

# For All His Creations of Which I'm a Part: Buddha Nature, Neo-Animism, and Postmodern Mormonism

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*A version of this paper was presented at the Mormon Asian Studies Conference, Berkeley, California, March 22, 2014.*

When my parents died, I inherited our family's Buddhist altar, or *butsudan*. It now sits in my living room in Lexington, Massachusetts. I pray before it about twice a month. I burn a stick of incense and ring a small brass bell. I close my eyes, and thank my ancestors for what they have given me. Usually, I do this with my youngest son, Kan, who is now three years old.

The brass vessels, the picture of Amida with rays of light emanating from his body in every direction—these are very familiar to me. So is the image of Jesus that I have put on top of the *butsudan*. These two images—Jesus and Amida—mark the two major poles of my early religious education. When I was a young boy, my parents, who were not members of the church, would take us to the Mormon chapel in Sigurd, Utah, where I attended meetings with my sister and brothers. Less often, my grandfather Sashichi Inouye would pull a chair in front of his dresser, stand me on it, put a rosary on my hands, light incense, and have me pray to the small, black-and-white photograph inside the altar.

My grandfather did not speak English.<sup>1</sup> I did not speak Japanese. Only much later did I learn that the woman in the picture was my grandmother Mikano Inouye. I feel close to her and to my other ancestors when I light incense at home, or visit the

Boston Temple, just five minutes away. Both actions are responses to what we Mormons call “the spirit of Elijah.” Because of my Buddhist training, I am very much at home when it comes to doing work for the dead.

The spirit of Elijah prompted my wife Rei and I to organize a family reunion. The part of my family that lives in the United States traveled to Japan to meet the part that lives there. We met at our ancestral home in Amagi, Fukuoka Prefecture, where there stands a similar, though much larger *butsudan*. At a nearby temple, we all examined the remains of my ancestors, many generations of hard-baked clay balls, stored in an urn and kept in a wooden locker.

Another part of this week-long family reunion was taking my Aunt Ruth to the Nishi Honganji in Kyoto, the physical center of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Sitting on the tatami floor next to my aunt and my cousin Jeanette Misaka, I listened and watched a Buddhist service. Tears welled up in my eyes because I could feel the devotion of the people around me.

My long involvement with Pure Land Buddhism raises an interesting question. Is the spirit I feel when I honor my ancestors in this Buddhist fashion the same spirit that I feel when doing ordinances as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? I talk about “the spirit,” but what exactly is it? Jesus taught that it is something we can misunderstand. Consider the example of the Sons of Zebedee, who were offended by the rude treatment they received at a certain village. Angered, they responded by wanting to call fire down from heaven and to destroy the people who had offended them. Seeing this, Jesus chastened them, saying, “Ye know not what spirit ye are of.” In the end, they went to another village (Luke 9:51–56).

In the Japanese case, spirituality is often broad and generous. The Japanese have been notably syncretic when it comes to appreciating various forms of religious inspiration. It is not unusual to be both Buddhist and animist at the same time. One might argue that this sort of openness suggests a lack rather than an abundance of religious devotion, that it ignores what distinguishes one religion from another. If taken too far, does not tolerance become confusion

and indifference? Does not a shallow acceptance of everything become simply convenience? To rephrase the question slightly, at what point does, or should, believing in one thing prevent us from believing in something else?

The explanation for Japanese openness can be explained in this way. At the foundation of Japanese culture is the acceptance of *hakanasa*, the idea that everything is always changing, that everything is contingent, and that life is brief, fragile, and quickly passing. This acceptance of radical change has obvious philosophical ramifications. If everything is changing and contingent, then, logically speaking, it becomes impossible to establishing meaning. Without positing that some things are at least semi-permanent, we cannot measure anything, or show development, or even identity. Would you still be you, if you changed your name every day?

In the attempt to make life meaningful, the Japanese assert form—*kata*, *katachi*, *kejime*—and they do so in a way that does not reference metaphysical ideals or ideological systems. In other words, by way of various customs and cultural practices—such as bowing, taking one's shoes off before entering a home, and so on—meaning is established within the realm of *hakanasa*, or radical change. In this world, significance is not necessarily symbolic, as the example of the *shimenawa* shows.

