

The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

Translated by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang
Commentary by Grand Master T'an Hsu

English Translation by Ven. Master Lok To
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Translated from Sanskrit into Chinese

By Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang

Commentary

By Grand Master T'an Hsu

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By Venerable Dharma Master Lok To

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The First Preface

When four assemblies jointly invited the great master of Chan Sham to expound *The Heart Sutra* at the Buddhist Library of China, he made an all-out effort, although his lecture series was to last nine grueling 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 the greatness of that Dharma assembly in this five-kasaya period of turbidity. The old master explained the Sutra directly, eluding conventional restrictions. Although he used the 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. And why? Because all dharmas are Buddhadharma, and 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 or her. All one's words and thoughts are thereby freed from obstacles. Each of one's statements, whether harsh or delicate, is

always exact and to the point. Sentient beings receptive to the Dharma will have their Wisdom Eye opened 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 the knowledge of every rule and every convention, and their words flood forth without surcease. 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 and turning them about, they are bewitched; and even though 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](#); and, also, the entire universe is the eye of a sramana. Although an enlightened person might spend a lot of time reading a sutra, he or she will not carry it around in his or her mind. One might say one is reading sutras not with one's eyes but with one's wisdom, and, though reading all day long, there are really 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, and 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* itself was never mentioned. This is truly the way to expound *The Heart Sutra*.

The master lectured in Mandarin, and **Upasaka** Wang K'ai 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 K'ai made every effort to retain the original meaning. Every sentence and 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 is equal to hearing them spoken. Upasaka Wang stood outside the adamant door and eventually made a breakthrough, using his superior knowledge and skills the way one would use an ax to break down any ordinary door. People entered and discovered what *The Heart Sutra* holds. I believe he understands what his treasury is and what his virtues are. Wouldn't you agree?

Disciple Nien An
The year of Wu Hsu,
June 1958

The Second Preface

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 the Dharma by teaching or explaining the sutras; however, in their deducing and in their 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 but who yet describes how great, how vast it is, is not speaking from his own experience. If one's view regarding the Dharma is based on speculation, one's understanding will not be clear; if one is not then 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 Jewels from my master many years before that, and Le Kuo, another master, had taught me Buddhadharma. Obliging and kind, he did not abandon me even though 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.

However, the Grand Master Tan Hsu's practice of the **Tao** of **Bodhi** is most serious. He thoroughly comprehends the unsurpassed Dharma in all its implications, and his Tao is of the highest integrity. His great reputation has long been 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 his thorough and exhaustive study, bringing into play all the subtlety of the wondrous and profound Dharma. It seemed as easy as if he had 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 Grand Master had not already climbed Mount Tai and had not already seen the Yellow River with his own eyes,

how could he have expressed 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 take up a collection for the publication of the master's discourses, which themselves are to be used as an offering to all mankind and to provide a good condition for the Dharma's condition in the future. With this in mind, I have accepted the responsibility for arranging and organizing my notes on the master's discourses. Other commentaries I have read are brief and to the point, but that approach does not suit all readers. Consequently, I chose not to edit my record of these lectures but handed them over as complete and integral to the Grand Master's teaching. I did not avoid or dodge any of the problems; I just presented the record in a straightforward manner. Also, because people have difficulty sometimes 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 Grand Master's discourse. May I be forgiven for my awkward presentation.

Wang K'ai, Disciple of the Three Jewels
The year of Wu Hsu, April 1958,
Hong Kong

Translator's Introduction

Wonderful **Prajna**! Mother of all Buddhas and 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 on the Wheel of Life-and-Death, their minds deeply affected by ignorance, bent by the five **skandhas**, and 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 the Prajna **Paramita**, the perfected virtue of knowing truth by intuitive insight, relieves us from our suffering and helps us to overcome all kinds of calamities. All Buddhas of the past, present and future attain Prajna, and the 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; it is perfect in all places and at all times, and yet it is inconceivable. If one can understand that voidness is not void since radiant existence exists within its mystery, then, at that 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 that exists is produced by causes and conditions and that the self is a false self without any selfhood. Most grasp form and mistake it for True Existence, enduring immeasurable suffering on the Wheel of Life-and-Death. The practice of truth, or the reality of Prajna, excepted, there is no release from suffering in the Three Realms, no hope of freedom from worldly worries.

It says in *The Mahaprajna Paramita Sutra*, “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 form and seeks me by sound cannot perceive the Tathagata because of deluded views.” This 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 or she is unable to perceive that all dharmas are voidness. The Sutra says 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, like 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,” the Sutra continues.

The Prajna Paramita Hrdaya Sutra is the core of *The Mahaprajna Paramita Sutra* in six hundred scrolls. Its teaching is the teaching of supramundane Voidness 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 Voidness of all dharmas; and 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 the Prajna Paramita, comprehended the substance of the reality of Prajna: All dharmas, as well as all five skandhas are empty of self, and completely free of thought. For this reason the Bodhisattva received the name *Guan Zi Zai Pu Sa*.

As the substance of all dharmas, Voidness 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 that is produced by causes and conditions,

with no permanent substance and no separate, lasting self. The remaining four skandhas are as follows: feeling, conception, volition, 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, and apart from mind there is no form. Although they are inseparable, they are not the same, as stated in the Sutra: “*Form is Voidness, and Voidness is form.*” Being neither form nor mind, all dharmas are void here and now; this is the wonderful Dharma of Reality and Suchness, transcending all others.

The uninformed view the perceptible world with all its beings and non-beings as real or true. Some of them know that it is an illusion produced by the interaction of matter and mentality, that it is deceptive and impermanent, and that it must return to the Void. That interpretation of voidness 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 selfhood and, therefore, empty. It is what they truly 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, and it neither increases nor decreases because it is originally void (of selfhood). If 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, then 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 is, therefore, empty of permanent self, then all reality equals stillness and the absence of diversified form. Then birth and death, pure and 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 it is the same for 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. However, 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, it is called *Non-wisdom*. Without the object and its domain there is absolutely nothing to obtain. True mind is not empty, yet it is Emptiness. Although Bodhi is considered to be an attainment, there is really nothing to attain. To perceive the ground of all Buddhas is Suchness. There are adornments everywhere, and ten-thousand merits manifest themselves. When **Dharmakaya** becomes manifest, there is only true Emptiness. Mind established in true Emptiness completely encompasses the universe. There should be no seeking – no inside and no outside. The universe is not attainable in 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, which *cannot* be called the Prajna Paramita.

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, mind and all that exists), a Bodhisattva is never moved by eulogy or ridicule, slander or fame. Even war, famine or the bubonic plague are dismissed by him or 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 enters 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 him or her when faced with disturbance. Water cannot submerge such a one, nor can fire burn. Having attained liberation, the Bodhisattva is fearless. Seeking Dharma *outside*, in what exists apparently independently of the mind, is proceeding backward, perpetuating a misunderstanding of 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, etc., if one wants to enter the gate of liberation through non-action. Only when the name or form is dispatched and there is no mind object, can the original Enlightenment become manifest and Nirvana, the perfect liberation in the [Dharmadhatu](#), be obtained.

All the Buddhas in the three periods depend on the Prajna Paramita for the attainment of [Anuttara-Sam-](#)

yak-Sambodhi. Due to their superb causes, they attain the fruit of sainthood. Thus, we know that the Prajna Paramita 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 their potential. *The Great Mantra* is beyond the 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 throughout 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 Prajna Paramita Mantra says, “Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha.” The great master T’an Hsu commented, “The 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.

Dharma Master Lok To
Young Men's Buddhist Association of America
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Bronx, New York

Prologue by Grand Master T'an Hsu

The Hrdaya Sutra, or *Heart Sutra*, is the topic under consideration. According to Grand Master Chih I (538-597 C.E.) 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? They are as follows:

- 1) Explanation of terms and names
- 2) Definition of the substance.
- 3) Clarification of the principles.
- 4) Discussion of its (the 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. Elimination of the three hindrances (greed, hatred and ignorance) is the application, and the ripening of the fruit is the doctrine. All of what follows will provide further explanation.

In order to explain its name, the Sutra should 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 category 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 by that particular discourse, such as *Nirvana Sutra* or *Mahaprajna Paramita 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 Mahabrahma. Each eye of the net is said to have contained a mani-jewel, and its brightness reflected all the others ad infinitum. Likewise, the Buddhadharma is forever reflected through the brightness of the radiant minds of all Bodhisattvas. In the fourth category, the sutras are named after the person(s) seeking Dharma from the Buddha – e.g., 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 *Prajna Paramita Hridaya (Heart) Sutra*, for example, consists of *Prajna Paramita*, which is the Dharma, and *Hridaya*, or *Heart*, which is the specific example. More will be said on this subject later.

In the sixth category, the name of a sutra expresses a connection between a person or a being and an ob-

ject or event that is the clue to the Dharma. The title *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 analogue 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 analogue. The *Buddha* attained the fruit of Buddhahood because he returned all the causes of all actions. *Avatamsaka* is the analogue, the ground of Buddhahood. *Maha* means great, suggesting that, in this instance, the doctrine is applied universally and accommodates all the other doctrines. *Vaipulya* stands for function of pure karma in all places. Because of Buddha's attainment of that stage, the mind encompasses the universe, and everything in the ten directions is the Buddha-sphere. Furthermore, each of the Buddha-spheres encompasses a chiliocosm. This is over the heads of most people because their only knowledge of this world is based on their narrow outlooks. To repeat then, the above seven categories of titles as relevant to Mahayana sutras are based on either of the

following: individual(s); a particular Dharma; an analogue; or any combination of these.

