

The Prajna Paramita  
**Heart Sutra**

Master Lok To, tr.



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## Preface # 1

When four assemblies jointly invited the great master of Chan Sham to expound the *Heart Sutra* at the Buddhist Library of China, the great master made an all-out effort, although his lecture-series was to last nine gruelling days and even though he was already eighty-four years old; he enjoyed teaching Buddhadharma, and those who came to listen were delighted. During those nine days, there was standing room only every time he lectured, a clear sign of greatness of that Dharma assembly in this five-kasaya period of turbidity. The old master explained the sutra directly, eluding conventional restrictions. Though he used traditional divisions of the Buddha's teaching into classes, on many occasions he dealt broadly with the general idea. Initially, his aim was to explain the *Heart Sutra*, but he commented likewise on the *Lotus Sutra*, and while discussing the doctrine, broached the topic of the world situation as well. Why? Because all dharmas are Buddhadharma, all sutras are one sutra.

Buddhadharma is never separated from the world. All phenomena are Buddhadharma and whoever understands completely does not have a single mote of dust settle on him/her. All his/her words and all his/her thoughts are thereby freed from obstacles. Each of his/her statements, may it be harsh or delicate, is always exactly to the point. Sentient beings receptive to Dharma will have their wisdom eye open upon hearing this teaching, but those with distorted vision are bound to be bewildered and most likely will miss the whole point. Some individuals excel in knowledge of every rule and every convention and their words flow as in catharsis; they may have acquired mastery over the divisions and classifications of the Buddha's teaching, but not understanding its meaning they cannot avoid getting entangled. Playing with words, turning them around they get bewitched, and much as their speech is systematic and orderly, they fail to understand the ultimate, and lose sight of the truth. According to one of the early Buddhist

sages, the entire universe is one sutra of a **sramana**; the entire universe is the eye of a sramana. Although an enlightened person might spend a lot of time reading a sutra, he/she will not carry it around in his/her mind. One might say one is reading sutras not with one's eyes, but with one's wisdom — though reading all day long, there are no sutras to read.

My great old teacher explained the *Heart Sutra* by highlighting its salient points in a prologue: According to his explanation all is really Buddhadharma, every single form and each tiny bit of color is the Middle Way. Speaking naturally and freely, he received support from all sides, precisely because all is Buddhadharma. The great old teacher expounded the *Heart Sutra* every day for nine days, yet the *Heart Sutra* was never mentioned. This is truly the way to expound the *Heart Sutra*.

The master lectured in Mandarin and **upasaka** Wang Ka'i translated into Cantonese, making the Cantonese people very happy. Because of these lectures many of them now understand the *Heart Sutra*. Those who knew both dialects praised him for the integrity of his translation. Having read his notes he made while translating, I concluded in my turn that Upasaka Wang Wai made every effort to retain the original meaning: Every sentence, every word is exactly as it was used by the great old master - only the dialect is different. The translator's descriptions convey even the sounds and the nuances to such a degree that reading them equals hearing them spoken.

Upasaka Wang stood outside the adamantine door and eventually made a breakthrough, using his superior knowledge and skills the way one would use an axe to break down any ordinary door. People entered and discovered what the *Heart Sutra* holds. I believe he understands what his treasury is, what are his virtues; wouldn't you agree?

Disciple Nien An

The year of Wu Hsu, June

## Preface # 2

The Buddhadharma is profound and wonderful, but to expound the unfathomable doctrine in all its depth is far from easy. Some people devote most of their energy and thought to Dharma, teaching or explaining sutras; deducing, searching for terms and supportive quotations, they have not yet reached the level of the Buddha's mind. The one who has not climbed Mount Tai (Tai Shan) can only say "How majestic!" Someone who has not seen the Yellow River, yet describes how great, how vast it is, is not speaking from experience. If one's view regarding Dharma is based on speculation, one's understanding will not be clear and one is not going to be in a position to explain the Dharma successfully to others. When the teacher lacks understanding of the Dharma, it is hard on the students. They must study too hard to make up for the incomplete guidance; they might even become discouraged and give up, fearing failure, and that would be such a pity! When the great master expounded the *Heart Sutra* in the Buddhist Library of China, I translated his lectures from Mandarin into Cantonese. I had taken refuge in the Three Precious Ones from my master many years ago, and Le Kuo, another master, had taught me Buddhadharma. Obliging and kind, he did not abandon me although I was foolish. He guided me patiently to the right path. Bound by my fixed karma I am constantly in a hurry and do not devote enough time to the **Tathagata's** teachings. It is difficult to reduce my ignorance and change my habits and my mind is as dull as it was before I started aspiring to Buddhadharma. The great master T'an Hsu's practice of the **Tao of Bodhi** is most serious. He thoroughly comprehends the unsurpassed Dharma in its implications and his Tao is of the highest integrity. His great reputation has been long established. My goal while learning Buddhadharma was to work with an all-out effort, to follow

faithfully and to be authorized to translate. I feel, nevertheless, uneasy about my own limited knowledge. Prior to his systematic explanation of the sutra, the master presented in everyday language and with perfect freedom of expression the results of thorough and exhaustive study, bringing into play all the subtlety of the wondrous and profound Dharma. It seemed as easy as if he peeled a plantain or stripped a cocoon, using many carefully chosen examples along the way to make his discourse more relevant in terms of daily life. The audience was very impressed and deeply moved. If the great master did not climb Mount Tai, had not seen the Yellow River with his own eyes, how could he express himself so lucidly, so consistently?

During those nine days of his lectures the entire Dharma assembly experienced a deep sense of well-being, and at the conclusion of the series they all agreed to make a collection toward the publication of the master's discourses, to be used as an offering to all mankind and to provide a Dharma condition in the future. I have accepted the responsibility for arranging and organizing my notes of the master's discourses. Other commentaries I have read so far were brief and to the point, but that approach did not suit all readers. Consequently, I chose not to edit my record of those lectures and handed them over complete, integral with the great master's teaching; I did not avoid or dodge any of the problems. I presented the minutes in a straight-forward manner, because people have been having difficulty at times with literary language. I did not take the liberty to emphasize, exaggerate or add anything for fear of losing the meaning and the expressions characteristic of the great master's discourse. May I be forgiven for my awkward presentation.

Wang Wai,  
Disciple of the Three Precious Ones  
The year of Wu Hsu, April, Hong Kong.

## Translator's Introduction

Wonderful Prajna! Mother of all buddhas, the supreme guide and teacher of sages and saints. All that is comes from Prajna and returns to Prajna. Sentient beings experience birth and death in the wheel of life, their mind deeply affected by ignorance, bent by the five **skandhas**, confused and submerged in the ocean of suffering for long **kalpas**. How regrettable! Prajna is said to be the light in the darkness of a very long night. On the ebb and flow of the ocean of suffering, Prajna is a raft. To a house consumed by a blazing fire, Prajna is the rain. Without Prajna the universe is darkness, without Prajna the human mind is ignorant, without Prajna sentient beings suffer without respite. Cultivation of Prajnaparamita, the perfected virtue of knowing truth by intuitive insight, relieves us from our suffering and helps us to overcome, every kind of calamity. All buddhas of the past, present and future attain Prajna, all sages and saints have cultivated Prajna: Therefore, all of us need to cultivate the practice of Prajna.

The wonderful doctrine of Prajna is true and, therefore, real, perfect in all places, at all times and yet it is inconceivable. If one can understand that voidness is not void since the radiant existence exists within its mystery, then at this moment all is perceived as void. Sages and saints become accomplished by means of Prajna, the ultimate ground all sentient beings share. The uninformed majority fails to understand that all existing is produced by causes and conditions, and the self is a false self without any selfhood. Most grasp form and mistake it for the True Existence, enduring immeasurable suffering in the wheel of life. The practice of truth or reality of Prajna excepted, there is no release from suffering in the three realms, no hope of freedom from worldly worries.

It is said in the *Maha Prajna Paramita Sutra* that “all forms are unreal and illusory, and if they are seen as such, the Tathagata will be perceived” because, originally, the true Void is formless. The sutra says further: “The one who sees me by the form and seeks me by the sound cannot perceive the Tathagata because of deluded views.” It is to be understood as saying that the one who perceives the form (or body) and the sound or voice as the Buddha is grasping merely the form. Missing the true meaning of reality he/she is unable to perceive that all dharmas are voidness. Says the sutra further: “A bodhisattva that (still) clings to the false notion of an ego, a personality, a being and a life, is not a bodhisattva”. Bodhisattvas, same as the buddhas, establish themselves in Emptiness, apprehending their ego, personality, being and life as false views rooted in duality. “The one who hears this pure teaching with a clear and faithful mind can attain the really real, the reality that is formless; those freed from all forms are called buddhas” continues the sutra.

The *Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra* is the core of the *Maha Prajna Paramita* in six hundred scrolls. Its teaching is the teaching of supramundane Void as the only true existence, the true Void being mysteriously concealed in the existing. Therefore one might say the substance of this sutra is the characteristic of Void of all dharmas; non-obtaining is the purpose. There is nothing to be obtained from the manifestation of dharmas, all dharmas being void, or empty. Bodhisattva *Avalokitesvara*, coursing deeply in Prajna Paramita comprehended the substance of the Prajna reality: All dharmas, as well as all five skandhas are empty of self, completely free from thought. For this reason the Bodhisattva received the Chinese name “Guan Zi Zai Pu Sa”.

As the substance of all dharmas, Void confirms the true reality of form as non-form. The one who understands that buddha and sentient beings are not different can liberate all sentient beings from disease and calamity, end the cycle of birth and death and attain perfect, complete enlightenment and Nirvana.

The aggregate of form (rupa skandha) stands for all matter as produced by causes and conditions, with no permanent substance and no separate, lasting self. The remaining four skandhas are: Feelings, perceptions, volitions, and consciousness. They all belong to the Dharma of Mind, which is, likewise, void. But mind cannot find expression without form and form cannot manifest itself without mind. Without form, mind cannot be expressed, without mind, form cannot be made manifest. In other words, apart from form there is no mind, apart from mind there is no form. Although they are inseparable, they are not the same, as stated in the sutra: “Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is form.” Being neither form nor mind, all dharmas are empty here and now; this is the wonderful Dharma of Reality as Suchness, transcending all.

The uninformed view the perceptible world with all its beings and non-beings as real or true. Some of them know it to be an illusion produced by interaction of matter and mentality, that it is deceptive and impermanent and must return to the Void. That particular interpretation of void has not been especially created by buddhas and bodhisattvas in order to emphasize that all dharmas are rooted in emptiness, because all existence is originally devoid of self-hood and, therefore, empty. It is what they have been practicing for countless kalpas. All those who attain enlightenment attain understanding of the true substance of reality. They perceive that the five skandhas are empty, and thereby overcome all ills and suffering.

Ultimately, mind and form are not different. Likewise, the rest of the existing world has neither birth nor death, is neither pure nor impure, it neither increases nor decreases because it is originally void (of selfhood). In case one perceives birth as coming and death as going, or if one claims that clean is pure and dirty is defiled, holds “full” to be an increase and “less” a decrease, one is not yet empty of skandhas. These views represent obstacles which bind. Not being able to liberate oneself, how can one hope to liberate others? When one has finally reached the understanding that all existence is produced by causes and conditions and,

therefore, empty of permanent self, then all reality equals stillness and the absence of diversified form. Then birth and death, pure, impure, increase and decrease all are void. Without defiled thought arising, suffering and calamity vanish. The entire range of artificial or contrived forms is the result of the six organs, six kinds of data and six kinds of consciousness. Reality, in truth, does not comprise any realm. When the five skandhas are empty, there is no diversity of form. Without ignorance there is no ending of ignorance and no ending of old age and death.

Supreme Prajna is stillness without form. When one is neither the resultant person, nor the dependent condition, one's suffering ends. When delusory thoughts and views are severed it is the end of the cause of suffering. To relinquish the doctrine of unreality is to block the cessation of suffering. Without the three studies there is no path. If there is no subject of wisdom, that is called "Non-wisdom." Without the object and its domain there is nothing to obtain. True mind is not empty, yet it is Emptiness. Although Bodhi is considered to be an attainment, there is nothing to attain. To perceive the ground of all buddhas is Suchness. There are adornments everywhere and ten-thousand merits manifest themselves. When **Dharma-kaya** becomes manifest, there is only true Emptiness. Mind established in true Emptiness completely encompasses the universe. There should be no seeking; no "inside" and "outside". The universe is not attainable that way. As long as there is something to attain, there are obstacles; thought arises and, there is then an object. To have an object means duality, which means the loss of true reality. It cannot be called Prajnāparamita.

The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara practiced wonderful wisdom and attained enlightenment completely free of attachment. He entered Emptiness, unobstructed, through the gate of liberation. Since there is nothing but Emptiness, (including the body, the mind and all that exists), a bodhisattva is never moved by eulogy, ridicule, slander or fame. Even war, famine or the bubonic plague are dismissed by him/her as illusions taking hold through karma.

Letting go of all that seemingly exists on its own, independently of the mind, sets forth brightness and the one experiencing it will not be intimidated. The Bodhisattva then entered the kind of liberation that is Nirvana. Similarly, the one who has been practicing over a long period of time achieves wonderful calmness which empowers when faced with disturbance. Water cannot submerge him/her nor fire burn. Because he/she attained liberation, he/she is fearless. Seeking Dharma “outside”, in what exists, apparently independent of mind, is proceeding backward, perpetuating a misunderstanding as to what is good and evil, dreaming of gain and holding the cycle of birth and death to be the opposite of Nirvana. It is essential to let go of distinctions such as dreaming versus thinking, right side up, and so on if one wants to enter the gate of liberation through non-action. Only when the name/form is dispatched and there is no mind object, can the original enlightenment become manifest and Nirvana, the perfect liberation in the **Dharma-dhatu**, obtained.

All the buddhas in the three periods depend on Prajnaparamita for the attainment of **Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi**. Because of superb causes, they attain the fruit of sainthood. Consequently, we know that Prajnaparamita can dispose of all kinds of demons. Independent of personality and Dharma, free at all times and in all places, the buddhas manifest or remain concealed depending on potential. The great mantra is beyond comprehension of the Saints and the worldly alike. Endowed with a power to sever ignorance, it radiates brilliance and stillness. This great, bright mantra emanates unadulterated wisdom, and its power to transcend the three realms and attain supreme Nirvana is beyond comparison. Illuminating **the ten directions**, it shines, like the sun, everywhere without discrimination. Such is the unequalled mantra.

The one who can receive and hold this sutra and mantra will liberate all sentient beings from obstacles, release them from suffering and attain complete enlightenment. This is true, and it is real; therefore the Prajnaparamita Mantra says: “Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha.” The great master T’an Hsu

commented that “mantra belongs to the esoteric tradition and accordingly, belongs to the five kinds of texts deemed primal, untranslatable, and inconceivable; when they are translated and explained they will become conceivable dharma and their original meaning and merit will be lost.” In short, the primary purpose of the Prajna Paramita mantra is to liberate self and others, traverse the sea of suffering and, attaining complete enlightenment, reach the serenity and joy that is Nirvana.

Venerable Dharma Master Lok To  
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## Prologue By Grand Master T'an Hsu

The *Hrdaya* or *Heart Sutra* is presently the topic. According to the grand master Chih I of the T'ien T'ai sect, any speaker who endeavors to explain one of the Mahayana sutras should cover five points of the scripture's profound meaning, or five profundities. What are they?

