

Living in Death's Shadow

The following is drawn from the fourth chapter of the second book of the series True Parents' Life Course (참부모님 생애 노정).

The books are composed of excerpts from Father's speeches over many years, arranged more or less chronologically in the form of an autobiographical account.

In this installment, the thirteenth to appear in Today's World, Father continues his account of experiences while imprisoned in Hungnam, North Korea, that he began in our last issue.

You received about 1.7 small bowls of rice a day, no side dishes, and salt water for soup. You worked eight hard hours on that food. The meal was so meager, that you could finish it in three bites. The soup was radish leaves and salt in water—that was all. It was like the expression “water that a pig had walked across.” Sometimes the soup was so salty you couldn’t finish it. Nevertheless, even on your deathbed you didn’t want to give up the soup.

If someone didn’t work, he’d get only a half ration of rice. Getting only that half-sized lump would make you feel so miserable. Because of the food, people on the brink of death still went out and worked. Unconsciously, you’d pour the rice into your mouth as soon as you received it. You wouldn’t realize you’d eaten any food. When you saw other people getting their bowl of rice, you’d realize your bowl is empty. Often people would fight with the person next to them, saying, You ate my food! Many people died from suffocation when the rice they’d taken in all at once obstructed their breathing.

When a man died without finishing his rice, other men fought for the food still in his mouth. Without their being consciously aware, men’s chopsticks would stray toward their neighbor’s bowl. You can’t imagine how horrible it felt when you realized that the bowl belonged to the person next to you. Your saliva would become like chewing gum.

When a visitor brought soybean flour, you’d knead it and make bread. If the flour fell on a stone, people would fight over the stone so they could eat the powder. Even liver oil mixed with water was very tasty. Uncooked soybeans also tasted so good. When you got one more grain of rice, that extra grain was like gold. If a grain of rice fell on the ground, no matter how dirty it was, men would fight over it.

The prison was like the valley of death. Over the course of a year, 40 percent of the prisoners died. There were funerals every day. Most prisoners died within three or four years. The Communists policy was to work prisoners to death. Even mercilessness has limits, but that situation was far beyond such limits.

Holidays and the mackerel season

In the prison, rice and beans were good. The next best meal was rice mixed with cereals. On the holidays North Korea observed, such as January 1, or May 1, they served us rice in this way. One request (or protest) everyone made was, Give us rice and beans.

On holidays, we were to be given pork as well, but the guards took all the meat. Once I found a piece of pork in my soup. I still cannot forget sharing that piece of pork with others. Twice a year, on January 1 and May 1, we were given fruit. When an apple was given to a prisoner, he usually ate it up right away, in a second. I would think, How bright it is! Let me eat the brightness before eating the fruit itself!

Hungnam is near the ocean where they catch a lot of mackerel. In season, they caught tons of mackerel and it was cheaper than anything else, so it was used as fertilizer. They’d serve us a truckload of mackerel when it was in season. Each of us got a bucketful, but because we couldn’t digest it well, it usually came out as soon as it went in. Where men had been sitting, warm watery stuff was left behind. It wouldn’t pass through some men, so it came back up.

Obsession with food

When I was in the prison, I stayed with many religious leaders and prominent members of society. As it turned out, they’d been reduced to living for food. One well-known pastor said, “In that place of hunger, no matter how much I searched for God, He did not seem to be there. Even His shadow did not appear. God may have given up, or He’s run away.”



While civil war wreaked havoc throughout the peninsula, the North Korean regime continued to expend money and manpower on the imprisonment of "dangerous" religious leaders.

Some church ministers even became materialists while in the prison.

A pastor famous in his region was sent to the prison with his son-in-law. His son-in-law became sick with malaria, which was noted for causing a high fever at a particular time each day. Even with his son-in-law, the pastor didn't share the medicine he had in his possession. Instead, he bartered it for someone else's soybean flour. He was a pastor obsessed with food. He is still around,¹ although I will not name him. The question is, Who will liberate the heavenly sheep that this group of food-obsessed pastors are nurturing?

