



SHAMBHALA DRAGON EDITIONS

THE SUTRA OF HUI-NENG GRAND MASTER OF ZEN



With Hui-neng's Commentary
on the *Diamond Sutra*

Translated by Thomas Cleary

“The latest work from a distinguished and prolific translator is a new rendering of a celebrated Zen text, *The Sutra of Hui-neng*. This comes with what is stated to be the first English translation of Hui-neng’s verse-by-verse commentary on the Diamond Sutra.”

—*The Middle Way*

ABOUT THE BOOK

Hui-neng (638–713) is perhaps the most beloved and respected figure in Zen Buddhism. An illiterate woodcutter who attained enlightenment in a flash, he became the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Zen, and is regarded as the founder of the “Sudden Enlightenment” school. He is the supreme exemplar of the fact that neither education nor social background has any bearing on the attainment of enlightenment. This collection of his talks, also known as the Platform or Altar Sutra, is the only Zen record of its kind to be generally honored with the appellation sutra, or scripture.

The Sutra of Hui-neng is here accompanied by Hui-neng’s verse-by-verse commentary on the Diamond Sutra—in its very first published English translation ever.

THOMAS CLEARY holds a PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University and a JD from the University of California, Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law. He is the translator of over fifty volumes of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and Islamic texts from Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, Pali, and Arabic.

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DIAMOND SUTRA

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Introduction

Hui-neng (638–713) is a central figure of Zen Buddhist tradition. The last of the early Grand Masters or founding teachers of Zen, Hui-neng is popularly considered the founder of the so-called Southern School of Zen. Hui-neng characterized his teaching as the teaching of immediacy, based on direct insight into the essential nature of awareness. As a testimony of his eminent place in Zen tradition, the record of Hui-neng's life and lectures is the only such document to be dignified with the title of *sutra*, or "scripture," the word traditionally reserved, in Buddhist literature, for the teachings of a buddha.

Hui-neng lived during the T'ang dynasty (619–906), which is often considered the apogee of Chinese culture. The development of Chinese Buddhism was particularly marked during this era, assisted by imperial patronage. Translators from India, Khotan, Sogdiana, Tocharia, Kucha, and other lands continued the enormous work of rendering the Buddhist canons into Chinese, while great masters of emerging Chinese schools pursued the full articulation of pragmatic syntheses of the teachings.

Hui-neng is traditionally said to have been an illiterate woodcutter from a frontier area. He attained enlightenment as a young man of no account, the story goes, and inherited the rank of Grand Master of Zen. Subsequently he was obliged to flee the persecution of jealous elitists, and he disappeared into the mountains. Hui-neng reemerged in middle age as the last of the Zen founders, finally popularizing the teaching among all classes of people. Although he himself was unlettered and expounded Buddhism in the simplest of terms, Hui-neng's students and disciples included Confucian scholars as well as eminent monks, even a Buddhist canon master from India.

The career of Hui-neng had an incalculable effect on the dissemination of Zen in China. According to the biography of Hui-neng recorded in traditional Zen sources, there were thirty-three people known as formal successors of the Grand Master, who taught Zen openly. There were an unrecorded number of others who attained the teaching, the biography adds, who concealed their names and hid their tracks. The names of ten of these hidden masters have been found, although nothing else is known of them. Besides these forty-three known successors of Hui-neng, Grand Master of Zen, it is also said that countless people “awakened to the Way and transcended the ordinary” under the impact of his teaching.

Two versions of Hui-neng’s sutra, called the *Altar Sutra*, are readily available today. A manuscript of an older, briefer version attributed to Hui-neng’s disciple Fa-hai was discovered among the many works unearthed at Tun-huang. A more detailed version compiled in 1291 was based on a number of texts. It is on this fuller version that the present translation is based.

The compiler of this version of the sutra, a monk named Tsungpao, notes in an afterword to his edition,

The teachings that the Sixth Grand Master used to expound were all the complete all-at-once message of the Great Vehicle; that is why this is called a *sutra*. The words are everyday, but its guidance is far-reaching; the expression is easy, the meaning is clear. Everyone who reads it gets something from it. Master Ming-chiao praised it by saying, “Those whose natural potential is sharp will get the deep, those whose natural potential is dull will get the shallow.” How true these words are!

When I first entered the Way, I was inspired by this sutra. Subsequently I saw three different texts of varying quality. The woodblocks were already worn out, so I made a comparison of the texts, correcting errors and filling in abbreviations, also adding the stories of disciples’ questions, in hopes that those who wish to learn may get the message.

Personal History

Realization of the Teaching and Inheritance of the Robe

When the Great Master came to the Forest of Jewels Monastery, Governor Wei of Shao Province went into the mountains with some government officers to request the Master to come out into the city and preach for the people at the lecture hall of the Great Brahma Monastery.

When the Master took the chair, the governor, over thirty officials, over thirty Confucian scholars, and more than one thousand monks, nuns, and laypeople all bowed at once and asked to hear the essentials of the teaching.

The Great Master said to the crowd,

Good friends, bodhi is inherently pure; just use this mind, and you will directly realize buddhahood.

Good friends, for now listen to the course of events through which I realized the teaching.

My father was originally from Fan-yang, but he was banished to Ling-nan, where he became a peasant in Hsin ["New"] Province. Unfortunately for me, my father also died early. With my widowed mother I moved to Nan-hai, where we suffered from poverty as I sold firewood for a living.

One day a customer purchased some kindling and had me deliver it to his shop. The customer received the wood, and I left the shop with my money. Outside, I saw a traveler reciting a scripture. On hearing the words of the scripture, my mind opened up and I understood.

I asked the traveler what scripture he was reciting. He said it was the *Diamond Sutra*. I then asked him where he had gotten this scripture from. He said, "I got it from the Eastern Meditation Monastery in Huang-mei Prefecture in Ch'i Province, where Great Master Hung-jen, the Fifth Grand Master [of Ch'an Buddhism], is teaching over a thousand students. I went there and listened to this scripture that the Great Master always recommends to both clergy and lay folk, saying that if they keep the *Diamond Sutra*, they will see their own essential nature and directly realize buddhahood."

Hearing this explanation, I felt a preexisting affinity. I was given ten ounces of silver by a customer to enable me to provide food and clothing for my mother, letting me go right to Huang-mei to call on the Fifth Grand Master.

After having gotten my mother settled, I left right away and reached Huang-mei within thirty-odd days. There I paid respects to the Fifth Grand Master.

The Grand Master asked, "Where are you from, and what do you want?"

I replied, "I am a peasant from Hsin Province in Ling-nan. I have come from far away to pay my respects to you only because I seek to be a buddha, nothing else."

The Grand Master said, "You are a southerner, and an aborigine; how can you be a buddha?"

I said, "People may be southerners or northerners, but the buddha-nature originally has no south or north. As an aborigine, my social status is not the same as yours, but what difference is there in our buddha-nature?"

The Grand Master wanted to talk with me more, but he saw that his followers were all around, so he had me do chores with the workers.

I said to him, "My own mind always produces wisdom. Not being alienated from one's own essential nature is itself a field of blessings. What work would you have me do?"

The Grand Master said, "This aborigine is very sharp! Don't say any more. Go work in the mill."

So I retired to a back building, where a worker had me splitting firewood and pounding rice. I spent over eight months at this, when

the Grand Master saw me one day and said, “I think your insight is reliable, but I was afraid bad people would harm you, so I didn’t talk to you. Do you realize this?”

I said, “I do know your intention. That is why I didn’t dare walk in front of the auditorium, lest one be careless.”

One day the Grand Master called all his disciples to him and said, “I tell you, for people in this world the matter of birth and death is serious. You lot just seek fields of blessings all day long, and do not seek to get out of the ocean of misery of birth and death.

“If your own nature is confused, how can blessings save you? Let each of you look into your own wisdom, grasp the insightful nature of your own basic mind, and compose a verse to show me. If you have understood the great meaning, I will bequeath to you the robe and the teaching, and make you the Sixth Grand Master.

“It is urgent, so do not tarry. Thinking about it is no use—people who have seen essential nature should see it the moment it’s mentioned. Someone like this could see it even in a battle line of whirling swords.”

After the followers had received these directions, they withdrew and said to each other, “The bunch of us don’t have to clear our minds and concentrate on composing verses to show the teacher. What would be the use? Shen-hsiu the senior is presently the mentor—he will surely get it. If the likes of us presumed to compose verses, we’d be wasting mental energy.”

Other people hearing this all set their minds to rest, saying, “We will rely on Master Shen-hsiu after this; why bother to compose a verse?”

Shen-hsiu reflected, “The reason the others won’t present verses is that I am their mentor. I must compose a verse to present to the teacher—if I do not present a verse, how will the teacher know the depth or shallowness of the insight and understanding within my mind? If my intention in presenting a verse is to seek the teaching, then it is good; if it is to seek the rank of Grand Master, that is bad—it would be the same as the ordinary mentality. How would it be different from usurping the rank of a sage? If I do not present a verse, I’ll never get the teaching. This is very difficult, very difficult.”

In front of the Fifth Grand Master's auditorium was a hallway three rooms long, where they were going to have an artist paint a mural of the projection of the *Lankavatara-sutra* and the succession of the five Grand Masters of Ch'an. After Shen-hsiu had composed his verse, several times he got as far as the front of the auditorium intending to present it, but each time he felt faint and broke out in a sweat. Unable to bring himself to present his verse, over a period of four days he made thirteen unsuccessful attempts.

Finally Shen-hsiu thought, "It would be better if I wrote the verse in the hallway, where the teacher can see it. If the teacher says it is good, I will respectfully come forth and declare it to be my composition. If he says it won't do, I have been wasting years in the mountains accepting respect from others—what further path would I practice?" That night, in the middle of the night, letting no one know, he took a lamp and wrote his verse on the wall of the south hallway, presenting his insight.

The verse said,

The body is the tree of enlightenment,
The mind is like a clear mirror-stand.
Polish it diligently time and again,
Not letting it gather dust.

Having written this, Shen-hsiu went back to his room, totally undetected by anyone.

Shen-hsiu also thought, "If the Grand Master is pleased when he sees my verse tomorrow, then I have affinity with the teaching. If he says it is unworthy, it is my own illusion—the barriers of my existing habits are manifold, and I am not fit to get the teaching. The mind of a sage is hard to fathom."

As he thought in his room, he was uneasy whether he sat up or lay down. This continued until dawn.

Now the Grand Master already knew that Shen-hsiu had not yet entered the gate and did not see his own essential nature. In the morning he called the artist Lu Kung-feng to make the mural on the wall of the south hallway.

Suddenly seeing the verse, the Grand Master told the artist not to proceed with the mural, thanking him for his trouble. "Scripture says that all forms are illusory," he said. "Just leave this verse for people to recite. If they act in accord with this verse, they will avoid falling into evil ways; there is great benefit in acting according to this verse."

He instructed the disciples to light incense, pay respect to the verse, and learn the verse so they could see essential nature. The disciples recited the verse, and all celebrated it admiringly.

In the middle of the night, the Grand Master asked Shen-hsiu to his quarters and said, "Was it you who composed the verse?"

Shen-hsiu said, "I did compose the verse, but I do not presume to seek the rank of Grand Master. I hope for your compassion, to see whether I have any wisdom or not."

The Grand Master said, "Your composition of this verse indicates you have not yet seen your fundamental nature. You have only arrived outside the gate; you have not yet entered inside. If you seek unsurpassed enlightenment with an understanding like this, you will never be able to attain it. Unsurpassed enlightenment requires that you be able to recognize your own basic mind at a word, and see your own original nature, unborn and undying. When you see yourself at all times, moment to moment, with no lingering over anything at all, as one is real all are real—myriad objects are themselves suchness as is. Consciousness of suchness as is is real truth; if you see in this way, this is the inherent nature of unsurpassed enlightenment.

"Go away for now and reflect for a day or two. Then compose another verse. If I see by your verse that you have succeeded in entering the gate, I will entrust the robe and the teaching to you."

Shen-hsiu bowed and left. When several more days had passed, and he still had not managed to produce a verse, he felt faint at heart and uneasy in spirit and thought. He was as if in a dream. He was uneasy and uncomfortable whether he was walking around or sitting down.

Two days later, a boy passing by the mill was chanting that verse. As soon as I heard it, I realized this verse did not yet reveal the fundamental essence. Although I had not received instruction, I

already knew the main idea, so I asked the boy, "What verse is that you're chanting?"

The boy said, "You aborigine! Don't you know that the Grand Master said for people in this world the matter of birth and death is serious—if they want to get transmission of the robe and the teaching, he had the disciples compose verses. If anyone has realized the great meaning, he will transmit the robe and the teaching and make him the Sixth Grand Master. The senior monk Shen-hsiu wrote this formless verse on the wall of the south hallway; the Grand Master had everyone memorize it, saying that if one puts this verse into practice one will avoid falling into evil ways, and if one puts this verse into practice one will gain great benefit."

I said, "I have been here pounding rice for over eight months, and have never been to the auditorium. Please take me to where the verse is, so I can pay my respects."

When the boy had led me to the verse to pay respects, I said, "I am illiterate; please read it for me." At that time the lieutenant military inspector of Chiang Province was there, a man named Chang Chih-yung; he read the verse aloud. After I'd heard it, I said I had a verse too, and asked the lieutenant inspector to write it for me.

The lieutenant inspector said, "How extraordinary that you too would compose a verse!"

I said to the lieutenant inspector, "If you want to learn supreme enlightenment, don't slight beginners. A person of the lowliest rank may have the very highest knowledge, while a person of the highest rank may lack practical wisdom. If you slight people, you will have done incalculable wrong."

The lieutenant inspector said, "Recite your verse, and I will write it for you. If you attain the teaching, you should liberate me. Don't forget these words."

My verse went this way:

Enlightenment originally has no tree,
And a clear mirror is not a stand.
Originally there's not a single thing—
Where can dust be attracted?

After this verse had been written down, the whole community was amazed, and everyone wondered. They said to each other, "How odd! You can't tell about people by their appearance! How could we have employed him, a living bodhisattva, as a servant for so long?"

Seeing the surprise and wonder of the crowd, the Grand Master feared someone might do me harm, so he erased the verse with his shoe and said, "This is still not yet perception of essence."

Everyone thought it was so, but the next day the Grand Master surreptitiously came to the mill, where he saw me pounding rice, a stone at my waist. He said, "People who seek the Way forget their bodies for the sake of the teaching; will he be like this?" Then he asked me, "Is the rice ready yet?"

I replied, "The rice has been ready for a long time, but it still wants sifting."

The Grand Master knocked the mortar three times with his cane. Immediately understanding the Grand Master's meaning, I went to his room at the third watch [in the middle of the night]. Using his vestment as a screen so no one could see us, he explained the *Diamond Sutra* to me. When he came to the point where it says, "You should activate the mind without dwelling on anything," at these words I had the overwhelming realization that all things are not apart from inherent nature.

I then said to the Grand Master, "Who would have expected that inherent nature is originally intrinsically pure? Who would have expected that inherent nature is originally unborn and undying? Who would have expected that inherent nature is originally complete in itself? Who would have expected that inherent nature is originally immovable? Who would have expected that inherent nature can produce myriad things?"

Knowing I had realized original nature, the Grand Master said to me, "If one does not discern the original mind, it is of no benefit to study the teaching. If you discern your own original mind and see your own original essential nature, you are what they call a great man, a teacher of humans and angels, a buddha."

I received the teaching in the middle of the night, unbeknownst to anyone. He then handed on the doctrine of immediacy, as well as the bowl and robe, saying, "You are the sixth-generation Grand

Master. Be conscientious and spiritually liberate beings everywhere, popularizing the teaching so that it will not die out in the future. Listen to my verse:

“Those with sense plant seeds;
The fruits grow from the ground.
Since there is no seed without sense,
There is no nature, no life.”

The Grand Master also said, “When the great teacher Bodhidharma first came to this land a long time ago, people did not yet believe in him, so he handed on this robe as an embodiment of faith, and it has been inherited through the generations. As for the teaching, it is transmitted mind to mind, enabling all to awaken themselves and understand themselves.

“Since olden times, the buddhas have only communicated the original reality; the teachers have intimately imparted the original mind. The robe is a bone of contention; let it stop with you and not be passed on. If you were to pass on this robe, your life would be in danger. You must go away immediately, for I fear people may harm you.”

I asked, “Where should I go?”

The Grand Master said, “Stop when you meet Huai; hibernate when you encounter Hui.”

Taking the robe and bowl in the middle of the night, I said, “I am originally a southerner, unfamiliar with the mountain roads here. How can I get out to the mouth of the river?”

The Fifth Grand Master said, “Don’t worry. I’ll take you there myself.” The Grand Master then took me right to Nine River Station, where he had me get onto a boat. The Fifth Grand Master himself took up the oars and rowed.

I asked the Grand Master to sit down and let me row, but he said, “It is appropriate that I ferry you across.”

I said, “When people are at a loss, the guide ferries them over; when one is enlightened, one ferries oneself over.”

The Grand Master said, “So it is. It is so. Hereafter Buddhism will become very popular through you. Three years after you go, I will

depart from this world. Now you should go; make your way to the South. It is better not to speak out too quickly; it is hard to promote Buddhism.”

After I had bade farewell and left the Grand Master, I set out southward. Within two months I reached Mount Ta Yu.

(After the Fifth Grand Master returned, he did not lecture for several days. The community was perplexed. They asked if he were unwell or indisposed. He replied that it was not that he was ill, but that the teaching had already gone South. When they asked to whom it had been transmitted, he replied, “The capable one got it.” The community then knew who it was [because “capable” is the meaning of the *neng* in the name Hui-neng].)

Several hundred people came after me, wanting to take the robe and bowl away. One monk, named Hui-ming, formerly a four-star general and a rough-and-ready type of man, joined in the pursuit with extreme enthusiasm. He chased me down before anyone else.

I tossed the robe and bowl onto a rock and said, “This robe represents faith; is it appropriate to struggle over it?” Then I hid in the brush.

Hui-ming went over to the robe and bowl and tried to pick them up, but he could not move them. Then he called to me, “Workman, I’ve come for the teaching, not for the robe!”

I then came out and sat on a boulder. Hui-ming bowed and said, “Please explain the teaching to me, Workman.”

I said, “Since you have come for the teaching, you should shut out all objects and not conceive a single thought; then I will expound the teaching for you.”

Hui-ming was silent for a long while. I said, “When you do not think of good and do not think of bad, what is your original face?”

At these words, Hui-ming was greatly enlightened. Then he asked, “Is there any further secret idea besides the secret idea just now secretly spoken?”

I said, “What I have told you is no secret. If you reflect inwardly, the secret is in you.”

Hui-ming said, “Although I was at Huang-mei, in reality I had not yet seen into my own face. Now that I have received your instruction,

I am like a man who takes a drink of water and knows for himself whether it is cold or warm. Now you are my teacher, Workman."

I said, "If you are thus, you and I are both students of Huang-mei. Maintain it carefully on your own."

Hui-ming also asked, "Where should I go after this?"

I said, "If you come to Yuan, then stop; if you come to Meng, then stay."

Hui-ming bowed and took leave. (When Hui-ming got to the foot of the mountain, he said to the crowd of pursuers, "I have just climbed to the heights, but after all there was no trace of him. We had better look elsewhere." The pursuers all believed him. Hui-ming later changed his name to Tao-ming, to avoid assuming the same first character as the Master Hui-neng.)

Later I came to Ts'ao-ch'i, but I was again pursued by bad men, and took refuge among a group of hunters in the Ssu-ming Range. I spent fifteen years among them, occasionally expounding the teaching to the hunters when suitable opportunities arose.

The hunters used to have me watch over the nets, but whenever I'd see living creatures, I would let them all go. At mealtimes I would put vegetables in the pot where the meat was being cooked. If anyone asked me about it, I'd reply that I just ate the vegetables beside the meat.

One day I thought that the time had come to disseminate the teaching, and I shouldn't stay in hiding forever. So I finally left and went to the Temple of the Nature of Reality in Kuang Province. There I found the doctrinal master Yin-tsung lecturing on the *Nirvana-sutra*.

At the time there was a wind blowing, and the pennants were flapping. One monk said, "The wind is moving." Another said, "The pennants are moving." They argued on and on, so I came forward and said, "It is not the wind moving, it is not the pennants moving; it is your minds moving."

Everyone was startled. Yin-tsung invited me up to the front seat and questioned me closely about the inner meaning. He saw that my speech was simple and my reasoning was accurate; and that this did not come from writings.

Yin-tsung said, "Workman, you are certainly not an ordinary man. For a long time I've heard that the robe and teaching of Huang-mei

came South. Might that not be you, Workman?"

I said, "I dare not presume."

Now Yin-tsung bowed, and asked me to show the community the robe and bowl that had been handed on to me. Yin-tsung also asked, "How is the legacy of Huang-mei demonstrated and transmitted?"

I said, "There is no demonstration or transmission; it is only a matter of seeing nature, not a matter of meditation or liberation."

Yin-tsung asked, "Why is it not a matter of meditation and liberation?"

I said, "Because these two things are not Buddhism; Buddhism is a nondualistic teaching."

Yin-Tsung asked, "What is the nondualistic teaching of Buddhism?"

I said, "You lecture on the *Nirvana-sutra*, which explains buddha-nature. This is the nondualistic teaching of Buddhism. For example, the bodhisattva King of Noble Qualities says to Buddha, 'Will violation of the four serious prohibitions, commission of the five perverse sins, or being hopelessly incorrigible, cut off the roots of goodness and essential nature of buddhahood?'

"Buddha said, 'Roots of goodness are twofold: one permanent, one impermanent. Essential buddha-nature is neither permanent nor impermanent, so it is not cut off; that is called nonduality.

"Oneness is good, dualism is not good. The essential buddha-nature is neither good nor not good; this is called nonduality.

"Ordinary people see the body and the world as two; the wise realize their essential nature is not two. The nondual nature is the buddha-nature.'"

Hearing this explanation, Yin-tsung was overjoyed. Joining his palms, he said, "My lectures on the scripture are like gravel; your discourse on meaning is like pure gold."

Now he shaved my head for me and wished to regard me as his teacher. So I finally opened up the East Mountain School under the enlightenment tree.

I attained the teaching on East Mountain, enduring extreme hardship and pain, my life hanging by a thread. Now that I have gotten to participate in this assembly along with the governor and his

officers, monks, nuns, and laypeople, it is all people of eons of affinity: and it is because of having supported buddhas in past lives, planting roots of goodness together, that you have gotten to hear the foregoing account of attainment of the truth of the teaching of immediacy.

The teaching of immediacy was transmitted by past sages; it is not my own personal wisdom. Those who wish to hear the teaching of the sages of yore should each clear your own mind. After you have heard it, each of you get rid of doubt by yourself, and you will be no different from the sages of former generations.

Having heard the teaching, the whole assembly joyfully bowed and withdrew.

2

Prajna

The next day Governor Wei requested more instruction. The Master took the chair and said to the assembly.

Everyone clear your minds and mentally invoke *maha-prajnaparamita*.

Then he went on to say,

Good friends, people of the world originally have the knowledge of bodhi and prajna within them, but they cannot realize it themselves because of the wandering of the conditioned mind; that is why they need a teacher to point it out and guide them to perception of essential nature.

You should know that the buddha-nature is fundamentally no different in ignorant people and wise people. It is just because of difference in confusion and enlightenment that there is ignorance and wisdom.

I will now explain to you the principle of universal transcendent insight, so each of you may attain knowledge and wisdom. Focus your mind and listen clearly; I will explain for you.

Good friends, people of the world who chant “Prajna” all day long without knowing the prajna in their own essential nature are as if talking about food without being filled. If they only talk about emptiness, they won’t attain perception of essential nature even in myriad eons—ultimately it is of no benefit.

Good friends, *maha-prajnaparamita* is a Sanskrit word, rendered here as “great insight having arrived at the other shore.” This must be applied mentally; it is not in verbal repetition. Verbal repetition

without mental application is illusory and evanescent. When it is both spoken of and mentally applied, then mind and speech correspond.

The original essential nature is buddha. There is no buddha apart from essential nature.

What does *maha* mean? *Maha* means great. The extent of mind is vast as space, without bounds. It has no squareness or roundness, no largeness or smallness; it has no blueness, yellowness, redness, or whiteness. It has no up or down, no long or short. It has no anger and no joy, no right and no wrong, no good and no bad. It has no head or tail.

The lands of all buddhas are all the same as space. The subtle nature of people in the world is originally empty, with nothing that can be grasped. The true emptiness of our inherent nature is also like this.

Good friends, don't cling to emptiness when you hear me speak of emptiness. Above all, do not stick to emptiness. If you sit quietly with an empty mind, you are fixated on indifferent voidness.

Good friends, the emptiness of physical space contains the colors and forms of myriad things, the sun, moon, and stars, the mountains, rivers, and land, the springs and valley streams, the grasses, trees, and forests, bad people and good people, bad things and good things, heaven and hell, the oceans and the mountains—all are within space. The emptiness of the essential nature of people in the world is also like this.

Good friends, our inherent nature contains all things—this is greatness. All things are in your essential nature. If you see everyone's bad and good but do not grasp or reject any of it, and do not become affected by it, your mind is like space—this is called greatness, hence the term *maha*.

Good friends, deluded people expound verbally, wise people practice mentally. There are also deluded people who sit quietly with empty minds, not thinking of anything whatsoever, and claim this is greatness. This sort of person is not worth talking to, because theirs is a wrong view.

Good friends, the extent of mind is so vast it pervades the cosmos. When it is used so that it functions adaptively with comprehensive clarity, it knows everything. Everything is one, the one is everything.

Going and coming freely, the substance of mind without blockage—this is prajna.

Good friends, all prajna insight comes from our own essential nature; it does not enter from outside. Don't misuse your thought and call that the inherent function of intrinsic essential nature.

When one is real, all is real. The extent of mind is too vast to travel a narrow path. Don't just talk about emptiness all day without cultivating its application in the mind. That would be like a commoner claiming kingship for himself, without ever being able to attain it. Such people are not my disciples.

Good friends, what is prajna? *Prajna* is translated into Chinese as insight or wisdom. When you are not foolish moment to moment, wherever you may be, at any time, always acting insightfully and wisely, this is the application of prajna. A moment of folly, and prajna is cut off; a moment of wisdom and prajna arises.

People of the world are ignorant and deluded; they do not see prajna. They talk about prajna, but in their minds they remain ignorant. They always claim to cultivate prajna, but while they talk on and on about emptiness, they do not know true emptiness.

Prajna has no form; the heart of wisdom is it. If you understand it in this way, this is called the knowledge of prajna.

What does *paramita* mean? This is a Western word, which means "arrived at the other shore" in Chinese. If you understand the meaning, you detach from birth and death. If you fixate on objects, birth and death occur, as when water has waves—this is called "this shore." When you detach from objects, there is no birth or death, as when water flows smoothly—this is called "the other shore," so it is referred to as *paramita*.

Good friends, people who are lost may reiterate this verbally, but even as they are reiterating it there is error and untruth in them. If they practice it in every moment of thought, this is called true nature. To realize this reality is the reality of prajna; to cultivate this practice is the practice of prajna. If you do not cultivate it, you are ordinary mortals; the moment you put it into practice, you yourselves are equal to buddhas.

Good friends, ordinary mortals are themselves buddhas, affliction is itself enlightenment. Deluded the moment before, you were an

ordinary mortal; enlightened the moment after, you are a buddha. Fixation on objects the moment before was affliction; detachment from objects the moment after is enlightenment.

Good friends, *maha-prajnaparamita* is most honorable, supreme, foremost. It has no dwelling, no going, and no coming. The buddhas of past, present, and future emerge from within it. You should use great wisdom to break through the afflictions and mundane toils of the five clusters. If you cultivate practice in this way, you will surely attain the way of buddhas, transmuting the three poisons into discipline, concentration, and insight.

Good friends, this teaching of mine produces 84,000 insights from one prajna. Why? Because people of the world have 84,000 passions. If they had no passions, wisdom would always be manifest, not apart from one's own essential nature. Those who realize this teaching are free of thought, recollection, and clinging; they do not create deceptive falsehoods. Employing their own essential nature of being as is, seeing with insight, they neither grasp nor reject anything at all. This is the way to see essential nature and realize buddhahood.

Good friends, if you want to enter the most profound realm of reality and prajna samadhi, you should cultivate the practice of prajna and recite the *Diamond Prajna Sutra*; then you'll attain perception of essential nature. You should realize that the merit of this sutra is immeasurable, boundless; it is clearly extolled in the sutra, but no one can explain it completely.

This teaching is the highest vehicle, expounded for people of great insight and superior faculties. When people of lesser faculties and little insight hear it, they conceive disbelief. Why? When it rains all over a continent, human habitations are flooded; but when it rains over the ocean, that neither increases nor decreases the ocean water. Similarly, when people of the Great Vehicle or people of the Supreme Vehicle hear the *Diamond Sutra* expounded, their minds open up to understanding. Thus they know their own essential nature inherently has the insight of prajna. They are continually observant, using their own insight; therefore they do not depend on writings.

Rainwater does not come from heaven, but it is produced by the agencies of moisture, causing all living beings, all grasses and trees, all animate and inanimate beings, to be refreshed; the hundred rivers and myriad streams enter the ocean, merging into one body. The insight of prajna in the original nature of living beings is also like this.

Good friends, when people of small faculties hear this teaching of immediacy, they are like grasses and trees with naturally small roots that collapse in heavy rains and cannot grow. So it is with people of small faculties: they originally have the wisdom of prajna, no different from people of great wisdom—why don't they awaken on their own when they hear the teaching? It is because the barriers of their false views are heavy and the roots of their passions are deep. They are like huge clouds covering the sun; if the wind doesn't blow, the sunshine won't appear.

The wisdom of prajna is neither great nor small: these differences are due to the differences in the delusion and enlightenment of the minds of all living beings. Those with deluded minds and externalist views cultivate practices to seek buddhahood without having realized their own essential nature; they are the ones with small faculties.

If you open to understanding of the teaching of immediacy, you do not cultivate practice grasping externals; you simply activate accurate perception at all times in your own mind, so afflictions and passions can never influence you. This is perception of essential nature.

Good friends, when you do not dwell on the inward or the outward, coming and going freely, you are able to eliminate the clinging mentality and penetrate without obstruction. If you can put this into practice, there's basically no difference from the *Prajna-sutra*.

Good friends, all sutras and other writings, including the twelve-part canon of the great and small vehicles, were all set down because of people. They could only be set up based on the nature of intelligence. If there were no people in the world, myriad teachings would not originally exist of themselves. So we know that myriad teachings originate from people; all scriptures and books exist because of what people have said.

Because there are ignorant and wise people among humanity, the ignorant become the lesser people, the wise become the great; the

ignorant question the wise, the wise explain things for the ignorant. When the ignorant suddenly understand and their minds open up, then they are no different from the wise.

Good friends, as long as they are not enlightened, buddhas are human beings; the moment they are enlightened, human beings are buddhas. So we know that all truths are in our own minds. Why not immediately see the original nature of true being as is from within your own mind? The sutra on ethics for bodhisattvas says that our original nature is fundamentally inherently pure. If you know your own mind and see its essential nature, you will all attain buddhahood. The *Pure Name Sutra* says, "At that moment you regain the original mind, clear and open."

Good friends, I awakened immediately on hearing the words of Master Hung-jen, suddenly seeing the original nature of being as is. Therefore I am popularizing this teaching to enable those who study the Way to awaken enlightenment at once.

