

## Why We Chant Repentance

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We are almost at the end of the year. It is the time of the year for preparing Christmas and New Year's Eve parties, but in Japan, it is the time for doing a big cleaning before the year's end. In Japan, there is a tradition that people look back at the year and self-reflect.

We always chant "Repentance" before we chant Hannya-Shingyo. I think most of us chant the repentance without thinking about the meaning. Repentance has deep spiritual meaning for us to live a happy life. I am going to read an excerpt of the explanation about the meaning of repentance from the book, "Gedatsu as a home-based religion."

"Repentance" is actually part of a sutra called "*Kegon kyo*":

*"For all the sinful deeds, which I have committed in the past through greed, anger and ignorance by the actions of my body, speech and mind, I now most sincerely repent."*

Repentance has two important messages. One: all of our sinful deeds which make us and others suffer are derived from our greed, anger and ignorance – "The Three Poisons" in Buddhism teachings. They are the source of problems. They are the roots of unhappiness.

Greed causes us to want to "get hold of" things, and to have more and more of them. Anger is a strong feeling which causes us to reject what displeases us or stops our desire. Ignorance, is "not knowing," especially not realizing that our mind has been taken over by negative feelings such as anger or jealousy.

We humans have had those three poisons in our mind from ancient times. Three poisons taint our mind and fill our lives with suffering, unhappiness and unsatisfactoriness. They are the roots of not only our own pain and misery, but those of our loved ones' and of society's.

Two: most of us are likely to be dominated by one of the poisons, so watch our actions, watch our words and watch our thoughts. In Buddhist terminology, this is called *Shinkui no Sango*, which means the three modes of karma, *Shingo*, *Kugo* and *Igo*.

*Shingo* is evil actions, such as killing, stealing and unlawful sexual intercourse.

*Kugo* is evil words, such as lying, flattery, random or irresponsible speech, defaming and duplicity.

*Igo* is evil thoughts, such as greed, anger and stupidity.

You might have felt a bit overwhelmed by the Buddhist terminologies, but it is good to know how our actions, words and thoughts affect our lives.

If we are dominated by anger, we tend to be depressed or obsessed over real or imagined enemies or our life's negative realities. If the dominating poison is greed, we are stingy, lack compassion, hoard or self-indulge. We tend to be attached to material things, thinking that more is better and that getting things will bring happiness. When we are ignorant, we are not realizing what true happiness is and our true nature. Ignorance causes insecurity and a feeling of weakness or powerless. It is not so easy to change our actions, words and thoughts, but if we are aware of the Three Poisons, their causes and their cures, we can change the bitter poisons into

sweet nectars. The reason why we chant Repentance is to do self-reflection and eradicate our wrong actions, words and thoughts that we are creating every day.

My wife has been feeding four teenager ducklings in the backyard lately. When she fed them yesterday, they went crazy with hunger. One of them jumped into the plastic food bowl. His body is too big for the bowl. He tried to bend his body to eat the food in the bowl, but he couldn't eat properly. The other three ducklings were eating the food with no problems. The duckling inside the bowl was struggling and kept quacking. My wife said to the duckling, "Hey, get out of the bowl. Otherwise, you cannot eat!" It took him a while to get out of the bowl.

There was a lesson there. We create our problems, but we don't know that. We should get out of the bowl.

I hope you have a happy holiday season.