

Traveling to Korea to celebrate Chuseok with True Mother in Chung Pyung

Mika Deshotel
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Mika Deshotel and her husband, Abe Deshotel, are a Second Generation Unificationist couple who are the pastors of the Family Church of Connecticut, based in the city of Bridgeport. Recently Mika was one of the U.S. leaders who traveled to Korea to celebrate Chuseok, the Korean holiday of the harvest, together with True Mother.

Background

I want to express tremendous gratitude to Rev. Demian Dunkley, the Vice President of Family Federation for a Heavenly USA, for giving me this precious opportunity to spend Chuseok in Korea with True Mother. He believed this Chuseok was an opportunity for younger leaders to attend a major celebration, and that was how I was asked to go: as the representative for Subregion 1 (the northeastern states). I also want to thank Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, Regional Chairman of Family Federation North America, for adding me in the group of people who went to Korea to represent America.

As I was considering travel options, I decided to go earlier than the rest of the American group because I really wanted to explore the Chung Pyung Heaven and Earth Training Center. The last time I had been there was 13 years ago, when I received the Matching and Blessing from True Parents. I wanted to take some time to see all of the changes and new buildings that make up the growing Hyojeong Complex. I couldn't wait to see the Cheon Jeong Museum, which had only been leveled ground the last time I was there. I also wanted to visit and pray at each holy tree, and to offer a prayer of gratitude in the Cheongshim Prayer Hall for all of the blessings I had received and lessons I had learned since leaving that place.

Arriving in Korea

I arrived at Incheon Airport at around 4:30 a.m. on Sunday morning, September 22, and took my time deciding how I would get to Chung Pyung. I was a bit nervous, knowing it had been so many years since I had been in Korea and that I had very little time to prepare myself with the basics of the language, not to mention the fact that it was not a completely safe time of day to travel alone, as it was still dark. After considering my options and taking some time to get my bearings, I decided to catch a limousine bus to Gapyeong County and then a taxi to our accommodations at Cheong Ah Camp. When I got on the bus, I immediately felt calm and that I was being taken care of. I kept thinking to myself that I was here in the Mother and Father Land, the land of True Parents, and I felt at ease and loved by the beauty of Seoul and the surrounding towns which I saw from my bus window. At Gapyeong Bus Station, I found myself being

looked after by a couple of ajumma (older women) until I found the taxi I needed. By 10 a.m., I finally arrived at my destination, which also goes by the name Cheongshim International Youth Center. To my surprise, the building in which I was staying was located just behind the Cheongshim Peace World Center, the site of the Seonghwa Anniversary and Cosmic Hyojeong Blessing.

When the taxi driver dropped me off at the Youth Center, the building looked completely desolate. The parking lot was empty, and there were "closed" signs on the front door. Even so, I noticed one door that was ajar, and I went in. Of course, there was no one at the front desk, but there were muffled voices and music coming from somewhere on a lower floor. After a short while, I saw a young girl who helped me to communicate with the office staff so that I could get my room key. This girl happened to know one of our students in Bridgeport because they both had been staff members at the summer's Global Top Gun Youth workshop. She was part of a group of Sun Moon University students who were practicing for the Chuseok performance the next day. It turns out, this group had been preparing for an entire year for the chance to perform for True Parents during Chuseok.



After dropping off my belongings, I immediately set out to find the Training Center. The girl who helped me told me it was within walking distance, but said she was too busy practicing with her team to take me, so I decided to find it on my own. I walked outside, back into the empty parking lot and headed down toward the Peace World Center. I could see the Cheon Jeong Museum to my right, in the distance, so it was a comfort to know I was right where I needed to be. At the bottom of the long hill I was surprised to see the Heaven G Burger restaurant right across the street from the Peace World Center. Inside, there was also a Kona Queens Coffee Shop. The coffee shop was open, but the burger joint was not. The barista had no idea where the Training Center was that I was talking about, so I thanked him and made my way down near a crosswalk when I noticed signs for the Training Center, which happened to be right up the road from where I was! Sure enough, as I walked along, I came upon the front gate where the attendant confirmed where I was going.

It took about six or seven minutes to walk up from the gate entrance to the main building, or Training Center, where Abe and I were blessed. Memories came back to me from that time 13 years ago. It was a February evening, and my sister and I were dropped off via taxi. We rushed inside, only to find our group was already upstairs waiting for True Parents. We did not know it at the time, but we would be matched that very evening.

