

## **An Egyptian Endowment**

A Summary of Hugh Nibley's The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri :  
An Egyptian Endowment by Dr. Kelly Ogden, Professor of the Jerusalem Center, Israel

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Perhaps the greatest assistance received by Joseph Smith in re-instituting the temple ordinances on the earth was the papyrus scrolls, containing the Book of Abraham. These scrolls may have contained, in addition to that portion recorded in the Pearl of Great Price, information on the endowments. Facsimile number 2 strongly indicates a direct connection. Figure seven states:

"Represents God sitting upon his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand key words of the Priesthood." The next figure is interpreted but Joseph Smith refused to reveal that interpretation, noting instead, "(it) contains writings that cannot be revealed unto the world: but is to be had in the Holy Temple of God." Obviously the Pearl of Great Price only contains part of the original translation: additional parts are found in the Temple.

But what was information on the endowment doing in the scrolls in the first place? To answer it should be remembered that this material was Abraham's in origin. The most important thing in his life was his initiation into the Priesthood and receiving a fullness of the endowment. This came as no accident. Abraham tells us, "I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same." (P. of G. P. Abr. 1:2) This is an interesting point for it shows that even among the apostate idle worshippers (which Abraham's father was) there was knowledge about Priesthood, and Abraham deliberately set out to get it, following the prescribed requirements. This special knowledge had direct temple bearing, for Abraham states that through it one could become 'a father of many nations.' Further he says, "I sought mine fathers concerning the seed." (Abraham 1:3, 4) This all ties into the eternal marriage covenants, the crowning ordinance of the temple rite.

The Egyptians were highly interested in Abraham and his record because Abraham had everything they wanted and could not get--viz, the Priesthood. It is not surprising they would cherish any information they could get from or about Abraham, the Priesthood and endowment. The papyrus' important to the Egyptian priest (whose copy it was) can be seen from the fact that it was placed in his sarcophagus. Only the most important things to the individual were packed there. Since there is not a lot of room in there, he had to be very selective about what he chose to have the mortician pack. One can understand that the priest wanted to hang on to (even in death) the sacred truths he believed he had found. What can be said of this priest's intelligence can be said of the Egyptian Intelligence in general.

The Egyptians were some of the most realistic and practical people that ever lived on the earth. If something worked, and worked well, they continued to use it for centuries. Their engineering ability was perfected very early in their culture and then used over and over with only slight modification or alteration. The best evidence of their practicality is their art forms which were made to last. Statues never have arms out-stretched: they are held rigidly to the side with the stone between the arm and the body left in place. This assured strength and permanency. All relief work is cut deep to last. Of course, that is what they had in mind. It was supposed to endure for eons and it has.

Being realists, the Egyptians recognized that mankind faces only two main problems. Once these two were solved, all other difficulties could be easily surmounted. What were these two problems? First, how to stop dying. The Egyptians were really bothered by the fact that people kept dying no matter how much they wanted or how hard they tried to slay alive. The Egyptians were intensely interested in how to gain immortality.

The second problem was closely related to it, and that was: once you are dead, what are you going to do? Sitting around on clouds strumming harps did not appeal to them. Nor did a continual repetition of the vicissitudes and sorrows of earth life hold any attraction. They felt the only way to be was as God--grand, powerful, majestic. So they set out to find out how to do it. Their ancient legends told of men who had been able to hold in abeyance the forces of physical death, gain control over the earth, and build a city in which the gods came down and dwelt. This, of course, was a historical corruption of the achievements of Enoch and the people of Zion.

One of the major reasons the Egyptians failed was because they would recognize no God but their own and no priesthood but their own--and they had neither, so they kept falling. Their Pharaohs, who supposedly held the key of life, kept right on dying. Nevertheless, the Egyptians kept right on trying the old worn-out ways, believing if they used what they had, more would eventually be given.

So Egyptian life revolved around the temple, for there, it was believed, the secret to eternal life was held. Their concern for the after-life and ideas of eternal progression make their theology closer to Mormonism than any other ancient people except the Hebrews. But this is as it should be, considering that the very first Pharaoh knew the truth and sought, "to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations (after Noah)." (Abraham 1:26) He could not hold the Priesthood, being Negro, but he and subsequent priests feigned claim to it through Ham and deliberately set up a copy as closely as they could to the Priesthood order of government and temple worship. The Egyptians realized the key to eternal life was in the temple. There it was that man could find god, be taught His ways, and learn the key-words which would break the bands of mortality and give eternal life. The Pharaoh was supposed to know the divine incantation by which he and, after him, his people could overcome death and ascend to the gods. Unfortunately, the Pharaohs kept dying just like everyone else. The Egyptians, however, had no alternative plan except, of course, accepting the truth from the Hebrew prophets. But, then, who wants to do that. So, they kept shoving their Pharaohs through the temple hoping each time it would do some good.

