

Temple Symbolism of the Body

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Near the beginning of the Savior's ministry, after He had cleared the temple of the money changers, Jesus was approached by some of the Jews and asked for a sign to show them He had the authority to expel these people from the temple. Jesus responded, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body" (John 2:19–21).

In this interchange, the Savior referred to His body as a temple, yet the confused Jews perceived only that He was speaking about the temple building where they stood. In making this bold reference to His body as a temple, the Lord was alluding to His future death and subsequent resurrection three days later. Yet why did the Lord refer to His body as a temple? The Apostle Paul gives us insight on the matter when he wrote to the Saints in Corinth, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

From this scripture, we learn that our bodies are temples where the Holy Ghost may abide. We also learn that our bodies are not our own—they were given to us by God. During the two millennia since Christ's earthly ministry, the attitude of the majority of mankind toward the body illustrates a great misunderstanding of these truths.

Attitudes toward the Body

Seeing the body as a burden, ascetics throughout the ages have sought to bring the body under subjection to the spirit by physically abusing the body—using various means such as extreme fasting, self-flagellation, sleeping on wooden boards, and wearing rough apparel. On the other end of the continuum, from the time of Christ's ministry in the days of the Roman Empire to the present day, people have indulged themselves in excesses to appease their physical appetites. Hedonistic pursuit of sexual pleasure has resulted in gross immorality and perverse behavior. The Romans also held eating orgies, where people would gorge and purge and gorge again, not unlike some of today's eating habits where people often eat well beyond the point where they are naturally satiated, sometimes resulting in bulimic behavior. As people seek further bodily pleasures and an escape from reality, drug abuse has escalated to epidemic proportions with all of its attendant personal and social problems, destroying lives and instituting untold pain and suffering.

In modern Western society, many people do not effectively maintain their bodies through beneficial exercise. Both youth and adults transport themselves in a variety of ways to avoid walking even short distances, and as a result many have become couch potatoes. In the last few years, as we have been alerted to the health risks of our sedentary lifestyle, more people have begun a regular exercise regimen. Some carry this to extreme levels and spend vast amounts of time in exercise, attempting to produce a beautifully toned body. Hence, the sculpted body prompts the owner to display it as a status symbol for others to admire.

In the time of the ancient Greek Olympic Games, which were held between 776 BC and AD 393, the body was viewed as an object of beauty to be displayed, so athletes performed in the nude. Now we have entered another period of near worship of the body. This is evidenced by current fashions that cover, uncover, and reveal the body in sensuous ways. Around the world people flaunt themselves on beaches, sometimes topless or nude, and nudity in entertainment is increasingly the norm. Pornography is readily available over the Internet and can be viewed privately to avoid public scrutiny. Its insidious effects have cast a dark shadow in our society.

Part of the focus on achieving a beautiful, individualistic body has led to defacing practices such as tattooing and body piercing. In further pursuit of the ultimate beautiful body, others have turned to cosmetic surgery for help in their quest. In the United States, from 1997 to

2003, there has been an 87 percent increase in the total number of cosmetic surgical procedures such as breast augmentation and reduction, rhinoplasty (nose modification), eyelid surgery, and liposuction.¹ People seek freedom to treat their bodies as they wish. A common aphorism of our increasingly pro-choice society is “It’s my body, and I’ll do what I want with it.”

The Power of Having a Body

Many people do not understand the sacred nature of their bodies and the fact that their bodies are not theirs. Satan does all in his power to perpetuate this by encouraging egocentric, hedonistic behavior because he knows the importance of possessing a physical body and the blessings that can come. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated:

We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into a herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine’s body to having none.

All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. The moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.²

Only in unrighteousness does the devil have power over us. Brigham Young explains in more detail how Satan gets this power over us:

You are aware that many think that the devil has rule and power over both body and spirit. Now I want to tell you that he does not hold any power over man, only so far as the body overcomes the spirit that is in a man, through yielding to the spirit of evil. . . . In the first place the spirit is pure, and under the special control and influence of the Lord, but the body is of the earth, and is subject to the power of the devil, and is under the mighty influence of that fallen nature that is of the earth. If the spirit yields to the body, the devil then has power to overcome the body and spirit of that man, and he loses both.³

Hence, it is important to allow the spirit to rule the body. The Prophet Joseph Smith provides further light on why the spirit is so powerful: “All things whatsoever God in his infinite wisdom has seen fit and proper to reveal to us, while we are dwelling in mortality, in regard to our mortal bodies, are revealed to us in the abstract, and independent of affinity of this mortal tabernacle, but are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all; and those revelations which will save our spirits will save our bodies.” When our spirits understand

the true nature of our bodies, we can act in appropriate ways that will help us to progress and be blessed.

