

Commentary on
The Method of Sitting Meditation
in
Chungjeon: Principle Book of Won Buddhism

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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 tasting an enormous joy and bliss in the course 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 led me to the great asset of sitting meditation. In order to share this precious asset, I now try to write this commentary on “The Method of Sitting Meditation”.

It is a pity that some practitioners of the Way 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 the way to cultivate the mind, which is the base of all things. Once we train and cultivate the mind and find its power, that resulting power becomes an eternal strength which we can use in everyday life through eternity. What could be a greater treasure than this!

Hobbies or other work in which one trains oneself in a particular field can develop capabilities when one trains very hard in that field. But when training is not accompanied by meditation, there will arise some weak points, which can become the cause of big trouble when one faces trying situations. The strengths one gains in training oneself for specific types of situations cannot be applied widely, for the resulting capabilities are limited to those situations. But the spiritual power that practitioners cultivate based on centering the mind can be applied to all cases and situations, so that when one acquires the precious jewel of spiritual power one acquires great fortune.

Practitioners will gain many benefits from sitting meditation, as is explained in *Chungjeon*. 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 what greater merits will result. Therefore I write this in order that practitioners can find and walk on the righteous path of meditation. My hope is that by this writing many students can be helped in their practice of sitting meditation.

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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 Zen schools, as well as from Taoism, is so extensive that one could not grasp it in its entirety even if one tried to. If one set out to practice sitting meditation only after referring to the whole volume of literature on Zen, one would spend one's whole life searching the numerous methods without any fruitful results or real absorption in meditation. Gukseun-do¹, Dhanhak², Ki-gong³, 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,⁴ 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, one should rely on the simple method expounded in "The Method of Sitting Meditation" in *Chungjeon: Principle Book of Won-Buddhism*, and practice with strong will and zeal based upon this book. As one reaches the more profound stage of meditation, we find the method in *Chungjeon* most perfect, 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 one, judging it as ordinary, made light of it, skipped the contents, and searched for another method. I have seen many cases in which the lack of attention to just one word has led to the wrong path. So one should choose this

¹ Korean Way of Taoism.

² The modern form of an ancient Korean practice of spiritual cultivation.

³ A practice of spiritual cultivation. By cultivating ki or energy, practitioners try to restore spiritual tranquility and union with truth.

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 koan⁵-observing Zen, 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 Buddha⁶ 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 on Danjeon, the “elixir field” which we find between the navel and hweong-gol⁷ in the lower abdomen. Never doubt that this dharma⁸—although easy and simple so that anyone can do it—is a perfect one, and let us try to grasp the essence of Zen. I now recommend the following simple and easy *Chungjeon* method, and hope that you do not commit the fallacy of being attracted to other more complex and weird methods, but follow this method strictly.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Literally, “horizontal bone.” This is the horizontal part of the upper pelvic structure, in the lower abdomen.

⁸ 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 merit of sitting meditation does not result instantly but requires considerable time as it disciplines and tames our spirit. When one sits 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, one needs to sit on the folded part of a long mat, or add another mat in order to sit on the raised portion. A square-shaped mat is fine if one is accustomed to it. The mat does not have to be luxurious; an inexpensive one is fine. However, an excessively thick or thin mat is not desirable. If it is too thick, the buttocks may feel cozy, but the legs can become uncomfortable; if too thin, the legs are comfortable but the buttocks may feel too much weight, preventing one from enduring for a long time.

Cross-legged position

This is the method of sitting with the legs crossed: the seated 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 ground or mat.

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

If one finds sitting in full lotus posture too hard, the half lotus posture is also okay. One should just be aware that if one practices sitting meditation for too long in the half lotus posture without alternating the leg positions, though one may feel very comfortable at first, eventually the pelvis can be twisted, as well as the spinal cord, creating back pain or illness. Thus from the beginning one should alternate one's legs. Having already become accustomed to one posture, one 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 that spreads into every part of the body, and all nerve currents pass through this pathway, so a twisted spine impairs the nervous system, causing disorder in the internal organs connected with the impaired nerves and resulting 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, one should make it a rule to sit erect, with the head and spine aligned. If one “hunches over”, one may feel temporary comfort but gradually the posture becomes hard to bear. When one bends the back, the originally erect spinal cord becomes bent accordingly, which imposes a big 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 idle thoughts, but as far as Zen is concerned, one should not adopt that kind of attitude; one should be alert and heedful. A person who practices Zen with a loose mind does not actually practice Zen but is just sitting. One must practice sitting meditation 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 good at Zen have an arrogant idea: “What is so important about the posture? The important thing is the concentration.” I cannot be aware of how deeply they enter the perfect realm of absorption, but the beginner should abandon this kind of thought. A beginner 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 induces one to enter the real absorption of Zen.

2. Casually 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 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.

Casually 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 earned positive recognition in recent times as meditation practices such as Dhanhak, Ki-gong, and Gukseun-do have become widespread.

The Danjeon is located midway between the naval and hwyaeong-gol 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, which requires quite a long time. When one tries to

forcefully practice the Zen of resting in the Danjeon when Danjeon is not yet settled, the energy 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, one should follow the proper technique. If one thinks he or she has not yet mastered the proper technique, one should seek the guidance and appraisal of predecessors; 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, depending on the situation, spends his or her whole life without succeeding in settling the Danjeon. There are many who try to breathe through Danjeon but find it hard to settle the focus. Those who have such difficulty need to learn a few specific techniques. When beginning sitting meditation, one may pinch the Danjeon in order to induce the nerve there to be awakened; put the folded hands on the Danjeon with the little fingers placed on the Danjeon; fasten the belt in order to exert mild pressure on the Danjeon; or put a adhesive band on the Danjeon. These methods should 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 one overexerts oneself sitting erect, one can feel the energy dissipate in the torso or arise in the body.

One should start the Zen of resting in the Danjeon with the state of mind that one brings 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. It becomes the pillar of all the energy in the body.

