

An Encounter between Quaker Mysticism and Taoism in Everyday Life

Cho-Nyon Kim

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This is a transcription of the video presentation, which included Introductory Remarks by David Purnell, and a PowerPoint presentation by 2018 Backhouse Lecturer, Cho-Nyon Kim.

Introduction

**by David Purnell, Convenor of the Backhouse Lecture Committee,
Australia Yearly Meeting**

James Backhouse, an English Quaker who came to Australia in the 1830's, travelled under a Concern for social justice, especially with convicts and Indigenous people. An outcome of his visit was the development of a movement of Quakers in Australia, with which we have reached a significant point in our time and so we honour him in this lecture series.

We are especially favoured this year because as members of the Asia West Pacific Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, Australia Yearly Meeting welcomes visitors from that region to our gatherings, and on this occasion, we not only have a visitor but a separate visit from Chon Nyon Kim from Korea. Cho-Nyon Kim is a Quaker from the Daejon Quaker Meeting in South Korea. He is a professor of Sociology and edits a magazine on Ham Sok Hon, the prominent Korean Friend known internationally for his peace and justice witness.

Cho-Nyon Kim is deeply committed to peace and care for the environment. His special interest is the encounter between Quaker mysticism and Taoism. He attended the World Gathering of Friends in Peru in January 2016, and the Australia Yearly Meeting gathering of Friends in July 2016. He is Alternatives to Violence-Korea facilitator. He will give the public lecture at the German Quaker Yearly Meeting in 2018.

His theme tonight is *An encounter between Quaker mysticism and Taoism in everyday life*.

The presentation he will use tonight and what you will see on the screen and what you will read in the book is not a direct translation from his Korean but is an English version, designed to make it easier for English readers to follow. Copies of the Lecture will be available in a printed format for a special price tonight of \$10. Supper will be served following the Lecture, across the way in the foyer of the church.

The normal process for these lectures is that we have a period of silence and the speaker begins when he is ready, and when he is finished he sits down again, and we have a further period of silence, with a shaking of hands to conclude the presentation.

There is no opportunity for questions tonight but those of you who want to ask questions can attend the Feedback session tomorrow at 4pm with him.

Transcription of the Backhouse Lecture Power Point Presentation by Cho-Nyon Kim

My dear Friends thank you very much for the invitation for the Backhouse Lecture. This evening I will speak about the Encounter between Quaker Mysticism and Taoism in everyday life. My English and accent are very bad therefore you will need more understanding power.

This simple image for my lecture, about this I will explain tomorrow. Everything is changing, including religion. *(Image appearing behind Cho-Nyon Kim is of a Calligraphic symbol for Tao and Quakerism.)*

There is tradition and identity. And also new enlightenment. Some religious contents may disappear. And a new, abundant meaning may develop.

I have to discover for myself what it is to be a Quaker. This is difficult.

Concepts such as “inner light” and “inner voice” are difficult. They are closely related to everyday life. I became more curious about Quakers’ attitudes to real life, than any literal understanding of these concepts.

Quakers are trying to accomplish Peace, Simplicity, Equality, Community, Truth, Sustainability and Integrity. These are adaptable to the situation.

How do we keep the tradition of living a simple life, in a modern civilization that advocates a complex life with many superfluities?

Taoism values the peaceful, simple, general and ordinary things, a life based on nature. Taoism can supplement and expand Quakerism. Spirituality and mysticism are in the events we meet in everyday life.

In this lecture, I look at:

1. The general religious life in the Korean society I grew up in.
2. Confucianism, Buddhism, the folk religions, Christianity.
3. The key points of Quakerism and Taoism.
4. The life and thought of Ham Sok Hon, the early Korean Quaker, advocate of peace and justice.
5. My own life as a Quaker.

What I write is not my claims, but questions, and expressions of wonder.

Is Quakerism a religion for a new era? It can become this, by combining the essence of one’s own cultural and religious traditions with Quakerism.

Early Quakers followed faith and truth. Even though they were treated harshly they practised their faith in everyday life. This is difficult for me to do: I am living in a mainstream atmosphere of religion without religion.

I have a desire to share my concern: how can we live a life that realizes truth, in a secular society and culture?

