

**般若心經集解**

Understanding the Heart Sutra

**智海法師編述**

Master Chi Hoi

translated by his disciples Hui-deng and Hui-yee

Printed in the United States of America  
on the day of birth of Sakyamuni Buddha, 2006

All rights reserved for Master Chi Hoi

of the Buddhist Wisdom Lecture Hall  
1339-38<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94122  
[www.bwlh.org](http://www.bwlh.org)

## The Heart Sutra

The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Kuan-tzu-tsai),  
while moving in the deep course of the profound *prajnaparamita*,  
illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments are but emptiness  
and thus crosses beyond all sufferings and difficulties.

Sariputra,  
form does not differ from emptiness,  
emptiness does not differ from form;  
whatever is form, that is emptiness,  
whatever is emptiness, that is form.  
The same is true of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness.

Sariputra,  
all dharmas are marked with emptiness;  
they are neither originating nor ceasing,  
neither defiled nor pure,  
neither increasing nor decreasing.

Therefore in emptiness there is no form,  
no sensation, perception, volition or consciousness;

no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind;  
no visible form, sound, smell, taste, tangible object or mental object;

no eye element and so forth, until we come to  
no mental consciousness element;

no ignorance and also no ceasing of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to no old age and death  
and also no ceasing of old age and death;

no suffering, the origin, the cessation and the way;  
no wisdom and also no attainment.  
It is because there is no attainment.

The Bodhisattva,  
by relying on the *prajnaparamita*,  
dwells without thought-coverings.  
In the absence of thought-coverings he has no fear,  
has come away from subversions and dreams,  
and in the end he attains nirvana.

Buddhas of the three periods of time,  
by relying on the *prajnaparamita*,  
have become fully awakened to *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.

**Therefore one should know *prajnaparamita* is  
the great spell,  
the great illumination spell,  
the utmost spell,  
the unequaled spell,  
capable of extinguishing all sufferings  
and is true without falsehood.**

**Thus the spell of *prajnaparamita* is spoken.  
It is said like this:  
*gate gate, paragate, parasamgate,  
bodhi svaha.***

(Trans. in Conze 1973: 142-3 slightly modified)

## Preface by the Author

Our Tathagata Sakyamuni, preached the Dharma in this world for forty-nine years, of which twenty-two were devoted extensively to discussions on *prajna*. The Sankrit word *prajna* translates closest to wisdom. Given the Buddha's superior wisdom and the great depth of Buddhist doctrine, to study Buddhism is to inspire and cultivate wisdom. Buddhist Dharma is the way to break through ignorance, and learning Buddhism can enhance wisdom and eliminate distress. In the secular world, one encounters various questions and doubts which may benefit from a Buddhist perspective. Faith in Buddhism is not superstition, but, on the contrary, a means to reduce mental stress and settle the mind toward liberation and ease. Therefore, learning Buddhism is highly recommendable for daily life.

However, learning Buddhism requires the wisdom of *prajna*. The Buddha's words, as recorded in the Buddhist cannon or Tripitaka, has a section on *prajna* known as the Perfection of Wisdom literature. Among these the longest is the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* consisting of six hundred volumes, and the shortest is the *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* containing only two hundred and sixty words. Yet, these two hundred and sixty words constitute the kernel of the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, and like the very heart of a man, they are of the utmost importance and hence entitled the *Heart Sutra*. Ever since this *sutra* reached China, the version translated by Dharma Master Hsuan-tsang has been most widely adopted and has inspired hundreds of commentaries throughout the ages.

I have preached Buddhism for forty years, studying and lecturing on sutras to explore Buddhist Dharma, while also reciting the Buddha's name and practicing meditation with the aspiration of reaching the Pure Land. I have presented lectures on the *Heart Sutra* several times in different countries, but still feel I have not yet been able to expound upon its doctrine to completion. I often ponder that among Chinese Buddhist communities, this *sutra* is practically "spoken by every family and known within each door," besides being included in the daily lessons of all major and minor monasteries. Given the importance of this *sutra*, should not any student of Buddhism pursue in-depth research? Thus, in addition to references from the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* and the *Ta-chih-tu lun*, I have collected commentaries from sages and scholars of former and recent times such as the venerable masters Kuei-chi, Yuen-ch'e, Fa-tsang and Jin-Mai of the T'ang dynasty, Te-ch'ing of the Ming dynasty, and T'an-hsu, Wu-tsung, Fa-fang, Chu-mo and Chen-ch'an of the modern era – altogether comprising over thirty sources in order to incorporate many different perspectives and present a balanced and comprehensive explication of this *sutra*.

There are three motivations for writing this book: first, for the expedience of my own study and research, second, to provide a reference for learned monastic communities everywhere in promoting Buddhist Dharma and third, to offer a time-saving resource for students of Buddhist academies doing research on the *Heart Sutra*. Due to these circumstances, I have, despite my humble capacity, edited a wide spectrum of commentaries in the attempt to better explain the *Heart Sutra*. If there are any mistakes herein, I hope scholars anywhere in the world will not hesitate to offer correction and guidance.

Buddhist calendar 2546 (2002)

Day of the initiation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara

Chi Hoi of Fo-shan Monastery

San Francisco, California

## Translator's Preface

Chinese Buddhism, unlike Theravada Buddhism, is sometimes perceived to be more mystical folk tradition than reasoned philosophy by the general public. To counter this impression, the venerable Master Chi Hoi, a Mahayana scholar and practitioner of both the Pure Land school and the Tien-t'ai school, has an uncommonly liberal and intellectual approach. Master Chi Hoi's *Understanding the Heart Sutra* presents a fusion of spiritual adventure and literary enjoyment by combining profound Buddhist themes with delightfully down to earth poetry and stories. Although the author originally intended this work for students of Buddhist academies and monastic scholars, his writing can appeal to the mind and heart of any interested reader.

This work begins by expounding on the ten special qualities of the *Heart Sutra* and then focuses on the essential meaning of this *sutra* from five perspectives. This is followed by an unprecedented historical account of the full fledged translation committee organized in eighth-century China for the purpose of exactness and esthetics in translating sutras from original Sanskrit versions. These delightful introductions usher in most detailed explications of the *sutra* with refreshing analogies and sophisticated commentaries. And most appropriately for the *Heart Sutra*, this piece concludes with a concise and symbolic verse.

Master Chi Hoi's work was originally written in Chinese, and his diction and references to sutras are all adopted from the Chinese Buddhist tradition. In translating Chinese characters, the Japanese/English Buddhist dictionary by Hisao Inagaki has been used given its wide recognition by Western Buddhist scholars. The translation of the *Heart Sutra* itself follows the Chinese version by Dharma Master Hsuan-Tsang of the T'ang dynasty, however, some language is adopted from the translation of the Sanskrit version by Edward Conze in *Perfect Wisdom*. References to the Diamond Sutra and the patriarch Hui-neng are selected from *Perfect Wisdom* by Edward Conze and *The Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Hui-neng* by A. F. Price and Wong Mu-lam. For adherence to mainstream vocabulary, attempts were made in some instances to conform to the Buddhist diction used by Rupert Gethin in *The Foundations of Buddhism* and Nyanaponika Thera in *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. An apology is in order here for Master Chi Hoi if this translation does not do full credit to his original work.

Hui-deng and Hui-yee

July, 2005

## Contents

**1. Ten Special Leading Qualities of the *Heart Sutra***

**2. The Fivefold Essential Meaning of the  
*Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra***

**3. Brief History of the Translator -  
The Tripitaka Dharma Master Hsuan-tsang**

**4. Compiled Explications of the *Sutra***

1) *Prajna* for self practice

2) **The theme of *prajna* – Perfection of Wisdom**

1- the exoteric perspective

2- the esoteric perspective

1. The *Heart Sutra* offers a way to settle the mind: to illuminate the emptiness of the five groups of attachments and thus cross beyond all sufferings.
2. The *Heart Sutra* emphasizes the contemplation of equality: to view all dharmas such as form and mind are but emptiness.
3. The *Heart Sutra* constitutes the virtue of forwarding Buddhahood: to attain *bodhi* and nirvana by means of *prajna*.

By Chi Hoi of Fo-shan Monastery

## **Ten Special Leading Qualities of the *Heart Sutra***

**The first leading specialty is its fusion of doctrinal depth with concise and condensed literature.**

All Buddhist scriptures go back to the words spoken by the Buddha that were later collected and compiled collectively by his disciples. These texts have been translated, preserved and handed down by Buddhist masters throughout the ages, and yet their subject matter can still be well contained between the Theravada and the Mahayana traditions. Theravada Buddhism evolved from Buddhism during Sakyamuni Buddha's life time to Buddhism immediately after his nirvana. Then from Buddhism of this period when direct experience from the Buddha still remained to sectarian Buddhism when various schools emerged among which Theravada is the most prominent and representative. It is founded principally on the theory of karma, initiating faith in the causal chain of dependent arising and karmic retribution, and expounding the way to cease suffering and reach enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhism divides chiefly into the "emptiness" school and the "existence" school based on the teachings of "nature" and that of "characteristics" respectively. The sutras of the "existence" school elaborate a doctrine built on the notions of "characteristics or aspects of dharma" and "all existences are reducible to the consciousness only," and were advanced and transmitted by the masters Asanga, Vasabandu and Hsuan-tsang. The sutras of the "emptiness" school espouse the doctrine of Perfection of Wisdom in understanding the "emptiness of all dharma" as the "true nature of all things," and are accredited to masters Nagarjuna, Aryadeva and Kumarajiva for their lineage and transmission.

The Perfection of Wisdom literature has great doctrinal depth. Though sages and masters from antiquity to modern times differ in their opinions regarding the classifying of Buddhist teachings, they all place great importance on *prajna* as the gate to liberation, simply because Mahayana Buddhism is mostly founded on this theme. For example, the *Consciousness-only* school categorizes Buddhist teachings into three aspects of understanding: the teaching of the conceptualized aspect, the teaching of the dependent aspect, and finally the middle path, the teaching of the perfect aspect. It places the *prajnaparamita* sutras in the second period, that of the teaching of the dependent aspect where one realizes that all dharma are dependent arising devoid of self-nature or reality, and thus awakens to the middle way of the perfect aspect. The *T'ien-tai* school classifies Buddhist teachings into five periods and places the *prajna* scriptures in the fourth period. Through melting and filtering by the teaching of *prajna*, grasping is swept away and wisdom emerges, one thus awakens and proceeds to the perfect complete teaching, the middle way of the *Lotus sutra*.

As recorded in the Chinese Tripitaka, the Perfection of Wisdom literature consists of seven hundred and forty-seven volumes, among them six hundred volumes of *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, the longest sutra of the Tripitaka, were translated by Master Hsuan-tsang. The *Heart Sutra* belongs to this group and is superlatively concise and condensed in expressing this most profound doctrine.

**The second leading specialty is how simple and easy it is to receive and hold this sutra.**

There are seven volumes for the *Lotus Sutra*, eighty volumes for the *Flower Ornament Scripture* and over six hundred volumes for the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*; none of these are easy to learn or remember. As for the *Heart Sutra*, though there are seven different translations, it is the one by the

great master Hsuan-tsang that is most popular and widely adopted throughout the ages. This version consists of two hundred and sixty Chinese characters only. With simple language but deep meaning it captures the quintessence of the Perfection of Wisdom theme in a way that can be easily received and held by the old as well as the young. Furthermore, it provides both a literal and an esoteric approach to practice, offering the followers immediate benefit during the present lifetime.