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

Originally, since time immemorial, Prajna has manifested itself as intuitive wisdom in all sentient beings. That is known as former wisdom, or wisdom of life. However, 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-Death, and it is difficult to get off. Actually, however, the True Mind is never separate from us, not even for one moment.

The Buddha spoke the Prajna Paramita Dharma for close to twenty-two years. Recorded and compiled, the resulting text consisted of six hundred scrolls, and it was delivered in sixteen meetings of the Assembly. 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, help them to abandon grasping, and teach them to return to the original source and understand their True Mind. In other words, the Prajna teaching is aimed at removing confusion, bringing about the recognition of one's own True Mind, and returning to the truth. According to this doctrine, the mind has three layers: the 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, which also is the relation of this Sutra to the doctrine. *The Heart Sutra* is the axis of all the Prajna Paramita teachings. Taking further the example of the mind, one might call *The Heart Sutra* the absolute center of the central sutras. If we compare the core of this Sutra with the mind of worldly people, the mind of Prajna is the true mind; and the mind of worldlings is the deluded mind.

Again, the absolute center of the mind's center may be perceived as consisting of three layers: the mind of worldlings, the mind of Saints and Bodhisattvas,

and the mind of Buddhas. Minds of worldlings are immersed in suffering of many kinds. In contrast, the mind of a saint, the first level, represents the accomplished individual of the Two Vehicles, or a Bodhisattva; and at the center of mind's center is the Buddha, the Ultimate or True Mind. The mind of the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* is the True Mind, also referred to as the Essential Wisdom. The Essential Wisdom we are speaking of is to be distinguished from the awareness of objects or the environment and their use and value, which usually characterized as knowledge by worldly people.

The term *Paramita* is Sanskrit, and it means *reaching the other shore*. The *Prajna Paramita*, or the Wonderful Wisdom, courses like a boat, transporting all sentient beings across the sea of defilement to the other shore that is Nirvana. The word *Nirvana*, also Sanskrit, means *transcending birth and death* or, simply, *liberation*. The *Prajna Paramita* is, therefore, the Essential Wisdom and the center of all kinds of prajna. Almost every sutra functions on two levels simultaneously: One level is general; the other is specific. However, the *Prajna Paramita 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 the Buddhas whether moving upward, downward, or upholding sentient beings according to their potential. If the one who understands Buddhadharma upholds the principles of all the past Buddhas, he or she can liberate sentient beings. Whoever can understand the theory behind the flawless, accomplished Buddha, can also understand how to uphold the potential of sentient beings. *Sutra*, then, means a shortcut and a well frequented path. Finally, it means the way to Complete Enlightenment.

The second profundity is the definition of substance. What, then, is the substance of *The Heart Sutra*? Starting with “Sariputra, the characteristics of the voidness of all dharmas are non-arising” through “there is no wisdom, and there is no attainment whatsoever” is the definition of its substance. Consequently, “the characteristics of the voidness of all dharmas” is the substance of this Sutra.

The third profundity is focused on the clarification of the purpose of a sutra. Since we already understand the meaning of this Sutra’s name as well as the meaning of its substance, we should have no difficulty understanding its 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 characteristics of Emptiness.

As to the discussion of the application of this Sutra – it being the fourth profundity – it is to break off the three obstacles. What are these? They are as follows: passions; deeds (past karma); and retribution. Problems, worries and suffering all are related directly to the three obstacles.

There are two kinds of retribution: being the resultant person; being in the dependent condition(s). Being the resultant person means being what we are physically, our bodies. Some are strong and in good health, so others respect them for it. Some are unsightly and unwholesome, so others dislike them. The strong, the weak, the long-lived and the short-lived, the beautiful and 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 existences enjoy good health, longevity, beauty and wisdom in this life. In contrast, those who generated evil causes in their past lives have various deficiencies and shortcomings in the present. This, then, is what being a resultant person means.

Being in the dependent condition(s) relates to 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 now have to exert themselves because of good causes in their previous lives. A resultant person relies on the dependent conditions for survival, and the conditions, in turn, have their causes in his or her past existences. However, good karma – practice and deeds that benefit others in the present – will produce favorable effects in one’s future existences.

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. There are three kinds of karma: good, bad and transcendental.

The obstacle of passion arises as retribution for deeds done in the past. The circumstances produced, then, are favorable or adverse according to karma. Striving to achieve one’s goal combines with the confusion that usually accompanies it, producing numerous defilements, and the result is suffering. That is the obstacle of passion. The original defile-

ments are six in number: greed, hatred, ignorance, the aggregates, doubt, and heterodox views.

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

Discernment of the doctrine is the fifth profundity. 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 now in a position to proceed to a discussion of this last one: The entire body of the Buddha's teaching can be divided into five phases; and using the example of the five ways in which milk is used to provide nourishment can be applied to situate *The Heart Sutra* in its proper position in the entire context of the Buddha's teachings.

While teaching, the Buddha frequently referred to the example of the white cow of Snow Mountain. On the slopes of Snow Mountain grow many varieties of grass that make cows healthy and strong. The milk is wholesome and rich in nutrients and helps

those who drink it to survive better. Similarly, the Buddhadharma can nourish our wisdom, and, thus, the example of the five uses of milk appropriately illustrates the five stages of the Buddha's teaching.

Initially, the Buddha delivered 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 people with obstructions could not rise to its level. It was like offering fresh raw milk to a baby; those with obstructions could not digest its message.

The second phase is represented by the *Agamas*, which are comparable to thin, sour milk. The Buddha spoke the *Avatamsaka Sutra* first so that the eyes of Mahayana Bodhisattvas would open to the view and awareness of the Buddhas. At that time, many with shallow roots 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 blind, deaf and mute. The Buddha continued teaching the *Avatamsaka* for twenty-one days to convert all those with Bodhisattva potential. Many who could not listen formulated, later on, the Theravada tradition. In the Deer Park, the Buddha chose to teach the *Agamas*, thereby making his teaching comparatively easier to un-

derstand. Five of his friends attained deep understanding and became his first disciples, and that marked the beginning of what later became the Theravada tradition. The Buddha taught the *Agamas* for close to twelve years. Those who could not follow the teachings during the *Avatamsaka* phase can be compared to babies who, unable to digest fresh milk, can take it thinned down or after it is allowed to turn. The teaching of the *Agamas* is comparable to milk that is, thus, made easier to digest.

The third phase is the *Vaipulya*, interpreted as containing the doctrines of equal relevance. This phase is comparable to milk of full strength that is 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. This 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 being easily digestible.

The fifth phase relates to the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra* and to the *Nirvana Sutra*. In contrast to the milk simile above, this phase 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 facts: expediency and reality. Expediency 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 the truth of his unsurpassed Wisdom directly. The five stages can profitably be reviewed for their expediency-reality balance:

1) The earliest stage, that of the *Avatamsaka Mahavaipulya Sutra*, is said to consist of expediency and reality (or truth) in equal proportion. Expediency means promoting the understanding of reality. The teaching of reality makes entry into the Wisdom of Buddhas possible. Thus, the first stage includes both expediency and reality.

2) The stage of the *Agamas* is focused on expediency. 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 term *incomparable Dharma* is intended to convey the conviction that nothing can be compared with the Agamas.

3) In the *Vaipulya* stage, the proportion between expediency and reality is about three parts to one, expediency being predominant. What are the expedient teachings? The first expedient teaching was later developed into the sutra section of the *Tripitaka*. It deals with the Two Vehicles – *sravaka* and *pratyekabuddha* – in relation to their ending the cycle of birth-and-death in terms of allotment only, but not ending the cycle of mortal changes. Nevertheless, the Two Vehicles have birth and death. The second expedient teaching of the third stage is the earliest formulation of Mahayana, specifically, the Dharma of the attainment of non-birth. The third expedient is the teaching of differentiation. The fourth expedient teaching belonging to this stage is the Dharma of Reality. Manifesting 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 expediency and one part reality; i.e., it is the Mahayana teaching, or the Great Vehicle.

5) The fifth stage, that of the *Saddharma Pundarika* and *Nirvana Sutras*, is the stage of the Dharma of Reality, or Truth, without concern regarding expediency. 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 Sutra of Bequeathed Teaching* during his final period, 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 expediency and one part reality, and it is comparable to well-ripened curd.

Prajna Paramita Hrdaya Sutra

Translated by Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang of the T'ang Dynasty with Commentary by Grand Master T'an Hsu

Of the seven known translations of *The Heart Sutra*, the one by the Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang (600-664 C.E.) is the most popular. *Tripitaka* is a Sanskrit term designating the whole Buddhist canon, which consists of three sections: 1) the *Sutras*, which are the original texts of the Buddhadharma; 2) the *Vinaya*, or rules of discipline; and 3) the *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 was a very famous sage in the T'ang Dynasty. The description of the arduous way by which 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 among them. According to Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva's translation, this Sutra was spoken by the Buddha. Every translation of *The Heart Sutra* includes a commentary which consist 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 *Mahaprajna Paramita* texts, and simple words were carefully employed to convey profound meanings. Although the Chinese version contains only two hundred sixty single characters, it nevertheless, 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 to realize that the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was chosen as a 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 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 **Lesser Vehicle** practices virtuous conduct and Dharma primarily to benefit oneself. The Mahayana practice, on the other hand, is aimed to benefit both oneself and others. To liberate all sentient beings implies concern for the well-being of all people. Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was chosen to demonstrate to the persons of the Lesser Vehicle mentality the full dimension of the Mahayana doctrines. The name *Avalokitesvara* lends itself to several interpretations. The Chinese translation – i.e., *Guan Zi Zai*, – means the attainment of the Bodhisattva stage and the causal-ground for practicing Dharma.

