

THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

The principle of causality, which states that all worldly phenomena, including our thoughts and actions, are subject to the law of cause and consequence, is a fundamental teaching in Buddhism. The wrongs and harms we committed in the past bring the obstacles we face in our lives now, and the wrongs and harms we do now will bring obstacles to our future. These obstacles are called karmic obstacles, which are the ripened fruits of our past actions. They bring hurdles and hardship to our career, family, health, and cultivation.

However, karmic obstacles can be avoided and removed through the process of repentance, which consists of two elements. One involves the rituals of confession in which we make offerings such as flowers and fruits to the Three Jewels as we sincerely confess and repent our sins. Through these rituals, we look honestly into our minds for the causes of our wrongdoings, sincerely accept responsibility for the harms we have caused, and resolve never to commit the

same transgressions again. The other involves contemplation in which we reflect on the empty nature of all worldly phenomena, including our body, mind, and karma. When we keep our minds pure, clear, undisturbed by any thoughts, emotions and concepts, we will be able to transcend all karmic obstacles.

Once there were two dissenters of the Buddha, King Ajatasattu and Devadatta, who conspired to discredit the Buddha's teachings and harm the Buddha. After their failed plots, King Ajatasattu found malignant tumors growing all over his body. He sought help from Jivaka, the most famous doctor in Buddha's time, who was known for his miraculous power to cure any disease. But the miracle doctor told the King, "I may be the best doctor alive, but I cannot cure your tumors, for they are the karmic consequences of your ill will to harm the Buddha. The only way to get rid of these painful tumors is to go directly to the Buddha and repent your sins." The King then had his attendants carry him to the Buddha, to whom he confessed his wrongdoings and made earnest repentance. Surely enough, his

tumors disappeared the next day. When we get sick, we can use the occasion to examine our minds and reflect on our actions, speech, and thoughts, and repent for the transgressions we have committed. In addition, we should vow to always do good deeds, and walk the path of enlightenment. Getting to know our pure mind is the ultimate repentance for all the deluded acts we have done since time immemorial, and the cleanest, fastest way of removing our karmic obstacles.