



Salt Lake Temple

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Symbolism: A Divine Means of Instruction

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My academic training is in the field of instructional science and learning theory. I have always been fascinated by how individuals best acquire information. Every time instruction is given, it is packaged in some type of presentation or method. One sister in our stake began a lesson on improving family home evenings by displaying a beautiful cake she had made the night before and offering it to anyone who wanted a piece of it. Another sister in the room gladly came to the front of the class, and the instructor promptly stuck her hand in the cake, squishing it between her fingers, and plopped a chunk of it on a garbage bag. She then flipped the remaining goop onto the plate, licked her fingers, and gave the cake to this woman. This volunteer, after recovering from her surprise, declined the invitation to eat what had been given her. The teacher then presented another piece, nicely cut, on a china plate and with a silver fork to another participant in the room. Her point was the same as one President Boyd K. Packer made when he was serving as a mission president: “The lesson was obvious. It was the same cake in both cases, the same flavor, the same nourishment. The manner of serving either made it inviting, even enticing, or uninviting, even revolting. The cake, we reminded the missionaries, represented the gospel. How were they serving it?”¹

I believe that God is vitally interested in the way His gospel is presented. Often, the presentation or method of instruction makes all the difference not only in acceptance but also in understanding.

A number of years ago as I attended the Salt Lake Temple, I

noticed a written statement attached to one of the walls: “God teaches by symbols; it is his favorite method of teaching.”²² This short statement by Elder Orson F. Whitney ignited my curiosity. Knowing that our Heavenly Father is perfect in all things would lead to the obvious conclusion that He is a perfect teacher. Therefore, it follows that it might be wise to focus on the methods He employs to instruct—in addition to the doctrine or content of the instruction.

I find that symbolic teaching imprints visual images in my mind. I often have students draw symbols of themselves as a readiness activity for a lesson on scriptural symbolism. Doing this myself, I determined that perhaps a sketch of a bulldog would be the most appropriate symbol for me, as I somewhat resemble this animal and as it represents my personality very well. My wife even honored me with a lovely pencil drawing of a bulldog that now hangs in a prominent place in my office. The drawing inspires me to expend whatever energy is necessary to complete an assignment and refuse to quit when fatigue sets in.

Symbols Powerfully Illustrate Abstract Concepts or Principles

Biblical writers often employed visualization techniques to help dramatize the doctrine they wanted to teach. This type of literary magic expanded the writers’ mere use of words into a realm of visual images that are lasting, impressive, and illustrative of divine principles. Take, for instance, the doctrinal instruction about repentance and forgiveness provided by Isaiah. The Lord clearly teaches that we must become clean and admonishes His children to “put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil” (Isaiah 1:16). He then provides a powerful symbol that “though your *sins be as scarlet*, they shall be as *white as snow*; though they be *red like crimson*, they shall be *as wool*” (Isaiah 1:18; emphasis added). For me, I see in my mind’s eye something soaked in blood contrasted with a beautiful, crisp winter morning adorned with newly fallen snow, or I see something stained set against the clean, white wool of a recently shorn sheep. The teaching is complete: regardless of my sin, there is the possibility of complete forgiveness. We can see why God often chooses to instruct His children with symbols. Symbolic teaching helps the scripture student grasp abstract principles, like forgiveness, by providing a physical or tangible vehicle in which to convey them. I rather enjoy this poem written by Marguerite Stewart because it teaches repentance through a symbolic device:

When I went to the door, at the whisper of knocking,
I saw Simeon Gantner’s daughter, Kathleen, standing
There, in her shawl and her shame, sent to ask

“Forgiveness Flour” for her bread. “Forgiveness Flour,”
 We call it in our corner. If one has erred, one
 Is sent to ask for flour of his neighbors. If they loan it
 To him, that means he can stay, but if they refuse, he had
 Best take himself off. I looked at Kathleen . . .
 What a jewel of a daughter, though not much like her
 Father, more’s the pity. “I’ll give you flour,” I
 Said, and went to measure it. Measuring was the rub.
 If I gave too much, neighbors would think I made sin
 Easy, but if I gave too little, they would label me
 “Close.” While I stood measuring, Joel, my husband
 Came in from the mill, a great bag of flour on his
 Shoulder, and seeing her there, shrinking in the
 Doorway, he tossed the bag at her feet. “Here, take
 All of it.” And so she had flour enough for many loaves,
 While I stood measuring.³

Flour is an excellent symbol for forgiveness in that it embodies the deeper symbol God often uses to describe what He gives so that we may live. When Jesus fed the five thousand, He did so by offering loaves of bread (see John 6:4–13). Later, He taught that He had been sent from His father to give “life unto the world” (John 6:33). He then connected the dots between what He had done earlier in feeding bread to the thousands to satiate their hunger and what His larger mission was in providing spiritual nourishment to satisfy mankind’s spiritual cravings: “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger” (John 6:35).

