

**LESSON 10**  
**“This Is My Voice Unto All”**  
**D&C 25**

**OVERVIEW:**

Husbands and wives should support and comfort each other. We should be meek and avoid pride. We should rejoice and be of good cheer.

Many of the revelations given in the Doctrine and Covenants were given to individuals. Although the counsel in the revelations was specific to individuals who lived many years ago, much of this counsel applies to us today.

(Numbered among the revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants are those given to people collectively and individually. This, however, is the only revelation given specifically to a woman. What is of greatest significance here is that this revelation given to the Prophet's wife, Emma Smith, is intended in principle and purpose for the instruction and blessing of faithful women everywhere. It is a revelation on the role of women. Revelations of the Restoration, p. 193)

**Biographical Background: Emma Hale Smith**

“Birth: 10 July 1804, Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. Daughter of Isaac Hale and Elizabeth Lewis. Death: 30 April 1879, (she was 74 when she died) Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois. Emma Smith stood about five feet, nine inches tall, had dark hair and brown eyes, and was described as ‘well-turned, of excellent form ... with splendid physical development.’ Her father wrote of Joseph Smith's courting of Emma: ‘Smith made several visits at my house, and at length asked my consent to his marrying my daughter Emma. This I refused.’ Emma, without the approval of her father, was married to Joseph in January 1827 in South Bainbridge, New York. She wrote of her elopement, ‘I had no intention of marrying when I left home; but [Joseph] ... urged me to marry him, and preferring to marry him to any other man I knew, I consented.’ On 22 September 1827 Emma was privileged to be the first to know that Joseph had acquired the plates from the angel Moroni. The plates ‘lay in a box under our bed for months,’ she said, ‘but I never felt at liberty to look at them.’ Emma was a scribe for the Book of Mormon translation, and said of her experience, ‘It is marvelous to me.... when acting as his scribe, [he] would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he could at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him.’ She bore a continuing testimony, even in her seventy-fourth year, of her husband's prophetic calling: ‘I believe he was everything he professed to be.’ Emma was baptized on 28 June 1830 by Oliver Cowdery... Emma was admonished to develop her talents, which included selecting sacred hymns... Her calling was to be ‘a comfort unto’ the Prophet (see D&C 25:5). Joseph loved Emma, for she was faithful in fulfilling this calling. He pleaded with the Lord on behalf of her and their children: ‘Have mercy, O Lord, upon [my] wife and children, that they may be exalted in thy presence, and preserved by thy fostering hand’ (D&C 109:69). ... While reaching out to serve others, Emma quietly endured her own personal sufferings. Of the nine children she bore, only four grew to maturity. This, together with religious persecution, bigotry, and the incarceration of her husband, led her to pen in a letter to Joseph, ‘No one but God, knows the reflections of my mind and the feelings of my heart when I left our house and home, and almost all of everything that we possessed excepting our little children, and took my journey out of the State of Missouri, leaving you shut up in that lonesome prison.’ Emma's concern was always for her husband and children. Brief historical entries in Joseph's journal reflect his caring for her: ‘Emma began to be sick with fever; consequently I kept in the house with her all day.... Emma is no better. I was with her all day.... Emma was a little better. I was with her all

day.... Emma is very sick again. I attended with her all the day, being somewhat poorly myself.' Emma was promised in a patriarchal blessing that her diligence would lead to great blessings: 'For thy faithfulness and truth, thou shalt be blessed with thy husband and rejoice in the glory which shall come upon him.... Thou shalt be blessed with understanding, and have power to instruct thy sex, teach thy family righteousness, and thy little ones the way of life, and the holy angels shall watch over thee: and thou shalt be saved in the kingdom of God.' Emma has been criticized for not following the leadership of Brigham Young and coming west with the Saints after the death of Joseph. Criticism led her to exclaim, 'I have no friend but God, and no place to go but home.' She married Major Lewis Bidamon and was his wife for thirty-two years. On one occasion she said, 'I have always avoided talking to my children about having anything to do in the church, for I have suffered so much I have dreaded to have them take any part in it.' Her health failed rapidly in April 1879. Her family rallied to her side the evening of 29 April 1879. Her son Alexander recalled hearing his mother call, 'Joseph, Joseph, Joseph.' Joseph Smith III reported seeing his mother extend her left arm and hearing her say, 'Joseph! Yes, yes, I'm coming.' Emma Smith Bidamon died at 4:20 a.m. on 30 April 1879 in Nauvoo at the age of seventy-four. She is buried next to the remains of her husband, the Prophet Joseph Smith." (Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], 273-277.)

## SCRIPTURES:

### THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS SECTION 25

*Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, July 1830. See HC 1: 103—104; see also heading to Section 24. This revelation manifests the will of the Lord to Emma Smith, the Prophet's wife. (This revelation was given after Emma's baptism in June but before she was confirmed a member of the Church in August. Emma initially did not want to go with Joseph. She wanted to stay near her parents. This revelation was given to Emma to help her move along with Joseph. Emma's parents were against Joseph. They did not want Emma to marry Joseph.)*

*1—6, Emma Smith, an elect lady, is called to aid and comfort her husband; 7—11, She is also called to write, to expound scriptures, and to select hymns; 12—14, The song of the righteous is a prayer unto the Lord; 15—16, Principles of obedience in this revelation are applicable to all.*

1 HEARKEN unto the voice of the Lord your God, while I speak unto you, Emma Smith, my daughter; for verily I say unto you, all those who <sup>a</sup>receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my <sup>b</sup>kingdom. (Referring to those who become members of Christ's kingdom through baptism.)

2 A revelation I give unto you concerning my will; and if thou art faithful and <sup>a</sup>walk in the paths of <sup>b</sup>virtue before me, (be good) I will preserve thy life (She lived longer than was normal during that time – age 74), and thou shalt receive an <sup>c</sup>inheritance in Zion.

3 Behold, thy <sup>a</sup>sins are forgiven thee, and thou art an <sup>b</sup>elect <sup>c</sup>lady, whom I have <sup>d</sup>called. (This designation, which is used in only one other instance in scripture (2 John 1:1 THE elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth);), identifies a woman who is called and chosen as a servant of the Lord even before her birth. Emma would yet become the first woman in this dispensation to receive the fulness of temple blessings and to preside over the Relief Society. On the day of the organization of the Relief Society (about 12 years later), the Prophet recorded that "elect" meant to be "elected to a certain work, &c., and that the revelation was then fulfilled by Sister Emma's election to the Presidency of the Society, she having previously been ordained to expound the scriptures" (Smith, History of the Church, 4:552-53.)

4 <sup>a</sup>Murmur not because of the <sup>b</sup>things which thou hast not seen, (Apparently Emma had been disgruntled because she had not been permitted to see the plates and other things shown to the special witnesses of

the Book of Mormon (D&C 17). Revelations of the Restoration, p. 194. Emma Smith was human, possessing many of the characteristics which are found in most of us. Being the wife of the man whom the Almighty had blessed, she felt, as most women would have felt under like circumstances, that she was entitled to some special favors. It was difficult for her to understand why she could not view the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and other sacred things, which view had been given to special witnesses. At times this human thought caused her to murmur and ask the questions of the Prophet why she was denied this privilege. In this revelation the Lord admonishes her and tells her that it is for a wise purpose to be made known in time to come, why she and the world were deprived of this privilege. Joseph Fielding Smith, Church History and Modern Revelation, 1:125) for they are <sup>c</sup>withheld from thee and from the world, which is wisdom in me in a time to come. (“Although Emma Smith never saw the gold plates in the same way the other witnesses did and was also counseled by the Lord not to murmur because of the things which she had not seen (see D&C 25:4), she did have close contact with the plates and the work of her husband. In response to a question from her son, Joseph Smith III, as to the reality of the plates, she responded: “The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth, which I had given him [Joseph Smith, Jr.] to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book. ... I did not attempt to handle the plates, other than I have told you, nor uncover them to look at them. I was satisfied that it was the work of God, and therefore did not feel it to be necessary to do so. ... I moved them from place to place on the table, as it was necessary in doing my work.’ (The Saints’ Herald, 1 Oct. 1879, p. 290; spelling modernized.) Even though Emma did not see the plates directly, what she had seen and felt by the Spirit deepened her conviction of the truth of the Book of Mormon. As a result, she bore this powerful witness and testimony of the book to her son: ‘My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; for, when acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.’” (Keith W. Perkins, “I Have a Question,” Ensign, July 1992, 54))

5 And the office of thy calling shall be for a <sup>a</sup>comfort unto my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., thy <sup>b</sup>husband, in his <sup>c</sup>afflictions, with consoling words, in the spirit of <sup>d</sup>meeekness. (The Prophet Joseph Smith taught wives that they should treat their husbands ”with mildness and affection. When a man is borne down with trouble, when he is perplexed with care and difficulty, if he can meet a smile instead of an argument or a murmur – if he can meet with mildness, it will calm down his soul and soothe his feelings.” TPJS, p. 228. It is the duty of a husband to love, cherish, and nourish his wife, and cleave unto her and none else; he ought to honor her as himself, and he ought to regard her feelings with tenderness.” Elders Journal, Aug. 1838, p. 61.)

