

CHAPTER 10

Getting Rid of Karma

X. CHAPTER 10: GETTING RID OF BAD KARMA

A. Q: IS BUDDHA MINDFULNESS ALL ONE MUST DO TO BECOME IRREVERSIBLE?

Question: Is it the case that, in order to become an *avaivartika*, one need only bear in mind Amitābha and those other buddhas while also bearing in mind the others, the bodhisattvas [mentioned above]? Or are there other additional skillful means [that must be used]?

B. A: ONE SHOULD ALSO REPENT, ENTREAT, REJOICE & DEDICATE MERIT

Response: For one who seeks to become an *avaivartika*, it is not the case that one must only remain mindful of them, utter their names, and make reverential obeisance to them, and that is all there is to it. In addition, one should, in the presence of the buddhas, perform repentances, entreat them, rejoice [in their meritorious deeds], and dedicate one's own merit.

1. HOW DOES ONE PERFORM THESE ENDEAVORS?

Question: How does one go about carrying out these endeavors?

2. "REPENTANCE" IS PERFORMED AS FOLLOWS:

Response:

There is nothing not exhaustively known by
the countless buddhas of the ten directions,
Now, in the presence of them all,
I reveal all of my black and evil deeds.

Three times three, nine kinds in all,¹⁵⁶
all of them have arisen from the three types of afflictions.
Whether committed in the present body or in prior births,
I repent of all of these karmic offenses.

If I should otherwise be bound to undergo karmic retribution
in the three wretched destinies,
I pray that [my offenses] may instead be repaid in this very body
so that I will not enter the wretched destinies to undergo retribution.

"The buddhas of the ten directions" refers to all of the buddhas of the present whose life faculty has become completely perfected but who have still not yet entered nirvāṇa. "Ten directions" refers to the four directions, the four midpoints, the zenith, and the nadir. "Buddhas"

refers to those who, with regard to all things that should be known, know them all without exception.

“Reveal” means that, in the presence of all buddhas, one reveals all of one’s karmic offenses, leaving none hidden, [while also resolving] to not commit them ever again. [In so doing, one’s resolve becomes] like a dike that holds back the waters.

As for “black and evil deeds,” because one has not had the bright light of wisdom, one has often committed many types of evil deeds, in some cases practicing unwholesome dharmas, and in some cases involving oneself in obscured morally indeterminate dharmas.¹⁵⁷

“Three times three, nine kinds in all” refers to creation of evil karma on the part of body, mouth, and mind that brings about negative retribution in the present life, negative retribution in the next rebirth, and negative retribution in subsequent lives. [This retribution may arise through] directly committing the deed oneself, instructing others to commit it, or by rejoicing that others have committed it.

As for “all arisen from three types of afflictions,” the “three types of afflictions” refers to [those actions] connected to the desire realm, the form realm, or the formless realm, whether promoting the affliction of desire, the affliction of hatred, or the affliction of delusion, and whether involving a supreme degree of affliction, a middling-degree of affliction, or a lesser-degree of affliction.

As for “whether it be that committed in the present body or in prior births, I repent of all of these karmic offenses,” this means that one repents of all of the many kinds of evil deeds committed in this present life and former lives, repenting of them all without exception.

[With regard to “the three wretched destinies,”] there are the hells, namely the eight hot hells and the ten cold-and-ice hells. There are the animals, including those that are earth-born, water-born, legless, two-legged, or many-legged. And there are the hungry ghosts, in particular those who feed upon spittle, vomit, rinsings, pus-and-blood, excrement and urine, and other such things.

[The intent here is to state]: “If my karma is such that I should undergo retribution in these three wretched destinies, I pray that I will instead be allowed to undergo that retribution in this very body. If it is to be undergone in a subsequent rebirth’s body, may I not be compelled to undergo it in the hells, among hungry ghosts, or in the animal realm.”

Also, the Buddha himself explained the dharma to be used in repentance, indicating that, if a bodhisattva wishes to repent of karmic offenses, he should utter his repentance as follows:

Facing the Buddhas of the present time throughout the worlds of the ten directions, namely those who have realized *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*, turned the Dharma wheel, rained down the Dharma rain, sounded the Dharma drum, blown the Dharma conch, planted the Dharma banner, and who have, through the giving of Dharma, fulfilled the needs of beings, benefited the many, brought peace and security to the many, taken pity on the world, and abundantly benefited devas and humans—I now, with body, mouth, and mind, make full reverential prostrations at the feet of the buddhas of the present, the buddhas who know, who see, who are the eyes of the world, and who are the lamps for the world.

