

The Way of Sitting Meditation

Commentary on

The Method of Sitting Meditation

in

Chongjon: The Principal Book of Won Buddhism

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of Won Buddhism

Table of Contents

Preface	i
Commentary on The Method of Sitting Meditation	1
The method of sitting meditation is extremely simple and easy....	5
1. After spreading out the sitting mat....	6
2. Gently bring all the body's strength down....	9
3. Keep your breathing smooth....	13
4. You should keep the eyes open....	15
5. Always keep the mouth closed....	22
6. The spirit should be ever alert....	20
7. Beginners at sitting meditation may suffer....	24
8. When first beginning sitting meditation....	29
9. During sitting meditation, you absolutely must not seek bizarre states....	30
If you continue practicing in the above manner....	33
Preparation for Sitting Meditation	42
Stages of Sitting Meditation	41
Reciting the Buddha's Name and Sitting Meditation	49
Sitting Meditation, Mindfulness and One Mind	53
Types of Mindfulness	516
Stages of dedication to the practice of Sitting Meditation	518
Concluding words	549

Preface

I have been interested in sitting meditation since I began searching for the truth. I have experienced almost all the rights and all the wrongs, sometimes being deep in agony, sometimes experiencing an enormous joy and bliss on the path of the Way. It was a great and precious blessing that I had my spiritual teachers nearby and had the chance for my practice to be appraised. This helped me discover the great asset of sitting meditation. In order to share this precious asset, I have written this commentary on *The Way of Sitting Meditation*.

It is unfortunate that some practitioners do not understand the value of sitting meditation, or do not find its righteous path, and thus wander about.

Meditation is not the cultivation of the outer surroundings or conditions but is a way to cultivate the mind, which is the foundation of all. Once we train and cultivate the mind and find its power, the result becomes an eternal strength which we can use in everyday life, throughout eternity. What could be a greater treasure than this!

When you work hard to train yourself in a particular field, you can develop your capabilities. But when training is not accompanied by meditation, there will arise some weak points, which may become the cause of big trouble when you face trying situations. The strengths you gain in training yourself for specific types of situations cannot be widely applied because the resulting capabilities are limited to those situations. But the spiritual power that practitioners cultivate based on centering the mind may be applied in all cases and situations, so that when you acquire the precious jewel of spiritual power, you acquire all.

Practitioners will gain many benefits from sitting meditation, as is explained in *Chongjon: The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*. But once practitioners transcend the mind-disturbing wandering thoughts, they can obtain a great liberation of mind, and once their concentration dwells at the Danjeon, a great power of stability will be cultivated. They can become so powerful and talented in whatever they try to do, that this merit

alone would be a great achievement. Even if one does not walk on the great and supreme way of meditation, the constant and sincere practice of sitting meditation will produce an increase in determination, perseverance, endurance, and more.

If one walks on the righteous path of sitting meditation, we can imagine that even greater merits will result. Therefore I write this in order that practitioners may find and walk on the righteous path of meditation. My hope is that by this writing many students may be helped in their practice.

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Commentary on The Method of Sitting Meditation

The method of sitting meditation is simple and easy, so that anyone can practice it.

Although the method of Zen is far from complex, the body of theory and interpretation which has come to us from various schools of Zen, as well as from Taoism, is so extensive that one could not grasp it in its entirety even if one tried to. If you set out to practice sitting meditation only after becoming familiar with the entire literature on Zen, you would spend your whole life searching the numerous methods without any fruitful results or real absorption in meditation. Dhanhak,¹ Chi-gong,² yoga, and other practices have their own strong points, especially with regard to applications of exercise based on the principle of meditation, and some of these can be recommended for their health benefits. But trying to practice all of these would lead to discrimination,³ preventing one from entering the authentic realm.

If one is to practice Zen, one should first abandon the thought that a variety of methods are necessary. Instead, you can rely on the simple method expounded in “The Method of Sitting Meditation” in *Chongjon: The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*, and practice with strong will and zeal based upon this book. As you reach a deeper stage of meditation, you will find the method in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* most complete because it covers everything from the most basic to the highest level, from a description of general principles to specific cases which are explained both briefly and meaningfully.

Each word in “The Method of Sitting Meditation” contains significant meaning. It would be a waste of time and energy if you read it superficially, skipped some of the contents, and then searched for another method. I have seen many cases in which the lack

¹ The modern form of an ancient Korean practice of spiritual cultivation.

² A practice of spiritual cultivation. By cultivating chi or energy, practitioners try to restore spiritual tranquility and union with truth.

³ Dualistic state of mind, choosing this or that, right or wrong. All mind-disturbing thoughts arise from this. With enlightenment, the non-dual dharma is realized.

of attention to just one word has led to the wrong path. So one should choose this method, which is simple and easy to practice, and actually begin meditation with utmost sincerity in order to accumulate the merits of Zen. We do not have to waste our time searching the various methods of Zen. Instead, we should now turn our energy toward the actual practice of sitting meditation.

Sitting meditation is not empty words, but a real and concrete task. The real effect of Zen depends on one's degree of concentration and not the method used. There is koan-observing Zen,⁴ just-sitting Zen and various techniques of concentration: focusing on the tip of one's nose, between the eyebrows, on the forehead, the naval, on the breathing, on the thought of Buddha⁵ or the moon. As long as one's mind is focused, the benefits of Zen will result. The original intention of sitting meditation is to focus one's mind on a single object and get rid of all wandering thoughts.

Among various techniques of concentration, the best choice is settling our consciousness in the Danjeon, the "elixir field" which is located between the navel and hweong-gol⁶ in the lower abdomen. Never doubt that this dharma⁷—although easy and simple so that anyone can do it—is an excellent one. Let us try to grasp the essence of Zen. The simple method presented in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* will help you avoid the fallacy of being attracted to other more complex methods.

⁴ A koan is a riddle-like puzzle which may be given to a Zen student. It is used as a topic of meditation to attain enlightenment. In Zen, a koan can be a phrase from a sutra, a teaching on Zen realization, an episode from the life of an ancient master—whatever the source, the koan points to the nature of ultimate reality. Essential to koan is paradox, i.e., that which is beyond thinking, which transcends the logical or conceptual.

⁵ Sanskrit and Pali. Literally, "awakened one." A person who has achieved the enlightenment that leads to release from the cycle of existence and has thereby attained complete liberation.

⁶ Literally, "horizontal bone." This is the horizontal part of the upper pelvic structure in the lower abdomen.

⁷ Sanskrit. Central notion of Buddhism, used in various meanings. 1. The cosmic law, the "great norm" underlying our world; above all, the law of karmically determined rebirth. 2. The teaching of the Buddha, who recognized and formulated this law and thus the teaching that expressed the universal truth. 3. Norms of behavior and ethical rules.

1. After spreading out the sitting mat and seating oneself comfortably in a cross-legged position, align head and spine in an upright, seated posture.

Sitting mat

The sitting mat itself is not directly related to Zen. Yet our body needs a mat. The benefit of sitting meditation does not happen instantly but requires considerable time as it disciplines and tames our spirit. When you sit for a long time, the buttocks are overstrained, which can easily lead to physical pain. A mat is necessary to prevent pain during sitting meditation. To relieve the weight of the legs, you can sit on the folded part of a long mat, or add another mat or cushion in order to sit on the raised portion. A square-shaped mat is fine if you are accustomed to it. The mat does not have to be luxurious; an inexpensive one is fine.

Cross-legged position

Sitting with the legs crossed means a posture with one leg placed on the other. There are two types of cross-legged posture: one is the full lotus posture with the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the top on the right thigh; the second is the half lotus posture which allows one foot to be put on the opposite thigh while the other rests on the mat.

The cross-legged posture with head and back erect enables one to endure for the longest time. The center of gravity is uniformly distributed onto the buttocks and the legs so that you can sit very comfortably for a long time. For beginners, sitting in the cross-legged position may not be easy; it can cause pain because the joints have already stiffened. But when you are accustomed to it, it becomes the most comfortable posture.

If you find sitting in full lotus posture too difficult, the half lotus posture is also alright. You should just be aware that if you practice sitting meditation for too long in the

half lotus posture without alternating the leg positions, though you may feel very comfortable at first, eventually the pelvis may be twisted, as well as the spinal cord, creating back pain or illness. Thus, from the beginning alternate your legs. Having already become accustomed to one posture, you should not forget to try to make the reverse position comfortable.

The pelvis and spine can be compared to a cornerstone and a pillar. The pillar that stands on a twisted cornerstone may well be twisted. A twisted spine in line with its instinct to sit itself up, has no alternative but to bend like an S. The spinal cord functions as the main passageway for the nervous system spreading into every part of the body. All nerve currents run through this pathway, so a twisted spine impairs the nervous system. Impaired nerves connected with the internal organs result in various illnesses. Thus when seating ourselves we must alternate the legs in turn; we can alternate daily or hourly.

Align the head and spine in an upright, seated posture.

From the beginning, make it a rule to sit erect, with the head and spine aligned. If you hunch over, you may feel temporary comfort but gradually the posture becomes hard to bear. When you bend the back, the originally erect spinal cord becomes bent accordingly, which imposes a heavy strain on the body, and the torso tilts forward. This puts strain on the legs, causing pain. With even the slightest deviation, one cannot reap the desired benefits of sitting meditation. The back is the first place distortion occurs, which then spreads to the whole body and to the mind.

There are things in this world that we can handle with ordinary thinking, but as far as Zen is concerned, you should not continue in this way. You should strive to be alert and mindful. A person who practices Zen with an unfocused mind does not actually practice Zen but is just sitting. You must practice with perfect alertness and at the same time with comfort, not tolerating even the slightest distortion from a posture that aligns the head and back.

Sometimes those who consider themselves to be experienced at meditation have the incorrect idea that posture is not important and the essential thing is the concentration. The beginner should abandon this kind of thought because one who holds this idea may easily become accustomed to poor posture and suffer his whole life, or practice only the formality of sitting meditation and find Zen unattractive.

Therefore, from the beginning one should adapt to straightening one's head and back. One should remember that correct posture not only keeps the mind alert and the spine comfortable but also preserves the health of the spine and leads one to enter the real absorption of meditation.

2. Gently bring all the body's strength down to the Danjeon and, without dwelling on even one thought, be aware only of the energy that is gathered at the Danjeon. If the mind becomes distracted, then that energy becomes diffuse. Do not neglect, then and there, to pull yourself together and bring the energy to rest.

Gently bring down all the body's strength to the Danjeon

Since ancient times, resting in the Danjeon has been highly praised as the best technique for meditation purposes as well as for physical health. This technique has become well known and has earned positive recognition in recent times as meditation practices such as Dhanhak or Chi-gong have become widespread.