6 And thou shalt go with him (Emma is directed not to remain behind in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Emma’s parents had been turned against the Prophet by Nathaniel Lewis, a local minister and brother to her mother. Once Emma left Harmony with Joseph, she never saw her parents again. Revelations of the Restoration, p. 194) at the time of his going, (When Joseph leaves Harmony, Emma is supposed to go with him.) and be unto him for a scribe, (Emma had served for a short period as Joseph’s scribe in the translation of the Book of Mormon. She would yet act in a similar capacity as the Prophet labored on the Inspired Version of the Bible. Revelations of the Restoration, p. 194) while there is no one to be a scribe for him, that I may send my servant, Oliver Cowdery, whithersoever I will.

7 And thou shalt be <sup>a</sup>ordained (Today we call it being “set apart.” Emma was not ordained, she was set apart.) under his hand to expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my <sup>b</sup>Spirit.

8 For he shall lay his <sup>a</sup>hands upon thee, and thou shalt receive the Holy Ghost, (Emma was baptized on 28 June 1830 at Colesville, New York. Before she could be confirmed and given the gift of the Holy Ghost, Joseph was arrested "for setting the country in an uproar by preaching the Book of Mormon." Vilified by his captors, he was subjected to two spurious trials before being released. It was not until August that Emma was able to be confirmed. Revelations of the Restoration, p. 194) and thy time shall be given to writing, and to learning much. (This admonition is to all in the Church. We should learn much.)

9 And thou needest not fear, for thy <sup>a</sup>husband shall support thee in the church; (In the Book of Commandments this read, "Thy husband shall support thee from the church," conveying the idea that she need not worry about Joseph's expending all his time and energy in the service of the Lord because the Church would provide for them. Revelations of the Restoration, p. 195) for unto them is his <sup>b</sup>calling, that all things might be <sup>c</sup>revealed unto them, whatsoever I will, according to their faith.

10 And verily I say unto thee that thou shalt lay aside the <sup>a</sup>things of this <sup>b</sup>world, and <sup>c</sup>seek for the things of a <sup>d</sup>better. (Where is our focus? Is it on eternal things?)

11 And it shall be given thee, also, to make a selection of <sup>a</sup>sacred <sup>b</sup>hymns, (90 hymns were collected in to the first hymnal. They sang most of the hymns to a few different tunes. Emma had a beautiful soprano voice.) as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church. ("Emma's hymnbook, entitled A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints, appeared in print in August 1835. The vest-pocket edition, measuring three inches by four and one-half inches, was published in Kirtland, Ohio, by F. G. Williams and Co. Of its ninety hymn texts, thirty-nine had been written by Latter-day Saint poets, including Parley P. Pratt and Eliza R. Snow. William W. Phelps adapted several non-LDS texts and helped Emma Smith in compiling and preparing the book. The Saints had felt a need for new texts that were expressive of their unique doctrines and beliefs. But they sang these texts to borrowed tunes they had learned as members of other churches. In those days most hymnbooks included words only, with no music." (Michael F. Moody, "Latter-day Saint Hymnbooks, Then and Now," Ensign, Sept. 1985, 11–12) "With the able assistance of William W. Phelps, Emma compiled the hymnbook and published it in August 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio. The introduction to that book states: 'It is sincerely hoped that the following collection, selected with an eye single to his glory, may answer every purpose till more are composed, or till we are blessed with a copious variety of the songs of Zion.' The necessity of having a book of hymns became apparent at the time of the organization of the Church, and while Emma Smith may have felt she had been slighted in not having the privilege of viewing the plates, yet it was a signal honor to her to be called to be an "elect lady" and preside over the women in the Church in matters of relief, to have the privilege of divine appointment to expound scriptures in the Church, and also to be chosen to select hymns to be published for the use of the Church. Evidently she had talent for this work. That talent is shown in the selection which was made. With the help of Elder William W. Phelps she went to work, and a selection of hymns was made, but it was not published until 1835. Wisdom and discretion are shown in this compilation. The title page of this book is as follows: "A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter-day Saints. Selected by Emma Smith, Kirtland, Ohio. Printed by F. G. Williams & Co., 1835." In this collection are found, because of lack of Latter-day Saint composers many sectarian hymns, but it also contains a goodly number of hymns by William W. Phelps, Parley P. Pratt and Eliza R. Snow. Church History and Modern Revelation, 1:126)

12 For my soul <sup>a</sup>delighteth in the <sup>b</sup>song of the <sup>c</sup>heart; (it is the heart to which the Lord listens, not the beauty of the voice.) yea, the <sup>d</sup>song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads. (The First Presidency: Inspirational music is an essential part of our church meetings. The hymns invite the Spirit of the Lord, create a feeling of reverence, unify us as members, and provide a way for us to offer praises to the Lord. Some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns. Hymns move us to repentance and good works, build testimony and faith, comfort the weary, console the mourning, and inspire us to endure to the end. We hope to see an increase of hymn

singing in our congregations. We encourage all members, whether musically inclined or not, to join with us in singing the hymns. We hope all leaders, teachers, and members who are called upon to speak will turn often to the hymnbook to find sermons presented powerfully and beautifully in verse. . . . In addition to blessing us as Church and family members, the hymns can greatly benefit us as individuals. Hymns can lift our spirits, give us courage, and move us to righteous action. They can fill our souls with heavenly thoughts and bring us a spirit of peace. (Preface, Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985) Dallin H. Oaks: This direction to praise the Lord with singing is not limited to large meetings. When the Lord's Apostles meet in modern times, the singing of hymns is still part of their meetings. The weekly meetings of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the Salt Lake Temple always begin with a hymn. Elder Russell M. Nelson plays the organ accompaniment. The First Presidency, who conduct these meetings, rotate the privilege of selecting the opening song. Most of us record the date each hymn is sung. According to my records, the opening song most frequently sung during the decade of my participation has been "I Need Thee Every Hour" (Hymns, 1985, no. 98). Picture the spiritual impact of a handful of the Lord's servants singing that song before praying for his guidance in fulfilling their mighty responsibilities. The veil is very thin in the temples, especially when we join in worshipping through music. At temple dedications I have seen more tears of joy elicited by music than by the spoken word. I have read accounts of angelic choirs joining in these hymns of praise, and I think I have experienced this on several occasions. In dedicatory sessions featuring beautiful and well-trained choirs of about thirty voices, there are times when I have heard what seemed to be ten times thirty voices praising God with a quality and intensity of feeling that can be experienced but not explained. Some who are listening today will know what I mean. Sacred music has a unique capacity to communicate our feelings of love for the Lord. This kind of communication is a wonderful aid to our worship. ("Worship through Music," Ensign, Nov. 1994, 10) Music is given of God to further his purposes. Sweet melodies mellow the souls of men and help prepare them for the gospel. After men receive the truth, songs of praise to Deity help to sanctify and cleanse their souls. It follows that the best and greatest music is that in which, by both note and word, God is praised and his truths are extolled. On the other hand, music can be used for sensuous and carnal purposes. To accomplish the Lord's aims both word and melody must be edifying and lead to wholesome thoughts and emotion. There is vulgar as well as virtuous music. Wholesome light music designed primarily to entertain has its place. So do the heavy classical presentations that appeal to the more musically gifted. But in meetings set apart to worship the Lord, the saints should sing songs which teach the gospel and enhance faith. Beautiful melodies alone do not suffice; the word-message must also conform to the principles. Truths taught in the hymns should be as accurately presented as they are in the scriptures themselves. Mormon Doctrine, p. 521. Boyd K. Packer: This is what I would teach you. Choose from among the sacred music of the Church a favorite hymn, one with words that are uplifting and music that is reverent, one that makes you feel something akin to inspiration. Remember President Lee's counsel: perhaps "I am a Child of God" would do. Go over it in your mind carefully. Memorize it. Even though you have had no musical training, you can think through a hymn. Now, use this hymn as the place for your thoughts to go. Make it your emergency channel. Whenever you find these shady actors have slipped from the sidelines of your thinking onto the state of your mind, put on this record, as it were. As the music begins and as the words form in your thoughts, the unworthy ones will slip shamefully away. It will change the whole mood on the stage of your mind. Because it is uplifting and clean, the baser thoughts will disappear. For while virtue, by choice, will not associate with filth, evil cannot tolerate the presence of light. In due time you will find yourself, on occasion, humming the music inwardly. As you retrace your thoughts, you discover some influence from the world about you encouraged an unworthy thought to move on stage in your mind, and the music almost automatically began. . . . There are many references in the scriptures, both ancient and modern, that attest to the influence of righteous music. The Lord, Himself, was prepared for His greatest test through its influence, for the scripture records: "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." (Mark 14:26.) (CR, October 1973, pp.

