

Becoming deeply rooted:

Our potential and our responsibility as elder 2nd Generation

Since the day I started school, I can always remember working very hard to get the best grades I could, so that I would get into the best University I could, so that I would get the best job I could and reach my fullest potential. But not so long ago, I realised there was something quite fundamental that I was missing in all of that, a lesson that I can better express through the example of the bamboo tree.

As any bamboo farmer will know, once a bamboo seed is planted, nothing happens to it in the first year, nor in the second year, nor even in the third or fourth year. But with enough care and water, finally in the fifth year, the seed suddenly sprouts and shoots up. And in some types of bamboo trees, once the seed sprouts, it grows 4 feet in the first 24 hours - making it the fastest growing tree in the world. What is going on in the first four years is not that the seed is sleeping or failing, but that it is building deep roots.

The thing I had missed was that whilst it *is* true that the world needs people with expertise and professionalism, more than that, the world needs people who are deeply rooted and who know who they are. People who, just like the bamboo seed, have strong roots that firmly anchor them so they don't topple over with challenges, people who are very clear in their identity, their values and on what they will never compromise. It made me reconsider that maybe, life is less about growing up, and more about growing down, deep into ourselves and our roots. The bamboo story made me realise that prioritising my individual success as my number 1 goal, and embracing the world culture that promoted results, recognition and showing off my personal achievements, was very damaging for my spiritual growth.

Instead, real long-term success, I believe, cannot come from knowledge and professionalism alone. Equally important, and perhaps even more important, is our essence, or character: being a person with strong values and a clear purpose; becoming people not motivated by promotions or status but by learning, growing and contributing to something more than ourselves. Thinking back to my Cambridge interview I realised that's what the professors were looking for. More than any exam results or academic achievements, they were looking for something deeper; for character, for a passion, a desire in me to contribute something bigger to the world with what they were going to teach me.

I believe that our responsibility as 2nd gen is not to first aim to become successful and professional and *then* to somehow bring it back to our movement. It's the other way round. I think that our responsibility is to live deeply rooted lives - lives that are deeply principled, where our strength is drawn from our relationship with God and our clear, everyday lifestyle. Then, just like the bamboo seed, if our roots and our character are clear, I believe the opportunities and job offers will find us and success will come, because God will be freer to work in our lives and bless us even more. Just like St. Catherine of Sienna said: "If we become who God meant us to be, we will set the world on fire". But I realised that instead, I was trying to create success in the world by myself and I forgot to leave space for God to be part of my life and to reveal a much greater version of who I can be.

The world is desperate for people who have strong values and a clear moral compass. And, in my past year now working full-time with the European Second Generation Department (ESGD), I see *huge* potential in our 2nd gen community to step up and offer this - because that desire to contribute to something bigger than ourselves is in our DNA.

But for us to step up to this, I believe it relies on two very important things. Firstly, it relies on us as 2nd gen to resist the temptation that I nearly gave into, which was to prioritise my individual success above everything else. Because the real strength in the bamboo is actually in the fact that it is not a tree (like I originally thought), but a type of grass. The difference is that, rather than forming an individual root and trunk, grass roots are collective and form together by becoming interconnected. This is where they get their strength from to grow so quickly. I believe God created us to be much more like bamboo grass than trees. That actually, we were designed to live lives for something greater than our own happiness, to live lives where we prioritise others, our community, our friendships and relationships over our personal ambitions. I think that our destiny as a 2nd gen community, is to be deeply connected and very intimately interested and involved in each other's lives. And it seems quite clear to me that in ignoring this by settling to create a generation of only successful individuals, we will greatly limit our full potential.

Secondly, I believe our success as 2nd gen relies on receiving good spiritual education. Education is my passion. I studied it at University and then became a teacher in a London school for three years. And from my experience, I have clearly seen that education is decisive. It has an incredible power to draw out the strength, the goodness and the potential in us as a 2nd gen community; to deepen our identity, reminding us about the bigger vision and purpose of our lives when we forget it. But, as we have seen from the tragic number of Blessed Children who do not see their future in our movement, the lack of care and investment in healthy, relatable education has hugely damaged our greatest resource – which is each other. This past year, working for ESGD, I have seen again and again the power of investing in good education and care. I am very hopeful that we can all participate in transforming our leadership and educational culture, and that when we create the right environment, we as 2nd gen *will* grow. Just like the bamboo seeds, which need regular care and water for many years whilst they grow their deep roots before shooting up, if we receive genuine care and investment, we will also shoot up and grow in amazingly strong ways.

I know that, personally, my blessing, my clarity and my happiness in life is in every way due to the education I received from those who personally invested in me. And so despite whatever job or career I will have next, I want to continue to support educating and caring for my younger brothers and sisters because I believe that will make the biggest impact. Received from my parents, who received it from our True Parents, passing on God's lineage really does matter to me.

So, in a time where we as 2nd gen have great freedom to pursue our personal interests and talents, I believe we need to remind ourselves that within this freedom, lies our great responsibility to each other as a community. I hope we can be inspired to create a culture where our greatest profession, far beyond any of our individual fields, is living for the sake others. Because maybe, just like the playwright George Bernard Shaw once wrote, maybe our life is much less our own than we like to think, and instead belongs to the whole community; so for as long as we live, we should see it as a privilege to do for others, whatever we can.

Yebuny Hanna ~ Cranes Club Kick-off testimony ~ Vienna, 10th May, 2015