

## President Thomas S. Monson

Have you ever cleaned an attic or rummaged through an old storeroom? One discovers a bit of history and a whole lot of sentiment. A few weeks ago we emptied the attic of our mountain cabin. Seventy years of treasures, each with its own special memory, passed in review. Leading the parade was an old high chair with metal wheels. This was followed by glass milk bottles that once had pasteboard caps and by a copy of *Life* magazine with a story from World War II.

### A story from the past

Featured in the magazine was an account of a once proud airplane, a mighty bomber, found rather well preserved in an isolated corner of the vast Sahara Desert. The bomber and crew had participated in the famous raid over Rumania's Ploiesti oil fields. The craft had been struck by anti-aircraft fire, which completely destroyed its communication and navigational equipment. As the stricken plane turned toward its desert landing field, a sudden sandstorm obliterated familiar points of reference. The field's landing lights were shrouded by sand. The plane droned on, even far beyond the landing field, into the desert wastes until, with fuel exhausted, it settled on the Sahara, never to fly again. All crew members perished. Home and the safety and shelter there to be found had been denied. Victory, hopes, dreams — all had been swallowed by the silence of the desert's dust.

### The Liahona provided Lehi heavenly guidance

Centuries earlier, a righteous and loving father by the name of Lehi took his beloved family into this same desert wasteland. He journeyed in response to the voice of the Lord. But the Lord did not decree that such a "flight" be undertaken without heavenly help. The

words of Nephi describe the gift provided on the morning of the historic trek:

"And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness" (1 Nephi 16:10).

War and man-made means of destruction could not confuse or destroy this curious compass. Neither could the sudden desert sandstorms render useless its guiding powers. The prophet Alma explained that this "Liahona," as it was called, was a compass prepared by the Lord. It worked for them according to their faith and pointed the way they should go (see Alma 37:38–40).

### Patriarchal blessings provide heavenly guidance

The same Lord who provided a Liahona to Lehi provides for you and for me today a rare and valuable gift to give direction to our lives, to mark the hazards to our safety, and to chart the way, even safe passage — not to a promised land, but to our heavenly home. The gift to which I refer is known as your patriarchal blessing. Every worthy member of the Church is entitled to receive such a precious and priceless personal treasure.

"Patriarchal blessings," wrote the First Presidency in a letter to stake presidents, "contemplate an inspired declaration of the lineage of the recipient and, when so moved upon by the Spirit, an inspired and prophetic statement of the life mission of the recipient, together with such blessings, cautions and admonitions as the patriarch may be prompted to give for the accomplishment of such life's mission, it being always made clear that the realization of all promised blessings is conditioned upon faithfulness to the gospel of our

Lord, whose servant the patriarch is" (First Presidency letter to stake presidents, 28 June 1958).

### The calling of a patriarch

Who is this man, this patriarch, through whom such seership and priesthood power flow? How is he called? The Council of the Twelve Apostles has special responsibility pertaining to the calling of such men. From my own experience I testify that patriarchs are called of God by prophecy. How else could our Heavenly Father reveal those to whom such prophetic powers are to be given? A patriarch holds an ordained office in the Melchizedek Priesthood. The patriarchal office, however, is one of blessing — not of administration. I have never called a man to this sacred office but what I have felt the Lord's guiding influence in the decision. May I share with you one treasured experience?

Many years back I had been assigned to name a patriarch for a stake in Logan, Utah. I found such a man, wrote his name on a slip of paper, and placed the note inside my scriptures. My further review revealed that another worthy patriarch had moved to this same area, making unnecessary the naming of a new patriarch. None was named.

Nine years later I was again assigned a stake conference in Logan. Once more a patriarch was needed for the stake I was to visit. I had been using a new set of scriptures for several years and had them in my briefcase. However, as I prepared to leave my home for the drive to Logan, I took from the bookcase shelf an older set of scriptures, leaving the new ones at home. During the conference I began my search for a patriarch: a worthy man, a blameless servant of God, one filled with faith, characterized by kindness. Pondering these requirements, I opened my scriptures and there discovered the slip of paper placed there long years before. I read the name written on the paper: Cecil B. Kenner. I asked the

stake presidency if by chance Brother Kenner lived in this particular stake. I found he did. Cecil B. Kenner was that day ordained a patriarch.