Without dwelling on even one thought

This means that one should not dwell on or be attached to anything. If our thoughts wander often, or are attached 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 there which holds the magical power that overwhelms our thinking.

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 our minds are attached to the slightest thing, our thoughts easily follow it and dwell there. Our minds, staying there, play with the delusive thoughts. One may not notice this when one is lost in playing with idle thoughts for a while. One is not conscious of the flight of time as one lapses into idle thoughts. Even when one is aware of his or her wandering and tries to turn back to the original state, thoughts easily slip out. 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 one should get rid of the attachments that distract one's mind.

As one tries to concentrate, one may feel distressed by the incessant recurrence of delusive thoughts. He or she may feel helpless and conclude that idle thoughts are impossible to control. At this point one should carefully keep two points in mind.

First of all, one should keep the Buddhist precepts clear and, in daily life when confronting situations, discipline the mind to keep it tranquil. If one's 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 one's 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, one must not regard the recurrence of delusive 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 one's scattered thoughts, the mind becomes spiritually empowered. In due course, one's accumulated

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.

karma dissolves and spirituality is enhanced. This lays the foundation for entering the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality. The process can be compared to the strength of a boxer's fist developing through the repetition of exercise. Therefore one should not worry about the recurrence of delusive thoughts; the worrying may make one 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, while fleeting and minute thoughts, though they easily vanish once noticed, incessantly recur. 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 realm of being-without-one-attached-thought to the bitter end. One should escape from all scattered thoughts and enter the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality.

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

As mentioned before, resting in the Danjeon is a very important technique and it should be carefully practiced. The Danjeon is a phenomenal thing, yet it cannot be seen by the eyes—only by formless energy and mind—so the collected energy becomes scattered easily, according to changes in the mind. If one could see thoughts with the physical eyes, there would be a lesser chance of their scattering, due to the eyes having a fixed direction, whereas the 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, one can arrive at the state in which one is aware only of the energy that has gathered at the Danjeon.

The consciousness and energy should be integrated. If one practices gathering energy in the Danjeon, it can maintain full energy for a while even if one's consciousness

wanders about. But if the concentration of the consciousness is not well formed, soon one 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 no going or coming. Once one reaches this state, the multitude of thoughts that were constantly arising and ceasing will eventually fade, so that one will be comfortable just at that place. This is the spiritual bliss of samadhi,¹⁰ the state of being peaceful. But this is the result 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. One cannot dwell in that state 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 one can succeed in resting the energy in the Danjeon, the mind may not rest there as one would like it to. One may laugh seeing the thoughts coming and going incessantly. One may despair, doubt that one is 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.

Man's mind is a living substance, so the incessant arising and ceasing of various thoughts is a natural occurrence; it is extremely natural and a normal condition. Do not consider it bothersome. On the contrary, the existence of such thoughts enables one to practice Zen effectively. Delusive 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, one can cultivate a vital force. Therefore, one must not consider rambling thoughts as troublesome, but just try to gather oneself.

¹⁰ Deep concentration: the state of one-pointedness of mind characterized by peace and imperturbability.

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 the energy goes and vice versa. Sometimes mind leads energy, sometimes the opposite. However, in sitting meditation, the mind is primary and energy secondary, so when the energy in the Danjeon becomes dispersed, this means that the mind has already slackened. The looser one becomes, the lesser the chance that one will notice this state of looseness, with time passing by endlessly. This is a most unsettling thing to meditators. Therefore, next come the words, “Do not neglect, then and there, to pull yourself together.” Otherwise, the gathered energy, one's concentration, will move further and further away.

Here we should investigate why we cannot collect ourselves. What is blocking the concentration we seek? As mentioned before, the very cause is our attachments. Our minds are drawn to where they are attracted in our daily lives. Our minds are no longer under our control when they are gripped by a desire for materialism, lust, fame, profit, and by feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, fear, love, or hatred. Our minds are completely stolen. In this condition, “pulling oneself together” becomes as difficult as plucking stars from heaven; even if one gathered the courage and pulled oneself together with strenuous efforts, one might easily lose control.

Zen is the path to restore the lost mind. It is the struggle to occupy the top seat between the attachments and one's identity. In this power struggle between the subject and the object, the party 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.

Thus the important thing in beginning meditation is a peaceful attitude in daily life, which makes the penchant for attachment weaken. In other words, one should meet each and every moment with a tranquil state of mind. When engaging in work, one

should 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.

Our practice should progress towards leaving a mark on the sky. In the beginning of practice, we leave a mark on wood; as we mature, we leave a mark on mud and then on water; finally, we leave a mark on sky, 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 one sits without exerting oneself. There are many things that can be done in a sloppy way but, as far as Zen is concerned, we should not practice carelessly. In order to practice sitting meditation well, one should confront it with zeal.

The attitude of not allowing any kinds of wandering thoughts and the zeal of perfect mindfulness are both necessary for Zen practitioners, especially for beginners. One should instantaneously catch oneself as soon as one is off one's guard; one can gather the energy at that moment.

One may find oneself being inattentive and try to catch oneself. It can require some length of time or sometimes just a moment to return to resting in the Danjeon, depending on how much one has been disciplined and accustomed to it. One who is already able to rest in the Danjeon can return directly, while an immature 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 by whatever means possible.

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

One thing that can hinder one from resting in the Danjeon is one's physical condition. One's physical limitations can prevent one from practicing sitting meditation well. In some cases, it can become an enormous obstacle to one's practice, preventing one from proceeding in meditation at all. Physical illness is the major obstacle to practicing sitting meditation. Chronic fatigue, lack of sleep, excessive drinking the previous night, overeating, all of these are critical obstacles breaking the biological rhythm. The management of one's 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 to pull yourself together and bring the energy to rest.” When one's mind is distracted, drowsiness will persist if one does not pay attention to immediately collecting oneself and resting in the Danjeon. When one's mind becomes distracted, one should notice this quickly, pull oneself together, and bring the energy to rest. Sitting meditation is a discipline of concentration and a practice of mindfulness at the same time. Fruitful sitting meditation depends on how mindful and heedful one is as to resting in the Danjeon. As sitting meditation makes one observe the state of one's mind at the very moment, one who practices Zen will obtain a great power of attention.

