

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO
THE TEACHINGS OF
THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH**

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Except for the Scriptures, The Teachings Of The Prophet Joseph Smith is the most authoritative book on Latter-day Saint doctrine. The purpose of this Introduction to the Prophet and his teachings is to help create a better understanding and appreciation of the nature and depth of the revelations which Joseph Smith received and which he tried valiantly to get others to understand. Faithful Latter-day Saints who seek a deeper knowledge of the Prophet and the nature and extent of the revelations that God gave to him begin to sense the love and appreciation which President Brigham Young voiced when he exclaimed, "I feel like shouting Hallelujah, all the time, when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith, the Prophet whom the Lord raised up and ordained, and to whom he gave keys and power to build up the kingdom of God on earth and sustain it."¹

Who was Joseph, the Prophet of the Restoration? What was he like? and what were his physical features?

Joseph Smith, Jr., was born the fourth child and third son of Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack Smith, December 23, 1805, in the town of Sharon, Windsor county, Vermont, with an American ancestry that went back to Samuel Smith, born at Topsfield, Massachusetts, in 1666, whose father, Robert, immigrated from England. His mother, Lucy, came from later immigrant stock.

In 1815 the Tambora Volcano erupted in Indonesia and discharged "so much ash and sulfur dioxide--both of which blocked and reflected sunlight--that 1815 was a 'year without a summer' across much of the world,... [with] crop-killing frost throughout the

summer in New England."² When the frost continued, the Smith family moved to Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne) county, New York. Later they relocated at Manchester, in the same county, where the events of the restoration of the fulness of the Gospel began to unfold in the spring of 1820.

The Prophet Joseph Smith was "tall and well built,"³--a full "six feet high in pumps"⁴--and at age 36 weighed "two hundred and twelve pounds."⁵ He was "a very handsome man,"⁶ "splendid looking,"⁷ with "the carriage of an Apollo."⁸ One person in meeting him for the first time was impressed with "his majestic bearing." The Prophet was, he wrote, "entirely different from anyone I had ever seen."⁹ His countenance glowed "with beauty from his pure thoughts and enlightened work."¹⁰ His wife, Emma, observed: "No painting of him could catch his expression, for his countenance was always changing to match his thoughts and feelings."¹¹

Physically, the latter-day Seer "was grandly proportioned; his carriage erect and graceful. He moved with an air of dignity peculiar to himself."¹² A United States Artillery Officer declared that he was "a noble looking fellow, a Mahomet every inch of him."¹³ An acquaintance spoke of Joseph's "commanding presence, his strength of mind and body, and that superiority of soul which was one of his distinguishing features."¹⁴ Another was deeply impressed with him "as a man of superhuman powers, physical, mental and spiritual."¹⁵ Josiah Quincy, later Mayor of Boston, visited Nauvoo in the spring of 1844 and stated that of all the men he ever met in his wide travels Joseph was one of but two who possessed that "kingly faculty which directs, as by intrinsic right," the lives and interests of others. He had, Quincy noted, "a certain peculiar moral stress and compulsion" which the distinguished Bostonian had never felt in any other man.¹⁶

"Brother Joseph," as he was often affectionately called, had light golden brown hair, a matching complexion, and very little beard. A "most remarkable" feature was his "handsome blue eyes, which seemed to dive down to the innermost thoughts with their sharp, penetrating gaze." They were "shaded, and, at times, almost veiled" by long thick light lashes. And his brows were also "light and thick."¹⁷ He was in his gaze "a man of great penetration."¹⁸ Said Parley P. Pratt: "There was something connected with the serene and steady penetrating glance of his eye, as if he would penetrate the deepest abyss of the human heart, gaze into eternity, penetrate the heavens,

and comprehend all worlds."¹⁹ Said another: "I felt when in his presence that he could read me through and through."²⁰

What kind of a person was the Prophet? What were his characteristics, spiritually, socially, physically?