1. Explanation of terms and names.
2. Definition of the substance.
3. Clarification of the principles.
4. Discussion of its (sutra's) application.
5. Discernment of the doctrine.

The five profundities regarding this sutra are as follows: The Dharma and the example stand for the name. All dharmas are empty (or void) of substance. "Nothing there to be attained" is the principle. Breaking off the three hindrances (greed, hatred and ignorance) is the application and the ripening of the fruit is the doctrine. The following details will provide further explanation:

By means of explaining its name, the sutra will be seen and distinguished within the context of all of the Buddha's teaching. Altogether, there were seven reasons for naming a sutra according to seven categories as follows:

The first consists simply of the name of the speaker (of a particular sutra), for example *Amitabha Sutra*, *Vimalakirti Sutra*, etc. In the second category the name designates the teaching conveyed in that particular discourse, such as *Nirvana Sutra* or

*Prajnaparamita Sutra*, to give two examples. In the third category, the sutras are named to elucidate the doctrine they teach by analogy. The title *Brahmajala Sutra* derives from the net of banners used for the adornment of the palace of Mahabrahman.

Each eye of the net is said to have contained a Mani-Pearl and their brightness reflected each other ad infinitum. Likewise, the Buddhadharma is forever reflected through the brightness of the radiant minds of bodhisattvas. In the fourth category, the sutras are named after the person(s) seeking Dharma from the Buddha, i.e., the *Sutra of Prajna for the Benevolent King* spoken by the Buddha. In that sutra, the Buddha teaches sixteen benevolent kings. The Buddha and the kings are the persons and Prajna is the Dharma. The fifth category combines an example specific to each case and the Dharma. The name *Prajnaparamita Hridaya (heart) Sutra* for example, consists of *Prajnaparamita* which is the Dharma, and *Hridaya* or *Heart* which is the specific example. (More on the subject later.)

In the sixth category, the name of a sutra expresses the connection between a person or a being, and an object or event that is the clue to the Dharma. The name *The Sutra of the Bodhisattva's Necklace*, to give an example, hints at the transcendental adornments of a highly accomplished spiritual being. The bodhisattva is the being, the necklace is the object, and their connection is the clue to the Dharma.

The combination of the teacher's name and the name of the Dharma with an analog are included in the seventh category of titles. Consider, for instance, the title *Buddhavatamsaka Mahavaipulya Sutra*: The Buddha is the teacher, Mahavaipulya is the Dharma and *Avatamsaka* is the analog. The Buddha attained the fruit of buddhahood because he returned all the causes of all actions. Avatamsaka is the analog, the ground of buddhahood. Maha means great, suggesting that in this instance the doctrine is applied universally and accommodates all other doctrines. Vaipulya stands for the function of pure karma in all places.

Because of the Buddha's attainment of that stage, the mind encompasses the universe and all is buddha-sphere in the ten directions. Furthermore, each buddha-sphere encompasses a chilicosm: This is over the heads of most because people only know about this world, due to their narrow outlook.

The above seven categories of the titles relevant to Mahayana sutras are based either on individual(s); a particular Dharma; an analog; or any combination of these.

The title of *The Prajnaparamita Heart (or Hridaya) Sutra* combines Dharma, i.e., Prajnaparamita, with a specific example — Heart or Hridaya. The terms used are in **Sanskrit**: Prajna means wisdom, and Prajnaparamita stands for wisdom acquired experientially, by means of intuitive insight, and perfected through cultivation to the level of transcendental knowledge; it is the original wisdom of the mind, or the True Mind. Why, then, add words to it? Because that sutra is axiomatic to the entire collection of the Prajnaparamita scriptures. Just as we hold the heart to be the center, that sutra holds the essence of all the Prajnaparamita texts.

Originally, Prajna manifested itself as intuitive wisdom in all sentient beings since time immemorial. That is called former wisdom or wisdom of life; but people became confused through grasping, and the True Mind fogged over by perverted views manifested itself as obsessive thought-patterns. The cycle of birth and death never stops turning the wheel of life, and it is difficult to get out. Actually, the True Mind is never separate from us, not even for one moment. The Buddha spoke the Prajnaparamita Dharma for close to twenty-two years. Recorded and compiled, the resulting text consisted of six hundred scrolls, classified into eight groups.

The differences that existed were merely differences in expedient means, adjusted to suit a particular potential, and in every case the aim was to free those who listened from perverted views, abandon grasping, return to the original source and understand their True

Mind. In other words, the Prajna teaching is aimed to remove confusion, bring about recognition of one's own True Mind, and return to the truth. According to this doctrine the mind has three layers: First is the layer of the deluded mind; the second is the Prajna mind, and the third is the center, the heart, or the pivot of the Prajna mind, and such is also the relation of this sutra to the doctrine. The *Heart Sutra* is the axis of all the Prajnaparamita teachings. Taking further the example of the mind, one might call the *Heart Sutra* the center of the central sutras. If we compare the core of this sutra with the worldlings' mind, the mind of Prajna is the true mind and the mind of worldlings is the deluded mind.

Again, the center of the mind's center may be perceived as consisting of three layers, i.e., the mind of saints, the mind of bodhisattvas and that of buddhas. Minds of worldlings are immersed in suffering of many kinds. The mind of a saint, such as the accomplished individual of the two vehicles, is approaching buddhahood; next comes the mind of a bodhisattva with only one more rebirth to endure and at the center of mind's center is buddha or the Ultimate or True Mind. The mind of *Prajnaparamita Sutra* is the True Mind, also referred to as the Essential Wisdom. Essential Wisdom we are speaking of is to be distinguished from an awareness of objects or environment and their use and value usually characterized as "knowledge" by worldlings.

The term "Paramita" is in Sanskrit and it means reaching the other shore. Prajnaparamita or the Wonderful Wisdom, coursing like a boat, transports all sentient beings across the sea of defilement to the other shore that is Nirvana. The word Nirvana, also from Sanskrit, means transcending birth and death, or simply liberation. Prajnaparamita is, therefore, the Essential Wisdom and the center of all kinds of prajna. Most every sutra functions at two levels simultaneously: One level is general, the other, specific, but the *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* is just specific: Although its title includes the word sutra due to usage, the text does not function at the general level.

“Sutra” in Sanskrit originally meant to uphold, and when applied to principles, it upholds the principles of all buddhas moving upward, downward upholding sentient beings according to their potential. If the one who understands Buddhadharma upholds the principles of all the past buddhas, he/she can liberate sentient beings. Whoever can understand the theory behind the flawless, accomplished Buddha, can understand also how to uphold the potential of sentient beings. Sutra means a shortcut, and a well frequented path. It means the way to complete enlightenment.

The second profundity is the definition of substance. What is the substance of the *Heart Sutra*? Starting with “Oh, Sariputra, the characteristic of the voidness of all dharmas is non-arising” until “there is no wisdom, and there is no attainment whatsoever” is the definition of the substance. Consequently, the characteristic of the voidness of all dharmas” is the substance of this sutra.

The third profundity is focused on the clarification of the purpose of the sutra. As we already understand the meaning of this sutra’s name as well as the meaning of its substance, we should have no difficulty understanding the sutra’s principle or purpose. We should understand its principle according to the sentence “There is nothing to be attained.” When there is nothing to attain, one is able to discern the characteristic of Emptiness.

As to the discussion of the application of this sutra — it being the fifth profundity — it is to break off the three obstacles.

What are these? They are 1) passions; 2) deeds (past karma); and 3) retribution. Problems, worries and suffering all are related directly to the three obstacles.

There are two kinds of retribution: 1. Being the resultant person, 2. Being in the dependent condition(s). Being the resultant person means being what we are physically, our body. Some are strong, in good health and others respect them for it. Some are unsightly, unwholesome and others dislike them. The strong, the weak, the long-lived and the short-lived, the beautiful, the ugly, the wise as

well as the foolish, all have varied causes in their previous lives, and accordingly receive diverse effects in their present existence. Those who have produced good causes in their previous existence enjoy good health, longevity, beauty and wisdom in this life. Those who generated evil causes in their past lives have various deficiencies and shortcomings in the present. That is what being resultant person means.

Being in the dependent condition(s) means one's circumstances, including clothing, sustenance and shelter. Obviously, those who have all their needs satisfied live happily; favorable events occur, yet they do not have to exert themselves, because of good causes in their previous lives. A resultant person relies on dependent conditions for survival and the conditions, in turn, have their causes in the past existence. Good karma, practice and deeds that benefit others at present will produce favorable effects in future existence.

The connection between cause and effect must not be doubted. The obstacles resulting from past deeds come into existence because we live in this world. It really does not make any difference who is a lay person and who is a monk or a nun. Most are involved in interactions inevitably connected with existence within society, which frequently produce circumstances generating obstacles through karma. Karma is of three kinds: Good, bad and unmovable.

The obstacle of passion arises because of retribution for deeds done in the past. The circumstances produced then are favorable or adverse according to karma. Strife to achieve one's goal combines with the confusion that usually accompanies it, produces numerous defilements and the result is suffering. That is the obstacle of passion.

The original defilements count six in number: Greed, hatred, ignorance, aggregates, doubt and heterodox views.

All three obstacles are severed naturally when the meaning of the sutra is thoroughly understood because the application of this sutra is breaking off the three obstacles. To get rid of the three obstructions is to be released from many kinds of suffering. The suffering is all-pervasive and even devas must endure it, though to a much lesser degree than humans. Therefore the purpose of all Buddhadharma is to depart from suffering and dwell in happiness.

Discernment of the doctrine: Since we have already reached some understanding as to the meaning of the sutra in terms of the four profundities, i.e., its name, substance, principles and application, we are in position to proceed to the last one - the discernment of doctrine. The entire body of the Buddha's teaching can be divided into five phases and the example of five ways milk is used to provide nourishment can be applied to situate the phase of the *Heart Sutra* in the context of the entire body of the Buddha's teachings.

While teaching, the Buddha frequently referred to the example of the white cow of Snow Mountains. On the slopes of the Snow Mountains grow many varieties of grass that make the cow healthy and strong. The milk is wholesome and rich in nutrients and helps those who drink it better to survive. Similarly, the Buddhadharma can nourish our wisdom, and therefore the example of five uses of milk appropriately illustrates the five stages of the Buddha's teaching.

Initially, the Buddha spoke the essence of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (Hwa Yen in Chinese), it being the first phase of his teaching. It was the teaching as formulated in the Mahayana sutras, and those with obstructions could not rise to its level. It was like offering fresh, raw milk to a baby; those with obstructions could not rise to its level.

The second phase is represented by the *Agamas*, comparable to thin, sour milk. The Buddha spoke the *Avatamsaka* first so that the eyes of Mahayana bodhisattvas would open to the view of the

buddhas. At that time many of shallow root could not and would not accept these highest teachings; though they had eyes they could not see; though they had ears, they could not hear. Though they had mouths, they could not ask. It was as if they were deaf and mute. The Buddha continued teaching the *Avatamsaka* for three weeks to convert all those with bodhisattva potential. Many who could not listen later formulated the **Theravada** tradition. In the Deer Park, the Buddha chose to teach the Agamas thereby making his teaching comparatively easier to understand. Five of his friends attained deep understanding and became his first monks (bhiksus) and that marked the beginning of what later became the Theravada tradition. The Buddha taught Agamas for close to twelve years. Those who could not follow the teachings during the Avatamsaka phase can be compared to babies, unable to digest fresh milk, but can take it thinned down or after the milk was allowed to turn. The teaching of Agamas is comparable to milk that was thus made easier to digest.

The third phase is Vaipulya, interpreted as containing doctrines of equal relevance. That phase is comparable to milk of full strength that was allowed to turn in order to be easily digestible. During that time the Buddha spoke four kinds of teachings, and the division into Theravada and Mahayana was not marked. The phase is said to have lasted for approximately eight years.

The fourth phase, that of Prajna, is believed to have lasted for twenty-two years; it can be compared to the ripened curd. The nourishment it provides is concentrated as well as digestible.

The fifth phase relates to the *Saddharma Pundarika* and to the *Nirvana* Sutras. Returning to the milk simile, it has the quality of clarified butter. During that period the Buddha is said to have taught Mahayana Dharma, the unimpeded teaching pointing directly at the mind.

To summarize, the Buddha taught Dharma in five stages and each of these displays two facets: Expedience and reality. Expedience means following the causes and conditions (such as the sentiment and potential of sentient beings in a given situation); Reality equals Truth or the absence of falsehood. The Buddha spoke truth of his unsurpassed wisdom directly.

1) The earliest stage is that of the *Avatamsaka Mahavaipulya Sutra*. The *Avatamsaka* is said to consist of expedience and reality (or truth) in equal proportion. Expedience means promoting the understanding of reality. The Teaching Of Reality makes the entry into the wisdom of buddhas possible: The first stage includes both expedience and reality.

2) The stage of the Agamas is focused on expedience. The Buddha adapted his teachings to the potential of sentient beings, specifically of those in the world; consequently, he did not discuss the superb Dharma at that time. Agama is a Sanskrit term, meaning incomparable. The name “Incomparable Dharma” is intended to convey the conviction that nothing can be compared with the Agamas.

3) In that stage, the proportion between expedience and reality is about three parts to one, expedience being predominant. What are the expedient teachings? The first was later developed into the sutra section of the *Tripitaka*. It deals with the two vehicles of *Sravaka* and Pratyeka Buddha in relation to their ending the cycle of birth and death of allotment only, but not the cycle of mortal changes. The two vehicles have, nevertheless, birth and death. The second expedient characteristic of the third stage is the earliest formulation of Mahayana: The Dharma of the attainment of non-birth. The third expedient is the teaching of differentiation. The fourth expedient belonging to this stage is the Dharma of Reality. It manifests progressively the doctrine of perfect teachings. During the third stage the Buddha is said to have taught these four different approaches.

4) The stage of Prajna, or the fourth stage, is reflected in the Prajna scriptures. It is said to be composed of two parts expedience and one part reality, i.e. the Mahayana teaching, or the great vehicle.

5) The fifth is that of the *Saddharma Pundarika* and *Nirvana* Sutras, is the stage of the Dharma of Reality or Truth without concern regarding expedience. At that stage the Buddha had little time left and could not afford to spend it worrying about the potential of the assembly. Following his delivery of the *Bequeathed Teaching* which lasted one day and one night, the Buddha entered his final Nirvana.

The *Heart Sutra*, the topic of the detailed commentary below, belongs to the fourth stage according to the above scheme. It is said to consist of two parts expedient and one part Reality, and it is comparable to well ripened curd.

