

My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 65

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My wife and I have been watching a Japanese series called "Midnight Diner." Set in Tokyo's Shinjuku, the show features a small diner open from midnight till seven in the morning. As a result, many of the customers are drawn from the margins of Japanese society: Yakuza, strippers, prostitutes, bar hostesses, night shift workers, detectives, or businessmen who don't want to go home. The diner's owner and solitary cook is a taciturn and mysterious protagonist, with a long scar running from his forehead, across his eye, and down his cheek. He commands his space with authority, but will make anything requested by the customer, as long as he has the necessary ingredients. He serves all of his customers as special guests, who refer to him as "Master." The only time his ire might be raised occurs when one customer disrespects another or violates the harmony of the environment. The physical setting recalls "wabi sabi," the Japanese ideal for the tea ceremony of simple, humble, rusticity - except this would be an urban rusticity.



The Master welcomes everyone as they pull aside his doorway's "noren" and enter his shop. No matter their station in life, he offers a safe haven without judgment. Each customer brings a story or a conflict seeking a resolution. They often seek a word, or two, from the Master but much of the time, he simply listens empathetically. He barely speaks, yet the overwhelming feeling is compassion for his customers' circumstances. In the space provided by the Master's silence, the beleaguered or suffering soul often hears the voice of their own conscience and comes to an appropriate resolution. Very rarely does the Master intervene.

The single word best describing these stories is "kokoro," or heart.

Whether intentional or not, the Master is a Christ figure. Each soul approaches him for solace, and seeks a path of repentance and redemption. His deep empathic silence provides just enough space for customers to wrestle with themselves and find personal liberation, or at least a pathway through the thicket of their problems.

As each character's story unfolds, I cannot help but to think of our nights on MFT, blitzing the bars where the margins of society gathered to seek comfort and escape. We have met them all: the pimps, the prostitutes, the Johns, the bartenders, cops, transvestites, gays, broken men and women, lost and far from home. We could not judge them and succeed in our mission. Like the Master, we came as Christ and offered an opening for salvation: buy a rose and donate to God's Providence in America. As much as we were working for our cause and seeking to meet a personal goal, we were serving the people we approached. We did not come to judge or condemn, we came as the embodiments of God's love, literally the hands, feet, and mouth of Christ.

Somewhere along the way, I became judgmental. The confrontational politics of San Francisco, the disappointing losses on social and cultural issues, the setbacks to traditional morality in the courts, the utter frustration and sense of powerlessness in the face of reckless change, all of these combined to shorten my fuse and make me angry. At home, I would express this resentment over California's immoral Hollywood culture or "gay political agenda" or abortion rights or the "feminazis." The post-modern world simply made no sense to me. My children would listen, but I gave them no room to disagree or silence in which they could wrestle with themselves. I acted more like Zeus, throwing bolts of lightning, than like Christ, opening a path of salvation through love, welcoming all.

Somewhere along the way, I lost my children. They heard me, but did not heed me. They listened only to contend. They hid from me in the garden, ashamed of their nakedness.



As I write, I feel an immense sorrow welling up from my heart. The God of judgment is inaccessible. We still backpacked, raised Guide Dogs, laughed at dinner, swam together, kayaked and did all of those things we loved. However, there has been a loss of moral authority, a separation of heart. I can breach the divide and often early in the morning before the dawn, in the silence, I transcend our separation and settle in their hearts as a presence. And yet, our relationship remains incomplete, unsettled, and unfulfilled.

During my son J. first semester at Brown, he came "out" and told us he was gay. Our expectations shattered, my wife and I went into mourning. How can I describe our loss and disappointment? Not so much in our son, but in ourselves. In his high school years, when he most needed to speak to me, in my political rage and judgmental religiosity, I had been inaccessible. He suffered in silence. The thought breaks my heart. My anger had turned him from us and from religion. How could he approach God, when his parents were unapproachable?

By finally mustering the courage to disclose his orientation, the healing of our relationship began. It has been nearly eight years now and we have grown closer. I cannot judge my son. I live in a state of paradox, I am a Unificationist with a gay child. I understand his situation is not ideal but I love him as he is. As he is. J. is one of the most generous and compassionate human beings I know. He has volunteered with me in Zimbabwe and Vietnam, investing his whole heart and self in concern for others. He has suffered. And he has forgiven me. Now a doctor, in the second year of his internal medicine residency, he loves the practice of medicine and has repeatedly been acknowledged by his program for his attentive care of patients. I must trust in J, conscience, in his original nature, and have faith that my prayer will help God's love connect with the very ground of his being.



He phones me daily, just to talk. More than all the other grandchildren, he calls my 96 year old father to visit with him. He is by far, the most filial child.

My son has helped me grow in understanding and I hope, in love. The circumstances of our Heavenly Parent have become more tangible to me. The complications of our fallen state are so painful for God. I viscerally know that God's love reaches out to us, where we stand, and yet God's heart aches in longing for the mutuality and reciprocal love which is the fulfillment of His dream.

Like the Master, I am determined to engage the world I encounter without judgment but with love - as we did long ago on MFT. With compassionate words or in empathic silence, I want to leave the space for each prodigal soul to wrestle with themselves and advance in hope towards our

Heavenly Parent, who already is running towards them, to embrace them and welcome them home.

As long as it takes, I will persevere, till each soul is restored