Why did we, the Chinese, choose to call the Bodhisattva *Guan Zi Zai*? Because he 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 his or her own mind but the world as well; and practicing in this

manner, one can be sure of obtaining 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 the passions and delusions** can be called *Zi Zai*. To observe one's own self is to discover body and mind bound by the five skandhas and the six organs with their corresponding six kinds of 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 the Bodhisattva attained 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 a full stop, occurring simultaneously with the ebb tide. He pondered the root of all causes and finally attained Enlightenment by understanding that all existence is subject to birth and death and, therefore, is impermanent. However,

the hearing itself is timeless; hence, it is beyond birth and death. Those without practice can hear, but they do not listen. While hearing the sounds, they only think of the outside; however, although the sound of tide has birth and death, the nature of hearing does not. And why not? Because even when the sound of tide stops, our capacity for, or nature of, 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. In reality, 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 this 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; and 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 his or her own intentions, but without effort one will not succeed. Nature is the substance; mind, the function. The function never separates from substance, nor the substance from the function. Function and substance, though separate, are causally connected. Nature governs the mind, and the mind is nature's function; they mesh. Although both retain their own character, they are inseparable. Dharma practice can start right at this point. One needs only 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 one's own nature has no boundaries, and it can accommodate all sentient beings while saving them. We worldlings only react to 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. However, when we listen to our 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 the perfect knowledge or wisdom by which a person becomes a Buddha. *Sattva* (*Sa To* in Chinese) stands for an enlightened and enlightening being, which is to say that a person has already enlightened his or her own nature by freeing himself or 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 of 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, then, informs us that Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is the appointed practice leader of the Prajna Assembly. He is going to teach us how to follow his Dharma practice and establish the mindfulness of listening to our 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 fifty-five **bhik-**
sus attained the **four fruits** of the **Arhat**; they prac-

ticed the Dharma of the Lesser Vehicle, which leads to the end of their birth-and-death allotment. What is the birth-and-death allotment? It means that every sentient being's body is merely a portion, or a part; whether short, long, or of middle length, the life of a sentient being must end. One round of birth and death is referred to as an allotment. Whoever practices the Dharma of the Lesser Vehicle will have the conversion into birth and death even after he or she has come to the end of the individual allotment of birth and death. What is the conversion into birth and death? Our distorted thought is at the root of our failure to escape from the cycle of birth and death. One of the recognized features of thought is to vibrate, 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 feeling, conception, volition and consciousness, every thought has its conversion into birth and death. The activity is never suspended, and, thus, the conversion into birth and death takes place, generated by feeling, conception, volition and consciousness. Every rise and fall of delusive thought marks this conversion into birth and death. If our Dharma practice does not take us back to truth, we are not going to be able to end the conversion into 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 Prajna Paramita? To end the samsaric cycle but not the conversion of thoughts into birth and death is a wisdom that is shallow. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara attained Truth, thereby bringing the two kinds of birth and death to a complete halt. This, then, is the real, deep Prajna, the awe-inspiring Wisdom: It is and has to be beyond discriminating knowledge, 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 "was coursing in the deep Prajna Paramita" attest to the Bodhisattva practice of all three kinds of wisdom – i.e., listening, thinking and practice; thus, he attained the Radiant Wisdom, or the Ultimate. This clause, then, offers a 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 the truth. By means of his minutely subtle Dharma practice, he penetrated the five skandhas, perceiving them as empty. The five skandhas – namely, form, feeling, conception, volition and consciousness – continually provide five occasions for craving and clinging. Two types of craving and clinging characterize the human mind: craving and clinging to form and 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 very root of our suffering. Clinging to the body as the true self begins to manifest in early childhood. Normally, the six organs produce the six types of data, six kinds of consciousness and the four mind skandhas along with them; jointly these constitute the delusory ego. Craving and clinging are spontaneous at birth, for, at that time, the ego

arises 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, neutral or indifferent types of feelings. The body depends on the mind to be provided with pleasant occasions and to be protected from discomfort. There must be thinking – i.e., conception – 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 and to acquire knowledge that prepares them for the future. When there is sufficient knowledge, there is action, which is invariably preceded by some kind of thinking such as planning, imagining, remembering, etc. The body then receives the support it needs. Thereupon, ego-grasping begins, 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 really the self – that one can merely say *mine* or *my body* – all delusion regarding the five skandhas is then 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 of how reality should be. Actually, however, the body is not the self. Rather, 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 correctly say, "This body is myself;" but I can accurately say, "This body is mine."

What, then, is the Real Self? Our Original Nature is our Real Self. It depends on the body only temporarily; and the body is no different from a house. A house is completed and then gradually deteriorates; similarly, the body has birth and death and the period between them. 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 the so-called human 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 minds. The Dharma of the Five Skandhas is comparable to five kinds of material, or elements. The mountains, the rivers and the entire universe, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the three periods, even the six realms of existence

and the Four Worthies – all are produced solely by the five skandhas.

Who are the Four Worthies? They are as follows: 1) the Arhat of Theravada, 2) the **Pratyekabuddha** of the **Middle Vehicle**, 3) the Bodhisattva of Mahayana, and 4) the Buddha, the ultimate fruit of the Path. What are the six realms of existence? Three are good and three are evil. Devas, human beings, 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 – mundane or supramundane – they are all produced and completed by the five skandhas. However, by taking the right path (the ultimate Path), one may become an Arhat, a Pratyekabuddha, a Bodhisattva or a Buddha.

A good action can be good in three different ways; likewise, an evil action can be evil in three ways. Worldlings, confused because not knowing or knowing wrongly, get carried away and lose control over their actions; then evil in the world increases, giving rise to the five turbidities. There is the turbidity of a kalpa in decay, the turbidity of view, the turbidity of the passions, the turbidity of living beings and the turbidity of life (the result of the turbidity of living beings). Turbidity means turmoil. The turmoil of a kalpa in decay is the product of the form skandha, whereby sentient beings in the **Saha World** grasp

form or material (the body) and misconstrue this as the 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 the craving for gratification of the senses or the body, and the result is the turbidity of view. The turbidity of the passions is generated by the feeling skandha. Seeking gratification of the senses brings greed in its wake, manifesting as the desire for wealth and personal gain and the subsequent strife that accompanies it. Sooner or later, sound ethics are abandoned, and the volition to grasp and to possess is given free rein. At this point, worldlings become totally engulfed in self-delusion, generating an unspeakable number of defilements.

The turbidity of the passions comprises family defilements, societal defilements, national defilements and world defilements. Also, while they are alive, human beings are the victims of turbidity in the realm of volition because the egocentric bias engenders the cyclic pattern of existence, perpetuating itself until the end of time. However, time is moving on, and no matter how much of it we might have, we shall die in the end.

The confusion of worldlings regarding the Real Self, or True Self, is the turbidity of living beings. This 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 the 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 average individual's height was one hundred sixty feet. However, there came about 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 of people is five to six feet. Somewhere in the very distant future, claims the ancient text, the life span of human beings will last ten years, and the average height will be close to three feet. That 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 and come to be viewed as lacking in expediency and when the 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. Thus, worldlings need to generate compassion for this declining world, resolve to uphold at least the basic code of

ethics and, perhaps, to study the Buddhadharma; furthermore, they should refrain from taking the life of any living being and be mindful of their actions, which should be skillful and cause no harm to others. If that is accomplished, there may still be time to save this world. To say it 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 universes. The skandhas are, furthermore, the substance of the incandescent True Existence and, at the same time, the transcendental Void, or Emptiness. (The relation of True Existence to transcendental Emptiness will be discussed later). Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, relying on his luminous wisdom, “perceived that all five skandhas are empty.” In other words, the Bodhisattva deeply practiced the Prajna Paramita – i.e., the root of Ultimate Reality – and attained the supreme Tao, realizing that the skandhas are empty of self. To arrive at that stage is Enlightenment, the state completely clear of any turbidity whatsoever. From then on, all dharmas are understood as being identical with 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, Voidness, or Emptiness, means the absence of duality, the end of accepting and rejecting. There are five categories of voidness: the obstinate void; the annihilation void; the void of analysis; the void of global comprehension; the Void of True Supramundane Existence. What is the obstinate void? It is just clinging to the space in front of us. What is the annihilation void? It is the kind grasped by those on the heterodox, or outer, path. It embraces the views that historically abounded in India as well as those assorted philosophical positions, based on cognitive patterns, which neglect the Buddhist axiom stating that all is generated by the mind. Such beliefs claim, in 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 erroneously choose to grasp that void, positing it as the prevalent characteristic of existence.

The remaining three kinds of voidness are introspectively oriented Buddhadharmas and constitute the Dharma of Voidness, or Emptiness, as the True Nature of the mind, in contrast with the teaching of the Lesser Vehicle, that focuses on the form skandha. The supramundane path of the Lesser Vehicle (Theravada) and that of sravakas and Bodhisattvas of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) are rooted in the aforementioned last three kinds of voidness. They

are neither the obstinate void of worldlings nor the annihilating voidness of the outer, or heterodox, path. The concept, or doctrine, of voidness is sometimes called either the nature of voidness or the theory of nature. The meaning is the same.