Temple Preparation—Body and Building

To understand the sacredness of our bodies as temples, we can profitably compare the temple building with the temple body. When the Kirtland Saints built the temple, it was constructed with high-quality materials. The sisters donated their china, which was ground and put into the exterior stucco finish to make the walls sparkle and look beautiful. Subsequent temples have always been built out of the best materials. The exteriors of our temple buildings are beautiful, and the grounds are immaculately kept. The interior is also beautifully adorned in simple elegance. Similarly, we should use the best materials to build our bodies. The Lord has furnished us with sound advice on this matter by giving us the Word of Wisdom in Doctrine and Covenants section 89, which outlines healthy and unhealthy foods with an accompanying spiritual promise. We should also be involved in appropriate physical exercise to maintain our health and keep our bodies functioning so we can feel invigorated and able to fulfill our mission here on earth. When we do not eat well or exercise regularly, we feel lethargic; and our spirit has to deal with a dulled body, which can result in a dulling of our spirit, thus hampering our effectiveness.

In addition to our concern for what we ingest, we should also be concerned with our outward appearance. President Gordon B. Hinckley has warned about defacing our bodies with tattoos and piercing. President Boyd K. Packer comments on this latter counsel: “You would not paint a temple with dark pictures or symbols or graffiti or even initials. Do not do so with your body.”⁵

In our wonderful body temple, we have been blessed with the tremendous power to create bodies for spirits awaiting their mortal experience. Satan unleashes all his efforts to tempt us to abuse this power through sexual immorality. President Hinckley encourages us to be morally strong: “Challenging though it may be, there is a way to apply traditional moral principles in our day. For some unknown reason, there is constantly appearing the false rationalization that at one time in the long-ago, virtue was easy and that now it is difficult. I would like to remind any who feel that way that there has never been a time since the Creation when the same forces were not at work that are at work today.”⁶ We need to be morally clean to enter the temple building. This is also a requirement of purity if the Holy Spirit is to abide in us. Temple attendance requires a temple recommend, signify-

ing our purity and worthiness. The physical body also needs to be pure so that it can fulfill its intended function as a temple.

We dress in our Sunday clothes when we go to the temple. Once in the temple, we all dress in white, symbolic of purity and equality. Our everyday dress outside the temple should also be modest and clean. President Harold B. Lee admonished us: “Do not underestimate the important symbolic and actual effect of appearance. Persons who are well groomed and modestly dressed invite the companionship of the Spirit of our Father in Heaven and are able to exercise a wholesome influence upon those around them. Persons who are unkempt and careless about their appearance, or adopt the visual symbols of those who often oppose our ideals, expose themselves and persons around them to influences that are degrading and dissonant. Outward appearance is often a reflection of inward tendencies.”⁷

The sacred music played in the temple helps us to be calm and to focus on things of divine importance prior to doing temple work. The kind of music we listen to on a daily basis should be similarly edifying so we are always ready to be taught by the Spirit, whenever He wishes to communicate with us.

Temple Blessings—Body and Building

Deity manifested. When the temple building is kept pure and undefiled, blessings attend worthy temple goers. The same principle applies to our bodies. When the body is pure and undefiled, it becomes a temple. A temple is a place where Deity can be manifest. This is clearly stated in the dedicatory prayer offered in the Kirtland Temple. “For thou knowest that we have done this work through great tribulation; and out of our poverty we have given of our substance to build a house to thy name, that the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people” (D&C 109:5).

Temple buildings are places where the Lord may come and manifest Himself. Our bodies, when pure, are places where the Holy Ghost, a Deity, may come. “But the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130:22). What a magnificent blessing to know that if we are worthy, the Spirit can dwell in us!

This presence of Deity can be more than transitory and can actually be a continual presence. Again we read from the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer about the Lord’s presence: “That thy glory may rest down upon thy people, and upon this thy house, which we now dedicate to thee, that it may be sanctified and consecrated to be holy, and that thy

holy presence may be continually in this house; and that all people who shall enter upon the threshold of the Lord's house may feel thy power, and feel constrained to acknowledge that thou hast sanctified it, and that it is thy house, a place of holiness" (D&C 109:12–13).

A continual presence of the Holy Ghost within us is also a promise to those who are righteous and pure. In Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph Smith was assured that if we are righteous, "the Holy Ghost shall be [our] constant companion" (D&C 121:46).

We may think that if we live the commandments, we can have the influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives, but do we realize the importance of having the Holy Ghost as our constant companion and making His abode with us? Do we realize the blessings that can bring into our lives? What then are the blessings that come from having continual access to Deity?

Sanctification. In the Kirtland Temple dedicatory prayer just quoted in Doctrine and Covenants 109:12–13, we learn that the presence of the Lord sanctifies and consecrates the building. The presence of the Holy Ghost in us can complete the same function for our bodies; He sanctifies us from all sin. He purges out all that is dross. Speaking to the Nephites, the resurrected Lord explained this: "Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day" (3 Nephi 27:20).

Comfort, peace, and knowledge. Whenever I enter the temple, I immediately feel a comfort and peace envelop me. Years ago, after moving to a new city, I was feeling quite homesick, so I decided to go to the temple. I entered the building and sat waiting for a friend to arrive. I thought to myself, "What am I doing in this city? I am so far from home." My gaze drifted to the wall above me and rested on a photograph of the temple. Immediately, I felt a tremendous outpouring of love soothing me. My eyes then slowly moved across the room to a painting of the Savior. These wonderful feelings of love and peace increased, and accompanying them came these thoughts: *You are home, and I am right here.*

Things are usually better when we go home. Going to the temple is like going home for me. I always feel love and acceptance and, well, just a feeling of being home. The presence of Deity has this effect. After all, we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, and one day we will go home. The temple helps us experience that feeling of being home while here in mortality.

