



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

Many years ago, I studied with my spiritual mentor. For two weeks straight, I would go to her room and study *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*, which is our core text. Looking back, those were some of the most fun and enjoyable days of my life. She always had fruit or some kind of snack ready for me when I walked into the room. When I sat down in front of her, she always asked the same question: "Do you have any questions for me?"

On the days that I practiced and studied diligently, I would have at least one question. But if I fell behind or became preoccupied with other things, I normally didn't have any questions to ask because I had not studied. Of course, she was aware of all of this.

She would remind me, "You have to make these teachings your own. You can't just memorize what I tell you. If you don't have questions, if curiosity doesn't arise within you, you will only repeat what I say." She was demonstrating to me that when we ask questions, we begin to reveal the truth about ourselves. We start to see the universal truths of this world. However, if we only embrace what we are offered, the world's realities will remain a secret and lifeless.

What kind of world do we live in? Sotaesan, the founder of Won Buddhism, regarded this world as a living scripture. He once asked his disciples,

"Who among you has discovered a scripture that can be read over and over again without end? Most people... don't recognize the great scripture that is open right here and now. And this is so unfortunate. If people look at this world in the right spirit, there will be nothing in it that is not scripture. When you open your eyes, you will be seeing scripture; when you listen, you will be hearing scripture; when you speak, you will be reciting scripture; when you act, you will be applying scripture. Any time and anywhere, this scripture will unfold without end. What we call 'scripture' explains the two aspects of human affairs and universal principles. These do not derive from the written word. The world is an open scripture. Therefore, I ask you first to read well the living scripture of reality before reading all the numerous and prolix written scriptures."

Sotaesan is highlighting a significant point: we all live in a world constructed on principles and driven by our daily human activities. The sky, the earth, and everything around me form the basis of my life; each has its own intelligent principles. There are days when I follow them and days when I don't.



When my mind and body are in sync with these universal principles, I experience benefit; when they aren't in sync, I suffer harm. It's akin to learning how to use a digital device. Any digital system operates according to a set of rules. If I understand how the device works and how to use it properly, I will be able to enjoy the many advantages it has to offer. However, no matter how sophisticated my smartphone is, for example, if I don't understand how it works, I won't be able to get the most out of it.

Think of a blooming flower, the rising and setting sun, the rotating earth. These are just a few examples of universal principles. They say that before the mind awakens, all we see is the physical sky and earth; after waking, we see the principle that moves the sky and earth.

What qualities do principles have that allow them to manifest in so many different ways? They are known as the great, small, being, and nonbeing in Won Buddhism. These three don't work alone; they work together.

The great principle is to see the big picture; it's to view that all is one. In the great, there's a small, which refers to the parts. If I use the body as an example, I have many body parts, but they're all part of a larger whole. And these parts aren't static; they are constantly changing—being and nonbeing, or transformation.

If we look at it from the perspective of nature, it's like the changing seasons, or from a human viewpoint, like birth, aging, illness, and death. I remember this one time when I was cutting my own hair. (I've learned how to cut my own hair now.) I had just bought a new pair of scissors, and I started cutting the back and then I accidentally cut my knuckle and it started bleeding.

I had an out-of-body experience. I was looking at down at my hand, and my right hand immediately, without thinking, grabbed my left finger that was hurt. I was looking at it like, "Oh my gosh, what a compassionate right hand." As soon as it wrapped itself around my left finger, the finger started to feel better. I started to see while these are different parts, they're part of this whole body. If one is feeling pain, the other comes to help.

Our universe is like this. It's made up of great, small, being, and nonbeing. It functions similarly to the hardware in a computer. Our human affairs are similar to the software. These are the daily things that take the form of right and wrong, benefit or harm between human beings. The computer operates on principles, but the outcomes differ depending on the software it runs.

Sotaesan emphasized the value of inquiry, which involves studying and mastering human affairs and universal principles. When we do that, we open the wisdom eye. Without opening this eye, it



would be like spending hours where, for example, where you're supposed to go to New York, but you're driving to North Carolina.

When we begin to understand human affairs, we are more mindful when we use our six sense organs because we are aware of what causes transgressions and suffering. And if we grasp universal principles, we will comprehend the causes of both misery and happiness. When the many benevolent buddhas and sages gave us these teachings, they wanted us to be born well, to live well, to die well, and return soundly.

There are several methods of inquiry, but I will focus on two. The first is learning from what you see and hear. It's about broadening our knowledge from the outside.

