



# Success Story Brief

## Ilchi Lee – World Peace Leader with Learning Disability

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### Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide.

### Based at:

University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Center on Disability Studies

### In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for Independent Living  
Hawaii Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division

### Funded by:

U.S. Department of Education  
Rehabilitation Services Administration

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*The following is the fourth in a series of portraits of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities who have embodied the following quote: "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent. The slogan 'press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."*

~ Calvin Coolidge

### Introduction

What is success in life? The notion of success is not easily stated in words because it will depend on different perspectives, lots of situations, and various criteria. These multiple variables may result in a reluctance to define success. Yet there are people who clearly define the meaning of success. One such man is Dr. Seung Heun Lee, commonly known as Ilchi Lee, who has achieved success despite a learning disability. He is a model/mentor for other Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) with disabilities.

Seung Heun Lee is the pioneer of the modern Dahn Hak movement, a traditional Korean system of physical and mental exercises that seeks to use energy, or Ki, to attain a spiritual awakening. Currently, Dahn Hak is famous as a rapidly growing movement, with more than three million participants worldwide; including over three hundred centers in Korea, and about sixty centers in the USA and in Europe.

Dr. Lee is also the author of books, including several bestsellers in Korea, and two musical CDs. He is a well-known lecturer on topics ranging from spiritual health to enlightenment. His speaking engagements have included the Harvard School of Theology and Queens College of New York City. In 2000, he and Neale Donald Walsch, well-known author of the "Conversations with God" series, established the New Millennium Peace Foundation, a non-profit foundation whose goal is to attain lasting world peace by raising the collective human awareness. Lee and Walsch lecture at 'The Meeting with the Creator,' an event held several times a year, in Sedona, Arizona, and other locations around the world. (For more information, please go to <http://www.healingso-ciety.org/ilchilee/ilchilee.html>).

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Dr. Lee was recognized as one of the fifty preeminent spiritual leaders of the world at the United Nations World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in August 2000 (Lee, 2000).

Born in 1950 to a family of educators, Lee majored in Clinical Pathology in college. In addition, he earned degrees in Physical Education and Oriental Medicine. After his marriage in 1974, he became more deeply interested in the traditional form of mind-body training of Korea, attaining an “Awakening” after a 21-day deep meditation training in the mountains of Central South Korea. Gaining a deep understanding and appreciation of the brain as a tool for integrating the body-mind-spirit aspects of human nature, he set out to systemize and organize his experiences and knowledge into a discipline he calls Brain Respiration.

After his enlightenment 25 years ago, on Mo-Ak Mountain in Korea, Seung Heun Lee chose the spiritual name Ilchi, which literally means ‘a finger pointing to the truth’, and symbolizes ‘a finger showing a path to enlightenment for humanity’. The name represents his promise to dedicate his life to the realization of true peace for humanity and the Earth.

As an internationally recognized spiritual leader, and founder of the Healing Society movement, Dr. Ilchi Lee is an educational philosopher and world peace leader. He has established Peaceology for Earth Humans, to practice love for humanity, love for the Earth, and realization of a true and lasting world peace. He outlined his experiences with disability and the process of dramatic enlightenment as the following:

“I was alone in a remote mountain, having gone without water, food, or sleep for 21 days. I was at my utmost limit, in body and mind. I had an excruciatingly painful headache that pierced through my head in rhythmic and dreadful pounding. My body wouldn’t move, nor my tongue form a word. And it was at this moment that the cosmos opened up inside me and swept me into her arms with a loud resounding moment of enlightenment, a deafening crash that seemed to transport me to another world. ‘Cosmic Mind is My Mind and Cosmic Energy is My Energy!’ my mouth automatically croaked in eternal joy, voicing the Oneness that I had glimpsed before and had even known intellectually, but never felt at this level of profound depth. This voice told me that my body is not me, but mine. It told me that my mind is not me, but mine. It assured me that the Cosmic Mind is my mind and that the Cosmic Energy is my energy. Through this moment I came to feel the all-encompassing rhythm of life. I experienced the light, the sound, and the vibration that formed the source of all life, absorbing and understanding in wonder the Cosmic Order within that governed all things. Through that moment, I had found my True Self, after so many years of fruitless search.”(Lee, 2000, p. xi).

In 1986, Dr. Lee began the Healing Society movement to expand the Brain-Peace Philosophy on a society-wide stage and use Brain Respiration not only as a tool for individual development but also as an instrument for healing society. He established the Korean Institute for Brain Science (KIBS) in 1990 to engage in scientific research of the human brain and Brain Respiration.

In 2000, Dr. Ilchi Lee founded the World Earth Human Alliance (WEHA) and hosted the 1st and 2nd Humanity Conference, in addition to hosting the first ever Earth Human Festival in Korea’s World Cup Stadium with over 100,000 in attendance.

In 2003, Dr. Lee founded the International Graduate University for Peace (IGUP), the only higher learning institution in Korea devoted solely to the study, research and implementation of peace, in conjunction with other global peace institutions such as University of Peace in Costa Rica. He expects IGUP to become a fertile breeding ground for future international peace leaders. (For more information, please see <http://eng.dahnworld.com/eng/dahnandbr7.asp>)

In a recent interview with Dr. Lee, he talked about his philosophy and faith for persons with disabilities, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities. Excerpts from the interview follow:

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Q: I have heard that you have a learning disability. Based upon your experience, could you introduce some methods for overcoming a learning disability to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders(AAPIs) with disabilities?

- A: When I was an adolescent, physical training like Taekwondo and so on was very helpful to me. From a perspective of “Dahn”/“Brain Respiration,” I think that developing senses of ‘Ki-energy’ and learning how to concentrate on such senses is very effective.

Q: What are your beliefs and philosophy about persons with disabilities?

- A: All human beings have disabilities. A successful life for human beings with disabilities is determined by a positive attitude and participating actively to overcome one’s own hard life. What is important is not that they recognize disability as a problem, but that they should do their best to cope with it. I am sure it will give them insights in life and an integrated growth of the body, mind, and soul. If they experience such enlightenment, the depressed feelings that those with disabilities may have felt will be changed into a kind of grace.

Q: How can Brain Respiration help lead AAPIs with disabilities on their path to healthy and productive lives?

- A: Both disability and the ability to overcome it are ultimately related to the brain. Brain Respiration (BR) helps us optimize the functions of body and brain through deep breathing, exercises, and imagination. Moreover, Brain Respiration enables us to have positive attitude towards life and BR can also help us realize that disability is not a physical problem but affected by higher dimensions.

Q: Have you had an experience of failure, frustration, or desperation in your life? If so, when did you experience such a feeling and how did you overcome it?

- A: Yes, of course I do. Everyone can have lots of experiences of failure whether he has disorder or not. However, the important thing is not only to keep faith, but also to have dreams. Above all, I have tried to take pride in myself even with a learning disability. Although I experienced lots of failure, frustration, and desperation, I promised myself I would not give up on my life. We will be proud of ourselves when such a promise is kept not only for ourselves, but for others in the world by us.

Q: I know you are a wholly integrated person, as an educational philosopher, peace leader, author, artist and musician. Could you tell AAPIs with disabilities about the methods you have developed to further your versatile talents?

- A: All of us have latent abilities. These become severe problems when we limit our own ability so that our dormant capability cannot be developed. Obsessing over constant learning can be a barrier to the development of latent abilities. It is essential for us to learn; however, we are not only made to learn. Good choice and practice in life does not always depend on learning. More important than learning are conscience, confidence, and volition.

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## References

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