It is very important not to forget what we need in daily life. Sometimes forgetting something results in a fatal mistake and, if it is an important thing, it can produce a big failure in one's life. Yet to forget or not can come from a difference of one thought. Forgetfulness is a hole in the management of one's character and living. Our task is how to fill this hole. Our future may depend on whether we can fill this hole or not. In order for one to pull oneself together and bring the energy to rest, one must plug up the forgetfulness hole.

Once one decides to practice sitting meditation through the technique of bringing the energy to rest, one should not give up. Whatever Mara's¹² temptation is, one should not be negligent of 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 is an invaluable thing to gain.

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

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; the inhaling and exhaling should be balanced. It is said, "Keep your breathing smooth," 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 the utmost balance.

When breathing with utmost balance, your inhalations are a little longer and stronger and your exhalations a little shorter and weaker. At this point one may have some misunderstanding with the literal meaning; some may think that the longer and stronger one's inhalation is, the better it is; or one may wrongly try to make one's exhalations as short and weak as possible. But we should be heedful 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.

¹² Sanskrit. The god of death, the personification of evil, the evil one. Evil influences (demons) which hinder one's practice. These can take an infinite number of forms, including evil beings or hallucinations. Disease and death, as well as the three poisons of greed, anger, and delusion are also equated to demons, as they disturb the mind.

Some practitioners inhale much longer and more strongly than they exhale. This causes imbalance, producing an unfavorable effect. Eventually one can be put in a position of being 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 suffocated. Trying forcibly to practice further arouses the fire energy, and this can separate the practitioner from sitting meditation forever. This is called getting the Zen illness. If one finds oneself in such a condition, one needs to proceed wisely. One should not try to solve this problem by oneself, but put a question to a more experienced predecessor. Depending on the seriousness of this illness, there are many methods for its cure. If it deepens, one 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 one tries to settle the focus on Danjeon as soon as possible, balance the inhaling and exhaling, and make the breathing and the resting of energy in the Danjeon one unity.

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 one is too mindful of resting in the Danjeon, one may not be mindful of ones' breathing, and vice versa. It is not easy to do these two things simultaneously. If one pays 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.

Our technique of Zen is the proper method to achieve 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 one can concentrate in complex matters can be *the* criterion to measure one's ability.

To carry out the regulation of breathing and resting in the Danjeon at the same time, one should apply one's power of concentration and train oneself to be accustomed to the way one breathes. He or she should inhale and exhale through the Danjeon. One should settle the energy in the Danjeon through breathing. 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 one develops one's power of concentration in regard to this complex matter, and one can be more easily absorbed in the authentic realm of Zen.

Even after one learns 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. If one continues in practice and does not give up, one will pass through this crucial point so that, in the process of inhaling and exhaling, one can continue to concentrate on resting in the Danjeon. Finally one will enter the stage in which one does not feel the distinction between inhaling and exhaling, and one is finally absorbed in resting in the Danjeon. This is a very crucial point.

4. You should 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 danger of drowsiness.

The first problem that beginners practicing sitting meditation face is how and where to place the eyes. It is explicitly written, "You should 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 danger of drowsiness."

Problems arise when one does not follow this guidance.

In Zen meditation, 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 danger of drowsiness. If one falls into drowsiness, they advise, one is led to a dead and useless Zen. To avoid this, a smacking stick was prepared, from which we can conjecture how dreadful the problem of drowsiness is.

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

Some practitioners, misunderstanding the idea that drowsiness is most harmful, try not to sleep at all, and try to sit up all night in the name of practice. This is in vain. If one tries to remain awake, one may enhance the power of endurance, but this does not mean that the person should not sleep at all. 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 in fierce battles; sleeping is such an essential thing. 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. If one insists on forcing oneself not to sleep, he or she will not reap the desired result but just have a hard time. When trying to practice Zen, we should be rational and wise as to how much we sleep.

Our bodies' desire for sleep is endless. We should just take the minimum sleep our body requires and practice Zen soberly, driving out slumber. One should take the least sleep necessary, and then decisively and resolutely overcome the temptation of drowsiness.

If one is 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 and invades our pure spirit. One does not notice the lapsing of time, but only feels comfortable. After spending time in this manner, one may feel his or her spirit refreshed and revived; this may drive one into the delusion that he or she has practiced Zen very well. However, this Zen is of no help.

Thus, one should cultivate a habit of practicing Zen with the eyes open from the start. Otherwise, one will surely be affected by drowsiness and one's meditation will not be fruitful. If one forms a habit of practicing Zen with the eyes closed and dozing off, unlearning that habit is an extremely difficult job. Such a habit cannot be corrected without strong determination and help from others. This cannot be treated lightly, for one cannot be corrected like this all one's life. What a pity that would be!

So one should cultivate the habit of practicing Zen with the eyes open. Some time later one will reach the stage where one can meditate well with closed eyes. When the physical and mental condition and the atmosphere permit, one can then judge whether he or she can meditate well with closed eyes. At that point, one has the opportunity to practice Zen with the eyes closed.

In this passage of the canon, closing the eyes is recommended with extreme carefulness. We should be particularly heedful 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 much even under bad circumstances. But this is the result of long training and cannot be expected easily by anybody. One should take proper measures according to the condition of the mind, body, and the surrounding universal energy at the moment.

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

Strangely, the beginner who has not yet formed the foundation of Zen will often try to jump over the first stage, closing the eyes during meditation in order to enter the high and profound realm of Zen. One should be aware that this does not yield good results; trying to get the results without following the procedure is just greed. This kind of greed does not bear good fruits but just results in a waste of time.

