

The Grace of Holy Songs: An Introduction to Holy Songs and Hymns

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Since the release of my book, *The Grace of Holy Songs*, published by Kogensha in 2008, which explained the background of holy songs based on True Parents' life courses, we have been receiving questions on holy songs that I had not been mentioned in the book. Therefore, we are releasing an irregular series -- *Sequel: The Grace of Holy Songs*, which I also wrote. As an introduction, we are exploring the roots of holy songs and hymns in this article.

Holy songs are heavenly treasures

While paintings and buildings extant from religious history are tangible legacies, music is an intangible legacy, an invisible form of art that one may inherit and express when performing or listening. This is how music has enhanced peoples' interaction with the invisible spiritual world and supported our lives of faith.

According to the Bible, when Saul fell into a state of confusion because of an evil spirit, David played the harp and the evil spirit departed. Furthermore, to Martin Luther, music is a gift from God which drives away the devil and makes people carefree, and it has the power to cut off the devil's influence and connect us with the sacred spirit world. [1 Samuel 16:23: And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.]

The holy songs of the Complete Testament Age especially are heavenly treasures imbued with True Parents' courses and the history of the saints. Inspirations that moved peoples' hearts when they made or sang these songs remain in the spirit world as unchanging energy. When we sing holy songs with sensation, the angels and good spirits in heaven come to earth and sing along.

According to one early member, Chizuko Kasuga Runyon, when she sang "Blessing of Glory" in front of True Father to welcome him to Japan, she clearly witnessed a group of Christian spirits including saints and martyrs gather around her and singing along in tears. We are indeed "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). This being the case, we sing "Grace of the Holy Garden" in the CheonBo chanyang session, a song that praises the opening of a victorious spirit world, so the rhythm of the song will open the door to the good spirit world.

Music is closely connected to the invisible world. Brilliant individuals who have gone down in history as "master musicians" had heard and expressed the music of the spirit world. I have heard that those dwelling in the spirit world are ceaselessly creating musical masterpieces and beautiful verses. I have also heard that an office in the spirit world is responsible for discovering, educating and training talented earthy people who could "catch" these masterpieces and express them. Maybe some of you reading this article today are receiving such training at this moment.

In 1978, True Father said, "When you receive applause for a musical performance, don't become flushed with your own success; return all cheers to the experts in the spirit world." This is a surprising remark for

musicians and artists. As Luther said, music is indeed "a gift of God."

The roots of holy songs and hymns

Music has such sacred and mystical power. In addition to such power, holy songs and hymns have the power of words. The power of words in holy songs and hymns are rooted in the Old Testament Psalms. The Psalms is an anthology of 150 psalms about one's laments, gratitude and happiness in daily life, or about a king's accession or peoples' suffering. They were written over a long period of time by many individuals and have been memorized and chanted, transmitting essence of the souls of people guided by God.

On reading the Psalms, I was often surprised to read psalms that begin with human-centric views. I believe many of you have also been surprised by the very up-front words used in some of the psalms and gasped, "Were you allowed to pray like that?" They complained of their sorrow or pain without politely disguising feelings. They were like little children desperately calling on their parents for help.

What surprised me even more was that God answered their call. Those who heard God's voice and saw his historical path were deeply moved and gained the power to move forward with him once again. This shows the path to spiritual victory that uplifts one's soul. The roots of holy songs and hymns are the path leading to God through the fight to separate from Satan. As such, a psalm, the original form of holy songs, was not written primarily for humans, but rather as an offering to God. Since its value exceeds that of burnt offerings, it is called "the sacrifice of praise" [Psalm 49].

To sing the psalm is a "religious service" and a spiritual fight to return to God

David is practically synonymous with the Psalms. He expressed just one hope, "God's presence is my life." He sought to hold services in God's presence, which is why he reformed religious service by introducing music into it, which was not common in Moses' time. David used various musical instruments and formed superb choirs.

Until the time of Babylonian Captivity, the tribe of Levi was mainly responsible for the choir. Their roots are in Moses and his older brother Aaron. In other words, they are the descendants of the people who survived the Exodus. When the Jews made the golden calf in the wilderness, the Levites received God's love for maintaining their faith. The name of one of the Levites, Asaph, appears in the Bible as one of the choral directors assigned by David. It is said that Asaph's descendants came to lead the choir after that. He is the great ancestor of choir.

When you were to listen to researchers of ancient Hebrew, you would be amazed by the devotion they put into training the choir. Four thousand out of thirty-eight thousand Levites were chosen for the choir, and 288 among them formed twenty-four groups of twelve singers who took turns pouring their hearts out to praise the Lord in front of the Ark of the Covenant in the shrine, twenty-four hours a day.

They were trained so they could meet the requirement to unite their hearts (spirituality) and voices (expression). During the period of David and Solomon, they allowed only those who had gone through rigorous training to the age of thirty to serve as members of the choir.

The Levites did not receive an inheritance such as land. They inherited the right to serve the Lord. To sing a psalm was a religious service of superb offering and an earnest prayer. It was a spiritual fight to return to God.

In early Christianity (Ecclesia), people passed down the psalms to the next generation by adding Jesus'

story within them. In times of suffering or in scenes of martyrdom, holy songs and hymns were with them. Jesus chanted a psalm before leaving for Gethsemane. Furthermore, he cried out the opening words of Psalm 22 on the cross.

People say that Jesus' cry "*Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?* (My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?)" proves his lament for being forsaken by God, but this is not true. When you read the whole chapter, you will see God's glory shine in the end. Jesus overcame his suffering on the cross and entered the spirit world in order to prepare a foundation for the Second Advent. Let us understand Jesus' heart who is still doing his utmost in the spirit world up to this day.

Music and truth that Judaism bequeathed

The power of music and truth implied within holy songs and hymns and the encouragement such power has given to people have been passed on through history to the central religions that have taken charge of God's providence, from Judaism to Christianity and on to us in this new era of FFWPU.

The FFWPU Choir Contest has marked its tenth anniversary. Not many organizations hold choir contests for the purpose of nurturing choirs rather than for entertainment. I cannot be but more grateful for those who have taken charge for this event. Endurance is indeed the power of prayer.

A choir to welcome the divine spirit to the altar! Such choir is about to be realized in our church. This is our pride and also our hope we must nourish with special care because usually, superb church has superb service and superb choir.

By the way, it is originally unlikely to play the piano or background music during representative prayers. This is something we must improve gradually. If you ask yourself, "Would I play the piano during True Parents' prayer?" the answer is obvious. We adopted such custom in the early Japanese church in order to cancel out noise from daily life during services in private homes, and also to create an atmosphere where newcomers who pray for the first time can pray easily in workshops and services.

However, the music which used to be a "servant of prayer" have now become too habitual and audible. This can make your conscience follow the melody and distract the formation of the resonance sphere of your prayer. Getting rid of it may make you feel wistful at first, but as True Father said, "When you pray, you must listen to God's response as you listen to your prayer," we should become accustomed to pray without background music. However, this shall not apply to collective prayer.

To hold a deep root of prayer and focus on the stories that have carried the hearts of those who lived with God is like tracing a river to its headstream. There is endless source at the headstream. How wonderful would it be if we could hold such source of faith within us?

People will continue to sing on holy songs and compose new songs praising Heavenly Parent and True Parents in history. The inspiration will become our lineage and empower us. It will support our prayers and enrich our service by pouring water of life to our new culture. We sing in order to return to a loving atmosphere. Let us unite with the great power of heaven.