

The Chung Pyung Providence - Parts One and Two

Michael Downey
August 8, 2018



Part One: So this is Korea

I first went to Chung Pyung Lake, as it was known then, in 1996 for the forty day workshop. Back in the day it was quite primitive with sleeping facilities and lecture halls in tents. They were nice tents. I had a 'great experience' as the saying goes. I always do well at workshops because I am always 'all in'.

There were plenty of Americans and Europeans at the 40 day and Michael Jenkins coordinated the westerners. We climbed the mountain every morning, read aloud in unison from Exposition of the Principle and of course the main activity was the clapping/ansu sessions. My favorite thing was when I had a chance to beat the drum to keep time during the clapping/holy song sessions. I put all my effort and energy into all the activities without hesitation. It seems that it was a time just prior to the structured ancestor liberation based on a payment schedule. We were told to liberate our ancestors through clapping/ansu/holy song sessions. I guess we were just freelancing.

Testimonies and reporting of spiritual experiences was encouraged. It was the thing to do and I, like a lot of others, began actively seeking and cultivating spiritual experiences that could be testified to. I began to imagine that I could feel and then see and hear the young Americans who came to Korea during the 1950-1953 Korean war. They seemed to be saying to me "We came here and we wanted to go home. We never wanted to die here. Don't let us have died in vain". Of course I assured them that they had saved Korea and saved True Parent's life. They had not died in vain. Even now as I write this the tears are flowing. I cried and testified that I had liberated these forgotten souls. A legitimate spiritual experience or the product of group hysteria, to this day I am not sure. There were plenty of tearful testimonies during those 40 days.

Of course it was not all sunlight and birds singing. There was a lot of strange stuff going down. The night I arrived it was past ten o'clock and after registration I was sent off to find the 40 day workshop brother's tent. Now I have never been a refuge on the run escaping dire conditions. But I swear to God I know what it feels like. I got to the brother's tent exhausted and more than a little confused. Inside the tent I encountered a mass of snoring, moaning, coughing, and farting male humanity. Every square inch of floor space was occupied. They were stretched out in what we called in the Marine Corps, snout to bristle and ass hole to belly button. It didn't matter I needed sleep. I chose a likely spot and wedged myself between two warm smelly bodies. The early morning piss calls required a mixture of delicate balance while tip-toeing through the bodies and a willingness to step on flesh when unavoidable. Good thing these were basically religious people or the temper flare ups would have surely turned to violence. In the morning the schedule began.

There was no dining hall per say at that time. All meals were set up and served outdoors in what could best be described as a picnic area. There were a limited number of tables but most people got their plate and stood up to eat. There was a vinyl tarp stretched overhead presumably to shield the diners from inclement weather. The first seven days of the workshop the weather was bright and clear and the mealtime atmosphere was festive. On the eighth day the heavens opened and the monsoon rains poured down continuously. Without rhyme, reason, or explanation the same day as the rains came, the overhead tarp was taken down. For the next ten days all stood in the pouring rain and bolted down waterlogged food. What did it mean? Nobody knew.

One day we woke up and the combination bath house and toilet was boarded up. Plywood was nailed over the door and windows. There was no way in. For the brothers it was a minor inconvenience and we

stepped into the tree line to answer nature's call but for the sisters it was an emergency and I saw a lot of poor souls wandering around in great distress. The bath house never reopened and a couple of enterprising brothers pried the plywood off one of the windows and we were able to crawl into the dark and retrieve our toilet kits that we had stored there. Eventually they brought in a string of porta-potties for sanitation. Again no explanation was forthcoming.

On another day we woke up and as usual we started up the mountain for prayer. To our utter astonishment the trail was gone, just gone. Where I remembered the trail had been the day before, the trail had disappeared and in its place were newly planted trees. Of course nobody knew why.

The food was also a big problem for a lot of people. The food was basic Korean fare. Rice, kimchi, soup, and a few side dishes is what is served in any Korean institutional setting. There was even a little fish or meat sometimes. For Koreans and I suppose for Japanese, who's everyday staple is rice, it was fine. For westerners who are used to more variety it was sometimes unbearable. I know a couple of people who survived the forty days on only canned tuna fish bought in the store.