Three weeks on half rations

How could I survive in that kind of environment? I was determined to do so through spiritual power. I planted the firm conviction in my mind that I could live on half the meal I was given. From the next day, I started to share the other half with my fellow prisoners. I did that for three weeks. I convinced myself that I could carry my workload even on half the scanty rations. After three weeks, I began eating the whole meal. I thought to myself that the second half had been given by God.

After training myself in this way, if any extra food came, I wouldn't even touch it. If for instance you were offered some soybean flour, how strong your desire would be to eat it! But I wouldn't touch it, or look at it; otherwise that would have been the way of death. We must develop rules to limit what we eat, and pioneer the path ahead.

The buckwheat conundrum

If I think about this during a meal, I can't eat anymore. I remember the days from December 14 to 28, 1949. You know buckwheat. For that period, buckwheat that was only half-peeled was provided as a meal. On the first day we ate it, our faces swelled up. We needed to eat it because we were hungry, but buckwheat is difficult to chew, so we just swallowed it. That's how we became sick. I knew that. To avoid the problem, I peeled

¹ Father said this in 1973.

off each buckwheat seed before I ate it. I can't forget doing that. We could not throw such food away, but ate everything. I thought about how we could eat this. After eating the buckwheat, we got diarrhea because we couldn't digest it. This painful experience in prison was a most unforgettable one.

When I think about the experience of eating the buckwheat, I cannot complain at mealtimes. I think about what it was like in that situation. I cannot complain about a lack of side dishes. I am grateful for what is provided.

The value of food

Even now, when I am hungry my mind stirs with the thought of how precious even one grain of rice is. You have to be able to feel how a single grain stimulates your nerves and appreciate its infinite value. Although I was hungry, yearning for food, I tried to forget that and yearn for God more instead, to the point of shedding tears. Rice is good, but even barley or wheat is adequate, or oats. I was more grateful to eat that than to have a king's feast. I am the king in terms of appreciating the taste of rice. During the years I was eating salty soup, though, I led a life of expressing gratitude to God in tears. While eating meals of barley, I thought of the hunger my ancestors experienced. I imagined I was eating the fruit of my ancestors' hard work. Even though I knew God's will, and had to preserve God's dignity, I did not leave any residue. I ate it all.

In prison, your sense of smell becomes very keen. Not even a dog's can compare to it. You can tell when someone is cooking beef broth a couple of miles away.

Prison is the best place in the world to learn the value of a meal. You become so hungry that a single grain of rice seems several times larger than the earth.

Sharing with others

When someone's family or friends visited him in prison, they would bring something to eat. Even if his loving mother or wife came to see him, his eyes would go first to the food she



Making rice balls for soldiers during the Korean War; one of these might approximate to a day's food ration at Hungnam labor camp.

had brought, rather than to her face. There was no sadder moment than when he discovered she hadn't brought any soybean flour or anything else to eat.

When I was in Hungnam, I received soybean flour once a month. Since there were thirty people in a cell, there wasn't much to share with each person. I gave each of them a spoonful on a piece of newspaper. The days when I shared the soybean flour were like feast days. Even though it was precious to me, I could not keep it all for myself.

I also mixed the powder with water to make soybean flour cakes. I packed the cakes in newspaper and took them to work. Because I would sweat a lot until lunchtime, the cakes would become wet. Still, when I shared them out, tears would trickle down a man's face as he ate it. What a precious life it was! By sharing my food and supporting them, I became their friend, in place of their mothers and older brothers.

Clothing made with love

The prison cells weren't heated rooms as in a regular house. Morning and night, the cells were colder than outside during the winter, because outside there was sunshine. Prisoners don't need silk or satin clothes. They would fight over who got a sack. Even a straw bag would be fine for them. You can appreciate the real value of clothes in prison.

I was always wearing the most ragged clothes. I gave all my good clothes to others and used a bamboo needle to patch up my worn-out ones. When family members brought me good clothes, I gave them to the most miserable prisoners.

