

Repentance

Repentance is a very important and wholesome practice in Buddhism. It is a major and intensified effort to correct mistakes done in the past and cultivate dharma towards Buddhahood in the future, as well as to help people stay away from bad deeds. “Repentance” is one of the seven utmost offerings, which include worshiping the Buddha, making offerings to others, repenting, compliantly rejoicing, inviting and persuading someone to join Buddha teachings, making a vow, and transferring one’s merit. Thus, confession is also a kind of important practice to cultivate and accumulate virtues.

The literal meaning of repentance includes disclosing one’s error and committing to never repeating the same error. If one can truly repent, he can attain immeasurable virtues. As in the sutras, the Buddha states: “If a person committed a serious crime but deeply blamed himself afterward, he would be able to uproot the original karmic deed by repenting himself without repeating the same error.” (CBETA, T01, no. 80, p. 893, c12-13) Therefore, the main aspects of repentance are for those who have committed various bad deeds, are able to feel ashamed and confess their bad deeds by disclosing them in front of other people, and who also take a vow that they will never repeat the same bad deeds.

Because they have not eliminated their afflictions and habitual tendencies, the commission of bad deeds by sentient beings is unavoidable; however, the crucial point would be whether they can repent and remedy

what they did according to the teaching described in sutras, but not immersed themselves in remorse for the bad deeds they committed in the past. The purpose of repentance is to transform the tainted acts of the body, speech, and mind into good and pure forms. In other words, it makes one's own defilement seeds be purified back into tathāgatagarbha (the True Mind) by purifying them through the process of repentance. Thus, besides arousing one's intention by following the truth and being willing to correct faults and cultivate oneself for the future after repentance, one should try hard to change one's own notions or thoughts into pure mental actions.

The method of repentance is in accordance with the Buddha's teaching described in disciplines. If a serious precept is violated, the violator should repent and disclose his own bad deeds to a group of four people who uphold bodhisattva precepts, after accepting blame in his own mind first, and in front of Buddha's statue he should promise the group and himself not to do it again. If a minor precept is violated, he should confess and disclose his own bad deed to one person who upholds bodhisattva precepts after accepting blame in his own mind first, and in front of Buddha's statue he should promise the other person and himself not to do it again.

If something less than a minor precept is violated, he should confess and disclose the deed after accepting blame in his own mind first, and he should promise himself not to do it again in front of Buddha's statue. After truly practicing the method of confession mentioned above, one should seriously follow the rule of confession that he should never repeat the same error. In

addition, he should try hard to uphold the true Dharma to benefit all sentient beings to fully achieve the merit of confession.

Repentance can also be done by prostrating oneself in front of the Buddha's statue to purify one's own karmic seeds of all kinds of faults. The confession method of prostrating oneself to the Buddha includes the confessions of worshipping eighty-eight Buddhas, worshipping three thousand Buddhas, worshipping ten thousand Buddhas, and so on. If one with a serious mind worships the Buddha, he should be able to have an empathetic response from all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless him, so that the karmic sins would be eliminated.

In summary, the true benefit of repentance is being able to purify the mind with wholesome intention; even if a precept has been violated, one still has a chance to purify the mind by promising oneself not to violate it in the future.