

Reverend Dosung Yoo
Week One, *The Heart Sutra*
February 1, 2016
“The Foundation of Understanding”



Today I would like to talk about the meaning of enlightenment. Prajna, our innate wisdom, is a very important topic in Won Buddhism, in traditional Buddhism. That's why we chant the Heart Sutra at our service, just like at other Zen Buddhist monasteries or retreat centers. Let me read one story from my book, *Thunderous Silence*. It's a practical guide of the Heart Sutra.

One day a Buddhist monk happened to see a beautiful woman who had come to the temple to pray. At that time, he felt no progress in his practice and the life of a celibate monk seemed boring. No matter how hard he tried, he could not forget her and he eventually left the priesthood to marry her. He became a farmer and sold his crops to make a living. The life of a farmer seemed difficult to him and married life was not as romantic as he had expected. On his 60th birthday, his wife and sons prepared a lavish dinner for him and when the meal was finished, he was left alone. He looked back over all his married years and the memories that arose in his mind reflected a hard life of a toil and tribulation in order to support his family. He felt lonely and came to regret his decision to leave the monastery and abandon the chance to become enlightened and help many people. Bitter tears of regret fell from his eyes as he thought, "I should have remained a monk, I should never have left the temple." As he wept, he heard the sound of a temple gong, and he was so surprised that he immediately woke up only to realize that it had all been a dream. He had fallen asleep while prostrating on the cushion in front of

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the Buddha images! During his short snooze, he had lived for almost 40 years. This is the story of the Korean Zen Master, Joshin. After that dream, after he realized the empty nature of our life or the reality, he became really motivated to walk on the spiritual path and doubled his effort to practice and he later became a greatly enlightened master.

There are four kinds of people in this world. The first group of people are the ones who search their dreams but don't realize them. I think most of the people in this world fall in this category. The second group of people are the ones who searched their dreams and are fulfilled and live in a pretty satisfied way. The third group of people are the those who achieved their dream but they start to feel a little disillusioned about their life. The last group of people are the ones who have awakened from the dream, like the Buddha or Sot'aesan the founding master of Won Buddhism.

Think about which group are we in right now. Sot'aesan, the founding master of Won Buddhism, said, "The person who lives a very happy life without knowing their eternal life, without realizing their true self, is like a tadpole who playfully lives in a pond not knowing in a couple of weeks all the water will dry up and they will die."

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There was one prisoner who really would like to escape from that horrible prison. One day when the delivery truck arrived inside the prison, he could luckily hide himself inside the delivery truck. He was in that truck for several hours, he was so excited to get to the world, to be freed from all those incarcerated situations. When the truck stopped, when he came out of the truck, he discovered the place where he arrived was another prison. Because of his attempt to escape from the prison, he was sentenced to life in prison. As long as we are not enlightened, we do not know where we have come, where we are going and the happiness or freedom that we enjoy in our life is very much limited, it's not perpetual, it's always momentary. It's like moving from one prison to another. It does not matter whether the prison is made from gold or just a plain metal. According to all the enlightened masters of teaching, the one and the only solution is if we became free from all suffering and distress—to be enlightened to our true self, awakened. That's why in the Heart Sutra, the first passage says, the Bodhisattva had great compassion when he realized all five aggregates are empty, in other words, he realized his true self or the empty nature of his self, and he became free from all suffering and distress. He did not say, became free from *most* of the suffering, he says *all* suffering and distress.

Buddhism is an English translated word of the Chinese, which literally means the teaching of or the path to enlightenment. Then what can be the path to enlightenment? Buddha says, the path is *jung ha*, it's casually translated as meditation and wisdom. But

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jung literally means single mindedness, one-pointedness of our mind. *Ha* means wisdom but particularly it is Prajna, our innate wisdom, the wisdom to realize our true self. Just like a bird flies with two wings by these two paths, meditation and wisdom, we can arrive in the land of Nirvana, complete liberation. So the path of enlightenment is not going to India or to some Japanese monastery, the path to awakening is in our daily life, we can maintain a peaceful and focused state of mind and hone our innate wisdom.

In the East, in the West many people these days study scripture, listen to dharma talks, and practice meditation, that's the path to enlightenment. It's a very significant thing, not a small thing, it really open the door of enlightenment. When a student asked our founding master, "What method should I cultivate so that I may eliminate all of the desires, focus a single mind on cultivating the way and lead a life of tranquility and comfort like the Buddha?" So then the founding master of Won Buddhism replied, "Rather than eliminating desires, you should expand them. Once your petty desires are transformed into a great vow they will naturally subside as you focus on single-mindedly on your vow. Then you will inevitably lead a life of tranquility and comfort."

Let's remember the one and the only way to be free from all suffering and distress is to be awakened to our true self to obtain enlightenment. As long as all people in this world would like to have happiness and a freedom, which is not momentary but perpetual, any enlightenment is a very practical thing. It's not just for some Zen priest or some serious priest practitioner. So why don't we give rise to a great aspiration to obtain great

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enlightenment for the benefit of all people, if our life goal is set on the direction and our mind is set on that, then we can live a far more peaceful and focused easy life, not be moved or wavered by the many worldly or secular things that constantly tempt our mind. So having a peaceful tranquil state of mind in our life does not necessarily originate from how long, how many hours you spend on the meditation cushion, it basically arises from your clear life goal—what you really want, what you really search in your life. That's why the Heart Sutra ends with: gone, gone, gone to the other shore of the Nirvana or the awakened, awake, this is the last entrustment of the Buddha's teaching. So let's reflect in our daily life, our practice, and contemplate from time to time where we are and where our mind is eventually going.