I was raised in the non-religious tradition of a Confucian family. We had a house for the dead ancestors in our house. Ancestor worship was strong. This everyday religion was not “organised”.

Confucianism is an Ethics based on human goodness, etiquette and wisdom. It is about living harmoniously with the conflicts in life.

At Year End or New Year, in my village we made sacrifices for the peace of the village. A guardian deity was built at the entrance to the village. People prayed to their gods according to their own family tradition. People worshipped at large rocks, trees, valleys, and old wells. In this way God was present in people's daily lives

I grew up in a living culture where various religions melded through stories and ordinary life; not as systematic education or religious activities. *(Image: Bright coloured banners tied around large tree, with statues surrounded the tree.)*

Christianity (Protestant): When I was in my teens I attended church. I experienced hymns, prayers, the Bible, sermons.

I could not understand what it meant that Jesus died for me, or to "believe in him", militant hymns, "Original sin" – there is no such concept in Korean religions—or Heaven and Hell. I encountered Quakerism through Ham Sok Hon and Seoul meeting and Ham's translation of Howard Brinton Quakers for 300 years. When I and my wife lived in Germany and we worshipped with German Quakers. *Image: (Left) My wife Jong Hee Lee who some friends will remember from yearly meeting in Hobart (Right) Me worshipping*

We intended to return to Daejeon, and we wanted to start a meeting there when we returned, so we applied for and became members through German Quakers. *(Image: This is joint meeting of Seoul and Daejeon.)*

At Daejeon Meeting we meet every Sunday for 1 hour of unprogrammed worship, 1 hour of study and then a shared meal. After 6 years we registered with Friends World Committee for Consultation, the umbrella organisation for Quakers.

We study:

- The Bible
- Quaker literature
- Buddhist scriptures
- Taoist scriptures
- Confucian classics.

Korea practices religious pluralism. Buddhism and Confucianism have been national ruling ideologies at different times. Taoism and folk religion have led people's everyday life.

Christianity: Catholicism

Catholicism came in the latter half of the 18th century. The Church taught that all humans are equal before God. The ruling class oppressed Catholics.

Christianity: Protestantism

Protestantism came a century later. Missionaries brought medicine, science, education, technology, democratic ideas. Korea was under Japanese rule from 1910-1945. Protestant Christianity helped Koreans oppose Japanese rule.

In a multi-religious society like Korea one's own religion is worked out with other religions. All religions start in their own way and place, and travel in parallel, but over time they converge.

They begin with opposition but over time they come close. There is in Korea an atmosphere of mutual toleration.

For example, my great-grandmother lost some family members, so she became a Christian. However, she prayed in the traditional Korean way. We believe that refreshing the body at dawn enhances our prayers.

She got up early in the morning, filled a pottery bowl with clean water and washed her face, put her hands together, rubbing them and praying to God.

Christianity and Traditional religions:

The preaching of a new religion must be related to what is already there.

Religions evolve in relation to each other.

Is the Ultimate Reality Personal?

Christians conceive of God as having a personality. Confucianists, Buddhists and Taoists do not conceive of God as having a Personality, but there is an ultimate reality that functions like God.

All religions are concerned with the ultimate: gods, heaven, the Tao, the absolute etc.

Religion is about being at one with oneself through direct experience of, contact with, the Ultimate Being.

Many religions are concerned with escaping from sin, or going beyond pain, into the world of liberation.

Confucianism does not pray for liberation from sin, but for the well-being of the nation and the human race and for solving temporal problems.

Constant self-discipline is needed to follow the will of heaven.

Korea does not provide religious education or systematic organisation.

Confucianism is a life ethic regulating human and social relations.

Koreans see it as natural to pursue self-growth and reflection.

Shamanistic folk religion continues to be created and is deeply rooted in the daily life and emotions of Koreans.

Buddhism has many temples and schools training monks. It has universities and high schools.

Buddhism comforts the dying. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that there is absolute in the relative and that one can find Nirvana in many things, like the forest. (*Image: Temple*)

There is sacredness in the mundane world.

This Buddhist tradition has united with the folk religions. And continues ancestor worship

The Buddhist concepts of nirvana and liberation helped in the non-confrontational acceptance of Christian concepts of salvation and heaven.

