

# Dance—The Supreme Physical Manifestation of Inner Convictions

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Everything I needed to know I have learned in Primary by singing two songs: “I Am a Child of God” and “Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam.”

Knowing what these songs teach makes all the difference in how I want to live my life.

*I am a child of God,  
And he has sent me here,  
Has given me an earthly home  
With parents kind and dear.  
Lead me, guide me, walk beside me . . .*  
[“I Am a Child of God,” *Children’s Songbook*,  
p. 2]

Learning about Jesus, the Son of God, and knowing that he wants me to be his light on earth makes me want to follow his example of patience, kindness, charity, and love “at home, at school, at play” (“Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam,” *Songbook*, p. 60).

The two questions we most often ask of ourselves, of trusted others, and of the Lord, are Who am I? and Why am I here? I suggest that we have the answers to these two questions—and that we are now ready for a barometer for measuring the third introspective and evaluative question: How am I doing?

We have scriptural references and interpretations from Church leaders to assist us in these self-evaluations. I hope that what I present here today will be helpful to you by creating in you an urgency to better understand the purpose of our time on earth and to put into daily practice those habits that are beneficial to becoming the daughter or son who deserves the blessing of this life on earth.

So let’s start at the very beginning: We learn from Genesis 1:16–25 that on the fourth day, God made two great lights—“the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night”; and thus the sun of the heavens (the source of all energy) was created. And on the fifth day the fish and fowl were created. We further read, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (v. 27).

It has always been interesting to me that the *sun* is the source of all energy on earth without which we cannot live, and that the *son* of God, named Jesus Christ, was sent to earth to give us the plan for living and the plan of salvation.

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*Phyllis C. Jacobson was a professor of dance at Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 8 August 1995.*

In section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants we are told that our purpose for coming to earth is to obtain a mortal body and that the spirit and body are the soul of man; neither is complete without the other.

In section 89 we were given the Word of Wisdom, showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all Saints in the last days: “Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints” (v. 3). Verses 5 and 7 through 9 are the do not’s:

*Inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good. . . .*

*. . . Strong drinks are not for the belly. . . .*

*. . . Tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man. . . .*

*. . . Hot drinks are not for the body or belly.*

And in verses 10 through 14 we are given the do’s:

*All wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man —*

*Every herb in the season thereof, and every fruit in the season thereof. . . .*

*Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly;*

*. . . only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine.*

*All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life, not only for man but for the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven.*

The promise is given in verses 18 through 20:

*All saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;*

*And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;*

*And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.*

Like Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, who spoke at a forum here, I, too, am thankful that we have a Father in Heaven who is interested in what we eat and how we care for our bodies (see “The Human Soul’s Quest for God,” *Brigham Young Magazine*, February 1995, pp. 22–29).

A few years ago I was asked to speak to a group relative to the health and fitness of the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After six months of collecting data, I was not able to verify that Mormons were healthier than the general population in the United States. Most of our members do fairly well at abstinence from tobacco and alcohol—the do not’s of the Word of Wisdom—however, we seem to ignore the importance of the do’s.

When did we, members of the Church of Jesus Christ, receive this counsel? Section 88 was given in 1832, and section 89 was given in 1833. Generally speaking, a new generation is born every twenty years or so—you are now living in the sixth or seventh generation since this revelation was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith. What you are today is a composite of *your heritage* and *your lifestyle* since birth. We have to ask ourselves, Why are we not the healthiest people? Have six generations failed to follow these truths that are verified scientifically today? You can blame your heritage for the color of your eyes, your hair, and other individual characteristics as well as for your skeletal frame, the nature and length of muscle fibers, even the places where fat is stored on your body and the propensity to store fat. However, you are responsible for your present level of health and fitness—the strength of those muscles, your cardiovascular endurance, even the amount of fat tissue you carry. Today you can make a commitment to yourself to

start living a life that will benefit the future generations of your family line.

In the south foyer of the Richards Building is a portrait of Stephen L Richards and a plaque with this quote:

*The human body is sacred—the veritable tabernacle of the divine spirit which inhabits it. It is a solemn duty of mankind to develop, protect, and preserve it from pollution, unnecessary wastage and weakness.*

Let me repeat: It is a solemn duty of man, male and female, to *develop the body, protect the body, and preserve the body* from pollution, unnecessary wastage, and weakness.

This statement is worthy of your visit to the south entrance of the Richards Building for your contemplation and self-evaluation.

Professor Truman Madsen once made a statement that will serve as a personal barometer for evaluating your present and future life style: “This generation will be known as those who trash the treasures and treasure the trash.”