*Tales from the Western Territories of the T'ang Empire (Ta-t'ang hsi-yu chi* by Hsuan-tsang) records the following: The great master Hsuan-tsang, during his journey west to retrieve Buddhist sutras, had crossed through stretches of quick sands, climbed over various green mountains and came to the bank of a river. Looking around him, he noticed no sign of people or boats offering any way to cross the river. As he was wondering what to do, he suddenly saw some abandoned utensils floating on the river surface down stream. He thus realized that there must be people living upstream from whom he might obtain some information. He proceeded in the up stream direction and discovered a monk lying in a grass-thatched hut, poor and afflicted to near death, having no one to take care of him. Master Hsuan-tsang then carefully and attentively nursed the monk back to health. When the master was ready to leave, the monk showed him the *Heart Sutra* which was written in Sanskrit and ordered him to recite and commit it to memory, telling him that in the days to come, it will decidedly help him escape perils and disasters during his journey to retrieve sutras. Master Hsuan-tsang memorized the Sanskrit version of *Heart Sutra* fluently and, as foretold, it did save him from many dangerous disasters during his travels.

Once, he met some very fierce and evil-looking local savages. They captured Master Hsuan-tsang and, seeing his dignified countenance, planned to kill and sacrifice him to their deity. The master begged them to grant him a favor, explaining that he came from the T'ang Empire and was on his way to India to retrieve Buddhist sutras. He asked them to release him temporarily, and once he has retrieved the sutras and brought them back to China, he will return willingly to give his life to their deity. The savages did not understand the language spoken by the master and thus persisted to tie him up and kill him for sacrifice. Presently with no way to turn, no resource to save him, Master Hsuan-tsang could only shut his eyes and concentrated his mind to silently recite the *Heart Sutra*. Suddenly heaven and earth became dark, storm wind raged, and dusts and sands whirled everywhere. Then the savages were caught by great surprise and lost their composure to fear. Thinking they must not assault the monk, together they knelt before the master, begged him for mercy and released him. Master Hsuan-tsang, having escaped disasters by the merit of reciting the *Heart Sutra*, translated the *sutra* into Chinese upon his return to China and highly promoted its recitation and adoption. Hence, the *Heart Sutra* has become the most popular Buddhist literature in China and is upheld by a great multitude.

**The third leading specialty is its extensive transmission to the general populace.**

Because the *Heart Sutra* is so simple and easy to learn and to retain, there are fantastical responsiveness and receptiveness recorded in the folk legends regarding the *sutra* which in turn has greatly contributed to its propagation. Since its transmission to China over a thousands years ago, the *sutra* has deeply reached the heart of the Chinese people. Even in remote villages, young farmer children, though not understanding the meaning of the phrases “form is emptiness, emptiness is form”, at times can also say these words without realizing it. The far-reaching transmission of the *Heart Sutra* through popular folklore is indeed one of its foremost leading qualities.

**The fourth leading specialty is how frequently and favorably it is written or inscribed on various artistic mediums for general appreciation and religious deference by Buddhists as well as lay scholars.**

Due to its concise literature and profound doctrinal depth, the *Heart Sutra* exceeds the style and taste of common worldly writings. Not only Buddhists like to have it copied in calligraphy for paying daily reverence, even among worldly scholars in general, many favor and appreciate the superior, sophisticated language and theme of the *Heart Sutra*. People like to have the *sutra*, as the motif for art objects, copied on paper or inscribed on assorted stone slates in various styles of calligraphy. When these objects are hung in the drawing room, they give a dignified, purifying and sophisticated appearance. Often hosts and guests would engage them as subject of conversation, speaking purely of wisdom, inspiring each other to deep thoughts, contemplating wondrous ideas like meditation riddles. There are some who have the *sutra* written on shell leaves, inscribed on bamboo boards, and even on brass leaves or gold leaves; all of these artistic presentations of the *sutra* are revered in the foremost manner.

**The fifth leading specialty is the recitation of this *sutra* during morning and evening lessons at monasteries throughout China.**

According to Chinese Buddhist tradition, regardless of whether it is in remote mountains, bustling cities or quiet countryside and whether it is in monasteries or other places of worship, be they great or small, when it comes to morning and evening lessons, the *Heart Sutra* is universally and uniformly recited. The merit acquired from chanting this *sutra* is always dedicated to the four benefactors (parents, teachers, the country, and the three jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha,) and the three realms (the realms of desire; of forms; and the formless realm,) and further, peace for the country, harmony for the people, smooth wind, plenty rainfall, and benefits for both this world and beyond. This indicates how Buddhists value the application of wisdom, quite contrary to the sometime general notion that Buddhism is merely idol worship, bordering on superstition. It should be noted that actually Buddhism relies purely and completely on the faculty of reason as a means to destroy superstition, to explain the theory of karmic retribution with respect to good and evil actions, and to realize the realm of absolute truth. Therefore sages of old have selected the *Heart Sutra* to be included in morning and evening lessons; it must be recited day and night to bring to light its foremost merit of benefiting both this world and beyond.

**The sixth leading specialty is how it conduces to the learning of Dharma**

To approach Dharma without the benefit of *prajna*, one may become attached to the Dharma. Therefore the common uninitiated cannot feel free and be at ease with all kinds of dharmas because without the wisdom of *prajna* they are unable to see the true nature of dharma. To approach dharma with *prajna*, one may feel emancipated and detached. This is how a Buddha can be free from all dharmas because with the wisdom of *prajna* he is able to see the ultimate truth of Dharma. Now, the Buddhist Dharma which is practiced by the Bodhisattvas refers to the first five of the six perfections (*paramitas*): generosity, forbearance, perseverance, effort and meditation. The remaining *paramita*, namely, *prajna*, is the eye of wisdom in choosing the right practice, the guide to the other five. Without *prajna* as the eye of wisdom, one may carry out all the other practice like a blind man, hardly able to avoid the danger of falling into traps. Hence, the *Ta-chih-tu lun (Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra)* says, “*Prajna* is the guide leading the other five perfections as a man with eyes leads the blind.”

**The seventh leading specialty is its efficacy in sweeping and washing away grasping and attachment.**

The cultivation of merit by good deeds can be categorized into two types of actions. First, when one performs good deeds, one tries to partake in the merit, to grasp or cling to self or Dharma; this is

the practice of worldly good with attachment. Second, one carries out good actions without clinging to or grasping the self or Dharma; this becomes the practice of good without attachment, capable of transcending this world. Therefore, in practicing good deeds to cultivate merits, one must go through the twice-emptying tasks of *prajna* to sweep and wash away the grasping and clinging to both self and Dharma. Only then one may accomplish the merit that transcends this world without attachment.

**The eighth leading specialty of the *sutra* is its ways to cease suffering and attain happiness.**

All Buddhist Dharma are nothing but ways to help sentient beings cease their suffering and attain happiness. Presently, the *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* offers two methods to cease suffering: first, by literally explaining the profound wisdom of *prajna* it enables people to “contemplate and realize that the five groups of attachments (*skanda*) are but emptiness and thus cross beyond all dangers and afflictions,” completely liberating themselves from human sufferings; second, it teaches liberation by esoterically speaking the power of the spell of *prajna*, the “great illuminating spell, the spell without equals, that can eradicate all sufferings, that is all truth without falsification.” Therefore, with this foremost double offering from the *Heart Sutra*, an exoteric as well as an esoteric method of practice, one may learn to cease suffering and attain happiness.

**The ninth leading specialty is its function to transform delusion into enlightenment.**

Sentient beings are usually caught in delusion and unable to be enlightened. It is because they grasp the five groups of attachments as if they were real, and hence fail to see the ultimate truth that all dharma are but emptiness. Consequently they cannot liberate themselves from the cycles of rebirth, cannot transcend the three realms. If they make vows to follow the method carried out by the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara, that is, to practice the profoundly deep Perfection of Wisdom, to use the torch of wisdom to illuminate and see the emptiness of the five groups of attachments, they may immediately transform delusion into enlightenment, and experience the reality of the emptiness of all dharma, a truly vast, clear, pure and wonderful realm.

**The tenth leading specialty of the *sutra* is its provision to guide to Buddhahood.**

Because *prajnaparamita* is the mother of all Buddhas, it gives rise to all Buddhahood. The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* states, “*prajnaparamita* can give birth to all Buddhas.” The *Diamond Sutra* says, “All the Buddhas, and their ways to attain the most perfect, wonderful enlightenment are from this *sutra*.” These lines from the *sutras* prove that not only all the Buddhas are born from *prajna* but also are the Dharma that they teach. Since all the Buddhist Dharma is spoken from the mouth of the Buddha, *prajna* guides not just to the birth of Buddhas but to the birth of Dharma taught by the Buddhas as well. And this *sutra* claims, “The Buddhas of the three periods, the past, the present and the future, all rely on *prajnaparamita* to attain the most perfect wonderful enlightenment.” Therefore *prajna* has the foremost prospect of providing a guide to Buddhahood.

## The Fivefold Essential Meaning of the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra

### Explaining the Motivation and Function Embodied in Its Title

Generally in any lecture or discussion of a sutra, the first step is to explain its title, to fully represent the theme through these words. According to Master Chih-che (Chih-i) of the *T'ien-t'ai* school, the explanation of the title of all sutras could be narrowed down to seven types of examples. These seven types, as subdivisions of three major categories, are namely the three singles, the three doubles and one all inclusive. The three types of examples with a single allegory are: first referring to people -- the sutra came about because of some person or concluding with some person; second referring to Dharma -- the sutra demonstrates the way of nature or ways for practice; third referring to analogy -- the sutra illustrates a partial or total analogy. The three types of examples with double allegories are first, referring to people and Dharma, second, referring to people and analogy and third, referring to Dharma and analogy. There is only one type of example that refers to people, Dharma and analogy all at once. Sages of old have used these seven types of examples in explaining the titles of all sutras.

Now, the *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* belongs to the double category with reference to Dharma and analogy in its title. *Prajna* and *paramita* represent Dharma while *heart* is an analogy indicating that the *Heart Sutra* is the heart of the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, the kernel of Buddhist Dharma. The words *prajna*, *paramita* and *heart* constitute the differential title, the part of the title showing how this *sutra* differs from other sutras. The word *sutra* is the generalizing title, the part of the title that is in common with all other sutras. Now we proceed to explain the title: *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*.

*Prajna* is a Sanskrit word closest to the word wisdom and in the present *sutra* the wisdom of *prajna* means the most wonderful truthful transcendental wisdom. Buddhist tradition usually expounds three ways of learning Buddhism: conduct, meditation and wisdom. Being clear and pure without defilement is the perfection of conduct. Knowing the mind without distraction and facing the outside realm with equanimity is the perfection of meditation. While knowing the mind without distraction and yet having no thought of non-distraction, and while knowing the mind to be clear and pure and yet having no thought of clarity and purity, totally free of defilement and attaining liberation and ease-- this is the perfection of wisdom. There are three aspects of wisdom:

### The Three Aspects of *Prajna*

*prajna* arising from listening — words *prajna* — like a raft

*prajna* arising from reflection — contemplative *prajna* — like navigation

*prajna* arising from meditation — reality *prajna* — like the destination

The three aspects of *prajna* are the exposition in words of *prajna*, the contemplative *prajna* that illuminates and realizes reality, and true reality that constitutes the basis of *prajna*; are, respectively, the wondrous characteristic; wondrous function; and wondrous body of *prajna*. They are equivalent to the three causes of Buddhahood: the good acts which contribute to the development of Buddha-nature; the wisdom of understanding reality which accomplishes the transcendental wisdom; and the true thusness

which is the proper cause of Dharma-body; and they also equal to the three virtues of one who has attained nirvana: the virtue of emancipation, the virtue of absolute wisdom and the virtue of Dharma. The Dharma Master Fa-fong said, “While understanding the mind is contemplative *prajna*, seeing the true nature or essence is reality *prajna*. Though seeing the true nature can lead to sudden enlightenment, understanding the mind requires gradual practice.” As the stanza by Master Shen-hsiu (of the northern Ch’an school ) states:

“Our body is the bodhi tree,  
And our mind is a mirror bright,  
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,  
And let no dust alight.”

