

Filial Piety to God and True Parents

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True Mother calls the culture of Cheon Il Guk “*hyo-jeong* culture.” *Hyo* is the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese character 孝 (Chinese pronunciation *xiào*) meaning filial piety, and *jeong* (정) is a pure Korean term meaning a deep connection of heart to one another.

Dr. Thomas Selover, in a brilliant paper presented at a PWPA conference in Korea in February, described *hyo* as defining our vertical relationship to God and True Parents, and *jeong* as our abiding connection of heart to brothers and sisters horizontally, extending to all humankind. Thus, to have *hyojeong* is to have a mind and heart devoted to Heaven and that also connects us to everyone in our family and to our community, nation, world, and cosmos.

The two concepts *hyo* and *jeong* naturally create a world that is a perfect sphere because God and True Parents, the object of *hyo*, have love that is universal and impartial. True Mother said as much when she declared at the opening of the HyoJeong World Peace Foundation, “I will expand the foundation to give equal benefits to mankind, making people know the original meaning of heaven and of our Heavenly Parent.”



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Thus, in loving God and True Parents with filial piety, our *jeong*, manifest in living for the sake of others, also becomes universal. It does not discriminate or show partiality to family, tribe, race or nation, because it is imbued with the universal love of God and True Parents.

Here I focus on the concept of filial piety. The etymology of the character *hyo*, 孝 is commonly described as a son, 子 (Korean *ja*, Chinese *zǐ*) carrying an old man 老 (Korean *no*, Chinese *lao*) on his back.

Several deeper spiritual meanings of *hyo* have been suggested; one takes the topmost strokes as a cross, while the intersecting horizontal and diagonal strokes resemble an A-frame carrier that a man in old Korea might have used to carry a load on his back; hence the whole character depicts a son carrying the cross of the providence. Or, the topmost cross is the Chinese character for the number 10, meaning completion, which gives a similar meaning: carrying the burden of completing God’s Kingdom. Certainly this has been True Parents’ heart in attending Heavenly Parent.

What’s important to understand about filial piety is that it mainly describes an adult child taking care of

his or her elderly parents. It is not to “honor your father and mother” by being an obedient child while you are young and your parents are in their prime and in command.

It extends throughout life and becomes especially important when your parents are old or ill. It means caring for an aged parent who is suffering from Alzheimer’s, or changing the diapers of a parent who is bedridden and cannot get up to relieve him- or herself.

Looking at True Father, who passed away leaving much left unfinished, or True Mother today as she struggles with the sometimes overwhelming demands of her position, it is instructive to understand this meaning of filial piety. It arises out of the strength of character of children who are capable and righteous, in loving and supporting elderly parents to whom they owe eternal gratitude.

This was also True Father’s filial heart toward God, his Heavenly Parent. Feeling God’s pain and suffering, Father understood that even almighty God could not be victorious without human beings fulfilling their portion of responsibility. In that sense, God is like an elderly father who has to rely on His children and cannot do without them. As a filial Son to his Heavenly Father, True Father was absolutely determined to fulfill the human portion; he willingly endured all manner of suffering to liberate God. True Mother has the very same determination.

According to the *Classic of Filial Piety*, a Confucian classic treatise, the fact that we would not exist in this world were it not for our parents is reason enough to care for them in their old age: “Our bodies — to every hair and bit of skin — are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them: this is the beginning of filial piety.”

The next phrase in the *Classic of Filial Piety* describes the goal of filial piety: “When we have established our character by the practice of the filial course, so as to make our name famous in future ages, and thereby glorify our parents: this is the end of filial piety.” This describes our growth from children to adults who by our own good character, good name and accomplishments, add luster to our parents, who can be praised for having such children as we have become. In other words, to be filial children of God and True Parents, we should become people of whom God and True Parents can be proud.

The *Classic of Filial Piety* continues, “It commences with the service of parents; it proceeds to the service of the ruler.” This means that filial piety is the foundational virtue for leading a public life. Loyalty to the ruler and filial devotion to God are the natural expansions of filial piety to higher levels of responsibility. Thus, in Korean society, it is well understood that unless people have demonstrated filial piety in their family, they are not fit for leadership.

It’s one thing to be filial to good parents, but what if our parents are bad people who don’t deserve respect? In the Asian tradition, filial piety should overcome even the resentment we might feel towards parents who don’t treat us well. That is because we still owe them our existence, regardless of whether they are good or bad. Likewise, we owe True Parents our eternal life. This is a relevant point to consider for anyone who for whatever reason has difficult feelings towards them.

In fact, the Chinese tradition especially honors children who demonstrate filial piety to bad parents. Those children are considered heroes of filial piety. *The Twenty-four Paragons of Filial Piety (Ershi-si xiao, 二十四孝)* is a famous collection of stories about people who practiced exemplary filial piety even in the most extreme situations.