Now I shall discuss the four subdivisions of the Buddhadharma according to T'ien T'ai and the three kinds of voidness 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 Lesser Vehicle. The mundane path is grounded in the minute analysis of form dharma (*rupa*) and mind dharma (*nama*) and how their interaction contributes to the illusion of a separate ego. The term *dharma* may be interpreted as meaning things, methods, formulas or standards; 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 air – which, respectively, have the character of solidity, viscosity, temperature and vibration.

The body is merely a mass of matter that does not possess the faculty of knowing an object; also, 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 and bones, which all have weight as well as softness and hardness. The element of water includes all bodily liquids as well as all that relates to fluidity and viscosity. The element of fire covers temperature in terms of heat in varying degrees of intensity from the highest down to the absence of heat. The element of air manifests as vibration in terms of movement. The body also manifests the three characteristics of existence – i.e., impermanence, unsatisfactory conditions and the absence of selfhood. Illness and death are caused by an imbalance of the elements or their scarcity or absence according to the Theravada teaching. Birth and death are the natural results of the body's being compounded from these four elements.

What is mind? Mind is knowing without form. What is form? Form is shape without the capacity of knowing. Uninstructed worldlings view the physical body (form), actually a collection of elements, as the

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 just my body; the mind is my real self.” The knowing consciousness is the master; the body is 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. Then the following thought arose: “Hearing the commentary on that sutra will increase my wisdom and reduce my defilement; I must go and listen to the Dharma.” Having persuaded oneself, he or she got on the bus and came here to hear this Dharma. Where did the initiative originate? Clearly, it originated in the mind. Again, 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, and originally the mind has 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, of 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 Lesser Vehicle, form and mind are two. The practitioner should know the mind while not abandoning the form (body). Where does the mind dwell? According to physiology, the heart is also the mind's 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 adequate proof to support such a theory have proved, again, negative. Whenever people have tried to find the very source in order to pinpoint the exact site where the mind is, the results were nil in each and every case. Since mind is neither form nor name, in the context of Buddhadharma it is expediently termed *Emptiness*, or *Voidness* (*Sunyata* in Sanskrit).

On a particular day, represented for us by the eighth of December, while he was absorbed in deep samadhi, Sakyamuni 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 that his own nature of seeing was boundless, and his first statement following his enlightenment was as follows: “Wonderful, wonderful! All sentient beings have the same wisdom and virtue as the Tathagata; but because of the obstacles of illusion and grasping, they cannot attain.”

The expression *sentient beings* means produced by and 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, lungs, the pores, and even some parasites. This means that a person, seemingly an individual entity, is also composed of many 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 the Dharmadhatu. However, sentient beings are confused, do not return to their Original Nature and do not purify themselves to attain the Dharmakaya; and, therefore, they are called sentient beings to designate their difference from the Buddhas.

Sakyamuni, glimpsing a star in the endless reaches of the eastern sky, realized the infinite nature of Mind and achieved Enlightenment instantaneously; 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 as the evidence of seeing, he or she fails to realize its subject. This view prevents one from being able to abandon both subject and object (dualism); so how can one ever understand or experience original seeing? One twists the process of experience to fit his or 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 or her Original Nature is clear-eyed, while anyone who focuses on the object of seeing and grasps its form is caught in turbidity.

Practitioners of the method promulgated by the Lesser Vehicle perceive mind as mind, form as form, and conceive of them as distinct and different. This method focuses on observing the observer. The

connection with one's own nature is apparently not taken into consideration. This method asserts the following: Seeing is the nature of the eye organ; 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, but it can also be termed *enlightenment* according to Buddhist understanding. Furthermore, followers of Theravada hold that clothing, nourishment and lodging are deemed to result from conditioning causes and, thus, are not the concern of full-time practitioners, who supposedly have surpassed worldlings and, therefore, are viewed as holy by the devotees sharing this tradition.

The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara attained Enlightenment by perceiving his Original Nature; that is, he abandoned the duality inherent in subject and object, whereupon he attained the Middle Way perfectly and completely. Such is the pure, radiant Dharmakaya, which is quite different from the accomplishments in the tradition of the Lesser Vehicle. At one point in history, one thousand two hundred 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 Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.

Comprehension of the immaterial substance of Reality marks the intermediate level of the Bodhisattva's career, and it is 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 Lesser Vehicle. At the intermediate level, the void of the five skandhas is attained and, accordingly, obstinate view is abandoned.

Thus, the immaterial substance of Reality is perceived, but perception of the five skandhas as the superb existence is still lacking. Also, we should note, 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. Voidness means simply the absence of grasping.

True Existence is Emptiness not of this world. The complete, perfect meaning of True Existence is the Supramundane Void; 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; and mind freed of grasping attains the wonderful Dharma of the Inconceivable. This, then, is *the True Existence of 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: the suffering of the birth-and-death allotment; the suffering of the birth-and-death realm's mortal changes. All ills and defilements mean suffering. According to the usual interpretation of the teachings, when it is fully understood that all five skandhas are empty, then the five fundamental conditions creating passion and delusion are severed, and two kinds of birth and death are finished. What are the five fundamental conditions creating passion and delusion? They are as follows: 1) wrong view,

which is 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;
5) the state of non-enlightenment, or ignorance, in the Triloka, held to be the source of all the distress-generating delusions. The five fundamental conditions creating passion and delusion depend on the five skandhas for their existence, and when the skandhas are found to be empty, the five fundamental conditions characterizing passion and delusion vanish. Everyone is equipped with the five skandhas, but those uninstructed in Buddhadharma cannot eradicate the five fundamental conditions giving rise to passion and delusion because they are unaware that they 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 endlessly 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 that give rise to defilement? To see the object, to be confused by the object, and to give rise to greed as the result of that confusion are the root of defilement. Let us suppose that someone meets a wealthy, influential, high-ranking official and thereafter becomes consumed with envy, greed and jealousy.

However, being useless, these emotions do not help one attain what one wants. Greed becomes entrenched in the mind and, as such, is very difficult to extirpate. Defilements of this kind are quite common. However, we should understand that those unexpectedly promoted or becoming prosperous, those finding themselves in humble circumstances or destitute, those who enjoy a long life or those who die young, and even the smart or the dull ones are all in that situation due to the law of cause and effect. Good causes in previous lives 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 (Triloka) and lead to the attainment of the fruit of the first stage – i.e., Stream-enterer.

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 the Great Liberation. Poverty, wealth, success and failure can all be endured. The next rebirth will be in the heavenly realm of desire; and when one's blessings run out in that realm, one will be reborn as a human being.

That cycle will be repeated four times, and then the fruit of the second stage will be attained, that of Once-returner. One more rebirth is required to attain the fruit of the third stage, that of Non-returner, which means the end of all delusion in the realm of desire. With the cessation of all desire at all the levels in all Three Realms, the fourth stage and its fruit are attained, that of the Arhat, or Saint. In the Realm of Desire, six planes of existence are generated by worldlings giving in to the attractions of the senses.

What is meant by attachment in the Realm of Form? Those who have 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, which consists of the four meditation (dhyana) heavens, which are further subdivided into eighteen heavens 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 only in meditation and dhyanic bliss. For this reason we speak of attachment in the Realm of Form. The beings in that

realm have all their necessities of existence attended to without any effort. The Realm of Form is beyond the reach of ordinary people of mundane concerns.

The nourishment in the Triple Realm is of four kinds: solid nourishment, especially of the palatable variety; fragrant nourishment; the nourishment of delight in dhyana; the nourishment of delight in the Dharma. The first kind, or solid nourishment, is the same as what is eaten every day in the manner of human beings, etc., on the six paths of the Realm of Desire. The second kind, fragrant nourishment, sustains devas (heaven-dwellers) in the Realm of Form. The nourishment of delight in dhyana and the Dharma is for those in the Realm of Formlessness.

What is attachment in the Realm of Formlessness? When wrong view with its concomitant grasping no longer contaminates the Realm of Desire and the Realm of Form, then rebirth in the Realm of Formlessness follows. That sphere is free from form (body); there is only the knowing consciousness and, therefore, we speak of clinging to the Realm of Formlessness. However, denizens of that realm are no longer preoccupied with matter or material. Only the dhyanas and the Dharma are their repast and their bliss.

The Realm of Formlessness is divided into the following: 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 a Dharma talk offered by an Arhat and that given by someone of lower attainment. In the latter case, the attachment to the Realm of Formlessness still manifests itself.

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. However, the five fundamental conditions of passion and delusion require the practice of both action and principle and equate meditation with wisdom, according to the Mahayana, which is not comparable to the Realm of Form and the Realm of Formlessness. Even the third stage of liberation, according to the Theravada – i.e., that of the Non-returner – does not imply liberation from the Three Realms.

What characterizes 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 of action and principle is far from clear; and, therefore, they cannot stop the conversion of their thoughts into the cycle

of birth-and-death, even though they have been released from the four states, or conditions, found in mortality. The Arhat, who has completed the fourth and the highest stage – attaining the fruit and the Path – is, likewise, liberated from these four mortal conditions. Worldlings cannot escape the two kinds of birth and death no matter how long their earthly existence might last. Furthermore, even though re-born in the Realm of Formlessness, they, nevertheless still have birth and death, even after eighty-four thousand kalpas. That is, indeed, 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 until 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 a full cycle is called a small kalpa. Twenty of these produce one middle kalpa and four middle kalpas are called a great kalpa. Several different systems of calculating a kalpa exist, depending on the cosmology used as the point of departure. The heavenly exist-

ence in the Realm of Form is eighty-four thousand great kalpas long, yet these beings, too, 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 absolutely inevitable!

