

How do we inspire older blessed children to attend Hoon Dok Hae joyfully?

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True Father asked us countless times to do Hoon Dok Hae with our children. As long as children are very young, they are more willing to do whatever their parents do. But how do we inspire older blessed children to attend Hoon Dok Hae joyfully? Here is the experience of our family living in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, a small nation located in Central Europe.

To qualify as true parents and true teachers we should develop a fine reading culture, a task many find difficult to fulfill but that is essential for the passing on of our faith. In our little family, the solution to this question came along with a task the children received during Sunday school -- the teacher asked them to read the entire Bible, from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. At that time our son was just thirteen years old. To help him accomplish this "homework" assignment, we listened to his readings for almost nine months. Every evening our son read for twenty to thirty minutes, sometimes asking questions, which showed that he was trying to digest the difficult material. His questions also tested our competence to explain the Bible well. We all enjoyed that "Bible course" a lot.

Afterward, we read True Father's autobiography; in addition to that came the series in Today's World magazine, "Father's Life in His Own Words," which includes fascinating aspects which are only briefly mentioned or not included in the autobiography. In between, our son read the whole Divine Principle book; some chapters he read several times.

Please note that the reading was done exclusively by our son; his parents only listened with occasional remarks on some important points. Why? The person who reads has to focus on the text and cannot allow his mind to wander, which often happens if one just listens as someone else reads.

After reading the Peace Messages and some other speeches by True Father, we searched for additional literature which would deepen his understanding, captivate his interest and have educational value. During the last years, we read, "Jesus Christ: His Life and His Mission" by Rev. Moon as well as the HSA-UWC chronicle "40 Years in America" and the exciting "Bodyguard for Christ," which our son's friends also liked a lot. Our reading list includes "True Family Values," which explains the meaning of the Family Pledge profoundly, and the intellectually challenging book "The Virgin and the Priest" in their superb German translations, as well as other titles. Fascinating and instructive but not fare that appeals to everybody were the two volumes of "The History of Christianity" and some chapters of "Inquisition: The Persecution and Prosecution of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon" by the distinguished journalist Charlton Sherwood. Presently we are reading European members' testimonies in the book "Footprints of True Parents' Providence," which help our children understand how valuable their parents' work was. The comments we have received from our son show that this goal can be achieved by literature of this type more readily than by his listening to occasional talks.

Since our blessed families have inherited a messianic mission -- be it on the tribal or the national level -- we have to educate our children more deeply and carefully than ever before. Born and raised as a Catholic, I received my first religious teachings from my parents at home when I was just four or five years old. To this day, their education helps me to do keep the traditions of the Unification Church. One of the strengths of the Jews after they had to leave their homeland following their failed rebellions against the Roman Empire was their ability to pass on their teachings to their descendants in a foreign and often hostile environment. Until they could establish an independent nation in 1948, they were forced to live in a non-Jewish environment with the danger of assimilation. Yet pious Jewish parents continued to pass on their traditions. Fathers instructed their sons as they read Scripture together. In this way, they were able to preserve their identity and survive in Christian Europe or under Muslim rule.

Our son, who communicates at home in German and Slovak, knows English quite well. So there is a wide range of literature available for our little "Home Academy," but surely there are valuable books in other languages about saints, sages or true patriots. For example "Heaven and Hell" by Emanuel Swedenborg exists in many languages, though we read only selected passages of that somewhat difficult literary work. There is also Christian literature which is acceptable for Unificationists, especially Bible stories written for children. When our son was in elementary school we made use of a Children's Bible published by the Jehovah's Witnesses. If True Father refers in his speeches to some Biblical figures, such as Moses or David, our children will remember some of the interesting story they read and prick up their ears -- they have heard about them before.

In any case, the occasional participation in seminars and other activities cannot replace individual and ongoing lessons which are learned most naturally in our homes day by day. A precondition for children to like Hoon Dok Hae is that at least one of the parents enjoys reading. Some say that books are our best friends. Perhaps that is true. In any case, a "taste" for the word needs to be cultivated from an early age and continued throughout one's life.