Taoism in Korea has no shrines, teachers or organisation. It teaches a life of simplicity and honesty in harmony with nature, and contemplative practice.

The Tao, the ultimate reality, can be experienced through emptiness but cannot be adequately expressed in words.

In Tao Te Ching, Chapter 1, the Tao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Tao.

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

The unnameable is the beginning of heaven and earth.

The nameable is the mother of all.

Therefore, get rid of your desire.

It cannot be adequately expressed in finite human thought, studies, language and feelings. Everything that comes out of the ultimate is infinitely mysterious and delicate. There is no shape, no image; therefore, it cannot be recognised objectively through rational thought.

It is only talked about as a symbol, and because the name and reality do not coincide at the moment of naming, in the end it is a reality that needs to be recognised, experienced and felt through denial.

In particular, the silent prayer in Quaker worship could reference the Zen meditation of Buddhism.

The purpose of Zen meditation is to realise the ultimate truth by first emptying the mind. One must abandon all obsessions. (*Image: bronze bowl with wooden pestle.*)

In this way, one realises the truth of nothingness as the ultimate reality beyond all relative things. One can reach the level of liberation, which meets the Buddha through the intuition of the inner mind.

This is like the prayers of Christian contemplatives who empty their minds and open themselves to God alone.

And it is consistent with the worship of a Quaker who, in the midst of calmness, seeks and waits for the promptings of God. In other words, encounter through self-denial.

Zen Buddhist meditation is like Taoism: the ultimate truth is reached by emptying the mind. It is consistent with Quaker worship – the Quaker practice of emptying the mind to seek the promptings of God.

In reading the Tao Te Ching there is no fixed point that a person must reach, but each needs to understand the process to the best of their ability.

The mystic experience of Taoism is dark, neutral, and uncertain.

It is not based on dogma but on the direct experience of God.

It naturally occurs when living a simple life.

Tao is the beginning of all.

The source of life is black darkness, like the lowest and deepest sea.

It cannot be expressed in words but is always ordinary. (*Image: Tao symbol*)

The Tao cannot be heard, seen, caught or named. It can only be seen and explained as a result of action.

The Tao Te Ching teaches the unnameable is the beginning of heaven and earth.

The nameable is the mother of all.

This is pointing to the same truth as Genesis 1, and John 1 in the Bible.

There is Absolute equality beyond all oppositions and all dualities. No preciousness, no inferiority. No high, no low.

Doing Nothing: People live in accordance with the Tao by doing nothing and yet everything is done.

It is as natural as water overflowing from a bowl or a pond when it is full. The water flows downwards when the bowl is tilted, the young sprout shoots in warm spring weather.

The temperature rises more gradually when it approaches the maximum, and falls more gradually when it approaches the minimum. (*Image: Flaming ying /yang symbol.*)

Likewise, Tao does not work by human power but proceeds in its own way and time. This means that we should not regulate or direct life by civilisation and institution.

'Doing nothing' is to pursue a life that renounces morality, law and form. Should this term 'positive passivity' be considered contradictory?

Natural disposition, p'o: This kind of life is possible only by returning to your 'Natural disposition', p'o. It is like a blank slate, infant-like, a return to the roots, natural, not polished, a life in which the human pursues freedom. (*Image: p'o.*)

It is the attitude and life of the "Ssial", the Seed. The seed means people, as taught by Ham Sok Hon.

So, how did Ham Sok Hon incorporate this Taoist thought system into his life by combining it with the Christian system?

Ham Sok Hon became a Christian in his youth. He became a Quaker as a man. He studied Tagore, Gandhi, Tolstoy; the Bhagavad-Gita, Lao-Tze and Chuang-tze (Taoist masters) and more.

When he began to read Chuang-tze, he felt his shell cracking off, bit by bit. (*Image: Ham Sok Hon.*)

He taught that there is no heresy, no fundamental difference between Christianity and Buddhism.

"I am not alone in my father's bosom, and I have seen so many ways to climb the mountain of truth"

So, all religions should be humble; individual religions are not large enough to hold God. Ham Sok Hon tried to live by the spirit of freedom.

To him, the true path is the way that you or I, or a Christian or a pagan, walk together. "I am not the only son. So, now you have to sacrifice your self-creed."

"It [truth] is in all past mankind and is the future humanity. In this way, no-one will perish."

