

An Education of the Whole Soul

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Across the eastern face of the new Joseph F. Smith Building, which was dedicated three years ago, runs a two-hundred-foot curved glass curtain. This curtain encloses a grand gallery on the second and third floors. In this gallery, a permanent multimedia exhibit opened its doors this fall. The exhibit is entitled *Education in Zion*, and its theme is how our Zion tradition of learning and faith has always been focused on the education of the whole soul.

For dozens of us who worked on the exhibit—all but a few were BYU students and recent graduates—this project has been like a secret passageway to a remarkable treasure. I think of it as an inheritance that we did not know was ours. We discovered this treasure in the stories of the people who founded this school. Under the guidance of God, these people created a kind of education that in certain very important ways is different from anything the world has to offer. To tell you more about this inheritance, I will share a few of their stories with you.

A Charge to Teach with the Spirit of God

At some point after the Saints had begun settling in the Mountain West, Brigham Young foresaw the need for schools that would cover the primary grades up through what we now call high school and would teach both the academic subjects and the principles of our religion.¹

In the spring of 1876, Brigham Young called Karl G. Maeser to preside at the first of these schools, Brigham Young Academy in Provo—which, at that time, was already in its first term under the interim principal, Warren Dusenberry. During his interview with Maeser, President Young gave Maeser the now famous charge “that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God.”²

Maeser could scarcely have been better prepared for the job. He had obtained a world-class education in his native Saxony, served three missions after his conversion, and administered and taught in schools in Salt Lake City for about a decade and a half.

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Maeser took over the academy at the beginning of its second term in late April. Before he left Salt Lake City for Provo, the Territorial School Association gave him a magnificent desk in recognition of his service³—a desk that will figure importantly in our story.

On a Friday afternoon at the end of the first week of school, Maeser received word that in three days President Young would be in Provo. The prophet wanted to see Maeser’s plans for a program that would fulfill the charge to teach every subject by the Spirit of God.

So under the pressure of the prophet’s pending arrival, Maeser sat at his desk through that Friday night trying to develop an educational plan that would incorporate President Young’s momentous conception of the Spirit’s role in true education. Nothing came. All through Saturday he worked, into the night, and then again on Sunday until the afternoon turned into evening. Finally he dropped, disheartened, to his knees, pleading, “O Father, show me the way, help me to make the plans for this great work. I cannot do it of myself.”⁴ Immediately the confusion of the preceding days was lifted, and within an hour or two Maeser had written out the plan for the new school. It had come to him as an answer to prayer.

Maeser’s plan ingeniously worked out many ways in which the students would grow morally and spiritually in the very same educational process that developed them intellectually.⁵ One of the factors that would make this process work was Maeser’s determination to have the teachers do nothing that the students were able to do. Students participated in the academic planning meetings, conducted discussion sessions following the theology classes, assisted administratively, and looked out for one another in a program much like our home and visiting teaching programs today. In this school each would serve the others, and all would progress together.

This educational program became the model for a great system of Church schools, many of which were called *academies*. Over a span of more than forty years, this system produced tens of thousands of Latter-day Saint leaders and faithful members. By and large, those who first developed

the seminary and institute programs all over the world came from these schools.

I love to contemplate these two momentous steps in the development of what is today the worldwide Church Educational System of seminaries, institutes, and schools of higher education. The first of these steps was a prophet’s instruction for the operation of a school he was founding, which was to give place to the Spirit of God in everything, and the second was a revelation in answer to the prayer of a very good and able servant, which that servant gratefully wrote down while sitting at the desk that he had been given for faithful service to the children of Zion.

Whatever the details of the plan Maeser recorded that day, they included the Spirit of God. As James E. Talmage wrote while still a student, “all our discipline, all our studies are conducted according to the spirit of the living God.”⁶ Student recollections of the period suggest that the Spirit was most noticeably manifest in the love and unity that prevailed in the school and that this love emanated especially from Brother Maeser. Many stories describe how he lifted and nurtured people. “He knew how to touch a boy’s heart like no one else that I’ve ever known,” said Bryant S. Hinckley. “I have seen men come from the farm and ranch and stay there six months and go home with an entirely new light in their eye.”⁷

An Educational Genealogy

Maeser had not always possessed this gift of love, at least not in such abundance. Apparently it came to him when President Young called him to preside at the academy. George S. Reynolds, the First Presidency’s secretary, was present and said that he would never forget the Spirit that filled the office that day. Prior to his calling, Maeser had a wide reputation in Salt Lake schools for severity; for example, he once boxed young Reed Smoot on the ear for coming to school unprepared. But it was this same Reed Smoot who later, and gratefully, attended Brigham Young Academy as one of Maeser’s first students and who as an older man said that Maeser’s “whole nature changed” at the time of his calling.⁸ Without this transformation, it is doubtful that Maeser could have instilled a

nurturing spirit in his students, which surely he did. I'll tell you about a few of them.