The whole notion of physical and spiritual hunger had been dramatized earlier through the symbols of manna and shewbread. Jesus referred to manna as something familiar to His listeners when He attempted to expand their vision in seeing that He was the bread of life. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32). The table of shewbread was positioned in the tabernacle with twelve loaves of bread on it. The priests were instructed to change the bread each week on the Sabbath, at which time they were to eat it. The word *shewbread* literally means the bread of presence, as the bread was placed in the presence of the Lord.⁴ I can visualize the priests consuming every morsel of bread on a weekly basis. I like to think of these worthy men understanding what the bread represented and the need to completely, wholly take this nourishment into themselves.

I also see the same modern application as we are invited to the Lord’s table not to snack, but rather to feast. Nephi certainly invited us to a similar table: “Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting

upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20). We must also feast upon the right kind of food, which is this bread of life rather than spiritual junk food. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland provided a powerful metaphor when he questioned, “Are we really nurturing our youth and our new members in a way that will sustain them when the stresses of life appear? Or are we giving them a kind of theological Twinkie—spiritually empty calories?”⁵

Most of us can remember the last time we ate a Twinkie; some of us can even taste it! At one time in my life, I believed Twinkies to be an essential part of my diet. It is not hard for me to understand the physical connection of this item in contrast to the abstract concept of needing constant spiritual nourishment that will build my soul. The ordinance of the sacrament becomes the critical link in the process of receiving this nourishment, to be filled with the Spirit of God (see 3 Nephi 18:9).

Symbols often represent the tangible evidence that teaches us about God and His laws. This is precisely the evidence Alma offered to Korihor (see Alma 30:43, 44). Korihor had demanded proof from Alma; Korihor wanted a sign to convince him that there is a God (see Alma 30:43). Alma declared that “all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44). Enoch taught the same truth, which the Lord had declared to Adam, saying, “And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual” (Moses 6:63).

If a symbol is defined as some object that bears inner or spiritual meaning, then this earth is indeed a primary symbol bearing witness of its Creator. We know, by examining doctrine through the lens of the Restoration, that our earth is a grand symbol for everything that is required of us as mortals. It teaches the plan of salvation in the very steps it has gone through and will go through in the future. Daniel Ludlow wrote: “As a living entity, the earth itself is subject to laws, obedience to which will gain for the earth a celestial glory. The earth was baptized of water at the time of the flood; will be baptized of fire and the spirit; will die, be resurrected, and attain a physical celestial status as a fit dwelling place eternally for the celestial beings.”⁶

One day as I was pondering this subject, listening to music while visiting a fairly distant unit in my CES assignment, one of the songs

caught my attention. I must have listened to it four or five times as it spoke with music and lyrics about this principle of the earth being a divine symbol of God's love and concern for His children. The song is entitled "This Is My Father's World," by Amy Grant, a popular Christian singer.

This is my Father's world.
 And to my listening ears
 All nature sings and round me rings
 The music of the spheres
 This is my Father's world.
 The birds their carols raise
 The morning light, the lily white
 Declare their maker's praise

This is my Father's world.
 I rest me in the thought
 Of rocks and trees, of skies and sea
 His hands the wonders wrought

This is my Father's world.
 O' let me ne'er forget
 That though the wrong seems oft so strong
 God is the ruler yet

This is my Father's world.
 Why should my heart be sad
 The Lord is king, let the heavens ring
 God reigns, let the earth be glad.
 This is my Father's world.

