

Choose the Temple

That's the advice from an increasing number of Latter-day Saints in India, who know that blessings come from going to the house of the Lord.

By Richard M. Romney
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You notice it most when you look in their eyes. There is joy there, hope and belief, an optimism that ignites a smile when you say, “Tell me how you feel about the temple.”

For Latter-day Saints in India, temple marriage brings a depth of understanding, a sense of fulfillment, and a commitment to keep covenants forever as they cherish the promises of eternity. Although the nearest temple is thousands of miles away in Hong Kong, increasing numbers are finding their way to the house of the Lord. Guided by prayer, faith, and the Spirit, they are choosing to be sealed in the temple. Here are some of their thoughts and stories.

Finding Strength

William Prabhudas of the Bangalore Second Branch works in a courthouse. He knows how heart wrenching it can be to see marriages torn apart. That’s one of the reasons he and his wife were so eager to find strength in the temple.

“Like most couples, sometimes we have small issues to work out,” he says. “But working them out is so much easier when we both have an eternal perspective.”

His wife, Sheela, says that going to the temple has helped not only her and her husband, but it

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Sheela Prabhudas



has also helped their children: Celesta, age 13, and Doris, 7. “We were sealed as a family,” Sheela says. “It was a good feeling. We forgot the outside world, and it was like heaven for us. We talk about it all the time.”

“What a blessing to be sealed to my wife,” Brother Prabhudas says. “And then they brought our daughters in, dressed in white, to join us. It reminded me of cleanliness—cleanliness in our lives and in our homes. Cleanliness and the temple go hand in hand. When we are clean, the Lord promises—in His house of promises—to bless us.”

Celesta recalls that her family worked, planned, and saved for two years to be able to travel to the temple. But most of all, she remembers being in the temple with her parents and that her aunt and uncle and cousins

Above: The Prabhudas family traveled to the Hong Kong China Temple (left) to be sealed. It is the temple nearest to India.

were also there to see her family sealed. “Afterward, we all held hands together. We looked in the mirrors and thought about eternity,” she recalls. “It was beautiful. I knew I wanted to belong to my family forever.”

Two Times Two Together

Over the years the Thomas brothers of the Hyderabad Fourth Branch have done a lot to set good examples for each other. As teenagers, they became members of the Church at the same time. They worked together to encourage their mother until she also joined the Church. Both brothers served in the India Bangalore Mission. Both helped comfort their mother when their father passed away. And both recently married.

Now Rejjie and his wife, Metilda, have been sealed in

the temple, and Rennie and his wife, Keerthi, following their good example, soon will be.

“From the time I joined the Church, it has been a process of changing and improving, learning the plan of salvation and following it,” Rejjie says. “But the actual goal is to go back and live with Heavenly Father, our loving Father, who wants us to come back to Him so much that He gave us a Savior, His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and everlasting death. I’m grateful that the gospel of Jesus Christ changed me and my family, and going to the temple is the culmination of all of that.”

Rejjie explains that one of the challenges he and Metilda faced in getting their parents’ approval for marriage was that they are from different regions and speak different dialects. “But in the

temple there are no differences,” he says, “and that was a great reminder for us.” He feels the future of India belongs to the young. “We are the ones who are going to make a difference,” he says, looking at Metilda.

“That’s the kind of vision we both have. We need to conduct family home evenings, have family scripture study and family prayer, and stay focused on the temple. That is our future.”

Metilda agrees: “When I ask him how he can be so understanding and loving, he says it is because the gospel makes him better. On his mission he saw the example of the mission president treating his wife with respect and love. And in the temple we see that same pattern. As we show that same



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Rejje Thomas

Above, from left: Rejje, Metilda, Keerthi, and Rennie Thomas. Below: Rennie and Keerthi enjoy Sunday School each week.

was investigating the Church. “I wanted to play cricket instead, but the seminary teacher said, ‘You need to put God first,’ so I did. Even though I was shy, I came and sat on the back row.” On the front row he saw Keerthi, who at that time had been a member for just six months. Though they became friends, it wasn’t until Rennie returned from his mission that they started dating. Keerthi remembers how, when they finally decided to get married, they went to their parents to convince them the choice was right.

“We learned in seminary that we should honor our parents, and we remembered that,” she says.

Rennie adds, “They counseled us that we should

finish our education and that I should wait for my brother to be married first. So we worked and waited, and the best part was that, just as we finished our education, my brother got married,

and Keerthi’s father was very impressed with their wedding. Once he saw their good example, he agreed to our marriage, and in that way we honored our parents and also got our marriage properly arranged.”

Rennie says his experience with Keerthi is a good example of how the understanding of marriage in the Church is becoming more widespread. “When I first joined the Church, it was a big thing if a member married a member,” he says. “And if they got to the temple, that was even bigger. But now we understand how to get married within the Church. We make sure we’re ready for the temple. The temple is the key.”

The President’s Example

Enter the apartment of Venkat and Lynda Dunna of the Hyderabad Fourth Branch, and there are plenty of clues that these newlyweds are crazy about each other. A handmade birthday banner from him to her is taped to the wall. An album with their wedding photos



pattern in our lives and someday to our children, that influence will strengthen the Church in India.”

Rennie talks about how he met his future bride while attending seminary when he

sits on the table near the sofa. As they talk, he puts his arm around her, and she smiles so often it's contagious.