(Trans. in Price and Wong 1990: 70)

This stanza illustrates the practice of contemplation in understanding the mind, that is, contemplative *prajna*. The stanza by Master Hui-neng (sixth patriarch of Ch’an school) said:

“There is no bodhi tree,  
Nor a stand of mirror bright,  
Since all is void,  
Where can the dust alight?”

(Trans. in Price and Wong 1990: 72)

This stanza is the realization and awakening to the realm of emptiness of all nature, that is, reality *prajna*.

### Five *Prajna*

1. words *prajna* ——— true teaching — explains the real nature of all dharma
2. contemplative *prajna* — true wisdom — from true teaching wisdom arises
3. outside-realm *prajna* — all dharmas — true wisdom illuminates, shows all dharma are void
4. reality *prajna* ——— truth/noumenon — the real state of things
5. relative *prajna* ——— myriad practices — the three studies, the six perfections  
and the four additional perfections

Regardless of whether the above analysis of *prajna* in three or five subdivisions, *prajna* as perfection of wisdom, conclusively, has the efficacy of enlightening and illuminating all realms, and further, this application of shining wisdom is like the sunlight, shines without cognition and like the mirror, reflects without knowing. While *prajna* is without cognition, the realm of reality it illuminates is correspondingly without realm. The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* says, “The realm that is without realm is the real realm.” The *Madhyamakakarika* or *Root Verses on the Middle* says, “All dharmas are after all void without originating or ceasing — that is but the emptiness of all dharmas.” Master Seng-chao (one of the four great disciples of Kumarajiva) said, “*Prajna* is able to illuminate because it does so without cognition, and whatever realm it shines on is the object of this illumination because it is really no realm at all.”

Common uninitiated sentient beings, not recognizing the realm of reality, not seeing the ultimate emptiness of all dharmas pertaining to the five aggregates of attachments, but instead, thinking the dharmas of such attachments as real, may mistake false view for the true wisdom of *prajna*, thus initiate delusion, commit karmic actions and end up wandering in the three realms. The *Ta-chih-tu lun* describes this as: “If one does not see *prajna*, he is then in a state of being fettered; yet if one sees *prajna*, he may still be in a fettered state.” If one is capable of using contemplative *prajna* to change false view into right view and thus realize the fundamental void of the five groups of attachments, one is then able to cross beyond all sufferings. The *Ta-chi-tu lun* accordingly says: “If one sees *prajna*, he then attains liberation; and if he sees the emptiness of *prajna*, he too attains liberation.” It says further: “The wisdom that perceives the reality of all dharmas is the Perfection of Wisdom, or *prajnaparamita*.” The reality of all dharmas is exactly the emptiness of all dharmas that this *sutra* focuses on. It is said to be empty because it is without originating or ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing; it is real since it does not change and cannot be destroyed. As portrayed in this *sutra*, the realm of void of all five aggregates of attachments is reality *prajna*, and the wisdom that illuminates and recognizes the emptiness of the five aggregates is contemplative *prajna*.

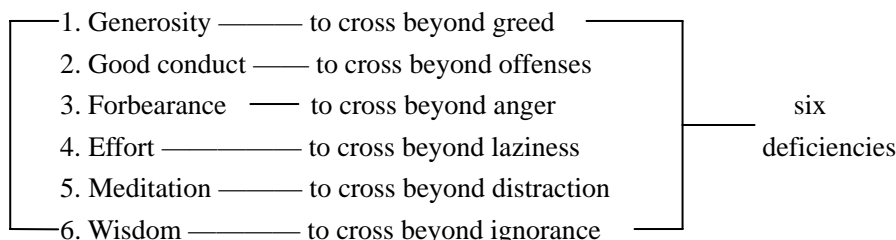
To distinguish according to the level of practice, there are two kinds of *prajna*: the first is the commonly shared *prajna*, and the second is the non-sharing *prajna*. The commonly shared *prajna* is referred to as the “emptiness of self” *prajna* or “skill in means” *prajna*, while the non-sharing *prajna* is referred to as the “emptiness of Dharma” *prajna*. The *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “The commonly shared *prajna*, relating to the *arhat* (*shravaka-yana*), the *pratyeka* Buddha (*pratyeka-yana*), and the *Bodhisattvas* (*Bodhisattvas-yana*), is the *prajna* shared by all three vehicles (*triyana*) in practice as well as in reaching enlightenment. The non-sharing *prajna* is for the Bodhisattvas path only, not shared by the other two vehicles either in practice or in learning, and that is why it is called non-sharing *prajna*.”

*Paramita* is the Sanskrit word meaning to reach the other shore. Volume twelve of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “This shore is the secular world, delusion signifies this shore; the other shore is nirvana, enlightenment signifies the other shore. The division between delusion and enlightenment lies in the mind alone.” One may ask: what does it mean by not reaching the other shore? The answer will be: as an example, while crossing a river, turning back before arriving at the opposite bank is referred to as not reaching the other shore. For instance, Sariputra, who had practiced the Bodhisattvas path for sixty kalpas, attempted to cross the river of generosity, one of the six perfections (*paramitas*) to achieve Buddhahood. Somebody came over to beg for an eye, Sariputra gave the person one of his eyes. After the beggar received the eye, he smelt it, and, displeased by its odor, spat and threw it on the ground. He then stepped on it with his foot. Sariputra thought, “such an unworthy person, it would be very difficult to enlighten him; much better putting effort to self-practice to be sooner liberated from the cycle of rebirth.” As soon as this thought arose, he dropt from the Bodhisattvas path and back to the lesser vehicle. This is what is meant by not reaching the other shore. If one is able to practice generosity clearly and purely, that is, to proceed forward without backing down, without allowing any grasping or attachment to steal from rightful practice, without being fearful of anything, and thus enter the way to Buddhahood, he is practicing the perfection of generosity as a Buddha would and this is what it means by reaching the other shore, namely, *paramita*.

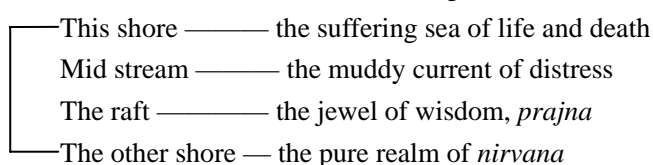
Also volume eighty-two of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: it is for the sake of *prajnaparamita* that we speak of the other five *paramita*. If people are able to directly reach the reality of all dharmas through practice, then it is not necessary to talk about *paramita* such as generosity etc. in order to enter the preliminary gate of *prajna*. However, because human beings are rooted in ignorance and commit severe offenses, various causal relationships all suggest us to destroy greed with generosity, to reduce distress by good conduct, to cultivate merits through forbearance, to carry out difficult practice with effort and to focus

the mind to one-pointed-ness through meditation. These five *paramitas* all propel toward *prajnaparamita* just like all rivers flow into the vast ocean. Therefore, *prajnaparamita* is referred to as the first wisdom among all wisdoms because being the wisdom without attachment it deserves the first place.

#### Six Paramitas



#### Reaching the Other Shore



The small vehicle transcends the river of life and death and reaches the shore of *nirvana*; however, it cannot be named *paramita*. The large vehicle further transcends the two hindrances of evil passions and of incorrect knowledge and, consequently, leads to the correct knowledge of objects and to the realization of enlightenment, and is thus named reaching the other shore, or *paramita*. Now for *prajnaparamita*, its body is wisdom, the wisdom that the *Ideas-only* school refers to as one of the elements of the mind that belong to one of the mind-kings, namely, the wisdom corresponding to each different realm. When this wisdom arises, it interacts with the sixth-consciousness, the mind consciousness, and the seventh –consciousness, the defiled mind (*klista-manas*), and is able to break down the current fetters of attachment. When it interacts with the eighth-consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*), the so-called store consciousness (*asraya*), responding to the entire being it perfumes and is being perfumed, unites, moves and works together with present thoughts as well as those stored in the eighth-consciousness, and in this manner it is able to break down the thick and heavy fetters formed by all the seeds sown by the defilements of a being’s past actions. The theme of this *sutra* reveals that *prajnaparamita* can break down both the fetters of attachment and the heavy fetters from past seeds. Hence, the *sutra* states that all Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, by means of *prajnaparamita*, can attain *nirvana* and *bodhi*, the supreme enlightenment.

As for the word *heart*, the Chinese equivalent for mind, all the teaching of the Buddha as recorded in all the sutras cannot be separated from the mind. In other words, the three realms are but the mind and all dharmas are but consciousness, that is, everything is but the creation by the mind. Now the meaning of heart or mind will be approached from five perspectives:

#### 1). The heart of flesh:

This is the coming together of the four elements, wind, water, fire and earth. In biology it is named the heart that controls the blood circulation of the entire body. The *Yogacarabhumi* states, “When the fetus is formed, it starts with the heart, and then followed by bones and the five sense organs; at death the heart is the last to cool and all life activities end.” Yet, this flesh though named heart is not the real heart.

2). The associating and thinking mind/heart:

This refers to the sixth-consciousness which associates and attaches to the objects of the six senses and thinks about good and evil. False perceptions mistake this consciousness as the central heart/mind. The *Suramgama Sutra* says, “This mind has no substance away from the objects of the senses, hence cannot be the true mind. But unenlightened people are deluded and mistake this to be the mind.” The *Perfect Enlightenment Sutra* says, “Sentient beings mistakenly identify the images of the six sense objects to be the characteristic of the mind.” Here it is referring to the associating and thinking mind.

3). The discerning and deliberating mind/heart:

This indicates the seventh-consciousness (*klista-manas*), the “defiled mind.” It distinguishes, considers and takes the eighth-consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*), the store-consciousness, to be a true self; it grasps the delusory images arising from the five aggregates of attachments and clings to real self and real Dharma, unable to penetrate through and relinquish the secular existence. Disputes between self and others, arguments of right and wrong, all such distress comes from this consciousness, the so-called defiled mind.

4). The collecting and storing mind/heart:

This refers to the mind associated with the eighth-consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*), the “store consciousness.” From beginningless samsara this consciousness accumulates all past tendencies, the traces and seeds of various good and evil, and when perfumed and cultivated by the karmic forces, it interacts with present consciousness, arising and falling depending on the outside realms. The *Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun (Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana)* says: “Thusness and ignorance join and unite to form the *alaya* consciousness.” The saying “Truth and delusion share the same origination” refers to this consciousness.

5). The true, thusness mind/heart:

“True” means truthful, real, showing the essence of all dharmas and away from falsehood and delusion. “Thusness” means like always without moving, demonstrating the nature of all dharma, staying constant without change or correction. This is the mind that is clear and pure in its own nature; it is in essence the same but with a different name from the Buddha nature, the Dharma body, the treasure of *Tathagata* and the perfect real nature. However, “The saint appeals to the mind not the Buddha while the ignorant appeals to the Buddha not the mind; the sage disciplines the mind not the body as the fool disciplines the body not the mind.” And this is where the uninitiated differ from the enlightened.

