

THE SEEKING HEAVENLY MOTHER PROJECT: UNDERSTANDING AND CLAIMING OUR POWER TO CONNECT WITH HER

Kayla Bach, Emily Peck,
and Charlotte Scholl Shurtz

If power is the ability to act, then creation is the ultimate manifestation of power. A creator is an engineer of something new, an artist of something never before seen, a musician of what has not been previously heard. Creation is not innately masculine or feminine. It is not defined by gender or channeled only through administrative practices. It is something that is ever-present in our everyday lives.

Within Latter-day Saint theology, Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father provide a clear example of creative power by creating the universe. Eliza R. Snow proclaimed this truth boldly, that the “eternal Mother [is] the partner with the Father in the creation of worlds.”¹ More recently, Patricia T. Holland explained how together our Heavenly Parents are involved in “our creation and the creation of all that surrounds us.”²

1. John Longden, “The Worth of Souls,” *Relief Society Magazine* 44 (Aug. 1957): 492, 494. Quoted in David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, “A Mother There? A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2011): 7.

2. Patricia T. Holland, “Filling the Measure of Our Creation,” in *On Earth as It Is in Heaven* by Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 4.

Though our Heavenly Parents are both involved in creation, Latter-day Saint discourse, teachings, and rituals often leave out Heavenly Mother, thus making it difficult to see creation as a universal opportunity. For us, this imbalance is unacceptable. As we have each sought to understand our own divine nature, as well as the nature of God, the need to know, seek, and recognize our relationship with Heavenly Mother has grown stronger. For this reason, we started the Seeking Heavenly Mother Project, centered on the idea of creativity as a pathway for connection. We believe that by creating in a variety of mediums, both artistic and literary, we can connect to the Divine Mother. Additionally, our project aims to create a community of individuals seeking to know and become like Her, thus allowing our interactions with one another to serve as acts of creation in building connection and unity.

Creation as Power

For each of us, creation has been personally meaningful. It has led us to know and feel Heavenly Mother's love on a deeper level. For Charlotte, connecting to Heavenly Mother started during her preteen years. While reading the Doctrine and Covenants, a marvelous idea came into her head. If we have a Heavenly Father, if families are so important to God, and if we are on this earth to become like Him, wouldn't it make sense to also have a Heavenly Mother? If we have a Heavenly Mother, what is She like? When Charlotte took these thoughts to her dad, he responded that we do have a Heavenly Mother, but "it" wasn't really something we talk about. This interaction left her feeling rebuked for asking about Heavenly Mother, and she quieted her questions for many years.

When she got married, the questions she had asked as a child returned and brought three more questions. What do the eternities look like for me, as a woman? What does Heavenly Mother do? How am I supposed to become like someone I know almost nothing about? These questions were so persistent and left her feeling so lonely and

hopeless that she sat in the shower and cried. Merely knowing that Heavenly Mother exists was not enough. Without any knowledge of Her love, Her power, or anything else about Her, Heavenly Mother didn't feel real.

Eventually Charlotte heard about *Mother's Milk: Poems in Search of Heavenly Mother* by Rachel Hunt Steenblik and *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry*, a collected anthology of poems edited by Tyler Chadwick, Dayna Patterson, and Martin Pulido. Both poetry books are exclusively about Heavenly Mother. Reading them gave her comfort and hope that she, too, could know Heavenly Mother like the poets whose words she was reading. Realizing that creation is a way to learn about Heavenly Mother directly motivated Charlotte to write poetry, paint pictures, and claim her authority to know and emulate Her as one of Her daughters.

Connection in Community

Like Charlotte, each of us has seen the power of creativity in connecting to our Heavenly Mother. We have been inspired to create a community where, together, we can connect and collaborate in the search for our Mother. While individually, we each have immense creative power, together, this effect is multiplied. Thus, the invitation is open to everyone to join with us by submitting art, music, poetry, essays, or experiences centered on Heavenly Mother to SeekingHeavenlyMother.com.

Already through our efforts, we have come to know others who are using their creative power to connect with our Heavenly Mother. Two of these amazing individuals are McArthur Krishna and Bethany Brady Spalding, the authors of *A Girl's Guide to Heavenly Mother*. Their book pairs artwork from artists all over the world with quotations and text in order to help girls visualize their Heavenly Mother and what She means in their own lives. Its initial success inspired McArthur to

coauthor a second book with Martin Pulido, edited by Bethany Brady Spalding, entitled *A Boy's Guide to Heavenly Mother*. In addition to McArthur, Bethany, and Martin, we have joined with other incredible artists, thinkers, and authors to share in this journey, many of whom are featured on our website SeekingHeavenlyMother.com. Their creative contributions to our community have allowed us to gain additional understanding of our Heavenly Mother and how She relates to her children. As we encourage one another to seek our Heavenly Mother through creativity, we will feel Her love not only in our work but also in our friendships. We will feel Her love more abundantly as we strengthen our bonds as members of the human family.