Likewise sleeping and sitting on the floor was painful for many westerners. I never saw a bed, chair, or sofa while I was there. I later learned that Koreans LIKE to sit on the floor. They are more comfortable on the floor than on chairs. For most westerners, excluding yoga practitioners, it was a test of endurance.

I put up with all these things with an attitude of challenge. Hell I was an ex-marine and ex-MFT. I have slept in holes, under cars, eaten c- rations, and lived off the land. There were other things that were more disturbing. We were told that our bodies were filled with, infected so to speak, with millions of tiny evil spirits. For me, at that time anyway, this was totally off the page. It was so outside of my own view of reality based on my experience in life that it didn't even merit a response and so I ignored it.

Another thing was angels. There was plenty of talk of angels and angelic assistance. Like any refugee camp or other large concentration of unwashed humanity, communicable diseases were rampant. Except in the most serious cases people were told it was caused by evil spirits and they should work harder and shake it off. People who wanted to go into town and see a doctor were told by Mrs. Richardson that it was not advisable because the angels who were protecting us could not go outside the front gates and we would lose their protection. It was so outrageous that I laughed. What was more outrageous is that people accepted it.

One day I noticed a crowd, mostly Japanese women, gathered at the base of one of the special trees and staring up in what can only be described as rapture. I joined them and also looked up into the branches of the tree. After awhile I asked somebody I knew what it was all about. She said "look can't you see them?" "What?" I asked. "The Angeles in the tree". I looked and looked and looked and guess what? Not even one angel. Later a photo was circulated purporting to be millions of angels appearing as points of light in the tree. It dawned on me that what was going on here was a classic case of mass hysteria. It was not unlike what happens in many religious traditions and is more about the intense desire of believers than about actual phenomenon. Think Our Lady of Lourdes, statues that weep and paintings that bleed. In a way it was positively medieval.

On my return to the states I chose to forget the strange things and use the experience as a chance for revival. In my absence the providence at Chung Pyung grew exponentially.

Part Two: Eyes Wide Open

In 1999 Father called all State Leaders to a meeting in Kodiak, Alaska. He also called leaders from Japan to come. He made trinities with one Korean one Japanese and one American leader and ordered a thirty day exchange program between the American and Japanese leaders. Father talked to us about people from the three nations making one heart and even living together. It was a beautiful ideal.

At that time I was the state leader of Washington State and was sent to Miyazaki Japan. Wow!!! My eyes were opened. Compared to the American church organization the Japanese organization was a much bigger well oiled machine. They treated us, what passed for the leadership of the US church, like VIPs. I was toured around in the back seat of a limousine, was taken to expensive restaurants for most of my meals and given pocket money with no receipts required. I sat in on staff meetings that were held twice a day and was provided with an interpreter. I was taken to various local groups where I stood up and testified to large assemblies of members. They hung on my every word. It was really heady stuff.

Of course we all knew that Japan was the Eve nation in the providence and was responsible to raise the funds that were required to save the world. Everyone had heard testimonies of the hard working sacrificial members who were raising blood money. We tasted a fraction of this culture and lifestyle on MFT.

The top leaders seemed to be up front when explaining their operation. When we arrived in Tokyo we went as a group to the headquarters and were briefed on the operation. The vice president of the church spoke to us in detail about how they raised funds. It went like this. Japan is a Buddhist country and Buddhist beliefs permeate the culture and form the basis for how people think. When Japanese people are unhappy or meet difficulty and misfortune they believe that the cause is that their ancestors did evil things

and the solution is to resolve those evil deeds by doing good deeds today. Our members contacted people and built a network. They counseled their contacts repeatedly about how to solve their unhappy circumstances. They offered them an array of products that had spiritual properties. If they bought/donated money, their ancestor's misdeeds would be erased and they would be happy. The products ranged from ginseng tea, personal stamps, to marble vases, temples, and statues of the Buddha. Their monthly, weekly, daily, and even hourly goals were huge.

At the regional headquarters in Miyazaki I was able to observe firsthand how they managed the operation. It looked nothing like the family, movement, or church that I had joined. The headquarters building was an eight story mixed use building with some living space, offices and meeting rooms. In the main hall where large meetings were held, there was a low stage with an altar on which were placed pictures of True Parents, Heung Jin Nim, Dae Mo Nim, the photo of True Mother's mother, and the Gulfstream jet that they were determined to buy for True Parents. Every meeting began by bowing to the altar and reciting the Family Pledge in Korean. Staff meetings consisted of various leaders reporting on their goals and the daily efforts of the members to meet their goals. There was a heavy emphasis on testimonies of the miraculous, often last minute, work of the spirit world to make a goal. Same as MFT only it was on a much bigger scale. I saw nothing of the personal life of leaders or members.

