**Il Shim Ceremony For Second Generation Teens**

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On Sunday, January 10th the New Jersey Family Federation conducted an IL SHIM Ceremony for all New Jersey blessed children in grades 7 through 12. Out of a pool of approximately 55 eligible children, 52 participated from a total of 36 different families. Attendance at the service exceeded 300 people (including children). Participants alone – parents and their children – exceeded 150 people. We did not have enough chairs to seat everyone. Many people simply stood in the back and a few people didn’t come in due to the crowd. In addition to the crowd at the Service, approximately 100 more people (children and teachers combined) attended Sunday School at the Clifton Church and helped prepare the reception after the service. By all accounts, it would probably be accurate to say that it was the largest and best-attended Sunday Service ever held in New Jersey.

***Meaning of "IL SHIM"***

IL Shim is a Korean term that means "one heart" or "one heart and mind". This term was chosen for this ceremony because of its implications for inter-generational unity and inheritance. True Parents conducted a similar ceremony called "IL SEUNG IL" or "Day of One Victory" (1985.8.20) centered upon Hyo Jin Nim and the second generation after True Father’s release from Danbury. In that ceremony, True Parents declared the beginning of the period of responsibility for the second generation. Four years later, True Parents also conducted an "IL SHIM" ceremony (1989.6.23) to proclaim the total unity between Heavenly Father and True Parents and the inheritance of this unity by the children. This ceremony was conducted on the occasion of True Father’s elevation and recognition as head of all Korean tribes and clans. During the ceremony, Father said that as children, who are to inherit the love and lineage of True Parents through the Blessing, we must completely remove ourselves from Satan’s influence. The IL SHIM ceremony was conducted to confirm our opportunity to now inherit this special status based upon the conditions made by True Parents and True Parents’ family.

It should be mentioned that True Parents did not authorize this New Jersey IL SHIM ceremony. Furthermore, it was not intended to serve as a forgiveness ceremony for those blessed children who have made serious mistakes. As of yet, True Parents have not indicated that blessed children in this situation have any hope for restoration. The New Jersey IL SHIM ceremony was conducted primarily to offer a pro-active and constructive deterrent to the development of serious spiritual problems. The term IL SHIM was selected due to its having been already used in a similar ceremony in True Parents family and because it seemed to be the most appropriate term for our purpose.

***Purpose of Ceremony.***

The IL Shim Ceremony was conceived to serve numerous purposes, four of which are listed below. These are not necessarily the only purposes, but rather only those that we have identified to date and which seem of most importance.

• Coming of age - to recognize children who are moving from adolescence to teen years (into puberty) as graduating from one level and moving into the next. The significance of this transition is also connected with coming into a new level of personal relationship with God. That is, God will now begin to relate to them in more of an adult fashion and they will be expected to take more responsibility for their spiritual life as they approach the top of the growth stage in spiritual development.

• Rite of passage - to signify that children who are participating in this ceremony have accomplished certain conditions of faith - such as having completed certain educational requirements - and have committed themselves to certain ideals - such as purity and a commitment to receive the Matching and Blessing from True Parents.

• Inheritance of tradition - to signify that as blessed children, they have received the grace of being "freed from original sin" as a result of the conditions made by True Parents and their own parents. As blessed children they stand in a "position of grace and blessing" and through this ceremony it is recognized that they now have a greater responsibility to maintain this position. This ceremony accentuates their responsibility to keep the tradition of faith that they inherited from their parents and welcomes them into more mature participation in their church and community. This ceremony underscores their personal commitment to do this.

• New Beginning - to signify that through participation in this ceremony and the (prerequisite educational programs) these children can be forgiven for past misbehavior (except serious violations) and be "reborn" into a new and fresh beginning in their relationship with God. As participants in the IL Shim Ceremony, they now have more responsibility to set a good example for other children and show the proper standard of behavior in relation to personal and public life. By participating in this ceremony, the children agree that from this day forward they will do their best to maintain all the conditions of the IL Shim Ceremony Pledge.

