Several of my nieces came up giggling, asking: "Who's your favorite niece?" I was a bit taken aback by this, and of course I wasn't going to choose one and hurt the others feelings so I said: "Well I don't know. There's some awfully stiff competition." They said: "Will you go through the line with us?" So we went through the line again. Then I was told that I should be in the line. So my daughter, the nieces, and I, got in the line, by one of my brothers. We were there for what seemed like hours, shaking hands and hugging. Again some of the people I knew and some I didn't. Some I had had very intense experiences with, spanning years, and we hadn't seen each other for a very long time. They were surprisingly friendly.

The leader of the group, Paul Kingston, was especially friendly to me, coming over repeatedly to shake my hand, say how good it was to see me, and bringing up old memories. I was quite taken aback by this. At the time I left I had been a pariah, and had been demonized for many years. The woman I married was supposed to be one of Paul's wives, according to their way of thinking.

I still don't understand why he (and others) were so friendly. It may be that they thought that after my marriage fell apart, I would be interested in coming back. My mother talked to me about this, saying:

“You could come back, but we have our values, and we’d need you to live by them. These kids worship you and we can’t have you being a bad example.” Of course, I think she was talking primarily about drinking alcohol.

The next day was the funeral. I was blown away by how big it was. There were thousands of people. Everybody said it was the biggest funeral they ever saw. The group had grown exponentially since I left. The leader himself had probably more kids than there had been members when I was there. You figure he has dozens of wives and most of them have over a dozen kids... and now these kids are having kids... that’s a lot of kids. That coupled with the popularity of my father, made for a big funeral. The main area was huge, and packed. I learned later they had to set up other remote rooms, with video feeds, for the overflow.

Most of my siblings talked at the funeral. I didn’t. I sat right up front with my mom. We’ve always been really close, even through everything. I cried a lot.

At the end of the funeral they had a bunch of little kids come up and sing a song. There were hundreds of them; just as cute as can be. It was a big stage. The whole stage filled up and then the area between the stage and the seats, and they were still coming. They all simply couldn’t fit.

After the funeral we went to the graveside. I was one of the pallbearers along with all three of my brothers, and Paul, among others. There were 12 pallbearers and 42 honorary pallbearers.

After the services a couple of teenage girls came up to me and asked: “Are you Bill’s son?” I said: “Yes.” They said: “You look like him. You have his hands.” and then they gave me a big hug. It was clear they had enormous respect for him.

After the graveside ceremony there was a dinner at the groups cafeteria. Way more people showed up than they planned to feed, and they ran out of food. They said they were digging around in the corner cupboards, pulling out cans of chili, and whatever they could find to try and feed everybody.

Through the whole thing, between activities, at my mothers house, there were people bringing plates of sandwiches, fruit baskets etc. A whole crew of people came over and totally redid the yard, mowing, weeding, and putting in flowers. It was an impressive display of what it’s like to have a large community of people that care about you in times of trial.

There were also a lot of things that were interpreted as “signs.” For example a woman who was in a late stage of pregnancy, and having some problems, said she was worrying about her baby, and then said she looked at the clock and it said: “5:46.” This she interpreted as her grandpa Billy letting her know everything was going to be OK. This is because his number was 46. Numbers are a big deal in the group.

When I grew up we went to public school. They have their own school now. My father was the school Principal. He was also the president of the church. This, I think was sort of a figure head position, since he had no real power. He had only one wife. The real power people have many wives. He was also the one that performed the polygamous marriages. These positions, I think, were simply because he was so well liked. He put a good face on everything.

My mother taught at the school. She told me me that when kids were acting up she'd say: "Do you want to go to the principals office?" Their eyes would light up and they'd say: "Yeah." She told my dad: "Billy, you've got to start being meaner to those kids; they *want* to go to the principals office." They ended up rewarding good behavior by letting the good kids eat lunch with the principal.

The way this thing ended up evolving was that the sons from one of the wives came to be believed to be the ones that could take the girls to the highest degree of glory, by marrying them. These sons were from the first wife of Ortell Kingston who was Paul Kingston's father. There are, I think, seven sons. These are the men that have large numbers of wives. They married most of the daughters from their fathers other wives ( I think there were around 13.) Of course all these girls would be their half sisters. Three of my six sisters married these brothers as polygamous wives. I've been away for awhile so some of these brothers sons may now have large numbers of wives as well. Perhaps Paul first wives sons are now the new highest. I know that now a thing that is common is that kids will get married to each other and both of them are offspring of one of these brothers. The rationale for this is that their blood is so holy and exalted, that it needs to be reinforced and multiplied through directed marriage. The marriages are "directed" by God. They weave this "direction" out of dreams, feelings, coincidences, impressions, or whatever. It's kind of a battle of little mini revelations, that sometimes contradict each other, but whose ultimate meaning is determined by those in positions of power. This is one of the ways the toadies in the group are rewarded. Their "direction" is more likely to get the stamp of approval.

