

Confluence

John Gray: I have the pleasure of introducing forever-friend Sunwha Choi to any and all who may not have met her.

Sunwha's first connection with the Emissaries was in England in 1980. She was studying child care on a scholarship from the British Women's Council when she met Oxford University graduate students Bill Isaacs, Yujin Pak, Bruce Allyn, Volker Brendel, Karen Stevenson and other friends, and participated in a one-week seminar at Mickleton in the summer of 1981.

After her return to Korea, Sunwha took a teaching position in Seoul, initiated EDL activities there, and soon invited Pamela and me to come to Korea. She arranged many meetings and seminars with us and others over the next decade.

Sunwha's academic career also blossomed. She accepted a position of professor of social work and initiated women's studies at Silla University in Busan. She was also head of a rehabilitation center for the disabled in Busan for a dozen years. Professor Choi published ten books and numerous papers during her tenure.

Since her retirement from formal academia in 2020 after 32 years, she has been writing, translating, and leading a center offering professional counseling, teaching, and spiritual activities in Busan. She also plays an active part in the unified spiritual endeavors in Korea with the groups in Seoul with Yujin Pak and Marsha Bogolin and on Jeju Island with JaeHyoung Lee and DukHee Kang.

While English is not Sunwha's native language, she has sufficient proficiency in it. We will, I am sure, enjoy her large spiritual presence behind her words.

Sunwha Choi: It has been my pleasure working with John and Pam for many years and I honor the friendship we share.

I like a story, and life is a story in a sense. Today I want to tell you a story of the Far East, where I grew up. What happened in a small hidden corner of the East can be a world story that we can all connect with. This is a story of both legendary and real people who represent divine being in human form.

Ever since I was young, I have enjoyed appreciating oriental paintings that are common around me. Among them, one that caught my particular attention was a painting of a grandfather, called Sinseon. Sinseon is an imaginary figure in the Orient and refers to a person



who reached the highest level of being that human beings can reach through practicing Tao and becoming a Master of Life.

I am sure all of you have seen this kind of painting somewhere, sometime. There is a slightly different form of Sinseon in China, Japan, and Korea, but all paintings are similar on the whole: an old man with a long beard sitting on a rock in the mountains looking down with a light smile or standing with a long cane or sitting with closed eyes, drinking tea. Sometimes tigers sit around or a boy prepares tea for him, but in most paintings, Sinseon seems to be alone and quiet, as if sitting on a cloud, looking down and not belonging in this world.

As a young girl, I really liked the calm, serene and even sacred atmosphere of these paintings, and his soft and gentle expression, yet having great authority and power. This always resonated deeply in my heart. Without knowing the reason why, that figure felt quite familiar.

However, some questions came up in me. Why does he live in the mountains alone, immersed in his own lifestyle, instead of going down and teaching? Of course, seekers of the Tao stay in the mountains for training. But the ones who have already reached the realm of Tao, these need to spread the Tao in the world. Otherwise, what is the meaning of seeking and realizing Tao and the way of life? Furthermore, what is the reason for human existence on earth? Can only an old man be a Sinseon? How about women? And why drink tea all the time?

This kind of Sinseon symbolizes the highest level, the level of God in human form, the character of God-human being. In the Orient, this is the lifestyle of the master who reaches Tao and is the ideal of all who follow Tao in general.

I came to understand a few things: To stay in the mountain means to be apart from human busyness--living with the laws of life, instead of being pushed and pulled by conditions in the world. This reminds me of Martin saying, "be in the world but not of it." And always sitting on a rock and holding a long cane means his life is based on the law of Tao, immovable, with the cane representing natural law and control in being. Drinking tea means not only a simple way of life but also purification and continuous sanctification and reflection, focused on attunement with life in tranquility.

These paintings reveal an accumulation of grains of oriental wisdom. In the consciousness of most Asians, the image of Sinseon is a residual memory of divine human being. They are our ancestors who lived with nobility, and their footprints remain in us as a legend and remind us of the truth of who I am and who we are.

A long time ago there was a humble, rustic man called Jaewoo Choi, who studied ancient Chinese teachings, but he did not climb the ladder of central power, he lived in the countryside and taught the people and children around. He was sincere and righteous, practicing Tao in his own way.

