

## The tremendous privilege that the IOWC had in coming to Japan and Korea

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*Despite some Western influence, families in Japan still maintain many of the customs and traditions of their ancestors*

Rev. Sun Myung Moon in his sermon "The True Pattern of Family Life" said, "The materialistic people of the Western world must be taught by the Orient: way of life, in order to get close to God." Any Western person unfamiliar with the Oriental way of life in comparison to his own may judge this to be a rather extreme, perhaps even outrageous statement. However, there is deep meaning behind these words, as members of the International One World Crusade have come to know during their nine-month stay in the Orient.

Having read Rev. Moon's words we could feel the tremendous privilege that the IOWC had in coming to Japan and Korea. Also, we felt our responsibility to learn about the Oriental heart and way of life in order that we could derive from it the lessons that would help restore a more spiritual and moral West.

Although much has changed since the Second World War in the East I would like to describe the more traditional feeling of the pre-war time in order to explain the more essential values that are intrinsic to their way of life and which the West is almost void of at present.

As most of our stay in the East has centered on Japan I will specifically refer to its spiritual and emotional background. However since China, Korea and Japan are very connected through the common influence of Buddhism many of the traditional thoughts and feelings will be true of all three countries.

About 85 years ago a man came to Japan in order to flee from what he termed a cold materialistic Western society. His name was Lafcadio Hearn. It was in his writings that I found our own experience most successfully expressed.

His love of the East, particularly Japan, was extremely profound and penetrating. He not only married a Japanese wife but he married the entire spirit and tradition of Japan. He was a writer with the heart of a poet who perhaps above all others succeeded in interpreting the heart of the East for Western minds. Therefore I am glad to refer to his thoughts gained over a period of many years to help our Western brothers and sisters capture some of the feeling and background that makes the Orient of today.

Many foreigners have come to the East, some for money and trade and others because they are attracted by the cloud of mystery that seems to envelope that part of the world. However, few become more than spectators and they leave not really knowing any more than before of what goes on behind the passive faces and what is the meaning of their many customs and traditions. This is because, says Hearn, "... Life, either intellectual or emotional (since one is woven into the other) is composed of combinations of experiences ancestral and individual which have no really precise correspondence in Western life."

### **Ancient Teachings**

It has been said that no nation without a religion has ever developed. For this reason I want to begin by

explaining the religious foundation of Japan. Actually Japan today has no living religion that motivates the general populace.

Buddhism and Shintoism, the most prevalent religious teachings, are usually only associated with the individual's birth, death or marriage. However the thoughts and feelings derived from these ancient teachings remain. Buddhism taught its followers that all form is illusion and that they should not try to capture material beauty for itself but to seek the unchanging truth behind all things. I feel somehow that this concept and understanding is well characterized in some of the Buddhist paintings of nature.

These are extremely detailed and fine -- sometimes so fine and sensitive in color that it seems they were painting the feeling not the fact. Hearn expresses a similar impression in the following quote: "In the flushed splendor of the blossom burst of spring in the coming and the going of the cicadae, in the dying crimson of autumn foliage in the ghostly beauty of snow in the delusive motion of wave or cloud they saw old parables of perpetual meaning." In this sense those so-called inscrutable eyes of the East have for years been looking at the same sky and earth and water but seeing far more than the physical eye can see.

### **The Soul-Compound**

The Buddhist believed there was no constant law underlying creation except that of change; therefore he did not struggle against life. He became quiet in pain. Another reason for this passive and patient endurance was the idea of pre-existence. Orientals considered themselves not as individual selves. They did not think one had a soul in the Christian sense which passes on to the next life retaining its own individuality.

They had an entirely different conception of existence. They thought of themselves as being many selves or in Hearn's terms, "... as a soul compound, the concentrated sum of feeling and thinking of countless past lives." A person was thought to have many existences to pay off his "karma," since it was not believed possible to attain perfection in one lifetime. It was taught that with each new existence the soul compound changed; there was no constant ego. This was because according to Buddhism all are just parts of an infinite whole in which all feelings and thoughts are one.

Therefore the goal was not individual perfection of self but rather a selfless perfection of the whole. Nirvana is the state when the soul-compound has rid himself of all ego to remain only as perfect selflessness.

This Buddhist teaching is rather abstract and difficult. The Shintoists in a more primitive and simple form expressed the same thing. For instance, a simple Shintoist also thought of himself as having many selves. His internal struggle between good and evil he attributed to the conflict of his good selves with his more evil ones. It was his hope to free himself of the worst ones until only the best ones remained. It seems that, unlike Buddhism, the Shintoist did not believe in the complete decomposition of the selves or soul-compound into the infinite whole. What their belief should be was not exactly defined.

In any case, such teachings have caused a relative lack of egotistic individualism because they attributed greater value to virtue than to self. For instance, honor and loyalty to the emperor, country and family were considered more important than life itself. From such feelings came the kamikaze spirit of the samurai, the self-destructing heroism of the Japanese pilots in World War II and the solemn act of hara-kiri committed by a Japanese wife whose entire family and ancestry had been disgraced by the wrongdoing of her husband.

As I have just mentioned the importance of honor and loyalty to the emperor, let me elaborate on the position of the emperor and the attitude of the Japanese people to him. It may be difficult for democratic-thinking people to understand, but to the Japanese the emperor was irreproachable -- no one could utter a word against him. Every household had a picture of him, as well as every school classroom and office. In the mornings everyone would assemble in front of the picture to pay respects before beginning the day's activities. In a sense he was their god and they were his people.

Of course since the war things have changed; still, the older generation, although they may externally follow the direction of the government, in their hearts they are still deeply devoted to the emperor.

