



# Our Refined Heavenly Home

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Of the Seventy

If we could part the veil and observe our heavenly home, we would be impressed with the cultivated minds and hearts of those who so happily live there. I imagine that our heavenly parents are exquisitely refined. In this great gospel of emulation, one of the purposes of our earthly probation is to become like them in every conceivable way so that we may be comfortable in the presence of heavenly parentage and, in the language of Enos, see their faces “with pleasure” (Enos 1:27).

President Brigham Young (1801–77) said, “We are trying to be the image of those who live in heaven; we are trying to pat[t]ern after them, to look like them, to walk and talk like them.”<sup>1</sup> I would like to peek behind the veil that temporarily separates us from our heavenly home and paint a word picture of the virtuous, lovely, and refined circumstances that exist there. I will speak of the language, literature, music, and art of heaven, as well as the immaculate appearance of heavenly beings, for I believe that in heaven we will find each of these in pure and perfected form.

The nearer we get to God, the more easily our spirits are touched by refined and beautiful things.

## Language

God speaks all languages, and He speaks them properly. He is restrained and modest of speech. When God described the grand creational process of this earth, He said in measured tones that “it was good” (Genesis 1:4). We would be disappointed if God had used “awesome” or other exaggerated phrases.

Britain’s Ben Jonson said: “Language most shows a man. Speak, that I may see thee.”<sup>2</sup> Our language reveals our thoughts, virtues, insecurities, doubts—even the homes from which we come. We will feel more comfortable in Heavenly Father’s presence if we have developed proper habits of speech.

I suppose that the language of heaven, properly spoken, may approach a form of music. Did C. S. Lewis have this in mind when he wrote, “Isn’t it funny the way some combinations of words can give you—almost apart from their meaning—a thrill like music?”<sup>3</sup> At the birth of Jesus the angels appeared and spoke, not sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). We now try to capture that beauty in song, but the original angelic utterance was in spoken words.

In his biography on Ralph Waldo Emerson, Van Wyck Brooks relates that Emerson was



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invited to speak at the commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the great poet Shakespeare's birth. After proper introduction Emerson presented himself at the pulpit and then sat down. He had forgotten his notes. He preferred to say nothing rather than words not well measured. For some, it was Emerson in one of his most eloquent hours.<sup>4</sup>

Refinement in speech is more than polished elocution. It results from purity of thought and sincerity of expression. A child's prayer on occasion may reflect the language of heaven more nearly than a Shakespearean soliloquy.

Refinement in speech is reflected not only in our choice of words but also in the things we talk about. There are those who always speak of themselves; they are either insecure or proud. There are those who always speak of others; they are usually boring. There are those who speak of stirring ideas, compelling books, and inspiring doctrine; these are the few who make their mark in this world. The subjects discussed in heaven are not trifling or mundane; they are sublime beyond our most extended imagination. We will feel at home there if we are rehearsed on this earth in conversing about the refined and noble, clothing our expressions in well-measured words.

### Literature

Is Friday evening a frenetic flight to see where the entertainment and action will be? Could our society today produce an Isaac Newton or a Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart? Can 85 channels and uncountable DVDs ever fill our insatiable appetite to be entertained? Do any unwisely become addicted to computer games or Internet surfing, thereby missing the richer experiences of great reading, conversations, and enjoyment of music?

I don't know whether our heavenly home has a television set or a DVD player, but in my mind's imagery it surely has a grand piano and a magnificent library. There was a fine library

in the home of President Gordon B. Hinckley's (1910–2008) youth. It was not an ostentatious home, but the library contained about 1,000 volumes of the rich literature of the world, and President Hinckley spent his early years immersed in these books. To be well-read, however, it is not necessary to possess expensive collections of literature, for they are available to rich and poor alike in the libraries of the world.

President David O. McKay (1873–1970) was inclined to awaken daily at 4:00 a.m., skim read up to two books, and then commence his labors at 6:00 a.m. He could quote 1,000 poems from memory. He referred to the grand masters of literature as the "minor prophets." He was a living embodiment of the scriptural admonition to "seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom" (D&C 88:118).

My wife and I recently spent four years on Church assignment in Eastern Europe. We often traveled on the Moscow underground subway, called the Metro. We noticed the bowed heads of the Russian passengers, for they were reading Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, or Pushkin—and, sometimes, Mark Twain. The people were poor, but they were not obsessed with their poverty. They possessed the rich tradition of Russian literature, art, and music.

President McKay noted: "As with companions so with books. We may choose those which will make us better, more intelligent, more appreciative of the good and the beautiful in the world, or we may choose the trashy, the vulgar, the obscene, which will make us feel as though we've been 'wallowing in the mire.'"<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the scriptures stand paramount among good literature, for they are not founded on the opinions of men.

### Music

If we could peek behind the heavenly veil, we would likely be inspired by the music of heaven, which is probably more glorious than any music we have heard on this earth.

When some music has passed the tests of time and been





cherished by the noble and refined, our failure to appreciate it is not a condemnation of grand music. The omission is within. If a young person grows up on a steady diet of hamburgers and french fries, he is not likely to become a gourmet. But the fault is not with fine food. He just grew up on something less. Some have grown up on a steady diet of musical french fries.

