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Abraham's Temple Drama

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CHAPTER 1

ABRAHAM'S TEMPLE DRAMA

Hugh W. Nibley

The Pearl of Great Price is rightly named. It contains enormous value in a very small scope. Also, it has long been lying with “purest ray serene” in the dark caves of the ocean, or in a shabby back lot where the merchant discovered it (see Matthew 13:45–46). Like no other book, it contains in its sixty-five pages the answers to the ultimate questions of philosophy, religion, and science. Even more wonderful, it fills those enormous gaps in our records of the past for which science must give an accounting. What was going on during all those lost millennia that the Egyptologist Jan Assmann calls “the great forgetting”?¹ We should know, and this book is good enough to tell us.

The Pearl of Great Price is a book of dispensations. Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young said we do not know how many dispensations there have been, but the classic number in most ancient records is seven. A dispensation is a time when the heavens are open and truth is dispensed or handed out to men. It happened with Adam, Enoch, and Noah “before Abraham was,” and after Abraham with

Moses, Christ, and Joseph Smith. Each one of these contributed his own story to this small handbook. Abraham's story is the only apocryphon written in the first person—an oddity not overlooked in the Pearl of Great Price. The key passages to all of these books appear at length in our wonderful Pearl of Great Price. Notice that Abraham is squarely in the middle; all things seem to zero in on him. He has been called the most pivotal and strategic man in the course of world history. In his position he binds all things together and gives meaning and purpose to everything that happened. The whole world was rent by strife and rancor, and Abraham was like a man who sews together a badly rent garment. It was said that "charity . . . was asleep [in the world], and [Abraham] roused it."² He joined man to God when he and his wife won souls to God. "Were it not for men like Abraham," said the Lord, "I would not have bothered to create heaven and earth, sun and moon."³ Converting them was as if he had created them anew. He was the perfect one who brought man nearer to God. He entered into the covenant the world is based on, as if the world were firmly established for his sake, as if he were the Messiah come to establish the kingdom of God on earth. "My name was not known among My creatures, and thou hast made it known among them," said God to Abraham. "I will regard thee as if thou wast associated with Me in the creation of the world."⁴ "As many as receive this Gospel," said the Lord, "shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed" (Abraham 2:10). "God said to Abraham: As I put Adam and then Noah in charge of all my creatures, I now put you in charge of them, and order you to give my blessing to them."⁵

Before we get any further we must see the rest of the picture, for this superman is simply Everyman. What office did he hold? We know of none. What miracles did he per-

form? What dazzling appearances? He lived in the heroic age, a time of great migrations, of epic literature, but we read of no mighty combats, blow-by-blow, or challenges boasting heroic genealogy. His ten trials were Everyman's trials. He was in trouble in business. The grass, water, and grazing rights on which he depended were often withheld from him. He never drove a hard bargain (the first rule of success according to Mr. Marriott), not even with the king of Sodom, or the generous Ephron the Hittite, who would have given him the burial cave for nothing. He yielded to Lot's greedy cattlemen and gracefully withdrew. We never hear of him punishing anyone, though when the time came to get back his nephew's property, he struck the marauding chieftains with brilliant strategy and knockout force. He forbade his children to marry into alien races, but they promptly went ahead and did so.

He seemed to be generous to the point of lacking common sense. He first sent out his servant Eliezer to look for lost wanderers, but he found none. Then Abraham on his one hundredth birthday, old and very sick, went out alone on the hottest day of the year because he thought he might find some wanderer lost in the desert. He found no one, but when he got home three men dropped in to visit him;⁶ "Lord of the Universe," he cried, recognizing one of them, "is it the order of the Cosmos that I sit while you remain standing?"⁷ The scene, as the archaeologist André Parrot, the discoverer of Mari, a city of Abraham, remarks, "is as magnificent as it is strange."⁸

Abraham was the essential Everyman, but never was there a less-ordinary individual. A recent issue of *Time Magazine* (29 March 1999) is devoted entirely to the study of this century's twenty most influential scientists, thinkers, and inventors. The short biographies that accompany the accomplishments of each of these people point up the

particular and peculiar idiosyncrasies of their creative genius. Interestingly, Albert Einstein and Philo Farnsworth are both on that list. But in a list of the twenty greatest minds of the last *forty* centuries, Abraham must surely make a strong bid for number one. Brief sketches given in the magazine describe the special traits and qualifications of the hundred geniuses of this century;⁹ those traits give an almost perfect character profile of Abraham. The first quality of all is precocious curiosity, which means a hunger for knowledge; as children these people were always disturbing their elders with searching questions about everything. To this weakness Abraham frankly confessed in that revealing second verse that lays out his goals in life: “desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, . . . and to possess a *greater* knowledge” (Abraham 1:2). A goodly portion of Abraham’s legendary biographical record tells how his question-asking as a child got him and his family into no end of trouble. From infancy he was asking searching questions about God, the cosmos, and the ways of men—embarrassing questions.¹⁰ When he emerged from the cave (at the age of ten days, or according to some reports, ten years, or according to others, thirteen years)¹¹ in which his parents had been hiding him from the jealous king, he saw the sun and decided it was God; then the sun set and the moon and stars came up, and he thought that must be God and his attendants. When they set, he started asking questions.¹² In one version he decided that the clouds must be the creative power because they darkened the sun; when the wind blew the clouds away, it was the wind. Then he asked whether the king, Pharaoh Nimrod, was God, and his parents got very nervous. When he refused to believe that Nimrod was God and started pointing out logical inconsistencies in such a claim, his parents saw

trouble. But he went on asking questions. He was especially good at making fun of the worship of idols, a practice in which his own family indulged.¹³

As he grew older the questions grew more dangerous—he debunked the idols by clever arguments which, worst of all, he applied to the king. This threatened the high social position of the family at court, and they finally volunteered him for sacrifice. If you think this sounds fantastic, you should read the Instructions of Pharaoh Amenemhēt I (1991–1962 B.C.), who tells how a conspiracy of ambitious courtiers and members of his own family attempted to murder him as he was napping after supper one night—Abraham's story is thoroughly typical of real conditions at the perilous court of Egypt.¹⁴ The title of Abraham's biography in the great Midrash is *lech lecha*, "keep moving!"¹⁵ Perpetual migration was one of the ten trials of Abraham, for the famine "wax[ed] sore in the land" (Abraham 2:1; see Genesis 12:10). In his suffering he knew how to feel for others.

The extreme independence of thought and action of our geniuses makes them all appear eccentric and willful to the rest of us, but that originality fostered their great inventiveness. At age fifteen Abraham had a job frightening the birds away from the fields at sowing time because they ate up all the seed in a time of great food shortage; he invented a sowing machine that covered the seeds with soil as it dropped them, thus protecting them from the birds—to whom, however, he apologized handsomely for cutting their rations—but gaining renown for his public service. This great zeal for the common good led him to plant trees and dig wells wherever his wanderings in the drought-ridden land led him—with no expectation of personal benefit—for the enjoyment of those who would come after.

At Hebron he ran a school for outcasts where he received all comers. He always played fair: “Charity was dead and Abraham revived it” was a proverb. In our obsession with crime and Western scenarios, the *Hauptthema* (central theme) is always the pleasure of revenge, watching the bad guys suffer, afflicting exquisite tortures, if possible far surpassing those administered by the villain. Such vengeance was not for Abraham; Josephus tells us that Abraham stubbornly pleaded with God to spare the wickedest people in the world because he felt sorry for them, “because they were his friends and neighbors.”¹⁶ That is almost inconceivable to us in our modern Sodom and Gomorrah. “It is compassion and forgiveness *alone* that are the unfailing traits of the true descendants of Abraham.”¹⁷

He was eager to exchange ideas with the greatest thinkers of his time and in his continual travels he visited the courts and schools of Egypt and the Near East, where he made an enormous impression on the wisest and most learned men of the time. One of the best-known stories about him is how, when he was studying the stars on his own, the Lord himself came down and instructed him personally in astronomy. In receiving such blessings, Abraham always made the first move: “Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee” (Abraham 2:12).

