

Ashley Eary

Chung Hyo Ye Essay Contest

When I discovered that a requirement for this scholarship was to read *Chung Hyo Ye*, *Tales of filial devotion, loyalty, respect and benevolence from the history and folklore of Korea*, I thought that this story would be like any other folk tale, mildly entertaining with a lesson found only by those who are looking for it. However, after reading the stories held within *Chung Hyo Ye*, I found that I was faced with something very different. It was rather a book of truth and wisdom, one that emphasizes the virtues of man and instructs those who have not had those virtues impressed upon them. The scholarship asks participants to describe how the book affected them, and while this certainly makes for amazing essays, I have found that rather than just affecting me in a superficial way, it has quite literally shook me to the core.

I am a Christian. In Sunday school I was taught to love my neighbors as my self, honor my father and mother in the Lord for this was right, and to do unto others as I would have them do unto me. However, between memory verses, youth rallies and the sermons that were preached from the pulpit, I lost something that was supposed to be fundamental. I lost in all the chaos, the pomp and circumstance, the understanding of what Christianity means. I took the teachings to be laws, rules that were not to be broken. They were rather to be memorized and regurgitated upon request of my elders. And so I lived. I kept, for the most part, the laws. In short, I obeyed the letter of the law, not the spirit of it because that foundation was never laid. And so living was living, not for a higher purpose, but for the here and now as it was all I knew.

It sounds cliché to say that my whole mindset changed with my first reading of *Chung Hyo Ye*, but in truth I suppose that this would only be a small portion of the whole story. What I mean to say is that I knew that something was missing. I knew that the law was supposed to be written in my heart. The commandments I found in holy text was to be followed not because the words bound one in obligation, but because a person was obliged for the sole reason that their

heart compelled them. I knew what to do, just not how to do it or to what extent. And here begins my answer to the question to this essay. *Chung Hyo Ye* answered my question. In simply written, yet complexly crafted terms, the book told me that one must love, honor, and respect their family, friends, and country with all of their heart and must do so to the very brink of death.

Perhaps in this day and age I will not be made a martyr, neither for country, family nor faith, but I will be called to put myself, in all my selfishness and defiance, to death. Stories of Hyangdok's devotion and of Sim Chong, who became the eyes of her father, tell of such unfaltering loyalty. These, along with all the others, convicted me. I know that I may never live up to the example given by any of these brave and noble people, but a commitment to attempt to live in this fashion is not one that I am unwilling to make. I saw for the first time that vow, that desire to conform to the ways told in this book, is not separate and apart from my faith. It is rather a fulfillment of my faith. Through this revelation, I have found that the law of the Lord must be on my heart and ever present in my mind. Not one or the other, but both.

I am a Christian. But, I am better for having read this. While this scholarship is important to me, even if I do not receive it, I am still left with a treasure that in the long run will benefit me far more than any sum of money. A few days ago I called my mother. It was a simple call, meant only to update her on my schooling, but instead, I wound up crying. I found myself asking for her forgiveness for not being the daughter I should be. I told her the story of Han Seokbong, about the mother who wanted the best for her son and the strong parallel I saw in us. Through quieted tears she replied that she was proud of me. Not because at 17 I received my associate's degree, or that now I am working on a bachelor's degree and am looking toward medical school, but rather because I had finally learned the lesson that she had so earnestly attempted to impart to me.