

# **B.H. Roberts (and Brigham Young) on *GOD***

**In writing these reviews on the nature of the Divine, I would be dishonest with myself if I did not "resurrect" those things from my own religious background that used to enthuse and excite me. For a long time I found the Mormon idea of a person becoming as God immensely empowering and uplifting. As it should be. In fact, I miss that certainty of knowing my destiny. But I do not miss the materialistic trappings in which that destiny was clothed.**

**Please recognize that below you will find Mormon doctrine as it is described by me. It is probably not reflective of the beliefs of current Mormons, which is generally closer to mainline Protestant beliefs than I ever was in my beliefs during my decades as a 'true believer.'**

**Brigham H. Roberts was an early twentieth-century Apostle in the Mormon church. His magnum opus, "God," is a chapter in an out-of-print book: *Discourses of B.H. Roberts*, (Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City. 1948).**

**Roberts' previous work on this subject, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity* (The Deseret News, Salt Lake City, 1903) was one I had not been overly impressed with it. There is another Roberts book with words on the nature of God. It has no date. It is *The Seventy's Course in Theology, Fifth Year*. No publication information is given, but the *Second Year's* course was published in 1908 by Skelton Publishing Company, Salt Lake City. These three sources will be cited by date (1948, 1903, no date).**

**Of these three sources, the little green book entitled *The Last Seven Discourses of B.H. Roberts* on the cover and simply *Discourses of B. H. Roberts* on the inside title page was a real delight to me when I found it in the Logan, Utah, public library.**

**Roberts introduces the concept of "the ONE God, though made of many" and suggests Brigham Young, the same one cited in the previous book review, was no stranger to this doctrine. Young touched on this subject in a Feb. 8, 1857 discourse approvingly cited by Roberts (1903 p.263):**

**He is a being of the same species as ourselves: he lives as we do, except the difference that we are earthly, and he is heavenly. He has been earthly, and is of precisely the same species of being that we are. Whether Adam is the personage that we should consider our Heavenly Father, or not, is a considerable mystery to a good many. I do not care for one moment how that is; it is of no matter whether we are to consider him our God, or whether his Father, or his Grandfather, for in either case we are of one species.**

**Thus, there is no jealousy among those that are part of "the ONE GOD, though made of many," and which particular one of these "many" we worship is not all that critical, or so it seems.**

**This is a very interesting innovation since it begins already to bridge the gap between the two extremes of God-visions: the personal and the foundation of Being. At least it suggests that Godhood is a shared way of being, loosening it from being**

**applicable to just one personage only.**

**Roberts described his own reactions to his contemplations of God in superlatives, he spoke of**

**. . .heights where we have contemplated God, and felt His presence where the veil between earth and heaven became so thin that we could hear the vibrations between the two worlds and know that celestial voices were hymning into our souls the high truth that could but come from the things that God has revealed . . . .  
(Roberts 1948 p.104)**

**Orson Pratt, a contemporary leader with both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had a vision of the eternities that was approvingly cited by Roberts (1903, p.284):**

**What, resurrected Saints have children? Yes, the same as our God, who is the Father of our Spirits; so you, if you are faithful to the end, will become fathers to your sons and daughters, who will be as innumerable as the sands upon the sea shore; they will be your children, and you will be their heavenly fathers, the same as our heavenly Father is Father to us, and they will belong to your kingdoms throughout all the vast ages of eternity, the same as we will belong to our father's kingdom.**

**This very much echoes the Young lecture excerpted in the previous review in this series. Personally I cannot fathom anyone's desire to own ones children or spouse or Lord it over them eternally. I cannot identify with a man that looks forward to losing count of his offspring, as if progeny is**

**property that define wealth or importance. It seems silly, and perversely materialistic.**

**Yet Pratt connected this theme of innumerable offspring with exaltation and achieving the Godhead when he said (Ibid. p.277):**

**. . . there never will be a time when fathers, and sons, and worlds will not exist; neither was there ever a period through all the past ages of duration, but what there was a world, and a Father and Son, a redemption and exaltation to the fullness and power of the Godhead.**