[I hereby reveal] all of the karmic offenses I have created throughout the course of beginningless births and deaths due to being driven along by greed, hatred, and delusion, including:

Sometimes failing to recognize the Buddhas, failing to recognize the Dharma, or failing to recognize the Sangha;

Sometimes failing to distinguish between offense-generating karma and meritorious karma;

Sometimes abundantly creating the many sorts of karmic offenses through actions of body, speech, and mind;

Sometimes, with evil intentions, drawing the blood of a buddha;

Sometimes contributing to the destruction of right Dharma;

Sometimes bringing about the destruction of the Sangha;

Sometimes murdering arhats;

Sometimes engaging in the ten courses of bad karmic action;

Sometimes instructing others to engage in them;

Sometimes subjecting others to speech that displeases them;

Sometimes cheating and deceiving others with altered weights and measures;

Sometimes afflicting beings with immoral behavior;

Sometimes failing in filial piety toward parents;

Sometimes stealing belongings from stupas;

Sometimes stealing possessions from the Sangha of the four directions;

Sometimes destroying or transgressing against [the teachings of] sutras or moral-precept codes originally set forth by the Buddha;

And sometimes disobeying monastic preceptors or monastic Dharma teachers.¹⁵⁸

Sometimes, when people have set their resolve on realization of the Śrāvaka Disciple Vehicle or the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle,

or have set their resolve on realization of the Great Vehicle, due to having a mind covered over by hatred or jealousy, I have used evil speech to vilify and slight them.

And sometimes, in the presence of buddhas, I have uttered abusive speech, have claimed right Dharma to be non-Dharma, and have claimed non-Dharma to be right Dharma.

Now, in the presence of the buddhas of the present, those who know, who see, and who have become realized, I entirely reveal all of these karmic offenses, not daring to conceal any of them, and I vow, from this point on, that I shall not dare to commit them again.

If I have committed karmic offenses through which I should fall into the hells, into the animal realm, into the hungry-ghost realm, or into the *asura* realm,¹⁵⁹ or if I ought not encounter the three objects of reverence,¹⁶⁰ but rather should be reborn in the midst of the [eight] difficulties,¹⁶¹ I pray that I may [instead be allowed to] undergo retribution for these karmic offenses in this present life.

Just as all the bodhisattvas of the past who sought realization of buddhahood did themselves repent of offenses created through bad karma, in the very same manner, I too reveal all of my offenses, repent of them, do not dare to conceal any of them, and vow not to commit them again.

Just as all the bodhisattvas of the present who seek realization of buddhahood do repent of offenses created through bad karma, in the very same manner, I too reveal all of my offenses, repent of them, do not dare to conceal any of them, and vow not to commit them again.

Just as all of the bodhisattvas of the future who shall seek realization of buddhahood shall repent of offenses created through bad karma, in the very same manner, I too reveal all of my offenses, repent of them, do not dare to conceal any of them, and vow not to commit them again.

Just as all of the past, future, and present bodhisattvas seeking realization of buddhahood did repent, do repent, and shall repent of offenses created through bad karma, in the very same manner, I too repent of offenses created through bad karma, do not dare to conceal any of them, and vow not to commit them again.

3. Q: HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT "ENTREATING"?

Question: Having already explained the method for repentance, how does one go about "entreating"?

4. A: "ENTREATING" IS PERFORMED AS FOLLOWS:

Response:

Whenever any of the buddhas of the ten directions now attain buddhahood,

I request them to turn the wheel of Dharma
and bring peace and happiness to all beings.

Whenever any of the buddhas of the ten directions
are about to relinquish their lifespans,
I now make full reverential prostrations to them,
and entreat them to remain for a long time.

As for “turning the wheel of Dharma,” this refers to the proclamation of the four truths of the Āryas in three turnings, thereby revealing their twelve aspects:

This is the truth of the existence of suffering. This is the origination of suffering. This is the extinguishing of suffering. This is the path leading to the extinguishing of suffering. This is what is meant by the four aspects of the first turning.

This truth of the existence of suffering should be known. This origination of suffering should be cut off. This extinguishing of suffering should be realized. This path leading to the extinguishing of suffering should be cultivated. This is what is meant by the four aspects of the second turning.

This truth of the existence of suffering has been known. This origination of suffering has been cut off. This extinguishing of suffering has been realized. This path leading to the extinguishing of suffering has been cultivated. This is what is meant by the four aspects of the third turning.

As for the four aspects, within the four truths, they correspond to the development of the eyes, the knowledges, the clear knowledges, and the awakenings.¹⁶²

There are those who explain that the Śrāvaka Disciple Vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and the Great Vehicle are what constitute “the Dharma wheel” and that it is the explanation of the meaning of the Three Vehicles that constitutes the “the turning of the Dharma wheel.”