We are told that that is the only case in which God appeared to man and talked with him person to person.¹⁸ Today we can add another one; the youth of Joseph Smith shows astonishing parallels to that of Abraham. Both were curious about everything, especially the stars, and asked searching questions that got their families into trouble and made them seek “another place of residence” (Abraham 1:1).

Still delving deeply into popular science, we turn to the current *Astronomy Magazine* (April 1999), where we learn

that the questions that absorb the most advanced branches of science today are the same ones that have always done so, namely: Where did we come from? How does it all begin? Is this all there is? Where are we going? As Karl Popper tells us, all the answers to the questions of science remain forever tentative ones.¹⁹ And so it is that Abraham scores again. He, and if we look around, he *alone* has given us the answers to those very questions—in the temple.

Abraham and the Temple

The altar where Abraham and Isaac met the supreme test was on Mount Zion, the cosmic rock uniting heaven and earth, “whereon Adam had brought the first sacrifice”; it was the altar of Cain and Abel and Noah; “Abraham . . . knew that it was the place appointed for the Temple.”²⁰ Maimonides says that Abraham chose Mount Moriah and dedicated it as the place of the future temple.²¹ As the great intercessor, Abraham joined Michael and Abel in a project of work for the dead, established in the temple.²² It was he who introduced prayers for the dead.²³ Another link between God and man—every follower of Abraham must receive certain signs and tokens relating to sacrifice; Abraham and Isaac were both tested as offerings on the altar, and both arose unharmed in similitude of the Only Begotten and the resurrection.²⁴

Today Jews are claiming Abraham rather than Moses as the founder of their religion, arguing that the covenant with Moses on Sinai was “but the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham.” All the great sacrifices of the past, “lost at the time of the Tower,” were restored by Abraham. God summoned Abraham to the site of the altar where Adam and Noah “offered the first sacrifice to me,” with the commandment, “It is now your duty, Abraham, to

build it up again!”²⁵ Again, according to Maimonides, God showed the future temple to Adam, who had received all of its ordinances. Everything Abraham does Adam did before him: Abraham restored what Adam had lost.²⁶

It was Abraham who restored the temple after locating the site of Adam’s altar, which he rebuilt, renewing the covenants and ordinances.²⁷ When the world turned to idolatry, Abraham alone was faithful, and so we get such sayings of the Lord: “If it were not for Abraham, I would not have created the world.”²⁸ He carries on the work of Adam, Seth, and Noah at the altar, uniting heaven and earth in the ordinances and covenants between God and man.²⁹ With Michael and Abel he inaugurated and still supervises the work for the dead with special permission, so now the righteous go to “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). God gave Abraham the law—the ordinances and covenants—and declared to him the complete plan of salvation.³⁰ Indeed, we are told that Abraham was associated with God in the creation of the world.³¹ We are even told that the marks on the garment which Joseph brought to Jacob showed it to be the original garment of Abraham which he received from Adam.³² He and Sarah were the greatest of missionaries, preaching wherever they went, their converts receiving the signs and tokens of the covenant and becoming the true seed of Abraham. This made him “the father of many nations” (Abraham 1:2) in whom “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 18:18).

In ancient times the world was covered with temples. What was done in them? Surprisingly, all followed the same general pattern. Over sixty years ago I wrote a paper on the subject, comparing a score of temple rites at the great ceremonial centers throughout the world from the remotest times to the present.³³ They were astonishingly

alike; many scholars had to check over the lists of their common traits again and again to realize that we may be dealing with one single worldwide institution. Thus Samuel Hooke listed five main elements that “constitute the underlying skeleton . . . not only of such seasonal rituals as the great New Year Festivals, but also of coronation rituals, [and] initiation ceremonies.”³⁴ “In extremely diverse cultural contexts we always find the same cosmological pattern and the same ritual scenario,” writes Eliade, and as “man progressively occupies increasingly vast areas of the planet, . . . all he seems to do is to repeat indefinitely the same archetypal gesture.”³⁵ He pointedly observes that “man would not know these tales if they were not revealed to him. Consequently, a myth is the story of what happened . . . at the beginning of time.”³⁶

Carl Jung accounted for these resemblances by what he called the *primal images*, though he confesses that he hasn't the vaguest idea how they began and that we don't even know where to begin to research the subject.³⁷ On the other hand, Lord Raglan and the diffusionists³⁸ say it all went forth from a single planting on the earth by aliens from somewhere.

The Temple Drama

The ancient state or nation was hierocentric, focused on one sacred place of power and authority; such places were sometimes referred to as “places of emergence,” that is, of contact between the Upper and the Lower Worlds, where at the New Year all the people met to rehearse the creation. Regarding this practice, Mircea Eliade writes, “It was the . . . sacred place, . . . the celestial prototype, . . . the act of creation which . . . brought the ordered cosmos out of

chaos, . . . the sacred marriage, . . . the ritual confrontation with evil as the dragon and the victory of the King, whose triumphant coronation inaugurates the new age of the world and the cosmos." There is an "atoning sacrifice" to "restore the primal unity between God and man and enable the latter to regain the Divine presence." In this, "Reality is conferred through participation in the 'symbolism of the Center': cities, temples, houses become real by the fact of being assimilated to the 'center of the world.' . . . The temple in particular—preeminently the sacred place—had a celestial prototype,"³⁹ the holy mountain, "the mountain of the Lord's house" (Isaiah 2:2).

Donald Redford begins the most recent comprehensive history of Egypt by noting that that nation first "bounced overnight, as it were, out of the Stone Age and into urban culture " and also that for "this quantum leap . . . no satisfying answer has been given."⁴⁰ Yet he unconsciously provides the explanation when he tells us about the great popular assembly going back in Egypt to prehistoric times: "All the community, high and low, the ancestral 'souls' and town gods and local numina, all convened to lend their approbation to the incarnate god-king."⁴¹ There is no need to ask why they went to all that trouble, for they realized that the only hope of continuing life indefinitely was to be born again from time to time, following the example of the sun, which, of course, represented the king, himself having to overcome the powers of darkness in a ritual contest, celebrate a brilliant new coronation and marriage, and get on with the usual affairs.

Since World War II, Egyptologists have displayed a sudden and lively interest in that vast Egyptian funerary literature which the older generation of scholars despised and deplored, and they have come to the agreement that

the abiding goal of the people was nothing less than resurrection and eternal life. It was that which made Egyptian civilization what it was. And in a hundred other places in the world people went through the same routine at the same time. Every year in a hundred ancient capitals the creation was dramatized with joyful celebration at the prospect of a new life; singing, dancing, feasting, and drinking were the order of the day, as the angel chorus sings at the beginning of Goethe's *Faust*: Everything was *herrlich wie am ersten Tag*, as glorious as on the day of creation.⁴²

But does all this singing, dancing, dramatizing, and preaching really make it happen? The performance at the temple was a preparation, a training, a school, and a theater, teaching by precept and example. They knew it was not the real thing. Shakespeare apologizes repeatedly in his great superspectacular *Henry V*, begging the pardon of the audience, "Can this cockpit hold / The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram / Within this wooden O the very casques / That did affright the air at Agincourt? / O, pardon!"⁴³ He excuses himself for the sheer gall of daring to stage a great battle with "four or five most vile and ragged foils / (Right ill dispos'd, in brawl ridiculous)."⁴⁴ Still, he is performing a service as he concludes, "Yet sit and see, / Minding *true* things by what their mock'ries be."⁴⁵ The whole thing is just a mockup, as a stage is, a make-believe, frankly, a mockery. But still it will give you an idea of the "*true* things" it is supposed to represent.