There was some nominal witnessing effort from a video center that I visited. I spent one day fundraising with small donation products going door to door. I was told this kind of activity was only used for training younger members. The main effort was the marble vase donation activity. One day I was taken to visit a Buddhist group that was waiting for the return of the Buddha. They had accepted True Father as the returned Buddha. They were actually a parallel movement that also raised funds. They were absolutely Buddhists and had nothing to do with what I thought of as the Judeo-Christian foundations of the Unification Movement. Probably many members were aware of these activities in Japan and I was, vaguely as well but to see it drove home the huge cultural gap that existed in the movement.

I later discovered that his group was not a main line Buddhist group but was a group that liberally mixed Buddhism, shamanism, and animism. The founder was a Japanese woman psychic who did healing and fortune telling in her native Hokkaido. She merged her group and a local stone worshipping group with the Unification Church. They recognized Moon Sun Myung as the returned Buddha.

Next we moved as a group to Korea to meet the Korean third of our trinity. Our time in Korea was a lot shorter than in Japan. The first activity was a meeting with True Parents at the Hannam Dong Residence. Father sent us off on a three day bus trip to visit historic and cultural places around Korea including mountains, museums, and holy places. Of course we visited a Dae Mo Nim Museum, the old Headquarters Church in Chum Pa Dong, and the holy places in Busan where True Parents wrote the Principle and began the church. It seemed to me that Unification Church culture fit almost seamlessly with Korean culture.

One day we visited Kyung Ju, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Shilla. Bul Kook Sa, Buddhist nation temple, is a huge temple complex with prayer halls, lecture halls, and pagodas. I wanted to know who built it. I asked several people and got the standard answer. It was built by the king in filio devotion to his parents. But I didn't want to know who commissioned or ordered it built, I wanted to know who actually built it with their hands and backs. Finally I learned it was built with corvee, that is required or forced, labor of the common people.

On the very next day after seeing the temple at Kyung Ju we visited the Chung Pyung training center. The Chung Pyung providence was in full swing at that time. Gone were the tents and porta potties. Built into the mountain side were plazas, a hospital, a prayer hall, a sauna bath house, and a three story lecture hall. The grounds were immaculately landscaped. All was new and reeked of new and unlimited money. When I saw the pagoda I immediately made the connection to Bul Kook Sa. It seemed like a new and improved version of the old temple complex at Kyung Ju. I had the same question; who built this? Obviously there were various architects and contractors involved but who paid for it? Of course the money came from members donating money to liberate their ancestors. It was not corvee labor, that common people were compelled to turn over a portion of their harvests or time for labor under pain of imprisonment or death. There was a different kind of compulsion in play. The Japanese church had the most members and they were already culturally primed to spend big time to liberate their ancestors. It was a revelation to me and I decided that I would not be a part of it. How about my ancestors? Will they rot in hell because of my faithfulness? After careful considerations I thought not. After all, where is the spirit world anyway? It's not up there some place as people believed in the past. Or pilots, astronauts, or astronomers would have seen it. If an unseen incorporeal world exists then it must exist in my own mind. Therefore ancestors must inhabit a place in my own mind. Communication or interaction with them must be within myself. Thoughts, feelings, and even compulsions exist and are often buried in my subconscious mind. Unrecognized and uncontrolled they become the cause of behaviors, good and bad. Behaviors are powerfully passed down to the next generation. If I recognize such bad impulses, resist them and thus not repeat bad behavior; have I not broken the cycle and 'liberated the ancestor' who passed it down to me. although it required a lot more self awareness, effort on my part, and time it was surely more legitimate than paying money to liberate my ancestors. I was sure this was right for me and I determined that I would not be donating money for someone else to do what I could and should do myself.

Koreans are nothing if not a religious folk. Many religions that originated in other places have taken root in Korea, including Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. They are all believed and practiced in unique Korean forms until today. The indigenous religions of Korea, totemism, animism, and shamanism, are the oldest forms of belief and practice. They arrived on the peninsula with the people who migrated from Siberia before the dawn of time. The uniqueness of the Korean religious experience is that many of these forms have mixed together to the extent that it is hard to separate one from another.

