

PART I

THE DHARMA TREASURE  
OF THE ALTAR SŪTRA  
OF THE SIXTH PATRIARCH

(*Lu Tsu Ta Shih Fa Pao T'an Ching*)

Edited by his disciple Ch'an Master Fa Hai

Foreword

*We take refuge in the Buddha,  
We take refuge in the Dharma,  
We take refuge in the Saṅgha,  
We take refuge in the Triple Gem within ourselves.*

THE Altar Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch is a résumé of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the Buddha's Transmission of Mind, called Ch'an (or Zen in Japanese) which is outside of the teaching. Ch'an really began to flourish in China after the Patriarch expounded at Pao Lin monastery the doctrine which later was developed and divided by his Dharma descendants into five sects, namely Kuei Yang (Ikkyo Zen), Lin Chi (Rinzai Zen), Ts'ao Tung (Soto Zen), Yun Men (Ummon Zen) and Fa Yen (Hogen Zen).

This sūtra is not a book of obscure dogmas and impracticable theories. It is essential for every student of Mahāyāna and especially for every adherent to the doctrine of mind. A serious Ch'an practiser will easily find that its teaching, if put into practice, can enable him to discover his errors and mistakes which seem imperceptible and are the first things to be uprooted before he can make real progress in his self-cultivation. A keen student of Mahāyāna will be able correctly to interpret all sūtras after he has well understood the Altar Sūtra.

All of us are accustomed to the deep-rooted habit of splitting our undivided whole into subject and object by clinging to the false ideas of the reality of an ego and of phenomena, which are responsible for our mental creation of all kinds of illusion with their accompanying pairs of opposites and all sorts of names and terms which are devoid of real nature. The Patriarch's doctrine consists in wiping out all these contraries which owe their seeming existence only to their mutual dependence. Consequently, if a practiser succeeds in stripping his mind of them and if he is firm in his determination not to stray from his absolute self-nature, as taught in the sūtra, the result will be that his self-natured Bodhi will manifest itself after all self-created obstructions have been removed.

The teaching is open to every man irrespective of his education or social standing. The Patriarch, as he himself related, was an illiterate



commoner of a border region, depending for his subsistence on the sale of firewood in the market-place; he was also called a barbarian at the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch. This shows that the self-natured Bodhi is immanent in every man, whether in the East or in the West, rich or poor, and superior or inferior, and will appear when all mental discriminations have ceased.

In order that prajñā (wisdom) which is self-possessed can manifest itself, it is imperative that we make the 'three studies' which are essential for our self-cultivation for realizing our minds. They are: Śīla (morality-discipline), Samādhi (mental imperturbability) and Prajñā (wisdom) and we should know that Śīla begets Samādhi and that Samādhi begets Prajñā. They are like the legs of a tripod which cannot stand if one of them is lacking.

Repentance and reform are the pre-requisites of Śīla because without repentance and reform, we shall never be able to practise Śīla, which alone enables us to put an end to our feelings and passions and to realize singleness of mind, that is a mind free from disturbances, or pure mind. This imperturbable state of mind is called Samādhi, which alone enables our self-natured Bodhi to manifest itself. Samādhi is the state of an enlightened mind and wisdom is its perfect function. The Patriarch compared Samādhi and Wisdom to a lamp and its light and to a body (substance) and its correct function.

When Samādhi and Wisdom are attained, the practiser is liberated from all worries, anxieties, distresses, troubles and whatever causes them, and will attain the state of Nirvāṇa. He should have a perfect knowledge of this state in order to be completely enlightened.

A serious practiser should seek his own enlightenment to teach and enlighten others before he can expect to realize his self-natured Buddha, since no selfish man can attain Buddhahood. For this end, the Patriarch taught us how to take the four Universal Vows that consist in saving the countless living beings of our minds, in putting an end to the boundless troubles (kleśa) of our minds, in studying the endless Dharma doors to enlightenment which are immanent in our self-nature and in achieving the attainment of Buddhahood inherent in our self-nature.

The Patriarch never strayed from his self-nature when teaching his disciples in their quest of the truth, for either delusion or enlightenment comes only from the self-mind. His doctrine was later developed by his Dharma-descendants who also did not stray from their self-minds when teaching their own disciples. Even today an enlightened Ch'an master

will not stray from the self-mind when instructing his disciples, in spite of the fact that the technique now in use differs from the ancient methods, for if we stray from the mind, we shall be unable correctly to interpret the doctrine and understand all the sūtras expounded by the Buddha.

In our efforts to quiet our minds, we have to uproot all our old habits and in this respect nothing is more instructive and inspiring than the Altar Sūtra and the Diamond Sūtra because they teach us to wipe out the notion of the existence of an ego which is the source of all our troubles and the direct cause of our useless suffering in our transmigration through the six worlds of existence. Once ego is eradicated, there remains only the pure and clean mind, free from delusion and able to resume its normal function of perceiving the self-nature. Only then can enlightenment be realized.

This Altar Sūtra, as well as the Diamond and Heart Sūtras presented in our First Series, are not for only one or a few readings but should serve as our daily lessons and permanent guide for our practice of self-cultivation. Even if our roots are really inferior and if we cannot expect an instantaneous enlightenment immediately, we can be certain that if we are 'stubborn' in our practice and if we succeed in disentangling our minds from externals, we will make appreciable progress in the right direction, will at least enter 'the stream' and will set up a bridge-head for our transcendental path. The Patriarch urged us not to lose sight of our fundamental thought for an instant and if we follow his teaching seriously and refuse to stray from this thought of our self-nature, we will achieve something that will surpass all our expectations.

The Sanskrit word 'Dharma', which readers will find in this sūtra and also in all sūtras, has two meanings: (1) law, truth, principle, method, doctrine, religion, Buddhism as the perfect religion, and (2) thing or things, anything great or small, visible or invisible, real or unreal, concrete things or abstract ideas. It has no equivalent in any other language and is used in this version in order not to stray from the original text.

The text is that compiled and edited by Fa Hai, a senior disciple of the Patriarch, rather than the Tun Huang or Pe Sung versions which, being much shorter, are therefore incomplete. The full title in Chinese is the Lu Tsu Ta Shih Fa Pao T'an Ching, or The Dharma Treasure of that Great Master the Sixth Patriarch's Altar Sūtra. It is called the Altar Sūtra after an altar erected in the Sung Dynasty (420-477) by the Indian Tripitaka Master Guṇabhadra, who also set up a stone tablet with an inscription predicting that a flesh and blood Bodhisattva would be ordained there.



In the first year of the T'ien Chien reign (A.D. 502) of the Liang dynasty, another Indian Tripiṭaka Master called Jñānabhaiṣajya planted a Bodhi tree by the altar and foretold that a Bodhisattva in flesh and blood later would expound the Supreme Vehicle under the tree, would liberate countless living beings and would be the Dharma lord of the Real Transmission of the Seal of Buddha Mind.

It is due to a mispronunciation of the Patriarch's name in Cantonese 'Wei Nang' by the late Mr Wong Mou Lam, who translated the Altar Sūtra some thirty years ago that it is now widely known in the West as the Sūtra of Wei Lang. Wong Mou Lam was a Cantonese and there are in South China some people who cannot spell correctly a name beginning with the letter 'n'.

All brackets are mine.

UPĀSAKA LU K'UAN YÜ.

Hongkong, August 1958.





The body of the Tripiṭaka Master Jñānabhaiṣajya (Sixth Century) in the monastery of the Sixth Patriarch at Ts'ao Ch'i

## Preface

By Ch'an Master Fa Hai, disciple of the Sixth Patriarch

THE Patriarch's Dharma name was Hui Neng and his lay surname was Lu. His father was Lu Hsing T'ao and his mother was a Li. He was born at the hour Tsu (between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m.) of the eighth day of the second lunar month (27 February) of the year Wu Hsu in the twelfth year of the Chen Kuan reign of the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 638).

At his birth fine rays of shining light rose in the air and the house was filled with a rare fragrance. At daybreak, two strange monks called on his father and said: 'We come especially to name the baby who has just been born and who should be called Hui Neng.' His father asked: 'What do these two characters mean?' The monks replied: 'Hui means bestowal of kindness and Dharma on living beings and Neng means ability to do the Buddha-work.' After saying this, they left and no one knew where they went.

As the baby refused to suck milk, every night a god (deva) gave him nectar (amṛta)<sup>1</sup> to drink. When he reached the age of twenty-four, he was awakened to the truth upon hearing the recitation of a sūtra and went to Huang Mei to obtain the seal of his awakening. The Fifth Patriarch thought highly of him, transmitted the robe and Dharma to him and made him the successor to the Patriarchate in the year Hsin Yu which was the first year of the Lung Shuo reign (661).

He returned to the south, where he hid himself for sixteen years. On the eighth day of the first lunar month of the year Ping Tsu, which was the first year of the Yi Feng reign (676), he met Dharma Master Yin Tsung with whom he discussed the profound and subtle Dharma. Yin Tsung was awakened to and had a personal experience of the Patriarch's doctrine.

On the fifteenth of the same month, he met the four vargas<sup>2</sup> and had his head shaved.<sup>3</sup> On the eighth of the second lunar month, well-

1. Amṛta: sweet dew, ambrosia, the nectar of immortality.

2. The four vargas: monks, nuns, male and female devotees.

3. Formally to join the Saṅgha order.



known and virtuous monks assembled to ordain him: vinaya master<sup>1</sup> Chih Kuang of Hsi Ching was in charge of the bestowal; vinaya master Hui Ching of Su Chou acted as karmadāna;<sup>2</sup> vinaya master T'ung Ying of Ching Chou acted as (spiritual) teacher; the Indian vinaya master Ch'i To Lo<sup>3</sup> of Central India read the precepts (śīla) and the Indian tripiṭaka master<sup>4</sup> Mi To<sup>3</sup> of West India acted as testifier.

The altar used for the ordination was built in the Sung dynasty by the Indian tripiṭaka master Guṇabhadra<sup>5</sup> who also set up a stone tablet with an inscription predicting the ordination there of a Bodhisattva in flesh and blood.

