

Repentance **from *Returning to Silence*, D. Katagiri**

In the ritual of formless repentance, the following verse is chanted:

All the karma ever created by me
Since of old through greed, anger and self-delusion
Which has no beginning, born of my body, speech and thought,
I now make full open confession of it.

In Buddhism, repentance does not mean to apologize to someone for an error or a mistake. The Ritual of repentance is not to ask forgiveness from someone for what one has done. Repentance is not a preliminary stage to enter the Buddha's world or to become a good person. If repentance is understood in this way, we fall, very naturally, into the trap of dualism; a big gap is created between us and whatever object we try to make repentance to and that will always cause some confusion. Real peace cannot be found in dualism.

Repentance in Buddhism is to lead us to be present right in the middle of peace and harmony. It is the perfect openness of our hearts that allows us to hear the voice of the universe beyond the irritation of our consciousness. Repentance, itself, makes our life perfectly peaceful.

When contemplating the significance of repentance in Zen Buddhism there are three conditions to consider: that we should realize the world of the compassionate heart; that the self must readily accept the compassion of Buddha's world; that we must set in motion the interactive communion between us and the universe.

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The troubles in the human world are very complicated, but you should not ignore them. However, neither can you stay with them. You have to take care of them. But we also must take care not to attach to something good or pretty or sweet. It's not so easy particularly if we do something good; we want to be proud of ourselves, we want to attach to our lives. But it is essential that we attach to neither the mistakes nor the good actions of our lives.

Repentance is to realize exactly the oneness of merging all sentient beings and Buddha, delusion and enlightenment. All sentient beings are allowed to live and are, from the beginning, forgiven for living their lives in this world. Everything, whatever it is, has some reason why it exists: evil, good, even something neither evil nor good. You cannot destroy devils just because you don't like them. Even though you don't like monsters, still there is some reason why they exist. Everything is entitled to live in this world in peace and harmony beyond our judgment, our evaluation. This is the first condition we have to realize – everything is Buddha.