Ham Sok Hon says that a new religion is needed. An old religion predicts and orders a new one, in the same way as severe shock results in a new flow.

The signs that a new religion is being born are: the nature of modern war is very different from before; progress in atomic science; changes in people's world-views; the development of bio-technology; and the whole world is a single network.

The new religion will be more rational, which belongs to the realm of science. Neither science nor religion wins. Those who are trapped in the emotions of winning and losing cannot go to heaven. It is not religion or science until one enters the world of eternal infinity.

We need a new perspective to re-unite body and soul.

Image: Jong-Hee Lee leads a Meditanz session

The new religion is of the here and now. Without thinking of the here and now, there can be no salvation and no repentance. Of course, the purpose is heaven. It is the way of religion to ascend to heaven. But there are no birds that fly without encountering land.

Evil or Sin is a social phenomenon. Living religion is a systematic activity of those who are determined to fight against evil. Authentic religion makes people more alive.

If God is the head, his feet are the people. God's service is in the service of the people. The highest is the lowest. What you do to one of the least of my brothers and sisters is what you do to me. An extremely small organisation is needed to wake up the people, the Ssial, the seed. *(Image: Ham Sok Hon, Ham's teachings.)*

Ham Sok Hon's argument, in summary, is that he is freed from the idea that Christianity is the only true religion and that the Bible alone proclaims complete truth. All religions represent the Word of God.

And that the world must be one, encompassing science and globalization. Therefore, nationalism must be overcome.

A religion of one's own asks a believer to come face to face with God without a mediator. God has given the believer freedom.

God has given the believer freedom. The free individual represents the whole. God represents the whole as a flow in the personal life.

To Serve your God with all your heart and all your soul and serve your neighbour as yourself. You are in me and I am in you. I am the whole within you.

In Ham's teachings, the individual and the whole are not separate to Ham. The seed, Ssial, is both the individual and the whole.

Therefore, Ham Sok Hon sees the spiritual community as a new religion that frees the individual while focusing on the individual as a whole. He experiences this in Quakerism.

Ham was committed to opposing war. He saw that existing religions would not endure, because they were closely connected with politics. He had a new vision of nationhood, that a nation must be for the people, not the people for the nation.

Different names, similar concepts: Human behaviour is the same whether expressed as 'sin' in Christianity or as 'ignorance' in Hinduism and Buddhism. Salvation in Christianity is Nirvana in Buddhism.

In this way, there is nothing to cause conflict between the two religions.

The place that Lao-Tze and Chuang-tze call 'Tao' is the place of God that Christians seek. *(Image: Symbol for Tao.)*

Ham Sok Hon did not wish to distinguish between the plural, the whole, the one, between the East and the West, or between Christianity, Buddhism, Zen and Taoism.

We are all children of God.

Religion is not complete. It continues to change, flow and grow. Religion is living, it is a process.

God is unfinished and growing.

Ham created the idea of the Ssial. The Ssial refers to the 'pure man'. A good example of the 'pure man' is Jesus.

To Jesus, a child represents purity. No-one can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is like a child. The way to achieve this, is to be born again, to return to one's original innocent self.

Eastern thought is the same. Lao-tse taught that the person who becomes as a child, has very deep virtue. The childlike mind is the true heart.

Lao-tze and Chuang-tze, great Taoist masters, intended to live beyond the phenomenon of reality. Reality is not evil, it is natural and inevitable. We are thinking beings, so our attitudes are what matters.

"The relative emerged from the absolute by seeing the relative apart from the absolute. That is transcending reality. The lives of Lao-tze and Chuang-tze begin with Tao and end at Tao."

To achieve the Way, the Tao, Lao-tze emphasises silence, unselfishness, doing nothing, weakness, non-violence.

The Tao is causeless because it is the basis of everything. What can be done to achieve the Way (Tao)?

Lao-tze was a pacifist. At the time of the Chunchu states, which emphasised national prosperity and military power, Lao-tze emphasised doing nothing rather than becoming political.

The king sent a messenger to Chuang-tze to offer him a high post in the government. As poor as Chuang-tze was, he said he preferred to be like pigs herded into the gutter, rather than living in a house designed for extravagant ceremony. He had a fiery faith to rescue Ssial who lived under a tyrannical ruler.