Going back to my fathers funeral was quite an experience. Much more positive and soulful than I expected it to be. I knew he was very popular, but I had underestimated just how popular. I was surprised at the positive things that I experienced. By this I mean the respect shown my father, the positive energy of the community supporting the family, and the sheer cuteness of the myriad of innocent children. Of course with this positive comes a great deal of negative. We will explore this further in pages to come.

One thing I've thought about is what I would have done if I'd been one of the boys that were taught that you had to marry lots of girls since you had such special blood. What would you have done? These beautiful girls are sort of handed to you to have sex with, one after another, and doing so is pleasing God since their children are needed to fulfill God's purpose in creating the Universe. I honestly don't know what I would have done. I had a hard time leaving this group as it was, and my experience was quite a bit more negative than their experience.

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Shortly after I turned five I remember coming partially awake to find myself being dressed by my sobbing mother. I had some little cowboy boots she was struggling with as she tried to get me into them. She was mad, frustrated, and very sad. It was quite scary to me. I couldn't figure out why she was crying, and why I needed to get dressed in the middle of the night. Our whole family then all got into the cab of a semi truck and drove to the mine. I had two younger sisters (one a baby) and a younger brother.

The mine was Co-op mine, in Huntington canyon, in Utah, and about 150 miles from Salt Lake City. It

was kind of a primitive place, especially at that time; people still cooked on coal stoves. You'd have to start a fire before cooking breakfast. This would have been about 1961.

We moved into a run down old house with no toilet, poor heating, and a leaky roof. My mother was crying the night we left for the mine because my father had received orders from Ortell Kingston (the prophet) to go work at the mine. My mother grew up at the mine, but had grown accustomed to the conveniences of the city. Life at the mine was dirty and primitive by comparison. We left in the middle of the night because my father was supposed to report to work at the mine the next day, and he had to finish putting up a sale at the Co-op shoe store before he left.

It was kind of a shock to me at first. We had to use a slivery old outhouse which was very cold in the winter, and quite smelly other times. The roads were dirt and there was no television. There was a cluster of houses along a creek, which we referred to as "Camp." I had a little peddle car I'd got for Christmas, which I was very fond of. This car kept disappearing and I'd find it at the bottom of the road. There were a bunch of wild looking, dirty, barefoot boys, running around looking kind of scary. One day I was walking up to our house, from my grandparents house, behind one of these little boys. He didn't see me, but went to my peddle car and pulled it out to coast it down the road. That solved the mystery of why my car kept disappearing

Little did I know at the time but I was soon to be, and for many years, one of those dirty little barefoot boys. The truth is it wasn't as bad as it sounds. Little boys don't much care how dirty they are as long as they're having fun, and whatever else the mine was, it was fun for little boys. There were mountains, caves, abandoned mines, abandoned buildings, old cellars, creeks to dam up, lots of wild life, a beautiful river full of trout, plenty of snow and steep hills for sleigh riding in the winter, unlimited wilderness, and innumerable other boyish diversions. It was a boys paradise. The only thing I really missed from the city was television, and flush toilets. Actually it wasn't long before we had a flush toilet. We moved into the only house in camp that still didn't have one, and we soon moved into one that did. There were a lot of outhouses around camp but they were little used and over the years they were dismantled. We never got television until I was no longer a boy.

There are many fond boyhood memories of this paradise. For example, part way up the mountain, it sort of leveled out at a place we call our camp spot. There was a huge pinyon pine tree with a large rock beside it. The branches of the tree grew all around the rock. In the fall this tree would be loaded with pine nuts. The rock provided access to the pine cones. We would climb around on the rock and throw the pine cones down into a large pile and then build a bonfire on top. The heat from the fire would burn off the pine sap and cause the cones to open up. We'd then fish out the cones and feast on the nuts. They were hot and delicious. The heat also softened the shells. We'd eat them, shells and all, and gorge ourselves till we could hardly walk.

It may seem a little more Epicurean than Stoic to enjoy this memory. But in a certain philosophical sense, it is also appealing to imagine enjoying such a feast so close to the place in nature where it was created, and prepared with such boyish ingenuity.