The priests were the guardians of the keywords and other formulas, as well as the ritual by which these were learned by the Pharaohs. The Pharaoh could receive them only in the temple, and it was his job to learn them so well he could put the divine incantation together at the veil and say the words which would bring life to all Egypt.

The following "Egyptian endowments" come from the Egyptian sacred writings known to us as the "Book of Breathings." Professor *Hugh W. Nibley* of Brigham Young University has studied this book and associated material in depth. He has concluded that, "If the Egyptian endowment was but an imitation, it was still a good one, and we *may* be able to learn much from it. . . (Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Deseret Book Co., Salt Lake City, 1975, p. xiii.)) The material below is extracted and condensed from his work. For the convenience of the students who would like to pursue this information further, this writer has noted the page numbers in parentheses where the material is located in Dr. Nibley's work.

The Egyptians understood the true purpose of temples. They were the University of God in which men could be schooled in eternal principles. Their early temples were the center of the study of the cosmos and the relationship of mankind thereto. It was at the temple that the heavens were closest to the earth. The temple was an earthly sanctuary but carefully oriented to the celestial order, thereby becoming the connecting link between man and deity. The two stately pylons which stood at the front of each temple were so arranged that the sun would rise exactly between them at the equinoxes. By this means the rites of the temple were timed in perfect coordination with the motions of the cosmos and at a set moment each year the temple basked in the full splendor of the Sun's celestial glory.

The purpose of the temple was to capture the Sun's light which the Egyptians believed was a source of knowledge and power. So their structures were designed as scale models of the universe and the pylons were made in such a way as to direct the light inward and downward into the depths of the building. Stone slabs were placed in such a way as to form narrow apertures through which the sunlight would pass along the walls of the otherwise dark interior, in brilliant contrast of light and darkness; illuminating marked off areas at set times, suggesting god's presence in a fallen world. (154) The Egyptians, being Sun worshippers, believed that the Sun's light was a source of knowledge and power which, once understood, the initiate could use to become deified. These universal principles by which godhood would be obtained were revealed through the temple ritual. (104, 153-54, 157)

Therefore, the Egyptians felt that the temple held the keys by which they could learn the secrets of obtaining eternal life and permanently secure it for themselves. However, it was not on a merely individual basis. Their idea of progression after earth life included the family and so provision was made to have the initiate's family sealed to him in the next world. (15-16, 88, 142)

In order to receive these blessings, the initiate had to obey certain laws such as renouncing all bad passions and desires, consecrating himself to the work and show willingness to sacrifice all things necessary. (124, 214) In this way, his own desires and deeds would be increasingly identified with that of god and godhood. All movement in the temple is toward this goal. The closer one approaches deity by penetrating deeper and deeper into the temple, the higher the law he must be willing to live. Thus, there is a continual narrowing of the gap between his nature and that of god until in the holy of holies they actually merge. (92, 161) The one word which most nearly expressed what the temple was about was "sensen" (~~) i.e. breathing. But the Egyptian verb "to breathe" meant much more than merely taking a breath. It was indicative of the most intimate and close association between parties--e.g. to join the company of and become one with the gods, i.e. to fuse or have an indwelling relationship with them. (9, 92) Thus the temple was the house of power and life. Knowledge was the secret of controlling the power and gaining eternal life. (155)

Before the initiate could enter the temple he had to go through a purification ritual in an annex outside of the temple. This ritual consisted of two parts. (98-99) First, the ceremonial cleansing from abominations so the initiate would not pollute the temple. (93) Further, the ceremony insured that each part of the body, by virtue of remaining 1) pure and 2) intact, would never again lose its proper function. (106) The areas washed and blessed were: the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the mouth to speak, the legs to walk, the mind to think and remember, and the groin to procreate. (111) The whole was symbolic of a rebirth and a partaking of godly power or a reuniting of the body with power forever. (67, 106)

The second part of the ritual was the coronation by which one was anointed a priest and king. This was a very sacred part of the ceremony. (98-99) Again various parts of the body were particularly noted. Oil or ointment were placed on the head, cranium, eye brows, ears, lips, shoulders, arms, heart (breast), stomach, buttocks, thighs, legs, feet and toes, in that order. (112) Once this was complete the candidate received a white ceremonial garment, thus showing he was properly cleansed and empowered to be instructed in the mysteries of becoming a god. (93) Along with this he received a new name. This he had to remember in order to live hereafter. The name was guarded, for to possess knowledge of another's name was to have some power over him. This applied even to the gods, for to grasp the meaning of the name was to understand the nature of the being. (141)

Once this was accomplished, the initiate entered into the temple proper. The ceremony was not static but progressed from room to room, the order being ever deeper penetration into the temple and its teachings. (115) The first area of the temple was the hall of the two Ma'ats. Ma'at was a female deity who symbolized every principle of social order and the entire concept of godhead. The presence of Ma'at is necessary at the moment one enters the temple to guarantee that one is a bona-fide candidate for eternal glory and is qualified to enter the holy place. For Ma'at's presence signifies all is correct and in order, the equivalent of a temple recommend. (116-17)