The *shimenawa* (七五三縄) is a rope that marks something sacred, but it is not a symbol like a cross or a swastika or a word. A symbol is a special type of sign. A portrait of Jesus, for example, is a symbol if it is meant to point to someone who is not immediately present. In contrast, the *shimenawa* is not a symbol because it points to the tree around which it is tied; and the tree is always present. In other words, the rope expresses the tree's sacred nature by drawing our attention directly to it. We can see it. We can approach it. We can touch it.

Such non-symbolic signs are important to Japan's animistic tradition. By contrast, Buddhism is a symbolic system of meaning, and tends to be highly metaphysical. Originating in India, the Mahayana branch of Buddhism that entered Japan came by way of China and Korea in the sixth century. It presented the Japanese with a new way of establishing meaning that was able to exist side-by-side

with animistic practice precisely because the emphasis of each was different—the one being metaphysical and the other being physical—and also because the visual splendors of Buddhism were also understood in already well-established animistic, directly physical, visual ways. Even today, it is not unusual to find a Shinto shrine located within the grounds of a Buddhist temple.<sup>2</sup>

Animistic practice existed in many places other than Japan; but in those locations where the great monotheistic traditions developed, the worship of many gods was largely supplanted. As the Old Testament shows, the struggle between one god and many gods was protracted. It was also fraught with difficulty and even at times violent. “Then the children of Israel put away Baalim and Ashteroth, and served the lord only” (1 Samuel 7:4).

Being focused on the one and only god, monotheisms tend to be exclusive and chauvinistic. In structure they are hierarchical and authoritarian. Consequently, their spread to Europe and beyond led to religious conflict and sectarianism on a large scale, as in, for example, the Thirty-Year War. Who can fathom the suffering that sectarianism and religious persecution have brought over the millennia? How many deaths have the differences between Christians and Jews, Protestants and Catholics, Sunni and Shiites caused? Mormons, of all people, should be aware of the troubles that follow when differing conceptions of God (and the culture of the godly) provoke hatred and persecution.

Modern secularism attempted to address the violence of religious chauvinism. The Enlightenment in Europe was meant to get us past the problems that religion caused. Yet even the modern impulse that led to the creation of various non-religious systems of meaning—positivism, nationalism, capitalism, and so on—have not done away with authority, prejudice, exclusion, persecution, and war. To say the obvious, modernity did not solve the problem of hating those who are different because it largely inherited the hierarchical structure of monotheism. This borrowing is reflected in, for instance, the dominance of realism throughout the modern era. Being perspectival, realism is an inclusive, even universal system of vision that translates reality into detailed constituents of a much larger picture. By asserting a single, unmovable point

of view, this modern type of expression established a knowable, measurable, reproducible relationship between these details, thus rendering them stylistically homogenous.<sup>3</sup>

My larger argument here is that Mormonism is not monotheistic and, therefore, shares something with the openness of Japanese spiritual practices. It allows for both the *butsudan* in my living room and the small wooden triptych of Jesus and Mary that sits on top of it.

My openness to this openness was imparted to me by my grandmother Kume Murakami. She compared religious striving to the climbing of a mountain. The destination is the same for all of us, but the paths that get us there can be very different. Each person has to find his or her path to the top. Yet each of these individual paths is, in essence, similar in that they lead to a certain high point that is obvious to all climbers who eventually get there.

This is a version of what we Mormons call “Man’s search for happiness.” And it is one that harmonizes with what I notice about the lives of spiritually accomplished people, whether Latter-day Saints or Baptists or followers of Confucius. As Karen Armstrong and others point out, as climbers of the mountain, we are surprisingly alike in our differences. We know we are getting close when we develop compassion, which is what the world’s various traditions commonly seek.<sup>4</sup>

More specifically, one important way that Mormons and Buddhists and animists are distinctively alike is that they share an understanding of divine nature. According to the Mahayana tradition, salvation is possible because everyone has what is called “Buddha nature.” That is, human beings not only have the instinct that has us climbing the mountain, but we also have the legs to get us there, and the ability to appreciate the view from the top.