The Danjeon is located midway between the naval and hweong-gol⁸ in the lower abdomen and is not difficult to find. But in the actual practice of Zen, setting the focus there is a very difficult task and may require quite a long time. If one tries to forcefully practice the Zen of resting in the Danjeon when Danjeon is not yet settled, the energy

⁸ Literally, "horizontal bone." This is the horizontal part of the upper pelvic structure, in the lower abdomen.

quickly begins to arise or to be blocked, creating tension in some area of the body. This may result in pain or disease. Therefore, in order to settle the Danjeon, you should follow the proper technique. If you think you have not yet mastered the proper technique, you should seek the guidance and appraisal of a teacher; once the wrong way has become a hardened habit, it requires more energy and time to correct it.

It is not unusual that a practitioner spends his or her whole life without succeeding in settling in the Danjeon. There are many who try to breathe through the Danjeon but find it hard to settle the focus. Those who have such difficulty need to learn a few specific techniques. For example, when beginning sitting meditation, you may pinch the Danjeon in order to induce the nerve there to be awakened. Or you can put your folded hands on the Danjeon with the little fingers placed on the Danjeon. Some practitioners lower the belt in order to exert mild pressure on the Danjeon; others put a small adhesive tape on the Danjeon. These methods can help settle the concentration on Danjeon both in meditation and in one's daily life. Only with this concentration does it become possible to center all of the body's strength on the Danjeon. Otherwise, if you overexert yourself sitting erect, you can feel the energy dissipate in the torso or arise in the body.

You should start the Zen of resting in the Danjeon with the state of mind that you bring down the strength of the head, shoulders, and torso, while maintaining an erect posture. Then the Danjeon will be the center of energy that spreads through the whole body; it becomes the sea and source of all energy, the pillar of all the energy in the body.

Without dwelling on even one thought

This phrase means that one should not dwell on or be attached to anything. If thoughts wander often, or are attracted to something, there are obviously reasons: some force that attracts our thoughts lurks there. When our thoughts are enticed by something

and dwell there frequently, a heavy karma⁹ forms and our thinking is distorted by the power.

We should return wandering thoughts to their origin, regardless of whether they are persistent and mind-disturbing thoughts generated by strong karma, or fleeting and minute thoughts generated by lesser karma. If your mind is attached to the slightest thing, our thoughts easily follow it and dwell there, playing with wandering thoughts. You may not notice this while you are lost in idle thoughts. And you may not be aware of the passage of time. Even when you are aware of wandering and try to turn back to the original state, thoughts easily slip in. The heavier one's karma is, the stronger the force that distracts our minds, making it even harder to restore the original mind. Therefore, the phrase, "without dwelling on even one thought" means that you should get rid of the attachments that distract your mind.

As you try to concentrate, you may feel distressed by the incessant recurrence of wandering thoughts. You may feel helpless and conclude that idle thoughts are impossible to control. At this point you should carefully keep two points in mind.

First of all, keep the Buddhist precepts clear and, in daily life when confronting situations, discipline the mind to keep it tranquil. If your mind is deeply immersed in the fluctuations of love or hatred, or in the choice of good or bad, it will become the root of strong attachment and create delusive thoughts, thus obstructing your original mind. It is absolutely necessary to keep the precepts and be ready to discipline the mind to keep it undisturbed in daily life.

In addition, do not regard the recurrence of wandering thoughts as negative or annoying but rather think of this recurrence as one's companion, helping to stimulate and advance one's practice. Through the process of repetition of collecting your scattered thoughts, the mind becomes spiritually empowered. In due course, your accumulated karma dissolves and spirituality is enhanced. This lays the foundation for entering the

⁹ Karma literally means "action" or "deed." It also means the effect of a deed or deeds that survives death and contributes to the formation of one's next life. The "law of karma" asserts that the virtuous or evil deeds of body, speech, and mind will inevitably bring corresponding results to the doer, in this or a future life.

genuine realm of stillness and non-duality. The process can be compared to developing muscles through the repetition of exercise. Therefore you should not worry about the recurrence of wandering thoughts; worrying may make you lose interest in Zen and add yet another burden to already existing ones.

Persistent and mind-disturbing thoughts, although easily noticed, are hard to eliminate; thoughts that are fleeting and minute incessantly recur but easily vanish once noticed. Thus both are obstacles during meditation. These are the objects we should be on the alert for. We should cope with them carefully.

One should find and intently enter the true realm of *samadhi*¹⁰ completely. One should leave behind all scattered thoughts and enter the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality.

Be aware only of the energy that is gathered at the Danjeon. If the mind becomes distracted, then that energy becomes diffuse.

As mentioned before, resting in the Danjeon is a very important technique; practice it carefully. The Danjeon is phenomenal; it cannot be seen by the eyes, only by formless energy and mind. The collected energy becomes scattered easily, according to changes in the mind. If you could see thoughts with the physical eyes, there would be a lesser chance of their scattering because the eyes have a fixed direction; spirit and energy are not restricted and cannot be fixed physically, so they wander in all directions. The problem of resting in the Danjeon is how to tame the mind and tie it up there. Settling the concentration with the previously mentioned method, and letting the consciousness gather in the Danjeon, you can arrive at the state in which you are aware only of the energy that is gathered at the Danjeon.

Consciousness and energy should be integrated. If you practice gathering energy in the Danjeon, you can maintain full energy for a while even if your consciousness

¹⁰ Sanskrit word which means the state of intense concentration or absorption induced by deep meditation, where the mind becomes still and completely concentrated.

wanders. But if concentration of the consciousness is not well formed, soon you will be overcome by weakness.

The ultimate state is that in which there is no further need for concentration. This is the realm of one's original pureness where there is neither going nor coming. Once you reach this state, the multitude of thoughts that were constantly arising and ceasing will eventually fade, so that you will be comfortable just at that place. This is the spiritual bliss of *samadhi*, the state of complete peacefulness and tranquility. But this result is obtained by repeated training of focusing the energy and consciousness in the Danjeon, not by chance. Anyone with a passing zeal can experience the temporary state of concentration, but it will not last for long. You cannot dwell in a deep state of concentration for long without practice.

The mind is like an untamed pony. It does not remain still for even a moment. A little negligence can scatter the energy that has been collected. Although with strenuous training you can succeed in resting the energy in the Danjeon, the mind may not rest there as you would like it to. You may laugh at seeing your thoughts coming and going incessantly. You may even despair or doubt that you are suited to Zen training, and consequently search for an alternative method, or by force of habit just sit idly, judging that entering the authentic realm of Zen is as difficult as picking stars out of heaven.

Our minds are living entities, so the incessant arising and ceasing of various thoughts is a natural occurrence, a normal phenomenon. Do not consider it bothersome. On the contrary, the existence of such thoughts will enable you to practice Zen effectively. Wandering thoughts are good material for Zen training, just as an athlete can develop his skill and strength by wrestling with an opponent. In struggling with this opponent, you can cultivate a vital force. Therefore, do not consider rambling thoughts as troublesome, but just try to gather oneself.

Do not neglect, then and there, to pull yourself together and bring the energy to rest.

Originally, energy and mind are related to each other; mind follows where energy goes and vice versa. Sometimes mind leads energy, sometimes the opposite occurs. However, in sitting meditation, the mind is primary and energy is secondary, so when the energy in the Danjeon becomes dispersed, this means that the mind has already slackened. When this happens, time passes by endlessly without being noticed. This is a most unsettling thing for meditators. Therefore, next come the words, “Do not neglect, then and there, to pull yourself together.” Otherwise, the gathered energy, your concentration, will move further and further away.

Why is it difficult for us to collect ourselves? What is blocking the concentration we seek? As mentioned before, the very cause is our attachments. Our minds are no longer under our control when they are gripped by feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, fear, love, or hatred, or a desire for materialism, lust, fame, profit. Our minds are completely stolen. In this condition, “pulling oneself together” becomes as difficult as plucking stars from heaven; even if you gathered the courage and pulled yourself together with strenuous efforts, you might easily lose control.

Zen is the path to restore the lost mind. It is the struggle to occupy the top seat between attachments and authentic identity. In this power struggle between the subject and the object, the part which is stronger and takes the initiative wins the victory. In other words, this is the conflict between our vow and our attachments. When the strength of our attachments weakens and the power of our vows strengthens, we win, and finally “pulling oneself together again” becomes an easy task.

The first important thing in beginning meditation is a peaceful attitude in daily life, which makes the penchant for attachment weaken. In other words, try to meet each and every moment with a tranquil state of mind. When engaging in work, be so absorbed in it that, after completing it, the mind is as empty as the sky. We do not have to dwell on the past mind, the present mind, or the future mind.

Ultimately our practice should progress towards leaving a mark in the air. In the beginning of practice, we leave a mark on paper; as we mature, we leave a mark on clay and then on water; finally, we leave a mark in the air, entering the *samadhi* of Zen, regardless of action or rest. At that stage, nothing interferes with the practitioner's collection of energy and spirit.¹¹

The second most important thing when we begin meditation is zeal. If zeal overflows in the practitioner's mind, he or she can overcome the obstacle of attachments easily although one is sometimes drawn to worldly things in daily life. Overcoming attachments is impossible with a weak state of mind, where you sit without exerting yourself. Do not practice carelessly. Begin with great zeal. In order to practice sitting meditation well, one should.

The attitude of not allowing any wandering thoughts and the zeal of perfect mindfulness are both necessary for Zen practitioners, especially for beginners. You should immediately catch yourself as soon as you are aware of wandering; you can then gather the energy at that moment.

When you may find yourself being inattentive, try to catch yourself. To return to resting in the Danjeon may take just a moment or sometimes it will take much longer. It will depend on how much discipline you have and how accustomed you are to it. One who is already able to rest in the Danjeon can return directly, while a less experienced practitioner has to work at it. As mentioned before, it is the most urgent and necessary thing for practitioners to become accustomed to resting in the Danjeon.

One thing that can hinder you from resting in the Danjeon is your physical condition. Physical limitations can prevent you from practicing sitting meditation well. In some cases, it can become an enormous obstacle to your practice, preventing you from proceeding in meditation at all. Physical illness can be a major obstacle to practicing sitting meditation. Chronic fatigue, lack of sleep, excessive drinking, overeating, all of

¹¹ To the mature practitioner, thoughts and ideas do not abide in the mind. Keeping the mind as unsullied as an empty sky is the practitioner's ideal. "Leaving a mark" on "paper," "clay," "water" and finally "air," refers to the progress of practice where the mind is becoming free from any thoughts or attachments.

these are critical obstacles breaking the biological rhythm. Management your health is a must for good sitting meditation. A proper amount of exercise, moderate eating, and adequate rest—all of these are required together.

Therefore, for effective sitting meditation and resting in the Danjeon, one should manage the mind, emotions, and body wisely and in a rational manner through daily life.