5. Always keep the mouth closed. If the water ascends and the fire 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 one stiffens one's resolution, one becomes taut and one's mouth becomes firmly closed; this is a natural phenomenon. When one is completely attentive, and one's energy is centered, one can gather and direct one's energy at will. But when one's resolution flags, the closed mouth is apt to loosen.

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

When one becomes inattentive or is grasped by drowsiness, the first signs appear at one's spine and mouth. The back slumps and the mouth loosens as the attention lapses. One should notice this immediately and bring the body erect to the original position. Unless detected and corrected, there always lurks the danger that these symptoms will worsen over time and form a habit that one cannot reverse. Tragically, one may easily slip into this state. Thus one must be resolutely attentive and courageous. The easiest and wisest method is to deal with irresolution before it becomes a habit, as one must employ tremendous effort once it becomes hardened.

If the water ascends and the fire 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 they operate by the harmony of water and fire. When the water energy and fire energy 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; the water energy rises while the fire energy descends. When this rule collapses, there appears disorder in our body. Water energy dries up if the fire energy becomes dominant. That is, when fire energy rises, our water energy is exhausted. Contrarily, if the fire energy wanes, the water energy exerts a heavy pull on us. Under either of these conditions, the 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 delusive thoughts calm down 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 on one's side, this natural state of harmony may be lost to one who is suffering chronic illness. Therefore, it is very important to pay close attention to and constantly care for your physical health. A loss of

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 of 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.

harmony can also result from your falling into the wrong path to sitting meditation; close monitoring of the causes and prompt troubleshooting are required.

It is written in the Principle Book that when clear and smooth saliva flows, it may be gathered in the mouth and swallowed occasionally. 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. However, 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 fretful desire, nor will it be achieved by obstinate willfulness.

Some students 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 wandering thoughts will develop. This in turn will bring about even deeper distress and can cause one 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 familiarized with the right way.

6. The spirit should be ever alert in its calmness and ever calm in its alertness. If it leans to torpor, refresh the spirit; if it lapses into idle thought, restore it with right mindfulness. Rest in the realm of your original face, which is effortless and spontaneous.

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 wandering thoughts, achieving one-pointedness and clearness of mind, it is being “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 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 Ven. Sotaesan's¹⁴ teachings from early on, resting in calmness without right mindfulness is erroneous, as is being distractedly alert. He cautioned us 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

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

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 those pitfalls and to break away from them when trapped, the Ven. Sotaesan instructed, “If it leans to torpor, refresh the spirit; if it lapses into idle thought, restore it with right mindfulness”. He thus cautioned us against the leaning of tranquility to drowsiness and the collapse of clearness of thought/mind into distraction.

Refresh the spirit

Not only in sitting meditation, but also in everything else, there's a high likelihood of its ending up in failure when your spirit leans to torpor or lapses into stupefaction. It is like tending to household affairs under a stupefied mental state influenced by anesthetic; the effort will naturally be led to failure. Therefore, it is vital to awaken from this dim state immediately. This is what “refreshing the spirit” means.

Falling into drowsiness and stupefaction, and not being aware of the fact or correcting the situation, you will be dragged even deeper into the pitfall. 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.

Restore it with right mindfulness

It is said that the saddest thing for an ascetic is the scattering of the spiritual energy. Even in daily life, wandering thoughts and idle thoughts serve no good purpose, but are only harmful. The more the spirit is disturbed by needless mental functions, the more energy it consumes, which causes the fire to ascend and the water to dry up. The power of right mindfulness the power to abandon irrelevant thoughts and focus on the right way of practice, will be undermined and wisdom will be buried under. There's no

positive aspect of which to speak. It is written in the Principal Book that even justifiable 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 function of the mind. Hence, “to 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 childhood 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, 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 a proof that your spirit is clearing. There is no need for apprehension; it's just a phenomenon that appears in the process of mind clearing. Instead of being troubled by its presence, you should pay closer attention to letting go of those recollections. These thoughts should never be held for long. They should be let go as soon as they appear and relinquished at the first sight of reappearance. As you repeat this process of letting go, your spirit will become familiarized with resting in the Danjeon and its power will grow stronger.

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

Rest in the realm of your original face, which is effortless and spontaneous

“The realm of your original face, which is effortless and spontaneous”¹⁵ is the ultimate goal in sitting meditation. Hence, it is the most difficult realm to understand and, at the same time, the most enjoyed by the practitioners. “Effortless” means no doing, and no thoughts. Upon entering the effortless realm, there is a cessation of all our mental concoctions and fabrications, our plotting, our habit of weighing the pros and cons in everything. Even discernment and knowledge cease to exist. The state of original nature is void of all things and everything, so that there's nothing else to be discarded; naturally pure and undefiled, so that there's nowhere to go to and nowhere to come from; disengaged from anything and everything. This is none other than “the realm of your original face, which is effortless and spontaneous.”

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 pure and clear life force is at its peak, attainable through repeated filtering out of impurities. The “false void” refers to a state void of pure and clear life force, resulting from the repeated accumulation of impurities that have not been filtered out. It is crucial to overcome the false void of resting in calmness without right mindfulness. If a practitioner falls into this false void, irrevocable misfortune will result. This is where the so-called “dark hell” starts to sprout.

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's not the smallest margin for an idle or delusive 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 face, which is effortless and spontaneous. 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. Novices at sitting meditation may suffer from aching legs or invasion by idle thoughts. If your legs ache, you may occasionally switch their positions. If you are troubled by delusive thoughts, merely recognize them as delusive thoughts and they will vanish of themselves. You absolutely must not become vexed or discouraged by their presence.

