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THE TRADITION OF A Balanced, Righteous Life

God bless you with the will and desire to be an example to the world and to live the balanced, righteous life He expects His children to live during their mortal probation.

At the beginning of the memorable musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye, the protagonist, introduces his story by saying:

“In our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof, trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn’t easy. You may ask, why do we stay up here if it’s so dangerous? We stay because Anatevka is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word—tradition!

“Because of our traditions, we’ve kept our balance for many, many years. . . . Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.”¹

I and other older members of the Church have been privileged to live in a special time in Church history. The pioneer era has given us



great traditions. Because the very survival of the pioneers depended upon it, they developed a great spirit of togetherness. I am a third-generation descendant of a noble Mormon pioneer family,

but I have been able to enjoy the blessings of a modern home, automobile transportation, and a college education. My life was not so far removed from the life of the pioneer, however, and pioneer traditions continued to be practiced in our family, ward, and community.

In my boyhood home it was evident that Father and Mother loved each other and loved each of their children. They were unselfish in devoting the best part of their lives to the family. As a family we always had three meals a day together. The traditional-type home that I knew is less and less common today. We sometimes long for the “good old days.”

Our social activities centered on the ward or our local grade school. The ward turned out to watch our participation in athletic events. Ward

dances involved the entire family. Celebrations such as Christmas, Independence Day, Pioneer Day, and the county fair were community events that the entire family attended.

We also had family traditions. The experiences gained from these family traditions taught us basic principles. One fun tradition we practiced in our family had a lasting impression on us. When the children in the family reached the age of one, they were placed at one end of a room and the family at the other end. Where the family was gathered, four objects were placed on the floor: a baby's milk bottle, a toy, a small savings bank, and the scriptures. The child was then encouraged to crawl to the objects and select one of them.

I selected the bank and turned out to be a financial executive. My brother Ted selected the scriptures, was a great lover of books all his life, and became a lawyer. My brother Bob was the well-rounded member of the family. He crawled up and sat on the scriptures, picked up the bank and placed it right at his feet, and put the bottle in his mouth with one hand and held the toy in the other hand. He became an accountant. He lived a well-balanced life.

Using these four items as examples, I would like to discuss living a balanced life.

Our Body Is a Temple

The bottle of milk represents our physical health. The scriptures testify as to how important our physical bodies are to our eternal progress.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

The Lord sets a high standard for us in

telling us to consider our bodies a temple. I have had the privilege of accompanying the President of the Church to many temple dedications. Before a dedicatory service the President always wants to inspect the workmanship of the new temple, which is of the highest quality and beautiful in its design. The grounds around our temples are always the most attractive place in the communities in which they are constructed.

Go and stand in front of a temple. Study carefully the house of the Lord and see if it does not inspire you to make some improvements in the physical temple the Lord has given to you to house your eternal spirit. The Lord has established some basic standards for the governance of our physical bodies. Obedience to these standards remains as a requirement for ordination to the priesthood, for a temple recommend, and for holding a calling in the Church.

Sometimes we may feel that people will not be as accepting of us because of the high standards we have set for ourselves. Still, there are things we just don't do. We have the Word of Wisdom, which helps us to live a healthier life, a type of life that is conducive to our growth and well-being. We have standards, ideals, and a way of living that are the envy of much of the world. I have found that if you live the way you should live, people notice and are impressed with your beliefs and you have an influence on the lives of others.

I spent my career in the department store business. Because I was part of a management team, it was important for me to interact socially with local business organizations. The meetings with most of these organizations always started with a cocktail hour. It was a time to mix and get acquainted with





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the men who belonged to the organization. I have always felt uncomfortable in these social hours. At first I started asking for a lemon-lime soda. I soon discovered that lemon-lime soda looks like many of the other drinks. I could not build the impression I was a nondrinker with a clear soda in my hands. I tried root beer. It had the same problem.

Finally I decided I had to have a drink that would clearly mark me as a nondrinker. I went to the bartender and requested a glass of milk. The bartender had never had such a request. He went into the kitchen and found a glass of milk for me. Now I had a drink that looked very different from the alcoholic beverages the others were drinking. Suddenly I was the center of attention. There were a lot of jokes made of my drink. My milk was a conversation piece. I met more business leaders that evening than I ever had before at a cocktail hour.

Milk became my drink of choice at the cocktail hours. It soon became common knowledge I was a Mormon. The respect I received really surprised me, as did an interesting event that started to occur. Others soon joined me in a pure milk cocktail!

Dare to be different. Live up to the standards we are taught in the gospel.

“Good physical and spiritual health can help us to stay on the straight and narrow way,” said Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “The Lord gave his code of health in the Word of Wisdom, ‘a principle with promise’ that modern medical science continues to substantiate. (D&C 89:3.) All of God’s commandments, including the Word of Wisdom, are spiritual. (See D&C 29:34–35.) We need to nourish ourselves spiritually, even more than physically.”²

How grateful we should be for gospel teachings on the importance of keeping our physical bodies pure and worthy of housing our eternal spirits.

Toys of the World

We live in an interesting world. The desire for worldly toys seems to be overpowering. Developed nations are becoming so secular in their beliefs and actions that they reason a human being has total autonomy. They believe we do not have to give an account to anyone or anything except to ourselves and, to a limited extent, to the society in which we live.