The implications of *heart* have been given through five perspectives in the above. Now, the *Heart Sutra* belongs to the category with reference to Dharma and analogy in its title. Observing from the point of analogy only, then the *heart* of flesh as the center point of the entire physical body is analogous to the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* as the heart of Mahayana Buddhism, and further, the *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* as the heart of all *prajnaparamita* literature, and thus completes the analogy of *heart*. If considering from the point of Dharma only, then *heart* here means the truth and thusness of the heart/mind because this mind is reality *prajna*. Reality *prajna* is the non-grasping mind that sees the emptiness of all dharmas, the mind that is capable to relinquish even nirvana to reach the other shore; it is also the very same original pure and clear *bodhi* mind (*bodhicitta* or awakening mind). Therefore this true mind is the kernel of *prajna*, the foundation of all dharmas.

## The Heart of Buddhist Dharma:

1. The bodhi mind: with the wisdom of *prajna* to see that the mind is without delusion, to ascertain that the deeds of action, speech and intention are pure and clear, and to collect wisdom as food for extensive practice to reach perfect completion.

2. The compassionate mind: with the wisdom of *prajna* to contemplate all sentient beings sharing the same body as oneself; to hold filial piety and deference toward elders and superiors, gentleness and modesty toward those on the same footing and mercy and help toward the less fortunate.

Now for the word *sutra* in the title, while the above words, *prajna*, *paramita* and *heart*, constitute the differential title, *sutra* represents the generalizing title. *Sutra* is a Sanskrit word which in Chinese is equivalent to “the (truth) securing thread,” that is, on the one hand it links to the doctrines of all the Buddhas above and on the other, links to the welfare of all sentient beings below. *Sutra* also implies a path, in other words, a path for practice, the way to Buddhahood. *Sutra* speaks for the teaching like the finger that points to the moon. Learning Buddhists should follow the finger to see the moon and once having beheld the moon, forget the finger; they should not grasp the finger instead and forget the moon, consequently losing sight of the true meaning of the *sutra*.

### **Illustrating Its Principal Theme**

The principal theme of this *sutra* is the emptiness of all dharma. Theravada doctrine is based on the “three marks of dharma”: namely all things are non-permanent, all things are selfless and nirvana is the state of tranquility. Mahayana doctrine, however concentrates on only “one mark of dharma,” the ultimate reality or enlightenment. The section of the *Heart Sutra* from “Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness,” up to “no wisdom and also no attainment,” illustrates the fundamental doctrine designated by this *sutra*, intending for people to trace these words to the recognition of the principal theme. Most Mahayana sutras espouse the true nature of dharma as the subject matter. The *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra*, though not directly expounding the middle way as the way things are, focuses on the broken surface as the revealing side, meaning to lead from the empty to the real, and thus awaken to reality *prajna*. Its fundamental doctrine is the emptiness of all dharmas as the true state of reality.

### **Demonstrating the Instruction for Practice**

The basic direction for practice provided by this *sutra* is contemplative *prajna*. The outline of this instruction is to practice deeply the contemplative *prajna* in order to illuminate and behold the emptiness of all dharmas pertaining to the five groups of attachments, and hence realize non-attainment, to see the ultimate nature of all dharmas emerging, to understand the emptiness of all dharmas, to recognize the original true nature of the mind and thus awaken to reality *prajna*. Therefore contemplative *prajna* constitutes the fundamental direction for practice. For example, the *Tien-t'ai* school advocates the practice of the threefold contemplation to awaken to the realm of the triple truth, namely the truth of void, the truth of temporariness and the truth of the middle, and thus become enlightened to the real nature of all dharmas, that is, reality *prajna*.

## **Distinguishing the Application**

The instruction for practice provided previously is the method to experience the fundamental doctrine. The discussion of application that follows shows the wonderful efficacy of the doctrine. This *sutra* is meant to apply to the crossing over of suffering and the breaking through of hindrances. First, its purpose is to cross over suffering as said in the *sutra*, “cross beyond all sufferings and difficulties” and “capable of extinguishing all sufferings.” The second purpose is to eliminate hindrances. Sentient beings suffer because of three hindrances. Unless these three hindrances are eliminated, the true nature and virtue cannot emerge, and until the nature and virtue emerge the suffering cannot be relinquished.

The first hindrance is due to karmic retributions. The primary karmic retribution pertains to the body or mind such as suffering from war and other weapon injuries as a result of previous karma; having unpleasant looking or handicapped six sense organs; and suffering afflictions due to disharmony of the four elements -- earth, water, fire and wind. The dependent or secondary karmic retribution relates to environment, in other words, personal circumstances such as being born in remote regions or to lower, unfavorable backgrounds; encountering disasters of fire, water or wind; and suffering from severe cold or heat. With such hindrances due to the result of past karma the true nature and virtue will not emerge. The second hindrance is due to evil karmic deeds committed through action, speech and intention. It may be a result from seeds sown in past lives or it may be an increase of evil deeds committed during the present lifetime. Either way, though the person may be endowed with perfect functioning six sense organs, the defilement by karma through action, speech and intention can be so heavy that the true nature and virtue cannot emerge. The third hindrance is the hindrance from evil passions such as greed, anger, delusion, conceit, doubt and wrong view. These six fundamental passions can prevent the emergence of true nature and virtue.

Therefore, in order to reveal the true nature and virtue one must eliminate the three hindrances, and in order to eliminate these three hindrances one must resort to the learning of *prajna*. One should employ good conduct to eliminate the first hindrance due to karmic retributions; employ meditation to eliminate the second hindrance due to karmic deeds committed through action, speech and intention; and employ wisdom to eliminate the hindrance from passions. Since a Bodhisattva relies on *prajna* he is able to dwell without thought coverings and thus eliminates the hindrance from misdeeds of action, speech and intention; able to have no fear and thus eliminates the hindrance due to karmic retributions; and able to come away from subversions and dreams and thus eliminates the hindrance of vexatious passions. Therefore, the Bodhisattvas rely on *prajna* to eliminate the three hindrances while the Buddhas rely on *prajna* to become Buddhas.

## **Placing the Teaching in the Classified Period**

According to Chinese Buddhist tradition, various schools created *p'an-chiao* systems for ranking sutras. For example, the *Tien-t'ai* school explains *p'an-chiao* as the way in which the Buddha uses skillful means to enlighten his followers by adopting various teachings to suit his hearers. Chih-che (or Chih-i), the great master of the *Tien-t'ai* school, distinguishes five time periods and eight categories to classify the Buddha's life-time teachings. The eight categories used to divide sutras and place them in the corresponding time period are the “four methods of teaching”: 1) sudden method; 2) gradual method; 3) secret method; and 4) indeterminate method; and the “four doctrinal teachings”: 1) *Pitaka* teaching; 2) general teaching; 3) special teaching; and 4) complete round or perfect teaching.

With respect to the five periods the *Heart Sutra* should be placed in the fourth period, that of *prajna*, analogous to butter as a milk product in the process of clarification (milk, cream, curdled milk,

butter and clarified butter), a metaphor used by the *Tien-t'ai* school to differentiate teachings. As a general teaching, namely teaching common to Theravada and Mahayana, this *sutra* expounds the non-arising of the four noble truths, that is, all dharmas are but emptiness. As a special teaching, that is, the specially Mahayana teaching which shows that although things are distinguishable in their phenomenal aspects, their essence is the same, this *sutra* espouses the infiniteness of the four noble truths, that all dharmas of the worlds in ten directions are not beyond the law of karma and causality. Both the general and the special teachings, covering two different facets of the four noble truths, are, in a sense, provisional teachings, the skill in means that lead to the perfect teaching wherein the four noble truths are unconditioned. Therefore this *sutra* acts as an expedient prelude to the principle of reality and is hence ranked for the fourth period, analogous to butter. It is not until the *Lotus Sutra* that all skill in means as represented by the previous sutras are relinquished and the real state alone is manifested, that the three vehicles merge into one, analogous to clarified butter, the supreme, most refined, wondrous final product.

In this classification the five periods are ordered chronologically, and the teachings are categorized according to their themes either as skill in means or as reality. There is an old rhyme that says:

“The first three weeks (after the Buddha’s  
Enlightenment) for the *Hua-yen Sutra*  
(*Flower Ornament Scripture*),

The following twelve years for the *Nikayas Sutras*  
(the Theravada sutras),

The following eight years for various Mahayana sutras,

The next twenty-two years for the *Prajnaparamita Sutras*  
(Perfection of Wisdom scriptures),

The last eight years for the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*.”

However, this chronological order is based on the hypothetical assumption that the Buddha emphasized the teaching of particular sutras at different periods during his lifetime. There is always the perspective that while the Buddha is preaching a particular scripture during one of the specified periods, he may meet someone who needs a different teaching to understand Buddhist Dharma and to be enlightened, and consequently, the Buddha may resort to any teaching during any period. In this light the chronological order of the five periods should become commutable or inter-exchangeable.

## Brief History of the Translator

*T'ang Empire's Tripitaka Dharma Master Hsuan-tsang received imperial decree to translate*

### Historical Background

The *T'ang* dynasty was founded by the Li family whom, for three generations, had served the court of its predecessor, the Sui Empire and earned exceptional merit. The Sui ruler later abdicated to Li-yuen, the patriarch and the founder of the T'ang Empire. Li-yuen, formally Emperor Kao-tsu, named his dynasty *T'ang* and designated Chang-an as its capital. His son Li-shi-min, known as Emperor Tai-tsung, succeeded him and ruled with great expertise and popularity that his statesmanship was historically commended as the Rule of Tseng-kuan, marking a most flourishing era in Chinese history. The present *sutra*, being translated from Sanskrit to Chinese, has altogether seven different versions throughout the ages, of which the one by Dharma Master Hsuan-tsang of the T'ang dynasty offers the simplest and clearest prose. Generations of Dharma masters of various schools all refer to this version in their lectures and explanations, making it a cultural continuum from antiquity to the present day.

### *Tripitaka*

Collection of Scriptures — *Sutra pitaka*

- connecting thread or path
- spoken by the Buddha
- for the study of meditation.

Collection of Precepts — *Vinaya pitaka*

- subduing or controlling
- formulated by the Buddha
- for the study of conduct.

Collection of Discourses — *Abhidharma pitaka*

- administering Dharma
- composed by the disciples
- for the study of wisdom.

### *Dharma Master*

1. When regarding the Dharma of Tripitaka as the teacher  
= one practices by the Dharma for one's own benefit
2. When teaching others the Dharma of Tripitaka  
= one promotes the Dharma for the benefit of others

*Hsuan-tsang*, having the family name of Chen before taking the robe, was a native of Yen-shi county of Henan province. During that time Emperor Yang-ti of the Sui dynasty had given strict orders respecting monastic ordination. One day at the age of thirteen, still under age to qualify for the examination to become a monastic, Hsuan-tsang was wandering near the examination hall. The supervising official at the examination, Tseng-shian-guo, questioned him when he came close, asking about

his aspirations and goals. Hsuan-tsang replied, “Speaking of the distant future I shall carry on the role of the Tathagata, speaking of the immediate future I shall promote the Dharma bequeathed by Him.” The official was very moved by his speech and made an exception for him to follow through the qualifying procedures. Master Hsuan-tsang was ordained by his brother, the Dharma Master Chang-je at the Pure Land Monastery in Lou-yang. Thereafter he sought knowledge from sages and learned scholars all over the nation, but yet, he still had unanswered questions and doubts respecting the sutras and discourses. Hence he aspired to obtain scriptures in their original Sanskrit version in order to explain and clear confusion and misunderstandings.

