

ASIA LOCAL PAGES

ASIA AREA LEADER MESSAGE

Agency

By Elder Fook Chuen Zeno Chow
Of the Seventy

Agency—A Gift from God and Essential to our Exaltation

Agency, or our right to choose, is a gift from our Father in Heaven. In our premortal existence, we were already enjoying this gift, which enabled us to choose between following our Savior or Lucifer in the Council of Heaven. It is so important that during that Council, Heavenly Father cast out Lucifer because he “sought to destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3).

Agency is of critical importance in our journey to exaltation. On the surface, Lucifer’s plan sounded very appealing as he guaranteed that not one soul would be lost (see Moses 4:1). In order to do that, he proposed to take away our agency so that no one would make any wrong choices in life. However, without the ability to make decisions, we would not have the opportunity to learn. And without learning from past experiences, we would not grow intellectually or spiritually. Thus, the gift of agency is essential to our exaltation. We need to value this wonderful gift by utilizing it wisely.

A Recent Experience

One of my 2014 “new year resolutions” is to keep myself physically fit. I picked hiking so that I can admire the Lord’s creations while getting my much-needed exercise. Though a great metropolis, Hong Kong is also home to numerous beautiful country parks. One weekend I decided to hike up a nearby hill which I had never visited before. After doing much research on the Internet, I gained the confidence to visit this hiking destination.

The climb to the top of the hill was not too difficult, and the closer I got to the peak, the more beautiful the scenery was. After admiring the wonderful scenery on top of the hill for a few moments, I began my descent down the other side of the hill.

A few minutes after starting downhill, I noticed a middle-aged man, whom I had never met before, coming up toward me. Apart from his hiking boots, he was dressed so casually that he looked as though he was just taking an afternoon walk in the park with an umbrella sheltering him from the bright sunlight. After taking a look at me and everything I was carrying, I am sure he was thinking, “amateur hiker.” We greeted each other



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with a nod, and he passed me by and continued up the hill.

My attention quickly turned to finding the best downhill path. There were at least two visible paths. The man was on one as he traveled uphill, while the other one was closer to where I stood and seemed shorter—a more direct path to the bottom.

As I moved toward the more direct path, I felt a gaze behind me. I turned and found that the man was watching me. I ignored him and continued moving downward. Very soon, I realized that this path was much steeper than I had originally anticipated and quite risky for me given my skill level. I retraced my steps to



the fork and started down the other path. At this time the man came down and met me. He said, “Taking the other path can be faster, but it goes straight down all the way.”

Before I could respond, he walked right past me and headed downhill. A thought came to me saying, “Follow him,” and so I did. I soon realized that there were quite a few paths going down the hill, yet the ones that this man took were always the easiest and safest. He was about 20–30 meters ahead of me, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not overtake him. From time to time he would look back to see whether I was able to keep up with him. When we were approaching the foot of the hill, I really needed to slow down to catch my breath, and eventually I lost sight of him.

I felt strongly that as this person sensed I was in need of help, he changed his plans and led me safely down the hill. I am so grateful that he volunteered to lead me and that I made the right choice to follow him.

This experience reminded me of a few important principles regarding making choices:

We have to accept the consequences of our choices, good or bad.

Our choice to follow the Savior in the premortal existence gave us the right to come to this earth and experience mortal life (see Abraham 3:26). We learn in the Doctrine and Covenants: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:20–21).

This same principle applies not only to celestial laws but also in our daily lives. If I had taken the risk to travel the path that lead straight down the hill without being sufficiently prepared, I would most likely have been injured and had to go through a painful recovery.

Our daily choices need to be in harmony with our ultimate goal.

The main purpose of this life is to prove ourselves “to see if [we] will do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command [us]” (Abraham 3:25). At baptism, we made covenants to take upon us the name of Christ and to serve Him and our fellowmen (see Mosiah 5:7–8, 18:8–10). In essence, we have to translate these covenants into actions by applying gospel principles in our daily lives and preparing ourselves to serve one another.

Comparing this to my hiking experience—it was not enough to just have the desire to go home after visiting the top of the hill; I needed to “find and follow” the path that would take me safely down the hill.

Knowledge and experience can help us make correct choices; alternatively, we can follow someone who has such knowledge.

Because it was my first time visiting that hill, I did not know which path was the right one to take. Fortunately, someone who knew the area very well led me so that I could avoid unnecessary risk or even injury.

In our mortal journey back to our eternal home, the Lord has sent His servants—prophets, apostles, and other Church leaders to set examples and give us guidance. It is wise to follow them, for they will always lead us safely on the right path. And once we have gained experience and a testimony, we can also be a guide in other people's lives.