# Prajnaparamita Hrdaya Sutra

**Translated by Tripitaka Master  
Hsuan Tsang of the Tang Dynasty With  
Commentary by Grand Master Tan Hsu**

Of the seven known translations of the *Heart Sutra* the one by the Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang is the most popular. *Tripitaka* is a Sanskrit term designating Buddhist canon, a Buddhist text which consists of three sections: 1. Sutras or original texts, or in other words, Buddhadharma. 2. Vinaya or rules of discipline and 3. Sastras or commentaries related to theory and practice, as well as to the teachings in relation to non-Buddhist argument. Dharma master Hsuan Tsang understood the *Tripitaka* thoroughly and therefore the title of Tripitaka Master was bestowed upon him. He did not study canonical texts primarily for personal satisfaction; his purpose was to make them available to others and he acted in compliance with a direct order from the emperor. Dharma Master Hsuan Tsang is a very famous sage from the T'ang Dynasty. The description of the arduous way he obtained the scriptures is known to every family and household and there is no need to delve into it at this time. The Prajna literature is very extensive; it covers approximately twenty years of the Buddha's teaching career. The seven translations of the sutra display minor differences but the essential meaning was respected in each case. There is no major difference between the seven of them. According to the Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva's translation, this sutra was spoken by the Buddha. Every translation of the *Heart Sutra* includes a commentary which consists of three parts: 1) The reason for the sutra; 2) the method used to convey the meaning; 3) the sutra's history. The *Heart Sutra* was composed of excerpts from the

*Mahaprajnapdranita* texts, and simple words were carefully employed to convey profound meanings. Although the Chinese version contains only two hundred sixty single characters, nevertheless it embodies the entire Prajna literature in all its depth and subtlety. As to the reason for this sutra, we only need to look at the method used to put the text together and we realize that the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was chosen as the model for the rest of us, and that the sutra was spoken by the Buddha. To understand it thoroughly is to understand all of the Prajna literature. We are not going to address the sutra's history at this time.

### **“When The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara”**

The opening words introduce the one practicing the Dharma. The Prajna teachings were spoken by the Buddha during the fourth stage, his purpose being to guide those practicing what later became the approach of the Theravadins toward the practice of Mahayana Dharma. Whoever practices according to the **Small Vehicle** practices virtuous conduct and Dharma primarily to benefit self. The Mahayana practice, on the other hand, is aimed to benefit self and others. To liberate all sentient beings implies concern for the well-being of all people. Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was chosen to demonstrate to the person of the Small Vehicle mentality the full dimension of Mahayana teaching. The name Avalokitesvara lends itself to several interpretations: The Chinese version, i.e. Guan Zi Zai, means the attainment of the bodhisattva stage and the cause-ground for practicing Dharma.

Why did we, the Chinese, choose to call the Bodhisattva Guan Zi Zai? Because he has attained the fruition of the path. Visualizing and contemplating the name we come to understand its meaning. Guan means to observe and to illuminate: The one who practices the bodhisattva path not only illuminates own mind, but the world as well; practicing in that manner one can be sure to obtain liberation. That is what Guan Zi Zai means.

What is the meaning of Zi Zai? The one who is able to halt the two kinds of birth and death and the **five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions** can be called Zi Zai. To observe own self is to discover body and mind bound by five skandhas and six organs with their corresponding six data; we are not free, and therefore, not Zi Zai.

The name Avalokitesvara comes from the ground causes of the Bodhisattva's Dharma practice while on an island, perceiving the sounds of the world, rooted in time as they are, rising and falling with the ebb and flow of the ocean. From the sound of the tide rising and falling, the Bodhisattva attained enlightenment, perfectly and completely comprehending the Dharma of birth and non-birth.

Someone asked how and why did the Bodhisattva attain the Tao and became enlightened by observing the ebb tide? The Bodhisattva, while practicing by the sea, contemplated the sound as it increased, decreased and then came to full stop, occurring simultaneously with the ebb tide. He pondered the root of causes and finally attained enlightenment by understanding that all existence is subject to birth and death and, therefore, is impermanent. Yet the hearing is timeless, hence beyond birth and death. Those without practice can hear, but do not listen. While hearing the sounds they only think of "outside"; the sound of the tide has birth and death, but the nature of hearing does not. Why? Because even when the sound of the tide stops, our capacity or nature for hearing does not. We can still hear the wind in the branches of a tree, the songs of birds and the shrill sound of the cicadas. Had our capacity for hearing vanished with the sound, we should not be able to hear ever again. Even when all is quiet late at night, we are aware of silence or non-sound, because of our capacity for hearing. There are two kinds of hearing: One comes and goes in response to stimulation, the other functions independently of it. Thus we can safely say that although sounds have birth and death, the hearing capacity does not. It actually never vanishes. All existence, including dharmas, is impermanent

and therefore subject to birth and death - just like magic, like bubbles or like shadows. The nature of hearing, on the other hand, can never be destroyed.

In that manner we come to know the bright and accomplished nature of hearing. Our mind accords with whatever we observe: If we observe birth and death, there is birth and death. If we observe non-birth and non-death, there is no birth and no death. All things are produced by the mind; they are completed through contemplation. Everyone has a mind and consequently a potential to formulate the world according to own intentions, but without effort he/she will not succeed. Nature is the substance, mind, the function. The function never separates from the substance, nor the substance from the function. Function and substance, though separate, are causally connected. Nature governs the mind and the mind is the nature's function; they mesh. Although both retain their own character, they are inseparable. Dharma practice can start right at this point. One needs to understand one's mind, see one's True Nature and following that, attain the Tao.

The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara practice makes one listen to, and be mindful of one's own nature and by means of listening attain the wonderful function. Listening to own nature has no boundaries and it can accommodate all sentient beings while saving them. We worldlings only react or become concerned about what we construe to be external or outside sound. Negligent of our True Nature, we hardly ever try to listen to it and our hearing is partial as a result of it. When we listen to own nature, our listening is not delimited by time. Perceiving one's nature thus, one's listening is complete and continual and one's joy and happiness are permanent.

When phonetically transliterated into Chinese, the Sanskrit word "Bodhisattva" produces two characters: Pu Sa or Bo Sa. Bodhi (Pu or Bo in Chinese) means perfect knowledge or wisdom by which person becomes buddha. Sattva (Sa in Chinese) stands for an enlightened and enlightening being, which is to say that person

has already enlightened his own nature by freeing him/herself from birth and death, and helps other sentient beings to do likewise. Worldlings, however, hold on to feelings and disregard or oppose the doctrine. Confusion and frustration take them through the samsaric suffering in the cycle of existence. To perceive one's Self-Nature by listening is the bodhisattva's way out of the round of birth and death.

The first line of the sutra informs us of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara as the appointed practice leader of the Prajna Assembly. He is going to teach us how to follow his Dharma practice and establish mindfulness by listening to Self Nature.

### **“Was Coursing In The Deep Prajna Paramita”**

This line specifies the Dharma of the Bodhisattva Practice. “Coursing” and “deep” relate to its quality. At one time, one thousand, two hundred and fifty-five bhiksus attained **the four fruits** of the **Arhat**; they practiced the Dharma of the Small Vehicle which leads to the end of their birth and death allotment. What is the birth and death allotment? It means every sentient being's body is merely a portion, or a part; whether short, long or middle length, the life of sentient being must end. One round of birth and death is referred to as allotment. Whoever practices the Dharma of the Small Vehicle will have the conversion of birth and death even after he/she has come to the end of the allotment of birth and death. What is the conversion of birth and death?

Our distorted thought pattern is the root of our failure to escape to escape from the cycle of birth and death. One of the recognized features of thought is to quiver and to move on, and the pattern and its movement normally neither change nor become suspended as long as there is consciousness. Every thought has its beginning, its duration and its end. Due to feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness every thought has its conversion into birth and

death. The activity is never suspended, and thus the conversion of birth and death takes place, generated by feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness. Every rise and fall of delusive thought marks the conversion of birth and death. If our Dharma practice does not take us back to the truth, we are not going to be able to end the conversion of birth and death and that would hinder us from discerning the Buddha's point of view. To practice Dharma correctly, one should endeavor to liberate one's thought from delusion; the attainment and practice of truth are the means to the attainment of Prajna. Without these, how can we say we are coursing in the deep Prajnaparamita? To end the samsaric cycle, but not the conversion of birth and death of thought is a wisdom that is shallow. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara attained Truth, thereby bringing the two kinds of birth and death to a complete halt. That is the deep Prajna, the awe-inspiring wisdom: It is beyond discriminating knowledge, has to be, since discrimination is one of the manifestations of duality, or birth and death.

Paramita is a Sanskrit term meaning virtue perfected to the level of transcendence. In the context of Buddhist practice it means to traverse the sea of Samsara, or the sea of birth and death, and reach Nirvana. The words "coursing in the deep Prajnaparamita" attest to the Bodhisattva's practice of all three kinds of wisdom, i.e., listening, thinking and practice; thus he attained the radiant wisdom, or the Ultimate. This paragraph offers description of correct Dharma practice and its purpose is to provide guidance for the assembly, including those who have attained partial understanding and insight.

### **“He Perceived That All Five Skandhas Are Empty”**

During his practice of contemplation and illumination the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara attained Truth. By means of his minutely subtle Dharma practice he penetrated the five skandhas, perceiving them as empty.

The five skandhas, namely form, feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness continually provide five occasions for craving and clinging. Two types of craving and clinging characterize the human mind: 1) Craving and clinging to form and 2) Craving and clinging to mind. Clinging to form is the domain of the form skandha; the remaining four skandhas constitute the domain of the mind and the clinging to mind is generated in those four realms. All our grasping, manifested in our attachments and aversions, is generated and developed due to the activity of these four skandhas. Craving and clinging emerge at birth, and the Buddhadharma aims to sever them.

The initial clinging is ego bound. Ego is the anchor of our volition to grasp and to possess, the root of our attachments and aversions, and via these, the root of our suffering. Clinging to the body as the true self begins to manifest in the early childhood: Normally, the six organs produce six types of data, six kinds of consciousness and the four skandhas along with them; jointly these constitute the delusory ego. Craving and clinging is spontaneous at birth; at that time, ego is formulated simultaneously with the form skandha. The rest of our existence is built up by our countless ego-affirming acts involving all the skandhas, but most prominently the skandha of feeling; its domain contains pleasant, unpleasant and neutral or indifferent types of feelings.

The body depends on the mind to be provided with pleasant occasions and protected from discomfort. There must be thinking, i.e., perceptions, followed by action, and action means volition. They, in turn, require established bases of knowledge, and that is the role of the consciousness skandha. Children are sent to school to learn, to acquire knowledge that prepares them for the future. When there is sufficient knowledge, there is action, invariably preceded by thinking as planning, imagining, remembering and so on. The body then receives the support it needs. There is ego-grasping, and confusion is generated by the five skandhas as the ego-notion imposes itself on the process of experience.

Once it has become clear beyond any doubt that this present body is not the self, that one can only say “mine”, or “my body”, all delusion regarding the five skandhas is broken off, and ignorance along with it. What a pity that worldlings get so deeply confused and completely fail to understand this brilliant doctrine; grasping the skandhas and the ego-notion, they twist the data to fit their own picture as to how reality should be. Actually, the body is not the self; it is like a house that I might call mine all right, but to consider it to be myself would be a ridiculous error. In the same way, I can’t say “this body is myself” but I can say “this body is mine.”

What is the real self? Our Original Nature is our real self. It depends on the body temporarily; the body is not different from a house. A house is completed and then gradually deteriorates; similarly, the body has birth and death and the part in between. Our True Nature (real self), on the other hand, has neither birth nor death. It is enduring and unchanging. The teaching of Real Self and of illusory ego is basic to all Buddhadharma. When it is understood, clinging is easily broken off.

The teaching related to the five skandhas is referred to as the Dharma of Assemblage. Skandha is a Sanskrit term used by the Buddha in reference to the five components of human so-called entity. A skandha is a constituent of personality and it also means accumulation in the sense that we constantly accumulate good and bad in our mind. The Dharma of Five Skandhas is comparable to five kinds of material. The mountains, rivers and the entire universe, the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the three periods, even the six realms of existence and the four kinds of worthies — all are produced solely by the five skandhas.

Who are the four worthies? 1. The Arhat of Theravada, 2. The **Middle Vehicle** of Pratyeka buddha, 3. The Mahayana Bodhisattva, 4. the Buddha, the ultimate fruit of the path. What are the six realms of existence? Three are good and three are evil. Devas, humans, and asuras inhabit the three good realms; animals, hungry

ghosts and hell-dwellers belong to the three evil realms. It does not make any difference whether mundane or supramundane; they are all produced and completed by the five skandhas. By taking the right path, (the ultimate path) one may become an Arhat, **Pratyeka-buddha**, Bodhisattva, or Buddha.

A good action can be good in three different ways; likewise, an evil action can be so in three ways. Worldlings, confused because of not knowing or knowing wrongly get carried away and lose control over their actions; evil in the world increases, giving rise to five turbidities. There is the turbidity of kalpa in decay, turbidity of views, turbidity of passions, turbidity of living beings and turbidity of life (the result of turbidity of human beings). Turbidity means turmoil. The turmoil of kalpa in decay is the product of the form skandha; Sentient beings in the **Saha** world grasp form or material (body), misconstrue that as their True Self, not realizing that all dharmas are produced by the mind, and give rise to the skandha of feeling. The egocentric bias goes hand in hand with craving for gratification of the senses or body and the result is turbidity of view. Turbidity of passions is generated by the perception skandha. Seeking gratification of the senses brings greed in its wake, manifesting as desire for wealth and subsequent strife for personal gain. Sooner or later, sound ethics are abandoned and volition to grasp and to possess is given free rein. At this point the worldlings become totally engulfed in self-delusion, generating unspeakable amount of defilements.

Turbidity of passions comprises family defilements, societal defilements, national defilements, world-defilements. While they are alive, human beings are the victims of turbidity in the realm of volition. The egocentric bias engenders the cyclic pattern of existence and perpetuates itself until the end of time. However, time is moving on; no matter how much of it we might have, still, we will die in the end. The confusion of worldlings as regards the real or True Self is the turbidity of living beings. Turbidity of life is caused by the consciousness skandha. The turbidity of living beings will eventually produce a decrease in the life span as well

as in size of each individual body. The Agamas speak of a certain stage in the history of mankind, when the life span was eighty-four thousand years and the individual height was one-hundred-sixty feet. There was a gradual decrease in both the life span and the height. Presently, to live seventy or eighty years is considered long life, and the average height is five to six feet. Somewhere in the very distant future, claims the ancient text, the life span of humans will last ten years and the average height will be close to three feet. It will be the time of upheavals and disasters of all kinds.

Actions considered sound today may be viewed as unskillful, even unethical tomorrow as a result of the ego inserting itself into the field of perception. Countless defilements develop when skillful or beneficial actions are re-evaluated, come to be viewed as lacking in expedience, and Buddhadharma is dismissed as irrelevant. Confusion resulting from ignorance is conducive to a lifestyle that has a detrimental effect on both the life span and the condition of the body. Turbidity first corrupts, then sooner or later takes over. Worldlings need to generate compassion for this declining world, resolve to uphold at least the basic code of ethics and, perhaps, study the Buddhadharma; furthermore, they should refrain from taking the life of any living being and be mindful of their actions. These should be skillful and cause no harm to others. If that is accomplished, there may still be time to save this world.

In a few words, the five turbidities are completely within the realm of the five skandhas. The skandhas combined constitute the basis of all dharmas, of all sentient beings in the ten directions and of all worlds in all the universes. The skandhas are, furthermore, the substance of the incandescent True Existence, being at the same time the transcendental Void or Emptiness. (The relation of true existence to transcendental Emptiness will be discussed later). Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, relying on his luminous wisdom, “perceived that all five skandhas are empty.” The Bodhisattva practiced deep Prajnaparamita, i.e., the root of Ultimate Reality, and attained the supreme Tao, realizing that skandhas are empty of self. To arrive at that stage is enlightenment, the state completely

clear of turbidity. From then on, all dharmas are understood as one's True Nature. When that level is attained, the mind comprehends the universe as the Self, and the Self, as the universe; the grand view is boundless. In short, Void or Emptiness means the absence of duality, of accepting and rejecting. There are five categories of void: the obstinate void; the annihilation void; the void of analysis; the void of global comprehension; the void of true supramundane existence.