The Holy Ghost is called the Comforter, or the first Comforter.

As we live pure lives, we will experience His continual presence, and He will be there to lift us in difficult times. “And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26).

If a person continues in humility to be obedient to the commandments, another Comforter is promised. The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote:

When the Lord has thoroughly proved him and finds that the man is determined to serve Him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the Saints, as is recorded in the testimony of St. John, in the 14th chapter. . . . Now what is the other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.⁸

We can be taught and thus gain knowledge in both types of temples. As we enter our temple buildings spiritually prepared and worthy, we are able to transcend the physical world and access the divine, spiritual realm. There is a focus on reverence and quietness in the rooms of the temple, which enables such communication to occur. We need to go with an inner quietude and a reverent, reflective demeanor if we wish to be taught by the divine. Then, we are ready to receive revelation and light. The same applies to us as we seek direction in our own lives outside the temple building. As we quietly ponder our inner questions and petition our Father in Heaven, enlightenment can come.

In the temple building, there are multiple meanings to the information we receive. The same is true as we read the scriptures. As we seek for knowledge, we need to get rid of willfulness and submit our will to our Father in Heaven. The Holy Ghost can help us know what to pray for. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

We can gain spiritual knowledge and knowledge to help us in our temporal affairs. “For behold, again I say unto you that if ye will enter

in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5).

We can also learn in different ways, cognitively and experientially. The Spirit will witness truth to us. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “Through the Holy Ghost the truth is woven into the very fibre and sinews of the body so that it cannot be forgotten.”⁹ As we live according to the truth of the gospel and repent, sin is purged from us and we receive more light. We all know good people who radiate this light and reflect it in their countenances.

Endowed with power and a protective shield. Both kinds of temples give those who are worthy a protective shield and the power to cope with life. Speaking of our temple buildings, President Boyd K. Packer states, “Our labors in the temple cover us with a shield and a protection, both individually and as a people.”¹⁰ This protection is illustrated in an incident recorded in the Old Testament. The Ammonites and others came to do battle against outnumbered Judah. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, proclaimed a fast and gathered his people to the temple:

And said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?

Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?

And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying,

If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. . . .

Then . . . came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation;

And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus, saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s. (2 Chronicles 20:6–9, 14–15)

Subsequent to this incident, the enemies of Israel warred among themselves and destroyed each other. God protected His people after they pleaded with Him at the temple. Likewise, the Lord has given us a body as a protective shield. Brigham Young described it in this way: “The spirit dwelling within the outer tabernacle, answering to the spirit what our clothing answers to this body, as a covering and shield and protection.”¹¹ Remember, righteous beings with bodies have power over those, such as Satan, who do not have bodies. However, when we are unrighteous, we lose the Spirit and divine power with its accompanying protective shield. Joseph Smith, speaking of the unrighteous use of the priesthood and the resulting consequences, stated:

That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God. (D&C 121: 36–38)

In the Doctrine and Covenants, after describing His own suffering in the Atonement, the Savior warns Martin Harris that without repentance, sins will lead to suffering. The protective shield is removed when the Spirit has left. “Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit” (D&C 19:20).

A refuge from the world. With all these blessings, the temple is a refuge from the world. It is a place to escape from celestial influences and be comforted, strengthened, taught, and endowed with power and protection. When we are worthy, our bodies can also be a refuge from the world. In its own way, the body can be a traveling tabernacle in the wilderness of the world, that through the influence of the Holy Ghost we can be lifted up and be protected from tainting worldly influences. The body can be our home away from home when we cannot be in the temple building.

Conclusion

Just as Jesus cast the money changers from the temple, we should cast the material world away from and out of us. As we live worthy, righteous lives, we can experience the previously mentioned blessings available to us both when we treat our bodies as temples and when we worthily attend the temple. If we do this, we will ultimately be resurrected with immortal, glorified bodies and have eternal life in the celestial kingdom with our Father and His Son.

John the Revelator describes the holy Jerusalem in the celestial kingdom: “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:22–23). As there is no worldly, impure influence to be shielded from in the celestial kingdom, there is no need for a temple building as a sacred, dedicated place for the Lord to manifest Himself to us because our Father and His Son will be the temples with Their glorified, immortal bodies. **RE**

Notes

1. *Cosmetic Surgery Quick Facts: 2003 ASAPS Statistics*, The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, <http://surgery.org/press/procedurefacts-asqf.php> (accessed July 5, 2004).
2. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 181.
3. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 2:255–56.
4. Smith, *Teachings*, 355.
5. Boyd K. Packer, “Ye Are the Temple of God,” *Ensign*, November 2000, 73.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “What Prophets and Apostles Teach about Chastity and Fidelity,” *Ensign*, October 1998, 38.
7. Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 220.
8. Smith, *Teachings*, 150–51.
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:48.
10. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 265.
11. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:272.