**Thus, human beings' eternal destinies are, according to Roberts' interpretation, to become:**

**. . .'partakers in the One Divine Nature,' being united in brotherhood with others of like nature... . All these that are thus united in one will have become partakers of the One Divine Nature - the God Nature. Of such are the Brotherhood of Intelligences of the Universe, the redeemed of celestial worlds. Of such may be chosen sons to preside as Deities over worlds and world systems... . (Roberts 1948 pp.95-96)**

**Roberts' words to the Seventy (a quorum of priesthood then, for which Roberts wrote instruction manuals for some years), attempted to convey his enthusiasm over these ideas of Godhood and Godhead:**

**The End of the Matter -- We Shall Be Like Him --  
Conformed to the Divine Image: That is the end then for**

**the spiritually born man --he will be conformed into the image of God -- conformed to the type of the Spirit-life that has taken up his abode in him. How long shall it take? Who knows? And what shall it matter. The important thing is that it shall be done. The important thing for us men is that the spirit-birth takes place; that union with God be formed; the ages may await upon the growth, and full fruitage of that event. It may take aeons of time to make a man, longer to make Super-man; but the eternal years are his who is born of the Spirit and again I say the important thing for us men is to have that Spirit-birth and then are we sons of God; and while it doth not appear what we shall be, for the height and glory of that is beyond our human vision, ultimately we shall be like him and see him as he is and be conformed to the Christ image, that is to say, to the Divine Nature -- unless one shall sin against the Holy Ghost. (Roberts no date p.109)**

### **APPENDIX: Brigham Young on the Divine nature.**

**Partly as an antidote to this materialistic view, consider also these sayings from the very same Brigham Young, many of which were cited with approval by Roberts. However, since I already have them typed in this format with these citations from the *Journal of Discourses* (JD), I will stay with this citation format to make the point that there is a flip-side to this rather materialistic view of God. One simply has to mentally remove some of the Mormon word-trappings from these descriptions to see, I believe, that they are very much in tune with the revelations of several Medieval mystics whose works I have read.**

**The Divine in humanity and in the very elements composing human beings is both observed and spoken of by Young:**

**When I speak to a congregation I know that I am speaking to the intelligence that is from above. This intelligence which is within you and me is from heaven. In gazing upon the intelligence reflected in the countenances of my fellow beings, I gaze upon the image of Him whom I worship – the God I serve. I see His image and a certain amount of His intelligence there. I feel it within myself. My nature shrinks at the divinity we see in others. This is the cause of that timidity to which I have referred, which I experience when rising to address a congregation. (1870, JD 13:171)**

**Furthermore, if men can understand and receive it, mankind are organized to receive intelligence until they become perfect in the sphere they are appointed to fill, which is far ahead of us at present. . . . It is the Deity within us that causes increase. Does this idea startle you? Are you ready to exclaim, 'What, the Supreme in us!' Yes, He is in every person upon the face of the earth. The elements that every individual is made of and lives in, possess the Godhead. This you cannot now understand, but you will hereafter." (1852, JD 1:93; see also 1856, JD 3:335)**

**This doctrine, suggesting that the very nature of humanity includes the Divine, may explain the universality of the mystical experience of the Divine Consciousness: it is a natural phenomenon. But revelation is also a natural phenomenon, according to Brigham Young, and is so universal that no one**

**can escape the voice of the Divine within. According to Young, even if persons lived in total spiritual darkness . . ."they never received a particle of intelligence but what came from God."**

**In fact, Young generalizes that all knowledge is from God:**

**Men know how to construct railroads and all manner of machinery . . . but that is all revealed to them by the Spirit of the Lord, though they know it not. (1857, JD 5:125)**

**Thus, Young seems to suggest here that revelation is the emanation of Divine Intelligence throughout creation.**

**Young discusses the nature of revelation in these terms:**

**"Well brother Young, have you had visions?" Yes, I have. "Have you had revelations?" Yes, I have them all the time, I live constantly by the principles of revelation. I never received one iota of intelligence, from the letter A to what I now know, I mean that, from the very start of my life to this time, I have never received one particle of intelligence only [except] by revelation, no matter whether father or mother revealed it, or my sister, or neighbor. (1856, JD 3:209)**

**Young continues to explain that . . ."we are revelators to each other." In telling of his conversion, for example, Young illustrates Divine revelation through a fellow mortal:**

