

# My Journey

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Everything changes repeatedly. Change is experienced in both the material and spiritual worlds. The meaning and the perspectives of the world, nations, states, religions and philosophies change all the time and in every situation. Sometimes, the changes are accompanied by a disappearance of content, while, at the same time, expanding to a new, abundant meaning. This phenomenon also occurs in religion. It is a matter of tradition and identity but also a matter of new enlightenment.

After I became acquainted with Quakers, I tried to discover the core of Quaker identity. This effort was a far cry from the Quaker tradition of not creating standards or creeds. However, after I was officially registered as a Quaker, I continued my search because I needed to know for myself what it is to be a Quaker. But the more I tried, the more abstract the Quakers' claim to live appeared. It was very frustrating.

The terms 'inner light', 'inner voice' and 'the person in me', which Quakers say, were hard to understand. They were as difficult to understand as the following concepts that I have heard since childhood from adults who have lived with Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Korea's own folk religions. For example, 'God', 'Holy Spirit', 'Messiah', 'Christ', 'Okhwangsangje', 'Yongwang', 'Yeomnadaewang', 'Geukrak', 'Seobangjeongto', 'Paradise' or 'Buddha in me' or 'Tao', 'Jinin, pure man', 'nature' or 'Buddha', which is said to be 'salvation' or 'liberation' (being Buddha) and so on—all were abstract. To my mind, nothing was obvious. However, it was clear that these abstract concepts were very closely related to everyday life, and I became more curious about Quakers' attitudes towards real life than any literal explanation or understanding of such concepts. What Quakers are very fond of and trying to accomplish are peace, simplicity, equality, community, truth, sustainability and integrity. It was very hard for me to understand them, and they were not easy to practise. I felt very deeply attracted to them, but when I tried to apply them to my life, they became very abstract. They are things that are relative and adaptable to the situation.

The world has become complicated. The community of life is broken, filled with confrontation and war rather than peace, and full of disagreement and division, increasing the differences rather than the togetherness. Where is the realisation of a life in the Quaker tradition, when the development and events of civilisation are increasing? In particular, how do we maintain the tradition of living a simple life in a modern civilisation that advocates a complex and superlative life?

I think the world has already progressed beyond the limits of sectarianism, considering the world as a whole, pursuing humanity over nation, country or region, and the fusion and coexistence of cultures. Quakers have been constantly trying to be rid of ties to a sect, and it is considered important to wear new clothes for a new age. According to the Oriental classics, the principle and life of Taoism valued the most peaceful, simple, general and ordinary things, and insisted on living a life based on nature beyond the form and norm. I think it would be meaningful to look into Taoism for the purpose of expanding the religiosity of Quakerism, not merely to compare them in a literal sense but to look at the spirituality and the mysticism of the covenant to supplement or expand Quakerism. This is because spirituality and mysticism are heard in the events we meet in our everyday lives.

In order to do that, I will first look at the general religious life in the Korean society that I was born into and grew up with. Then, I will briefly examine the evolution of Confucianism, Buddhism, folk religions, and the indigenous process of new Christianity, which have led Korean society for a long time. I am also going to examine what Quakerism pursues and discuss the key points that we pursue in Taoism.

Then I will look at the life and thought of Ham Sok Hon, one of Korea's early Quakers who lived in harmony with both Taoism and Quakerism. Finally, I would like to talk about the orientation of my life as a Quaker. These discussions, which will be organised in the form of questions, are not claims but expressions of wonder. This is a desire to re-establish Quakerism in myself. We see that Quakers are aging and the number of young Quakers is shrinking, so much so as to cause concern for the future of Quakerism. This may be a phenomenon that all religions are experiencing. However, many people look upon Quakerism as a religion for a new era, a religion that tries to find a new way and does not propagate and preach traditional Quakerism but secures an extended religiousness by combining the essence of one's own cultural and religious traditions with that of Quakerism. I feel this could be one of Quakers' ways of looking at a new era.

I am fortunate to have had the great pleasure of meeting Quakers. At the same time, I feel a great burden because a Quaker is considered an exemplar of realising faith in everyday life, and I want to put myself in that flow, but I am not

in that life. I am very hesitant to tell someone that I am a Quaker, because I am not whole-heartedly true to that belief. Especially when I read the diary of the early Quaker, George Fox, I feel that I cannot experience such emotions as the trembling and the commitment to truth.

At that time, it seemed that the religious atmosphere that prevailed throughout society was much stronger than it is now. I feel that the society of the past as a whole had a much more religious atmosphere during the Reformation and expended greater efforts to adhere to the traditions of the established religions than now. At such a time, however, the lives of the early Quakers, such as George Fox, were very harsh, and they were treated strangely. It is very touching to learn that they lead a life following the faith and truth even in such circumstances.

It is like the impression I have when reading the Acts of the New Testament: I myself want to be living that life. I feel I am living in a very secular social atmosphere, an atmosphere of religion without religion. Of course, the number of people living their lives according to the systems and doctrines of religion is in fact very large, but the number of people practising a faithful religious life in formalised religion is very small. At the same time, the non-religious atmosphere seems to be the mainstream in the daily life of religion, politics, the economy, culture, scholarship and in social relations. It is not easy to live a deeply religious life at this time.

I have no experience of seeking the thorough truth that the early Friends had or of trying to realise that life. I have lived by a very ordinary and plain religion. Therefore, religion is very rare in my words, and it is difficult to find holiness in my everyday life. In fact, when I think about the question of whether I live according to the living word of Christ living in me, or the light in me, I am not confident about my answer. It is not easy to give a frank answer to the question of what Quaker life is today regardless of wearing a necklace with a cross on one's chest. However, I agreed to deliver this lecture because I had a desire to share my own concerns.

I want to ask how we can live a life that realises truth without distinction between religion and non-religion in a secular social atmosphere and cultural system. In asking that question, I will start with the following story—not the story of my Quaker enlightenment but of seeking a path to enlightenment.