Aching legs and invasion by idle thoughts

Aching legs prove that your body is alive and the invasion by idle thoughts proves that your spirit 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, not strange, 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, without considering the principles of sitting meditation, you are captivated by some biased view of meditation and persistently cling to this partiality, meditation for you will only be laborious and fruitless. You will only be drifting further away from entering its genuine realm. Hence, for this point, the Principal Book prescribes the correct direction for you to follow.

¹⁵ Our original nature. This is sometimes called Buddha nature.

If your legs ache, you may occasionally switch their positions

For anyone whose body is not familiarized with sitting meditation, legs are bound to ache during meditation. Those who have been routinely trained in 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 everybody feels the same.

This is where the matter of choice comes in. It is only a common choice, but it could control your success in sitting meditation. 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.

Simply deciding that you are not cut out for sitting meditation just because you feel pain in your legs every time you practice meditation 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 weakness in our character since it is not something which can be physically seen. But one cannot be helped if one refuses to confront a weakness in one’s character. Whenever the desire to forsake sitting meditation is stirred, you must try a little harder to overcome it.

One who tries to endure the pain of aching legs maybe a person of considerable fortitude. It is true that through training you may be able to enhance endurance. However, it is important to know 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 the 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 prudently 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, we are naturally bothered by it. The more bothered we are, the harder it is to focus with single-mindedness. Hence, if you desire to conduct meditation in the right way, you must pay close attention to maintaining good physical and mental health. You also must be able to appropriately control how much to eat, sleep, and work. Excess or deficiency in any one of the three will certainly work against 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, Ven. 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 repugnant and you will lose interest in it and thus drift away from it. "Endurance at any cost" can never be called wisdom.

In case you are bothered by delusive thoughts, merely recognize them as delusive 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 it is invaded by weeds. The higher up a being is, the more thoughts it has. Therefore, the invasion of delusive 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 delusive 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 “delusive thoughts” which never forgives a fleeting moment of carelessness. It is a continuous battle of seizing and being seized, fought against delusive thoughts that in an instant would creep in without fail and take over, if given half a chance.

Then, what is “right mindfulness” and what are “delusive thoughts”? Speaking in general terms, their respective meanings are very easily defined. Right mindfulness refers to correct thought and delusive 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 solely on the Danjeon, while delusive thought generally refers to anything and everything that works against it. Whether good or bad, necessary or unnecessary, any thoughts that interfere with focusing the spirit on the Danjeon with single-mindedness are all delusive thoughts. Sitting meditation is the face-off 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 delusive thoughts.

It is particularly important to know the intrinsic nature of delusive thoughts. The delusive 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; and they retreat from those who are not discouraged or vexed by their presence but

merely recognize them as what they are. They can never come out victorious from a battle fought against those who refuse to be discouraged under any circumstance, however difficult the situation may be; though they will wage war, they'll never succeed in complete seizure. On the other hand, they can completely take over those who are easily discouraged by their presence; once seized, 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 delusive thoughts under any circumstance, however difficult. The delusive thoughts intensify vexation for those who are irritated by their presence. You want to focus your spirit solely on the one thought, but your mind 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 such self-conflict, no matter how incessantly the thoughts come. If you do, you will be adding another thought to already existing ones. You must absolutely be aware of the fact that, once you give in to one delusive 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 delusive thoughts. This is why the Principal Book prescribes that “You absolutely must not become vexed or discouraged by their presence.” The word “absolutely” was not an expression the Ven. Sotaesan often used. However, he did say “absolutely” for this point.

Therefore, “do not become vexed or discouraged,” but just promptly recognize them as delusive thoughts whenever they surface and stare you in the face. These wandering thoughts, when observed, tend 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 the wandering thoughts to vanish by themselves through simply being recognized, there's 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 the delusive thoughts and the wisest thing to do.

8. When first beginning sitting meditation, you may find your faces and bodies feeling itchy, as if there were ants crawling over them. 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 promotes 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 various neural flows 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 of itching skin. Infection and healing of wounds in the skin can cause itching. But the itching discussed in the passage occurs when blood flow which had been blocked or slowed is suddenly released, inducing the blood to actively flow. 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 is not too hard to endure and one should not pay much attention to it through either touching or scratching. It's only a natural phenomenon. You should ignore it and simply hold on to fulfilling the sole task of resting in the Danjeon.

On the other hand, you must 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 right after another.

In addition to what is specifically described in the 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 met with these bodily changes, you must 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 conditions occur, think of them only as freakish. Pay them no attention; just look past them unconcernedly.

We often hear phrases like “seek after truth,” “seek enlightenment,” or “realize truth” and occasionally come across those who strive to do that. Some of those who are in pursuit of truth lead unusual lives, forsaking their ordinary lives. Many pursue special abilities through being conversant with mysticism, sometimes sacrificing everything and abandoning all duties and responsibilities of reality. They may be among those who devote themselves to Zen meditation, prayers, or recitation of chants.

Some devotees practice sitting meditation in anticipation of the special abilities alluded to in the passage, but such practice is merely a misdirected endeavor. The Ven. Sotaesan strongly cautioned us against having such misled 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 practice take place, such as displaying the ability to make miraculous things happen, foretelling a person’s future, or healing a sickness in “miraculous” ways.

“Mysterious signs” refers to certain illusions surfacing or passing by in the mind, various phenomena appearing in a person’s mind who is in a state half asleep and half awake in which supernatural occurrences may take place. 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 Ven. Sotaesan strongly cautioned us against seeking these signs. He instructed us to “think of them only as freakish. Pay them no attention; just look past them unconcernedly.”

In spite of this warning, people experiencing such sensory conditions often mistake them for achieving some kind of great thing and become so insolent as to think

that they are now conversant with Truth. Most of the time, they will delude the world and deceive the people, including themselves, and ultimately end up in hell where there's 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,"¹⁶ or the principle of cause and effect. Nor do they have any connection to understanding right and wrong, or benefit and harm. Hence, they have no relevance to the deliverance of our souls or the attainment of our spiritual freedom. They do not provide any kind of help.