As for “bringing peace and happiness to all beings,” the pleasures associated with the five objects of desire do not constitute peace and happiness. Rather, it is entry into the Three Vehicles for the sake of achieving pure peace and happiness in the present and future lifetimes—this is what is meant by peace and happiness.

This person entreats the Buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma to cause all beings to receive the bliss of nirvāṇa and, so long as they have not yet gained entry into nirvāṇa, to cause them to receive the types of happiness available in the world. It is for this reason that “peace and happiness” are mentioned here.

As for this matter of a "lifespan," it is due to the causes and conditions involved in undergoing karmic retribution that the continuity of one's life faculty is sustained. It is comparable to an apparition created through a magical conjuration that continues to be sustained in correspondence with [the magician's] mental actions. When those mental actions cease, [that conjuration] is then extinguished.¹⁶³

"Entreat" refers to the most ultimately sincere prayerful beseeching. The Buddhas regard all beings [equally], great and small, without treating them differently. Therefore one sets forth this earnest request, hoping that they will accede to one's wishes and refrain from relinquishing their lifespans and instead remain in the world for *asaṃkhyeyas* of kalpas in order to liberate beings.

Then again, the Buddha himself described the method to be used in entreating the Buddhas, indicating that the bodhisattva should speak as follows: "I bow down in reverence to all buddhas of the present throughout the ten directions." Then, at that time when they have just realized *anuttarasamyakṣambodhi* but have not yet begun to turn the wheel of Dharma, [he is to say]:

I now beseech you, praying that you will turn the wheel of Dharma, sound the Dharma drum, blow the Dharma conch, plant the Dharma banner, establish the great Dharma rituals, and ignite the great Dharma torch, using these means of Dharma giving to fulfill the needs of beings so that there will be many who are benefited and many who are made happy. Have pity on the world and bestow abundant benefit on devas and humans. It is for these reasons that I now present this entreaty.

This is what is meant by "entreating." As for entreating the buddhas who have turned the wheel of Dharma to then "remain for a long time," in that case as well, one should address all buddhas of the present throughout the ten directions at just that time when those buddhas are about to relinquish their lifespans, saying, "I beseech you to remain for a long time so that there will be many who are benefited and many who are made happy. Have pity on the world and bestow abundant benefit on devas and humans."

5. Q: WHAT IS MEANT BY "REJOICING"?

Question: Having already explained "repentance" and "entreating," what is meant by "rejoicing"?

6. A: "REJOICING" IS PERFORMED AS FOLLOWS:

Response:

All of the merit produced by giving,
observance of moral precepts, and *dhyāna* practice—

all of it arising through body, speech, and mind,
 all of it created throughout the past, the future, and the present,
 all of it created by those who cultivate the Three Vehicles,
 by those who have fulfilled the practice of any of the Three Vehicles,
 and all of the merit created by common people—
 I rejoice in accordance with all of it.

As for “the merit produced by giving,” it is created through relinquishing the dharma of miserliness.

As for “the merit arising from observance of moral precepts,” this is created through being able to subdue the body and speech.

“*Dhyāna* practice” refers to developing all of the *dhyāna* concentrations.

As for “that arising through body and speech,” this refers to acts arising because of the body or speech such as giving, observance of the moral precepts, welcoming others when they come, escorting them off when they leave,¹⁶⁴ and other such actions.

As for “that arising through the mind,” this refers to the *dhyāna* concentration states¹⁶⁵ as well as to kindness, compassion, and so forth.¹⁶⁶

As for “all of it created in the past, the future, or the present,” this is referring to all merit produced by all beings throughout the three periods of time.

As for “those who cultivate the Three Vehicles,” this refers to those who aspire to success in the Śrāvaka Disciple Vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and the Great Vehicle.

As for “those who have fulfilled the practice of any of the Three Vehicles,” this refers to those who have perfected the cultivation of either the Arhat Vehicle, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, or the Buddha Vehicle.

“All” means every single instance, exhaustively, excluding none.

“Common people” refers to those who have not yet realized the four truths.

With respect to “merit,” there may be two types of actions which may be involved here, namely good actions or unobscured morally indeterminate actions.¹⁶⁷

“Rejoicing in accordance with it” refers to circumstances where, when others engage in meritorious actions, one’s mind is filled with delight and one praises that deed as good.

7. Q: WHAT IS MEANT BY “DEDICATION”?

Question: Since you have already explained “repentance,” “entreat-ing,” and “rejoicing,” what is meant by “dedication”?