I continued my way somewhat hurriedly past the Training Center, in large part because I was actually quite hungry and knew I'd have to find my way to Cheongshim Village in time for lunch, and I walked toward the Tree of Love. Just as Demian had told me, the old store that used to be there stood there no longer, and in its place was the Cheon Bo Won (Heavenly Genealogy Center). As I walked past that building toward the Cheong Shim Tower, or special monument that is supposed to connect heaven and earth, memories came back to me of Lunar New Year when we got blessed, waiting in line for udon noodles. One thing I immediately noticed to the right of the monument were picnic tables and a fenced-in playground. It brought a smile to my face to see these small efforts to make the place more family-friendly.

After taking a quick look around the tower, I approached the Tree of Love, offered a sincere prayer, and made my way up the hill toward the other holy trees. As I walked up the hill, past some of the lecture halls, I was reminded of a dream I had had with True Mother, one of my first, in which she encouraged

me to use my time in Chung Pyung to truly grow. In the dream, the overall message was to let go of any reservations, limitations, or fears about making mistakes and not doing things perfectly. This was the first of a few key experiences I had with Mother in my dreams in which I was encouraged to grow by trusting God's voice within me.



As I rounded the top of the hill, toward the Water of Life and Tree of Heart, I was surprised to find new buildings and the newly created Chinhwa Park, overlooking Chung Pyung Lake, which also had small playground equipment for children, picnic tables, a pavilion, and even some exercise equipment. As I prayed at the Tree of Heart, I was reminded that less than a month before, our American leaders had prayed at these trees and walked these grounds as part of a three-day condition of complete emptying and unification of mind and body, centered on True Mother's direction. I prayed with the kind of sincerity of heart I was imagining those brothers and sisters had had as they pledged to do all they could to fulfill their 430 Tribal Messiahship goals by Foundation Day 2019 and establish Cheon Il Guk by 2020.

One of the quotes that caught my attention, as I prayed at each tree and read the plaques that were placed so beautifully on the grounds, said, "Only when we are grateful for everything and feel sorry toward Heaven, will we prevent greed and open the way for Heaven to help us." These words from True Mother in 2015 really resonated with me, and I kept them with me throughout my time in Korea.

I made my way up to the Tree of Blessing, all the while in complete silence and contemplation. It was actually really easy to do that, because the whole Training Center was almost completely empty. There were only a handful of people whom I met while walking along the entire grounds. Even as I made my way down to pray at the Prayer Hall, I was the only one there as well. It was only as I was making my way back down to the front gates, after doing a quick loop around the Hyojeong Cafe and former site of the Water of Heaven, that suddenly one bus after another made its way up the hill, each filled with leaders in suits. I later found out that the Japanese leaders had just concluded their own special three days of jeongseong, to replicate the experience that our international leadership had had there, centering on Mother. I also found out that because of Chuseok, the weekend workshop at Chung Pyung probably had ended earlier so that families could visit their relatives, and this was why Chung Pyung looked so empty.

After exiting the Training Center, I went to find the Cheongshim Village, where our team was supposed to have our meals. It is actually within walking distance as well, along a fairly busy road with a nice sidewalk and crosswalk. It took me about 15 minutes to walk over there, and it is situated right next to the HJ Magnolia building, which houses a gift shop, beauty salon, coffee shop, and restaurant. The Cheongshim Village, which also goes by the name of "Silvertown," was just being built when I last visited. It wasn't until dinnertime that I finally met the rest of the American team, and we gathered to practice our performance for Chuseok later that evening.

Chuseok

Our team met up at 5:30 a.m. on Monday morning, Chuseok, to make our way to Cheon Jeong Museum. It was my first time back to the site, which was only leveled ground when I last left Korea, and it was absolutely magnificent. The structure is just enormous. It is one of those places where one could get lost, with winding stairways and secret doors. Our group joined with other leaders, and we made our way toward the back of the building to the Bon Hyang Won, True Father's resting place. I was told that normally everyone climbs a small hill to get there -- going around the building, I guess -- but this time we went through the building, up an elevator, and then up a small escalator. There were only about 70 of us in attendance there, and our time outside was quite short, compared to the pictures I had seen of years before. After an initial bow and prayer, we were directed to circle around the large earthen mound of True Father's burial site, where we lay hands upon it and said a short prayer.

It was this moment, laying my hands on Father's resting place, that was the most powerful experience for me while in Korea. Unlike many others who had attended True Father's Seonghwa in Korea in 2012, I felt I had missed my chance to really say goodbye and to offer myself to True Father when he passed. At that time I was going through my own struggles in the Movement, and my heart was distant. In the few years since then, I feel I've "made a comeback" in supporting God's Providence. I have felt so sorrowful to True Father for not really "getting it" while he was still alive. Since we had just celebrated the sixth anniversary of True Father's Seonghwa, my heart was yearning so much to give back to True Parents and to support them more than ever before, in a way to make up for my ignorance from the past. While I was at the Bon Hyang Won, placing my hands on True Father's resting place, the words that flowed from my heart were simply, "We love you, Father, and we don't want you to worry anymore. We attend you now on this Chuseok as the original Parents of all humankind." An intense energy flowed from the earthen mound into me, and then from me, back toward True Father. I walked away, realizing I had never really prayed like that before, completely letting go of myself and my own preservation and with a desire to simply give, not worrying about my own limitations or fears. It was an incredibly eye-opening experience, which affirmed my identity as God's and True Parents' daughter. I felt I could tap into my truest self and purest motivation while at the Bon Hyang Won.