In the first year of the T'ien Chien reign (A.D. 502) of the Liang dynasty, another Indian tripiṭaka master Jñānabhaiṣajya<sup>6</sup> came by sea from West India with a bodhi tree which he planted by the side of the altar. He also predicted that some 170 years later, a flesh-and-blood Bodhisattva, a true Dharma lord of the transmission of Buddha mind, would expound the Mahāyāna under the tree and would liberate an uncountable number of living beings.

Thus the Patriarch's head was shaved and he was ordained in fulfilment of the prophecies according to which he would expound the doctrine of transmission to the four vargas.

In the spring of the following year, the Patriarch took leave of the assembly and went to Pao Lin monastery. He was accompanied to Ts'ao Ch'i by Master Yin Tsung who led over a thousand monks and laymen. At the same time, vinaya master T'ung Ying of Ching Chou, together with a few hundred Buddhists, came to stay with the Patriarch.

After his arrival at Pao Lin monastery at Ts'ao Ch'i, the Patriarch found that the monastic buildings were too small for the community. As he wanted to enlarge them, he called on (the landowner) Ch'en Ya Hsien and said: 'I come to see you, the almsgiver, and wish to obtain a place for my seat; will you give me one?' Ch'en Ya Hsien asked the Patriarch: 'What is the size of your seat?' The Patriarch took out and showed him the cloth on which he sat (niṣīdana), and Ch'en Ya Hsien nodded assent. The Patriarch then unfolded the cloth which spread and

1. Vinaya master: teacher of the rules of discipline.

2. Karmadāna: director of the duties at the ordination.

3. The Sanskrit names of these two Indian masters are unknown.

4. Tripiṭaka master: a master who is well-versed in the three divisions of the Buddhist canon.

5. A.D. 394-468.

6. See illustration opposite p. 15.

covered the whole area of Ts'ao Ch'i; the four deva kings<sup>1</sup> appeared on guard in the four directions of space, and because of this, the mountain range is now called the Deva King range.

Ch'en Ya Hsien said: 'The power of your Dharma is indeed wide and great, but the tomb of my great-great-grandfather is here and if you build a stūpa later, I beg you to reserve a site for it. As to the rest of the area, I am willing to present it to you for the monastery. This mountain is part of the "Living Dragon" and "White Elephant" (range);<sup>2</sup> the sky can be flattened but the ground should not.'<sup>3</sup> Monastic buildings were put up later on the landowner's instructions.

When the Patriarch strolled over the area, he used to halt at places noted for the view, and altogether thirteen monastic buildings were soon erected. The present Hua Kuo<sup>4</sup> hall was one of them.

As to the Pao Lin monastery, its construction was decided upon long ago by the Indian tripiṭaka master Jñānabhaiṣajya who came from India and who, during his journey from Nan Hai (now Canton city), passed through Ts'ao Ch'i where he drank its water which he found pure and fragrant. He was surprised and told his followers: 'This water is exactly the same as that in West India, there must be at its source some place of scenic beauty on which to build a monastery.' Then he followed the stream and saw mountains and rivulets encircling one another with wonderfully beautiful peaks. He exclaimed: 'It is exactly like the "Precious Wood" on the mountains in West India.' Then he said to the villagers at Ts'ao Hou: 'You can build a monastery here; some 170 years later, the unsurpassed Dharma treasure will be expounded here and those who will be enlightened will be as many as the trees of these thickets. It should be called "Pao Lin monastery".'<sup>5</sup>

At the time, magistrate Hou Ching Chung of Shao Chou reported the Indian master's prophecy to the emperor who then ordered the monastery to be built and conferred the epigraph 'Pao Lin' to it. Thus the building of the Pao Lin monastery began in the third year of the T'ien Chien reign of the Liang dynasty (A.D. 504).

In front of the main hall, there was a pond where a dragon used to come pushing and twisting the surrounding trees. One day, it appeared

1. Catur-mahārāja.

2. Lit. Bending dragon mountain and white elephant range.

3. The heights of monastic buildings should be so arranged as to be in harmony with the ground which could not be levelled.

4. Hua Kuo: flower-fruit.

5. Pao Lin: precious wood.



huger than ever, raising heavy waves and a thick mist which overshadowed the area. All the monks were scared but the Patriarch scolded the dragon, saying: 'You can make yourself very large but you cannot appear small. If you are a spirit dragon, you should be able to transform your small body into a big one, and vice versa.' Suddenly the dragon disappeared, returned a short while later as a very small one and jumped out of the water. The Patriarch held out his bowl and said: 'You dare not get in the old monk's bowl.' Thereupon, the dragon advanced towards the Patriarch who scooped it up with the bowl, inside which it could not move. Holding the bowl, the Patriarch returned to the hall where he expounded the Dharma to the dragon. Then the reptile went away, leaving behind its body which was (only) seven inches long, complete with head, tail, horns and legs. It was kept at the monastery. Later the Patriarch filled up the pond with (earth and) stones and erected a stūpa over it on the left side in front of the main hall.

## *The Altar Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch*

(Lu Tsu T'an Ching)

### I

## *How he Acquired the Dharma*

WHEN the Patriarch arrived at Pao Lin monastery, magistrate Wei Ch'u of Shao Chou district and local officials went to the mountain to invite him to (Ch'u Chiang) town to expound the Dharma in the hall of Ta Fan monastery for the benefit of all those present.<sup>1</sup>

After the Patriarch had ascended to his seat, the assembly of over thirty officials led by magistrate Wei, more than thirty Confucian scholars and over a thousand Buddhist monks and nuns, Taoists and laymen, bowed before him and expressed their desire to hear about the essentials of the Dharma. The Patriarch said to them:

'Learned friends, our self-natured Bodhi<sup>2</sup> is fundamentally pure and clean. Use only this mind (of yours) for your direct understanding and attainment of Buddhahood.

'Learned friends, let me tell you (first) how I came to possess the Dharma. My father was a native of Fan Yang;<sup>3</sup> he was dismissed from his official post and banished to be a commoner of Hsin Chou district in Ling Nan.<sup>4</sup> I was very unlucky as my father died when I was young, leaving behind my old mother and myself in poverty and distress. We moved to Nan Hai,<sup>5</sup> where we sold firewood in the market-place. One day, a customer bought our wood and ordered me to carry it to his shop. After he had taken delivery and I had received the money, I left the shop where I saw at the door another man reciting a sūtra. When I heard the words, my mind was immediately awakened to their meaning. I asked the reciter for the name of the sūtra and was told it was the Diamond

1. Lit., for forming a cause beneficial to all those present.

2. Bodhi: illumination, enlightenment or awakening in regard to the real in contrast to the seeming.

3. Fan Yang: a town in Hopei province in North China.

4. Ling Nan: in Kuang Tung province, South China.

5. Now Canton city.



Sūtra. When I asked him where he came from and why he recited it, he replied: "I come from Tung Ch'an monastery in the Huang Mei district of Ch'i Chou prefecture. The abbot is Master Hung Jen, the Fifth Patriarch, who has more than a thousand disciples. I went there to pay my reverence to him and listened to and received the sūtra. The master always exhorted monks and laymen to study only the Diamond Sūtra which would enable them to perceive their own nature for their direct understanding and attainment of Buddhahood."

'Due to a co-operating cause in a former life, another man gave me ten silver taels<sup>1</sup> for my old mother's upkeep and urged me to go to Huang Mei to call on the Fifth Patriarch. As soon as my arrangements for my mother had been completed, I left her and over thirty days later reached Huang Mei, where I went to pay my reverence to the Fifth Patriarch, who asked me: "Where do you come from and what do you want?" I replied: "I am a commoner from Hsin Chou in Ling Nan and come from afar to pay reverence to you. I seek nothing but Buddhahood." The Patriarch said: "You are a Ling Nan man and are, therefore, a barbarian; how can you become a Buddha?" I replied: "Men can be recognized as northerners and southerners, but their Buddha nature is fundamentally the same everywhere. You and a barbarian may differ in physical features but what is the difference in your Buddha nature?" He was willing to say more, but as his disciples were on either side of him, he stopped and ordered me to join the other monks at work. I said: "I wish to tell you that my own mind always gives rise to wisdom; it does not stray from my own nature and should be a field of blessedness. I do not know what work you will give me to do." The Patriarch said: "This barbarian has a very sharp nature and character. Don't talk any more; now go to the backyard." I withdrew there and an attendant ordered me to split firewood and pound rice.

'Over eight months had elapsed when one day the Patriarch suddenly came to see me, saying: "Your knowledge has been found of use and I have been thinking about it. I have not spoken to you lest evil men might harm you. Do you know that?" I replied: "Yes, and it is to escape the notice of others that I dare not come near the hall."

'One day, the Patriarch summoned all his disciples and said: "The question of birth and death is a great one. All day long, you look only for blessings and do not try to get out of the bitter ocean of birth and death. If your own nature is deluded, blessings will not save you. Now

1. Silver tael: Chinese money worth about 1.40 Hong Kong dollars, now abolished.

go away and look into your own wisdom; use the prajñā-wisdom of your own minds and each compose a gāthā<sup>1</sup> for me to see. He who understands the great meaning,<sup>2</sup> will inherit the robe and Dharma and will be the Sixth Patriarch. Go away quickly and don't linger over the gāthā; thinking and reasoning will be of no use for he who can perceive his (own) nature, should do so at will. Such a person will perceive it even while brandishing a sword on the battlefield."

After receiving his order, the disciples withdrew and said to one another: "What is the use of our concentrating on writing a gāthā to submit to the Patriarch? The head monk Shen Hsiu is our instructor and is certain to be the winner. It will only be a waste of effort if we write the gāthā in a perfunctory manner." When the other disciples heard this, they all set their hearts at rest and said: "Henceforth we will follow Master Shen Hsiu. Why worry about writing the gāthā?"

