

How I met the Unification Movement - Part 1

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Introduction

Like many people throughout history I have been on a quest: a search for an understanding of ultimate reality. This has been the fundamental theme of my life. After a long, meandering journey I have found an explanation that satisfies me but is difficult to use as a guide in my life. Along the way I have come across some other philosophies of life and learned very much from them. One in particular served me as a guide for many years and set my life on a course which I can and will no longer change: the Divine Principle as taught by the late Korean religious leader Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

I no longer believe in the Divine Principle and Rev. Moon, who proclaimed himself with his wife Hak Ja Han as the "True Parents" of humankind, essentially the one and only Messiah. In fact I no longer believe even in the God postulated by the monotheistic religions. My idea of "God" is quite different, closer to the reality I perceive and understand. But I am no longer alone and free to pursue my quest wherever it may lead me. I have a family and a responsibility that I cannot and will not shirk. My family was begun by Rev. Moon and is inseparable from him and the movement he founded.

Here, then, is the story of my meanders.

Chapter 1

New York City, Thursday, 6 March 1975. After a long flight over the icy wastes of Iceland and Labrador, this was Manhattan, a different world. It was after dark, on 42nd Street near Grand Central station, when I encountered what to me was a foreboding of Doomsday. The tall, dark buildings, the impression of decay given by the city's famous potholes, and the steam rising here and there from pipes running under the streets reminded me of a haunting image I had in my mind of the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, which I expected to occur within a few years' time.

It was a relatively warm night for this time of the year in New York. As I walked with my backpack on my back, I noticed a young man standing on the sidewalk in front of a small blackboard, alternately drawing and gesticulating rather wildly while he gave what seemed to be a lecture at the top of his voice. The funny thing was, there was no one listening.

Another young man stood a few meters away, apparently waiting for something or somebody, but he seemed to pay no attention to the first one. I looked at the blackboard but the figures the lecturer had drawn meant nothing to me. I caught the words "Last Days" in the stream of his talk, and then something about the Bible and a "Divine Principle."

Tired as I was after the long flight, the man's lecture seemed too arcane for me to be able to figure out what he was talking about even though his mention of the "Last Days" had intrigued me. Also, I was hoping to catch a train to Montreal rather than having to spend the night in New York. So I asked the bystander where I could find out about trains to Canada. "Sorry mate, I can't help you there," he said with an accent that didn't sound American. He turned out to be an Australian who knew little more about New York than I did.

As I walked on, down Park Avenue, then over to Fifth Avenue and back up towards 42nd Street, I saw more young people giving lectures in front of blackboards set up on the sidewalks. Some of them had an audience, others did not. They all seemed to preach the same message and draw the same figures.

One of the city's yellow cabs stopped at the curb in front of me and two well-dressed young women got out, one black, the other oriental. Both came right up to me and introduced themselves: Barbara from Guyana and Tamie from Japan. They asked me if I needed some help. I told them I was from Luxembourg and asked where I could catch a train to Montreal. Barbara said I had to go to "Penn Station" below Madison Square Garden. She told me they would take me there but could not because they had an appointment in the building in front of which we were standing.

She explained that they had to attend an important lecture about a new revelation about God and a new understanding of the Bible, and she invited me to attend if I was interested. I said I might be interested but first I had to find out about trains to Montreal, as I was hoping to catch one that same night. Barbara gave me directions to Madison Square Garden and both girls handed me their business cards, suggesting that I call them if I needed any further help.

I walked slowly down Fifth Avenue, lost in thought. Yes, this big city really conjured up the feeling that it was doomed, and the entire civilization that created it was doomed. It would all be annihilated in the nuclear war that I saw coming within a few years' time. That holocaust had to happen -- and I actually wished for it to occur. Because I felt that something was fundamentally wrong with this civilization. More than that, something was fundamentally wrong with humankind.

In my view, the earth and in fact the entire universe was a harmonious whole, like a gigantic organism within which every part played a certain role and all parts were complementary to each other. Only man did not fit into this harmonious whole. Man was like a malignant cancer that, though originating from the whole, spread uncontrollably and destroyed other parts of the organism. Man alone was going against the purpose and design of the universe, and modern human civilization represented a cancer that had grown to such proportions that it threatened to overwhelm an entire planet. It had to be destroyed. Actually, because of its inherent contradictions, it was bound to destroy itself.

But I believed there could be, there had to be, a new beginning -- because the universe had brought forth humankind and it was thus meant to exist, but it clearly had somehow gone wrong. Modern civilization would be destroyed but there would be survivors in different places. Those people would have to live in nature and start anew, but they would have to avoid the original mistake that made man go in the wrong direction.

I felt that those survivors had to become completely one with nature, one with the spirit of the whole, the essence of the universe. And they should never ask the question "why?" To me, this was the root of all the problems. We had to attune our hearts and minds to the harmonious whole of the universe without ever asking why things were the way they were and why we were what we were. Asking "why?" somehow meant that we separated ourselves mentally from the whole -- and that was what caused humankind to go astray.

Our ancestors in Stone Age had made this mistake, and the survivors of the expected nuclear holocaust would have to go back to Stone Age to try again. I was on my way to Stone Age. I was planning to go to a remote area in the wilds of British Columbia and to try to live in nature on my own, ridding myself gradually of all the implements of civilization that I carried with me to help me get over the initial shock.

