



Welcome back to the fourth week of "The Threefold Practice of Won Buddhism." This week, we're going to take a look at the practice of mindful choice in action.

When you hear the word "action," what comes to mind? The dictionary definition is usually the fact or process of doing something, typically to achieve an aim. We generally think of action as having a goal, as something that must be accomplished. We don't normally associate action with things like sitting quietly or walking across the street.

However, the term "action" has a very different meaning in Won Buddhism. "Action" here means the functioning of our six sense organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Since we create karma every time we use our six sense organs, our future is determined by our intentions and acts in life.

If we practice cultivating the mind for a long time, our mind is not easily disturbed, especially in difficult situations. And if we devote ourselves to inquiring into human affairs and universal principles for a long time, we'll be able to find a solution to every problem we encounter. But even if I develop absorption and wisdom, if I can't make a choice that leads me down a wholesome path, it's all for naught.

Some of the reasons why we may not be able to carry out choice are (1) we are unaware of what is wholesome and unwholesome in the situation, which necessitates the use of inquiry, or (2) even though we're aware of what is right or wrong in the situation, we can't regulate our greed or our hardened habits, which necessitates developing autonomous power of mind.

Our practice is to do our best to put into action what is wholesome in that particular situation. That requires the combination of clarity, wise discernment, and courage to carry out the action.

So what does it look like to put the Threefold Practice into action? It's to be mindful to make choices with sound thought. Why is this important? Why is it important to be mindful to make choices with sound thought in all that we do?

Perhaps it's better to ask what life would be like if we made choices with unsound thought in everything we do. Perhaps the question is too obvious. When we say use the mind well, our choices lead to benefiting not only myself, but benefiting others, family, society, and eventually the world. That is one way we can measure whether we are making mindful choices in life.

When we have to do something, we usually need some sort of thinking in order to get it done. We get things done or accomplished because there is some kind of thinking that goes on first.



The sequence is usually think first, and then put it into action. Here, thinking is extremely important. How are we thinking? Do I have the ability to see the big picture, or do I only focus on myself? Thinking varies depending on how wide and deep and how long (in terms of time) I can think.

Let's say you live in a communal setting, and you get a delicious cheesecake as a gift from a friend. If you think to yourself, "I want this cheesecake all to myself," your next move is likely to be to hide it somewhere where no one can see it.

However, if you have a broader mind, you might consider, "Well, the guy who lives next door is pretty cool, so maybe I'll share a piece with him." So you call him over and you say, "Don't tell anyone else. This cake is just for you and me."

But let's suppose you have an even broader mind, and you decide, "You know what, I'm going to have a slice for myself, and I'm going to leave the cake in the fridge so that others can have a piece as well." And you write on a sticky note, "Help yourself, but please leave some for the others."

It's a simple example, but you can see that actions differ according to how deep and broad and vast we think. Before you even engage in any action, what you think is extremely important. And it is the deciding factor in everything. How you think today is how you live your life.

You might reflect on the previous week. Notice if there were any encounters where you were challenged in some way. How did you respond? Did you respond from your deepest intelligence?

So if you want to think, What is important? What kind of mind state is necessary? A sound mind is important. But what does it mean to be sound? This is a mind that is clear and round, calm and tranquil. It's very vast. Another way to put it is that if your mind is vast, then there's no room for greed. If your mind is narrow, then it's all about me, me, that small, egoic sense of self.

What kind of thoughts emerge when the mind is vast? Just thoughts about yourself? Or do you think of others as well? It definitely moves to the side of the public good. When we engage in mind study, we begin to realize that the whole is me.

This is to understand that in order for me to live a happy life, others must as well. A small-minded person will not think broadly, widely, or in a public-spirited manner. When we are at this state, it's very egotistical. It's what I need, what I fear; it's what's wrong with you, what's wrong with me. It's focused inwardly.



But when we practice, we don't just do it for ourselves. That's, of course, the first step, but there is a greater vision. When we shine the light inwards and settle the thoughts and truly tap into our true self, there is this vastness.