So it is with the temple. Anyone who has ever taken a guided tour through an LDS temple before its dedication or seen the extensive guide to temples published by the *Improvement Era*⁴⁶ may recognize the situation. Outside, the temple is boxed to the compass, oriented to the whole

universe; we are often told today that the ancient temple was nothing but a scale model of the universe, a place where we take our bearings in eternity. But what about the Provo Temple? While it was being built, I was shocked to notice that it was not so oriented. I was upset, since Brigham Young laid such stress on that arrangement, and I wrote to the Brethren about it. Then it occurred to me that Brigham Young also reminded the Saints that they should not be scandalized if one temple had two towers and another only one.⁴⁷ In Provo, the architect, while displaying the building itself as an arresting spectacle seen from the valley, took advantage of the phenomenal view of the lake and the valley from the temple—strictly following the directions of the compass would have spoiled all that (see fig. 1). I readily accepted the margin allowed by taste and practicality. While temples are still in the planning stage to suit various climes and settings throughout the world, we need not be alarmed at sundry shifts and alterations. For this is not the final real temple, the ideal future temple of the *Temple Scroll*. This is a training center, a school for precepts and a showplace for examples (see D&C 109). Here we do not receive crowns of glory but only the promise that if we are true and faithful the day will come when we shall be eligible for such.

To resume the temple tour, the first room is the creation room, where we are introduced to the reality with which we have only recently become accustomed of a world waiting to be born, “empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but the earth” (Abraham 4:2). And then cloud-covered darkness, from which we escape into the infinite expanse of the starry heavens to learn that this earth is made of the same materials and on the same pattern and following the same physical laws as other worlds that have

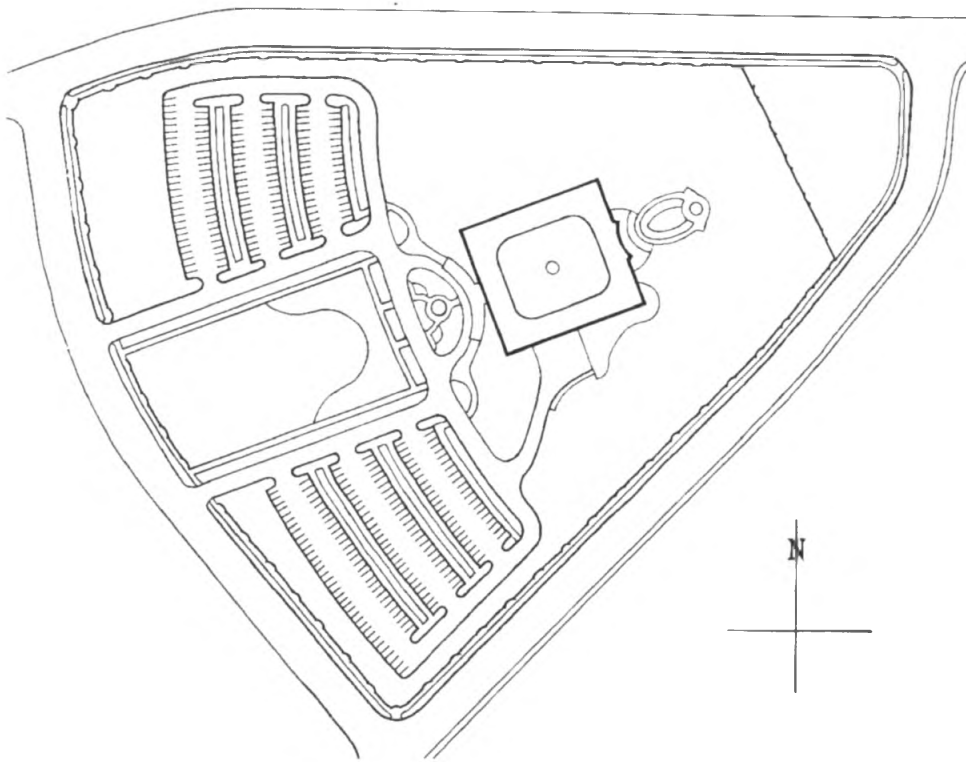


Figure 1. The Provo Temple was oriented 21 degrees south of due east in order to fit the site more perfectly. The inscription "Holiness to the Lord" follows tradition by being placed on the east and surrounded by a quiet garden, while the entrance faces west, like the Nauvoo Temple.

already been formed. This teaches us a basic principle of Mormonism, that we are living in the physical universe. Though medieval and modern theologians vigorously condemn "cosmism," that is, the inclusion of the visible universe in the plan of eternal life,⁴⁸ there is, to quote the Egyptologist G. van der Leeuw, "a human inclination (in general as well as in Christianity) . . . to base trust on one's salvation in the cosmos. . . . [O]nly when the human passion of a divine Savior has a cosmic background does salvation seem sufficiently assured."⁴⁹ Hence, Arthur Lovejoy can conclude that in religious writings of any period "the

language of acosmism . . . is never to be taken too literally."⁵⁰ So Origen, first and best informed of all theologians, declares triumphantly, "When finally, by the grace of God, the Saints shall reach the celestial place, then they shall comprehend all the secrets of the stars. God will reveal to them the nature of the universe."⁵¹ This is the teaching of the early brethren of which Origen is an authority, but his own Alexandrian training breaks through at the end of the passage when he appeals for "perfect knowledge, purged of all that is physical and corporeal." And since the scriptures tell us nothing about the heavens, he recommends consulting another Alexandrian, Philo the great allegorizer, on the subject.⁵²

The next room is the Garden of Eden, the scene of the greatest primal drama of them all. Now it becomes even plainer that the whole thing is a stage set; everything has been properly set up and we are ready for the play to begin. Where is the stage? The room itself is the stage; it is an auditorium filled with seats for everybody, but the audience is part of the play. They are all actors, each in the imaginary role of Adam or Eve. Each individual, in fact, who is not visiting the temple for the first time, has taken the name and is playing the part of another person; he speaks for him, thinks for him (it is all by proxy), and that makes us all actors, role-playing. But this is no "insubstantial pageant faded," which "leave[s] not a rack behind."⁵³ The Lord left his peace and blessing when he departed after the drama of the last supper. For it was a drama too: He explained to the apostles that they were to think thereafter of the wine and the bread as something far more than wine and bread, and to think of him as if he were present. He was teaching them as Jeremiah taught the people when he went around armed with a lamp like Diogenes, staging a

