

The short story below was written by a Korean Buddhist monk. It illustrates (though lightheartedly) the concept in [Buddhism](#) of *inyon*, sometimes translated as "relation and affinity," but here translated simply as "fate." This page is also designed to be a supplement for intermediate level study of the Korean language, as well as certain aspects of the culture.



The Table Clock

It is possible to have a sense of gratitude in one's heart¹ when meeting someone² for the first time. Out of the 3.6 billion people living on this earth, we are meeting one. One person out of the whole world represents the mind-boggling ratio of 3.6 billion to one. We simply must be grateful that fate³ has led us to meet this person. Even a person that causes us harm has been brought to us by fate. Out of so many people... This kind of relationship also seems to exist between things and people. Out of so many things in the world, one in particular comes to me.

One day last fall, upon returning from sunrise worship service,⁴ I found the door to my room open. It seemed that Sir Thief⁵ had paid me a visit. It turned out that only the things I really needed were missing. Apparently, the things I needed were also the things he needed. Even so, more things were left behind than were taken. I'm a bit ashamed of the fact that someone would see something of mine and think it worth coveting. Such things were never really mine; they came to me by fate, and when fate ran out they left me--no problem at all.

Several days later, I went to buy a clock. This time I felt I had to get one that was so junky that no one would want it, so I went to a clock shop in *Chonggyechon*.⁶ But, but, well who'd have thought! The clock that I lost from my room a few days before was there waiting for me. Someone was there talking to the owner about the price. When he saw me he was embarrassed and looked away. I was embarrassed, too. I gave him a thousand *won*⁷ and bought my clock back. If you think about it, we all have similar human faults... anyway, I'm thankful that by fate I was unexpectedly reunited with my clock.

Author unknown; translated by Stephen Wright, Ph.D.

Notes:

¹ or "mind" (*maum*) [\[back\]](#)

² literally, when one "shares greetings" [\[back\]](#)

³ *inyon* [\[back\]](#)

⁴ the author is a Buddhist monk (as mentioned in the introduction) [\[back\]](#)

⁵ *to-sonseng*. *To* means "thief." *Sonseng* literally means "teacher," and is a higher title than "Mr." (Respect--or at least politeness in order to maintain one's own dignity--should be shown toward all people, even thieves.) As the reader might expect, however, this is a backhanded kind of "respect." [\[back\]](#)

⁶ where there are a lot of pawn shops [\[back\]](#)

⁷ a thousand *won* is about a dollar [\[back\]](#)

탁상 시계

처음 만난 사람과 인사를 나눌 경우, 마음 속으로 고마움을 느낄 때가 있다. 이 지구에는 36억의 많은 사람이 살고 있다는데, 지금 그 중의 한 사람을 만난 격이다. 36억대 1이라는 아슬아슬한 비율로 그를 만난 것이다. 그 만났다는 인연에 감사하지 않을 수 없다. 나를 해롭게 할 사람이라도 그와 나는 인연이 있어서 만난 것이다. 그 많은 사람들 가운데에서... 이러한 관계는 물건과 사람의 경우도 마찬가지일 것 같다. 많은 사람 중에서 하나가 내게 온 것이다.

지난 해 가을, 새벽 예불에서 돌아 왔는데 방문이 열려 있었다. 도선생이 다녀간 것이다. 평소에 필요한 것들만 골라서 갔다. 내게 필요한 것이 그에게도 필요했던 모양이다. 그래도 가져간 것보다 남긴 것이 많았다. 내게 잃어버릴 물건이 있었다는 것이, 남들이 보고 탐낼 만한 물건을 가지고 있었다는 사실이 부끄러웠다. 물건은 원래부터 내가 가졌던 것이 아니고 어떤 인연으로 내게 왔다가 그 인연이 끝나면 떠나가는 것이라고 생각하니까 조금도 아깝지 않았다.

며칠 후 시계를 사러 갔다. 이번에는 아무도 욕심내지 않을 허름한 것으로 사야겠다고 생각하고 청계청에 있는 어떤 시계가게로 들어갔다. 그런데, 그런데, 허허, 며칠 전에 일어버린 우리 방 시계가 거기서 나를 기다리고 있었다. 어떤 남자가 가게주인과 값을 이야기하고 있었다. 나를 보자 그 남자는 당황하면서 외면해 버렸다. 나도 당황했다. 그 남자에게 천 원을 주고 내 시계를 내가 사고 말았다. 생각하면, 우리 모두 비슷한 허물을 가지고 살아가는 인간인데... 뜻밖에 다시 만난 시계와의 인연이 고마웠다.