I also made articles of clothing out of tent cloth and gave them to people who never had visitors. They liked them so much. Among the prisoners there were those who were going out in the strong wind in clothes so worn that their bottoms showed. It was to these men that I gave the clothes I made.

I also taught them a pattern for making pants. I folded wrapping cloth and then cut out the pattern to make them. In

this way, one could make ten pairs on a Sunday.

I wanted to feed others while I was starving. I wanted to clothe others while I was shivering in the cold. This is because I had to connect them together with lines of love even in that environment. If I did that, when I pulled on those lines, I could catch them all.

The value of a single needle

Did they provide needles in the prison? Absolutely not; you had to provide them yourself. Hearing that somebody in some cell had a needle was the most sensational news. You would negotiate with that man. Seeing a needle, I would wonder if anything could be more valuable than that.

When we needed to, we got pieces of broken glass. Even if we were punished later, we'd throw a hook to knock bits of glass from the roof of the plant. We used them to shave and to make chopsticks. I was teaching others how to do that.

You fold a piece of wire and trim it with a piece of glass. Then, you'd have a beautiful needle. My front tooth was damaged slightly while I was making a needle. How valuable would a needle made with such effort be? Even the person God was seeking was awakened to its preciousness.

Prayer while incarcerated

Absolute love. Nothing else. The communists put me in prison and subjected me to all kinds of difficulties, but I didn't stop loving God even for a moment. I kept absolute faith in God. If I have made a promise, that promise is absolute. Then if God gives an order, I understand what he is asking absolutely, no matter if it is difficult or easy. If I am in prison I must behave like a devoted son; if I am a loyal subject to God I must act like one.

Knowing that over time water dropping from the end of a gutter can pierce rock, I thought, "If tears, drops of my love, could pierce through the rock of resentment in God's heart..." You may not understand the situation of weeping deeply and watching your tears fall.

I never prayed when I was in difficult situations. I wouldn't talk for a week or even a month. The more difficult the situation was, the more I thought about how to mobilize the best of my wisdom and make my most sincere effort to create a way for God to work through me to overcome it. I thought about how to use this kind of motivation in my heart to enable God, through His tears, to be relieved of His pain and grief. How to set off that heart-based explosion to demolish the enemy lines. This is how I thought when I prayed. I didn't think, Woe is me, I have to get out of here.

There were members I never stopped praying for from breakfast time to when I slept during my almost three years in prison. Even if one of them left the fold, I kept praying for him or her. Some of them came to me in spirit and reported to me in tears how they had left. Some would tell me how they had to leave me because their bodies were sick and weak. Seeing that pitiable situation, I inevitably felt compassion for them. I had to pray for these people even after they had left me, until others appeared who could succeed them. For three years, I prayed for members three times a day.

Sometimes, I needed to pray about an issue for twelve hours or even twenty-four hours.

There was a convicted thief in the cell. One morning, I found him stealing. I scolded him and told him that what he was doing was wrong. But after that, I couldn't pray. There is no hell like that on earth. How mortified would you feel when your only candle goes out in the darkest night? That is exactly how I felt then. After a week of hard effort, when your prayer



The devastation of the Korean War, which began on June 25, 1950, resulted from key figures not recognizing the Messiah. Here, the men in the background launch artillery shells.

begins to work again, you would not exchange that for everything under heaven.

You must hold fast onto prayer. Prayer is a lifeline! You have to have something that neither God nor Satan can do for you. You have to have that power of life, vitality, which you alone can appreciate and preserve.

Next to the toilet

Thirty-six inmates were in the same cell I was in. It got so hot in the summer, but I chose to stay in the hottest and smelliest corner. What would I think about in that corner? I'd think about the coldest winter. The person who can be the master of winter can manage the summer and vice versa.