## **Journey to India**

In August of the third year of Tseng-kuan, Master Hsuan-tsang at the age of twenty-eight vowed to journey west to seek sutras. He set off from Ch’ang-an without the emperor’s permission, and took the route through Kan-su, Tun-huang and Ha-mi (Turfan). After climbing over the Mt. Tien, crossing through shifting sand and snowcapped peaks he finally reached India in the seventh year of Tsung-kuan. Sometime during the crossing over of an eight hundred kilometers stretch of shifting sand he traveled without a single drop of water touching his lips for four days and nights and was near the verge of perishing, like going through a cycle of death and rebirth. Eventually he was able to accomplish his goal of studying the teachings of learned masters all over India.

After a long journey he arrived at the Monastery of Nalanda and stayed with the Abhidharma Master Chieh-hsien (*Silabhadra*). At the time Abhidharma Master Chieh-hsien was already at the age of one hundred and six. Before Master Hsuan-tsang came to India, Chieh-hsien had suffered greatly from severe afflictions for three years and had even considered starving himself to death. However he dreamed of the Bodhisattva Manjusri who told him, “During past lives you were once a king who injured many beings and therefore presently you are enduring the karmic retributions. In the near future a Chinese monk will come here to seek knowledge. You should teach him all the Dharma that you know in order for him to transmit the supreme Dharma upon his return to the East. Then your sin will be relinquished and your afflictions will end.” Because of this the venerable Chieh-hsien waited despite his sufferings and was so happy to see Hsuan-tsang’s arrival that he was in tears. He embraced Master Hsuan-tsang and said, “Near the brink of death, it has been such a long wait for you!” Master Hsuan-tsang stayed there altogether for five years learning the doctrines of *Yogacara* and *Ideas-only*, and received complete Dharma transmission from Chieh-hsien. There were thousands of disciples under the Abhidharma Master Chieh-hsien but only ten among them were well versed in the Tripitaka. Master Hsuan-tsang was one of the ten.

Before his return to China, Master Hsuan-tsang was invited to preside over the Great Debate for Buddhist Study held at the city of Ch’u-nu by the King Chieh-jih. Through invitations there arrived eighteen kings from the five regions of India, three thousand Buddhist scholars of both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions, two thousand non-Buddhists and other attendants, all together over ten thousand people. Master Hsuan-tsang took the seat and announced the theme of the conference, naming “the true measure of *Ideas-only*” as the topic of debate. After eighteen days no one could best him. The prestige of Mahayana Buddhism soared through all five regions of India and Master Hsuan-tsang was revered as the “Mahayana heaven” at the time.

## **Imperial Patronage for Hsuan-tsang to Translate Sutras**

“*Receiving imperial decree to translate*” means to accept and respect the wish of Emperor Tai-tsung to translate the sutras obtained from India into the Chinese language from their original Sanskrit. Master Hsuan-tsang’s journey to and from India to seek sutras took altogether seventeen years. He traveled through one hundred and thirty-eight countries, walked over fifty thousands kilometers enduring countless hardships and perils to return with six hundred and fifty-seven Sanskrit scriptures and discourses of both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions. At the nineteenth year of Tseng-kuan when Hsuan-tsang finally arrived back at the T’ang capital Chang-an, starting from a distance of ten kilometers outside the city, over a hundred imperial officials were waiting to welcome him home. The Emperor Tai-tsung himself revered him as a teacher and invited him to use the Hung-fu Monastery and Yu-hua-kung Monastery as translation halls. Over the next twenty years seventy-five Mahayana and Theravada texts were translated amounting to one thousand three hundred and thirty five volumes. Among these the six hundred volumes of the *Mahaprajnaparamitas Sutra* constitute the greatest translation work, that which Master Hsuan-tsang dedicated most of his energy and effort during his latter years. In Chinese Buddhist history Hsuan-tsang is the venerable Dharma master who is reputed for having translated the highest number of sutras and for having written the finest translated prose.

Under Master Hsuan-tsang there were numerous talented and accomplished disciples estimated to be in the thousands. Among them Sheng-fong, Chia-shan, Pu-kuan and K’uei-chi earned the prestige as the “four sages of the House of Hsuan-tsang,” each specializing in either the study of “characteristics of dharma (or marks of existence),” or Abhidharmakosa, or logic and philosophy. Master K’uei-chi is also the son of Wei-chi-jin-te, who is the Duke of Uh-kuo and one of the founding fathers of the T’ang dynasty; Kuei-chi presided at the translation of over a hundred sutras.

### **The Translation Committee**

Master Hsuan-tsang is one of the four great translators of Sanskrit texts in the history of Chinese Buddhism. In later days people would refer to the translations done before Hsuan-tsang as the old translation era, and the translations done after him as the new translation era. The organization for translation formulated by him was not only grand in scheme but refined and sophisticated. When the first translation conference began in the Hung-fu Monastery in Chang-an, it was first initiated by the imperial court who decreed that learned monks of all major monasteries over the entire nation join and participate in the translation hall. At the time the team of translators constituted principally the following members:

- 1) Head translator: During translations he sits in the center seat holding the Sanskrit text of the sutra and reading the original Sanskrit words in a loud voice.
- 2) Umpire/judge of meaning: He sits to the left of the head translator and together with the head translator, they discuss and deliberate whether the meaning of the translated work differs from the original Sanskrit script of the sutra in order to revise and correct accordingly.
- 3) Proofreader of script: He sits to the right of the head translator and listens carefully and clearly to the reading of the original Sanskrit script by the head translator to ascertain whether there were any mistake in the reading.

- 4) Recorder of words, also named translator of speech: Following the original Sanskrit text, for each Sanskrit word he writes down the Chinese characters whose pronunciations are closest to the corresponding Sanskrit syllables.
- 5) Writer of reception: He formally translates the characters representing the Sanskrit words into the Chinese language.
- 6) Coordinator of prose: He adjusts and smoothes grammar and phrases, turning around the sentences that were in accord with Sanskrit grammar and rephrasing them into sentences in accord with Chinese grammar while keeping the meaning intact.
- 7) Consultant of translation, also named referee of translation: He consults and reviews both the Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the sutra to make sure they express the identical meanings.
- 8) Editor, also named publishing director: He confirms the meaning of each sentence and then simplifies repeating or wordy sentences into compact and concise ones.
- 9) Refiner of prose: He sits across from the head translator and refines the ready prose by adding color to the sentences and phrases.
- 10) Singer of sutra: Using an elevated intonation he chants the newly translated sutra once over in a singsong fashion in order to listen and determine whether it both reads and sounds smoothly, that is, if it is easy to read as well as pleasing to hear.
- 11) Supervising Ambassador: As the imperial official personally appointed by the Emperor, he witnesses and supervises the translation process of the scriptures.

Because Master Hsuan-tsang devised such sophisticated and complete procedures for translation, it is of small wonder that the sutras translated through them can be expected to meet the highest literary standard imaginable. Therefore, among the seven versions of translation of the *Heart Sutra*, the one by Master Hsuan-tsang is the most popular.

On February fifth of the first year of Ling-te (664CE) of the Emperor Kao-tsung, Master Hsuan-tsang, at the age of sixty-five, knew his time had come. Upon seeing the emergence of lotus flowers he died peacefully at the Hsi-ming Monastery in the city of Chang-an. He was buried at the White Deer hills of San-hsi prefecture where over a million people attended the ceremony. At Master Hsuan-tsang's death Emperor Kao-tsung cried with great sorrow that he did not hold court for three days. He sighed to those around him, "We have lost our national treasure!" The virtue and scholarship of Hsuan-tsang have continued to move people throughout the ages and have inspired in them great respect and deference for the master.

## Edited Explications of the Sutra

### 1) Prajna for Self Practice: required and acquired

*The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Kuan-tzu-tsai), while moving in the deep course of the profound prajnaparamita, illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments are but emptiness and thus crosses beyond all sufferings and difficulties.*

This section of the *sutra* illustrates *prajna* for self practice and constitutes the direction of the entire *sutra*. The T'ang dynasty Master Fa-tsang (third patriarch of the *Hua-yen* school) said in his commentary, "Since this is the *Heart Sutra*, it does not include an introduction or conclusion." Among the eight translations of this *sutra*, besides the versions by Masters Kumarajiva, Hsuan-tsang, and I-tsing, the other five translations all include the full three sections of introduction, prose proper and conclusion. The commonly adopted version nowadays is the one translated by Master Hsuan-tsang, which is without the three divisions. There are some who claim that only Master Hsuan-tsang's version suits the natural mode of the *Heart Sutra* because the *Heart Sutra* is the central heart of *Prajnaparamita Sutras*. Actually in the six hundred volumes of the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* there is a chapter of "Learning Contemplation" whose content is almost exactly the same, nearly word for word, as the *Heart Sutra*, and was spoken directly by the Buddha to Sariputra.

A different version of the *sutra*, translated by Prajna and Li, begins like this:

"Thus have I heard. Once, the Buddha was dwelling in Rajagriha at the Vulture Peak Mountain, together with a great gathering of the *sangha* of monks and a great gathering of the *sangha* of bodhisattvas. At that time the World Honored One entered the *samadhi* (concentration) that expresses the dharma called 'profound illumination,' and at the same time noble Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva, was practicing the profound *prajnaparamita*. Then, through the power of the Buddha, venerable Sariputra, reverently joining his palms together, said to noble Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva:

'How should a son of noble family train, who wishes to practice the profound *prajnaparamita*?' Addressed in this way, noble Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva, said to venerable Sariputra . . . ." And from there on the *Heart Sutra* was spoken.

The translation then follows by: "After this was said, the World Honored One then arose from that *samadhi* and praised noble Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva, saying, 'Good! Good! O, son of noble family, thus it is. Thus it is. One should practice the profound *prajnaparamita* just as you have taught... 'rejoiced and praised the words of the World Honored One."

These lines of this translated version illustrate the motivation of this *sutra*. Sariputra, endowed with the power of the Buddha, poses the question to the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara regarding how to practice the profound *prajnaparamita*. In reply, the Bodhisattva then told Sariputra the *Heart Sutra*. Afterwards it is praised and endorsed by the Buddha. The present version by Hsuan-tsang simplifies the above translation by skipping the prologue and the epilogue, and starts the *Heart Sutra* from the words of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. This format indeed comprises the essential direction of the entire *sutra*.

## Contemplative prajna required for self practice

The bodhisattva *Avalokitesvara* is known in China as *Kuan-yin* or *Kuan-tzu-tsai*, and in the *Heart Sutra* the latter, which literally means “contemplate-free”, is adopted. From the perspective of personal practice, this Bodhisattva who practices the profound *prajnaparamita*, crosses beyond all sufferings, and attains emancipation and freedom, is appropriately named Kuan-tzu-tsai. From the general perspective, all Bodhisattvas above the eighth ground who practice the contemplation of non-characteristic or formlessness and attain freedom over characteristic and over Buddhahood can be named as a Bodhisattva Kuan-tzu-tsai. As for the name Kuan-yin which means perceiving the world’s sound there are two approaches for interpretation: 1) from the causal point of view, where the Bodhisattva performs practices for the cause of reaching enlightenment, and 2) from the point of view of fruit or effect where the Bodhisattva, having already attained enlightenment, practices to fulfill his Bodhisattva vow.