The preceding explanation has dealt with the five fundamental conditions creating passion and delusion. We understand presently that neither heaven-dwellers nor worldlings can escape suffering on the Wheel of Birth-and-Death unless they terminate the five fundamental conditions creating passion and delusion. 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 giving rise to passion and delusion, one must make the Great Vow to attain Enlightenment; and to be able to do that one must study and practice the Buddhadharma.

The passage we are just concluding is related to the two kinds of birth and the five fundamental conditions giving rise to passion and delusion, which are dependent on the five skandhas – namely, form, feeling, conception, volition and consciousness. At the time of his attainment of the Radiant Wisdom, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara conquered all ills

and suffering by apprehending beyond any doubt that all five skandhas are devoid of independent existence.

“O, Sariputra, form does not differ from voidness, and voidness does not differ from form. Form is voidness and voidness is form; the same is true for feeling, conception, volition 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 that the saints of three kinds will have the occasion to relinquish their less-than-perfect views. This Sutra was translated by the Tripitaka Master Hsuan 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 the deep Prajna Paramita, attained radiant wisdom through a full understanding of the ultimate Voidness of the five skandhas. The Dharma of the Skandhas is a teaching of existence rather than of emptiness, but due to the depth of his Prajna contemplation, the Bodhisattva acquired the full, complete understanding of True Reality. He ended simultaneously the two kinds of birth and death and the five

fundamental conditions giving rise to passion and delusion, and, thus, irreversibly overcame all suffering.

Turning to and addressing 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 could decide to use either his or her mother's or father's name, or both. The word *sariputra* (*chiu lu tzu* in Chinese) literally means a 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 of surpassing 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.

Thus, directly addressing Sariputra, the Buddha declared, "Form does not differ from the Void, and the Void does not differ from Form...; the same is true for feeling, conception, volition and consciousness." This statement highlights and expands the foregoing sentence of the Sutra, leading toward a deeper, sharper understanding of its essential teach-

ing. This Dharma might not be clearly understood, however, without at least some further explanation.

I have already, heretofore, introduced the fivefold interpretation of the meaning of Voidness, or Emptiness, as follows: 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. Thus, “Form does not differ from the void”, is an observation of inconceivable wisdom rooted in the deep practice of Prajna Paramita.

The sense-organ group produces three types of experience: touching combined with seeing; the activity of one sense-organ door alone; activity of the mind alone. This point relates to the six kinds of data – sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thought – and the corresponding six material sense-organs – 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 Kamadhatu. Dust of

this kind is one of the major hindrances to Enlightenment.

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

The second is the kind of experience produced separately by one of the four based on contact – 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 us of bodily states, thereby producing touch-dust.

The third kind of experience arises from mental activity alone. It engenders mind objects, thoughts or ideas and eludes both sight and touch. While each of the five sense organs has its own specialized field, the mind knows and receives all of them. A 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 and cannot know one another.

The six kinds of dust generate these 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, then, can form be considered the true existence of the Supramundane Emptiness? How, then, 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 seeing 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 Voidness.

We say, furthermore, that Emptiness is the *substance* of our nature. Speaking of the seeing nature and the number of colors seen, as well as their characteristics, is without relevance. To put it simply, form is

nature, and nature is form. Thus, nature being void, form is also void. What does it mean when we say that form is nature? Because our six organs – namely, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind – give rise to the six natures – 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. However, form is not separate 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 your answer is that the *nature* of seeing comes first, then consider how it can manifest itself in the absence of form. If, on the other hand, the answer is *form*, then ask yourself, how you can become aware of it without your seeing nature. There is really no difference between form and seeing; all of it is relative dharma. The seeing nature, or the seeing consciousness, is like this; and the hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing consciousnesses are also.

The just concluded study of form and nature according to T'ien T'ai has helped us to realize that they are inseparable, or nondual. Since the void is the

substance of nature, it must be the substance of form as well. Accordingly, to perceive that “Form does not differ from the void, and the 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 or 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. The mirror always reflects something, and, therefore, it is comparable to our Self Nature; the reflection itself 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, and even the entire universe are mere reflections, or dust; and, as such, they must all rise and vanish in the cycle of 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; and being True Suchness, it is unmovable, so cyclic existence cannot touch it. However, without a mirror, how can there be a 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 by 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 the void, seeing it is not the void; and when you see 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. Therefore, how can your affected seeing reach that Absolute Seeing?" In the part of *The Heart 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 because form and nature are of the same substance and there is no inside or outside. This is the stupendous, wonderful Dharma of Suchness.

Let's return to the example of the bright mirror. The worldling, unlike a Saint, is interested solely in the reflection, never giving as much as a thought to the mirror's reflectivity. Clinging to 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 a mirror nature. Our True Nature is also like that, and yet most people are always confusing illusion with reality, being quite unaware of their True Nature. They grasp at and cling to reflections and dust. Thus, 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 them over and over again so those who listened could follow his example and attain Enlightenment. Reflections in the mirror are impermanent, but the mirror-nature is constant. Reflections come and go, but the reflectivity of the mirror remains.

The Enlightened practitioner of the Theravada tradition dualistically holds form and mind to be distinct and separate. However, a Bodhisattva of the Mahayana tradition, who has attained the intermediate level of practice, views the reflection as the characteristic of the mirror's nature; and so the mirror's capacity for reflection is not dualistically held to be separate from the reflection. There is a cohesive bond, meaning that form and mind are inseparable. It is the material entities that are unreal; this is what *immateriality of substance* means. Although it is true that a Bodhisattva is enlightened and the Mahayana doctrine more accomplished than that of the Theravada, 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, and mind is form; they are neither two nor one. Such is the fundamental Buddha-dharma. True existence is the supramundane Void, and the true Void inconceivably exists.

In the next part of our discussion, we shall direct our attention to a further analysis of “He perceived that all five skandhas are empty; thus, he overcame all ills and suffering.” The adherents of the Buddha need to understand clearly that the form-skandha is the first one of the five. Then the fundamental question arises: 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 an independent existence is one of the wrong views. Actually, form is not different from the Void.

Someone once asked why we talk only about the skandha of form; why not talk about all five? The answer is that form as shape is most confusing, particularly when applied to the materiality of the human body. Feeling, conception, volition and consciousness are the domain of mind. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental formations constitute the group of the six dusts, also referred to as the six

forms (relating to the foregoing discussion of the three types of experience). The six dusts are generated by our five material sense-organs – eye, ear, nose, tongue and body – each of which possesses both shape and form, which is 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 conception jointly are amenable to fifty-one mental conditions; the skandha of volition has the form (or dharma) of twenty-four noninterrelated actions. The skandha of consciousness is made up of eight parts. The dharma of form and the dharma of mind jointly contain ninety-four dharmas. In addition, there are six inactive supramundane dharmas (asamskrtas), which bring the number of dharmas to one hundred, as referred to in the principal sastras (commentaries). The Buddha's teachings originally contained eighty-four thousand of them, but Bodhisattva Maitreya, by condensing them, arrived at six hundred sixty dharmas. Then, Vasubandhu (c.320-400 C.E.), the Bodhisattva of non-attachment, and his older brother Asanga (c.310-390 C.E.) distilled their content further to obtain one hundred dharmas, simplifying it for future students.

The domain of mind is vast; it contains four skandhas out of the five, and its cultivation is the means to the attainment of the Path. Returning to the analogy of the bright mirror, we should understand that the reflection, or image, is composed of ninety-four form and mind dharmas, while the six inactive, supramundane dharmas (asamskrtas) constitute the *mirroriness*, or True Nature, of the mirror.

Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara practiced the deep Prajna Paramita and perceived that all five skandhas are empty. This 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. However, 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 voidness, and voidness does not differ from form." What is the True Void? The True Void is the luminous wisdom of enlightened Mind. Without wisdom, how could the Emptiness of the skandhas be disclosed? Also, for that matter, how could anyone overcome and end all ills and suffering without wisdom? In reality, to break off the eleven form dharmas is far from easy. Non-duality of form has the inconceivable, brilliant form

of the Supramundane Void – the True Existence. Such is the meaning of “Form does not differ from voidness, and voidness does not differ from form.” The Buddha was aware that some of his disciples continued dualistically approaching form and Void as separate and distinct, as left and right for instance; and, therefore, he elaborated further, in more depth as follows: “Form voidness, and voidness is form.”

Form and voidness initially are nondual. All present form, empty of self, is the Supramundane Void of True Existence: It is the stupendous Dharma of Non-duality and Non-grasping. Just by one’s comprehending this concept, the five skandhas are already broken off. That is the meaning of “The same is true for feeling, conception, volition 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.

Furthermore, “The same is true for feeling, conception, volition and consciousness” means that feeling, conception, volition and consciousness are, likewise, recognized as void of selfhood. Rather, the Void is their essence. The Dharma of the Five Skandhas is the teaching of things in general – one is all, and all is one. Consequently, by understanding one skandha one understands all five.

Then, the Buddha continued to expand the scope of this teaching, addressing [Arya Sariputra](#). First, the skandhas were revealed as void of self, and now Voidness is to be revealed as their true essence.

“Sariputra, the characteristics of the voidness of all dharmas are non-arising, non-ceasing, non-defiled, non-pure, non-increasing, non-decreasing.