Perhaps this teaching explains why my parents were comfortable with Mormonism—why they took us to the church in Sigurd, and why they eventually were baptized as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For one thing, Mormons teach the same principles of human potential that Pure Land Buddhists do, although the terms differ slightly. We talk about “eternal progression”—about the innate divinity of God’s many sons and

daughters.<sup>5</sup> We believe in the spiritual purification that overcomes the “natural man” in us, and allows us to realize our own divine nature.<sup>6</sup> By comparison, Buddhists talk about a path to enlightenment, and the ability to become Bodhisattvas—compassionate, godly men and women who return to suffering, to the burning house, to help those who still linger in delusion.

We are the same yet different. One perhaps overly simple way to explain why many Christians do not consider Mormons to be Christians is to say that our version of Christianity is a bit Buddhist. While the claim to be gods-in-training is not surprising to members of the Pure Land tradition, in the eyes of some of our Christian brothers and sisters, this notion seems arrogant and even blasphemous.<sup>7</sup> Surely, the need to be temperate and humble also exists in our teachings. “Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend” (Mosiah 4:9). These differences notwithstanding, we still believe that we are as God once was, and that the purpose of this life is to become godly.

To be sure, the real arrogance of our reality here on earth lies not in this assertion of divine potential, but in the chauvinism that follows from the hierarchical structure of traditional Christianity and its amplification by various modern ideological systems that place justice before compassion. The pride that had Jesus’ disciples arguing about which of them was greatest has been amplified by the modernization of Catholicism, which led to the many protests of Protestantism, on the one hand, and the rejection of religious sentiment by secularists, on the other. Unavoidably, much of modern, secular thought has colored our understanding of the mountain and of the possibility of many paths.

Personally speaking, of the things that I have made me uncomfortable about my membership in the church over the years, practically all of them have actually been reactions to the modern context of our faith. We live in a world of racism, chauvinism, and materialism, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which has taken shape within this modern, secular world,

reflects these values even though it was never meant to be a modern institution. To be sure, when Joseph Smith went into the grove to pray, he asked a most modern question: which church is true? The answer he received, however, was a surprising, post-modern response: the visit of personages who were plural, visible, approachable, and loving. As we know, Joseph Smith went on to establish an organization that was not a derivation of existing forms of Christianity, but a restoration of ancient practices. My question is this: How ancient is Mormonism? Could it be even more ancient than monotheism?

Again, Joseph Smith lived in a modern age, and so even the restored church naturally reflects modern values. For example, the emphasis placed on The Book of Mormon as a cornerstone of our faith echoes the Protestant assertion that the Bible is the only word of God. For this reason, our emphasis on scripture study would seem to be clearly antithetical to the lack of a scriptural tradition in Japan.

In Japan there is no regular practice of referring frequently to an authoritative text that gives clear answers to the big questions. Who are we? Why are we here? And where are we going? For the Japanese, there is no single, authoritative text. This is true today; and it has been the case in the past despite the popularity of certain texts at certain times: the *Tales of Ise*, *Heart Sutra* (*Hannya shingyo*), and such. This lack of an emphasis on scriptural study holds for both animists and Buddhists.

I once asked a group of would-be Buddhist clerics about their thoughts on this matter. My wife and I played volleyball with them on Wednesday nights during the year we were living in Kyoto doing research. One evening as I was making my way home from work, I saw them in a small neighborhood restaurant. I stopped in to say hello. One thing led to the next, and I was able to pose the question that I had wanted to ask for some time.

“Is it true that you don’t teach your people to study the sacred texts?”

“Yes. That’s true.”

“Why not?”

“It would confuse them.”

At first, I did not know how to process this answer. But now that I have had time to give it some thought, I think that there is simply no better answer than the one they gave. We can, and regularly do, confuse ourselves by studying the sacred texts. Moreover, we Mormons are actually close to Mahayana Buddhists in this felt need to avoid doctrinal complications.

While we believe that intelligence will rise with us in the next world, (D&C 130:8), what we call intelligence is not actually intellectual accomplishment per se. Some of us, myself included, dare to identify ourselves as Mormon intellectuals. But the truth is that the climb up the mountain is a matter of spiritual, not scholastic, accomplishment. Our model of education is such that progress comes through experiencing the same simple precepts over and over.