They describe how they met through Church-sponsored activities and how happy

want to say no, but they did want us to wait many months, maybe a year," recalls Venkat.

"What helped us was the Spirit," he continues. "I felt prompted to tell everyone that Lynda and I were both working,



"We just kept thinking, 'The Lord's going to help us,' and He did."

Venkat Dunna

Lynda's mother was when they got engaged because she knew Venkat from church. But there was a problem. Venkat had an older brother who was single, and in India some still hold to the tradition that older siblings should be married before younger siblings. His parents, who are friendly to the Church but are not members, were also building a house and didn't want a wedding until the house was finished. "My parents didn't

so we would help take care of everything but that it was important to get married as soon as possible and that it was important to start by going to the temple. We just kept thinking, 'The Lord's going to help us,' and He did."

A new Latter-day Saint chapel was opened just in time for them to have their wedding and reception there, and then they left immediately to be sealed in the Hong Kong China Temple.

Above: Venkat and Lynda Dunna remember traveling to the temple in a group of seven. The same day they were sealed, Lynda was also sealed to her deceased father.

"Seven of us traveled to the temple together," Lynda says. "On the same day Venkat and I were sealed, my mother, my sister, and I were able to be sealed to my deceased father. It was a wonderful day in every way."

Venkat, who is now serving as branch president, says one of his greatest desires is to see a temple in India some day. "That will be a great blessing," he says. "It will help us to build Zion where we are."

“We were brought together by our families and friends but also by the Spirit. We hope the Spirit will always guide our marriage.”

Barat Powell

A Guided Marriage

The story of Barat and Ishla Powell of the Chennai Second Branch actually begins with Barat’s parents, Sathiadhas Powell and Suriya Kumari, who were married in 1981 and joined the Church in 1991. In 1993 Sathiadhas was called as branch president. After years of saving and preparing and before the Hong Kong Temple was dedicated, they traveled to the Manila Philippines Temple to be sealed.

As their family grew and matured in the gospel, they taught their two sons about the importance of going to the temple. (Their youngest son is currently serving a mission.) The Powells were thrilled that when their oldest son, Barat, got engaged, temple marriage was immediately part of the plan. Ishla, his fiancée, was a new member of the Church. “From the first day I met with the missionaries, I knew the gospel was true, and I loved it,” she says. She grew close to the current branch president’s family, the Isaacs,

Right: The story of Barat and Ishla actually begins with Barat’s parents (next page). “We are teaching the younger generation the importance of the temple,” says Barat’s father, Sathiadhas.



who had been introduced to the Church by the Powells.

At the time of her baptism, Barat had four months remaining on his mission. “The Isaacs kept saying he would be the right match for me, but I wanted to postpone marriage and serve a mission myself,” Ishla says. Even though the branch and mission presidents approved her missionary application, Ishla explains, “Suddenly and unexpectedly my mind was

completely changed. I wanted to pray for marriage.”

When he returned from his mission, Barat was surprised when several people told him that Ishla would be right for him. A short time later they met briefly at the wedding of President Isaac’s daughter but never talked much. Indian society is quite formal about men and women getting acquainted, and both Barat and Ishla wanted to behave appropriately.



Three weeks later Ishla was praying and wondering what to do, and so was Barat. “The Lord showed me through so many ways that Barat was the right one,” Ishla says. “But I was very reserved. I prayed, ‘Lord, if this is the way, then show me how I can speak to him.’”

Barat says, “I had talked to several people about her, and they all had nothing but good to say. Suddenly I thought, ‘I need to talk to her right now,’ but I didn’t know how. I called President Isaac’s sister and asked if she thought it was all right to call.”

Ishla continues, “As I was praying, the branch president’s sister telephoned and said, ‘Barat wants to talk to you. Can I give him your number?’” Half an hour later they were talking. Barat says, “It was as if we had known each other for years.”

Ishla had learned about temple marriage at institute and knew she wouldn’t settle for anything less. Barat felt the same way. But they would have to save money to travel to the temple, and it meant many friends and family members, including Barat’s mother and father, wouldn’t have enough money to travel with them.

“It’s a long way to go, and traveling is very expensive, but we all agreed they

should go,” Sathiadhas recalls. “We told them we would celebrate with them at the legal ceremony before they left, and we asked them to take lots of pictures after they were sealed. Then we would celebrate again when they returned.

“We are teaching the younger generation the importance of the temple,” Sathiadhas explains. “We encourage all people to go to the temple, and we wanted our children to go there too.” He says he is particularly pleased with the way Barat and Ishla respected their parents, the customs of their people, and their own agency.

“In India people refer to ‘arranged marriages’ and ‘love marriages,’” Barat says. “We feel we have both.” In fact, Barat and Ishla prefer to call their marriage a “guided marriage.” “We were brought together by our families and friends but also by the Spirit,” he says. “We hope the Spirit will always guide our marriage.” ■



LOCAL CULTURE AND GOSPEL CULTURE

“The purpose of the gospel is to transform common creatures into celestial citizens, and that requires change. . . .

“The traditions or culture or way of life of a people inevitably include some practices that must be changed by those who wish to qualify for God’s choicest blessings. . . .

“There is a unique gospel culture, a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This gospel way of life comes from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of the living prophets. It is given expression in the way we raise our families and live our individual lives.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Repentance and Change,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 37, 39.