

How to Perform Buddhist Services?

The phrase “Buddhist services” literally means matters about Buddhism or Buddhas. So, what do these matters involve? Those who have some preliminary understanding of Buddhism or the Buddha might think Buddhist services include offering to the Buddha, prostration to the Buddha, reciting the sutras and mantras, etc. These ceremonies, whether they include paying obeisance and repentance, seeking blessing, eliminating misfortune, or liberating the dead, are usually the activities involved in a Buddhist assembly. They are the superficial aspects of Buddhist services. However, from the perspective of the teachings of the scriptures and the core essence of Buddhist enlightenment, what is the true meaning of Buddhist services?

In *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, volume 3, the Buddha says, “All Buddha’s deportments, conducts, and giving activities are nothing but Buddhist services.” The Tathāgata’s every manner, demeanor, show of hands and feet, or even a frown and a smile, are all for nothing but the benefit of sentient beings. To show boundless sentient beings the way to liberation without leaving anyone behind is the excellent and supreme great vow of all Buddhas during their practice as Bodhisattvas in the causal grounds, and this great vow will never be abandoned, even after

they have attained Buddhahood. All Buddhas' giving and deeds are to help sentient beings.

Hence, Buddhist services refer to all the activities that Buddhas perform when they teach and benefit sentient beings. This is the one huge reason and cause for all Buddhas to appear in the world and manifest the attainment of Buddhahood—to unveil the True Mind (tathāgatagarbha, the matrix of the Buddhahood); the True Mind is the origin of all phenomena (dharmas), and the true principle of the one-and-only Buddha Vehicle for sentient beings who are inclined towards Buddhism to personally realize. All bodhisattvas take the great vow to help liberate sentient beings just like all Buddhas. Therefore, all the actions performed by bodhisattvas before attaining Buddhahood are to teach and benefit sentient beings can also be called Buddhist services.

When Buddha Śākyamuni picked up a flower and admired it in a public congregation at the Vulture Peak, only the venerable Mahakasyapa lightly smiled while the whole congregation was silent and clueless. That was also an excellent Buddhist service that the Buddha performed to help disciples directly realize the origin of all dharma—the true and wonderful mind, the tathāgatagarbha.

In ancient times, patriarchs of the Chan school improvised Chan's methods of hauling firewood and carrying water in disciples' daily assignments with the intention of helping them realize their own

individual True Mind. They are Buddhist services as well. Even the Gong-ans of the truly enlightened patriarchs in Chinese Chan are the direct inheritance of Buddha Śākyamuni's special transmission apart from the scriptures that are Buddhist services designed to directly help practitioners realize the true reality.

If one has yet to realize the origin of all dharmas (the True Mind) but falsely claims to have attained high levels of enlightenment and excelled his teachings, that is only a lot of empty talk. It is not Buddhist service because neither the listeners nor the bragger can receive any real benefits from it.

Once we have found the Chan methods that can truly help us realize the tathāgatagarbha, with such realization that presents as the entrance that leads to the principle of true Buddha Dharma, we should temporarily put aside all unnecessary, mundane distractions and engage in performing diligent and single-minded contemplation. Only then will it be possible to encounter the ripe conditions during daily activities that will lead to sudden enlightenment and realize one's tathāgatagarbha mind. That is indeed an excellent way to perform a Buddhist service for oneself.