Even if you lay right next to where the prisoners defecate, you'd think that you were in better place than Adam and Eve were. Adam and Eve went on the ground directly; at least I had a bowl to use. When you'd sleep next to the manure bucket, you couldn't avoid getting an excrement shower once in a while, especially when people had to rush. Because you were right there, you got covered with the stuff... But what could you do? Nevertheless, I would think, "This is good. Isn't this a good opportunity from which to begin to master the future of humankind?"

Gaining mastery over the physical self

Even under the direst circumstances, we are responsible to serve and attend God. That is to say, the road to heaven should shine even if you are in hell. In prison, they provided only a third of a cup of water to drink at night. That was the ration. Instead of drinking it, I wet a cloth with it and cleaned my body. I risked punishment if I was caught. I would get up ten to fifteen minutes earlier than others in the cell to take that cold bath.

One should also exercise. You have to maintain your stamina. I have an exercise program that I designed. It's very effective.

I always prayed to sanctify a place when I sat down or got up in order not to be made dirty. Even while sleeping alone, I didn't spread out my arms and legs. God is above you. There is even etiquette for sleeping.

We had some free time on Saturdays and Sundays. You could take a nap after a meal. For three years, I didn't take a nap even once, which is why those in the prison would say they'd never seen me sleeping. When you are very sleepy, your eyesight dims and your eyes become very tired. However, once you make a determination, you must keep it.

After going through that kind of training process, you feel God's helping hand as soon as you lie down. When you are so tired that you fall asleep without even changing clothes, do you think you will be able to open your eyes going to the toilet? It is difficult to go to the toilet because it is so dark, but you can see the path clearly. Your hand becomes a flashlight; there is such a way. You have to connect with such a realm.

Guards and cell mates

Even when I was sent to the prison, I thought it was fortunate to have archangels with whips watching over me so that I didn't go astray. I felt thankful toward the prison guards. I thought of them as archangels with clubs, preventing me from doing bad things, unlike the archangel who led Adam and Eve to fall.

Thirty to thirty-five people stayed in a small room. Among that group were all types of criminals, including murderers. You rub shoulders with those people in the cell. While sleeping, you sometimes hold them. You do all kinds of things

together. They step on you on the way to the toilet bowl at night, or they trip and fall on you. I could tell you all kinds of anecdotes. There were no class divisions; everyone was equal. Prisoners sometimes defecated in the bucket while you were eating right next to it. Even so, you had to eat and drink without complaining. You would go out to work holding hands.

If I were sent to prison, I could make the inmates look up to me within three days. I understand that world so well. It is like society on a small scale. I understood the prisoners' backgrounds well. So I took care of and supported those folk, crying with them, feeling sympathy for them, dealing with them as if they were my own family. We need such training.

Compassion for inmates sentenced to death

Prison life was the best training ground for me. It was a training ground that challenged me to feel true love for people, to truly love my enemy, and to rub noses and share breath with inmates who'd been sentenced to death.

I slept beside them; we used each other's arms as pillows. At times, one would wake up at two or three in the morning from a dream. Then he'd inhale deeply. You don't know how deep the attachment to life is. On many occasions, I witnessed the pitiful sight of a man calling out his own name, his face pale. He would sigh deeply, his face showing indescribable misery. He didn't know if that would be the last thing he did.

Prisoners always thought, If I could just have the chance to do it over again, things would turn out differently.

For those under sentence of death, nothing would be impossible. If one could save his own life by walking through the whole city of Seoul with a cup of water balanced on his forehead, he would do it.

I realized that while in prison I needed to be able to shed more tears for the people I comforted than a father would when leaving his child. Unless I could do that, I couldn't take responsibility for restoration. Only with this kind of heart



Father's mother endured hardships to visit him in prison, but he turned away the comfort of her love. Here, with Korea in the throes of war, a mother sees off her son (in an army uniform).

could I move these people. When I held the hands of these men, I wanted to comfort them. I would explain to them that this life isn't all that there is, but that our eternal life sprouts from our life on earth.

Longing and gratitude

One cannot feel how precious liberation is without having gone to prison. To those sentenced to life imprisonment, freedom had infinite value.

