

Be Anchored in Order to Soar

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When I tell people I am a faculty member in the Department of Linguistics and English Language, I am often asked, “How many languages do you speak?” Or they may react and say, “Oh, I’d better watch my grammar.” While it is true that linguists study language, they study it in many different ways, not just by learning languages or by watching for grammar mistakes. I would like to give you a taste of what some of the linguists in our department and college do.

A few of my colleagues study and describe lesser-known languages—some that are spoken in North America, such as the Ute and Salish languages, along with other languages spoken around the world, such as Quichua, Xinkan, and Marshallese. Other colleagues study older forms of language, such as Old, Middle, and Early Modern English, with some examining how language has changed over time. Others investigate the language rules we are taught and which rules are useful to us today. One colleague studies how ambiguity in language—that is, how words or sentences can have more than one meaning—is applied in advertising. Others study how the pronunciation, words, and grammar of a language vary from one region or group to another. Another colleague has dedicated many years

to researching the language in the Book of Mormon and constructing its original text. Some use technology to solve difficult and complex language problems. Others use databases containing millions of words to find language patterns, while others look for words and language patterns used by specific writers. Another group focuses on how languages are learned, particularly second languages, with some investigating the best ways to accurately measure proficiency in a language.

This research has been applied to a number of real-world problems by supporting language-preservation projects, creating language-frequency dictionaries and academic vocabulary lists, helping missionaries learn languages and assessing their progress, and extracting genealogical facts from texts in a fraction of the time it used to take.

These are just a few examples, but as you can see, there is much diversity in what my colleagues study; however, one thing they have in common is that they are passionate about

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and engaged in their research and teaching. While they have different stories of how they were led to study linguistics, they all have dedicated much of their time and effort to making their unique contributions to our field.

You do not have to be a linguist to be interested in language. You may have noticed differences in your own language or in others' language when you came here to BYU or as you have traveled to different places. Some of you may have taken surveys available online that sometimes quite accurately pinpoint the area of the country you are from. These surveys include questions about how you pronounce different words. How do you pronounce these words: *mountain*, *crayon*, *caramel*? Do you pronounce the *t* in *mountain*? Do you say "crey-ahn" or "crey-en" or "cren"? Do you say "care-a-mel" or "car-mel" or both depending on whether it is a candy or a topping? The surveys also often include questions about the words you use: What do you call the little bug that rolls into a ball? A roly poly, a potato bug, or something else? How do you refer to a group of people: "You all," "you guys," or "y'all"? We all have some differences in our language.

There is a natural tendency to describe these variations as being right or wrong; the majority of linguists I know, however, are more interested in describing or noting the differences without an evaluating judgment. For me, it is simply amazing to hear and see the many variations in language use.

Just as each of us is unique in our language use, we are also unique in our interests and in the gifts we bring to the area we choose to study, whether that be business, engineering, nursing, science, mathematics, humanities, education, or the arts. Just as my colleagues have done, use your gifts in whatever you choose to do; make your unique contribution. As I interact with students in my classes, in the office, and in other ways, I am filled with hope. I see students who are attentive in their

studies, who are curious and excited about learning, and who want to apply what they learn to real-life settings. I see students who bring with them unique abilities and experiences. I believe I can say with confidence that we—that is, the faculty, staff, and administration at BYU—see your diligence, determination, and daring to bring about good in the world, and it fills us with hope for the present and for the future.

A short time ago my husband, Larry, and I went for a walk in our neighborhood park on one of those windy days we had in April. Several people were flying kites. They were multicolored kites that soared in the sky; some swayed back and forth, and one was so high you could barely see it. I thought about how we are like those kites, with the potential to soar in the sky and reach great heights. I thought of my colleagues and their contributions. I thought about my students and the great possibilities ahead of them.

Later I also thought about examples of people I have known or read about who, with their great capabilities, seem to have climbed out of sight, like a kite that has broken off from its string. Solely focused on accomplishing their goals, they became self-promoting, selfish, and willing to compromise standards to get what they wanted. Some may say that in these cases the ego takes over; King Benjamin called it "the natural man" (Mosiah 3:19). Robert L. Millet, who was a professor of ancient scripture at BYU, described the natural man this way:

*Acting without the Holy Ghost, the natural man can be proud, obsessed with self, overly competitive, reactionary, fiercely independent, driven by desires, appetites, worldly acclaim, or one who yields himself to the harsh and the crude.*¹

At the other extreme, I thought about examples of people with great promise who have not reached their potential, like a kite that can't seem to get off the ground or that begins

to rise only to fall back down. Sometimes this happens because of fear or because they may feel insignificant, discouraged, or anxious. For some reason they lack the confidence to fully accomplish what they are capable of doing or become who they are capable of becoming.