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Polygamy was never openly taught or talked about in church or in any large group when I was in it. They were extremely secretive about that. Children under about eight years old knew nothing about

it. The ones whose mothers were living polygamy never even knew who their fathers were. I learned about it from an older cousin when I was about nine or ten. I didn't believe it at first, but it was kind of like finding out about sex. It seems implausible at first, but the more you think about it, the more sense it makes. I think my father planned on telling me soon. At the time I was reading the Book of Mormon, (part of Mormon scripture) and I kept running into the word "whoredoms." I didn't know what it meant so I asked my dad. I could tell it made him nervous, which just made me more curious. He kept telling me he'd tell me what it meant later. I guessed that he was going to tell me about polygamy in the Order at the same time. I was right; when we had the discussion he told me about polygamy. By that time however I had learned about both sex and polygamy from other kids. It's interesting to me that in this situation "polygamy" and "whoredoms" were somewhat synonymous.

As we grew up in the coal camp, dad went through the Book of Mormon several times in church. The Book of Mormon, of course, is a Mormon scripture, which in Mormon mythology was translated by Joseph Smith from golden plates given to him by an angel.

Dad would read the Book of Mormon during the week, and then in church, on Sunday, he would tell the stories in his own words. He had a real gift for story telling. He made it very interesting for the kids, and we looked forward to it a lot. He had a way of really getting people fired up with religious fervor. On one occasion he was telling us about the larger plates. In Mormon mythology there are other plates, which Joseph Smith saw but didn't translate. These plates, the story goes, are much more comprehensive, and contain all the secrets of the Universe.

Dad got us so fired up talking about this that the three oldest Hansen boys and I, after church, went into the mountains looking for these plates, looking in caves, turning over rocks.

On another occasion (and this is the one I remember most) dad was talking about the vision of Lehi. In the Book of Mormon Lehi is the Patriarch; the father of Nephi and Laman. They crossed the ocean to America and split into two peoples; Nephites and Lamanites. Nephites were good, Lamanites bad. The Lamanites killed off the Nephites and the American Indians are supposedly descendants of the Lamanites.

Early in The Book of Mormon Lehi has a vision in which he travels through a "dark and dreary waste" until he comes to a tree bearing delicious white fruit which filled his soul with "exceeding great joy" There is a "rod of iron" and a "straight and narrow path". Numberless souls are trying to get to and follow the straight and narrow path but a "mist of darkness" arises and much of the multitude lose their way. Then some who do get to the tree and partake of the fruit become ashamed because people in a great house with exceedingly fine clothing mock them. Those who become ashamed fall away into forbidden paths and are lost. There is much more but you get the general idea.

After Lehi recounts this vision to Nephi, Nephi desires to see these things for himself. This is the part that got me as my dad was speaking. From 1 Nephi,10-19.

For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old...

Nephi's desire to know these truths and mysteries results in his being carried away by a spirit. He sees all the things his father saw and much more. In my fathers telling there were many great mysteries revealed which only God could show, and which language is insufficient to describe.

I got so excited to see these things for myself that I could hardly sit still. I just wanted church to end so I could go have the vision Nephi had. Church seemed to last an eternity as I fidgeted, waited and imagined the great mysteries I was going to see. When church finally ended, I went straight out our front door and up the mountain to an abandoned coal mine we called Freed's mine.

It was a steep climb of several hundred feet, some of it through old loose coal. I was fired with anticipation. When I got to the mine I went just inside the portal, and a little out of breath, I knelt. I poured out my desire to see the vision that Nephi had, and said amen.

Then, still kneeling, with eyes closed, I wasn't sure what to do next. Do you see the vision with your eyes closed or open? I was half afraid to open my eyes because I didn't know what fantastic thing might be there. Would I be in a different place, or in space, or what? I was half afraid to open them because there might be nothing. After a few moments I did open them and there was the wall of the mine exactly as it had looked just before I'd closed my eyes. I had a swirl of thoughts. Does it take a while to start. Do I have to wait for an angel or the Holy Ghost to get here? And of course there was the terrifying thought, which I pushed away, that the whole thing was bogus.

I don't know how long I knelt there thinking about it but my excited fervor plummeted leaving me antsy and anxious. It was terribly anticlimactic. Eventually I came to the conclusion that it was presumptuous for a small boy to ask such things of the Lord; it's probably the kind of thing a person has to earn first.

I grew up down the mine for the most part, but often went away in the summers to work at various companies they called "stewardships." By the time I was 17 I had worked at grocery stores, a service station, a laundromat, a potato farm, a plastics and bottling plant, a dairy farm milking over three hundred cows twice a day, at a mechanic shop rebuilding diesel engines, hauled hay, and other assorted jobs. Even this has a positive aspect to it because with so much varied experience, from such a young age, a person develops a lot of skills.

At seventeen I had dropped out of school, and had been working in and around Salt Lake City for a few years. Then I was sent back down to the mine to work. I was under age to be underground at the time, and so were many of my co workers. I worked down there until I lost my faith and quit about seven years later.

