

The Need

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“Come out of it; you’ve suffered enough”, he says. “All your wanderings through lives uncountable would stack up a mountain of bones. All of your tears shed crying through innumerable lifetimes for those who have died would make a great ocean.”

--The Buddha

The incident was a result of needing to solve a problem. For the old woman, who participated from the beginning, it was most strange. She was a recent Korean immigrant to the Beautiful Country, *Mi Kuk*, the United States. Since that poorly managed Korean war, MacArthur’s folly, Koreans had been pouring into the USA. MacArthur, not satisfied with conquering or taking 90% of the country, ignored the threats of Beijing. He tried to push to the Yalu river, the northern-most border of North Korea. Mao Tze-tung therefore ordered 1 million soldiers to charge over the Yalu south to assist the North Korean Army, ending in a permanent division of the peninsula at the 38th parallel, a disaster for the ancient nation. Now the old woman had also arrived. From the land of the Hans, *Han Kuk*, what Westerners call Korea, she fought her way. She came feeling victorious in her lifelong struggle. Tussling with the odds, which were normally against them: it was the brutality of life in Asia. In the three years that had now passed, she found that this struggle had only changed its form rather than subsiding. A new world in a New World.

A month before she left Korea her husband died; she and her children had come anyway as he had insisted on his death bed. Impelled to claw their way out of the low class of farmers, the Kims also had been pushed into the rural outskirts of

Seoul after their Great War. The family had finally transplanted itself into a Korean ghetto fifty miles north of San Francisco's East Bay.

The girls did not adjust well, too shy they were to practice English. Leaving their hometown almost fully grown, they had come of age in a village some 80 kms. south of the Korean capitol. The old woman's major problem of her 67 years was her last born daughter. She had developed schizophrenia. The mother often thought this sickness, which began to appear in her daughter's high school years, as a curse. The shamans in their Tae Beak Mountains could do nothing. Nor the curt, pill dispensing medical doctors in Seoul. From where I was looking, it was precipitated by the incredible pressures which East Asian society and family place on children to succeed in their studies. To succeed in their social mobility processes. These pressures broke the girl. Following the upper classes, mother and father had put her in various 'cram' schools. Endless rounds of tutoring after the legal school finished each day. Cramming, clipping, slipping and sliding in more and more English grammar, math, piano, and Bible. A continual prodding was there to uphold her family's honour. Do well. Good job. Good husband. Strong children. Endless upwards. Beginning in grade school, it would only subside when the university exam was passed.

By age 16, a tenuous connection to reality in Young-nam was discernable, if one took the time to look. Increasingly shy, far beyond the norms of female society. Talking on and talking on. Crippling integration into adulthood. Insomnia and fundamental Christianity consumed a share of that youthful energy. She was certainly protected through most of her 20's by her barricade of schoolmates which, out in even the outskirts of Seoul, was always strong. They protected each other's innocence. And it is still practiced out there. It goes until, one by one, marriage and pregnancies pull them under. Then the Kim *Ka-joak*, the Kim family moved to the Beautiful Country, the United States, the East Asian Promised Land.

Young-nam was ripped out of her social security. Lost from the beginning, she completely withdrew. It was three years at this writing, but her 'world' never developed. A constricted life. Cooking and cleaning, shopping and cooking. Watching Korean soaps on the satellited TV. Her life transpired in the apartment which she shared with her sister. This sister, Mi-ah, after attempts at several trades, finally made it through a beauty school in Oakland's Chinatown. Young-nam only went out for groceries or to visit her mother Kim Ajimoni, mother Kim, in the apartment complex for Seniors. Mi-ah was due to marry in two months time. "Where can Young-nam find shelter? It is impossible to send her back to Seoul." This question was a beacon of worry, a nerve racking broken record that had taken over Mrs. Kim's mind.

However, she was still a resourceful farmer's wife. From as early as 1940, perhaps, she had been forced to learn by experience. No schooling for the farmers. Who could remember those days exactly? The Japanese Empire was in a life and death struggle. Their rule of Korea was strangling the culture. A Chinese/Tibet prototype. By 1953 a new urgency was served up. The need to *absorb* the English language. How else could it be done? There was no money in the country and the schools were destroyed in their war. The better one could speak it in those days, the more business one could make with the American soldiers. But the obstacle in this was shyness and fear of the 'hairy big-noses'. Once this was overcome, some mastery of the English language could be achieved.

Money was earned by cleaning their apartments. Once you proved yourself, the GIs would sell commissary goods for an uninformed profit. Kim Ajimoni resold them on the black market. In this way she and her husband were able to move from their hovel of '54 and '55, and raise three children. It seemed to culminate in the move to the far distant land of their greatest fascination. You may call it 'black

marketing', but a Korean new ruling class was built on it. It became a profession for the business minded low class, the *Sang Nome*. The cultured Koreans were ashamed of it. But they too put in their orders down at the *Nam Dae Mun Shi-jang*, the Great South Gate Market. Coming into the shadows to purchase the American canned foods and condiments. The beer and the Scottish whiskey. The kitchen appliances even to huge Frigidaires and Whirlpools. Coming with their tight fists, pennies pinched, to buy from the *Sang Nome* in their *To-kae-bi Shi-jang*, the Ghost Market. Regardless, Mother and father kept the children as separated as possible from their endeavors. Never fully knowing, never understanding the secret, the children grew up with an ignorance of the food on their plates, the shirts on their backs. The children too lacked a critical first hand experience of the wealth and exuberance of Americans.