He shines in all that's fair
 In the rustling grass, I hear Him pass.
 He speaks to me everywhere
 In the rustling grass, I hear Him pass.
 He speaks to me everywhere.⁷

It should not surprise us that others of faith, although not of our faith, uncover and explain certain truths just as we would as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We know that the complete gospel was first given to Adam: "And thus the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, by an holy ordinance, and the Gospel preached, and a decree sent forth, that it should be in the world, until the end thereof; and thus it was. Amen" (Moses 5:58–59).

President Joseph F. Smith averred:

Undoubtedly the knowledge of this law and other rites and ceremonies was carried by the posterity of Adam into all lands, and continued with them, more or less pure, to the flood, and through Noah, who was a “preacher of righteousness,” to those who succeeded him, spreading out into all nations and countries, Adam and Noah being the first of their dispensations to receive them from God. What wonder, then, that we should find relics of Christianity, so to speak, among the heathens and nations who know not Christ, and whose histories date back beyond the days of Moses, and even beyond the flood, independent of and apart from the records of the Bible.⁸

I submit that often these relics are either minute or cosmic symbols that teach anyone with a believing heart about the majesty of God. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell has taught on several occasions, we are all part of a “witnessing universe.”⁹

Over the past twenty-six years of teaching mostly abstract concepts or principles, I have found that some tangible object anchored my most memorable lessons. At least these symbolic objects caught my learners’ attention and provided a focal point of instruction. For example, I have regularly used salt, water, a light bulb, and a bit of electricity to demonstrate the critical issue of honoring our covenants with God. The bulb lights up when salt is stirred in the water where electricity is present. God uses these tangible, everyday objects of light and salt to help us better understand that we become a light to others when we make and keep covenants, which brings power into our lives (see Matthew 5:13–16; D&C 101:39).

One of President Packer’s well-known teaching examples also focuses on the notion of providing a physical symbol or object when he tried to talk about his testimony. Although his testimony was very real, he found it difficult to explain to a nonbeliever, especially someone who was quick to ridicule spiritual truths that do not lend themselves to empirical evaluation. His experience sounds hauntingly similar to Alma’s experience with Korihor. Elder Packer recounts:

I sat on a plane next to a professed atheist who ridiculed my belief in God. I bore my testimony to him: “There is a God. I know He lives!”

He said: “You don’t know. Nobody knows that. You can’t know it.” When I would not yield, the atheist posed perhaps the ultimate challenge to testimony. “All right,” he said in a sneering, condescending way, “you say you know.” Then, “Tell me how you know.”

I could not do it. I was helpless to communicate. When I used the words spirit and witness, the atheist responded, “I don’t know what you are talking about.” The words prayer, discernment, and faith also were meaningless to him.

“You see,” he said, “you don’t really know. If you did, you would be able to tell me how you know.”

Perhaps, I thought, I had borne my testimony to him unwisely, and I was at a loss as to what to do. Then came the experience. A thought, a revelation, came into my mind, and I said to the atheist: “Let me ask you a question. Do you know what salt tastes like?”

“Of course I do,” was his reply.

“When did you taste salt last?”

“I just had dinner on the plane.”

“You just think you know what salt tastes like,” I said.

He insisted, “I know what salt tastes like as well as I know anything.”

“If I gave you a cup of salt and a cup of sugar, could you tell the salt from the sugar if I let you taste them both?”

“Now you are getting juvenile,” he said. “Of course I could tell the difference. I know what salt tastes like. I know it as well as I know anything.”

“Then,” I said, “assuming that I have never tasted salt, explain to me just what it tastes like.”

After some thought, he ventured, “Well—I—uh, it is not sweet, and it is not sour.”

“You’ve told me what it isn’t, not what it is.”

After several attempts, of course he could not do it. He could not convey, in words alone, so ordinary an experience as tasting salt.

I bore testimony to him once again and said: “I know there is a God. You ridiculed that testimony and said that if I did know, I would be able to tell you exactly how I know. My friend, spiritually speaking, I have tasted salt. I am no more able to convey to you in words alone how this knowledge has come than you are able to tell me what salt tastes like. But I say to you again, there is a God! He lives! And just because you don’t know, don’t try to tell me that I don’t know, for I do!”