Each of you, observe your mind yourself; see your original nature yourself. If you do not realize it on your own, you must seek a teacher who understands the Supreme Vehicle, to show you the right way. Such a teacher has a great cause, namely to guide others to perception of essential nature. Because all good qualities can be activated by a real teacher, even though the twelve-part canons of the buddhas of past, present, and future are originally inherent in human nature, if people cannot understand on their own, they need to find teachers to point the way so they can see.

Those who realize on their own do not need to seek outside. If you insist absolutely that a teacher is necessary in order to attain liberation, that is not right. Why? Because there is a teacher within one's own mind that understands spontaneously. If you create falsehood, confusion, erroneous thought and delusion, then even if a teacher gives you instruction, it cannot help you.

If you activate the insight of genuine prajna, in an instant erroneous thoughts all vanish. If you know your own nature, with one realization you immediately reach buddhahood.

Good friends, insight sees through inside and out, clearly penetrating, discerning your own original mind. If you know your

original mind, you are fundamentally liberated. If you attain liberation, this is prajna samadhi, which is freedom from thought.

What is freedom from thought? If you see all things without the mind being affected or attached, this is freedom from thought. Its function pervades everywhere, without being attached anywhere. Just purify the basic mind, having the six consciousnesses go out the six senses into the six fields of data without any defilement or mixup, coming and going freely, comprehensively functioning without stagnation: this is prajna-samadhi, freedom and liberation. This is called the practice of freedom from thought. If you do not think at all, you will cause thoughts to be stopped entirely. This is dogmatic bondage; this is called a biased view.

Good friends, those who realize the state of freedom from thought penetrate all things. Those who realize the state of freedom from thought see the realms of the buddhas. Those who realize the state of freedom from thought arrive at the rank of buddhahood.

Good friends, those who attain my teachings in later generations will vow to accept and uphold this doctrine of immediacy among those with the same insight and the same practice, because it is like attendance on Buddha; those who never regress all their lives will surely enter the ranks of sages.

So you should transmit what has been handed on silently since time immemorial; don't conceal the genuine teaching. If people do not share the same insight and the same practice, but are within a different norm, don't transmit it to them, for it will be harmful to them. Perhaps ignorant people who do not understand may repudiate this teaching, cutting off the seed nature of buddhahood for a hundred eons, or a thousand lifetimes.

Good friends, I have a hymn on the formless, which each of you should memorize. Whether you are householders or renunciants, just practice in accord with it. If you do not practice personally but only memorize my words, that is of no benefit. Listen to my hymn:

Communication by speech and communication by mind
Are like the sun in the sky,
Only transmitting the teaching of seeing essential nature,
Emerging in the world to destroy false doctrines.

The truth has neither immediacy nor gradualness,
But delusion and enlightenment have slowness and speediness.
This method of seeing essential nature
Ignorant people cannot comprehend.

Explanation may be of myriad kinds;
If they accord with truth, they are ultimately one.
In the dark abode of affliction,
We always should produce the sun of wisdom.

When falsehood comes, there are afflictions;
When truth comes, afflictions are eliminated.
When neither falsehood nor truth are employed,
Purity reaches remainderlessness.

Enlightenment is our original inherent nature:
Excite the mind, and there is confusion.
Be pure of mind in the midst of illusion;
Just be true, and there are no barriers.

If people of the world practice this Way,
Nothing will present an obstacle.
Always see your own mistakes by yourself
And you will be fit for the Way.

All kinds have their own paths,
Which do not interfere with each other:
If you leave your path to seek another way,
To the end of your days you'll never see the Way.
Passing a whole lifetime in ups and downs,
Wherever you are you'll still be tormented in yourself.

If you want to actually see the true Way,
Acting rightly is the way,
If your eyes have no mindfulness of the Way,
You go in the dark, not seeing the way.

People who really practice the Way
Do not see the faults of the world;
If you see the errors of others,
Your own error abets them.
If others err but you do not,
Your own error's still faulty.

Just get rid of your own wrong-mindedness,
Eliminate the affliction:
With hatred and love not affecting the mind,
Stretch out your legs and sleep.

If you want to try to teach other people,
You need to have expedient methods yourself:
The moment you get them to break through the doubts they
have,
Thereupon their own essential nature manifests.

Buddhism is in the world;
It is not realized apart from the world.
Seeking enlightenment apart from the world
Is like looking for horns on a hare.

True seeing is called transcendence;
False seeing is worldliness:
Set aside both right and wrong,
And the nature of enlightenment is clear.

This hymn is of the doctrine of immediacy,
Also called the ship of the great teaching.
If you listen confused, it takes eons on end;
When you're enlightened, it takes but an instant.

The Master also said,

Now that I have explained this doctrine of immediacy at the
Temple of Great Brahma, I pray that all beings of the universe will
see essential nature and attain buddhahood at these words.

At that time Governor Wei, the officials, the clerics, and the laity all had insightful understanding after hearing the Master speak. As one they bowed and lauded him: "Excellent! Who would have expected there would be a buddha appearing in the world south of the Range!"

Questions

One day Governor Wei held a banquet for the Master. After the banquet, the governor asked the Master to give a lecture. Along with the officials, gentry, and commoners, he bowed again with a serious expression and asked,

I have heard your teaching, and it is truly inconceivable. Now I have a few doubts, which I wish you would be so compassionate as to resolve for me.

The Master said,

If you have any doubts, then ask, and I will explain for you.

Governor Wei asked,

Isn't what you teach the basic message of Great Master Bodhidharma?

The Master replied

It is.

Governor Wei said,

I have heard that when Bodhidharma first tried to teach Emperor Wu of Liang, the emperor asked, "All my life I have been building temples, ordaining monks, giving alms and charitable meals: what virtue have I achieved?" Bodhidharma said, "In reality, no virtue is

achieved.” I do not understand the principle of this; please explain to me.

The Master said,

There really is no virtue achieved; do not doubt the words of the ancient sage. Emperor Wu’s mind was wrong and he did not recognize true teaching. Building temples, ordaining monks, giving alms and charitable meals, is called seeking blessings. Blessings themselves cannot be considered virtue achieved. Virtue is in the embodiment of qualities, not in cultivating blessings.

The Master also said,

Seeing essential nature is achievement, equanimity is virtue. Not stagnating moment to moment, always seeing the real true subtle functions of the original nature, is called achievement and virtue. Inward humility is achievement, outward courtesy is virtue. Establishing myriad truths in your own nature is achievement; the mind being essentially detached from thoughts is virtue. Not departing from one’s own essential nature is achievement; acting adaptively without being affected is virtue. If you seek the body of qualities of achievement and virtue, just act on this. That is real achievement and virtue.

People who cultivate achievement and virtue do not slight anyone in their hearts, always acting with respect for all. If you always slight people in your heart and are constantly egotistic, then you have no achievement yourself. When your nature is false and not genuine, then you have no virtue yourself, because of egotistic self-aggrandizement and habitually slighting everyone.

Good friends, continuity moment to moment is achievement, balance and directness of mental activity is virtue. Refining your own nature is achievement; refining your own person is virtue.

Good friends, achievement and virtue must be seen within your own nature; they are not to be sought through almsgiving and donations. That is why blessings and virtues are different. Emperor Wu did not know the true principle—it was not our spiritual ancestor who was mistaken.

The governor also asked,

I often see clergy and laity invoking Amitabha Buddha in hopes of rebirth in the [Pure Land of the] West. Please explain this to me. Can we attain rebirth there? Please resolve this doubt for me.

The Master said,

Listen clearly, Governor, and I will explain it to you. When the World Honored One was in the city of Sravasti, he spoke of the Western Pure Land as a teaching device. Scripture is clear that “it is not far from here,” but treatises say it is “108,000 miles away.” This number refers to the ten evils and eight wrongs in one’s person. This says it is far away. Saying it is far away is for people of lesser faculties. Saying it is near is for people of better faculties.

People may be of these two kinds, but the truth is not. Delusion and enlightenment differ; perception may be slow or quick. Deluded people invoke Buddha seeking rebirth elsewhere; enlightened people purify their own minds. That is why Buddha said, “The lands of the buddhas are pure according to the purity of their minds.”

Even though you are a man of the East, you are impeccable as long as you purify your mind. Even people of the West are faulty if their minds are not pure. When people of the East do wrong, they invoke Buddha, seeking rebirth in the West; when people of the West do wrong, in what land do they seek rebirth by invoking Buddha?

Ordinary ignorant people, not realizing their own essential nature, do not recognize the Pure Land within the body; so they pray for the East and pray for the West. For enlightened people, it’s the same wherever they are. That is why Buddha said, “Wherever they are, they are always at ease.”

Governor, as long as there is nothing in your mind that is not good, the West is not far from here. If you harbor states of mind that are not good, even if you invoke Buddha, rebirth can hardly be attained.

Now I urge you, good friends, to first get rid of the ten evils; that is the equivalent of traveling ten myriad miles. Then get rid of the eight wrongs; that is the equivalent of crossing eight thousand miles. See

essential nature in every moment, always acting with impartial directness, and you will arrive in a finger-snap and see Amitabha Buddha.

Governor, if you just practice the ten virtues, what further need do you have to pray for rebirth? If you do not stop the mentality of the ten evils, what buddha would come welcome you? If you realize the birthless reality of immediacy, vision of the West is instantaneous; if you invoke Buddha seeking rebirth without enlightenment, the road is long—how can you get there?

I will move the West in an instant, so you can see it right before our eyes. Does everyone want to see it?

The crowd bowed and said,

If it is to be seen here, why should we pray for rebirth any more? Let the Master be so compassionate as to cause the West to appear for all to see.

The Master said,

The physical body of a human being is a city. The eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are gates. There are five outer gates and one inner gate, the gate of the consciousness. Mind is the ground, nature is the ruler. The ruler lives on the ground of the mind. As long as essential nature is there, the ruler is there; when nature is gone, the ruler is not there. When essential nature is there, body and mind exist; when essential nature is gone, the body decomposes.

Buddhahood is actualized within essential nature; do not seek it outside the body. If your own nature is confused, you are an ordinary person; if your own nature is awakened, you are a buddha.

Kindness and compassion are Avalokitesvara, joyfulness and dispassion are Mahasthamaprapta; competence and purity are Shakyamuni, impartiality and directness are Amitabha. Egoism toward others is the polar mountain, greed is the water of the oceans, afflictions are the waves, viciousness and malevolence are violent dragons, falsehoods and illusions are ghosts and spirits, worldly passions are fish and turtles, craving and wrath are hells, follies are animals.

Good friends, always practice the ten virtues, and heaven will be there. Get rid of egoism toward others, and the polar mountain will topple. Eliminate greed, and the ocean waters will dry up. If afflictions are not there, the waves die out. When viciousness and malevolence are eliminated, fish and turtles are gone. On the ground of your own mind, the buddha of awareness radiates abundant light, outwardly illuminating the six gates, pure enough to penetrate the heavens. When your own essential nature is inwardly illuminated, the three poisons are eliminated; punishments like the hells vanish all at once, so inside and out are clear through and through, no different from the West. If you do not do this practice, how can you get there?

Hearing this explanation, the great assembly clearly saw essential nature. All of them bowed and praised its excellence, chanting,

May all living beings in the universe who hear this realize understanding at once.

The Master said,

Good friends, if you want to put this into practice, you can do it at home—it doesn't depend on being in a monastery. Being able to practice at home is like someone of the East whose mind is good; being in a monastery but not practicing is like someone of the West whose mind is bad.

As long as your mind is pure, this is the West in your own nature.

Governor Wei then asked,

How can we practice it at home? Please give us instructions.

The Master said,

I will recite a formless hymn; as long as you practice in accord with it, you will always be with me. If you do not practice in accord with it, what benefit on the Way is shaving your head and being ordained?

The hymn:

When the mind is even, why bother to keep precepts?
When action is straightforward, what's the need to practice
meditation?
If you're grateful, you take care of your parents respectfully;
If you're dutiful, above and below are mentally sympathetic.

If you're deferential, high and low harmonize amicably;
If you're tolerant, myriad evils cause no disturbance.
If you can drill wood and produce fire,
You will produce red lotuses from the mind.

Harsh words are clearly good medicine;
If it offends the ear, it's surely faithful speech.
Reform your errors, and you'll develop wisdom;
Attaining the Way does not come from donating money.

Enlightenment is only to be sought in the mind;
Why bother seeking mysteries outside?
Hearing my explanation, practice on this basis,
And the West is right before your eyes.

The Master added,

Good friends, everyone should put this hymn into practice: see
your essential nature, and attain buddhahood directly. Time does not
wait for you.

Let everyone disperse now. I am returning to Ts'ao-ch'i—if anyone
has doubts, come ask me.

*At that time the governor, the officials, and the good men and
pious women in the assembly all attained understanding,
accepted it faithfully, and put it into practice.*

Stabilization and Insight

Good friends, this teaching of mine is based on stabilization and insight. Do not make the mistake of considering stabilization and insight to be separate. Stabilization and insight are one entity, not two. Stabilization is the substance of insight, insight is the function of stabilization. When it is itself insight, stabilization is in insight; when it is itself stabilization, insight is in stabilization. If you know what this means, that is balanced learning of stabilization and insight.

Students of the Way, do not say there is a difference between stabilization coming first and then producing insight, and insight coming first and then producing stabilization. Those who entertain this view are dualistic in their doctrine.

If you talk good talk but are not good at heart, you have stabilization and insight in vain; stabilization and insight are not balanced. If your heart and your talk are both good, and inside and outside are as one, then stabilization and insight are balanced.

Self-enlightenment and -cultivation are not to be found in argument. If you argue about precedence, then you are the same as deluded people. If you do not put a stop to contention, you are increasing egoism and have not detached from the four images [of a self, a personality, a being, and a life].

Good friends, what are stabilization and insight like? They are like a lamp and its light. If there is a lamp, there is light; without a lamp, there is darkness. The lamp is the body of the light, the light is the function of the lamp. The names may be two, but in essence they are basically one and the same. The phenomena of stabilization and insight are also like this.

The Master said to the assembly,

Good friends, absorption in one practice means always acting with a unified, direct mind in all situations, no matter what you are doing. The *Pure Name Sutra* says, "The direct mind is the site of enlightenment; the direct mind is the Pure Land." Don't merely talk about directness while your mind acts deviously; don't merely talk about absorption in one practice without a straightforward mind. Just act with a direct mind and have no clinging attachments to anything.

Deluded people stick to the appearances of things: they cling to the idea of absorption in one practice as only meaning constantly sitting unmoving, not letting the mind be aroused at random. They identify this with absorption in one practice, but those who make this interpretation are equivalent to inanimate objects. This is a condition that obstructs the Way.

Good friends, the Way should be fluid, free-flowing. Why then do you stagnate? When the mind does not dwell on things, then the Way is fluid. If the mind dwells on things, that is called self-binding. If you say constant sitting is right, that is contradicted by the fact that Shariputra was scolded by Vimalakirti for sitting quietly in the forest.

Good friends, there are also people who teach sitting, gazing into the mind, and visualizing purity, without moving or getting up, positing merit from this. Confused people do not understand, so they grab onto this and become delusional. There are many like this; they teach each other this way, so we know it is a big mistake.

The Master said to the assembly,

Good friends, the true teaching originally is neither sudden nor gradual; it is human temperaments that may be quick or slow. People who are lost cultivate gradually, while people who are awakened attain suddenly. When you know your own original mind and see your own original nature, then there is no difference. That is why the temporary terms *sudden* and *gradual* are set up.

Good friends, since time immemorial this school of ours has first established freedom from thought as the source, freedom from form as the substance, and freedom from fixation as the basis.

Freedom from form means detachment from forms in the midst of forms. Freedom from thought means having no thought in the midst of thoughts. As for freedom from fixation, while the basic nature of humanity is in the midst of the world, with good and bad, beauty and ugliness, enmity and familiarity, words and speech, offense and attack, deception and contention, one considers it all empty and does not think of retaliation, not thinking about the objects in the surroundings. If thought after thought, previous, present, and subsequent thoughts, go on continuing uninterrupted, this is called bondage. When thought after thought does not dwell on things, then there is no bondage. Thus freedom from fixation is basic.

Good friends, outwardly being detached from all forms and appearances is called freedom from form. If you can be detached from forms and appearances, then the substance of things is pure. Thus freedom from form is the substance.

Good friends, when the mind is not influenced by objects, this is called freedom from thought. One is always detached from objects in one's own thoughts, and one does not arouse the mind over objects. If you just do not think of anything at all, and get rid of all thoughts entirely, once all thoughts end you die and come back to life someplace else. This is a big mistake; those who study the Way should think about it.

If you do not know the intention of the teaching, you go wrong yourself, and can also mislead others. Your self-delusion is not visible to you. You even misrepresent Buddhist scripture. That is why we establish freedom from thought as the source.

Good friends, how do we establish freedom from thought as the source? Deluded people who only talk about seeing essential nature have thoughts about objects, then create false views based on these thoughts; all worldly troubles and erroneous ideas come from this.

In our own essential nature, there is basically not a single thing that can be grasped. If you grasp anything supposedly bad or good, this is a worldly trouble, a false view. Therefore this teaching establishes freedom from thought as the source.

Good friends, what does "freedom from" nullify, what does "thought" think of? "Freedom from" means freedom from dualism, a mind without all sorts of worldly troubles. "Thought" means thought

of the original nature of reality as such. Reality as such is the substance of thought, thought is the function of reality as such. The intrinsic nature of reality as such produces thought. It is not the eyes, ears, nose, or tongue that can think; reality as such has an essential nature whereby it produces thought. If there were no eyes or ears and no form or sound in reality as such, it would decompose at once.

Good friends, the essential nature of reality as such produces thought. Though the six senses have perception and cognition, the real essential nature is not affected by myriad objects; it is always independent. Therefore scripture speaks of being able to distinguish the characteristics of all things while remaining unmoved in ultimate truth.

5

Sitting Meditation

The Master said to the assembly,

Sitting meditation in this school basically does not fixate on mind, and it does not fixate on purity. Also it is not immobility. If you speak of fixating on mind, mind is basically deceptive; it is because of knowing the mind is like an illusion that there is no fixation. If you speak of fixating on purity, people's essential nature is originally pure; it is by false thoughts that they cover reality as such—just have no false ideas, and essential nature is pure of itself. If you arouse the mind to fixate on purity, you create the delusion of purity.

Delusion has no location; fixation is delusion. Purity has no form; if you define a pure form as meditation, the act of entertaining this view will obstruct your own original nature, and you will be subject to bondage by purity.

Good friends, if you are going to cultivate immovability, when you see people, simply do not see people's right and wrong, good and bad, faults and problems; then your own essential nature is unmoved.

Good friends, deluded people may achieve physical immobility and yet the moment they open their mouths they are talking about others' right and wrong, strengths and weaknesses, good and bad. They turn away from the path. If you cling to mind or cling to purity, this obstructs the way.

Good friends, what does the term *sitting meditation* mean? In this teaching there is no obstacle and no obstruction: when mind and thought are not aroused over any good or bad objects or situations in the external world, this is called sitting. When you see the

immutability of your own essential nature inwardly, this is called meditation.

Good friends, what does the term *meditation concentration* mean? Being detached from external appearances is called meditation; being free from inward disturbance is called concentration. If you are fixated on appearances externally, your mind is disturbed within; if you are detached from appearances outside, then the mind is not disturbed.

The original essential nature is inherently pure and spontaneously concentrated; it is just because of thinking about objects when seeing objects that one becomes disturbed. If you see all objects without your mind becoming disturbed, this is true concentration.

Good friends, being detached from appearances outside is meditation, not being disturbed inside is concentration. Meditation outside with concentration inside is called meditation concentration. A scripture on precepts for bodhisattvas says, "Our original nature is inherently pure." Good friends, see for yourself the purity of original essential nature in every moment of thought, cultivating yourself, practicing yourself, attaining buddhahood yourself.

Repentance

At that time, seeing the gentry and peasantry of the regions of Kuang, Shao, and the four quarters gathered on the mountain to listen to the teaching, the Great Master took the high seat and said to the crowd,

Welcome, good friends. This thing must come from your own essential nature. At all times, moment to moment, purify your own mind. Cultivate yourself, work on your own, see your own reality body, see the buddha in your own mind, liberate yourself, regulate yourself—only then will you attain realization.

You have not come here for no reason. Since you have come from far away to gather here as one, all of you have affinity together. Now let each of you kneel: first I will transmit the perfumes of the five-part reality body in our own essential nature; then I will pass on formless repentance.

The crowd kneeled, and the Master said,

First is the perfume of morality: when there is no error in one's own mind, no evil, no envy or jealousy, no greed or hatred, no robbery or injury, this is called the perfume of morality.

Second is the perfume of stability: seeing the good and bad characteristics of objects without disturbance in one's own mind is called the perfume of stability.

Third is the perfume of wisdom. When one's own mind has no obstruction, and always observes one's own nature with insight, one does not do anything bad. Even when one does good, the mind does not cling to it. Respectful of elders while considerate of the young,

one is sympathetic and compassionate to the orphaned and the impoverished. This is called the perfume of wisdom.

Fourth is the perfume of liberation. When one's own mind does not fixate on objects, does not think of good, does not think of bad, is free and unobstructed, that is called the perfume of liberation.

Fifth is the perfume of liberated knowledge and vision. Once one's own mind is not fixated on anything, good or bad, it will not do to sink into vacuity and keep to quiescence; one should study broadly and learn a lot, recognize one's own original mind and master the principles of the buddhas, harmonize enlightenment to deal with people, free from egotistic personality, unchanging right up to the attainment of the true nature of enlightenment. This is called the perfume of liberated vision and knowledge.

Good friends, these perfumes are inner effects within each individual—do not seek them externally. Now I will transmit formless repentance to you, to annihilate the sins of past, present, and future, enabling you to attain purity of thought, word, and deed.

Good friends, let each of you repeat after me, in unison: "From the preceding moment of thought, the present moment of thought, and the following moment of thought, from moment of thought to moment of thought I will not be affected by folly or delusion; I repent of all previous folly and delusion, and other faults due to them, and pray that they disappear all at once and never occur again.

"From the preceding moment of thought, the present moment of thought, and the following moment of thought, from moment of thought to moment of thought I will not be affected by any conceit or deceit. I repent of all previous misdeeds associated with malignant conceit and deceit, and pray that they disappear all at once, never to occur again.

"From the preceding moment of thought, the present moment of thought, and the following moment of thought, moment of thought to moment of thought I will not be affected by jealousy and envy. I repent of all previous misdeeds associated with malignant jealousy and envy, and pray that they disappear at once and never occur again."

Good friends, the foregoing constitutes formless repentance. Why is it called repentance? Repentance means repenting of former

errors, previous bad actions, faults like stupidity, delusion, conceit, deceit, jealousy, and envy, repenting of them all so they don't ever recur. That is being penitent. Repentance further means regretting later mistakes, from now on aware of bad behaviors and faults like stupidity and delusion, conceit and deceit, jealousy and envy, and stopping them forever, not acting them out any more. This is called repentance.

Ordinary people who are ignorant and confused only know to repent of their former errors and do not know to repent of future faults. Because they do not repent of future faults, their past errors do not disappear, and later faults also arise. If the former errors do not disappear and later faults also arise, how could this be called repentance?

Good friends, once you have repented, I will make the four universal vows for you. Each of you should be careful to listen accurately.

“The beings in my own mind are infinite; I vow to liberate them.

“The afflictions in my own mind are infinite; I vow to end them.

“The teachings in my own nature are inexhaustible; I vow to study them.

“The buddhahood in my own nature is supreme; I vow to attain it.”

Good friends, doesn't everyone say, “Beings are infinite; I vow to liberate them”? Speaking this way doesn't mean I am going to do the liberating. Good friends, the beings in the mind are delusion, deception, immorality, jealousy, malice—states of mind like this are all beings. Each of you must liberate yourselves through your own essential nature; that is called true liberation.

What is meant by liberating yourself through your own essential nature? That means the beings in false views, afflictions, and ignorance are liberated by accurate insight. Once you have accurate insight, you get the wisdom of prajna to break through the beings in folly and delusion, so each one is self-liberated. When falsehood occurs, truth liberates; when delusion occurs, enlightenment liberates. When folly occurs, wisdom liberates; when evil occurs, good liberates. Liberation like this is called true liberation.

What is more, “Afflictions are infinite; I vow to end them” means using the prajna wisdom in your own essential nature to get rid of

false ideas. And “Teachings are inexhaustible; I vow to study them” requires you to see your own essential nature and always act on right principle; this is called true learning.

As for “I vow to attain supreme buddhahood,” once you are able to humble your mind and practice straightforwardness at all times, you always produce prajna, beyond delusion and awakening; setting aside both reality and falsehood, you see buddha-nature. Then you attain buddhahood at a word. Always thinking of practical application is the principle of the power of vowing.

Good friends, having made the four universal vows, now I will transmit to you the precepts of the formless three refuges.

Good friends, we take refuge in the most honorable of two-legged beings, the awakened one. We take refuge in the honorable one correctly detached from desire. We take refuge in the pure honorable one in the midst of the crowd. From this day forth we call awakening our teacher, relying no more on demonic cults, always witnessing ourselves through the Three Treasures in our own essential nature.

Good friends, I urge you to take refuge in the Three Treasures in your own essential nature. “Buddha” is awareness, “Dharma” is truth, “Sangha” is purity.

When your own mind takes refuge in awareness, error and confusion do not occur. One who has few desires, is content, and able to be aloof from materialism and sensuality, is called the most honorable of two-legged beings.

When your own mind takes refuge in truth, you have no false views from moment of thought to moment of thought. Because you have no false views, you have no personal selfish pride, craving, or clinging. This is called the honorable one detached from desire.

When your own mind takes refuge in purity, your own essential nature is not affected by all mundane toils and objects of desire. This is called the honorable one in the midst of the crowd.

This is taking refuge in oneself. Ordinary people who do not understand this take the Three Refuge Precepts from morning to night. If you say you take refuge in Buddha, where is Buddha? If you do not see buddha, where can you take refuge? The words would then be falsehood.

Good people, let each of you examine yourself. Do not use your mind mistakenly. Scripture clearly says to take refuge in the buddha in oneself, not to take refuge in another buddha. If you do not resort to your own inherent buddha, you have nothing to rely on.

Now that you are self-realized, each of you should take refuge in the Three Treasures in your own mind. Inwardly tame the nature of mind, outwardly respect other people: this is called self-refuge.

Good friends, once you have taken refuge in the Three Treasures in yourself, let each of you focus your mind, and I will explain to you the buddha of our own nature as three embodiments of one substance, to enable you to see the three embodiments and clearly realize your own essential nature by yourself.

Let everyone follow me in saying: "I take refuge in the Buddha as the pure body of reality in my own physical body.

"I take refuge in the Buddha as the fulfilled body of reward in my own physical body.

"I take refuge in the Buddha as thousands of hundreds of hundreds of millions of projected bodies in my own physical body."

Good friends, the physical body is a house; it cannot be called a resort or a refuge. The aforementioned Buddha in three embodiments is in our own essential nature; everyone in the world has it, but because of confusion in their own minds they do not see their inner nature, and so they seek a three-bodied Tathagata externally, not seeing that they have buddha in three embodiments within their own bodies.

You have heard an explanation that will enable you to see, in your own body, that in your own essential nature is a buddha with three embodiments. This buddha with three embodiments comes from your own essential nature, and is not attained from outside.

What is the buddha as the pure body of reality? The essential nature of human beings is originally pure. All things come from essential nature; when you think about all evil things, it produces bad behaviors; when you think about all good things, it produces good behaviors. Thus all things are in your own essential nature. It is like the sky, which is always clear, and the sun, which is always shining: when they are covered by drifting clouds, there is light above but

darkness below. Suddenly a wind blows away the clouds, so above and below are both light; then myriad forms are visible.

The nature of worldly people is always drifting, like the clouds in the sky. Good friends, wisdom is like the sun, insight is like the moon: knowledge and insight are always light, but when you fixate on objects outside, you get your own essential nature covered by the drifting clouds of errant thoughts, so you cannot have light and clarity. If you meet a spiritual benefactor and hear truly authentic teaching, you get rid of confusion so that inside and out are thoroughly clear, and myriad things appear within your own essential nature. This is how it is with people who see essential nature. This is called the buddha as the pure body of reality.

Good friends, your own mind taking refuge in your own essential nature is taking refuge in the real Buddha. Self-refuge means getting rid of bad states of mind in your own nature—jealousy, flattery, selfishness, deceptiveness, disregard for others, disrespect for others, false views, conceit, and any bad behavior that might take place at any time. Always seeing your own faults and not discussing others' good or bad is self-refuge. One should always be humble in mind and be respectful toward everyone. This is mastery of seeing essential nature, without any more obstruction. This is self-refuge.

What is the fulfilled body of reward? Just as one lamp can obliterate a thousand years' darkness, one insight can annihilate ten thousand years' ignorance. Don't think about what has already passed, and don't keep thinking about what is yet to come. Perfectly clear moment to moment, see original nature yourself. Though good and bad differ, the original nature is not dual. The nondual nature is called the true nature. When your own nature produces a single thought of good, it can achieve the ending of countless evils, all the way to unsurpassed enlightenment. Seeing yourself in every moment of thought, not losing basic mindfulness, is called the embodiment of reward.

What is the embodiment of thousands of hundreds of hundreds of millions of projections? If you don't think of myriad things, your nature is basically like space. A single moment of thought is called a projection. If you think of bad things, you produce hell. If you think of good things, you produce heaven. Viciousness produces dragons

and snakes; compassion produces bodhisattvas. Wisdom produces higher states, folly produces lower states. The projections of our nature are very many; confused people are unable to be alert to them, and so create evil thought after thought, constantly going in bad ways. If they would turn a single thought to good, wisdom would thereupon be born; this is called the Buddha as embodiment of projection of our nature.

Good friends, the body of reality is originally there. Spontaneously seeing your own nature in every moment of thought is the buddha as the embodiment of reward. Thinking from the embodiment of reward is the embodiment of projection.

Self-realization and self-cultivation of the virtues of one's own nature is true refuge. Skin and flesh are the material body; the material body is a house, and cannot be called a resort or refuge. Just realize the three embodiments in your own nature, and you will know the buddha in your own nature.

I have a formless hymn: if you can memorize it, the impact of the words can cause your accumulated eons of confusions and errors to dissolve away all at once.

Confused people cultivate blessings, not the Way;
They simply say blessings are themselves the Way.
The blessings of charity and alms may be boundless,
While in the mind the three poisons are created all along.
If you try to cultivate blessing to annihilate sins,
Though you gain blessings in the coming life, the sin is still
there.
Just get rid of conditions of sin within your mind—
That is called true repentance within your own nature.
Suddenly realizing the true repentance of the Great Vehicle,
Getting rid of falsehood, acting on truth, you're then impeccable.
In studying the Way, always observe your own nature,
And you'll be of a kind with all the buddhas.
My spiritual ancestors only transmitted this teaching of
immediacy,
Wishing all to be one in seeing nature.
If you want to seek the reality body in the future,

Detach from the appearances of things, and clean the mind.
Strive to see for yourself; don't waste time—
When the following moment is cut off, a whole lifetime's over.
If you understand the Great Vehicle, you'll see essential nature:
Reverently and respectfully, seek with all your heart.

The Master said,

Good friends, everyone should memorize this, cultivate your behavior in accord with it, and see essential nature under the impact of the words. Then even if you are a thousand miles away from me, it is as though you are always with me. If you do not awaken at these words, then you are a thousand miles away even when we are face to face—why bother to come so far?