'As to Shen Hsiu, he thought: "The others do not submit their gāthās because I am their instructor. I should write mine and hand it to the Patriarch, for if I do not, how can he know whether my knowledge is superficial or profound? In submitting it, my object is good if I seek the Dharma, but it would be bad if I sought the Patriarchate for (in that case) my mind would be like that of a common man and by my act I would be usurping his holy rank. If I do not submit the gāthā, I will never acquire the Dharma. How very difficult, how very difficult!"

'In front of the Fifth Patriarch's hall, there were three corridors, the walls of which were to be frescoed by Lu Chen, a court artist, with pictures of transformations of the assembly as described in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra and with genealogical tables of the five patriarchs for veneration in perpetuity.

'Shen Hsiu had composed his gāthā and had already made several attempts to submit it to the Patriarch, but as soon as he reached the door, his mind became so disturbed that his whole body was wet with perspiration. He dared not present it in spite of thirteen attempts in the course of four days. (Finally) he thought: "It will be better to write my gāthā on the wall of the corridor so that the Patriarch can see it. If he approves, I will come out to make my obeisance and tell him that I wrote it. If he does not, I shall have wasted several years on the mountain to receive others' reverence; (in that case) how can I continue to practise the Dharma?"

1. Gāthā: a stanza or poem.

2. Great meaning: the truth.



"That night, in the third watch,<sup>1</sup> he took a lamp and went unnoticed to the south corridor, where he wrote on the wall the following gāthā on his comprehension:

*Like the Bodhi tree is body, like  
A bright mirror (on a) chest the mind.<sup>2</sup>  
Constantly and diligently rub it  
Clean so that it cannot gather dust.*

As soon as he had written this, Shen Hsiu returned to his room, thus escaping the notice of others. He then thought: "Tomorrow, if the Fifth Patriarch is delighted with my gāthā, it will mean that I have a co-operating cause for the Dharma. If he says that it is unfit, it will mean that I am infatuated owing to karmic obstructions from my former lives and that I am not qualified for the Dharma. It is difficult to guess the holy opinion." In his room, he was thus absorbed in thoughts and could neither sit nor sleep at ease until the fifth watch.

"The Patriarch knew already that Shen Hsiu had not entered the door<sup>3</sup> and had not perceived his own nature. At dawn he called Lu Chen, the court artist, to fresco the wall of the south corridor. Unexpectedly, he saw the gāthā and said to the artist: "There is no need to paint the pictures now and I am sorry for the trouble you have taken in coming from so far. The (Diamond) Sūtra says: 'All that have forms are unreal.' We will retain this gāthā so that people can recite and observe it. If it is put into practice, evil worlds (destinies) can be avoided and great advantage will result." Then he ordered a monk to burn incense sticks and urged his disciples to revere and recite the gāthā so that later they could perceive their own nature.<sup>4</sup> The monks repeated it and exclaimed: "Excellent!"

"In the third watch of the night, the Patriarch called Shen Hsiu to the hall and asked: "Did you write the gāthā?" Shen Hsiu replied: "Yes. I dare not seek your Patriarchate but I hope you will be compassionate

1. The five watches of the night are from 7 to 9 p.m., 9 to 11 p.m., 11 p.m. to 1 a.m., 1 to 3 a.m. and 3 to 5 a.m.

2. Lit. 'mirror stand'. This consists of a small wooden box or chest with drawers having on the top a folding mirror as covering. Here the mirror symbolizes the mind and the chest or box represents the physical body. Hence the Sixth Patriarch's correction 'And the bright mirror has no chest'.

3. The Dharma door to enlightenment.

4. To practise the gāthā only enables one to avoid miseries in the three lower worlds of existence but not to realize the self-nature; it can only be a contributory cause in the quest of the truth.

enough to see if I possess a little wisdom." The Patriarch said: "Your gāthā shows that you have not perceived your own nature; you have only reached the outside door which you have not yet entered. Such knowledge will not help you to attain Supreme Bodhi, for one who realizes it should know his own mind and perceive his fundamental nature at will. The fundamental nature has neither birth nor death and should be self-perceived at all times; nothing can obstruct it. One reality is all reality<sup>1</sup> and all externals are automatically in the state of suchness. The Bhūtatathatā mind<sup>2</sup> is reality. If perceived in this manner, it is self-natured supreme Bodhi. Go away and take one or two more days to think it over again and compose another gāthā for me. If it shows that you have entered the door (to enlightenment), I will transmit to you the robe and Dharma."

'Shen Hsiu paid obeisance to the Patriarch and withdrew. A few days passed but he could not compose another gāthā. His mind was uneasy and his intellect agitated as if he were in a dream; he found no comfort in walking or sitting.

"Two days later, a boy who passed by the place where I was pounding rice, chanted the gāthā. Upon hearing it, I immediately knew that the writer had not perceived his own nature. Although I was not taught about it, I already knew the great meaning. I then asked the boy: "What gāthā are you chanting?" He replied: "You, a barbarian, know nothing. The Patriarch said that the question of birth and death was a great one and as he intended to transmit the robe and Dharma to a successor, he ordered each of his disciples to compose a gāthā and submit it to him. He who comprehended the great meaning would inherit the robe and Dharma and would succeed him as the Sixth Patriarch. The head monk Shen Hsiu wrote this gāthā of the Immaterial<sup>3</sup> on the wall of the south corridor and the Patriarch ordered us to chant it because if it was put into practice, evil worlds could be avoided and great advantage would derive therefrom." I said: "I must also chant the gāthā so that I can form a co-operating cause in the next reincarnation. I have been pounding rice for over eight months and have never been to the hall. Will you please take me there so that I can pay my reverence to the gāthā."

'Led by the boy, I went to pay reverence, saying: "I am illiterate, will you please read it to me." A petty official of Chiang Chou district, called

1. When the self-nature is perceived, all the seeming will automatically be in the state of reality.

2. Bhūtatathatā: Bhūta is substance, that which exists and tathatā is suchness, thusness, i.e. such is its nature. The suchness of mind.

3. As contrasted with the material, or the worldly.



Chang Jih Yung, who was there at the time, read it aloud to me. After hearing the gāthā, I said to him: "I also have one, will you please write it for me?" The official said: "You also compose a gāthā! How wonderful!" I said to him: "If you wish to learn the Supreme Bodhi, you should not slight a beginner for the lowest man sometimes possesses the highest wisdom which the highest man frequently ignores. If you despise others, you will commit immeasurable and unlimitable sins."<sup>1</sup> The official said: "Read me your gāthā and I will write it for you. If you succeed in acquiring the Dharma, you must liberate me first. Don't forget." My gāthā read as follows:

*In essence Bodhi has no tree  
And the bright mirror has no chest.  
In essence there is not a thing;  
On what then can dust gather?<sup>2</sup>*

'As soon as my gāthā had been written, all those present were stunned and struck with admiration. They said to each other: "How wonderful! Certainly we cannot judge a man by his appearance. How is it possible that we have had at our service for so long a Bodhisattva in flesh and blood?"

'Seeing that those present were taken aback, and being apprehensive that evil men might harm me, the Patriarch took his shoe and erased my gāthā, saying: "This also does not show perception of the fundamental nature." They all subscribed to his opinion.

'The following day, the Patriarch secretly came to the place where I was pounding rice and seeing that I was working with a stone attached to my waist,<sup>3</sup> he said to me: "Should a seeker of the truth risk his life for the Dharma in such a manner?" Then he asked: "Is the rice ripe?" I replied: "Ripe long ago but still waiting for the sieve." He knocked the pestle thrice with his staff and left. I immediately grasped his idea and that night, in the third watch, I went to his room. He used his robe as a

1. If one despises others, one will cling to the idea of the reality of ego which is the cause of delusion. Moreover, others have also their Buddha nature and should never be slighted.

2. Shen Hsiu's gāthā showed that he still clung to externals which obstructed his realization of his self-nature. The Sixth Patriarch's gāthā was intended to wipe out all traces of bodhi tree and mirror on a chest which could not be used for comparison with the immaterial bodhi and mind. His method of destroying all discriminations is described in detail in Chapter 10 of this sūtra.

3. The stone was to add weight to the body of the worker using the foot pestle which was very heavy. This stone was kept at Tung Ch'an monastery at Huang Mei.

screen so that no one could see us from outside and expounded the Diamond Sūtra to me. When he came to the sentence: "One should develop a mind which does not abide anywhere", suddenly I was completely enlightened and realized that nothing existed outside the self-nature. I then said to the Patriarch:

*"Who would have expected that the self-nature is fundamentally pure and clean?*

*Who would have expected that the self-nature is fundamentally beyond birth and death?*

*Who would have expected that the self-nature is fundamentally complete in itself?*

*Who would have expected that the self-nature is fundamentally immutable?*

*Who would have expected that the self-nature can create all things?"*

'Knowing that I had realized my own nature, the Patriarch said to me: "He who does not know his fundamental mind, will not gain any advantage in his studies of the Dharma but he who knows it and perceives his self-nature, is called a master,<sup>1</sup> a teacher of devas and men, a Buddha."

'I received the Dharma in the third watch of the night, thus escaping the notice of the community. Then the Patriarch transmitted to me the doctrine of instantaneous enlightenment as well as the robe and bowl, saying: "You are now the Sixth Patriarch. Take good care of yourself, liberate as many living beings as you can and spread the teaching widely for its uninterrupted continuity in future generations. Now listen to my gāthā:

*"Seed sown by the sentient  
In causal ground produces (Buddha) fruit.  
If no sentience, then no seed,  
If no nature, no production."*

The Patriarch further said: "When the great Master Bodhidharma first came to this country, people did not believe him. Therefore, he transmitted this robe as a token of faith, to be handed down from one patriarch to another. As to the Dharma, it was transmitted from mind to mind for self-awakening and self-interpretation. From ancient times, the Buddhas transmitted their own substance, from one Buddha to another

1. A master who brings all passions under control.



and the masters esoterically passed down their fundamental minds from one master to another. This robe is the cause of dispute and you should not hand it down. If you transmit it, your life will hang by a thread. You must leave this place quickly as I am apprehensive that bad people may harm you." I asked him: "Where should I go?" He replied: "Halt at Huai and hide yourself at Hui."<sup>1</sup>

In the third watch of the night, I received the robe and bowl, and said to the Patriarch: "I am a southerner and do not know the mountain tracks; will you please tell me how to get to the river?" He replied: "Don't worry, I will accompany you."