What is obstinate void? Clinging to the space in front of us. What is annihilation void? It is the kind grasped by those on the heterodox or outer path; the views that abounded in India, as well as the assorted philosophical positions based on cognitive patterns which neglect the Buddhist axiom stating that all is generated by the mind; claims to the effect that there is existence beyond one's cognitive realm and that is where the dharmas are. Heading full speed into large-scale confusion, the supporters of such views choose to grasp that void, positing it as the prevalent characteristic of existence.

The remaining three kinds of void are introspectively oriented Buddhadharma and constitute the Dharma of Void or Emptiness as the true nature of the mind, in contrast with the teaching of the Small Vehicle that focuses on form (*rupa skandha*). The supramundane path of the Small Vehicle (Theravada) and that of Sravaka and bodhisattva of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) are rooted in the last three kinds of void just mentioned. They are neither the obstinate void of worldlings nor the annihilating void of the outer or heterodox path. The concept or the doctrine of the void is sometimes called the nature of the void or the theory of nature: The meaning is the same.

I shall discuss presently the four subdivisions of Buddhadharma according to T'ien T'ai, and the three kinds of void relevant to Buddhadharma as they are understood and applied in each of the four subdivisions, to wit: 1. Tsang Jiao (Theravada teachings based on the Tripitaka), 2. Tung Jiao (Theravada and Mahayana

interrelated), 3. Bie Jiao (particular or distinctive Mahayana, characterized as the bodhisattva path), 4. Yuan Jiao (original or complete Mahayana).

The mundane path of Theravada does not accommodate the radiant Truth at its fullest, although in some cases a Mahayana teaching may be perceived as Theravadin by a practitioner of the Small Vehicle. The mundane path is grounded in minute analysis of form (rupa) Dharma and mind (nama) Dharma, and how their interaction contributes to the illusion of a separate ego. The term dharma may be interpreted as meaning things, method, formula or standard; form is distinguished through shape and color, mind through its function of knowing. Our body is composed of four elements, i.e., earth, water, fire and wind; these have the character of solidity, viscosity, temperature and vibration, respectively.

The body is a mass of material and does not possess the faculty of knowing an object; matter changes under physical conditions and because of this feature it is called form. The element of earth is like the body, complete with skin, flesh, tendons, bones in terms of weight, softness and hardness. The element of water includes all bodily liquids, all that relates to fluidity and viscosity. The element of fire covers temperature in terms of warmth in varying degrees of intensity up to the absence of warmth. The element of air manifests as vibration in terms of movement. The body manifests the three characteristics of existence, i.e., impermanence, unsatisfactory condition and the absence of selfhood. Illness and death are caused by an imbalance of the elements, their scarcity or absence according to the Theravada teaching. Birth and death are the natural result of body being compounded from these four elements.

What is mind? Mind is knowing without form. What is form? Form is shape without the capacity for knowing. Uninstructed worldlings view their physical body (form), actually a collection of elements, as their self or ego and therefore cannot leave the ocean of birth and death. Deeply confused about truth, they feel

oppressed because of wrong views. The only correct way to put it is to say “this body is my body; the mind is my real self.” The knowing consciousness is the master; the body, only a slave. Let us consider, for example, someone who, though interested in attending this lecture, initially did not want to make the effort because of feeling tired. But then he/she had the following thought: “Hearing the commentary on that sutra will increase my wisdom and reduce my defilement; I must go and listen to the Dharma.” Having persuaded him/herself, he/she got on the bus and came here to hear this Dharma. Where did the initiative originate? Clearly, it originated in the mind; the mind is the master and the body is the slave.

Unfortunately, a person of mundane concerns is very confused, mistaking the slave for the master, and consequently there is birth and death., To perceive the brilliant Dharma is to enlighten the mind to itself; originally the mind had neither birth nor death. Although the body dies and vanishes, the mind is imperishable and indestructible: Understanding this experientially marks the end of the cyclic pattern of existence, the exit from the ocean of suffering.

Mind is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing. The six natures or capacities for seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing are the nature of the mind. The Buddha spoke Dharma on numberless occasions for forty-nine years. All of his teachings were expedient means, and all his explanations and discourses were delivered for the purpose of helping sentient beings to be freed from attachment and delusion and to return to the Truth. He dealt predominantly with two dharmas: Form and mind. According to the teaching later formulated as the Small Vehicle, form and mind are two. The practitioner should know the mind while not abandoning the form (body). Where does mind dwell? According to physiology the heart is also the mind (the organ) but efforts to prove it have been inconclusive so far.

According to some religions, the mind resides in the brain; however, all attempts to find some proof to support such theory proved, again, negative. Whenever people tried to find the very source, to pinpoint the exact site where the mind is, the results were nil in each case. Since mind is neither form nor name, in the context of Buddhadharma it is expediently termed “Emptiness” or “Void” (Sunyata in Sanskrit).

On that particular day, represented for us by the eighth of December, while he was absorbed in deep samadhi, the Buddha attained complete enlightenment. Noticing the bright morning star in the eastern sky, he observed that the nature of seeing can be a kind of connecting: He realized his own nature of seeing is boundless, and his first statement following his enlightenment was: “Wonderful, wonderful! All sentient beings have the same wisdom and virtue as the Tathagata, but because of the obstacle of illusion and grasping they cannot attain.”

The expression “sentient beings” means produced by, composed of many, not being just a separate “one”. The human body, for example, appears to be of one piece, yet it is composed of many concealed parts, such as the heart, liver, kidneys, spleen, the lungs, the pores, even some parasites. This means that a person, even though being an entity, is also sentient beings. To reiterate, the Buddha’s view was that all sentient beings have the same virtue and the same wisdom as the Tathagata - the pure, luminous virtue of Dharma-dhatu. However, the sentient beings are confused, do not return to their Original Nature and do not purify the Dharma-kaya and therefore they are called sentient beings, or different from buddhas.

The Buddha saw a star in the eastern sky following his enlightenment, and the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara practiced the three kinds of wisdom of the instructed ones, meditated on sound and attained the stage of Bodhi. When all conditions are generated by one’s own mind, that is the Original Mind. The ordinary person of mundane concerns looks at an object and considers that seeing,

and from that moment on adheres to the view that a table is a table, a person is a person; taking the object of seeing he/she fails to realize its subject. The view prevents him/her from being able to abandon both subject and object (meaning duality); how can he/she ever understand original seeing? He/she twists the process of experience to fit his/her own concept of reality, intensifying the delusion. To perceive one's Original Nature as shapeless and formless is to perceive the true Void. People's potentials are dissimilar. Whoever can understand his/her Original Nature is clear-eyed; the one who takes the object of seeing and grasps the form is caught in turbidity.

Practitioners of the method promulgated by the Small Vehicle perceive mind as mind, form as form, and conceive them as distinct and different. That method focuses on observing the observer. The connection with one's own nature is apparently not taken into consideration.

Seeing is the nature of the eye; hearing is the nature of the ear organ; smelling is the nature of the nose organ, tasting is the nature of the tongue organ; touching is the nature of the body and knowing is the nature of the mind. If the practice is based on this point of view, only partial Void can be attained, although it can also be termed "enlightenment" according to Buddhist understanding. Followers of Theravada hold that clothing, nourishment and lodging are deemed to result from conditioning causes and are not the concern of full-time practitioners. These have surpassed the worldlings and therefore are viewed as holy by the devotees sharing the same tradition.

The Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva attained enlightenment by perceiving his Original Nature; he abandoned the duality inherent in subject and object, whereupon he attained the Middle Way perfectly and completely. That is the pure, radiant Dharma-kaya, quite different from the accomplishments in the tradition of the Small Vehicle. At one point in history one thousand two hundred and fifty-five disciples of the Buddha became Arhats:

Nonetheless, their attainment was not exhaustive regarding the Ultimate Truth, but merely the end of the birth and death allotment. The study and practice of the bodhisattva Path was their opportunity for expanding their practice by following the example of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.

Comprehension of the immaterial substance of Reality marks the intermediate level of the bodhisattva career, sometimes referred to as the first gate of Mahayana and of the Middle Vehicle. It is considered to be a higher doctrinal accomplishment than that of the Small Vehicle. In the intermediate level the Void of the five skandhas is attained and, accordingly, obstinate view is abandoned.

The immaterial substance of Reality is perceived, but the perception of five skandhas as the superb existence is still lacking. It is not actually necessary to abandon the body after the attainment of the Void. Everyone has form (body) and knowing; having attained the Void does not mean one has to endeavor to abandon the body. Void means simply the absence of grasping.

True existence is Emptiness not of this world. The complete, perfect meaning of true existence is Void not of this world; containing neither partial existence nor partial Void, it is the Middle Way, also known as the Ultimate Reality. In short, a mind that does not discriminate by means of craving and clinging is the mind that understands the meaning of “not of this world”; though non-existent, it is the True Existence. There is no void, yet it is the supramundane, recondite Emptiness. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, in his great wisdom, does not allow his mind to discriminate: Seeing is seeing, hearing is hearing, smelling is smelling, tasting is tasting, knowing is knowing, understanding is understanding; the six organs do not dwell on the six types of data. Enlightened by means of perceiving the sound of the tide, he comprehended the nature of hearing as non-abiding; mind freed of grasping attains the wonderful Dharma of the Inconceivable: That is the “True Existence in the supramundane Void.”

## “Thus He Overcame All Ills And Suffering”

He perceived that all five skandhas are void, thereby transcending all suffering. Of suffering there are two kinds: 1. The suffering of birth and death of allotment, 2. The suffering of birth and death of mortal changes. All ills and defilements mean suffering.

According to the interpretation of the teachings, when it is fully understood that all five skandhas are empty five fundamental conditions of passions and delusion are severed and two kinds of birth and death are over. What are the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions? They are: 1) wrong view, very common in the **Triloka** (three realms); 2) clinging, or attachment in the realm of desire; 3) clinging or attachment in the realm of form; 4) clinging or attachment in the formless realm (mundane); 5) the state of un-enlightenment or ignorance in the Triloka, held to be the source of all the distress generating delusions. The five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions depend on the five skandhas for their existence and when the skandhas are found to be empty the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusion vanish. Everyone is equipped with five skandhas, and those uninstructed in Buddhadharma cannot eradicate the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions because they are unaware that these are originated by, and dwell in the mind. Such being the case, sentient beings have no other choice but to endure suffering in the present and turn in the cyclic pattern of existence until they recognize the cause of their suffering and enter the path to enlightenment.

What are the wrong views common in the Triloka? To see the object; to be confused by the object and to give rise to greed as the result of that confusion is the root of defilement. Let us suppose that someone meets some wealthy, influential, high-ranking official and from that is given to envy, greed and jealousy. It is of no use, he/she cannot obtain what he/she wants. Greed becomes entrenched in the mind and as such is very difficult to extirpate. Defilements of this kind are most common. Those unexpectedly

promoted and prosperous, those in humble circumstances or those destitute, those who enjoy long life and those who die young, even the smart and the dull ones, all are in that situation because of cause and effect. Good causes in previous life will produce good effects in the present. Good causes in the present will produce favorable effects in the future. The law of cause and effect is all-pervasive, excluding nothing and no one. The practice of this Dharma and the understanding of obstinate void sever eighty-eight wrong views in the three realms and lead to the attainment of the first fruit of the path, i.e., Stream Winner.

What is meant by attachment in the realm of desire? To recognize greed as objectionable and to relinquish it is expedient and noble: Not to see the object, not to give rise to clinging and not to be moved by outside things leads to great liberation. Poverty, wealth, success and failure can all be endured. The next rebirth will be in the heavenly realm of desire and when his/her blessings run out in that realm, he/she will be reborn a human. That cycle will be repeated four times and then the second fruit and the path will be attained, that of Once Returner. One more rebirth is required to attain the third fruit (Non Returner), which means the end of all delusion in the realm of desire. With the cessation of all desires at all levels in all three realms, the fourth path and fruit is attained, i.e. that of the Arhat, or saint. In the realm of desire, six layers are generated by the worldlings' giving in to the attractions of the senses.

Attachment in the realm of form: Those who freed themselves from wrong views and clinging, but still hold on to the analysis of the theory of voidness will be reborn in the realm of form (rupa loka), which includes eighteen layers of heaven. These are divided into four dhyanas according to the depth of absorption: Each dhyana dissolves nine kinds of illusory thought, which means that thirty-six illusory thoughts are brought to a halt by the four dhyanas. If the one reborn in the realm of form still has a form-body, it would not be that of a woman: Those reborn in that realm have the form-body of a man. It is also called the Brahma

sphere because the beings there have renounced sense desires and delight in meditation and dhyanic bliss. For that reason we speak of attachment in the realm of form. The beings in that realm have all necessities of existence attended to without any effort. The realm of form is beyond the reach of ordinary people with mundane concerns.

The nourishment in these realms is of four kinds: Solid nourishment, especially of the palatable variety; fragrant nourishment; the nourishment of delight in dhyana; the nourishment of delight in Dharma. The first kind, or the solid nourishment, is the same as what people eat every day: It is the manner of humans in the six realms of desires. The second kind, the fragrant nourishment, sustains devas (heaven-dwellers) and ghosts. The nourishment of delight in dhyana and Dharma is for those in formless realm.

Attachment in the formless realm: When wrong view with its concomitant grasping no longer contaminates the realm of desire and the realm of form, rebirth in the formless realm follows. That sphere is free from form (body); there is only the knowing consciousness and, therefore, we speak of clinging to the formless realm. Denizens of that realm are no longer preoccupied with matter or material. The Dhyanas and the Dharma are their repast and their bliss.

The formless realm is divided into attainment in meditation on the void; attainment in meditation on consciousness; attainment in meditation on nothingness; and attainment leading to a state of neither perception nor non-perception. Consider for a moment the difference between Dharma talk offered by an Arhat, as compared with that given by someone of lower attainment. The attachment to formless realm still manifests.

Vast differences are noticeable when the two traditions, namely the Theravada and the Mahayana, are viewed in juxtaposition. Why? Because meditation according to the Theravada does not

single out wisdom, yet the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions require the practice of both activity and principle and equate meditation with wisdom; it is not comparable to the realm of form and the formless realm. Even the third stage of liberation according to Theravada, i.e. the Non Returner, does not imply liberation from the three realms.

The state of ignorance in the Triloka: Ignorance and delusory views still predominate, as countless as the atoms in the universe, although beings in that realm have relinquished some part of both. Their understanding as to action and principle is far from clear and therefore they cannot stop the conversion of their thoughts into the cycle of birth and death, although they were released from the four states or conditions found in mortality. The Arahat who completed the fourth and the highest stage, attaining the fruit and the path is, likewise, liberated from these four. Worldlings cannot escape the two kinds of birth and death no matter how long their earthly existence might last. Reborn in the formless realm, they still have birth and death, even after eighty-four thousand kalpas. That is a very long time.