Joseph B. Keeler, one of Maeser's first students, later managed the school's finances and physical facilities while teaching eight classes per term. He was widely known for his splendid example, for listening, and for finding ways to help students in need.⁹ One day he overheard BYU's fourth president, George H. Brimhall, expel a very uncooperative repeat offender. As the student was leaving, Keeler drew him into his office in order, he said, to "take care of the details." He asked about the young man's plans, which included going into business. Then, explaining that withdrawing from school would take a few days, Keeler offered the young man work in the office "to finish out the week." The week became a month, and then more. The young man stayed in school. He graduated with honors and became an upright businessman. Years later, he attributed his "success in life to that great man."¹⁰

As a faculty member, Alice Louise Reynolds obtained most of her advanced education studying with some of the world's finest literature teachers during leaves from her teaching position. She brought back and shared with her students, who flocked to her classes, whatever she had discovered that had enriched her life.¹¹ She was a person of uncommon intellectual standards who taught her students to bring together "all the beauty and all the uplift there is in art" with "all the reverence and all the holiness and beauty there is in religion."¹² I think she was able to awaken both the faith and the intellect of her students because she had blended them so well in her own life. Similarly she could build the confidence of her students because she believed in them so much herself.

Brigham T. Higgs taught carpentry classes and supervised the school's maintenance. He was the first to hire students for this purpose. Though he arrived at the academy too late to work under Brother Maeser, he quickly came to exemplify the school's nurturing spirit. He would meet with the student workers daily before dawn and instruct them not only in their duties but also about the value of work and virtuous living. "Don't be a scrub,"¹³ he would say, meaning someone who does less than his best. He believed a father

should "be the kind of man he would be proud to have his son become."¹⁴ Higgs would visit the students' boarding houses to make sure their living conditions were adequate and bring food to the ones who were struggling. President George H. Brimhall once said that no one had been more valuable to the university than B. T. Higgs, and a number of Higgs's students praised him as their greatest inspiration.

Partly because of the influence of these and other educational pioneers as the years rolled by, more Latter-day Saint students who went to major universities for advanced schooling stayed in the Church, and many of these returned to build up Zion, rear their own families, and become leaders among their people. Many taught in the Church's quorums, auxiliaries, and schools. Then these faithful ones' students, who were even more numerous, did the same. Each succeeding generation was better prepared academically and spiritually than its predecessors. Thus a branching, expanding, educational genealogy runs through our history as well as the history of other Church educational schools and programs. Sadly, we have records of relatively few individuals kindling in others the flame of learning, but I am sure that this lighting of others' lamps happened many thousands of times in our history and that all the stories are written in the book of life.

A Zion Tradition of Learning

The stories I have shared clearly illustrate two of the characteristics of education in the kingdom of God that make it different from anything to be found in the world.

First, as already indicated, it is an education of the whole soul. We saw in the story of Brother Maeser the limitations of a person with extraordinary talent whose development was deficient in some essential respect.

Second, if we are living as the gospel requires, when we ourselves are learning, we are unwilling to leave others behind. An essential part of our growth comes in helping others grow. And then those we help in turn help others—among them, in many instances, our own posterity. This draws us close to one another, even across generations, and we become united, a Zion people. Fundamentally,

education in the kingdom of God is different because it operates on the Zion principle of love.

The Zion tradition of learning did not begin with Brigham Young and Karl G. Maeser. In this dispensation, it goes back to Joseph Smith. His was truly an education of the whole soul, divinely orchestrated. Heavenly teachers were his instructors and models.¹⁵ His scriptural translations and revisions gave him great knowledge of God's dealings with Israel and developed his ability to obtain revelation. In the tribulations he passed through, he grew in virtue, leadership, compassion, and wisdom. God was developing not just Joseph's mind but his whole being.

