

Good morning, it's good to be here.

Desiree shared that you just studied the chapter on our universal repentance verse ji-sange as explained by the wonderful priest Shohaku Okamura.

I also recently got ahold of another commentary on our everyday Zen verses by Kazuaki Tanahashi called Zen Chants: Thirty-Five Essential Texts with Commentary and in his short commentary on the origins of this verse he says it's from the Samantabhadra's Vows chapter of the massive Avatamsaka Sutra - The Flower Ornament Sutra. He said that's chapter 40, but the translation I have only has 39 chapters.

So I got to a little Dharma sleuthing.

Googling around though I remembered there's a stand alone sutra, maybe it's excerpted from the Avatamsaka Sutra, I don't know, called the Samantabhadra Sutra and that includes his 10 vows.

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is the third great bodhisattva we call out in many of our rituals including the great list of 10 Buddhas and Ancestors we bring up in before receiving the precepts (and before receiving meals actually!). Most often we bring up Manjushri - the bodhisattva of Wisdom, and Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion - also known as Kannon or Kanzeon in Japanese or Guan yin in Chinese. (did we just chant the Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo?). And we also bring up Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva of activity, or devoted action is more complete. The Bodhisattva of doing practice. Chris B loves Samantabhadra and featured him back when she did her shuso practice with us and ever since. He's usually depicted riding an elephant: going places and getting stuff done, not seated peacefully in meditation like most Buddha and Bodhisattva figures.

Here's an example (screen share)

Anyway in this much, much shorter Samantabhadra Sutra is explains that he took and lived by 10 vows:

The Ten Great Vows of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra

1. To worship and respect all buddhas.
2. To make praises to the thus come ones.
3. To practice profoundly the giving of offerings.
4. To repent and reform all karmic hindrance.
5. To rejoice and follow in merit and virtue.
6. To request that the dharma wheel be turned.
7. To request that the buddhas remain in the world.
8. To always follow the buddha's teaching.
9. To constantly accord with all living beings.
10. To transfer all merit and virtue universally.

And then digging around a little more I saw a reference to the Vows of Samantabhadra being received by the pilgrim Sudhana at the end of his quest. Sudhana is featured in the last chapter of the Flower Ornament Sutra goes on a great spiritual quest meeting with many teachers and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He studies with 53 "good friends" over the course of this long chapter in the sutra 386 pages worth in the main translation.

Side note it turns out Sudhana shows in multiple ancient texts, not just in this sutra, and is also a character in the famous 16th century Chinese novel Journey to the West.

Anyway at the end of this lengthy and in depth spiritual journey - here I'm quoting the summary someone wrote for Wikipedia:

Sudhana's quest reaches its climax at when he meets Maitreya, the Future Buddha, who snaps his fingers, thereby opening the doors to his marvelous tower. Within the tower, Sudhana experiences all the dharmadhatu (dimensions or worlds) in a fantastic succession of visions.[2] The final master he visits is Samantabhadra, who teaches Sudhana that wisdom only exists for the sake of putting it into practice.

So I took a look at the very end of that chapter which, to be honest, is the only part of this sutra I've really tried to read. It's just so darn long. A few people (Chris included?) say they've read the whole thing which amazes me. Usually that's more reading as a practice, a daily ritual, than it is reading and remembering and cataloging information or something.

Which makes me think of a great Zen story that Norman once told about a SF Zen Center priest named Jerome. Great big man whom I met once back in the day. He said Jerome was leading such a reading-practice group and they were going through the Flower Ornament Sutra which took a few years. When they got at last to the final lines of the sutra, there was still time left in that particular meeting time, so Jerome just paused for a second and took a breath and then flipped back to the first page and started reading the thing all over again. Zen does lead to such wonderful grounded appreciation for all things doesn't it? Makes me wonder if I get a little too "whoop-di-do!" sometimes as a Zen teacher. You can give me feedback later: am I just too wild and crazy for us as a sangha? I'll try to turn it down a bit.

Anyway when I looked at the end of the final chapter of the Flower Ornament Sutra sure enough there are 57 vows, most of them in four-lines that Samantabhadra shared with the pilgrim Sudhana as the final teaching of his quest. I appreciate the summary line in Wikipedia, that hearing these vows "teaches Sudhana that wisdom only exists for the sake of putting it into practice."

The 7th one in Thomas Cleary's translation is:

Whatever evil I may commit
Under swap of passion, hatred, or folly
Bodily, verbally, or mentally,
I confess it all.

So there's the source of our repentance verse. Oddly it doesn't mention the depth of time like the Chinese original and our main translation do - use version saying "All my ancient twisted karma" and Shohaku's "All the karma ever created by me of old" - but it does say

"evil" which our other translators avoid because of the dualistic and Christian associations we have with evil. Shohaku as you read points out that the Chinese definitely says "bad karma"- shoakugo but he wanted to avoid dualism altogether with his and points out that we need to be aware of the karmic effects of wholesome things too: stay curious in all actions about our impact and effect.

And Kaz is concerned that the "ancient" and "of old" bits make it sound like we're just confessing stuff from long ago. What about the grouchy email I wrote yesterday. Boy those can be impactful. I received a very grouchy email yesterday morning myself and I carried it around with me for most of the day pondering the impact of it on me, how to respond, how unlike the person who sent it it was. Karmic effects to everything, no?

Anyway so Kaz adds some language to help us with this, here's his version of the Repentance Verse:

For all my unwholesome actions since olden times,
Form my beginningless greed, hatred, and ignorance,
Born of my body speech and thought,
I now fully atone.

I guess he feels just add "all" pulls that off but to me it doesn't have that much impact.

And we see with these two Japanese thinkers- one a priest and teacher the other an artist and scholar how much interpretation and tinkering there can be in translations from the Chinese.

Here's the original Chinese:

Extracted by OCR program (<https://www.i2ocr.com/free-online-chinese-traditional-ocr>)

- lines 2, 3, 4

我音所造諸是業
皆由無始貸瞋疾
從身語意之所生
一切我今皆懺悔

A couple of those characters might not be perfectly right.