

Rev. Dosung Yoo  
Week Four, *The Heart Sutra: The Foundation of Understanding*  
February 22, 2016  
“Where Are You Going?”



There was a communist revolutionary in South America, born into a very rich family. He was the typical spoiled, undisciplined young person, but when he met his mentor while in college—who later became the leader of the communist revolutionists—his life was totally changed. Before he met his teacher, he was a very sensitive, vulnerable, weak person in his mind. But after he discovered the cause to which he would dedicate his life, he became a focused, peaceful person. He was no longer moved or wavered by worldly things.

Let's think about that all together: what our mind is moved by, attracted to, or distracted by. It's usually by worldly things, things that arise in our mind, like jealousy, that may be the root cause that disturbs our mind. Think about that communist revolutionary. He's not interested in meditation or spiritual practice. But after he discovered his life goal, he became a very centered and peaceful person.

When people come to the Won Dharma Center, from time to time I ask, what interested you in meditation or other forms of spiritual cultivation? They usually reply that they would like to maintain a very tranquil, peaceful, focused state of mind when they are involved in their daily activities. They would like to enrich their lives by means of spiritual practice. That direction is great, but how much we are able to live a peaceful, centered life does not not necessarily depend upon whether we are a practitioner or how much we spend our time on the meditation cushion at the center. It mainly depends on our value system, what we are searching for. What do we really want in our life? That direction makes us very calm and focused. Sometimes we lose our center.

Think about Paul the evangelist. When he met Jesus in a vision, his life was totally changed. We cannot imagine how many hardships he had endured when he spread the gospel of Jesus, but he was always peaceful and grateful. Paul did not practice sitting meditation like me or like other Zen priests, but his life was very clear. That made his life always centered and made him grateful.

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Before cultivating the way, before we practice meditation, from time to time we need to reflect what we really want in our life. Sot'aesan, the founding master of Won Buddhism, said they are two kinds of tranquility, two paths to obtain calmness and tranquility.

Let me read:

Sot'aesan, the founding master of Won Buddhism said, in general, a human being lives either in a state of motion or at rest. There are two aspects of mental calmness: external concentration and calmness, and internal concentration and calmness. By external concentration and calmness, it's meant that you remove the source of matter, or the obstacles that would disturb your mind, by refraining from foolish and disturbing things. This requires you to make a mindful choice of right over wrong in accordance with the mortal standard of righteousness in any adverse condition. By internal concentration and calmness, it's meant that you cultivate mental calmness by keeping defilement from rising. For this, you may practice intoning the name of Buddha or sitting meditation when you are free from work. You will be able to attain mental stability by practicing both external and internal calmness, each as the basis of the other.

He explained more:

External concentration, calmness, is the practice of one's unwavering aspiration. Let one look but see nothing, or see no hindrance, when myriads of worldly affinities lie ahead, just as the pleasure of the royal palace or the suffering of the Himalayas did not stay in the mind of Shakyamuni Buddha once he resolved to attain the great way. Second, one possesses great faith. This is to have no consideration or estimation of the myriad worldly opinions because of one's firm faith, just as Huike, or Hui-k'o, the second patriarch of Zen Buddhism in China, sought the dharma upon his resolution to receive the dharma from his teacher, Bodhidharma, without minding his body.

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Apart from practicing sitting meditation, chanting meditation, prayer, etcetera (which is the path of internal concentration and calmness), our vow, our life goal, our faith, the faith, of course, in our teacher, faith to the dharma or zeal or passion to carry out our life goal, these also make a very big influence on our mind. [They help us] stay centered and peaceful. These elements are the elements of external concentration and calmness. Especially [important is] the first, our vow or aspiration.

In the Buddhism context, aspiration or vow means to attain great enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. A vow usually means this holy life goal. In the early stages of Won Buddhism, there was a Won Buddhist minister named Lee Chung-Choon. She was a barkeeper. By running a bar, she made a lot of money. One day she happened to visit our headquarters of Won Buddhism in Korea, where she saw two pigs playing joyfully in the pigpen. She told her friend that it was just like seeing her life. It was a turning point. The simple scene provided her with a great awakening. So she donated all the money she had made to the Won Buddhism and became a minister. She changed her life direction.

In my case, I have read hundred of times that the chance to be born as a human being and the chance to meet Buddhadharmā is very slim. We heard that many times. But one day, I really deeply felt that in my mind. It's really, really true. It's not exaggeration. That was a turning point for me to decide to become a Won Buddhist priest. After that, I was not that much disturbed or moved by the worldly things. It did not come from my practicing sitting meditation or chanting. My value system changed. My car is a Honda Civic, 2002 model. Even if I become a billionaire, I think I will drive the same car. Just like I read—in Shakyamuni Buddha's case—the pleasure of the royal palace or the suffering of the Himalayas did not stay in his mind once he resolved to attain the great way.

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One student asked our founding master: “What method should I cultivate so that I may eliminate all the desires, focus single-mindedly on the cultivation of the way, and lead a life of tranquility and comfort like the Buddha?”

Sot'aesan 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 single-mindedly on your vow. Then, you will inevitably lead a life of tranquility and comfort.”

In the Diamond Sutra, Subhuti, the wisest disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha, asked him: “How can I center my mind? By what criteria should I abide and how should I control my thoughts?” The Buddha replied, “All the bodhisattvas should discipline their thoughts as follows: All living creatures of whatever class, all these are led by me to attain unbounded liberation, nirvana.” To that aspiration, we need to tie our life.

As our founding master said, the most urgent thing in our life is to realize the truth of neither arising nor ceasing, and the karmic principle of cause and effect. That realization is the most urgent, important thing. So just like the in the Bible, the truth will set you free. If we really fully believe in eternal life—that death is not the end—or the karmic principle of cause and effect is exactly, precisely working in our lives, then our value system would become very much changed.

Zen Master Huangbo is the teacher of Rinzai. Rinzai you may be familiar with. Master Huangbo was the mentor of the Chinese emperor. One day Huangbo and the king went out for an excursion to the Yangtze River. In the early spring, they saw a lot of boats where noble people rode in to enjoy the springs there. The emperor said, “Wow, there are a lot of boats in the river.” But the master replied, “Your Majesty, I just see two boats; one boat chasing fame, another boat chasing wealth.”

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As I said, before we practice meditation, we need to reflect on what we are really searching for in our lives. That is the foundation of our practice. They say the Heart Sutra is the condensed form of all prajna literature, which is the essence of the Buddhadharma. The Heart Sutra ends with *gategate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhisvaha*. This is the prajna mantra, which means “gone, gone, gone beyond, far beyond, now awaken.”

This mantra is not only the conclusion of the Heart Sutra, but it's also the conclusion, the essence of all the Buddhadharma. This is what Shakyamuni Buddha really would like to say to his students. He asks us to reflect constantly upon the direction of our life. When we are young, we are really interested in how attractive we are, how tall we are, etcetera. But as we become more mature, sometimes we lose interest. The person who becomes really mature very naturally comes interested in something eternal. We practitioners need to search for something eternal. Let's all give rise to a great aspiration: to attain great enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. It starts at a very conceptual level. How can we say already, for *all* sentient beings? We all have a lot of our own problems and issues. But it may start from very conceptual level, but it will start to be embedded in our mind, in our consciousness very differently. So whenever we chant *gategate, paragate*, let's all reflect together on where our lives are going.

Thank you.