As we parted, I heard him mutter: “I don’t need your religion for a crutch. I don’t need it.”¹⁰

Symbols Are Universal

A ring carries universal application as a symbol. It indicates, among other things, commitment, marriage, eternity, a covenant, love, and promises. Using a ring as his symbol, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught a bit about eternity: “The elements are eternal. That which has a beginning will surely have an end; take a ring, it is without beginning or end—cut it for a beginning place and at the same time you have an ending place.”¹¹

When I served a mission in Venezuela, I had little trouble adjusting to traffic laws in South America because the signs had familiar shapes, even though the words were in a different language. A stoplight conveys the same meaning regardless of its physical location. Colors invoke not only emotion but also meaning. In most cultures, white connotes the notion of purity and cleanliness, whereas black seems to represent darkness and evil. I find one of the most fascinating passages about symbolic color in the book of Revelation. John describes the celestial kingdom and, specifically, the throne of God (see Revelation 4:3). One of the gems in the throne is green. We associate the color green with eternity as the evergreen of the Christmas tree. John uses this association to convey the principle that the God we love and worship is everlasting and eternal. By extension, I have felt that John wants us to visualize the throne through his writing and realize that we too can become everlasting through our relationship with God as His children.

The caduceus is the universal symbol of medicine. You often see this icon on a doctor’s vehicle to identify the driver as a physician. This sign intertwines a rod with two snakes and wings at the top of the staff. Interestingly, this symbol of healing reflects the healing that took place for the children of Israel in the wilderness. All the Israelites needed to do was look at the serpent on the brass pole Moses had made in order to be cured (see Numbers 21:6–9). Alma used this Old Testament type in admonishing the Zoramites to look to Christ for their own salvation. He first reminded them that “a type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live” (Alma 33:19). He then taught them that this represented Christ and admonished them to “cast about your eyes and begin to believe in the Son of God, that he will come to redeem his people, and that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins” (Alma 33:22).

Architecture both inspires and teaches with symbols. The Salt Lake Temple is a powerful architectural symbol of everything Latter-day Saints believe. The structure itself breathes lessons about constancy and

stability that come only through righteousness. The actual purpose of the building itself elevates desires beyond the plane of this existence and demands sacrifice in some equivalent manner to that which was given in the temple's construction. Embedded in the granite are heavenly symbols teaching mortals that our God is the creator, organizer, and finisher of each nook and cranny of His infinite universe!

Certain animals or creatures represent powerful symbols for the truths they teach. The dragon is associated with Satan (see Revelation 12:3–4). “Dragons, as monsters, are autochthonous ‘masters of the ground,’ against which heroes, conquerors and creators must fight for mastery. . . . Killing the dragon is the conflict between light and darkness, the slaying of the destructive forces of evil.”¹²

The Psalmist connected the dragon with “the shadow of death” (Psalm 44:19). Thus, we encounter in the pages of scripture Michael warring against the dragon long before this earth came into existence (see Revelation 12:7). Michael seems to have received the unenviable assignment of fighting this beast not only in heaven but now here on earth (see D&C 88:115). A dragon, especially one with seven heads and ten horns, as described by John the Revelator, provides a vivid and frightening sight (see Revelation 12:3). This dragon in Revelation has the ultimate goal of devouring its prey (see Revelation 12:4). In more literal terms, Satan has really only one purpose, which is the destruction of mankind (see D&C 10:27). This motif of a dragon has invested itself in the mythology of knights slaying fire-breathing dragons and saving damsels in distress. In a very real sense, there are knights today clothed in God's armor battling daily against evil and providing spiritual safety for themselves and others for whom they are responsible (see Ephesians 6:11–17).

In contrast, the dove symbolically becomes the opposite of the dragon. It is closely tied to the Holy Ghost and things of goodness, usefulness, truth, and light. “The dove sits in the branches of the Tree of Life and appears with the fruit of the tree and vases of the waters of life.”¹³ Joseph Smith revealed that the dove was given to Abraham as a sign (see Abraham, facsimile 2, explanation of figure 7). The Bible Dictionary indicates that “we suppose that [the dove] has been similarly made known to other prophets on occasion since the time of Adam.”¹⁴ The dove brought back “an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth” (Genesis 8:11). Interestingly, the heading to section 88 in the Doctrine and Covenants notes that the revelation was like an “olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Para-

dise, the Lord's message of peace to us."¹⁵ A dove appeared as a sign of the Holy Ghost at the baptism of the Savior (see Matthew 3:16). The Prophet Joseph gave this explanation to its appearance at the baptism: "The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the *form* of the dove, but in *sign* of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence."¹⁶

