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*Mormon Women Speak: A Collection of Essays* by Mary Lythgoe  
Bradford

Sondra Sumsion

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## Book Reviews

MARY LYTHGOE BRADFORD, ed. *Mormon Women Speak: A Collection of Essays*. Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Company, 1982. 237 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by Sondra Sumsion, an English major at Brigham Young University.

Many Mormon women recognize that selfless service does not preclude development of talents, but finding how to balance both is a genuine concern for them. It is not surprising, therefore, that balance becomes a key theme in Mary Lythgoe Bradford's anthology of women's essays, *Mormon Women Speak*. Many of the essays deal with the task of achieving a balance, and Bradford has structured the book to make balance an even more distinct message. The cover design of the book is a mandala. Composed of four divisions balanced around a woman's face, the mandala symbolizes attempts to harmonize a woman's "home, her church, her service to others and the development of her own talents" (p. 8). Each section of the mandala represents a division of the book. The essays in the first section discuss self-awareness. Those in the second section demonstrate the joys and trials of being wives and mothers. Essays in the third section reveal the growth and awareness that come through service. The fourth section, a series of essays tracing journeys of discovery, demonstrates self-development. Finally, in the fifth section, the essays discuss individual identity within the Church. Thus, moving through the various aspects of a woman's life, the book traces spiritual growth from the early, developmental encounters with conscience to deeply perceived personal manifestations achieved through the balance of family, service to others, self-development, and church activity.

The center of the mandala, a woman's face, is the image for the first section of essays. Dian Saderup, in the opening essay, decides that "God would have me penetrate my countless tangled images of self but that he does not *shout* direction or inspiration at me. He knows I need to learn to hear *inwardly*" (pp. 16-17). She learns she can best understand herself through personal revelation. The next essay, by Gladys Clark Farmer, shows how one woman could understand herself by understanding her mother. She explains, "What I am is not only a



product of an era of 'liberated women,' it is also a result of and a reaction to the example of my own mother'' (p. 21). Helen C. Stark, in the third essay, senses bitterness in herself and realizes she must gain self-knowledge before she can repent. Surfacing from self-examination with "hands overflowing with weeds and with treasure" (p. 35), she has gained the needed insight. The last essay in this section, by Karen Rosenbaum, is a confrontation with doubt. Thus we see self-knowledge growing from budding awareness, through understanding others and probing self, to the unequivocal self-honesty essential to balance. As Bradford says, quoting C. G. Jung, the mandala "cannot tolerate self-deception" (p. 7).

Demonstrating another aspect of balance, the theme of motherhood connects the essays in the second section. Appropriately, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher's opening essay tells how the birth of one of her children brought deepest self-awareness and spiritual communion. She explains, "And I had known it all. Had experienced the sisterhood, had participated in a ritual as old as seeding wheat, had sensed the link, to powers beyond my own, had found my own soul, had felt God" (p. 55). The next essay, by Judith R. Dushku, moves back into pregnancy and a difficult decision on abortion. After agonizing days, she acknowledges, "I could not abort this child. . . . It was clear that I had already projected a lifetime of dreams, of mother-daughter intimacies upon it, calling it by name and talking to it" (p. 65). Myrna S. Marler and Elinor G. Hyde deal with the work and demands of actual mothering. Finally, Edna B. Laney's essay completes the examination of the roles of wife and mother by recording her response to the death of her husband: "Instead of knitting our lives together, we would now begin to unwind the strands and go our separate ways" (p. 84).

The third section, on service, begins with Rubina R. Forester's discussion of discrimination in the Church, "Mormon Brown." Carol C. Ottesen's essay is an act of service in itself, a letter to a discontented friend whom she tries to help by describing the balance she has achieved in her own life. In the third essay, Ann Edwards-Cannon declares, "I *need* my women friends" (p. 110) and describes and celebrates the simple but vital services her friends have rendered her. The fourth essay returns to the theme of service to others, as Donna T. Smart tells how helping a Thai refugee family helped her pinpoint life's basic values. In the final essay, Phyllis N. Barber describes how helping a black man in a stalled car enabled her to confront and overcome her own racism. She says of the experience, "At that moment, I knew that he knew. He had been there just for me" (p. 133).