One way to counteract either of these potential pitfalls is to be anchored, like a kite is with its string. There are many ways we can be anchored, but let me suggest that one of the most powerful anchors is to know who you are. You are a spirit daughter or son of our Heavenly Father. Most of us here today know this. We have heard and sung the song “I Am a Child of God” for as long as we can remember. As young women we recited the words “We are daughters of our Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we love Him.”² We read in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” that “all human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny.”³ This knowledge is not new to us. We are beings dual in nature: we are both physical beings as well as spiritual beings.

However, in order for this knowledge to provide an anchor for us, we need to not only know it in our minds but also understand it in our hearts and apply it in our lives each day. Some seem to have the gift of being able to do this with ease. For most of us, however, it takes time and practice to really connect to our true spiritual selves. It takes dedicated focus to make our way past the social masks we wear, the protective defenses we have put up, and the unproductive or negative thoughts in our minds. I encourage you to make every effort to connect with your true self—your spiritual self—for when you are securely anchored with this understanding, you can better negotiate this life in many ways.

I would like to focus on five ways that knowing our true selves will help us.

1. Recognizing Our Potential

When we understand who we are, we recognize our own potential. Our true selves are not fearful. The anxiety, the self-doubt, and the other beliefs that stem from our experiences—real as they are and important as they are to our mortal existence—are not part of the true self. While the trials and challenges we face may be difficult, we are taught that they are needed for our growth, just as a kite needs a strong opposing wind to soar. We can meet these challenges better, however, as we remember our true self, which has an eternal perspective. In a devotional address given at BYU in March 1999, Elder Jeffery R. Holland said:

*Paul said to those who thought a new testimony, a personal conversion, or a spiritual baptismal experience would put them beyond trouble, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, **after ye were illuminated**, ye endured a great fight of afflictions” (Hebrews 10:32; emphasis added).*

*Then came this tremendous counsel . . . : **Cast not away therefore your confidence**, which hath great recompence of reward. . . . [Hebrews 10:35 . . . ; emphasis added] . . .*

This opposition turns up almost anyplace something good has happened. It can happen when you are trying to get an education. It can hit you after your first month in your new mission field. It certainly happens in matters of love and marriage. . . .

*. . . Yes, there are cautions and considerations to make, but once there has been genuine illumination, beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don’t give up when the pressure mounts. You can find an apartment. You can win over your mother-in-law. You can sell your harmonica and therein fund one more meal. It’s been done before. Don’t give in. **Certainly don’t give in to that being who is bent on the destruction of your happiness.** He wants everyone to be miserable like unto himself. Face your*

doubts. Master your fears. “Cast not away therefore your confidence.” Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you.⁴

2. Seeing Others’ Potential

When we understand who we are, we not only recognize our own potential but recognize that others are also spiritual beings with their own potential. We understand that all persons are of infinite worth and that we are not superior or inferior to anyone, no matter their circumstances—whether they are wealthy or poor, famous or unknown, sophisticated or simple, learned or uneducated; whether they have physical or mental disabilities; or whether they are just plain difficult to get along with or not. We respect all regardless of race, color, creed, cultural differences, educational differences, and behavior. When we see through the eyes of our true self, we see others as who they actually are—spiritual sons and daughters of God. When we understand who others are, we act differently toward them. We become more compassionate and try not to cause harm to them.

President Thomas S. Monson gave an example of a missionary who saw others in this way. He described a time when N. Eldon Tanner, who was then an assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve, had interviewed a successful missionary, asking him about what made him so effective.

The young man said that he attempted to baptize every person whom he met. He said that if he knocked on the door and saw a man smoking a cigar and dressed in old clothes and seemingly uninterested in anything—particularly religion—the missionary would picture in his own mind what that man would look like under a different set of circumstances. In his mind he would look at him as clean-shaven and wearing a white shirt and white trousers. And the missionary could see himself leading that man into the waters of baptism. He said, “When I look at someone that way, I have the

capacity to bear my testimony to him in a way that can touch his heart.”