The experiences we have together in community can be transformative. Emily had one such experience during her sophomore year at Brigham Young University. While taking an Indian dance class, she learned an interpretive dance about the Hindu deity Ganesh. During a section of the dance, she used her hands to imitate the blooming of a lotus flower while slowly standing up. During this process of uplifting and unfolding, she suddenly became aware of her own divine potential. She realized that regardless of what she was going through, she had the power to ascend above the turmoil and one day become divine. After this realization, she saw all the women around the room dancing in unison, all rising above their life's confusion. She saw divinity in them. Emily felt a sense of community and kinship with the women dancing together and felt she was journeying with them to become like the Eternal Mother.

Like the community Emily found in her dance class, this project builds a community through creative works. This sense of community has the ability to encourage and enlighten others to reach for the divine. One of our key goals is to establish a safe and inclusive venue in which we can celebrate our Heavenly Mother through our own creations. Through works of creation, we can lift and influence others. We want this project to help us grow together in our understanding of the eternal connection we have with our Heavenly Mother.

Belonging with the Divine

A community has many purposes. One is to support the efforts of the individual members. The other is to support the edification of the whole. The Seeking Heavenly Mother Project is a place where anyone can go to find art, essays, music, and poetry to ponder as they seek their own personal revelation about Heavenly Mother. We desire to build a community ever growing toward Her through creative works. Through the acts of creating and witnessing others' creations, we can build personal relationships with Heavenly Mother.

Kayla experienced how a strong personal connection to Heavenly Mother can bless and empower others while serving as a missionary in Santiago, Chile. During her mission, she developed a friendship with Constance,³ a recent convert who had grown discouraged about her relationship with God. Kayla decided to teach her about Heavenly Mother. As she taught and as Constance gained her own belief in the Divine Mother, the question became obvious: "Why don't we talk about Her more?" Constance wanted to know why the missionary discussions and Church lessons that had taught her the gospel had neglected to teach her about her Mother in Heaven. It seemed to her to be of the utmost importance that she had an all-powerful, infinitely loving Divine Mother. This understanding empowered her as she felt more connected to her own divine nature.

Throughout her mission, Kayla encountered others who were seeking this same sense of belonging that comes from learning about the Mother. As she shared her beliefs with them, her conviction of the importance of Heavenly Mother was strengthened. Other missionaries who served alongside her also sought reminders that they, too, were "created in the image of God."⁴ By expanding their understanding of

3. Name has been changed.

4. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2010/11/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng>.

divinity to include Heavenly Mother, they expanded their understanding of themselves. Their belief in Her helped them to claim the power they had to effect change, for as children of “divine, immortal, omnipotent Heavenly Parents,”⁵ power was a part of their spiritual DNA.

Our goal is for the Seeking Heavenly Mother Project to have this empowering effect on all who participate. We see a strong need to ensure that our community is inclusive and intersectional, creating spaces wherein LGBTQ+ individuals and other members of marginalized groups can be affirmed in the knowledge that they too are created in the image of God. We want to encourage each individual to develop their own personal connection to the divine while also offering them a sense of belonging in a community of seekers where every journey is honored. By creating, connecting, and building understanding, we can support one another as we each discover our divine nature.

5. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “O How Great the Plan of Our God!,” Oct. 2016, <https://churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2016/10/o-how-great-the-plan-of-our-god?lang=eng>.

KAYLA BACH {kayla.bach@gmail.com} is currently pursuing her master’s degree in theological studies at Harvard Divinity School. She graduated from Brigham Young University in 2021 with a bachelor’s degree in sociology and minors in global women’s studies and political science. As a cofounder of the Seeking Heavenly Mother Project (SHM), Kayla has facilitated the development of its social media presence and engaged in outreach efforts to gather content for SHM’s digital collection of creative works and expressions relating to the divine feminine.

EMILY PECK is a senior at Brigham Young University majoring in Middle Eastern studies/Arabic and minoring in global women’s studies. She is a cofounder of the Seeking Heavenly Mother Project.

CHARLOTTE SCHOLL SHURTZ {charlottershurtz@gmail.com} is a queer Mormon woman, author, and poet. She graduated from Brigham Young University in 2019 with a degree in English and a minor in professional writing and rhetoric. She is a cofounder of the Seeking Heavenly Mother Project, a digital repository of creative works celebrating the feminine divine.