24-25.))

13 Wherefore, <sup>a</sup>lift up thy heart and <sup>b</sup>rejoice, and cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made. (Marriage vows superseded Emma's allegiance to her parents.)

14 Continue in the spirit of meekness, (Neal Maxwell said that meekness is power under control. Meekness is mentioned twice in this revelation.) and beware of <sup>a</sup>pride. (This may have been Emma's main problem later in her life. She would not go west with the Saints.) Let thy soul delight in thy <sup>b</sup>husband, and the <sup>c</sup>glory which shall come upon him.

15 Keep my commandments continually, and a <sup>a</sup>crown of <sup>b</sup>righteousness thou shalt receive. And except thou do this, where I am you <sup>c</sup>cannot come. (Shortly before her death Emma reported a vision to her nurse in which she saw the Savior and her husband, the Prophet Joseph Smith. She told the nurse that Joseph came to her and said, "Emma, come with me, it is time for you to come with me." Emma explained, "I put on my bonnet and my shawl and went with him; I did not think that it was anything unusual. I went with him into a mansion, and he showed me through the different apartments of that beautiful mansion." One room was a nursery in which she found a baby in a cradle. "I knew my babe," Emma said, "my Don Carlos that was taken from me." She swept the child up into her arms and cried for joy, but when recovered, stopped to ask, "Joseph, where are the rest of my[children[?]" He assured her, "Emma, be patient and you shall have all of your children." Emma then related that she saw a personage of light standing by the side of her beloved husband—"even the Lord Jesus Christ." (Emma probably gained her exaltation, but what she may have lost was her children. If this vision is true, she may have to wait until her children are hers once more.) George Albert Smith: I have many times repeated what my grandfather said. . . . In advising his family he said, "There is a line of demarcation, well defined. On one side of the line is the Lord's territory. On the other side of the line is the devil's territory." And he said, "If you will stay on the Lord's side of the line, you are perfectly safe, because the adversary of all righteousness cannot cross the line." What does that mean? It means to me that those who are living righteous lives, keeping all the commandments of our Heavenly Father, are perfectly safe, but not those who trifle with his advice and counsel. (CR, September 1949, pp. 5-6.))

16 And verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my <sup>a</sup>voice unto all. (Although this revelation was given to Emma Smith, it is true that all faithful women will be well served by its admonitions and blessed in like manner by its promises. Through Emma the Lord is saying to all women of faith that if they will walk in paths of virtue they will be preserved to accomplish their life's mission and they will be assured an inheritance in Zion (v. 2). They too have the promise that their sins have been forgiven (v. 3). Those who have husbands are charged to be a comfort to them (v. 5); indeed, the greatest labor they will perform will be that which they find at their husbands' side. Their husbands will find strength in their strength, courage in their courage, and faith in their faith (v. 5). It is also their right to expound scripture and, for that matter, to interpret and apply the various manifestations of the Spirit to their families and in their various assignments in the Church (v. 7). Following the instruction to give time to writing and learning (v. 8), would enhance the ability of every woman to bless others. President Spencer W. Kimball observed that "children may not recover from the ignorance of their mothers" (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, 320). We know so little, brothers and sisters, about the reasons for the division of duties between womanhood and manhood as well as between motherhood and priesthood. These were divinely determined in another time and another place. We are accustomed to focusing on the men of God because theirs is the priesthood and leadership line. But paralleling that authority line is a stream of righteous influence reflecting the remarkable women of God who have existed in all ages and dispensations, including our own. Greatness is not measured by coverage in column inches, either in newspapers or in the scriptures. The story of the women of God, therefore, is, for now, an untold drama within a drama. Just as certain men were foreordained from before the foundations of the world, so were certain women appointed to certain tasks. Divine design—not chance—brought Mary forward to be the mother of Jesus. The boy prophet, Joseph Smith, was blessed not only with a great father but also with a superb mother, Lucy Mack, who influenced a whole dispensation. In our modern kingdom, it is no

accident that women were, through the Relief Society, assigned compassionate service. So often the service of women seems instinctive, while that of some men seems more labored. It is precisely because the daughters of Zion are so uncommon that the adversary will not leave them alone. So often our sisters comfort others when their own needs are greater than those being comforted. That quality is like the generosity of Jesus on the cross. Empathy during agony is a portion of divinity! When the real history of mankind is fully disclosed, will it feature the echoes of gunfire or the shaping sound of lullabies? The great armistices made by military men or the peacemaking of women in homes and in neighborhoods? Will what happened in cradles and kitchens prove to be more controlling than what happened in congresses? When the surf of the centuries has made the great pyramids so much sand, the everlasting family will still be standing, because it is a celestial institution, formed outside telestial time. The women of God know this. No wonder the men of God support and sustain you sisters in your unique roles, for the act of deserting home in order to shape society is like thoughtlessly removing crucial fingers from an imperiled dike in order to teach people to swim. Finally, remember: When we return to our real home, it will be with the "mutual approbation" of those who reign in the "royal courts on high." There we will find beauty such as mortal "eye hath not seen"; we will hear sounds of surpassing music which mortal "ear hath not heard." Could such a regal homecoming be possible without the anticipatory arrangements of a Heavenly Mother? Neal A. Maxwell, CR, Apr 1978, p13-15) Amen.

The following is not part of the lesson, but it shows the feelings that some have regarding Emma Smith. It is found in the book *Heroines of the Restoration*, by Barbara B. Smith, Blythe Darlyn Thatcher.

WENDY C. TOP \*

*"A Deep Sorrow in Her Heart"*

Emma Hale Smith 1804–1879

I first came face to face with the Emma Hale Smith "dilemma" in seminary during my senior year of high school. Our teacher gave us a two-page handout written by another seminary teacher, Brother Erwin Wirkus. He had written Emma's story in first person, as if she were pleading for understanding and consideration for all she had been through. Up until this time I had heard little about this woman who was a very present but somewhat mysterious figure in Church history. I had the general idea that she had left the Church after the Prophet's death and, as a result, was not held in high esteem. While I had never heard her openly castigated, I also had seldom heard her praised. Brother Wirkus's story (which he later developed into a booklet titled "Judge Me, Dear Reader") was the first hint I had that Emma Hale Smith was a remarkable woman—"an elect lady."

In the summer of 1977 I did some research on Emma for a special seminar on Joseph Smith that I took from Dr. Milton Backman at BYU. I thought that perhaps I could build upon Brother Wirkus's thesis by adding insight from a woman's perspective. At that time in my life I was a wife and mother of two children. Emma's trials took on a new and deeply personal meaning for me. I was overwhelmed by the trials she faced and by her compassion. I felt sure that if I had been in Emma's place I would have failed long before plural marriage ever became my Abrahamic test. Moreover, I found that most historians who wrote about her were male and therefore could not fully understand her and empathize with her feelings and challenges as a woman, wife, and mother. It appeared also that historians were often tainted by the bitterness of the early Utah Saints who felt they had been betrayed and forsaken by the wife of their beloved Prophet. Because of this bias, much unkind and incorrect information became attached to her name through the years. (Unfortunately I still run into some of it even today.) In reading my paper Dr. Backman was so moved by this sympathetic view of this unfortunate heroine that he had me present the paper to the class.

It was still uncommon at that time to view Emma in such a compassionate light. However, other women and some men were also beginning to reexamine the traditional view of Emma Smith. Here and there positive articles appeared. Many lauded her courage and compassion but more or less overlooked the plural marriage problem and her eventual abandonment of the Church, as if they hadn't really happened. I began to feel an earnest desire to help members of the Church understand *all* of Emma Smith's life and judge her with increased understanding and greater compassion. I wanted others to be inspired by her singular fortitude and generosity, as I had been. I hoped to give them a glimpse of the steadfast love she possessed for her prophet husband, which was a driving force in her life. I sought not to excuse her failings but to help others empathize with them.

So when the opportunity arose, I developed a one-woman presentation in which I spoke as if I were Emma, telling her story and incorporating my own interpretation of how she may have felt and why she may have made some of the choices she did. Unbeknownst to me at the time, several other women in the Church felt moved upon to do similar creative projects favorable to Emma. There seemed to be a scattered but simultaneously inspired movement stirring within the membership of the Church to reclaim the reputation of Emma Smith. As people learned the true facts of her life and were able to put her struggles in proper perspective, they often were deeply moved by her profound contributions to the Church.

For several years I gave my presentation in wards and stakes and other settings. Audiences always received it with gratitude and deep emotion. One autumn I was asked to give my presentation to the Northeast Area Church Educational System administrators at their yearly before-school convention held that year in Palmyra, New York. My husband was the CES coordinator in northern Virginia at the time, and we were well acquainted with the men he served with and their wives. It should have been easy to perform among friends, but several of these men were institute directors at Ivy League universities and were very learned and scholarly. The night before I was to give the presentation I got into a spirited discussion with some of them about Emma Smith. Their view was that Emma had her chance and failed, and she would have to face her punishment-being cut off forever. They seemed to subscribe to Brigham Young's heated sentiments that Joseph would have to go to hell to find her. <sup>2</sup> They strongly hinted that any attempt to "rehabilitate" her would be purely sentimental.

