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Temples

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THERE IS A THEME THAT

is most powerful in my life,

and always has been, in keeping balance.

I introduce it with just one comment that came to me secondhand

from the late President J. Reuben Clark, whose name this Law School

honors. After going through the Harvard mania and earning my

degree, I was in a position,

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through a strange set of circumstances, to earn a second PhD by investing only one more year. (I had already been at it for four.) I raised the issue with Elder Harold B. Lee during a stake conference. I asked for a nudge.

He said, “President Clark just returned from being released as a director of Union Pacific Railroad. He chatted with me on the way west. He said to me in effect: ‘Now that I am 80 plus, all of the distinctions that I achieved, all else that deals with getting through life has paled alongside only one real question: How have I lived in relation to the gospel, and what about my family?’” Then Brother Lee said, “Spend more time with your family! Life is for living!” Good counsel to me at the time.

Where does one find a balance staff? The balance staff is the temple. This is something I’ve addressed before. My few remarks will be slightly skewed

this time toward some insights gained through living and breathing and feeling the Jewish tradition about the centrality of the temple.

The Midrash says five things were missing from the second temple compared to the first.

First, the sacred fire. In Solomon’s temple and at its dedication, there was an outpouring they call the *shekhinah*, the Glory of God, like fire. That did not happen at the second temple. In the first temple they had the gift of prophecy, but not in the second. In the first temple they had a holy anointing, but not in the second temple. The first temple had the Urim and Thummim, an instrument for somehow discerning the will of God. That was not in the second temple. Finally, they had the Ark of the Covenant in the first temple. The Ark was most significant because it contained the tables of the law given to Moses.

At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, all five of those things were present. (This preparatory temple made way for the eventual complete temple, of which the most magnificent example is here in Salt Lake City.) There was an outpouring so real it was like fire. Neighbors, not of the faith, came running, thinking it was fire. Father Joseph Smith stood up and asked, “Is the building on fire?” His son Joseph said, “No, Father, our prayer has been answered. We asked that it would be as on the days of Pentecost, as encircling tongues of fire. It has happened.” In the Kirtland Temple there was a Urim and Thummim in an upstairs room. In that temple all experienced the gift of prophecy, an unprecedented outpouring in the Church up to that point. It was rich and powerful. There was a holy anointing under divine direction. Upstairs in Joseph’s translation room were books—being translated from Moses and Abraham—and other sacred scripture that had not been made known to the world for generations. And there was a prophet of God.

Incredible that we should have inherited in this generation what was so long lost. But that is only the beginning. Brothers and sisters, when as a mere fledgling 19-year-old missionary I had the privilege of receiving the blessings of the temple, one thing was clear to me. Within that set of walls, I felt something almost as tangible as light and the warmth and peace of a warm blanket, heavier than air. I felt it. I didn’t want to leave it. I now think I understand the line in the Prophet’s Kirtland prayer that all who enter might be “constrained to acknowledge . . . that it is [his] house, a place of [his] holiness” (D&C 109:13). We don’t believe in compulsion in this Church. What does constraint mean? It means the very weight and power of the Spirit that we cannot deny is there. It is there, waiting for us. We are invited to come to this sacred sanctuary, in the spirit of dedication, for more.



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Hugh Nibley, in his book on the Egyptian papyri, speaks of the Egyptian temple. Though he sees all kinds of parallels, he simply summarizes by saying the temple is a powerhouse. It is both filled with power and is a generator of power. *Endowment* means, among other things, the surrounding and then permeating of the power of God: “endowed with power from on high” (D&C 105:11). That is what we are called to go back and back again for. We can then concentrate, receive, and carry this power into our own minitemples, which are our homes.

Ann and I had a temple courtship. We were idealistic; the temple was to us the symbol of everything glorious in marriage and promise. We can now rejoice that our family, our children, have taken hold of this. In five successive home evenings, we prepared our children for the Provo Temple dedication. Though the children were small, they could understand about a sanctuary, a sacred place, a house of prayer, a place where all dress in beautiful symbolic white, and so on. We went to the dedication fasting. Some of you may remember the gathering in the Marriott Center with the huge screen. All of our family, even the youngest, felt and gained a temple testimony. God’s power is there.

The Jews now go not to the remnant of the temple, or even of the foundation of the temple, or even of the platform on which the temple stood (all are destroyed), but to a remnant of the retaining wall that provided the stonework, or buttress, for the superstructure. Annually, on *Tishbe-av* (the ninth of the month of Av), they weep and cry out in mourning for the loss of the temple. The most orthodox have faith that there will be a new one.

The temple is the culminating place of kinship and love. As if it were a magnifying glass that catches the light of the sun (*S-o-n* as well as *s-u-n*), the temple somehow enables us to see and feel and be filled with divine love. We often talk about the family unit as one set of parents and children. This is a recent 20th-century idea. *Family*

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in earlier centuries meant at least four generations. Family is the *whole* family. We speak, I think misleadingly, about going through the temple when what we should say is that the temple goes through us. We speak of doing “work for the dead” when, in fact, we only work for the living, and the living in the spirit world may be more alive than we. The power that comes from the assurance of that kinship and the sense that we are serving unselfishly creates a return wave of love that is real. Guidance, protection, loving influence—all these the house of God makes possible for us.

Now, a word of testimony. While we were in the Jerusalem Center, the numbers of visitors increased. First the curious came, and then many others followed, wanting to see. How many?

A hundred thousand last year. We encouraged them to write, in a guest book, their impressions. Is the Jerusalem Center a temple? No, it isn’t. It is a house of learning; but it feels like a temple. We have Jewish friends who have used that exact language. Often those who write say, in Hebrew or sometimes in Arabic, “I feel shalom” or “salaam.” What is that? Peace. We heard a little child, maybe five, pulling on her mother’s skirts, “Imma, Imma (that means “mother”), can we live here?” Why?

President Hunter gave a dedicatory prayer. We were privileged to hear it. He asked that everyone who entered, whether to learn or to teach or for any other purpose, would feel the Spirit of the Lord. That blessing is tangible. Perhaps the world would not understand the difference such a dedication has made to that glorious structure. God’s power now resides in that building, and we had the privilege day after day of basking in a tangible peace.

I testify that this is even more true of our sacred sanctuaries, the temples of the Lord. The temple is a template to help us find and recover our bearings. Twice a month Ann and I go to the temple. We gain something each time. I hear people say, “But it’s the same thing. How can you stand sheer repetition?” For the same reason that Hugh Nibley and his wife do. I’ve watched him. He concentrates; he focuses. It is never “just the same thing.” This week there is greater depth of understanding; this week there is more of putting things together. In the temple Hugh Nibley is like a child on Christmas morning. So can we be.

I pray that in the moments of anguish and stress and burden that will come to all of us, we will recognize that God has given us a balance staff, which, as the Prophet Joseph once said, “holds the storm.” That is the temple. It is the Lord’s house. He is there through his Spirit, and he has promised to manifest himself in mercy unto his children throughout their lives, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.