



Welcome back to the second week of "The Threefold Practice of Won Buddhism." This week, we're going to take a look at the practice of cultivating the spirit.

Master Daesan, the Third Head Dharma Master, once told a story about a visitor who came to the headquarters in Korea during a retreat. He stayed with them for a few days, and in the morning, he went to the morning meditation and he asked, "Why do you all sit in the dark this early in the morning in this day and age?" Master Daesan said, "Come here. Please sit down and try to keep your mind still for five minutes." The visitor couldn't keep it still for more than ten seconds. Master Daesan said, "That's why we're here this early in the morning."

We all have a mind. But how many of us have the ability to pilot our own mind? We interact with people and objects, we deal with a variety of circumstances, and we make decisions on a daily basis.

We also live in a time in which scientific civilization is rapidly progressing. Sotaesan predicted that as scientific civilization progressed, people's greed would also increase day by day. The issue is that our human spirit, which should be using material, can become so weak that it becomes enslaved by the material instead so we're no longer the pilots of our own mind. That is why Sotaesan said, "I'm going to provide a training that cultivates the mind so that people are not dominated by the material, but can actually use it effectively."

There's a teaching in Won Buddhism that says that the founding motive is not to oppose science but instead to strengthen the mind of humans so that we can use it in the best way possible. The good news is that Won Buddhist mind training doesn't require us to leave our families. It doesn't require us to leave our livelihood or relocate to a peaceful mountain. It's a practice we're going to incorporate in our daily lives. Saying, "I can't practice because I have a lot of work" or "I have a family to care for, so I can't practice" are excuses.

Buddhadharma is daily life, and daily life is buddhadharma. Our life is our practice. The more you practice, the closer you reach paradise. Paradise here is not some far-off place. Paradise is when our mind is clear, round, calm, and tranquil.

One of the components of the Threefold Practice is cultivating our spirit. Spirit here means that state in which the mind, being clear and round, calm and tranquil, is free from a tendency toward discrimination and a penchant toward attachment.

When the mind is in a busy state, it usually means we are lost in discrimination and attachment. The mind can discriminate based on habitual patterns of thinking. It's constantly moving from



moment to moment, and we absorb so much information that may be true or may not reflect reality.

You can think of the discriminating mind as the same as the thinking mind. And when you sit on the cushion, you may notice that sometimes we have many unnecessary thoughts, excessive thoughts. Just like the waves of an ocean are constantly moving, our mind is also active. Thoughts will arise and disappear.

The mind also has a way of attaching to things. It abides in some place or becomes powerfully bound and can't escape. Sometimes it's described as a fixation. Attachment can, for example, form when we have a mind that dislikes someone or likes someone, and then we form labels such as "That person's a nice person," "That person's always lazy."

When there's an attachment followed by a label, it sometimes becomes difficult to change that perspective. It's like attaching a metal chain to the foot of a bird who should be flying high in the sky.

Sometimes our attachments can be so strong that we actually think we're going to die if we let go of them. I experienced this a lot in high school, especially when you have a crush on somebody. You meet them for the first time, you think they're the perfect one, and you think you're going to die without them. But what I didn't know back then was that attachment was causing my suffering. I learned a lot from experience.

I didn't have a practice back then. Back then, it was just a matter of time and a lot of crying. The attachment distracted me from schoolwork or from spending time with my friends. But even now, attachments can get in the way of me truly living and enjoying life.

Therefore, nourishing that spirit, which is clear and round, calm and tranquil, helps us to let go of habitual patterns of discrimination. In that way, we're not constantly being pulled by distractions, so then we can respond to difficult situations with more clarity and spaciousness. We can start to detach from that internal unnecessary negative banter and sometimes the assumptions we make about other people.

Cultivating the spirit can be practiced in both rest and action. When we're at rest, it's easy to hop on the train of excessive thinking. There are many times when we can be sitting and we're bothered by our thoughts, our thoughts of the past, situations that happened years ago but still haunt us today.



For example, I fought with someone yesterday. It already passed, but as I sit on the porch and look out, I start thinking about the argument and get angry again. "Now that I think of it, I didn't do anything wrong. Why did they do that to me?" The practice is to be aware of these arising thoughts and settle the mind again.

