

C. Making Repentance

Living in the world, nobody is absolutely innocent, except the enlightened ones. We therefore discuss only the occasions in which we violate the precepts at the levels that we have vowed to keep.

1. Definition

The term Repentance used in Buddhism is composed of two parts: Repenting a bad action, and promising not to repeat the action in future. For example, when we violate a precept we vowed to keep, we need to make repentance.

When we vow to keep a precept at a higher level or when we vow to keep a new precept, we also repent that, in the past, due to ignorance or lack of courage we have not kept that precept.

2. Repentance Analysis

Consider a sieve that lets only small grains go through. The sieve is the metaphor for the precepts, and the small grains are those of our thoughts, speeches and actions (good seeds or good karmas). The precepts help us to select only good seeds for our mental field (alaya). If there is a defect (hole -ignorance) in the sieve, some big grains (bad seeds) may get through (precept violation). Recognising the existence of the defect is similar to repenting our bad thoughts, speeches or actions. Plugging the hole is similar to promising not to violate the precept again. If we do not plug the hole, bad seeds continue getting into our alaya.

When we want to have finer grains (have better seeds in alaya), we should have a thicker sieve (precepts with higher levels). However many bad seeds already exist in our alaya. When these bad seeds sprout, we get their consequences (sufferings). If we want to repent our bad karmas (all our past mistakes), we should calmly bear the sufferings and promise not to sow more bad seeds by increasing the levels of our precepts. Slowly, only good seeds remain in our alaya, and all sufferings cease.

3. Repentance Procedures

There are different Repentance approaches. One of the best ways is to live in mindfulness, i.e., we should be conscious of the activities we are doing, from thoughts to speeches and actions. When we are going to perform an activity, we should check whether the activity is good or bad (by considering its motivation, and its effects or consequences). If it is a bad one, we should repent by stopping that activity immediately, and promising ourselves not to do it again.

Another approach is as follows. Every day when we wake up, after a body exercise session, we sit down (may be in lotus position), and follow our in-and-out breathing. We may count the breaths from one to ten repeatedly, or pray silently "Na-mo A-mi-ta Bud-dha", each sound for a breath (inhaling and exhaling) or the whole praying for one in-out breath. Note that the breaths should be slow, light and continuous, and should not have a pause between the inhaling and the exhaling as well as between two breaths. After following our breaths for ten minutes, we pray

"Namo Sakya-Muni Buddha, (repeat three times),

"Respectful Tathagata, now my body and my mind have woken up. With all my righteous love, understanding, and courage, I vow to avoid bad activities, do wholesome things and keep my mind pure. I pray for all living beings, including my parents, my siblings, my relatives and my people, all to have a day with peace, joy and happiness.

Namo Sakya-Muni Buddha, (repeat three times)."

In the evening, before going to bed, we sit down and follow our in-and-out breathing, then pray:

"Namo Sakya-Muni Buddha, (repeat three times),

Respectful Tathagata, now my body and my mind are going to rest. I vow to forward all my merits for the peace, joy and happiness of all living beings, including my parents, my siblings, my relatives and my people. I pray for all of them to have a peaceful night.

Namo Sakya-Muni Buddha, (repeat three times)."

Another Repentance procedure often used in pagodas is as follows. On the full-moon day and the last day of a lunar month, we go to a pagoda or monastery to chant the Buddha's teachings and to pay respect to the past, present and future Buddhas. We sincerely say the Buddhas' names and prostrate in front of the Buddhas altar. These repeated activities would sow good seeds in our mental field.

In western countries, most of community and religious activities are scheduled in weekends. We may reserve one hour a week to check our activities in the week and to make repentance if necessary.

Conclusion

To be a Buddhist, it is essentially necessary to take Nammo in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Once we have taken Nammo in the Three Jewels, we should apply the Buddha's teaching in our daily activities. Keeping precepts is a direct and efficient approach to practise the Dharma. Whenever we

are still living consistently with the precepts, we are still in the protection of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. That is the true meaning of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. To help us keep precepts, we should be mindful in every of our daily activities from thoughts, to speeches and actions. However sometimes, due to ignorance or lack of courage, we may violate a precept. In that situation, we should sincerely make Repentance in front of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, especially in front of our Buddha nature, our pure and brilliant nature.