

A Commentary on the movie

“PLEASANTVILLE”

by Max B. Skousen

SEEING MOVIES AS ALLEGORIES

Our scriptures tell us that all things, both temporal and spiritual are created to bear record of God “all things” would certainly include movies, for they are one of the most powerful and dramatic communication devices every known to mankind. In fact, movies might be one of God’s greatest teaching tools for our generation. But if they are, what great divine messages do they contain that cannot be taught openly for all to see, and instead, are being revealed only indirectly and cryptically? As you know, I believe that the greatest truth and the best kept secret is the knowledge of who and what God is, thus knowing who and what we are. But don’t we Latter-day Saints already know who we are? We are children of God. So is that such a big secret? *Yes, as we have found, it really is!* Not only that, IT NEEDS TO BE GUARDED CAREFULLY!

But if God is using movies, why do many movies appear to be anything but spiritually, uplifting symbolic allegories?

Well, sometimes it might be for effect. Since the natural man is so quick to judge, do you think God might sometimes offend our knowledge of good and evil to reveal to us our own prejudices and self righteousness? For example, many of Christ’s stories and statements were very disturbing, even offensive, to the people of His day, especially the Church leaders. So it is evident that God often uses the profane to shock us in our pharisaical judgmentalness. This movie is certainly no exception.

SEEING THE MOVIE *PLEASANTVILLE* ONLY AS PERMISSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

“Pleasantville” is a movie which can offend many of our tree of knowledge sensibilities. The story has many provocative scenes, causing it to be rated PG13, which suggests the need for parental concern and guidance. There is nudity in art, unrestrained sex, implied masturbation and adultery, disrespect for civil authorities and emphasizing the stupidity of a moral community. To the worldly eyes of most of the public, this humorous story teaches how people should be “real” about their feelings, thus becoming free to do whatever they feel like doing, including sex, pornography, anger and violence. When seen in this light, the movie appears to be another sad demonstration of Hollywood’s decadent morality, falsely claiming that anything goes as long as people are honest with their feelings.

THE DANGER OF JUDGING ON FIRST APPEARANCES

If this movie is judged only by our well established LDS standards, there would seem to be few redeeming features of this, otherwise, entertaining and well produced film. But once we understand the nature of teaching parables, we may stop and take another look. What we may find is that behind the demonstration of the permissiveness typical of our times, there are some very useful messages that describe the deeper levels of being transformed into a whole new state of spiritual consciousness. But some might ask, “Why bother?”

The answer is that this movie, when seen as an inspired, teaching parable can help us understand and avoid many of the pitfalls that can occur along the way of liberation.

So our purpose here is to go beyond the carnal interpretation and recognize how *“Pleasantville”* reveals some deeper spiritual principles of awakening which can lead to a level of consciousness called *the “liberty in Christ”, being “spiritually born of God”, “entering the rest”, being “stripped of pride”*

and “filled with the pure and perfect love of Christ”. In this way, the movie becomes an enlightening teaching story of this liberating process rather than what it may appear on the surface, which is only a license to do whatever feels good.

SEEING THE MOVIE ON THE FOUR LEVELS

Now, hopefully, since you have already seen the film, you know it is a story of two young twins, a brother and sister, who are taken through a process by a teacher in which they become transformed from arrogant, self centered kids to incredibly wise, loving, understanding adults. When we look more carefully, we will see that their waking up goes through four phases, which, when seen symbolically, describe the distinct four levels of the gospel, going from the first and second level of the “gospel milk” to the third and fourth level of the “gospel meat”, taking them from the carnal to the spiritual, from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, through the flaming sword, to the tree of life.

Since you have read my *Book II, Finding the Mark: How To Grow The Tree of life In Your Heart*, you can recall that I described how the liberating power of the gospel comes on these four different levels. So the more I thought about this movie, the more I began to realize how it also demonstrates these same four distinct steps in the process of successfully completing the perilous journey from being spiritually asleep to being fully, spiritually awake.

REVIEWING THE FOUR LEVELS OF THE GOSPEL

To refresh your memory, let us briefly review these four levels --

1. **The tree of knowledge level of the temporal law** -- Trying to be successful (worthy) by believing in and doing the *right things*, comparing “what is” with “what ought to be.”
2. **The tree of knowledge level of the spiritual law** -- Trying to be worthy by experiencing the Spirit and thus, feeling the *right way*, but still comparing “what is” with “what ought to be.”
3. **The flaming sword level of Christ’s chastening process** -- Being gradually awakened by an integrative process of being in more unity with what is, seeing the illusions of our fixed conclusions about “what ought to be.”
4. **The tree of life level of being bestowed Christ’s pure and perfect love** -- Entering the rest from this time onward by our not only believing in the oneness of all things, but also personally experiencing our oneness with all things.

COMPARING LEHI’S VISION TO PLEASANTVILLE

In Part I of *Book II, Finding the Mark*, we saw how Lehi’s vision describes the four levels. Let’s compare these four steps in Lehi’s vision to the four stages of awakening in “*Pleasantville*”.

- **Phase 1. The great and spacious building of arrogant pride, mocking those who go to the tree of life.** This is the state of consciousness David and Jennifer were in before being approached by the teacher, the TV Repairman.
- **Phase 2. The strait and narrow path covered by the blinding mist-of-darkness, in which those trying to reach the tree of life, become lost.** This is represented by David and Jennifer, now being identified as Bud and Mary Sue, experience the chaos of trying to fix this new world by using their old way of doing things. In doing so, they mess everything up.
- **Phase 3. The iron rod which can be used to safely pass through the mist-of-darkness toward the tree of life.** This stage is represented when both Bud and Mary Sue have developed a more harmonious way of seeing this new world. They begin to give up their prejudices and begin to create a way of seeing a new, harmonious relationship to life.