It is said, “Do not neglect, then and there, to pull yourself together and bring the energy to rest.” When your mind becomes distracted, you should notice this quickly, pull yourself together, and bring the energy to rest. Otherwise drowsiness will persist. Sitting meditation is a discipline of concentration and a practice of mindfulness at the same time; fruitful meditation depends on how mindfully you can rest in the Danjeon. As sitting meditation makes us observe the state of our mind at the very moment, practitioners of Zen will obtain a great power of concentration.

It is very important not to forget what we need in daily life. Sometimes mindlessness results in a serious mistake and, if it is important, it can lead to a big problem in your life. Both forgetfulness and mindlessness are holes in the management of our character and living. Our task is how to fill these holes; our future may depend on whether we can do this or not. In order for you to pull yourself together and bring the energy to rest, you must plug up the forgetfulness hole.

Once you decide to practice sitting meditation through the technique of bringing the energy to rest, one should not give up. Whatever *mara's*¹² temptation is, one should not be negligent in bringing the energy to rest. When one becomes negligent, he or she has already sunk into the limbo of forgetfulness. But by the repeated process of fighting negligence, the power of mindfulness will increase day by day, and that gain is invaluable.

¹² In Pali and Sanskrit, *mara* means death or destruction. In Buddhist mythology, *mara* is the personification of evil. It is best known for its part in attacking and challenging the Buddha to keep him from attaining supreme enlightenment.

3. Keep your breathing smooth and even, making inhalation a little longer and stronger, and exhalation a little shorter and softer.

From the somatological point of view, our bodies operate best when absorption and evacuation are in balance; if one absorbs exceedingly and lacks evacuation, the absorbed contents may function poisonously. When one excretes more than one absorbs, one becomes lethargic. This principle applies equally to breathing; inhaling and exhaling should be balanced. It is said, “Keep your breathing smooth and even,” which means that inhalation and exhalation should be even. This means that we should neither breathe too strongly nor too slowly, but inhale and exhale with careful balance.

When breathing with balance, your inhalations become a little longer and stronger and your exhalations a little shorter and softer. At this point you may have some misunderstanding about literal meaning, thinking that the longer and stronger your inhalation is, the better it is. Conversely, you may wrongly try to make your exhalations as short and weak as possible. But we should be careful of the phrase “a little.” It is not “much” but “a little.” “Much” is not desirable; “a little” is good and is the appropriate method.

Some practitioners inhale much longer and more strongly than they exhale. This causes imbalance, producing an unfavorable effect. Eventually you may find you are even unable to practice Zen due to panting, heaviness, and the fire energy rising up, inducing indigestion or blocked energy around the belly. One cannot settle the focus in the Danjeon under the condition of the fire energy rising up. When the focus is not settled, one may feel slight suffocation. Trying forcibly to practice further makes the fire energy rise up, and this can separate the practitioner from sitting meditation forever. This is called getting the Zen illness. If you find yourself in such a condition, you need to proceed wisely. Do not try to solve this problem alone, but seek advice from a more experienced practitioner or a teacher. There are many possible responses you can use to address this illness. If it deepens, you had better stop the Zen of resting the energy in the Danjeon and instead recite the name of the Buddha, try walking meditation, or practice koan-observing Zen,

until the blocked energy vanishes completely. It is obvious that the wisest and easiest way is to prevent the illness before it starts. Therefore, it is most desirable that you try to settle the focus and energy in the Danjeon as soon as possible. You should seek to balance inhaling and exhaling, and unify the breathing with the resting of the energy in the Danjeon.

Beginners will at first experience disunity, trying to focus on their breathing and at the same time focus on resting the energy in the Danjeon. If you are too mindful of resting in the Danjeon, you may not be mindful of your breathing, and vice versa. It is not easy to do these two things simultaneously. If you pay attention to inhaling and exhaling, the consciousness immediately becomes attached to the nose, and resting in the Danjeon vanishes easily. On the other hand, if one pays attention to the Danjeon, it may lead to unmindful breathing.

The method of Zen outlined here can help you attain both, i.e., “breathing and resting in Danjeon” and “resting in Danjeon and breathing” at the same time. It is a technique which shows us the way to raise the spiritual power of concentration in regard to any complex matter. This spiritual power is an indispensable asset in coping with the many complex matters occurring in life. In some sense, how deeply you can concentrate in complex matters can be the criterion to measure your ability to concentrate.

To carry out the regulation of breathing and resting in the Danjeon at the same time, one should apply the power of concentration and train yourself to be accustomed to the proper way of breathing. To settle the energy in the Danjeon through breathing, try to inhale and exhale through the Danjeon. If these two coincide simultaneously, no problem arises; breathing helps gather energy in the Danjeon, and the gathering of energy in the Danjeon helps breathing. Thus you can develop your power of concentration in regard to this complex matter, and be more easily absorbed in the authentic realm of Zen.

Even after you learn how to rest in the Danjeon and breathe well at the same time, maintaining this concentration is not an easy matter. The concentration on exhaling may become loosened when one is inhaling and vice versa. This is a common problem, but if

you continue in practice and do not give up, you will pass through this crucial point so that while in the process of inhaling and exhaling, you will be able to continue to concentrate on resting in the Danjeon. Finally one you enter the stage in which you do not feel the distinction between inhaling and exhaling, and are finally absorbed in resting in the Danjeon. This is a very crucial point.

4. It is essential to always keep the eyes open to help keep drowsiness away. You may try meditating with eyes closed when the energy of the spirit is refreshed and there is no risk of drowsiness.

The first problem that beginners practicing sitting meditation face is how and where to place the eyes. It is explicitly written, “It is essential to keep the eyes open to help keep drowsiness away.” It is also said, “You may try meditating with the eyes closed when the energy of the spirit is refreshed and there is no risk of drowsiness.”

Problems arise when one does not follow this guidance.

In Zen mediation, what matters are the contents, not the formality. Just being seated is not Zen. Just sitting can indeed raise endurance, perseverance, patience, etc., yet it is far from the real essence of Zen.

Since long ago, many enlightened masters and spiritual mentors have warned about the risk of drowsiness. If one falls into drowsiness, they advise, one is lead to a dead and useless Zen. In the old days to avoid this, a smacking stick was used, from which we can conjecture how dreadful the problem of drowsiness has always been.

Drowsiness is generally more harmful than wandering and idle thoughts, which we at least notice; we may hardly notice drowsiness and thus fall into it and sink. Therefore, those who would practice Zen should start meditation with the firm determination to never fall into drowsiness. To accomplish this, keeping the eyes open is the best way.

Some practitioners, misunderstanding the idea that drowsiness is so harmful, try not to sleep at all. Some may try to sit up all night in the name of practice. This is in vain. If you try to remain awake, you may enhance the power of endurance, but do not try to deprive yourself of sleep. Our body needs sleep and this is a physical condition. If a person does not sleep at all, he or she will have a nervous breakdown, or some other kind of mental disorder. It is known that soldiers who do not have enough sleep doze off even in fierce battles; sleeping is essential. There is a minimum level of sleep that our body requires. If one sits up all night, this may enhance the technique of seated sleeping but this is not Zen, only forced and unnatural foolishness. When trying to practice Zen, we should be rational and wise as to how much we sleep. One should take the least sleep necessary, and then decisively and resolutely overcome the temptation of drowsiness.

If you are seated for Zen, all of the dynamic energy and the distracting thoughts will gradually calm down. At this point, the *mara* of drowsiness gets its chance; it takes every opportunity to invade our pure spirit. You will feel comfortable and not notice the lapsing of time. After a while, you may even feel your spirit refreshed and revived and this may lead the delusion that you have practiced meditation very well. However, this Zen is of no use.

Thus, one should cultivate a habit of practicing Zen with the eyes open from the beginning. Otherwise, you will surely be affected by drowsiness and your meditation will not be fruitful. If you form the habit of practicing Zen with the eyes closed and dozing off, unlearning that habit is an extremely difficult job. Do not treat it lightly; it cannot be corrected without strong determination and help from others.

So from the beginning cultivate the habit of practicing Zen with the eyes open. Sometime later you will reach the stage where you can meditate well with closed eyes. When the physical and mental condition and the atmosphere permit, you can then judge whether you can meditate well with closed eyes. At that point, you have the opportunity to practice Zen with the eyes closed.

Closing the eyes however, is recommended with extreme carefulness. We should be particularly mindful about this. A person who has attained considerable power from long training in Zen can be absorbed in the authentic realm of Zen directly, not being distracted even under bad circumstances. But this is the result of long training and cannot be expected to happen easily. You must take proper measures according to the condition of the mind, body, and the surrounding energy at the moment.

So when you can make a judgment that you will not be affected by drowsiness, you may practice Zen without opening the eyes. However, if there appears some indication of falling into drowsiness, immediately open your eyes to avoid being grasped by drowsiness.

Sometimes the beginner who has not yet formed the foundation of Zen will try to jump over the first stage, closing the eyes during meditation in order to enter the high and profound realm of Zen. Be aware that this does not yield good results; trying to get results without following the procedure will ultimately be a waste of time.

5. Always keep the mouth closed. When the water energy ascends and the fire energy descends readily after lengthy practice, clear and smooth saliva will flow continuously from the salivary glands, which you may gather in the mouth and swallow occasionally.

Always keep the mouth closed.

It is a well-known fact in daily life that when you make a firm resolution or become taut, your mouth becomes firmly closed; this is a natural phenomenon. When you are completely attentive, and your energy is centered, you can gather and direct your energy at will. But when your resolution flags, the closed mouth tends to loosen.

We can stay alert without one moment of being inattentive by keeping the mouth resolutely closed. In this frame of mind, we collect the energy that is dispersed, and can enter the authentic realm of absorption in accord with the energy and mind.

If you become inattentive or overcome by drowsiness, the first signs appear at the spine and mouth. The back slumps and the mouth loosens as the attention lapses. One should notice this immediately and bring the body erect, back to the original position. Unless detected and corrected, there is always the risk that these symptoms will worsen over time and become a habit that will be difficult to reverse. Unfortunately, it is easy to slip into this state. Thus we must be resolutely attentive and courageous. The easiest and wisest method is to deal with irresolution before it becomes a habit; tremendous effort would be required once bad habits become hardened.

When the water energy ascends and the fire energy descends readily after lengthy practice, clear and smooth saliva will flow continuously from the salivary glands, which you may gather in the mouth and swallow occasionally.