Agency and Atonement

With agency, there is a probability of making mistakes or committing sins. Fortunately, in the great plan of salvation, the Lord has provided us with another gift—the Atonement. Jesus Christ willingly sacrificed Himself to atone for our sins so that with sincere repentance, we will be saved through His grace after we have done all that we can.

These two gifts, agency and the Atonement of Jesus Christ, go hand in hand to enable us to gain the necessary experience, prove our willingness to follow the Father, repent of our sins, and prepare ourselves to return to our heavenly home. I am grateful for these two wonderful gifts.

I testify that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that They love us. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, amen. ■

It's Never by Accident!

Earlier this week, my companion, Elder Stevens, and I were out in the farthest part of our area. It's called Kukatpally, and it's halfway between our chapel and the West Marredpally chapel (the other chapel in the stake). It's probably an hour or 45-minute bus ride from our apartment. We were out there trying to locate a colony called Balaji Nagar and then hopefully locate the apartment complex. It didn't really help that there are colonies called Bala Nagar and Bajaj Nagar nearby. It was just one of those days where you think nothing is going your way, and we just couldn't find it. We started going through the names of the people who live in Balaji Nagar, hoping we'd recognize an active member's name that we could call. No luck, but we did notice that an inactive member had a number listed. So we decided to call the number, and she actually picked up!

I know that might not be so surprising in America, but here it is! The reason is that people here switch their SIM cards so often and they are always changing numbers. She answered the phone and she

spoke good English! Such a blessing for us. She was at work but said her cousin and mom were home. She told us how to get to her house, so we headed over. We met her cousin who is studying here and is a non-member! Part-member families are the best! We talked to the mom and found out that they went inactive because they were moving around so much that they just kind of stopped coming. They had actually only been to church in Madinaguda once! Then they moved and were there for a few months and then moved back and didn't know when church was so they just didn't come. Elder Stevens and I are thinking, "Awesome! We can get an inactive family back to church, and teach their non-member family members!" We taught the nonmember cousin and set him with a baptism date.

We headed out and before getting in an auto to get back to the main road, we decide to stop at a bakery on the ground floor and get something to drink. We bought some drinks and the shop owner greeted us by saying, "Hello Elders!" Now that's weird—the Church isn't

well known here so very few people know what we do and what church we're from, let alone know our titles. So we started talking to him thinking that he was probably a member. Turns out that he's not a member but has family who are members in Coimbatore! What are the chances of that? I'll tell you, nearly zero! Especially when your area has a million or more people.

After that amazing find, we called that same sister who we called before and asked her when she would be home so we could meet her and talk with her. She said that we could come over Thursday at 7:30 p.m. So that's exactly what we did. We came a little early so we could talk to the bakery owner again. He doesn't seem too interested but I know that we didn't meet him by chance on the ground floor running a bakery in a building that has an inactive family living in it. We'll start to work with him slowly. He really enjoys talking to us, so I'm sure it'll lead to lessons soon.

Back to the main story. We headed up to the apartment to meet her. Her cousin was gone for a few days helping his family move from a different part of

town, to a place where the family will be a little closer. So we just talked to her and she told us that her husband is baptized too! We couldn't believe it—we didn't even have his records. So it'll be a little bit of a hunt to find his records. But there is some bad news to this story. Her husband, shortly after being baptized, had gotten into a Word of Wisdom problem. It's been growing for a while, and a few days prior she had given him six months to change and save their marriage. Well, then she told us how she had been praying for help and strength and a way to help her husband make the change. Then our call came. To us, we were just two frustrated missionaries trying to find Balaji Nagar. To her, we were the answer to her prayers. That's something that really hit me this week. When we find a long lost member, it's never by accident, but we find them when they are most ready to come back and when they most need the Lord. We were in Kukatpally on Tuesday for the very reason of finding this sister and her family, to help her husband see that the path to becoming the husband he wants to be is in the very church he was baptized into

so long ago. That's why we're out here. Not just to baptize and get new members, but also to help those who have lost their way.

We found her cousin to teach and this sister and her husband to bring back to activity, this time with her husband by her side. I know I'm doing the Lord's work. He's directing us every step of the way. ■

Elder Gill, Harkanwar is currently serving in the India Bangalore Mission

67 Weeks of Mission

It has been 67 weeks since I said good-bye to my family. I still remember my mom walking out of one door while I walked in another door as missionary and absolutely everyone weeping uncontrollably and singing "Called to Serve" (*Hymns*, no. 249). As I walked in another door, I felt I was leaving my family behind to serve, but now I understand that I never left my family but I got a very big family. I am very grateful for the time I am spending in the mission, for the people I am working with, and especially the people I am serving.