First to explain the name of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin from the causal perspective where the Bodhisattva practices for his own discipline, the sixth volume of the *Suramgama Sutra* (Trans. in Luk buddhanet: 191-202) quotes the Bodhisattva:

“When I was with that Buddha (a previous Buddha Avalokitesvara), I developed the *bodhi*-mind and for my entry

into *samadhi*, I was instructed by that Buddha to practice meditation by means of the organ of hearing.”

“He taught me to use my illusory hearing and perfume and perfect it to realize the Diamond (*Vajra*) *Samadhi*.”

Further, “As the Buddha (Sakyamuni Buddha) now asks about the best means of perfection, my method which consists in regulating the organ of hearing so as to quiet the mind for its entry into the stream of meditation leading to the state of *samadhi* and attainment of Enlightenment is the best. World Honored One! That Buddha praised my excellent method of perfection and gave me, in the presence of the assembly, the name of Avalokitesvara (Kuan-yin). Because of my all-embracing (absolute function of) hearing, my name of Kuan-yin is known everywhere.”

Second, to interpret the name Kuan-yin with respect to effect where the Bodhisattva practices for the benefit of others, the Chapter on the Universal Gate of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the *Lotus Sutra* (Trans. in Watson SGI-USA online) says:

“Suppose there are immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of living beings who are undergoing various suffering. If they hear of this Bodhisattva Kuan-yin (Perceiver of the World’s Sounds) and single-mindedly call his name, then at once the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin will perceive the sound of their voices and they will gain deliverance from their trials.” And:

“Suppose there are living beings in the lands who need a variety of forms to be saved, the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara then assumes these forms to preach the Dharma to them.” Because the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara perceives the voices of the suffering beings, comes to their rescue, appears in suitable forms and preaches the dharma to them, he is known as the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin of great compassion and great mercy.

The *Tien-t’ai* school offers an explanation of the word *kuan* with respect to the school’s practice of the “threefold contemplation.”

### 1) Contemplation on the void of all existences:

Use contemplative wisdom of *prajna* to first observe that all objects of perception, that is, the external world, are but temporary appearances of things which have come into existence through dependent origination. They do not have real, inherent existence and are void as things in and of themselves. Next contemplate that one’s own body, as the temporary union of the four great elements, earth, water, fire and

wind, is but an illusory image that will eventually perish. Apart from the four elements there is no real self as it too ends in emptiness. Then contemplate that the deluded mind associated with the sixth-consciousness, arising and ceasing, always impermanent, has no self nature independent of the sense faculties and the objects of sensation and perception. Since it contains no intrinsic nature, it is but void.

2) Contemplation on the temporariness of all existences:

Also employ contemplative wisdom of *prajna* to observe that a person's entire subjective and objective worlds which though may be seen and recognized to be empty of existence, are temporary appearances that one continues to pass through, certainly not nothing. With respect to all dharmas one should not discount their coming into existence through dependent arising but be able to go along with the external world and respond to the objects of sense and perception with no attachment to any of them.

3) Contemplation on the truth of the middle:

Also, use contemplative wisdom of *prajna* to see that all dharmas are in the middle way between existence and non-existence. In other words, when contemplating things as empty of existence, do not be attached to their emptiness because just like all other dharmas, they are without self nature; and when contemplating things as temporarily existing, do not abandon them as long as one is able to recognize that like all dharmas they are but illusions. While contemplating things as in the middle way, see all dharmas as perfect and interpenetrating, without being attached to them yet simultaneously without abandoning them; in other words, not discounting their temporary existence but at the same time not having any attachment to them either. In this way one thoroughly experiences and realizes that their emptiness in nature and their temporariness in characteristic are not two separate entities and that void and form are not different but perfectly interpenetrating.

Now, according to the thirty-eighth volume of the *Flower Ornament Scripture*, chapter twenty-six on the ten grounds of the Bodhisattva path, the eighth-ground Bodhisattva is described as having perfected the spiritual state in which one recognizes the non-arising of all existences and thus having entered the eighth, the immovable ground. There is a paragraph in this chapter which states that such Bodhisattvas have acquired already ten controls, or in other words, have acquired freedom from ten situations. Now, the Bodhisattva Kuan-tzu-tsai (contemplate-free), being the reappearance of an ancient Buddha, has long surpassed the achievement of the eighth ground Bodhisattva and should naturally possess the merit of the ten freedoms as listed below:

1) Freedom over life span:

Common uninitiated people, without control over their life span, are not free to determine its length. The Bodhisattva has the freedom to live limitlessly whether long or short, less than a moment of thought may not be short enough while longer than untold eons may not be long enough.

2) Freedom over mind:

The common uninitiated beings have illusory consciousness; their minds, like climbing monkeys and running horses constantly following the objects of sense and perception cannot be free. The Bodhisattva acquires control and frees the mind from greed, anger, delusion, jealousy, pride, various likes and dislikes, and grasping of the self. The *Suramgama Sutra* says, "When the mind is able to relinquish the objects of perception, it then becomes the same as the Tathagata." The *Lotus Sutra* says: "When all the attachments end, the mind acquires freedom."

### 3) Freedom over implements or daily necessities:

The Bodhisattva acquires great freedom over daily necessities and provisions. He may stir a long river into cream or butter and turn vast earth into gold. Common uninitiated beings, obsessed with greed for wealth and possessions, are not able to feel free. The legend has it that the heavenly being Lu-tung-pin, having learned from the Ch'an Master Huang-lung, wished to help people in the secular world reach enlightenment. Once, he saw a little child and asked what he would like. The child replied that he would like gold. Lu then used his finger to point at some rock, turned it into gold and gave it to the child. However the child shook his head and refused. Lu asked, "Why don't you want the gold?" He replied, "I would like to have your finger." Have a try at this meditation riddle?

### 4) Freedom over karmic action:

Action here refers to karmic deed — good or evil karmic act committed through action, speech or intention. Common uninitiated beings commit defiled deeds with attachment. Fettered in this way, they cannot be free from karmic retributions. The Bodhisattva preaches Buddhist Dharma like doing household duties and benefits living beings as a career. Though he benefits sentient beings, he does so without attachment; his acts, even conditioned, are nevertheless pure deeds, not fettered by karma. Therefore, the Bodhisattva has freedom from the result of karma.

### 5) Freedom over birth:

From beginningless time common uninitiated living beings continue through the cycles of birth and death; as one life extinguishes another begins, to be reborn endlessly, in heaven or in hell, all ruled by the law of karma. There is no control over birth, no freedom from it. In order to enlighten living beings the Bodhisattva acquires power of manifesting birth in all the worlds. For instance, the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin is able to follow the sounds of the world and rescue living beings from suffering by appearing in various forms according to their needs. Whatever form he should assume in order to enable a particular living being to reach enlightenment, he correspondingly appears in that form and teaches the Dharma to that being. The Bodhisattva is free to be born in any world and in any form.

### 6) Freedom over vows:

Common uninitiated beings can hardly have control over their vows, because their vows and wishes are all centered on the self. Being ignorant and grasping, they either make their vows insincerely or make false vows. New Year salutations, for instance, though they are very good sayings toward other people, common uninitiated beings may not be able to freely accomplish these vows. The Bodhisattvas can freely accomplish their vows of enlightening living beings to Buddhahood, invoking the Buddhas above and transforming the beings below. The great vow of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha (Earth Repository), the great vow of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, or the great vow of the Amita Buddha (Buddha of Infinite Light or Infinite Life) while still a Bodhisattva have all been truly freely achieved.

### 7) Freedom over inclinations and superior understanding:

Common uninitiated people are prejudiced by and attached to their inclinations and cannot freely understand the absolute reality. The Bodhisattva possesses already superior understanding of Buddhist Dharma, realizes the ultimate reality, and is also able to explain to others, to show all living beings the superior principle. He acquires control over inclination and understanding.

### 8) Freedom over mystic powers and wishes:

Common uninitiated people possess greed, anger and delusion and lack good conduct, concentration and wisdom. Whatever their wishes, they are hardly able to freely fulfill them. The Bodhisattva has extinguished greed, anger and delusion and possesses fully good conduct, concentration and wisdom. He acquires control over mystic powers and is free to show miracles as he wishes.

9) Freedom over knowledge or wisdom:

The Bodhisattva possesses great wisdom and expertise in showing and debating over the power and importance of Buddhist Dharma such that living beings love and enjoy in hearing the Dharma and are happy to be enlightened. He has acquired control over knowledge.

10) Freedom over the Teaching:

The Bodhisattva acquires control over all dharmas: for the worldly dharmas, he is not fettered by the dharmas; for Buddhist Dharma, he can expertly lecture and present the teaching of the Buddha in its infinite aspects to enable all sentient beings to receive the Buddhist Dharma in perfect completion. He therefore has freedom over the Dharma or the teaching.

The above ten freedoms can relinquish the ten corresponding fears: 1. fear of death, 2. fear of evil passions and defilement, 3. fear of poverty, 4. fear of evil karma, 5. fear of being born to the evil realms, 6. fear of being unable to fulfill vows, 7. fear of sins of slandering Buddhist Dharma, 8. fear of wishes not granted in time, 9. fear of acquiring authority over populace, 10. fear of having various doubts of Buddhist Dharma. (*Outlines of the Hua-yen*, p.1603)

**Bodhisattva** is a Sanskrit word. *Bodhi* is translated to “enlightenment” and *sattva* to “sentient being,” together they mean “enlightened sentient being.” “Sentient being” alone is the general name for all living beings. Now “enlightened sentient being” refers only to a Bodhisattva who has generated the *bodhi* mind (*bodhicitta*). This has two meanings: 1. with respect to self-enlightenment, the Bodhisattva is a “sentient being” who has attained enlightenment; and 2. with respect to enlightening others, the Bodhisattva is a “sentient being” who is able to enlighten other “sentient beings.” To be named a Bodhisattva one must have accomplished self-enlightenment as well as attained the ability to enlighten others -- to be able to seek enlightenment above and transform sentient beings below.

**While moving in the deep course of the profound prajnaparamita:** Among these words the profound *prajnaparamita* has already been explained during the explication of the title of this *sutra*. Now it remains to explain mainly the words *deep*, *move*, and *while*.

The word **deep** refers to relative depth, deep as opposed to shallow. However, this *sutra* espouses the notion that all dharmas are but empty and therefore it fundamentally does not distinguish between shallow or *deep*. The difference between shallow and *deep* pertains to the contemplative wisdom of each individual. The *Ta-chih-tu lun* says, “It is like the way people enter into the ocean, some barely reach its surface while others prefer to explore its depth.” And also, “If someone lights a lamp in a dark room, the light will shine on various objects making them all clearly visible. Yet, there may be greater light that shines brighter and further increases the visibility.” This can be rephrased as:

“The *prajna* of the practitioner may be deep or shallow,  
As one enters the ocean from the shore or the middle;  
Also like one lights a lamp in a dark hall,  
It shines not same for the candle may be great or small.”

Master Seng-chao says in the *Discourse on the Namelessness of Nirvana*, “When three arrows hit the target, just like three animals cross the river, there is no difference among the three in their acts of hitting or crossing. However the difference between shallow and deep exists because the strength or effort exerted may not be the same.” Strength is analogous to wisdom, since the wisdom of each practitioner is different, there will be difference in the depth of practice.

