

Chung Ye
The Values of Loyalty and a Virtuous Way of Life

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What is the Virtuous Way of Life? What is Patriotism? We in our American society feel that we've defined these values, and what they mean to us. But have we? Chung and Ye are these values epitomized for the Korean culture. And, the stories *Ulpaso*, *Prime Minister Hwang Hee*, *True Wealth*, and *Giving Away a Fortune* are the truest representations of these values that I have ever seen.

What is Chung? Unlike Patriotism, Chung is not just loyalty to one's country. While Patriotism only applies to love for one's country, Chung is respect not only for one's country, but also other people, and one's self. In addition, unlike blind Patriotism, blind loyalty, Chung, and respect and love for one's country and Emperor, means offering support; offering frank and honest advice to that Emperor. This respect for the Emperor entails questioning that Emperor, and this respect is mutual. A true sign of Chung is an honest exchange of ideas and opinions between the Emperor and the people of the society. Chung was a value that was self-imposed, also setting itself apart from the somewhat naïve way in which we handle our Patriotism. People who believed in Chung meant it; they believed Chung to be a part of their essence. Something that struck me as odd about our Patriotism is that much of the time we have this Patriotism because we are told too. Followers of Chung just accept this practice of Patriotism as part of their essence; it is a prerequisite of being a good person, especially in the eyes of a follower of Chung.

There were many rulers who exemplified the practice of Chung, however, Prime Minister Hwang Hee and Ulpaso are considered by many to be the personification of the humble, respectful, and intelligent ruler. Ulpaso was originally a farmer, a descendant

of a great man (another prime minister, in fact). After the current ruler, Kogukchon, changed the nomination process for the government from birthright inheritance of the position to elections based on merit, he chose a man, Anryu, as his prime minister. Anryu refused, and pointed towards Ulpaso. After a telling first encounter, he was chosen as prime minister. Ulpaso, to me, is such a strong character, and really one of the few people that can claim to be a true leader. He didn't sit back on his throne, use his wealth for his own personal gain, but made sure that he observed the suffering of the common man, and made sure that he was able to address every concern that they may have had. Prime Minister Hwang Hee was another perfect example of Chung. Not only did he have respect for his country, no, love for his country, but he understood that this meant a love for the people. He lived a humble life, and devoted himself to studying, learning, and understanding. He proved to me that Chung is a value that covers much territory, in that to truly understand Chung, and to follow Chung, you have to love people, because they are the country. Those who truly understand Chung understand that the country is not defined by its rulers. It is defined by the people who live there, who make their homes and their lives in that country. Hwang Hee understood this, and showed the truest form of patriotism by demonstrating a love and respect for all of his country's people.

However, all values pale in comparison to the values of Ye. Chung and Hyo guide you in conduct, but Ye defines how to live your spiritual life. Ye is the answer to the question, "How do I achieve spiritual fulfillment?" Ye is the Virtuous Way of Life. To give a point of comparison: Ye leads to Enlightenment. Or, through a Christian view, Ye

leads to Heaven. But, what defines the Virtuous Way of Life? Worship of a God? Acceptance of a savior? Not to the Koreans. Ye was something more. It wasn't so much worshipping of a God, it was becoming a God. Ye is defined by respect and love for one's elders. Not just elders, but others. Ye is defined by selflessness, and by valuing others above yourself. Sacrifice is a term that many would call this form of dedication to others, but it is not an exaggeration to say that one who understands Ye would literally sacrifice themselves for someone else. Not only is it respect and benevolence, but it is a literally giving away of everything one has. If I were to drive down the street and see a man walking on the side of the road, I would question whether to stop. I'm not ashamed to admit this. Because I have not dedicated my life to Ye, if I saw a person of this situation, while I would feel guilty, I wouldn't act. I would be scared, I would be selfish, and I would continue driving. Events like this haunt me, even to this day, because I know that is not the right practice. In order to understand Ye, and to follow Ye, you must literally stop and give that man a ride, food, shelter, maybe even a home if you could. There would be no question in the mind of a man who follows Ye: I see suffering, I will help. To compare this to a Western ideal: the follower of Ye is the Good Samaritan. Even if the man wasn't suffering, a person on the path of Ye would still stop to assist in whatever way they could. Ye is defined by courtesy, respect, and love.

True Wealth and *Giving Away a Fortune* really impacted me deeply. *True Wealth*, to me, seems the most fitting title for the story; this is the story of a man who truly was wealthy, in mind, body, and spirit. Wealth was defined by a lack of wealth; the wealthy man lives a life of decadence, ignorance, cut-off from nature, from the true lives that

most humans live. A "wealthy" man was one who lived a life of simplicity. True wealth to the Koreans was a striving to eliminate wealth. If one had someone in their debt, you would forget that debt if they couldn't pay you back. As one rises to a higher rank in a government rank, they make their house smaller. You have few items you truly need, therefore, the true followers of Ye and the ones who possessed the most wealth would have nothing. They didn't need it. *Giving Away a Fortune* defines this selfless quality. When Kim jae-hae bought his house from the widow, and found the fortune of gold stowed away, while his first thought was, "I am rich," he soon realized the wealth was not his to take. He knew that he had to return this to its true owner. And, when he learned that it was not the widow's, and she suggested they share the gold, both him and his wife both said, "We don't need it. You do. Take it." That is such a simple concept. Wealth is defined by need. If you don't need something, but someone else does, give it to them. The scholar and his wife knew that this woman was a widow. How was she to provide for herself? She needed all this gold, so that she could support herself and her family. And there was no hesitation; they gave her the gold. This was true self-sacrifice. And this is Ye.

So, Chung and Ye to me truly define what a person should desire. Chung and Ye are what all people need. And Chung and Ye, as I have learned them from these stories, seem two qualities that all people, not just Koreans, or followers of Eastern philosophy, can use to better themselves, and better humanity. These two values define, to me, the best way to live, and the path to true enlightenment.