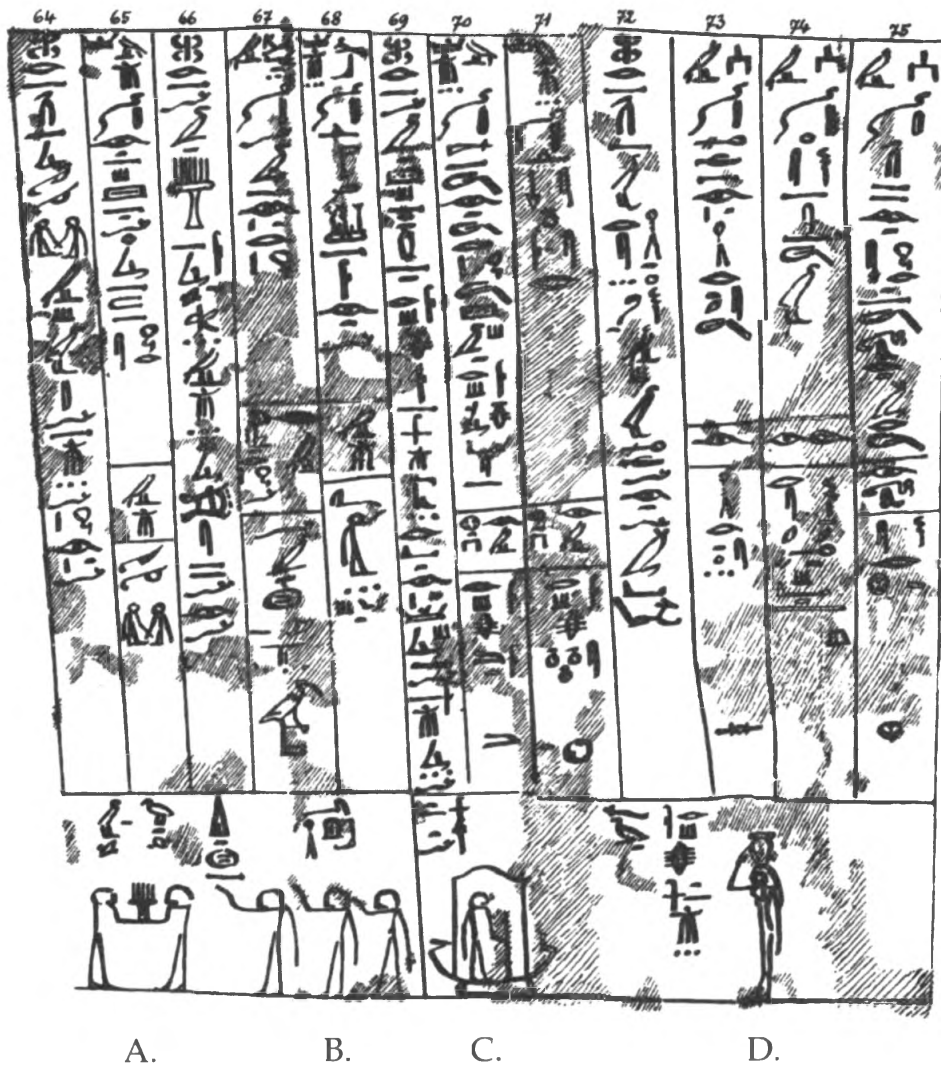


Figure 2. This New Kingdom copy of a much older script has directions and small drawings telling the priests how to perform rituals in honor of Senwsret I, whose statue appears in a boat (C), while his daughters (D) bring in jars of wine. Embalmers (A) carry in offerings, and ritual dancers (B) perform. Line 75 describes the red carnelian stones.

like “mystery,” for the Bible calls it a mystery. The “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” are things understood only by those who have been initiated and taught (Matthew 13:11). One of the oldest Egyptian ritual plays, the so-called Ramesseum Drama (see fig. 2), is careful to explain to the audience that each of the properties represents something

else—the carnelian stones are blood, the green stones are bread, etc.

Why do we call the temple a school? The initiatory ordinances make that clear. We begin there with the first requirement, that our brain and intellect be clear and active—we are there to learn and to understand. Bring your brain with you and prepare to stay awake, to be alert and pay attention; also come often for frequent reviews repeating the lessons to refresh our memory, for you cannot leave without an examination—you have to show you have learned some things.

A famous saying of Aesculapius is that “All Egypt is a temple.” Indeed, everywhere you look in Egypt, you are faced with teaching devices boldly displayed on the outside as well as the inside of the many sacred edifices. That is why even the most hard-headed Egyptologist of the Old School felt he was being haunted, “bugged” by somebody trying to tell him that wherever he went in Egypt, the place had a sense of uneasiness and “ennui”—one seems to be living in two worlds at once. The temple, like the medieval cathedral, presents us on every hand with symbols to remind and instruct the worshiper.

Leaving the garden room, we go into the dismal world in which we are now living to take care of certain matters that have to be expedited in this world. Then we pass on to a better world. Thus we progress by going higher and higher for each new chamber. It was exactly so in the Egyptian temples. The final ascent takes us to the place of transition, where we take the step into the next world. In the wonderful temple at Denderah, the devotee makes his departure from the roof into the world above. The recently discovered *Temple Scroll* calls the large assembly room at the top of the temple at Jerusalem (the model temple of the

future) the room of the golden veil because the veil was hung from one side to the other. One reaches it in Manti by a spiral ascent, a freestanding stairway that defies gravity, supported only by its own weight—the neat expression of an idea.

Today the various steps of creation are made vivid to us by superb cinematographic and sound recordings, showing the astral, geological, and biological wonders described by the actors and the vast reaches of time that the gods called days before time was measured unto man. Along with that, we are regaled by haunting background music that touches the feelings without intruding on the attention of the audience. Yes, the temple is a theater, and no one directs it so well as Abraham. He gives us the creation story and the plan of salvation in a privileged personal showing. He did not have the visual and sound effects that we do, but he had the common resources of all the ancients—the song, dance, and recitation. It was long debated among Egyptologists whether the Pyramid Texts were recited by a priest or acted out, following instructions held in the hand or written on the walls.

The Sacred Dance

The Greeks called the great yearly celebration the *panegyris*, meaning everyone gathered. Singing and dancing are the natural modes of expression among archaic peoples throughout the world, and the ring dance is universal.

Philo, in his work on the creation, says the true initiate during the rites moves “in the circuit of heaven, and is borne around in a circle with the dance of the planets and stars in accordance with the laws of perfect music”⁵⁴—the music of the spheres. Lehi in vision “thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless

concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (1 Nephi 1:8). From that meeting he saw twelve appointed agents descending to earth ("their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament," 1 Nephi 1:10), transferring the glories of heaven to earth with the preaching of the gospel.

Lucian, a clever Syrian who wrote in Greek and spoke for the whole Near East, reports that "You cannot have a single ancient *teleten* (high religious celebration, a mystery) without an *orchesis* or pantomime dance."⁵⁵ Plato says dancing is mandatory at every public offering,⁵⁶ and Athenaeus says no respectable dinner party could be without song and dance.⁵⁷ The Old Testament is rich in dancing situations. Israel came out of Egypt dancing, and the victory dances that followed were by choruses of maidens (see Exodus 15:20; 1 Samuel 18:6). We read of a company of prophets carrying instruments (see Psalm 149:3); they danced as they prophesied. There was a daily procession, with song and dance around the altar in the temple; David and Solomon both participated in it. In the dance of the water drawers, "Pious men and men of affairs danced with torches in their hands, singing songs of joy and praise, with a full orchestra of Levites."⁵⁸ Rabbi Simeon ben Gamal juggled eight torches in the dance. The Song of Solomon was an antiphonal between two choirs of maidens. Rival maiden choruses got David into big trouble when one sang "Saul hath slain his thousands," while the others topped with "But David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:6–7). Just such competitions took place in Greece, preserved in the "Maiden Songs" of Alcman.

So we should not be shocked when we find Abraham composing a ballet on the creation. The Greek name for it was *chorus*. Aeschylus, the first and greatest writer of sacred



Figure 3. In William Blake's magnificent engraving, God answers Job, his wife, and three comforters by demanding to know where he was at the creation of the sun and the moon, shown under his outstretched arms, while the morning stars lift their arms in rejoicing.

plays, choreographed his own dramas. In fact, the chorus *was* the play; it was the chorus that was awarded the prize; the author's first step in celebrating the sacred rites was to "ask for a chorus." Plato says in the *Laws* that "The chorus was nothing more nor less than the *educating (paideia)* of the people."⁵⁹ It was the chorus that sang and danced the creation song. We all know the challenge to Job when he was moping and wailing: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7; see fig. 3). We consistently ignore the words: "Answer thou me" (Job 38:3) and "declare if thou knowest it all" (Job 38:18). Job was there, and the Lord is reminding him that his sufferings and the defects of this world are for a purpose. In the *War Scroll* of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the same speech is addressed to the army of Israel when they are downcast after a defeat, saying in effect, "Remember how glad we were to come down here? Bad times were to be part of the picture."⁶⁰

I have shown elsewhere that the round dance of the creation drama takes the form of the prayer circle in the temple.⁶¹ The *Testament of Job* brings it vividly to mind. Job himself is not committed to any tribe or nation; like Abraham he was just one of the "men of the East." Job's story is indeterminate in time and place but is still full of ancient reminiscences and familiar undertones. The valuable apocryphal *Testament of Job*, discovered at the beginning of the century, lays special emphasis on temple ordinances. It has long been generally accepted that the book of Job is authentic theater. The texts go back to the fifth century.⁶²

In the opening lines of his *Testament*, Job tells his three virgin daughters and seven sons (see Job 1:2) to form a circle around him (the second son's name is Choros):



Figure 4. Blake shows Job encircled by his three fair daughters as he recounts his trials by pointing to their depictions on either side. In the center above him God answers him out of the whirlwind.

