

## FFWPU USA: The Power of Prayer

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"The Cheon Shim Won is a sacred place [that] would be nice to have people surrounding it with prayer and devotion."

- Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon

Hearing other people pray is not my definition of a meaningful prayer. I used to find it hard to open up my heart and speak to Heavenly Parent when I could hear other people's conversations with their wails and pleas. That was what I used to think when I heard about the Cheon Shim Won, a special prayer room established by the Unification faith leader, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, whom we affectionately call Mother Moon. The Cheon Shim Won can be compared to a temple or shrine where you can find peace to be one with God.

The first location that Mother Moon founded in the U.S. was Las Vegas. She called it "a sacred place [that] would be nice to have people surrounding it with prayer and devotion." (2022) Filled with everyone's flowing tears, fervent prayers, and desperate hopes, it is a place where you can find answers through "spirit and truth".

One practice encouraged by Father and Mother Moon is unison prayer. As the word implies, unison prayer is when every person in the room begins praying together out loud, and I mean very loud. You may have experienced a unison prayer in a Pentecostal church where the Holy Spirit surges through the room. I have always thought prayer was a silent and peaceful communication between you and God.

Unison prayer in the Cheon Shim Won is on a whole other level.

"A strong prayer life is not formed in an instant. It takes both time and practice. Therefore, be patient with yourself; you are able to learn more about prayer as you continue to pray. It is only natural that you would rather withdraw and be on your own. It is sometimes hard for new members to acclimatize themselves with the practice of unison prayer. However, developing the ability to break through to God even in unison prayer is definitely one of the best ways to become spiritually free, as well as to build up spiritual power. By developing a strong prayer life, you will experience breakthroughs."

- Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon

Being part of a [new religious movement](#) is interesting. We have a living founder who offers new revelations and shifts our teachings, which can sometimes be a challenge. Mother Moon established the Cheon Shim Won, unlike any other prayer room. It is a place where we can connect to Heavenly Parent's heart and spirit directly as parent and child. There are Cheon Shim Won prayer rooms in over 50 Unification Churches across the United States. Specially designed to create an atmosphere of healing, renewal, and clarity, the Cheon Shim Won is a holy place.

[Since my younger brother passed away](#), my family has prayed every single night in front of our altar at home. During the first few months after his death, I remember how hard it was for me to pray; to look to God for comfort or understanding. I knew better than to be angry at God because there was no point in going down the rabbit hole of wondering if this was in "God's plan".

However, deep inside, I couldn't help but feel like it was unfair. That someone who had the smile of an angel and the heart of a hero could go so soon. Maybe that was because I never went inside the Cheon Shim Won in the small community church of Philadelphia. I helped paint it and decorate the room, but a part of me was a little afraid to go inside. It felt like I would be forced to unpack all the burdens, fears, and responsibilities I had left unresolved. As though the moment I sat down, closed my eyes, and said a word, I would burst into helpless wails myself.

I decided to call an older sister and mentor I talk to when I feel like I have used up every logical reason to resolve a situation. The words she gave to me still come to mind. ["What you need the most right now is the exact thing you are avoiding."](#)

I still resisted going into the Cheon Shim Won until after I moved a month later. When I finally stepped inside, there was something about the holy prayer room at the Chicago Family Church that felt serene. I felt calm, peaceful, and warm. I didn't bother turning on the lights and sat in front of the altar. At first, I just took deep breaths so I wouldn't cry. When I finally gave in, I cried and cried, and maybe wailed a little, too.

The months it took me to attempt to solve, reflect, and, explain what I was going through didn't vanish with a revelation or a profound experience. However, praying in the Cheon Shim Won gave me a serenity I had never felt before, which I could only find [in the embrace of my Heavenly Parent](#).

I don't mind the wailing, and the shouts from other people in the Cheon Shim Won anymore because I understand that is another person who desperately desires to be in tune with their Heavenly Parent, just like me.

## How is a Unificationist Funeral Different?



*Photo credit: Lena Iwasaki*

**By Lena Iwasaki**

If you have ever been to a funeral service, you would see the familiar scene of black suits, black dresses, black umbrellas, and sad faces. Being at a funeral is just—sadness. Maybe you haven't lost someone close, but you can imagine the feeling of not seeing a loved one anymore.