The Patriarch accompanied me to the couriers' station at Chiu Chiang (Kiukiang). He ordered me to board a boat, took the oar and rowed. I said to him: "(Sir), please sit down, it is fitting that I take the oar." He replied: "It is appropriate that I ferry you across." I said: "When one is infatuated, one's master ferries one across, but when one is enlightened, one should ferry oneself. Although (the word) ferry has only one meaning, its use is different in each case. (Although) I was born in a frontier region and although my enunciation is incorrect, you have transmitted the Dharma to me. As I am now enlightened, it is only appropriate for my own nature to ferry itself across." The Patriarch said: "Exactly so, exactly so! Hereafter, the Buddha-dharma will prosper through you. Three years after you leave me, I will leave this world. Now start on your journey and go south as fast as possible. Do not expound the Dharma too soon as it will not flourish without difficulty."

I bade farewell to the Patriarch, set out on foot to the south, and within two months, reached the Ta Yu mountains.

The following note is inserted in the Text:

"The Patriarch returned to the monastery but did not come to the hall for several days. His disciples were suspicious and went to his room to ask him "(Sir) are you indisposed?" He replied: "I am not but the robe and Dharma have gone to the south." When asked who had received them, he replied: "The able one has got them." Thereupon, his disciples realized that upāsaka Hui Neng had received the robe and Dharma."<sup>2</sup>

"Several hundred people were pursuing me with the intention of snatching the robe and bowl. A monk whose lay name was Ch'en Hui

1. Huai is Huai Chi and Hui is Szu Hui, two small towns in East Kwangsi and West Kwangtung respectively.

2. The Sixth Patriarch's name was Hui Neng, lit. 'Bestow-Able', hence the 'Able One'. See also the Preface, page 15.

Ming and who had been a military commander of the fourth rank, a man of harsh temper, was intent in his search for me and ahead of the others. When he was about to overtake me, I threw the robe and bowl on a rock, saying: "This robe is a token of faith; can it be taken by force?" Then I hid myself in the bushes. When Hui Ming came to the rock, he tried to pick up the robe and bowl but could not move them. Then he shouted: "Lay brother, lay brother! I come for the Dharma and not for the robe."

I came out and sat with crossed legs on the rock. Hui Ming made obeisance to me and said: "Lay brother, please expound the Dharma to me." I replied: "Since you come for the Dharma, you should (first) banish all feelings and should not give rise to a single thought (in your mind); I will expound it to you." After a long while, I said: "Do not think of either good or evil, at the very moment (when there is no thought in your mind), what is the Venerable Hui Ming's fundamental face?" Instantaneously Hui Ming was enlightened. He asked me: "Is there any other hidden meaning beside the esoteric expression and teaching handed down by the Patriarchs?" I replied: "That which has been expounded to you is not esoteric, (and) if you look inward, that (which you call) esoteric is within yourself." Hui Ming said: "Although I was at Huang Mei, I did not realize my fundamental face. Now that you have taught me, I am like a drinker of water who alone knows whether it is cold or warm. Lay brother, you are now my master." I replied: "If this be so, then you and I are fellow disciples of Huang Mei. Take good care of yourself." Hui Ming asked again: "Where should I go now?" I replied: "Halt at Yuan and dwell at Meng."<sup>1</sup>

"Then Hui Ming descended from the mountain and at its foot said to the other pursuers: "Above there is only a rocky height; we are on the wrong track and must follow another one." They believed him. Afterwards, Hui Ming changed his name to Tao Ming in deference to the Sixth Patriarch (whose name was Hui Neng).

"Afterwards, I proceeded to Ts'ao Ch'i and was again pursued by evil men. To avoid trouble I went to Szu Hui, where I mixed with a group of hunters. I stayed there fifteen years and occasionally expounded the Dharma to them in a manner suitable (to their understanding). They asked me to watch the nets for them but as soon as I saw living beings

1. Yuan is Yuan Chou and Meng is Meng Shan. Hui Ming was later abbot of a monastery on Meng Shan Mountain in Yuan Chou district.



caught therein, I set them free. For my meals I put vegetables in the same pan that the hunters used to cook meat and when asked, I said that I ate only vegetables cooked next to meat in the pan.<sup>1</sup>

'One day I thought the time was ripe for spreading the Dharma and that I should not stay in hiding for ever. I went, therefore, to Fa Hsin monastery at Kuang Chou (now Canton city) where the Dharma master Yin Tsung was expounding the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. One day, as a banner was streaming in the wind, a dispute arose between two monks, one insisting that the wind, the other that the banner, was moving. As they could not agree, I said: "Neither the wind nor the banner moves; the minds of the Venerable Sirs really move."

'All those present were startled. The Dharma master Yin Tsung invited me to take the seat of honour and asked me about the abstruse meaning (of the sūtras). Seeing that my doctrine was exactly to the point and that what I said was concise and did not come from the Scriptures, he said: "Lay brother, you are not an ordinary man. I heard long ago that the robe and Dharma of Huang Mei were brought to the south, are you not the holder of them?" I replied: "I dare not (claim to be)."<sup>2</sup>

'Upon hearing this, Yin Tsung made obeisance to me and requested me to show the robe and bowl to the community. He further asked: "How was the Huang Mei doctrine taught?" I replied: "There was no teaching but the Patriarch only discussed looking into the (self-) nature and did not postulate meditation and deliverance." Yin Tsung asked: "Why were meditation and deliverance not postulated?" I replied: "Because that is a dual Dharma and is not Buddha-dharma. The Buddha-dharma is not a dual one." Yin Tsung again asked: "What is the non-dual Buddha-dharma?" I replied: "The realization of Buddha nature is the non-dual Buddha-dharma. The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra which you are expounding, mentions a question put to the Buddha by Bodhisattva Kao Kuei Te Wang<sup>3</sup> who asked: 'Does the commitment of four grave prohibitions,<sup>4</sup> of five rebellious acts<sup>5</sup> and of icchantika<sup>6</sup> cut off the good roots of Buddha nature?' The Buddha replied: 'There are two kinds of good root, one permanent and one impermanent, but the Buddha nature

1. Lit. 'meat-fringing vegetable'.

2. A very polite term in Chinese, meaning, 'Yes, I am.'

3. The Sanskrit name of the Bodhisattva is unknown.

4. The four grave prohibitions or sins, pārajikas in Sanskrit, are: killing, stealing, carnality and lying.

5. The five rebellious acts, or pañcānantarya in Sanskrit, are: parricide, matricide, killing an arhat, shedding the blood of a Buddha and destroying the harmony of the Saṅgha.

6. Icchantika: An unbeliever who has no desire for Buddha enlightenment.

is neither permanent nor impermanent, and cannot, therefore, be cut off.' This is called the non dual. There are good (roots) and bad (roots) but the Buddha nature is neither good nor bad and is called non dual. The five skandhas<sup>1</sup> and (eighteen) dhātus<sup>2</sup> are dual as seen by the common man, but for the wise man who has a clear understanding of them, their nature is non dual and the non dual is Buddha nature."

'Yin Tsung, very delighted at what I said, brought his two palms together to salute me and said: "My way of expounding the sūtra is as worthless as a potsherd and your discourse on its meaning is as valuable as real gold." Then he shaved my head and asked me to accept him as my disciple. Subsequently, under the Bodhi tree, I inaugurated the Tung Shan doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

'I acquired the Dharma at Tung Shan and suffered great hardship, my life hanging by a thread. Today, if I have the opportunity of meeting you, magistrate, officials, monks, nuns, Taoists and laymen here in this assembly, it is due to co-operating causes of many former aeons and also to our past offerings to all Buddhas and to our having planted in common good roots in former incarnations, thus giving ourselves the chance of listening to the above instantaneous doctrine and providing a cause for the acquisition of Dharma. The teaching was handed down by former Patriarchs and does not come from my own knowledge. All of you who wish to hear about the teaching of past Patriarchs should purify your minds and after you have listened to it, you should cut off your doubts so that you will become exactly like the Patriarchs of past generations.'

After listening to the Dharma, the assembly was filled with joy, made obeisance to the Patriarch and dispersed.

1. The five skandhas, or aggregates, are: rūpa, form; vedanā, reception, sensation, feeling, the functioning of mind and senses in connexion with affairs and things; saṃjñā, conception or discerning, the functioning of mind in discerning; saṃskāra, functioning of mind about like and dislike, good and evil, etc.; vijñāna, mental faculty in regard to perception and cognition, discriminative of affairs and things.

2. The eighteen dhātus: realms of sense, i.e. the six organs, their objects and their perceptions.

3. The Fifth Patriarch stayed on Huang Mei mountain in Huang Mei district. The mountain was to the east of the district and was called Tung Shan, lit. 'Eastern Mountain'. His doctrine was also called the Tung Shan doctrine.



## Prajñā

THE following day, at the invitation of magistrate Wei Ch'u, the Patriarch ascended to his seat and addressed the assembly: 'All of you should purify your minds and repeat: "Mahāprajñāpāramitā".'

He continued: 'Learned friends, all worldly men fundamentally possess the wisdom of Bodhi-prajñā. If they cannot be awakened to it, it is because their minds are under delusion. They should call on enlightened persons who will guide and show them how to perceive their (self-) nature. You should know that the Buddha nature of the ignorant and of the enlightened are the same, the only difference being that the former are deluded whereas the latter are awakened to it. Today, I will expound the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-dharma so that each of you will acquire wisdom. Please listen attentively to what I say.

'Learned friends, all day long worldly men repeat aloud (the word) prajñā but do not know their self-natured prajñā. They are like one who cannot satisfy his hunger by only talking about eating. Just talking of voidness will not enable one to perceive one's nature for myriads of aeons, and there will be no advantage in the end.