Take care; go well.

Everyone in the crowd heard the teaching and opened up in understanding. Joyfully they put it into practice.

Key Events

When he had gotten the teaching from Huang-mei, the Master went back to Ts'ao Hou Village in Shao Province, where no one knew him. A certain Confucian gentleman, Liu Chih-lueh, treated him courteously and was very considerate to him.

Chih-lueh had a mother-in-law who had become a nun by the name of Wu-chin-tsang, or Inexhaustible Treasury; she constantly recited the *Great Sutra of Nirvana*. After listening for a while, the Master knew the subtle meaning and began to explain it to her. Scroll in hand, the nun then asked about a character. The Master said, "I don't know characters; please ask about meaning."

The nun said, "If you don't even know the characters, how can you understand the meaning?"

The Master said, "The subtle principles of the buddhas have nothing to do with written letters."

Startled, the nun found him unusual. She told all the old worthies in the village, "This is a man who has the Way; we should invite him to accept our support."

A certain Ts'ao Shu-liang, who was a great-great-grandson of the Martial Lord of Wei [Ts'ao Ts'ao], eagerly came to behold the Master and pay him respects, as did the local people.

Now the ancient monastery of Pao-lin or Jewel Forest, which had been abandoned after being razed in the wars at the end of the Sui dynasty [589–617], was rebuilt on its old foundations, and the Master was invited to live there. All at once it became a religious center.

The Master had lived there for nine months and some days when he was driven out by a faction of ill-wishers again. The Master hid in the mountain in front of the monastery, but they set fire to the woods and underbrush.

The Master escaped by squeezing in among rocks and concealing himself there. There are still marks on the rocks from the Master's knees as he sat there, as well as the pattern of the fabric of his clothing. Thus they have come to be known as the "rocks of escape."

Remembering the Fifth Grand Master's instructions about stopping and hiding at Huai and Hui, the Master wound up in these two regions, sometimes active, sometimes in hiding.

The monk Fa-hai was a man of Ch'u-chiang in Shao Province. When he first called on the Grand Master, he asked, "Please teach me how mind itself is buddha."

The Master said, "When preceding thought is not conceived, that is mind itself; when succeeding thought is not extinguished, that is being buddha. Determining all appearances is mind; detachment from all appearances is buddha. If I were to explain in full, I would never finish, even if I spoke until the end of time. Listen to my verse:

"'Mind itself' is called insight;
Being buddha is stabilization.
When stability and insight are equally maintained,
Consciousness is at peace.
Understanding this teaching
Depends on your habitual character:
Its function is basically birthless—
Twin cultivation is correct."

Fa-hai was greatly enlightened at these words. He eulogized in verse,

"The mind itself is originally buddha:
Not realizing, we hinder ourselves.
I know the bases of stability and insight;
Cultivating both, I detach from all things."

The monk Fa-ta was a man from Hung Province. He had left home at the age of seven, and constantly recited the *Lotus Sutra*. When he came, he bowed to the Master without his head touching the ground.

The Master chided him, "If you bow without reaching the ground, how does that compare to not bowing at all? You must have

something on your mind. What have you learned?”

He said, “I have recited the *Lotus Sutra* as many as three thousand times already.”

The Master said, “If you recite it ten thousand times and get the meaning of the sutra without considering this to be superiority, then you are a fellow traveler with me. At present you are conceited about this formal practice, totally unaware of your error. Listen to my verse:

“Bowling is originally to break the banner of pride:
Why should one’s head not reach the ground?
When you have ego, faults then occur:
Forget your achievement, and blessings are peerless.”

The Master also said, “What is your name?”

Fa-ta replied, “Fa-ta [Arrival at Truth].”

The Master said, “Your name is Fa-ta, but when have you ever arrived at truth [*ta-fa*]?” Then he uttered another verse:

“You are now named Arrival at Truth,
And diligently recite without cease.
If you recite in vain, you just follow sounds;
One who clarifies mind is called bodhisattva.
Because you have affinity now,
I now explain for you:
Just trust in buddha without words,
And lotuses will bloom from your mouth.”

After listening to this verse, Fa-ta apologized and said, “Hereafter I will be modest and respectful toward all. I have been reciting the *Lotus Sutra* without having understood the meaning of the scripture, and have always had doubts in my mind. Your wisdom is so great, I wish you would briefly explain the principles in the sutra.”

The Master said, “Fa-ta, the teaching is quite masterful, but your mind has not attained mastery. There is originally nothing doubtful in the scripture; your mind doubts on its own. You recite this sutra; what do you consider its basis?”

Fa-ta said, “I am dull and slow; all along I have just recited the words literally. How would I know the basic import?”

The Master said, "I am illiterate. Recite the sutra for me, and I will explain it for you."

Fa-ta then recited the sutra out loud, until he came to the chapter of metaphors, when the master said, "Stop. This sutra is based on emergence in the world for a cause; though it presents many kinds of metaphors, none go beyond this.

"What is the cause? The sutra says, 'The buddhas, the World Honored Ones, only appear in the world for one great cause.' The one great cause is the knowledge and vision of buddhahood. People of the world, lost in externals, get fixated on appearances; lost inwardly, they get fixated on emptiness. If you can be detached from appearances while in the midst of appearances, and be detached from emptiness while in the midst of emptiness, then you will not be lost inwardly or outwardly. If you realize this truth, your mind opens up in an instant; this is called opening up the knowledge and vision of buddhahood.

"Buddhahood is equivalent to awakeness. It is divided into four aspects. There is opening up awake knowledge and vision, showing awake knowledge and vision, realizing awake knowledge and vision, and entering into awake knowledge and vision. If you hear the opening and the showing, and are able to realize and to enter, then the original real nature of awake knowledge and vision actually becomes manifest.

"Be careful not to misconstrue the intent of the sutra, supposing that when it speaks of 'opening, showing, realizing, and entering' it is referring to the knowledge and vision of buddhas of which people like us have no share. If you interpret this way, you are slandering the sutra and reviling the buddhas.

"Since Buddha was already enlightened, he already had knowledge and vision; why would there be any more need to open them up? You should believe now that the knowledge and vision of buddhas are just your own mind. There is no other buddha besides.

"It was because all people had covered up their own light, greedily craved material objects, were inwardly disturbed by external conditions, and accepted compulsiveness, that they roused the World Honored One out of meditation to exhort them, with various intense speeches, to rest and not seek externally, so they could be

the same as Buddha. That is why the sutra speaks of opening the knowledge and vision of buddhahood.

“I also urge all people to always open the knowledge and vision of buddhahood in their own minds, but worldly people are perverted in mind; foolish and deluded, they commit crimes. Their talk may be good but their hearts are bad. Greedy, irritable, envious, obsequious, devious, conceited, unjust, and destructive, they open the knowledge and vision of ordinary people for themselves.

“If you can rectify your mind, it will always produce wisdom. Observe your own mind, stop evil, and do good: this is opening the knowledge and vision of buddhahood for yourself.

“You should open the knowledge and vision of buddhahood moment to moment; don’t open the knowledge and vision of ordinary people. Opening up the knowledge and vision of buddhahood is transcending the world; opening up the knowledge and vision of ordinary people is being mundane.

“If you just laboriously keep reciting and consider that an accomplishment, how is that different from a yak admiring its tail?”

Fa-ta said, “Does that mean I shouldn’t bother to recite the sutra, as long as I can understand the meaning?”

The Master said, “What’s wrong with the sutra? How can it obstruct your mindfulness? It is just that delusion and enlightenment are in the individual; loss and gain depend on oneself. If you recite it and also act on it mentally, then you are reading the sutra; if you recite it but don’t practice it mentally, then you are being read by the sutra.

“Listen to my verse:

“When the mind is deluded, the *Lotus of Truth* reads it;
When the mind is enlightened, it reads the *Lotus of Truth*.
If you recite the scripture a long time without understanding,
You become an enemy to its meaning.
Thought without thought is correct;
Thought with thought becomes false.
When with and without are both out of the question,
You always ride the white ox–drawn vehicle.”

Hearing this verse, unawares Fa-ta wept. Under the impact of the words he was greatly enlightened. He told the master, “All these years I have really never read the *Lotus of Truth*, but have been read by the *Lotus of Truth*.” Then he added, “The sutra says, ‘Even if the great disciples and the bodhisattvas all exhaust their thinking in a collective effort to figure it out, they cannot fathom the knowledge of the Buddha.’ Now if you get ordinary people to just understand their own minds and call that the knowledge and vision of buddhahood, unless one has superior faculties one could hardly avoid doubt and repudiation. Also, the sutra speaks of three vehicles, drawn by a goat, a deer, and a white ox: how are they differentiated? Please give some more explanation.”

The Master said, “The intent of the sutra is clear; it’s just that you are turning away from it in confusion. The people on the three vehicles cannot fathom the knowledge of Buddha because the problem is in trying to figure it out. Even if they use all their thinking collectively to figure it out, that adds an even greater distance.

“Buddha originally articulated this principle for ordinary people, not for buddhas. Any who refuse to believe may leave, but they still won’t realize they are already sitting in the white ox–drawn vehicle yet still looking for the three vehicles outside the door.

“Indeed, the scripture clearly tells you, ‘There is only one vehicle of buddhahood, no other vehicle, no two or three. . . . The countless expedients, various stories, metaphors, and expressions, these teachings are all for the sake of the one vehicle of buddhahood.’ Why do you not realize that the three vehicles are provisional, being for the past, while the one vehicle is real, being for the present? I am only teaching you to leave the provisional and return to the real. After you return to the real, the real has no name either.

“You should know that all the valuables and all the wealth belong to you, and their use depends on you. Don’t conceive the idea of the father anymore, or the idea of the son, or the idea of the use: this is called holding the *Lotus of Truth Sutra*. Age to age the scripture never leaves your hands; day and night you’re never not invoking it.”

Edified, Fa-ta was overjoyed. With a verse he eulogized,

“Three thousand recitations of the sutra

Disappeared at one statement of Ts'ao-ch'i:
Without understanding the transmundane message,
How can lifetimes of madness be stopped?
The goat, deer, and ox are expedient setups;
Beginning, middle, and end are skillfully expounded.
Who knew that inside the burning house
Has been the monarch of the teachings all along?"

The Master said, "Hereafter you can appropriately be called a sutra-reciting monk."

Henceforth Fa-ta attained the mystic message, and also continued to recite the sutra.

The monk Chih-t'ung was a man of An-feng in Shou Province. First he read the *Lankavatara-sutra* more than a thousand times, yet he did not understand the three embodiments and four knowledges. Paying respects to the Master, he sought an explanation of their meanings.

The Master said, "As for the three embodiments, the pure embodiment of reality is your essential nature; the fulfilled embodiment of reward is your knowledge; the thousand hundred hundred million-fold embodiment of projections is your activity. If you speak of three embodiments apart from original nature, this is called embodiment without knowledge; if you realize the three embodiments have no independent nature, you will clarify enlightenment with four knowledges. Listen to my verse:

"Our own nature contains the three embodiments;
When brought to light, they become the four knowledges.
Without departing from objects of sense,
You rise transcendent to the stage of buddhahood.
Now I have explained for you:
Trust with certainty, and you'll never get confused.
Do not emulate those who seek frantically,
Who spend all day talking about enlightenment."

Chih-t'ung spoke up again, saying, "May I hear about the meanings of the four knowledges?"

The Master said, "Once you've comprehended the three embodiments, you understand the four knowledges—why do you still ask about them? If you talk about the four knowledges apart from the three embodiments, this is called knowledge without embodiment. This is having knowledge that turns out to be no knowledge at all."

Then he uttered another verse:

"The knowledge like a mirror is purity of nature,
The knowledge of essential quality is mind without sickness;
The subtle observing knowledge sees without effort,
The knowledge of practicalities is the same as the mirror.
Five and eight, six and seven, transform in effect and cause;
If you just use names and words, there's no reality:
If you do not keep feelings on the transformation,
You'll flourish and be ever in the dragon stability."

Chih-t'ung suddenly realized essential natural knowledge and presented a verse:

"The three embodiments are basically my own being,
The four knowledges are clarity of the original mind;
Embodiments and knowledges merged without resistance,
They respond to people, freely adapting in form.
Deliberate practices are all random actions;
Keeping steady is not true spirituality.
With the subtle meaning clarified by the teacher,
Finally gone are messy names."

The monk Chih-ch'ang was a man from Kuei-ch'i in Hsin Province. He had left home in childhood and was intent on seeking perception of essential nature. One day he visited and paid respects. The Master asked him, "Where have you come from, and what are you seeking?"

He replied, "I recently went to White Park Mountain in Hung Province, where I paid respects to Master Ta-t'ung and was taught the principle of realizing buddhahood by seeing essential nature. I have not yet resolved my doubts, so I have come all this way to pay

respects and humbly hope that the Master will be so compassionate as to guide me.”

The Master said, “What did he have to say? Try to quote him.”

Chih-ch’ang said, “I was there for three months without having received any instruction. Being eager for the teaching, one night I went to the abbot’s room and asked, ‘What is the original nature of my mind?’ Ta-t’ung then said, ‘Do you see space?’ I replied, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Do you see space has any appearance?’ I replied, ‘Space has no form—what appearance does it have?’ He said, ‘Your original nature is like space; there is nothing that can be seen—this is called true seeing; there is nothing that can be known—this is called true knowing. It has no blue or yellow, long or short. Just see the purity of the original source, the complete illumination of the substance of awakesness: this is called realizing buddhahood by seeing essential nature. It is also called the knowledge and vision of the realized ones.’ Although I heard this explanation, I’m still not sure. Please teach me.”

The Master said, “That teacher’s explanation still maintains seeing and knowing; that’s why you haven’t fully understood. Now I’ll teach you a verse:

“Not seeing anything maintains unseeing;
It’s much like floating clouds blocking the face of the sun.
Not knowing anything keeps unknowing;
It’s like the vast sky producing lightning.
When this knowing and seeing suddenly arise,
You misapprehend them; what understanding have you of
expedients?
You should realize your own error instantly;
Your own spiritual light will always be manifest.”

When he had heard the verse, Chih-ch’ang’s mind was opened. Then he uttered a verse, saying,

“Pointlessly producing knowledge and views,
I sought enlightenment attached to forms.
When feelings retain a single thought of realization,

How can one transcend previous illusions?
Our own nature is the actual source of awakening;
Following perception, one vainly shifts in the flow.
Had I not entered the Grand Master's room,
I would have headed two ways, at a loss."

One day Chih-ch'ang asked the Master, "The Buddha expounded the teachings of three vehicles, yet also spoke of the highest vehicle. I still don't understand; please instruct me."

The Master said, "Observe your own original mind; don't cling to the appearances of external things. There are no four vehicles in truth, but human minds have differences of level. Seeing, hearing, reading, and reciting are the small vehicle; understanding the teaching and solving the meanings is the middling vehicle; cultivating conduct in accord with the teaching is the great vehicle. Penetrating the truths, encompassing all realities, undefiled by everything, detached from the appearances of all things, not grasping anything at all, is called the supreme vehicle. *Vehicle* means going; it is not a matter of verbal argument. You should practice on your own; don't ask me. At all times your own essential nature is as is of itself."

Chih-ch'ang bowed in thanks and attended the Master for the rest of his life.

The monk Chih-tao was a man from Nan-hai in Kuang Province. Asking for help, he said, "Ever since leaving home I have been reading the *Nirvana-sutra*. It has been more than ten years, but I still have not understood the great meaning. Please instruct me."

The Master said, "On which point are you unclear?"

He said, "'All events are impermanent; they are things that arise and perish. When arising and perishing have died out, quiescent extinction is bliss.' I am perplexed about this."

The Master said, "How are you perplexed?"

He said, "All living beings have two bodies, known as the physical body and the reality body. The physical body is impermanent; it has birth and it has death. The reality body is permanent; it has no knowledge and no consciousness. When the sutra says, 'When arising and perishing have died out, quiescent extinction is bliss,' I

wonder which body is quiescent and extinct, and which body experiences bliss.

“If it is the material body, when the material body dies out, the gross elements disintegrate; this is completely miserable, and misery cannot be called bliss. If the reality body is quiescent and extinct, it is the same as grasses and trees, tile and stone—who is to experience bliss?

“Furthermore, the nature of things is the substance of birth and death, while the five clusters are the function of birth and death: one substance has five functions. Birth and death are eternal: birth is initiation of functions from substance, death is withdrawal of functions back into the substance. If allowed to be born again, then the category of ‘sentient beings’ will never be ended or die out: if not allowed to be born again, they wind up extinct forever, same as inanimate objects. Thus all things are stopped by nirvana—since one does not even get to live, how can there be bliss?”

The Master said, “You are a Buddhist—how can you discuss the teaching of the supreme vehicle in terms of heretical, perverted views of nihilism and eternalism? According to what you say, there is a separate reality body outside the physical body; you seek quiescent extinction apart from life and death. Also, you suppose the eternal bliss of nirvana is a physical experience—this is attachment to life and death, obsession with worldly pleasure.

“You should know that Buddha took pity and pointed out the true bliss of nirvana because all confused people take the combination of the five clusters to be the form of their own being, discriminate all phenomena as the form of external matter, like life and dislike death, shift and flow from thought to thought, do not know the unreality of dreams and illusions, vainly get caught up in vicious circles, think of eternally blissful nirvana as painful, and spend their days in frantic seeking.

“There is no sign of origination in an instant, and there is no sign of passing away in an instant: with no more birth and death to be extinguished, quiescent extinction thus manifests. As it is manifesting, furthermore, there is no quantification or objectification of manifestation, so it is called eternal and blissful. This bliss has no

subject that experiences it, yet there is none who does not experience it.

“How can there be the term ‘five functions of one substance’? Indeed, how can you go on to say nirvana stops everything, so nothing ever occurs? This is slandering Buddha and reviling the teaching.

“Listen to my verse:

“Great nirvana, unexcelled,
Is complete illumination, always silently shining:
Ordinary fools call it death,
Heretics call it annihilation;
People who seek the Two Vehicles
Give it the name nonconstruction.
All belong to intellectual calculations,
The root of the sixty-two views.
If you arbitrarily set up unreal names,
What constitutes real true meaning?
Only people beyond measure
Comprehend without grasping or rejection:
By knowing the phenomena of the five clusters,
And the self within the clusters,
They outwardly manifest a multitude of physical forms;
Each and every voice
Is equal, like dreams or illusions:
They do not conceive ideas of ordinary or holy,
And do not make an understanding of nirvana;
The two extremes and three times cut off,
They always respond with the functions of the senses,
Yet do not conceive the notion of function.
They distinguish all things
Without conceiving discriminatory ideas.
The aeonic fire burns the ocean floors,
The wind knocks the mountains together;
The true, eternal, quiescent, and blissful
Characteristics of nirvana are like this.
I am now forcing an explanation

To get you to give up false views:
Don't interpret me literally,
And I'll admit you know a little bit."

Hearing this verse, Chih-tao was greatly enlightened. Overjoyed, he paid respects and withdrew.

Ch'an Master Hsing-ssu was born to the Liu clan in An-ch'eng in Ch'i province. Hearing that the teaching activity at Ts'ao-ch'i was flourishing, he went there directly to visit and pay respects. Eventually he asked, "What should one do so as not to fall into ranks and grades?"

The Master said, "What have you done?"

He replied, "I don't even work on the holy truths."

The Master said, "If you don't even work on the holy truths, what ranks or grades are there?"

The Master deeply respected him as a vessel of the teaching, and had Hsing-ssu lead the congregation.

One day the Master said to him, "You will dispense the teaching over a whole region, not letting it die out." Once Hsing-ssu had attained the teaching, he returned to Ch'i Province, to Mount Ch'ing-yuan, where he spread the teaching, continuing its influence. (He was posthumously entitled Ch'an Master of Universal Salvation.)

Ch'an Master Huai-jang was an offspring of the T'u clan of Chin Province. He first called on National Teacher An at Mount Sung. An sent him to Ts'ao-ch'i to seek enlightenment. When he got there, he paid respects. The Master said, "Where have you come from?"

He said, "Mount Sung."

The Master said, "What thing has come thus?"

He said, "To speak of it as a thing is to miss it."

The Master said, "Can it be cultivated and realized?"

He said, "It's not that there is no cultivation and realization, but it won't do to be obsessed."

The Master said, "This nonobsession is just what all buddhas keep in mind. You are thus, and I too am thus. In India, Prajnatarā predicted that a colt would emerge from your company and trample

everyone in the world to death. The fulfillment is in your mind. You ought not be quick to preach.”

Huai-jang understood clearly, and ultimately spent fifteen years attending the Master, attaining the profundities of mysticism day by day. Later he went to Nan-yueh, where he popularized Ch’an. (He was posthumously entitled Ch’an Master of Great Insight.)

Ch’an Master Hsuan-chiao of Yung-chia was an offspring of the Tai clan of Wen Province. He had studied scriptures and treatises when he was young, and he was well versed in the T’ien-t’ai teaching of stopping and seeing. He discovered the ground of mind as he read the *Vimalakirti-sutra*. He happened to meet the Master’s disciple Hsuan-ts’e, who visited him and engaged him in intense discussion. The words he spoke spontaneously agreed with the grand masters of Ch’an, and Hsuan-ts’e said, “Who is the teacher from whom you got the teaching?”

He said, “I heard the scriptures and treatises, each from a particular teacher; later I realized the source of buddhahood from the *Vimalakirti-sutra*. As yet there has been no one to corroborate it.”

Hsuan-ts’e said, “‘Before the prehistoric buddhas,’ you’ve gotten; but self-enlightenment without a teacher ‘after the prehistoric buddhas’ is all naturalistic deviation.”

He said, “Please be my witness.”

Hsuan-ts’e said, “My word carries no weight. In Ts’ao-ch’i there is the great teacher who is the Sixth Grand Master. Those who gather in droves from the four quarters are all recipients of the teaching. If you go there, I’ll go with you.”

Hsuan-chiao finally came along with Hsuan-ts’e to call on the Master. Circling the Master three times, he shook his ringed staff and stood there.

The Master said, “A *sramana* embodies three thousand dignified manners and eight myriad refinements of behavior: where do you come from, great worthy, to be so conceited?”

Hsuan-chiao said, “Life and death is a grave matter; impermanence is swift.”

The Master said, “Why do you not realize there is no birth and comprehend there is no speed?”

He said, "Realization itself has no birth; comprehension basically has no speed."

The Master said, "That is so, that is so."

Now Hsuan-chiao finally paid respects to the Master formally, with every courtesy, and then took his leave a moment later. The Master said, "Isn't this too speedy, after all?"

He said, "Fundamentally I am not in movement myself—how could there be speed?"

The Master said, "Who is aware of not being in movement?"

He said, "You are producing discrimination yourself."

The Master said, "You have certainly gotten the intent of non-conception!"

He said, "If there is no conception, how can there be any intent?"

The Master said, "If there is no intent, who will discriminate?"

He said, "Discrimination itself is not an intent."

The Master said, "Good! Stay here at least one night."

In those days he was called the Overnight Enlightened One. Later he wrote a song on realization of the Way, which became popular. (He was posthumously entitled Great Master of the Formless, and in his time he was called Chen-chiao, Truly Awakened.)

The Ch'an devotee Chih-huang first studied with the Fifth Grand Master. Thinking he had already attained true experience, he lived in a hermitage and sat for twenty years. When the Master's disciple Hsuan-ts'e came to Hopei in the course of his travels, he heard Chih-huang. Going to his hermitage, he asked, "What are you doing here?"

Chih-huang said, "Entering stabilization."

Hsuan-ts'e said, "You say you are entering stabilization: are you entering it mindfully or mindlessly? If you are entering mindlessly, then all inanimate things should attain stabilization; if you are entering mindfully, then all sentient and conscious beings must attain stabilization."

Chih-huang said, "When I am entering stabilization I do not see the existence of mindfulness or mindlessness."

Hsuan-ts'e said, "If you do not see the existence of mindfulness or mindlessness, then this is constant stability: how can there be exit

and entry? If there is exit and entry, it is not great stability.”

Chih-huang had no reply. After a long silence he asked, “Whose successor are you?”

Hsuan-ts’e said, “My teacher is the Sixth Grand Master at Ts’ao-ch’i.”

Chih-huang said, “What does the Sixth Grand Master make out to be meditative stabilization?”

Hsuan-ts’e said, “What my teacher speaks of is subtle tranquility, perfectly serene, with substance and function conforming to being as is. The five clusters are fundamentally empty; the six fields of sense data are not existent. There is essentially no dwelling in meditation; it is apart from dwelling in meditative stillness. There is essentially no conception in meditation; it is apart from conceiving ideas of meditation. The mind is like space, yet without any notion of space.”

Having heard this explanation, Chih-huang went directly to call on the Master. The Master asked him where he had come from, and Chih-huang related the foregoing events in full. The Master said, “Truly it is as you were told: just let your mind be like space, without clinging to a mental image of space, functioning responsively without obstruction, unminding in action and repose. Feelings of ordinary and holy forgotten, subject and object both submerged, nature and form are as is; at no time are you unstable.”

At this Chih-huang was greatly enlightened. The sense of attainment he’d had for twenty years disappeared without a shadow or an echo. That night, the gentry and common folk of Hopei heard a voice in the sky saying, “Meditation Master Chih-huang has attained enlightenment this day.”

Chih-huang later respectfully took leave and returned to Hopei, where he taught monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

One monk asked the Master, “Who gets the message of Huang-mei?”

The Master said, “Someone who understands Buddhism.”

The Monk said, “Do you get it?”

The Master said, “I don’t understand Buddhism.”

One day the Master wanted to wash the robe that had been handed down to him, but there was no good spring, so he went a few miles behind the monastery, where he saw the mountain forest dense and luxuriant, with an auspicious atmosphere over it. The Master stuck his staff into the ground, and a spring welled forth, accumulating into a pond. Then the Master knelt and washed the robe.

Suddenly a monk showed up on the rocks. He bowed and said, "I am Fang-pien, a man of Western Shu. Yesterday I saw the Great Master Bodhidharma in South India. He told me, 'Go quickly to China; the treasury of the eye of true teaching and the vestment I inherited from Maha-Kasyapa have been transmitted through six generations to Ts'ao-ch'i in Shao Province. Go and see him.' I have come a long way; please show me the robe you inherited."

The Master showed it to him, then asked, "What work do you do?"

Fang-pien said, "I am an expert sculptor."

The Master said, "Try to make an image of me."

Fang-pien was at a loss, but after several days his sculpture was done, a lifelike image about seven inches tall, with extremely fine detail. When he showed it to the Master, the Master laughed and said, "You understand the nature of image making, but not the nature of buddhahood." Then the Master reached out, patted Fang-pien on the head, and said, "Always be a field of blessings for humankind and the spirits."

A monk quoted a verse of Ch'an Master Wo-lun:

"Wo-lun has a skill,
Cutting off a hundred thoughts.
When mind is not aroused in face of objects,
Enlightenment grows day by day."

When the Master heard this, he said, "This verse does not yet clarify the ground of mind. If you put it into practice, that will add to your bondage." Accordingly, he taught a verse that said,

"Hui-neng has no skill,
Does not cut off a hundred thoughts."

In face of objects, mind is aroused again and again;
How can enlightenment grow?"

Immediate and Gradual

At the time, the Grand Master was living at Jewel Forest Monastery in Ts'ao-ch'i, while Great Master Shen-hsiu was at Jade Spring Monastery in Hsing-nan. Both schools flourished in their time, and everybody called them Hui-neng of the South and Shen-hsiu of the North. Thus there was a division into two schools, immediate and gradual, of the South and North, and people did not know the fundamental aim.

The Master said to the crowd, "The teaching is originally of one source, but people may be 'southern' or 'northern.' The teaching is of one kind, but perception may be slow or fast.

"What are called immediate and gradual? The truth has no immediacy or gradualness, but people may be sharp or dull; hence the terms immediate and gradual."

Nevertheless, the followers of Shen-hsiu often criticized the Grand Master of the Southern School for being illiterate, questioning his merits. Shen-hsiu said, "He has attained the wisdom that has no teacher, and has profoundly realized the highest vehicle; I am not his equal. Furthermore, my teacher, who was the Fifth Grand Master, personally handed on the robe and teaching to him—how could that have been for no reason? I regret that I cannot make the long journey to go associate with him, but vainly receive the favor of the nation. You people should not linger here; go to Ts'ao-ch'i to seek resolution."

One day Shen-hsiu instructed his disciple Chih-ch'eng, "You are bright and very knowledgeable; you ought to go to Ts'ao-ch'i for me, to listen to the teaching. Pay attention and remember whatever you hear; then come back and tell me about it."

Following instructions, Chih-ch'eng went to Ts'ao-ch'i; there he joined in the studies of the congregation without saying where he had come from.

At that time, the Grand Master announced to the crowd, "Now there is someone stealing the teaching concealed in this congregation." *Immediate and Gradual*

Chih-ch'eng then came forth, paid respects, and told the whole story. The Master said, "If you have come from Jade Spring, you must be a spy."

He said, "Not so."

The Master said, "How can you not be?"

He said, "Before I said so, I was; now that I've said it, I'm not."

The Master asked, "How does your teacher instruct people?"

He said, "He always instructs people to stop the mind and contemplate quietude, sitting constantly without lying down."

The Master said, "Stopping the mind and contemplating quietude is pathological; it is not Ch'an. Sitting all the time constricts the body—how does it help toward truth? Listen to my verse:

"During life it will sit, not lie;
After death it will lie, not sit:
A set of stinking bones—
How can it establish success?"

Chih-ch'eng bowed again and said, "I studied the Way with Great Master Shen-hsiu for nine years without realizing enlightenment; now, hearing a single talk from you, I immediately attained the original mind. For me the matter of life and death is serious; please be so kind as to teach me more."

The Master said, "I've heard your teacher instructs people in the principles of discipline, stabilization, and wisdom; please tell me how they are practiced."

Chih-ch'eng, said, "Great Master Shen-hsiu says that 'not doing any evil' is discipline, 'doing good' is wisdom, and 'purifying the mind' is stabilization. That's how he teaches. What doctrine do you teach?"

The Master said, "If I said I had a doctrine to teach people, I would be fooling you. I just untie bonds according to situations. That is

provisionally labeled *samadhi*. The sort of discipline, stabilization, and wisdom your teacher speaks of are truly wonderful, but discipline, stabilization, and wisdom as I see them are different.”

Chih-ch’eng said, “Discipline, stabilization, and wisdom should only be of one kind; how can there be any different?”

The Master said, “Your teacher’s discipline, stabilization, and wisdom are for people of the Great Vehicle; my discipline, stabilization, and wisdom are for people of the Supreme Vehicle. Understandings are not the same, perceptions may be slower or swifter. Listen to what I say and see if it is the same as what he says or not.

“What I teach is not apart from our own essential nature. Teaching apart from nature is called talk about forms; one’s own essential nature is always confused. We should realize that the functions of all things come from our own essential nature. This is the true principle of discipline, stabilization, and wisdom.

“Listen to my verse:

“The mind ground without error is inherent natural discipline.
The mind ground without folly is inherent natural wisdom.
The mind ground without confusion is inherent natural stability.
Neither growing nor diminishing—the inherently indestructible:
Though the body come and go, there’s fundamental *samadhi*.”

Hearing this, Chih-ch’eng apologized. Then he presented a verse saying,

“The five clusters are an illusory body—
How can illusion be ultimate?
Yet when I turn around to head for true suchness,
The method turns out to be impure.”