8. A: DEDICATION IS PERFORMED AS FOLLOWS:

Response:

May all of the merit that I have acquired
be gathered together,
and then, for the sake of all beings,
may it be rightly dedicated to attaining buddhahood.

"I" refers to oneself. "All of the merit," whether produced through physical actions, produced through verbal actions, produced through mental actions, produced through giving, through upholding the moral precepts, through cultivation of *dhyāna* meditation, through rejoicing, or through entreating—all such goodness as this as well as any other goodness—all of these are what constitute "all of the merit."

As for "may it all be gathered together," this refers to a reflection whereby one envisions all of the merit being gathered together and assessed in a manner whereby one becomes aware of its expansiveness.

"All beings," refers to all beings throughout the three realms of existence.

"Rightly" refers to performing this dedication of merit in a manner corresponding to the way it is done by all buddhas. It is that dedication that aligns itself with reality. It is dedication directed toward bodhi. This "dedication directed toward bodhi" involves dedicating all merit toward the realization of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.

Again, these two matters of "rejoicing" and "dedication" were explained by the Buddha himself who spoke of them as follows:

Where there is a bodhisattva *mahāsattva* who wishes to engage in rejoicing and in dedication, he should bring to mind all of the roots of goodness and merit of all buddhas, those who have cut off continuous abiding in the three realms of existence, who have extinguished all conceptual elaborations, who have dried up the mud of the afflictions, who have destroyed their piercing thorns, who have thrown off the heavy burden, who have accomplished their own benefit, who have obtained right knowledge and liberation, whose minds have achieved sovereign mastery, and who have put an end to the fetters of existence.

So too, he should bring to mind all of the measurelessly, boundlessly, and inconceivably many *asaṃkhyeyas* of buddhas in each and every one of the measurelessly, boundlessly, and inconceivably many *asaṃkhyeyas* of worlds throughout the ten directions while also bringing to mind all the roots of goodness and merit of all of these buddhas from the time they come forth [into the world] to the time they enter nirvāṇa, from the time they first brought forth their resolve to realize buddhahood to the time they actually realize buddhahood

on to that time when they enter the nirvāṇa without residue, and on to all of the remaining time before the Dharma they bequeath finally comes to an end.

He should bring to mind the roots of goodness associated with [bodhisattvas' practice of] the six *pāramitās* as well as the roots of goodness of those who have received the prediction that they are bound to become *pratyekabuddhas*.

He should also bring to mind the roots of goodness of the *śrāvaka* disciples, whether they are the product of giving, of upholding moral precepts, or of cultivation of *dhyāna* meditation, including in this the uncontaminated roots of goodness those in training and those beyond training.¹⁶⁸

He should also [bring to mind the roots of goodness] associated with all buddhas' measureless meritorious qualities related to moral precept observance, meditative absorptions, wisdom, liberations, knowledge and vision of liberation, great kindness, and great compassion, including as well that related to all buddhas' proclamation of Dharma, for there are those people who have consequently brought forth faith and understanding in these dharmas, who have then undertaken training in them, and who have then acquired the benefit of these dharmas. Hence he should bring to mind all the roots of goodness planted by these people in relation to these dharmas.

He should also include all the roots of goodness of all common people as well those of all the devas, dragons, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kinmaras*, and *mahoragas* who, on being able to hear the proclamation of Dharma, then brought forth thoughts of goodness. He should also include here even [those roots of goodness planted] by animals who heard the Dharma and then brought forth thoughts of goodness. And he should also include here the roots of goodness planted by beings [who gathered together] when the Buddhas were about to enter nirvāṇa.

All of these roots of goodness and all of this merit are brought together and assessed, excluding none, and are, then and there, made the object of the most superior rejoicing, of the most sublime rejoicing, of the most excellent rejoicing, of unsurpassable rejoicing, of incomparable rejoicing, and of rejoicing that is equal to the unequaled.

Having rejoiced in all of this, one then takes all of the merit arising from this rejoicing and dedicates it to the realization of *anuttarasamyakṣaṃbodhi*. In precisely the same manner, one does this with respect to the merit associated with all buddhas of the future and all buddhas of the present.

One's mind rejoices in all merit created by all these buddhas of the three periods of time, rejoicing as well in all merit produced by others due to the influence of all these buddhas. One then dedicates the merit [produced by this rejoicing] to the realization of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.

Therefore we have a verse here that states:

One should repent of karmic offenses in this manner.
As for entreating, rejoicing in merit, and
dedicating merit to the unsurpassable path,
all of these should be carried out in this manner as well.