My first area on my mission was Chennai, a place where I have never been before. I arrived with fear and questions like, "What I am going to do?" "How I can commit myself fully to my mission?" and "How will my companion be?" But once as I stepped in there, all my questions vanished. During these 67 weeks, I used my time



Sister Divya

to read, read, and read. My biggest happiness as a missionary came through knocking on doors. I saw days when people shut the door on our faces, and I saw people who lovingly invited us to listen to our message and who accepted the invitation to be baptized. A little while later, I was approaching the Sabbath day with a sweet feeling as it was their baptism. I will never ever forget the feeling of seeing them getting baptized. I enjoyed going to dinner appointments with my companions to lots of members' homes in many different settings of wards and branches. It was by meeting different families and being exposed to different traditions and environments that I gained an appreciation for them and their lives.

The funniest part of my mission was when I was trying to learn the language. I used to write it down in my notebook and when I tried to read it back, I found how easy it was for me to start my own new language. Some of my most cherished

moments are teaching Gospel Doctrine class, leading hymns, and sharing my testimony with investigators. It is the most spiritually fulfilling feeling I've ever had. Whenever I'm given a topic to discuss, I ponder on it. I love presenting my ideas in an unusual way and seeing people get excited when I present it. I love to systematically study the scriptures, by which I have completed reading the Book of Mormon within three months. My hardest times were when I got transferred to a new area, leaving the people who loved me a lot. Change in place will change climate, which I find to be difficult at the beginning of a transfer. I used to have trials but still nothing stopped me from serving a mission, and I am so happy with all these experiences that I have gone through all these days and I still have more to go. I love being a missionary! How great is my calling! ■

Sister Divya Yadav Yelamanchili is currently serving in the India Bangalore Mission

Commitment, Patience, and Love Lead to Marriage



Brother and Sister Seerapu Prasad

On the last day of May 2012, a young single adult conference was held at Hyderabad, where we talked a lot about careers, the Church, and studies. Amidst all these exciting happenings, my heartstrings were thrilled. The reason—I had a girl in mind but we weren't dating. She left after the conference, and I felt to pray and ask God if she was the one for me to marry for time and all eternity. I spoke to my dad about it. That night I prayed earnestly about her and got an inspiration and felt good in my heart. I then recognized that I received my answer! Armed with this conviction, I decided to propose marriage to her. She took time and prayed about it, then she agreed. Our families, initially, did not agree, and we had to convince them we are happy about our marriage. We both prayed many times and fasted every week to soften the hearts of family members. Our patience and commitment towards each other finally made our families allow us to marry. Everything went so smoothly that we were totally surprised by the blessings we received.

We prayed and did our scripture studies over the phone every day. This strengthened both of our testimonies and prepared us for the future. But marriage was not easy. Her dad passed away at a very crucial time. We had to put our inner commitment into action by sticking to each other. Our families understood.

She always mentions that one of the top reasons she chose me was because I have similar characteristics to her dad, and she loves her dad so much.

The great and grand day of our lives came when we were able to go to the temple and be

sealed for time and all eternity. It was such a wonderful blessing for both of us. We understood it was not only our plan but the Lord's plan for us. We enjoyed every single moment at the temple, feeling the Lord's presence in that sacred beautiful house of God. As we were sealed in the Hong Kong China Temple, we came to a better understanding of each other. We are now planning our next visit to the temple.

We are in the gospel not by chance but by choice. We know that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ live and love us for whatever we are, whoever we are, however we are. Their love for us is divine. We know with all our heart that the Book of Mormon contains the true and living gospel that was restored during the latter days for us

through the Prophet Joseph Smith. We know that prophets are called by God to receive revelations for us. We know that this Church is restored by God and that is why it's true. We are so grateful for temples, which bring happiness and the hope of seeing our departed loved ones again. We are so grateful for all the happiness and blessings that the gospel has brought to us. Today, whatever good we are, whatever blessings we have, whatever happiness we share is only because of what we have learned from the gospel. We love being at church and learning the gospel; it brings us closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. We bear witness of the things which we have shared in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

Brother and Sister Seerapu Prasad live in Hyderabad

True Gospel Can Change Lives!

In my family I am the second missionary. I was a non-Christian when I heard of this gospel, but I decided that I needed to accept this gospel. I believe that the gospel can change anyone's life. As soon as I accepted the gospel in my life, I decided to share it with all of God's children so that they can be blessed by this message.

When I asked my family, "Can I go on mission?" my family said, "You can go on mission, but one thing we want to tell you is that whatever happens, please don't come back home before you finish two years." My family also told me, "We know that when you go on a mission, you will be changed positively and so many families can be blessed."

I encourage every young man in every branch or ward to serve. God will bless you and your

family. I learned many things and I am still learning many things. I believe that I will learn many more things. I know that the work which I am doing is true. All these things I say in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

Arjun Radakrishnan is currently serving in the India Bangalore Mission



ELDER ARJUN

Elder Arjun

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