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Flashback to a mining memory

Black dust glitters darkly in the bright lance from my mine light. A brutal cacophony assaults my senses; screaming motors, cracking timbers, ripping carbide; all punctuated by monstrous pops, bangs, and bounces, as huge blocks of coal are smashed downward and outward by an unimaginable force. I wouldn't even still be in here except that my faith in God assures me I will be protected while

doing his work. But now primal terror overwhelms the comfort of faith. It's time to get out.

I signal the shuttle car driver. He's only too glad to leave. I start high tramping the continuous mining machine toward safety. It moves agonizingly slow. The bouncing intensifies as solid sandstone fractures and settles in increments, sending shock waves careening through rock, coal and air alike. Timbers groan and snap. Ribs (mine walls) move inward with each bounce, sloughing off, exploding and sometimes hurling lumps of coal. One of these come through the front of the miner cage hitting me painfully in the chest, making it even harder to breath the dust laden air. With each bounce, shock waves cause weird oscillations in the dust dancing in my light beam. I feel the oscillating pressures in my body, and especially in my ears. I'm in slow motion, almost bending the tram handle; willing the monstrous machine to move faster. The bumps build to a crescendo. I hear the gigantic ripping sound I know precedes a cave, and curl up in terror as I am buried alive.

The metal cage protects me. Strangely, I still hear the mountain working, and men yelling. Turning, I see lights through the rear of the cage. I waggle the miner tail to enlarge the hole. I recognize Nate, my foreman. He is highly excited, waving vigorously for me to keep coming. Only top coal has come down. I might still get out before the rock comes. I wiggle the mechanical beast, sending hydraulic fluid surging to the motors that turn the tracks. Right track forward, left track reverse and then the opposite direction, back and forth, swinging the tail side to side, lifting and lowering the head, wiggling everything to break the grip of the fallen coal.

"Come on. It's coming in." The guys are yelling. I finally wiggle free and continue my ponderous retreat. The mountain is still working. More top coal comes down behind me. I tram over it and into the entry where it's safe. Just as I do, the rock comes; massive sandstone rips noisily apart and plummets. The displaced air rushes out. I hold on to my hard hat to keep it from blowing off. I close my eyes tightly, instinctively sucking my head between my shoulders as protection from coal and timber debris being violently blown my way.

Then, the air reverses direction; rushing in to occupy vacuum in the space, that for millions of years, until moments ago, had been solid rock. The mountain quiets, but there is a new sound...the whoops of miners now buzzing on a massive dose of adrenaline.

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I grew up very much believing in this whole thing. During the time I was working in the mine I lived in a trailer with the cupboards stuffed full of books. I started to have a lot of questions as time went on, but what really accelerated my loss of faith was what they called "the weekend crews." The price of coal had gone way up, and Ortell started sending people from Salt Lake down on weekends to mine coal. There would be two crews who would work two shifts of twelve hours each, Saturday and Sunday. None of these shifts were on record.

Since none of the people coming down knew how to run the continuous miner, or how to pull pillars, they would need people from the regular crew to work as well. I was considered the best miner operator, and the only one skilled enough to pull pillars without supervision. That put me in high demand, and I worked more of the weekend shifts than anyone else.

The reason this situation accelerated my loss of faith was because it brought into focus the hypocrisy,

pettiness, dishonesty, and just sheer lack of integrity of many of the people involved. They totally ignored the laws, and put tiny little boys in the mine. There would be a rivalry between the two shifts to mine the most coal. There were leaders of the shifts and they were very much in competition. After every weekend, they would head back to Salt Lake to give Ortell a play by play of what happened.

If it was near the end of shift and there was work to do like setting timbers etc, to get things ready for the next shift, they would just leave. They had no interest in helping the next shift get more coal; they wanted to out mine them. This was a completely different ethos than the the regular miners had. We would be left there alone to do what we could to prepare things for the next shift. The weekend guys were only interested in what Ortell was going to hear about, which was production.

Ortell was very interested in who got the most coal, who caused downtime, who to blame etc. He clearly fostered the competition, and likely thought it caused everybody to mine more coal.

They lied about how many cars they mined. They lied about what happened. In particular, Ortell had some sons who were somewhat inept with machinery. They would do things like break power cords, get shuttle cars stuck etc. This often caused downtime, and downtime had to be explained to Ortell. They did this by finding ways to blame people who it was politically acceptable to blame.

Anyone who's witnessed company politics, probably has seen the kind of people I'm talking about. In any case, the story was totally twisted by the time it got to Ortell; twisted in such a way to cater to his prejudices. It was obvious that these people did this to gain favor with Ortell, and that it worked.

I found that Ortell's perception of what happened was the only thing that really mattered, that people knew this, and that they were willing to lie to him to influence his perception. The truth didn't matter. Ortell's perception of the truth did, simply because he held the power. This was surprising to me at the time; that's how naive I was.