After we left the Bon Hyang Won, we made our way to True Parents' Dining Hall. It was a very special place, pretty exclusive, and there was an intimate feeling in the room. As we welcomed True Mother, who looked absolutely perfect and beautiful in a red and white hanbok, there was a very light and happy spirit in the room and True Mother looked very happy to be there with us. After a toast and prayer, we enjoyed a wonderful meal of a special beef bone broth, simmered for 24 hours with pieces of taro in it, along with kalbi, sweet-and-sour shrimp, rice and banchan (side dishes). We also ate some songpyeon (Chuseok rice cakes) to mark the occasion.

After the meal, it was time for a karaoke competition by two members from each participating country: Korea, Japan, and the United States. Steve Honey of the Blessing and Family Ministry and Rev. John Jackson, the Southwest subregional director, performed on behalf of the American team, and they sang beautifully. One thing that surprised me was how many of the traditional songs that were being sung I knew. These were songs that were played in the car when I was a child, songs my dad would sing, and ultimately, these were songs even True Parents had sung before, years ago, and I was tapping into these long-forgotten memories of them.

One song in particular that Dr. Ki Hoon Kim sang was so familiar to me that, though I did not have a conscious remembrance of it, suddenly the melody started flowing from my lips and I was singing along. I was so surprised that these long-hidden memories were suddenly coming to life for me again. I didn't think too much of it until later that day, when the same kind of experience happened again.

After we left Cheon Jeong Museum, we went back to our rooms to relax and prepare for the evening's banquet. Just before our scheduled rehearsal time, we joined Dr. Kim for a lunch of seolleong tang, a special beef bone broth with noodles served during Chuseok, and then a quick trip for dessert and coffee

at the HJ Bakery in the HJ Magnolia building. For our American performance, a special arrangement of Battle Hymn of the Republic was pre-recorded for us to sing to, and our major hurdle was creating a unified look and sound for our group. We practiced as often as we could, centering on Steve Honey, and we also took time to share encouraging words, thoughtful suggestions for improvement, and a group prayer.



One unforgettable experience I had was with Rev. Richard Buessing, the president of Family Federation for a Heavenly USA, as we were rehearsing for the last time. We were all lined up, getting ready to rehearse our greeting to True Mother right at the start of the song. It was Rev. Buessing's task to give everyone the signal to bow by first saying "Cha ryut!" in Korean, and there was no question that it was not the easiest word for him to say. But in a moment of ignorance, and probably exhaustion, I immediately shouted the word right after Rev. Buessing did, in what came across, I'm sure, as a correcting tone of voice. Everyone immediately looked over at me in bewilderment because I was kind of overstepping my bounds. I burst out laughing because of how embarrassed I was to have publicly corrected our president like that. Then, when Rev. Buessing approached me right after our final rehearsal with a stern look on his face, I went completely cold inside. I was so sure he would reprimand me for interrupting him during our rehearsal, but to my surprise, with a very serious face, he asked me to say the word again and continued to practice the pronunciation of the word until he mastered it. I was really taken aback by his humility and sincerity to totally become an object in that moment, a real owner in the role of a true student. I was humbled to see his complete determination to get it right for the sake of greeting our True Parents properly.

The banquet took place in the Cheonseong Heavent and Earth Training Center, the very same hall in which I was blessed 13 years before. I had never imagined it would take me this long to come back, and I regretted having waited so long. The banquet hall was filled with around 800 guests, most of whom were leaders representing our three key nations, with probably more than 50 percent Japanese leaders, as they had just finished their three-day special jeongseong experience. I dressed in a traditional Korean hanbok lent to me by Rev. Lawrence Fong and Mrs. Kyoung Sook Fong, a Unificationist couple from Bridgeport, CT, and though there were a handful of other women in the audience, it was literally a sea of men in suits and ties. It was the first time I had seen anything like it.

After we welcomed True Mother into the banquet hall, she offered a few words about how important it is to attend Heavenly Parent. She said this is the conclusion our politicians must make as they advance toward the peaceful reunification of North and South Korea. "We cannot realize true peace by our own efforts alone," she said.