Though personal development is a minor theme in every section, the fourth section makes it the major theme. Jerrie W. Hurd's opening essay traces her intellectual and emotional journey into the professional world. She realizes she can successfully balance work and home only by overcoming self-imposed limits. She explains, "Believing that the pursuit of my dreams would be inconsistent with my image of a nurturing Mormon woman, I had avoided identifying the things I really wanted. This blindness had led me to accept limits that did not, in fact, exist" (p. 140). The next essay, "A Purple Rose" by Reva Beth L. Russell, examines her desire to excel and remain as individual as a purple rose, "unique, yet beautiful" (p. 147). In the case of Jean W. Johnson, development outside the role of mother was not welcome, but forced. Nevertheless, work outside her home brings her self-confidence and self-responsibility and teaches her balance. Happy in her new lifestyle, she explains her new-found balance: "My job is not my career; it does not occupy the center of my life. I have come to view the whole of my life, with its multiple components, as my career" (p. 161). In the next essay, Marilyn C. White continues the themes of development and balance by using trail imagery. She writes: "It seems to me that we are all born to different tracks and whether or not they head over mountains depends on the map each of us is given to follow" (pp. 163-64). The final essay in this section makes the figurative journeys of the other essays into a literal trip. Delores C. Ritchie describes her growth as she traveled alone through France: "I traveled alone to prove something to myself, and as such it became a personal pilgrimage—a 'rite of passage,' of sorts" (p. 172).

The final section completes the themes of balance and personal development by showing the importance of the Church in the balance of a woman's life. Cherie T. Pedersen describes how she came to balance gospel ideals and the women's movement: "The goals of both the Church and the women's movement are the same: to help women to be the best they can in every aspect of human development" (p. 188). That realization helps her understand how personal development can make her a better Church member: "To acknowledge needs that make us unique and to seek to fulfill them is not selfish. It is wisdom born of the understanding that we cannot give to others unless we ourselves are full" (p. 193). Marlene J. Payne describes how she found joy and fulfillment by developing her nurturing abilities not only as a mother but as a psychiatrist. Mary Ellen R. MacArthur describes an imbalance that developed during her daily commute to college: "I began noticing that I really had developed a 'Stanford self' and a 'home self'" (p. 202). Years later she learns she can

balance both: “It is perfectly possible to be considered a liberal, intellectual feminist at church and a religious, conservative ‘square’ in the world and still be accepted in both spheres” (p. 210). Also dealing with the lack of balance, the next essay, by Elizabeth O. Wach, parodies a zealot who must return to earth and “have a good time” before she can enter heaven. Completing both the section and the book, Loretta R. Sharp’s “Saturday Voice—Sunday Burning” consummates the themes of balance and development. Sharp directly addresses the problem of obedience and autonomy. What she calls “Saturday voice” is an individual revelation, and what she calls “Sunday burning” is a commitment to support leaders whose words do not always correspond to individual revelation. She recognizes that self-awareness is essential to perceiving truth but that it must not turn into selfish autonomy which disregards community truth. She concludes, “If we allow ourselves instruction from heavenly beings in different ways, and if we then celebrate rather than fear differences in one another, we will do as our Heavenly Father commands: we will become one, we will receive the Holy Ghost” (p. 230).

By arranging the book to show positive development between the beginning and ending of each section and beyond—from Saderup’s opening to Sharp’s closing essay—Bradford encourages women to seek personal development. Just as the mandala symbolizes balance in the book, the book itself symbolizes balance in life, never discounting the nurturing role so stressed by Church leaders yet always reminding women of their unique talents and encouraging development of them.