The functioning of our bodies is very complicated, yet the main principle is that we operate by the harmony of water energy and fire energy. When they are in harmony, each playing its respective role, we can live well. When the balance is broken, however, the water energy and the fire energy fail to do their respective parts and health cannot be maintained.¹³

The characteristics of water and fire are that water flows down and fire rises up. However, in a living body there is a circulation of energies; water energy rises while fire energy descends. When this harmony collapses, there appears disorder in our body. Water energy dries up if the fire energy becomes dominant. That is, when fire energy rises, our

¹³ From the standpoint of sitting meditation, our bodily energies can be classified into two kinds: fire energy and water energy. In nature, water energy is clear and calm, whereas fire energy is turbid and unstable. All the six sense organs are governed by the combination and movement of these two energies. The practice of sitting meditation causes the fire energy to descend and the water energy to ascend in the body. This practice calms wandering thoughts and manifests our true nature.

water energy is exhausted. Contrarily, if the fire energy wanes, the water energy exerts a heavy pull on us. Under either of these conditions, physical health deteriorates. The body becomes exhausted as our energies are lost in perspiration and the mind becomes exhausted as the fire energy rises and water energy dries up.

When the body obtains comfort through correct posture, and wandering thoughts diminish in our mind, our body regains the harmonious state of water rising and fire descending. The spirit becomes refreshed, and clear and fragrant saliva springs up between the tongue and teeth. This is the natural condition in a practitioner without illness who has found the right path to sitting meditation after lengthy practice. However, even with a considerable level of competence in sitting meditation, this natural state of harmony may be lost to one who is suffering from chronic illness. Therefore, it is very important to pay close attention to and constantly care for your physical health. A loss of harmony can also result from your falling into the wrong path in sitting meditation. Close monitoring of the causes and prompt attention are required.

It is written in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* that when clear and smooth saliva flows, it may be gathered in the mouth and occasionally swallowed. If the saliva is swallowed too frequently without given time to be gathered in the mouth, the power of descent will decrease. The effect that trickling water has is weak, but when it is gathered and is let to flow all at once, it has power. If saliva is allowed to gather in the mouth and only occasionally swallowed, the power of descent will be facilitated, having a good influence on the body and the spirit. This can greatly help in accumulating the merit of sitting meditation. But this phenomenon is attainable only when the body and the mind have been familiarized with the right method of sitting meditation and physical and mental comfort has been reached. That is to say that the phenomenon occurs when the body is made comfortable by being familiarized with the correct posture. The energy is resting in the Danjeon, and the spirit is rid of all the mind-disturbing wandering thoughts and is familiarized with the single-mindedness of the Danjeon. It will never be attained by a rushing mind, nor will it be achieved by obstinate willfulness.

Some practitioners pay too much attention to the subject of saliva. The more you want the saliva and pay attention to it, the more the mind-disturbing thoughts can develop. This in turn might bring about even deeper distress and can cause you to drift away from sitting meditation. Therefore, it is best to leave the production of saliva up to the bodily condition and focus instead on consistently following the correct method of sitting meditation. Continuously train the body and the spirit to be familiar with the right way.

6. The spirit should be ever alert in its calmness and ever calm in its alertness. If the spirit becomes dim, collect the mind to refresh the spirit; if it lapses into wandering thoughts, restore it with right mindfulness. Rest in the realm of your original nature, which is effortless and spontaneous in its natural state.

Be ever alert in its calmness and ever calm in its alertness

“Ever alert in calmness and ever calm in alertness” has been the true standard for the practitioners of meditation since ancient times. The phrase “ever calm” refers to tranquility and the phrase “ever alert” refers to clearness of mind. When tranquility is attained by calming all the mind-disturbing and wandering thoughts, achieving one-pointedness and clearness of mind. Only then is the practitioner “ever alert in calmness.” When clearness of thought is attained by one-pointedness, through which all the mind-disturbing wandering thoughts are calmed and the state of tranquility achieved, it is being “ever calm in alertness.” This is the true realm of sitting meditation, in which you are ever calm in alertness and ever alert in calmness. Ultimately, there is no distinction between “being ever calm in alertness” and “being ever alert in calmness,” but only the state of being steadfastly settled in the genuine realm of *samadhi*. In this orientation, sitting meditation is not trapped in mere alertness and does not fall into torpid calmness, but enters into the true *samadhi* state of our original nature.

This state of alertness and calmness may frequently be misconceived. As stated in the Venerable Sotaesan's¹⁴ teachings from early on, resting in calmness without right mindfulness is erroneous, as is being distractedly alert. He cautioned us repeatedly against following the incorrect way of meditation.

It is generally the characteristic of the human spirit, when it is tranquil or calm, to easily lapse into drowsiness or to fall asleep. When we are alert, on the other hand, many mind-disturbing wandering thoughts tend to surface all at the same time, causing the mind to be distracted. In order to avoid falling into these two wrong tracks, special efforts and accumulation of practice are required.

To prevent the spirit from falling into these traps and to break away from them when caught, the Venerable Sotaesan instructed, "If the spirit becomes dim, collect the mind to refresh the spirit; if it lapses into wandering thoughts, restore it with right mindfulness." He thus cautioned us against the kind of tranquility which leads to drowsiness and the kind of clearness of mind which leads to distraction.

Refresh the spirit

Not only in sitting meditation, but also in everything else, when your spirit leans to torpor, there is a high likelihood of its ending up in failure. It is like tending to household affairs when under an anesthetic; the effort will result in failure. Therefore it is vital to awaken from this drowsy state immediately. This is what "refreshing the spirit" means.

If you fall into drowsiness and are not aware of it, you will be dragged even deeper into this mental trap. The deeper the fall, the harder it is to climb up. Therefore, the best way is to not to let yourself be lulled into drowsiness in the first place. If you fall, the next best and indispensable thing to do is to refresh your spirit and promptly climb back up. After a while, alertness will settle in its rightful place.

¹⁴ Founder of Won Buddhism and the author of *Chongjon: The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*, in which we find "The Method of Sitting Meditation."

Restore it with right mindfulness

It is said that the saddest thing for a practitioner is the scattering of the spiritual energy. Even in daily life, wandering and idle thoughts serve no good purpose, and can be harmful. The more the spirit is disturbed by needless mental activities, the more energy it consumes; this causes fire energy to ascend and water energy to dry up. The power of right mindfulness—power to abandon irrelevant thoughts and focus on the right way of practice—will be undermined, and wisdom will be buried. It is written in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* that even necessary thoughts must be used sparingly.

If this is true for daily life, it holds truer still for sitting meditation. Idle thoughts and right thoughts are both undesirable. No matter how justifiable a thought is, it is merely an idle thought if it surfaces while in sitting meditation. The only right mental activity while in sitting meditation is being aware only of the meditation. Everything else is just an idle, irrelevant, and disturbing activity of the mind. Hence, “restore it with right mindfulness” is to revive one-pointedness in your mind.

There is one peculiar thing that every dedicated practitioner at sitting meditation has come across at one time or another. When in meditation, past events from one’s life tend to be recalled more clearly—things that have been forgotten amid one’s daily routine seem to find their way back. Although the purpose of sitting meditation lies in resting in the Danjeon and not in reviving those forgotten events, they revisit as uninvited guests. Many practitioners are troubled by this phenomenon, but it is not something to be concerned about. It is merely proof that your mind is being cleared and becoming pure. There is no need for apprehension; it is just a phenomenon that appears in this process. Instead of being troubled by its presence, pay closer attention to letting go of these recollections. These thoughts should never be held for long. Let go of them as soon as they appear and relinquish them at the first reappearance. As you repeat this process of letting go, your mind will become familiar with resting in the Danjeon and its power will grow stronger.

If you persistently cling to thoughts and allow yourself to be troubled by their presence, your meditation will be hindered not only by all kinds of irrelevant and idle thoughts but also by your worrying about having these thoughts. This is time wasted. Therefore, it is imperative to resolutely restore your spirit to right mindfulness and rest in the Danjeon. Under no circumstances should you fail to do this.

Rest in the realm of your original nature, which is effortless and spontaneous in its natural state.

“The realm of your original nature, which is effortless and spontaneous in its natural state” is the ultimate goal in sitting meditation. The realm of your original nature is a very difficult realm to understand and, at the same time, the most sought after. “Effortless” means no action, no doing, and no thoughts. Upon entering the effortless realm, there is a cessation of all our mental delusions, our plotting, our habit of weighing the pros and cons in everything, and fabrications. Even discernment and knowledge cease to exist. The state of original nature is void of all things, there is nothing else to be discarded. It is naturally pure and undefiled. There is nowhere to go to and nowhere to come from; it is disengaged from anything and everything. This is none other than “the realm of your original nature, which is effortless and spontaneous in its natural state.”

All too often the effortless state is misconceived as a state without purpose or reason where one does nothing. This is where the need comes in to differentiate the “true void” from the “false void.” The “true void” refers to the realm in which the pure and clear life force is at its peak, attainable through the repeated filtering out of impurities. The “false void” refers to a state which is empty of pure and clear life force but contains the accumulation of impurities which have not been filtered out. It is crucial to overcome the false void in meditation of resting in calmness alone because it does not contain right mindfulness. If a practitioner falls into this false void, misfortune will result. This is where the so-called “bottomless hell” starts to arise.

After a long period of disciplined, single-minded focus, all the mind-disturbing wandering thoughts and idle thoughts will vanish of themselves. Your spirit will be

securely in the realm where there is not the smallest margin for any thought to creep in. When you reach this stage, the mind will approach a climax by entering into the genuine realm of sitting meditation, the realm of your original nature, effortless and spontaneous in its natural state. There exists only the experience of full contentment to rest in peace in that realm, and nothing else.

The six passages cited above give a comprehensive approach to sitting meditation. Discussion of a seventh, eighth, and ninth passage follow, dealing with points to beware of in the course of sitting meditation.

7. Beginners at sitting meditation may suffer from aching legs or intrusion of idle and wandering thoughts. If your legs ache, you may occasionally switch their positions. If you are troubled by wandering thoughts, merely recognize them as wandering thoughts and they will vanish by themselves. You absolutely must not be vexed or discouraged by their presence.

Aching legs and intrusion of idle and wandering thoughts

Aching legs prove that your body is alive, and the intrusion of idle thoughts proves that your spirit and mind is alive. Legs that are used to being stretched out will obviously ache when left bent for a long time. Likewise, when you have coexisted with all kinds of idle thoughts in your routine daily life and have not recognized them as idle thoughts nor been burdened by their presence, it will be difficult for you to simply remove them from your mind just when you want to. Hence, it is only natural that your legs ache and idle thoughts bother your mind. What is important in sitting meditation is how to manage this natural phenomenon. You need to approach this problem rationally and wisely.

If you have an undeveloped view of meditation and persistently cling to this, meditation for you will only be laborious and fruitless. You will be drifting further away from entering true *samadhi*. Hence, for this point, readings in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* guides you in the right principles of sitting meditation.

If your legs ache, you may occasionally switch their positions

For anyone whose body is not familiar with sitting meditation, legs are bound to ache during meditation. Those who have been accustomed to seated posture will be able to endure for some time longer; others will feel the pain sooner and be able to endure less. The younger generation in Korea and elsewhere who are used to sitting in chairs will especially find the pain hard to endure. However, while such “aching of legs” may vary in degrees depending on a person’s condition, it is universally experienced. It is never the case that everyone else is just fine and you are the only one that feels the pain. It is important to note that everyone feels the same at one time or another.