If such is the case, what good purpose will they serve 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 are met with the greed, hatred, and delusion rooted in our mind, we are led to indulge ourselves further in the Three Poisons, deluding the world and unrepentantly deceiving the people. What can be more treacherous and freakish 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 things, and thus led into a pitfall 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 conditions, those who follow the right course will merely look past them unconcernedly, intent on erasing their

¹⁶ 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, 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.

influence and striving not to leave a trace of such things. If, deluded by a trifling little trace of such phenomena, you make a boast as if it is a great and rare thing, you will not only be committing an act of foolishness, but may also be engaging in a greater wrong because of the potential of deluding the world and deceiving the people. This is especially true to the extent that you are inclined toward such deception. Therefore, you must be on your guard against such things. They will decisively interfere with your following the “great path” and therefore are certainly freakish and treacherous.

Therefore, it is prescribed in the Principal Book that, even if “bizarre states” and “mysterious signs” occur, we must pay them no attention and look past them unconcernedly. The Book instructs us to think of them only as freakish and to ignore them altogether.

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 cling to them, the longer you allow them to stay in your mind, the stronger they will grow, as a treacherous and freakish force that works against your following the “great path”.

“Look past them unconcernedly” means to think of them merely as trivial occurrences. In other words, do not hang on to them, thinking that they are something good, and do not allow yourself to be afflicted by their presence, thinking that they are 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 freakish interference, which will ultimately lead you into a pitfall. When treated lightly, they are trivial, insignificant, and ever so powerless. However, the more you hold fast to, dislike, or are afflicted by their presence, the stronger the power they will demonstrate. The Principal Book enlightens us to pay close attention to this fact.

If you continue practicing in the above manner for a long period of time, you ultimately will forget the distinction between subject and object. You will forget time and place and, resting in the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality, you will rejoice in an unparalleled bliss of mind.

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

However, hastily driven by misconception or greed, you may easily be troubled by several difficulties. You may be questioning yourself, wondering why you have not experienced “unparalleled bliss of mind” 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 subject and object.”

Such rash expectations will cause you to lose interest in and take a skeptical view of sitting meditation, which will 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. The stronger the anticipation of the desired outcome functions as a standard for evaluating sitting meditation, the greater the force of interference it will become. With sitting meditation not proceeding as you would like, and the possibility of attaining the desired effect only drifting farther away, 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 the drained spiritual strength. Just as by taking meals everyday we provide necessary nutrients to our bodies, making it possible for us to be always on the move, when we regularly practice sitting meditation our spiritual strength is replenished and the train of spiritual activities is kept on track. Therefore, you must think of sitting meditation as a daily routine, much like taking meals. You must simply stop conjecturing upon the outcome and weighing its pros and cons. Merely repeat the practice faithfully. When your body and mind are familiarized with the methods previously described, and when you are settled in the state of physical and

spiritual comfort, you will be absorbed into the blissful and profound realm of sitting meditation.

There must 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 golden mean. The true definition of “a long period of time” is to devote a considerable amount of time to sitting meditation everyday and to repeat this daily practice for a long, long time. It must be practiced for a long time in the manner faithful to the prescribed methods. Your ability 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 ability will accumulate in a neat pile only when all the right conditions are met.

Therefore, raising high or hasty expectation of a desired outcome while being negligent in accumulating due effort, you will be faced with fierce interference. Such practice must be prudently avoided. It is best to devote yourself to accumulating due effort and not to be concerned with the outcome.

You ultimately will forget the distinction between subject and object

This stage refers to the state in which the separation between self and surroundings has disappeared. The state in which only the thought of resting in the Danjeon exists is recognized as the state where the distinction between subject and object is forgotten.

You will forget time and place

Anyone who practices sitting meditation frequently experiences idle distractions relating to time and space. Various thoughts repeatedly arise and cease, such as distracting thoughts reminding you of the time you started or the time to end. This leads

you to estimate how long meditation has continued or imagine that it must have continued for a quite a while, manifesting 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 also continuously surface and submerge.

Only by rising above such space-time conditioning and reaching the state in which only the single thought of resting in the Danjeon exists 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.” With the fulfillment of the Danjeon and the ceasing of all thoughts that come and go, stillness is attained. With all dualistic thoughts, conjectures, and schemes forgotten, non-duality is gained; without a speck of impurity remaining, the genuine realm is reached. It is this state that is in union with the innate truth of Il-Won¹⁷, the realm prior to thought.

It is like pure clean water brought up from deeply below the earth’s contamination. 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 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 force. Then, wherever the spirit travels, and whatever activity it is engaged in, boundless grace will be generated.

¹⁷ 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 being. This is the object of faith and the model of practice in Won Buddhism. Won Buddhism is a reformed Buddhism founded in Korea about one hundred years ago.

You will rejoice in unparalleled bliss of mind

This is the bliss you experience when your spirit is absorbed into the ultimate in sitting meditation, the genuine realm of stillness and non-duality. In our daily routine, no matter what activity we may be engaged in, when we overcome various obstacles and finally reach the ultimate, we experience the world of joy in which we forget all our troubles and allow ourselves to be immersed. This world can never be experienced if there is a speck left in your spirit untrained by the dharma, however minute it may be. Through continued practice of sitting meditation and repeated tastes of the genuine realm, little by little your body and spirit become trained until finally you are absorbed into the genuine realm. Once in this genuine realm, you will forget your self and will rejoice in a boundless bliss of mind.

Preparation For Sitting Meditation

All things in this world require preparation. Sitting meditation is no exception to this rule. To successfully practice sitting meditation, you need daily doses of scrupulous preparation. Sometimes, success or failure in sitting meditation depends on the level of preparation you make. It would be an illusion to think that you can be careless in your thoughts and actions in your daily routine 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. It is a facet of truth that nothing can be completed successfully without due preparation. Sitting meditation is no exception to this universal principle. A number of points to be applied in your daily routine in preparation for sitting meditation are as follows:

You must study the methods of sitting meditation

In order to practice sitting meditation, you must first study its methods. Through studying, you must thoroughly and completely familiarize yourself with its procedure. You cannot be successful in sitting meditation by merely sitting in a position pointlessly. Moreover, it is vitally important to decide which of the various methods you choose to take, for each method has its own merits and demerits, and points of strength and weaknesses.