I was devastated. I had never claimed to be a scholar. My presentation was as historically accurate as I could make it, but I began to feel that perhaps my interpretations of those facts were on shakier ground-clouded by my own imperfect inspiration and my love for Emma Smith. Were my views merely sentimental? Wishful thinking? Emotional distortions? I lay awake much of the night going through the presentation in my mind, praying to know if I were saying things that weren't true, or were unreasonable or sentimental inferences. For my 45-minute presentation I only felt the need to change one or two words. Nevertheless, I was scared to death to make a fool of myself in front of these distinguished scholars. I finally prayed that if the presentation was right and if the Lord was pleased with it, he would let me know. Then it wouldn't really matter what they thought.

The next evening I was nervous and stiff as I began my presentation. I was so anxious and intimidated that I couldn't seem to feel the Spirit with me as I usually had before. It seemed to me that my acting was unnatural and my tongue tangled at every turn. I rushed through it and then made my exit as quickly as possible, feeling that I had failed miserably. I stood out in the hallway, shaking my head and lamenting that I hadn't done well, despite reassurance from my husband, who always introduced and concluded my program. We waited for the meeting inside to resume so that I could make sure they were done with me and I could go collapse somewhere. Instead, an unusual silence filled the room. No one stood up to speak. The silence became more awkward, and I began to hear muffled sobs coming from



the room. I glanced back inside and saw the man who had given me the most unbending argument the previous night unable to control his emotions and resume conducting the meeting. I suddenly realized that the Spirit in that room was so strong that no one could speak. After what seemed like several minutes, someone finally stood up and suggested that they all stand for a moment so that the group could regain its composure. At that moment I knew the Lord approved of my effort to bring Emma Smith the recognition and understanding she deserves. In spite of my stumbling, unemotional delivery, the Spirit still carried its message into the hearts of those present.

Indeed, it would now appear that Emma Smith's heroic sacrifices before her falling away will not go unrewarded or unheralded. An attractive, educated, much-admired young woman from a respected family, she gave up everything, including her family, to marry and follow a poor, uneducated farm boy who claimed to have visions. While others mocked Joseph and her father hated him, she humbly saw through his deep blue eyes into his soul and knew he was a man of integrity and spoke the truth. Thoughtful and well-bred, Emma would never marry any man on a foolish whim, let alone one whose reputation was so questionable in the community and objectionable to her parents. According to Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph "thought that no young woman that he ever was acquainted with was better calculated to render the man of her choice happy than Miss Emma Hale." 3

Emma's contributions to the early Church were great. Her self-assurance and education must have been a great help to Joseph as he translated the Book of Mormon. She acted as a scribe for him when no one else was available. Once, as he translated a certain passage about the city walls of Jerusalem, he stopped, innocently asking her if there were walls around Jerusalem. Being well acquainted with the Bible, she was able to inform him that, indeed, there were. 4 Undoubtedly her education filled other needs and answered other questions as well. Her testimony of the Book of Mormon also remained strong till her death. Someone once asked her later in life if Joseph could have written the story privately, pretending to translate as he dictated. She replied that "Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. . . . It is marvelous to me . . . as much as to any one." If such a deception had existed, lesser women might have fallen for it, but not Emma Smith. "I am satisfied," she continued, "that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; for when [I was] acting as his scribe, [he] would dictate to me for hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without having any portion of it read to him." 5 Emma is a credible, intelligent, and powerful witness of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

Yet Emma contributed far more than just her unwavering support for her young prophet husband. For instance, although pregnant with twins she worked tirelessly along with other women in weaving cloth and sewing clothing for the early missionaries of the Church. Lucy Smith commented on her daughter-in-law's remarkable devotion to the cause: "Emma's health at this time was quite delicate, yet she did not favor herself on this account, but whatever her hands found to do, she did with her might, until so far beyond her strength that she brought upon herself a heavy fit of sickness, which lasted four weeks. And, although her strength was exhausted, still her spirits were the same, which, in fact, was always the case with her, even under the most trying circumstances." 6

She was also the only woman to have an official revelation directed to her and canonized as scripture. Because of that, the revelation warrants close examination. After Emma's baptism Joseph received in her behalf what is now the 25th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Though Emma could not have fully comprehended it at the time, it lay her soul open before the world. Through it we see the many facets of Emma Smith—her strengths and weaknesses, as well as our own. Indeed, the Lord closed the

revelation by declaring, “This is my voice unto all” (D&C 25:16). This makes a close reading of it even more imperative.

In verse 3 of this section Emma is called an “elect lady,” important evidence of her previous greatness. Joseph later explained to her that when she became the first president of the Relief Society in 1842 it was in fulfillment of this designation. Because of her righteousness she had been “called and elected” to fill that position long before she was ever set apart for it.

After giving her this title the Lord then gently counseled her to “murmur not” because of things which she had not seen, “for they are withheld from thee and from the world, which is wisdom in me in a time to come” (verse 4). Some historians have pointed to this injunction as evidence that Emma was a whiner and complainer from the beginning—that she was nagging Joseph and making his life difficult even before plural marriage ever became an issue. Others have suggested that this means Emma was actually losing her faith. There is simply no evidence that Emma had been openly murmuring or complaining. However, if one considers how the faith of the elect lady must have been tested by not being able to view the plates when so many of those others who were assisting her husband were allowed to do so, perhaps we can understand the questioning that must have been in her mind if not on her lips. Though she handled the plates when they were covered by a linen cloth bag which she herself had made for them, moving them to dust under them, and they lay under the couple’s bed for a long period of time, she “never felt at liberty to look at them.”<sup>7</sup> What incredible trust Joseph must have had in her to leave them repeatedly exposed and unattended in her presence! However, the greatest question must have arisen when Mary Whitmer was shown the plates by a mysterious “old man” because of her tireless support of the men who were working on the translation.<sup>8</sup> Hadn’t Emma given her all as well? Rather than chiding her, this counsel to “murmur not” must have reassured her that the Lord was mindful of her struggle and that there was divine purpose in her not seeing the plates.

Instead, she was given the office of being a comfort and blessing to her husband in his monumental responsibilities and frequent afflictions, of being his refuge and his earthly comforter at all times. While all married women are called to this office, few if any in history would need the strength, faith, and persistence to fill it as would Emma Smith. Being the wife of a prophet who must restore the gospel blessings of every previous dispensation of time would not be an ordinary job or for the faint of heart. The greatest powers of hell would be unleashed against her and her husband.

A letter Emma wrote to Joseph while he was in Liberty Jail after the Saints had been driven from Missouri gives us a small glimpse of Emma’s painful struggle: “Was it not for . . . the direct interposition of divine mercy, I am very sure I never should have been able to have endured the scenes of suffering that I have passed through . . . but I still live and am yet willing to suffer more if it is the will of kind Heaven, that I should for your sake. . . . No one but God, knows the reflections of my mind and the feelings of my heart when I left our house and home, and almost all of everything that we possessed excepting our little children, and took my journey out of the State of Missouri, leaving you shut up in that lonesome prison.”<sup>9</sup>

Another unusual aspect of the Lord’s revelation to Emma was the commandment in verse 7 to “expound scriptures and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit.” It would have been highly unusual in 1830 for any woman to expound and exhort in church, for women simply did not take visible or leadership roles in churches at that time. Presumably in preparation for this, the Lord also commanded her to spend her time in “writing” and “learning much.” Intelligent and well versed in the Bible as she was, Emma was especially qualified among women to assume this role. The Lord entrusted her with much responsibility. Perhaps we Latter-day Saint women today have too easily overlooked this

aspect of the revelation that was given to Emma but intended for all. In the true Church of Jesus Christ, women as well as men are expected to be well versed in the holy scriptures and able to teach others with testimony, confidence, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in Latter-day Saint doctrine is this right and responsibility reserved solely for the priesthood.

After further defining her role, the Lord then gave his elect daughter additional counsel that would have tremendous bearing on her life. “Thou shalt lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better,” she was told (verse 10). Time after time as she moved away from her homes, left behind her belongings, and moved in with others, she must have reflected on this line from the revelation. Undoubtedly she endeavored to accept this as her lot in life, but like the rest of us she had her moments of weakness. One day when Joseph had been away for some time, Jesse W. Crosby dropped by to see if Emma needed anything. Letting down her guard and allowing a poignant glimpse into her heart, Emma unexpectedly burst into tears and told him that “if the persecution would cease they could live as well as any other family in the land. They could even have the luxuries of life.”<sup>10</sup> However, most of the time, until her disaffection from the Church, she accepted such inconveniences as the price of being the wife of Joseph Smith, and even when she had little, she willingly shared it with others.