One particular sutra teaches that a very, very long time ago, people lived eighty-four thousand years, but the life span gradually decreased, shortened by greed, hatred and delusion, and the process continues at a steadily accelerated pace. Thoughts of the past or future tend to make people uneasy or jittery. According to the T'ien T'ai method of counting kalpas, the life span of eighty-four thousand years is taken as the basis; it is reduced by one year a century till the life span has reached ten years, at which point the counting is reversed and years are added, one at a time, up to eighty-four thousand. Such full cycle is called small kalpa. Twenty of those produce one middle kalpa and four middle kalpas are called the great kalpa. Several different systems of calculating the kalpa exist, depending on the cosmology used as the point of departure. The heavenly existence in the realm of form is eighty-four thousand great kalpas long, yet these beings must die in the end if they do not understand the Buddha's teaching and do

not practice accordingly. They may be reborn in any circumstances and may suffer a great deal, depending on whether their causes were good or evil; it is quite reliable.

The preceding explanation dealt with the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions. We understand presently that neither the heaven-dwellers, nor the worldlings can escape the suffering in the wheel of birth and death unless they terminate the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions. There is, however, more happiness in heaven than in the world. To end the two kinds of birth and death and the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions one must make the great vow to attain enlightenment; to be able to do that one must study and practice Buddhadharma. The passage we just concluded was related to the two kinds of birth and death and the five fundamental conditions of passions and illusions as dependent on the five skandhas, namely form, feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness. At the time of his attainment of the radiant wisdom, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara conquered all ills and suffering by means of apprehending beyond any doubt that all five skandhas are devoid of independent existence.

**“Oh Sariputra, Form Does Not Differ From The Void, And The Void Does Not Differ From Form. Form Is Void And Void Is Form; The Same Is True For Feelings, Perceptions, Volitions And Consciousness.”**

In this part of the *Heart Sutra* the Buddha expounds the luminous Dharma of the Middle Way or “When coursing in the deep Prajna Paramita,” so the saints of three kinds have the occasion to relinquish their less-than-perfect views. The sutra was translated by the Tripitaka Master Hsuen Tsang who depended on the Buddha alone for its meaning and therefore we should consider this teaching to be spoken by the Buddha.

The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, while practicing deep Prajna Paramita, attained radiant wisdom through a full understanding of the ultimate Void of the five skandhas. The Dharma of Skandhas is a teaching of existence rather than of emptiness, but due to the depth of his Prajna contemplation, the Bodhisattva acquired full, complete understanding of True Reality. He ended simultaneously the two kinds of birth and death and the five fundamental conditions of passions and illusions and irreversibly overcame all suffering.

Turning once more to Sariputra, the Buddha reiterated the essential point for the benefit of those not understanding clearly.

Sariputra was the best of the best, the most advanced Sravaka or “hearer”, renowned for his sagacity. According to an established Indian custom regarding personal names, a person may decide to use either his/her mother’s name, or father’s, or both. The word sariputra (Chiu Lu Tzu in Chinese) literally means certain species of waterfowl similar to an egret. Sariputra chose to use the name of his mother, who was said by those who knew her to have luminous eyes like that particular bird. She had the reputation to surpass her brothers in wisdom and keen spirit. Sariputra’s mother was an adept of the heterodox path and as her name suggests, she was a person of the highest wisdom.

“Form does not differ from the Void, and the Void does not differ from form; the same is true for feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness.” This statement highlights and expands the foregoing sentence of the Sutra, leading toward a deeper, sharper understanding of the Sutra’s essential teaching. This Dharma might not be clearly understood without some explanation.

I have already introduced the fivefold interpretation of the meaning of Void or Emptiness, i.e., the obstinate voidness of worldlings; the annihilation voidness of those travelling the outer or heterodox path; the voidness understood by means of analysis as practiced on the path of the two vehicles; the Void perceived by

bodhisattvas as the true substance of the universe; the supramundane Void of True Existence. “Form does not differ from the Void”, is an observation of inconceivable wisdom rooted in deep practice of Prajna Paramita.

The sense-organ group produce three types of experience: Touching combined with seeing; one sense-organ door alone; activity of the mind alone. This point relates to the six kinds of data, i.e., sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thought, and the corresponding six material-sense-organs, meaning eye, ear nose, tongue, body and mind. All our experiences, physical and mental, are generated and accumulated by this group. During their interaction with their objects the senses are affected or contaminated by earthly views. The result then is dust (attraction or aversion of the senses) which characterizes the sentient sphere or Kamaloka. Dust of that kind is one of the major hindrances to enlightenment.

Let us proceed with an analysis of these three types of experience. The first is experienced through contact with form, any form, by means of combining seeing and touching and includes mountains, rivers, houses, flowers, dogs, our body and all the other forms that have corporeality and can be touched as well as seen; the result of that contact is the dust of form.

The second quality is produced separately by one of the four based on touch, i.e., hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. Hearing is accomplished by the ear and produces sound-dust; smelling is accomplished by the nose and results in smell-dust; tasting is done with the tongue, generating taste-dust, and touch informs of bodily states thereby producing touch-dust.

The third quality is the mental activity alone. It engenders mind objects or thoughts or ideas and eludes both sight and touch. While each of the five organs has its own specialized field, the mind knows and receives all of them. Mind-object or mental

formation is a shadow of the five kinds of dust; the mind knows all of them, but they do not know, cannot know one another.

The six kinds of dust generate three kinds of experience; but where do the six kinds of dust come from? With our five physical sense organs, we experience the material world. When a sense-organ relays information obtained through contact to its corresponding consciousness, the dust is produced. The six kinds of dust involve the participation and combination of numerous forms in the process of generating the three types of experience. How can form be considered the true existence of the supramundane Emptiness? How can we call void what our eyes can see and our hands can touch?

We may believe we see with our eyes but actually, it is our seeing nature that sees. A dead body, for example, though having eyes, cannot see, because its seeing nature is no longer there. The nature as substance has no specific residence. It is neither the brain nor the mind. It is vast and boundless, signless, unattainable. Despite the fact that we can see whatever is in front of us, we cannot see our own seeing nature. Because our seeing nature cannot be traced and cannot be fathomed, we assign to it the term Emptiness or Void.

We say, furthermore, that Emptiness is the substance of our nature. Speaking of the nature of seeing, the number of colors seen, as well as their characteristics, are of no relevance. To put it simply, form is nature is form. Nature being void, form is void also. What does it mean when we say that form is nature? Because our six sense-organs, namely eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind give rise to the six natures, i.e., seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing, countless forms combine and manifest themselves as three kinds of experience and in the process generate six kinds of dust. Yet form is not separable from nature and nature cannot separate from form. When it is separated from form, nature is non-form; form separated from nature is non-nature.

We have another example, in case some people are not completely clear regarding the doctrine. Ask yourself, which comes first: Form or nature? If you answer that the nature of seeing comes first, then consider how can it manifest itself in the absence of form? If, on the other hand, your answer is “form”, then ask yourself, how can you become aware of it without your seeing nature? There is really no difference between form and seeing — all of it is relative dharma. The nature of seeing, or the seeing consciousness is like this and the hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing consciousness also.

The just concluded study of form and nature according to Yien Yai helped us to realize they are inseparable or nondual. Since Void is the substance of nature, it must be the substance of form as well. Accordingly, to perceive that “form does not differ from Void, Void does not differ from form”, is to understand that they are inseparable. It is the Dharma of Nonduality.

Let me give you another example: A mirror is made to reflect whatever is in front of it, The “whatever” may be near or far, round or square, green, yellow, red, white or all four. The mirror will reflect all with equal clarity. Facing clothes, the mirror will reflect clothes, facing a table the mirror will reflect a table, and when made to face the sky, the mirror will reflect it. Mirror always reflects something and, therefore, it is comparable to our Self Nature; the reflection can be compared to dust. A person of mundane concerns will misunderstand the situation, hold the reflection (dust) for the real thing, and struggle to grasp it. Who would believe that mountains, rivers, the earth, even the entire universe are a mere reflection or dust, and as such, they must all rise and vanish in the cyclic existence? What this means is that phenomena are the Dharma of Birth and Death. The mirror’s reflective capacity is like the True Nature of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching: being true Suchness, it is unmovable, and cyclic existence cannot touch it. But without a mirror, how can there be reflection?

Their relationship is immutable yet clearly defined in terms of sharp contrast. Similarly, form and mind-nature are one and the same. One can become enlightened and see one's own True Nature practicing this dharma, The *Surangama Sutra* says: "When you see light, your seeing is not the light and when you see darkness, your seeing is not the darkness; when you see void, seeing it is not the void and when seeing a slab, the seeing is not the slab. When your absolute seeing perceives the essence of seeing, the former is not the latter; they still differ from one another; how can your affected seeing reach that absolute seeing?" In the part of the sutra we are presently studying, "seeing" applies in the first instance to subject seeing and in the second one to object seeing. This point should be cogitated and comprehended intuitively. Without form there is no nature — form and nature are of the same substance and there is no inside or outside. This is the stupendous Dharma of Suchness.

Let us return to the example of the bright mirror. The worldling, unlike the saint, is interested solely in the reflection, never giving as much as a thought to the mirror's reflectivity. Clinging, grasping the reflection, the worldling grasps an incidental occurrence on the mirror's surface and mistakes it for the original. The uninformed fail to understand that all that exists has its nature; earth has earth nature; fire has fire nature; water has water nature; wind has wind nature and consequently the mirror has mirror nature. Our True Nature is also like that and yet most people are confusing illusion with reality, quite unaware of their True Nature. They grasp and cling to reflections and dust. For them the Tao of Bodhi is difficult to attain. The Buddha made use of many expedients while teaching the Dharma of Truth. He repeated over and over again so those who listened could follow his example and attain enlightenment. Reflection in the mirror is impermanent, but the mirror-nature is constant. Reflections come and go, but the reflectivity of the mirror remains. However, the enlightened practitioner in the tradition of Theravada holds form and mind to be two, distinct and separate.

A bodhisattva who attained the intermediate level of practice views the reflection as the characteristic of the mirror's nature, and the mirror's capacity for reflecting is not held as separate from the reflection. There is a cohesive hold, meaning that form and mind are inseparable. It is the material entities that are unreal; that is what "immateriality of substance" means. Although it is true that a bodhisattva is enlightened and the Mahayana doctrine more accomplished than the Theravada one, there is still more that needs to be done. The only complete enlightenment is that of the buddha, and it is attainable only by means of mindfulness, by being observant and by awakening to the Ultimate Truth. Form is mind, mind is form and they are neither two nor one: That is the fundamental Buddhadharmā. True Existence is the supramundane Void, and the True Void inconceivably exists.

In the forthcoming paragraph we will direct our attention to the interpretation of "he perceived that all Skandhas are empty, thus he overcame all ills and suffering." The adherents of the Buddha needed to understand clearly that the form-skandha is the first one of the five. The question is, why? Why is form different from the Void, and why is the Void different from form? Form is one of the six dusts, and the first of the five skandhas. To consider form as having independent existence is one of the wrong views. Actually, form is not different from the Void. Someone asked why we talk only about the skandha of form; why not talk about all five?

Because form as shape is most confusing, particularly when applied to the materiality of the human body. Feeling or sensation, perception, volition and consciousness are the domain of mind. Sound, smell, taste, touch and mental formations are from the group of the six dusts also referred to as the six forms (to summarize the forgoing discussion of the three types of experience). The six dusts are generated by our five material-sense-organs, i.e., eye, ear, nose, tongue and body; each of these possesses both shape and form, being the first of the five skandhas. When we add the six dusts to the five skandhas, we arrive at eleven forms called collectively the Dharma of Form.

The remaining group of four skandhas is called the Dharma of Mind. The skandha of feeling and the skandha of perceptions jointly are amenable to fifty-one mental conditions; the skandha of volition has the form (or Dharma) of twenty-four non-interrelated actions. The skandha of consciousness is controlled by eight minds. The Dharma of Form and the Dharma of Mind jointly contain ninety-four Dharmas. In addition, there are six inactive supramundane dharmas (asamskrtas), which brings the number of Dharmas to one hundred, referred to as the Principal Sastras (commentaries). The Buddha's teachings contained originally eighty-four thousand of them, but Maitreya Bodhisattva, by condensing them, arrived at six hundred and sixty Dharmas.

Vashubandhu, the Bodhisattva of non-attachment, distilled their content further to obtain one hundred sastras, simplifying it for future students. The domain of the mind is vast; it contains four skandhas out of five and its cultivation is the means to the attainment of the path. Returning to the analogy of the bright mirror, the reflection or image is composed of the ninety-four form and mind Dharmas, while the six inactive supramundane Dharmas (asamskrtas) constitute the mirrorness or True Nature of the mirror.

Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara practiced the deep Prajna Paramita and perceived that all five skandhas are empty. The radiant, all-encompassing wisdom is the Dharma of Reality as Non-action. In terms of our analogy, the mirror's True Nature is the Ultimate Reality. It reveals the five skandhas as essentially void. But without practice and study, how can we understand True Reality?

The skandha of form embodies eleven dharmas, all of which are "not different from Emptiness" therefore "form does not differ from the Void, and the Void does not differ from form."

What is the true Void? True Void is the luminous wisdom of the enlightened mind; without wisdom, how could the Emptiness of the skandhas be disclosed? And, for that matter, how could anyone

overcome all ills and suffering? In reality, to break off the eleven form Dharmas is far from easy. Nonduality of form has the inconceivable, brilliant form of supramundane Void — the True Existence. Such is the meaning of “form does not differ from the Void, and the Void does not differ from form.” The Buddha was aware that some of his disciples continued approaching form and Void as two, as left and right for instance, and therefore he elaborated further, in depth: “Form is Void, and Void is form.”

Form and Void initially are nondual. All present form empty of self is the supramundane Void of True Existence: It is the stupendous Dharma of Nonduality and Nongrasping. Merely by comprehending this concept the five skandhas are already broken off. That is the meaning of “the same is true for feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness.” Once the skandha of form was disclosed as void of separate, lasting self, the mind skandhas, similarly, were found to be void. To break off one skandha is to break off all of them.

“The same is true of feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness”; feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness are, likewise, recognized as void of selfhood: The Void is their essence. The Dharma of the Five Skandhas is the teaching of things in general — one is all, all is one. Consequently, by understanding one skandha one understands all five. The Buddha continued to expand the scope of this teaching, once more turning to **Arya** Sariputra. First, the skandhas were revealed as void of self, and now Void is revealed to be their true essence.

**“Oh Sariputra, The Characteristics Of The Voidness Of All Dharmas Are Non-Arising, Non-Ceasing, Non-Defiled, Non-Pure, Non-Increasing, Non-Decreasing.”**

The above paragraph proclaims Emptiness as the substance of all dharmas: That being the case, there can be neither birth nor death;

no defilement; no purity; no increase or decrease. What holds true for the Dharma of Skandha applies equally to the rest of dharmas, and therefore all dharmas are presently void.