'Learned friends, Mahāprajñāpāramitā is a Sanskrit word which means, in our language, "the great wisdom (which enables one to) reach the other shore". This should be performed by the mind and has nothing to do with verbal repetition. Verbal repetition without using the mind is like an illusion, a transformation, dew and lightning; but verbal repetition, coupled with use of the mind, will ensure a union of mind and mouth. The fundamental nature is Buddha and apart from this nature, there is no other Buddha.

'What does Mahā mean? Mahā means great. The capacity of the mind is broad and great, like space; it has no boundaries; it is neither square nor round; neither great nor small; neither blue nor yellow; neither red nor white; neither above nor below; neither long nor short; neither anger nor joy; neither right nor wrong; neither good nor bad; and it has neither head nor tail. All Buddha lands are like space. The wondrous nature of (all) worldly men is fundamentally void and does not contain

a single thing (dharma). The absolute voidness of the fundamental nature is also like it.

'Learned friends, when you hear me speaking of the void, please do not grasp the void. The first thing is not to grasp the void. If you sit in meditation with an empty mind, you will grasp the unrecordable voidness.<sup>1</sup>

'Learned friends, the voidness of the universe is capable of containing all things of various forms and shapes, such as the sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, the great earth, springs, streams, mountain torrents, plants, trees and woods, good and bad men, good and bad things (dharma), heavens and hells, all the great oceans and all the Sumeru mounts; all these are in the void. The voidness of worldly men's nature is also like it.

'Learned friends, one's own nature is great because it can contain all things (dharma). As all things (dharma) are contained in your (own) nature, if good and bad men are viewed with neither attachment nor repulsion, also without contamination, the mind which is like space, is called great. For this reason, it is called mahā.

'Learned friends, while the ignorant only talk, the wise apply their minds to practice. There are also ignorant people who sit in meditation with an empty mind and without thinking of anything and who call themselves great. It is useless to talk to them because of their heterodox views.

'Learned friends, the mind has a great and broad capacity and pervades the whole Dharmadhātu.<sup>2</sup> Its function is to see through (all things) completely and clearly, and when at work, it readily knows everything. One is all and all is one.<sup>3</sup> It is free to come or go. The substance of mind is free from all obstructions. This is prajñā.

'Learned friends, all prajñā wisdoms come from one's own nature, not from outside. Make no mistake about this. This is called the true nature's own function. One reality is all reality. The capacity of the mind is for great affairs and not for small ways. Do not speak of voidness all day while the mind does not practise the same (great things). This is

1. Avyākṛta, or avyākhyāta; unrecordable either as good or bad; neutral, neither good nor bad; things that are innocent or cannot be classified under moral categories but cause a deviation from the self-nature.

2. Dharmadhātu here means the physical universe. See its full meaning in the Glossary.

3. Mind and objects are not two different things; all things are identical with One Mind and One Mind is identical with all things. This is the essential unity of all things.



like a commoner who calls himself, but can never be, a king. Such people are not my disciples.

'Learned friends, what is *prajñā*? It is wisdom in Chinese. At all times and in all places, if all our thoughts are not stupid and if we act wisely, this is the performance of wisdom. A stupid thought will cut off *prajñā* at once and a wise thought will beget it. Worldly men are ignorant and deluded and do not perceive *prajñā*. They speak of it but their minds are always stupid. They always talk of their practice of *prajñā*, and (although) they always speak of voidness, they do not know absolute voidness. *Prajñā* has neither form nor shape. It is just the wise mind. Such an interpretation is called the wisdom of *prajñā*.

'What does *pāramitā* mean? It is an Indian word and means in Chinese "reaching the other shore". It is interpreted as freedom from birth and death. Attachment to externals produces birth and death, just as water rises in waves; this is called "this shore". Detachment from externals (ensures) freedom from birth and death, like water which flows freely and uninterruptedly; this is called the "other shore". Hence the term "*pāramitā*".

'Learned friends, the ignorant repeat (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā*) with their mouths and during their repetition, false and evil thoughts arise (in their minds). If thought after thought, (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā*) is actually practised, this is called the true nature. Awakening to this Dharma is called *prajñā-dharma*. Practice of this Dharma is *prajñā* conduct. He who does not practise it is a common man. Its practice (even) in the time of a thought will put one's own body on an equality with the Buddha.

'Learned friends, the worldly man is Buddha (and) distress (*kleśa*)<sup>1</sup> is Bodhi. If the preceding thought be under delusion, it is (that of) a worldly man (and) if the following thought be awakened, it is (that of) Buddha. The preceding thought clinging to objects is *kleśa* (and) the following thought discarding objects is Bodhi.

'Learned friends, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā* is the most honoured, the highest and the supreme. It neither stays nor comes nor goes. All Buddhas of the past, present and future come from it. One should use this great wisdom to destroy the *kleśa* caused by the passions of the five aggregates. Such a practice will ensure the certain attainment of Buddhahood. The three poisons<sup>2</sup> will thereby be transmuted into discipline (*śīla*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*).

1. *Kleśa*: distress, worry, anxiety, trouble and whatever causes them.

2. The three poisons are: (1) concupiscence, or desire; (2) anger, hate or resentment; and (3) stupidity.

'Learned friends, this Dharma door of mine begins with one *prajñā* begetting 84,000<sup>1</sup> wisdoms. Why? Because the worldly men have 84,000<sup>1</sup> passions (to cope with). If there are no passions, wisdom will constantly be apparent and will not stray from one's self-nature. Awakening to this doctrine is (realization of) the mind without a thought. The non-recollection, the non-attachment, the non-arising of deception and falsehood, the use of one's self-natured suchness to contemplate all things by means of its wisdom and the non-grasping and non-rejecting of all things, all this is the perception of one's self-nature and attainment of Buddhahood.

'Learned friends, if you wish to enter the very deep Dharmadhātu and the *prajñā-samādhi*, you should practise the *prajñā* performance (and) keep and recite the Diamond Sūtra which will enable you to perceive your self-nature. You should know that the meritorious virtues of this sūtra are immeasurable and boundless and cannot, as clearly praised in the text, be fully discussed. This Dharma door is the Supreme Vehicle and is for expounding to men of great wisdom and superior roots. Those of small roots and shallow wisdom do not believe it when they hear about it. What is the reason? Take for example the rain which the heavenly dragons (*nāga*) shower on this world (*Jambudvīpa*); it causes cities, towns and villages to be swept away in the flood like leaves of the date tree. If rain falls into the great ocean, it will neither increase nor decrease the latter. If men of the Mahāyāna and men of the Supreme Vehicle hear about the Diamond Sūtra, they will open their minds to it, and comprehend and interpret it (accordingly). So we know that the fundamental self-nature possesses the wisdom of its own *prajñā* and uses its own wisdom for constant contemplation without having recourse to Scriptures.

'Take for example rain water. It does not come from heaven but its downpour is caused by dragons (*nāga*) so that all living beings, plants and trees, the sentient as well as the insentient will all receive its refreshing benefit. Carried by rivers and streams, it flows into the great ocean where it merges into one body. The *prajñā* wisdom of the fundamental nature of all living beings is also like it.

1. The digit 8 stands for the ālaya-vijñāna, or the eighth consciousness and the digit 4, for the four elements, earth, water, fire and air, of the human body; they symbolize space. The three zeros stand for time. The whole number symbolizes space and time which should be eradicated before enlightenment can be attained. This is a Ch'an interpretation which differs from other explanations for men of inferior spirituality, which we do not mention in this sūtra for men of great wisdom and superior roots.



'Learned friends, when men of small roots hear about this instantaneous teaching, they are exactly like plants and trees which are not deeply rooted and are swept away by torrential rains without having a chance to grow. Men of small roots are also like these (plants and trees). The prajñā wisdom which fundamentally they possess does not differ from that of people of great wisdom. Why do not they open up their minds to and understand the Dharma when they hear about it? It is because of the great obstacles caused by their perverted views and of their deep-rooted kleśa, like thick clouds hiding the sun which appears only after the clouds have been dispersed by the wind.

'Prajñā wisdom is also neither great nor small. All living beings differ from each other because of their minds which are either deluded or enlightened. Those of deluded mind see outwardly; they practise and seek the (external) Buddha. They are not awakened to their self-nature and are, therefore, of small roots. If one's self-mind is opened up and awakened to the instantaneous teaching, there will be no external practice but only the uprising of correct views in one's self-mind so that the passions of kleśa cannot stain it. This is realization of (one's self-) nature.

'Learned friends, non-abiding either within or without, freedom to come and to go, ability to relinquish the clinging mind and thorough and unimpeded comprehension (of the self-nature), if put into practice, do not differ fundamentally (in pattern) from the Diamond Sūtra.

'Learned friends, all sūtras and scriptures, the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, and the twelve divisions<sup>1</sup> of the canon are all devised for men. (Dharmas) are established because there is the wisdom nature (which can absorb them). If there were no human beings, there would be no Dharmas which fundamentally do not exist. So we know that all Dharmas are set up for men and that all sūtras exist because they have been expounded by men. Since there are men who are ignorant and men who are enlightened, the ignorant are inferior and the enlightened are superior. At the request of inferior men, the superior expound the Dharma to them. Suddenly the latter wake up, comprehend and open up their minds, thus

1. The 12 divisions of the Mahāyāna canon are: (1) sūtras, the Buddha's sermons; (2) geyā, metrical pieces; (3) gāthā, poems or chants; (4) nidāna, sūtras written because of a request or query, because certain precepts were violated and because of certain events; (5) itivṛttaka, narratives; (6) jātaka, stories of former lives of Buddha; (7) abhūta-dharma, miracles; (8) avadāna, parables, metaphors, stories, illustrations; (9) upadeśa, discourses and discussions by question and answer; (10) udāna, impromptu, or unsolicited addresses; (11) vaipulya, expanded sūtras; and (12) vyākaraṇa, prophecies.

becoming equals of superior men, without any difference existing between the two.