Concerning our story, the next twist of fate this greyed old woman would encounter was that morning, in the late fall, when she boarded her bus. Standing room only and heading downtown. That young American who pressed against her then, astonishingly, greeted her in Korean. "*An-young-ha-sae-yo. Han-kuk Sa-ram Im-ni-ka?*" How are you, are you Korean? A startled nod. A smile. "Yes". "Oh, how long have you been in this country?" "Three years" she said, disarmed by his non-GI usage of her language. The stranger speaking only Korean. The query continuing, gently drawing her out. "How do you like the Beautiful Country? Where is your home town?" Bauer was proficient in Korean proverbs: "*sal-a-ka-mi-an, ko-hyang-ee-da*", Where I go and live is my home town. "I am a former Peace Corp volunteer, down in *Ee-Ri* town for three years".

He had passed almost ten years in their country could talk about Korea and its culture. Make jokes in Korean. She had never met an American who knew so much about her country. "What do you do in America?" "I am studying psychology over at UC Berkeley". When she heard this, she hesitatingly began the

explanation. Her version of Young Nam's sickness. "My daughter doesn't go out much. Too shy. She don't talk to others. Only her sister or me. She can't read much. But cooking and cleaning, shopping, not bad. If she takes her medicine, she is much better, even laughing".

What kind of sickness did those symptoms indicate? Bauer didn't give it much thought, but sympathy, that arose. He knew the human affinity for fast acting symptom reducing, Western medicine. And also the side-effects of psychiatric medicines. Yes, this would conflict with conservative Korean social psychology. Disturbed people had to take their prescribed medicines. Comfort without social integration? The pain of side effects worse than marginal membership in society? Incomprehensible. But in America, there was a search on, however limited, for a non-chemical way of treating psychological instabilities, Bauer had actually entered in treatment with a Chinese acupuncturist for this reason.

A flurry of intentions appeared; possibly he could help the old woman's daughter. He told her that some Western people were using *Han-yak*, Chinese medicine, for treatment of mental illness. "Chinese view the imbalance of energies in the body as the cause of many psychological problems". Kim Ajimoni was relieved that this talk was not in English.

He told her he was now going to see his Chinese doctor: "Try to come and see; you'll find it interesting. She is 45 years. Trained for 10 years in hospitals in China." The old woman was paying attention. Bauer, intrigued. Ajimoni with her daughter, he as translator. Dr. Huang would be impressed. Kim Ajimoni agreed to come.

Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play should be known. The diversity in kamma should be known. The result of kamma should be known. The cessation of kamma should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of kamma

should be known...Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect.

--The Buddha, AN VI.63

The bus was now approaching Chinatown. It went several stops further, emptying out in the business district, then turned left into Chinese district. "Bauer-*shi*, where is your family?" She was actually asking about his marital status. "I'm divorced" "Children?" "No, we were too busy studying and working." They volleyed this subject until the clinic was reached. Inside was a noticeable clean and white. Ajimoni's face showed bright. Covering the left wall was a small drawered bureau containing perhaps one hundred drawers. Each one with Chinese characters scribed on its face. Inside, were the herbs. The pharmacopeia. In front of the bureau which hugged the wall, was a glass counter containing ready made boxed and bottled potions. Straight from China.

A grey, wizened grandfather, shifts from drawer to drawer intently, and with an ancient weight scale in hand. The herbs are silently, intently measured, as prescribed for each patient. "The doctor's father no doubt", thought she. On the opposite side of the room at this time of day are the grandfathers and grandmothers. Doubtful that many speak much the devil's English. They take turns sliding their chairs up to the doctor's desk. Set in the middle of the room, all watch as pulses and tongues are checked. It is a communal experience. Who has been diagnosed, sits without care, without thought of the needles embedded in different parts of the body. The clinic is a symphony of the singsong Cantonese dialect. The exaggerated, sassy language of Hong Kong.

Sitting down at the end of the line Ajimoni and Bauer exchange pleasantries with the doctor. The doctor examines her patients one by one. She explains to Richard their maladies and her treatment; soon it is Richard's turn. Kim Ajimoni is introduced. Her situation, explained. Dr. Huang translates all of this to the other

patients and then Richard is examined and treated in the treatment room. He lay now with needles in legs and arms, Mother Kim standing at the foot of the bed. She chatters, digesting the new experience. She is impressed by it all and she is comfortable with the doctor's diagnostic manner.