In prison, hearing that you had a visitor was the most wonderful news. It was the same for me. Prisoners missed being able to share with someone heart-to-heart. When given that chance, how happy and joyful the prisoners would become! You can't ever imagine, even in your dreams, that you would yearn for such a thing.

When you see the sunlight, it looks like a string of candy. Or, should we call it a string of honey? Anyway, it is good. People in prisons can tell you in genuine terms about the sun, because it is they who like the sun the most.

People who understand about time might respond emotionally to the changing seasons or the falling snow. When I was in a grievous position, receiving persecution, having lost my country and being chased out of my home, you can't imagine how much I longed to hear familiar Korean folk songs.

When summer came, I envied insects who were outside making sounds. A prisoner even envies a fly, which can fly freely in and out of the barred window. You would be envious of them. Why did God make me follow this path? He wanted me to understand how such a person feels. I was grateful for this.

I had many kinds of friends—fleas, bed bugs, mosquitoes and houseflies. We caught them and made them run around. Our conversations with them would probably fill a couple of hundred volumes.

The guards and propaganda

The center of the communist organization was the prison. The communists placed the sign, Laborers' Accommodations, at the prison. The prison captain, who took care of the prisoners' eating and living conditions, would often ask, "Are you thankful to the leader, Father Kim Il-sung, who loves us and feeds us every day?" The inmates would say yes.

There were reflection meetings, which were a time for self-condemnation.... Young people in the Communist Party were usually placed in the front. They would form the security team, which kept an eye on all the administrators. They would give

lectures on communism and prisoners would be asked to write self-reflections, which were later compiled into a book. Those who wrote good essays were called to the front and had their essays read aloud.

One of the most difficult aspects of prison life was writing reflections. I never wrote even one. I always submitted blank paper, but that wasn't a problem as long as I reached my daily work quota. Therefore, I became a model worker. There was no other way to survive there. I know North Korea better than anyone else does. I studied the North Korean system well while I was in their prison. So I know how the fundamentals of communism work.

My mother's visits

My mother traveled hundreds of miles to visit me in prison. When she came, however, I commanded her sternly. Shyly, she mumbled, "I am your mother." She stood there with quivering lips, wiping away her tears with her hands. I cannot put this out of my memory.

I reproached her, saying, "What is this? Before I am your son, I am a son of Korea, a son of the world and a son of heaven and earth. You must understand that based on having loved those, I must listen to and love my mother. I am not a son of a small-minded person, please show the proper attitude of a mother who has such a son."

To go to Hamhung,² one had to come down to Yongsan [in Seoul] and take the train on the Gyungwon line. There wasn't any other way. But to travel to Seoul on the Gyung-ui line and change to the Gyungwon line. To get to Hamhung was an extremely difficult journey that took about twenty hours. To see her son, whom she couldn't forget, in a communist prison camp, my mother borrowed handfuls of rice from distant relatives, roasted it and made flour, and braved the long journey.

She was devastated when her son reproached her. In the visiting area, he dipped his hand into the rice and distributed it among the inmates. I even shared out the clothes she brought, such as the silk trousers I had worn at my wedding ceremony. I always wore worn-out prison clothes and my skin was exposed. Even the underwear she'd brought was distributed.

My mother sobbed bitterly. She was devastated and at a loss for words. When she returned to Elder Moon Yong-gi's house, she cried her heart out. I'm fully aware of this.

Witnessing through spiritual phenomena

In those difficult prison conditions, even though I asked God

2 A large city not far from Hungnam



Father was in Hungnam on September 15, 1950, when UN troops landed at Incheon *Left*: The USS Missouri bombards the North Korean coast; *Right*: General Douglas MacArthur directs the action from the USS Mount McKinley

not to help me, He was always there. Under trying circumstances, a prepared environment existed. Of course, a lot depended on my own resolve, but I clearly recognized that God had prepared the environment for me.