'Learned friends, without enlightenment, even Buddha is a living being. If enlightened, in the time of a thought, even a living being is Buddha. Therefore, we know that all Dharmas are inherent in our self-mind. Why do not we (try to) perceive instantly our fundamental Bhūtatahatā mind which is immanent in our self-mind? The Bodhisattva-śīla Sūtra<sup>1</sup> says: "Fundamentally our own nature is pure and clean; if we know our mind and perceive our self-nature, we will all attain Buddhahood." The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra says: "Instantly (the Bhikṣus) obtained a clear understanding and regained their fundamental minds."<sup>2</sup>

'Learned friends, when I was with (the Fifth Patriarch) Hung Jen and heard (his words) I immediately became enlightened and instantly perceived my fundamental Bhūtatahatā nature. This is why I am spreading this Dharma so that seekers of the truth will instantly be awakened to Bodhi and that each of them will (succeed in) looking into his self-mind and perceive his essential nature. If they are unable to be awakened, they should call on a learned person who is well versed in the interpretation of the Dharma of the Supreme Vehicle and will give them the direct pointing at the right way. This learned person possesses a great (co-operating) cause for instructing and guiding them to perceive their (fundamental) nature, because all good Dharmas are established by men (like that learned person). All Buddhas of the three times and the twelve divisions of the Mahāyāna canon are immanent in men's own nature. If one cannot awaken to it, one should look for a learned person's teaching which will enable one to perceive (one's fundamental nature). (However), if one is able to enlighten oneself, no external help is required. It is incorrect to think that a learned person is indispensable so that one can attain liberation. Why? Because the self-enlightening knowledge is immanent in one's own mind. If erroneous, deluded, false and inverted thoughts arise (there), even the teaching of a learned person cannot save one. But if there arises the correct and true contemplation by prajñā, all false thoughts will instantly disappear. If one's own nature be known, one's awakening will enable one to reach the Buddha stage (in one bound).

'Learned friends, the contemplation of wisdom which thoroughly

1. The tenth chapter of the Brahmajāla Sūtra was published in a special edition called the Bodhisattva-śīla Sūtra.

2. The Buddha's disciple Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra was reprimanded for his wrong teaching by upāsaka Vimalakīrti who used his supernatural power to enable the Bhikṣus to perceive and recover their fundamental minds.



penetrates the internal (organs) and external (objects) ensures the knowledge of one's fundamental mind. If the fundamental mind is known, this is fundamental liberation. If the fundamental liberation is realized, this is prajñā-samādhi. Prajñā-samādhi is (the mind) without a thought.<sup>1</sup> What is (the mind) without a thought? It is seeing all things without the mind being stained by and clinging to them. Its functioning pervades everywhere without attachment to anything. If one purifies one's mind so that the six consciousnesses come out through the six gates (sense organs) without being stained and infected by the six sense data so that one's coming and going are free without obstruction, this is unhindered liberation by prajñā-samādhi. This is using (the mind) without a thought. If nothing is thought about in order to cut off all thinking, this is Dharma bondage and is an extreme view.

'Learned friends, he who is awakened to the Dharma of (the mind) without a thought thoroughly knows all Dharmas. He who is awakened to the Dharma of no thought perceives all Buddha realms. He who is awakened to the Dharma of no thought reaches the Buddha stage.

'Learned friends, in future generations those who acquire this Dharma of mine should, together with men sharing the same views and making the same observance, vow to receive and practise this instantaneous Dharma door as if serving the Buddha without backsliding during their whole lives; they are bound to attain the holy rank. They should transmit the esoteric teaching<sup>2</sup> handed down (by past Patriarchs) and should never hide the latter's correct doctrine. (However) they should on no account teach this doctrine to the followers of other schools holding different views and observances, for this will harm them and will after all be futile. I am apprehensive that ignorant people who cannot understand this Dharma door may make slanderous observations about it and thereby destroy their Buddha seeds for hundreds of aeons and thousands of reincarnations.

'Learned friends, I have a hymn of the Immaterial which laymen and monks should recite and practise, because the mere memorizing of my words without actual practice is useless. Now listen to my hymn:

*'Real knowledge of the Teaching<sup>3</sup> and of the Mind<sup>4</sup> is like*

1. Apart from thoughts, nothing exists.
2. From mind to mind without words or writing.
3. The expedient teaching as distinguished from 'direct pointing' of the mind, outside scriptures.
4. The Transmission of Mind which the Buddha handed down through Mahākāśyapa.

*The sun in space. To transmit the self-realizing Dharma  
Is why (the Buddha) on earth appeared,  
And to destroy all heresies. This Dharma is neither  
Gradual nor instantaneous, for delusion and enlightenment  
Are the cause why one is slow, the other sudden.  
The ignorant can never comprehend  
This door through which self-nature is perceived.  
The myriad ways of teaching it are  
Traced right back to the fundamental one.  
The dark house of kleśa should be lit  
Constantly by the sun of wisdom.  
Kleśa leads to heresies,  
But is destroyed by the orthodox;  
If both be discarded there remain<sup>1</sup>  
Purity and cleanness absolute.  
Self-natured Bodhi in itself will be  
Deluded if the mind discriminates.  
A pure mind in the midst of falsehood  
When corrected meets not the three barriers.<sup>2</sup>  
Nothing can impede these worldly men  
Who practise this (instantaneous) teaching:  
If on their faults they keep a constant eye,  
They with this doctrine ever will agree.  
Since each living species has its nature<sup>3</sup>  
Why should one impede or irritate the other?  
He who from his nature strays elsewhere to seek it  
Will never in this life perceive that nature:  
Restlessly will he pass his days  
And in the end be disappointed.<sup>4</sup>  
If you would perceive your own self-nature (realize)  
That it is but the right performance (of the mind).<sup>5</sup>  
If on it you do not set your mind,*

1. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy are a duality which has no room in the pure and clean self-nature.

2. Desire, hate and stupidity.

3. As they are at one with the undivided whole, it is natural that there should be no interference and irritation.

4. At his death.

5. The Patriarch said to Ch'en Hui Ming: 'Do not think of either good or evil; at this very instant, what is the Venerable Hui Ming's fundamental face?' This is the right use of the mind which should never be stirred.



Walking in the dark you see it not.  
 Whoe'er can truly practise it  
 Sees not others' errors.  
 If we find fault with others,  
 We too are in the wrong:  
 Though they not we be faulty,  
 We are wrong when we discriminate.  
 If we discard this erring mind  
 We destroy the trouble (kleśa).  
 If from our minds we can dismiss both love  
 And hate, we can stretch our two feet to sleep.  
 Have expedient methods  
 If others you would teach:  
 Strip them of all doubts<sup>1</sup> and then  
 Their own nature can appear.  
 This (instantaneous) Dharma belongs to the (discriminating) world  
 Within which only can enlightenment be sought.  
 If we leave it in our search elsewhere for Bodhi  
 'Tis as hopeless as searching for a hare with horns.  
 Right views are transcendental  
 But heresies mundane:  
 When both are eliminated<sup>2</sup>  
 Bodhi nature is fulfilled.  
 This is the hymn of instantaneous teaching,  
 Known as the great ferry o'er the Dharma.<sup>3</sup>  
 'Tis aeons before the deluded hear of it,  
 (But) for the enlightened it happens in an instant (kṣaṇa).<sup>4</sup>

The Patriarch further said: 'I have now expounded the instantaneous teaching in this Ta Fan monastery. May all living beings in the dharmadhātu instantly comprehend the Dharma and attain Buddhahood after listening to my sermon.'

At the time, magistrate Wei Ch'u, the local officials, monks and laymen were all awakened to the teaching and paid obeisance to the Patriarch, all exclaiming: 'Excellent! Who would have thought that a Buddha has appeared in Ling Nan?'

1. Doubts about their self-nature and their abilities to attain Buddhahood.

2. The transcendental and the mundane are a pair of opposites which should be discarded so that the absolute self-nature can manifest itself.

3. Ferry of salvation.

## Queries

ONE day, the Patriarch was entertained by magistrate Wei Ch'u who, after the feast, invited him to ascend to the seat. Together with local officials, gentry and laymen, he knelt down again and asked the master: 'I have listened to your expounding of the Dharma which really is inconceivable. I have some doubts and hope you will be compassionate enough to enlighten me.' The Patriarch replied: 'If you have doubts, please ask me and I will explain.' Wei Ch'u said: 'Is it true that the doctrine you are expounding is that of the great Master Bodhidharma?' The Patriarch replied: 'Yes, it is.' The magistrate asked: 'I hear that when Bodhidharma first tried to convert emperor Liang Wu Ti, the latter said to him: "All my life, I have built monasteries, given aid to the Saṅgha order, practised charity and offered food to monks. Have I thus acquired merit(orious) virtues?" Bodhidharma replied: "Really you have acquired no merit(orious) virtues." "I do not understand and hope you will enlighten me." The Patriarch replied: "There were really no merit(orious) virtues." Emperor Liang Wu Ti's mind was deluded and he did not know anything about the right Dharma. The building of monasteries and help given to the Saṅgha order as well as the practice of charity and offering of food were for the quest of blessing and should not be regarded as merit(orious) virtues. These are inherent in the Dharmakāya<sup>1</sup> and have nothing to do with the cultivation of blessedness.'

The Patriarch continued: 'The realization of self-nature is merit and its universality is virtue. The constant perception of self-nature without impediment and the incessant performance of its wondrous function are called merit(orious) virtues. Inner humility is merit and outer politeness is virtue. The self-nature's ability to create all things is merit and the

1. The Buddha has three bodies: (1) Dharmakāya, i.e. essential or immaterial body; (2) Sambhogakāya, i.e. reward-body or body of bliss; and Nirmāṇakāya, or transformation body. His Dharmakāya is called Vairocana and is perceptible to Buddhas only. His Sambhogakāya is called Locana and is perceptible only to Bodhisattvas and his Nirmāṇakāya is called Śākyamuni and is perceptible to men and gods (deva) only.



mind's ability to discard all thoughts is virtue. Not to stray from self-nature is merit and its performance without contamination (by externals) is virtue. The performance of the above in quest of the meritorious and virtuous Dharmakāya is true merit(orious) virtue. Those cultivating merit(orious) virtues do not slight, but always respect, others. Contempt of others and non-relinquishment of the notion of the I will not result in merit. The self-nature abiding in unreality and falsehood has no virtue because of the self-importance of the I and the constant contempt for all others.