Joseph also exemplified the second characteristic of a Zion education in that his constant labor was to help the Saints come to gain the same knowledge and enjoy the same holy experiences that he had obtained. He did not reserve any privileges for himself alone. The instructions for the first School of the Prophets were given by the Lord, and they are in all respects expressive of Joseph's heart. They outline the way the participants were to build each other up and thus advance together.

The school met in Kirtland in an eleven-by-fourteen-foot room above Newell Whitney's store and included the most seasoned Church leaders. They were instructed to study subjects that would develop all their gifts and talents, from the doctrines of the kingdom to the affairs of the world, so that they, like Joseph, could be prepared to help build up a Zion people. And they were told how to conduct themselves in the school, which brought a dimension to their learning and growth that otherwise would have been absent. For example, everyone was to come repentant; humble; reverent; invigorated after a good night's sleep; clean and wearing fresh clothing; fasting; free of pride, envy, and faultfinding; and bonded together by love. The learning itself was to be collaborative, with each given a chance to teach the others and then listen carefully while the others taught, so "that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege."¹⁶ The pattern of their preparation and study together, which is rooted in the order of the priesthood, would enable them to grow in many directions.

You can see that in these instructions the Lord was building up His beloved servants by asking them to build up one another. Following this divine example, Joseph, Brigham Young, and their successors sought diligently to bring the kind of education that began in the School of the Prophets to as many Latter-day Saints as possible. I haven't time to speak of details, but I will just say that throughout the next century, as the Church grew, they established priesthood quorums,¹⁷ priesthood auxiliaries, community schools, stake academies, colleges, a university, and eventually the seminaries and institutes. They kept at the work even in desperately impoverished circumstances, when many others thought education should be postponed.

They understood very clearly the urgency that Elder Jeffrey R. Holland expressed when he presided at this school in 1981. "This Church," he said, "is always only one generation away from extinction. . . . All we would have to do . . . to destroy this work is stop teaching our children for one generation."¹⁸ It was not primarily for themselves but for the children of the future, for Zion, that these visionary leaders and their faithful associates worked so hard. There's almost nothing we can name that has absorbed as much of the latter-day prophets' attention, energy, and care as the education of this people.

A Crucial Task

You may have thought that you are here at this university to take a certain series of courses, obtain a degree, and then leave learning behind. If so, you do not fully understand. God desires the flourishing of your whole soul for the glories He has in mind for you, including an eternal family with children who will shine as jewels in His crown and yours, and that is why He intends to bless you, if you will exert yourself, with a soul-stretching education.

It is also why He has provided this school, together with all the rest of Church education. I caution you against making the mistake of supposing these resources to be merely human institutions. In 1885, when Brigham Young Academy's financial challenges were particularly trying,

a faculty member, who also happened to be Brigham Young's daughter, sought President John Taylor's help. President Taylor told her that her father, who had passed on some years before, had come to him "in the silence of the night" and said "that the school being taught by Brother Maeser was accepted in the heavens and was a part of the great plan of life and salvation; . . . and that Christ himself was directing, and had a care over this school."¹⁹

Brigham Young founded the academy because he was alarmed that educational institutions were rapidly forgetting their religious heritage and rearing children to embrace an increasingly secular and increasingly atheistic culture. Only a different kind of school could avoid this fate—a school in which all teaching and learning would be done by the Spirit of God. Maeser once put it this way: the new academy simply had to have "the spirit of the latter-day work" running through it "like a golden thread."²⁰

Maeser's successors shared that conviction. Our fourth president, Franklin S. Harris, said at his inauguration in 1921:

There has grown out of the history of [this] institution . . . a certain fire that must be kept burning. . . .

*The first task of the future is to preserve . . . this spirit that comes to us from the past.*²¹

This is our task also.

We should not expect this task to be easier than what the founders had to do. As in Brigham Young's time, we live surrounded by a secular culture that seems more and more threatening. I suppose that most of us unwittingly bring elements of this culture into our community of learning. We import tinges of its contempt for simple religious faith, its frivolous and often angry mental life, its demand for rights without responsibility, its tolerance for wasted time, its sickening vulgarity, its pride in gaining advantage over others, and much more. When we help or allow such attitudes to encroach upon this community, we subtly but surely lend ourselves to the devil's project of making this school over in the image of the world, which is something President Spencer W. Kimball said must not happen.²²

We can overcome such dangers not by becoming a cultural police force but by actively building up a far better way of life. When men and women are "anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will [to] bring to pass much righteousness,"²³ they make it very hard for the attitudes and habits of a carnal and violent world to get a foothold. By building others up and thus building Zion, we overcome evil with good.