Just as taught by the Buddhas,
I repent of karmic offenses, entreat,
rejoice, and also dedicate merit,
all in this very same manner.

Throughout the course of the beginningless time in which one has dwelt in the world, one has committed an immeasurable number of karmic offenses that obstruct one's path to buddhahood. One should repent of these offenses in the presence of all buddhas of the ten directions and, in this same way, one should also present entreaties to all buddhas, rejoice in others' merit, and dedicate one's merit accordingly, [reflecting], "Just such repentance as does accord with what is known, seen, and permitted by the Buddhas—it is in accordance with this that I repent of my own karmic offenses." One's entreaties to all buddhas and one's dedications of merit should also be performed in this way. If one repents, entreats, rejoices, and then dedicates one's merit in this manner, this is what is meant by "right dedication."

9. Q: WHICH WAYS OF PERFORMING THESE ACCORDS WITH THE BUDDHAS?

Question: Just what is meant by "repentance, entreating, rejoicing, and dedicating merit that accord with what is known, seen, and permitted by the Buddhas"?

10. A: WHICHEVER WAYS ACCORD WITH THIS PASSAGE FROM SCRIPTURE

Response: "Repentance" and "entreating" are as previously explained. As for "rejoicing in merit" and "dedicating merit," they should accord with the following statements in the large edition of the [*Great Perfection of Wisdom*] Sutra.¹⁶⁹

Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying, "O Bhagavat, as for the aforementioned 'supreme rejoicing' brought forth by the bodhisattva after comprehensively considering and assessing all the merit and roots of goodness of all past, future, and present buddhas, of all their disciples, and of all other beings—O Bhagavat, precisely what is meant by this 'supreme rejoicing'?"

The Buddha then told Subhūti, “It is when, with respect to all dharmas of the past, the future, and the present, a bodhisattva does not seize on them, does not retain them in mind, does not perceive them, does not apprehend them, and does not make discriminations about them, even as he is still able to reflect in this way:

All of these dharmas are supposed to exist merely due to perceptions and mental discriminations regarding the coming together of many conditions. In reality, none of these dharmas is ever produced nor do any of them have any place from which they come forth. There is not even a single dharma among them that has ever been produced, is now being produced, or ever will be produced. Nor are there any of them that have ever been destroyed, are now being destroyed, or ever will be destroyed. The character of all dharmas is precisely of this sort.

It is in accordance with the character of dharmas that I rejoice and, having rejoiced, it is then also in accordance with the true character of all dharmas that I dedicate all merit to *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.

“It is precisely this that constitutes the most supreme rejoicing and dedication.

“Furthermore, Subhūti, a son or daughter of good family striving to follow the path to buddhahood who wishes to refrain from slandering the Buddha should dedicate their roots of goodness in this way and they should think as follows:

Just as, using the buddha mind, the buddha wisdom, and the buddha eye, all buddhas know and see from root to branch and in terms of substance and signs on which bases this merit and these roots of goodness exist—so too do I also accord with all buddhas’ knowledge and vision as I rejoice. And just as all buddhas have permitted it, so too do I also dedicate these roots of goodness.

“If a bodhisattva dedicates merit in this manner, then he will thereby refrain from slandering the buddhas. Thus he will remain free of fault by acting in this way. Dedicating merit with deep-seated aspirations and resolute faith, doing so in a manner that accords with reality—this is what is meant by “great dedication” and “perfectly complete dedication.”

“Furthermore, Subhūti, a son or daughter of good family should dedicate roots of goodness and merit in the following manner: This dedication should be done in a way that conforms to the moral precept observance, meditative absorptions, wisdom, liberation, and knowledge and vision of liberation possessed by worthies and *āryas*.

Those dedications are not anchored in the desire realm, are not anchored in the form realm, are not anchored in the formless realm, and are not situated in the past, the future, or the present. Just as those qualities are not anchored anywhere within the three realms, just so should this dedication of merit not be anchored there, either. Nor should the bases for the dedication of merit be anchored in any such way, either.

“If a bodhisattva is able in this way to gain aspirations and resolute faith that accord with reality, this is what is meant by dedication that is free of error, dedication that is free of the poisons, and dedication that accords with the nature of dharmas.

“If, however, in performing dedications of merit, a bodhisattva were to seize on any signs or were to have any fond attachment to them, this would constitute wrong dedication.

“Therefore, all bodhisattvas and *mahāsattvas* should understand the character of dharmas as it is known by buddhas. When one dedicates merit in a manner that accords with the character of dharmas, one becomes able to reach *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. This is what is meant by ‘right dedication.’”