This is similar to Confucian practice, which also contributed much to Japanese culture.<sup>8</sup> In the *Analects* we read, “Is it not joy when an old friend visits from afar?”<sup>9</sup> One interpretation of this passage is that the old friends mentioned here are the teachings we learn in our youth. They are a joy to us because every time we encounter them over the course of a lifetime, they allow us to measure the change in us precisely because the teachings have remained the same. When we live those teachings, they are powerful and transformative. When we do not, they become platitudes. We Mormons believe in learning; but just as it is possible to criticize the Japanese for a lack of philosophical sophistication, so is it possible to dismiss Mormon thought as less than robust. Children write memoirs of their loving parents more often than they write studies of them. We, therefore, are not distinguished theologically. Our rhetorical tradition requires us to have experienced what we claim to know, what we write, what we encourage others to do. So, like the Japanese, we do not spend a lot of time speculating about God’s nature. “If God is perfect, does he ever get a haircut?” More than eloquence or conceptual vigor, we value day-to-day acts of kindness, and through these we come to know our Father in Heaven in an intimate, familiar way.

We are told there are different ways of learning. “And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of



wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 109:7). Please do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that study is irrelevant to living a good life. What I am saying is that what we are trying to learn is, above all else, compassion and understanding, virtues that do not exist apart from our lived relationship with God, which includes our lived relationship with everything and everyone.

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If you ever go to Kyoto, visit the Ginkakuji, or the Silver Pavilion. There you will find a garden of remarkable beauty. It is an affirmation of *hakanasa*, constant change. Every time the wind blows, every time the rain pours, every time a leaf falls, someone has to get out there with a rake or trowel and fix the sand. Why would anyone in his right mind make such a garden? In America, we would probably try to make such a space out of stainless steel, so we would not have to worry about the upkeep. But in Japan, with its affirmation of constant change, such a departure from the nature of sand would be out of the question.

Of course, the point of the Ginkakuji garden is its high maintenance. Like this plot of sand, our lives require constant attention and effort. This is, of course, also the point of such practices as Family Home Evening, Home and Visiting Teaching, Sunday meetings, regular temple attendance, and so on.

Both Mormonism and Zen emphasize practice because this is how the symbolic order and the non-symbolic order are reconciled. That is, both traditions try to learn about less visible things by way of more visible things. To put it simply, Zen is the most Japanese form of Mahayana Buddhism because it tries to make the abstract teachings of Buddhism as concretely animistic as possible. One's spiritual progress comes by practicing a certain way, or *dō*, as in *kendō* (the way of the sword), or *sadō* (the way of tea), or *kadō* (the way of flower arrangement). By doing something hands-on, we grow spiritually. Raking gravel is spiritual. Doing the dishes is spiritual. Everything becomes a matter of spiritual practice.

Now, you might ask, “If this is so, if everything is a matter of practice, then is there any room for God in such a picture? Is my

mastery of a *jūdō kata* really a way to worship God? Is the arranging of flowers a way to the top of the mountain?

The short answer to this is “Yes, they are.” God certainly is a part of this type of everyday practice because everything is godly. Even the ink that flows from the calligrapher’s brush, or the branches of a cherry tree that become a part of an arrangement—they, too, have a spiritual aspect, as informed by Japan’s ancient animistic sensibilities.

This is also a Mormon sensibility. As Joseph Smith taught, everything has a spiritual nature. There is no matter that is not also spiritual. This includes, of course, you and me. “All forms of living things—man, beast, and vegetation—existed as individual spirits, before any form of life existed on the earth.”<sup>10</sup> We have a divine nature and view as unavoidable the out-of-the-garden process of becoming as the gods, knowing good from evil.

What is the cultural context of this understanding of many potential gods, especially for us today? As I said, animism was once pervasive. It is also true that it is still very much alive today. By calling our times the era of the “post-human,”<sup>11</sup> the so-called postmodern critique of modernity suggests just how normal this ancient response to the divine has recently become.<sup>12</sup> For us, the idea that the end of human dominance is now upon us should be neither alarming nor hard to grasp. It is not difficult to see how lasting “pagan” practices have been, despite the rise of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and despite the age of science that followed. Consider how we place stuffed animals near our babies, or bring trees into our homes during the Christmas season, or color, hide, and find eggs on Easter, or dance around trees in springtime. These lasting practices are vestiges of a very deeply rooted animistic sensibility. They express a lyrical reflex that responds to the spiritual nature of the world in which we live, one that is not easily tied to any symbolic order, which is only to say that even a Christmas tree is not necessarily tied to Christ.