Therefore, you must have a profound understanding of the methods of sitting meditation in your everyday life. Not only must you study them through the Principal Book, 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 directly lead you to a sound practice of sitting meditation.

Replenishment of the vow

The vow is the driving force. Without it, you will be unable to switch on the ignition, nor be able to move forward. Without the vow, when your body assumes the seated posture, you will merely be sitting, not actually practicing sitting meditation. The vow is the core and the main force in sitting meditation. Hence, the continuous recharging of the vow is a requirement.

For this to make sense to you, you must 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 spirit's 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 merits of sitting meditation, you will naturally awake to the desire for it without encouragement from anyone else. You will be driven to solidify your vow to practice sitting meditation and to do it well.

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

Management of the heart and emotions

The heart and the emotions are so subtle that they capture the entire world of your imagination. However hard you try to do away with attachments, it is sometimes of little avail. The harder you try and the deeper you are dragged in, the stronger the hold the world of attachment will have on you. You may be willing to practice sitting meditation but, in the realm of the imagination, you completely succumb to the workings of the heart and the emotions. The stronger the sensory conditions you experience, the harder it is to resist 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 must ignore them. Only when these heroic emotions, which strive so hard to capture your heart, vanish of themselves will you actually be able to practice sitting meditation easily. Love and hate, lust, greed, hatred and delusion, desire for wealth and fame, and desire for food and sleep are the chief obstacles of sitting meditation.

Management of health and daily routine

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 cases that would hinder sitting meditation would be as follows.

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 due to 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 deep sleep and you may frequently awaken during the night. This will 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 will be interrupted. Therefore, it is important to handle these issues appropriately.

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

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. Novices, especially, are advised to increase the blood circulation and relax hardened muscles and joints through light but thorough exercise before entering the meditation room and starting meditation.

Assuming the correct posture is important 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. Due to frequent driving, you are forced to use your right leg a lot more than your left, 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 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 poor back 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 prescribed method is a wise way to practice.

Stages of Sitting Meditation

For the benefit of the novice, the following stages of sitting meditation are here explained. You are advised to consider individual differences in temperament while examining these points.

Overcoming of 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 because you are unable to hold the posture for long. At this point, you must carefully condition your body, following the methods prescribed in the Principle Book. 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 the crack of 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 today’s society, who are in the habit of going to bed late and also 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 of 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 easily prevail.

Control of energy and breathing

This refers to the smoothing of your physical energy and breath. If you haven't paid attention to your energy or breathing in daily life, you will most likely find it hard to follow the method prescribed for gathering energy and for control of breathing. Therefore, you must 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 and fame, lust, and desire for food, and sleep) are empowered. These thoughts are clinging by nature and are not subdued easily.

When overcoming persistent mind-disturbing thoughts, a head-on confrontation, such as is prescribed for the battle against drowsiness, cannot be recommended. Such a method will only make you grow weary and, as you become tired, the thoughts will grow stronger. A more effective method is needed, and in fact has already been described in passage Seven in *The Method of Sitting Meditation*. Using the technique given in passage Seven, 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 will serve as a crucial turning point in sitting meditation, you must devote yourself to this task until the very end.

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 detected. You must 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.

State of Having Arrived

When these obstacles are overcome, a clear and orderly mind will be gazing 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 minute chance, something were to appear in your mind, you would unrelentingly and severely reprimand it. It is much like a cat with its eyes fixed intently on a mouse. This is the state in which 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 forget that your spirit has reached the state of Arrived Once. When your spirit is absorbed deeper 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 man is there, but the bull is not.¹⁸

State Void of Arrived Once and Forgetting Arrived Once

This is the state 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 the state of Arrived Once and the state of Forgetting Arrived Once become void. It is the state where there is neither bull nor man.¹⁹ It is the ideal state for all practitioners, and the ultimate goal in sitting meditation. You will gain deep gratification, absorbed into the so-called perfect state of spiritual concentration (“samadhi”) in which you will “hear but not hear” and will “see but not see”, with all of the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body, and mind) fully functioning.

Action and rest become one and the same

Although you have attained 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 to discrimination even when active, and your discriminations are in accordance with the middle way even at rest. By administering great loving-kindness and great compassion in all directions through infinite expedients, you must exercise boundless dharma grace to benefit the immeasurable number of sentient beings. It is only in the state where action and rest become one and the same that omnipotence and all the 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 man, each stage symbolizing a practitioner’s stage of spiritual evolution. In these pictures, the bull 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, the relationship between recitation of the Buddha's name and sitting meditation is explained as follows:

“Since recitation of the Buddha's name and sitting meditation are two aspects of the single subject of spiritual cultivation, if a practitioner's mind-disturbing thoughts are excessive, the distracted spirit is first to be counteracted by recitation of the Buddha's name and the practitioner is subsequently to be led into that genuine realm of stillness and non-duality through sitting meditation.

Furthermore, as far as the time of day is concerned, recitation of the Buddha's name is more appropriate during the daytime or when one is faced with various kinds of external sensory conditions; sitting meditation is more appropriate in the evening and in early morning when one is far from external sensory conditions.”

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 the 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, and 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 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 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. It is a matter of autonomy and subjectivity.

Hence, while reciting the Buddha's name serves as an effective method in 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 in 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.