One day in April 1860, he had a strange urge and felt like he was sick. Then an energy or aura came down from heaven and told him, "Fear not. I am the Lord thy God." The Being told him to prepare a piece of paper and a pencil, and he dictated what Jaewoo Choi should write. What he wrote could not be read by anyone else but him. After his special experience of meeting God, he practiced in silence for three more years.

When he first initiated his teaching, called Donghak, which means "teachings of the East," he did it because he had studied the Bible and loved it, but the followers of the Bible, the Westerners, did brutal things in the East. So, Jaewoo Choi thought that that teaching was not suitable, and he developed something different that was true to his real experience. When he began Donghak, the first follower was his wife and the second was his son. At that time, Korea was a caste-based society, but he also took a worker in his house and his daughter-in-law as followers, and his foster daughter as another follower.

As word and rumors spread that he had met God, large crowds of people gathered. The core essence of his teachings was that man is heaven and man is a god, that human beings have the Great One in themselves. So, one must honor and treat everyone with respect and dignity. Jaewoo Choi treated everyone as a God being.

This is a famous anecdote about him: One day, a follower invited him to his house. There was a woman in the house. When Master Choi asked him who she was, he replied that she is his daughter-in-law. When asked again, he replied the same. Then the Master said, "God is there" and he bowed to her with respect.

The large crowds of people became such a threat to the society and the king that Master Choi was executed three years later. He was 41; his ministry counted only three years. However, another man, Shihyoung Choi, continued in leadership, and followers continued to grow in numbers to become the main body of the Korean independence movement from Japan. He reminds me of Mahatma Gandhi in India. His teaching also had revolutionary impact and changed the people's daily living, particularly the lower classes, and women and children.

When I was young, a lot of rituals and concepts connected with Donghak were used in my family, and their influence has continued. Later in Shihyoung Choi's life his followers formed a more organized entity as a kind of religious group, but it remained small and inadequate for the big cosmic mission and the chance given to humanity. Recently, a famous man here in Korea, a man named Doall, reintroduced Donghak in a series of lectures and that drew a big response from the public. He publicized the teachings of Master Choi and his book became a bestseller that stimulated much interest, particularly among young ones. They are learning Donghak not as a religion, but as a teaching and new orientation in life. So, these days

the oneness of God and human is not an unfamiliar concept. But who can actually live it is another thing.

Master Jaewoo Choi predated Uranda by about 60 years, and I feel the same heavenly message could have been happening unknowingly all over the world. However, it has not carried through fully. Now here we are. Who really knows the meaning of God being on earth and willingly devote themselves to exemplify the spirit of it?

In these days now, living with many people in the forest of buildings in the city, we can maintain tranquility and purity of heart, transcend the world and be a window of heaven. This is the new vision of the Tao style of life today: instead of staying in the mountains alone, to actively come down and be with others, knowing who we are and what we are doing.

Everything is in our hands now. How huge the mission is! What an honor to know and give our lives in this. Beyond all the shadows of history and limitations, we revive the consciousness of true human-God being, the oneness of it, and no longer leave it as a dim memory of forgotten history or legend.

The predominant trait and character of God-being is the spirit of love and the expression of benevolence. We understand and take care of others with mercy and benevolence. This is the life of Tao, of Buddha and Jesus, and the reappearance of God-human being now on earth in a new and larger way. As God-beings we enfold each other and the world again with divine light and vision. So let it be. Let it be so!

John Gray: Let it be so!

Throughout human history, countless people with spiritual, philosophical or religious inclinations have recognized, theoretically anyway, that there is a presence of something divine in human beings. A common phrase is, "There's a spark of God in every person." If, for the person saying that, the recognition is real, it is because the speaker is at least somewhat acquainted with the spark in him- or herself. Only that personal experience begets the wherewithal to see what is real in another. If "seeing the spark of the divine in others" is more than a belief or platitude, it is a small but essential starting point toward fuller, deeper realization of spiritual reality.

We recognize that the true presence of a human being is actually far more than just a spark. Each of us is a flaming fire radiating light and glory. In the Old Testament of the Bible, Moses described his wondrous realization of this in symbolic language: "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed." (Ex. 3:2) We are each an angel of the Lord, our forms ablaze with love and light. How do we see one another? As little

sparks? I think to Moses the realization of the fire and the angel within it was hugely more impressive than the bush. It was a breath *giving* experience.