Previously I had believed that Ortell could talk to God practically at will. I thought he would be impossible to deceive because God would let him know the truth. It was obvious that Ortell was primarily influenced by his own prejudices, and that people got ahead by learning to massage his ego, and his prejudice. Daniel and his brothers got away with the things they did because almost nobody was going to put forward a narrative that didn't fit Ortell's prejudice, regardless of what the truth was. That wouldn't have been rewarded.

It was a real mystery to me how these people could believe in Ortell, in themselves, or in the Order, when they were being rewarded for lying to a supposed prophet. I had a lot to learn about the convolutions of human nature. My opinion of Ortell gradually changed to the inverse of what it had been.

I actually talked to my father about this. I asked him how he could make himself subservient to people who clearly had less integrity than he did. He told me that it says in the Bible that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. He seemed to see it all as a big test, or trial, with a big reward for putting up with injustice.

One incident in particular has haunted me. Daniel Kingston was Ortell's son, and older brother to Paul

Kingston. Daniel and I were working in the mine going through a fault, which involved setting off charges of dynamite. Prior to blasting, the dynamite has blasting caps inserted, and then these are wired together in a daisy chain. We used to bare the wires with our teeth, and then twist them together. On this occasion we had wired the charges and went out to set it off. We used an opened pump switch to energize the blasting caps (which was illegal.) We hooked the wires to the switch, and turned it on. It didn't go off.

I went back in to see what was wrong. I found that every single connection that Daniel had wired was bad. He had pulled the wire between his teeth, and flattened the insulation slightly, but hadn't bared the wire! He then twisted the unbared ends together! I had to redo all of them. I didn't want to stick the wire ends in my mouth, since they'd been in Daniels, so I bared the wires with my fingernails. I then went back out, flipped the switch, and of course, the charges went off.

The reason this event has haunted me, is that the whole time I was in there rewiring, Daniel was sitting by the switch. All he would have had to do is flip the switch, and as soon as I completed the circuit, the dynamite would have gone off. At the time I hadn't learned what a total flake he was, or I wouldn't have trusted him. If he had done this, there would have been no repercussions to him, there never were. The story would have simply been that Scott blew himself up.

During this time I would go to church and the things they were talking about just seemed ludicrous. We were always taught that the devil was incredibly clever and that if you start letting yourself drift away, it allowed him into your mind, where he could mess with your thoughts, making things seem different than they actually were. After church I'd sit and think about the ramifications of the stuff in church seeming so ridiculous, and I'd wonder if the devil was manipulating my thinking because I'd let him in.

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delete this paragraph

**I had planned on leaving the mine after I my week of fasting on the mountain, but upon my return there was a whole lot of concern for my state of mind. My father pulled me out of the mine, and gave me the job of running a cat over in another canyon (Bear Canyon) where they were preparing to open another mine. This was appealing, so I decided to stay for awhile.**

During this time my best friend was Ryke. (Rhymes with Tyke, who is his twin brother.) I hadn't really talked to anybody about my doubts about the Order up to this time, but after the mountain fast, I did. He was the main person I talked to.

Even before this we had become quite wild by Order standards. We both had Blazers. Mine was white and tan, his was brown. They were both old and beat up since we didn't make enough money to afford anything else. Mine was faster since I'd blown the original engine and put in a rebuild that was tweaked a bit. His climbed a lot better since it had water tanks that could be filled for traction purposes. His was better looking. Because we had such beater vehicles, we also became quite good mechanics. These were not city drive on the freeway Blazers, but get out in the hills and see what this machine will do Blazers. They were scratched up, and often muddy.

He and I and did a lot of four wheeling. We did a lot of drinking. We'd started smoking dope. We had a

lot of interesting adventures together. I'm glad he was there.

I went through severe bouts of depression during this time. I was very isolated. I knew no one outside of the group. All my friends and family were there. My whole life, my sense of purpose, everything had been tied up in the Order. I had no idea where to go, or what to do next. I knew that I could never again believe in it, and it seemed by me even being around, I was causing a lot of pain; talking to the other young guys, ruining their testimonies. My mother was heartbroken. My father was embarrassed. All of my sense of purpose or the meaningfulness of my life had been tied up in the Order, and now it was all gone. Nothing was as it had seemed. It was like the Scott I had been died, and a new Scott became in a nightmare world.

I thought a lot about suicide. When I thought about it, the main thing that bothered me was thinking of people finding my corpse. I'd picture my mother looking at it; her grief stricken face. I couldn't stand to think of people cleaning up the mess, or even touching my body, or having to dispose of it. I absolutely did not want an Order funeral. The thought of Ortell and all the idiots getting up and using their warped perceptions of reality to define why I'd lived and died was unbearable. I wanted Ortell to say no words over me.