An ordinary person views all things of this world as possessing their own shape or form, he/she grasps and clings to them, not understanding that their presence is empty of a permanent, separate self. The Buddha, mindful of some of his adherents who still grasped worldly dharmas as if they were real, addressed once more the problem generated by the perception of dharmas as increasing, decreasing, defiled or pure. Explaining in more detail, he reiterated that since all dharmas are void, there is no birth and no death, neither an increase, nor a decrease, no defilement and no purity. The pre-eminent theme of this sutra is the essential Emptiness of all dharmas and the distinguishing marks of their emptiness are defined as non-arising, non-ceasing, non-defilement, non-purity, non-increasing, non-decreasing, non-birth and non-death.

The *Vaipulya Sutra* speaks of “neither existing nor extinct, neither permanent nor annihilated, neither identical nor differentiated, neither coming nor going.” The history of Buddhism is replete with illustrious sages who pondered and expounded this doctrine at great length. To the deluded worldlings, it makes no sense to speak of no birth and no death: They hold birth and death as essential; all of us were born and must die, in the same way the grass sprouts and grows in the spring and summer and dies in the fall. That is clear to everyone, so how can anybody teach that there is no birth and no death? Thus worldlings come to perceive objects as permanent (the view called *parikalpita* in Sanskrit).

In the *Madhyamika Sastra*, Bodhisattva Nagarjuna says: “For the one who is already born, there is no birth; nor is there birth for the one who has not been born. The one who was born and the one who was not born, neither has birth — nor the one being born has birth at the time of his/her birth.” To give an example, grass that is one foot tall is no longer sprouting. That is what is meant by “no

more birth for the one already born.” Supposing the grass that is presently one foot tall is allowed to grow one more foot: It still cannot be said to have birth, because there is no manifestation of birth. That is meant by “what has not been born yet has no birth.” The grass cannot be said to “have birth” or “being born” at any specific time during its sprouting and so it is said that “the one being born does not have birth at the time of birth.” The mark or the sign of birth does not obtain at any one moment. Bodhisattva Nagarjuna demonstrated by means of this example that the doctrine of no-birth makes perfect sense and that it is relevant to an understanding of the teaching.

I have already explained birth and non-birth. Let me explain now the opposite to non-birth. For the one already dead there is no death; for the one not dead yet there is no death, either. At the time of dying there is not one specific point in time for death to manifest itself. The explanation should clarify the eight dharmas of form, i.e., “neither existent nor extinct, neither permanent nor annihilated, neither identical nor differentiated, and neither coming nor going.” A simple statement of non-birth and non-death would not be convincing enough. To counter the argument, the Buddha said: “Neither permanent nor annihilated” for those holding on to the doctrine of permanence. To make it succinct in terms of the luminous Dharma, “if you open your mouth you are already wrong, if you give rise to a single thought you are in error.” All of this is, in fact, inconceivable. To quote once again the Surangama Sutra: “the language we use has no real meaning.”

I would like those who hold things as permanent to explain why we cannot see at present all those who lived before us? The impermanence of human existence becomes immediately apparent. Similarly, those who subscribe to the annihilation theory should tell us how is it possible for us to eat last year’s rice? Today’s rice is the seed from last year’s plant, which, in turn, grew from the seed of the previous year. That should be evidence enough that the annihilation theory does not work, as asserted by

the above “neither birth nor death, neither permanence nor annihilation.”

As to “neither identical nor differentiated”, it means not being the same (or alike), and not being varied, either; being neither one nor many. Consider the human body, for example; it is a collection of many dissimilar parts, i.e., skin, muscle, tendons, bones, blood, viscera and more. Though we refer to it as one body, one sentient being, there are, actually, more than one there. Yet our body cannot be called a group or a composite, because of being perceived as entity. The quote under discussion can be reformulated as “one is all, all is one.” The Ultimate Dharma is the silence that follows after the sound of discussion has ceased and when the role of thought is over.

“Neither coming nor going” addresses the view of things as having independent, lasting existence. By “coming” and “going” we mean questions such as “where do people come from and where do they go?” Or, similarly, some may wonder where do mountains come from and where do they go? The view that holds everything in the world to be in some way continuing is called in Sanskrit parikalpita. The view is based on a fundamental cognitive distortion, bringing further distortions in its wake: From there on, there is birth, death, permanence, annihilation, sameness, differentiation, coming and going.

The foregoing discussion of the superb doctrine dealt with “neither birth nor death, neither permanence nor annihilation, neither sameness nor differentiation, and neither coming nor going.” Presently, we are going to turn our attention to the doctrine of Ultimate Reality as “not defiled, not pure, not increasing and not decreasing,” dependent on the substance of Prajna (or the Voidness of all things).

Defiled and pure both are without definite form, thus leaving everyone to his/her own resources or subjective point of view. Rejecting “defiled”, clinging to “pure” gives rise to yet another

defilement because of our natural tendency toward opinions and prejudice. It is only when discriminating thought no longer arises that liberation can be attained. Let us imagine that someone slipped while walking on a country road; while getting up he/she put his/her hand in some dung. He/she washed the dirty hand, and having done that, considered that hand clean again. Had a piece of cloth been used instead, it would have been considered somewhat soiled even after many launderings; it might even be discarded because of it. However, the hand could not be discarded since it forms an essential part of the owner's body; he/she had no other alternative but to wash it carefully and then accept it as clean. The handkerchief would be easy to abandon and for that reason there would be no need for mind to hold on to "soiled."

A lady scholar named Lu Mei Sun once told me a story about a friend of hers, a lady who lived in a village. Once her friend went shopping in the nearest town, where she saw a pretty enamelware receptacle she liked well enough to buy; she derived much pleasure from serving food in it. About six months later she invited several of her friends for a special meal and used her favorite vessel to serve it in. Her guests, however, were repelled by it, because they identified the vessel as a chamber pot. In spite of the fact that the pot was never used for anything else but food since the lady brought it home brand new from the store, her friends were taken aback. We can appreciate how the view of "soiled" and "clean" is totally grounded in the assumption that things have permanent and, therefore, independent existence.

There is a certain soy condiment that is very popular, but most of those who consume it are not aware of the process used to make it. During its fermentation, the condiment harbors colonies of maggots; they are carefully removed, prior to the product being offered for sale. People enjoy its flavor, but were they reminded, while eating it, that it was once populated by maggots, they might suddenly consider the condiment dirty and stop eating it.

Clearly, the maggots feel perfectly at home in the midst of the decomposing material, and the question of dirty or clean does not arise. Yet rotten or decomposing material has a connotation of dirt in the minds of people.

Those who inhabit heavenly realms consider us, the earthlings, dirty, yet they, in turn, are deemed dirty by the Arhat or the saint of the Theravadin tradition while he, the Arhat, is perceived as dirty by a bodhisattva. Thus the demarcation between pure and impure is far from clear. If your mind is impure, the world appears correspondingly impure, and vice versa. All these distinctions are arbitrary, yet people grasp them, and cling to their views as if they were carved in stone.

And, finally, we are going to talk about increase and decrease. As it is to be expected, these two terms are, likewise, completely relative: There may be an increase in a decrease, or a decrease in the increase. Let me give you an example: There are ninety days of summer. Presently, thirty days of summer have already passed. We might say that hot weather has been increasing over the past thirty days, or we can put it differently by saying that the hot season has already decreased by thirty days. An idiomatic saying puts it as “months and years have no feelings, they just decrease while they increase.” While the years increase, our life span decreases says the same thing using different words. I am eighty-four years old. If I am to live till ninety, I have six more years, and if I live one more year after that, it means an increase, yet it is also a moment to moment decrease in my life span. That is the meaning of an increase in the decrease, and a decrease in the increase.

In a few words, there is neither birth nor death, neither impure nor pure, neither increase nor decrease: That is the wonderful doctrine of the Middle Way; but most people twist their perception to make it fit their picture of how reality should be. Then there is birth and death, impure and pure, increase and decrease, all being produced by ego-notion and its concomitant craving. For that reason the

Buddha taught the true nature of reality: To point out that the notion of separate ego is an illusion, and to emphasize the necessity to eliminate craving if we want to bring the round of suffering to a halt.

The point is that the skandhas are all empty at this very moment; since the Skandha-Dharma is central to Buddhadharma, the rest of Dharmas are equally empty. To reiterate once more, there is no birth and no death, neither pure nor impure, neither increase nor decrease. According to the *Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*, Emptiness is the substance of all dharmas.

**“Therefore, In The Void There Are No Forms, No Feelings, Perceptions, Volitions Or Consciousness;”**

The Buddha knew that repetition is essential to learning; he explained further that there is form because the mind craves it, and when mind releases its hold, form ceases to exist. It does not have any independent nature of its own. Additionally, there are no feelings, no perceptions, no volitions and no consciousness in the supramundane Emptiness of True Existence. He returned to the fundamental Skandha Dharma again and again to explain the essential Emptiness of all existence. He hoped to make the path of liberation be known by teaching it continually.

In this paragraph I will shed light on the meaning of the phrase “all Dharmas are Voidness.” The fundamental Dharma of Five Skandhas teaches that all five skandhas are empty, which means that there are really no skandhas. They are not the substance, but only the function, or worldly dharma; just as all buddhas and bodhisattvas, the skandhas are rooted entirely in the Dharma of Emptiness.

**“No Eye, Ear, Nose, Tongue, Body Or Mind; No Form, Sound, Smell, Taste, Touch Or Mind Object; No Realm Of The Eye, Until We Come To No Realm Of Consciousness.”**

This portion of the *Sutra* is the Teaching on Emptiness in connection with the eighteen worldly dharmas, or the eighteen realms; the uninstructed lack understanding of the Dharma, of Emptiness and repeatedly yield to the play of delusion as permanence and as independent existence. Ultimate Emptiness is not the obstinate void of the worldlings nor the annihilation view of those on the heterodox path; it is not the analysis of the Void as practiced by Theravadins, nor the Void of the present moment as perceived by the bodhisattva.

The supramundane Emptiness of True Existence is not possessed by buddhas alone: All of us are endowed with the same truth and would come to know it, if only we relinquished our discriminating mind; that is the supramundane Void of True Existence. In order to have correct practice it is not necessary to apply the method of Theravada, the Middle Vehicle or the Mahayana. Anyone can become buddha spontaneously by deeply comprehending that “all existence is Void.” The Arhat of Theravada is equal to a worldly person of great potential.

A worldling of superior potential can sharpen his/her wisdom and receive the radiant Dharma at any time. People of mundane concerns wear themselves out in the realm of the eighteen mundane dharmas that lead to confusion and craving; for them there can be no salvation. The six organs, i.e., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, and the corresponding six sense data or dust, i.e., form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental formations generate the six kinds of consciousness, i.e., eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness and mind consciousness. The group is referred to as the eighteen realms or the eighteen mundane

dharmas. To be conscious means to be conscious of something, to distinguish or to discriminate.

The average person works to make a living, eats and drinks every day always bound by the eighteen realms. He/she always sees with his/her eyes, hears with his/her ears, smells with his/her nose, tastes with his/her tongue, touches with his/her body and knows mental objects with his/her mind. The cognitive objects are discerned, produce sense data and from the six kinds of consciousness arise all the other functions.

People assume the reality of subject and object behind the process, unaware as they are of it being a mere assumption unverifiable by experience. To understand this doctrine means liberation, but getting confused about it means falling into the ocean of suffering. Six kinds of consciousness arise from the six organs and the six data. The six organs are useless to a dead body. How could the six kinds of consciousness receive the six data and act upon receiving them? Since Emptiness is the substance of the six organs and, consequently, of the six kinds of data, what do the six kinds of consciousness depend on for their existence? The sutra says: “No realm of the eye all the way up to no realm of consciousness,” meaning no realm of eye consciousness, no realm of ear consciousness, no realm of nose consciousness, no realm of tongue consciousness, no realm of body consciousness and no realm of mind consciousness.

The mundane Dharma of eighteen realms and their range is clear: Each of them has a character of its own. As a matter of fact, just as one hundred rivers merge into one ocean, all dharmas are contained in one teaching, the teaching of Emptiness. To attain enlightenment instantly, all one needs is to comprehensively understand the Dharma of Emptiness as the essence of reality. The uninformed majority submerge their True Nature in confusion resulting from misconception regarding the eighteen realms, a concept that has no counterpart in reality. Whenever mind touches a point, there is feeling; it may itch, hurt, feel numb, burn, or

produce any of the countless sensations, and the knowing consciousness is alerted. When the taste buds are stimulated, there is the knowing of tasting. There is sweet, bitter, sour, etc. and the tasting nature becomes confused by the variety and the complexity. Similarly, the moment the eye makes contact, the eye consciousness engages in making distinctions in terms of light/dark, and the pristine seeing nature gets covered over by them. When the ear catches a sound, the hearing nature gets lost in judgments regarding it. These cognitive patterns are so deep it is difficult to trace and abandon them. And yet, it manifests complete misunderstanding of the original nature of consciousness. Looking at the city at night, we see the brilliant lights of ten-thousand households: Such is the form of light. During blackout we are able to observe the form of darkness. Light and darkness both have birth and death, yet the nature of seeing is free of cyclic existence. It is in the nature of seeing to perceive darkness in the absence of light and light in the absence of darkness. This should help us to understand the timeless nature of seeing. Our tendency to crave and grasp the object of seeing is a major obstacle to an understanding of the true nature of reality.

Attachment resulting from pleasurable eye contact, once established, is exceedingly difficult to relinquish. Most people do not have any understanding of the subject of seeing. The organ of the eye does not have the ability to see — only the nature of seeing does. The one who can enlighten himself/herself as to the subject of the nature of seeing can understand his/her own mind and see his/her own nature immediately. Whether a person is holy or worldly depends entirely on his/her ability (or the lack of it) to see his/her own Original Nature. This holds true for the nature of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and for the nature of knowing. The Surangama Sutra says: “When one organ has returned to its source all six of them are liberated.” Our study and practice should begin by looking inward in order to free ourselves from the effect of light and dark. It is truly important to turn our attention completely onto our nature of seeing. When it is accomplished it means a true awakening to the supreme Tao. At first we should

learn the Buddhadharma and try to understand the doctrine. When we start to practice we should apply what we have learned: Without practice there is no learning.

The World Honored One is said to have attained Buddhahood in the previous **asamkhiya** kalpa; nevertheless, he appeared in the world in order to save all sentient beings, manifesting himself as a worldling and a prince. The son of king Suddhodana of the Sakya clan, he renounced his regal status at the age of twenty-nine so he could dedicate himself wholeheartedly to the quest for liberation from suffering. He practiced ascetic meditation in the Himalayas, and at the age of thirty-five the former prince attained perfect and complete enlightenment while meditating beneath a Bodhi tree. Noticing a bright star in the eastern sky, the Buddha observed that the nature of seeing is boundless. He commented that all sentient beings have the same wisdom and virtue as the Tathagata, but since it is covered over with delusion, attachment and aversion, sentient beings do not attain enlightenment. All evidence affirms that the Buddha attained the Original Nature, but most people are confused regarding their own, mistaking the four elements for their bodies and the reflections of their six conditioned sense data for their minds. That is delusion and grasping, and these are major hindrances to attaining the Tao.

The preceding explanation dealt with the eighteen realms consisting of six sense organs, six sense data and six kinds of consciousness. Now I would like to sum up, using the eye organ for illustration:

There are two aspects to the eye: There is the organ of sensation and the faculty of sensation; the eye is the organ; the faculty of sensation has two parts — seeing and form. The capacity of the eye to see, or the subject of seeing, is called the nature of seeing. The form of seeing is related to the object of seeing: It is always connected to an object, and therefore the eye is always seeing something, whether a thing, a shape, a color or a size. The object of seeing is most confusing, and the uninstructed can easily fall

into self-deception as to the independent existence of whatever they are looking at. The process of experience gets twisted so it suits the volition to grasp and to possess, thus changing into a source of suffering. The Buddha's teaching is the path to liberation and whoever understands this, understands all the Mahayana sutras as well.