How do you think a practitioner who wishes for all to attain buddhahood will treat others? If they see somebody else working diligently, they will encourage them. Or if anyone is having difficulty, they will try to assist them as much as possible.

On the other hand, if a practitioner has a very small mind and thinks to himself, "I want to be the first to achieve buddhahood," how do you think they'll respond if they see someone practicing very hard? They might become annoyed, jealous, distracted, and competitive as a result of this.

When we say be mindful to make choices with sound thought, this thought is crucial because this one thought leads to action. However, the basis or foundation of that thought is also important.

So is my mind this big, or is it this wide? Or is it vast or limitless? Because, as you may experience, when we come up against something difficult, we can get caught up in our egoic self, and then we can get very small, and it's all about me versus the other person.

The Threefold Practice helps us to widen our mind, especially when we come across a difficult situation. As I mentioned in previous talks, we're able to stop. When we stop, we can create space. When we stop, we can settle the mind and then think from a place of clarity.

So what arises is not the problem. That's natural. Of course we have reactions to difficult circumstances. We can get angry, irritated, annoyed, frustrated—these are natural emotions that come up for us because we are obviously not insentient objects.

Just notice what's going on and let it be there so that we deepen presence. Realize this is the reality of the moment, but I have a decision now—I don't have to automatically react. With a clear mind, we are able to think through the situation, rolling the thoughts, and then make a decision by figuring out what is right and what is wrong in the situation.

So pausing gives a space, widens our perspective so that we can think from a clear place, and then truly allows us to communicate trust and love. Viktor Frankl once said, "Between the stimulus and the response, there is a space, and in that space is your power and your freedom."

The vaster the mind becomes, you start living from your most awake self. You start responding to difficulties from an awakened heart. This means responding and not reacting. That is what it



means to be an active and living buddha. As I reflect on the Threefold Practice I am filled with gratitude. I'm very grateful that I've been provided with a practical way to live that enhances my well-being and at the same time inspires me to help others.

As a Won Buddhist *kyomunim*, I've met so many amazing and inspiring people, spiritual mentors, who embody this practice. It manifests in how they talk to me and how they treat me.

I remember one teacher, Venerable Sangsan. He passed away some years ago, but there was one day when we were all watching a soccer game in his room in Korea. It was that last moment when the two teams were down to the penalty shootout. It was Korea versus Japan, and it was Korea's turn to make that last shot. If they made that goal, they would win the whole tournament. Just as the Korean soccer player was going to make the shot, someone from the kitchen started hitting what we call the *moktok*, which is the wooden drum, to let us know dinner was ready.

Venerable Sangsan grabbed the remote, turned the TV off and said, "Okay, dinner time." And we were like, "What?! How can you turn it off at that moment? We need to know who's going to win," but he was already walking off.

While we were still thinking of the game, he was already eating his meal. That's it. No attachment. Time to eat. Now when I reflect back, I realize that he was constantly putting the Threefold Practice into action. He never rested from the practice, no matter what the temptation or the obstructions of Mara. Inwardly, he was always practicing timeless and placeless meditation and outwardly making buddha offerings. He eventually returned to Korea to retire. He lived past the age of 100.

He would always say, "Keep the Il-Won-Sang in your mind. It should be your question, your object of faith and standard of practice. Go inwards and realize the buddha in your mind, practice the Threefold Practice diligently, realize that all things in the universe are all Buddhas, and make that Buddha offering."

Some of his last words were, "We cannot be two, and we should not be divided into two. We have to become one. We have to come together and everything will be fine. Everything will be fine."

I bow to all of you, and I thank you for joining me on the spiritual journey. May we allow life to unfold and accept that it's interspersed with moments of sweetness and joy and that it doesn't have to be fueled by rumination or suppression. May we continue to build inner strength,

Grace Song

The Threefold Practice of Won Buddhism

Part 4: “Mindful Choice in Action”

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stability, and vitality. And I reassure you that everything will be fine. Everything will be fine.
Thank you.