The Master agreed with this, then went on to say to Chih-ch’eng, “Your teacher’s discipline, stabilization, and wisdom encourage people of lesser basic intelligence, whereas my discipline, stabilization, and wisdom encourage people of greater basic intelligence. If you realize your own inherent essential nature, you do

not set up 'bodhi' or 'nirvana,' or liberation or knowledge: there is nothing to attain. Only then are you able to set up myriad teachings.

"If you understand what this means, it is also called embodiment of buddhahood, and it is also called bodhi and nirvana, and liberation and knowledge. People who see essential nature can set these up or not set them up; they are free to come or go, without stagnation or inhibition. They act according to need and respond as spoken to. Their personal projections, seen everywhere, are not apart from their own nature; thus they attain the samadhi of sport in free spiritual powers. This is called seeing essential nature." *Immediate and Gradual*

Chih-ch'eng then addressed the Master again: "What is the meaning of not setting up anything?"

The Master said, "With no error, no folly, and no confusion in one's inherent nature, prajna is observing, moment to moment, thought after thought, always detached from the appearances of things, independent and free, complete master of adaptation—what is there to set up? Your own nature is self-realized, immediately realized and immediately cultivated, without any gradual process. That is why there is no setting up anything; all things are nirvanic—what steps are there?"

Chih-ch'eng paid obeisance, and volunteered to be an attendant. Day or night, he never slacked off.

The monk Chih-ch'e was a man from Chiang-hsi. His original surname was Chang, and his given name was Hsing-shang. In youth he had been a wandering swordsman.

After the Southern and Northern schools were divided in their teaching methods, even though the masters of the schools were nonpartisan, followers of theirs became competitive and partial. At that time, the followers of the Northern School set up Master Shen-hsiu on their own as the Sixth Grand Master, and were jealous of the fact that the Grand Master [Hui-heng] was known throughout the land to have inherited the robe. They hired Hsing-shang to assassinate the Master.

Knowing of this before hand by telepathy, the Master placed ten ounces of gold by his seat. That night Hsing-shang entered the

Grand Master's room to kill him. The Master stretched out his neck to the sword. Hsing-shang slashed three times, but failed to make any wound at all.

The Master said, "A straight sword is not crooked, a crooked sword is not straight. I only owe you some money; I don't owe you my life."

Hsing-shang was so startled he collapsed. It was a long time before he revived, and when he did he begged for mercy and repented of his wrong. Then he wanted to leave the world and become a monk. The Master gave him the gold and said, "Go away for now, lest the disciples do you harm. Come back someday in a different guise, and I'll take you in."

Hsing-shang did as instructed and fled during the night. Later he became a monk, disciplined and energetic. One day, remembering what the Master had said, he made a long journey back to see him.

The Master said, "I've been thinking about you for a long time. What took you so long?"

He said, "Previously you forgave my crime; now though I am a monk and practice intensely, after all I cannot repay your favor. How could I think of transmitting the teaching and liberating people? I frequently read the *Nirvana-sutra*, but I still don't understand the meanings of permanence and impermanence. Please be so kind as to give me a brief explanation."

The Master said, "What is impermanent is the buddha-nature; what is permanent is the discriminatory mind with all sorts of good and bad states."

Hsing-shang said, "What you say is greatly at odds with the text of the sutra."

The Master said, "I transmit the seal of the buddha-mind; how dare I differ with scripture?"

Hsing-shang said, "The sutra says the buddha-nature is permanent; but you say it is impermanent. Good and bad states, even the aspiration for enlightenment, are all impermanent, yet you say they are permanent. These are contradictions, confusing me even more."

The Master said, "In the past I heard the *Nirvana-sutra* recited by the nun Wu-chin-tsang, and then expounded it to her. Every word,

every principle, was in accord with the sutra. What I have said to you is no different.”

Hsing-shang said, “My knowledge is shallow and unenlightened. Please edify me in detail.”

The Master said, “Don’t you realize? If the buddha-nature were permanent, then what good or bad states would there be to speak of? There would never ever be anyone aspiring to enlightenment. That is why I say it is impermanent; this is precisely the path of true permanence spoken of by the Buddha.

“Furthermore, if all things were impermanent, then everything would have its own nature, subject to birth and death, while true eternal essence would not be universal. Therefore I say things are permanent; this is precisely the meaning of impermanence spoken of by the Buddha.

“Because ordinary people and cultists cling to false permanence, while people of the Two Vehicles think of the permanent as impermanent, altogether making eight inversions, therefore in the complete teaching of the *Nirvana-sutra* Buddha refutes their biased views and openly explains true permanence, true bliss, true self, and true purity. You are now relying on the word and turning away from the meaning, misunderstanding Buddha’s perfect, sublime, final statement as if it meant nihilistic impermanence and fixed stagnant impermanence. Even if you read the sutra a thousand times, what would be the use?”

Suddenly Hsing-shang was greatly enlightened. He uttered a verse saying,

“Buddha said there is permanence
Because of the mentality clinging to impermanence.
Those who do not know expedient technique
Are like picking up pebbles in a springtime pond.
Now the buddha-nature has appeared
Without my expending any effort:
It is not bequeathed by the master,
And neither have I obtained anything.”

The Master said, "You have penetrated. You should be named Chih-ch'e [Intent on Penetration]."

Chih-ch'e bowed in thanks.

There was a youth named Shen-hui from the Kao clan of Hsiangyang; thirteen years old, he came from Jade Spring to call on the Master.

The Master said, "Friend, you've come a long way, a hard journey; have you brought the basis along? If you have the basis, you should know the host. Try to express it."

Shen-hui said, "Nondwelling is the basis, seeing is the host."

The Master said, "How is it appropriate for you, a novice, to speak glibly?"

Shen-hui then asked, "When you sit meditating, do you see or do you not see?"

The Master hit him three times with his staff and asked, "When I hit you, are you pained or not?"

He replied, "Both pained and not pained."

The Master said, "And I both see and do not see."

Shen-hui asked, "What is it to both see and not see?"

The Master said, "My vision is such that I always see the excesses and errors of my own mind, while I do not see the right and wrong or good and bad of other people. Thus I both see and do not see.

"You say you are both pained and not pained—what about that? If you are not pained, you are the same as wood or stone; if you are pained, you are the same as an ordinary man, so you get angry and resentful.

"The seeing or not seeing you spoke of just now are two extremes; being pained and not being pained are birth and death. You don't even see your own essential nature, yet you dare to play with people."

Shen-hui bowed and apologized.

The Master also said, "If your mind is confused and you do not see, you ask a teacher to seek the path. If your mind is enlightened, then you see your own essential nature, and you cultivate practice based on the teaching. You are confused yourself and do not see your own mind, yet you come asking me if I see or not. I know my

seeing for myself—how could it substitute for your confusion? If you can see yourself, that could not replace my confusion either.”

Shen-hui bowed again, more than a hundred times, seeking pardon for his error. He worked for the Master diligently, never leaving his side.

One day the Master said to the congregation, “I have something with no head, no tail, no name, no label, no back, no front: do you recognize it?”

Shen-hui came forth and said, “This is the original source of all buddhas, my buddha-nature.”

The Master said, “I just told you it has no name or label; then you immediately call it the original source, the buddha-nature. Later on, when you have a bunch of thatch covering your head, you will still just be a follower of intellectual understanding.”

After the death of the Grand Master, Shen-hui went to the capital and popularized the Ts’ao-ch’i teaching of immediacy. He wrote *Notes Revealing the Source*, which was very popular in this time. (This was Ch’an Master Ho-ts’e.)

The Master saw that critics from various sects, all with ill will, had gathered at his assemblies in great numbers. Pitying them, he told them, “People who study the Way should eliminate all thoughts of good and thoughts of bad. What has no name that can name it is termed intrinsic nature; the nature that is without duality is called the true nature. It is on the basis of true nature that all the methods of teaching are established; under the impact of the words, you should immediately see for yourself.”

Hearing this talk, all those people paid respect and asked to serve him as their teacher.

The Imperial Summons

On New Year's Day of 705, [Empress] Tse-t'ien and [Emperor] Chung-tsung summoned the Master, in these terms: "We invited the two teachers An and Hsiu to court, where we provided support, regularly studying the One Vehicle in our spare time. Those two teachers deferred, saying, 'There is a Ch'an Master Hui-neng in the South, who was secretly given Great Master Hung-jen's robe and teachings and transmits the seal of the buddha-mind. He should be invited so questions can be submitted to him.'"

Now the courtier Pi Chien was sent to deliver the imperial summons invited the Master, asking for the Master to be so compassionate as to hasten to the capital city.

The Master formally declined on the grounds of illness, desiring to spend the rest of his days in the forests.

Pi Chien said, "The Ch'an worthies at the capital city all said that if we want to attain understanding of the Way, it is necessary to sit in meditation and cultivate concentration; no one has ever attained liberation but for meditation concentration. How about the doctrine you expound?"

The Master said, "The Way is realized by the mind—how could it be in sitting? A sutra says, 'If you say the Buddha is sitting or reclining, you are traveling a false path. Why? Because he neither comes from anywhere nor goes anywhere.' Freedom from birth and death is the pure meditation of the Buddha; the emptiness of all things is the pure seat of the Buddha. Ultimately there is no realization, much less sitting."

Pi Chien said, "When I return to the capital, their majesties will surely question me. Please be so kind as to indicate to me the essentials of mind, that I may transmit it to their majesties, and to the

students of the Way in the capital city, so it will be like one lamp lighting a thousand lamps, so all in the dark are illumined, light upon light without end.”

The Master said, “The Way has no light or dark. Light and dark means alternation. Light upon light without end is still finite, because it is defined in relative terms. The *Pure Name Sutra* says, ‘Truth has no comparison, because there is no relativity in it.’”

Pi Chien said, “Light symbolizes wisdom, darkness symbolizes affliction. If people who cultivate the Way do not use wisdom to see through affliction, how can they escape beginningless birth and death?”

The Master said, “Affliction itself is enlightenment: there is no duality, no difference. If you use wisdom to see through affliction, this is the understanding of the Two Vehicles, for potentialities like the goat and the deer. Those of superior wisdom and great faculties are not like this at all.”

Pi Chien asked, “What is the understanding of the Great Vehicle?”

The Master said, “Enlightenment and ignorance are seen by ordinary people as two, while the wise realize their essential nature has no duality. The essential nature without duality is the true nature. True nature is not diminished in the ordinary and ignorant, nor is it increased in the wise and the holy; it is not deranged in affliction, and it is not quiescent in meditation concentration. It does not come to an end, nor does it endure forever; it does not come or go, and it is not in the middle or the inside or outside. Unborn and unperishing, nature and characteristics as such, permanent and unchanging—this is called the Way.”

Pi Chien said, “How is your talk of being unborn and unperishing different from outsiders’?”

The Master said, “The unborn and unperishing of which outsiders speak is using annihilation to stop birth, using birth to show annihilation. Annihilation is still not annihilated, and birth is said to be unborn.

“The unborn and unperishing of which I speak is original intrinsic birthlessness and present nonannihilation. Therefore it is different from outsiders’ doctrines.

“If you want to know the essence of mind, just do not think about any good or bad at all. Then you will spontaneously gain access to the pure substance of mind, calm and always tranquil, with subtle functions beyond number.”

Receiving this instruction, Pi Chien was greatly awakened. Respectfully taking leave, he returned to the imperial palace, where he reported the Master’s words.

That year, on the third day of the ninth month, there was an imperial rescript encouraging the Master in these terms: “The Master has declined due to old age and illness. Cultivating the Way for us is a field of blessings for the nation. The Master is like Vimalakirti, using a pretext of illness in Vaisali to expound the Great Vehicle, communicate the mind of the buddhas, and discourse on nondual reality.

“Pi Chien has transmitted the Master’s teaching on the knowledge and vision of buddhas: it is our fortune, through the accumulated good deeds of our ancestors, and having planted roots of goodness in the past, that we encounter the Master’s emergence in the world, and immediately realize the highest vehicle. We are grateful to receive the Master’s kindness, and will appreciate it no end.”

The Master was also presented with a fine vestment and a crystal bowl, and the governor of Shao Province was ordered to refurbish the monastery. The Master’s old abode was entitled Temple of National Gratitude.

One day the Master called his disciples Fa-hai, Chih-ch’eng, Fa-ta, Shen-hui, Chih-ch’ang, Chih-t’ung, Chih-ch’e, Chih-tao, Fach’en, and Fa-ju; he said, “You are not like the other people. After I pass away, you will each become the teacher of a region. I will now tell you how to expound the teaching without losing the basic source.

“First you should bring up three classifications of things, actively using thirty-six oppositions, on both sides—appearing and disappearing, merging and detaching. In explaining everything, do not depart from intrinsic nature. If people ask you questions, everything said is twofold; everyone grasps relative things. Coming and going are relative; ultimately duality all disappears, with nowhere else to go.

“The three classifications of things are the clusters, elements, and media. The clusters are the five clusters—matter, sensation, perception, conditioning, and consciousness. The media are the twelve sense media: the six external fields of form, sound, scent, flavor, feeling, and phenomena; plus the six internal organs of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The elements are the eighteen elements—the six fields of sense, the six organs of sense, and the six consciousnesses of sense.

“Our essential nature can contain all things: this is called the storage consciousness. If you conceive thought, this is the activation consciousness. It produces the six consciousnesses, which go out through the six organs and perceive the six fields of sense; thus the eighteen elements all are activated from our nature. If your essential nature is perverted, it produces eighteen-fold perversion; if your essential nature is right, it produces eighteen-fold right. If you use it badly, this is the function of ordinary beings; if you use it well, this is the function of buddhas. Where does the function come from? It comes from our essential nature.

“In the external world of relative objects there are five pairs of opposites: sky and earth, sun and moon, light and dark, yin and yang, water and fire. These are the five pairs of opposites.

“In characteristics of phenomena and language there are twelve pairs of opposites: words and things, being and nonbeing, physical and nonphysical, perceptible and imperceptible, contaminated and uncontaminated, matter and emptiness, motion and stillness, purity and pollution, ordinary and holy, clergy and lay, old and young, great and small. These are the twelve pair of opposites.

“Our essential nature produces functions in nineteen pairs of opposites: strengths and weaknesses, perversion and rectitude, ignorance and insight, folly and wisdom, disorder and stability, kindness and viciousness, morality and wrongdoing, honesty and crookedness, truth and falsehood, bias and fairness, affliction and enlightenment, permanence and impermanence, compassion and malevolence, delight and anger, generosity and stinginess, progress and regression, origination and destruction, the reality body and the physical body, the projection body and the reward body. These are the nineteen pairs of opposites.”

The Master said, “If you know how to apply these thirty-six pairs, this is the Way, pervading all the teachings of the scriptures. Exiting and entering, merging and detaching, on both sides, inherent nature actively functions.

“When you talk with people, outwardly be unattached to appearances while in the midst of appearances; inwardly be unattached to emptiness while in the midst of emptiness. If you totally fixate on appearances, then you increase false views; if you totally cling to emptiness, then you increase ignorance.

“Some people who cling to emptiness repudiate the scriptures, simply saying they don’t need writings. If they say they don’t need writings, then people shouldn’t speak either, because speech has the characteristics of writing. They also simply say they do not establish writings, but these words ‘do not establish’ are also written. Seeing what others teach, they slander them, saying they are attached to writings.

“You all should know that self-delusion is one thing, while slandering the scriptures another—don’t slander the scriptures; the obstacles caused by this error are countless.

“People who cling to external appearances, construe them as truths, and seek reality in them, and people who set up big religious establishments and talk about the problems of being and nonbeing, will not manage to see essential nature even in eons; they can only cultivate practice in accord with the teachings.

“But do not think of nothing at all, for that inhibits your enlightened nature.

“If they listen to preaching but do not practice, people contrarily produce wrong thoughts. Just truthfully practice the giving of teaching without fixation on appearances.

“If you understand, speak on this basis, function on this basis, act on this basis, work on this basis—then you will not lose the original source.

“If people question you about principles, if they ask about being, reply with nonbeing; if they ask about nonbeing, reply with being. If they ask about the ordinary, reply with the holy; if they ask about the holy, reply with the ordinary; the two paths are relative to each other, producing the principle of the middle way. As with one question and

one answer, do the same for other questions, and you won't lose the principle.

"If someone asks you what is called darkness, reply that light is the cause, darkness the condition: when light disappears, there is darkness. Darkness is revealed by light, light is revealed by darkness. Their coming and going are relative, creating the meaning of the middle way. Other questions are all like this.

"Later on, when you are transmitting the teaching, pass it on in this way; do not lose the essence of the source."

In the seventh month of the year 712, the Master had some disciples go to the Temple of National Gratitude in Hsin Province and build a stupa. Although he told them to hasten the construction, by summer of the next year it had not yet been completed.

On the first day of the seventh month of 713, the Master gathered his followers and said, "I want to depart from the world next month: if you have any doubts, you'll have to ask me about them soon, so I can break down your doubts for you and put an end to your confusion. After I go, there will be no one to teach you."

Fa-hai and the others wept when they heard this; Shen-hui alone was psychologically unmoved and did not cry.

The Master said, "Young Shen-hui has managed to maintain equanimity toward good and bad, unmoved by slander or praise, not conceiving sadness or happiness. The rest of you have not attained this—what path have you been cultivating all these years in the mountains? Who are you troubled about now, crying so sadly?

"If you are worried I don't know where I'm going, I intuitively know where I'm going. If I didn't know where I was going, I wouldn't have informed you ahead of time. Your weeping is because *you* don't know where I'm going. If you knew where I was going, you wouldn't be crying. The nature of reality has no birth or death, no coming or going.

"Sit there, all of you, and I will recite to you a hymn called Hymn on True and False Action and Stillness. Memorize this hymn, for its intent is the same as mine. Practice on this basis, and you won't lose the essence of the source."

The monks prostrated themselves and requested the Master to tell them the hymn. The hymn went as follows:

Everything has no reality;
We do not see reality thereby.
If you 'see' reality,
That is a view, not reality at all.

If you can yourself embody reality,
Detached from falsehood, mind itself's reality.
If your own mind does not detach from falsehood,
There's no reality—where is real?

Animate beings are mobile,
Inanimate things are immobile:
If you cultivate a practice of not moving,
That's the same as inanimate immobility.

If you seek true immovability,
There's immobility in action.
Not moving is unmoving—
Without sentience, there's no seed of buddhahood.

Be able to distinguish characteristics skillfully
While immovable in ultimate truth:
As long as you see in this way,
It's the function of reality as is.

I announce to all who study the Way:
Work diligently—you need to focus attention.
Do not cling to knowledge from birth and death
In the context of the Great Vehicle.

If you attain accord at the impact of the words,
Then I'll talk about buddhahood with you:
If you are not really in accord,
I'll salute you to make you happy.

The school basically has no argument:
If you argue, you lose the sense of the Way.
By clinging to perverse argumentative doctrines,
Your own essential nature enters birth and death.

At that time the followers, having heard the hymn, all bowed; they understood what the Master meant, and each of them concentrated on practicing according to the teaching, not daring to dispute any further.

Then they realized the Grand Master would not be remaining in the world for long. Elder Fa-hai respectfully inquired, "After your passing, to whom are the robe and teaching to be imparted?"

The Master said, "The lectures I have given at the Great Brahma Monastery have now been excerpted for circulation, called the Sutra of the Altar of the Treasure of the Teaching. You all preserve it and pass it on. To liberate people, just follow this teaching; this is called orthodoxy.

"I now explain the teaching, and do not impart the robe. That is because your roots of faith are pure and mature, certain, without doubt, capable of the great task. So, according to the meaning of a verse of our spiritual ancestor Bodhidharma on transmission, the robe is not to be handed on. The verse says,

"I originally came to this land
To transmit the teaching to save deluded sentient beings.
One flower will open into five petals,
Forming a fruit that will ripen naturally."

The Grand Master also said,

Good friends, let each of you clear your mind to listen to my teaching. If you want to accomplish all-knowledge, you must attain absorption in oneness and absorption in unified activity.

If you do not dwell on appearances wherever you are, and you do not conceive aversion or attraction to those appearances, and neither grasp nor reject, and do not think of things like gain, success, or failure, but are peaceful, serene, empty and fluid, tranquil and calm, this is called absorption in oneness.

If your unadulterated, undivided, straightforward mind does not move from the site of enlightenment wherever you are, whatever you are doing, with reality constituting the Pure Land, this is called absorption in unified activity.

If people have these two absorptions, it is like the earth having seeds, which it stores and nurtures, and matures the fruits. So it is with oneness and unified activity: my teaching now is like seasonal rain moistening the great earth everywhere; your buddha-natures are like seeds, which will all grow when thoroughly moistened thus. Those who get my message will certainly attain enlightenment; those who follow my practice will definitely realize the sublime result.

Listen to my verse:

The mind ground contains the seeds:
With universal rain, all of them sprout.
When you've suddenly realized the blossoming heart,
The fruit of enlightenment will naturally mature.

Having uttered this verse, the Master said,

The teaching has no dualism, neither does the mind; the Way is pure, without any signs. You should be careful not to contemplate stillness and empty your minds. The mind is originally clean, with nothing to grasp or reject. Each of you work on your own, going along as best you can according to circumstances.

At that point the disciples bowed and withdrew.

On the eighth day of the seventh month, the Grand Master said to his disciples, "I want to go back to Hsin Province; prepare a boat and oar right away."

The whole congregation was saddened and tried very adamantly to get him to stay.

The Grand Master said, "Even the buddhas who appeared in the world manifestly passed away—whatever comes must go. This principle is always so. This physical body of mine certainly has a place to return."

People said, "After you leave, Master, might you come back?"

The Master said, “When leaves fall, they return to the root. When I come I’ll have no mouth.”

They also asked, “To whom is the treasury of the eye of the true teaching imparted?”

The Master said, “Those who have the Way get it; those who have no mind comprehend it.”

They also asked, “Will there be any trouble later?”

The Master said, “Five or six years after my death, someone will come to take my head. Listen to my prediction:

“Taking care of parents on the head,
Eating must be done in the mouth.
Coming upon the trouble of fullness,
The willows become officials.”

The Master also said, “Seventy years after I leave, two bodhisattvas will come from the East. One will be a renunciant, the other a householder. Actively teaching in the same age, they will establish my school, organizing sanctuaries and enabling spiritual heirs to flourish.”

They asked, “Since the buddhas and Grand Masters appeared in response to necessity, how many generations has the transmission been handed on? Please tell us.”

The Master said, “The past buddhas who answered the need of the world have already been innumerable—they cannot be counted. Now we consider the Seven Buddhas to be the first: in the past Aeon of Adornment, there was Vipasyin Buddha, Sikhin Buddha, and Visvabhu Buddha; in the present Aeon of Virtue, there was Krakucchanda Buddha, Kanakamuni Buddha, Kasyapa Buddha, and Shakyamuni Buddha—these were the Seven Buddhas.

“From Shakyamuni Buddha, the transmission went through:

1. VENERABLE MAHA-KASYAPA
2. VENERABLE ANANDA
3. VENERABLE SANAVASA
4. VENERABLE UPAGUPTA
5. VENERABLE DHRTAKA

6. VENERABLE MICCHAKA
7. VENERABLE VASUMITRA
8. VENERABLE BUDDHANANDI
9. VENERABLE PUNYAMITRA
10. VENERABLE PAROVA
11. VENERABLE PUNYAYASAS
12. MAHASATTVA ASVAGHOSA
13. VENERABLE KAPIMALA
14. MAHASATTVA NAGARJUNA
15. VENERABLE KANADEVA
16. VENERABLE RAHULATA
17. VENERABLE SANGHANANDI
18. VENERABLE JAYASATA
19. VENERABLE KUMARATA
20. VENERABLE JAYATA
21. VENERABLE VASUBANDHU
22. VENERABLE MANORA
23. VENERABLE HAKLENA
24. VENERABLE SINHA
25. VENERABLE VASASITA
26. VENERABLE PUNYAMITRA
27. VENERABLE PRAJNATARA
28. VENERABLE BODHIDHARMA
29. GRAND MASTER HUI-K'E
30. GRAND MASTER SENG-TS'AN
31. GRAND MASTER TAO-HSIN
32. GRAND MASTER HUNG-JEN

“I, Hui-neng, am the Thirty-third Grand Master. The Grand Masters throughout history have each had an endowment: hereafter you should communicate it through the generations without letting it go wrong.”

On the third day of the eighth month of 713, after a vegetarian meal at the Temple of National Gratitude, the Great Master said to the congregation of disciples, “Each of you remain sitting in your place; I am leaving you.”

Fa-hai said, “Master, what teaching are you leaving to enable confused people of later generations to see the buddha-nature?”

The Master said, “Let all of you listen clearly. If confused people of later generations get to know ordinary beings, then this is buddha-nature. If they do not know ordinary beings, they will hardly find buddha-nature even if they seek for ten thousand eons. I now tell you, when you know the ordinary beings in your own mind, you see the buddha-nature in your own mind. If you want to see buddha, just know ordinary beings. It is just because of the ordinary beings that you lose sight of buddha; it is not buddha that loses sight of ordinary beings.

“If your own nature is enlightened, ordinary being is buddhahood; if your own nature is confused, buddhahood is ordinary being. If your own nature is impartial, ordinary being is buddhahood; if your own nature is perverse, buddhahood is ordinary being. If your minds are biased and crooked, then buddhahood is submerged in ordinary being; a single moment of fairness and honesty, and ordinary being becomes buddhahood.

“Our minds inherently have buddha in them; your own inner buddha is the real buddha. If there were no buddha-mind, where would we look for the real buddha? Your own mind is buddha. Do not doubt any more. There is nothing external that can establish anything—it is all the original mind conceiving all sorts of things. That is why scripture says, ‘When the mind is aroused, all sorts of phenomena arise; when the mind is quiescent, all sorts of phenomena pass away.’

“Now I am going to leave a hymn as a farewell to you, called the Hymn to the Real Buddha of Inner Nature. If people of later generations know the meaning of this hymn, they will spontaneously see the original mind and spontaneously attain buddhahood. The hymn goes,

“Intrinsic nature as it really is—that’s the real buddha.
False views and the three poisons are the chief demons.
When there’s delusion, demons are in the house;
When there’s accurate seeing, buddha’s in the living room.
When false views and the three poisons occur in one’s nature,

These are demon chiefs coming to dwell in the house.
Accurate seeing naturally clears the triply poisoned mind;
Demons turn to buddha, real, nothing artificial.
Reality body, reward body, and projection bodies—
The three embodiments are originally one body:
If you can see them yourself within essential nature,
This is the cause of realizing the enlightenment of the buddhas.
Originally pure nature is born from the projection body;
Originally pure nature is always immanent in the projection
body.
Nature induces the projection body to go the right way
To future complete fulfillment, reality without end.
Debauched nature is at root the basis of pure nature;
Eliminate debauchery, and this is the body of pure nature.
Let each in your own nature detach from the five desires;
The instant you see nature, this is reality.
If you encounter the teaching of immediacy in this lifetime,
And suddenly realize your own nature, you'll see the World
Honored One.
If you want to cultivate practices seeking to become a buddha,
Who knows where you will try to seek reality?
If you can see reality for yourself in the mind,
Having reality is the basis of attaining buddhahood.
If you seek buddhahood externally without seeing your own
nature,
Whatever your intentions, you're still an ignoramus.
The teaching of immediacy has now been left
To save the people of the world—but it must be practiced
oneself.
I announce to future students of the Way:
If you do not see this, you are far, far away.”

After the Master had recited the hymn, he said, “You all should stay well. After I pass away, do not entertain worldly feelings and mourn, accept people’s condolences, or put on robes of mourning. If you do, you are not my disciples, and this is not true religion.

“Just know your own original mind and see your own original nature; there is neither motion nor stillness, neither birth nor death, neither going nor coming, neither yes nor no, neither staying nor going.

“In case you are confused and do not understand my meaning, now I will instruct you again to enable you to see essential nature. If you practice in accord with this after my passing, it will be like when I was alive; but if you violate my teaching, even if I were in the world it would be no use.”

Then he uttered another verse, saying,

“Unmoving, not cultivating goodness,
Ebullient, not doing evil,
Serene, detached from the senses,
Clear, mind without fixation.”

After the Master had recited this verse, he sat up until the midnight hour, when he suddenly said to his disciples, “I’m going!” Then he passed away at once.

At that moment, an unusual scent filled the room. A white rainbow touched the earth, and the trees of the forest turned white. The birds and beasts cried sadly.

In the eleventh month, the official of three provinces—Kuang, Shao, and Hsin—as well as the disciples, both monks and laypeople, vied to host the Master’s body, and no one could decide where it should go. Finally they lit incense and prayed that the incense smoke would point to where the Master was to be laid to rest.

Now the fragrant smoke went straight toward Ts’ao-ch’i, so on the thirteenth day of the eleventh month the casket and the robe and bowl he had inherited were moved back there. In the seventh month of the next year, the body was removed from the casket, and the disciple Fang-pien plastered it with fragrant paste. The people of the school remembered the Master’s prediction that his head would be taken, so the Master’s neck was securely protected with sheet iron and lacquered cloth; then it was put in the stupa. Suddenly a white light appeared from within the stupa, shining straight up to the sky; it did not disappear for three days.

The authorities of Shao Province reported this to the emperor, and were commissioned to set up a memorial tablet summarizing the Master's spiritual life.

The master lived for seventy-six years. He inherited the robe at the age of twenty-four, was ordained at age thirty-nine, and taught for thirty-seven years. His religious successors numbered forty-three people, while those who awakened to the Way and transcended the ordinary were countless.

The robe of faith inherited from Bodhidharma, the vestment and crystal bowl given by Emperor Chung-tsung, the likeness made by the sculptor Fang-pien, as well as his implements, were placed for eternity at the Precious Forest sanctuary. The *Altar Sutra* was preserved and transmitted to show the message of the school, causing Buddhism to flourish for the universal benefit of all living beings.

Hui-neng's Commentary
on the
DIAMOND SUTRA

Preface

by HUI-NENG

Sixth Grand Master of Zen

The *Diamond Sutra* has no form as its source, no abiding as its substance, subtle being as its function. Ever since Bodhidharma came from the West, to communicate the intent of this sutra he got people to realize noumenon and see essential nature.

It was just because people of the world do not see their own essential nature that the teaching of seeing essential nature was established. If people of the world clearly see the original body of reality as is, then it is not necessary to establish a teaching.

This sutra is read and recited by countless numbers of people, lauded and eulogized by infinite numbers of people: over eight hundred people had composed commentaries and explanatory notes, the reasoning they expound each being according to what they see. Yet though perceptions may not be the same, truth has no second.

Those who have earlier developed higher faculties will immediately understand on hearing once. Those who do not already have insight may read and recite many times without understanding what Buddha meant; that is the reason for interpreting the meaning of the sage, to remove students' doubts. If you get the essential message of this sutra beyond a doubt, you do not need explanation.

The good things expounded by the Realized Ones since time immemorial are expounded for the purpose of eliminating ordinary people's bad attitudes. Sutras are sayings of sages, which teach people who listen to them to transcend the profane and realize the sacred, forever stopping confusion.

This one-scroll sutra originally exists in the essential nature of all living beings. People who do not see it themselves just read and recite written letters. If you realize your original mind, you will realize

for the first time that this sutra is not in written letters. If you can clearly understand your own essential nature, only then will you really believe that “all the Buddhas emerge from this sutra.”