We return once more to the example of the mirror and the reflection. The mirror was made to reflect whatever it faces, including mountains, rivers, even the great earth; the problem arises when the reflection is mistaken for the object and when it is no longer realized that it may vanish at any time, it being part of the birth/death cycle. The susceptibility to reflect is the real self, the timeless characteristic of the mirror we are talking about, yet it is very seldom realized. There was a Ch'an master who said: "Always facing it, yet not knowing what it is!", meaning that worldlings do not recognize the nature of seeing for what it is: Ignoring the clarity of the mirror they hold on to the reflection.

Time passes very quickly; even if we live for one-hundred years, it still is a very brief period of time. Those who inhabit heavens still worry about death although their lives last much longer. Things seen during one's life are completely useless after one has died. The nature of seeing, however, is not amenable to birth or death, it is not dependent on the organ of the eye. To have eyes does not necessarily mean having seeing awareness. The nature of seeing is like the capacity of the mirror to reflect images, shapes or actions; after the images, shapes or actions vanish, the nature of seeing remains, unmovable and unchangeable. The same applies to the nature of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing.

Simply stated, people should not hold reflections as permanent, clinging to them and grasping them. To perceive the reflectivity of the mirror as the True Self means quick release from defilement and an expeditious liberation. The remaining five sense doors can be inferred from the example of the eye organ; the six sense-organs with their corresponding six data and six kinds of

consciousness collectively generate the eighteen realms or the eighteen worldly Dharmas: All of these are reflections, impermanent, subject to birth and death. Only the nature of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing, like the nature of the mirror, remains unchanged. Furthermore, that which reflects is also the reflection, and the reflection becomes that which reflects it: They complement one another.

Thus there is “no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind: No form, sound, smell, taste, touch and no mind object. No eye realm until no realm of consciousness.” According to the phrase “all five skandhas are empty” the five skandhas are the true Void of the supramundane existence and the Dharma of the Five Skandhas is the fundamental Dharma. In the true Void of supramundane existence, when there are no more skandhas, there is nothing to be attained. The eighteen realms are void at this very moment. Without the mirror, how can there be reflection?

**“No Ignorance And Also No Ending Of Ignorance, Until We Come To No Old Age And Death And No Ending Of Old Age And Death.”**

This part of the *Sutra* refers to the formula of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence: These are in the sphere of the five skandhas. As we have seen, the five skandhas were found empty; consequently the twelve links are also void. Pratyekabuddha or the saint of the middle vehicle who practices the Dharma of the Twelve Links and who attained enlightenment by that means was liberated from his/her allotment of birth and death, but has not reached the realm of buddhahood. The Buddha taught the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* to bring people closer to the attainment of buddhahood by means of a deep understanding of all dharmas as manifestations of Reality and Emptiness.

Someone endowed with superior wisdom and the highest potential, who understands that all Dharmas are void can attain buddhahood immediately. The attainment of Pratyeka-buddha is the outcome of his practice based on the Dharma of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence, or causes and conditions. Causes and conditions act as support for the twelve links, which confuses people further. Ignorance conditions karmic action, action conditions consciousness, consciousness conditions name and form, name and form condition the six sense doors (sense organs), the six sense organs condition contact, contact conditions sensation, sensation conditions craving, craving conditions grasping, grasping conditions becoming, becoming conditions birth, birth conditions old age and death, sorrow, pain, grief, lamentation, despair and anguish. The Twelve Links of Existence in combination with causes and conditions illustrate how confusion contributes to human suffering. Let me explain:

Ignorance in the context of the Buddha's teaching means either not knowing or knowing incorrectly; the term is interchangeable with confusion. Assumptions based on ignorance support or condition unskillful actions. Action rooted in confusion reinforces the bias generated by ignorance.

Consciousness is the prime agent in the selection of conditions for rebirth: If there is confusion present during the intermediate existence between death and rebirth, proper conditions for the next existence will not be recognized. In this respect it is the consciousness that conditions name and form.

Name and form at the beginning of a new existence are simply the sperm of the father, combined with the ovum and blood of the mother; the form already exists, but the name part has yet to develop. The eighteen realms that will eventually come into existence will be conditioned from the very beginning by name and form.

The six organs develop on the basis of corporeality and of the natures of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing, with a discriminatory bias already built in. The six senses develop on the bases of the six organs: The six organs, being the sense doors, condition contact.

Contact takes place when a sense organ produces sense data in response to stimulation. In the case of a newly born, the earliest experience is tactile: There is an abrupt change of environment in terms of temperature and texture, causing intense discomfort in the newborn baby, making it cry. The contact conditions sensation.

As the range of stimuli widens, diversity of contact increases; the material sense-organs develop accordingly, each becoming progressively specialized and its own realm more and more specific. Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind develop preferences and aversions, giving rise to greed and anger. Therefore it is said that sensation conditions craving.

Craving is sometimes interpreted as thirst. Initially, it is the thirst for the continuation of one's existence, construed as independent. That notion is the anchor for the impulse to grasp.

Grasping leads inevitably to clinging which brings new becoming in its wake.

Becoming may be described as setting the stage for new birth. It is the unavoidable outcome of grasping.

Birth is conditioned by becoming. It introduces a new round in the cyclic pattern of existence; because there is birth, old age and death automatically follow.

Old age and death require care and produce pain, grief and anguish. Most humans, when approaching death, are ravaged by grief and anxiety. They hold on to their thirst for existence entrenched through lifelong habits; their suffering and their fear

are similar to what a tortoise experiences when its shell is removed. Death and dying are frequently accompanied by manifestations of grief.

Birth, death, and all the suffering in between arise because of ignorance and supportive conditions, and the ordinary people have no choice but to continue the cycle of rebirths in the six realms. Pratyeka-buddha understands the source of defilement and of birth and death. Upon hearing the Dharma of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Existence he/she will generate the mind of Tao and practice to end his or her own suffering. He/she will attain the path and fruit of the middle vehicle thereby ending the allotment of birth and death.

To free oneself from confusion or ignorance is requisite for right or correct practice. When ignorance is eliminated, all delusory activity ceases. There is no more fuel to feed delusion and thus consciousness is extinguished, meaning there is no more birth, no more death. With the six sense organs extinguished there is no more contact. In the absence of contact and sensation, there is no longer any greed or hatred, no craving and therefore no grasping (no karmic activity); without grasping there can be no becoming, which means that all future rebirths are extinguished. Without birth there is no aging and death and that is the end of pain, grief, lamentation and anguish.

The Buddha taught the Prajna Paramita Dharma to awaken practitioners to the teaching of the Void and to make them receptive to it. The Chinese term Wu (none) implies putting an end to grasping; to understand the essential Void of all existence is to understand the True Mind. To see one's Self Nature enables swift attainment of buddhahood, because when ignorance is recognized as void, there is nothing left to break off. Therefore the sutra says "also no ending of ignorance." Because, originally, there is no such thing as old age and death (they are the product of the conceptual mind), the sutra says "until we come to no old age and death and to no ending of old age and death."

## **“Also There Is No Truth Of Suffering, Of The Cause Of Suffering, Of The Cessation Of Suffering, Nor Of The Path.”**

This sentence deals with the Void as the ground of the Four Noble Truths. What are they? Suffering, Cause of Suffering, Cessation of Suffering and The Path. The teaching transcends the mundane and provides access to sainthood. A saint from the Theravada tradition attains the path and the fruit on the basis of his/her practice of The Four Noble Truths. The Mahayana attainment is in the realm of the supramundane. The suffering spoken of is the suffering in this world. Its causes are, likewise, of this world, the path is operative in this world and Nirvana or cessation of suffering is our exit from this world. The path provides the right causes for the Tao and the practice is aimed toward enlightenment.

The first of the Noble Truths is presented in three aspects: 1. As ordinary suffering. In this aspect it includes all forms of physical and mental pain and ache. 2. The outcome of the impermanent nature of life. All the fleeting pleasures are illusory and temporary and subject to change. 3. The five aggregates or the conditioned states. Matter, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness, the last being based on the first four, are constantly changing, hence impermanent, and what is impermanent is, inevitably, suffering.

The six realms of existence comprise three good or happy ones, and three unhappy or evil ones. The first three are the realm of heavenly beings, the realm of humans and the realm of asuras (titans). The latter three consist of the realm of hell, the realm of hungry ghosts, and the realm of animals. The form sphere and the formless sphere both provide much longer life continuity than this world, and more happiness as well, but they are still subject to birth, death and suffering consequent of action. The sphere of desire in the human realm provides equal parts of happiness and suffering, while the asuras, though enjoying blessings, are without morality and their good fortune will eventually end.

The inhabitants of the three happy realms made good causes in their former lives, and depending on how they benefit others, they will receive rewards accordingly in this world. There is no need to explain the three unhappy realms. All we need to say is that there is a great deal of suffering there. The suffering of those inhabiting unhappy realms is the present effect of causes from their previous lives. All suffering is produced by the mind. One reaps as one sows.

What is the cause of suffering? The second of the Noble Truths posits the cause or the origin of suffering as craving or thirst which produces re-existence and re-becoming, accompanied by passionate clinging. Numerous causes come together, and we know that our present suffering is the effect of previous causes. Likewise, our present behavior is the foundation for future effects.

What effect has the supramundane on the cessation of suffering? The third of the Noble Truths follows logically from the first two. If craving is removed or transcended there will be no more suffering. Cessation means calmness and extinction, or Nirvana: It is inviting, attractive and comprehensible to the wise. The one who understands the source of suffering thoroughly knows that it is generated by one's own self; yearning for Nirvana, he/she resolves to practice and attain the path and the fruit, i.e., Nirvana.

What is the cause of the Noble Truth of the Path? Having analyzed the meaning of life, the Buddha demonstrated to his disciples how to deal effectively with suffering. The fourth Noble Truth makes the teaching a complete whole. Those who focus their desire on attaining the supramundane Nirvana can break off the causes of suffering and practice toward enlightenment.

The practitioner of the teaching of the Four Noble Truths should reach understanding of the cause of suffering and direct his/her efforts toward the dissolution of the cause of suffering, resolve to attain Nirvana and from then on practice wholeheartedly. Following his enlightenment the Buddha taught the Avatamsaka,

but some hearers had difficulty understanding it, and therefore he applied expedient means to accommodate them. His teaching of the Four Noble Truths was threefold: 1. By means of contemplation of the manifestations of suffering, 2. By exhortation, 3. Using his own attainment as an example and as encouragement.

### **1. Contemplation of the manifestations of suffering.**

There are several kinds of suffering people are forced to endure in order to survive and to get the basic necessities of life; The ordinary form of suffering includes birth, old age, sickness, death, parting from what we love, meeting what we hate, unattained aims and all the ills of the five skandhas. Where does the suffering come from? It is generated by one's own self.

The cause of suffering is a cluster of six root defilements: Greed, hatred, ignorance, pride, doubt and heterodox views. The lesser defilements are diversified varieties of the six root defilements. The twenty secondary afflictions are belligerence, resentment, spite, concealment, deceit, dissimulation, haughtiness, harmfulness, jealousy, miserliness, non-shame, non-embarrassment, non-faith, laziness, non-conscientiousness, lethargy, excitement, forgetfulness, non-introspection, and distraction; the six root defilements and the twenty secondary afflictions together cause all the suffering in the world.

Cessation of suffering can be attained; it is possible to end the cycle (allotment) of birth and death, put aside the four conditions of mortality and attain the appealing, joyful Nirvana. To follow the Theravada practice means, however, not to halt the mortal changes of the round of births, and to have some obstruction regarding Emptiness.

Those who resolved to practice and attain because of their ardent wish to reach Nirvana should observe the thirty-seven conditions leading to Bodhi. The three studies or three pillars of practice — discipline, meditation and wisdom — represent the thirty-seven conditions in condensed form. The practice of discipline removes the obstacle of greed, meditation reduces delusion and the two combined foster wisdom. Without diligent practice the Buddha's follower does not get very far on his journey.

## **2. By exhortation:**

Using the expressions and the tone of a concerned teacher or a parent the Buddha would, at times, urge his followers: “You should understand how people are forced to endure their predicament...” or “the cessation of suffering can be attained, you ought to make the effort, you should practice...” and so on.

## **3. Using his own attainment as an example and as encouragement:**

“The problem of suffering can be resolved; look, I did it and so can you.”

“The causes of suffering are cumulative. The sooner you eliminate or transcend them, the quicker you will be free once and for all; I freed myself and now I don't have to worry any more” and such like.

At the time the Buddha set the wheel in motion by teaching the Four Noble Truths, the hearers (Sravakas) attained sainthood (Arhatship). After years of teaching, the Buddha taught the Dharma of Emptiness (Sunyata) to promote the understanding of the supramundane Void of True Existence. We have seen the

emptiness of the five skandhas, and at present we perceive the Dharma of the Four Noble Truths to be void as well. There is no suffering, no cause of suffering, no cessation of suffering and no path. They are only the reflection in the mirror; without reflection there is not the ability to reflect. The reflection is not separate from that which reflects it; the reflective surface and the reflection are one. To understand this means to be close to enlightenment.

### **“There Is No Wisdom And There Is No Attainment Whatsoever”**

This part of the sutra concerns the teaching of the six paramitas, or the bodhisattva practice as explained in the Tripitaka. Allowing one's actions to be guided by one or all of the paramitas, one will surely attain the path and the fruit. For each of the previously mentioned six fundamental defilements there is one of the six paramitas or perfections of virtue, to be applied as a specific antidote.

Charity eliminates greed, discipline cures laziness, patience overcomes hatred, determination overcomes laxity, meditation cools the mind making it receptive to wisdom and wisdom dispels ignorance. The Mahayana doctrine of action and principle differs from the Theravada as to the intent. In addition to one's actions that should follow the paramitas one is expected, according to the Mahayana understanding of the bodhisattva path, to endeavor to liberate all sentient beings by leading them toward an upward path while seeking his/her own enlightenment upward. If one has not cut off grasping completely, one's wisdom becomes colonized by consciousness, turning into an obstacle rather than being a virtue.

According to the Buddha, “there is no wisdom and there is no attainment whatsoever”. It means that the paramitas and the bodhisattva action as promulgated by the Tripitaka are not entities to be grasped, conceptualized, manipulated or used. But this is the

perspective of the Mahayana, Dharma; the teaching of Emptiness is evident neither in the practice nor the wisdom, and not in buddhahood for that matter, as taught by the Theravadins.

The Dharma of Emptiness is characterized by the concept of Emptiness as the substance of all dharmas. Then the six paramitas and the bodhisattva action are the reflection in the mirror, since they are all amenable to change and therefore empty of self. The already introduced Chinese term Wu, meaning non, un-, or none, expresses the true nature of the mirror, or its capacity to receive and relinquish all that goes on in front of it without holding on to any part of it. If the paramitas are practiced with the understanding that they are rooted in Emptiness, the great enlightenment can be attained. Non-wisdom is the true wisdom, non-attainment is the true attainment. This is what it means to practice deeply the Prajna Paramita; the five fundamental conditions of passions and delusions stop, and the two kinds of birth and death are finished forever.

