

# The Platform Sutra

## Chapter 6: On Repentance

Translated by Zen Master Dae Kwang and Zen Master Dae Kwan

At one time a large gathering of scholars and commoners from Guangzhou, Shaozhou and other places asked the patriarch to teach. The patriarch took the high seat and delivered the following talk:

In practice, we should always start from our true nature. Moment to moment, let us purify our minds through our own efforts, realize our own dharmakaya (dharma body), attain the Buddha in our own mind and deliver ourselves by keeping the precepts. If you do this, your visit will not have been in vain. Since all of you have come a long distance, the fact of our meeting here shows that there is a good affinity between us. Let us now kneel and I will give you the formless repentance.

The first is the incense of precepts, which means that our mind is free from the taints of misdeeds, evil, jealousy, greed, anger, aggressiveness and hatred. The second is the incense of samadhi, which means that our mind is unperturbed in all circumstances, whether favorable or unfavorable. The third is the incense of prajna, which means that our mind is free from all hindrances, and is constantly perceiving our essence of mind with wisdom. Here we refrain from evil deeds and cultivate good acts without being attached to them. We are respectful toward our superiors and considerate of our inferiors. Also, we are sympathetic to the destitute and the poor. The fourth is the incense of liberation, meaning that our mind does

not cling to anything, thinking neither good nor bad—free and without hindrance. The fifth is the incense of the knowledge realized on the attainment of liberation. When our mind clings to neither good nor evil, we should take care not to let it dwell on emptiness or remain in a state of inertia. We should rather widen our study and broaden our knowledge, so that we can know our original mind and understand thoroughly the principles of Buddhism. We should be kind to others and get rid of every idea of “self” and “other.” We must realize that up to the time when we attain bodhi, our true nature is always unchanging and immutable. This is the incense of knowledge realized on the attainment of liberation. The fragrance of this fivefold incense permeates our mind from within and should not be sought from outside.

Now I will give the formless repentance that will extinguish the sins committed in our past, present and future lives, purifying the karma of our thoughts, words and deeds. Learned audience, please repeat after me:

May we always be free from the taints of ignorance and delusion. We repent of all our sins and evil deeds committed in delusion and ignorance. May they be extinguished at once and may they never arise again. May we always be free from the taints of arrogance and dishonesty. We repent of all our arrogant behaviors and dishonest dealings in the past. May they be extinguished at once and may they never arise again.

May we always be free from the taints of envy and jealousy. We repent of all our sins and evil deeds committed in an envious or jealous manner. May they be extinguished at once and may they never arise again.

Learned audience, this is what we call formless *chan hui* (repentance). What is the meaning of *chan* and *hui* (Sanskrit: *ksamayati*)? *Chan* refers to the repentance of past sins. To repent of all our past sins and evil deeds committed in delusion, ignorance, arrogance, dishonesty, jealousy, envy and so forth, so as to put an end to them, is called *chan*. *Hui* refers to repentance concerning our future conduct. Having realized the nature of our transgressions, we make a vow to never sin again. Hereafter we will put an end

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to all evil committed in delusion, ignorance, arrogance, dishonesty, jealousy or envy. This is *hui*. Because of ignorance and delusion, common people do not realize that in repentance they have not only to feel sorry for their past sins but also refrain from sinning in the future. Since they take no heed of their future conduct, they commit new sins before the past ones are extinguished. How can we call this repentance? Learned audience, having repented of our sins, we will now take the following four great vows:

*The sentient beings inside our mind are numberless; we vow to save them all.*

*The suffering of our mind is endless; we vow to extinguish it all.*

*The teachings of our true nature are numberless; we vow to learn them all.*

*The Buddha way of true nature is inconceivable; we vow to attain it.*

Learned audience, all of us have now declared our vow to save an infinite number of sentient beings, but what does that mean? It does not mean that I, Hui Neng, am going to save them. Also, who are these sentient beings within our mind? They are the delusive mind, the deceitful mind, the evil mind and so forth—all these are sentient beings. Each one of them has to save themselves by means of their own true nature; then the deliverance is genuine.

