

Dr. Bokin Kim

*Material and Spiritual Balance*

Week Three: "What is the Mind?"

July 18, 2020



Welcome back. My talk today will focus on recovering sovereignty of spirit and rescuing enslaved humanity. Then I will ask you: what is spirit? According to the Won Buddhist teaching, the spirit is defined as "the state in which the mind being clear and round, and calm and tranquil, and is free from the tendency toward discrimination and the penchant toward attachment."

Then what is mind? In order to know the spirit we need to know the mind. From the previous statement you can see the mind has two functions. One is discrimination, and discriminate means making distinction, distinguish, and differentiate. And the second function is attachment and to attach. The spirit is the state free from those two functions. But spirit is not a separate, independent entity from the mind. It seems that the spirit and the mind can be understood as a broadly, revealing spectrum.

I'll start with contemporary neurology and brain science. This field has developed immensely and is heading for rapid growth and progress. I think you know of the scientist Stephen Hawkins, the brilliant British theoretical physicist. He stated that the mind is equivalent to the human brain. The human brain is an incredible pattern matching machine. He regards the human brain and human mind as a computer, which will stop working when its components fail. Nothing is left for the broken computer. That's his materialistic position. That is contemporary scientist's position on materialism.

Unlike the contemporary scientific position, Jinul, the second century Korean Buddhist monk, started with mind. He said, "The mind is not identical with the body. But the mind is not separate from the body." But I will not involve in long philosophical debates in my talk, I'll just focus on the practice part.

Okay. Mind is not body. But the functioning of the body is not possible without the mind, that's Jinul's position. So let's take a look at some passages of Jinul's book, an important and famous book, *Secret on Cultivating the Mind*. This book responds to his contemporaries who espoused the position that our mental phenomenon is just a function of our body, a position even which many 21st century scientists believe today.

A man asked Jinul, "Do I have a mind beyond my brain?" Jinul answered, "You are like someone who does not see his eyes, assumes he doesn't have eyes, and figures out other ways to see. Similarly, you don't know your mind and your own luminous awareness. Then assuming you don't have a mind, you figure out other ways to know. You see and you know because you have a mind.

Then the question that follows is, "Isn't seeing or knowing the physical body's functioning, just the brain's functioning?"

And Jinul answered, "If it is only the physical body's functioning, then, at the moment of death, when the body has not decayed yet, why is the body not seeing, hearing, or knowing? Your physical body is composed of four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. They are by nature

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transient and empty. Bodies are like shadows of the moon reflected on a river. However, the mind may function in the body but it is not the body.”

And Jinul asked the man, “Do you hear birds singing and babies crying?” The man said, “Yes, I hear.” Jinul said, “Trace back and listen to your hearing nature. Reflect on your awareness of hearing. That awareness is your mind. Your mind is aware of your hunger, thirst, cold, heat, anger, and joy while you are awake or asleep, 24/7.”

“Regarding the nature of mind,” Jinul stated, “the nature of mind is untainted, it is originally consummate and complete, in and of itself.” Jinul continued, “The untainted complete mind is not more evident in Buddhas and sages, nor less evident in ordinary persons. In its original wisdom, it is not brighter in Buddhas and sages, nor darker in ordinary people. The only difference is that the Buddha and sages can protect their mind. And how do we practice protecting it?”

These days, we talk a lot about cleaning. “Clean your hands, clean your hands!” Jinul used an analogy of cleaning when speaking about the practice. He spoke about two kinds of cleaning: cleaning with pure water versus cleaning with contaminated water. Jinul had a warning against tainted practice. What is tainted practice? He said, “Any practice or cultivation without awakening is not true. Thus, it is a tainted practice. Cultivation prior to awakening is like cleaning with contaminated water.” In order to start a genuine practice realization of the nature of the mind is needed. Awakening and realizing that mind which is untainted, consummate, and complete, needs to occur prior to your practice.

Awakening is a difficult concept for the West, said Dr. Len Swidler, a Christian ecumenical thinker and a theologian. He was my advisor at Temple University at Religious Studies. He visited Korea and he met Master Daesan, the head of Won Buddhism, in 1980. When he met Master Daesan, he expressed that the most difficult concept for him as a Christian theologian is the term “awakening.”

Alfred Whitehead, a British philosopher, was interested in the process philosophy of Buddhism. In his book, *Religion in the Making*, he stated that the future of humanity lies in how Buddhism and Christianity cooperate in the experiencing realm, rather than not doctrinal or not theoretical debate or argument.

So, I would like to pay attention to cooperating in the experiencing realm. I'm interested in how Buddhism and theistic religion share the understanding of awakening in an experiencing way. In Buddhism, especially in Jinul's teaching, awakening means awakening to the mind. The mind is untainted, originally consummate and complete, in and of itself. There is no need for addition, accumulation, or learning. Rather it involves the opposite, which is unlearning, lessening, and letting go.

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So, from the Christian tradition, I found Meister Eckhart, a 12th-century Christian thinker. His teachings seem to share common ground in the experiencing perspective with Buddhism. Eckhart emphasized detachment. Detachment is to purify, to cleanse, to awaken the spirit. Detachment is to separate us from all created things and to unite us with a God—the origin. Through meditative practice, regardless of our own religious or spiritual tradition, we may find common ground for spirituality and cooperation in the experiencing realm.

My next talk will be the final one in this series and will explore the practice of protecting our mind, which is originally untainted and complete. I'll talk about how to strengthen our weakened spirit and how to recover the sound spirit. Training our mind—that is, training our mind muscle—is my final topic of this series. I hope to see you all again.