Although there are many other symbolic creatures, one of the most instructive is the ox. It was the emblem of the tribe of Ephraim.¹⁷ It is a powerful animal and congruent symbol for the responsibility laid upon the shoulders of Ephraim to assist in the latter-day gathering of believing Israel (see Deuteronomy 33:17). When I see the font in a temple baptistry, I am visually reminded of my responsibility as a member of this tribe to assist in the redemption of mankind by providing myself as proxy in the saving ordinances for my ancestors who have gone before me. At least a part of the burden rests squarely upon my back, just as the font rests on the back of those twelve oxen. I have also heard that we should be equally yoked in conjunction with marriage, with a priesthood leader, or with a coworker. Once I participated in a lesson where the teacher brought in a yoke from the farm and demonstrated its use by putting two volunteers on each side. He then made the point that in critical relationships, it is essential to pull together just as two equally matched oxen do. The benefit is in the result of more effectively and efficiently accomplishing the objective, just as strong oxen made their way slowly and steadily across pioneer trails more than a century ago.

Truly, "symbols are the timeless and universal language in which God, in his wisdom, has chosen to teach his gospel and bear witness of his Son."¹⁸ For me, the symbolic images of scripture imprint doctrine into my long-term memory.

Additional Examples of Symbolism in Old Testament Times

The tabernacle erected in the stark wilderness provided constant visual instruction to the Israelites. It taught how Christ stands in the midst of this barren world, requiring that we simply turn and face Him. If we will turn to Him, He promises to guide us so that we will be like a watered garden (see Isaiah 58:11). When King Benjamin delivered his final sermon, the people congregated around the temple, being

instructed to position their tents with the doors facing the temple (see Mosiah 2:5–6).

The words that John used at the beginning of his gospel, “the Word. . . *dwelt* among us” (John 1:14; emphasis added), meant to tent or encamp, to reside.¹⁹ It could be said that John wrote that Christ chose to tabernacle with mortals. The tent or tabernacle provided shelter and a place to worship. The focus of protection and communion always resides within the power of the Savior. Isaiah taught this same principle when he encouraged the Church to “enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine inhabitants: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes” (Isaiah 54:2). Individuals will find safety in today’s world only within the protective confines of committed Church membership and, more specifically, in covenant relationships with God and His Son. The charge is to lengthen our reach and provide a spiritual shield for the entire earth.

The high priest who officiated in the tabernacle was a constant reminder of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The clothing he wore symbolically taught not only his role as a priest but more importantly the function of our Lord. He represented the Savior and bore the responsibility of all Israel upon his shoulders. An onyx stone upon each shoulder held his clothing in place, with the names of the sons of Israel engraved upon the stones. He wore a breastplate of fabric over his chest with a precious stone set in it for each of the sons of Israel. We know that the Savior loves us; we are His precious children; He bore our sins; and He keeps us close to His heart. Attached to the end of the priest’s robe were pomegranates. Their odor is pleasant and sweet—just as the Savior and His word are the most pleasant and sweetest of all things we can desire. There were also bells sewn to the bottom of the high priest’s clothing, which signaled the sounding of God’s word or revelation and which we must heed for our own salvation’s sake.²⁰

In a personal way, this means that I need to tune my ear and heart to the soundings of revelation, both customized revelation that comes privately and public revelation given by our presiding high priest, for his word represents the Savior’s words (see D&C 107:66; 1:37–38).

Leviticus 14 contains one of the most dramatic illustrations of the power of symbols to teach gospel principles. It describes a very detailed ritual that seems to have little relevance to us today. However, on closer examination, the principles of salvation are on full display.

All of us must come to the priest—Christ—to be cleansed and healed. Because of our sinful natures, He will come to us out of the camp. Elder Holland wrote that “Christ will run to [us], and is running

even now, if [we] will but receive the extended arm of His mercy.”²¹ The angel taught Nephi that this act was the condescension of God (see 1 Nephi 11:16, 26–27). We understand this concept when we sing, “I marvel that he would descend from his throne divine.”²² The act of killing one of the sacrificial birds is a metaphor for what we must do to be clean, in what Paul called being dead to sin, with the need to crucify our old self or destroy that wicked part of us (see Romans 6:2, 6). King Benjamin warned and counseled, “The natural man is an enemy to God . . . unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19).