I think of Florence Jepperson Madsen, who had gained great prominence as a contralto soloist in Boston and New York. When she came to BYU in 1920, she and her husband, Franklin, established a great musical tradition by hiring fine faculty and mounting splendid productions. Beyond that, she organized and directed more than two thousand groups of singing mothers throughout the Church. We cannot count the students who carried their enhanced musical talents and enthusiasm wherever they went. It was said that no Latter-day Saint woman did more to bring beauty and harmony into this world.

I think of Sidney B. Sperry, who, beginning in the late 1920s, helped to pioneer the blending of scholarship with the teaching of scripture. It was a time when the faith of young Latter-day Saints was being shaken by scholars' naturalistic explanations of spiritual events recorded in the Bible. Sperry used these scholars' findings, though not their irreligious speculations, to deepen religious understanding. By this means, over the course of nearly forty years, he brought gospel scholarship into the lives of Church education teachers and students and a wide audience of Church members. Among those who learned from him were many who later shaped religious instruction in the Church Educational System.

I ask myself, what if people such as these had not built up this school and the rest of the Church Educational System? What would we be learning? Would our attitudes, aspirations, and relationships be at all different from those who are part of the secular culture around us? Would we care about God? Would we have any idea of His plan of happiness? What would we be like if the teachers of our teachers, going back very far, had not been men and women such as Karl Maeser, Alice

Louise Reynolds, and Sidney Sperry? Remember, the way “to destroy this work”—and to cheat the children of the future of everything we hold dear—“is [to] stop teaching [them the gospel, our precious way of life,] for [just] one generation.”

A Temple of Learning

Today I have spoken of the importance to us of our educational ancestors. So many of us have given this topic so little thought that I supposed it helpful to tell you that for many of us who have learned about their lives, they have become an unexpected treasure. We soon realized as we worked on the exhibit that we were not just recounting the stories of bygone men and women. We were coming to know these people, as if in person. Even across the years we could feel their influence spiritually. Their example seemed to gently pull us aside and show how we could be doing better. They became part of our work.

In the process, we sought the Lord’s Spirit so that our efforts, like theirs, might enlighten, edify, and encourage others. Thus we joined our hands and hearts with theirs, and we became part of their work.

This has seemed to me a very real inheritance in Zion. We have been given a place among eternal friends who did eternal work for souls they had yet to meet. I learned from these noble people that laboring *in Zion for Zion*, in whatever capacity, gives us the privilege of using all our talents, gifts, and learning to build up a Zion way of living together, a holy culture, a desperately needed alternative to a perishing world! In that Zion culture, the major formative influence upon our posterity will come from well-prepared, good, and faithful people.

I have been closely associated with three great universities and can tell you that, for me, the life of learning does not get any sweeter than this. The inheritance I have described is also yours to claim if you desire.

On two high, facing walls, one on the north and the other on the south of the exhibit gallery, are two remarkable, eighteen-foot-high murals painted by one of our students. The one on the south depicts the Kirtland Temple, the first temple of the dispensation, which, like all temples, was

to be a house of learning. It is labeled *The Temple, a Holy School*. The mural on the north depicts Brigham Young University in President George H. Brimhall’s time, with the Academy Building in the foreground and the newly constructed Maeser Building further in the background on Temple Hill. Its title is *The School, a Temple of Learning*.

I have learned from the lives of our founders that this school does indeed deserve the name “A Temple of Learning.”

I pray this may continue to be so. I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ that the work of this university and of the entire Church Educational System is His work, for He commanded, “Feed my lambs. . . . Feed my sheep.”²⁴ Amen.

Notes

1. See Brigham Young Academy Deed of Trust, 16 October 1875, in *Deeds and Indentures of the Brigham Young Academy, 1872–1903*, Manuscript Collection, UA 399, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; also in appendix 1 of *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, 4 vols. (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975–76), 1:523–25.