I know of no greater verification of that quote than to apply it to the human body.

How often do you or those with whom you associate trash the treasure of the sacred body with junk food and drink—foods high in fat, sugar, or salt and low in nutrients—in preference over fruits, vegetables, and grains packed with nutrients and low in fats, sugar, and salt? How many of you are addicted to such trash as soft drinks—high in sugar, salt, and carbonated gas—a poor substitute for the recommended daily intake of sixty-four ounces of water so essential for the healthy functioning of the body systems? Do you trash the heart, lungs, and other muscles of the body by living the life of a couch potato? The human body is designed for activity. It is strengthened by *proper* use, and it is weakened and deteriorates with misuse and no use. Do you treasure the trash and thereby trash the treasure of the greatest of all of God’s creations—the sacred body, “a veritable tabernacle for the divine spirit which inhabits it”?

I have recently thought about influences in my life that have developed my convictions about the human body and about *my* body in particular. Growing up on a farm in southeastern Idaho provided me with many opportunities to develop and test my physical body. While I was very young, one of my chores was to get up early and run to the pasture to bring the cows into the milk barn. I got up at five o’clock—that habit has stuck with me all of my life. This daily activity—considered a chore by others—was a wonderful experience for me as I ran through the pasture, jumping the ditches, dodging the gopher holes, skipping, leaping, changing movement patterns, finding new routes to travel, and finding the exhilaration of the body moving through the atmosphere. I also remember the wonderful inner feeling I received when I first noticed that the cows were interested in my physical entrance into their presence. Old Pet, the leader of the herd, would be the first, and soon the entire herd would watch my antics as I rounded them up.

I had other positive experiences and challenges during those early years. My parents liked to dance, and as children we took our turn being danced around the room in the arms of one of them or standing with our feet on top of theirs as they danced us around the room. One experience that made a lasting impression on me, relative to challenges, was an attempt to cross the irrigation ditch. When I told my father I wanted to get across the ditch, he said, “Jump.” When I said, “I can’t,” his answer was, “You can jump halfway, can’t you?” I tried, landing in the middle of a ditch full of water. That experience taught me two things: (1) not to trust my father—he loved to give challenges, and he loved to have a good laugh; and (2) never try to jump a ditch of water until you have tried it out on a *dry* ditch.

My challenges and opportunities for physical development were many in that setting. What about you in your environment? What about here and now? Do you have someone to

challenge you? Do you have something to do on a daily basis that challenges your physical body? You probably don't have a pasture to run in or the twice-daily responsibility and opportunity to perform for an appreciative audience of Holstein cows, but I recommend that you put into your life daily physical exertion—park a mile from campus just think how that would solve the traffic problem here), be a participant in the studios, on the grass fields, on the track.

Something that might give additional incentive is another valuable lesson I learned on the farm as I worked with animals. I noted that when they became good and fat they were hauled off to market.

Recently I read an article in the *Daily Universe* relative to dance at BYU. The leading caption was “Dance Dilemma: Some Say It Is Art, Others P.E.” I would like to respond to that caption and emphasize that the purpose of P.E. (physical education) is to educate man (male and female) on how to maintain, “develop, protect, and preserve [the body] from . . . unnecessary wastage and weakness” and that dance is a vehicle or a means by which the participant can exercise, care for, and discipline the body. Dance is physical education. Dance is for everyone, a *general education* for invigorating the body, mind, and spirit for effective study and living, whether the participant is majoring in science, music, mathematics, engineering, education, law, or any other chosen area of academics.

According to Rousseau, the great French philosopher of the seventeenth century:

*It is a lamentable mistake, to imagine that bodily activity hinders the working of the mind, as if these two kinds of activity might not advance hand in hand, and as if the one were not intended to act as a guide to the other. . . .*

*To learn to think we must therefore exercise our limbs, our senses, and our body organs which are tools of the intellect; and to get the best use out of*

*these tools the body which supplies us with them must be strong and healthy.* [Quoted in Charles A. Bucher, *Foundations of Physical Education*, 5th ed. (St. Louis: C. V. Mosby Company, 1968), pp. 127, 129]

Some people seem to think that physical education is for only those who are already highly skilled and physically fit. This thinking is as naive as thinking that mathematics is for only those who can succeed at a high level in mathematics or that English is only for those who already understand the language and can write skillfully.

It is equally ludicrous to think that if you study and talk about health and fitness, you are physically educated. The same would be true of taking a math class without the discipline of correctly computing any of the math problems or taking the English class without the discipline of writing essays.