Seldom in history has there been a more colorful charismatic person than Joseph Smith, with such a remarkable endowment of the Holy Spirit and its sacred gifts. "He was not an ordinary man," said an acquaintance. "Saints and sinners alike felt and recognized a power and influence which he carried with him. It was impossible to meet him and not be impressed by the strength of his personality and influence."²¹ Both friend and foe admired his personality, his intelligence, and his spiritual energy. They called him "a very remarkable man,"²² "an extraordinary man"²³--"among the great spirits of the age."²⁴ Said one who saw Joseph for the first time: "He was different to anyone I had ever met before; and I said in my heart, he is truly a Prophet of the Most High."²⁵

Joseph "possessed...the innate refinement that one finds in a born poet, or in the most highly cultivated intellectual and poetical nature";²⁶ and he had a "most heavenly countenance."²⁷ He possessed, as another "distinguishing mark," a "noble grandeur" that set him apart from other men.²⁸ One who travelled with him for hundreds of miles explained: "There was something in his manner, his countenance and spirit that was not associated with any mortal man that we had ever looked upon before. Sidney Rigdon was a fine looking man, polished in address and powerful in oratory; but he was far behind Joseph in the possession of those magnetic powers of the mind which attracted the multitude, and chained the attention of his auditors. In comparison, Rigdon's eloquence was delightful, like the ripple of a merry brooklet that glides over its pebbled bed or dashes down a narrow declivity. But the testimony of Joseph struck through the heart, and, like the thunder of the cataract, declared at once the dignity and matchless supremacy of the Creator."²⁹ Said another: "In all that he did he was manly and almost godlike."³⁰ And another declared that he was "incomparably the most God-like man I ever saw."³¹ A close acquaintance affirmed: "I know that by nature he was incapable of lying and deceitfulness, possessing the greatest kindness and nobility of character."³²

Socially, Joseph "was an ideal of affability";³³ he was always "the most companionable and lovable of men--cheerful and jovial."³⁴

An intimate friend wrote: "As a companion, socially, he was highly endowed; was kind, generous, mirth loving, and, at times, even convivial."³⁵ Another explained: "His familiar, yet courteous and dignified manner, his pleasant and intelligent countenance, his intellectual and well-formed forehead, the expressive and philanthropic facial lines, the pleasant smile and the happy light that beamed from his mild blue eyes; all these were among the attractive attributes that at once awakened a responsive interest in the mind of every kindly beholder, which increased in intensity as the acquaintance continued. With his most familiar friends he was social, conversational and often indulged in harmless jokes; but when discoursing upon complicated topics that pertained to the welfare of individuals or the progressiveness of communities, his elucidations were clear and so full of common sense and genuine philosophy that the candid and fair-minded felt interested by his views, though they might decline to entertain or promulgate all of the self-evident truths he originated."³⁶

Along with these traits of character, Joseph "had that strong comradeship that made such a bond of brotherliness with those who were his companions in civil and military life, and in which he reached men's souls, and appealed most forcibly to their friendship and loyalty."³⁷ These qualities "made him the friend and companion of all, and the ideal of the poor, the lowly and humble."³⁸ Said a hired hand at Nauvoo to an inquirer: "He was the biggest-hearted, bravest, most wholesouled man I ever knew," then added, tapping the inquirer on the arm: "That's what he was. If ever I loved a man, it was Joseph Smith."³⁹

A "prominent trait" of the Prophet was his love of children, which revealed the innocence of his own soul. When the Saints came to Kirtland for meetings, "Joseph would make his way to as many of the wagons as he could and cordially shake the hand of each person. Every child and young babe...were especially noticed by him and tenderly taken by the hand, with his kind words and blessings. He loved innocence and purity, and he seemed to find it in the greatest perfection with the prattling child."⁴⁰

While Joseph was "naturally...courteous, kind and obliging," he was also "frank to all men, both friends and foes."⁴¹ Said an acquaintance: "The Prophet Joseph was always kind and sympathetic in his way, but he wasn't afraid to rebuke anyone, and I

never knew anybody that was any franker than he was. He called a spade a spade,... and he was just as brave and fearless as he was outspoken."⁴²