This phenomenon can be seen in the group cooperation of the Japanese people to rally around a leader. In Japanese society they are constantly looking for a father or central figure. It is in this characteristic that the Japanese have found both their power and their weakness.

### **Ancestor Worship**

Returning to the explanation of Japanese spiritual background I would like to clarify the nature of ancestor worship, which continues to exist even today. Hearn tells us that Shintoists believe that the world of the living is directly governed by the dead. According to the Shintoists all dead become kami, literally

translated as gods. However these kami do not have the characteristics which we attribute to God. They are not considered perfect or even very good.

By the Shintoists of that time they were considered superhuman simply because they had gone beyond death. Actually they are mere ghosts of humans both relatively good and bad.

Strange as it may seem to some of us, the Japanese believed that these kami partook in their daily lives, influenced all their thoughts, feelings, general wellbeing and even the weather.

Therefore they were very careful to secure their favor and to avoid their displeasure. They set up shrines and gave offerings to the bad kami as well as the good. In early times this was thought to be devil worship by the Christian missionaries, but the Shintoists, who had no conception of an absolutely good or evil spirit such as our Christian God or Devil, thought even the bad kami could be appeased because they believed in the intrinsic good of all people.

Out of these early beliefs have evolved emotions quite unknown to the West, in particular the strong and transcendent sense of duty to past, present and future.

Of these three the most foreign to us would seem to be their deep and loving gratitude to the past. For the West, although we have many details and records of past history, these do not inspire our hearts with love and gratitude. The western person approaches the past in a rather scholarly fashion, being quite analytical and critical.

### **Filial Piety**

It is very difficult for a Westerner to conjure up the feelings of an Oriental about his ancestors and his nation's history, especially if he does not believe in God or if he is a Christian without a belief in a real relationship between the dead and the living. The Oriental feels very indebted to his ancestors, including not only great men and leaders but all who have labored, suffered and lived that the present generation might live. The deep sense of filial piety of children to their parents extends beyond parents and grandparents to the dead. Deeply embedded in the subconscious of every Japanese, says Hearn, are the words "Never must we cause shame to our ancestors.... It is our duty to give honor to our ancestors."

In the East, family members are closely knit and dependent upon one another. They do not have the independent character of the West where the husband, wife and children all tend to stress their own individuality as separate entities rather than seeking to find their identity in the family as a whole. The Japanese always try to find value in the eyes of others; therefore mutual cooperation and respect are so important to them. The western attitude of "I don't care what anyone thinks about me" is very far from them. This is also the reason why they are not quick to give a direct answer to a direct question but choose to embroider it to make it as acceptable and agreeable as possible. In the past women were brought up to suppress any feelings of jealousy, grief or anger.

They were trained always to portray the outward calm and graceful manner of a perfect wife. Their primary duties were to cultivate the arts of sewing, cooking, tea ceremony and flower arranging -- in other words to occupy themselves solely with household matters pertaining to their position as wife. Hearn adds that a wife was expected never to reproach her husband even if he was well deserving.

It was her duty to woo him to goodness by "pure sweetness" alone. Also, the well-educated young husband was trained to respond gently to the most irate wife. Nevertheless, for all this self-control, the Japanese have, says Hearn, behind their mask of calm composure, the same feelings of grief, anger, and jealousy as their Western brothers and sisters.

### **Traditional Family Life**

In the traditional family the father stood in subject position, next the first-born son, his brothers and finally the wife and daughters. This extreme situation for women has changed very much since the war but it helps us to understand the much more objective, retreating manner of the Japanese woman who is still shy to give open vent to her emotions and who demurely hides her smile behind her hand.

In Japanese society the moral level is still much higher than in the West. The percentage of men who are chaste when they get married is almost as high as that of women, although the general standard has dropped considerably from what it had been before the war. Even today in many families marriages are still arranged by the parents. The passionate "love at first sight" which is so romanticized in the West is not considered as important as the establishment of a secure family base through the development of mutual respect for each other and each other's family, and filial piety in their children.

This report gives in no way a complete picture of Japanese nature but its purpose is served if at least part of the veil of mystery that has clouded our understanding of the East is lifted. As I have mentioned before,

many things have changed since the Second World War and since the time I learn lived in Japan. Today I would say the great majority of Japanese have no idea of the exact content of the religious beliefs that have so extensively influenced their way of life.

Also, they remember only vaguely the strict family traditions of the past. Perhaps most of all, I am told, they are losing the strong feeling of devotion to emperor, teacher, employer or family that in earlier times made them sacrifice their lives on the spur of the moment.

Rev. Moon said in the previously mentioned sermon, "The Western people are more or less tired of the materialistic way of life while in the Eastern world people are the other way around.... So in the Orient people are faced with the danger of losing what they used to have."

### **Helping Each Other**

It is obvious that we must help each other. The West must rediscover the precious values and morals that are buried in Oriental history and restore them to an even higher level before they are completely destroyed in the influx of Western intellectual materialism. In this way the material blessing given to the West can become the base for a higher moral civilization than ever before.

In his writings Hearn once used the following quotes. I would like to use them again since they reflect the essence of our beliefs and our present day situation.

From Ferdinand Bruntiere: "All our educational measures will prove vain, if there be no effect to force into the mind and to deeply impress upon it, the sense of those fine words of Laménais: 'Human society is based upon mutual giving or upon the sacrifice of man for man or of each man for all other men; and sacrifice is the very essence of all true society.'" Hearn ended saying, "It is this that we have been unlearning for nearly a century and if we have to put ourselves to school afresh, it will be in order that we may learn it again!"

As IOWC members we are truly proud to recognize these facts and to be actively involved in the re-education of society toward the goal of unselfish living in a God centered world.