One day, some disciples were arguing the pros and cons of current events while reading the newspaper. The Founding Master heard them and said,

"Why do you talk rashly about matters that are none of your business? A person with a genuine outlook does not talk lightly about others' pros and cons. Even while reading the newspaper, the proper conduct for practitioners, and the way to gain true benefit, is to examine carefully in what you read the root cause and the good and bad fruition that result, taking them as a mirror for your future conduct.

This is an approach for illuminating the one mind by penetrating all dharmas. For a person who reads newspapers in this spirit, they will become a living scripture and source material for wisdom and merit.

Otherwise, you will only become good at critiquing other people's pros and cons contentiously and glibly, thereby easily falling into many transgressions. Be extremely careful about this."

We all have our preferences and beliefs. We all have our thoughts and criticisms about certain individuals and topics, especially when we read newspapers or search social media. But what if we viewed it as if it were a scripture? Then we can start to see how the cause and effect principle operates and how some behaviors result in specific outcomes. We can also use it to reflect on our own intentions and behavior.

Our Fourth Head Dharma Master, Chwasan, always amazes me. He's in his 90s now, and you'd think a master would know a lot, but he's always asking questions. If he comes across someone who is an expert in an area he is unfamiliar with, he will sit them down and interview them. It's inspiring to see someone who has come so far along the spiritual path but still maintains a



beginner's mind, an inquisitive mind, and doesn't confine teachings to a book but considers everything to be scripture.

Second, inquiry can also be done through deep contemplation. This means sitting with and focusing on what I see or hear rather than simply taking it in. I may ask, "What am I experiencing in this moment? What is happening to me right now?"

Inquiry means wanting to discover and know what I don't know. This is the motive that reveals what I'm ignorant of. This wanting to discover and know refers to a deep interest and a longing to investigate and to know what's true.

We want to come home to the living truth because this is what frees us. What went wrong in this situation? Why was that person correct in that circumstance? Through deep contemplation, we gain a better understanding of things. We must keep inquiring until we obtain the power of wisdom.

Third Head Dharma Master Daesan advises us to roll our thoughts until we attain the power of *prajna*, or wisdom. We practice this because it's very comfortable for most of us to stick to our biases. What happens if you roll something? You start to see the other side of a situation.

For instance, I have this cup in front of me. You see this side, which says "acupuncturist." On my side, it doesn't say anything. You argue to me, you see "acupuncturist"; I see nothing. Well, you're right, and I'm right. But I had not seen it from your point of view. But when I roll the thoughts, I start to see from different perspectives. It gets me out of my comfort zone.

Let's say your company is going to be a success. Instead of stopping there, think about what could happen if it isn't a success, rolling the thoughts again. What's the game plan? This plan suits me, but what about others? This is beneficial to me, but what about the rest of the community? Rolling thoughts is seeing it from this way and from this angle and from that angle.

Or perhaps you're organizing an annual event. If you intend to do event the same way as you did last year, is this rolling the thoughts? Rolling the thoughts would be to consider how can I make this year's event better. What do I need to do to improve the event? Is there an easier way to do it? If you do it the same way as you did last year, then there's no improvement.

A teacher would say to me, "Add the question 'why' to your inquiry process." One of my teachers is very bright in explaining the doctrine. A lot of people would ask him, "How did you study the doctrine? Do you have any notes you can show us? Please share with us." He said, "I don't have



any notes. Once in a while, I'll sit and I'll inquire and question. And I'll think again and again and ask the question, 'why.'"

He didn't do anything spectacular. He just learned how to roll the thinking process. And after a long period of practice, whatever problems you encounter, you'll have the ability to quickly determine what is best in that situation. Even if it's an area that you have no experience in, you gain the wisdom to be able to figure things out.

When we practice inquiry for a long time, then tomorrow will be better than today, and our minds will be at ease. When we use our minds well, wisdom and blessings naturally follow, and we don't fail in our work.

People who inquire are not afraid to ask for help or guidance. If there's something that I don't know, I'll seek for assistance. This is another reason why we don't fail at our work.

In the inquiry process, it's important not to be hasty. Have patience; go step by step. Inquiry is to view the world as a living scripture. If we open our eyes and ears, there's so much to learn because this universe itself is a teacher. I always say mother nature is my greatest teacher. She shines her sunlight on everyone.

She doesn't discriminate; she doesn't come to me at the end of the day demanding payment for her services. She does it with no thought. If we start to open our eyes to the many natural principles that exist and attune ourselves into that flow, we will experience innumerable blessings and wisdom and have the ability to make wise life decisions.

In my next lecture, I'm going to discuss the Threefold Practice of mindful choice in action. We may have learned about maintaining a clear and calm mind and awakening the light of our innate wisdom through inquiry, but it's all useless if we don't make mindful choices. I hope you'll join me.