Let me quote a devotional speech given by Sara Lee Gibb in this same setting six years ago:

*There is no aspect of our existence—whether it be social, intellectual, or spiritual—that is not affected by our physical well-being or lack of it.* [“Our Mortal Body—A Sacred Gift,” *BYU 1988–89 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1989), p. 136]

Physical education is the act of *doing*, of *becoming* a healthy individual—better today than you were yesterday with the goal of becoming the healthiest and reaching the highest level of neuromuscular skill possible for you, not based on what someone else achieves but on your own heritage and your own physical abilities and disabilities. To add an additional barometer for measuring “How am I doing?” A Greek historian said:

*What a disgrace it is for a man [male / female] to grow old without ever seeing the beauty of which*

*his [or her] body is capable.* [Xenophon, 435 B.C.; quoted in Bucher, *Foundations*, p. 129]

Yes, dance is physical education, and dance is a performing art, the only performing art in which the total body is the performing instrument.

Just as poetry is the most eloquent form of human languages, dance is the most eloquent form of human movement—there is no language barrier. Dance is the supreme physical manifestation of inner convictions.

In this mechanized, materialized, computerized world, how much better it would be that at an early age our children were engaged in creative, imaginative activity that involves the total being—the body, mind, and spirit—rather than sitting with computer games, watching TV, or participating in other sedentary activities six to eight hours each day.

At my invitation, Rachel Kocherhans agreed to join us to share a dance she created to her selection of musical accompaniment. Rachel has been involved in the creative dance program since she was four years old.

*[A three-minute creative dance performance was presented.]*

Dance has been and continues to be an aspect of Mormon culture. From the writings of the late Leona Holbrook, as published under “Dance” in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, I quote:

*In 1830 when the Church was organized, many Christian denominations were hostile toward recreation and play, particularly dance. However, the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors advocated dance and participated in recreational dancing. Joseph Smith was a skillful dancer and enjoyed hosting dances in his home (Holbrook, p. 122). Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve “danced before the Lord” to the music of a small orchestra in the Nauvoo Temple after long days of*

*joyous participation in temple ordinances (HC 7:557, 566; Holbrook, p.123).*

*. . . Early Latter-day Saints commended dancing as healthful to body and mind, but only when conducted in accordance with Church principles. Emphasis was on propriety, good company, and the spirit of praising the Lord. During their difficult trek west, the pioneers danced as “camps of Israel.” President Brigham Young said, “I want you to sing and dance and forget your troubles. . . . Let’s have some music and all of you dance” (Holbrook, p. 125). Around the campfires they danced polkas, Scotch reels, quadrilles, French fours, and other figures. [Encyclopedia of Mormonism, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1992), p. 354]*

*[The Brigham Young University Folk Dancers presented a segment of dances representing early Mormon culture.]*

The culture of the LDS Church and the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been shared with people worldwide as the dance and music groups have represented Brigham Young University and the Church, bringing hope, peace, beauty, and friendship to the peoples of the world.

Dance is a most eloquent form of communication, and as such has also been a tool for promoting the work of the devil. The entertainment world is full of the sexy, sadistic, profane forms of body language, and through this means many are invited into a life of glitz, sensuality, and satanism.

We hope that students of the dance programs of Brigham Young University and other institutions of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can counteract the satanical and bring to the world the eloquent, the beautiful, the wholesome, the sacred.

In closing, I wish to read to you the published Statement of Philosophy of the Brigham Young University Department of Dance:

*With the belief that dance, as an expressive art, is an optimal educational vehicle to harmonize the body, mind and spirit, our work seeks to integrate the scientific, the historical, cultural, and the aesthetic, in theory and practice. Dance at Brigham Young University celebrates the worth of the “whole individual,” including the sacredness of the physical body. It is based upon a philosophy of love, hope, enthusiasm, and a striving for excellence refined by a desire to serve, exemplifying the values of our Savior Jesus Christ. We believe in the dignity and potential of every human being and seek to provide a full spectrum of dance experiences for all who have a desire to be enriched through the joy of movement.*

[Department of Dance, “Self-Study Document,” 15 March 1995, p. 1]

I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*[Amy Clark Lives—a protégée of the children’s and teen’s creative dance program, a graduate of the dance major program, and a dance teacher at BYU—danced “the supreme physical manifestation of inner convictions.” She was accompanied by vocal soloist Kim Underwood, a voice teacher in the Department of Music.]*