In the depth of the prison was God's infinite comfort. In the silence deep in the night or even in the desperation of what might be my final breath, God always extended His hand to me. In the intensity of all this, God's guidance was always there. To put it briefly, because of this, some viewed me with suspicion. In the most difficult and serious place, I can meet God. That is the most hidden and secret place.

While in prison, I had to indemnify the faithlessness of Jesus' disciples. With the help of those in the spiritual world, I managed to witness to twelve disciples, and through that, I could initiate a new future. The spirit world is the archangelic realm. Because the archangel didn't accomplish his mission, Adam couldn't attain the glorious realm and establish the proper relationship, so those in the spirit world had no alternative other than to help me. At the time of Elijah, God sent crows to bring Elijah food, but to me, God sent people.

My prison number was 596, which has a similar sound [in Korean] to the word "mistreated." Someone's ancestor would appear in a dream instructing him not to eat the rice powder he had received but to give it to prisoner 596 in such and such a room. At first, the prisoner would refuse to follow the order. After a second, and a third dream, the ancestor would grab him by the neck and demand, Will you do it or not? The prisoner would have no choice.

Through phenomena of that sort, I gained quite a number of disciples. If I had spoken, I would have convinced more people. Some of you may know that twenty-four secret disciples, such as Park Chung-hwa and Kim Won-duk, came to me through heavenly guidance. They were people who would do anything I asked. They would place their lives on the line. If I had said, Let's break out of here, they were the kind of people who would have tried.

Greeting with the eyes alone

The prison consisted of six blocks, all interconnected. Other inmates might want to meet me, even though we were under the strict, watchful eyes of the prison guards. Just to meet me, some inmates would stealthily crawl beneath the guards' line-of-sight. In the morning, when we were out of our cells in the narrow corridors, we would stand in four lines. It was a narrow corridor, but they would make their way to me, wink and

give me a quick embrace. This made a deep impression on me.

A guard would hit, with his rifle butt, anyone discovered doing this and send him to an isolation cell for one to three weeks. These people would make plans to escape. Those discovered for a third time planning to escape would be punished with death. Despite that, they would still make effort to meet and greet me, because that would be the most glorious part of their day. They played that kind of game.

This went on for several months. I began to think it might cause a problem, and I would break out in a cold sweat. Sometimes they would greet me lying down flat. You could not know the taste of such tragedy, pitiableness, unless you experienced it.

You surely cannot grasp the deep communication of the heart made through just our eyes unless you have experienced it. Even if you studied volumes of encyclopedias, you still wouldn't know. Sometimes I felt God Himself smiled, thinking, How wonderful! when He saw the beauty of these relationships.

Food hidden in the work place

During my time in Hungnam, some men became my followers. Some of them would hide packets of rice powder in smelly holes or gaps where they would be unlikely to be discovered and would share them with me later. Those meals left me with more unforgettable memories than luxurious banquets would.

Some inmates would signal me with their eyes from around the corner of the prison toilet. They would say, I felt sorry about eating this alone, so I have brought you some. Teacher, you surely know that I want to share this with you at lunch-time, don't you?

Moving experiences of sharing rice powder brought tears to my eyes and left such a deep impression on me that I have never forgotten them. On the morning of my birthday, a person from Pyongyang who knew came up to me and gave me a bowl of rice powder he had kept. I will remember this as long as I live.

I have never forgotten, even once, the experiences I've had, or when and in which prison they took place. I have to reciprocate to remove this debt from my life. If you think in this way, no debts will remain. Even if the person who had done me a kindness were no longer here, I would establish a greater condition and repay the debt through another person. When I die, I don't want to carry any debts into my grave. This is my philosophy and outlook on life. *STW*



Left: UN forces bombed the Chosun Nitrogen Fertilizer Company's Hungnam plant, where Father and other prisoners had toiled; **Right:** UN Forces cross the Taedong River on December 4, 1950, during their evacuation of Pyongyang, which they had held for forty-five days; They had crossed north of the Thirty-Eighth Parallel in early October, but were driven back south of the Thirty-Eighth Parallel after China entered the Korean War.