In addition to the paramitas of bodhisattva action there is another set of six paramitas of principle as part of teachings of the intermediate school (Tung Jiao). Action and Principle are not separated in the teaching of the differentiated school (Bie Jiao), but in the original or genuine school (Yuan Jiao) the six paramitas are practiced as non-action; the practice leads to perfect wisdom and to the supreme Bodhi.

**“Because There Is Nothing To Be Attained, The Bodhisattva Relying On Prajna Paramita Has No Obstruction In His Mind.”**

“Nothing to be attained” is the all-important theme of the *Sutra*. The obstruction alluded to in the above sentence refers to the three obstructions of function, to wit: 1. The karmic obstruction, or the

obstruction of deeds done in the past; 2. The obstruction of retribution and 3. The obstruction of passion.

The above quote implies the supramundane Void as the True Existence of all dharmas and for that same reason no dharmas can be obtained. “Since the bodhisattva cannot seek outside help when dealing with obstructions, he has to rely on insights provided by his own radiant wisdom for his attainment of freedom. The first to break off is the obstruction of retribution; it is of two kinds, the dependent condition (meaning one’s circumstances) and the resultant person (meaning one’s physical condition). The bodhisattva already discarded these two kinds of obstruction, and several types of anxiety vanished from his mind.

### **“Because There Is No Obstruction, He Has No Fear.”**

This sentence is about discarding obstructions to action. Not to be obstructed by body and mind means to be free of worry and of fear. The practice of bodhisattva action engenders five kinds of fear, and those who did not break off delusion yet, who are in the early stages of the bodhisattva career, are particularly susceptible: 1. Fear of being left without sustenance after giving away all possessions; 2. Fear of being insignificant after giving up one’s reputation; 3. Fear of dying in situations that call for self-sacrifice; 4. Fear of falling into evil circumstances; 5. Fear of addressing an assembly, especially in the presence of important people.

These five fears obstruct Dharma practice and without them there is no obstruction to action.

## **“And He Passes Far Beyond Confused Imagination.”**

This statement is related to the obstacle or obstruction of passion. That obstruction has its root in the defilement of confusion or ignorance, manifested as mistaking the impermanent for permanent, the ugly for beautiful, and suffering for happiness. It is the way of people of mundane interests. The bodhisattva whose perception has been clarified through Prajna has been liberated to a great extent from that obstruction.

## **“And Reaches Ultimate Nirvana.”**

When there is no more mental pain or grief, Nirvana becomes perceptible, comprehensible, inviting and attractive. It is the complete and final cessation of greed or craving, hatred and ignorance, and therefore the cessation of rebirth and of the continuity of life. Dharma-kaya, Prajna and, consequently, freedom manifest themselves to their fullest. Nirvana cannot be expressed through words; it has to be experienced.

## **“The Buddhas Of The Past, Present And Future, By Relying On Prajna Paramita Have Attained Supreme Enlightenment.”**

In this sentence Prajna is proclaimed to be the perfect, ultimate Dharma of supreme relevance not only to bodhisattvas but to all the past, present and future buddhas as well.

**“Therefore, The Prajna Paramita Is The Great Magic Spell, The Spell Of Illumination, The Supreme Spell, Which Can Truly Protect One From All Suffering Without Fail.”**

The above segment of the Sutra praises the merits of Prajna. The term “spell” suggests that the theme and the essence of this sutra transcends concept; its power and its strength are operative in realms not amenable to manipulation. Furthermore, its effect can manifest itself instantaneously, transcending the worldly, attaining holiness.

**“Therefore He Uttered The Spell Of Prajnaparamita, Saying Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha.”**

The above is a mantra, i.e., an esoteric teaching by means of which we are reminded of the subtlety and complexity of the inconceivable Dharma. The body of the Teachings includes some exoteric parts, such as the sutras, and some esoteric ones, such as the dharmas and the mantras. Exoteric Teachings are accessible to rational understanding and can be explained, but the meanings of the esoteric or mystic forms of prayer such as dharmas and mantras are not within the reach of the intellect; the good is upheld and cannot be lost and evil cannot arise. During recitation, dharmas and mantras enable the one reciting them to control both the sound and the timing, but any recognizable words and meanings which would normally hold his/her mind captive are not there. He/she has then an opportunity to experience expansiveness or spaciousness of mind, it being one of mind’s very special characteristics.

To recite this mantra by itself, omitting the text of the sutra is a true Mahayana practice of the non-discriminating mind. The inconceivable nature of the teaching is apprehended and the teaching seen as a whole. Thorough study of the sutra and a

complete understanding, equal the meaning implied in the mantra (sometimes referred to as “spell”).

The explanation of *The Heart Sutra*, including both the exoteric and the esoteric aspects, is presently completed. Any contrived and/or faulty interpretations of the Teachings ought to be carefully avoided.



## GLOSSARY

Terms are from Sanskrit unless stated otherwise.

*Agamas*. Generic term applied to a collection of traditional doctrines and precepts. The sutras of Theravada (Hinayana) are referred to at times as the Agamas.

*Anuttara Samayak Sambodhi*. The incomparably, completely and fully awakened mind; it is the attribute of buddhas.

*Arhat*. The one who has achieved Nirvana: A Saint in the Theravada tradition. The stage is preceded by three others, 1. Stream Winner, 2. Once-Returner, 3. Non-Returner, 4. Arhat.

*Arya*. Any individual ennobled by his/her own continuing effort on the path to enlightenment.

*Asamkhyia (kalpa)*. Term related to the Buddhist metaphysics of time. Each of the periodic manifestations and dissolutions of universes which go on eternally has four parts, called asamkhiya kalpas.

*Avalokitesvara*. The name is a compound of Ishwara, meaning Lord, and avalokita, looked upon or seen, and is usually translated as the Lord Who Observes (the cries of the world); the Buddhist embodiment of compassion as formulated in the Mahayana Dharma; the most important Bodhisattva of the Mahayana pantheon, second only to the Buddha.

***Avatansaka or Avatamsaka*** (Sutra). One of the 5 key texts of the Mahayana canon. Its principal doctrine is that of the law-nature (Dharma-dhatu) of the universe. In modern terms it means that all objects and energies are under the law of causation, on account of which they are co-existent and interdependent.

***Bhikshu***. Religious mendicant; Buddhist fully ordained monk. Bhikshuni is the equivalent term designating a woman.

***Bodhi***. Perfect wisdom or insight knowledge by means of which a person becomes buddha.

***Brahmajala***. Or Indra's net, characterized by holding a luminous gem in every one of its eyes. (Hindu mythology).

***Dharani***. Extended mantra used in esoteric branch of Buddhism to focus and expand the mind. Its words, or sounds, should not communicate any recognizable meaning.

***Dharma-dhatu***. The Law-doctrine that is the reality behind being and non-being. It is interpenetrative and all-inclusive, just as the rotation of the earth holds both night and day.

***Dharma-kaya***. The first of the three forms of the Buddha: The Self-Nature or Void aspect. The real being in his true nature, indescribable and absolute.

***Five Fundamental Conditions of Passions and Delusions:***

1. Wrong views which are common to triloka; 2. Clinging or attachment in the desire realm; 3. Clinging or attachment in the form realm; 4. Clinging or attachment in the formless realm which is still mortal; 5. The state of unenlightenment which is the root-cause of all distressful delusion.

***Four Fruits of the Arhat.*** See under **Arhat** entry.

***Hinayana.*** Lit., a small vehicle; designates Buddhist tradition of south-east Asia; replaced by the term Theravada.

***Kalpa.*** Periodic manifestations and dissolutions of universes which go on eternally. Great kalpas consist of four asamkhiya kalpas corresponding to childhood, maturity, old age and the death of the universe.

***Lotus Sutra.*** Or **Saddharma-pundarika**, Dharma Flower, or “The Lotus of the True Law.” The sutra is the basis for the Lotus sect (T’ien-t’ai in Chinese). Among the sutras of the Mahayana canon.

***Mahayana.*** Lit., great vehicle; the dominant Buddhist tradition of China. Special characteristics of Mahayana are 1. Emphasis on bodhisattva ideal, 2. The accession of the Buddha to a superhuman status, 3. The development of extensive philosophical inquiry to counter Brahmanical and other scholarly argument, 4. The development of elaborate devotional practice.

***Middle Vehicle.*** Also called Middle Doctrine School or Madhyamika; one of the two main schools of Mahayana thought; it upholds the Void as the only really real or independent, unconditioned Reality.

***Nirvana Sutra.*** The last of the sutras in the Mahayana canon. It emphasizes the importance of Buddha-nature, which is the same as Self-Nature.

**Paramita.** Perfected virtue, of which there are six, namely:

1. Dana: Generosity; charity. 2. Shila: Morality; harmony.  
3. Kshanti: Patience; tolerance of insults. 4. Virya: Valor; vigor in practice. 5. Dhyana: Contemplation; meditation. 6. Prajna: Essential wisdom; awareness as such, beyond the duality of subject and object.

**Pratyeka-buddha.** Self-enlightened being who attained without a teacher; attained individual unwilling or unable to teach.

**Saddharma-pundarika.** See entry under [Lotus Sutra](#).

**Saha-lokadhatu** or Saha world; this world to be endured, this earth.

**Sanskrit.** Learned language of India. Canonical texts of Mahayana Buddhism in its Indian stage were written in Sanskrit.

**Skandhas.** As taught by the Buddha, the skandhas are the components of the human so-called entity that is constantly changing. They are: 1. Name/form; 2. Feeling; 3. Conception; 4. Impulse; 5. Consciousness.

**Small Vehicle.** See entry under [Hinayana](#).

**Sramana.** Lit. laborer; applied to those who wholeheartedly practice toward enlightenment; root word of the designation for novice monk.

**Sravaka.** Lit. hearer; it originally referred to those who paid devoted attention to the spoken words of the Buddha; today it is more often applied to an ardent teacher of Buddhist texts; an individual still needing guidance in Dharma.

**Tao.** Chinese term meaning the way. In Buddhist terminology it may be applied to practice, to Self-nature or to the Ultimate.

**Tathagata.** Thus gone; term frequently used by the Buddha in reference to himself.

**T'ien T'ai.** Chinese name designating a school of Buddhism in that country; the Lotus Sutra is the school's textual foundation. The T'ien T'ai doctrine speaks of the threefold Truth, the three being three-in-one. These are: 1. All things are of the Void; 2. Phenomenal existences of all kinds are only temporary productions and so only the Void; 3. As everything involves everything else, all is one, and something of everything involves everything else, all is one, and something of everything is the basis of its being, this something being the Buddha-nature. The school emphasizes Buddhist philosophy.

**The ten Directions.** North, South, East, West, N-E, N-W, S-E, S-W, Zenith and Nadir.

**Theravada.** Lit., the School of the Elders; one of the two main forms of Buddhism known in the world today; practiced chiefly in south-east Asia; has the Pali Canon for textual foundation; previously called **Hinayana**.

**Triloka or Trailoka.** The three realms: World of sensuous desire; form; formless world of pure spirit.

**Tripitaka.** Lit., three baskets: The earliest Buddhist canonical text consisting of three sections: 1. Buddha's discourses (sutras), 2. Rules of Discipline (Vinaya), 3. Analytical and explanatory texts or commentaries (Sastras); usually referred to as the Pali canon.

**Upasaka.** Buddhist lay disciple (man), who formally received five precepts or rules of conduct. Upasika is the equivalent term designating woman.

With bad advisors forever left behind,  
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,  
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light  
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.  
The supreme and endless blessings  
Of 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**

I vow that when my life approaches its end,  
All obstructions will be swept away,  
I will see Amitabha Buddha,  
And be born in his Land of Ultimate Bliss and Peace.  
When reborn in the Western Land,  
I will perfect and completely fulfill  
Without exception these Great Vows,  
To delight and benefit all beings.

### **The Vows of Samantabhadra Avatamsaka Sutra**

# The Teachings Of Great Master Yin Guang

Whether one is a layperson or has left the home-life, one should respect elders and be harmonious to those surrounding him. One should endure what others cannot, and practice what others cannot achieve. One should take other's difficulties unto oneself and help them succeed in their undertakings. While sitting quietly, one should often reflect upon one's own faults, and when chatting with friends, one should not discuss the rights and wrongs of others. In every action one makes, whether dressing or eating, from dawn to dusk and dusk till dawn, one should not cease to recite the Buddha's name. Aside from Buddha recitation, whether reciting quietly or silently, one should not give rise to other improper thoughts. If wandering thoughts appear one should immediately dismiss them, constantly maintain a humble and repentful heart; even if one has upheld true cultivation, one should still feel one's practice is shallow and never boast. One should mind one's own business and not the business of others. Only look after the good examples of others instead of bad ones. One should see oneself as mundane and everyone else as bodhisattvas. If one can cultivate according to these teachings, one is sure to reach the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

**Homage to Amitabha! Amitabha!**

# **A PATH TO TRUE HAPPINESS**

**True Sincerity**

towards others

**Purity Of Mind**

within

**Equality**

in everything we see

**Proper Understanding**

of ourselves and our environment

**Compassion**

helping others in a wise and unconditional way

**See Through**

to the truth of impermanence

**Let Go**

of all wandering thoughts and attachments

**Freedom**

of mind and spirit

**Accord With Conditions**

go along with the environment

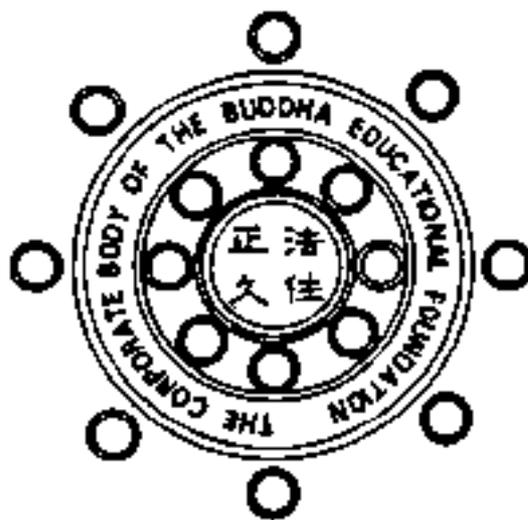
**Be Mindful Of Amitabha Buddha**

wishing to reach the Pure Land and follow in

His teachings

“Wherever the Buddha’s teachings have been received, either in cities or countrysides, people would gain inconceivable benefits. The land and people would be enveloped in peace. The sun and moon will shine clear and bright. Wind and rain would appear accordingly, and there will no disasters. Nations would be prosperous and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons. People would abide by morality and accord with laws. They would be courteous and humble, and everyone would be content without injustices. There would be no thefts or violence. The strong would not dominate the weak and everyone would be settled at their proper place in society.”

**The Sutra of Amitabha’s Purity,  
Equality, and Understanding**



# DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtues  
accrued from this work,  
adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,  
repaying the four kinds  
of kindness above,  
and relieving the suffering of  
those in the Three Paths below.  
May those who see and hear of this,  
all bring forth the heart of  
understanding,  
and live the Teachings for  
the rest of this life,  
then be born together in  
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.  
Homage to Amitabha Buddha!

**NAMO AMITABHA**