



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADAM C. OLSON, EXCEPT AS NOTED, RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH OF JADE MOUNTAIN © FOTORESEARCH

# MAKING MOUNTAINS

The Parables of the Mountain Guide and the Mountain

By Adam C. Olson

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As an interpretive tour guide in Yushan National Park in Taiwan, Chén Yù Chuàn (Richard) is often assigned to escort important visitors around the park. Typically when he asks his guests what they would like to see, they want to go to the top of Yushan (Jade Mountain), the highest peak in northeast Asia at 12,966 feet (3,952 m).

Richard has a passion for nature and loves the beauty and majesty of Yushan. But through experience he has learned something important that he tries to share with his visitors: the spectacular view from above gains its real value only after one has experienced what's below.

Visiting the peak, with its manmade trails and wonderful view, is a great experience, but Richard tries to explain that there is much to learn and much hidden beauty to find in the more difficult-to-access river gorges and canyons below.

"To appreciate the height, you must experience the bottom," he says. "You can't appreciate the end without understanding the process."

Some of his visitors are persuaded; however, most just want to make it to the top—and they want the easiest way there.

Richard sees some spiritual symbolism in their attitudes. As he describes it, the peak of life's experiences is to be able to return to God's presence (see Alma 12:24). Yet while many recognize the value of that goal, some don't realize that to be *with* Him, we must become *like* Him (see 1 John 3:2; 3 Nephi 27:27; Moroni 7:48). And there is no quick and easy path to that peak.

## The True Guide

Richard doesn't want to take visitors for just a walk; he wants to give them an experience. But he is limited in how much he can teach them by their level of desire.

"I can take those who *want* to experience nature to places that others rarely see," he says. "Their experience may be more difficult, but it is much richer."

Richard feels that life is no different, and his personal experiences reflect this principle. While a university student, Richard began a search for real purpose in life. He visited a number of churches without finding what he was searching for—until he met the missionaries.

His parents, however, strongly opposed his joining the Church. They worried about their



*To appreciate the summit, one must experience the valleys, says Richard Chén (left, at Baiyang Waterfall in Taroko National Park). Brother Chén is a guide in Yushan National Park, home to Jade Mountain (above).*





*Those who follow Brother Chén through the valleys learn about the intense geological forces that make mountains—a process parallel to the refining one must endure to return to God’s presence. Above: Richard overlooks a tributary of the Liwu River. Right: The contorted marble walls of the Mysterious Valley are evidence of tremendous geological forces.*



only son leaving their faith. They also worried about what would become of them. Many in their culture believe that their standing in the afterlife depends heavily upon the veneration offered them by their living descendants.

Although he struggled with his parents’ opposition, Richard had gained a testimony of the Savior and the need to follow Him.

“Jesus Christ is the way,” Richard says. “He is the True Guide back to the Father” (see John 14:6).

He chose to follow the Savior and be baptized, trusting that the Lord would lead him down the right path even if it looked harder.

A week after his baptism, he was blessed with a good job as a radio news reporter

for the largest broadcasting corporation in Taiwan. Getting the job pleased his parents, and along with the change for good they saw in him, it helped smooth ruffled feathers. It also strengthened his faith and taught him an important lesson.

“If we don’t follow Jesus Christ,” he says, “we will miss a lot of important experiences that we need.” These experiences may be more difficult, but they are necessary for our good (see 2 Nephi 2:2; D&C 122:7).

### **How Mountains Are Made**

Anyone who follows Richard through his beloved gorges and valleys will undoubtedly learn that the mountains of Taiwan and its precipitous east coast were created by the collision of two plates in the earth’s crust. The intense heat and pressure created by that powerful force turned layers of sediment first to limestone, then to the marble for which the east coast is famous. That same unseen power shakes and grinds and buckles the earth, eventually sending mountain ranges soaring into the heavens.

Whether in Yushan or Taroko National

Park, where he worked earlier, Richard loves to point out evidence of how the forces of nature formed Taiwan from the bottom up.

“There are ripple marks on the highest rock, and there are sea fossils and other evidence of what’s on top having once been at the bottom,” Richard says. “If you want to understand the summit, you must understand the depths, because that’s where the summit began.”

Richard believes this is important because it parallels the purpose of life. In difficult times it can seem like we aren’t just visitors to the mountain but more like the mountain itself, buffeted by forces and stresses that shape us and push us toward heaven if we can bear them with patience and faith (see Mosiah 23:21–22; D&C 121:7–8).

### Making Mountains of Us

From his own experiences Richard has learned that we cannot rise up out of the world to reach our highest potential without undergoing uncomfortable, sometimes painful, experiences.

As a radio reporter Richard worked under considerable pressure covering a wide variety of topics on short deadlines. He soon learned that social drinking was an important way many reporters obtained information. Work became increasingly difficult because he refused to participate in the drinking.

The thought of finding a new job eased his conscience but not his challenges. His radio job had helped pacify his parents after he joined the Church. So when he left the high-paying, prestigious, full-time job for part-time contract work as a guide, his parents were disappointed for a time.

It was another difficult path to choose, but he doesn’t regret taking it because he knows



### THE GROWTH REQUIRED TO RETURN HOME

“One’s life . . . cannot be both faith-filled and stress-free. . . .

“Therefore, how can you and I really expect to glide naively through life, as if to say, ‘Lord, give me experience, but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal, and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made Thee what Thou art! Then let me come and dwell with Thee and fully share Thy joy!’ . . .

“Real faith . . . is required to endure this necessary but painful developmental process.”

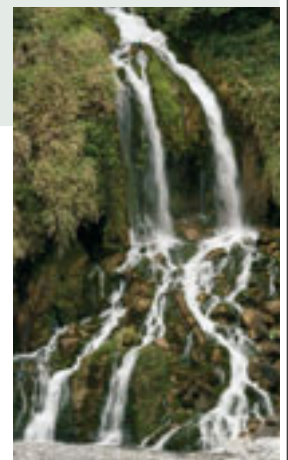
Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Lest Ye Be Wearied and Faint in Your Minds,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 88, 90.

that to be “exalted on high” (see D&C 121:7–8), we must first experience the lows (see D&C 122:5–7).

“We sometimes limit what God can make of us because we don’t want to experience the bad with the good,” he says.

Following the Lord led him to a job he enjoyed. It led him to serve a mission. It introduced him to his future wife, with whom he now has four beautiful children. Despite the trials, there has been no end to the blessings.

When discipleship leads through “the path of the low valley” (2 Nephi 4:32) and even “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4) on its way to “him who dwells on high” (D&C 1:1), Richard takes comfort in the promise that “the words of Christ, if we follow their course, [shall] carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise” (Alma 37:45)—further confirmation to him that it is only after experiencing the challenges of life that we will be prepared to enjoy the summit. ■



For more on this story, including a gallery of photos from Taroko National Park, visit [liahona.lds.org](http://liahona.lds.org).