

Studying Korean Language - A long-term investment with spiritual rewards

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Learning Korean is intriguing, bewildering, fun, challenging, a long-term investment with spiritual rewards.

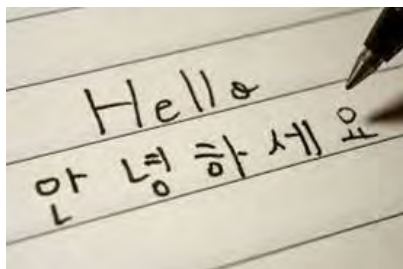
Fifty years ago, I was a bit jealous of members who were studying/being taught Korean.

I wasn't given that opportunity then. Moving forward five years, I purchased a textbook and attempted to study Korean independently, but I found it an arduous task and lost hope. Moving forward about six years, I had the chance to participate in a basic class where I got a solid foundation in the Korean alphabet, consonants and vowels. Moving ahead three years more, I could participate in Korean classes with the children at Jin-A Child Care Center. A few different Korean-born teachers taught at JinA over the years, including the late Mrs. Schanker. Classes were fun! We learned songs accompanied with dance-like movements and vocabulary using picture cards. The song melodies and lyrics still stick in my mind. Through learning children's songs we were also exposed to basic vocabulary, although not fully aware of it.

More adult classes were offered at our Clifton church, then located on Van Houten Avenue. By now the vocabulary and grammar were becoming more advanced. I enjoyed learning and dissecting the lyrics to a few songs that were favorites of True Father, including one we heard sung many times about the barley fields. I also bought my first Korean dictionary and learned to look up words!

How many years ahead are we at this point? Well, perhaps 20 years ago, Korean classes were offered at New Hope School under the direction of Mr. Kim. Monika Lewis was one of the instructors. In the second year there, I was put in the "advanced" class. But it makes me laugh to think of that label because my proficiency in the language was probably not even at the kindergarten level of a Korean-born child. In my first few advanced classes, I had an experience similar to my first few times in church choir. It was above me, yet all around me, like a cloud, a fog. But the fog gradually cleared as I continued to attend. I found I was digesting compound vowels, attempting to create sentences, attempting to discern audio recordings and adult-level speech, and was perhaps fair (or worse) at writing Korean. In forming the characters, a couple of my strokes are made in habitual, unconventional ways due to my self-taught, independent learning. So, I appreciated having been properly taught later on. For a short time, I even had a semi-private tutor.

As with anything we try to accomplish, fallen nature seems to get in the way; unconstructive comments from peers also discourage us. This resulted in me abandoning my study for some years. But whenever I read True Parents' words, the desire and motivation to learn would tug at my heartstrings. So, again, I tried studying independently. And at my current age, I offer my study with the goal of being more proficient in Korean before I die. Sometimes, I study daily for two hours. Then there are periods of time when more pressing practical matters or tasks related to spiritual work distract me from my studies. But I return to them.



Each person will have their own level of ability with their own unique forte and unique difficulties in learning Korean. Previously, I admired those who could converse in Korean and had less respect for those who studied using books but could not converse casually. Now I see that I have become like the latter.

With continued practice, each student will see improvements in speed of reading, writing, recall of vocabulary, and many other skills. So, while it is fine to recognize the greater or lesser proficiency of others, it is most constructive to focus on one's own and to diligently plow ahead.

Currently, I study reading Mother of Peace in Korean. Though I may not comprehend the full meaning with complete accuracy, I often have rich experiences with God and True Parents in which I am brought to tears as I discover the deep meaning of even one sentence. Such sentences have an impact on my prayer life, my perspective, my walk of faith, and my interactions with others. They are truly gems that I have mined. I enjoy investing diligently to dig them out. I will share just one of these gems that moved me: "All religions are clearing up this world of sin, making the ideal world with God and humans as life partners."

Just this morning I had the inspiration to study using DP in Korean. So I am now trying to get a hard copy of it.