***Why did we do it?***

Well… Our tradition seems to have many beautiful ceremonies for young children. The prayer tradition at birth, the 8-day ceremony, the 100-day ceremony, Church Holy Days, and of course, the birthday ceremonies. However, as our children age, birthday ceremonies become less and less significant and Church Holy Days seem to lack a personal connection. There seems to be no public, church-based ceremony to recognize our children’s maturation into the top of the growth stage. Once the early ceremonies are finished, there seems to be no other significant event until the Matching and Blessing. Due to the importance placed upon the Blessing, it would seem appropriate to offer more preparatory rituals to reinforce the inheritance of our tradition during the turbulent teen years.

Ritual has been called the "glue for tradition." It helps to provide continuity between generations and cultural identity. Other faith traditions provide significant ceremonies to recognize and promote the inheritance of their tradition by their children. The "Bar Mitzvah" in the Jewish tradition or "Confirmation" in the Catholic tradition are typical examples that come to mind. We chose the term IL SHIM (one heart one mind) and conducted this ceremony to provide our children with a comparable ceremony to reinforce the fundamental aspects of our tradition.

Our Preparation.

To qualify for the ceremony, we asked all children to participate in a special workshop at Barrytown prior to God’s Day. In that workshop, the children offered a fast together with a confession and repentance ceremony, and made a written determination for the New Year. The content of the workshop dealt with fundamental issues of being a BC teen.

The Ceremony.

Many parents expressed sincere gratitude for this ceremony. Several parents commented to me that they had no idea it would be such a dignified and holy affair. One mother in particular called and said that the ceremony made a deep impression on her daughter. She had been having problems with her and this ceremony seems to have restored (to some extent) her daughter’s appreciation for being a BC. Another parent commented that his son seems to behaving in a more serious and adult fashion after the ceremony. Other parents expressed regret in not having prepared more and for not taking it more seriously. Many parents said that they want to make this ceremony a yearly tradition that the younger children can look forward to. Several parents mentioned that many the 5th and 6th graders who were watching the ceremony were impressed and were looking forward to participating next year. In general, the parents were very grateful and uplifted by the ceremony. The children – even the more callous among them – were moved to varying degrees. Some obviously did it only to please their parents, but as one child told me, "it made them think more deeply about things."

***Ceremony Date & Frequency.***

We have decided to conduct this ceremony annually on the first Sunday after God’s Day. This date was chosen to add significance to the ceremony in that it should symbolize a new beginning in life. Just as God’s Day is a day of making new determinations for the coming year, likewise, the children participating in this ceremony should make a new determination to begin not only the New Year, but also a new phase in their life. This date was also chosen in relation to the Day of Victory of Love which was declared as a result of the sacrifice of Heung Jin Nim who offered his life to protect True Parents. True Parents have declared Heung Jin Nim as the example and model for the second generation. Hence, this date was chosen to help connect his life to the life of our second-generation children.

***Program Format.***

In recognition of our desire to make this ceremony a significant church event, we planned to hold the ceremony in front of the entire church congregation with younger children present. Sunday school classes for grades 4-6 were canceled while the pre-k through 3rd grade classes were held as usual. We felt that the younger children should attend the ceremony with their families in hopes of making a lasting impression on them of the importance of being a "Blessed Child" and to underscore the responsibility of setting a good example for the younger children.

The format of the ceremony can be modified to meet local requirements, but we would recommend the following two fundamental components always be included (see accompanying program outline):

• IL SHIM PLEDGE AND PRAYER– the local pastor should explain the purpose and significance of the IL SHIM Ceremony and offer the IL SHIM Prayer before starting the ceremony. Next, the children and their parents all together bow to True Parents and then recite the family pledge. At the conclusion of this pledge the children will affirm their commitment to the ideals of the IL SHIM Pledge by bowing two times:

First, to God and True Parents (facing forward with back to congregation),

Second, to their parents and congregation (facing parents and congregation),

After completing their bows they stand facing the congregation and receive a warm and heartfelt applause from the entire congregation (standing ovation OK). After the bows are finished, they all together recite the IL SHIM Pledge, after which they may return to their reserved seats in front of the congregation with their parents sitting in reserved seats behind them - children all together and parents all together.