### Profile of a patriarch

Patriarchs are humble men. They are students of the scriptures. They stand before God as the means whereby the blessings of heaven can flow from that eternal source to the recipient on whose head rests the hands of the patriarch. He may not be a man of letters, a possessor of worldly wealth, or a holder of distinguished office. He, however, must be blessed with priesthood power and personal purity. To reach to heaven for divine guidance and inspiration, a patriarch is to be a man of love, a man of compassion, a man of judgment, a man of God.

### "Your patriarchal blessing is to you a personal Liahona"

A patriarchal blessing is a revelation to the recipient, even a white line down the middle of the road, to protect, inspire, and motivate activity and righteousness. A patriarchal blessing literally contains chapters from your book of eternal possibilities. I say eternal, for just as life is eternal, so is a patriarchal blessing. What may not come to fulfillment in this life may occur in the next. We do not govern God's timetable. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Your patriarchal blessing is yours and yours alone. It may be brief or lengthy, simple or profound. Length and language do not a patriarchal blessing make. It is the Spirit that conveys the true meaning. Your blessing is not to be folded neatly and tucked away. It is not to be framed or published. Rather, it is to be read. It is to be loved. It is to be followed. Your patriarchal

blessing will see you through the darkest night. It will guide you through life's dangers. Unlike the struggling bomber of yesteryear, lost in the desert wastes, the sands and storms of life will not destroy you on your eternal flight. Your patriarchal blessing is to you a personal Liahona to chart your course and guide your way.

### Choose the right path

In Lewis Carroll's classic, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice finds herself coming to a crossroads with two paths before her, each stretching onward but in opposite directions. She is confronted by the Cheshire Cat, of whom Alice asks, "Which path shall I take?"

The cat answers, "That depends where you want to go. If you do not know where you want to go, it doesn't really matter which path you take" (see *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [London: J.M. Dent, 1954], p. 54).

Unlike Alice, each of us knows where he or she wants to go. It does matter which way we go, for the path we follow in this life surely leads to the path we shall follow in the next.

### A patriarch's prophetic promise fulfilled

Patience may be required as we watch, wait, and work for a promised blessing to be fulfilled.

One afternoon Percy K. Fetzer, a righteous patriarch, came to my office by appointment. He was weeping as we visited together. He explained that he had just returned from the land of Poland, where he had been privileged to give patriarchal blessings to our worthy members there. After a long pause, the patriarch revealed that he had been impressed to promise to members of a German-speaking family by the name of Konietz declarations which could not be fulfilled. He had promised missions. He had promised temple blessings. These were beyond the reach of those whom he had blessed. He whispered that he had tried to withhold the

promises he knew were unattainable. It had been no use. The inspiration had come, the promises spoken, the blessings provided.

"What shall I do? What can I say?" he repeated to me.

I replied, "Brother Fetzer, these blessings have not come from you; they have been given of God. Let us kneel and pray to Him for their fulfillment."

Within several years of that prayer, an unanticipated pact was signed between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Polish nation which provided that German nationals trapped in Poland at war's end could now enter Germany. The Konietz family, whose members had received these special patriarchal blessings, came to live in West Germany. I had the privilege to ordain the father a bishop in the Dortmund stake of the Church. The family then made that long-awaited trek to the temple in Switzerland. They dressed in clothing of spotless white. They knelt at a sacred altar to await that ordinance which binds father, mother, brothers, and sisters not only for time, but for all eternity. He who pronounced that sacred sealing ceremony was the temple president. More than this, however, he was the same servant of the Lord, Percy K. Fetzer, who, as a patriarch years before, had provided those precious promises in the patriarchal blessings he had bestowed.

*How far is Heaven?*

*It's not very far.*

*When you live close to God,*

*It's right where you are.*

Your patriarchal blessing is your passport to peace in this life. It is a Liahona of light to guide you unerringly to your heavenly home. Of these sacred truths I testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### President Benson

President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has been our concluding speaker.