Parousia is a word new to my vocabulary. P-A-R-O-U-S-I-A. Maybe you know the word, but I didn't. Parousia is of Greek origin; it means "presence." In some factions of Christianity, the term is dogmatically contorted to refer to an imagined second coming of Christ sometime in the future, but clearly parousia—presence—suggests *now* and not a "then" in the future. From an online source I read, "Some theologians have connected the Hebrew *shekinah* and the Greek term *parousia*, both essentially meaning 'presence' or 'arrival' or 'dwelling.'" Both terms point to the evidence of the presence of God in the world, here and now.

When as a young girl, Sunwha looked at the Sinseon figure, the sage in the painting, it stimulated an initial awareness of a presence in herself; hence the sense of familiarity. Maybe it was but a spark of recognition at first, but that was the beginning of her awakening to true identity as a divine being having a human experience.

I came across a quote of Martin Luther King Jr. in Ken Burns' introduction to his masterpiece photography book, *Our America*. It's not one of Dr. King's more famous quotes, like "I have a dream..." I don't recall having heard or read it before, but I find it wonderfully insightful:

"All life is interrelated. All people are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."

We are responsible individually but only successful collectively. When I say "we" I do not limit it to those of us on this videocall today; we here are among a far larger "we" who serve the fulfilment of divine purpose in the world, who serve the Tao.

Tao translates as "the Way." Our individual ways or paths to our present experiences of divine identity are metaphorical tributaries, like streams that merge to become rivers enroute to replenishing the sea. Maybe it's in part because I am appearing through a septuagenarian body these days, but it seems to me that for many or most, the full awakening process can take a long time. But maybe it needn't. And it isn't as if the process isn't necessary and important--it is! We celebrate everyone everywhere who is waking up spiritually. But individual awakening isn't an end in itself. In fact, it doesn't occur independently of the whole but is a result of moving with the collective confluence as a body of many members moved by the impulse of vast divine purpose. Being awake to this reality permits, or better, *compels* us to live so as to

fulfill our cosmic destiny together. It's not an individual enlightenment thing; today, it's all of us or nothing!

How clearly do we know the “inescapable network of mutuality,” and that we are “tied in a single garment of destiny?” Maybe Dr. King intuited something potential beginning to emerge into collective experience. Let us deeply accept the blessed fact that we are among those who are awake to what he sensed and articulated. Thank God for every sage and visionary in history, whether famous or obscure, and for every human being they sparked along the way. From East and West, North and South, all have contributed to the awakening process that has brought us to this time, here and now. Sparks are essential starting points, but it takes more than sparks to light the world.

In my perception it is high time to turn our attention from emphasis on aspirational journeying and let our focus be on the arrival, on the presence—parousia—that we embody together. The awakened collective, however large or small it seems to be—and let's never judge!—is responsible to *be* God in action on earth, now. That's inspirational, and the world rises to meet its presence. Members of the awakened collective know that it is ours to give focal form to the world shekinah—to compose the burning lifeform through which the presence of the archangel of the Lord becomes increasingly evident: parousia made visible.

So, how do we see and know one another? As collegial fellow sparks doing our respective little bits? Or as fellow members of the unified body of omnipotent God, stewarding and administering the creative process for the whole world?

All that is true burns with God's fiery love and is not consumed. All that is false is burned up and is no more. These are two aspects of one and the same creative process.

We live in hot times!

Following Comments:

Sunwha Choi: It was my honor and great experience to be with you all. When East and West meet together, it makes a whole. Yin and Yang get together and make one whole. Rich abundance and blessing to this world and to all people.

John Gray: Yes, all of us come from the one whole to give form to the One, revealed by shekinah, parousia. The world depends on a relative few who live in this place of apex consciousness, through which the power of transformation flows unhindered. We do indeed live in hot times.

September 10, 2023

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Pre-Service Music

1. Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D Major, BWV 1068

Composed by J.S. Bach and performed by Albrecht Mayer & Berliner Barock Solisten

2. 3 Morceaux, Op. 15: No. 1, Sérénade

Composed by Agathe Backer Grondahl and performed by Sara Aimée Smiseth

3. Je te veux

Composed by Erik Satie and performed by Hee-Young Lim & Daniel Lindemann

Concluding Music

Arirang (Instrumental)

Traditional Korean folk song