At the time we had been pulling pillars for a long time so there was a large caved area which had spaces all thorough it. I planned to go in when no one was inside, climb over the caved area as far back as I could, and use dynamite to cave the mountain over me. That way no one would ever know what happened. I'd simply disappear. The cleanest way out. An anonymous eternal grave. I'd take care of the death, the burial, and the ceremony in one big lonely flash. There I'd be in an area of the Earth where no else had ever been and never would be. An eternal anonymous grave. I planned the whole thing out in considerable detail even down to disposing of my Blazer. I knew that if my Blazer was at the mine people would assume I was nearby; if it was gone they'd assume I was gone. If me and my Blazer were nowhere to be found and; never came back, no one would ever know what happened. It was a painful and lonely time. I didn't believe in God then, but had decided that others needed to, and that I was ruining it for them by sticking around sharing my thoughts. I felt I was a person who should have never been; a person whom by cold chance had ended up entirely in the wrong place. There were times when I got close to carrying this out. There were times when I thought I was a coward for not having done it already.

I was of two minds about this. One voice was telling me that suicide is the logical solution. There could be no reconciliation with family or friends. Leaving the group would be worse than death to them anyway. Staying is out of the question. Life's a joke. You got screwed royally by being born in a place you could never fit in. It's no good telling everybody else it's all a joke, because if you convince them them, then you've ruined their hope as well as your own. This voice was telling me it was cowardly to put off the inevitability of suicide, and that there was nothing positive to be gained by putting it off.

The other voice had as a basic premise that life has an inherent meaning even with all its pain and angst. It was telling me that my experience was just my experience, that others had suffered through much worse things; that I should suck it up, and live my life in the most ethical way possible under the circumstances.

During this time I remember that it seemed really weird that the sun kept coming up, birds still sang in

the trees, life went on as if nothing had happened. It seemed weird that there could such internal devastation and nothing in the outside world even seemed to notice. It seemed like just another demonstration of the cold uncaring nature of the Universe. I remember one day after a long day of working on the cat I was showering. Hot rivulets of soapy lather were coursing through the dirt on my aching, work hardened body; all of the sudden I had the stunning realization that I was experiencing pleasure from a simple shower. It amazed me because I had sort of decided that there would be no more pleasure for me in these new circumstances; that pleasure in life was somehow tied to belief in God, the Kingdom of God, and all that stuff; that the best I could do was to dull my senses with drugs and alcohol in order to forget my situation for a time.

Ultimately I came to the conclusion that there were to many potential years of life ahead of me, and that I wasn't the type of person to give up without at least trying to make something good of them.

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Ryke and I were out in my trailer talking about quitting the mine and heading to Salt Lake. It was something we'd discussed many times but this time we made the decision to head out that night. Just minutes after we'd made the decision, my father knocked on my door and asked me if I'd work that weekend. I said: "No, I just quit." He instantly got very angry and said: "Alright then, don't ever come back here." and left.

Ryke and I got in his Blazer and headed for Salt Lake. It was kind of funny because you have to go up over a mountain to get to Salt Lake and near the top the Blazer broke down. This is the kind of thing that Order people would take a s a sign that we weren't supposed to do what we were doing. Neither of us wanted to have to listen to the "direction from God" speech so we never talked to anyone about it.

As it turned out a nice gentleman from Fairview picked us up, took us into Fairview to the motel, picked us up the next morning, took us to the parts store, and then back up to Ryke's Blazer. I suppose that could be taken as God's intervention as well, if one were so inclined.

We went and stayed at a motel owned by the Order while we were finding a place to stay. Someone came over and told me I had a phone call. There weren't phones in the rooms, but there was a pay phone just outside the office. I went to the phone and it was my mother. She was sobbing and started begging me to come back. "Come back just because I love you." Previously it had all been about the Kingdom of God, God's will, going to hell, and all of that. She realized that I no longer gave any weight to any of that, and just wanted me to come back because she loved me. My mother and I were always very close, and it was an emotional conversation. I said: "Mom I cannot believe in the Order, and I know you have to. It's not possible for me to stay there. That's just the way it is."

After I got off the phone I was overcome with grief. I went into the shower and cried for a long time. I hadn't cried for a very long time, but now I did; without trying to control it, or hold back, I just cried. I cried for my mother's loss, and for my own. There was no sense of weakness in it at all. It was the obvious right thing to do at the time, and I cried until I couldn't cry anymore. It was somehow cleansing and accepting of the inevitability of leaving. I don't think I've ever cried like that before, and

certainly not since, but it was an experience to remember.