One of the most powerful images in the entire rite is the act of the leper—the sinner—shaving off all his hair, from his head to his toes. The visual image teaches that we must become like a newborn babe, totally clean and pure, to enter back into the presence of the Father; it is the process of being born again through the elements of blood, water, and spirit (see 3 Nephi 11:37–38; John 3:3–5; Moses 6:59).

Principles of Interpretation

One of the most important tools available to correctly understand the meaning of a particular symbol is to examine it within its scriptural context. For example, the element of blood has various meanings depending upon its context. In Genesis 9:4, blood equates with life; in Moses 6:60, blood now represents the Atonement and sanctification; and in 2 Nephi 9:44, blood becomes a symbol for sin and spiritual death.

It is always helpful to use the study aids available within our scriptures. Ezekiel 37:24 is an excellent example of how the chapter heading, in essence, helps in the interpretation of who “David my servant” is. The heading indicates, “The Messiah shall reign over them.” Thus, in this instance, the servant David represents the Savior. In Joel 1:4 we learn by examining the footnote that the various stages of the locust represent invading or conquering armies.

Often, the most helpful tool is to examine the symbol itself and determine what it represents or teaches. Jeremiah uses the symbols of fishers and hunters to represent those who will gather Israel back to God (see Jeremiah 16:16). But why did Jeremiah use two different symbols to illustrate the concept of sharing the gospel and reclaiming those with believing hearts? By the very nature of the symbols of fishing and hunting, I begin to see how these two methods of gathering will differ. The fishers will be successful in gathering great numbers with

their nets, whereas the hunters will have to seek out those willing to listen under rocks, in caves, behind bushes, or wherever they may be hiding. It reminds me of my own mission and of our young men and women serving missions today. As they go door to door sharing the message of the gospel, at times they find the one or two who are willing to listen and be baptized. I was a hunter, as are many missionaries today. On the other hand, we often read of experiences where the gospel was preached to large groups who joined en masse and even raced one another to see who would be baptized first. Wilford Woodruff and Heber C. Kimball were fishermen of such groups.

Conclusion

For teachers, the question resides in the realm of how best to present whatever content they want their students to learn. In a gospel setting, that learning extends beyond the mind and into the heart. God, the perfect teacher, chooses His methods with absolute precision, and symbolism is one of His most used and valued instructional tools. We, the learners, must struggle to understand the meaning of the symbol and then apply it to our particular time and circumstance. When we do this, the symbol, with its meaning and application, penetrates our minds and hearts. And this process of struggling to capture meaning, perchance, is at least as valuable as the product of complete understanding, which might not come in this life; yet we must struggle. I like the following statement by Joseph Fielding McConkie, as it challenges us as gospel scholars to focus our study more intently on symbols and how doctrine often flows through them: “To be fluent in the language of the Spirit one must be fluent in the language of symbolism.”²³ **RE**

Notes

1. Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 228.

2. Orson F. Whitney, *Improvement Era*, August 1927, 861.

3. Marguerite Stewart, “Forgiveness Flour,” *BYU Religious Studies Center Newsletter* 7, no. 3 (May 1993), 1.

4. See Church Educational System, *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel (Religion 301)* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 149.

5. Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Teacher Come from God,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 26.

6. Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 2:71.

7. Amy Grant, “This Is My Father’s World,” *Legacy . . . Hymns and Faith*, compact disc, A&M Records, 2002.

8. Joseph F. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1873), 15:325.
9. Neal A. Maxwell, "Our Creator's Cosmos," *Religious Educator* 3, no. 2 (2002): 13.
10. Boyd K. Packer, *Memorable Stories and Parables of Boyd K. Packer* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 57–59.
11. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 181.
12. J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 55–56.
13. Cooper, *Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 54.
14. Bible Dictionary, "Dove, sign of," 658.
15. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 1:316.
16. Smith, *Teachings*, 276.
17. See Church Education System, *Old Testament Student Manual: 1 Kings–Malachi (Religion 302)* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 193.
18. Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 1.
19. James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* (Madison, NJ: Abingdon, 1890), 65.
20. *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel*, 151–53.
21. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Therefore What?" Religious Educators' Church Educational System Conference, 2000, 9.
22. "I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 193.
23. McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*, ix.