Now I fear that people of the world will see Buddha outside their own bodies, or pursue the sutra externally, without discovering the inner mind, without holding the inner sutra. Therefore I have composed this “secrets of the sutra” to get students to hold the sutra of the inner mind and clearly see the pure buddha-mind themselves, beyond number, impossible to conceive.

If students of later times have doubts on reading the scripture, when they see this interpretation their doubts will melt away, and then they won't need the secrets any more. What I hope is that students will all see the gold within the ore, and use the fire of wisdom to refine it out. When the dross is gone, the gold remains.

Our original teacher Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the *Diamond Sutra* in Sravasti. As Subhuti raised questions, the Buddha very compassionately explained for him. Subhuti attained enlightenment on hearing the teaching, and asked Buddha to give the teaching a name according to which later people could absorb and hold it. Therefore the sutra says, “The Buddha told Subhuti, ‘This sutra is named *Diamond Prajnaparamita*, and you should uphold it by this name.’”

The “diamond prajnaparamita” spoken of by the Realized One takes its name from a metaphor for the truth. What does it mean? Diamond is extremely sharp by nature and can break through all sorts of things. But though diamond is extremely hard, horn can break it. Diamond stands for buddha-nature, horn stands for afflictions. Hard as diamond is, horn can break it; stable though the buddha-nature is, afflictions can derange it.

Even though afflictions may be intractable, prajna knowledge can destroy them; even though horn may be hard, fine steel can break it. Those who realize this principle clearly see essential nature. The *Nirvana-sutra* says, “Those who see buddha-nature are not called ordinary people; those who do not see buddha-nature are called ordinary people.”

The metaphor of the diamond expounded by the Realized One is for the sake of people in the world without stability of nature: they

may recite the scripture, but illumination does not develop. If they would practice inwardly as well as recite outwardly, they would be equally illumined. If they are not firm within, stability and insight are lost; if they practice mentally as well as recite verbally, stability and insight will be equal. This is called the ultimate end.

Gold is in the mountain, but the mountain does not know it is precious, and the treasure does not know this is a mountain either. Why? Because they are inanimate. Human beings are animate, and avail themselves of the use of the treasure. If they find a metal worker to mine the mountain, take the ore and smelt it, eventually it becomes pure gold, to be used at will to escape the pains of poverty.

So it is with the buddha-nature in the physical body. The body is like the world, personal self is like the mountain, afflictions are like the ore, buddha-nature is like the gold, wisdom is like the master craftsman, intensity of diligence is like digging. In the world of the body is the mountain of personal self, in the mountain of personal self is the ore of affliction; in the ore of affliction is the jewel of buddha-nature. Within the jewel of buddha-nature is the master craftsman of wisdom.

We employ the master craftsman of wisdom to drill through the mountain of the personal self and discover the ore of afflictions, smelt it in the fire of awakening, and see our own adamant buddha-nature, perfectly luminous and clear. Therefore the diamond is used as a metaphor, and hence the name.

If you only understand but do not act on it, there is the name without substance. If you understand the meaning and put it into practice, name and substance are both there. If you don't cultivate it, you are an ordinary mortal; if you do cultivate it, you are the same as a sage. Therefore it is called diamond.

What does *prajna* mean? *Prajna* is a Sanskrit word, rendered into Chinese as "insightful wisdom." Insight is not giving rise to ignorant attitudes, wisdom is having the appropriate expedients. Insight is the substance of wisdom, wisdom is the function of insight. If there is wisdom in substance, function is insightful and not ignorant; if there is no wisdom in substance, function is ignorant, without insight. It is just to get rid of ignorance, folly, and being unenlightened that we cultivate insightful wisdom.

What does *paramita* mean? It is rendered into Chinese by “reaching the other shore.” Reaching the other shore means detachment from birth and death. Just because people of the world lack stability of nature, they find appearances of birth and death in all things, flow in the waves of various courses of existence, and have not arrived at the ground of reality as is: all of this is “this shore.” It is necessary to have great insightful wisdom, complete in respect to all things, detached from appearances of birth and death—this is “reaching the other shore.”

It is also said that when the mind is confused, it is “this shore.” When the mind is enlightened, it is “the other shore.” When the mind is distorted, it is “this shore.” When the mind is sound, it is “the other shore.” If you speak of it and carry it out mentally, then your own reality body is imbued with paramita. If you speak of it but do not carry it out mentally, then there is no paramita.

What does *sutra* mean? It means a course; it is a road to the fulfillment of buddhahood. Whenever people want to get on this road, they should inwardly cultivate the application of prajna in order to reach the ultimate end. If you can only recite it and do not act in accord mentally, then there is no sutra, no course. If you see truthfully and act truthfully, then there is a sutra in your own mind.

Therefore the Realized One entitled this sutra the *Diamond Prajnaparamita Sutra*.

1 The Cause and Reason of the Teaching Assembly

The Prime Minister Zhang Wujin, the layman, said, “If not for the teaching, there is no way to talk about emptiness; if not for insight, there is no way to expound the teaching. The profusion of myriad things is called the cause, the responsive sensitivity of one mind is called the reason. Thus the sutra begins with a section on the cause and reason of the teaching assembly.”

Thus I have heard:

Ananda claims that he has heard such a teaching from the Buddha, to make it clear he is not speaking on his own: that is why he says, “Thus I have heard.”

Also, “I” is nature, nature is “I.” All actions, internal and external, come from nature. Since it hears everything, it is said that “I have heard.”

At one time Buddha was in the countryside of Sravasti, at the Grove of Jeta donated by Sudatta,

“At one time” means the meeting of teacher and learners, the time when all are together. “Buddha” is the one who is teaching; “was in” is to show the location.

The countryside of Sravasti was in the country of King Prasenajit [Kosala was the country, Sravasti a city]. Jeta was the crown prince; the grove was a gift of Prince Jeta. The grove originally belonged to the grandee Sudatta. [Actually it was bought from Jeta by Sudatta and given to Buddha.]

“Buddha” is a Sanskrit word, rendered in Chinese as Awakened. Awakening has two meanings. One is outward awakening, seeing the emptiness of all things. The other is inward seeking knowing the

emptiness and silence of the mind, not being influenced by objects of the six senses. Outwardly not seeking others' faults, inwardly not being confused by falsehood and error, it is therefore called awakening. When awakened, you are buddha.

together with a crowd of 1,250 great mendicants.

“With” means that the Buddha was with the mendicants at the formless site of enlightenment. They were “great” mendicants because they were great arhats. The Sanskrit word *bhikshu* for mendicant is rendered in Chinese as “able to overcome the six robbers.” Twelve hundred fifty is the number of mendicants; “together” refers to their common presence in the spiritual assembly of equanimity.

At that time the World Honored One put on an outer robe at mealtime, took a bowl, and went into the city of Sravasti and begged for food in the city.

“At that time” it was late morning, almost mealtime. He put on an outer robe and took a bowl to show an educational example. To say “he begged for food” represents the Realized One’s ability to humble his mind toward all people.

After begging from house to house, he returned to his original place. After eating his meal, he put away the robe and the bowl. Washing his feet, he spread out a mat and sat.

Begging from house to house implies that he did not choose between the poor and the rich, teaching egalitarianism. “After begging” means that he begged from no more than seven houses. Once he had been to seven houses, he would not go to any more.

It says he “returned to his original place” because the Buddha’s intent was to regulate the mendicants, such that they would not go readily to laypeople’s houses, except when they were invited.

In “washing his feet,” the Realized One demonstrated identification with the ordinary man. Yet in the teaching of the Great Vehicle, cleaning the hands and feet alone is not considered cleanliness,

since cleaning the hands and feet is not comparable to cleaning the mind. If the mind is clean for a moment, then the dirt of sin is removed.

2 Subhuti Initiates Questioning

Activating insight from emptiness, question and answer illuminate each other. Therefore the sutra follows with a section on Subhuti initiating questioning.

At that time the elder Subhuti was in the crowd. He rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, knelt on his right knee, joined his palms in respect, and said to the Buddha, “It is wonderful, World Honored One, how well the Realized One minds the bodhisattvas, how well he instructs the bodhisattvas.”

The “Realized One” is original nature that comes from reality as is. “Minding” means protecting the bodhisattvas with the teaching of prajnaparamita. “Instructing” means the Realized One hands on the teaching of prajnaparamita to Subhuti and the other great bodhisattvas. “Minding” means getting learners to mind their own bodies and minds with prajna wisdom, not allowing arbitrary occurrence of hatred and love, or infection by external objects of the six senses, falling into the bitter sea of birth and death.

When every thought in your own mind is always true, and falsehood is not allowed, the Realized One in your own nature skillfully minds itself.

As for skillful instruction, when the preceding thought is pure, then the succeeding thought is pure: when there is no interruption, ultimately this leads to liberation. The Realized One carefully instructed people, including those in his congregation, that they should always practice this: therefore it is said that he instructs well.

“Bodhisattva” is a Sanskrit word, rendered in Chinese as people with the spirit of the Way, and also awakened conscious beings. The spirit of the Way means always behaving respectfully, universally respecting and loving all creatures, without disdain—this is the reason by which someone is called a bodhisattva.

“World Honored One, when good men and good women set their hearts on supreme perfect enlightenment, how should they live? How should they conquer their minds?”

“Good man” means an even mind, and also a correctly stabilized mind. It can perfect all good qualities and is unobstructed wherever it goes. “Good woman” means a truly insightful mind. From a truly insightful mind all good qualities can be produced, whether deliberate or spontaneous.

Subhuti asks how all people who have set their hearts on supreme perfect enlightenment should live, and how they should conquer their minds. Subhuti sees all ordinary people are continuously restless, like whirling dust; mental agitation arises like a whirlwind, continuing thought after thought, without a break. The question is how to conquer the mind to practice cultivation.

The Buddha said, “Good, Subhuti! As you say, the Realized One minds the bodhisattvas well, and instructs the bodhisattvas well. Listen clearly now; I will explain to you.

“When good men and good women set their hearts on supreme perfect enlightenment, they should live and conquer their minds thus.”

“Yes indeed, World Honored One. We would like to hear about it.”

3 The True Source of the Great Vehicle

The source is beyond true and false, the vehicle has no great or small; but teaching and liberation are carried out according to the differences in people's faculties. To set aside different doctrines and single out the worthy, the sutra follows up with a section on the true source of the Great Vehicle.

The Buddha said to Subhuti, "The bodhisattva mahasattvas should conquer their minds thus:"

When the preceding thought is pure and the succeeding thought is pure, this is called being a bodhisattva. When one does not regress, thought after thought, and one's mind is always pure even in the midst of worldly toils, this is called a mahasattva.

Also, teaching and liberating people with kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity, and all sorts of appropriate skills, is called being a bodhisattva. Those who are not mentally fixated on either the teacher or on those taught are called mahasattva.

Respecting all living beings is where you conquer your own mind. Reality does not change, suchness does not differ: when the mind does not change or differ in any situation, that is called reality as such.

Also, not being artificial outwardly is called reality, not being vacuous inwardly is called suchness. When there is no digression thought to thought, that is called conquering the mind.

"All kinds of living beings—be they born from eggs, born from wombs, born from moisture, or born from transmutation, be they material, immaterial, thinking or nonthinking, or neither thinking nor nonthinking—I have them all enter nirvana without remainder . . ."

“Born from eggs” means confusion, “born from wombs” means habituation, “born from moisture” means deviation, “born from transformation” means opinionation. Confusion is the reason for creating all sorts of karma, habituation is the reason for constant repetitious routines; a deviant mind is unstable, and opinionation tends toward obsession.

When you excite the mind about cultivating the mind, with arbitrary views of right and wrong, inwardly you do not realize the formless truth. This is called being material.

When you keep to simplicity in your inner mind and do not practice respect and charity, if you just say the simple mind is buddha and do not cultivate virtue and knowledge, that is called being immaterial.

If you do not comprehend the middle way, but see and hear and think and ponder, fixated on the externals of doctrine, talking about the conduct of Buddha without applying it in your own mind, that is called having thinking.

Confused people who sit in meditation fanatically trying to get rid of illusion and do not learn kindness, compassion, joyfulness, equanimity, wisdom, and expedient skills, and so are like wood or stone, without any function, are called nonthinking.

Not clinging to the concept of duality is called “neither thinking,” while still consciously seeking noumenon is called “nor nonthinking.”

Afflictions differ in myriad ways; all of them defile the mind. Physical forms are countless; all are called living beings. The Realized One teaches all with great compassion, enabling all to enter remainderless nirvana.

“ . . . and thus liberate them through extinction.”

The Realized One points out that each living being in the universe has the sublime heart of nirvana, causing them to realize it themselves and enter remainderless nirvana. “Remainderless” means that there are no habit forces or afflictions; “nirvana” means complete purity. This is attained only by extinguishing all habit energies, causing them never to occur. “Liberation” means crossing over the ocean of birth and death.

Buddha's mind is impartial, wishing to enter into complete pure remainderless nirvana and cross the ocean of birth and death along with all living beings, sharing the same realization of all buddhas. There are people who understand and practice yet entertain a sense of attainment, producing a self-image, which is called the religious ego. Only when you get rid of the religious ego is it called liberation through extinction.

“Thus I liberate innumerable, countless, infinite beings through extinction, while in reality there are no beings attaining liberation through extinction.”

“Thus” refers to the foregoing teaching; liberation through extinction is great release. Great release means afflictions, habit energies, and all karmic obstructions are completely extinct, with no remainder. This is called great liberation.

Innumerable, countless, infinite beings originally have their own individual afflictions of all kinds, greedy and angry bad karma: if this is not removed, they can never attain release. Therefore Buddha said, “Thus I liberate innumerable, countless, infinite beings through extinction.”

When all confused people have realized their own essential nature, for the first time they will know Buddha does not entertain a self-image, and possesses no knowledge of his own—when did he ever liberate beings?

It is just because ordinary people do not see their own original mind that they do not know what the Buddha meant—they cling obsessively to the external appearances of things and do not arrive at the uncreated inner truth.

Those who are not free of egotistic personality are called “beings.” If you detach from this illness, in reality there are no “beings” to attain liberation through extinction. Therefore it is said, “When there is no errant mind, you manifest enlightenment; samsara and nirvana are originally equal.” What liberation through extinction is there?

“Why? Subhuti, if bodhisattvas have images of self, images of person, images of a being, images of a liver of life, they are not

bodhisattvas.”

The buddha-nature of ordinary beings has no difference, but they do not enter remainderless nirvana because they have four images. If they have the four images, they are ordinary beings; without them, they are buddhas. When confused, buddhas are ordinary beings; when enlightened, ordinary beings are buddhas.

When confused people slight everyone on account of having wealth, education, and social status, that is called self-image.

Even if they practice benevolence, duty, courtesy, intelligence, and faith, if they are conceited about it and do not practice universal respect, saying, in effect, “I know how to practice benevolence, duty, courtesy, intelligence, and faith, so I don’t need to respect you,” this is called an image of person.

Claiming good things for oneself and passing bad things off onto others is called an image of a being.

Discrimination among things, grasping and rejecting, is called an image of a liver of life.

These are called the four images of ordinary people.

Religious practitioners also have four images. When there are subject and object in the mind and one slights beings, this is called self-image. Presuming upon observance of precepts and slighting those who break precepts is called an image of person. Disdaining the miseries of the three mires and wishing to be born in the heavens is an image of a being. Diligent practice of good deeds out of love for long life, without forgetting attachments, is an image of a liver of life. Those who have these four images are ordinary beings; those without these four images are buddhas.

4 Subtle Practice without Dwelling

When you act in accord with the source, you do not dwell on appearances. Therefore the scripture continues with a section on subtle practice without dwelling.

“Furthermore, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should not dwell on anything as they practice charity. That means practicing charity without dwelling on forms, practicing charity without dwelling on sounds, scents, flavors, feelings, or phenomena.”

When ordinary people practice charity, they are just seeking personal dignity, or enjoyment of pleasure: that is why they plunge back into the three mires when their rewards are used up. The World Honored One is very kind, teaching the practice of formless charity, not seeking personal dignity or pleasure; he just has us inwardly destroy the attitude of stinginess while outwardly helping all beings. Harmonizing thus is called practicing charity without dwelling on form.

“Subhuti, bodhisattvas should practice charity like this, not dwelling on appearances.”

To practice charity in accord with a formless mind like this means there is no sense of being charitable, no idea of a gift, and no notion of a recipient. This is called practicing charity without dwelling on appearances.

“Why? Because if bodhisattvas practice charity without dwelling on appearances, the blessings are inconceivable.”

Bodhisattvas practice charity without seeking anything—the blessings they gain are immeasurable as the space of the ten directions.

According to one explanation, the practice of charity is universal dispersal. If you can inwardly disperse all false thoughts, habit energies, and afflictions in the mind, the four images are gone, and nothing is stored up—this is true giving.

Also, to further explain giving, this depends on not dwelling on objects of the senses, and not having contaminated discriminations. One should just return to purity and realize all phenomena are empty. If you do not understand this, you only increase karma. Therefore we must inwardly get rid of greed while outwardly practicing generosity. When inside and outside correspond, the blessings obtained are infinite.

If you see people doing wrong but do not view their faults, your own nature not creating discriminatory thoughts, this is called detachment from appearances. If you cultivate practice in accord with the teaching, and there are no subject and object in the mind, this is a good state. If a practitioner has subject and object in mind, this is not called a good state. As long as the sense of subject and object is not extinguished, one will never attain liberation.

If you always apply prajna wisdom moment to moment, the blessings are infinite. If you practice this way, you win the reverence and support of all people and spirits—these are called blessings. If you always practice charity without dwelling on appearances, universally respecting all beings, the merit and virtue have no bounds and cannot be measured.

“Subhuti, what do you think—is the space to the east measurable in thought?”

“No, World Honored One.”

“Subhuti, is the space to the south, or the west, or the north, or the four intermediate directions, or the zenith, or the nadir, measurable in thought?”

“No, World Honored One.”

“Subhuti, the blessing of bodhisattvas’ practice of charity without dwelling on appearances is also like this—it cannot be measured in thought.”

Buddha says space has no boundaries and cannot be measured. The blessings realized by bodhisattvas' charity without dwelling on appearances are also like space in being incalculable and boundless.

Nothing in the world is greater than space, no nature is greater than buddha-nature. Why? Whatever has shape and form cannot be called great; space has no shape or form, so it can be called great. All natures have limitations, so they cannot be called great; buddha-nature has no limitations, so it is called great.

In space there is no east, west, south, or north: if you see east, west, south, and north, this is also dwelling on appearances, and so you do not attain liberation. Buddha-nature fundamentally has no self, person, being, or liver of life: if these images are evident, this is a nature of ordinary beings, not to be called buddha-nature. It is also what is referred to as charity dwelling on appearances.

While in the context of the deluded mind it is said there are east, west, north, and south, in the context of abstract truth, how can they exist? So-called east and west are not real—how could south and north be different?

Our own nature is originally open, peaceful, and unified, not discriminating anything; therefore the Realized One deeply praises not conceiving discriminatory thoughts.

“Subhuti, bodhisattvas should just live as they are taught.”

Just accord with the foregoing teaching, abiding in formless charity, and you are a bodhisattva.

5 Real Seeing in Accord with Truth

When every act is in accord with thusness, this is called real seeing. Therefore the sutra continues with a section on real seeing in accord with truth.

“Subhuti, what do you think—is it possible to see the Realized One in terms of physical characteristics?”

“No, World Honored One; it is not possible to see the Realized One in terms of physical characteristics.”

The physical body has form, the reality body is formless. The physical body is composed of gross elements, born of a father and a mother, visible to the physical eye. The reality body has no discrete shape, no color, no appearance whatsoever; invisible to the physical eye, it can be seen by the eye of wisdom.

Ordinary people only see the physically embodied Realized One, not the Realized One embodying reality. The embodiment of the reality body is equal to space; that is why Buddha asks Subhuti whether it is possible to see the Realized One in terms of physical appearance.

Subhuti knows that ordinary people see only the physically embodied Realized One, not the Realized One embodying reality; therefore he replies that it is not possible to see the Realized One in terms of physical characteristics.

“Why? Because physical characteristics explained by the Realized One are not physical characteristics.”

The physical body consists of characteristics, the reality body is essence. All good and bad comes from the physical body, not from the reality body. If the physical body does evil, the reality body is not regenerated in good states; if the physical body does good, the reality body does not fall into bad states.

Ordinary people, only seeing the physical body and not the reality body, cannot practice charity without dwelling on appearances, cannot practice impartial behavior in all situations, and cannot universally respect all beings.

Those who see the reality body can practice charity without dwelling on appearances, can universally respect all beings, and can cultivate the practice of prajnaparamita, perfection of wisdom: then they truly believe that all beings have the same one true essence, fundamentally pure and unpolluted, with countless functions.

The Buddha said to Subhuti, "All appearances are illusory; if you see that appearances are not characteristics, then you see the Realized One."

The Realized One wants to reveal the reality body, so he says all appearances are illusory. If you see that all appearances are illusory and unreal, then you see the formless truth of the Realized One.

6 The Rarity of True Faith

Seeing and believing, the root of goodness is deep and firm. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on the rarity of true faith.

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, will anyone who gets to hear this exposition develop genuine faith?”

Subhuti is asking, “This teaching is very deep, hard to believe, hard to understand; the intelligence and insight of ordinary people of the final age are slight and inferior—how can they believe in it?” The Buddha’s reply follows.

Buddha told Subhuti, “Don’t talk that way. In the last five hundred years after the death of the Realized One, there will be those who keep the precepts and do good deeds who will be capable of conceiving belief in this exposition, considering it to be true. You should know that those people will have planted roots of goodness, not with one, two, three, four, or five buddhas, but with infinite thousands of myriads of buddhas. They will conceive pure belief on hearing this exposition for even a moment.”

In the last five hundred years after my passing, if there are any people who can keep the formless precepts of the Great Vehicle, not mistakenly grasp appearances and not act out compulsive routines, whose minds are always empty and quiet and not bound by appearances, then this is the mind dwelling nowhere; this mind can believe in the Realized One’s profound teaching. What these people say is true and trustworthy. Why? These people have planted roots of goodness, not merely for one, two, three, four, or five eons, but for infinite thousands of myriads of millions of eons.

For this reason the Realized One says, “In the last five hundred years after my death, if there are those who can cultivate their conduct detached from appearances, you should know these people have planted roots of goodness, not merely with one, two, three, four, or five buddhas.” What does planting roots of goodness mean? It may briefly be set forth as follows:

It means wholeheartedly supporting the buddhas and following their teachings, while always being respectful and obedient to bodhisattvas, spiritual friends, teachers, parents, old folks, experienced worthies, and venerable elders. This is called planting roots of goodness.

To develop an attitude of mercy and compassion toward all beings suffering because of craving, not conceiving disdain for them, giving them what they need according to one’s ability—this is called planting roots of goodness.

To be gentle and tolerant with all bad types, treating them affably and not provoking them, causing them to develop a sense of joy, and stop being stubbornly perverse—this is called planting roots of goodness.

Not killing or harming living beings, not cheating and not despising them, not defaming and not disgracing them, not riding or beating them, not eating their flesh, always acting to their benefit—this is called planting roots of goodness.

As for belief, this means believing that prajnaparamita can eliminate all afflictions; believing that prajnaparamita can perfect all transmundane virtues; believing that prajnaparamita can produce all buddhas; believing that the buddha-nature in your own body is originally pure, without defilement, equal to the buddha-nature of the buddhas; believing that all types of beings are originally formless; believing that all beings can attain buddhahood—this is called pure belief.

“Subhuti, the Realized One knows and sees all those beings attaining infinite blessings this way. Why? These beings have no more image of self, image of person, image of being, or image of a liver of life. They have no image of truth, and no image of nontruth either.”

After the death of the Realized One, if people develop the consciousness of prajnaparamita and practice the application of prajnaparamita, cultivating enlightened understanding and attaining the profound meaning of the buddhas, they are all known to the buddhas. If people hear the teaching of the higher vehicle and accept and keep it wholeheartedly, then they are able to practice the formless, nonobsessive application of prajnaparamita, utterly without the four images of self, person, being, and liver of life.

No self means no matter, sensation, conception, conditioning, or consciousness. No person means understanding the gross elements are not substantial and ultimately disintegrate. No being means no mind being born and dying. No liver of life means our bodies are originally nonexistent—how can there be a liver of life?

Once the four images are gone, the objective eye is thoroughly clear, not attached to existence or nonexistence, detached from both extremes: the Realized One of your own mind realizes itself and awakens itself, forever detaching from mundane toils and errant thoughts, naturally attaining blessings without bound.

To say that there is no image of truth means being detached from labels and beyond appearances, not trapped in words. To say that there is no image of nontruth either means it cannot be said there is no truth to prajnaparamita. If you say there is no truth to prajnaparamita, this is repudiating the teaching.

“Why? If these beings’ minds grasped at appearances, they would be attached to self, person, being, and liver of life. If they grasped at an image of truth, they would be attached to self, person, being, and liver of life. Why? If they grasped at an image of nontruth, they would be attached to self, person, being, and liver of life.

“Therefore you should not grasp at truth, and should not grasp at untruth. In this sense the Realized One always says you mendicants know the truth I teach is like a raft; even the truth is to be relinquished, let alone nontruth.”

“Truth” means the truth of prajnaparamita, perfection of wisdom; “untruth” means teachings for rebirth in heaven. The truth of prajnaparamita can enable all beings to cross the ocean of birth and death; once they have crossed over, they should not dwell on it, much less get obsessed with teachings for rebirth in heaven.

7 No Attainment and No Preaching

Realization without attainment is called true realization; teaching without preaching is called true teaching. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on no attainment and no preaching.

“Subhuti, what do you think—has the Realized One attained unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment? Has the Realized One any doctrine to preach?”

Subhuti said, “As I understand the principles expounded by the Realized One, there is no fixed state called unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, and there is no fixed doctrine for the Realized One to preach.”

The “unexcelled” is not attained from outside—as long as there are no subject and object in the mind, this is it. Medicine is prescribed according to the illness, teaching is given according to situational applicability—how could there be any fixed doctrine?

In the unexcelled true teaching of the Realized One, the mind fundamentally has no attainment, and yet it is not said not to attain. It is just because people’s perceptions are not the same that the Realized One adapts to their faculties with various expedient methods to induce them to detach from their obsessions. He points out that the wandering minds of all ordinary beings fluctuate unceasingly, acting in pursuit of objects. Of the momentary arising of the preceding thought, the succeeding thought should be aware: since the awareness does not abide, the view does not remain either. That being so, how could there be a fixed doctrine for the Realized One to expound?

In the term *unexcelled*, the prefix *un-* means there are no errant thoughts in the mind; “excelled” means there is no conceit in the mind. “Complete” means the mind is always in a state of correct stabilization and accurate insight. “Perfect enlightenment” means the

mind is always empty and silent. If the ordinary mentality is set aside even for a moment, you see the buddha-nature.

“Why? The doctrines taught by the Realized One are not to be grasped, and not to be preached; they are neither truths nor untruths.”

Lest people get fixated on the verbal expressions used by the Realized One, fail to realize the formless truth, and mistakenly create interpretations, Buddha says they are not to be grasped. How could there be any fixity in explanations given by the Realized One according to potential and capacity to edify all sorts of people?

Students who do not understand the Realized One's deep meaning but just recite the teachings expounded by the Realized One without realizing the original mind never attain buddhahood. That is why the sutra says the doctrines are not to be preached.

Verbal repetition without mental application is not truth; verbal repetition with mental application, realizing nothing is obtained, is not untruth.

“What is the reason? All saints and sages exist through uncreated truth, yet they have differences.”

The understandings of the mentalities of the three vehicles are not the same; their perceptions have differences in depth. That is why it says they have differences.

The uncreated truth expounded by Buddha is nondwelling. Nondwelling is formless, formlessness has no origin; what has no origination has no destruction. Clear, free, empty, and silent, perception and action equally enlightened, mirrorlike awareness unobstructed—this is truly the liberated buddha-nature.

Buddha is awakening, awakening is observant awareness, observant awareness is insightful wisdom, insightful wisdom is prajnaparamita.

8 Emergence into Life through the Truth

If there is no attainment and no preaching, there is fear of sinking into voidness. All the buddhas emerge from this sutra, so it follows up with a section on emergence into life through the truth.

“Subhuti, what do you think—if someone filled a billion-world universe with precious substances and used this to give in charity, would this person gain many blessings?”

Subhuti said, “Very many, World Honored One. Why? These blessings are not of the nature of blessing; therefore the Realized One says the blessings are many.”

Although the blessings of giving away a universe of treasures in charity may be many, there is no benefit in respect to essential nature. To cultivate conduct in accord with maha-prajnaparamita, great perfection of wisdom, causing your own essential nature not to fall into any existences, is what is called the nature of blessing. If you have subject and object in mind, then it is not of the nature of blessing; when consciousness of subject and object vanishes, this is called the nature of blessing.

“If anyone accepts and holds the equivalent of even a four-line verse from this sutra, and tells it to others, the blessing in that exceeds the aforementioned.”

The overall meanings in the whole canon are all in four-line verses. How do we know this is so? By the eulogies in the sutras. The “four-line verse” is maha-prajnaparamita. Mahaprajna is the mother of all buddhas; the buddhas of past, present, and future all put this sutra into practice in order to realize buddhahood. The *Prajna Heart Sutra* says, “The buddhas of past, present, and future

realize unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment by prajnaparamita.”

Learning from a teacher is called “accepting,” understanding the meaning and putting it into practice is called “holding.” Understanding for oneself and acting on it oneself is self-help; explaining to people is helping others. The merit in this is so great it has no bounds.

“Why? Subhuti, all the buddhas, and the state of unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment of the Buddha, come from this sutra.”

“This sutra” does not refer to this particular text: the essential point is to reveal the buddha-nature, bringing function forth from substance, for subtle benefit without end. Prajna is wisdom. The practical efficacy of insight is expedient means, the function of wisdom is certainty. Insight and wisdom characterize the mind that is aware at all times. All the buddhas, and the state of unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment of the buddhas, come from this awareness; so it is said they come from this sutra.

“Subhuti, what is called Buddhism is not Buddhism.”

All verbal and literary expressions are like labels, like pointing fingers. Labels and pointers mean shadows and echoes. You obtain a commodity by its label, and you see the moon by way of the pointing finger—the moon is not the finger, the label is not the thing itself. Just get the teaching by way of the sutra—the sutra is not the teaching. The sutra literature is visible to the physical eye, but the teaching is visible to the eye of insight. Without the eye of insight, you just see the literature, not the teaching. If you do not see the teaching, you do not understand what Buddha meant. If you do not understand what Buddha meant, then reciting sutras won’t produce buddhahood.

9 Oneness without Forms

Even though there are four states of realization, their forms are originally nondual. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on oneness without forms.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can a stream-enterer think, ‘I have attained the fruition of stream-entering’?”

Subhuti said, “No, World Honored One.”

Stream-enterers go against the stream of birth and death; unaffected by objects of the six senses, they are wholly devoted to cultivation of uncontaminated practices. Getting coarse afflictions not to occur, they certainly do not take on inhuman personalities like maniacs, beasts, or monsters. This is called the fruition of stream-entering.

If you understand formless truth, you have no sense of attaining fruition. If there is the slightest consciousness of attaining fruition, then it is not called stream-entering. That is why Subhuti says, “No.”

“Why? A stream-enterer is called one who enters the stream, yet does not enter anything. One does not enter form, sound, scent, flavor, feeling, or phenomena—this is called a stream-enterer.”