Shamanism as practiced in Korea can be traced to forms common in Siberia and Manchuria. There is no Korean word for Shamanism in the Korean language. Instead the derogatory word *mi shin* is used. This is the same word used for superstition. Female shamanists are called *moo dang* and their practice is called *mooism*. Male shamans are called *Bak soo*.

Shamanism is not an organized religion with a theology, organization, or an ordained clergy. In fact it is not even recognized as a religion in Korea. Instead it is a made up of freelance practitioners. The belief system and the *moo dang's* practice is deeply embedded in Korean village life. When folks move to the cities they try to leave village superstitions behind but they pop up in unexpected ways.

For those who have eyes to see, shamanism and its practice is everywhere in Korea. If you go into almost any small business or shop and look above the entrance door you will see a dried whole pollock. You may also see various stickers with good luck words in Sanskrit. At the formal opening of the concern they will have a ceremony with food drink and a pig's head. Guests of course stuff money in the pig's mouth for good fortune. In any neighborhood you will find a residence with a flag pole flying both a red flag and a flag with the Buddhist inverted swastika. When I asked folks what these were I got different answers. Some said they were Buddhist temples and others said they were fortune tellers. Later I found that they were both right. There are three main Buddhist orders in Korea. They are organized and hierarchical. They control orthodoxy and own the big temples. The big orders would disavow the small urban centers. They aren't really Buddhists. They are fortune tellers masquerading as monks.

At other times I encountered unorthodox monks and nuns in Buddhist garb wandering around. It was surprising that they often smoked and drank alcohol. When I talked with them they gave off a very different vibe than any monk I had conversed within the past. For a long time I wondered what was up with this. Not long ago I learned what was behind this. Shamanism is not legal in Korea. They can't own property or operate like other religions. In the world of religion they are an underclass. To avoid persecution shamans often have disguised themselves as Buddhist monks and nuns, shaving their heads and wearing the gray robes. They have also disguised shamanist shrines to look like Buddhist temples on the outside.

These shamans make their living by telling fortunes, selling amulets to attract good luck, to ward off evil, and when necessary, contact, communicate with and are mounted by spirits. When they are mounted they find the problem in the spirit world and, for the right price, placate the offending spirit. The *kut* or exorcism ceremony is elaborate, colorful and expensive. Blowing smoke, spitting alcohol, twirling sharp knives, walking on the knives, and conveying the spirit's message are all a part of the *kut*.

Today most Koreans will try to distance themselves from the past and consider such rituals as quaint. But many still go to fortune tellers and even pay for good luck charms and to buy new more fortunate names. It is impossible to overestimate the continued impact of the old religion on Koreans. The old ways often blend seamlessly with more modern religious beliefs. As a part of the bus tour, one day we visited the Chung Pyung training center. The Chung Pyung providence was in full swing at that time. I had been to a 40 day workshop three years earlier and was surprised at the fraud to describe the activities of Kim Hyo Nam infers that she intentionally set out to deceive folks. I don't think that is true. I'm sure she believes in what she is doing. I can best describe her as a *moodang*. Without understanding Korean shamanism and how deep it runs in the Korean soul we can't know who this woman is. Like any human endeavor it is difficult to know how things will end up at the beginning. Among the many spiritual mediums active at that time True Father selected her. I was present at East Garden when True Father questioned her and another Mrs. Kim about their activities. He asked those assembled if we believed her and how much we believed her.

It was after this that members were told to stop channeling spirits and all such activities had to be vetted by Kim Ho Nam. I believe that True Father recognized the situation for what it was. Members wanted or needed such activities and to minimize confusion chose one *moodang*. In a sense, we asked for it and we got it. It was clear to me that True Father's endorsement of Kim Hyo Nam was not 100%. She tapped into the Japanese need for such activities and was able to mobilize a lot of money. It is my contention that the same money could have been mobilized in a different way without the side effects of slipping back into superstition and opening the door to financial corruption.

I wrote this while Kim Ho Nam was still in the catbird seat. Whether she retired or was kicked out for corruption, it's sure she is no longer running the show yet the basic activities are continuing. If folks feel they want and need these rituals then I won't oppose them. As for me, I'll face outboard, pick up the heaviest burden I can bear, and carry on.