What does it mean to save oneself by means of one's own true nature? Inside our mind we have delusive, ignorant and suffering beings. We use right views to save them. With the aid of right views and prajna-wisdom, the barriers raised by these ignorant and delusive beings may be broken down. Then each of them may deliver themselves through their own efforts. Let the fallacious be delivered by correctness, the deluded by enlightenment, the ignorant by wisdom and the malevolent by benevolence. Such is genuine deliverance.

The vow to extinguish the endless suffering of our mind refers to the substitution of our unreliable and illusive thinking faculty with the prajna-wisdom of our true nature.

The vow to learn the numberless teachings means that there will be no true learning until we have seen face-to-face our true nature and conform to the orthodox dharma on all occasions.

The vow to attain the Buddha way refers to always being humble and acting correctly in all situations. When prajna arises in our mind moment to moment, then we can detach from both enlightenment and ignorance. We can do away with both truth and falsehood, see our Buddha nature and attain buddhahood. ♦

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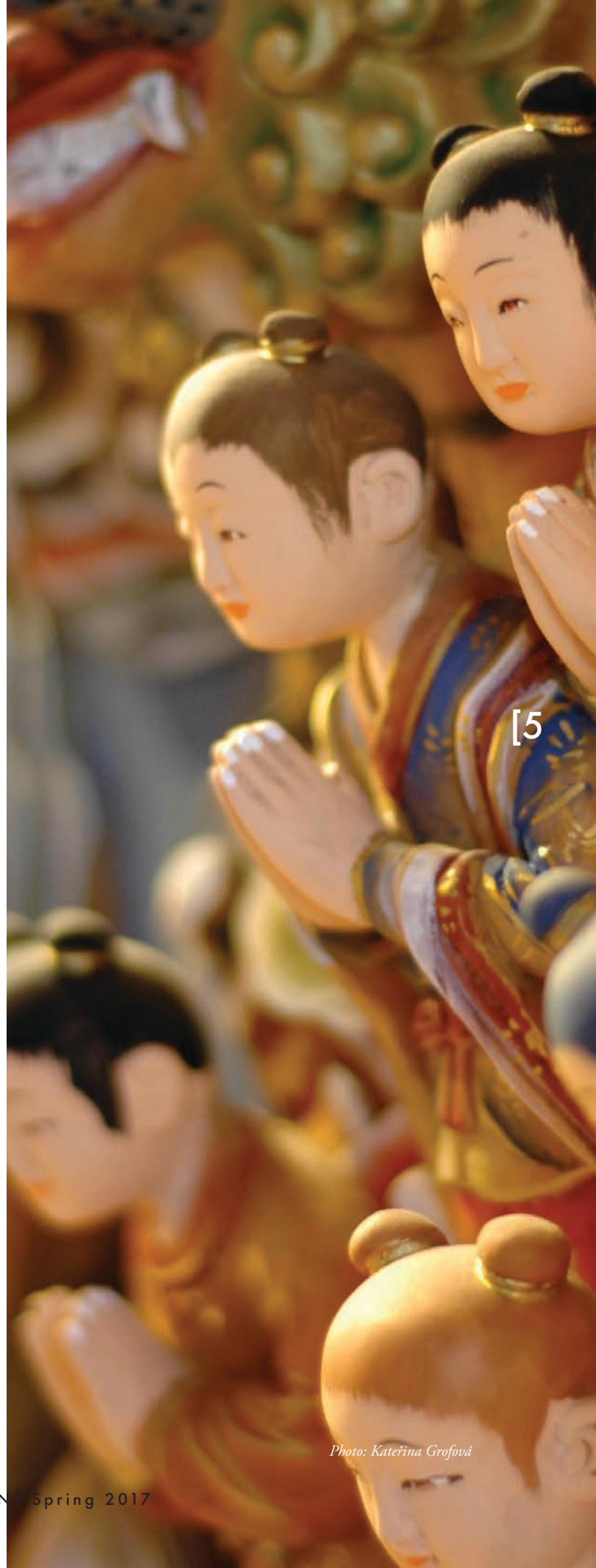


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