It was also no accident that Emma was given further responsibility to make a collection of hymns for the Church. Emma, who had a beautiful singing voice, was raised in the Methodist Church, where she would often have participated in singing the great and inspiring hymns of the ages. Because of persecution, pregnancies, and other problems, it took her several years to complete this assignment, but in 1835, with the able help of W. W. Phelps, the Church’s first hymnal was published. Even today we trace a number of hymns in our current hymnbook back to those included by Emma in the first compilation of hymns as she faithfully responded to this commandment.

Finally, in D&C 25 the Lord exhorted Emma to be faithful to her covenants-to “cleave” unto them (verse 13). His admonition that she “*continue* in the spirit of meekness” (verse 14) further implies that she was humble and unwavering and not complaining or faltering in her faith, as some have suggested. However, the Lord was aware that her greatest strengths-her independence, strength of will, and persistence-would also become her weaknesses and her stumbling blocks. Thus, he warned her to beware of pride and told her instead to let her soul delight in the glory which would eventually come to her husband, and, by implication, to her if she remained faithfully by his side (verse 14). I believe that this same strong spirit which helped Emma through untold persecution and suffering and kept her doggedly determined to stand by her husband also became the unbending will that would not obey the commandment that would have her share Joseph with others.

I’m not sure anyone could fully understand just what Emma did go through for her husband. As she was his wife and his comforter, surely her greatest anguish was during those moments-and they were many-when she did not know whether he was alive or dead, or worse. On one of the most harrowing nights of her life Emma waited in terror, clutching her children to her bosom to protect them from the piercing cold that invaded their bedroom after a crazed mob had broken in and dragged Joseph out into the black night. The loud, vile cursings of the mob against her helpless husband did not prevent the sound of Joseph pleading for his life from reaching her terrified ears. When the mob had done its dirty mischief and scattered, Emma waited helplessly in the dark silence, unsure of her husband’s fate. Suddenly a tall black figure appeared like an apparition, silhouetted in the doorway. When Emma realized that it was Joseph, she fainted dead away. She did not know he had been tarred and feathered, but thought he had been crushed and was covered in his own blood.

It must have seemed at times that all the fiends of earth and hell were after her beloved husband. How often she must have had to summon up her undaunted faith to quell her fears! Her mother-in-law, Lucy Mack Smith, paid her a tribute of which few women are worthy: “I have never seen a woman in my life, who would endure every species of fatigue and hardship, from month to month, and from year to year, with that unflinching courage, zeal, and patience, which she has ever done,” wrote Lucy: “for I know that which she has had to endure-she has been tossed upon the ocean of uncertainty-she has breasted the storms of persecution, and buffeted the rage of men and devils, which would have borne down almost any other woman. It may be, that many may yet have to encounter the same-I pray God, that this may not be the case; but, should it be, may they have grace given them according to their day, even as has been the case with her.” 11

In addition to suffering along with her husband, Emma lost six of her children, including one adopted child who had been sick with the measles and subsequently died from exposure to the cold after the tarring and feathering incident mentioned above. Perhaps as a mother she endured even more anguish than her husband in this trial. She had her own crosses to bear. She undoubtedly missed her dear parents and sorrowed over the fact that they were sorely disappointed in her, however unjustly. What’s more, she worried over their salvation. In 1841, after the Lord had revealed to the Prophet Joseph the doctrine of salvation for the dead, Emma anxiously completed the ordinance of baptism for her father. A year later she did the same for her mother. 12 They had passed away shortly before that time and she had not seen them since the day she left Harmony, Pennsylvania, in 1830 with a man they considered a charlatan.

Above and beyond this, the most impressive thing about the elect lady to me is her consummate compassion. The list of her charitable works is not only lengthy but profoundly moving. For example, she once stayed dutifully by the bedside of her ailing mother-in-law, Lucy, for five nights straight and never left her side until she became quite ill herself. She took countless orphans, friends, strangers, travelers, and homeless people not only into her home but into her life. Lucy Mack Smith recalled, “How often I have parted every bed in the house for the accommodation of the brethren, and then laid a single blanket on the floor for my husband and myself, while Joseph and Emma slept upon the same floor, with nothing but their cloaks for both bed and bedding.” 13 Emma and Elizabeth Ann Whitney once held a feast for the poor and needy of Kirtland. With the help of others in the community they provided simple but abundant fare, not only for the new Saints who were streaming into the city but also for the poor, disabled, aged, and infirm residents of Kirtland. When the Saints were draining the swamps of Commerce, Illinois, to build Nauvoo, many became ill with malaria. Joseph and Emma began taking in the sick to care for them and soon found their cabin full of the ailing while they slept in a tent in their own dooryard. Joseph Smith III recalled an autumn when Joseph was in Washington, D.C., that his mother took in and cared for 13 of the Saints by herself. 14 He also could scarcely remember a Sunday in ordinary weather when the house and yard were not crowded with callers. 15

However, perhaps the most poignant and Christlike act of compassion occurred late in Emma’s life. Ironically, after her rejection of plural marriage her second husband, Lewis Bidamon, fathered a son by a young woman while he was married to Emma. Without bitterness Emma took the child into her own home to raise him at the request of the child’s mother. Later she gave the mother employment, which enabled her to be near her son. When Emma died the boy was only 12 years of age. Determined that he should grow up with proper parentage and a stable family situation, Emma had urged Bidamon to marry the boy’s mother after her death. 16 Perhaps the whole thing was penitence of a sort, but above all it was the act of a great soul.

For these reasons I could not so easily dismiss Emma's ultimate exaltation. At the very least, *I* was in no position to judge her and doubted that many others would be either—perhaps not even her contemporary sisters who were struggling themselves with the covenant of plural marriage. They could not fully comprehend her feelings as the first wife of the Prophet, who was undoubtedly the most popular man in Nauvoo. Many women, young and old, wanted to be married to him and could now do so without paying anything approaching the price Emma had paid to be by his side. Indeed, she could give up everything else for him. He gave her strength to go through anything. She simply could not give up him or her place as the only one next to him. Perhaps she loved him too much.

Like countless other Latter-day Saint women I have had to ask myself what I would do if I were faced with living plural marriage. Many of us have wrestled mightily with that question. I still do not know what I would actually do if asked to share my husband, and that is why I cannot judge Emma. However, I know in theory and from past experience that, as the Prophet Joseph taught, “Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.”<sup>17</sup> Commendable as Emma's great love for her husband was, the Lord requires that our whole souls be given to him at all costs and above all others—no exceptions, even for great prophets. Perhaps that was the real sifting and refining test of plural marriage. “He that loveth father or mother . . . [or] son or daughter [or husband or wife] more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37).

Yet the elect lady did not reject the revelation on plural marriage in totality. Though at times she fought it doggedly, at other times she tried desperately to humble herself and accept the new revelation. She actually gave permission for Joseph to marry some of his wives, and even chose some of them for him. Some witnessed Emma's terrible struggle, perhaps made more visible or central because of her position as the wife of the Prophet. Allen J. Stout, who served as a bodyguard for Joseph, recounted a conversation he overheard in the Mansion House between Joseph and his tormented wife. A summary of his account states that “from moments of passionate denunciation [Emma] would subside into tearful repentance and acknowledge that her violent opposition to that principle was instigated by the power of darkness; that Satan was doing his utmost to destroy her, etc. And solemnly came the Prophet's inspired warning ‘Yes, and he will accomplish your overthrow, if you do not heed my counsel.’”<sup>18</sup> Maria Jane Johnston, who lived with Emma as a servant girl, recalled the Prophet's wife looking very downcast one day and telling her that the principle of plural marriage was right and came from Heavenly Father. “What I said I have got [to] repent of,” lamented Emma. “The principle is right but I am jealous hearted. Now never tell anybody that you heard me find fault with that [principle]; we have got to humble ourselves and repent of it.”<sup>19</sup> Many of us struggle through life with one or two trials, challenges, or commandments that seem ready to overwhelm and swallow us whole. Perhaps if Joseph had lived longer the elect lady would have eventually conquered her pride and jealousy, especially with the mellowing of age.

Then again, maybe not. At the time of Joseph's martyrdom Emma seemed hardened and set against plural marriage. At her insistence he had moved all of his plural wives out of their home. Some believe Emma thought she had actually talked Joseph into doing away with the practice. All we know is that after his death, whether to protect her children or because the acknowledgment of it was just too painful, her opposition to plural marriage crystallized into an unswerving denial that Joseph Smith had ever even lived the principle. Some have suggested that after her husband's death Emma suffered an emotional breakdown, which caused her subsequent rejection of the Church and its principle of plural marriage. Other than her understandable grief over the loss of her husband, there is really no evidence of an emotional illness in her behavior. At any rate, I don't feel it is necessary to make excuses for Emma. The Lord had warned her in a revelation found in D&C 132 (see verses 54-56) that she should support her

husband in the new and everlasting covenant of plural marriage or she would be destroyed. Emma was about to be destroyed.