The first part of the temple ritual took the form of a mystery play complete with stage, props and actors. In the hall of Geb and Shu the creation of earth and man was enacted. (126) The characters involved in the creation were Thoth and Atum but these are working under the direction of a higher god to whom they must continually report their progress. (132) It is Atum who has the key role in the play. In the heavens he is known as the god Re, but when he descends to Earth his name is changed. Its meaning is: Creator, collective sum of all other beings, all embracing. More extended it means: sum, totality--the combining of all preexistent beings into one archetype who then represents all beings who come after. Scholars have noted his close identity with Adam. (133-34)

The creator of the man Atum is Ptah but again he is only an agent working under the direction of an even greater god known as Amon. He is the supreme god, source of all power. He is also the hidden one, the one with whom the fallen world cannot associate. (134) Atum is created asleep, Ptah and Amon awaken him by giving him the breath of life. (148) He is instructed then introduced to the lady whom he calls the mother of all. (151)

The next stage of the ritual takes place in a beautiful garden. Here they pause and partake of refreshments. The garden is the home of the Ished tree. When they eat of its fruit their nature is changed. Things are not as they were before. (176) To further complicate things the female companion has altercations with a serpent. It represents corruption and destruction. For its deeds in trying to defeat the woman by preaching false doctrine, it is deprived of its arms and legs symbolizing that it will never be able to rise in full power and might again and its vulnerable head is made easy prey for the foot of man. (179-80)

All parties are then forced to take a long and dangerous journey. Fire and sword keep the serpent from the Garden but not the man. He must eventually overcome all things and return to that blissful state and when he does return there will be no serpent to ruin the tranquility. (181-98)

As the party passes from room to room they symbolically undergo a change of nature. This is dramatized by changing the costume along the way. (165) As the initiate and his company begin the long and dangerous journey back to glory they don special clothing for protection for their eternal life is in danger. Knowledge is revealed to them along the way by divine beings sent from the gods. Atum becomes the guide and all must follow him. (190, 194) The purpose is to overcome the adversary which is done by escaping his power and by cleansing themselves of all legal and moral problems. (209-10)

Transition from one stage to another is done by passing through narrow gates which represent rebirth. Also the progression was shown by mounting steps, thus symbolically going from a lower level of order to a higher. However, the initiate was not allowed to go through the gate unless certain formulas, creeds, and pass-words were known. (212) The initiate was able to escape the power of evil by using different names along the way which act as code word. (215-

17) It is during this stage of the endowment that a puzzling practice was engaged in. This was the ritual wounding or blows struck upon the body of the candidate. These served to remind him that he was in real danger of losing his life unless he was careful. However, so sacred was this that what goes along with it, and to promise that he would not do certain things. These were: not to be light-minded, speak evil, steal, be contentious, hard hearted, or impure, etc. (218-220)

The climax of the ritual was the divine embrace when the initiate was clasped to the breast of Amon. This part of the ceremony was weighed with meaning and was the goal of all the consecration. (241) It represented the acceptance back of the candidate and through it there was an infusing of power by which he was joined to the sun-god Re and received everlasting dominion. (243-44) It was not a sign of affection but of communion between two beings. (243) It symbolized indissoluble togetherness, an enduring relationship between god and man and the actual binding of the two (244)

The embrace also had the feature of being a recognition rite. The candidate was expected to give to the priest certain passwords in response to certain questions put to him. In part of the ritual a certain formula was exchanged which had to be repeated back exactly. This formula is not written out anywhere but it is shown by use of three symbols: Ankh, Was, and Djed. These however do give a clue to what it was all about. Ankh is the navel string and is associated with health and life. Was represents power, dominion, and lordship while Djed is associated with the backbone and represents life, durability, stability and protection.

This last ceremony took place at a veil. Not a small one but a large theatrical type. It symbolized the separation between time and eternity and was believed to open up on an uninterrupted passage devoid of all obstacles--eternal progression. (245) The veil had four elements associated with it which are also on the garments worn by the initiate and both followed the same pattern. (246-47)

Once the candidate had received the embrace he could be united with the gods in their realm. So the veil was parted and he stepped through. The ceremony ended in a blaze of glory. for the candidate stepped out into a court onto which was reflected from a pyramid the full power of the sun thus symbolizing the joining of the candidate with Re. (147, 253)

Perhaps one last point should here be noted for the consideration of the reader. No one actually went through the temple in the sense of going in one door and out another for all leave by the same door they entered. The ancients realized there was only one path but it led in two directions--forward or backward. The temple stood on the path, gave knowledge, strength and power by which one could face the trials back in the real world and eventually gain exaltation. (258)