“Make a circle around me, and I will demonstrate to you the things which the Lord expounded to me, for I am your father Job who is faithful in all things.”⁶³ Job next tells the circle how the Lord, after healing him of his awful ailments, said, “Arise, gird up thy loins like a man!”⁶⁴ “And the Lord spoke to me in power, showing me things past and future.”⁶⁵ He tells his daughters that they will have nothing to fear in this life from the adversary (see fig. 4) because the garments they wear are “a power and a protection from the Lord.”⁶⁶ Then he tells them to arise and gird themselves to prepare for heavenly visitors.⁶⁷ “Thus it was that when one of the three daughters . . . arose and clothed herself . . . she began to utter words of wisdom in the angelic language, and sent a hymn up to God, using the

manner of praising of the angels. And as she recited the hymns, she let the Spirit make marks [*charagmata*, cuts or rents] on her garment."⁶⁸

The next daughter girded herself likewise and recited "The Hymn of the Creation of the Heavens," speaking "in the dialect of the archons [cf. the council in heaven]."⁶⁹ The third daughter "chanted verses in the dialect of those on high . . . and she spoke in the tongue of the cherubim," her words being preserved as "the prayers of Amaltheias-Keras."⁷⁰ Amaltheias-Keras as Amitla was the mother of the infant Abraham when she concealed him from the murderous Nimrod and fed him from her milk in a cave: she was also the horned Amaltheia, the she-goat whose milk fed the infant Zeus when his mother was hiding him in the Dyktaeian Cave from the bloodthirsty Saturn, even as the infant Horus was concealed in the marshes of Chemmis from Seth by his mother Isis. What can all this be leading to, all these strange parallels? This is the most striking aspect of the histories of Abraham, including the longest biography in the Bible (see Genesis 11–25). It would seem that parallel instances cling to Abraham as to few other figures, including his rivals Nimrod and Alexander the Great.

After this artistic treat—and no one will deny that the temple makes no apologies for appealing to our gentler senses and our delight in the Good, the True, and the Beautiful—we now turn to another medium. Just as it is impossible to present the vast panorama of the creation in its enormous stretches of time without the aid of Steven Spielberg and our modern techniques, we find ourselves obliged to fall back on the age-old procedures of voices offstage, describing the scene and the situation by solo voices or various combinations. We still do this in the temple teachings. In the Book of Abraham we also have both the descriptive recitation and the spectacular choral dance themes.

The Terrible Questions

Of the former, the factual recitation, Abraham gives us the most marvelous text of all, the miraculous third chapter of the book that answers with astonishing economy the most fundamental and baffling questions of our existence. Various individuals have struggled with those questions. For example, I like to recall the case of Clement of Rome, the precocious boy in the first century who tells us the story of how in his school days he started asking himself the baffling questions of existence, which almost drove him out of his mind. The young Clement's main problem was to find someone who could answer his questions—he tried every famous teacher in Rome and found no satisfaction; a friend advised him to go to Egypt, the only place where they had answers to such questions. Instead of going to Egypt, Clement had a chance meeting with the missionary Barnabas that sent him to Caesarea, where he met Peter at a general conference. At last his questions were answered.⁷¹

And here is an interesting coincidence: I know of two other boys who had exactly the same problems with exactly the same questions and received exactly the same answers. They were Abraham and Joseph Smith. We do not need to attribute their inspiration to the schools of Alexandria or Athens.

So the Prophet Joseph recalled:

At about the age of twelve years my mind became seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul. . . . [T]hus from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind the contentions and divi[si]ons the wickedness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind my mind become exceedingly distressed . . . for I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary

of the earth and also the moon rolling in their magesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in magesty and in the strength of beauty . . . even in the likeness of him who created them and when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed . . . all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipreasant power a being who makith Laws and decreeth [*sic*] and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to Eternity and when I considered all these things . . . I cried unto the Lord for mercy for there was none else to whom I could go.⁷²

And how about Abraham? An important part of his biography, mentioned in all the principle sources, is his precocity as a boy. It began with his asking the usual questions, the same elementary questions that Clement and Joseph asked at the same age and, like the other two, Abraham was answered only by the highest source: Clement by Peter, Joseph by the Lord himself, and Abraham likewise: “Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee” (Abraham 2:12). That was when the Lord appeared to him in the nighttime as he was studying the stars, giving him lessons on the nature and structure of the universe, which Abraham has handed on to us in convenient notation of Facsimile 2.

The knowledge is handed on to us in chapter 3 of the Book of Abraham, a statement of principles and doctrines that answer the ultimate mysteries of our existence. I consider this a miraculous chapter because of its brevity and the astonishing expanse of knowledge it covers. Here are some of the “Terrible Questions” and their answers:

1. *The inevitable Where do I come from?* The spirits “have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end . . . for they are gnolaum, or eternal” (Abraham 3:18). “And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them. . . . Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born” (Abraham 3:23). It is strange that the doctrine of premortal existence should be so hard for the world to accept. The *Sefer Yetzirah*, the oldest Hebrew book, usually attributed by the rabbis to Abraham, ends with a resounding declaration of his greatness in the premortal existence. If it is possible for us to be here now, it is just as possible for us to have been there then. Neither proposition, as Roger Penrose has shown, can be proved by algorithm or allegory, yet we have to accept their reality.⁷³

2. *Why am I here?* “We will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; . . . and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” (Abraham 3:24, 26). The oldest Egyptian creation drama, portrayed on the Shabako Stone, says that when the earth was adorned and ready to receive its inhabitants, a law was given by which every action of every creature would be judged: “To him who does what is agreeable (lovable, *mr.wt*) shall be given a life of eternal rest or happiness (*ḥr-ḥtp*, rest, peace, happiness), while to him who does what is hateful (detestable, *msdi*) shall be given death and condemnation (disfavor, *mtḥr ḥbn.t*).”⁷⁴ Note that it is not necessary to categorize what is good and bad: everyone knows it; it is the Golden Rule. There is no need for centuries of probabilistic head-splitting to define and assign precise numerical values to degrees of good and evil.

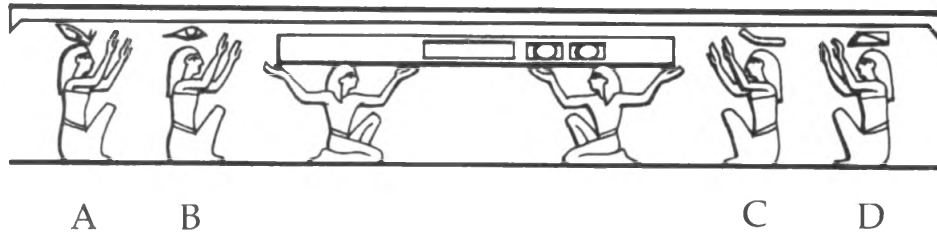


Figure 5. From the temple-library of Edfu, the two central figures support a scribal palette venerated by four figures, representing all that is heard (A), seen (B), uttered by Hu (C), or understood by Sia (D).