This is where the matter of choice comes in. You have a choice of one of three possibilities. You may choose to give yourself up to despair, feeling that you are not cut out for sitting meditation; you may decide to endure the pain of your aching legs; or you may switch the positions of your legs whenever the pain is felt. Your choice will determine our success in sitting meditation.

Simply deciding that you are not cut out for sitting meditation just because you feel pain in your legs every time you practice is too hasty a judgment, lacking in perseverance. One with such a tendency is the type of person who needs sitting meditation the most. We often neglect to pay attention to the weaknesses in our character since they are not something which can be physically seen. If one refuses to confront a weakness in one’s character, it cannot be helped. When the temptation to forsake sitting meditation is stirred, you must try a little harder to overcome it.

If you try to endure the pain of aching legs, you may be a person of considerable fortitude. Through lengthy training you may be able to enhance your endurance, however

it is important to understand that sitting meditation is not a confrontation with suffering. Endurance is not the main goal of sitting meditation though it may be gained as a by-product. Our purpose is to cultivate spiritual strength, to “focus with single-mindedness,” to concentrate the myriad thoughts scattered in every direction into one focal point. Therefore, you must be able to carefully counteract problems that interfere with achieving that goal.

Another person might switch the positions of the legs whenever the pain is felt in order to cope with the aching legs. When we suffer pain—whether physically or mentally—it is natural to be troubled by it. The more troubled we are, the harder it becomes to focus with single-mindedness. Hence, if you desire to practice meditation in the right way, you must pay close attention to maintaining good physical and mental health. You must also be able to control how much you eat, sleep, and work. Excess or deficiency in any one of the three will certainly work against your efforts at sitting meditation. So spending all one’s effort to endure the pain of aching legs cannot be called wisdom, but mere suppression and ignorance, like “grass pressed under a rock.” On this point, Venerable Sotaesan instructed, “If your legs ache, you may occasionally switch their positions.” By quickly switching the top and bottom positions of the left and right legs whenever the pain is felt, you will promptly counteract dispersion of the spirit and enter into the genuine realm of sitting meditation at once. After a period of frequently switching the top and bottom positions of the left and right legs whenever the pain is felt, constant daily practice of sitting meditation will eventually train your body to naturally persevere longer. After a while, you will be able to sit in one position for quite a long time before you feel the need for the leg switching.

If you ignore the laws of nature and think that enduring the pain is a virtue to be pursued at any cost, you will be afflicted with greater suffering, such as muscle spasms. If it comes to this, sitting meditation will become a burden and you will lose interest in it and thus drift away from it. “Endurance at any cost” can never be called wisdom.

If you are troubled by wandering thoughts, merely recognize them as wandering thoughts and they will vanish by themselves. You absolutely must not become vexed or discouraged by their presence.

The more fertile the soil, the more weeds will grow. The more spiritual a being is, the more thoughts they will have. Therefore, the intrusion of wandering thoughts is proof that there is hope for you in the practice of sitting meditation. If you didn't have obstacles to overcome, how would you be able to enhance your ability?

The path to sitting meditation is a long journey with these wandering thoughts as unwanted companions along the way. Mere words fail to describe the long and complicated vicissitudes involved. It is a battle of life and death between "right mindfulness" and "wandering thoughts" which never forgive a fleeting moment of carelessness. It is a continuous battle of seizing and being seized, fought against intrusive thoughts that in an instant, and without fail would creep in and take over.

Then, what is right mindfulness and what are wandering thoughts? Speaking in general terms, their respective meanings are very easily defined. Right mindfulness refers to correct thought and wandering thoughts to impaired thought. However, the definition of those two phrases in terms of sitting meditation goes far beyond that. Right mindfulness refers to focusing the spirit and mind solely at the Danjeon, while delusive thought generally refers to anything and everything that works against that. Whether good or bad, necessary or unnecessary, any thoughts that interfere with focusing the spirit and mind at the Danjeon with single-mindedness are all intrusive thoughts. Sitting meditation is the confrontation between the subject that strives to rest in the Danjeon and the object that tries to interfere with that attempt. It is the battle over whether the subject will seize the object or vice versa. Seizing or being seized will ultimately come to an end when all the objects surrender and disappear into oblivion.

Such a confrontation calls for a high level of wisdom. It is said, "If you know your enemy as well as you know yourself, you will win a hundred times in a hundred battles."

It is essential to be well aware of the respective properties of right mindfulness and wandering thoughts.

It is particularly important to know the intrinsic nature of intrusive thoughts. Intrusive thoughts have the following attributes: they are victorious over those who are easily discouraged by their presence; they intensify irritation for those who are vexed by them, but they retreat from those who are not discouraged by their presence, merely recognizing them for what they are. Wandering thoughts can never be victorious in a battle fought by those who refuse to be discouraged under any circumstance, however difficult the situation may be. Though these thoughts will cause conflict, they'll never succeed in complete victory. On the other hand, if a practitioner is easily discouraged, these thoughts can completely take over; once caught by wandering thoughts, you have no sure way to preserve your free will.

For this reason it is vitally important to never get discouraged by the presence of wandering thoughts under any circumstance. They intensify irritations for those who are distracted by their presence. You want to be able to focus your mind solely on one thought, and you cannot settle in one place due to the incessant interference of wandering thoughts. It is easy to be in conflict with yourself over this, but you must never fall into this delusion, no matter how incessantly the thoughts come. If you do, you will be just adding another thought to already existing ones. You must absolutely be aware of the fact that once you give in to one intrusive thought, it in turn will bring about a new thought, one right after another. It would be like falling into a pit of quicksand set up by intrusive thoughts. This is why *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* prescribes that “You absolutely must not become vexed or discouraged by their presence.” The word “absolutely” was not an expression the Venerable Sotaesan often used. However, he did say “absolutely” for this point.

Therefore, “do not become vexed or discouraged,” but promptly recognize them as intrusive thoughts whenever they surface. These wandering thoughts, when observed, have the tendency to immediately retreat by themselves. There is no need for you to even lift a finger to drive them away. Since it is the intrinsic nature of wandering thoughts to

vanish by themselves through simply being recognized, there is no need to force them out.

In sitting meditation, simply be faithful to fulfilling the task of resting in the Danjeon. This is the correct way to counteract wandering thoughts and the wisest thing to do.

8. When first beginning sitting meditation, you may find your face and body feeling itchy, as if there were ants crawling over you. This sensation is evidence of the blood flowing more actively through the capillaries. Be sure not to touch or scratch.

There are two ways in which sitting meditation enhances more active blood flow through the capillaries. One is that by straightening the back, you are straightening the spine, your main neural cable system connecting the entire body. This eases the neural activity and promotes blood flow in the capillaries. The other is that, by repeated breathing deeply, you increase your pulmonary capacity, thus helping the blood to flow more actively through the veins.

There are, of course, other causes for itching skin. Infection and healing of wounds in the skin can cause itching. But the itching discussed in this passage occurs when blood flow which had been blocked or slowed is suddenly released, inducing the blood to flow actively. This is not associated with disease or injury, but is a phenomenon of sitting meditation. Itching caused by infection or healing may be hard to endure, depending on the severity of the affliction, but the itching associated with sitting meditation will not be too difficult to endure. One should not pay much attention to it by either touching or scratching; it is only a natural phenomenon. You can ignore it and simply hold on to fulfilling the sole task of resting in the Danjeon.

On the other hand, do not prematurely greet a little bit of itching as having completely achieved the full blood flow. Becoming attached to this idea may cause mind-disturbing thoughts to surface, one after another.

In addition to what is specifically described in this passage, other changes in the body may occur. By unblocking the flow of energy which had been obstructed earlier, you may experience burping or flowing of clear and smooth saliva, and such. When encountering these bodily changes, you should look past them and not be overtaken by them.

9. During sitting meditation, you absolutely must not seek bizarre states and mysterious signs. Even if such sensory experiences occur, regard them as anomalies. Pay them no attention; look past them without concern.

We often hear phrases like “seek after truth,” “seek enlightenment,” or “realize truth” and occasionally come across those who strive to do that. However, some people pursue special abilities such as being able to create mystical experiences, sometimes sacrificing everything and abandoning all duties and responsibilities. They devote themselves to Zen meditation, prayers, or recitation of chants, and in so doing, abandon their ordinary lives and lead a life apart from their society.

Some devotees practice sitting meditation in anticipation of special sensory or psychic experiences alluded to in the above passage, but such practice is merely a misdirected endeavor. The Venerable Sotaesan strongly cautioned us against having such misguided expectations.

“Bizarre states” and “mysterious signs” refer to such misdirected endeavors. The “bizarre states” refer to the establishment of conditions in which events that cannot occur in everyday life take place, such as displaying the ability to make miraculous things happen, foretelling a person’s future, or healing a sickness in so-called miraculous ways.

“Mysterious signs” refers to certain illusions surfacing in the mind or various supernatural experiences appearing to one who is in a state of half sleep. They may take various forms, such as receiving a divine revelation, meeting with a sage or the Ruler of

Heaven and coming back from the beyond, radiating light in meditation, or emitting an auspicious energy or light.

The Venerable Sotaesan strongly cautioned us against seeking these signs. He instructed us to “regard them as anomalies. Pay them no attention; look past them without concern.”

In spite of this warning, people experiencing such things sometimes mistake them for having achieved a high level of spirituality and believe that they are now conversant with Truth. Many times they delude the world and deceive people, including themselves, and ultimately end up in hell where there is unceasing pain and suffering. Occurrences such as these have no relevance to the principle of our original nature. They have nothing whatsoever to do with awakening the principles of “the great” and “the small,” “being and nonbeing,”¹⁵ or the principle of cause and effect. They also have no connection to understanding right and wrong, or benefit and harm. Hence, they have no relevance to the deliverance of people or the attainment of our spiritual freedom of mind. They do not provide any kind of help.

In these cases, they are not helpful in our becoming decent human beings who are obliged to fulfill the duties of husband or wife, parent or child, brother or sister, fellow citizen, friend and colleague, and superior or subordinate.

When those supernatural and mysterious conditions encounter the Three Poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion rooted in our minds, we are led to further indulge ourselves in this wrong path, deluding the world and unrepentantly deceiving others. What can be more treacherous than this?

The true purpose of sitting meditation lies in calming thoughts and cultivating right mindfulness. For those who are not interested in the true purpose and who are

deluded by bizarre states and supernatural phenomena, the dedication to the preservation of right mindfulness is lost. Furthermore, those around them who have witnessed these signs could be lured away from the right dharma and the correct path into the seduction of supernatural and mysterious experiences, and thus led into a pit of delusion.

