

My Spiritual Odyssey with Father Moon

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September 2012: Jack and Wha ja LaValley at a Korean waterfall last visited together in July 1978.

When I was a sophomore in high school my uncle died of brain cancer. He was fifty six years old. Before the cancer ravaged his body he weighed two hundred twenty pounds and stood six feet three inches tall. The last time I saw him alive was when my father and I got called over to his house to help him get off the kitchen floor. He had fallen down and could not get back under his own power. As my father and I helped him up off the floor and stood him up, it felt like my uncle weighed around one hundred and twenty pounds and he looked to me to be about five feet nine inches tall! I was shocked and bewildered at the sight of him, and I felt embarrassed as my father and I helped him back up the stairs leading to the second floor and put him into his bed. After his funeral I found myself wondering about life after death. Was my uncle still alive somewhere? Was the death of his body the end of him? Why did he have to suffer in such a way, my beloved uncle?

Between my sophomore and senior years in high school I embarked on an intense exploration of life after death and the meaning of life. I devoured books on the subject and eventually ended up corresponding with an extrasensory perception (ESP) investigator and author, a wonderful man by the name of Harold Sherman, who deeply inspired me to pursue “things of the Spirit.” My immediate circle of friends showed little interest in my efforts to unlock the secrets of the unseen universe. (Could I blame them?) Yet I pressed on, compelled to uncover some good answers.

It was a very intense time for me. Here’s one example: During first semester at my local community college I ran into a girl at a local bar that I had been eyeing to possibly ask out for a date. Later in the evening when I found out she was going to walk back to her apartment alone I volunteered to walk with her back to her place. She accepted. As we were strolling down the street on that warm summer Friday night I began to ask her questions about life after death. She gave me a strange look, things got awkward, and we never did end up dating after I said good night at her door step. (Oh well ...)

By the end of the first year of community college life I found myself even more urgently wanting to find answers to my questions. I had a strange feeling in my mind that somehow I needed to uncover life’s deeper meaning and purpose. I’d seemed to have lost my desire to pursue girls (a couple of failed relationships helped), drinking and the “normal” lifestyle of young adult males. Later that summer in 1972, I had an encounter with the Unification Movement (UM) while conducting some personal business in Burlington, Vermont. Two months later in October I headed down to Washington, D.C. to attend a weekend seminar on Unification teaching. The Divine Principle lecture series I listened to was interesting

(when I was awake!), yet not that compelling. My Catholic roots did not necessarily resonate with ideas about “messiahs” and “the last days.” (But my sex-related Catholic guilt did resonate with the discussion about the “Fall of Man!”)

I was deeply impressed with the fact that a complete stranger living six thousand miles away who could not even speak English claimed that God had instructed him to set up shop in the United States to save my butt and that of two hundred million other Americans. I found myself asking, “What kind of man is this who is willing to give up country, family, friends, etc., to save me?” I went back to Vermont to consider if I wanted to help Rev. Sun Myung Moon in his evangelical work in America. A few weeks later I decided to sign on the dotted line. It made sense for me to do so. After all, if God had called Rev. Moon to America to save me and others, and I was in a position to help him, it was incumbent on me to help him, so I reasoned. I closed up my apartment in Vermont, sold my van and moved down to Washington, D.C. to work fulltime with the Unification Movement. Rev. Moon had just recently settled into the Washington, D.C. area and I had plenty of opportunities to see him and his wife and listen to his sermons.

After living in Washington, D.C. for nine months I ventured out into the world of fulltime not-for-profit fundraising (MFT) and during the next three- and a half years traveled all over America collecting donations on behalf of the Unification Movement. This time for me was “the best of times and the worst of times.” I’m a somewhat reserved person. Intense encounters on the street with complete strangers coupled with often self-imposed pressures to perform at the highest level triggered hidden feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. At the same time, I was able to share a deep affinity with my fellow fundraisers and experienced peak moments of exhilaration and fulfillment. During this period I got to see Rev. Moon, his wife and children about three to four times. I was always moved to see him, for each time doing so I was reminded that he “came to America to save me.” Cool!

In the summer of 1977, I was asked to come to New York City to help coordinate a series of MFT workshops for “fundraising challenged members.” Ironically, at the time I was one such member (in my mind). On September 10, 1977, we heard that Rev. Moon — who had been fishing in Gloucester, MA, for 70 days — would be coming to the Belvedere training center (in Tarrytown, N.Y.) the following morning to deliver a Sunday sermon. The night of September 10th or 11th our fundraising team got to bed at 2:00 a.m. in the morning. After two- and a half hours of sleep, we woke up, boarded a bus from the New Yorker Hotel and arrived at Belvedere around 4:45 a.m. Needless to say, I slept through most of the speech. At the end of his speech, Rev. Moon asked all brothers in the church for more than three- and a half years to stand up. We did. Rev. Moon then picked six brothers to join his executive protection team (security). I was one of the brothers selected for this mission. (Funny anecdote: At the time Rev. Moon selected me, I thought he was pointing to the brother who was standing to my right, because it never entered my mind I’d be doing security for him!)