Ham wrote in "The Spirit of Wilderness", that this spirit is seen in the lives of prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos, in the lives of Lao-tze and Chuang-tze and in Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ham Sok Hon's critique of nationalism is derived from the unregulated politics of Lao-tze and Chuang-tze, and from Jesus and the concept of the Kingdom of heaven.

Is this also the Quaker spirit? It is the fusion of these ideas that leads to a new world of truth and a nation that does not ignore or forsake the real world.

My life as a Quaker: Am I able to practice Quakerism in my daily life? When I think about it, I have grave doubts.

Can I keep the Quaker tradition of seeing faith and practice as equally important, as one?

In today's highly civilised society I have to live in luxury compared with ancient times, so what is humble and simple living?

How can I live without destroying the nature's ecosystem when I am aware that birth itself is an environmental destruction? In what way can we live together peacefully when the pattern of life leads to competition and strife from beginning to end?

In an overly systemised and organised society, is it possible to live under soul guidance like a natural spirit?

In a modern society becoming increasingly nationalistic and militaristic, how can I practise the philosophy that humankind belongs to one life system?

When I think about it, my breath seems to be stifled. But I feel that finding a little road to life in the frustrating and obstructed reality is essential for a Quaker.

I am seeking a practical narrow path that captures a feeling from an invisible reality, a mystical experience.

Korea is divided into two. The entire human race must transcend nations and countries. In order to create a peaceful society, I must be peaceful, live with a peaceful mind, and share peace with the people around me.

I practice keeping a smile on my face and in my mind.

I must endeavour to acknowledge and tolerate others, but I should also challenge the tradition and social trend of making everything uniform.

I am starting a peace pilgrimage to input the energy of peace into places of severe conflict, and to remind us that we are all different, and we are all one.

The picture is of the beginning of a pilgrimage 1 March 2018, starting at the place where the Independence Movement against the Japanese began, on 1 March 1919.

Another peace activity: I am participating in AVP. We need to train individuals creatively to change their violent tendencies. (*Image: AVP Beliefs Mandala.*)

Amnesty International is another way I am participating in making peace. To do so, I must experience other cultures, religions, people, civilisations and customs, find their core values, always seeking truth with an open mind.

Living this way is my life task, by spreading the message through research, lectures, forums, with small groups and being a friend to troubled people. And in daily life, assisting others to love their enemy, bless those that are different.

Normal life is mystical. Taoism teaches that softness encompasses strength and dissolves rigidity. This can become a habit in daily life.

This training begins with the belief that all people have an inner light, that there is an inner teacher, and that all can find a way to Buddha-nature and get in touch with Tao.

This is the mystical experience of everyday life. Mysticism is a very normal life.

However, in contemporary civilised society, Koreans especially lack sufficient daily rest and do not practise deep breathing.

Modern society is an exhausted society.

I do not have the ability and vision to lead to a place of peace those who feel tired, but I want to create an atmosphere where I can talk with them as a friend.

I want to be a friend to troubled people who cannot establish themselves or who are conflicted. I feel that this is a way to live with the truth in my own heart.

Language, culture, customs, clothing, lifestyles, religion, race are different. This difference offers hope.

Like water, all truths come from one source and return to it. (*Image: Stream and tributaries.*) For example, the stream where I live flows from the nearby mountain. It provides my farmland and my house with water. I depend on the water.

Water flows and flows into the vast ocean. The water becomes as one. In the end, the water that flows in the rivers and eventually into the sea remain compatible as friends do.

All religions are compatible and it is important for people to maintain their own traditions and way of life. (*Image: Stream and tributaries.*)

My life task is bridging divisions through peace, as an AVP activist, as a Quaker and as a member of Amnesty International.

I hope to establish bridges and eliminate borders. In order to do so, I must experience other cultures, religions, peoples, races, and civilisations and find and absorb their core values.

It will be important to lead my life in the manner of those who always seek truth with an open mind.

Religion is not complete. It continues to change, flow and grow. Religion is living, it is a process. God is unfinished and growing. (*Image: Calligraphic symbol for Tao and Quakerism.*)

I have finished my lecture. Let us go into silence. (*Image: seeds sprouting out of the ground.*)