Since ancient times, supernatural and mysterious signs have been said to be a most peripheral issue for the sages. When met with such sensory phenomena, those who follow the right course will merely look past them unconcernedly, intent on erasing their influence and striving not to leave a trace of such things. If, deluded by a small trace of such phenomena, you can claim that it was a great and rare experience, you will not only be committing an act of foolishness, but you may also be engaging in a greater wrong because it has the potential of deluding the world and deceiving people. Therefore, you must be on your guard against such things. They will decisively interfere with your following the Great Path and therefore are treacherous.

In that sense, it is said in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* that, even if “bizarre states” and “mysterious signs” occur, we must pay them no attention and look past them without concern. We are instructed to think of them only as anomalies and to ignore them completely.

The phrase “pay them no attention” means not to hold on to them, not to allow them to remain in your mind. The more you are attached to them, the longer you allow them to linger in your mind, the stronger they will grow as a treacherous force that works against your following the Great Path.

“Look past them without concern” means to think of them merely as trivial occurrences. In other words, do not be attached to them, thinking that they are something good, and do not allow yourself to be affected by their presence, thinking that they are

¹⁵ In Won Buddhism, the dharma is said to be composed of three principles: “the great,” “the small,” and “being and nonbeing.” “Great” means the realm where all dualities disappear, which is essentially the origin of all things in the universe. “Small” means the realm of discrimination, where things are distinguished by their shapes, colors, smells, etc. “Being and nonbeing” means the realm of change, such as the cycle of nature’s four seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter, as well as wind, clouds, rains, dew, frost, and snow; the birth, aging, sickness, and death of all things; and the transformations of creation and destruction, prosperity and decay.

something bad. You need only to think lightly of them and treat them accordingly. Becoming attached to such phenomena, being afflicted by their presence, or taking a dislike to them will all function as harmful interference, which will ultimately lead you into a trap. When treated lightly, they become trivial, insignificant, and powerless. However, the more you are attached, dislike, or are troubled by their presence, the stronger the power will be. *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism* enlightens us to pay close attention to this fact.

If you continually practice in the above manner for a long period of time, you will ultimately forget the distinction between yourself and other things. You will forget time and place and, resting in the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality, you will rejoice in unparalleled spiritual bliss.

The above-stated stage is the last phase you encounter in sitting meditation after having gone through the entire process.

However, if you are rushed by misconception or hastiness, you may easily be troubled by several difficulties. You may be questioning yourself, wondering why you have not experienced “unparalleled spiritual bliss” or “the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality.” You may be wondering why you have not attained the state of “forgetting time and place” or “forgetting the distinction between yourself and other things.”

Such hasty expectations will cause you to lose interest in sitting meditation, and to take a skeptical view of it. This may ultimately develop into a negative opinion about the value of your practice. In the end, you could become weary of sitting meditation and give it up altogether. If you have very high expectations for a desired outcome and use it as a standard for evaluating your sitting meditation, it can become a strong interference in your practice. Sitting meditation will not proceed as you would like, and the possibility of attaining the desired effect will only drift further. You cannot but lose interest. This is the saddest thing that can happen to a practitioner. It is the greatest loss a practitioner can suffer, a loss that can never be replaced.

The time during sitting meditation is the period of replenishing drained spiritual strength. Just as by taking meals everyday we provide necessary nutrients to our bodies, when we regularly practice sitting meditation our spiritual strength is replenished and mental activities will stay on the proper track. Therefore, you need to think of sitting meditation as a daily routine, much like taking meals. You should simply stop conjecturing upon false and unrealistic expectations. Keep repeating the practice faithfully. When your body and mind become familiar with the proper methods, and when you are settled in the state of physical and spiritual comfort, you will be absorbed into the blissful and profound realm of *samadhi*.

There should be no prejudice or misconception about the meaning of the phrase “a long period of time.” A long period of time does not mean to sit for a long time without lying down or sleeping, or just to put in one’s time without sincere effort and dedication. This is a misunderstanding of the true meaning of sitting meditation and a failure to maintain the middle path or “golden mean.” The true definition of a long time is to devote a considerable amount of time to sitting meditation every day and to repeat this daily practice for a long time. Practice over time in a manner faithful to the prescribed methods. Your capacity in sitting meditation does not grow by itself just because you have set yourself in the seated posture for a lengthy period of time. This is why it is important to note that your capacity will accumulate only when the right efforts are made.

If you have high or hasty expectations of a desired outcome while being negligent in accumulating right effort, you will experience severe interference. Such an approach to sitting meditation should be prudently avoided. It is best to devote yourself to accumulating due effort and not overly focused with the outcome.

You will ultimately forget the distinction between yourself and other things

This stage refers to the state in which the separation between self and surroundings has disappeared. It is recognized that the ideal state where the distinction

between oneself and other things disappears and only the thought of resting in the Danjeon exists.

You will forget time and place

Anyone who practices sitting meditation frequently experiences idle distractions relating to time and space. Various thoughts repeatedly arise, such as distracting thoughts reminding you of the time you started or the time to end. This leads you to guess how long meditation has continued, or think that it must have continued for a quite a while, reflecting your wish for the end of the session. Idle thoughts associated with the place or the environment you are presently in, as well as recollections of past events or forgotten incidents, continuously surface and submerge.

When you rise above such space-time conditioning and reach the state in which the single thought of resting in the Danjeon exists, only then can the realm of forgotten time and place be attained.

Resting in the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality

The state in which the energy and the spirit together become one through resting in the Danjeon is “the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality.” When energy fills the Danjeon and all thoughts cease, then true stillness is attained. With all dualistic thoughts, conjectures, and schemes forgotten, non-duality is gained; without any impurity remaining, the genuine realm is reached. It is this state which becomes one with the true nature of Il-Won,¹⁶ that is to say the realm prior to thought.

It is like pure clean water brought up from the deep. Water such as this holds the most vibrant power, pulsating with life force. It grants boundless grace everywhere it touches. The longer you rest in “the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality,” the

¹⁶ An important concept in Won Buddhism. Il-Won, which literally means “One Circle,” symbolizes the origin of all beings in the universe and the original nature of all sentient beings. This is the object of faith and the model of practice in Won Buddhism. Won Buddhism is a reformed Buddhism founded in Korea nearly one hundred years ago.

stronger your spiritual life force grows. This water of life will purify the polluted spirit at its roots, endlessly expanding its positive influence on the spiritual life. Then, wherever the spirit travels, and whatever activity it is engaged in, boundless grace will be generated.

You will rejoice in unparalleled spiritual bliss

This is the bliss you experience when your spirit is absorbed into the ultimate state in sitting meditation, the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality. In our daily life, no matter what activity we may be engaged in, when we overcome various obstacles and finally reach the ultimate stage, we experience a world of joy. Immersed in this, we forget our troubles. This world can never be experienced if there is even a small part of your mind untrained by the dharma, however minute it may be. Through continued practice of sitting meditation and repeated experiences of the genuine realm, little by little your body and spirit become trained until finally you are absorbed into the deep *samadhi*. Once in this genuine realm, you will forget your self and will rejoice in boundless bliss of mind and spirit.

Preparation for Sitting Meditation

All things in this world require preparation. Sitting meditation is no exception. To practice sitting meditation successfully, you need daily careful preparation. Sometimes success or failure in sitting meditation depends on the level of preparation you make. It is an illusion to think that you can be careless in your thoughts and actions during your daily activities, and that you can then put yourself in the right mood at a moment's notice when the time for sitting meditation is near at hand. Nothing can be completed successfully without due preparation. Sitting meditation is no exception to this universal principle. Here are some points to apply in your daily routine to prepare for sitting meditation:

You need to study the methods of sitting meditation

In order to practice sitting meditation you must become completely familiar with its methods. You cannot be successful in sitting meditation by merely sitting in a position pointlessly. Moreover, there are many methods to choose from; each has its own merits and demerits, strength and weaknesses.

Hence, you need to have a deep understanding of the methods of sitting meditation in your everyday life. Not only should you study them through *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*, but also learn from more experienced practitioners by asking them questions and receiving their appraisals. Learning does not stop after the initial stage, but accompanies each stage throughout the entire process. This checking and assessing will prevent you from going down a wrong path and will lead to a sound practice.

Replenish the Vow¹⁷ to Practice

The vow is the driving force, without it you will be unable to move forward. Without the vow, when your body assumes the seated posture you will merely be sitting, not actually practicing sitting meditation. The continuous replenishment of the vow is essential; it is the core and the main force in sitting meditation.

For this to make sense to you, try to understand the following issues: What is the outcome of practicing or not practicing sitting meditation? How does practicing or not practicing sitting meditation influence your mental ability and all aspects of your life in general? What outcome does your ability in sitting meditation have in store for the eternal life?

Once firmly convinced of the benefits of sitting meditation, you will naturally awaken to the desire for it without needing encouragement from anyone else. You will be driven to solidify your vow to practice and to do it well.

If such a vow has not been taken and strengthened, you will be lacking in the resolve to practice. You may soon lose interest, becoming an uncommitted practitioner. You may either reluctantly engage in it only to seek others' approval, or fail to focus your mind while practicing, merely ending up sitting in vain. Therefore, recommitment to the vow must be continuous.

Management of the Heart and Emotions

The heart and the emotions are very subtle, but they can capture the entire world of your imagination and become your strongest attachments. However hard you try to do away with them, it is sometimes of little avail. The harder you try and the deeper you are dragged in, the stronger the hold this world of attachment will have on you. You may be willing to practice sitting meditation in your mind but in the realm of the imagination and in your daily life you completely succumb to the workings of the heart and the emotions.

¹⁷ "Vow" in Buddhist literature means the practitioners' aspiration or strong determination for their life

The stronger these sensory conditions are for you, the harder it is to resist or relinquish them.

Therefore, those who want to practice sitting meditation must train themselves to assume a serene state of mind in their daily routine, avoiding the heavy emotional fluctuations created by joy, anger, sadness, or happiness. If such sensory conditions occur, you should ignore them. You will be able to practice sitting meditation easily only when these strong emotions vanish of themselves. The chief obstacles of sitting meditation are the desire for wealth, fame, food, sleep, and sex.

Management of Health and Daily Life

Your mind alone does not practice sitting meditation. It does it together with your body. Hence, you must care for your physical health as well as your mental and emotional well-being. Several kinds of physical conditions might hinder sitting meditation. It is hard to practice sitting meditation when you are ill or suffering physical pain, or when you are exhausted. Extreme fatigue due to strenuous activity would also pose a problem. Lack of sleep for any reason of course greatly interferes with sitting meditation. It is also difficult to be completely absorbed in meditation when you have digestive trouble due to an inability to control the intake of food. If you eat or drink a lot right before you go to bed, you won't be able to fall into a sound sleep and you may frequently awaken during the night. This can in turn lead to a fruitless meditation the next morning. In addition to what has been mentioned above, if discipline in your life collapses or a sudden change occurs in your life's everyday pattern, your practice of sitting meditation can be interrupted. Therefore, it is important to handle these issues appropriately and as quickly as possible.

