

Can Reciting the Name of Buddha Only Once Eliminate Sins as Numerous as the Sands of a River?

“Reciting the name of Buddha only once can eliminate sins as numerous as the sands of a river.” Many people will have doubts when they see this phrase. Have we committed sins as numerous as the sands in a river? Is it true that all karmic sins are eliminated by just speaking the Buddha’s name only once?

The Buddha taught in the Flower Garland Sutra [Avataṃsaka-sūtra] that if we try to fit karmic sins committed by sentient beings since the beginningless eon into a dimension or a measurable form, then even all the space of emptiness in the ten directions cannot contain these karmic sins of our past. The *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra* says: “When I observe ordinary sentient beings, every thought they have is nothing but an atrocity.” Everyone is committing karmic sins continuously through the body, speech and mind without realizing it.

Each individual has habitual tendencies from his past lives and continues to develop new ones in his current life. These accumulated habits have far-reaching impacts on us fundamentally. For instance,

when we interact with others, we are influenced by karmic causes of the past and with the manifestation of these habitual tendencies as well as aids provided by requiring conditions. When a thought arises, various other thoughts follow as a consequence, depending on the inmost habitual tendencies that developed from our past lives. When encountering adverse conditions, afflictions resulting from greed, aversion and delusion will arise and propel one to commit all sorts of karmic sins. Beginning with the original thought, countless karmic deeds have already been accomplished as a result. This is the reason for what has been stated in the *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra*: “...every thought they have is nothing but an atrocity.”

One good or bad thought will affect our connection with many sentient beings. When our mind and speech are in unanimity, thinking of the Buddha faithfully, we have pure and wholesome thoughts. Such a thought can prevent subsequent corrupting thoughts that can lead to an unwholesome act. In addition to ceasing our unwholesome thoughts and establishing good connections with sentient beings, another crucial point is getting the blessings from the Buddha. It is like placing a piece of wood under a stone to prevent it from sinking into the water. The Buddha and bodhisattvas act like this piece of wood that can support sentient beings endlessly. When these blessings are bestowed upon us, we ought to practice diligently in return. Have we practiced Buddhism earnestly, other than by speaking the Buddha’s name?

Alternatively, have we abided by the thought of the Buddha continuously during our daily activities? There is more to the elimination of karmic sins than merely reciting the Buddha's name. If one cannot eliminate wandering thoughts and soothe pain, though many sins are extinguished through speaking the Buddha's name, there will be more delusional thoughts and pain that arise subsequently, and thus the cycle of committing more sins continues endlessly. Hence, not all karmic sins since the beginningless eon can be eradicated by merely reciting the Buddha's name.