

From Schoolmate and Friend to Disciple and Follower - Part 1

Duk Moon Aum

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True Father and Duk Moon Aum (left)

Father and I were students in Tokyo at the same time, but Father's major was in engineering and my major was architecture. There were many Korean students in Japan at that time, and I was president of the Korean students in Tokyo. Father was very quiet; he never spoke loudly, went to coffee shops, drank, or mixed with other students. When I became president of the Korean students, I organized a student meeting, and for the first time Father stood up, spoke and sang loudly. This was how I began to know Father.

In those days, Korean students had to be very careful, because the Japanese secret police were very concerned about the Korean students' ideology, knowing that sometimes, deep inside, they were hostile to [Japanese] authority or, because of being idealistically motivated, were interested in Communist ideology.

Sometimes I visited Father's boarding house, where he and two other Korean students lived. Father was always very studious, and when I went to his room I saw Japanese, Korean and English Bibles on his desk; many passages were underlined and the margins were filled with many notes. On Sundays, I never found Father home, because he always went to a Christian church, no matter how bad the weather was that day. Later on, I found out that

he was a leader of some sort in a Korean church. Still, Father never asked me to go to church with him and never spoke to me about the Bible, so I didn't know much about that aspect of his life.



Refugees flow south away from the fighting, toward Busan

Our university program was intended to last three years, but because of the war situation, it had to be condensed into two years and six months. We were quickly graduated and had to return to Korea (this was around 1943). The evening before we left, I visited Father and spent the night talking with him. Our conversation lasted through the night.

I am the oldest son of my parents, and I realized that when I returned to Korea, my father would want me to get married. Since I knew that Father was a leader in the Korean church in Japan and that he would know many young women who attended church, I asked him to introduce me to some young woman of his acquaintance. Father looked through some photographs and picked out one woman, and we corresponded for about one year. Just as I thought, when I got home, my father urged me to marry. I explained to him that I was already writing to someone, but my father said that the combination of characters was not so good, and he was angry at me for not being loyal to him. He had chosen another girl and asked me to meet her. But when he told me her age, I felt she was too young, for if the Japanese police would come and take me away (as sometimes happened to young men at that time), it would be difficult for a very young wife to take care of a family. I wanted a more mature woman, someone closer to my age, whom I could ask to take care of things in case I had to be absent.



Korean families fleeing the war in January 1951 trek through the frozen countryside. Father was himself a refugee at this time.

Still, my father pressured me to meet the girl he had chosen. So my father and I went together to the girl's house. When we returned, Father and the woman with whom I had been corresponding were waiting at my home to meet with me. So I had to take them aside and explain with apologies that my father insisted that I marry another girl. Even so, Father came to my wedding and gave us a blessing message, praying that we would have many children.

The next time I met Father was in Busan, at the end of January 1951. I am almost sure it was January 30. I had been working as an architect on construction projects in Busan before the Korean War broke out. With the coming of the war [June 25, 1950], however, everyone had lost his job. Still, because I was an architect, I was soon able to find another job, working for a hospital, doing a type of construction work. It was winter time. Winters in Busan are not usually very severe, but that year it was very cold.

[Editor's note: Busan, the main city in the only corner of South Korea that had not been overrun by the North, was by 1951 swollen with hundreds of thousands of war refugees fleeing the savage conflict. People had trekked south even from Pyongyang, which was evacuated in December 1950. Father had been among those moving South, knowing he must find somewhere to recommence his work. He had arrived in Busan January 27, 1951, just a few days before he met up with his old school friend.]

Father Comes to Stay with Our Family

That January afternoon, I met a young man who looked familiar, but his external appearance was shabby and I had the impression that he was a beggar. But still, he looked at me as though he were acquainted with me. Then I recognized him. As students, we had talked with each other in familiar terms, calling each other by name. "Moon!" I called out and greeted him. I found out that because he had just escaped from North Korea, he was dressed in this fashion. I asked him when he had arrived and what he was doing. But he just smiled at me. Then I asked where he was staying.

"I just arrived yesterday, so I don't have a place to stay," he answered.

I invited him to my house. He hesitated because he didn't want to be a burden to me. If times had been more normal, he would not have hesitated, but conditions were so confused in those days. Even though he had nothing to eat or wear, still he hesitated.

But I insisted. "Don't worry; come and stay with us."

"I will accept your offer and stay for three days," Father answered. "For as long as you wish, you can stay with us," I repeated. This was how I brought Father to my house.

It was drizzling that day and Father's clothes were wet. He was dressed like a beggar, so I gave him my best clothes, my only good suit.



In Busan, makeshift homes were built on the outskirts of the city by the huge numbers of refugees.

Even though Busan is at the southern tip of Korea, it still gets cold at night; the temperature going down below freezing. Also, our rooms had no heating system. Therefore, I suggested that we go out for a drink. I had loved to drink, ever since my student days. In Korea, when people drink, they sit around a table with a fire and eat fish barbecued on it. I knew that Father didn't drink, but I told Father that he could accompany me and eat some sweets or fish. But he said he would rather not go to such a place, so we didn't go.

We ate dinner at my home, and during the meal, Father told us about North Korea and how he had come south with Kim Won-pil and Pak Chong-hwa. Mr. Pak had remained in Gyeongju, but Father and Mr. Kim went on together to Busan. As soon as they arrived, Mr. Kim began working in a restaurant, so he was not with Father when I met him. Therefore, assuming that Father was alone, I didn't invite Mr. Kim to join us.

My wife started to wash Father's clothes and mend them, and Father and I began to talk. "Since you were reading the Bible so faithfully during our student days in Japan," I began, "let's talk about Christianity."

"That's not a bad idea," Father replied. Then he started to speak. I had never heard the kinds of things Father began to relate to me, and as I listened to him, I felt an unusual power coming from my stomach.

My father had been a very devout Buddhist and he used to beat me whenever I went to a Christian church. Being such a loyal Buddhist, my father considered it very important to worship one's ancestors, but the Christian churches never talked about ancestors. Although I had never studied Christianity, sometimes when I was riding on a train or walking along a street, I had heard some Christian missionaries speak. These passing encounters had never attracted me to stop and hear more; but as I listened to the contents of Father's speech that night, I thought to myself, "If this is the essence of Christianity, I wouldn't mind being a Christian."

No doubts entered my mind as I listened to Father speak; rather, I accepted everything completely. I had been close to Father since our student days, and I knew him to be very sincere, totally honest, and very studious and diligent. Therefore, I had no trouble believing what he said. Besides, his words were so wonderful. In short, knowing Father's character had prepared me to believe what he told me. (It was because I trusted Father so much that I had earlier asked him to choose a wife for me.)

One day, two days, three days, four days, Father talked to me about the Principle, and I felt myself changing spiritually. It seemed like I was walking on the clouds. It was a totally new experience. I couldn't hold it all inside myself, so I had to share it with somebody. It seemed selfish to keep this wonderful message all to myself.