

My teeth chipped in Hungnam prison when I used them to make a sewing needle

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July 11, 1990

Chambumo Gyeong - Book 7. True Parents' Course of Suffering and Victory - Chapter 1. Suffering and Victory during the Japanese Occupation and in Communist North Korea - Section 3. Pyongyang and Hungnam - Transfer to Hungnam Prison



Photo date and location unknown

12. If you look at my teeth, you will see that some are chipped. They chipped in prison when I used my teeth to make a needle. Needles were scarce in prison. Since we could not buy them, we had to make them. In the fertilizer plant, we used hooks to bind up the bags filled with fertilizer. We used those hooks to make needles. We had to gently beat the end of the hook thousands of times, not strongly but rather gently, until it eventually became flat. We used a piece of broken glass to cut off the barb of the flattened hook. Then we sharpened it. The needle hole should not be round, so we bit it strongly with our teeth to make the hole oval-shaped. Finally, we had to cut it, but since we did not have any tools, we used our teeth again. While I was doing that, my teeth chipped. Now when I look at my teeth, I recall my life in prison.

Once I made my needle, news about it began to circulate. Every Saturday, inmates came to me to borrow my needle. Then, sitting like a king on his throne, I would lend the needle to them, saying, "You, take this and go! You, take this and go!" Because I helped people like this, they greeted me as I went out for work in the morning. You too should be able to make a needle in such circumstances. I thought that my needle worked better than any other needle in the world, since I had made it with all my devotion. (204-266, 1990/07/11)