2. Brigham Young, quoted in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928), 79; see also Karl G. Maeser, “History of the Academy,” address delivered on October 16, 1891, at Brigham Young Academy’s first Founders Day exercises, in *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography*, 130.

3. See Presentation, in “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret News*, 24 December 1873, 748.

4. Karl Maeser, quoted in Ida Stewart Peay, “A Story Dr. Maeser Told,” *Improvement Era*, January 1914, 195; also “That Master Teacher,” *Improvement Era*, April 1952, 218; see also Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), 29–30.

5. See Karl G. Maeser, “The Monitorial System,” Church School Department, *Juvenile Instructor*, 1 March 1901, 153–54. (In this reference, Maeser stated that although he called his system by the name commonly used among educators, he altered his version of the system to discourage student abuses, such as bullying and tattling, and

to encourage “cultivation of a public spirit among the pupils.”) See also “Brigham Young Academy of Provo,” *Deseret News*, 30 January 1878, 829.

6. James E. Talmage, “Incidental Instructions,” 13 October 1879, recorded by M. J. John, page 9 in *Theological References*, book 2, in *Papers, 1879*, Manuscript Collection, UA 238, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU.

7. Bryant S. Hinckley, quoted in Beatrice Maeser Mitchell, page 3 of oral history interview by Hollis Scott, 29 September 1980, Manuscript Collection, UA OH 38, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU.

8. Reed Smoot, BYU assembly address, autumn 1930, page 3 of typescript in *Papers, 1930, 1932*, Manuscript Collection, UA 290, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU; see also Smoot, BYU Founders Day address, 17 October 1932, page 1 of typescript in *Papers, 1930, 1932*; see also Smoot, *CR*, October 1937, 19.

9. See Amos N. Merrill, “In Remembrance of President Joseph B. Keeler,” typescript, undated, 8, UA 909, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU.

10. In Beulah May Keeler McAllister, “Treasured Heritage,” typescript, 1958, 143–44, Joseph B. Keeler Collection, MSS 2016, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU; see also Daniel M. Keeler, *Build Thee More Stately*, 1989, 324–26, MSS 2016, Joseph B. Keeler Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU.

11. See Alice Louise Reynolds, “Autobiography of Alice Louise Reynolds,” 39 pages, BX 8670.07 R331a, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, BYU; see also Amy Brown Lyman, *A Lighter of Lamps: The Life Story of Alice Louise Reynolds* (Provo: Alice Louise Reynolds Club, 1947), 37–46.

12. Alice Louise Reynolds, in Lyman, *Lighter of Lamps*, 69.

13. See “‘Don’t Be a Scrub,’ He Told His Boys,” *Church News*, 13 September 1975, 16; see also B. T. Higgs, “A Talk Given by B. T. Higgs to a Group of College Students Who Are Doing Janitor Work in the Brigham Young University,” 18 December

1936, Manuscript Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

14. Emma Higgs Wakefield, “Brigham Thomas Higgs—Builder of Houses and Men,” *Improvement Era*, August 1940, 474.

15. See Wilford Woodruff, *JD* 16:265 (8 October 1873); see also Alexander L. Baugh, “Parting the Veil: Joseph Smith’s Seventy-Six Documented Visionary Experiences,” in John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson, eds., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 265–326.

16. Doctrine and Covenants 88:122.

17. See William G. Hartley, “The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young’s Last Achievement,” *BYU Studies* 20, no. 1 (Fall 1979): 3–36; see also William G. Hartley, “Brigham Young and Priesthood Work at the General and Local Levels,” in Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter, eds., *Lion of the Lord: Essays on the Life and Service of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 338–70; see also John A. Tvedtnes, *Organize My Kingdom: A History of Restored Priesthood* (Bountiful, Utah: Cornerstone, 2000), 219–30.

18. Jeffrey R. Holland, “That Our Children May Know,” BYU Campus Education Week address, 25 August 1981.

19. Zina P. Young Williams Card, page 3 of “Short Reminiscent Sketches of Karl G. Maeser,” typescript, undated, Zina Presendia Young Williams Card Collection, MSS 1421, box 2, folder 20, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

20. Maeser, “History of the Academy,” 131.

21. Franklin S. Harris, “Inaugural Address,” Brigham Young University, 17 October 1921, 6.

22. See Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.

23. Doctrine and Covenants 58:27.

24. John 21:15–17.