The first of these paragons is the Emperor Shun, one of China’s founding rulers. The previous emperor had grown old and was looking for a worthy successor. His advisors said of Shun:

“His father is unreasonable and harsh, his step-mother is petty by nature and constantly abuses and scolds her son, and his step-brother is arrogant, jealous and wants to kill him. Yet in living in such a family, Shun manages not to resent them; he behaves as a devoted son should. When he is scolded, he simply runs out into the fields where no one can see him and cries to himself. He does the plowing, planting and weeding every day while his father and brother never lend a hand.”

The report of Shun’s filial conduct inspired the emperor to choose him and make him his heir.

This story illustrates the life of exemplary church members, who understand there is nothing to be gained by nursing a grudge against a leader who belittles their efforts. If they maintain their lonely course and bring results for the mission without giving in to resentment, eventually Heaven will recognize them.

Another paragon is Zeng Shen, a disciple of Confucius who was devoted to his widowed mother. One day, while Zeng was off in the mountains to cut firewood, a guest came to the house and his mother had to welcome him. But as they were poor they had nothing to offer him, and his mother, at her wit’s end, bit her finger. Immediately Zeng felt a stinging pain in his heart and knew that something was wrong. He quickly rushed home, having felt her thoughts from a distance. This illustrates that filial piety does not

discriminate based on gender; it is to Mother as it is to Father. Moreover, if we think constantly of True Parents, we will receive messages and inspirations about what we should do to attend them.

There is the story of a young boy, “Wang the Lucky” (Wang Xiang), who had a bad-tempered stepmother who took a dislike to him. She constantly berated him and even turned his father against him. Yet Wang never stopped being filial to both of them. One unusually cold winter, his stepmother took sick. She craved fresh carp to cure her illness. The rivers were frozen solid, yet Wang, who couldn’t bear seeing his parents unhappy, forced his way out into the shivering cold and went to the creek, thick with ice. Feeling hopeless, he began crying, and in desperation he removed his coat and shirt and lay down on the ice while his hot tears flowed.

Before long, his body heat and the expanding puddle of tears melted a hole in the ice and two carp jumped out. He scooped them up and brought them to his ailing stepmother. Seeing the two live fish, Wang’s stepmother felt thoroughly ashamed of her selfishness, and from that time on she changed her attitude towards her stepson and cared for him kindly. Many people said that it was Wang Xiang’s filial piety that moved Nature to reward him with the fish.

Enduring the rain and cold to fulfill a mission for our suffering Heavenly Parent is an honorable Unificationist tradition — think of 24-hour fundraising conditions. Also, here even a stepmother is the object of filial piety, because the child sees how much his father loves her. We can draw a parallel to the story of Joseph and his stepbrothers in Egypt, who could not restrain his love when Judah reminded him of the pain that his father Jacob was feeling in their absence (Gen. 44:18-34). There is an elementary lesson we can draw from this: The filial piety we have towards True Father should not stop with him, but should extend to supporting True Mother out of love for him.



A depiction of the story of Guo Ju

Another story is of Guo Ju, which is reminiscent of that of Abraham and Isaac. Guo Ju lived with his wife and elderly mother, and they had a young child. Being very poor, there was hardly enough food to go around, but the grandmother delighted to forgo her portion of food and feed it to her grandson. As the baby grew, the elderly woman’s health deteriorated and she fell sick. Unable to afford medicine, Guo Ju was heartsick about what to do and couldn’t sleep. Finally after discussing the matter with his wife, he resolved to part with his own son in order to save his mother. “Perhaps we can have more children in the future,” he told his wife, “but mother in her old

age deserves our best offerings and care.”

So weeping with grief, the couple took the infant out into the backyard and he began to dig a hole. But before he had dug down three feet, he heard a loud *thunk!* and unearthed a metal chest filled with gold coins and silver bars. Written on the box was the inscription, “A gift to filial son Guo Ju.” The couple took the gold to the local magistrate, but due to that inscription and the circumstances of the find, he returned the money to the couple. With their new-found wealth they found a doctor and medicine to heal their mother as well as keep their son alive.

Unificationists went through such experiences in the early days, even putting our children in orphanages or nurseries while we went out on missions out of devotion to Heavenly Parent. Years later, some have regrets about doing so, especially if they see that it caused emotional damage to their children. Yet in practicing filial piety to God and True Parents, with the fate of the providence on the line, could we have done anything differently? We should hold these sacrifices as worthy of honor, in the tradition of Abraham and of Guo Ju.

What we learn from Chinese literature about filial piety is that while the impulse to be filial may begin from the parents’ love, it is ultimately a question of the child’s own character. Practicing filial piety in a difficult situation requires strength of character and a strong sense of personal righteousness. It is not dependent on the parents’ love, but even covers for the parents’ shortcomings. This is something to consider when thinking about our relationship with God and True Parents: are we attending them in return for their love, or are we attending them unconditionally, desiring only to love them more?

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