One who worked for Joseph on his farm explained that he loved "a good horse." And, he added, "there wasn't any better horses around that country than old Charlie and Joe Duncan, the two animals he rode; and there wasn't many better horsemen either about them parts than the Prophet. Joe Duncan was a chestnut sorrel, and was a beauty, but he wasn't anything as fine a horse as Charlie, a great big black fellow with a star in his forehead. The Prophet's enemies used to recognize him by his horse when he had Charlie, and many a time, out on the farm, that star has been painted out [in order] to fool them."⁴³

Another man who knew the Prophet stated: "Joseph Smith was...about the finest figure on horseback that I have ever seen. I have never met a man yet that I admired so sincerely.... You simply couldn't help but like him, he was so considerate, so sympathetic and so manly."⁴⁴

Joseph loved to engage in sports. Physically, he was "very strong and quick"⁴⁵--"as quick as a squirrel and as strong as a mountain lion."⁴⁶ Peter H. Burnett, who served the Prophet as a lawyer in Missouri and later became the first Governor of the State of California, explained: "Joseph Smith, Jr., was a very stout, athletic man, and was a skilled wrestler. This was known to the men of Daviess County, and some of them proposed to Smith that he should wrestle with one of their own men. He at first courteously objected, alleging...that, though he was once in the habit of wrestling, he was now a minister of the Gospel, and...hoped they would excuse him upon that ground. They kindly replied that...it was but a friendly trial of skill and manhood,...and they hoped he would...comply with their request. He consented; they selected the best wrestler among them, and Smith threw him several times in succession, to the great amusement of the spectators."⁴⁷

Joseph noted other physical contests in his Journal. Under date of March 11, 1843, he wrote: "I started in company with Brother Brigham Young to Ramus [Illinois].... Arrived at...a quarter to four.... In the evening, when pulling sticks, I pulled up Justus A. Morse, the strongest man in Ramus, with one hand." Two days later he wrote: "I

wrestled with William Wall, the most expert wrestler in Ramus, and threw him."⁴⁸

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3. Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt (1874), p. 47.
4. Correspondent to New York Herald, Feb. 19, 1842.
5. Ibid.
6. Elias Cox, in Young Woman's Journal, XVII, p. 544, to be abbreviated YWJ, followed by the volume and page number(s).
7. Bathsheba W. Smith, in Ibid., XVI, p. 549.
8. Lydia Bailey Knight, Journal History, Oct. 29, 1833, to be abbreviated JH, followed by the date.
9. Emmeline B. Wells, YWJ, XVI, p. 555.
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11. The Weekly Gazette, St. Louis, May 1844.
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16. Quincy, Figures of the Past (Boston, 1883), pp. 277-9, 376-400.
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21. Mary Alice Cannon Lambert, YWJ, XVI, p. 554.
22. General Moses Wilson, a bitter enemy of the Prophet, related in JD, XVII, p. 92.
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25. James Leech, in JI, XXVII, p. 152.
26. Emmeline B. Wells, in YWJ, XVI, p. 556.
27. Bathsheba W. Smith, in JI, XXVII, p. 344.
28. Lydia Bailey Knight, op. cit.
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31. Jesse N. Smith, in JI, XXVII, p. 23.
32. Jesse N. Smith, in ibid., pp. 23-4.
33. Jane Snyder Richards, in YWJ, XVI, p. 550.
34. William Taylor, YWJ, XVII, p. 548.
35. Benjamin F. Johnson, My Life's Review (1947), pp. 92-3.
36. Lyman O. Littlefield, in JI, XXVII, pp. 56-7.
37. Emmeline B. Wells, in YWJ, XVI, p. 556.
38. Mrs. Jacob Earl, in The Tri-Weekly, op. cit.
39. Washington B. Rogers, in Ibid.
40. Louisa Y. Littlefield, in JI, XXVII, p. 24.
41. Lucy W. Kimball, in The Tri-Weekly, op. cit.
42. Washington B. Rogers, in ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Patriarch L. Hatch, in ibid.
45. Elam Cheney, Sr., in YWJ, XVII, pp. 539-40.
46. Cited in Nels Anderson, Desert Saints, p. 5.
47. Burnett, An Old California Pioneer (1946), pp. 40-1.

48. HC, V, p. 302.