

Circumscribed Practice: The Test of Faith



Michell Wong – Mississauga Meditation Class, Toronto

We are the product of our upbringing, our inherited karma, and a host of other factors. I am the product of that mix as is everyone else. Through meditation I have learned to accept who I am regardless of the reasons for why I am. An important part of my cultivation has involved my circumscribed practice. A circumscribed practice is an established session of meditation, sutra or mantra recitation or a combination of those methods for 53 consecutive days. Involving a commitment from the practitioner, the circumscribed practice serves to cultivate faith in oneself among other qualities.

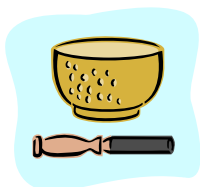
In my case, my biggest challenge has always been with the idea of a commitment. I shy away from saying something definitively because I doubt whether or not I will be able to do as I promise. So you can imagine the anxiety and pressure I put on myself when I first began my circumscribed practice.

At the beginning of each session of a circumscribed practice I made a verbal vow of how long I would practice for and what I would be doing. The first time I said this vow my voice wavered with doubt; but as the days went by my voice was strengthened with confidence. In fact, saying the vow aloud increased my confidence in my ability to complete the 53 days. I felt invested and responsible for the outcome of my practice, which is not such a major concern when I meditate apart from the circumscribed practice.

So if circumscribed practice is so significant, why do I only meditate and not recite? Well, I am an imperfect human being who enjoys sleeping in and gets caught up in the details of her own life. I get preoccupied with work and would rather spend time with friends.

Then why do I continue to do circumscribed practice repeatedly? Because when all is said and done, I cannot say that work is my life, and my friends do not deal with the inner me. My work is not a part of who I am; it is something that I do. My friends support me but they have their own lives to live. I personally have to deal with the thoughts and emotions that flow through my mind and body. I myself have to face the challenges in my life. No one can slay the demons in my mind other than myself. I just have to practice embracing those demons in order to make them disappear.

Buddhism is a solitary path and I am alone on my own path. Fortunately, there are many people on that same path. A circumscribed practice is one way to remind me that I can take care of myself. I know this is not the ultimate goal, but to survive from day to day, a circumscribed practice allows me to strengthen my faith in myself. That is why the circumscribed practice is such an important part of my Buddhist education.



What is Circumscribed Practice?

Brief Summary by Lungzhi – Toronto Huazang Workshop

Circumscribed Practice in Chinese is “結” (jie ˊ) and “界” (jie ˋ). The first word “結” (jie ˊ) means to bind, or join, or form, while the second word “界” (jie ˋ) indicate a boundary, scope, or range. The

term thus means that each practitioner vows to complete a certain amount of specified practice in a certain amount of time and at a designated place. That is, each individual takes the particular practice that he or she has chosen to cultivate, and coordinates it with time, space, and willpower in an effort to generate maximum benefits. This method of practice is advocated by the Huayen Monastery and is proven to have bona fide results.

This Practice is particularly appropriate for new practitioners. Each individual practises according to his or her own ability and makes his or her own choices and adjustment. Circumscribed practice is one of the best ways to accumulate resources or merits in order to advance your cultivation. The most obvious benefits of this practice are the building up of confidence and independence, which in turn strengthens your ability to handle stress and obstacles in life. The method itself is simple; it just requires devotion, attention and commitment.

The procedures are as follows:

1. Time: 53 days as one complete session, preferably same time every day.
2. Location: find a suitable place and stick to it.
3. Homework: in the following sequence
 - Making vows
 - Repentance
 - Specific practice - for example: meditation, recitation of sutras or mantras
 - Transfer of merits

Huayen Circumscribed Practice Procedure

- Making Vows:
I _____ (name), today, wish to attain Buddhahood and deliver all sentient beings, vow to do one session of Circumscribed Practice, from _____ (Date) to _____ (Date), for _____ days. My daily practice (homework) includes recitation of _____ (which sutra, for how long), and/or recitation of _____ mantra _____ times, and/or Chan sitting practice for _____ (how long). Also, I vow to (e.g. abstain from being angry; not eat more than necessary etc.), as my circumscribed practice, and as the basis for my Buddhism learning. May I have the blessings of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. (One Prostration or one Bow)
- Repentance:
I _____ (name) repent for the _____ that I have made. I vow not to commit the same mistake again. (One Prostration or one Bow)
- Actual Practice/Homework
- Transfer of the Merit:
*The supreme and endless blessings from Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Land of Limitless Light!*

*(The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra)*

Homage to Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (One Prostration or one Bow) - 3 times