It is important to understand, however, what the Lord may have meant by the term “destroyed.” Obviously she was not physically destroyed but lived a generously long life for her time, dying in 1879 at the age of 74. The Lord often uses figurative physical terms to represent graphic spiritual consequences—in other words, he may have been warning that Emma would be spiritually destroyed, or cut off from the Spirit of the Lord, left to face the buffetings of Satan without the guidance and comfort of the Holy Ghost. In the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, those who will not heed the words of the prophets are designated to be “cut off from among the people” (D&C 1:14). Yet God does not literally come down and physically separate the disobedient from the flock and prevent them from mingling with the righteous. They tend to cut themselves off because they lose the Spirit and their testimony of the truth. They apostatize or drift away. I believe this is the spiritual destruction that befell Emma.

Because of her unwillingness to follow the Prophet—her own beloved husband—she lost the Spirit and her testimony of the importance of the institutional Church (though never of the Book of Mormon). Left to herself to the degree that she rejected the truth and turned her back on the authorized leaders of the Church, Emma nevertheless committed no egregious sins and remained compassionate and kind. Yet in leaving the Church she forfeited great blessings, honor, and spiritual safety that might have been hers. She struggled through many family problems that she might have been able to avoid had she stayed true to gospel principles and taught her children to do likewise. Besides the wrenching infidelity of her second husband already mentioned, her oldest, adopted daughter, Julia, suffered through an unhappy marriage to an alcoholic husband who eventually deserted her. Emma’s youngest son, David Hyrum, who was born six months after his father’s martyrdom, ended up in an insane asylum at the age of 32, in part tormented by the contradiction between the undeniable evidence of his father’s plural marriages and his mother’s unbending denials that Joseph had ever advocated or practiced such a doctrine.

Deep sadness pervaded Emma’s life in later years. Her granddaughter Emma Belle Smith Kennedy remembered a melancholy grandmother: “Her eyes were brown and sad. She would smile with her lips but to me, as small as I was, I never saw the brown eyes smile. I asked my mother one day, why don’t Grandma laugh with her eyes like you do and my mother said because she has a deep sorrow in her heart.”<sup>20</sup> A maid of Emma’s recalled that Emma would go upstairs to her room every evening after chores were done to sit in her rocking chair and gaze sadly out the window at the sun going down over the Mississippi River. No one dared approach her or attempt to dry the tears that would roll softly down her cheeks.<sup>21</sup> I can’t help but wonder if the Lord’s gentle admonition to “beware of pride” ever echoed through her weary mind.

Shortly before her death Emma reported a vision to her nurse in which she saw the Savior and her husband, the Prophet Joseph Smith. She told the nurse that Joseph came to her and said, “Emma, come with me, it is time for you to come with me.” Emma explained, “I put on my bonnet and my shawl and went with him; I did not think that it was anything unusual. I went with him into a mansion, and he showed me through the different apartments of that beautiful mansion.” One room was a nursery in which she found a baby in a cradle. “I knew my babe,” Emma said, “my Don Carlos that was taken from me.” She swept the child up into her arms and cried for joy, but when recovered, stopped to ask, “Joseph, where are the rest of my[children[?]]” He assured her, “Emma, be patient and you shall have all of your children.” Emma then related that she saw a personage of light standing by the side of her beloved husband—“even the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> (Emma probably gained her exaltation, but what she

may have lost was her children. If this vision is true, she may have to wait until her children are hers once more.)

I consider myself more than just an apologist for Emma Hale Smith. She has become almost as much my sister and my friend as if she were my contemporary. Her personal tragedy is haunting and painful to me. Yet the possibility of her reward is joyous to me. Her saga is one of heroic proportions—her great deeds as well as her signal failings are legendary in the Church. I believe the profound lesson of the life of Emma Smith, however, is the manifestation of the triumph of God’s far-reaching mercy and love over human failings. Unlike many heroines of the Restoration, she stumbled and was spiritually and physically left behind. Like Emma, I also grapple with sins and shortcomings that threaten to overcome me at times, and I am grateful to be able to hope that the Lord will do everything he can to find mercy for me, and for Emma as well. I have pleaded with members of the Church to refrain from judging her unfairly and condemning her, just as they should any other fellow Saint or human being.

Eliza Partridge, a plural wife whom Emma had given to Joseph, poignantly expressed similar sentiments in 1883: “After these many years I can truly say; poor Emma, she could not stand polygamy but she was a good woman and I never wish to stand in her way of happiness and exaltation. I hope the Lord will be merciful to her, and I believe he will. It is an awful thought to contemplate misery of a human being. If the Lord will my heart says let Emma come up and stand in her place. Perhaps she has done no worse than any of us would have done in her place. Let the Lord be the judge.” 23

Let us then remember Emma, our sister, as any of us would wish to be remembered by future generations—with gratitude for her sacrifices and contributions, empathy for her struggles and shortcomings, and a generous eye toward her eternal possibilities.

## Notes

1 See Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* 17:159. (Now Latter-day Saints, I want to say this to you, when a man lifts his heel against the counsel that we give him, I know that man will apostatize, just as sure as he is a living being, unless he repents and refrains from such conduct. Brother George A. Smith has been reading a little out of the revelation concerning celestial marriage, and I want to say to my sisters that if you lift you heels against this revelation, and say that you would obliterate it, and put it out of existence if you had the power to nullify and destroy it, I say that if you imbibe that spirit and feeling, you will go to hell, just as sure as you are living women. Emma took that revelation, supposing she had all there was; but Joseph had wisdom enough to take care of it, and he had handed the revelation to Bishop Whitney, and he wrote it all off. After Joseph had been to Bishop Whitney's he went home, and Emma began teasing for the revelation. Said she—“Joseph, you promised me that revelation, and if you are a man of your word you will give it to me.” Joseph took it from his pocket and said—“Take it.” She went to the fire-place and put it in, and put the candle under it and burnt it, and she thought that was the end of it, and she will be damned as sure as she is a living woman. Joseph used to say that he would have her hereafter, if he had to go to hell for her, and he will have to go to hell for her as sure as he ever gets her.)

2 Lucy Mack Smith, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), p. 126.

3 See *Saints Herald* 31 (21 June 1884): 396.

4 Joseph Smith III, ed., “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints Advocate* 4 (October 1879): 49–52.

5 Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), p. 190.

6 Emma Smith Bidamon, interview by Nels Madson and Parley P. Pratt Jr., 1877, Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

7 *Comprehensive History of the Church* 1:127.

8 Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, 7 March 1839, Joseph Smith Letterbook, as quoted in Valeen Tippetts Avery and Linda King Newell, “The Elect Lady: Emma Hale Smith,” *Ensign* 9 (September 1979): 66.

9 Jesse W. Crosby, in Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), p. 143.

10 Smith, *History*, pp. 190–91.

11 See Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), p. 104.

12 Smith, *History*, pp. 231–32.

13 See Joseph Smith III, “The Memories of President Joseph Smith (1832–1914),” ed. Mary Audentia Smith Anderson, *Saints Herald* (6 November 1934): 1479.

14 See Joseph Smith III, *Joseph Smith III and the Restoration*, ed. Mary Audentia Smith Anderson (Missouri: Herald House, 1952), p. 73.

15 See Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, pp. 275–77, 303.

16 Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), p. 256; emphasis added.

17 Allen J. Stout, “Allen J. Stout’s Testimony,” *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887): 230–31.

18 Emma Smith to Maria Jane Johnston, as quoted in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 161.

19 Emma Belle Smith Kennedy, journal, as quoted in Gracia N. Jones, “My Great-Great-Grandmother Emma Hale Smith,” *Ensign* 22 (August 1992): 37.

20 As quoted in *ibid.*

21 Alexander Hale Smith, sermon given 1 July 1903, as quoted in *ibid.*

22 Eliza Partridge, in Emily D. P. Young, “Incidents of the Early Life of Emily Partridge,” as quoted in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 309.

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Grove, Utah, Wendy and her husband have four children and one grandchild. Wendy derives courage from Emma's life and sees many of her own strengths and weaknesses in Emma's example.

The following excerpt is not part of the lesson, but is interesting regarding certain stories about Emma and Eliza R. Snow.

[This essay] is concerned with how one separates fact from fiction in attempting to verify a legendary account. In a way, it sheds light on the fact that there is little light on one of Mormonism's most persistent legends. The tale of Emma Smith's pushing Eliza R. Snow down the stairs has become almost commonplace; yet the historical evidence is not only inadequate but whatever there is raises questions as to whether it happened at all. The essay brings together in a unique collaboration the three women who know most about the lives of Emma Smith and Eliza R. Snow: Maureen Beecher is preparing a biography of Eliza, and Linda Newell and Valeen Avery have a biography of Emma in process of publication. Items such as this emphasize the continuing need for writers and tellers of history to verify their facts before they present them with too much finality. Perhaps the better course with regard to such tales is to withhold judgment, as our authors do at the end.