President Monson went on to say:

We have the responsibility to look at our friends, our associates, our neighbors this way. Again, we have the responsibility to see individuals not as they are but rather as they can become. I would plead with you to think of them in this way.⁵

3. Being Willing to Forgive

When we understand who we are, we are willing to forgive. When someone wrongs us, intentionally or not, we may initially feel offended. However, carrying around a chip on our shoulder becomes a heavy burden to bear, and no one profits by it. With the understanding that we all are dual in nature and that at this moment perhaps the very imperfect, fallible part has taken center stage, we can take a step back, take time to pause, and reach inward to the true self and forgive others as well as ourselves. When conflicts arise, as they certainly will, we can take a moment to see through whatever is going on and see the other person as a son or daughter of God. What I am suggesting is that we look beyond the behavior. This doesn’t mean that we allow others to take advantage of us or that we condone negative behavior, but it does mean that we give others the benefit of the doubt.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf reiterated this idea when he said:

Each of us is under a divinely spoken obligation to reach out with pardon and mercy and to forgive one another. There is a great need for this Christlike attribute in our families, in our marriages, in our wards and stakes, in our communities, and in our nations.

We will receive the joy of forgiveness in our own lives when we are willing to extend that joy freely to others. Lip service is not enough. We need to purge our hearts and minds of feelings and thoughts

*of bitterness and let the light and the love of Christ enter in. As a result, the Spirit of the Lord will fill our souls with the joy accompanying divine peace of conscience.*⁶

4. Giving and Receiving Freely

When we understand who we are, we give and receive freely. When Jesus was teaching the Twelve Apostles as they were about to go out and preach the gospel, He said, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Because we understand that we are all spiritual beings, we freely give to others—not for recognition but because we know we are all connected as part of God’s eternal plan. Probably the most lasting gifts are those we give of ourselves—our time, our talents, our love, and our appreciation. This idea is captured in one of Emily Dickinson’s popular poems:

*If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain*

*Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in Vain.*⁷

Not only do we give freely, but we also receive freely. We recognize the gifts we receive each day. We recognize the gifts from nature—a sunrise, a rain shower on a summer’s day, or a blossom. We welcome gifts from others—a smile, a listening ear, or a shared experience. We receive these everyday gifts and recognize the abundance that surrounds us.

5. Recognizing That Heavenly Father Loves Us

Lastly, when we understand who we are, we recognize that our Heavenly Father loves us. We understand more fully the importance

of the Atonement of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who opened the door so that we can live with our Father in Heaven again. How significant it is for us as spiritual beings to understand this gift, which increases the meaningfulness of these words from John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

We understand these words from an eternal perspective, knowing that because of the sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we can return again to the presence of our Heavenly Father. In the last general conference, Elder David A. Bednar said that having faith in Christ and understanding the power of the Atonement bring us hope. He continued by saying:

*The peace Christ gives allows us to view mortality through the precious perspective of eternity and supplies a spiritual settledness . . . that helps us maintain a consistent focus on our heavenly destination.*⁸

We all have probably heard the quote “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”⁹ By divine design this human experience carries with it challenges as we—imperfect beings that we are—struggle to negotiate these mortal experiences. However, as we gain an eternal perspective by connecting to our true selves, each mortal experience can become a spiritual experience.

I now return to our kite analogy: be anchored in order to soar. Although the words *anchor* and *soar* seem to be in direct contrast to each other, their combination brings great strength. I encourage you to take time each day to become securely anchored in the understanding that you are spiritual beings, sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father. At the same time, I encourage you to soar, to not be afraid to meet your full potential, and to seek out and make your unique contribution

to humanity, whether that be as a CEO in a large company, the head of a small business, a scientist discovering new ways to combat diseases, a young mother struggling to best know how to teach her children who they are, a nurse, a writer, a counselor, or a musician. Understanding your true self allows you to see others as spiritual beings of great worth who you would not intentionally harm. It allows you to more easily forgive others and to give and receive. And, above all, it allows you to more fully appreciate the love of our Heavenly Father and the gift of the Atonement.

I bear testimony that Heavenly Father loves each of us; we are His children. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Robert L. Millet, s.v. “natural man,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 582.
2. Young Women theme, in *Young Women Personal Progress* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 3.
3. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995.
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence,” BYU devotional address, 2 March 1999; emphasis in original; see also Holland, “Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence,” *Ensign*, March 2000.
5. Thomas S. Monson, “See Others as They May Become,” *Ensign*, November 2012.
6. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Point of Safe Return,” *Ensign*, May 2007.
7. Emily Dickinson, “No. 919” (c. 1864), in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960).
8. David A. Bednar, “Therefore They Hushed Their Fears,” *Ensign*, May 2015.
9. Quote often attributed to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.