The above sentence proclaims Emptiness to be 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 the skandhas – applies equally to the rest of dharmas; and, therefore, all dharmas are absolutely and permanently void.

An ordinary person views all the things of this world as possessing their own shapes or forms. He or she grasps at 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 at 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, neither defilement nor purity. The central and notable 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 deluded worldlings, however, it makes no sense to speak of no birth and no death. They hold birth and death to be essential; all of us were born and must die in the same way that 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 (c.150-250 C.E.) says: “For the one who is already born, there is no birth; nor is there birth for the one who has not been born. Also, neither the one who was born nor the one who was not born has birth, nor does the one being born have birth at the time of birth.” For 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.” Now, suppose that 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 what is meant by “What has not been born yet has no birth.” The grass cannot be said to *have birth* or *be 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 of non-birth. For the one already dead there is no death; for the one not yet dead there is no death either. At the time of dying there is not one specific instant in which death manifests itself. The following explanation should clarify the eight dharmas of form: 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, so, to counter any argument, the Buddha added “neither permanent nor annihilated” for those holding on to doctrine of permanence. To make it succinct in

terms of the luminous Dharma, it is often said, “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, inconceivable. However, *The Surangama Sutra* simply asserts, “The language we use has no real meaning.”

I would like those who hold things to be permanent to explain why we cannot see at present all those who have lived before us? If you consider thusly, the impermanence of human existence becomes immediately apparent. Similarly, those who subscribe to the annihilation theory should tell us how it is 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 aforementioned “neither birth nor death, neither permanence nor annihilation.”

Regarding “neither identical nor differentiated”, it means not being the same or alike and not being varied either; it also means 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 or one sentient being, there are, actually, more than one. However, the body cannot be called a group or a composite

because it is perceived as an entity. Thus, the idea under discussion can reasonably be reformulated as “One is all, and 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 done.

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

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

Both *defiled* and *pure* are without definite form, thus leaving everyone to his or her own resources, or subjective point of view. Rejecting *defiled* and clinging to *pure* give 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 slips while walking on a country road; while getting up he or she puts a hand in some dung. This person washes the dirty hand, and having done that, considers it clean. Had a handkerchief been used instead to wipe that hand clean, it would have been considered somewhat soiled even after many launderings; it might even be discarded. However, the hand cannot be discarded since it forms an essential part of owner's body; one has no other alternative but to wash it carefully and then accept it as clean. The handkerchief is easily abandoned, however, and for that reason there is no need for the mind to hold on to the idea of *soiled*.

A female 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 a nearby town, where she saw a pretty enamelware receptacle that 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 had brought it home brand new from the store, her friends were taken aback. Through this example, we can appreciate how the view of *soiled* and *clean* is totally grounded in the assumption that things have permanent and, therefore, independent existence.

Also, 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's being offered for sale. People enjoy the 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 suggests dirt and disgust to the minds of people.

Similarly, those who inhabit heavenly realms consider us, the earthlings, dirty; yet they, in turn, are deemed dirty by the Arhat, or 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, clinging to their views as if they were carved in stone.

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 the decrease or a decrease in the increase. Let me give you an example. There are ninety days of summer. At present, 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 decreased by thirty days. An idiomatic saying puts it as follows: “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, and 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 de-

crease: This is the wonderful doctrine of the Middle Way. However, most people twist their perception to fit their picture of how reality should be. Then there, indeed, is birth and death, impure and pure, increase and decrease, all being produced by the notion of ego and its concomitant craving. For that reason the Buddha taught about the True Nature of Reality: He pointed out that the notion of separate ego is an illusion, and he emphasized the necessity to eliminate craving if we want to bring the round of suffering to a halt.

The essential point in all this is that the skandhas are all empty at this very moment; since the Dharma of the Skandhas is central to the Buddhadharma, the rest of the 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 Mahaprajna Paramita Sutra*, Emptiness is the substance of all Dharmas.

“Therefore, in the void there is no form, feeling, conception, volition 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 is no

feeling, conception, volition or consciousness in the supramundane Emptiness of True Existence. He returned to the fundamental Dharma of the Skandhas 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.

Now, I shall shed some light on the meaning of the assertion “All dharmas are void.” The fundamental Dharma of the 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, of worldly dharmas; and just as is the case with all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the skandhas, too, are rooted entirely in the Dharma of Emptiness.

No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, mind-object, or eye realm, until we come to no realm of consciousness;

This portion of *The Heart Sutra* is the Teaching on Emptiness in connection with the eighteen worldly dharmas, or 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 worldlings nor the annihilation view of those on the heterodox path; further-

more, it is neither the analysis of the voidness as practiced by the Theravadins nor the voidness of the present moment as perceived by Bodhisattvas.

However, 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 the discriminating mind, thus realizing 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 Mahayana. Anyone can become Buddha spontaneously by deeply comprehending that “All existence is void.”

The Saint of Theravada is equal to a worldly person of great potential. Thus, worldlings of superior potential can sharpen their 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 – eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind – and the corresponding six sense-data, or dust – form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental formations – generate the six kinds of consciousness: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness and mind consciousness. This group, as a whole, 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 and is, thus, always bound by the eighteen realms. He or she always sees with the eyes, hears with the ears, smells with the nose, tastes with the tongue, touches with the body and knows mental objects with the mind. Thence, the cognitive objects are discerned and produce sense-data; and from the six kinds of consciousness arise all the other functions.

People assume the reality of the subject and object behind the process, unaware as they are of its being a mere assumption unverifiable by experience. To understand this doctrine means liberation, but becoming confused about it means falling into the ocean of suffering. The six kinds of consciousness arise from the six organs and the six sense-data, but the six organs are useless to a dead body. How do the six kinds of consciousness receive the six sense-data and act upon receiving them? Also, since Emptiness is the substance of the six organs and, consequently, of the six kinds of sense-data, what do the six kind of consciousness depend on for their existence? The Sutra says, “No realm of the eye,

until we come to no realm of consciousness,” which means there are 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 dharmas of the eighteen realms with their ranges are 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 understand comprehensively the dharma of Emptiness as the essence of reality. The uninformed majority submerge their True Nature in confusion resulting from a 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 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 or dark, and the pristine seeing nature gets covered over by them. When the ear catches a

sound, the hearing nature is lost in judgments regarding it. These cognitive patterns are so deep that it is difficult to trace and abandon them, and yet they manifest a 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 a blackout we are able to observe the form of darkness. Light and darkness both have birth and death, yet the seeing nature 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 seeing nature. Our tendency to crave, grasp and cling to 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 oneself about the subject of the seeing nature can understand one's own mind and see his or her own nature immediately. Whether a person is holy or worldly depends entirely on one's ability (or the lack of it) to see his or her own Original Nature. This also holds true for the natures 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 focus our attention completely on our seeing nature. When this is accomplished, it means a true awakening to the supreme Tao. First, however, we should learn the Buddhadharma and try to understand the doctrine. Then, when we start to practice, we should apply what we have learned; for without practice there is no learning.

The World Honored One is said to have attained Buddhahood already, [asamkheya](#) kalpas ago; 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, he observed that the seeing nature is boundless. He commented that all sentient beings have the same wisdom and virtue as the Tathagata, but since they are covered over with

delusion, attachment and aversion, sentient beings do not attain Enlightenment. All evidence confirms that Sakyamuni attained the Original Nature, but most people are confused regarding their own ability to do so, mistaking the four elements for their bodies and the reflections of their six conditioned sense-data for their minds. The former create delusion and grasping, and the latter 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 are the organ of sensation and the faculty of sensation. The eye is the organ, while 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 seeing nature. 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 or a shape, a color or a size. The object of seeing is most confusing, and the uninstructed can easily fall into self-deception by believing in the independent existence of whatever they are looking at. Hence, the process of experience gets so twisted that it suits volition to grasp and to possess the objects, thus changing the process of experience into a source of suffer-

ing. However, the Buddha's teaching is the path to liberation from suffering; and whoever understands this, understands all the Mahayana sutras as well.

Let us return once more to the example of the mirror and the reflection. The mirror was made to reflect whatever it faces, including mountains, rivers, and even the great earth. However, the problem arises when the reflection is mistaken for the object and when there is no realization that it may vanish at any time, being, as it is, a part of the birth-and-death cycle. The inherent ability 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!" This means 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; so 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 seeing nature, however, is not amenable to birth or death, nor is it 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 seeing nature remains, unmovable and unchangeable. The same applies to the hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing natures.

Simply stated, people should not hold reflections to be permanent, grasping and clinging to 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 organs with their corresponding six data and six kinds of consciousness collectively generate the eighteen realms, or the eighteen worldly dharmas, all of which are reflections, impermanent and subject to birth and death. Only the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing natures, like the nature of the mirror, remain 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 or mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, mind-object, or eye realm, until we come to no realm of consciousness.” According to the assertion “All five skandhas are empty”, the five skandhas are the True Void of Supramundane Existence, and the Dharma

of the Five Skandhas is the fundamental Dharma. In the True Void of Supramundane Existence, where there are no more skandhas, there is nothing to be attained. Thus, the eighteen realms are void at this very moment. Without the mirror, how can there be any 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 Heart Sutra* refers to the formula of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation: These are in the sphere of the five skandhas. As we have seen, the five skandhas were found to be empty; consequently, the twelve links are also void. The pratyekabuddha, or saint, of the Middle Vehicle, who practices the Dharma of the Twelve Links and who has attained Enlightenment by that means, is liberated from his or her allotment of birth and death, but has not yet reached the realm of Buddhahood. However, 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 manifesting Reality and Emptiness. Hence, someone endowed with superior wisdom and the highest potential who understands that all dharmas are void can attain Buddhahood immediately.