I spent the next 20 years of my life doing executive-protection work for Rev. Moon and his family. I traveled to many countries and American cities during this time providing protection for him and his family. Again, it was the best of times and the worst of times. Rev. Moon had asked me to help out with his family, and for me this was a great honor and privilege. I set out to make the very best of it. I learned how to do security work, martial arts, self-defense, trained guard dogs and did firearms training. One morning in October of 1978 I was awakened from sleep to learn that Rev. Moon had engaged me to a Korean woman thirteen hours prior in Korea. I learned her name and her age. No photo was provided! We were married in the 1982 Madison Square Garden blessing ceremony. These times were great! On another early morning in late December 1983, I was again awakened from sleep, this time to learn that Rev. Moon’s son, Heung Jin, had been involved in a traffic accident in Upstate New York and was fighting for his life in a hospital. (He died several days later.)

By the mid-1980s I started to sense a change in my perspective about the Unification Movement. I felt a need to supplement Unification teachings and experiences with other spiritually rich traditions and practices. I began to hold Unification teachings in a broader context, no longer content to be edified largely by just the Unification worldview. This development appeared to me to be a normal and positive unfolding of my spirituality. But, by the late 1990s, after watching up close and personal some of Rev. Moon and Mrs. Moon’s struggles as their children suffered through various personal problems, crises and tragedies, I found myself highly agitated and upset. I was angry for what I interpreted to be an enabling of very bad behavior by some of Rev. and Mrs. Moon’s children. My interpretation of these circumstances caused a great sadness to envelope me. It was hard for me to shake it. This coupled with challenges within my own marriage and the raising of our children was a lot for me to bear. I found myself lacking the inner resources to process all these things in the most positive and healthy way.

I worked gradually over the next few years to shift my perspective. By around 2005 I adopted better ways to interpret what was happening around me and within me. I embraced a healthier perspective about the meaning and functional role of religion in my life. Together my wife and I made a conscious choice to embrace any seeming divergent views about Unification faith and practice. For example, she wants to

donate money to liberate her ancestors. I do not. I am fine with her expressing her faith in this way. She accepts that I do not see this particular activity as an essential part of how I express my faith.

I adopted the view that we are all at different “levels of God-awareness” at any given moment in time. Just because someone maintains a view radically different than mine does not equal he/she is a lesser or greater person. Example: Hyun Jin Preston Moon claims that his view about God and True Parents and “God’s Providence” is the right and correct view. I do not see his claim as valid, but I do not cast judgment on him for his view, for as the Bible says only God can judge. Yet, I do maintain the right to discern what is before me in all matters of faith and life. Another example: In Jin Moon apparently believes that her recent actions and behaviors with a man outside her marriage are okay and good. I do not share this view, and consider her behavior unhealthy. Yet, I am no lesser or greater a person because I do share her view or behaviors.

Since Rev. Moon’s passing, Mrs. Moon and newly appointed church leaders have been getting hammered on a variety of fronts. From a call for a “product review” as to why no one is joining and why so many have left the Unification Movement, to the ever-increasing questioning about Rev. Moon’s sex life, the Unification Movement appears to be undergoing great strain at this time. Numerous voices are weighing in on these matters -- thanks to the advent of the internet. Such examination should and will continue.

My wife and I had a chance to attend Rev. Moon’s funeral in Korea. We stayed for two more weeks before returning to the States. One day we went to visit the first official headquarters church established in 1954 in Seoul. Upon arrival, we observed that the church building was being renovated and repaired throughout. It was completely open. We met several members from Africa who were touring the building. My wife noted that under normal circumstances members do not have access to all parts of the building. Yet, on this day we were able to freely roam throughout. Eventually we made are way up to the third floor where Rev. and Mrs. Moon’s bedroom and study room are located. I got to see a suit and pair of shoes Rev. Moon wore during the time he lived in this building, and a dress worn by Mrs. Moon. My wife was surprised to find a barber’s chair in this area, noting that her father had bought this chair for Rev. Moon back in the early 1960s. In fact, my wife’s family lived in a house right next to this first headquarters church, and my wife told me she used to run around on the first floor and kitchen area when she was a little girl.

Later that evening, as I was preparing for bed, I reflected on our trip to the headquarters church. I was struck that I had walked through our first church headquarters set up in 1954, including the living and sleeping areas of Rev. and Mrs. Moon.

In 1954 I was three years old. I thought to myself, “When I was a three-year-old toddler living in Plattsburgh, New York, Rev. Moon was praying in tears for me and America from that third floor prayer room of this old headquarters church.”

I was reminded again of why I fell in love with Rev. Moon back in 1972. He will always be in my heart. I cannot forget him, or his wife, or their children. I rejoice over all of it; the good, the bad, and the ugly. And why not?