

## The Meaning of Religious Life

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"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.  
" Luke 9:23

There are many ways of life. Some people live in the mountains, while others live on the seashore; some live in urban areas, while others live in the countryside. Some people choose to become physicians and teachers, while others become farmers and factory workers. Finally, some people lead secular lives, while we are leading religious lives. There are so many different lifestyles that we can see. We each have only one life, and we must pick one of them.

What is the difference between the religious life and the secular life? Is it that religious people don't eat so much, and secular people eat a lot? When religious people are hungry, they go to MacDonal'd's, buy a Big Mac, and eat; but secular people do the same. If we use this criterion, we don't see much difference between religious and secular lifestyles.

### **One who Responds to God's Call**

In actuality, what is the true meaning of being religious? To be religious means to be connected with God. Without God, there can be no religion or religious life. The religious person is one who responds to God's call and wants to live together with God. God may call you and say, "My son, my daughter, come with me." If you don't want to follow, but rather go off on your own, that is not the religious way.

When Peter was fishing, he was not living a religious life. Yet when Jesus came to him and said, "Follow me," he forgot his boat, his fishing net, his fish-everything-and just followed. Peter heard the voice of God in Jesus' words, and was moved by the invisible power emanating from him. At the very moment that Peter responded to the voice of God speaking through Jesus, his religious life began.

When we respond to God, what kind of life do we embark upon? How does it differ from our previous secular life? The voice of God is very different from the desire of our flesh. Because of original sin and the crucifixion, Satan has a condition to work through our physical bodies. Satan always works against God. Therefore, man always hears two voices, both from within and without; it is often very difficult to discern between them. For example, while you are praying at night, one voice within may say, "Pray more!" Then another voice will say, "It's okay: you can sleep. You have to take care of yourself. You can pray in the morning." Instead of praying, you might go to bed and wake up late the next morning-too late to continue praying.

### **The Importance of Self-Denial**

The difference between the religious life and the secular life becomes very clear: when we start to lead a religious life, we always have to deny ourselves, particularly the desire of the body. Religious life begins with self-denial. It is not just a matter of reading the Bible or attending Sunday service; religious life

involves routine disciplines every day of our lives.

Why is self-denial necessary? Self-denial is necessary to fulfill the purpose of religious life. What exactly, then, is the purpose of religious life?

Someone is calling us-but also, we are calling back to someone. The voice which is crying out from within comes from our true inner self, our original mind, which is the reflection of God. In essence, we are children of God. It is very natural that, as children of God, we should be calling out to Him. Man wants to jump back into the very heart of God, to embrace God, and be embraced by God. Our religious life, then, stems from our desire to return to God. It is this inner desire which attracts people to religion and inspires them.

When we are embraced by God, our hearts and God's heart will quiver with joy. At that moment we can feel real fulfillment. That is what we are striving for. Even if we don't realize it sometimes, our original minds are calling out to God from morning until night. Thus religion is not only God's calling to man, but man's calling to God.

### **Search for Truth**

We must deny ourselves in order to receive guidance and revelation from God. This is why, in the past, spiritual luminaries and founders of religious movements usually went to some secluded place to pray and search for truth. Buddha sat under the Linden tree for six years until he reached the realization of universal truth. Through such effort, he laid the foundation of Buddhism. Although we are not experts in Buddhism, we know that it contains a deep understanding of truth.

Much of Jesus' life is still unknown. The Bible provides some basic facts about when and how he was born. It tells of one incident when Jesus, at the age of 12, was found in the temple talking with priests who were amazed at the depth of his wisdom. Yet from that time until he was thirty, almost nothing of his life is recorded.

We can well imagine, however, that this 18-year period must have been a very important time, during which Jesus had to prepare for his public mission. He must have spent time in the mountains and desert, praying to find a solution to the problems and suffering of this world.

Father went through the same course. At the age of 16, he received a revelation from Jesus. Jesus appeared to him and gave him his special mission. After that time, his life changed: he had to conduct serious internal research to discover the formula by which the suffering of humanity could be ended. The major religious figures of this world must all pass through a course in which they deny their physical lives and their own desires to find the will of God.