'Learned friends, the (right) concentration of mind at all times, without interruption (and without disturbance) is merit and the performance of impartiality and straightforwardness is virtue. Self-cultivation of the self-nature is merit and (moral) culture of the body is virtue.

'Learned friends, merit(orious) virtue should be introspected within the self-nature and cannot be sought by means of almsgiving and offerings. Hence the difference between blessings and merit(orious) virtue. Emperor Liang Wu Ti did not know the true doctrine and my ancestor (Bodhidharma) was not wrong.'

The magistrate asked again: 'I have always noticed that monks and laymen repeat Amitābha Buddha's name in the hope that they will be reborn in the Western Paradise. Will you please tell me if they will succeed in being reborn there, and so remove my doubt?' The Patriarch said: 'Please listen attentively, I will tell you all this now. In Śrāvastī town, the World Honoured One expounded the sūtra of the Western Paradise to guide and convert people. It is clearly stated in the text that this Paradise is not distant, yet it is 108,000 miles away which (number) means the ten evil things<sup>1</sup> and the eight heterodox practices<sup>2</sup> which are within ourselves and that is why he said it is so far away. He spoke of a long distance to men of inferior roots and of nearness to men of superior wisdom. There are two classes of man but there is only one Dharma. The difference between delusion and enlightenment produces the difference between slow and quick realization. The deluded man repeats the Buddha's name to seek rebirth in the (Western) Paradise but the enlightened man purifies his own mind (instead). This is why the Buddha said that purification of mind is simultaneous with purification of the Buddha land.

'If you are a man of the east and if your mind is pure, you are sinless.

1. The ten evils are: killing, stealing, carnality, lying, double-tongue, coarse language, filthy language, covetousness, anger and perverted views.

2. The opposite of the eightfold noble path.

If your mind is not pure, even though you may be a man of the west, you will be wrong. The man of the east commits sins and repeats the Buddha's name so that he will be reborn in the west. Where will the man of the west, who commits sins and repeats the Buddha's name, seek to be reborn? The ignorant man who does not know clearly about his own nature and ignores the Pure Land which is within himself, looks to the east and the west. For the enlightened man, the position in which he may find himself makes no difference. This is why the Buddha said that happiness existed anywhere one might happen to be. If your mind is entirely right, the West(ern) Paradise is near at hand. If your mind is wrong, it will be very difficult to reach it by (merely) repeating the Buddha's name.

'I now advise you, learned friends, first to get rid of the ten evils and you will have walked 100,000 (miles); then get rid of the eight heterodox practices and you will have gone (another) 8,000 (miles). If thought after thought and without interruption you perceive your own nature, and if you are constantly impartial and straightforward, you will arrive there in a snap of the fingers and will behold Amitābha Buddha. If you practise the ten good virtues, there will be no need for you to be reborn there. If you do not get rid of the ten evils, which Buddha will come and receive you? If you are awakened to the instantaneous doctrine of the uncreate, you will perceive the Western Paradise in an instant (kṣaṇa).<sup>1</sup> If you are not awakened to it and if you (only) repeat the Buddha's name to be reborn there, the distance being so great, how can you go there? Do you want me to shift the Western Paradise here in a kṣaṇa so that all of you can behold it?'

The whole assembly knelt down and said: 'If we can behold it here, there will be no need to pray for our rebirth there. Will you please be compassionate enough to make the Western Paradise appear so that all of us can behold it?'

The Patriarch said: 'Learned friends, the human body is a citadel. The eyes, ears, nose and tongue are gates. Outside there are five gates and inside there is the gate of the intellect (manas)<sup>2</sup>. The mind is the ground and self-nature is the king. The king dwells on the mind-ground. When the self-nature is in, the king is in. When the self-nature is out, there is no king. When the self-nature is in, body and mind exist. When

1. Kṣaṇa: the shortest measure of time; 60 kṣaṇa equal one finger-snap, 90 a thought, 4,500 a minute.

2. Manas: the sixth of the six means of perception, or the intellect, usually called the sixth consciousness.



the self-nature leaves, body and mind perish. We should cultivate Buddhahood within our own nature and should not seek it outside the body. If deluded, the self-nature is a living being. If enlightened, the self-nature is Buddha. Kindness (maitrī) and compassion (karuṇā) are Avalokiteśvara (Bodhisattva). Joy (muditā) and indifference or renunciation (upekṣā) are Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Bodhisattva).<sup>1</sup> The ability to purify (self) is Śākyamuni (Buddha). Impartiality and straightforwardness are Amitābha (Buddha). The (false) view of an ego and of a personality is Mount Sumeru. The depraved mind is ocean water and kleśa is the waves: cruelty is the evil dragon (nāga); falsehood is a ghost or spirit; passions are fish and turtles; desire and anger are the hells; and stupidity and ignorance are the animals.

'Learned friends, the unceasing performance of the ten good virtues will bring forth the coming of the (Western) Paradise. The riddance of (the view of) self and others will cause Mount Sumeru to fall. With the disappearance of the depraved mind, the ocean will dry up of itself. With the removal of kleśa, all waves will vanish. The ending of cruelty will bring about the elimination of fish and dragons (nāga). (Then) on the mind-grounds, the Tathāgata<sup>2</sup> of enlightened self-nature will send out a great light to shine on and purify the six external gates and destroy the six heavens of desire (devaloka). It shines inwardly to wipe out the three poisons. At a stroke, hells and other sins will vanish. (Thus) the internal (organs) and external (objects) become thoroughly bright and clear and do not differ from the West(ern Paradise). How can one go there if one does not practise?'

After listening to the discourse, the whole assembly was awakened to self-nature and knelt down, exclaiming: 'Excellent! May all the living in the dharmadhātu who hear this sermon, understand it!'

The Patriarch said: 'Learned friends, if you wish to cultivate yourselves in the right practice, you can do so while staying at home and need not enter a monastery. If you can do so at home, you are like a man of the east whose mind is good. If you enter a monastery and do not practise it, you are like a man of the west whose mind is wicked. If your mind is pure and clean, it is the Western Paradise of your own nature.'

Magistrate Wei Ch'u then asked: 'Will you please instruct us how to practise it while staying at home?' The Patriarch replied: 'I will give

1. Maitrī (kindness), karuṇā (pity), muditā (joy) and upekṣā (indifference or renunciation) are the four immeasurables, or infinite Buddha states of mind.

2. Tathāgata: He who came as did all Buddhas; who took the absolute way of cause and effect and attained to perfect wisdom; one of the highest titles of a Buddha.

you a hymn of the immaterial. If you practise it, it will make no difference whether you are with me or not. If you do not practise it, (even) if you shave your head and leave your home (to join the Saṅgha order), there will be no advantage. My hymn is:

*'Why should śīla be observed when the mind's impartial?  
When conduct is correct why practise meditation?  
Parents to requite their kindness should be cared for by their sons.  
Righteous conduct leads to sympathy between high and low,  
Between man and master complaisance breeds goodwill,  
While patience stops development of evil acts.  
If fire can be kindled with a piece of wood,<sup>1</sup>  
Mud surely will produce the lotus flower.<sup>2</sup>  
Medicine that tastes bitter is well known to be good,  
So the word that is not pleasing must be good advice.  
Wisdom is begotten by correcting faults. Concealment  
Of one's own shortcomings is surely lack of sageness,  
While what we do each day should benefit all others.  
Buddhahood cannot be won by giving alms,  
For Bodhi must be sought within one's mind,  
Why trouble then to seek for the abstruse outside?  
The hearing of this hymn when followed by its practice  
Ensures that Paradise will loom before the eyes.'*

After hearing the teaching, magistrate Wei Ch'u and local officials as well as virtuous men and women were awakened and believed, accepted and practised it.

1. Zealous conduct with devotion and diligence.

2. Mud symbolizes kleśa and a lotus-flower symbolizes the Buddha land.



## *Dhyāna and Prajñā*<sup>1</sup>

(ONE day) the Patriarch addressed the assembly as follows:

'Learned friends, dhyāna (meditation) and prajñā (wisdom)<sup>1</sup> are the fundamentals of this Dharma door of mine. Make no mistake about this and do not say that dhyāna and wisdom differ from each other. Dhyāna and wisdom are one and are not two (separate) things. Dhyāna is the substance of wisdom and wisdom is the function of dhyāna. Whenever wisdom is at work, dhyāna is within it, (and) when dhyāna is at work, wisdom is within it. To understand this is to understand simultaneously (both) dhyāna and wisdom. You students of this doctrine, should not say that dhyāna comes first and then begets wisdom (or) that wisdom comes first and then begets dhyāna. If this view were held, the Dharma would have two aspects, and while your mouths were uttering good words, your minds would be wrong. (In such a case), dhyāna and wisdom would be useless, because they were not present

1. 'Ting' and 'hui' in Chinese. For want of better Western equivalents, we are compelled to use the Sanskrit words dhyāna, or abstract meditation, and prajñā, or wisdom. However, dhyāna is not the exact equivalent of the Chinese ting which means 'dhyāna-samādhi' or abstract meditation leading to a state of imperturbable mind free from disturbances. According to the Chinese Buddhist terminology, ting is an abbreviation of 'ch'an ting' which means: ch'an, the unstirred mind, and ting, its imperturbable condition which causes prajñā, or wisdom, to manifest itself. In other words, one should practise dhyāna in order to attain samādhi, without which wisdom cannot appear.