In Japan, the presence of the *shimenawa* reminds us that animism managed to survive the modern period in Japan. This occurred despite the attempt to create the institutional juggernaut of State Shintō, where local practices were brought into a national

structure, and the emperor was made the symbolic father of all Japanese—the head signifier of all realistic Japanese details. With defeat in war, the hegemonic structures of militarism and imperialism collapsed, ushering in a postmodern world in which the usual authorities are the enemy and monsters (*bakemono*) are the only ones who speak the truth.<sup>13</sup> The highly imaginative and globally popular works of an animator such as Miyazaki Hayao similarly mark a post-War resurgence of interest in animism. So do *yokozuna*, masters of sumo wrestling. Encircled by a similar rope, they too are *kami*, or god.

Once again, the *shimenawa* is a marker of the sacred that does not symbolically turn our attention to something not present. Rather, it draws us to something that is present. Whether tree or rock or sumo wrestler, the sacred is close to us, visible rather than invisible.

This immediacy and concreteness is Japanese, but I would also add that this appreciation of the here-and-now is a Mormon impulse as well. Most of my high school friends in Gunnison, Utah did not become long-haired, bell-bottomed “flower children” back in the 1960s. But we did grow up singing “My Heavenly Father Loves Me,” which turned us into flower children of a different sort.

This song was my favorite. My wife Rei, who grew up in Japan and converted to Mormonism in her forties, quickly came to revere this Primary song for the way it expresses a very lyrical, very Japanese regard for the senses and for the world that our senses bring to our awareness.

Whenever I hear the song of a bird  
Or look at the blue, blue sky,  
Whenever I feel the rain on my face  
Or the wind as it rushes by,  
Whenever I touch a velvet rose  
Or walk by our lilac tree,  
I'm glad that I live in this beautiful world  
Heav'nly Father created for me.

He gave me my eyes that I might see  
The color of butterfly wings.

He gave me my ears that I might hear  
 The magical sound of things.  
 He gave me my life, my mind, my heart:  
 I thank him rev'rently  
 For all his creations, of which I'm a part.  
 Yes, I know Heav'nly Father loves me.

The sentiment expressed here by Clara Watkins McMaster (1904–1997) is wonderfully Japanese *and* wonderfully Mormon. No doubt a Japanese composer would have referenced cherry blossoms and irises rather than roses and lilacs. But the idea of being “a part” of “this beautiful world” and grateful for having been given senses that apprehend and appreciate God’s creativity are familiar to Japanese poetics, at least as they were anciently expressed.

A lilac tree has a spirit that resonates with mine. The same can be said for butterfly wings. As God’s creations, are they to be appreciated as symbols that point to Him, the God of All? Or are they to be understood as beautiful things in their own right? To put the question in slightly more dramatic fashion, when our Heavenly Father and Mother created you and me in their own image, was their intention to make us symbols of them? When I take upon me the name of Jesus, so that I might have the companionship of the Spirit, am I trying to become a symbol of Heavenly Father? Or am I trying to become godly in the same way that Jesus and the Father are similarly divine? What Mormons, Mahayana Buddhists, and neo-animists share is a belief that parents and children are alike.

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Last spring, I organized an event at Tufts, where we put a *shimenawa* around a large beech tree on campus. I did this in order to seek an answer to the pressing question of how community is to form in a postmodern environment. Put simply, postmodernism is a critique of modern hegemony with its emphasis on uniformity and on making everything seamlessly fit. Back in the 1960s, “Love it or Leave it” was countered by “Change it or Lose it,” thus beginning a counter-cultural critique of “the system” that postmodernists came to term “the symbolic order.” The way to fight the system

was to embrace diversity and to admit that what we see depends on the perspective from which we are seeing things.

If there has been a perceived problem with postmodernity, it is the lack of an obvious point of commonality that unites us. If diversity rules—if there are many truths, rather than one—then what is the glue that holds us together and allows us to work together as a community?

