

HOW TO PRACTISE BUDDHISM

Lecture given by Rev. Shin Wu of Beow Hiang Lim Temple, Penang at the Buddhist Society of Ipoh-Perak.

Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha. It contains the Truth of life in the Universe. Its function is to emancipate sentient being from all sufferings thus leading them to attain perfect serenity.

As Buddhists, we should have right understanding of the message of Buddha so as to enable ourselves to do away with all misconceptions, to provoke truth-realization, to be free from sufferings and to acquire profound peace. Then we can move one step ahead to enlighten others.

Many Buddhists today know little about the religion they profess. Their religious concepts and actions are superstitious. Some assume that to appeal to the Buddha or the Bodhisattas for wealth, for off-springs, or for a choice of decision to do something is the relevant practice of all Buddhists. They consider burning joss-sticks, joss-papers, prostrating in front of images, and praying for protection to be very important obligations for Buddhists. Some go even further by burning paper houses, vehicles, estates, and servants with picturesque decoration, offerings, sacrifices or exhibiting ridiculous performances. The above patterns of professing Buddhism will not be beneficial. Those who do such things will even acquire evil outcome contrary to their intention. It may appear to be harmless in performing such acts. But these mal-practices smear Buddhism with the stain of superstition. Spectators will at once refer to these prevailing practices as proofs of a superstitious religion in Buddhism. Great harm has been done to Buddhism indirectly if not directly. Besides, superstitious trend of thought and behavior lead non-Buddhists to misinterpret Buddhism. They create bad impression and discourage non-Buddhists from studying or embracing Buddhism, thus depriving others of their opportunities to be benefited by the teachings of the Buddha. This has a direct effect on the society.

I hope that you all are Buddhists with the right kind of faith. I appeal to all of you not to be superstitious so as not to spoil Buddhism. I now wish to raise three points currently misunderstood to discuss with you, following which I welcome your questions.

1. Taking refuges in the Triple Gem and cultivating righteous attitude.

I assume that all of you here take refuges in the Triple Gem and have faith in the Triple Gem. Triple Gem consists of the Buddha, the Teaching of the Buddha and the celibate Buddhist Order. The Buddha is the great Teacher. His Teaching consists of the Truth in the Universe. The celibate Buddhist Order serves as the promoter of the Teaching. These three are considered as gems because they benefit sentient beings by eradicating sufferings and helping them to attain ultimate release. Thus they are precious to life as gems.

Besides showing respect to the Triple Gem and expressing willingness to follow the guidance, it is most important to cultivate the righteous attitude. Taking refuges in the Triple Gem without a truth-inclined attitude is useless. This attitude is a combination of sincerity and respect. Sincerity allows no cheating. Respect allows no bullying. These two place men on the right path. Men must possess this attitude if they wish to lead a meaningful, valuable and dignified life. Otherwise they may still be men, only in the physiological sense.

Sincerity and respect are not instinctive, they have to be cultivated. To take refuges in the Triple Gem is an effective way of cultivating these qualities. As the Triple Gem is the most dignified object in the world, it invites our mind to show it our sincerity and respect. If we are sincere and if we respect the Triple Gem every day we are cultivating this attitude every day. When the degree of sincerity and respect has reached certain intensity, we will extend the same attitude towards other people. When there is mutual respect and sincerity in the society, the human relationship in it will be most harmonious. At the same time, if you show respect and sincerity in dealing with people, you will do no harm to hamper or sacrifice the dignity and interest of others. You have ceased to do evil, you have done good deeds, you maintain a lofty quality, and you will be honoured wherever you may be. Life to you will be meaningful and blissful.

2. The function of reciting sutras and performing repentant services.

Many people do not understand the true meaning behind the recitation of sutras and the performance of repentant services. They think that by reciting verbally or performing bodily will bring in heaps of blessing and remove lots of wrongs. This is altogether a misconception. We must realize that the content of the sutras and services expound certain phases of truth. They give guidance to us so that we may take steps to compensate or neutralize the effect of previous bad actions or to

produce and accumulate blessings. If we do not follow the instructions and just recite or salute to the book or the passage without even knowing the meaning, the effort will be wasted. Sutras spoken by the Buddha contain messages about life and the universe. Repentant verses compiled by learned patriarchs show us the method to repent our wrongs. When we go through those books, we should find out the meaning and then do as instructed. Only then may we achieve what we are aiming at.

For example: The sutra tells us the causes of committing wrongs. They are greed, hatred and ignorance. Instigated by these three poisons, we take whatever steps applicable to satisfy our desire. We are selfish; do not care about others or the after-effect whatsoever. The sutra further advises us to get rid of these poisons and relates the way to do so. The sutra teaches us to be compassionate. Through good deeds we get good results. Should we have committed certain wrongs in the past and now realize our mistake, what can we do about it? The books of repentance tell us to feel sorry about our past misdeeds, to repent in front of the Triple Gem, to decide not to commit further mistakes and to promise to do good with diligence. Remember, it is the attitude and practice that count. The number of times in reciting or performing, the volume, the quality, or the tone of your voice has no bearing.

3. Human relationship and the way of response to appeal

Buddhism also teaches the way of response to appeal. Many people do not go further to study the method to enable one to be in tune with others or a certain object. They assume that the Buddha and the Bodhisattas who are all-powerful, should response to their appeal just to satisfy their desire. For example when a person buys a lottery ticket, he burns some joss-sticks to offer to the Buddha, not to show respect as you have done here, but to expect the Buddha to help him to strike some luck. They are doing the wrong thing. The Buddha and Bodhisattas definitely do not bother with so many unreasonable, selfish and ignorant appeals, bribery and murmurings. If you wish to get an effective response, appeal to men, and not the Buddha or Bodhisattas. We must realize that we live in the society. We make contact with people all the time. We need help from the people around more than we need help from the Buddha and Bodhisattas. Be earnest in our relationship with others in our everyday life, so that when we need help, our appeal will be answered.

For instance, you have a project. You need help. You do not want obstacles in your way. So, you must be kind, earnest and considerate. Don't lose your temper

or scold people with bad words. If you treat people well, people will in turn respect you, have kind thoughts about you and give you full assistance and co-operation. Your way towards others is the influence, others' sincere actions to help you is the response. Mencius said, "One who loves others will always be loved by others. One who respects others will be respected reciprocally." Similarly, one who helps others will be helped by others. Good human relationship is the most practical way of obtaining response from appeals. If your manner towards others is undesirable, if you are easily annoyed, or if you scold people with harsh words, you have made enemies among men. Then even if you appeal daily to the Buddha or Bodhisattas to send you good people and experts, and to send away those who may disturb you, you will be in vain. For, if you sow the wrong kind of seed, you cannot expect to harvest the right kind of fruit.