**. . . the Holy Ghost proceeding from that individual**

**illuminated my understanding, and light, glory, and immortality were before me. I was encircled by them, filled with them, and I knew for myself that the testimony of the man was true. (1852, JD 1:90)**

**To the direct question, "Are the heavens opened?" Young replies:**

**Yes, to some at times, yet upon natural principles, upon the principles of natural philosophy. (1856, JD 3:209)**

**Revelation, for Young, is the principle whereby intelligence is communicated. In Young's theology, the Holy Ghost is the moving force, either directly or indirectly, that communicates all knowledge, religious or secular. But in keeping with his vision of the profound unity of human and Divine life, he refuses to partition life into the religious and the secular in order to discuss revelation in more traditional terms.**

**Young saw a continuous flow of intelligence emanating "from the inexhaustible fountain of knowledge and truth," (1856, JD 3:355) the Divine Source, that cascades through living beings. If these beings will but hearken to whatever small portion impinges upon them from moment to moment, they will grow in intelligence. Indeed this is the definition and purpose of human life**

**. . . intelligent beings organized to receive a great amount of intelligence -- seeking to possess eternal life. (1860, JD 8:136)**

**Young's view of "natural revelation" is a proclamation of the**

**doctrine of the Divine Principle "that is our heavenly Father," (1856, JD 3:355) that emanates from the Gods to enlighten and enliven all that lives and is.**

**Young's description of how the light of revelation is presented to the mind is an eloquent statement of the essence of the mystical experience:**

**. . . the influence of the Almighty, enlightening his mind, giving instructions to the understanding. When that which inhabits this body, that which comes from the regions of glory, is enlightened by the influence, power, and Spirit of the Father of light, it swallows up the organization which pertains to this world. Those who are governed by this influence lose sight of all things pertaining to mortality, they are wholly influenced by the power of eternity, and lose sight of time. All . . . that pertains to this organization, which is in any way independent of that which came from the Father of our spirits, is obliterated to them, and they hear and understand by the same power and spirit that clothe the Deity, and the holy beings in His presence. (1852, JD 1:90; see also 1853, JD 1:241)**

**Young suggests that all that is not as God is, including time, is temporarily obliterated as one experiences the mind of God. Note that this description of the revelatory experience partakes of the central characteristics of the mystical experience: the boundaries of the self are transcended, as are space and time; knowledge is gained; one feels uplifted, and one senses the presence of the sacred.**

**In other contexts, Brigham Young touched upon other qualities of the mystical experience, such as seeing that all that is has life, and recognizing that the planet Earth is a living being:**

**The terra firma on which we walk, and from which we gain our bread, is looking for the morning of the resurrection, and will get a resurrection, and be cleansed from the filthiness that has gone forth out of her. . . . We are of the earth, earthy, and not only will the portion of mother earth which composes these bodies get a resurrection, but the earth itself. It has already had a baptism. (1853, JD 1:274)**

**Two of the most characteristic and important qualities of the mystical experience are the idea that all that lives and is is related, and that experiencing the mind of God is an ineffable experience, transcending the power of human language. These two most characteristic qualities were amply addressed by Brigham Young in his discourses in the context of explaining revelation.**

**The relatedness of all life was addressed by Young when he said:**

**Let the people be holy, and filled with the Spirit of God, and every animal and creeping thing will be filled with peace; the soil of the earth will bring forth its strength, and the fruits thereof will be meat for man. The more purity that exists, the less is the strife; the more kind we are to our animals, the more will peace increase, and the savage nature of the brute creation vanish away. (1852,**

**JD 1:203)**

**In the context of our beholding the purpose of life, Young reiterates the theme of the relatedness of all human and Divine life, but broadens that relatedness to include all matter, infused with spirit. Young asserts that through revelation one**

**. . . could understand that matter can be organized and brought forth into intelligence, and to possess more intelligence, and to continue to increase in that intelligence, and could learn those principles that organized matter into animals, vegetables, and into intelligent beings; and could discern the Divinity acting, operating, and diffusing principles into matter to produce intelligent beings, and to exalt them -- to what? Happiness. (1859, JD 7:23; see also 1859, JD 7:285)**