The “stream” means the stream of sagehood. Stream-enterers detach from coarse affliction, and thereby gain entry into the stream of sagehood without having entered into anything, without having any consciousness of attaining fruition. Stream-entering is the first fruition of practice.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can a once-returner entertain the thought, ‘I have attained the fruition of once-returning’?”

Subhuti said, “No, World Honored One. Why? A once-returner is called one who goes and comes back once, but really has no going or coming—this is called once-returning.”

Once-returners have cast off the bonds of the world; they are called once-returners because their ties to the world are over. The expression going and coming back means being regenerated from a celestial state into a human state, being regenerated from a human state into a celestial state, then finally leaving birth and death, all worldly karma ended. This is called the fruition of once-returning.

As for the once-returning of the Great Vehicle, when the eyes behold objects, the mind has one arousal and quiescence; there is no second arousal and quiescence. Therefore it is called going and returning once. Even if the preceding thought initiates confusion, in the succeeding thought it stops; even if the preceding thought has attachment, the succeeding thought is detached. Therefore there is really no going or coming back.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can a nonreturner entertain the thought, ‘I have attained the fruition of nonreturn’?”

Subhuti said, “No, World Honored One. A nonreturner is called one who does not come back, yet in reality there is no coming, and that is the reason for the name nonreturner.”

Nonreturning is also called leaving desire. Those who have left desire do not see any desirable objects outside, and do not have any desirousness to act upon inside. They certainly do not take on life in the realm of desire, so they are referred to as not coming back; yet in reality there is no coming, so they are also called nonreturners. Since the habit of desirousness is forever ended, they definitely do not come back and undergo rebirth; therefore they are called nonreturners.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can a saint entertain the thought, ‘I have attained sainthood’?”

Subhuti said, “No, World Honored One.”

When all contaminations are ended and there are no further afflictions, one is called an arhat or saint. Saints do not contend with anyone, their afflictions eternally ended; if they entertained the notion of having attained fruition, this would be contentious.

“Why? There is no state called sainthood. World Honored One, if saints were to entertain the notion, ‘I have attained sainthood,’ that would be fixation on self, person, being, and a liver of life.”

The Sanskrit word *arhat* for “saint” means no contention. They have no afflictions to cut off, no greed or anger to divorce. Essential nature has neither obstreperousness nor docility; mind and objects are both empty, inside and outside are always silent. If one had a notion of having attained fruition, one would be the same as an ordinary mortal. So Subhuti says, “No.”

“World Honored One, you say I have attained absorption in noncontention better than anyone else, and I am the saint most detached from desire. I do not entertain the thought that I am a saint detached from desire.”

What is absorption in noncontention? It means the mind of saints has no arousal and quiescence, going and coming: there is only the constant shining of basic awareness—therefore it is said to be absorbed in noncontention.

The Sanskrit word for absorption, *samadhi*, means accurate reception, and accurate perception. Detachment from the ninety-six kinds of false view is called correct perception.

In space there is still contention between light and dark; in human nature there is contention between falsehood and truth. If every thought is always true, and there is no false consciousness, even for a moment of thought, this is absorption in noncontention. One who cultivates this absorption is the best of human beings; if there is any contentiousness of attaining fruition, then it is not called absorption in noncontention.

“World Honored One, if I were to entertain the thought that I have attained sainthood, then the World Honored One would not

say Subhuti likes to frequent the wilderness. It is because Subhuti really frequents nothing that it is said Subhuti likes to frequent the wilderness.”

“Wilderness” means noncontentious behavior. Noncontention is pure conduct. Pure conduct is for removal of consciousness of attainment. If you retain consciousness of attainment, this is contentiousness. Contentiousness is not the path of purity. Always having no sense of attainment is noncontentious conduct.

10 Adorning a Pure Land

The emergence of the pure mind is the pure land. The forms of adornment are not adornment. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on adorning a pure land.

The Buddha said to Subhuti, “What do you think—when the Realized One was with Dipankara Buddha in the past, did he gain anything in the way of truth?”

“No, World Honored One. The Realized One really did not gain anything in the way of truth from Dipankara Buddha.”

The Buddha posed this question lest Subhuti have any consciousness of attainment, in order to dispel this doubt. Subhuti knew that truth is not some thing to be gained, so he said to Buddha, “No.”

Dipankara Buddha was the teacher who gave Shakyamuni Buddha direction, so Buddha asked Subhuti, “Was there anything for me to gain from a teacher?”

Subhuti considered the truth to need pointing out by a guide, but really not an object of attainment. Just realize the original purity of your own nature, the original freedom from mundane toils, so it is calm and natural—then you will spontaneously realize buddhahood.

It should be known that the World Honored One actually did not gain anything of truth from Dipankara Buddha. It is like the shining of sunlight; it is boundless, yet cannot be grasped.

“Subhuti, what do you think—do bodhisattvas adorn buddha-lands?”

“No, World Honored One. Why? Adorning buddha-lands is not adornment—this is called adornment.”

There are three kinds of adornment, concrete and abstract. First is adornment of the buddha-land of the world; this means building

sanctuaries, copying sutras, practicing charity, and giving alms. Second is adornment of the buddha-land of sight, which means acting with respect toward all people in sight. Third is adornment of the mental buddha-land. When the mind is pure, the buddha-land is pure. This means always working with the buddha-mind in every moment of thought.

“Therefore, Subhuti, bodhisattva mahasattvas should generate a pure mind thus: they should not activate the mind dwelling on form; they should not activate the mind dwelling on sound, scent, flavor, feeling, or phenomena. They should activate the mind without dwelling on anything.”

Practitioners should not discuss others’ right or wrong, or claim their own ability and understanding while slighting those who have not studied—this is not a pure mind.

When your intrinsic nature always produces insightful wisdom, you act with an impartial, kind, and compassionate mind, and respect all people, this is the pure mind of a practitioner.

If you do not purify your own mind, but get obsessed with a pure state, your mind dwells on something—this is attachment to an image of a phenomenon.

If you fixate on forms when you see forms, and activate your mind dwelling on form, then you are a deluded person. If you are detached from forms even as you see forms, and activate mind without dwelling on forms, then you are an enlightened person.

When you activate the mind dwelling on forms, it is like clouds covering the sky; when you activate the mind without dwelling on forms, it is like the sky without clouds, sun and moon always shining.

Activating the mind dwelling on form is errant thought; activating the mind without dwelling on form is true wisdom. When errant thoughts arise, there is darkness; when true wisdom shines, there is light. In the light, afflictions do not occur; in the dark, objects of the six senses insistently arise.

“Subhuti, suppose a man had a body as big as the polar mountain. Do you think this body would be large?”

Subhuti said, "Very large, World Honored One. Why? The incorporeal spoken of by the Buddha is called a large body."

Even if the physical body is large, if the capacity of the inner mind is small, it is not called a large body. When the capacity of the inner mind is vast as space, then it is called a large body. Even if the physical body is as big as the polar mountain, that does not make it large.

11 The Superiority of Uncreated Blessings

Created blessings are limited; uncreated blessings are incomparably superior. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on the superiority of uncreated blessings.

“Subhuti, suppose there were as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the bed of the Ganges River: would the grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers be many?”

Subhuti said, “Very many, World Honored One. The rivers themselves would be countless, let alone their sands.”

“Subhuti, I am telling you the truth. If a good man or good woman filled as many billion-world universes as grains of sand in that many Ganges Rivers with precious substances, and used all that to give in charity, would there be much blessing gained?”

Subhuti said, “Very much, World Honored One.”

The Buddha said to Subhuti, “If a good man or a good woman accepts and holds even the equivalent of a four-line verse of this sutra, and tells it to others, the blessing in this exceeds the aforementioned blessing.”

If you give precious things in charity, you will be rewarded with worldly wealth and status, but if you expound the scriptures of the Great Vehicle and cause the hearers to develop great wisdom, you attain the supreme Way. So you should know that the blessing of accepting and holding surpasses the blessing of the aforementioned precious substances.

12 Honoring True Teaching

This sutra is revered and supported by celestial beings wherever it may be. Therefore it follows up with a section on honoring true teaching.

“Furthermore, Subhuti, wherever this sutra is expounded, even the equivalent of a four-line verse, this place is worthy of the offerings of all beings, human, angelic, or titanic, as if it were a shrine of Buddha.”

Wherever it may be, if someone expounds this sutra, always practicing freedom from thought, mind without consciousness of attainment, not speaking in terms of consciousness of subject and object, if able to detach from all states of mind, always remaining unpossessive, then there is the total-body relic of the Realized One in this very body. Therefore it says, “as if it were a shrine of Buddha.”

If this sutra is expounded with a nonpossessive attitude, it will move all types of beings to come listen to it. If one’s mind is not pure, and one just expounds this sutra for fame and profit, at death one will fall into the three mires—what benefit is there in that? If this sutra is expounded with a pure mind, causing hearers to be rid of confusion, realize the original buddha-nature, and always act genuinely, this will move celestial beings to bring offerings to the person holding the scripture.

“How much the more if anyone can accept, hold, read, and recite the whole thing: Subhuti, you should know that this person achieves the highest, rarest state. Wherever this sutra may be, this person, like a reverent disciple, considers Buddha to be there.”

When your own mind can recite this sutra, your own mind understands the meanings of the sutra, your own mind embodies the

formless principle of having no fixation, and you always practice the conduct of Buddha wherever you are, with unbroken attention moment to moment, then your own mind is buddha.

13 Accepting and Holding the Teaching Accurately

The ultimate Way has no name, but is named as an expedient; practitioners accept and hold it by this name. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on accepting and holding the teaching accurately.

Then Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, what is this sutra to be named? How should we uphold it?”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “This sutra is named *Diamond Prajnaparamita* ; you should uphold it by this name. Why? Subhuti, the prajnaparamita explained by the Buddha is not prajnaparamita.”

The Buddha expounded prajnaparamita, perfection of wisdom, to get learners to use insight to clear away the arousal and quiescence of the ignorant mind. When arousal and quiescence are gone, one arrives at the Other Shore. If there is any sense of attainment, one does not reach the Other Shore. When there is nothing in mind to attain, this is the Other Shore.

“What do you think, Subhuti—does the Realized One have a doctrine to preach?”

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, the Realized One has no doctrine.”

Buddha asks Subhuti, “When the Realized One teaches, is there any attainment in mind?” Subhuti knows there is no attainment in mind when the Realized One teaches, so he says there is no doctrine.

Buddha’s intention is to get worldly people to detach from the sense of attaining something—that is why he expounds the teaching

of prajnaparamita to cause all people hearing it to be inspired toward enlightenment, realize the uncreated truth, and fulfill the unexcelled path.

“Subhuti, what do you think—are there many atoms in a billion-world universe?”

Subhuti said, “Very many, World Honored One.”

“Subhuti, those atoms the Realized One says are not atoms, they are called atoms. The Realized One says that the universe is not the universe, it is called the universe.”

The Realized One says the false thoughts in the natures of living beings are numerous as the atoms in a billion-world universe. All living beings have their buddha-nature obscured by the ceaseless appearance and disappearance of atoms of false thoughts, and do not attain liberty. If you can truly and correctly practice the unfixated, formless practice of prajnaparamita in every moment of thought, you realize the mundane toils of false thoughts are none other than the pure nature of reality.

Since false thoughts are nonexistent, they are not atoms, they are called atoms. When you understand reality is falsehood, you understand that falsehood is reality—reality and falsehood both disappear, and there is nothing else. Therefore it says they are called atoms. When there are no mundane toils in the mind, then this is a buddhauniverse; if there are mundane toils in the mind, this is a universe of ordinary beings. Understanding that false thoughts are empty and null, he therefore says the universe is not the universe.

When you witness the reality body of the Realized One, you see all worlds and function responsively without fixed convention. This is called the universe.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can the Realized One be seen by way of the thirty-two marks?”

“No, World Honored One, the Buddha cannot be seen by way of the thirty-two marks. Why? The thirty-two marks explained by the Realized One are not marks, they are called the thirty-two marks.”

The thirty-two marks are thirty-two pure practices. The thirty-two pure practices are cultivation of the six paramitas in the five sense organs and cultivation of formlessness and nonfabrication in the mental sense organ. These are called the thirty-two pure practices. If you always carry out these thirty-two pure practices, then you can fulfill buddhahood; if you do not carry out the thirty-two pure practices, you will never become a buddha. If you are merely fascinated by the Realized One's thirty-two marks and do not cultivate the practices of the thirty-two marks yourself, you can never see the Realized One.

“Subhuti, suppose there are good men and good women who give countless lives in charity. Now suppose there are people who accept and hold the equivalent of even a four-line verse of this sutra and explain it to others; their blessings would be much more.”

Nothing in the world is valued as much as life, but for the sake of truth bodhisattvas give their lives to all beings through infinite eons. Yet though the blessings therein are many, they still do not compare to the blessings of accepting and holding four lines of this sutra.

Even if you give up your body for many eons, if you do not understand emptiness and your errant states of mind are not eliminated, you are after all an ordinary being. But if you hold the sutra for a single moment of thought, self and person immediately end; once false ideas are gone, you realize buddhahood under the impact of the words. So we know that many eons of relinquishing the body do not compare to the blessings in holding four lines from the sutra.

14 Absolute Peace beyond Forms

Hearing the sutra and understanding the meaning, you awaken to the manifestation of reality alone. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on absolute peace beyond forms.

Then Subhuti, hearing the exposition of this sutra, profoundly understood the import. Weeping, he said to the Buddha, “It is wonderful, World Honored One, how the Buddha expounds such an extremely profound scripture. What with all the insight I have gained since long ago, I have never gotten to hear such a sutra.

“World Honored One, if there are any people who get to hear this sutra and have pure faith, this gives rise to the manifestation of truth. One should know that such people accomplish the most wonderful virtues.”

When your own nature is not ignorant, that is called the eye of insight. When you hear the teaching and understand it on your own, that is called the eye of the teaching.

Subhuti was an arhat, a saint, foremost in understanding among the five hundred disciples. He had already served many buddhas—how could he not have heard such a profound teaching? How could he say he first heard it from Shakyamuni Buddha?

Then again, maybe what Subhuti had attained in the past was the insight of hearers, and only now has he understood the Buddha’s intention, and so has finally gotten to hear such a profound sutra. He weeps because he laments not having understood before.

Hearing the sutra with clear attention is called purity. From the embodiment of purity flows the profound teaching of prajnaparamita. We should know this is sure to accomplish the virtues of the buddhas.

“World Honored One, this manifestation of truth is not a form: therefore the Realized One says it is called the manifestation of truth.”

Even if you practice pure conduct, if you see defilement and purity as two characteristics, whatever strikes your feelings is all defilement, so this is not a pure mind. As long as there is any attainment in mind, this is not manifestation of truth.

“World Honored One, that I have now gotten to hear such a sutra, believe in it, understand it, and accept and hold it, is not to be considered difficult. If, in a future age, in the final five hundred years, there are people who get to hear this sutra, believe in it, understand it, and accept and hold it, these people will be most rare. Why? These people will have no image of self, no image of person, no image of a being, no image of a liver of life. Why? The image of self is not a characteristic; the image of person, the image of a being, and the image of a liver of life are not characteristics. Why? Being detached from all images, they are called buddhas.”

Subhuti deeply understands the Buddha’s intent. He sees for himself that once karma is exhausted and defilement is removed, the eye of insight is thoroughly clear—to believe, understand, accept, and hold then poses no difficulty.

When the World Honored One was in the world teaching, there were still countless people who could not believe, understand, accept, and hold—why only talk about the final five hundred years?

When Buddha was in the world, even though there were people of mediocre and lesser faculties, as well as disbelievers and doubters, when they went to question the Buddha, Buddha would talk to them according to what was appropriate for them, so none would fail to understand. In the final five hundred years after the Buddha’s demise, the ending of the teaching was gradually being reached.

With the enlightened one long gone, only verbal teachings survived; if people had doubts, there was nowhere to ask questions. Ignorant and confused, they held onto their attachments; not

realizing the uncreated, they searched frantically, obsessed with forms, revolving in all sorts of states. By this time, those who respectfully believe with a pure mind when they get to hear the profound sutra, and realize the uncreated noumenon, would be extremely rare. That is why Subhuti says they are going to be most rare.

Then again, in the final five hundred years after Buddha's demise, if there are people who can believe, understand, accept, and hold the extremely profound sutras of prajnaparamita, we know these people have no images of self, person, being, or liver of life. Absence of these four images is called manifestation of truth; this is the buddha-mind, so Subhuti says that being detached from all images, they are called buddhas.

Buddha said to Subhuti, "It is so. It is so. If, moreover, there are people who, on getting to hear this sutra, are not shocked, not frightened, and not intimidated, know that these people will be extremely rare.

"Why? Subhuti, the first perfection the Realized One expounds is not the first perfection; this is called the first perfection."

If the mouth says it but the mind does not act on it, that is not it. If the mouth says it *and* the mind acts on it, that is it. If there are subject and object in mind, that is not it. If there are no subject and object in mind, that is it.

"Subhuti, the perfection of patience under insult the Realized One says is not perfection of patience under insult."

If you see an insulting situation getting at your feelings, that is not it. If you do not see a demeaning situation getting at your feelings, that is it. If you see any image of personal status, and so are susceptible to injury by others, that is not it. If you do not see any image of personal status to be susceptible to injury by others, that is right.

“Why? Subhuti, it is like when I was dismembered by King Kali long ago. At that time I had no image of self, no image of person, no image of being, and no image of a liver of life. Why? As I was being dismembered in the past, if I had had an image of self, an image of person, an image of being, and an image of a liver of life, I would have become angry and hateful.”

When the Realized One was in the first stage during his developmental phase, he was a wizard of forbearance. He was dismembered by King Kali, but had no thought of vexation at the pain. If he had a sense of painful vexation, he would have been angered.

King Kali is a Sanskrit name that means immoral, evil tyrant.

“Subhuti, I also remember that in the past I was a wizard of forbearance for five hundred generations, and during all that time I had no image of self, no image of person, no image of being, no image of a liver of life.”

During his developmental phase, the Realized One cultivated perfection of forbearance for five hundred generations, getting the four images not to occur. The Realized One’s spontaneous mention of his past is to get all people who cultivate their behavior to accomplish the practice of perfection of forbearance.

Those who practice perfection of forbearance do not see anyone’s faults, regarding enemy and friend as equal, none being right and none being wrong. When injured by others, they accept it gladly, even being more respectful. Those who behave in this way can accomplish perfection of forbearance.

“Therefore, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should aspire to enlightenment detached from all images. They should not activate the mind dwelling on form, they should not activate the mind dwelling on sound, scent, flavor, feeling, or phenomena. They should activate the mind that does not dwell on anything.”

“They should not activate the mind dwelling on form” is the indicator of the whole; the distinctions of sound, scent, etc., are a list

of the names. People give rise to feelings of hatred and love for these objects of the six senses, and because of this subjectivity they accumulate countless knots of habits that cover up their buddha-nature. Even if they labor at various practices, as long as they have not gotten rid of the defilement in their minds, there is no way they can be liberated. When you look into the root basis, it is all due to fixating the mind on form.

If you can constantly practice prajnaparamita moment to moment, figuring all things are empty and not conceiving clinging attachments, you constantly progress on your own moment to moment, singlemindedly keeping watch, not allowing any heedlessness or carelessness. The *Pure Name Sutra* says, “When seeking all-knowledge beyond, it is never not the time to seek.” The major *Prajna Sutra* says, “Bodhisattva mahasattvas work diligently day and night, always abiding in attention corresponding to perfection of insight, never giving up, even for a while.”

“If the mind dwells anywhere, this is an abode.”

If the mind dwells in nirvana, this is not the abode of bodhisattvas. Not dwelling in nirvana, not dwelling on phenomena, not dwelling anywhere at all—*this* is the abode of bodhisattvas.

“This is why Buddha says the minds of bodhisattvas should not dwell on matter as they give charity. Subhuti, bodhisattvas should give in this way so as to benefit all beings.”

Bodhisattvas do not practice charity in hopes of personal pleasure. They only practice charity to inwardly destroy stinginess while outwardly benefiting all beings.

“The Realized One, coming from thusness, says that all appearances are not characteristics, and that all beings are not beings.”

“Thusness” means nonbirth, “coming” means nonperishing. Nonbirth means images such as self and person do not occur; nonperishing means awareness does not die out. In a later passage

it says the Realized One is said to come from thusness because of coming from nowhere and going nowhere.

The Realized One says that appearances of self, person, and so on ultimately can be destroyed and are not substantial realities. “All beings” is nothing but a provisional term: if you detach from the errant mind, then there are no graspable “beings”—so it says they “are not beings.”

“Subhuti, the Realized One is one who speaks genuinely, one who speaks truly, one who speaks as is, one who speaks without deception, one who speaks without contradiction.”

One who speaks genuinely says all beings, animate and inanimate, have a buddha-nature. One who speaks truly says beings who do evil will surely experience painful consequences, while those who cultivate good ways will surely have pleasant consequences. One who speaks without deception says the reality of perfect insight produces the buddhas of past, present, and future, certainly, of a truth.

One who speaks without contradiction, the Realized One teaches elementary good, intermediate good, and final good. The intent of his message is extremely subtle; no fanatics or cultists can surpass or break down the words of Buddha.

“Subhuti, the truth realized by the Realized One has neither reality nor unreality.”

There is no reality in the sense that the essence of things is empty and silent, with no appearance that can be apprehended. And yet there are countless inherent potencies within it, which are not hidden when put to use; and so it says there is no unreality either.

You may want to say it is real, yet no defining characteristics can be found; you may want to say it is unreal, yet it functions without interruption. Therefore it cannot be said not to exist, yet cannot be said to exist. It can be nothing, yet is not nothing; no words or metaphors can reach it—does this not describe true wisdom alone?

There is no way to reach this without cultivating conduct detached from forms and appearances.

“Subhuti, if bodhisattvas practice giving in charity with their minds dwelling on things, they are like people who have gone into darkness and so see nothing.”

If the mind has any abiding attachment to things, then one does not realize the essential emptiness of giver, receiver, and gift. One is like a blind man in the dark; nothing is clear. When the *Flower Ornament Sutra* says that the listeners in the Realized One’s audiences were as if blind and deaf, it is because they were dwelling on the appearances of things.

“If bodhisattvas practice giving charity with their minds not dwelling on things, they are like people with sight in the sunlight, seeing all sorts of shapes and colors.”

If bodhisattvas always practice the nonattached formless practice of prajnaparamita, they are like people with sight in broad daylight—what would they not see?

“Subhuti, in future ages, if there are good men and good women who are able to accept and hold this sutra, read and recite it, the Realized One will know and see all of these people by means of enlightened wisdom; all of them will develop infinite, boundless virtues.”

“In future ages” means the last five hundred years after the extinction of the Realized One, times of pollution and evil, when false doctrines will arise in profusion and true teaching will be hard to carry out. In those times, if there are good men and good women who come in contact with this sutra, receive it from teachers, read and recite it mindfully, persevere without forgetting, cultivate practice according to the meaning, and realize the knowledge and vision of buddhas, then they can accomplish unexcelled enlightenment. By this the buddhas of the past, present, and future know them all.

15 The Virtues of Holding the Sutra

Accepting and holding, reading and reciting, self-help and helping others—the virtues are boundless, and cannot be measured. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on the virtues of holding the sutra.

“Subhuti, suppose there are good men and good women who in the morning give in charity as many bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, then in the afternoon again give in charity as many bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, and then in the evening also give in charity as many bodies as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, and go on giving bodies in charity this way for countless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of eons. Now suppose there are people who hear this sutra, believe in it, and do not oppose it. The blessings of these latter people surpass those of the former; how much the more so if they copy the sutra, accept and hold it, read and recite it, and explain it to others!

Buddha says that in the time of the ending of the teaching, if you get to hear this sutra, and you believe in it and do not oppose it, and the four images do not occur, then this is the knowledge and vision of buddhas. The virtues of such people far surpass the virtues of giving up the body for many eons. The blessings in hearing the sutra for even a moment are still many; how much the more if you can copy it, accept and hold it, and explain it to others. People who can do this will certainly accomplish unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.

This is why all sorts of expedients are used to expound this extremely profound scripture, causing detachment from all appearances and attainment of unexcelled supreme perfect enlightenment. The blessings realized are boundless.

Giving up the body for many eons means you have not understood the fundamental emptiness of all things; you have subject and object in mind, and have not gotten beyond the view of living beings. If you can awaken to the Way on hearing the sutra, self and person end at once, and you realize buddhahood under the impact of the words. The contaminated blessings of giving up the body actually cannot compare to the uncontaminated wisdom of holding the sutra. Therefore even if you gather treasures from the ten directions and give up the body in the past, present, and future, that is not comparable to holding a four-line verse of the sutra.

“In sum, Subhuti, this sutra has inconceivable, immeasurable, boundless virtues:”

People who hold the sutra have no ego or possessions in mind. Because they have no ego or possessions in mind, this is the buddha-mind. The virtues of the buddha-mind are boundless. Therefore it is said that these virtues cannot be measured.

“the Realized One expounds it for those who set out on the Great Vehicle; he expounds it for those who set out on the Supreme Vehicle.”

The Great Vehicle is a matter of vast knowledge and wisdom, skillfully able to establish all teachings. The Supreme Vehicle is a matter of not seeing defiled things to reject, not seeing pure things to seek, not seeing living beings to liberate, not seeing nirvana to realize, not entertaining the idea of liberating living beings, not entertaining the idea of not liberating living beings: this is called the Supreme Vehicle, and it is also called all-knowledge. It is also called acceptance of nonorigination, and it is also called great prajna, insight or wisdom.

“If there are people who can accept and hold, read and recite, and explain extensively to people, the Realized One knows all these people and sees all these people; every one of them achieves immeasurable, incalculable, boundless, inconceivable

virtues. Such people are in effect bearing the unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment of the Realized One.”

If there are people who determine to seek the unexcelled enlightenment of Buddhas, when they hear this formless, uncontrived, extremely profound teaching, they will believe and understand it, accept and hold it, and explain it to others to enable them to understand it deeply and not repudiate it. Only when one has attained great power of forbearance, great power of wisdom, and great power of expedient means can one spread this sutra.

When people of superior faculties hear this scripture, they attain profound understanding of the Buddha’s intent and hold the sutra in their own minds. When their perception of essential nature is consummate, then they start working for the benefit of others. Able to explain to others, they enable students to realize the formless truth for themselves, see the Realized One in their fundamental nature, and fulfill unexcelled enlightenment.

The virtues attained by those who expound the teaching are boundless, immeasurable. Hearing the sutra, understanding the meaning, cultivating practice according to the teaching, also being able to explain extensively for other people, enabling them to understand and cultivate formless, unattached practice—by being able to carry out these actions, they are imbued with the light of great wisdom and get out of mundane toils. But even though they get out of mundane toils, they do not entertain the thought of getting out of mundane toils; thus they attain unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment. Therefore they are said to bear the Realized One. We should know that people who hold the scripture are naturally imbued with measureless, boundless, inconceivable virtues.

“Why? Subhuti, those who take pleasure in lesser teachings are attached to the idea of self, the idea of person, the idea of a being, and the idea of a liver of life; so they cannot listen receptively to this sutra, read or recite it, or explain it to others.”

“Those who take pleasure in lesser teachings” refers to the listeners of the Two Vehicles. They are pleased with lesser results

and do not aspire to the great; therefore they cannot accept or hold, read or recite, or explain to others the profound teaching of the Realized One.

“Subhuti, wherever this sutra may be, in whatever place it may be, it should be provided support by all beings, celestial, human, and titanic. You should know that this place is a stupa, which all should honor, bow to, and circumambulate, and strew with flowers and scents.”

If one recites prajna verbally and practices prajna mentally, wherever one may be, in whatever place, one always practices uncontrived, formless practice. Wherever this person is, it is as if there were a monument of Buddha there, moving all celestial and human beings to bring offerings of support and courteously honor the person as no different from Buddha. If one can accept and hold the sutra, within this person's mind there is inherently a World Honored One. That is why it is said to be like a shrine of Buddha. You should know that the blessings realized are infinite.

16 The Capacity to Clear Away Karmic Obstructions

The resulting consequences of sinful actions as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River are eliminated in a single moment of thought.

“Furthermore, Subhuti, if good men and good women accept and hold and read and recite this sutra, if they are slighted by others, those people should have fallen into miserable ways because of their misdeeds in former times; but because of being slighted by others in the present, the misdeeds of former times are thereby erased, and they will attain unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.”

Buddha says that people who hold the sutra should have the honor and support of all celestials and humans, yet because of the existence of obstructions by grave actions of earlier life, even if they currently manage to accept and hold the extremely profound scripture of the buddhas, nevertheless they are always slighted by others and do not get people’s honor and support. But because they accept and hold the scripture themselves, they do not conceive of images of person or self, and always act respectfully, whether to enemy or friend, without any vexation or bitterness in mind, innocent of any calculation, always practicing prajnaparamita moment to moment, without backsliding. Because they are able to practice in this way, they are able to dissolve the barriers caused by evil deeds from infinite eons past up to the present life.

Also, speaking in terms of principle, “former times” means the confused mind of the preceding thought, while “the present” means the awake mind of the succeeding thought. Because the awake mind of the succeeding thought slights the confused mind of the preceding thought, the confusion cannot remain. Therefore it says that the

misdeeds of former times are thereby erased. Once confused thoughts have disappeared, misdeeds do not happen, so one attains enlightenment.

“Subhuti, I remember how in the past, over incalculable eons in the presence of Dipankara Buddha, I got to meet eight hundred four thousand myriad zillions of buddhas; I supported and served every one of them, not missing a single opportunity. If, however, there is someone in the final age who can accept and hold and read and recite this sutra, the virtues realized thereby are such that the virtues of my support of those buddhas do not amount to a hundredth part, to a trillionth part, indeed to any numerical or figurative part.”

The various blessings of supporting countless buddhas, giving away treasures filling the universe, or giving up bodies as numerous as atoms, cannot reach holding the sutra and realizing the uncreated truth in an instant of thought, stopping the expectant mind, departing from the deluded cognition and perception of ordinary people, and thus arriving at paramita, the Other Shore, forever leaving the three mires, realizing nirvana without remainder.

“Subhuti, if I were to fully expound the virtues realized by good men and good women who accept and hold and read and recite this sutra in the final age, people who heard it would become mentally disturbed and would not believe.”

Buddha said that the people living in the age of the ending of the teaching would be slight in virtue and heavily defiled, their jealousies ever deepening, their false views proliferating. At this time, if there are good men and good women who accept and hold and read and recite this sutra, fulfilling the teaching without any sense of attainment, constantly practicing kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity, humble and gentle, they will ultimately fulfill unexcelled enlightenment. There may be people who do not know the Realized One's true teaching is eternal and unperishing; they will surely become frightened and will not believe when they hear that in the final five hundred years after the Realized One's death, people

will attain unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment if they can accomplish a formless mind and carry out formless practice.

“Subhuti, you should know that the principle of this sutra is inconceivable, and its reward is also inconceivable.”

The principle of this sutra is unfixated formless practice. The expression “inconceivable” praises the capacity of unfixated formless practice to fulfill unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.

17 Ultimate Selflessness

There is originally no self—how could there be a person? In order to liberate people, the self is provisionally defined. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on ultimate selflessness.

At that point Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, when good men and good women awaken the inspiration for unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, how should they live? How should they conquer their minds?”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “Good men and good women who have awakened the inspiration for unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment should develop an attitude like this: ‘I should liberate all living beings through extinction. After having liberated all living beings through extinction, there is not a single living being who has actually been liberated through extinction.’”