According to the Chinese Buddhist terminology, there are: (1) the worldly dhyānas which lead to a rebirth in the dhyāna heavens; (2) the supramundane dhyānas which ensure the realization of samādhi; and (3) the supreme dhyāna which is the characteristic of our self-nature. The Chinese ting comes under the above category (2) of 'supramundane dhyāna leading to samādhi'.

The introduction in the West of Sanskrit, Pāli, Tibetan and Japanese terms has already created enough confusion and to avoid further complication, we do not use English transliterations of Chinese terms which, however, convey the exact meaning of the Patriarch's teaching and of all Chinese sūtras. Moreover, the ancient Sanskrit in use at the time of the Buddha, has disappeared and is now completely unknown in India and in the West and it is possible that the Sanskrit as now known there, may not convey the exact meaning of the former, the alphabet of which is, however, found and fully explained in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. In spite of the lack of proper equivalents in Western languages, we will be able to interpret correctly the profound teaching if we are serious in our practice of self-cultivation and succeed in releasing from illusion our inherent wisdom which will enable us to take up the 'host' position in order to understand our self-natured Dharma.

simultaneously. If both mouth and mind are right, within and without there will be a true state of suchness, and dhyāna and wisdom will be (present) in equal proportions. The practice of self-enlightenment does not depend on debating and the discussion as to whether dhyāna or wisdom precede or follow (one another) denotes a deluded man. Such a debate will never be settled and will intensify the (false) notion of ego and dharma (things)<sup>1</sup> and the clinging to the four (false) conceptions.<sup>2</sup>

'Learned friends, what are dhyāna and wisdom like? They are like a lamp and its light. Where there is a lamp, there is light and where there is no lamp, there is darkness. The lamp is the substance of light and light is the function of the lamp. Although there are two (different) names, fundamentally there is one body. Dhyāna wisdom is just like that.

(Another day) the Patriarch addressed the assembly as follows:

'Learned friends, the samādhi of universality<sup>3</sup> is the unceasing state of one straightforward mind in all places, while walking, standing, sitting and lying. The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra says: "The straightforward mind is the holy site<sup>4</sup>; the straightforward mind is the Pure Land." Your minds should not practise flattery and crookedness while your mouths speak of straightforwardness. Do not speak of the samādhi of universality when you do not act straightforwardly.

'Just be straightforward and do not cling to anything. Deluded men grasp the Dharma and hold on to the samādhi of universality. They claim that the samādhi of universality consists in sitting motionless all the time without any uprise in the mind. Such an interpretation makes the meditators inanimate and hinders the (realization of) self-nature.

'Learned friends, the self-nature should pervade everywhere. How can it be obstructed? If the mind does not abide in Dharma, the self-nature will pervade everywhere. If the mind abides in Dharma, this is self-bondage. If it is claimed that continuous and motionless sitting (in meditation) is right, it is the same as when Śāriputra sat in meditation in the wood and was reprimanded by Vimalakīrti.<sup>5</sup>

1. The two false conceptions of the reality of (1) an ego and of (2) dharma (things); both are illusions.

2. The four false conceptions of an ego, a man, a being and a life. (See Diamond Sūtra.)

3. Samādhi of universality or samādhi of one act (of body, mouth and mind); holding to one course. A samādhi for realizing that the nature of all Buddhas is the same.

4. Holy site: bodhimaṇḍala, truth-plot; place of enlightenment; a place for attainment to Buddha truth; a place for teaching, learning and practising religion.

5. See Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra, Chapter III, The disciples.



'Learned friends, there are also those who teach people to sit for the purpose of watching over the mind and of contemplating stillness, without motion and without any uprise in the mind, and who claim that this is real achievement. The deluded man who knows nothing about this, sticks to it and so becomes insane. There are cases like this. Such a teaching is a great mistake.

(On another occasion) the Patriarch addressed the assembly as follows:

'Learned friends, fundamentally the correct teaching is neither instantaneous nor gradual, whereas the nature of each individual may be either sharp or dull. The deluded man practises the gradual method whereas the enlightened man realizes the instantaneous union (with reality). This is why the unreal names of instantaneous and gradual (methods) have been in use (but) there will be no difference between the two when their own minds are known and their fundamental nature is perceived.

'Learned friends, this Dharma door of mine was established by past Patriarchs with:

- (1) Thoughtlessness (not-a-thought) as its doctrine;
- (2) Immateriality as its substance, and
- (3) Non-abiding as its fundamental.

'Immateriality is detachment from all forms, aspects and characteristics whilst in the midst of forms, aspects and characteristics.

'Thoughtlessness (not-a-thought) is the absence of all thoughts while in the process of thinking.

'Non-abiding is (the characteristic of) men's fundamental nature.

'In all worldly situations, whether good or evil, pleasant or ugly, friendly or hostile and when faced with provocative, critical, oppressive and quarrelsome language, all this should be treated as empty and all thoughts of retaliation should be dismissed. Instant after instant, one should not think of the past, because if past, present and future thoughts succeed one another without interruption, this is bondage. If there are no thoughts abiding in anything, this is freedom from bondage. Therefore, non-abiding is set up as the fundamental (of my Dharma door).

'Learned friends, the riddance of all external forms, aspects and characteristics is called immateriality. If all forms, aspects and characteristics are discarded, the Dharma body<sup>1</sup> will be clean and pure. Therefore, immateriality is set up as the substance.

'Learned friends, if the mind is not stained by external objects, this is called thoughtlessness (not-a-thought). (This means that) while thinking

1. Dharma body: the nature of all mundane and supra-mundane things.

of our 'Self', all our thoughts are detached from the externals to which our mind does not cling. If one merely refrains from thinking so as to stop the thinking process, then when the last thought ceases, one will die and will transmigrate elsewhere. This is a great mistake and students of the Tao (Truth) should think about it. It is bad enough to make mistakes through not understanding the Dharma, but if one exhorts others to do the same, one will not only be unaware of one's own delusion, but will also vilify the Buddha's sūtras. Therefore, thoughtlessness is set up as the doctrine (of my Dharma door).

'Learned friends, why is thoughtlessness (not-a-thought) established as the doctrine (of my Dharma door)? Because there are deluded men who speak only of perceiving their own nature while their thoughts cling to external objects with the resultant rise of heterodox views. As a result all passions and erroneous thinking are generated. Our self-nature fundamentally does not gain a single Dharma. The presumption that something is obtainable and false talk about weal and woe are nothing but passions and heterodox views. This is why this Dharma door sets up thoughtlessness (not-a-thought) as its doctrine.

'Learned friends, (when I say "not a thought", I mean this:) "not" is not a thing (of real concern to us) and "thought" is thought of nothing; "not" is not dual, is not the passion-mind and "thought" is thought of the self-natured Bhūtatathatā. Bhūtatathatā is the body of thought and thought is the function of the self-natured Bhūtatathatā.<sup>1</sup> When the self-natured Bhūtatathatā gives rise to a thought, it is not the eyes, ears, nose and tongue which can think. As Bhūtatathatā has its own nature, it can give rise to thoughts. If Bhūtatathatā does not exist, the eyes, ears, form and sound will decay immediately.

'Learned friends, when the self-natured Bhūtatathatā gives rise to a thought, although the six sense organs see, hear, feel and know, there is no taint of myriad externals and the true nature is always independent and comfortable. For this reason, the (Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa) Sūtra says: "He who is versed in the skilful discerning of all phenomena remains immutable in the Supreme Reality."'

1. Our self-nature possesses body, or substance, and function, or activity. A body without function is a useless body and function without body is bodiless function which is non-existent.



## 5

*Sitting in Meditation*

(ONE day) the Patriarch addressed the assembly as follows:

'According to this Dharma door, sitting in meditation does not primarily mean that the mind should be grasped, that the (idea of) purity should be clung to, nor that it should be motionless.

'When you talk of grasping the mind, (remember that) the mind is fundamentally unreal and is known to be illusory. Therefore, there is nothing that can be grasped.

'When you talk of clinging to the (idea of) purity, (remember that) the self-nature is essentially pure. It is only due to false thoughts that the absolute is concealed. If there is no thinking, the self-nature will appear pure and clean. If the mind grasps the (idea of) purity, the illusion of purity will be created. As illusion itself is non-existent, it is an error to grasp it. Purity has neither form nor shape. If the (idea of) purity is nevertheless established, with the claim that such is an achievement, this view will screen the self-nature and will result in bondage to purity.<sup>1</sup>

'Learned friends, if we practise imperturbability (samādhi), we should not, when meeting all kinds of people, see whether they are right or wrong and good or bad and whether they have other faults. This is self-natured imperturbability.

'Learned friends, although deluded men do not move their bodies, as soon as they open their mouths, they immediately speak of other people's qualities or defects, and of their being good or evil. They thus contradict their own nature. To grasp the mind and the (idea of) purity is to screen the self-nature.'

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(Another day) the Patriarch addressed the assembly as follows:

'Learned friends, what is sitting in meditation? According to this Dharma door, sitting means the non-rising of thoughts in the mind which is free from all obstructions and is beyond all states, good or evil, and meditation means insight into the immutable self-nature.

1. The practiser is kept in bondage by the idea of purity which is an illusion.

'Learned friends, what is dhyāna-samādhi?<sup>1</sup> Outwardly (when) all forms are discarded, this is abstract meditation (dhyāna). Inwardly (when) there is no disturbance, this is samādhi. If there is clinging to forms without, the mind will be disturbed within. Without if all forms are discarded, immediately the mind (within) will be free from disturbances. One's fundamental nature is essentially pure and immutable; there is disturbance only when external objects are seen and clung to. If external objects are seen while the mind remains undisturbed, this is true samādhi.

'Learned friends, the discarding of all external objects without is dhyāna and the freedom from disturbances within is samādhi. Dhyāna without and samādhi within, this is dhyāna-samādhi. The Bodhisattva-śīla Sūtra says: "Our own nature is fundamentally pure and clean."

'Learned friends, one should, thought after thought, realize the self-perception of one's own nature which is pure and clean, self-cultivation and self-performance for the self-attainment of Buddhahood.'

1. See also page 44, note 1.