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Not long after I'd left the mine, I was told that Ortell wanted to talk to me. Various people called and told me to take it easy on him. I had the reputation of being intense, and difficult to talk to. People were worried that I'd anger him. I'd gotten interested in a phenomena I'd witnessed where people changed their memories of events as time passed to better fit their world view. I wondered if I was susceptible to this same phenomena. I knew this meeting with Ortell was a prime candidate for this kind of reality warping. I endeavored to burn everything into my mind as it happened.

Because of this I remember the meeting very well. I remember Ortell sitting there. I remember the rug on the floor. I remember the picture of Jesus on the wall. Ortell was sitting there looking a little frail because he'd been fasting, and either by design, or by habit, he was looking rather holy. He looked at me and said: "So how're things going?" I said, "Oh, not to bad," in that sort of automatic, noncommittal way we all do. We sat there for awhile. He wanted me to say something, but I didn't have anything to say to him. He often used silence to make people uncomfortable, expecting them to feel guilty, apologetic, and looking to him for approval.

There was no way I was going to speak. I didn't feel uncomfortable. I knew he was a fraud. I knew I was more intelligent than him. I felt amusement. To me it was an experiment to see what he was going to say. Eventually he sensed that I was not uneasy to be in his presence, and that I was not going to speak first. In a more serious tone he said, "So how *are* things really?". I looked him straight in the eye with force and candor and said, "Well, if I still believed in the Order, I'd still be at the mine." There was an instant chill. It was like someone pulled the rug from under him. I told him that I had wanted to believe in the Order more than I'd wanted to live, but that after what I'd seen, it was impossible. It was clearly not what he was expecting. He actually started to give me advice a couple of times, but it was like in mid sentence he'd realize that it didn't mean anything to me, and he'd trail off.

I don't know what he had planned to say to me but, I must have ruined it, because after a little small talk, I left. As I'd suspected, Ortell warped the meeting into something other than what it was.

While I was working in the coal mine, I had studied after work and finished high school through a correspondence course. After I left the mine I wanted to go to college. I went up to the University of Utah to sign up and found out they didn't accept the high school certificate I had from the correspondence school; however, I was told, if a person was twenty five or older, they could enroll, without a high school diploma, and as long as they maintained grades, they could keep going. As luck would have it, I had recently turned twenty five. I started going to college, originally thinking I wanted to study philosophy. That ended up being not at all what I thought it would be. After several false starts I eventually got a degree in Electrical Engineering.

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So what can be learned from all this from an ethical perspective? There are two main things here to explore. The ethics of polygamy for one, and the ethics being a member of a group that does not respect, or live by, the laws of the larger society of which they are a part, for another.

In my opinion polygamy, if it is between consenting reasoned adults, should not be ethically problematic. In practice however things get much more complicated. For one thing, often girls that are too young to have any idea what they are getting into, receive enormous pressure to enter into these lifetime relationships. Once they commit, they start start having children one after the other. They're responsible for teaching these children the same way they were taught, and become essentially trapped into this lifestyle early on. I think it often ends up being much harder than they ever dreamed.

One of the methods used to pressure these girls is the promotion of the idea that children meant to be from these marriages are already in heaven, waiting to be born, having already earned the privilege of being born into the Kingdom of God. Young girls are told that it is their duty to God to marry the "right" person; otherwise their children will miss the opportunity they've already earned, and it will be all the girls fault for not doing what they promised God they would do before they were born.

Even the adult women are pressured with promises of divine reward in the afterlife. This seems to present an ethical problem, because they are being promised a reward, for a sacrifice, and it's likely the promise is bogus, and they will never get the reward.

This ethical criticism can also be applied to the various religions as well, since they all basically claim to own the toll road into heaven, and require actions (often designed to benefit the religion or the leaders) as payment for the right to a rewarding afterlife.

The pressure that is brought to bear plays on peoples natural desire to do the right thing, to please God, to please their parents, to lead a meaningful life. Often the women entering these relationships are radiant with joy. There is something very powerful in the religious experience. When people believe, it often causes what is called "a burning in the bosom." Many religions, I think, believe they have a monopoly on this feeling, and take it as proof that theirs is the one and only true religion. The truth is this "burning in the bosom" is just part of the religious experience everywhere. In the group I was in, if anything, the feeling is more powerful, simply because they are so extremely religious, and spend so much time cultivating "the burning in the bosom."

This kind of exploitation of young impressionable girls does seem unethical to me, although it should be noted that many of these women, who married very young, now have numerous grandchildren, and they have no regrets about marrying young, and think they have had a wonderful life.

Then there is the question of the ethics of breaking the law by people who consider themselves above the law. Besides the underage coerced marriages, what they practice includes incest, welfare fraud, labor violations, and etc. Anything that benefits the Order, benefits God, and thus is justified.

As I write this, two of Paul Kingston's nephews are in jail, suspected of defrauding the government of over five hundred million dollars. This as part of their operation of a large biofuel plant. They're suspected of receiving tax credits for biofuel that was never actually produced.