Centering on True Father, the religious life which we are leading is not easy, but it is very precious because it is a shortcut to reaching God. We are faced daily with the choice between doing what is difficult and doing what is comfortable. The religious person chooses the more difficult path so that more blessings can come to others.

### **You Lose Nothing by Sacrificing**

One day, Father told a hypothetical story that typified the course of religious life. Imagine, he said, that a missionary went to a faraway country. When he started to preach the Christian gospel or the Principle, people could not understand and instead, they started to accuse and persecute the missionary and tried to force him to stop. The missionary continued, and the people got so angry that they cruelly beat him to death, and threw his body into a ditch. Police came to investigate, and soon discovered that the missionary didn't do anything wrong at all. He had just tried to bring the message of God and serve the people of the nation. The contents of his work were then made public, and the people who killed him came to realize that the poor missionary didn't intend any harm, but instead intended to help them. They began to feel so sorry.

Then a second missionary came, and the people flocked to him eagerly, asking, "What is your message?" Many people listened, understood, and joined the missionary in his effort to serve the nation and the world.

Actually, the people didn't come to hear the second missionary: they came to hear what the first missionary really wanted to say. Then, through the message, the people could find true happiness and the will of God could prosper.

By giving his life, the first missionary could bring happiness to the people. This is the religious way of life, Father said; this is the true meaning of indemnity. By sacrificing themselves, religious people can bring joy to others. Through the new life that people receive and the gratitude that they feel, great

blessings can come back to those who sacrifice, as the first missionary did. Many people think that by sacrificing, they lose; but actually, the reverse is true.

There is a Japanese missionary to Nigeria here with us today. I visited Nigeria, and I know that he is loved by many, many Nigerians because he has been serving and sacrificing himself for the sake of the nation. He is always surrounded by scores of young people.

Another missionary who was working in an African country was jailed, tortured, and then kicked out. But he still would not give up. He traveled hundreds of miles through the jungle to the borderline of his mission country, where there was a river. He built a mud house on the shore of the neighboring country, living together with his wife and baby without electricity, with the constant danger of disease, and surrounded on every side by primitive peoples. He only has a desire to save his country and prays constantly from the other side of the border. The people of his country can cross the river to come and visit him, but he cannot go to visit them. By living there on the border, he can still meet and talk with the people of his mission country. He is determined to continue until this nation is saved.

### **How to Gain Victory**

In 1980 Father called the overseas missionaries back to America and delivered a special message. This message was not kind. He never once said thank you, nor did he offer any words of admiration or praise. All that we have we are investing for the sake of America, the richest nation in the world. Father said that if we gave even one-tenth of this amount to Africa, not only one but two or three African countries would be saved. There has to be a deep reason for this. Father knew that the missionaries were wondering why they would not be given money, but he wouldn't tell them; instead, he just told them to go back to their mission countries and suffer. "Am I cruel?" he asked them.

One day the time will come that the heads of state will invite Rev. Moon together with all the dignitaries of the nation for a state dinner. At that time, I will invite you to join my table. I will introduce you, and you will have a chance to give your testimony-how you were persecuted, jailed, tortured; how much you suffered and shed blood, sweat, and tears for the sake of that nation. The people will absolutely break down and cry, and from that moment, that nation will be your nation.

So I am not cruel. This is the meaning of religious life, and this is how you can win the victory. The whole nation will come to cry for you, and the people will say, "We are sorry. We did not understand you. Please forgive us. Tell us what we can do for you." You will become the eternal spiritual father of that entire nation. But if you were given a lot of money enabling you to live in a house that is many times better than the houses of the native people, who will come to you in tears of gratitude and dedication? No one. This is the reason that I tell you, "Go and suffer."

In the past, this was true; it is true now; and it will still be true in the future. Anyone who sacrifices himself for the sake of God and for the sake of others will never perish but will prosper eternally. This is the meaning of religious life.