This would be a good time to sift through your music library and choose primarily that which uplifts and inspires. It is part of the maturing process of your eternal journey. This would also be a fine time to learn a musical instrument or improve musical skills now partially possessed.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said: “We . . . live in a world that is too prone to the tasteless and we need to provide an opportunity to cultivate a taste for the finest music. And likewise, we’re in a world that’s so attuned to the now. We need to permit people to be more attuned to the best music of all the ages.”<sup>6</sup>

Recognizing the penetrating influence of great music, Oscar Wilde had one of his characters say, “After playing Chopin, I feel as if I had been weeping over sins that I had never committed, and mourning over tragedies that were not my own.”<sup>7</sup> After the first performance of *Messiah*, Handel, responding to a compliment, said, “My lord, I should be sorry if I only entertained them—I wish to make them better.”<sup>8</sup> Haydn “dressed in his best clothes to compose because he said he was going before his maker.”<sup>9</sup>

Some events in life are so sublime that they cannot be imagined without the companionship of beautiful music. We could not have a Christmas without carols or a general conference without sacred anthems. And

there could not be a heaven without music of surpassing beauty. President Young said, “There is no music in hell, for all good music belongs to heaven.”<sup>10</sup> It would be punishment enough to go to hell and not hear a note of music for all eternity.

### **Art, Appearance, and Attitude**

What I have shared about bringing great language, literature, and music into the home may be said with equal truth of great art—perhaps tastefully displayed in our heavenly home. It may also be said of our physical appearance and manners, the order of our homes, how we offer our prayers, and how we read God’s word.

I once visited briefly with the great actress Audrey Hepburn while she was making the movie *My Fair Lady*. She spoke of the opening scene in the movie in which she depicted a modest, unpolished flower girl. Her face had been besmirched with charcoal to make her seem part of her surroundings. “But,” she said with a twinkle in her eye, “I was wearing my perfume. Inside I still knew I was a lady.” It doesn’t take expensive perfume to make a lady, but it does require cleanliness, modesty, self-respect, and pride in one’s appearance.

Many years ago an associate of mine decided he would please his wife by sharing with her a specific compliment each night as he arrived home. One night he praised her cooking. A second night he thanked her for excellence in housekeeping. A third night he acknowledged her fine influence on the children. The fourth night, before he could speak, she said, “I know what you are doing. I thank you for it. But don’t say any of those things. Just tell me you think I am beautiful.”

She expressed an important need she

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had. Women ought to be praised for all the gifts they possess—including their attentiveness to their personal appearance—that so unselfishly add to the richness of the lives of others. We must not let ourselves go and become so casual—even sloppy—in our appearance that we distance ourselves from the beauty heaven has given us.

Some flippantly say, “How I look has nothing to do with how God feels about me.” But it is possible for both earthly parents and heavenly parents to have unspoken disappointment in their offspring without diminished love.

President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918), sixth President of the Church, owned few things, but he took care of them. He was fastidious in his appearance. He pressed his dollar bills to remove the wrinkles. He allowed none but himself to pack his overnight bag. He knew where every article, nut, and bolt of the household was, and each had its place.

Would this be true of the environment in which you live? Is it a house of order? Need you dust, clean, and rearrange before you invite the Spirit of the Lord into your home? President Lorenzo Snow (1814–1901) said: “The Lord does not intend that the Saints shall live always in dens and caves of the earth, but that they shall build fine houses. When the Lord comes he will not expect to meet a dirty people, but a people of refinement.”<sup>11</sup>

David Starr Jordan, former president of Stanford University, wrote: “To be vulgar is to do that which is not the best of its kind. It is to do poor things in poor ways, and to be satisfied with that. . . . It is vulgar to wear dirty linen when one is not engaged in dirty work. It is vulgar to like poor music, to read weak books, to feed on sensational newspapers, . . . to find amusement in trashy novels, to enjoy vulgar

theatres, to find pleasure in cheap jokes.”<sup>12</sup>

Your Father in Heaven has sent you away from His presence to have experiences you would not have had in your heavenly home—all in preparation for the conferral of a kingdom. He doesn’t want you to lose your vision. You are children of an exalted being. You are foreordained to preside as kings and queens. You will live in a home and environment of infinite refinement and beauty, as reflected in the language, literature, music, art, and order of heaven.

I close with the words of President Young: “Let us . . . show to the world that we have talent and taste, and prove to the heavens that our minds are set on beauty and true excellence, so that we can become worthy to enjoy the society of angels.”<sup>13</sup>

Even more, may we become worthy to enjoy the refined society of heavenly parentage, for we are of the race of the Gods, being “children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6). ■

*From a devotional address given at Brigham Young University on September 19, 2006. For the full text in English, visit <http://speeches.byu.edu>.*

#### NOTES

1. Brigham Young, “Remarks,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 5, 1862, 1.
2. In Algernon Swinburne, *A Study of Ben Jonson*, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and others (1926), 120.
3. C. S. Lewis, *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914–1963)* (1979), 96.
4. See Wendell J. Ashton, *In Your Own Image* (1959), 113.
5. David O. McKay, *Pathways to Happiness*, comp. Llewelyn R. McKay (1957), 15.
6. Neal A. Maxwell, in LaMar Barrus, “The Joy of Music,” *New Perspectives*, Apr. 1997, 10.
7. *The Works of Oscar Wilde* (1909), 112.
8. In “A Tribute to Handel,” *Improvement Era*, May 1929, 574.
9. In Hal Williams, “Dr. Reid Nibley on Acquiring a Taste for Classical Music,” *BYU Today*, Apr. 1980, 14.
10. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 242.
11. Lorenzo Snow, in *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors*, ed. Matthias F. Cowley (1964), 468.
12. David Starr Jordan, “The Strength of Being Clean,” in *Inspirational Classics for Latter-day Saints*, comp. Jack M. Lyon (2000), 191.
13. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 424.