Management Before and After Sitting Meditation

Your body is bound to stiffen if it is not used or moved properly. If you only move your body in a set pattern or repeat only certain movements, your body will perform only

goal; to ultimately attain the great enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

those motions comfortably, and ultimately lose its physical balance. Therefore you need to do appropriate exercise to loosen muscles that have stiffened during the night before practicing sitting meditation. It is a good idea for beginners especially to increase the blood circulation and relax tightened muscles and joints through light but thorough exercise before entering the meditation room and starting meditation.

Correct posture is crucial during sitting meditation. Otherwise you may acquire weakness or misalignment in the pelvic structure. If such a problem becomes chronic, you may suffer pain in your back or in your legs as you get older. In order to prevent this, you are advised to acquire the habit of frequently sitting in a kneeling position during your everyday practice. When kneeling, it is best to put the right toes on top of the left toes. You use your right leg a lot more than your left, in driving for example, and hence the right side of your pelvis is more likely to become distorted. Placing your right toes on top of your left toes is a good and necessary habit to maintain a correctly aligned pelvis.

When your pelvis is correctly aligned, your spine is healthy. Only when your spine is healthy can you be free of distraction caused by physical discomfort. Therefore, proper care of your pelvis and your back is an indispensable part of sitting meditation. A weak pelvic structure and a weakened spine may not pose such a problem when you are young, but as you get older they will become a major threat both to sitting meditation and to your health. Counteracting these potential problems by meditating according to the previously stated method is a wise way to practice.

Stages of Sitting Meditation

For the benefit of the beginner, the following nine stages of developing a deep sitting meditation are explained here. Be sure to consider individual differences in temperament while examining these points.

Overcoming Physical Challenges

When you start practicing sitting meditation, the very first thing you will be trained to do is to assume the correct physical posture. At first, it is difficult for anyone to attain the correct posture. Even once you think you have it, you are soon faced with a problem of being unable to hold the posture for long. Over time you will carefully condition your body, following the methods stated in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*. There is a limitation to what your body can endure. Trying to forcibly overcome your limitations, or holding the idea that extreme endurance is the best course to take, is not a wise path to follow. The term “overcoming of physical challenges” means to carefully condition your body to overcome its limitations without unnecessary strain. If the physical challenges are not carefully overcome from the beginning, you may suffer later on in your practice or decide to cease practicing altogether.

Control of Drowsiness

Since sitting meditation is usually practiced at dawn and in stillness, it is easy to succumb to sleep. Therefore, in some sense it is a battle against drowsiness. This problem has become even more serious for people in modern society, who are in the habit of going to bed late and getting up late because of television, computers, and such. Defeating drowsiness is a pivotal issue in the practice of sitting meditation. Needless to say, if the temptation to sleep is not overcome, sitting meditation will be fruitless. Nothing will be

attained in regard to breathing and control, for instance, not to mention resting in the Danjeon.

Therefore, a practitioner of sitting meditation must tackle the temptation of drowsiness head-on. If you do this faithfully as if it were a matter of life and death, you will prevail.

Control of Energy and Breathing

This refers to the smoothing of your physical energy and breath. If you haven't paid attention to this in your daily life, you will most likely find it hard to follow the proper method for gathering energy and control of breathing. You should proceed carefully in this task. Your training should continue until controlled breathing comes naturally without a conscious effort, and you feel comfortable with such breathing. Eventually your mind and body will form a perfect oneness, resting in the Danjeon while breathing correctly.

Control of Persistent and Mind-Disturbing Thoughts

Mind-disturbing thoughts occur when the "Three Poisons" (greed, hatred, and delusion) and the "Five Vices" (immoderate desire for wealth, fame, food, sleep, and sex) are empowered. These thoughts are clinging by nature and are not subdued easily.

When overcoming persistent mind-disturbing thoughts, a head-on confrontation with them is not recommended. Such a response will only make you grow weary, and as you become tired the thoughts will grow stronger. A more effective way is to "merely recognize them as wandering thoughts and they will vanish by themselves." (see [Section Seven](#)). Using this technique, you will be spared from the trouble of "battling it out" because the mind-disturbing thoughts will naturally fade away. Through this process, the persistent and mind-disturbing thoughts will ultimately vanish by themselves.

Since overcoming mind-disturbing thoughts is a crucial turning point in sitting meditation, you must devote yourself to this task, over and over until these thoughts finally disappear.

Control of Fleeting and Minute Thoughts

This refers to the management of little wandering thoughts that float about in a disorderly manner. These fleeting thoughts do not possess the power of the persistent and mind-disturbing thoughts. They don't remain for long, nor do they exercise great power. They are just wandering thoughts that endlessly come and go, floating in and out of your mind. Things or events that have escaped your attention during the day suddenly come to mind and flee as soon as they are noticed. You should take proper steps to clear your mind of such fleeting thoughts. If you repeatedly and faithfully practice such steps and deny those thoughts even the slightest opportunity, they will ultimately disappear on their own.

The Initial Experience of Full Concentration

When these obstacles are overcome, a clear and orderly mind will continue to dwell at the Danjeon. The watchful eyes of your mind will be scrupulous and precise so that nothing will be able to work its way into your mind. If by some small chance something were to appear in your mind, you would unrelentingly let go of it. It is much like a cat with its eyes fixed intently on a mouse. This is the state in which your mind has reached full concentration and your spirit has reached the Danjeon and is resting there.

State of Arrived-Once and State of Forgetting-Arrived-Once

There only remains the coming and going of the state of Arrived-Once and the state of Forgetting-Arrived-Once. The state of Forgetting-Arrived-Once refers to the state in which you even forget that your spirit has attained the state of Arrived-Once. When your spirit is absorbed more deeply into the state of Arrived-Once, you will be led to the state of Forgetting-Arrived-Once. It is the state in which you let go of the fact that your

spirit has reached the state of Arrived-Once or that it is resting there. That is to say that the ox-herder is there, but the ox is not.¹⁸

State Void of Arrived-Once and Forgetting-Arrived-Once

This is the level in which the state of Arrived-Once and the state of Forgetting-Arrived-Once are both suddenly forgotten. From the state of Arrived-Once you enter the state of Forgetting-Arrived-Once. By being deeply absorbed into the state of Forgetting-Arrived-Once, both of these states become void. It is the state where there is neither ox nor ox-herder.¹⁹

This is the ideal state for all practitioners, and the ultimate goal in sitting meditation. You will gain deep gratification, absorbed into the perfect state of *samadhi* in which you will “hear but not hear” and “see but not see,” with all of the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body, and mind) fully alive.

Action and Rest become One and the Same

Although you have reached the *samadhi* of sitting meditation, you cannot continue to rest there. You must seek out the realm in which action and rest become one. You must set out in pursuit of the state in which you are free of attachment even when active, and your discriminations are in accordance with the Middle Way²⁰ even at rest. By showing great loving-kindness and great compassion in all directions through boundless ways, you can exercise immeasurable dharma grace to benefit countless numbers of sentient beings. It is only in this state, when action and rest become one, that all the power and virtues of the Buddha can grow deeper and stronger.

¹⁸ This refers to the “Ten Ox-Herding Pictures,” a Zen teaching dharma. The pictures describe the process as an ox is gradually tamed by the ox-herder, each stage symbolizing a practitioner’s stage of spiritual evolution. In these pictures, the ox symbolizes our flesh-desire and the ox-herder symbolizes our original nature or buddha nature.

¹⁹ This is the stage where all dualities (buddha vs. sentient being, enlightenment vs. ignorance, right vs. wrong) have disappeared. At this stage, the practitioner is completely united with the truth.

Reciting the Buddha's Name and Sitting Meditation

In *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*, the relationship between recitation of the Buddha's name and sitting meditation is explained as follows:

Recitation of the Buddha's name and sitting meditation are two aspects of the single subject of spiritual cultivation. If a practitioner experiences many wandering thoughts, he or she may counteract the distracted spirit first by reciting the Buddha's name. By doing that the practitioner may then be subsequently led into that genuine realm of stillness and non-duality through sitting meditation. When practicing these two forms of discipline, recitation of the Buddha's name is more properly done during the daytime or when one is active; sitting meditation is more appropriate during the quiet time of the early morning or evening.

To further explain, the characteristic of chanting is that practitioners are led to single-mindedness through the one sound of the recitation, while sitting meditation leads you to single-mindedness through resting in Danjeon.

On many occasions we experience a single-mindedness naturally attained through the effect of external sensory conditions. Taking exams, facing clear danger, or having fun are some examples of various instances in our daily life where single-mindedness is realized. In each of these occasions, your mind is stimulated by the external sensory condition and becomes highly charged, thus naturally attaining single-mindedness.

The case similarly applies to recitation of the Buddha's name. Through the one sound of the recitation and its effect, single-mindedness is easily attainable. Therefore, there is no doubt that chanting is more effective than sitting meditation when your mind is

²⁰ "The Middle Way" (Pali: majjhim pa ipad ; Sanskrit: madhyam -pratipad) found in Buddhism means a life or practice between the two extremes of self-denial and self-indulgence. This is the path that led

invaded by excessively distracting thoughts or when you are faced with external sensory conditions.

Sitting meditation must be practiced with your mind severed from all sensory conditions and from all worldly things. Resting in the Danjeon does not mean that the Danjeon is sending stimuli to the mind so that it can be charged highly. What comes first is mind. The mind is the main force which drives consciousness and energy. Success of meditation depends on our mind, not on the environment.

Hence, while reciting the Buddha's name serves as an effective method for eliminating mind-disturbing thoughts, it is not as effective as sitting meditation with respect to leading the spirit into the genuine realm of stillness. Sitting meditation serves as an efficient method for leading the spirit into that genuine realm of stillness. However, it is not as good as chanting when it comes to counteracting external sensory conditions and mind-disturbing thoughts. Therefore, if a practitioner keeps control over the outer layers by reciting the Buddha's name and regulates the inner elements through sitting meditation, one will draw closer to the genuine realm of stillness.

Although this principle is clear, many practitioners think that reciting the Buddha's name befits only low-level practitioners, and consider themselves to be at a higher level, holding fast solely to sitting meditation and ignoring this principle. Such practice may often result in failing to get rid of distracting thoughts and sensory conditions, consequently hindering sitting meditation. On the other hand, there are those who cling solely to reciting the Buddha's name and underrate the importance of sitting meditation because, to them, chanting is a better technique in attaining single-mindedness. If you practice in this way, you may have trouble in approaching the genuine realm of consummate stillness; you may be unable to keep control over the center of your mind.