Emma and Eliza and the Stairs

by Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Linda King Newell, and Valeen Tippetts Avery 1

Several elements in various combinations comprise one of the most oft-told tales of Mormon biography / history. The characters involved are Joseph Smith, his wife Emma Hale Smith, and a plural wife, usually Eliza Roxcy Snow. The place is invariably Nauvoo, the scene either the Homestead residence of the Smiths or the later roomier Mansion House. The time, if specified, is either very early morning, or night, in 1843, April or May, or in 1844. The action involves two women in or coming out of separate bedrooms. Emma discovers the other woman in the embrace of or being kissed by Joseph. A tussle follows in which Emma pulls the woman's hair, or hits her with a broom, or pushes her down stairs, causing either bruises, or a persistent limp, or, in the extreme versions, a miscarriage. There may or may not be a witness or witnesses. 2

The anecdote is told orally more often than it is written, with details of time, scene, costume (one account has Eliza in her nightclothes), action, motivation, and results being adjusted according to the attitudes of the teller. As generally related, it takes the form of a short story, with setting, plot, and characters; and it displays the characteristics of easily defined formula fiction: the characters are "good" or "bad", their motives oversimplified, the action predictable, the results inevitable. It is the stuff of legend, a folk tradition, perpetuated orally, and likely to continue.

For the student of Mormon culture, the prevailing questions about this story are: Why was it told and why is it still told? What does the telling say about the tellers? What "truths of the human heart," their own human hearts, do people reinforce through the telling? But for the biographers of Joseph Smith, or Emma Hale Smith, or Eliza Roxcy Snow, there is a more awkward problem: How did the story get its start, and which details, if any, are based on fact?

The earliest-known published version of the story appears in the 1886 anti-Mormon polemic, *Joseph Smith the Prophet: His Family and His Friends*, by Wilhelm Wyl. Implying as his source the universal "they say," Wyl writes:

There is scarcely a Mormon unacquainted with the fact that Sister Emma . . . soon found out the little compromise [plural marriage] arranged between Joseph and Eliza. Feeling outraged as a wife and betrayed as a friend, Emma is currently reported as having had recourse to a vulgar broomstick as an instrument of revenge; and the harsh treatment received at Emma's hands is said to have destroyed Eliza's hopes of becoming the mother of a prophet's son. 3

From this account, the implication of miscarriage, the suggestion of the broom as instrument, and Emma's motive remain in the story today. The veiled suggestion of a forced abortion was not included by early tellers of the oral tale; even Emma's detractors could not believe that of her. The detail of the stairs, the most persistent element of the story as it is now told, is missing here.

There is, however, an interesting juxtaposition in the Wyl book. The page immediately before the Eliza Snow account just cited tells this story of another Eliza: "Eliza Partridge, one of the many girls sealed to the Prophet, used to sew in Emma's room. Once, while Joseph was absent, Emma got to fighting with Eliza and threw her down the stairs." 4

That the two stories and the two Elizas later became merged in the popular mind is possible, but obviously impossible to prove. An account recorded by a diarist at the time of the alleged incident, however, may, in a similar manner, have promoted the replacement in the story of the relatively obscure Eliza Partridge with the more public Eliza Snow. In May 1843, William Clayton, clerk and intimate friend of the Prophet, wrote:

Prest [Smith] stated to me that he had had a little trouble with sis.[E[mma]. he was asking[E[liza] Partridge concerning Jackson conduct during Prest. absence &[E[mma] came up stairs. he shut to the door not knowing who it was and held it. She came to the door & called Eliza 4 times & tried to force open the door. Prest. opened it & told her the cause etc. She seemed much irritated. 5

In this case, the possibility of the reader's interchanging Eliza Snow for Eliza Partridge is as feasible as in the earlier juxtaposition. More to the point, however, is the likelihood in this case of that error creeping into the realm of folk history: in the 1850s the William Clayton diary was being used as a source in compiling the official History of the Church, at which time not only George A. Smith, under whose direction the work was carried on, but also his colleagues and office staff would have had access to the diary. From any of them the story could have been told, or mistold, in an environment which either ignored Emma Smith or denigrated her. Brigham Young's own antipathy towards the Prophet's widow would be reason enough, consciously admitted or otherwise, to read into neutral documents evidence against her. Whether or not the incident as William Clayton wrote it has any bearing on the story as it developed, the Clayton account remains the only known contemporary version of any such event involving Emma and an Eliza.

Recently there was discovered one other contemporary record which could have solved the whole issue: Eliza Snow's own journal and notebook containing sporadic entries dated between 29 June 1842 and 14 April 1844. However, there is no mention of any such event as that described in the lore. Remembering that no evidence is not evidence, the reader cannot conclude that the event did not take place. A woman as aware as Eliza Snow was of the Victorian proprieties would hardly have described such an event, even in her diary. So careful was she in her journal keeping, lest the volume fall into enemy hands, that she did not even mention in so many words the event with which her diary began--her marriage to Joseph Smith. 6

Eliza's Nauvoo journal, having surfaced just a few years ago, was not available to most writers of this century's histories and biographies. The most direct connection scholars have had with Eliza Snow's Nauvoo years has been through one of her nephews, the last of Lorenzo Snow's sons, LeRoi C. Snow, who in his mature years researched materials for biographies of his illustrious aunt and father. Considering his sources, he had, as one judges from his notes, a remarkably accurate picture of the Snow family at the time in question. From several reports eagerly shared with fellow researchers in the Church Historian's Office, where he worked from 1926 to his retirement in 1950, it is apparent that the supposed incident of the stairs loomed large in his mind. A search through his papers, including his notes for the planned but never-written biographies, reveals one account written around the time he told the story to such people as Fawn Brodie. Details of that account and indications from his outline that it was the version he intended using suggest he gave it more credence than his own verbally transmitted version. He wrote:

Charles C. Rich called at the Mansion House, Nauvoo, to go with the Prophet on some appointment they had together. As he waited in the main lobby or parlor, he saw the Prophet and Emma come out of a room upstairs and walk together toward the stairway which apparently came down center. Almost at the same time, a door opposite opened and dainty, little, dark haired Eliza R. Snow (she was "heavy with child") came out and walked toward the center stairway. When Joseph saw her, he turned and kissed Emma goodbye, and she remained standing at the bannister. Joseph then walked on to the stairway, where he tenderly kissed Eliza, and then came on down stairs toward Brother Rich. Just as he reached the bottom step, there was a commotion on the stairway, and both Joseph and Brother Rich turned quickly to see Eliza come tumbling down the stairs. Emma had pushed her, in a fit of rage and jealousy; she stood at the top of the stairs, glowering, her countenance a picture of hell. Joseph quickly picked up the little lady, and with her in his arms, he turned and looked up at Emma, who then burst into tears and ran to her room. Joseph carried the hurt and bruised Eliza up the stairs and to her room. "Her hip was injured and that is why she always afterward favored that leg," said Charles C. Rich. "She lost the unborn babe." 7

That Charles C. Rich would be privy to the intimacies suggested by this account, unless it occurred within a month of the Prophet's death, is unlikely. By his own affidavit sworn in 1869, he was first introduced to the principle of plural marriage in May 1844, just prior to his leaving on a mission. Had he indeed witnessed such an incident in the presence of Joseph Smith, surely something of that principle would have been explained to him then. The possible times during which the incident might have occurred will be dealt with later, but May 1844 is not a likely one. 8

In his notes LeRoi Snow attributes this account to Charles C. Rich, giving as source a letter from W. Aird MacDonald dated 11 August 1944. That letter has not yet been found, but from MacDonald's son we learn that his father, who would not have known Apostle Rich, did serve a mission in 1906-1908 under the presidency of Ben E. Rich, Charles Rich's son. If that is the connection, the account is at best fourth-hand; in any case the event is separated from the writing by a century.

But LeRoi Snow was telling the story before he received MacDonald's letter. And although family traditions are notoriously unreliable, LeRoi's lifetime overlapped Eliza's by eleven years and his father Lorenzo's by twenty-five years. However unlikely it may be that the eighty-year-old Aunt Eliza would have told the story to her eleven-year-old nephew, it could be assumed that if the incident happened, his father knew it, considering the familial closeness of the brother and sister. Then it would not be inconceivable that Lorenzo could have told his son when LeRoi was older. If such be the case, unless Lorenzo Snow were guilty of covering up a family scandal with an outright lie, the miscarriage element of the story must be discounted. In May 1899, he addressed a group of Saints in St. George, Utah,

assuring them that their eternal salvation was not lost if in this life they failed to marry and have children: "My sister Eliza R. Snow I believe," he said, "was just as good a woman as any Latter-day Saint woman that ever lived, and she lived in an unmarried state until she was beyond the condition of raising a family. " He then acknowledged Eliza's sealing to Joseph Smith, an event which occurred when she was thirty-eight years old. 9 Had LeRoi Snow learned even part of the Eliza-Emma story directly from his father, he would himself have been the historically better source, leaving us to ponder why he would have preferred a further-removed version of the story to his own.