The answer to this conundrum is also an answer to the question of why so many of my students reject religion, even when they recognize the importance of spiritual matters. One way to propose a new answer to this decades-old question was to introduce my students to the *shimenawa*, a non-symbolic symbol, a direct expression of divine love. By providing an unmediated, non-symbolic access to the sacred, the problem of connection might be solved.

The *shimenawa* insists that the world itself is sacred. It connects us with the divine, which is less mediated and less represented than either monotheism or modernity makes possible. In other words, it brings into being a world that is meaningful without being symbolic. At Tufts, our animistic celebration of the tree was a moment of rejoicing. My students loved direct access to the spiritual. On the other hand, because our non-symbol was still interpreted by some to be a symbol, three students cut it down on the night of commencement. We repaired it, and put it back up. By the end of the summer, the rope vanished again.

In another month, we will put up another rope. This time, it will be accompanied by a sign that explains that the *shimenawa* is not a symbol, that it does not stand for anything, that it simply marks the tree as something to respect and to love. Perhaps this will prevent further attacks. The assumption here is that this sort of aggressiveness flows from a residual, subliminal anger towards the symbolic order, and that by replacing symbols with non-symbols this antagonism might be ameliorated.

This is why I wished to deploy the *shimenawa* in places that are not Japan. The finer point here, of course, is that this expression of Japanese culture is also an expression of Mormon values. Both are similarly of the moment because both emphasize the non-symbolic nature of the divine. This common quality also suggests

why the postmodern present is a good time for both Japanese culture and for Mormonism.

Largely because of the cultural circumstances in which the church has developed to this point, many Mormons consider themselves modern. Many consider the church to be a conservative, last-bastion of certain values that are being eroded by the decadence of our times. I see this sort of nostalgia as problematic for two reasons. First, it marks a yearning for something that was bad for Mormonism in the first place. Let us remember that modernity is secular and anti-religious by nature. Second, the timing of things is off. If the “latter-days” are the modern days, and if modernity has come and gone (as is arguably the case in places like the United States and Japan), then this can only mean that we have missed the boat. Our moment has come and gone. And the future we envision is not really a future.

This alarming wake-up call comes to us just as the so-called culture wars that were fought within the academy during the 1960s to 1980s have spread to the general population at large. The contested nature of modernity—is it really over or still going strong?—brings us to a state of political gridlock that will, unless someone pulls the plug, gradually resolve itself for reasons that deserve more attention than can be given here. Suffice it to say that the end of modernity should be good news for Mormons. If we are true to practice, if, Zen-like, we keep trying to reconcile the symbolic and the non-symbolic, then the golden age of Mormonism is not behind us, but lies ahead.

In sum, I have made the point that, precisely because of the way Mormonism resonates with Japanese culture, both are presently flourishing and should continue to do so for into the foreseeable future. We have considered a few similarities: the closeness of the living and the dead, human godliness, the spiritual nature of all things, an emphasis on constant practice/service, a lack of theology, etc. A secondary point is that all these features make both Japanese culture and Mormonism of the moment, well suited to the present postmodern, post-human times that are upon us.

When we take a look around from this vantage point, we see that diversity is not someone’s political agenda. Neither is it an

institutional program, nor a code word for progressivism. Diversity is reality. Truly, the world is diverse by nature; but this is not to say that it is easily understood as such. There are modern-minded Mormons and those who are not; and so our paths up the mountain will have to be different and various. Having said that, I would also like to say that we share important similarities. For many of us, the mountain itself still entices us to climb it, and the spirit teaches us when and where to turn and when and where to go straight. Slowly ascending—and sometimes descending—we learn what we can, when we can. We move forward from the place we are now.

Our circumstances are different. From my ancestors, I learned about my animistic nature and about my Buddha nature. From Sister Miriam Dastrup, who taught me the Primary lessons and songs that have become old friends, I have learned my divine place in this godly world, “of which I’m a part.” Both the *butsudan* and the sacrament tray teach me to practice certain simple fundamentals, and to appreciate “the color of butterfly wings,” and the “magical sound of things.” They are symbolic elements that are useful to my non-symbolic practice. Both make me glad that I live in this beautiful world that Heavenly Father created for me.