Subhuti asks the Buddha, “In the final five hundred years after the demise of the Realized One, if there are people who aspire to unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, what principle should they live by, and how should they conquer their minds?” Buddha says that they should be determined to liberate all living beings. Having liberated all living beings so that they have realized buddhahood, they are not to entertain the notion that they have liberated even one living being. Why? In order to get rid of the sense of subject and object, to get rid of the notion that there are living beings, and also to get rid of the notion of themselves seeing.

“What is the reason? Subhuti, if bodhisattvas have an image of a self, an image of a person, an image of a being, or an image of a liver of life, then they are not bodhisattvas.”

If bodhisattvas have the notion that there are living beings to be liberated, this is an image of self. If they have the sense that they

can liberate living beings, this is an image of person. If they think nirvana can be sought, this is an image of a being. If they have the notion of the existence of nirvana to be realized, this is an image of a liver of life. Those who have these four images are not bodhisattvas.

“What is the reason? Subhuti, in reality there is no state of awakening the inspiration for unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.”

The existence of a state refers to the four phenomena of self, person, and so on. Unless you get rid of these four phenomena, you will never realize enlightenment. If you say “I am inspired to seek enlightenment,” this is also self, person, and so on, which are at the root of afflictions.

“Subhuti, what do you think—when the Realized One was with Dipankara Buddha, was there any state of attaining unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment?”

“No, World Honored One. As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, when the Buddha was with Dipankara Buddha there was no state of attaining unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.”

The Buddha said, “That is so. That is so. Subhuti, in reality there is no state in which the Realized One attained unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.

“Subhuti, if there were a state in which the Realized One attained unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, then Dipankara would not have given me the prediction, ‘In a future age you will be a buddha named Shakyamuni.’

“Because there was in reality no state in which I attained unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, therefore Dipankara Buddha gave me the prediction, saying, ‘In a future age you will be a buddha named Shakyamuni.’ Why? Because the realization of the Realized One is the meaning of the suchness of all things.”

Buddha says there really is no self, person, being, or liver of life; only thus did he receive the prediction of enlightenment. If I had any

notion of being inspired to enlightenment, he says, then Dipankara Buddha would not have given me the prediction. Because I really did not attain anything, Dipankara Buddha therefore gave me the prediction. This section establishes the meaning of selflessness.

As for the suchness of all things, “all things” means form, sound, scent, flavor, feeling, and phenomena. To be able to distinguish these objects of the six senses while remaining fundamentally calm, not being influenced by them or fixated on them, never altered, unmoving as space, completely penetrating with thorough clarity, ever-present through all time—this is called the meaning of the suchness of all things.

The *Bodhisattva’s Necklace Sutra* says, “Being unmoved by slander or praise is the practice of the Realized Ones.” The *Sutra on Entry into the Sphere of Buddhas* says, “Being unaffected by desires, respectful obeisance regards nothing.”

“If anyone says that the Realized One has attained unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, Subhuti, really there is no such thing as the Buddha attaining unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment. Subhuti, in the unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment attained by the Realized One, there is neither reality nor unreality.”

Buddha says that he actually has no notion of attaining anything, yet realizes enlightenment. It is because the notion of attaining something does not occur that he realized enlightenment.

Outside of this mind, there is no enlightenment to be realized: therefore he says there is no reality. The sense of attainment is nil, all-knowledge is inherent, myriad practices are all fulfilled, and incalculable potential functions without lack, so he says there is no unreality.

“Therefore the Realized One says that all things are Buddha’s teachings. Subhuti, ‘all things’ are not all things; therefore they are called ‘all things.’”

Mentally free from grasping and rejecting anything, and also free from subject and object, he clearly defines all things yet his mind is

always empty and silent; therefore he knows all things are Buddha's teachings.

Lest the deluded greedily cling to all things as Buddha's teachings, in order to eliminate this disease he says that "all things" are not all things. There is no subject or object in his mind, which is silent yet ever aware; stability and insight are equally operative, substance and function are one—therefore "they are called all things."

"For example, Subhuti, it is like a person whose body is large."

Subhuti said, "World Honored One, the Realized One says that a person whose body is large is not large bodied, but is called large bodied."

The Realized One says that a person whose body is large is not large bodied in order to show that the reality body of all living beings is not two and has no limit. This is called large bodied. The reality body fundamentally has no location, so it is said to be not large bodied. Also, even if the physical body is large, if one has no wisdom within, then one is not large bodied. Even if the physical body is small, if one has wisdom within, then one can be called large bodied. Even if one has wisdom, if one cannot act in accord with it, then one is not large bodied. If one practices in accord with the teaching and awakens to the unsurpassed knowledge and vision of the buddhas, the mind has no limitations of subject and object; this is called large bodied.

"Subhuti, bodhisattvas are also like this. If they say, 'I am going to liberate countless living beings,' then they are not to be called bodhisattvas."

If bodhisattvas say, "Other people's afflictions are removed by my teaching," then this is religious ego. If they say, "I have liberated living beings," then this is possessiveness. Even if they liberate beings, if they have subject and object in mind, and the sense of self and other is not removed, they cannot be called bodhisattvas. If they fully expound all sorts of expedient methods, educating and

liberating living beings, without any subject or object in mind, then they are bodhisattvas.

“Why? Subhuti, in reality there is no such thing as a ‘bodhisattva.’ Therefore Buddha says that all things have no self, no person, no being, and no liver of life.

“Subhuti, if bodhisattvas say, ‘I am going to adorn a buddha-land,’ they are not to be called bodhisattvas. Why? The Realized One says that adorning buddha-lands is not adornment, it is called adornment.”

If bodhisattvas say, “I can construct a world,” then they are not bodhisattvas. Even if they construct a world, if they have subject and object in mind, they are not bodhisattvas. If they fully construct a world without a sense of subject or object occurring, they are called bodhisattvas. The *Sutra of Supremely Subtle Stabilization* says, “Even if people can construct pure silver sanctuaries filling the universe, that is not as good as stabilizing the mind in meditation for one moment of thought.” If there are subject and object in mind, then it is not stabilization in meditation. If subject and object do not occur, this is called stabilization in meditation. Stabilization in meditation is the pure mind.

“Subhuti, if bodhisattvas realize selflessness, the Realized One says they are true bodhisattvas.”

When you are not obstructed by the characteristics of things, that is called realization. Not entertaining the notion of understanding things is called selflessness. Selflessness is what the Realized One calls true bodhisattvahood. Those who practice according to their ability can also be called bodhisattvas, but they are not yet actually true bodhisattvas.

When understanding and application are perfectly fulfilled, and all sense of subject and object is ended, only then can it be said that one is a true bodhisattva.

18 Impartial View of Oneness

One eye includes five eyes, one particle of sand includes the grains of sand in the Ganges; one world includes many worlds, one mind includes a plurality of minds. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on impartial view of oneness.

“Subhuti, what do you think—does the Realized One have the physical eye?”

“Yes, World Honored One; the Realized One has the physical eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think—does the Realized One have the celestial eye?”

“Yes, World Honored One; the Realized One has the celestial eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think—does the Realized One have the wisdom eye?”

“Yes, World Honored One; the Realized One has the wisdom eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think—does the Realized One have the reality eye?”

“Yes, World Honored One; the Realized One has the reality eye.”

“Subhuti, what do you think—does the Realized One have the enlightened eye?”

“Yes, World Honored One; the Realized One has the enlightened eye.”

All people have five eyes, but they cannot see by themselves because they are covered by confusion. Therefore the Buddha teaches that when we get rid of confusion, the five eyes open up clearly. By putting the teaching of prajnaparamita into practice moment to moment, we first get rid of the confused mentality; this is called the first, physical eye. When we see that all living beings have

buddha-nature and we develop a compassionate attitude, this is called the second, celestial eye. When folly does not occur, this is called the third, wisdom eye. When the mentality of fixation on phenomena is eliminated, this is called the fourth, reality eye. When subtle confusions are permanently ended and complete clarity illumines everywhere, this is called the fifth, enlightened eye.

Also, seeing that there is the reality body within the physical body is called the celestial eye. Seeing that all living beings have the essence of prajna in them is called the wisdom eye. Seeing nature with penetrating clarity, subject and object forever eliminated, all the teachings of Buddha originally inherent, is called the reality eye. Seeing prajnaparamita can produce all teachings of past, present, and future is called the enlightened eye.

“Subhuti, what do you think—does the Buddha say the grains of sand in the Ganges River are sand?”

“Yes, World Honored One. The Realized One says they are sand.”

“Subhuti, what do you think—if there were as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, would buddha-worlds as numerous as grains of sand in that many Ganges Rivers be many?”

“Very many, World Honored One.”

The Ganges River is near the sanctuary in the Jeta Grove. When the Realized One taught, he used this river for examples. The Buddha likens each grain of sand in the river to a world, and asks if they are many. Subhuti replies that they are very many. The Buddha cites this many lands in order to illustrate how each of the living beings therein has so many mental states.

The Buddha told Subhuti, “The many mental states of the many beings in that many lands are all known to the Realized One. What is the reason? The Realized One says that those minds are not mind, they are called mind.”

Each of the beings in those many worlds has numerous different states of mind. Many as these states of mind may be, they are all

referred to as deluded mind. Recognizing that deluded mind is not mind is called mind. This mind is the true mind, the constant mind, the enlightened mind, the mind of transcendental insight, the mind of purity, enlightenment, and nirvana.

“What is the reason? Subhuti, the past mind cannot be grasped, the present mind cannot be grasped, and the future mind cannot be grasped.”

The past mind cannot be grasped in that the deluded mind in the preceding thought has already passed in a flash, and there is nowhere to pursue it or look for it. The present mind cannot be grasped in that the true mind has no form, so how can it be seen? The future mind cannot be grasped in that there is originally nothing that can be grasped; when habit energies have been exhausted, they do not occur again. Realizing that past, present, and future mind cannot be grasped is called being a buddha.

19 The Teaching Pervading the Cosmos of Realities

The entire cosmos of realities is pervaded by one teaching; the field of blessings of precious substances cannot compare to four lines of the sutra. Therefore it follows up with a section on the teaching pervading the cosmos of realities.

“Subhuti, what do you think—if someone were to fill the universe with precious substances to use for giving in charity, would this person gain many blessings because of this?”

“Yes, World Honored One. This person would gain very many blessings because of this.”

“Subhuti, if blessings had substance, the Realized One would not say that many blessings are gained. Because blessings are nonexistent, therefore the Realized One says many blessings are gained.”

The blessings of precious substances cannot fulfill the enlightenment of buddhahood, so they are said to be nonexistent. Because they have no limit of quantity or number, blessings are said to be many, but if you can transcend, then you do not say they are many.

20 Detachment from Forms and Appearances

With the three embodiments complete, all their characteristics are completely realized. Since person and phenomena are both forgotten, this is not perfection. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on detachment from forms and appearances.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can the Buddha be seen by his perfect physical body?”

“No, World Honored One. The Realized One is not to be seen by his perfect physical body. Why? The Realized One says the perfect physical body is not a perfect physical body, it is called a perfect physical body.”

The Buddha’s concern is that people may not see the reality body and only see the thirty-two marks, the eighty refinements, and the violet-gold luster, and consider these to be the true body of the Realized One. In order to get rid of this confusion, he asks Subhuti whether or not the Buddha can be seen by his perfect physical body.

The thirty-two marks are not the perfect physical body; inwardly fulfilling the thirty-two pure practices is what is called the perfect physical body. The pure practices are the six perfections: cultivating the six perfections in the five sense organs and cultivating both stabilization and insight in the mind organ is called the perfect physical body. If you just admire the thirty-two marks of the Realized One and do not carry out the thirty-two pure practices inwardly, then this is not the perfect physical body. If you do not care about the Realized One’s physical body but can yourself maintain pure conduct, this can still be called the perfect physical body.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can the Realized One be seen by the full complement of distinguishing marks?”

“No, World Honored One. The Realized One is not to be seen by the full complement of distinguishing marks. Why? The Realized One says that the full complement of distinguishing marks is not the full complement, it is called the full complement of distinguishing marks.”

The Tathagata, or Realized One, is the formless body of reality. It cannot be seen by the physical eye; it can only be seen by the wisdom eye. When the wisdom eye is not yet fully clear, and one conceives images of self, person, and so on, and views the thirty-two distinguishing marks as the Realized One, then that is not called complete.

When the wisdom eye is thoroughly clear, and images of self, person, and so on do not occur, the light of true knowledge shines continuously. This is called the full complement of distinguishing marks. Those who are still infected with the three poisons yet say they see the true body of the Realized One cannot be right; even if they can see something, it is only a projected body, not the true formless body of reality.

21 Not Preaching a Doctrine

Talking about emptiness all day does not say a single word. If you say he has a doctrine, you are slandering the Realized One. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on not preaching a doctrine.

“Subhuti, do not say that the Realized One entertains this thought: ‘I should preach some doctrine.’ Do not entertain this thought. Why? If any say the Realized One preaches any doctrine, they are slandering the Buddha, because they cannot understand what I say. Subhuti, the explanation of the teaching is that there is no doctrine to preach—that is called teaching.”

When ordinary people preach, they have a sense of accomplishment. Therefore the Buddha tells Subhuti that when the Realized One teaches, he has no sense of accomplishment. Ordinary people preach with a sense of being able to understand. The Realized One’s speech and silence are both spontaneous; the words he utters are like echoes responding to sounds, occurring naturally without deliberate intent, not the same as the ordinary man preaching with a fluctuating mind. If any say that the Realized One preaches with fluctuation in his mind, they are slandering Buddha. The *Sutra of Vimalakirti* says, “Real teaching involves no preaching, no giving orders; listening to the teaching involves no hearing and no grasping.” You realize that myriad things are empty, and all names and words are temporary setups; constructed within inherent emptiness, all the verbal expositions explain that all realities are signless and unfabricated, thus guiding deluded people in such a way as to get them to see their original nature and cultivate and realize unsurpassed enlightenment.

At that point Subhuti, whose life was wisdom, said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, if living beings hear this teaching

in the future, will they believe in it or not?”

The Buddha told Subhuti, “They are not living beings, but not not living beings. Why? Subhuti, the Realized One says living beings are not living beings, they are called living beings.”

22 There Is Nothing to Attain

There is actually nothing at all in unsurpassed true knowledge; truth has nothing to attain, but is evident everywhere. Thus the sutra follows up with a section on the nonexistence of anything to be attained.

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, when the Buddha attained unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment, is it that there was nothing attained?”

The Buddha said, “That is so. That is so. Subhuti, there was nothing whatsoever for me to attain in unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment. This is called unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.”

Subhuti says that when the sense of attainment is ended, then this is enlightenment. Buddha says that this is so: “I really have no sense of seeking for enlightenment, and no sense of attainment. Because it is like this, it can be called unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.”

23 Purifying the Mind and Doing Good

One reality sustains the mind, but feelings produce high and low. Purify your mind and cultivate your conduct, and there is no end to goodness. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on purifying the mind and doing good.

“Furthermore, Subhuti, this reality is unbiased; it has no high or low. This is called unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment. Those who practice all good ways without a self, without a person, without a being, and without a liver of life will realize unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment.

The reality of enlightenment is said to be unbiased, without high or low, because all beings from the buddhas above to insects below have all knowledge within them, since enlightenment is nondual. Just practice all good ways detached from the four images, and you will attain enlightenment.

If you do not detach from the four images, then even if you cultivate all good ways, that will increase the sense of self and person, so there is no way to realize the liberated mind. If you practice all good ways without the four images, then liberation is possible.

Practicing all good ways means not being obsessed by anything, not being disturbed by objects, not being greedy for transcendental states, always applying expedient means in all situations, adapting to people, to get them to rejoice and have faith, expounding true teaching to them to enable them to realize enlightenment. Only when it is like this is it to be called practical application; thus it is called practicing all good ways.

“Subhuti, so-called ‘good ways’ the Realized One says are not good ways, they are called good ways.”

When you cultivate all good ways in hopes of rewards, then they are not good ways. When you carry out the myriad practices of the six perfections without hoping for rewards, these are called good ways.

24 Blessings and Wisdom without Compare

Even if you give away jewels like mountains, mountains are not infinite. An individual of stature with subtle wisdom—*this* is a jewel mountain. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on blessings and wisdom without compare.

“Subhuti, if someone took heaps of jewels as big as the polar mountains in a billion worlds and gave them away in charity, the blessings would not compare to a hundredth part, a hundredth trillionth part, or indeed any calculable or imaginable part of the blessings of accepting, holding, reading, reciting, and explaining to others even so much as a four-line verse of this sutra on the perfection of wisdom.”

The blessings realized by giving away mountains of jewels in charity are measureless and boundless, but after all the basis is contaminated, so there is no way of liberation. Even though a four-line verse on the perfection of great wisdom may be little, if you put it into practice you can attain buddhahood; therefore we know that the blessings of holding the scripture are incomparable because it can cause people to realize enlightenment.

25 Teaching without Teaching Anyone

Setting up methods of teaching is inevitably an expedient; in terms of the essential, there is really nowhere to abide. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on teaching without teaching anyone.

“What do you think, Subhuti? You should not say that the Realized One entertains this thought: ‘I should liberate beings.’ Subhuti, do not think this. Why? There really are no beings the Realized One liberates. If there were beings the Realized One liberates, then the Realized One would have self, person, being, and liver of life.”

Subhuti imagines that the Realized One has a sense of liberating beings; in order to dismiss this suspicion of Subhuti, the Buddha tells him not to entertain this thought. All beings are originally themselves buddhas; if you say the Realized One liberates beings so they become buddhas, then this is a false statement. Being a false statement, that would be referring to self, person, being, and liver of life. This is for the purpose of dismissing the sense of “me” and “mine.” Even though all beings have buddha-nature, if not for the teaching of the buddhas, they would have no way to realize it; how could they cultivate the practices that would enable them to fulfill buddhahood?

“Subhuti, the Realized One says that having self is not having self, yet ordinary people think they have self. Subhuti, the Realized One says ordinary people are not ordinary people, they are called ordinary people.”

The self that the Realized One says exists in the inherently pure self of eternity, bliss, selfhood, and purity, not the same as the

greedy, angry, ignorant, false, unreal self of ordinary people. Therefore he says that ordinary people think they have self. Those who have self and person are ordinary people, those to whom self and person do not occur are not ordinary people. Those whose minds have fluctuation are ordinary people, whereas those whose minds have no fluctuation are not ordinary people. Those who do not realize the perfection of wisdom are ordinary people; if they realize the perfection of wisdom, then they are not ordinary people. Those who have subject and object in mind are ordinary people, whereas those who have no subject or object in mind are not ordinary people.

26 The Embodiment of Reality Is Not External Appearances

Seeing by way of form and seeking by way of sound is traveling a false path. Here subtle communion reveals true eternity alone. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on the embodiment of reality not being external appearances.

“Subhuti, what do you think—can you view the Realized One in terms of the thirty-two marks?”

Subhuti said, “That’s the way it is—we view the Realized One in terms of the thirty-two marks.”

The Buddha said, “If you view the Realized One in terms of the thirty-two marks, then a law-giving sage ruler would be a Realized One.”

Subhuti said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, we should not view the Realized One in terms of the thirty-two marks.”

The World Honored One poses this question out of great kindness, lest Subhuti’s disease of clinging to appearances may not be eliminated. Subhuti does not yet know the Buddha’s intention, so he says that’s the way it is. This is already confusion, to which he adds more confusion by saying that we view the Realized One in terms of thirty-two marks. He has become even further removed from reality, so the Realized One tells him, in order to eliminate his confusion, that if we could view the Realized One in terms of thirty-two marks, then a law-giving sage ruler would be a Realized One.

Even though a law-giving sage ruler may have the thirty-two marks of greatness, how could he be the same as the Realized One? The World Honored One uses this expression to get rid of Subhuti’s disease of clinging to appearances and to cause his understanding to penetrate deeply. When questioned, Subhuti’s confusion melts

away all at once, so he says, “As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, one should not view the Realized One in terms of thirty-two marks.” Subhuti is a great saint, his understanding is very deep, and he has skill in means—he does not create a path of delusion, but wants the World Honored One to get rid of subtle confusion to enable people of later generations to see without error.

At that point the World Honored One said in verse,

“Anyone who sees me in form,
Or who seeks me through sound,
Is traveling a false path
And cannot see the Realized One.”

Form means appearances, seeing means recognition. “Me” refers to the inherently pure, uncreated, formless, real eternal essence within the bodies of all beings; this cannot be fulfilled by loudly chanting invocations of Buddha. Mindfulness must be accurate mindfulness, with distinct clarity, before one can realize enlightened understanding. If you seek this through form or sound, it cannot be seen. Thus we know that if we look upon Buddha in terms of appearances, or seek the teaching in sounds, the mind fluctuates and does not understand the Realized One.

27 No Annihilation or Extinction

Manifest yet formless, empty yet not void, constant throughout all time—who says annihilation or extinction? Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on neither annihilation nor extinction.

“Subhuti, if you entertain the thought that the Realized One does not attain unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment on account of perfect manifestation, you should not think this way. Subhuti, if you entertain the thought that those who aspire to unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment speak of all things as being annihilated, you should not think this way. Why? Those who aspire to unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment do not speak of things as being annihilated.”

Hearing that the real body is beyond appearances, Subhuti then imagines that one attains enlightenment without cultivating the thirty-two pure practices. Buddha tells Subhuti not to say the Realized One attains enlightenment without cultivating the thirty-two pure practices. If you say that unexcelled enlightenment is attained without cultivating the thirty-two pure practices, this is annihilating the lineage of buddhas; it is not true at all.

28 Not Accepting, Not Being Greedy

A great mind is patient and naturally free from greed; worldly blessings are so very many—how could they be taken on? Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on not accepting and not being greedy.

“Subhuti, suppose a bodhisattva took as many jewels as would fill worlds as numerous as the sand grains in the Ganges River and gave them in charity. Now suppose someone else knew the selflessness of all things and attained tolerance; this bodhisattva would surpass the blessings attained by the former bodhisattva.

“Why? Subhuti, it is because bodhisattvas do not accept blessings. Subhuti, the blessings produced by bodhisattvas are not supposed to be objects of greed and attachment; therefore it is said they do not accept blessings.”

Comprehending all things without a sense of subject and object is called tolerance. The blessings attained by such a person surpass the aforementioned blessings of the jewels. The blessings produced by bodhisattvas are not for themselves; their intention is to benefit all beings. Therefore it is said they do not accept blessings.

29 Serenity of Conduct

Going and coming, sitting and reclining, are all in accord with thusness. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on serenity of conduct.

“Subhuti, if anyone says the Realized One comes or goes, sits or reclines, this person does not understand the principle I expound. Why? The Realized One comes from nowhere and goes nowhere; that is why he is called the Realized One.”

The Realized One does not come, yet it is not that he does not come; does not go, yet it is not that he does not go; is not sitting, yet it is not that he does not sit; is not reclining, yet it is not that he does not recline. Within these four postures—walking, standing, sitting, and reclining—if one always remains empty and serene, then this is a realized one.

30 The Principle of the Compound

When the believing mind is continuous, this is atoms; when these jewels of faith fill all over, this is called a world. The “world” and the “atoms” are one compound, being thus by natural law. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on the principle of the compound.

“Subhuti, if a good man or a good woman pulverized the billion-world universe into atoms, do you think there would be many of these atoms?”

Subhuti said, “Very many, World Honored One. Why? If these atoms were really existent, then the Buddha would not say they were a mass of atoms. Why? The Buddha says a mass of atoms is not a mass of atoms, it is called a mass of atoms.”

Buddha spoke of the billion-world universe to symbolize the number of particles in the natures of all beings, which are like the atoms in a billion-world universe. The particles of false thought in the natures of all beings are not atoms. If they hear the sutra and realize the way, awakened insight constantly shines, heading for enlightenment, not stopping thought after thought, always remaining pure: such pure elements are called a mass of atoms.

“World Honored One, the billion-world universe spoken of by the Realized One is not a universe, it is called a universe.”

A billion is a thousand to the third power: speaking in terms of the inner pattern, this means that greed, anger, and folly each contain a thousand false thoughts. The mind is the root of good and evil; it can be vulgar and it can be sagacious. Its movement and stillness are unfathomable, and it is boundlessly vast, so it is called a universe.

“What is the reason? If the universe really existed, it would be a compound; but the Realized One says that a compound is not

a compound, it is called a compound.”

For perfect clarity of mind, nothing compares to the two elements of compassion and wisdom; enlightenment is attained by way of these two elements. Those who speak of a compound do so because they have a sense of attainment; thus it is not a compound. When there is no sense of attainment, this is called a compound. This “compound” means talking about reality without destroying temporary names.

“Subhuti, the compound is inexpressible, but ordinary people greedily cleave to their affairs.”

Enlightenment, the realization of buddhahood, is fulfilled by means of two elements, compassion and wisdom: these cannot be fully explained; their subtlety is inexpressible. Ordinary people greedily cleave to literary work and do not practice compassion and wisdom. If you seek unsurpassed enlightenment without practicing compassion and wisdom, how can you attain it?

31 Views Do Not Occur

The four views are all wrong; this is called four perceptions. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on views not occurring.

“Subhuti, if someone says that the Buddha expounds the notion of self, the notion of person, the notion of a being, or the notion of a liver of life, do you think this person understands the principles I expound?”

“World Honored One, this person does not understand the principles expounded by the Realized One. Why? The World Honored one says that the notion of self, the notion of person, the notion of a being, and the notion of a liver of life are not a notion of self, a notion of person, a notion of a being, or a notion of a liver of life, they are called the notion of self, the notion of person, the notion of a being, and the notion of a liver of life.”

The World Honored One expounded this sutra to get all beings to realize prajna wisdom themselves and cultivate the realization of enlightenment themselves. Ordinary people do not understand the Buddha’s intention, and therefore think the Realized One speaks of notions such as self and person. They do not know that the Realized One expounds the teaching of extremely profound, formless, uncontrived perfect insight.

The notions of self, person, and so on as explained by the Realized One are not the same as the ordinary person’s notions of self, person, and so on. The Realized One says that all beings have buddha-nature; this is the notion of the true self. He says all beings have uncontaminated knowledge, basically inherent in their essential nature; this is the notion of person. He says all beings are originally naturally free from afflictions; this is the notion of being. He says all beings’ essential nature is fundamentally unborn and unperishing; this is the notion of liver of life.

“Subhuti, those who aspire to unexcelled complete perfect enlightenment should know, see, and believe and understand all truths in this way, not conceiving of an appearance of truth. Subhuti, the Realized One says that the supposed ‘appearance of truth’ is not characteristic of truth; this is called the characteristic of truth.”

Those who aspire to enlightenment should see all beings as having buddha-nature, should see all beings as inherently endowed with uncontaminated all-knowledge, should believe all beings are originally without afflictions, should believe that the intrinsic nature of all beings is fundamentally without birth or death. Even though they put all knowledge and insight into practice and expediently deal with people and help them, they do not entertain a sense of subject and object. If you talk about formless truth yet have a sense of subject and object, then this is not characteristic of truth. If you talk about formless truth, mentally practice formless practice, and have no sense of subject and object, this is called the characteristic of truth.

32 The Reward and the Emanation Are Not the Real

Once the mind is inspired, blessings are realized accordingly; embodying the rewards, the emanations influence others—this is inevitable. When the real Buddha is known everywhere, then the work is done. Therefore the sutra follows up with a section on the reward and the emanation not being the reality.

“Subhuti, suppose someone filled infinite incalculable numbers of worlds with precious substances and used these to give in charity. Now suppose a good man or a good woman who has awakened the inspiration for enlightenment holds this sutra, even so much as the equivalent of a four-line verse, accepts and holds it, reads and recites it, and expounds it for others, the blessing in this will exceed the former.

“How does one expound it for others? Not grasping forms, not budging from thusness as such.”

Even though the blessings of precious substances may be many, they do not compare to the blessings of people awakening the inspiration for enlightenment, accepting and holding four lines of this sutra, and expounding it for others. These blessings surpass the former hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of times, beyond any comparison.

Explaining truths skillfully and expediently, taking people’s faculties into consideration and adapting to their capacities, adjusting suitably in various ways—this is called expounding for others. The people who listen to the teaching are of various different appearances; one should not have a discriminatory attitude. Just master an empty, silent mind in accord with suchness, without any sense of gaining anything, without any sense of winning or losing, without any sense

of hope or expectation, without excitement or oblivion—this is called not budging from thusness as such.

“Why? All created things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows; like dew, and like lightning. They should be viewed in this way.”

The dreams are bodies astray, the illusions are wandering thoughts, the bubbles are afflictions, the shadows are the barriers created by past actions. These are called created things. As for uncreated truth, it is reality, apart from labels and appearances.

After Buddha had spoken this sutra, the elder Subhuti, as well as monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, angels, humans, and titans from all worlds, having heard what the Buddha said, all rejoiced greatly; they believed it, accepted it, worked at it, and put it into practice.

Notes on the

SUTRA OF HUI-NENG

CHAPTER ONE. PERSONAL HISTORY

Places

Shao Province, where Hui-neng's lecture is taking place, was in what is now Guangdong (Canton) Province in the far south of China, as was Hsin Province, where Hui-neng was born, and Nan-hai, where he grew up. *Hsin* means "new," and this area was, from the perspective of the expanding Chinese empire, a newly developing region. This is important background to understand the imagery of racial and cultural bias that is to figure in the development of Hui-neng's story.

Ling-nan was the name of a Tao or Circuit, a larger administrative unit, encompassing what are now the provinces of Guangxi (Kuang-hsi) and Guangdong (Kuang-tung), the deep south of continental China. While Guangdong is now densely populated by Han Chinese, Guangxi has such a large aboriginal population that it is politically designated an autonomous region, named after the majority Zhuang people.

Fan-yang, where Hui-neng said his father was from, was a place in modern Hopei (Hebei), north of the Yellow River. The fact of his banishment suggests that Hui-neng's father had been in the civil service. Many men of good repute suffered banishment in the course of Chinese history, including some outstanding Confucian scholars and great Buddhist masters, so there is no reason to suppose that Hui-neng's father was a bad man. Tyranny and partisan politics were part of everyday life in gigantic bureaucracies like that of imperial China; indeed, one of the main points of the story of Hui-neng's apprenticeship and the contest for the robe of succession is to illustrate how such patterns also infect religious establishments.

Huang-mei, where Hung-jen the Fifth Grand Master of Ch'an was teaching, was in modern Hupei (Hubei), in the center of China proper, along the Yang-tzu River.

Meeting the Fifth Grand Master of Ch'an

Hung-jen (602–675) is supposed to have based his teaching on the *Diamond Sutra*, one of the most condensed works in the scriptural corpus known collectively as the *Prajnaparamita* or Perfection of Wisdom teachings. A brief work called *Treatise on the Supreme Vehicle* is attributed to Hung-jen; an English translation may be found in my *Minding Mind: A Course in Basic Meditation* (Shambhala Publications, 1995).

Hui-neng's sudden awakening on hearing a passage of the *Diamond Sutra* is one of the core stories of Zen tradition, representing the action of Buddha's word on an innocent mind. One of the very greatest works of Zen art, by the obscure 13th-century artist Chih-weng, depicts Hui-neng on this occasion, still a woodcutter, in a state of profound bemusement after his unexpected awakening.