There was an extreme focus on making money for the Order. Wages were ridiculously low, and people were expected to live very frugally. All this to build the Kingdom. The idea being that the Order had to get big enough to run the whole world someday. A lot of the lawbreaking had to do with making more money for God's work.

To my father, who was deeply involved in these kinds of things, doing them was serving the Lord. From a Stoic perspective, the idea that intentions matter more than results, could be used to argue that my father's support of these things was eminently ethical. His intention was only to serve the Lord, which in his mind was the highest good imaginable. Serving the Lord, in large part, consisted of obeying the wishes of the leadership, which to my father's way of thinking, were the mouthpieces of God.

Though this argument could be made, I don't think it works. Stoic ethics has to do with rational personal responsibility. The kind of ethics practiced by my father were based on a blind, non-critical, adherence to supposed "truths" based on claims of revealed truth (revelation) and authority based on position and power, within the organization my father found himself in. It comes down to faith vs. reason. My father had faith in these things. It was not based on reason. It made him feel good to believe, he wanted to do good, and this is what worked for him.

When I was working in the coal mine, there used to be a law that mine Foremen and others had to have periodic first aid training. One of the things my father did, while he was the Superintendent of the mine, is that he went and got his first aid training certificate, so that he could certify that people had satisfied their training requirements. At this point everybody's first aid training stopped. The whole reason for doing this is so he could falsify the records of training for mine personnel so that they didn't have to go to the training. This, I imagine, is shocking to the reader, because it makes sense, that in such a dangerous occupation, there should be expertise in dealing with accidents. The rationale at the time though, was that nothing happened except by God's will. Nobody's going to get hurt unless God wills it; therefore first aid training is something that is not of as much importance as mining coal for God. There was a real perception that the rules of the state and federal government were absurd, and that any ways to successfully get around them were commendable.

In fact there were accidents, some of them quite gruesome. When this happened the rationale for the accident happening went one of two ways. If the victim was considered a "good" person (meaning thinking and acting the "right" way,) the accident was rationalized as happening as a sacrifice to pay for something holy. If the victim was considered a bad, or not so good person, the accident was perceived as being a punishment, or warning to straighten up.

I've thought about this, and often been grateful that there were laws, and mine inspectors, and oversight. If not, this mine might not have even had a ventilation fan. That might have been considered an unnecessary expense. I was told, when I complained about the amount of dust I was breathing while running the continuous miner, that God would not let the dust impact my health while I was doing his work. We used to have dust sample collection systems where filters were sent to government oversight people. We would just run it until it looked a little dirty and then change it. We would make five or six in a shift instead of one.

There are two basic ways people use to determine what is true. In one, you start by knowing the "Truth" based on scripture, dictates of prophets, or some authority. In this case the evidence is twisted, and molded, to fit the "Truth." In the other way it's the "Truth" that is malleable, and it's the careful application of reason in exploring the evidence, that determines what should be determined true.

Of course many things in the past considered truth by religious authorities, are now known to be wrong.

Things like the age of the Earth. The fact that the Earth is not the center of the Universe etc.

My dad, as we've seen, was quite satisfied with the comfort of faith. I on the other hand was much more swayed by reason than faith. I remember, as I began to become aware of how other people thought about these things, I thought that if you let someone else make your decisions for you, (in other words be unquestionably obedient to someone) you're still responsible for what they have you do. Because of this fact, if you're going to give someone this kind of power over your actions, you better be absolutely sure that they are what they claim to be.

It goes deeper than this of course. The most horrific actions of mankind were committed by people convinced they were doing the will of God. The Crusades, the Inquisition, and etc. were perpetrated by people who, in their minds, had the best of intentions.

In the case of The Order, where I came from, Paul Kington is now in charge, and the power of what people think and do, is so much in his hands, that all it would take is for him to go off the rails, and hundreds would follow him to whatever catastrophe he happened to orchestrate.

It has happened many times before: Jim Jones, Heavens Gate, David Koresh, etc. People, who through what seems to me to be intellectual laziness, or perhaps lack of intellectual ability, or just fear of the uncertainty of life, trust other to tell them the truth. They give over their power of judgment to others, letting them decide what they do and think. This concentration of power into a single person can, and often does, cause megalomania.

The antidote to all of this I think, is the careful application of reason; and absolute personal responsibility. A responsibly to accurately judge, and take responsibility for, your own actions; and a responsibility not blindly follow someone who claims divine authority. It may be attractive to believe someone has the "Truth," so that all you have to do is follow them, but rationally, all you have to do is look at the history of various "Prophets" to know that they often are either frauds, or deluded.

I think it's this rational aspect of my personality that, in a large part, drove me out of the Order, and eventually attracted me to Stoicism.

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