## Notes

1. My paternal grandfather, Sashichi Inouye, actually did know English quite well. But when his family was put into a concentration camp during World War II, he decided to stop speaking English. This was something I learned only after I had studied Japanese and tried to have a conversation with him in his language. Apparently, he preferred to keep our essentially wordless relationship the way it was.

2. There have been two notable periods of exception to this compatibility: when Buddhism was first introduced in the sixth century, and then around the turn of the twentieth century when animism took the modern form of State Shinto, a hegemonic system that provided ideological support for an unfortunate period of nation and empire building.

3. A detailed analysis of modernity and the importance of realism to its development is contained in my recently completed manuscript, *Archipelago: Figurality and the Development of Modern Consciousness*.

4. Karen Armstrong, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010). For a video summary of her thoughts on compassion, see her TED talk at [http://www.ted.com/talks/karen\\_armstrong\\_makes\\_her\\_ted\\_prize\\_wish\\_the\\_charter\\_for\\_compassion](http://www.ted.com/talks/karen_armstrong_makes_her_ted_prize_wish_the_charter_for_compassion).

5. For Gordon B. Hinckley's thoughts on eternal progression, see "Rise to the Stature of the Divine within You," <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1989/10/rise-to-the-stature-of-the-divine-within-you?lang=eng> (accessed March 15, 2014). For the provenance of Lorenzo Snow's well-known couplet, "As man is now, God once was. As God is now, man may be," see Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1884), 9–10. Joseph Smith elaborated upon Lorenzo Snow's revelation in the King Follet Discourse. "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! . . . It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself." *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 345–46.

6. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:14). "For the natural man is an enemy to God . . . unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit . . . and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ" (Mosiah 3:19).

7. At the Global Crossroads Conference, held in Berkeley, California on March 22, Reverend Jerry Hirano, who grew up in Utah and now is the head priest at the Buddhist temple there, made the point that many Buddhists think that they do not share this point of Buddha nature with Christians. As he pointed out to his fellow Buddhist clerics, Mormons are exceptional in that they share a similar conception of human divinity. For more on Reverend Hirano's understanding of Buddhism, see J. K. Hirano, *Teriyaki Priest: Tales from the Realm of Gratitude* (Anaheim, Calif.: Buddhist Education Center, 2013).

8. The influence of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism (which was a later theorization of Confucian thought and sensibility) has waxed and waned over the centuries, from ancient times to the present. Although this influence has been complicated, it is probably safe to say that it has had turned the Japanese mind toward social harmony, the value of education, and respect for parents, ancestors, teachers, and other figures of authority.

9. This is the opening line of the *Analects*.



10. "Spirit" as defined in the Bible Dictionary, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bd/spirit.pl?lang=eng&letter=s> (accessed March 15, 2014).

11. Simply put, as articulated by Japanese artists such as Oshii Mamoru and Murakami Takashi, the post-human situation is marked by the way that people, plants, animals, and even robots exist on the same level. As a denial of human superiority, the "superflat" post-human movement comes as an adjustment to ever more sophisticated technological developments that it is actually dependent upon. More straight forwardly, it is also a critique of the modern arrogance that brought us World War II and, now, environmental problems such as global warming.

12. "Postmodern" is a broader term than "posthuman." It is a vague, and perhaps temporary, marker of a time—our present time—that comes after modernity's demise. There are many definitions of modernity in circulation, one of which—"better than what you had before"—does a good job of ensuring the relevance of modernity forever. Who wouldn't want something better? One point of the postmodern, of course, is that this claim of constant improvement has been shown to be false: newer is not always better; progress often comes at an exorbitant price; and what counts as improved depends on one's relative position to it. As an attack on modern hegemony—that is, a perfected and coercive system that skillfully conceals its manipulation even to the point that we are unaware of it—postmodern critics argue that there is no single unimpeachable, authoritative position that deserves our unquestioning subservience. While many view the collapse of modern structure as a time of mourning, I view the growth of new plants that are coming up through the rubble as a sign of a possibly better, more compassionate future.

13. For an English translation of Mizuki Shigeru's *War and Japan* see Matthew Penny, "War and Japan: The Non-Fiction Manga of Mizuki Shigeru," in *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, <http://japanfocus.org/-Matthew-Penny/2905> (accessed March 15, 2014).