You don't think of seeing white dresses, smiling faces, laughter, and tears of gratitude. Only lamenting their disappearance. However, in the Unificationist tradition, there is the term Seong Hwa (pronounced sohng-hwa), which means ascension into the spirit world. This new and profound teaching of Father and Mother Moon shows us that God as our eternal parent would like to live with us even after our physical lives on earth have ended. Therefore, the Seong Hwa ceremony performed by Unificationists is the honoring of the sacred transition of our spirit from our physical bodies into the eternal world of love—the spirit world. Father Moon described the Seong Hwa ceremony as such:

“The word ‘death’ is sacred. It is not a synonym for “sadness and suffering.” [We] have created the term Seong Hwa (ascension) to explain the true significance of death. The moment we enter the spirit world should be a time that we enter a world of joy and victory with the fruits born of our lives on earth. It is a time for those of us remaining on earth to send off the departed with joy. It should be a time for great celebration. We should be shedding tears of joy instead of tears of sadness. That is the way of the sacred and noble

instead of tears of sadness. That is the way of the sacred and noble Seong Hwa Ceremony, the first step the spirit of the departed takes toward enjoying eternal life in attendance of God, within His embrace. ”

— Rev. Sun Myung Moon

Just as a fetus develops its heart, brain, fingers, and lungs to prepare for the world outside of the mother’s womb, our physical life is preparation for the spirit world. That is what Father Moon means when we “celebrate the fruits born of our lives on earth.” We must develop our lungs of love by growing our hearts.

I have been to a funeral service. In fact, I have been to several Seong Hwa ceremonies. Each one was a beautiful testament to that person’s victories on earth. The last one I went to was my younger brother Akinobu’s. Yes, there is sadness and grief. There was also the taste of regret for not spending enough time with him when he was alive. Despite all that, there was an immense celebration for the life my little brother led. A life battling anxiety yet conquering those fears. At his Seong Hwa ceremony, his family and friends defined him as a man bold enough to keep fighting for his dreams. We celebrated the fruits of his physical life on earth by listening to the countless testimonies of people touched by his courage.



*Photo credit: Lena Iwasaki*

My friends who were unfamiliar with a Seong Hwa ceremony told me how touched they were with the love in the room. It strengthened my views on Father and Mother Moon’s teachings. It allowed me to understand that the question is not when we will die or how successful we were materially. The question we must ask ourselves every day is how we were able to grow our lungs of love. Because that is the only thing we may take with us into our next life. The pain we feel when we lose a loved one is a testament to the love we experienced with them. What kind of testimonies will the people around you

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## Why Conflict is Good for You



### **A Process of Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis**

We live in a world abounding with differences in culture, language, philosophy, and lifestyle. For the most part, we celebrate those differences. Other times, they challenge our way of life. From our long history of world wars down to our one-on-one relationships and even the conflicts within ourselves, lifestyle clashes are present everywhere, and choosing the right response is incredibly tough.

They say you dwell in what you dwell on, so rather than getting stuck whenever we feel pulled in two directions, let's ask ourselves, what is the purpose of conflict? Could God have designed a world with so much contrast, as a way to help us? Do our inner and outer conflicts serve a purpose toward our happiness?

### **Built to Rebuild**

Father Moon teaches that God's creation involves a process called "origin-division-union action." He explains that God is a being of dualities—masculine and feminine, silence and sound, youth and maturity, and so on. To fully explore the vastness of these types of contrasting yet harmonious aspects of God's essence, God chose to manifest them outwardly into different individual creations, especially into our unique entities as people. Just like an artist channeling a specific emotion into a piece of art as a means of introspection or catharsis, God sought to find personal meaning through creation.

### **Where do we fit in?**

If that is the case, where do we fit in? Consider this: do we experience deeper satisfaction when we breeze easily through a task, or when we work hard, struggle, fail a couple of times, and then succeed? Perhaps God's infinitely parental heart knew that we would have a richer and more fulfilling experience here on earth if we came into it incomplete, with something still to learn and gain. If so, then maybe our lives were intended all along by God to be spent in search of what makes us whole: each other. Hence, God (the Origin) would purposefully create us into divergent dualities (Division) in hopes that we learn from each other and become harmonized (Union), thus returning to full resemblance with God. Origin-division-union action is a way to take contrasting aspects of our nature to build and rebuild ourselves, over and over again, in order to keep growing, keep learning, keep pursuing our full potential, and out of that process, become co-creators with God.