Therefore, you must acquaint yourself thoroughly with the technique of leading yourself into the genuine realm of stillness, conquering the myriad of obstacles through

Shakyamuni Buddha to the great enlightenment. He said this is the path of liberation and wisdom.

chanting, and freeing yourself from the obstructive force of all disturbing thoughts through sitting meditation. As prescribed in *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*, you must familiarize yourself with the habit of reciting “*Nammu Amit’abul*,” the homage to Amitabha Buddha,²¹ the Buddha of Limitless Light and Life. You may recite the Buddha’s name in order to reflect on the original nature of your mind for example when your mind grows restless, or “when greed arises,” or “when you are attracted by favorable circumstances,” or “when you are repelled by adverse circumstances,” By so doing, you will experience the gratification of conquering the myriad obstacles through the one sound of the recitation of the Buddha’s name.

It is said that the Venerable Sotaesan had always commented that reciting the Buddha’s name is like “working a coarse wood plane” and sitting meditation is like “working a fine wood plane.”

²¹ Sanskrit. Literally, “boundless light” and “boundless life.” Amitabha is the presiding Buddha of the Western Paradise, or Pure Land, in which all beings enjoy unbounded happiness. The Western Paradise of Ultimate Bliss is not to be understood as a location but as a state of the highest consciousness.

Sitting Meditation, Mindfulness and One Mind

About meditation, the Venerable Sotaesan said that practitioners when at rest should be mindful to practice sitting meditation or recite the name of the Buddha, and when they are involved in daily routines, practitioners should continue to be mindful throughout all activities. One Mind refers to mindfulness to remove the wrong and do the right. In whatever activity there is an aspect of right and wrong. If you are careful to choose the right and abandon the wrong, that is mindfulness and concentration. Mindfulness is the beginning and concentration with total absorption is the end result. If you cultivate the mind's ability to concentrate, you will ultimately enter *samadhi* whether you are at rest or active. This is called meditation in work. It enables practitioners to practice meditation wherever and whenever they are, not leaving meditation even for a moment. By this merit of mindfulness, both our spiritual and physical life can be improved in complete balance, and the understanding of universal principles and human affairs can be pursued together. This practice enables practitioners to realize that "Buddhadharma is daily life and daily life is Buddhadharma."

Many practitioners ignore or underestimate the practice of keeping mindful throughout daily activities. Many hold the idea that mindfulness in sitting meditation is the best practice. We cannot say these people are enlightened or know the basic principle of mind. The Venerable Sotaesan warned, "The Zen which can only be practiced when one is seated but cannot be while standing is a crippled Zen."

The mind has the characteristic that it can be developed according to the way it is disciplined. If you are mindful while driving, you become a competent driver; if you are mindful while writing calligraphy, you become skillful at calligraphy; and if you try to concentrate when reading, you will be able to read deeply and come to have much knowledge. Whatever you do, if you are mindful while doing it, you can nurture the ability to cultivate One Mind and become a useful and able person.

If you do not cultivate One Mind, you may be unable to be effective in your life and cannot even think of helping others.

If you concentrate your mind on what you are doing without being carried away to another matter, concentration will be cultivated and attachments and distracting thoughts will disappear. Your wisdom and clarity of mind will also be greatly enhanced. You will be enabled and empowered to decide to do the righteous thing, so that you can act according to the dharma, no matter what obstacles you face, anytime and anywhere.

In *The Principal Book of Won Buddhism*, the chapter entitled “Timeless Zen and Placeless Zen” says that practitioners will be centered like “an iron pillar and become as impenetrable as a stone wall,” never being distracted or obstructed. Even while residing in this world, you will attain hundreds and thousands of *samadhi*. You can obtain freedom from birth and death, liberation from the cycle of rebirths, and the ultimate bliss of the Pure Land.”²²

Therefore practitioners will obtain great power in meditation if they recite the name of the Buddha or practice sitting meditation when they are at rest, in order to eliminate distracting thoughts and to practice the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality, and are mindful and concentrated while doing activities.

Practitioners should not only utilize what they have attained in their daily activities, but also use the power obtained by meditation to hone their wisdom by studying the universal principles and also studying human affairs, to enhance their power of choice and to act in accordance with the Middle Way. This is a skillful and efficient way of practice that anyone can do. In this way, one can practice the Threefold Practice—Meditation, Inquiry, and Conduct—in concert. One’s daily life and practice will improve together, assisting each other.

²² Generic term for the realm of the buddhas or buddha-paradise. Since according to the Mahayana Buddhism there are countless Buddhas, countless Pure Lands also exist. Many times pure land denotes the land of ultimate bliss or western land of Amitabha Buddha. It is not a realm of enjoyment, but rather an ideal place of spiritual cultivation, beyond the cycle of birth and death.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that sitting meditation is the only technique and think that only people of lesser spirituality recite the name of the Buddha and practice the mindfulness of timeless Zen and placeless Zen. Rather we should be wise enough to practice these three techniques together and achieve twice as much with half the effort.

Types of Mindfulness

1. Undisciplined mindfulness and necessary mindfulness

Undisciplined mindfulness is to act with awareness when doing something unrighteous.

Correct mindfulness is to pay attention to righteous things.

2. Inattentive mindfulness and attentive mindfulness

Inattentive mindfulness is carrying out the practice of mindfulness inconsistently, without any standard, sometimes acting with awareness and at other times acting without awareness, depending on one's mood and situation.

Attentive mindfulness is doing the practice of mindfulness with consideration and discipline most of the time.

3. Everyday mindfulness and systematic mindfulness

Everyday mindfulness is paying attention to everyday tasks.

Systematic mindfulness is acting with commitment to long-term aspirations.

4. Temporary mindfulness and long-term mindfulness

Temporary mindfulness is acting with awareness temporarily and only in certain situations.

Long-term mindfulness is acting with awareness consistently with a long-term vision.

5. Singular mindfulness and complex mindfulness

Singular mindfulness is paying attention to one thing that the practitioner is interested in.

Complex mindfulness is paying attention to various things simultaneously.

6. Individual mindfulness and group mindfulness

Individual mindfulness is an individual paying attention to his or her own matters.

Group mindfulness is all members of a group paying attention to their common matters.

7. Superficial mindfulness and profound mindfulness

Superficial mindfulness is paying attention to ordinary things.

Profound mindfulness is acting with deep awareness in order to realize profound truth.

Stages of dedication to the practice of sitting meditation

Objective Appraisal

1. One uses any excuse to skip meditation.
2. One sometimes practices sitting meditation, sometimes not.
3. One practices sitting meditation at retreats and training sessions, but not in daily life.
4. One endeavors to practice sitting meditation every day.
5. One tries to practice meditation at all times and in every place.
6. One practices meditation habitually, like eating and drinking.

Stages of concentration during sitting meditation

Subjective Appraisal

1. Most of the time one is bothered by drowsiness and wandering thoughts.
2. One sometimes is able to concentrate on Danjeon.
3. One concentrates on Danjeon but is often bothered by drowsiness and wandering thoughts.
4. One stays focused on Danjeon. Wandering thoughts come and go from time to time.
5. Most of the time one stays within Danjeon with no thoughts arising.
6. One stays within Danjeon with no thoughts at all.

Concluding Words

These days there are various techniques of practice. Many teachers contend that their technique is the best but the person who realizes the principle of mind can distinguish the strong points and short points in each practice. Whatever their approach is, as long as they help to cultivate One Mind and lead the practitioners to find and dwell in the genuine realm of one's original nature, they can be of value. Whether it is reciting the name of the Buddha, or sitting meditation, or being mindful while in activities, we should not be deluded by exaggerations.

It can be very time-consuming to learn and master the various disciplines which emphasize the practice of chi,²³ or the circulation of chi, or the enhancement of physical health. This loss of focus can become an obstacle for a practitioner's spiritual cultivation. Select and utilize several postures for the purpose of strengthening physical health, but do not regret later that you spent so much time just seeking the best method.

In addition, do not be too hasty to achieve the merits of sitting meditation. This urgency can be another obstacle in sitting meditation. One should enter meditation without any thoughts or ideas. Any wishing mind or calculating mind will lead you into dualistic thinking. This hinders meditation and can cause the meditator to lose interest. Therefore, you should not develop expectations about the merits or results of sitting meditation. Instead, keep sitting with sincerity and dedication. When the dedication is little and the wishing mind is big, this is not the way.

If you expect that a short period of sitting meditation will decrease suffering or illness, and become suspicious of its merits after finding your health does not improve quickly, you may feel disappointed with meditation. Sitting meditation does not make you healthy all of a sudden. It is said, "the suffering of illness decreases,"²⁴ which means that illness will decrease gradually. Our physical wellness depends heavily on our physical

²³ Energy, life force or power

²⁴ *The Scriptures of Won-Buddhism*, p. 54.

constitution, so too much expectation of enhanced health is unrealistic. Improved circulation, deepened breathing, and a straight and corrected spine will all help to decrease the suffering of illness. However, it is too much to expect an immediate disappearance of illness.

It is said that one cannot go a long way always keeping a quick pace. We become weary if we have a hasty mind about the merits of sitting meditation. Continue your sitting meditation comfortably on a daily basis, just as you eat three meals. Over time many benefits will result.

I would like to conclude this writing by quoting the words of the Venerable Sotaesan.

If you all truly understand the merit that derives from Cultivation, your dedication will naturally continue without anyone pressuring you. However, there is one thing you should be careful about: if you do not accurately understand this technique and, becoming either impatient or seeking out strange signs, you do not practice the genuine S n [Zen] dharma, then during your practice you may instead become ill, fall into a perverse path, or create more defilements. You must often assess your method against our dharma of seated meditation, or inquire about the correct procedures from your seniors, thereby assuring that your practice does not have the slightest error. If you diligently pursue the right practice, you will easily gain freedom of body and mind. All the buddhas, sages, and great masters have attained such power of mind through this S n [Zen] dharma.²⁵

Letting it Go

As I do not hold the mind which wanders out,
Nor receive the mind which comes inside,

²⁵ *The Scriptures of Won-Buddhism*, pp. 152-153.

So now I obtain the One Mind which neither comes nor goes.

The original mind, which neither comes, nor goes,
Is primordially pure and clear, so why be troubled with attachments?

Let go your hold of the cliff.

Forget the boat after crossing the river.

Take one more step forward at the edge of the precipice.

Master Joosan²⁶

²⁶ In *Won Buddhist Periodical*, Vol. 45, Won Buddhist Year 23, June. Master Joosan was one of the greatest disciples of the Venerable Sotaesan. This poem was published in 1938. The first year of Won Buddhism corresponds to 1916. This is when Sotaesan, the founder of Won Buddhism, attained his great enlightenment.