Two practices that can be done at rest are formal seated meditation and reciting the Buddha's name or chanting. Both of these practices help calm deluded thoughts and manifest the true nature. In Won Buddhism, we practice what's called *danjeon*, or lower abdomen breathing meditation. It's a method that's also beneficial to our physical health because we're working with the two energies of water and fire.

Sitting comfortably on a cushion or a chair, align your head and spine in an upright seated posture. Casually bring down all your body's strength to the *danjeon*, the lower abdomen, without abiding in even a single thought.

Keep the breathing smooth. When you inhale, slowly expand the lower abdomen, and when you exhale, bring it back in.

The energy will gather in the lower abdomen, and the fire energy will descend, so it might be warm in that area. The watery energy will ascend, so you might find saliva gathering in the mouth. This is a sign that the two energies are working in harmony.

Reciting the Buddha's name or chanting is the other method that focuses the distracted mind into a single thought. In Won Buddhism, we chant *Nammu Amitabul*, which means "Homage to Amitabha Buddha, the buddha of limitless life." Through chanting, we're aiming to discover the Amitabha of our own mind and return to the ultimate bliss of our original nature.

When reciting the Buddha's name, maintain an erect posture and settle the energy. Don't swing or shake the body. Don't make the voice either too loud or too soft, but keep it at a level appropriate to your energy. Concentrate on the one sound of the recitation of the Buddha's name.

When chanting, let go of each and every thought, and maintain a relaxed, effortless state of mind. If you have a lot of thinking and you feel distracted, it's sometimes helpful to chant first and then transition into seated meditation. Many people prefer chanting during the daytime or when faced with a difficult situation. Many people prefer to practice seated meditation either early in the morning or at night.



The power of absorption at rest helps us not to feed the internal storyline. If we continue to practice, then that power grows so that the instances of my mind being dragged and attached to external situations decreases. When I'm at rest, the idle and unnecessary thinking will also be put to sleep.

This practice is not relegated, however, to the cushion; we can also cultivate this ability in action. When we are using our six sense organs, it's important, especially when we're out there being active and we come up to a very challenging situation, to be grounded, almost like a mountain. How can we cultivate that ability to be unmoving like a mountain? It's this practice of cultivating spirit. One practice is the power of pausing, which is not easy. But practice is about constantly trying.

Recently, I started class. It was a Zoom class, and I start each class with a short meditation. I rang the bell. We closed our eyes. One of the students entered late and left his microphone on. Noise started to fill the room. I could feel the disturbance, and the thoughts started coming up: “Should I mute the mic? Should I pause?” And I just stopped. I stopped the thinking mind, and I said, Just focus on your breath, and just let it be. This is what life is like. It's not always quiet. There's noise sometimes.

That power of pausing helped me to recognize what was going on with my body but also gave me the ability to let it go. And it gave me some space to not immediately react but to respond from a place of care and compassion.

Another event happened during the elections last year. I kept receiving texts from volunteers urging me to vote, more than five texts a day. I usually ignored the texts, but I started getting irritated. But one day, I paused. I stopped again. And I thought to myself, you know, these are volunteers just doing their job. I decided to text back, and I said, "I'm Canadian, I can't vote. But thanks for all you do." And one person texted back and said, "Thank you. Thanks for all your help. I've visited all over Canada and enjoy the people and the places." That pause gave me some space to respond and not react, and this can change the trajectory of a situation.

This has helped me change a potentially unwholesome situation into a wholesome one. Let's not rush. Let's take practice day by day and grow our roots deeply to the ground.

Today, I talked about cultivating the spirit as a way to gain the power of the mind so that we are not easily disturbed by external situations and internally, we are not being controlled by excessive greed or emotions. Seated meditation and chanting in times of rest are helpful methods to calm deluded thoughts and focus on a single object of meditation.

Grace Song

*The Threefold Practice of Won Buddhism*

Part 2: “Cultivating Absorption”

June 12, 2021



I talked about the lower abdomen meditation, which helps to bring our energy to the danjeon and harmonize our watery and fiery energies, which is also good for our health. Find out what practice helps you to settle your mind. For some, it could be painting, yoga, hiking, or sports. See what helps you to bring your focus to a single thought.

When we restore a mind that is clear, round, calm, and tranquil, then we start tapping into that innate light of wisdom, which is what I will explore in the next talk.