I felt that if I could survive like this for a year or so, then I was ready to become one of the survivors of the nuclear war to come -- and perhaps even a leader of a new humankind. I was 24 years old and I believed the nuclear war would come in 1979, which was four years away. After spending at least a year in British Columbia, I wanted to make my way down to Patagonia, where I would wait for the holocaust to begin. The reason why I had chosen Patagonia was that I felt there would be less nuclear fallout over the southern hemisphere because most worth-while targets for nuclear strikes were in the north.

In front of Madison Square Garden I saw two blackboards like the ones I had encountered before. Several people were standing around either listening to two preachers who were lecturing about the Last Days or talking to others.

I watched the scene for a moment and then looked for the passage to the train station below the building. Just as I started moving toward the entrance an Oriental lady in her 30s approached me and asked if I was interested in science or religion. I said I was interested in both. She gave me a flyer and told me the people lecturing about the Last Days were speaking about a new revelation that could bring science and religion together for the sake of world peace.

The idea sounded good to me, and when she told me a little more about it I realized it must be the same revelation the Guyanese lady Barbara had mentioned a little earlier. I asked where she was from and it turned out she was Japanese, and her name was Noriko. I gave her my name and told her I had just arrived from my country Luxembourg but wanted to take a train to Montreal that evening or early next morning.

She said she hoped I could find the time to listen to a special lecture about the new revelation, which she called the Divine Principle, before I took off for Montreal. The lecture was going to be held in a building across Fifth Avenue from the New York Public Library, exactly the place where I had met Barbara and Tamie earlier.

I said I was interested but I needed to get information about trains to Montreal and to buy a ticket first. Noriko called a tall young man standing nearby and asked him if he could show me where to find what I wanted. The man introduced himself as Bill. He took me down to Penn Station, where I bought a train ticket to Montreal.

A little later Bill disappeared briefly and then returned driving a big Dodge van. Noriko and I got in and we drove to the building near the library on 5th Avenue, [4 West 43rd Street in Manhattan] picking up a few other people along the way.

I don't remember any detail but we entered a hall full of people, with a man in front who had just begun to give a lecture. From time to time he drew figures and symbols on a large board facing the crowd.

He explained about how God's nature is reflected in everything through the dualities of internal character and external form, and positive and negative charges or male and female genders.

He said God was like a parent to us humans, whom He created in order to share his love. But, as told in the Bible, when the first humans fell away from their Parent He had to let them go their own way because He did not want to interfere with their freedom of choice. In order to win them back to His side He guided leaders He chose among them to set conditions that would ultimately prepare the way for a Messiah, a person who perfectly embodied God's love.

This Messiah would have to find a perfect bride together with whom he would become the "True Parents" in reflection of God's dual nature and lead humankind back to Him. The Messiah was Jesus Christ, but the people did not follow him, so he could not find a bride and had to sacrifice his life to become a spiritual guide and inspiration to the world.

Jesus's followers the Christians then became the people through whom God worked to fulfill His providence to bring a Messiah who could become the "True Parents" of humankind. The Last Days prophesied in the Bible was the time when a new Messiah would appear with a new understanding of God's truth, and this time was upon us.

I remember seeing many pictures on the walls of the man I later learned was Rev. Sun Myung Moon of Korea, the man who had discovered the Divine Principle, and I couldn't help feeling even then that perhaps he was the one the people here believed to be the new messiah.

At the end of the lecture the speaker suggested there was much more to the Divine Principle than what he had just explained. He invited anyone interested in learning more about it to attend a weekend workshop in a beautiful place in the countryside on the Hudson River north of New York City.

Over snacks and drinks after the talk Noriko introduced me to a few of her friends who were all members of the Unification Church, the movement founded by Rev. Moon. Some of them asked me how I liked the ideas presented by the speaker, whom they named Mr. Barry. I said I thought they were quite interesting because they seemed to indicate a possibility to reconcile the Bible with modern science. Also, I liked the proposition that Jesus' death on the cross was not God's original plan.

When Noriko suggested I attend the workshop Barry had mentioned I told her there was a problem: I was allowed to stay in the United States only until the next day, 7th March. This was because the immigration official at J.F. Kennedy Airport who checked my papers stamped that date on the I-94 card that he stapled into my passport. He had asked me how long I was planning to stay in the US and I said I wanted to take a train to Canada either that evening or the following day.

When I showed her the form in my passport Noriko went to talk to Barry and others about it. Barry later came up to me and said my stay permit could easily be extended. He seemed quite confident about it, so I decided there was no need to worry and I could spend the next weekend in the retreat upstate on the Hudson, which he had called Barrytown.

I was told a bus would take people to Barrytown the next evening, so I thought I might have to spend that night in a hotel. Barry suggested I could stay in a house owned by the church in Manhattan, on 71st Street.

Late that evening Bill, driving his Dodge van, took Noriko, me and several other people I had met after the lecture to the house Barry had mentioned. The church members called it a "center," and it seemed packed with mostly young people. The men and women were strictly segregated and lived on separate floors. I was taken to a large room where many men lay close to each other in sleeping bags on the floor. The ceiling lights had already been turned off, so it was fairly dark inside. I found a place in a corner with just enough space for my backpack and sleeping bag.

Early next morning we were all woken up when the lights were turned on, and we had to take turns using the bathroom and the few sinks where we could wash our faces. I talked to some of the men there, and when they found out I was not a member of the church they were surprised I had been allowed to spend the night there with them.

Noriko came to our men's floor a little later to pick me up for a sightseeing tour of Manhattan. We had lunch in a Japanese restaurant that day and visited Central Park, the Empire State Building and a few other places around town.