This principle is clear. However, many practitioners think that reciting the Buddha's name befits only the low-level practitioners, and consider themselves to be high-level practitioners, holding fast solely to sitting meditation and ignoring this principle. Such practice will many times 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 consummate stillness, conquering the myriad of obstacles through chanting, and freeing yourself from the obstructive force of all disturbing thoughts through sitting meditation. As prescribed in the Principal Book, you must familiarize yourself with the habit of reciting "*Nammu Amit'abul*", the homage to

Amitabha²⁰ Buddha, the Buddha of Limitless Light and Life, when your mind grows restless from inward agitation, such as “when you are faced with vexations”, “when greed arises”, “when you are drawn by favorable circumstances”, or “when you are repelled by adverse circumstances”, in order to reflect on the original nature of your mind. By so doing, you will experience the gratification of conquering the myriad of obstacles through the one sound of the recitation of the Buddha’s name.

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

²⁰ 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 consciousness.)

Sitting Meditation, Mindfulness and One Mind

About meditation, the Ven. Sotaesan said that practitioners when at rest should be mindful to practice sitting meditation or recite the name of the Buddha, but when they are involved in an activity, practitioners should be mindful during that activity. One Mind refers to the 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 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 "The Meditation on Work." This enables practitioners to practice meditation wherever and whenever they are, not leaving meditation even for a moment. By this merit of mindfulness, our spiritual and physical life can be improved in complete balance, and 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 in daily activities. They hold the idea that only sitting meditation is the best practice. We cannot say these people are wise enough or know the basic principle of mind. The Ven. Sotaesan warned, "The Zen which can only be practiced when one is seated but cannot be while standing is a sickly Zen."

The mind has the characteristic that it can be developed according to the way it is disciplined. If one is mindful while driving, the person becomes a competent driver; if one is mindful while writing calligraphy, one becomes skillful at calligraphy; and if one tries to concentrate on reading, the person is able at reading and will come to have much knowledge in that field. Whatever one does, if one is mindful while doing, the person can nurture the ability to cultivate One Mind and become a useful and able person.

If one does not cultivate One Mind, one becomes unable to carry out one's own matters and cannot even think of helping others.

If one concentrates one's mind on what one is doing without being carried away to another matter, concentration will be cultivated and attachments and distracting thoughts will disappear. One's wisdom and clarity of mind will also be greatly enhanced. One will be enabled and empowered to decide to do the righteous thing, so that one can do every thing righteously according to the dharma, no matter what obstacles one faces, anytime and anywhere.

As is said in "Timeless Zen and Placeless Zen," "One will be centered like an iron pillar and become as impenetrable as a stone wall, and never be enticed or obstructed. Even while residing in this mundane world, one will constantly attain hundreds and thousands of samadhi," and "One will obtain freedom from birth and death, liberation from the cycle of rebirths, and the ultimate bliss of the Pure Land."²¹

Therefore practitioners will obtain great power of Zen 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 Study—Meditation, Inquiry, and Conduct—in concert. One's daily life and practice will improve together, assisting each other.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that sitting meditation is the only technique and think that only people of low spirituality recite the name of the Buddha and practice the mindfulness of "timeless Zen and placeless Zen." Rather we should be

²¹ 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 cultivation, beyond the cycle of birth and death.

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.

3. Everyday mindfulness and systematic mindfulness

Everyday mindfulness is paying attention to everyday necessities.

Systematic mindfulness is acting with awareness with a long-term aspiration.

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.

7. Superficial mindfulness and profound mindfulness

Superficial mindfulness is paying attention to ordinary things.

Profound mindfulness is acting with awareness to all things in order to realize the 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 everyday.
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 so many techniques of practice. Many contend that their technique is the best, and try to attract people. But the person who realizes the principle of mind can tell what they really are—what are the strong points and what are the 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. Each way of practice has its own strong and weak points whether it is reciting the name of the Buddha, or sitting meditation, or being mindful while in activities. So 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 ki²², or the circulation of ki, or the enhancement of physical health. A loss of focus can result and become an obstacle for a practitioner's spiritual cultivation. We can select and utilize several postures for the purpose of strengthening physical health, but we should not regret later that we spent so much time just seeking the best method.

In addition, some are too hasty to the merits of sitting meditation. A hasty mind is 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 in sitting meditation. Therefore, we should not develop expectations about the merits or results of sitting meditation. Instead, we should 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 become disappointed with sitting meditation. Sitting meditation does not make you healthy all of a sudden. It is said, “the suffering of illness decreases,”

²² Energy, life force, power

which means that illness will decrease gradually. Our physical wellness heavily depends on our physical constitution, so too much expectation of enhanced health is unrealistic. Improved circulation, deepened breathing, and a straight and corrected spine help to decrease the suffering of illness. However, it is too much to expect an immediate disappearance of illness.

So we should not have a hasty mind about the merits of sitting meditation. It is said that one cannot go a long way constantly keeping a quick pace. We should just endeavor to practice sitting meditation well. Just as we eat three meals, we should just keep on practicing sitting meditation comfortably on a daily basis. In the meantime, many benefits will result.

I would like to conclude this writing by quoting the words of Ven. Sotaesan, the founder of Won Buddhism. The Ven. Sotaesan said,

“If you know the merits of Cultivation you will continue sincere practice without any encouragement. However, you should be very careful about the method. If, without knowing the right way, you become impatient or try to look for miraculous signs, this is the wrong way to meditate. It sometimes gives rise to more illusions and can lead you to contract some disease or fall into evil ways. Hence, you have to check your practice frequently and consult your seniors for instruction, lest you fail in your practice of the Law. If you continue this practice correctly and sincerely, you will easily attain freedom of mind and body. All Buddhas, sages, and great ones in the past have attained great power of mind through this way of meditation.” (The Discourses of The Great Master, On Moral Practice, Chapter 13)

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

(Won Buddhist Periodical, Vol. 45, Won Buddhist Year 23, June) ²³

²³ This poem was published in 1938. The first year of Won Buddhism corresponds to 1916. This is when Ven. Sotaesan, the founder of Won Buddhism, obtained the Great Awakening.