According to Yuan-che's *Praise of the Heart Sutra*, there are two interpretations of depth. First, it refers to *deep* practice. By the non-distinguishing wisdom to realize the two-fold emptiness of self and Dharma, to relinquish all discernment and to practice in the manner as if there is nothing that can be practiced is what meant by practicing *deeply*. The *Large Sutra* states: "Not seeing the practice, and not seeing the non-practice is what meant by a Bodhisattva practicing deeply the *prajna*." Second, it refers to *deep* realm. Knowing the principle of the emptiness of both self and Dharma, relinquishing both existence and non-existence of characteristics, abandoning all conjecturing doctrines, and being without wisdom to distinguish---realizing such depth of realm is what meant by practicing in the *deep* realm.

With respect to the subject of wisdom there are two *prajna*: the first shallower, the second *deeper*. The shallower is called emptiness of self *prajna*, which enables one to eradicate the attachment to self and see the void, though it does not reveal the non-void. It is commonly practiced by all three vehicles -- the *arhat*, the *pratyeka* Buddha and the Bodhisattva -- therefore known as commonly shared *prajna*. When this wisdom manifests, it leads to the realization of a partial truth and hence is described as shallower. The *deeper* is called emptiness of Dharma *prajna*, which enables one to eradicate the attachment to self as well as to Dharma and thus see not only the void but also the non-void. According to the *Tien-t'ai* school, this *prajna* completely breaks the three delusions (the delusion arising from incorrect view, the delusion hindering the knowledge of salvation methods, and the delusion hindering the knowledge of reality), ends forever the two deaths, and leads to the realization of the first principle, the emptiness of all dharma. It is practiced by the Bodhisattvas alone, therefore known as non-sharing *prajna*, unlike the teaching of expedient means which is shared in practice by all three vehicles. When this wisdom manifests, it leads to the attainment of bodhi (*bodhicitta*), and hence is described as *deeper*.

According to the *Chu-she* (*Abhidharmakosa* by Vasabandhu) the word *move* has two implications: first it implies to act, to make a move, and second it implies to traverse. Here it refers to practice, meditative practice, wondrous practice: by means of deep and profound wisdom to contemplate and illuminate the empty nature of all dharmas to its very origin and foundation. This is how to *move* in the *deep* course of the profound *prajnaparamita*, it is not what uninitiated people or non-believers can easily perceive. Relying on the *prajnaparamita* the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is able to reach the very deep realm of the nature of emptiness and it is at this instance that He is said to be *moving* in the *deep* course of the profound *prajnaparamita*. Suppose it is asked: what is meant by the very deep realm of the nature of emptiness? The *Proof of the Sacred Doctrine* (*Aryashasana-prakarana* by Asanga) volume fifteen says: "Though all dharmas are relinquished, nothing is diminished; though all dharmas are adopted, nothing is acquired." Neither taking nor abandoning, without increasing or decreasing: that is the deep realm of the state of void. When one is able to initially reach this realm, he is referred to as practicing the profound *prajnaparamita*. If he has completely entered this state, it will be said he has attained the profound *prajnaparamita*. Presently, the focus is on the manner of initial entry, and therefore is described as *moving* in the *deep* course of profound *prajnaparamita*.

According to the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, "when a Bodhisattva practices or *moves* in the deep course of the profound *prajnaparamita*, he does not see a Bodhisattva nor the word of Bodhisattva, does not see *prajnaparamita* nor the practicing of *prajnaparamita*, nor the non-practicing of *prajnaparamita*." Because of non-acquisition and non-discrimination there is neither practice nor non-practice, and this is the practice referred to as *moving* in the *deep* course of the profound *prajnaparamita*.

The word *while* refers to time. The Mahayana *Discourse on the Hundred Dharma* explains: time may indicate the past, the present and the future, the four periods of cosmic change (the kalpa of creation, the kalpa of existence, the kalpa of destruction and the kalpa of annihilation), the four seasons or three seasons, the year, month, day and night, the six period (in India) and the twelve period (in

China) time measures for each day and night; all these scales of timing with respect to each locality can be referred to as time. And *while* can refer to a time as short as an instant or as long as a kalpa. Speaking from the perspective of Buddhist Dharma, if detached from all dharmas, there is really no concept of time; it is for the sake of enlightening sentient beings that the notion of time is temporarily adopted. According to the *Ta-chih-tu lun*, “the division of time is temporarily spoken of according to the conditioned dharmas; it is neither in the precinct of the five aggregates of attachments, namely the physical and mental events that constitute all existences nor the six sense faculties or objects of the six senses.” According to the *Yogacara Bhumi* (by Asanga), “in the dharmas of the phenomenal things, there is the distinguishing of before and after, the temporary division of time, belonging to the non-corresponding section of the aggregate of volitional activities.”

Therefore, *while* here refers to the time a practitioner is moving in the deep course with great effort, in other words, the time contemplative *prajna* arises by means of words *prajna*, and the time reality *prajna* is realized by means of contemplative *prajna*. Consequently, “while moving in the deep course of the profound *prajnaparamita*” indicates the principal effort of practice espoused by the entire *sutra*, symbolically analogous to the effort of navigating a raft to cross from this shore to the other shore.

### **Reality prajna acquired from self practice**

***Illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments are but emptiness:*** Group of mental and physical events is translated from the Sanskrit word *skandha* which has two meanings: aggregate or join and, from older translations, covering. The five aggregates are the five constituent elements of all existences, form or bodily phenomenon, sensation or feelings, perception or recognition, mental formations or volitional activities and consciousness or conscious awareness. These five groups join together to become the physical frame of a being, and then in turn, to this body are gathered the three delusions arising from 1) incorrect views and thoughts, 2) inadequate knowledge of methods for salvation as numerous as sand grains, and 3) ignorance of the ultimate reality; and then, immeasurable trials and evil passions resulting from sense objects; and consequently limitless sufferings through cycles of life and death. From the other meaning of covering, these five aggregates of attachment can cover one’s true nature, or rather, prevent one from seeing his true nature.

***Form or matter:*** Form implies change, meaning all matters or substantial materials that are prone to change. It is called form because it is the gathering and uniting of the four elements of earth, water, fire and wind (and simultaneously the insubstantial qualities of solidity, fluidity, heat and motion) and the five sense faculties to form the physical body, and thus the aggregate of form.

***Feeling or sensation:*** Sensations imply the act of receiving and accepting, meaning sense impressions or receptions. When the five sense faculties contact and respond to the objects of the five senses, the five corresponding consciousness arise, and the union and interaction of these senses, sense stimuli and sense consciousness contribute to the experiencing of favorable, unfavorable or neutral realms and thus giving rise to feelings of pleasure, suffering or indifference capable of propelling the mind toward greed, anger and delusion. Consequently these events are grouped under feelings or sensations.

***Recognition or perception:*** Perception means the capture of an image and imagination while recognizing requires discernment and reflection; therefore, this group of events is to distinguish, sort and reflect over one’s experience. When the mind consciousness and the six sense-objects gather and unite,

thoughts arise: as mental consciousness grasps visual color or form, it thinks about the sight, and as mental consciousness grasps audio objects, it thinks about the sound. This sixth consciousness, the mind consciousness, possesses particularly great power of imagination. It constitutes the various acts of recognition rising from the contact of each sense consciousness with external sense stimuli, such as understanding, associating, analyzing, synthesizing, generalizing, or the commonly spoken expressions of emotions and awareness etc., all of these belong to active thought.

The *Abhidharmakosa* volume one says that “for the aggregate of perception, it takes the semblance or image as the subject, grasping various characteristics such as blue and yellow, long and short, women and men, detested and beloved, suffering and pleasure.” A commentary on the Mahayana *Discourse on the Hundred Dharma* says that “with respect to thought or perception, its nature is to take images from the physical realm and its function is to label these sense objects with various names. It needs to construct clear identifiable boundaries between these mental images in order to follow up with corresponding verbal designations.” This explains the meaning of the aggregate of perception.

**Volitional activity or mental formation:** Volition refers to conditioned act. 1) The motivating activities of the mind: as the mind consciousness thinks, it moves and acts, hence various thoughts, good or evil, continue to course through the mind, one thought after another, originating and ceasing, without stop. All the dharmas of the mind join and unite to become the aggregate of mental formation. In other words, all mental phenomena aside from those belonging to the aggregates of sensation and perception are contained in this aggregate of volition. Some theory claims that volition refers to the seventh consciousness (*manas*-consciousness), capable of very powerful thinking. 2) The differential phenomenon of mental and physical events such as time, space, characteristic of words and the state of originating and ceasing: for example, the reflection that a day has gone by and life has diminished accordingly belongs to the aggregate of volition.

**Consciousness:** Consciousness implies awareness and discernment, referring to all the consciousnesses of a person. For the Theravada, there are six types of consciousnesses, that is, consciousness of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, bodily sensation and mental consciousness. The Mahayana, particularly the *Ideas-only* school, claims eight consciousnesses: besides the six sense-consciousnesses, there are the additional seventh *mana*-consciousness and the eighth *alaya* consciousness. The aggregate of consciousness then refers to the eight consciousnesses as *mind-kings* in the *Ideas-only* vocabulary.

To summarize the meanings of the five aggregates, the aggregate of form arises from the gathering of the elements which belong to the biological, indicating the actual physical body; the aggregate of sensation arises from contact, relating to what is psychologically the various emotions; the aggregate of perception arises from images of the external world, equivalent to what is psychologically ideas and thoughts; the aggregate of volition arises from all pervasive attachments, belonging to what is psychologically the intentions; and the aggregate of consciousness arises from discernment, referring to what is psychologically awareness and acknowledgement. From the perspective of human existence, man is composed of the five aggregates among which form is our body and the other four aggregates constitute our mental faculty, though volition being a combination of both the physical and the mental.

The Mahayana *Characteristic of Dharma* school reduces all existence to one hundred dharmas: besides the six unconditioned dharmas, the remaining ninety-four conditioned dharmas all pertain to the five aggregates of attachments. Included among these are: eleven dharmas specifically relating to material form contained in the group of form; one mental factor (*element of the mind*) of sensation from the dharmas common to all mental occasions contained in the group of sensation, one mental factor of perception from

the dharmas common to all mental occasions contained in the group of perception, forty-nine mental factors plus twenty-four dharmas independent of the mind contained in the group of volition and eight consciousness *mind-kings* contained in the group of consciousness. Therefore the five groups of attachments permeate and exhaust all conditioned dharmas. From a restricted perspective, all sentient beings are composed of the five aggregates; from a broad perspective, the five aggregates are the summation of all physical and mental phenomena such that outside of the five aggregates, the entire world with its object or event is non-existent.

**Emptiness:** If Buddhism is regarded as a philosophy, then it may be thought of as a philosophy of emptiness. The notion of emptiness is not easily understood, and will be approached from six perspectives here.