• INHERITANCE & COMMITMENT RING CEREMONY - following the pledge and prayer, we recommend that the children receive from their parents a "commitment ring." This ring symbolizes their commitment to purity as well as their inheritance of a blessed lineage from True Parents via their parents. This ring should be kept with them forever, or at least until receiving the Matching and Blessing from True Parents. The ring is important because it symbolically commits them to purity and provides a visible reminder of their commitment. We recommend the "True Love Waits" ring with "IL SHIM" engraved inside. This ring can later be given to their spouse.

***A Reflection.***

In general, the program turned out better than we expected and the turnout was much higher than expected in spite of short notice. We did not have the chance to properly educate or inform the community as to the content and purpose of the ceremony. Many found out about it only days before and learned of the content during the ceremony. In spite of this, however, they came anyway and seemed to be deeply moved. The most significant moment for me came when one particular child requested to join the ceremony. She had refused to participate earlier and for various reasons, was unqualified. I told her that unless she would change certain things in her life she could not participate. She ended up only watching the ceremony. Afterwards she and her mother came to me again requesting to participate retroactively. She said that she was willing to do the various conditions to "qualify." Later she told me that the ceremony had caused her to reflect more deeply on some of her attitudes and behaviors. I never expected this program to have that kind of impact on a person. I had almost given-up on this girl. To have her come to me and say this was the most gratifying moment of the event for me.

For others planning similar ceremonies, I would recommend more preparation and involvement of the parents. We had no for this due the to shortness of the preparation. If there were more involvement of the parents I think the ceremony could have been even deeper and more meaningful for both children and parents. I also feel that we must follow-up this program with a more effective youth ministry program. Rev. Hong and I are currently working on a new program for New Jersey. I also feel the need to underscore the importance of improving the Sunday service in order to maintain the involvement of the parents. One child asked me to personally call her parents next Sunday to ask them to come to Sunday service. She said that they never come and that she cannot come to our teen youth-group class unless they decide to come to service.

Ideally, I feel that the age of the children participating should be 13 or 14 (Junior High School). Older children may perceive the ceremony as trivial and merely conform out of parental pressure. Nonetheless, we encouraged even the older children to participate, and in spite of some sarcasm and negativity, they came and many were moved. Future ceremonies will primarily focus on 13 and 14-year-old children. I think older children – those graduating from high school – need something more. Some have suggested a ceremony that recognizes adulthood and eligibility for the Blessing that would be conducted after high school graduation. This is an idea needing much more thought and development.

In conclusion, from all that I have heard and seen, the New Jersey IL SHIM Ceremony was a great success and made a deep impact on many of the children. Yet it is only a ceremony. Many problems and serious issues remain. A ceremony certainly cannot replace the need for a well-planned and carefully implemented parental and church-based religious education program. Our children are facing many issues that challenge their faith on a daily basis. We need to establish comprehensive and well-integrated youth ministries that combine the efforts of the home, church, and community. The home alone is not enough. Likewise, the efforts of the church, if not supported by the home, will also fail. Ultimately, all three of these educational domains need to work together to provide a nurturing environment where a child’s spirituality can develop. Since the school and community are not about to adopt our values anytime soon, it behooves us to make greater efforts to work together and strengthen our education wherever and whenever we can.

***Il Shim Ceremony Pledge***

As a Blessed Child of the second generation

I freely and sincerely dedicate myself to:

• Love and honor God and True Parents by practicing a life of attendance with absolute love, absolute faith, and absolute obedience.

• Love and honor my parents by maintaining the tradition of our lineage that began with the Matching and Blessing of True Parents and has been passed on to me.

• Love and honor my church and community by giving of myself in service to others and by participating in church activities.

• Love and honor my future spouse, my future children and myself by saving sexual relations until the day I receive the Matching and Blessing from True Parents.