When Hung-jen referred to Hui-neng as an "aborigine," the expression used is "Hunting Liao." The Liao were a non-Chinese (i.e., non-Han) people living in Hupei. Since Hupei was already settled by agriculture-centered Han culture, as an earlier minority hunting people the Liao were undoubtedly mountain dwellers. The Zen monastery at Huang-mei was in the mountains of Hupei, so it is not impossible that its inhabitants were to some degree acquainted with Liao tribals.

Later on, when Hui-neng had to take refuge from persecution, he went into the mountains and lived with hunters for fifteen years. This would suggest that he did in fact have such a background in his personal history.

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Hui-neng's father married a Liao woman of Hupei, and Hung-jen may have been using the name of the local aboriginal minority as a general term for aborigines. It is hardly thinkable that Hui-neng's father would not have already been married and had children by the time he had become a civil servant. After having been banished south, however,

alone in exile in a frontier area, he may have had a liaison with a local native. This would account for Hui-neng having a distinctive physical appearance in the eyes of Han people of northern China.

It must be realized that the cultural and racial stereotypes and bigotries portrayed in this story are part of a deliberate setup, ultimately designed to illustrate the universality of the buddha-nature vis-à-vis the relatively limited and superficial conditioned personality.

The Contest with Shen-hsiu

Shen-hsiu, the senior disciple of the Fifth Grand Master, was originally a Confucian scholar. The principal aim of formal Confucian studies at that time was to win degrees in civil service examinations, which would qualify the holder for government offices.

In the story of Hui-neng, the whole scenario of the poetic competition for the succession to the rank of Grand Master of Ch'an is a spoof on the habit of carrying worldly customs over into Buddhism. Shen-hsiu's inner struggle is depicted in great detail in this version of the text, illustrating the depth of the conflict between ambition and truth that plagued institutionalized systems of intellectual and religious education.

In terms of Buddhist teaching, the juxtaposition of the scholarly meditation devotee and the free innocent illustrates the principle that buddha-nature and enlightenment are not externally acquired but inwardly discovered. This point is strongly emphasized in the *Diamond Sutra* on which Hung-jen is said to have based his teaching, and in his own *Treatise on the Supreme Vehicle*, he says that inherent mind is the basic teacher.

The site of the poetic contest also has symbolic meaning. The poems are written on a wall upon which there was to be painted a mural depicting the projection of the *Lankavatara-sutra* and the succession of the five Grand Masters or patriarchs of Ch'an. According to Ch'an lore, the founder of Ch'an in China considered the Chinese Buddhists of his time to be literalists and formalists; so he used the *Lankavatara-sutra*, a text of the Buddhist *vijnana-vada* or school of consciousness, to break through these biases.

A Lankavatara school developed from the circle of the Second Grand Master of Ch'an and continued to specialize in this way for a

few generations, but the Ch'an mainstream employed whatever texts proved useful from time to time, generally drawing not only from the vast body of Buddhist sutras, but also occasionally from Taoist and Confucian classics.

In the story of Hui-neng, the final abandonment of the Lankavatara Ch'an master's mural in favor of the verse of Shen-hsiu illustrating practical method may be one of the signals of the end of the patriarchal era and the popularization of Ch'an. Hui-neng's own story emphasizes that he is the last of the Grand Masters, the teaching having become fully established in China by the end of his career.

In the final judgment of the contest, it may seem contradictory that the Fifth Grand Master approves the verse of his eminent disciple yet grants the ultimate recognition to the illiterate workman. Ch'an Master Pai-chang said, "To say that it is possible to attain buddhahood by cultivation, that there is practice and there is realization . . . is Buddha's teaching, but these are words of incomplete doctrine. . . . To say that one cannot attain buddhahood by cultivation, that there is no practice and no realization . . . is also Buddha's teaching, but these are words of complete doctrine." Both these types of teaching are found throughout Ch'an Buddhist lore; the question of when they apply is addressed in the dictum, "If you want to know the meaning of buddha-nature, observe timing and conditions."

Inheritance of the Teaching

Hui-neng's insight was recognized by the Fifth Grand Master of Ch'an at their first meeting; then it was confirmed in his secret victory in the poetic contest of the disciples. Only after that did the Grand Master expound the *Diamond Sutra* to Hui-neng, who had originally been inspired by that sutra and had come to the Ch'an master for that reason.

The *Diamond Sutra* became popular among Ch'an followers, as well as other Buddhists, and some devotees took to reciting it as a regular ritual. According to a commentary on this sutra attributed to oral transmission from Hui-neng, "This one-scroll sutra originally exists in the essential nature of all living beings. People who do not see it themselves just read and recite written letters. If you realize

your original mind, you will realize for the first time that this sutra is not in written letters. If you can clearly understand your own essential nature, only then will you really believe that “all the Buddhas emerge from this sutra.”

Persecution

The pursuit of Hui-neng by jealous rivals further illustrates the theme of worldliness carried over into supposedly religious or spiritual circles. As a former general, the monk Hui-ming is the perfect figure to represent aggressive ambition. His inability to lift the robe and bowl, symbolic of the teaching, shows that it is capacity that counts here, not desire. The scenario of the sudden change of attitude and ultimate awakening of Hui-ming through crucial redirection of attention as guided by Hui-neng was later used as a Zen teaching story to orient consciousness. The term *original face* thereby became a common watchword of Zen.

Hui-neng’s renewed persecution shows that his message was not welcomed by entrenched interests. The First and Second Grand Masters of Ch’an were also persecuted by jealous clerics who wanted to retain their authority. The First Grand Master was poisoned six times, ultimately fatally; the Second Grand Master was condemned to death as a result of an intrigue and finally executed.

Emergence in the World

The story of the public emergence of Hui-neng as the Sixth Grand Master through his dialogue with the monks arguing about the flag and the wind is another of the episodes in this sutra often singled out for special attention in Zen study. An interesting interpretation of this story attributed to the medieval Japanese Zen Master Keizan can be found in the chapter on Hui-neng in *Transmission of Light*, an important Japanese koan collection (North Point Press/Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990; Weatherhill, 1992).

CHAPTER TWO. PRAJNA

Bodhi, Prajna, and Paramita

Bodhi, *prajna*, and *paramita* are Sanskrit Buddhist technical terms that are rendered variously in Chinese: each has at least three

versions, including at least two Chinese translations plus at least one transliteration of the Sanskrit sound into Chinese. In each case, the various Chinese renditions of the technical terms are used interchangeably in native Chinese Buddhist lore such as that of the Ch'an schools. One or another version may be selected or preferred in a given case, however, in order to take advantage of some choice of characters or peculiarity of expression that may serve to highlight a particular point. Mechanical regularity of the external shape of technical terminology is therefore not characteristic of Chinese Buddhist literature.

Bodhi

Bodhi means enlightened knowledge or wisdom. It comes from the same root as *buddha*, which means one who has realized wisdom. Bodhidharma, the name traditionally associated with the founding of Ch'an in China, is actually a patronymic meaning "teaching of wisdom," symbolizing the inner essence of Zen.

Bodhi is the main root of the word *bodhisattva*, a term also commonly seen in transliteration, and also used by Hui-neng in his lectures, meaning a being whose essence or nature is wisdom. The bodhisattva is the hero of the Mahayana "Great Vehicle" of Buddhism, working for universal liberation and enlightenment.

Prajna

Prajna means insight or wisdom. According to the *Sandhinirmocanasutra*, there are three kinds of insight: insight into worldly truth, insight into ultimate truth, and insight into benefiting sentient beings. In many cases, Ch'an and Zen teachings emphasize insight into ultimate truth. The classical master Pai-chang said, "Just as insects can alight anywhere except on the flames of a fire, the minds of sentient beings can relate to anything but wisdom."

Hui-neng also uses the transliterated expression *prajna-samadhi*. *Samadhi* means concentration or absorption, and in Ch'an lore is sometimes used to mean attainment.

Paramita

Paramita has been translated into Chinese as “crossing over” and “reaching the other shore.” *Param* comes from the root *pr*, “bringing across,” and means the further shore, the other side, the ultimate extent or end. The second part of the word, *ita*, is technically a past participle of the verb “to go,” thus meaning “gone.” It can also mean, according to conventional Sanskrit usage, “going,” insofar as the route and goal are established. Thus, from both of its Sanskrit elements, the term *paramita* has meanings of the process of transcendence as well as the realization of transcendence. The two principal Chinese translations of the term reflect these two layers of meaning. According to classical Buddhist tradition, the bodhisattva who arrives on the “other side” does not remain there, but continues to travel back and forth from “this shore” to “the other shore,” delivering others from bondage to freedom, ultimately not staying here, there, or in between.

In his commentary on the *Diamond Sutra*, Hui-neng says,

What does *prajna* mean? *Prajna* is a Sanskrit word, rendered into Chinese as “insightful wisdom.” Insight is not giving rise to ignorant attitudes, wisdom is having the appropriate expedients. Insight is the substance of wisdom, wisdom is the function of insight. If there is wisdom in substance, function is insightful and not ignorant; if there is no wisdom in substance, function is insightful and not ignorant; if there is no wisdom in substance, function is ignorant, without insight. It is just to get rid of ignorance, folly, and being unenlightened that we cultivate insightful wisdom.

What does *paramita* mean? It is rendered into Chinese by “reaching the other shore.” Reaching the other shore means detachment from birth and death. Just because people of the world lack stability of nature, they find appearances of birth and death in all things, flow in the waves of various courses of existence, and have not arrived at the ground of reality as is: all of that is “this shore.” It is necessary to have great insightful wisdom, complete in respect to all things, detached from appearances of birth and death—this is “reaching the other shore.”

It is also said that when the mind is confused, it is “this shore.” When the mind is enlightened, it is “the other shore.” When the mind is distorted, it is “this shore.” When the mind is sound, it is “the other shore.” If you speak of it and carry it out mentally, then your own reality body is imbued with paramita. If you speak of it but do not carry it out mentally, then there is no paramita.

The Diamond Prajnaparamita Sutra

There are numerous sutras, or Buddhist scriptures, belonging to the *prajnaparamita* class. The *Diamond Sutra* is one of the most condensed and most popular of these texts, commonly recited by all sorts of people. The commentary on this sutra attributed to Hui-neng himself says,

The “diamond prajnaparamita” spoken of by the Realized One takes its name from a metaphor for the truth. What does it mean? Diamond is extremely sharp by nature and can break through all sorts of things. But though diamond is extremely hard, horn can break it. Diamond stands for buddha-nature, horn stands for afflictions. Hard as diamond is, horn can break it; stable though the buddha-nature is, afflictions can derange it.

Even though afflictions may be intractable, prajna knowledge can destroy them; even though horn may be hard, fine steel can break it. Those who realize this principle clearly see essential nature. The *Nirvana-sutra* says, “Those who see buddha-nature are not called ordinary people; those who do not see buddha-nature are called ordinary people.”

The metaphor of the diamond expounded by the Realized One is for the sake of people in the world without stability of nature: they may recite the scripture, but illumination does not develop. If they would practice inwardly as well as recite outwardly, they would be equally illumined. If they are not firm within, stability and insight are lost; if they practice mentally as well as recite verbally, stability and insight will be equal. This is called the ultimate end.

The Pure Name Sutra

The *Pure Name Sutra*, featuring the householding buddha named Vimalakirti, is another Buddhist scripture that was very popular among practitioners of Ch'an and is often quoted in the sayings and writings of Ch'an masters. One of the central functions of the teaching in this sutra is to dissolve dogmatic attachments to formal doctrines and practices.

CHAPTER 3. QUESTIONS

Bodhidharma

Bodhidharma came to China around the end of the 5th century or the beginning of the 6th century. He is traditionally considered the founder of Ch'an in China. The story of the encounter between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of the southern Chinese domain of Liang is recounted in the first chapter of the classic collection known as *The Blue Cliff Record* (Shambhala Publications, 1977, 1992). The great 14th-century Japanese master Muso explains the underlying principle in some detail in his *Dream Conversations* (Shambhala Publications, 1996):

Virtue without wisdom is said to be an enemy for three lifetimes. When time is passed in ignorance, doing only contaminated good, virtue in hopes of reward, it is therefore not possible to clarify the true ground of mind. This is the enemy of the first lifetime.

As a result of contaminated virtue, pleasurable states eventually develop. Still in the realm of emotion, they occasion a deepening of mundane attachments. These attachments become influences toward greedy and possessive behavior. This is the enemy of the second lifetime.

When the pleasurable states are worn out, while the force of ignorance has not been diminished but rather increased by habitual attachment to the rewards of virtue, the fall from the state of elevation of feeling produces negative reactions. This is the enemy of the third lifetime.

Pure Land Buddhism

Pure Land Buddhism has long been the most popular type of Buddhism throughout East Asia. Though Ch'an/Zen and Pure Land Buddhism outwardly seem quite different, they have been amalgamated from time to time by practitioners of both types of school, and two of the patriarchs or Grand Masters of the parent tradition of Pure Land Buddhism in China were also recognized Ch'an masters.

Pure Land practice is centered on invocation of the name of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, to purify the mind and experience spiritual rebirth in Amitabha's Pure Land in the West. The West is the direction of the setting sun, which symbolizes the cessation of mundane thoughts.

Just like so-called fundamentalists in other religions, followers of Buddhism lapsed from time to time into literalistic and dogmatic views of scriptural teachings. Hui-neng's resurrection of the inner meaning of the Pure Land symbolism is repeated over and over again in Ch'an and Zen lore through the ages. In his *Dream Conversations*, Zen Master Muso explains,

Among masters of the various schools of Buddhism, including Zen Buddhism, have been those who encourage the Pure Land Buddhist practice of chanting the name of the Buddha of Infinite Light. Some types of Pure Land Buddhist teaching and practice are elementary and incomplete, but this is a matter of perspective. The *Nirvana-sutra* says, "Coarse words and fine speech all end up in ultimate truth." The *Lotus Sutra* says, "Productive labor and business do not contravene the character of reality." When you have awakened to the principle of the Great Vehicle, then all talk in the world, all activity, is the Great Vehicle of Perfect Meaning; so recitation of a Buddha name could hardly be called a lesser vehicle.

The masters who set up Pure Land Buddhism understood the profound principle of the Great Vehicle in their own minds, yet temporarily distinguished the Pure Land from the defiled land in order to guide ignorant people, drawing a distinction between self-power and Other-power. They were not ignorant themselves; these teachings are compassionate expedients of

enlightening beings. Among believers in Pure Land Buddhism, however, there are those who invoke the Buddha's name with the notion that there is a Pure Land outside this defiled land. This cannot be called the Great Vehicle of Perfect Meaning.

Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta are names of supernal bodhisattvas traditionally associated with Amitabha Buddha. Shakyamuni is one of the names of Gautama Buddha. Hui-neng's symbolic interpretation of these names is typical of classical Ch'an and Zen teachings. Supernal bodhisattvas are often called "gods" or "goddesses" in Western writings on Eastern art and religion, but this is incorrect and misleading, as can be seen from the teachings of the masters themselves.

CHAPTER 4. STABILIZATION AND INSIGHT

Stabilization and Insight

The Sanskrit term *samadhi*, often rendered as "concentration" or "absorption," was commonly translated into Chinese by a character that suggests stabilization or stability. In his essay *The Cooperation of Concentration and Insight*, the great Ch'an Master Yung-ming Yen-shou wrote, "In Ch'an and the Teachings there are two methods, most honored of the myriad practices of the ten perfections. At first they are called stopping and seeing, to help new learners; later they become concentration and wisdom, roots of enlightenment. These are only one reality, which seems to have two parts. In the silence of the essence of reality is stopping by comprehending truth; when silent yet ever aware, subtle seeing is there" (*The Five Houses of Zen*, Shambhala Publications, 1997).

Shariputra and Vimalakirti

In the *Pure Name Sutra*, Buddha's disciple Shariputra relates how the enlightened layman Vimalakirti once came upon him sitting quietly in the forest and chided him for superficiality, saying,

Hey, Shariputra, it is not necessarily sitting that constitutes quiet sitting. Quiet sitting means not manifesting body or mind in the realms of desire, form, and formlessness—*this* is quiet sitting!

Demonstrating dignified behavior without rising from absorption in extinction—this is quiet sitting. Appearing to engage in the occupations of ordinary people without abandoning the principles of the Path—this is quiet sitting. The mind not dwelling on the inward, yet not being outside either—this is quiet sitting. Cultivating the thirty-seven elements of the Path without being moved by any views—this is quiet sitting. Entering nirvana without ending afflictions—this is quiet sitting.

The great master Lin-chi said, “There are blind baldies who, after they have eaten their fill, sit in meditation, arresting thoughts leaking out to prevent them from arising, shunning clamor and seeking quiet. This is a deviated form of Zen” (*Zen Essence: The Science of Freedom*, Shambhala Publications, 1989).

Sudden and Gradual

Hui-neng’s disciple Shen-hui said, “Listening to the teaching is the gradual within the sudden; understanding the teaching is the sudden within the gradual. Cultivating practice is the gradual within the sudden; realizing the result is the sudden within the gradual.”

CHAPTER 5. SITTING MEDITATION

The great 14th-century Chinese master Kao-feng said, “It is essential in Zen study that you do not cling to a sitting cushion for practice. If you sink into oblivion or distraction, or plunge into ease and tranquility, totally unawares, not only will you waste time, you will not be able to digest the offerings of donors. When the light of your eyes falls to the ground one day, in the end what will you rely on?” (*Teachings of Zen*, Shambhala Publications, 1997).

The great 14th-century Japanese master Muso said, “People meditating on the fundamental carry out their ordinary tasks and activities in the midst of meditation, and carry out meditation in the midst of ordinary tasks and activities. There is no disparity between meditation and activity. It is for those as yet incapable of this, those weak in focusing their intent on the Way, that special meditation periods were set up. The practice of meditating four times a day in

Zen communities began in this manner during the 12th century” (*Dream Conversations*).

The great 13th-century Korean master Chinul said, “While scriptures and treatises mostly speak of sitting practice, that is because it is easy to accomplish that way; they also include walking, standing, and so on, because a gradual development takes place. . . . All four postures—sitting, standing, walking, and reclining—will work.”

Chinul also said, “Even sitting cannot stop the mind; how can walking, standing, and so on, access the Way? If your practical application reaches whole maturity, even if a thousand sages came forth you would not be startled, and a thousand monsters couldn’t turn your head; then how could you be unable to do the work while walking, standing, or sitting?” (*Kensho: The Heart of Zen*, Shambhala Publications, 1997).

The great 11th-century Chinese master Ta-hui said, “If you have been practicing quiet meditation but your mind is still not calm and free when in the midst of activity, this means you haven’t been empowered by your quiet meditation. If you have been practicing quietude just to get rid of agitation, then when you are in the midst of agitation, the agitation will disturb your mind just as if you had never done any quiet meditation” (*Zen Essence*).

Buddha said, “Squatting motionless will not purify a mortal who has not gotten over doubt and desire.” Buddha also said, “Not merely by rules of conduct and religious observances, nor by much learning either, nor even by attainment of concentration, nor by sleeping alone, do I reach the happiness of freedom” (*Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, Bantam Books, 1995).

CHAPTER 6. REPENTANCE

The Five Perfumes

Morality, stability, wisdom, liberation, and liberated knowledge and vision, here symbolized by perfumes, constitute what is known as the five-part reality body. An “incarnation” of a buddha means embodiment of these five realities. This teaching is found in the *Lankavatara-sutra*, one of the Buddhist scriptures commonly cited in

Ch'an teaching. Repentance practice is depicted in more detail in the meditation lore of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism, with which Ch'an and Zen had strong affinities (see *Stopping and Seeing: A Comprehensive Course in Buddhist Meditation*, Shambhala Publications, 1997, pp. 61–69).

The Four Universal Vows

The metaphysics and meditations of the four universal vows are also described in *Stopping and Seeing*, pp. 28–29.

The Three Embodiments

The three embodiments, or bodies, of a buddha (or Tathagata, another epithet of a buddha) are defined in various ways in Buddhist literature. The eminent Ch'an Master Pai-chang said,

The body of reality in its true aspect is called the Illuminator Buddha as the pure clear reality body; it is also called the empty reality-body buddha. It is also called the great perfect mirror knowledge, and it is called the eighth consciousness. It is also called the source of nature, and it is also called the empty source. It is called the Buddha dwelling in the land that is neither pure nor defiled. It is also called the lion in its den. It is also called adamantite applied knowledge. It is also called the spotless altar, and it is also called the primary void. It is also called the hidden essence. The Third Grand Master said, "It is useless to work at concentration on stillness without knowing the hidden essence."

Second, the reward-body buddha is the Buddha under the tree of enlightenment. This is also called the illusory transformation buddha, and it is called the beatified buddha. This is called the Luminous Buddha as the completely fulfilled body of reward. It is also called the knowledge of the essential equality of things, and it is also called the seventh consciousness. It is also called the Buddha as result in accord with cause. It is equal in all the fiftytwo stages of meditation, equal in saint and self-enlightened ones, equal in all bodhisattvas, and is equally subject to such pains as birth and

death, but is not equally subject to the misery of sentient beings' binding habits.

Third is the projection-body Buddha. Now in the midst of all things, existent and nonexistent, when there is utterly no influence of longing, and no indifference either, detached from the four propositions [of being, nonbeing, neither, or both], such words and intelligence as there may be is called Shakyamuni Buddha with a thousand hundred hundred thousand projection bodies. It is also called the great miraculous projection, and it is called sporting in spiritual powers. It is also called subtle analytic observational knowledge, and it is called the sixth consciousness.

CHAPTER 7. KEY EVENTS

The Great Sutra of Nirvana

The *Nirvana-sutra*, more properly titled *Mahaparinirvana-sutra*, "The Scripture of the Great Ultimate Demise," is the Mahayana Buddhist analogue of the Hinayana *Nibbana-sutta*. It is represented as the final teaching of Shakyamuni, Gautama Buddha, just before passing away into final nirvana, or parinirvana. The quintessential teaching of the *Nirvana-sutra* is that the buddha-nature, the essence of enlightenment, is eternal and inherent in all sentient beings. This is congenial to Ch'an Buddhism, and certain aphorisms, allusions, and images from the *Nirvana-sutra* are commonly found throughout Ch'an and Zen lore.

Ts'ao Ts'ao

This is a very famous name in Chinese history. Ts'ao Ts'ao (Cao Cao) was a very powerful warlord of the 3rd century C.E. He is mentioned here in connection with the visit of one of his descendants to Hui-neng to illustrate how people of distinguished family background would respect an illiterate peasant with spiritual realization. This illustrates the transcendence of ultimate truth over conventional truth. At this point in the story, moreover, Hui-neng is still not publicly known as a Ch'an master, let alone the Sixth Grand Master; so his recognition by the Confucian gentleman and the

great-great-grandson of Ts'ao Ts'ao also illustrates the possibility of recognizing ultimate truth from within conventional truth.

Once Hui-neng was publicly recognized, that public recognition would become conventional truth, and those who recognized that recognition would not necessarily be recognizing the reality of Hui-neng's spirituality. To have Hui-neng recognized by laypeople while challenged by monastics illustrates the contrast between intrinsic sense and cultivated ignorance. Professional Buddhists whose learning and practices were a source of self-importance were slower to understand Hui-neng than were laypeople without religious pretensions. Some proud and obsessive monks did, nevertheless, realize liberation through Hui-neng's guidance, according to the traditional stories of his interactions, as found in this chapter of his sutra as well as classical Ch'an sourcebooks.

The Lotus Sutra

The *Saddharmapundarika-sutra*, or Scripture of the Lotus of the Truth, is considered the crown jewel of Buddhism by the T'ian-T'ai school, and is often quoted in Ch'an lore. According to the *Lotus Sutra*, nirvana as extinction or quiescence is merely an expedient illusion, and the real goal is the knowledge and vision of buddhahood.

The *Lotus Sutra* extols the Ekayana or One Vehicle, symbolized by the "white ox-drawn vehicle," representing the way to supreme enlightenment. In one of the most famous parables of the sutra, a man finds that his house is on fire with his children inside. The children do not respond to his calls to come out, because they are engrossed in playing with their toys. The father then devises an expedient to lure them out, promising the children even better playthings on the outside.

Knowing their various temperaments and inclinations, the father offers three things—a goat cart, a deer cart, and an ox cart. Drawn out of the burning house by these promises, the children are then given an even better cart, yoked to a great white ox. The other, lesser carts were just mentioned to entice the children out; once out, they are all given the best. This symbolizes the supersession of the provisional preparatory teachings by the real teachings.

The Four Knowledges

The four knowledges, or four cognitions, are four modes of cognition held to characterize the complete mentation of an awakened mind, according to Buddhist psychology as outlined in the *Lankavatara-sutra*—mirrorlike awareness, realization of universal equality of essential nature, precise observation of differentiation of characteristics, and practical wisdom in action. These are also associated with the so-called three bodies or embodiments of buddhahood or enlightenment: the body of truth or reality, the body of reward or enjoyment, and the body of projection or emanation.

The distinguished 18th-century Japanese Zen Master Hakuin wrote,

When the discriminatory mentality is suddenly shattered and the essence of enlightenment suddenly appears, the filling of the universe with its boundless light is called the universal mirror cognition, the pure body of reality. This is the transmuted storage consciousness.

Realizing all these things in the six fields of sense—seeing, hearing, discernment, and knowledge—are your own enlightened nature is called cognition of equality, the fulfilled body of perfect enjoyment.

Discerning the principles of things by the light of true knowledge is called subtle observing cognition. This is the body of perfect enjoyment, and also includes the emanation body.

Activity and stillness, even coughing, spitting, and swinging the arms as you walk, all doings in harmony with the nature of reality are called practical cognition. This is called the sphere of freedom of the emanation body” (*Kensho: The Heart of Zen*).

Dragon Stability

Dragon stability is a technical term for stabilization so profound that it is not destabilized by activity in the world. The image comes from the idea that a dragon is physically an animal yet mentally dwells in an elevated state. Thus it is used to represent the

Mahayana Buddhist ideal of transcending the world while in the very midst of the world.

The Two Vehicles

This term refers to the so-called lesser vehicles of “hearers” (*sravaka*) and “individual illuminates” (*pratyeka-buddha*), which culminate in personal nirvana. In Ch’an terminology, there is a negative implication of escapism associated with this term. The classical Ch’an Master Pai-chang said, “Mendicants of the Two Vehicles have put an end to the diseases of greed and aversion, removing them completely. They dwell in the absence of greed and consider that correct. This is the formless realm. This is obstructing the light of Buddha, this is shedding the blood of Buddha.”

The Sixty-Two Views

This is a standard reference to the whole range of non-Buddhist philosophies, based on the reputed existence of sixty-two different schools of thought in Buddha’s time. In the Ch’an perspective, dogmatic adherence to any view—as if the view were itself reality—is inherently cultish, non-Buddhistic, and heretical.

Five Clusters

This is a standard Buddhist term for the mortal coil. The five clusters are matter, sensation, perception, coordination, and consciousness.

Two Extremes and Three Times

The two extremes are annihilation and eternity, the three times are past, present, and future; cutting these off means liberating the mind from fixation on these discriminations as absolute points of reference.

Before the Prehistoric Buddhas: After the Prehistoric Buddhas

These are Ch’an terms: *before the prehistoric Buddhas* refers to nondiscursive knowledge; *after the prehistoric Buddhas* refers to discursive knowledge. These also correspond to what are referred to as the heart of nirvana and the knowledge of differentiation. In Taoist

terms, the former is called the science of essence; the latter is called the science of life.

Prajnatara predicted that a colt would emerge

Prajnatara was considered the Twenty-seventh Grand Master, the predecessor of Bodhidharma, who introduced Ch'an to China. The "colt" is held to allude to the emergence of the exceptional master Ma-tzu, one of Huai-jang's disciples, who would popularize Ch'an to an unprecedented degree, with more than a hundred successors.

sramana

A *sramana* is someone who is engaged in self-mastery. The word comes from a verbal root referring to effort, exertion, overcoming, conquering, and subduing. Hui-neng appeared to demand courtesy from monks, not from self-importance, nor from reverence for rank or convention, but on account of the practical function of humility and courtesy in the process of self-mastery.

CHAPTER 8. IMMEDIATE AND GRADUAL

Northern and Southern schools

From an absolute point of view, there is no conflict between immediate and gradual enlightenment. From a relative point of view, there may or may not be such a conflict. Whether or not there is a conflict may depend, furthermore, on whether the relative point of view is relative to the needs of the individual or to the indoctrination of the individual. While Hui-neng's teaching may emphasize immediacy and oppose attachment to rigid formalism, nevertheless he explicitly recognizes the legitimate applications of both immediate and gradual approaches, and distinguishes the types of mentalities to which they are suited.

What is repudiated in this story of conflict between the Northern and Southern schools is not one possible method of Zen or another, but the infections of contentiousness and sectarian bigotry. The masters themselves are depicted as having no truck with the controversy; it is the self-important followers who are emotionally overwrought. Divided along doctrinaire lines, the confused followers

have forgotten that effective practicality is the essence of the matter, not dogmatic formality.

While Hui-neng does not repudiate the gradual methods of the Northern school entirely, he does place the immediate way on a higher level. Furthermore, Hui-neng does repudiate an exaggeration associated with the Northern school and later imported into the Southern school in spite of Hui-neng's warnings. Excessive and introversional inhibition of mental and physical activity are counterindicated as not merely ineffective but even harmful. This particular type of obsessional behavior can be seen to recur from time to time, typically associated with certain historical conditions. This sort of degenerate Buddhism has generally been connected with both individual and collective psychological and social ills, to the extent that it has often provoked reactive intellectual and cultural opposition to Buddhism itself, as if the aberration were the reality. This unfortunate fact is probably one reason for the careful preservation of Hui-neng's teachings.

It is noteworthy that after recording a series of enlightening encounters between Hui-neng and challengers of various kinds, this chapter ends on a note of general resolution of sectarian controversy, not only within Ch'an Buddhism, but among "various sects," apparently referring to the broad range of Buddhist schools active in the time of Hui-neng and his contemporaries.

CHAPTER 9. THE IMPERIAL SUMMONS

Empress Wu Tse-t'ien was the widow of Kao-tsung, the third emperor of the T'ang dynasty. Two of her sons succeeded to the imperial throne, but she displaced them both and personally took the helm of the empire for twenty-one years, founding a new Chou dynasty. She was a great patron of learning, culture, and religion, especially Buddhism. She died later on in 705. Emperor Chung-tsung was Wu Tse-t'ien's son, who was earlier displaced by his mother, and resumed the throne in 705.

The "two teachers An and Hsiu" invited to the imperial court were Shen-hsiu, some of whose followers claimed he was the Sixth Grand Master, and the revered National Teacher Hui-an, who died in 709 at

the age of 128. Both Shen-hsiu and Hui-an had been disciples of the Fifth Grand Master Hung-jen.

Hui-neng's refusal to accept imperial patronage is considered part of his teaching. While some Buddhist masters did accept royal and imperial patronage to protect and spread the teaching, there is also a tradition of independence in Ch'an Buddhism. The reasoning is that elite patronage could attract people to Buddhist orders from the wrong motives.

The Lineage of Grand Masters

The lineage given in the older version of Hui-neng's sutra differs from this one in several places, particularly as regards the latest of the Indian Grand Masters. The T'ien-t'ai lineage of Buddhist Grand Masters agrees substantially with the Ch'an versions, except that it ends with Sinha. The T'ien-t'ai lineage also mentions Madhyantika, who was another successor to Ananda and is inserted between Ananda and Sanavasa in the older version of the *Sutra of Hui-neng*.

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