The scriptures warn us, “They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall

perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall” (D&C 1:16).

Societies in which this secular lifestyle takes root have a deep spiritual and moral price to pay. The pursuit of so-called individual freedoms without regard to laws the Lord has established to govern His children on earth will result in the curse of extreme worldliness and selfishness, the decline of public and private morality, and the defiance of authority. Amidst the bustle of the secular world, with its certain uncertainty, there must be places that offer spiritual refuge, renewal, hope, and peace.

In contrast to this secular lifestyle, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) taught us the importance of seeking knowledge from God:

Mortality is the time to learn first of God and the gospel and to perform the ordinances.





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“In proper sequence, first comes the knowledge of God and his program, which is the way to eternal life, and then comes the knowledge of the secular things, which is also very important. . . .

“Peter and John had little secular learning, being termed ignorant. But they knew the vital things of life, that God lives and that the crucified, resurrected Lord is the Son of God. They knew the path to eternal life. This they learned in a few decades of their mortal life. Their righteous lives opened the door to godhood for them and creation of worlds with eternal increase. For this they would probably need, eventually, a total knowledge of the sciences. But whereas Peter and John had only decades to learn and do the spiritual, they have already had nineteen centuries in which to learn the secular or the geology of the earth, the zoology and physiology and

psychology of the creatures of the earth. Mortality is the time to learn first of God and the gospel and to perform the ordinances. After our feet are set firmly on the path to eternal life we can amass more knowledge of the secular things. . . .

“Secular knowledge, important as it may be, can never save a soul nor open the celestial kingdom nor create a world nor make a man a god, but it can be most helpful to that man who, placing first things first, has found the way to eternal life and who can now bring into play all knowledge to be his tool and servant.”³

Seek after the things of God, where eternal rewards await you.

Banking on Good Character

The Savior, as recorded in Luke 14, taught us this lesson:

Personal, sincere involvement in the scriptures produces faith, hope, and solutions to our daily challenges.



“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

“Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

“Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:28–30).

As you prepare for the future, you must be certain that what you are putting into this mortal experience will enable you to finish strong and gain your eternal reward.

Our world today is increasingly fast moving and complex. There are always opportunities for individuals to play fast and loose. Many people like to play to activities that produce quick windfalls and often take advantage of others who try to play according to the rules established by good practices. This fast-moving world has heightened the temptation

for people to play the game with their own set of rules.

However, we must always answer to the law of the harvest. “For whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap; therefore, if ye sow good ye shall also reap good for your reward” (D&C 6:33). This is a law that will never be repealed.

“A man’s character is the reality of himself.—His reputation is the opinion others have formed of him.—Character is in him;—reputation is from other people—[character] is the substance, [reputation] is the shadow.”⁴

A good character is something you must make for yourself. It cannot be inherited from parents. It cannot be created by having extraordinary advantages. It isn’t a gift of birth, wealth, talent, or station. It is the result of your own endeavor. It is the reward that comes from living good principles and manifesting a virtuous and honorable life.

With that noble quality of trust comes the reputation of one who is honest and possesses integrity. These are character traits that will ensure a long and successful career. The greatest asset you can put into your bank is the reputation of being a person of trust.

Daily Scripture Study

In his writings concerning how he felt about the scriptures, Nephi said: “Upon these I write the things of my soul, and many of the scriptures which are engraven upon the plates of brass. For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children” (2 Nephi 4:15).

We find a wealth of conviction and knowledge from our scriptures: the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. We can find inspirational threads running through each of them. In our study we will easily recognize them.

The scriptures teach that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He lives and is our Redeemer and Savior. We should follow Him and show our love for Him by remembering Him and humbly keeping His commandments.

Through His Atonement we are able to repent and be cleansed. We are His covenant people and should always keep the covenants we have made.

We should have faith, repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end.

Personal, sincere involvement in the scriptures produces faith, hope, and solutions to our daily challenges. Frequently reading, pondering, and applying the lessons of the scriptures, combined with prayer, become an irreplaceable part of gaining and sustaining a strong, vibrant testimony.

President Kimball reminded us of the importance of consistent scripture reading when he said: “I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems that . . . no divine voice is speaking, that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns.”⁵

Make a daily practice of studying the scriptures.

An Example to the World

My generation is dying off at a rapid rate. We are willing to pass the torch to a new and better-prepared generation of Latter-day Saints. We expect that they will:

1. Keep their wonderful physical bodies pure and holy as temples of God.
2. Place preeminence on spiritual learning and knowledge from God.
3. Be a trusted generation and use the foundation of eternal gospel truths to establish standards and values.
4. Seek learning from the eternal truths contained in the holy scriptures.

God bless you with the will and desire to be an example to the world and to live the balanced, righteous life He expects His children to live during their mortal probation. ■

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NOTES

1. Joseph Stein, Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick, *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), 2–3.
2. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Straight and Narrow Way,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 65.
3. Spencer W. Kimball, *President Kimball Speaks Out* (1981), 90, 91, 92.
4. Henry Ward Beecher, in Tryon Edwards, comp., *The New Dictionary of Thoughts* (1944), 67.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 67.