3. *How did it all begin?* It is the Egyptian *sia*, “intelligence,” awareness, that comes first. But it is lost without *hu*, “authoritative utterance,”⁷⁵ “communication” (see fig. 5). As the Lord made clear to Moses, “there is no end to my works, neither to my words” (Moses 1:38). The one is incomplete without the other, and this is made very clear in the oldest Egyptian creation drama, where God “conceives in his mind” and then “utters with his mouth,” communicating his intention to the council of the gods at each step of the creation. This is the very modern doctrine of anthropism. Without *sia*—intelligence, awareness—what would exist? And if it were confined to one mind only, what would be accomplished? The Creator must communicate that others may share his “most glorious and beautiful” works of creation, to bring about “the immortality and eternal life of man.”

4. *How does the real universe figure in the gospel?* Ever since Alexandria all the clergy have condemned “cosmism.” But Abraham puts us into the real universe forever: “He said unto me: My son, my son. . . . And he put his hand upon mine eyes, and I saw those things which his hands had made . . . and I could not see the end thereof” (Abraham 3:12). It was all real and visible; this is the latest definition of universe—everything.

5. *The question of the Big Bang: How did it all begin and how will it all end?* Intelligent beings “existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are gnolaum, or eternal” (Abraham 3:18). It is the Hebrew *en sof* (“without end”) principle of the rabbis and Penrose—an idea beyond definition but not beyond our conception.

This brings up a theological question to which only the Book of Abraham offers a clear solution, namely the problem of hierarchy. This was the secret of Egypt’s strength and stability, a strict hierarchical order of everything, which everyone respected. If it was hard for Satan to subject himself to any other being, it is still hard for the individual human to recognize his inferiority to another. Again and again we are reminded of the strangely obvious principle that one thing can be above another. According to Miriam Lichtheim, who supplies us with over seven hundred gems of Egyptian wisdom, every man’s ego is constantly threatened by other egos, and none is secure—the weakest can damage the strongest.⁷⁶ Again and again Abraham takes the trouble to remind us of what should be obvious: “Now, Abraham, these two facts exist, behold thine eyes see it. . . . And where these two facts exist, there shall be another fact above them” (Abraham 3:6, 8). “If two things exist, and there be one above another, there shall be greater things above them” (Abraham 3:16). Why is he so insistent on anything so obvious? And so society throughout history has been locked in a paralyzing round of Thorstein Veblen’s “invidious comparison.” We have to live with it; why can’t we admit it cheerfully? I have children who can run circles around me brainwise—should that depress me?

In our competitive society every ego aspires to assert itself, and it does that by comparison. Thus the deadly Christological controversy in which the Athanasians accused the

Arians of belittling the Son of God by making him inferior to the Father, while the Arians accused the Athanasians of insulting God by making the Son equal to him. Does the Son envy the Father, or is the Father jealous of him? Christians were willing to shed blood over the issue. Joseph Smith gives us four follies that must be avoided at any cost. One should *never*, he says, (1) aspire, for that is what Satan did to bring about his fall; (2) accuse—Satan is the devil, and *diabolos* means “accuser of his brethren”—never mind that the brethren are as guilty as he is; (3) contend—the first rule the Lord gave to the Nephites was, “For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:29); and (4) coerce, or use force to persuade.

Abraham removes the mean, invidious element and makes the order of things accessible to all: “If there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other, yet these two spirits, *notwithstanding* one is more intelligent than the other, have no beginning; they existed before, . . . they shall exist after. . . . And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all” (Abraham 3:18–19). One cannot plead that he is a latecomer, that others came early and got the jump on him: “*Ye were also* in the beginning with the Father; that which is Spirit, even the Spirit of truth” (D&C 93:23). Opportunity is not a matter of early arrival, for “Man was *also* in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (D&C 93:29). This nullifies the whining excuse of Omar

Khayyam that God created us that way, and there is nothing that we can do about it: "He who did man of baser metal make."⁷⁷ Who is responsible then? It is all in my own hands. Intelligence was not created—it unfolds; no matter how backward I may be I can rejoice in my ignorance, knowing that wonderful things are awaiting my discovery. When I am honest, that is, intelligent enough to search out and dwell upon the things I do not know or in which I have been mistaken, rather than preening myself on the little I do know, surveying such latent discoveries is like a child waiting to open packages on Christmas morning.

6. *What is man's position relative to the universe?* Five times in our remarkable third chapter we are reminded that everything that he sees is to be understood only as viewed from the place "upon which thou standest" (Abraham 3:5, 6, 7, 9; see Abraham 3:4). Like Einstein's man on the boat who thinks that the dock is moving away from him, so Abraham must remember his real position relative to the universe. In all that the Lord showed him, Abraham has still only a limited view. When Moses asked to see more than the scope and range of mission assigned him, he was sharply rebuked: "Worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose" (Moses 1:33). "But only an account of this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, give I unto you" (Moses 1:35). In the next verse Moses apologizes: "Be merciful unto thy servant, O God, and tell me concerning this earth . . . and then thy servant will be content" (Moses 1:36).

Our temple drama began like the book of Job, the Gospel of John, and Goethe's *Faust*, with the "Prologue in Heaven." In the temple today the prologue is spoken offstage, that is, in another world far removed from our present one. We hear the council in heaven discussing the plan to organize a

world like other worlds that have been formed. They will “take of these materials, and . . . will make an earth whereon *these* may dwell” (Abraham 3:24). The definite pronoun *these* plainly points to or indicates something, showing that the drama is in progress. Then they appoint two others from among those who stood “among those that were spirits” (Abraham 3:23). Again the definite pronoun that calls our attention to parties who are not mentioned but are obviously indicated by gesture—these are stage directions.

Things being thus decided, the Lord said “Whom should I send?” Here we should note that thirty-three of the forty-two verses in Moses 1 begin with the word *and*. This in our narrative is the so-called *wāw*-conversive in Hebrew, which converts the past to a future tense, giving it the sense of stage direction: “The Lord *shall* say.” To his question, “one answered [or one shall answer] like unto the Son of Man,” obviously stepping forward: “Here I am, send me” (Abraham 3:27). The action is clearly indicated, but why “one *like unto* the Son of Man?” Why not simply the Son of Man? Because plainly this is not the real character but an impersonation of him, one taking his part: “*like* the Son of Man.”

“And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. And the second was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him” (Abraham 3:27–28). Here we have a drama that was played out at the new year in the temples of Egypt. Dozens of texts still exist, recounting the rivalry of the two leaders, sometimes taking the form of a litigation before the court of the council in heaven, sometimes the form of a knock-down-and-drag-out duel. But it always ends with the expulsion of the aspiring party. (These dramas include that on the Shabako Stone, the Ramesseum Drama, the Celestial Cow, the Contendings of Horus and

Seth, etc.) At this point the chorus divides into two, the usual half-choruses that engage in an antiphonal contest. The losers follow the leader off the stage. End of first act.

The Second Act

We now get to the ballets. They start with all useful vegetation, the first step in making the earth—formed, divided, and beautified—habitable for man. The Gods said: “Let us prepare the earth to bring forth grass; the herb yielding seed; the fruit tree yielding fruit, after his kind . . . and it was so, even as they ordered” (Abraham 4:11). This script was made to order for a ballet. The oldest dances in the world have to do with planting and harvesting (in Egypt the *haker* dance); their significance as fertility rites was the subject of much study in the 1920s and 1930s. This episode of the plants ends a period: from “morning until the evening they called day; and it was the third time” (Abraham 4:13). End of ballet.