Following her short message, an all-female panel of judges was introduced to rate the performers for the evening's entertainment. Highest marks were given to those who could make Mother laugh the most. We saw wonderful performances from youth representing Japan and Korea. Performances were also given by the Cheon Jeong Museum staff, Chung Pyung Training Center Staff, and Cheon Il Guk missionaries. It was wonderful to see so many of these key leaders who were my age. I felt True Mother is clearly showing the world what she cares about through the people she is surrounding herself with, namely young

people.

The Americans were one of the last teams to perform. Our brothers wore cowboy hats and blue vests, while Steve Honey and I wore a hanbok on either side of our performing line. Rev. John Jackson came out in Elvis glasses and wig, and got the crowd laughing when he took it off to greet True Mother. In the end, all of the youth who performed received awards, and I was so happy to see that.

Following the evening's celebration, everyone gathered near the Cheongshim Peace World Center to watch the moon with True Mother. There were many young families there with their children, and True Grandchildren joined as well, singing American songs under the tent with Mother. Peter Kim and his wife were asked to sing, along with Steve Honey. Uncle Steve had prepared a few songs especially for Mother before the trip, and he was a little sad that he couldn't sing them because of the change of direction for all leaders to perform, but in the end he got his moment as he sang one song, and then another at Mother's insistence. (She looked straight at him after his first song and said, "Encore," which was so much fun to see.) Then she handed him some money right from her own pocket, which was a beautiful moment as well.

The experience singing songs with True Mother while watching the moon outside was "like old times," as Rev. David Rendel, the Midwest subregional director, put it. I got the same awakening feeling; it seemed that my childhood memories of True Parents visiting Belvedere were suddenly becoming so real to me again. It was like I woke up after a long slumber, like I had been asleep to everything our True Parents have been about this whole time: namely, building the kingdom.

A young Unificationist asked me recently, in disbelief, "Really, Mika, you think it's true that Mother is building the substantial Cheon Il Guk in Korea? What does that even mean?" At the time, I honestly couldn't answer this person. We both had been to Chung Pyung in years past and had good experiences, but coming this time, there was something that suddenly became real to me about what True Mother is all about and what she's doing. It is amazing to begin to see a glimmer of the vision being substantiated as it is in Chung Pyung, or rather in the HJ Cheonwon Complex. I felt like what we've been working for in our Movement all this time is substantial, and it is something that begins in the culture and then expands outward to touch everything substantial we see around us. This is why True Mother is emphasizing hyojeong culture in everything we do now, to come back to the root of who we are and where we come from.



True Mother said the following about the HJ Cheonwon Complex:

HJ Cheonwon, which True Father and I planned and discussed during True Father's lifetime, is a place where Heavenly Parent's sovereignty, citizens and territory are established; it is where the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is established; it is the Cheon Il Guk that both humanity and Heaven long desired, and a project where all its citizens can find enjoyment and lead original, ideal lives.

Reflections

One big takeaway from this experience is, of course, that I must go back, sooner rather than later, and that I must bring my family with me next time so that they also can experience the life-giving experience I had in Korea.

During this time in Korea I realized how much I have been asleep, spiritually. I feel like I suddenly woke up to greet our True Parents again after being away in heart for so long. And the True Parents whom I am greeting now are victorious, strong, and fervent to do God's Will more than ever before to reach every person on this earth and bring them into rebirth.



When I came home from my trip, I experienced an intense feeling of melancholy. Our world is so far from God's dream, and so far from the kind of culture of heart I experienced in Korea. I guess this is what happens when you become numb to it for such a long time. But now that I have had this incredible taste of what Cheon Il Guk could be like, I also feel hopeful and fervent to accomplish it where we are, standing as a nation, God's nation.

The United States has been so incredibly blessed so that it can bring the world to True Parents. Unlike our Korean and Japanese brothers and sisters, especially the youth in those countries who are my age, America has been so blessed because of the incredible amount of time that True Parents spent there. True Parents gave us so many precious years of love, heart, and beautiful memories filled with song. Like my awakening experience, I believe America has been asleep. We have forgotten how blessed and prepared we are to accomplish national restoration at this time in history. Now is the time to claim this nation for God first, as an example to other nations. This is one reason I am so excited for the chance to welcome True Mother when she comes to the United States in November. I want her to be inspired by the atmosphere we can create, and the culture of heart we can exemplify through our unity.

Let's revive the spirit of the old times, as our True Mother said after our True Father's passing. Let's revive the feeling of freshness and excitement, wholeness, and deep heart among all our brothers and sisters around us, as it once felt singing with our True Parents outside on the Belvedere grounds years ago. Let us be renewed and strengthened in this incredible age with our True Parents still with us, to touch our youth who never got to experience that before, or bring new life to our brothers and sisters in our respective communities who have been waiting for so long to finally meet True Parents.