- **Phase 4. Partaking of the fruit of the tree of life, thus coming to a state of love, joy and peace.** This is the stage in which both sides of the self, the mind and the heart, represented by Bud and Mary Sue, enjoy full, objective consciousness, called the pure love of Christ, in which the world is comprehended in its true, glorious Technicolor — just the way it is and the way it is not, without fear of the future, which comes from not needing to know what is going to happen next.

ALL THE CHARACTERS REPRESENT PARTS OF OUR INNER SELF

As we delve deeper into the allegorical meaning of this movie, it is critical to refrain from seeing the characters as people “*out there*”, but rather as “*in here*” representations of the many aspects of our inner self. For example, when Mary Sue seduces Skip, the captain of the basket ball team, it is the immature feeling side (feminine) of the self entrapping the naive intellectual (masculine) side of the self.

With this background, I would now like to share some of the parallels one will find in the transformation of David and Jennifer as they evolve in the four phases of transformation.

Pleasantville is that world we pretend is our real ideal self, where we claim there must be absolute good and evil, that there is only one reality, that it is only two dimensional of absolute right and wrong, where good and truth always win and never lose, where everyone is pure and innocent, functioning in perfect harmony and sterile routine.

The two main characters in the story each experience the awakening in different ways. Notice that the story reveals how they went from a conflict between each other, to absolute harmony, yet each adapting to the new view of seeing the world in different ways. In the same way, each of us have two opposing functions within us, the left brain which is the conscious, masculine side of us, and the right brain, which is the subconscious, feminine side of us. These are represented in the story by **David** and **Jennifer**.

David, who is *Bud* in the fictitious inner world, represents our conscious mind going from subjective consciousness to objective consciousness, going to being a victim to being awake to his being true perfection..

Jennifer, who is *Mary Sue* in the inner world, represents love, first as the distorted expressions of *eros* and *phileo*, which is conditional love of sex and adoration, to *agape*, which is the unconditional love bestowed upon us as we awaken to the true glory of the universe just the way it is.

The **TV Repairman** is a very wise teacher who hides the fact that he knows what he is doing, especially when he acts frightened when it appears that the kids have messed everything up.

The **old Remote Control** represents the way we have of accessing the imaginary world of ideals without having to face the discrepancies between that world and our real world.

The **new and strange Remote Control** represents the teachings given to the students to put them into their imaginary world of ideals to let them experience, first hand, the conflict between the two.

Mom, in Pleasantville, represents the illusion of the ideal mother who has no life of her own except to give the kids total comfort and approval.

Dad, in Pleasantville, represents the ideal that the world can always be counted on to protect us and provide for our needs.

The **Mayor** represents that aspect of ourselves that looks to our authorities who will always tell us what we need to know in order to be right, safe and admired, i.e., “pleasant”.

The **basketball team** represents the belief that harmony is the ideal and will always win. When that illusion is exposed, nothing seems to work any more.

The **Pleasantville class** represents how the beliefs which make up the comfort zone and are protection from the outer reality by blinders which deny any possibilities which might conflict with the limited awareness that makes Pleasantville appear to be the *only* reality.

Lover's Lane is where they start to experiment and the two worlds start to crash, temporarily ruining the basket ball team.

Color represents objective conscious awareness. First it comes as specific individualized presence, like a flower or apple, then takes over individuals, finally the entire town.

The **new rules** represent our last ditch efforts to make the old fantasy of the ideals work. Though beautifully intentioned, they create violence and conflict, threatening the very existence of the comfort zone.

The **court** represents when the conscious mind finally takes a stand to live or die in true consciousness. As Christ said, those who find their life shall lose it, but those who *“lose their life for my sake”* shall find it. Only then did the mayor become colored.

Being made off-limits as **“Colored People”** represents the way our old way of seeing is frightened by the new way of seeing. In Lehi's vision, this is the mocking from the great and spacious building to those who were at the tree of life. Both are within us at the same time for awhile.

The **riot** represents the conflict that erupts when the comfort zone is being breached and will no longer sustain the magnitude of the contradiction between the new and the old ways of seeing.

The **bus** taking Mary Sue to the neighboring university represents the new-found *agape* love becoming taught in the ways of perfect understanding in a totally transformed comfort zone that resides within the harmony of both the mind of objective consciousness and the heart of *agape* love.

On **David's return, his real Mom** represents the new way of handling the real world of pain and suffering, wherein he cheers her up and wipes away the mascara, letting her know that things are all working out fine.

The **“I don't know what is going to happen”** scene at the very end is the high level of consciousness of the *“not knowing mind,”* in which we yield in trust that *God really is God*, that *His hand is in all things* and that He really does know what He is doing with His life that we are.

CONCLUSION

If you have made your own copy of this video, you can benefit by watching it every once in awhile and identify those polarized entities to your personality which are being invited to go through the transition of expanded consciousness. Seeing *“God's hand in all things”* can enable us to see that His true world is in full and brilliant color -- even the darkness when we comprehend the light that is shining in it. When the Lord accused His latter-day priesthood of walking in darkness at noon day and President Benson informed us that we could now cast off our blinders, this movie might be showing us a little of the key as to how this is done.

Max B. Skousen
(Oct. 28, 1921 – Nov. 16, 2002)

For more information, visit:
www.maxskousen.org