Now a quite different dance. “And the Gods organized the lights in the expanse of the heaven” (Abraham 4:14). We have already mentioned the torch dances in Israel, and many of us fondly recall the lively fire dances at the LDS Polynesian Cultural Center. The key word is “organized.” That means everything arranged from subatomic particles to molecules, to organizing the family, an army, a church, or a galaxy. Here we see the mazy motion of the dancers’ chorus and semichorus, as they divide the day from the night and organize themselves into groups to take position, “To be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years” (Abraham 4:14). Again it says not “to be signs,” but to be *for* signs, and for days, and for seasons and for years; they are taking their places for the benefit of man. “And the Gods organized the two great lights, the greater light to

rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; with the lesser light they set the stars also; And the Gods set them in the expanse of the heavens, to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to cause to divide the light from the darkness" (Abraham 4:16–17). Is all that repetition necessary? This is not a laborious tale for the simpleminded, but the unfolding of a splendid pageant, the Dance of Life, the ever-popular torch dance. Not long ago we used to laugh our heads off at the idea that God created the stars and their motions for the benefit of puny man. Today the shoe is on the other foot. Now we are asked to believe how the unimaginable raging forces of the universe, completely uncontrolled and undirected, should zero in on this little planet with nothing but the most benevolent results, adjusting a score of fine-tuned constants to each other with unerring accuracy in defiance of entropy. Not long ago it was believed that such a coincidence was so rare that it could have happened only once in the universe, that is, that this could be the only possible habitable world. But today it seems that the main concern of astronomers is life on other worlds. Carl Sagan resented the suggestion of any mind equal to his own elsewhere in the universe, and yet he designed a missive to be sent into outer space with a message directed to whom it may concern.⁷⁸

It was all for an appreciative audience, for "the Gods watched [these] things which they had ordered until they [were] obeyed" (Abraham 4:18). The thing was done properly, and then the lights go down: "It was from evening until morning that it was night; and . . . from morning until evening that it was day; and it was the fourth time" (Abraham 4:19).

Next the Dance of the Waters, always a favorite. In the oldest Greek play the chorus is made up of water maidens,

the Oceanids; they sail above the stage weeping for poor Prometheus and shedding their tears over the Caucasus.⁷⁹ The episode is reflected in the Enoch drama of the Pearl of Great Price, where the hero asks, "How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as rain upon the mountains?" (Moses 7:28). It is an equally poetic and dramatic passage from the same antediluvian milieu—for both tales are an immediate preparation for the flood. There is a stunning bas-relief from the Theban tomb of Kheruef depicting the water maidens imitating the waves of the Nile, though quite unaware of the parallel with the Rhine Daughters.

This prepares us for the waters to "bring forth great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters were to bring forth abundantly after their kind; and every winged fowl after their kind" (Abraham 4:21). The impression is that all life began in the waters and that there was an element of the experimental in the undertaking, with the Creators watching the developments until they "saw that they would be obeyed, and that their plan was good" (Abraham 4:21).

Next comes the great animal show. Everyone's favorite. It is the circus-parade, of course, splendidly displayed on the walls of Paleolithic caves of Lascaux, etc.; it meets us on the prehistoric standards and palettes of Egypt and Mesopotamia from the First Dynasty right through the cosmic chorus of Aristophanes, the bestiaries and mummings of the Middle Ages, and the fancy-dress *Fasching* celebrations along the Rhine. It takes us back to the earliest drama of Adam and the animals. He lives with them on intimate terms. He must have because he called them all by name, and they were all around him in overwhelming force. He was living in another world then, and we don't know how long it lasted since "as yet the Gods had not appointed

unto Adam his reckoning" (Abraham 5:13). This was before he entered with Eve into the garden and the covenant of marriage. It was the earth's turn to bring forth new types of "beasts after their kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after its kind; and the Gods saw they would obey" (Abraham 4:25). Again the moment of testing; it is as if new ideas were being tried out in the new world.

Before the wonderful photographic images of today, the creation drama was conveyed by dialogue offstage. After Satan's dismissal, "the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning . . . and formed the heavens and the earth. And the earth, after it was formed, was empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but earth; and darkness reigned upon the face of the deep" (Abraham 4:1–2). These are the two pictures we get of lifeless worlds, painted on the walls of the creation room: "the earth . . . empty and desolate, because they had not formed anything but the earth." This we see in Mercury and Venus. This corresponds to dense cloud coverings on other planets, soon to explode into torrential rains. Both conditions are clearly displayed in our older creation rooms. Then "darkness reigned upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters" (Abraham 4:2). "Brooding" implies a long time of preparation for life as we know it. In the fifth chapter we learn that no plants were growing on the earth because it had not yet rained (see Abraham 5:5). Up to this point we are still in the council and planning stage. This raises an interesting question which at present is the object of debate among quantum-mechanics scientists, namely, which world is the real world? According to one school of thought, we cannot say a thing exists until we are aware of it. Recently the emi-

nent French Egyptologist Philippe Derchain has noted that the Egyptians were convinced that if they ever stopped thinking about the universe it would cease to exist.⁸⁰ This is the Copenhagen doctrine, also called “the anthropic principle,” that light does not exist until we see it.⁸¹

The Significance of Temples

There are two parts to the temple ceremony, the dramatic and the pragmatic. So far we have only mentioned the first. The play is ended by the appearance of heavenly messengers who now bid farewell to the artifice of the antique theater and engage us in a new type of learning. Everything up to this point has been by way of explaining our position in *this* world. The dramatic motifs of the temple and its ordinances are found throughout the world from the very earliest times. President Joseph F. Smith pointed this out when he noted that we find everywhere broken remnants of teachings familiar to Latter-day Saints, going back to a time before world apostasy.⁸² Where does the gospel differ from all the rest? There is no difference at all where their teachings are true. An old maxim of Mormonism states that all religions have some truth that we share with them. The first part of the endowment, the drama, is found throughout the world. Shakespeare sees the point when he says, “*All the world’s a stage / And all the men and women merely players.*”⁸³ We are all actors in this world, “merely players,” and nothing else. This was also Abraham’s predicament; according to Martin Buber his life was “an ever-new separation for him and his progeny”; his “entire history . . . is a consequence of choices and partings.”⁸⁴ He no sooner settled down to living in a place than he had to leave (*lech lecha*). If all the men and women “have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his

time plays many parts, / His acts being seven ages," and if each part is completely different—the baby, the schoolboy, the lover, the soldier, the magistrate, the senior citizen, and then, "last scene of all, . . . / Is second childishness and mere oblivion, / Sans eyes, sans teeth, sans taste, sans everything"—if all that is so, which is the real you?⁸⁵ Shakespeare got this from Solon, the wisest of the Greeks, who wrote on the seven ages of man and concluded that "all are miserable upon whom the sun shines down."⁸⁶

But now comes the serious business of our temple. The antique temple drama ends in nothing. The stage lights go out and the house lights go up. Now *we* must be introduced to the rites and principles that will carry us far beyond this world. We are introduced to special messengers, teachers, and guides and told to pay heed to their counsel, which will continue to lead us on the path of life and salvation. Significantly, those instructions are all in the nature of restrictions and limitations to be set on what could be the exercise of unlimited power through unlimited time. Satan wanted power all for himself: "because that Satan . . . sought . . . that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down" (Moses 4:3). And so like the Ten Commandments the promises and covenants of the temple seem strangely negative to the vanity and arrogance of men. The first is obedience, the restraint on the individual's power. The second is restraint on possession of things; the eternal spirit cannot be attached to them—one must be willing to sacrifice. The third puts restraints on personal behavior, it mandates deportment, self-control to make oneself agreeable to all. The fourth is restraint on uncontrolled appetites, desires, and passions, for what could be more crippling on the path of eternal progression than those carnal obsessions

which completely take over the mind and body? Finally, the fifth covenant is a limitation on the innate selfishness of the other four—everything you have must be set apart to the everlasting benefit of all.