Father Moon isn't alone in his fascination; this dynamic of intentional division with an end goal of union has been explored by other big thinkers too. Most notably by philosopher [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel](#). His Dialectic, expressed in components called Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis, has been used as an essential framework for critical reasoning, art, and storytelling, and underscores how conflict and resolution are notions that capture the attention of many.

With this fresh spin in mind, think about some of the things you tend to struggle with. Perhaps you have a friend whose faith or life philosophy clashes with yours, or perhaps you believe strongly in two ideas that seem completely incongruous. In viewing them more as two parts of a whole instead of two opposing forces battling for superiority, do they still seem as incompatible as before? Or might their presence in your life be an opportunity to grow closer in mutual respect and love? The harder the conflict is to surmount, the greater the reward for surmounting it.

Are there any seemingly conflicting beliefs, thoughts, or ideas that you think might actually harmonize? Here are some of ours:

- Planning our own dreams versus trusting in God's plan
- Supporting our families versus investing in personal growth
- Keeping things simple versus living a bold, epic life
- Self-care versus service
- Perfectionism versus loving our flaws
- Being assertive versus being embracing


• Being assertive versus being embracing

• Competition versus collaboration

• Being strong versus being sensitive

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## Does God Suffer?



By Jennifer Pierce

### **God does suffer, and it matters.**

It was the end of summer 2019. My elderly cat had to be put down. I cried for about a week, even though it was painless for her. My mom, who watched and supported me through that ordeal kept saying that she never wanted me to suffer that much again. (She almost denied me getting a new kitten based on that experience, but I digress.)

In my experience, for the religious community, the concept of suffering has largely been reserved for sinners. Suffering is treated like the consequence of sin. Since God has no sin, then how could God suffer?

Unificationists think of it a little differently. **God suffers because God loves us.**

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken.”

– C.S. Lewis

It's not a huge leap, if you think about it. Like my mother, parents feel the pain their children feel, whether it be self-inflicted or caused by someone else.

Parents don't have to be the target of suffering to feel their children's pain. This is not to say the loss of my beloved feline friend is the same as the enormous

pain and suffering that some people endure, but the way my mother experienced what I was going through is comparable.

Seeing people you care about go through difficult times causes us pain as well, whether they're friends or family. It's impossible to separate love from grief or pain. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken."

If your heart goes out to another person, naturally a sympathetic or empathetic bond is created. As researcher Brené Brown puts it, "Staying vulnerable is a risk we have to take if we want to experience connection." The connection made with another person opens us up to the possibility of pain.

In Unificationist teaching, God is all of humankind's Heavenly Parent. Our suffering is God's suffering. The fact that we are not happy and are hurting, God feels those emotions with us as our Parent. For God, closeness is the goal, not distance. If we are in the trenches, God is right there with us.

"Staying vulnerable is a risk we have to take if we want to experience connection."

— Brené Brown

I think the fear for religious people is that if we claim God suffers, it devalues the Divine. That God can be as base as the common man. But that is not what Unificationists are saying. We are claiming the opposite – God's love is so perfect and big that it cannot help but feel our hurt.

Our Heavenly Parent has personal suffering, too. Since sin has separated God and humans, God has never had the chance to really enjoy the sharing of love with us, to live with us in harmony, as Unificationists believe is God's true desire. History's journey to bring us back to our Heavenly Parent has been long and messy, and, so far, incomplete. As long as even one child of God is not connected to their Heavenly Parent, God will mourn their absence.

Rev. Moon, in his 1977 speech "The Pinnacle of Suffering," explains it this way:

"One thousand years is just one moment to God, who has no concept of time, and the pain of man...has never gone from God's mind and heart. Could God ever decide, 'I don't want to suffer anymore,' and just cast His suffering out of His heart? Even though He is almighty, could He ever change His situation? God's love is absolute, unique, and unchanging, and it is impossible that He could alter His heart and decide not to suffer.

If you lost your loved ones, you could never erase from your mind the memory of them or the pain of their departure. It is there to stay. It is the same with God."

[God's suffering matters](#) because it's proof of Heavenly Parent's love for us.

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