The attainment of the pratyekabuddha is the outcome of his or her practice based on the Dharma of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation, or causes and conditions. Causes and conditions act as the support for the twelve links, a concept which confuses people even further. Ignorance conditions karmic action; karmic 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 in the Chain of Causation, in combination with causes and conditions, illustrate how confusion contributes to human suffering.

Let me explain further. 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 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 ovum and blood of the mother; the form already exists, but the name part has yet to develop. The eighteen realms, that 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 seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing natures, with a discriminatory bias already built in. The six senses develop on the basis 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 newborn, 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 accord-

ingly, 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 human beings when approaching death are ravaged by grief and anxiety. They hold on to their thirst for existence, which is 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 ordinary people have no choice but to continue the cycle of continual rebirth in the Six Realms. The pratyekabuddha, understanding the source of defilement and of birth and death and on hearing the Dharma of the Twelve Links in the Chain of Causation, will generate the mind of Tao and practice to end his or her own suffering. He or 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, which means that 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, nothing) 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 the 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." Since, originally, there is no such thing as old age and death (the products of 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, or of the Path."

This sentence deals with the Void as the ground of the Four Noble Truths. What are they? They are Suffering, the Cause of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering and the Path. This 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 or 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 the 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, which includes all forms of physical and mental pain and ache; 2) As the outcome of the impermanent nature of life, wherein all the fleeting pleasures are illusory, temporary, and subject to change; 3) As the five aggregates, or conditioned states, wherein form, feeling, conception, volition and consciousness, the last being based on the first four, are constantly changing and, hence, impermanent; and what is impermanent is, inevitably, the cause of suffering.

The six realms of existence comprise three good, or happy ones and three evil, or unhappy ones. The first three are the realm of heavenly beings, the realm of human beings and the realm of asuras (titans). The last 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 does, and more happiness as well; but they are still subject to birth, death and the suffering of the consequences of action. The sphere of desire in the human realm provides equal parts of happiness and suffering; but

the asuras, though enjoying blessings, are without morality, and their good fortune will eventually end.

The inhabitants of the three happy realms have created 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 at length 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 origin, of suffering as craving, or thirst, which produces continuous re-existence and re-becoming accompanied by passionate clinging. Numerous causes come together, and we know that our present suffering is the effect of those 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 suffer-

ing thoroughly knows that it is generated by one's own self, so, yearning for Nirvana, such a person resolves to practice and attain the Path and the Fruit – namely, 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 Way of the Four Noble Truths should reach an understanding of the cause of suffering and direct his or 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 Sutra*, but some hearers had difficulty understanding it; therefore, he applied expedient means to accommodate them. His teaching of the Four Noble Truths was threefold: 1) by contemplation of the manifestations of suffering; 2) by exhortation; 3) by using his own attainment as an example and as encouragement.

Now, let us consider these expedients in more detail:

1) By 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 other ills of the five skandhas. Where does this suffering come from? It is generated by nothing other than 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 appealing, joyful Nirvana. To follow the Theravada practice means, however, not to halt the mortal

changes of the round of births and still to have some obstruction regarding Emptiness.

Those who have 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. The Tao is reachable for the Buddha's followers only with diligent practice.

2) By exhortation

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

3) By using his own attainment as an example and as encouragement

Using this expedient, the Buddha would often urge his followers, saying, “The problem of suffering can be resolved; look, I did it and so can you” or “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 the like.

In his time, the Buddha set the wheel in motion by teaching the Four Noble Truths, and the hearers (sravakas) attained 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 already seen the emptiness of the five skandhas, and now we perceive the Dharma of the Four Noble Truths to be void as well. In this light, we can clearly understand that there is no suffering, no cause of suffering, no cessation of suffering or no Path. There is only the reflection in the mirror; and without the reflection there is no ability to reflect. The reflection then, 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 Heart 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 aforementioned six fundamental defilements there is

one of the Six Paramitas, or Perfections of Virtue, to be used 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 that of the Theravada regarding 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 onward and upward while simultaneously seeking his or her own enlightenment. If, however, one has not cut off grasping completely, one's very wisdom becomes colonized by consciousness, thus, 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 things to be grasped, conceptualized, manipulated or used. However, this is the perspective of the Mahayana Dharma only. Such an idea of Emptiness is evident neither in the practice nor in the wisdom and also not in Buddhahood, for that matter, in the teachings of the Theravadins.

The Dharma of Emptiness is characterized by the concept of Emptiness as the substance of all dharmas. In this light, then, even the Six Paramitas and the Bodhisattva action are the reflection in the mirror, since they, too, are all amenable to change and, therefore, empty of self. The already introduced Chinese term *Wu* (none, nothing) 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. Thus, 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 the Prajna Paramita deeply; then, the five fundamental conditions of the 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 the 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, and this practice leads to perfect Wisdom and to the supreme Bodhi.

“Because there is nothing to be attained, the Bodhisattva, relying on the 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; 3) the obstruction of passion.

The above quote implies that the supramundane Void is 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 be eliminated is the obstruction of retribution, which is of two kinds: the dependent condition (one’s circumstances) and the resultant person (one’s physical condition). The Bodhisattva has already discarded these two kinds of obstruction, and the different sorts of anxiety have all vanished from his mind.

“Because there is no obstruction, he has no fear;

This clause is about discarding obstruction to action. Not to be obstructed by body and mind means to be

free of worry and fear. The practice of Bodhisattva action engenders five kinds of fear, and those who have not yet broken off delusion and 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 of accomplishment; 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 one with important people present. These five fears, then, obstruct Dharma practice, and without them there is no more obstruction to action.

And, thus, he passes far beyond confused imagination

This clause is related to the obstacle, or obstruction, of passion. That obstruction has its root in the defilement of confusion, or ignorance, which manifests as mistaking the impermanent for the permanent, the ugly for the beautiful, and suffering for happiness. It is the way of people of mundane interests. The Bodhisattva, however, whose conception 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 and craving, hatred and ignorance and, therefore, the cessation of rebirth and of the continuity of life. Then, the Dharmakaya, 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, also relying on the 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 also to all past, present and future Buddhas as well.

“Therefore, the Prajna Paramita is the great magic spell, the great spell of illumination, the supreme spell, which can truly protect one from all suffering without fail.”

The above segment of *The Heart Sutra* praises the merits of Prajna. The term *spell* suggests that the theme and the essence of this Sutra transcend all intellectual concepts; its power and its strength are operative in realms not amenable to manipulation.

Furthermore, its effect can manifest instantaneously, transcending the worldly, attaining holiness.

Hence, he uttered the spell of the Prajna Paramita, saying, “*Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate. Bodhi, Svaha!*”

The above is a mantra, which is an esoteric teaching by means of which we are reminded of the subtlety and complexity of the inconceivable Dharma. The body of Teachings includes some exoteric parts, such as the sutras, and some esoteric ones, such as the **dharanis**, or 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 dharanis, or mantras, are not within the reach of the intellect; thus, the good is upheld and cannot be lost nor can evil arise. During recitation, dharanis, or mantras, enable the one reciting them to control both the sound and the timing, but any recognizable words and meaning which would normally hold his or her mind captive are not there. One then has an opportunity to experience expansiveness, or spaciousness, of mind, one of its very special characteristics.

To recite the above mantra by itself, omitting the text of the Sutra, is a true Mahayana practice of non-discriminating mind. The inconceivable nature of the Teaching is apprehended and the teaching seen as a

whole. Through study, the Sutra and a complete understanding of it equal the meaning implied in the mantra (sometimes referred to as *spell*).

This explication of *The Heart Sutra*, including both the exoteric and the esoteric aspects, is presently completed. As a final word, let me caution that any contrived or faulty interpretations of the Teachings ought to be carefully avoided.

Memorial For My Master, The Great Teacher T'an Hsu

At the time that my master entered his final Nirvana, I was on my way home from the office. When my friend, Chung Wen, told me the heartbreaking news, it was difficult to believe him. I took the news lightly at first; but when I paid my Master a visit the following morning, I realized it was true: I found him still in the meditative posture; when I called out to him, he did not answer; and when I touched his hand, it was completely cold. Only then did I realize he had left us.

I hold the greatest respect for my Master. He always treated us with loving-kindness. This was not only my personal impression, because those who listened to his lectures made the same observation. At the dedication ceremony of the Buddhist Library of China in April, 1958, the Grand Master presented his commentary on the *Mahaprajna Paramita Sutra*. He was most happy to do it. He also shared with me his intention to explicate the *Surangama Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*, saying, "Following my lectures on *The Heart Sutra*, I intend to explicate the *Surangama Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra*; I hope you will still be able to take on the responsibility of translation." The sincerity of his words moved me very deeply. I

have many worldly concerns, and I am also duty-bound. Still, I agreed to do it. I told him, “Yes Master, I will do it because you yourself, advanced as you are in years, still spread the wonderful teachings, thereby liberating sentient beings. As your disciple, I would not shun this responsibility; I shall follow the example and the wishes of my Master. Do not worry.” The Master added with a smile that the lectures at the Library always provided a good opportunity for the dispensation of the Buddhadharma. Because of my willingness to translate, those who speak only Cantonese will also be able to benefit from his lectures now.