But we cannot leave it here. Everything about the temple calls for conclusion and a decision; we cannot remain in limbo suspended between the two worlds. Whether we catch a glimpse of the inside of the temple as we approach it from without, or of the outside world once we are inside, they are worlds apart. Latter-day Saint temples have always provided a soothing transition to soften the culture shock, the passing from one existence to another. Gardens of almost unearthly beauty offer an easy and credible passage by sharing the essential qualities of both worlds, “most glorious and beautiful.”

But the wonder is that everything about this experience is real. For seventy-two years I have gone to the temple and listened carefully to everything, and at no time could I say, “There is something wrong here; this is not the way it is!” On the contrary, the lesson is brought home with irresistible force that we do not know everything. There is wonder upon wonder awaiting. What the temple teaches is as real as the temple itself.

Notes

This chapter is based on a presentation given on 6 April 1999 as part of the Book of Abraham Lecture Series sponsored by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies at Brigham Young University.

1. See Jan Assmann, *Ma'at* (Munich: Beck, 1990), 24–25, 42.
2. *Midrash on Psalm 110:1*, in *The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. William G. Braude (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2:205.

3. Micha J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1914), 2:203.

4. *Midrash Rabbah Genesis* 43:7.

5. Bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden*, 2:137.

6. This tradition is discussed by J. Perlès, "Ahron ben Gerson Aboulrabi," *Revue des études juives* 21 (1890): 247.

7. The stories, based on Genesis 18, are told with the sources in bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:201–3, and Bernhard Beer, *Leben Abraham's nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage* (Leipzig: Leiner, 1859), 37.

8. Compare André Parrot, *Abraham et son temps* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1962), 42.

9. Other issues of *Time Magazine* covered leaders and revolutionaries, artists and entertainers, builders and Titans, and heroes and icons; see *Time Magazine*, 13 April 1998, 8 June 1998, 7 December 1998, and 14 June 1999, respectively.

10. See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), 1:210–11.

11. See Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 78; and Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 3.

12. See Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 70–71.

13. See *ibid.*, 70–72; Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 9–14.

14. See Adolf Erman, *The Ancient Egyptians: A Sourcebook of Their Writings*, trans. Aylward M. Blackman (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 72–73. Some scholars think the plot succeeded and the account was delivered by the king's ghost!

15. See *Midrash Rabbah Genesis* 39:7–9.

16. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.176.

17. Josef S. Bloch, *Israel und die Völker* (Berlin: Harz, 1922), 513, emphasis added.

18. See Harry Torcszyner, "The Riddle in the Bible," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924): 140.

19. See Karl R. Popper, "Science: Problems, Aims, Responsibilities," *Federation Proceedings of the American Societies for Experimental Biology* 22 (1963): 964, 970.

20. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:285.
21. See Maimonides, *Dalalat* 3.45.
22. See K. Kohler, "The Pre-Talmudic Haggada," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 7 (July 1895): 587.
23. See J. G. Wiess, "The Kavvanoth of Prayer in Early Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 9/3-4 (1958): 170-71.
24. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Sacrifice of Isaac," *Improvement Era*, March 1970, 88-89.
25. *Pseudo Jonathan*, cited in Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 66.
26. See Sofia Cavalletti, "Abramo come messia e 'ricapitolatore' del suo popolo," *Studi e Materiali* 35 (1964): 251-52.
27. See Hugh W. Nibley, "Setting the Stage: The World of Abraham," *Improvement Era*, January 1970, 63.
28. Bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden*, 2:203.
29. See Nibley, "World of Abraham," 61-62.
30. See M. H. Segal, "The Religion of Israel before Sinai," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 52 (1961-62): 41.
31. See *Midrash Rabbah Genesis* 43:7.
32. See Nibley, "World of Abraham," 64.
33. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Roman Games" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1938), introduction; "The Expanding Gospel," *BYU Studies* 7/1 (1965): 3-27, given as the Second Annual BYU Faculty Lecture on 17 March 1965; compare "The Hierocentric State," in *The Ancient State* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 99-147.
34. Samuel H. Hooke, ed., *Myth and Ritual* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 8.
35. Mircea Eliade, "The Prestige of the Cosmogonic Myth," *Diogenes* 23 (1958): 9.
36. *Ibid.*, 1.
37. Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 21, 73.
38. See Lord Raglan, *The Origins of Religion* (London: Watts, 1949), 35-38. Lord Raglan makes several statements about the diffusionist theory on pp. 51, 55, and 58.
39. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal*

Return, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959) 5, 7.

40. Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3.

41. *Ibid.*, 25.

42. On new year's celebrations, see Nibley, "The Hierocentric State," 99–147.

43. William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, act 4, prologue, lines 11–15.

44. *Ibid.*, lines 50–51.

45. *Ibid.*, lines 52–53, emphasis added.

46. See, for example, *Temples and the Latter-day Saints*, Improvement Era Temple Issue (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1967); see also a section on temples in the *Improvement Era*, November 1963, 941–84, and *Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Ensign, 1988).

47. See Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 1:133: "[The Salt Lake Temple] will have six towers, to begin with, instead of one. Now do not any of you apostatize because it will have six towers, and Joseph only built one. It is easier for us to build sixteen, than it was for him to build one."

48. See Hugh W. Nibley, "The Terrible Questions," in *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 356–78.

49. G. van der Leeuw, "Zum Mythos und zur Gestalt des Osiris," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 3 (1926): 11.

50. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 92–93.

51. Origen, *Liber Secundus*, 2.11.7, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus . . . Series Graeca* (hereafter *PG*), ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1857–66), 11:246.

52. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.21, in *PG*, 11:1321–25.

53. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, act 4, scene 1, lines 154–55.

54. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 70.

55. Lucian, *De Saltatione (On the Dance)* 15.
56. Plato, *Laws* 7.
57. See Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 14.627–68.
58. TB *Sukkah* 51a–51b.
59. Plato, *Laws* 2.672e, emphasis added.
60. *War Scroll*, frg. 11, lines 11–16.
61. See Hugh Nibley, “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 45–99.
62. See Robert A. Kraft, ed., *The Testament of Job according to the SV Text* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974), on the various texts. For the Greek versions, see F. C. Conybeare, “The Testament of Job and the Testaments of the XII Patriarchs,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 13 (October 1900): 111–13.
63. *Testament of Job* 1:2.
64. *Ibid.*, 47:5.
65. *Ibid.*, 47:10.
66. *Ibid.*, 47:11–12.
67. See *ibid.*, 47:12.
68. *Ibid.*, 48:1–4.
69. *Ibid.*, 49:1–3.
70. *Ibid.*, 50:1–3.
71. See Clement of Rome, *Recognitions* 1.106, in *PG*, 1:1207–10.
72. An 1831–32 account of the first vision, dictated to Frederick G. Williams, reproduced in *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 279–82, spelling retained.
73. See Roger Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Law of Physics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
74. Author's translation. See also Kurt Sethe, *Das “Denkmal Memphitischer Theologie” der Schabakostein des Britischen Museums* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1930), 1:64–65.
75. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (1927; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 588, 580.
76. See Miriam Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in*

the International Context (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 16–18.

77. Compare the translation in *The Rubáiyat of Omar Khayyám*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (Roslyn, N.Y.: Black, 1942), 38.

78. This message was a 6x9-inch gold-anodized aluminum plate that was sent to outer space in Pioneer 10; see Carl Sagan, *The Cosmic Connection: An Extraterrestrial Perspective* (New York: Dell, 1973), 16–20.

79. See Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, lines 140–49, 161–71.

80. See Philippe Derchain, *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (British Museum 10051), rituel pour la conservation de la vie en Égypte* (Brussels: Academy Royale, 1965), 10–11, 14, 82.

81. See Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind*, 354, 433–34.

82. See *Journal of Discourses*, 15:325–26.

83. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 7, lines 139–40, emphasis added.

84. Martin Buber, "Abraham the Seer," *Judaism* 5/4 (1956): 295, 296.

85. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 7, lines 141–43, 163–66.

86. Solon, *Elegiacs* 13.