

The Meadows as My Home

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Photo date and location unknown

As a child, I thought of the meadows as my home. As soon as I could wolf down my bowl of rice for breakfast, I would run out of the house and spend the entire day in the hills and streams. I could spend the day wandering about the forest with all the different birds and animals, eating herbs and wild berries, and I would never feel hungry. Even as a child, I knew that my mind and body were at ease anytime I went into the forest.

I would often fall asleep in the hills after playing there. My father would be forced to come find me. When I heard my father shouting in the distance, "Yong Myung! Yong Myung!" I couldn't help but smile, even as I slept. My name as a child was Yong Myung. The sound of his voice would awaken me, but I would pretend to still be asleep. He would hoist me onto his back and carry me home. That feeling I had as he carried me down the hill -- feeling completely secure and able to let my heart be completely at ease -- that was peace. That is how I learned about peace, while being carried on my father's back.

The reason I loved the forest was also because all the peace in the world dwells there. Life forms in the forest do not fight each other. Of course, they eat one another and are eaten, but that is because they are hungry and need to sustain themselves. They do not fight out of enmity. Birds do not hate other birds. Animals do not hate other animals. Trees do not hate other trees. There needs to be an absence of enmity for peace to come. Human beings are the only ones who hate other members of the same species. People hate other people because their country is different, their religion is different, and their way of thinking is different.

Spending time in the forest cleanses the mind. The sound of leaves rustling in the wind, the sound of the wind blowing through the reeds, the sound of frogs croaking in the ponds: All you can hear are the sounds of nature; no extraneous thoughts enter the mind. If you empty your mind and receive nature into your entire being, there is no separation between you and nature. Nature comes into you, and you become completely one with nature. In the moment that the boundary between you and nature disappears, you feel a profound sense of joy. Then nature becomes you, and you become nature.

From childhood, I have had a gift of being able to resonate with the sounds of nature as I roam around the hills and meadows. Nature creates a single harmony and produces a sound that is magnificent and beautiful. No one tries to show off and no one is ignored; there is just a supreme harmony. Whenever I found myself in difficulty, nature comforted me; whenever I collapsed in despair, it raised me back up. Children these days are raised in urban areas and don't have opportunities to become familiar with nature, but developing sensitivity to nature is actually more important than developing our knowledge. What is the purpose of providing a university education to a child who cannot feel nature in his bosom and whose sensitivities are dull? The person separated from nature can gather book knowledge here and there and then easily become an individualistic person who worships material goods.

We need to feel the difference between the sound of spring rain falling like a soft whisper and that of the autumn rain falling with pops and crackles. It is only the person who enjoys resonance with nature who can be said to have a true character. A dandelion blooming by the side of the road is more precious than all the gold in the world. We need to have a heart that knows how to love nature and love people. Anyone who cannot love nature or love people is not capable of loving God. Everything in creation embodies God at the level of symbol, and human beings are substantial beings created in the image of God. Only a person who can love nature can love God.