There was a gathering of the assembly for a Dharma function honoring Buddha the Healer some years ago. It took place in the memorial hall of Grand Master Ti Hsien, and my Master and I were seated side by side. He said at that time, “I am going to explicate the *Lotus Sutra* very soon. That Sutra is very profound, in terms of the Buddhadharma, as the manifestation of all Dharmas. The Buddhadharma is beyond speech and cannot be conveyed through words; the wonderful meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* is subtle, and so is the meaning of Suchness. The boundary of verbalization is reached when we use words to end all words. In spite of the difficulty of speaking about the profound meanings, we can resort to expedient means and continue the

cultivation of Buddha's wisdom. Let's open the way to perfection by helping people understand the Supreme Doctrine."

My Master's words were sincere, and there was such a glow, such depth to his purpose, that I immediately visualized a meeting of a great Dharma assembly, highlighted with my Master's lecture, sometime in the near future. The sound of his Dharma talk is still in my ears, and his kindly face is still in my mind; yet he is gone. I am overwhelmed with grief. I always went to see my master whenever I was free and had a question regarding Dharma. Even when I received only one word or one sentence from him in response, my heart was moved and my consciousness felt clear and bright. Later, when he was advanced in years and could not talk for long, he could not complete his answer at times; and I had to leave disappointed. Had I anticipated then that he was going to leave us so soon, I would not have left him for one single moment, my worldly concerns notwithstanding.

On one occasion my Master wanted to share with me something that made him happy, but Dharma Master Cheng Hsiang, a disciple of his, dissuaded him, saying I was surely very busy in my office. I brought the matter up with my Master, and since that time he would come out of his room at the Library every

time I made an informal visit. He was very generous with his time and never appeared to be in a hurry to return to his room.

My Master had the highest goal and had taken the Great Vow. He was meticulous, choosing his words with deliberation to help his listeners grow spiritually. One day, I brought my younger son, K'o Hsin, with me to the Library; but the boy, being so young, was very disrespectful. Not only did he not bow, he practically ignored the Master and amused himself as he wished. But the master only smiled and said, "This is innocence, the original face of all people." He gave my boy some treats and then said to him, "I am going to save some more candy for you, so come to see me again; when you grow up, remember to be generous when a monk asks for a donation. Be generous so you will receive blessings in return!" His remarks and his manner always manifested exemplary compassion.

Alas! Had he stayed in this world longer, my master could have given more people the opportunity to hear the Buddhadharma. He could have converted even more sentient beings. However, now that he is gone, I realize how lucky I was to have received the wonderful Dharma and, even more so, how privileged I was to have been so closely associated with such a great teacher.

I paid my Master a visit a few days before he passed away. He said at the time, “In the first place, I am not ill. Do not call the doctor anymore. He can cure illness but not death. In death we are all equal, so do not be concerned about me any more!” I thought that his health was, indeed, not getting any worse, and so, from then on, I made my visits less frequent. Who would have guessed that a serious illness can be cured, but not a minor one? Whenever I think about this, I realize my ignorance at the time. I did not perceive that he knew he would leave soon and did not want me to see his final moment. Without my Master I am a man without blessings. Shall I ever meet a True Master again? When am I going to hear once more the radiant Dharma? I do not know.

Disciple Wang K'ai

Glossary

All terms are in Sanskrit unless otherwise stated.

Agamas: Generic term applied to a collection of traditional doctrines and precepts. The sutras of Theravada are referred to, at times, as the Agamas. [back](#)

Anuttara-Samayak-Sambodhi: The incomparably, and fully awakened Mind; it is the attribute of Buddhas. [back](#)

Arhat: The one who has achieved Nirvana: A Saint in the Theravada tradition. The stage is preceded by three others: 1) Stream-enterer, 2) Once-returner, 3) Non-returner, 4) Arhat. Together they are called the Four Fruits (stages), culminating in Arhatship. [back](#)

Arya: Any individual ennobled by his or her own continuing effort on the path to Enlightenment. [back](#)

Asamkheya (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 asamkheya kalpas. [back](#)

Avalokitesvara: The name is compound of *Ishwara*, meaning Lord, and *avalokita*, meaning 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 Maha-

yana Dharma; the most important Bodhisattva of the Mahayana pantheon, second only to the Buddha. [back](#)

Avatansaka, or Avatamsaka (Sutra): One of the five key texts of the Mahayana canon. Its principal doctrine is that of the law-nature (Dharmadhatu) of the universe. In modern terms it means that all objects and energies are under the law of causation, and, thus, they are co-existent and interdependent. [back](#)

Bhikshu: Religious mendicant; fully ordained Buddhist monk. Bhikshuni is the equivalent female term.

Bodhi: Perfect wisdom or insight; knowledge by means of which a person becomes a Buddha. [back](#)

Brahmajala: Or Indra's net, characterized as holding a luminous gem in every one of its eyes (Hindu mythology). [back](#)

Dharani: Extended mantra used in the esoteric branch of Buddhism to focus and expand the mind. Its words, or sounds, should not communicate any recognizable meaning. [back](#)

Dharmadhatu: 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 encompasses both night and day. [back](#)

Dharmakaya: The first of the three forms of Buddha; i.e., the Self-Nature, or Void aspect. The Real Being in his True Nature, indescribable and absolute. [back](#)

Five Fundamental Conditions of Passion and Delusion: 1) wrong views, which are common to the 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. [back](#)

Four Fruits of the Arhat: See [Arhat](#). [back](#)

Hinayana: Lit., Lesser Vehicle; designates the Buddhist tradition of Southeast Asia; replaced by the term Theravada. [back](#)

Kalpa: Periodic manifestations and dissolutions of universes, which go on eternally. Great kalpas consist of four asamkheya kalpas corresponding to the childhood, maturity, old age and the death of the universe. [back](#)

Lesser Vehicle: See [Hinayana](#). [back](#)

Lotus Sutra: [Saddharma-pundarika](#), *Dharma Flower*, or *The Lotus of the True Law*. This Sutra is the basis for the Lotus Sect (T'ien-T'ai in Chinese). It is among the chief sutras of the Mahayana canon. [back](#)

Mahayana: Lit., Great Vehicle; the dominant Buddhist tradition of China. Special characteristics of Mahayana are as follows: 1) emphasis on the 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. [back](#)

Middle Vehicle: The Vehicle of the pratyekabuddha, who attains his enlightenment alone, independently of a teacher, with the goal of attaining enlightenment and his own salvation rather than that of others as is the goal of a Bodhisattva. [back](#)

Middle Way: See T'ien T'ai. [back](#)

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. [back](#)

Paramita: Perfected virtue, of which there are six, namely: 1) *Dana*: generosity, charity; 2) *Sila*: morality, harmony; 3) *Ksanti*: 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. [back](#)

Pratyekabuddha: Self-enlightened being who has attained without a teacher; attained individual unwilling or unable to teach. [back](#)

Saddharma-pundarika: See [Lotus Sutra](#). [back](#)

Sahalokadhatu: Saha World; this world to be endured; this earth. [back](#)

Sanskrit: The learned classical language of India. The canonical texts of Mahayana Buddhism in its Indian stage were written in Sanskrit. [back](#)

Skandhas: As taught by the Buddha, the five skandhas are the components of the so-called human entity, that is constantly changing. They are as follows: 1) Name/form; 2) Feeling; 3) Conception; 4) Volition; 5) Consciousness. [back](#)

Sramana: Lit., laborer; applied to those who wholeheartedly practice toward Enlightenment; root word of the designation for a novice monk. [back](#)

Sravaka: Lit., hearer; it originally refers to those who paid devoted attention to the spoken words of Buddha; today it is more often applied to practice; an individual still needing guidance in Dharma. [back](#)

Sunyata: A fundamental Buddhist concept, variously translated as non-substantiality, emptiness, voidness, etc. The concept that entities have no fixed or independent nature. [back](#)

Tao: Chinese term meaning the Way. In Buddhist terminology it may be applied to practice, to the Self-nature or to the Ultimate. [back](#)

Tathagata: The Thus-Gone One, a term frequently used by the Buddha in reference to himself. [back](#)

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 a threefold Truth, the three being three-in-one. These are: 1) Phenomena are produced by various causes, and thus their essence is devoid of any permanent existence; that is, they are *empty*; 2) Nevertheless, they do have a real, if only temporary, immediate, illusory existence; 3) Since phenomena are, thus, a blending of both ultimate emptiness (voidness) and temporary (impermanent, illusory) existence, they should be seen as occupying a position midway between the two poles (the *Middle Way*). The school emphasizes Buddhist philosophy. [back](#)

The Ten Directions: North, South, East, West; Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest; Zenith and Nadir. [back](#)

Triloka, or Trailoka: The Three Realms: the World of Sensuous Desire; the World of Form; the World of Formlessness. [back](#)

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 together as the Pali Canon. [back](#)

Upasaka: Buddhist lay disciple (man), who has formally received five precepts, or rules of conduct. Upasika is the equivalent term designating a woman. [back](#)

Transfer-of-Merit Vow (Parinamana) For All Donors

May all the merit and grace gained from adorning Buddha's Pure Land, from loving our parents, from serving our country and from respecting all sentient beings be transformed and transferred for the benefit and salvation of all suffering sentient beings on the three evil paths. Furthermore, may we who read and hear this Buddhadharma and, thereafter, generate our Bodhi Minds be reborn, at the end of our lives, in the Pure Land.