About the time of the MacDonald letter, Fawn Brodie was finishing her manuscript of *No Man Knows My History*, first published in November 1945. In documenting the story she says simply that the tradition "was stated to me as fact by Eliza's nephew." 10 She, however, mixes into her account other suggestions of violence, forcing all her details to fit into one coherent event. She tells the pushed-down-the-stairs-with-a-broomstick story, complete with miscarriage, and tacks onto that the scene related in 1931 by John R. Young to Vesta P. Crawford. John Young recounts having heard Solon Foster, once coachman to the Prophet, tell of a night when Emma "turned Eliza R. Snow outdoors in her night clothes" and the Smith children "stood out in the street crying." Young's account written first in his journal in 1928, then later in the letter to Crawford, is difficult to date. Foster, he said, told the story in sacrament meeting in St. George "at the time Joseph [Smith III] and Alexander, the prophet's sons, visited S.L. City." 11 The diary of Charles L. Walker, contemporary of John R. Young, reveals that in 1876 Solon Foster did preach in St. George, where he reported his visit with young Joseph 12--again, a third-hand telling, separated from the incident by nearly a century. There is verification in Joseph Smith III's biography that Solon Foster in his later years did have conversation with young Joseph on the subject of the possible plural marriage of young Joseph's father, the context in which John Young said he gave his witness of the Eliza incident; however, the incident itself is, understandably, not included there. 13

In her re-creation of the alleged Nauvoo incident, Fawn Brodie dates it in the spring of 1844. We cannot, of course, fault Brodie for not having had access to a diary that had not as yet come to light, but we can now determine that such an episode, if it indeed happened, had to have occurred at least a year earlier. Eliza's Nauvoo diary clearly spells out the period during which she lived with the Smith family, an essential to the story in every version. On 18 August 1842, she moved into either the Homestead or the Mansion House 14 and stayed there until 11 February 1843. 15 LeRoi Snow, in his notes, gives the probable time of the incident as May 1843, but her own journal shows that Eliza was living with other friends by then. However, LeRoi Snow did not have Eliza's journal either.

The journal itself gives not a hint of either a pregnancy (unless "delicate constitution" be construed to mean "delicate condition", a nineteenth-century euphemism for pregnancy) or an altercation with Emma at any time during that six-month stay. One cannot read anything into Eliza's terse note of her departure: "Took board and had my lodging removed to the residence of br.[J[onathan] Holmes. " The next entry, dated 17 March 1843, shows Eliza ceremonially closing the school she had taught since 12 December 1842, "having the pleasure of the presence of Prest. J. Smith [and] his lady." 16 During the period of Victorian prudery, no woman would have ventured forth unnecessarily, much less have taught school, once her pregnancy was evident. Certainly the account attributed to Charles Rich does not square with the dates in the journal: either Eliza would have to have been pregnant when she moved in with the Smiths, allowing her to have become "big with child" by the close of her sojourn there so that she could not have taught school, or she would have to have conceived afterward, allowing her to teach school for the few early months but not giving her time to become "big with child" before she left the Smiths'. In any case, the report she kept of her class shows her own perfect attendance during her school, a record

she could hardly have maintained had she miscarried during that time. 17 And, as has been noted, her school continued a month after Eliza moved in with Jonathan and Elvira Holmes.

One other account of an altercation between Emma and Eliza must be introduced, mainly because it has as much--or as little--claim to credibility as do the other documents here cited, with the exception, of course, of the Eliza Snow and William Clayton diaries. In an undated entry in her husband's book of patriarchal blessings, Mary Ann Barzee Boice wrote her own witness to some events of the Church's past, along with some accounts she had from other members. Among these she gives one of Aidah Clements, mother of Mary Ann's son-in-law. Aidah, she says, was a member of the first Relief Society in Nauvoo (the listing in the minutes of that society does not include her name, however) and "worked for the Prophets family." Mary Ann tells that Aidah "said he [Joseph Smith] was going from home one day when she saw Emma go up to him and she was in a Passion jirked him by the collar and talked to him about going after other Women." Continuing her report of Aidah's story, Mary Ann writes that "she says once when she was at her work Emma went up stairs pulled Eliza R Snow down stairs by the hair of her head as she was staying there." At the bottom of the page containing the above, Mary Ann wrote, "This is the testimony of Aidah Clements," then crossed it out and wrote after it, "but this I give as a rumer only." 18

What of the two women themselves, Emma Smith and Eliza Snow? In the view of those who have studied their lives, could such an event have occurred had there been opportunity? Eliza R. Snow had known Emma Smith since Kirtland days; they may even have met as early as 1831 in Hiram, Ohio, four years before Eliza joined the Church, when Joseph and Emma lived there as guests of the Johnsons, and the Snows lived in nearby Mantua. In 1836-1837 Eliza lived twice in the Smith household in Kirtland, the second time as governess for the Smith children. She remained with the Smiths even after she became owner of a two-family dwelling in Kirtland.

Eliza and Emma had much in common. They were the same age. Both were articulate, educated, self-confident, and attractive. By 1842, when Eliza was married to Joseph Smith, it was clear that they also loved the same man. Fawn Brodie goes so far as to say that Emma "apparently . . . trusted Eliza above all other women," 19 an assumption for which she provides no evidence. The Eliza journal refers to Emma in cordial, though not in intimate terms, not unusual for a reserved New England lady in the 1840s. Three months before the marriage of Eliza to Joseph, Eliza had been chosen Emma's secretary in the newly formed Relief Society; in July they traveled together to Quincy to petition the governor in Joseph's behalf; Eliza served as amanuensis to Emma in her correspondence with Carlin. Because Eliza's own arrangements required her to move, by the end of August 1842, Emma had invited her to live in the Smith home. The invitation was not unusual for the charitable Emma--the 1842 census shows eleven people, besides the Smiths, living on their property, in or about the home. But the spring of 1843 was a trying one for Emma. Her acceptance of plural marriage, as much as she knew of it, was tenuous, verging on rebellion. Eliza, meanwhile, convinced though she was about polygamy, was herself insecure, afraid, and, for most of the time, bereft of family. Unaccustomed to facing conflict, Eliza was more likely to "go into a brown study" silently sulking until the sources of the conflict disappeared, or to assume an attitude of superiority that precluded possibilities of resolution. 20 Emma, under the stress of the time, could have reacted with a physical outburst to a threat as easily as the then less forward Eliza could with her very silence have presented that threat. These responses are all possible; the question remains, did they occur?

The Utah years brought from Eliza Snow little recorded comment about Emma Smith; the continuing Nauvoo years none from Emma about Eliza. Brigham Young, to whom Eliza was then married, publicly condemned Joseph's wife Emma, yet no word of agreement came from the usually compliant Eliza. The

same John Young who recounted Solon Foster's talk wrote of his own experience as a boy living for a year in "Uncle Brigham's family." "Every day I met with, and listened to the conversations of Eliza R. Snow, Zina D. Huntington, Emily Partridge, Precilla [Presendia] Buel Kimball, the wives of the Prophet Joseph Smith," and others, women who had known Emma Smith in Nauvoo. "During that year", John Young concluded, "I never heard one of those noble women say an unkind word against Emma Smith."  
21

During the defenses of plural marriage occasioned by the visits to Utah of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints representatives, and later by the federal prosecutions, Eliza in her public discourses never stated that Emma knew of Eliza's marriage to Joseph, though she did say, and that publicly, that Emma did know of his sealings to four women, two of whom were still alive and able to testify, referring apparently to the Partridge sisters, Eliza and Emily. 22 After his mother's death, Joseph Smith III published her deathbed denial of her husband's polygamy. To that statement, Eliza responded, in part, that

I once dearly loved "'Sister Emma," and now, for me to believe that she, once honored woman, should have sunk so low, even in her own estimation, as to deny what she *knew* to be true, seemes [*sic*] a palpable absurdity. 23

She concluded by blaming Emma's "misguided son" for fastening onto his mother's character "a stigma . . . that can never be erased." But not until the 1880s, and then in the characteristic metaphor with which she sometimes veiled her answers, do extant documents reveal Eliza as acknowledging that Emma knew of Eliza's own marriage to the Prophet. David McKay, then a bishop in Ogden Valley, driving the Presidentess Eliza in his buggy from Huntsville to Eden, took the opportunity to ask her outright, "Did Emma Hale Smith know that you were married to her husband, Joseph Smith?" He recorded her reply: "Just as well as you know that you are sitting by my side in this Buggy." He did not ask, nor did she volunteer, at what point in time Emma might have been told of the marriage. But we must remind ourselves that this document, like so many others we have used, is imperfect, a faded photocopy of a 1916 letter reflecting an elderly man's memory of a conversation that took place more than thirty years earlier. 24

So there we are. But where are we? Faced with a folk legend, with genuine documents that tell no tales, and dubious ones that contradict themselves and the contemporary accounts, perhaps it is best for us to respond as we must to many paradoxes of our history: consider thoughtfully and then place all the evidence carefully on the shelf, awaiting further documentation, or the Millennium, whichever should come first.

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