Leaving together when all was finished, Ajimoni asked Richard when he could meet her daughter. "I think you would be better able to interest her in acupuncture than I...". This was the sign again. She was hoping to interest Richard in courtship. Pictures of Young-nam with mother and Mi-ah. "Oh, she is pretty", but the sister Mi-ah was erotic. "Bauer-*shi*, you make the meeting time because you very busy. Young-nam and I have too much free time. When is good for you?" They arranged to meet on the morrow.

The next day it was an hour or so before noon in a small Korean mom and pop restaurant. It was Bauer's choice. Mrs. Kim seemed to be embarrassed but got over it. Afterwards, they spent the afternoon together walking on the university campus. Bauer quickly saw that Young-nam was far more sick than he had understood. He avoided the sexual side of the meeting. But Young-nam was drawn to him and readily agreed to watch his next treatment. That was the following Monday.

When mother and daughter arrived, he was laying on the treatment table. Twelve needles protruding. "Does it hurt?" Young-nam asked. Bright and widened are the eyes. "No, there is no hurt, in fact the bad energy is just flowing out of me, and that feels wonderful!" Kim Ajimoni had seldom seen her so animated. In comes Dr. Huang. Clean white smock, she, happily middle aged. The doctor adjusts the electrodes which are clipped on the end of the needles. Long wires run from them to a control box which was on a small table next to Richard's shoulder. Turning up the power some she asks "OK Bauer? No too strong? I want bring *Chi* down..."

There is a diagnosed regular excess of *Chi* energy flooding into his head. A real hot head. He translates this to the Kims but it is thinly understood. And the three of them go out. Mother and doctor conversing exhaustively in broken English, then doctor examines Young Nam. By the time the needles are pulled from Bauer, Young-nam had decided to have that treatment. Bauer comes out, Dr. Huang escorts Young-nam in.

He sits and begins...small talk with Ajimoni who does not want to watch. Oh! There is a sharp scream of pain. Richard and Mother running in. But the doctor has simply hit an energy spot; she is where she wants to be. Even so, she is asking Young-nam if it is pain or energy or both which she is feeling. Diverting her attention. But Young-nam does not answer amidst her shock, nor when he translates. The doctor continues on.

The treatment goes this way for the next thirty minutes. Dr. Huang puts in a needle until a scream and then Richard talking, soothing Young-nam through the shock and fear. Once all the needles are in place, the pain and nervousness decreases greatly. It is now a half hour wait for the magic to work. Ajimoni, thinking about her luck in the tight situations she has faced throughout her life, walks in, feeling confident. She carries those Korean snacks, a roll of a rice treat wrapped in dry seaweed paper. Savory *kim-pop* cut in pieces. And rice cake, their culturally revered *duk*. Steamed rice flour, in small blocks. Some green and others, white. It is actually malleable, bland plaster, glue. Out of deference to her age and his hunger, Bauer isn't rejecting. Ajimoni is, in that old way, rewarding Young-nam's courage. She offers to her, tries to put it in her mouth. But she closes it and turns her head away "Not hungry" says she. Ajimoni simply eats it herself. Soon Young Nam's hunger sharpens, after the third offer she opens her mouth. The mother brightens; loss of appetite is one of her daughter's symptoms. She continues putting food into the afflicted girl's mouth.

The family is thus engaged, oblivious to their surroundings, engrossed in the food. Bauer, expansive, telling of his learning of things Asian. Those things of the shared culture of Asia, of the 'Black Haired Peoples'. Things Korean. Etiquette for example. Showing respect to one's guest or elders. Always pouring drinks with the bottle in the right hand, the left hand fully opened tips, of the fingers almost touching the wrist of the right hand. Bauer, for the sake of the humor, pours himself a drink in this fashion. Asian culture is very adamant about not honoring oneself. Parent and child look into each other eyes, hope sparkles. Laughing and disbelieving Richard's presence. And then something sticks in the throat of Young Nam. She begins to choke. For a few seconds time suspends itself. It is 'out of order'. They don't perceive what it means. Trying to clear her throat, it worsens. A spasm. Another. Spasm after spasm. The needles. Quivering now shaking. They pushing this way, perhaps deeper. And that way. Shockingly they pain her. Food is drawn into the lungs. Spasms into contortions. The choking. The gagging. It immediately threatens her existence.

Ajimoni is yelling. Doctor streaks into the room, instantly analyzes the situation. Trying now to get the needles out. He tries to grasp her body. Knocking needles. The contortions must be arrested. Each second her life force is being exhausted. All of the energy of her youthful body attempts to clear her lungs: massively it chokes. Obstructed coughs. The needles, they must come out to save Young-nam. An age lapses, falls away.

The dumb tortured visage turns in color. Blue oxygen-less blood swelling her face. Eyes trying to blow out of her head, exthalmic. Body shivering, vibrations so intense. Its whole force to save the lungs. Mother in hysterics, trying to help, knocking needles, knocking needles. Their minds reel with the clarity of nightmares.

Those old Chinese, they crowd around the door of the treatment room. Stretching to look. Straining to know. The stench of feces. It poisons the air. Young-nam, face twisted from such pain and dumbfounded shock, ceases fighting. Her death rattle now, it shakes the room. Another cycle of birth and death is completed.