- 1) Buddhism does not speak of emptiness as nihilism.
- 2) Emptiness due to impermanence: for instance, the four elements are impermanent; national territories are delicate, constantly under danger and threat; men are destined to birth and death; the world flourishes and deteriorates. All things are impermanent and that is the dharmas of originating and ceasing. Since everything originates and ceases, it is impermanent and therefore, empty.
- 3) Emptiness due to dependent arising: The myriad dharmas of the universe all arise dependent on karmic causes and present circumstances. Karmic cause is the primary condition and the immediate circumstance is the helping condition. Every phenomenon of the world is the union of causality and external realm, an instant of grasping the material world according to the *Diamond Sutra*. As all worldly objects and events originate from karmic cause and external circumstance, apart from dependent arising they appear devoid of self-nature and thus empty without essence. However, it should be noted that dependent arising is emptiness of self-nature, and emptiness of self-nature is dependent arising; dependent arising is not different from emptiness of self-nature, and emptiness of self-nature is not different from dependent arising. Because dependent arising does not differ from emptiness of self-nature, the wondrous existence is the true void; because emptiness of self-nature is dependent arising, true void is wondrous existence.
- 4) Emptiness because of delusional grasping: It is ignorance that causes delusional grasping, namely, illusion, subversion and attachment. Not understanding that impermanence leads to emptiness, and that dependent arising is emptiness, illusory attachment will originate. One may grasp the existence of a real self or the belief in the creation of the entire universe by some deity, or the existence of substance not subjective to change. Buddhist Dharma is meant to break down such cravings and grasping, and return to the true reality that all phenomenon are subject to dependent arising and empty of self-nature. Because delusional grasping is subverted knowledge, once such illusory attachment is relinquished, the true state of things will be revealed.

According to the *Ideas-only* school, delusional grasping is the grasping of all pervasive imaginary attachments; it grasps as real independent subjects and objects that are dependent arising of experiences, ever changing causes and conditions, originating and ceasing. Yet the basis for this dependent nature of experience is the very same true basis for experience in its perfected nature as understood by the enlightened mind. What is emptiness here lies in the nature of delusional grasping of experience, not in the dependent nature or the perfect nature of experience. A world of experiencing subject and experienced object is but imagination which is a result of grasping the dependent flow of ideas. When the awakened mind sees the emptiness of the duality of subject and object, it understands the true state, the perfect nature of experience. Actually, from the perspective of the emptiness of dependent arising, even the so-called dependent nature and the perfect nature are empty as well -- they too have no essentiality.

5) Emptiness of mind: In the mind of a Bodhisattva there is not one single attachment, no hatred nor affection, no greed nor anger, no winning nor losing, no self nor others, no illusion nor discernment; everything is relinquished; all realms are empty. The realms are empty because the mind is empty. Since the mind is empty the five groups of attachments are naturally empty. Therefore, the eighteen elements (formed by the six sense faculties, the six objects of sensation and the six sense-consciousnesses), the twelve links of conditional arising and the four noble truths are all empty. This is to say that when the mind is empty, all realms are automatically empty.

6) Emptiness of Dharma: This emptiness is the real state of things where all dharmas are empty -- a state of thusness. According to the *Awakening of Faith*, "to say it is empty is because from the very beginning, all dharmas of attachment are non-corresponding. It is said that to be able to detach from the differential characteristic of all dharmas is to be without any illusory or false mind." It also says that for all sentient beings with an illusory mind, all thoughts are distinguished, none are corresponding, and therefore all are empty. Independent of the illusory mind, there is really no emptiness to talk about.

***The five groups of attachment are but emptiness:*** Why are the five groups empty? These five aggregates constituting the body and mind are all dharmas arising from causes and conditions. Form originates from the temporary union of the four elements, and as these four elements disperse and expire, without permanence, where could the illusory body be? Therefore it is said to be empty. It follows that the remaining four aggregates can be nothing but emptiness. Since the corresponding form is empty, then for the derivative four aggregates, if there is no sense faculty to encounter the sense object, who is to experience the feelings? Who is to experience the perceptions? Who is to experience the volitions? Who is to experience the consciousness? Hence, all five groups of attachments are empty.

The *Increasing-by-One Nikaya Suttas* describes the five groups as: "form is like suds, feeling is like a floating bubble, perception is like a wild horse, volition is like a banana tree and consciousness is like magic." According to the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*: "form is like suds, feeling is like a water bubble, perception is like sunshine, volition is like a banana tree and consciousness is like magic." Just as a magician uses magic tricks to make magical appearances, these magical images are not real to start with. And why? It is because the five aggregates are without self-nature, and therefore, empty. The translation by Fa-yueh of the T'ang dynasty uses this phrase: "illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments are empty of essentiality." Essentiality means the self, without essentiality is without self-nature and hence empty. Also according to the translation of the Tripitaka by I-tsing it is phrased thus: "illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments etc. are but emptiness," namely the aggregates, the elements, the spheres, the noble truths, the links of causes and conditions and the perfections are all empty.

An anonymous writer composed the *Song for Awakening the World*:

"In the Tripitaka emptiness is form,  
In the *Prajnaparamita* form is emptiness.  
Heading west at dawn and heading east at dusk,  
Human life is just like nectar gathering bee.  
Having made honey from hundreds of flowers,  
At the end all works are a show of emptiness.  
In the deep night the drum for the third hour has been heard,  
Turning over not realizing the fifth hour is ready to sound.  
Contemplating from the very beginning,  
It is all but a dream of fantasy."

In the T'ang dynasty, ch'an master In-fung wrote:

“The four elements and the five aggregates are empty to begin with,  
Like a clear bottle that will disappear without a trace when broken,  
If you can indeed lock up and keep the empty void,  
Then you may try capture Deng-in-fung too.”

***Illuminates and sees:*** How is it to illuminate? How is it to see? Like lighting objects with a lamp, seeing is made possible by illumination, and so it is said “illuminates and sees.” With respect to illumination and seeing, the illuminating is by the light of wisdom of *prajna* and the seeing is done with eyes of wisdom of *prajna*. However, this illuminating and seeing arise from the deep practice of the profound *prajnaparamita* and that is why illumination is the illuminating from the shining mind of *prajna* and seeing is seeing through the mind's eye of *prajna*. Without moving in the deep course of the profound *prajnaparamita* neither the illuminating nor the seeing can arise. Why is it so? For example, although there are lamp and candle here, if no one ignites them, there will be no light, and therefore, no illuminating and no seeing either. If one is able to practice deeply the profound *prajnaparamita*, it is like lighting the lamp to give off light, consequently, illuminating and seeing are made possible, and is thus called “illuminates and sees.”

Now proceed to “illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachment are but emptiness.” The wisdom of *prajna* enables one to illuminate and see, and all dharmas pertaining to the five aggregates are what has been illuminated and seen. Emptiness is what one concludes after illuminating and seeing the five groups with the wisdom of *prajna*; the conclusion is that the five groups of attachments are all empty. This breaks two types of grasping or attachment: 1) It breaks down sentient beings' attachment to self, that is, the five aggregates are empty because they contain no real self. 2) It breaks down the attachment to Dharma by the lesser vehicles. The dharmas of the five aggregates are empty because they, as dharmas, are without essentiality. “Illuminating and seeing that the five groups of attachments are but emptiness” means that there is neither self nor Dharma to be attained. If one is able to attain and hold on to a self, then why can he not be in control, be free, be permanent and be without change? Suppose dharmas may be attained and held on to, but every dharma of the five aggregates arises from dependent origination and therefore empty of self-nature, it follows then that there can be no essentiality to be attained or held.

Further, the five groups of attachments are fundamentally empty -- the real state of all dharmas and the nature of emptiness of all dharmas. In other words, the true state is the state of emptiness and thus cannot be seen; however, to see what cannot be seen, to penetrate directly the realm of all dharmas without seeing is so called “illuminates and sees.” To illuminate is to reach the emptiness of all dharmas, and to see is to realize the characteristic of the true state. To let go both the emptiness and the characteristic is to illuminate and see. The illuminating and seeing is the wisdom for contemplation -- contemplative *prajna*. The five groups of attachments are the realms for contemplation -- words *prajna*. The emptiness is the true state that is revealed -- reality *prajna*. These three *prajna* are but one mind, a mind already containing all three *prajna* and is called the mind of *prajna*. The light of this mind is tranquil but continually illuminating, and while illuminating, always tranquil. Not giving way to illusory thoughts, it shines over everything and thus thoroughly sees the true void as the reality -- the essence of the Dharma of the five aggregates. This is described as “illuminates and sees the five groups of attachments are but emptiness.” When a Bodhisattva practicing deeply the *prajnaparamita* illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments are empty of self-nature, then the five groups are without the five groups—that is though they are not nothing, they are seen as empty. This is the complete revelation of a mind of *prajna*.

To further explain by the doctrines of the Chinese *Yogacara* tradition, the *Characteristic of Dharma* (or marks of existence) school, when a Bodhisattva moves in the deep course of the profound *prajnaparamita*, the light of *prajna* illuminates the dependent arising of the five groups of attachments showing that they possess no reality like they appear to be and thus liberates the fetters of attachments and the heavy fetters of past seeds and consequently reveals the state of emptiness, the lack of self-nature of all dharmas. From this it is conclusively called, “illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments are but emptiness.” It is from the dependent origination of the five aggregates that the grasping of the independent existence produced from all illusory attachments is relinquished and the real perfect nature is revealed. It is empty once this grasping is let go, but the process of realizing the perfect nature is not empty; the meaning of emptiness must contain these two perspectives, it does not mean simply empty on both account. In this way a Bodhisattva is emancipated from various attachments and realizes purity and clarity. Free and in control of the present, he can therefore cross beyond all sufferings and difficulties of the three realms and the five lower realms.

***Crosses beyond all sufferings and difficulties:*** To cross is to transcend, leave and be liberated. Sufferings refer to afflictions pressing to body or mind while difficulties refer to danger, disasters and perils. As sentient beings journey through the three worlds and the six realms according to their deeds of karma, sometimes in good realms, sometimes in evil realms, from one death to another rebirth, no one can escape afflictions and dangers. It is only by illuminating and seeing that the five groups of attachments are but empty may one cross beyond and achieve emancipation from all sufferings and difficulties. The various aspects of suffering all originate from the aggregate of sensation; the arising of unfavorable feelings, favorable feelings and neutral feelings result correspondingly to sufferings of afflictions, sufferings of change and sufferings of conditions. The sufferings of conditions refer to the suffering from the impermanence, the originating and ceasing of conditioned volitional activities. From such sufferings pressuring the body and mind, whether being rich or poor, lowly or prestigious, man or woman, young or old, no one is spared. In order to be freed from these worldly sufferings, one must illuminate and see that the five groups of attachments are but emptiness. In order to illuminate and see the emptiness of the five aggregates, one must practice deeply the profound *prajnaparamita*. The Bodhisattva moves through the deep course of the profound *prajnaparamita*, illuminates and sees the dharmas pertaining to the five groups of attachments are all empty in the true state and thus is able to cross beyond all sufferings and difficulties. As recorded in various sutras and discourses, sentient beings have limitless sufferings, which will be briefly explained from four definitions in the following:

1) Two sufferings: The *Ta-chih-tu lun* volume nineteen states two types of sufferings--the internal and the external sufferings. The internal sufferings can be subdivided into two: 1- physical sufferings experienced by sentient beings such as old age, bodily afflictions, hunger, thirst, cold and heat etc. 2- mental sufferings experienced by sentient beings such as worry, anxiety, jealousy, doubt, fear and anger etc. The external sufferings can also be subdivided into two: 1- bodily sufferings from attacks by bandit, lion, tiger, wolf and poisonous snake etc. 2- physical sufferings from storm, frost, snow, thunder and lightning.

2) Three sufferings: 1- Suffering due to affliction: Human world and the three lower realms have sufferings of affliction. It is said that the body is already an apparatus for affliction, yet on top of that there may be additional sufferings from unfavorable conditions like cold, heat, hunger and thirst, or from encountering pressures of unpleasant circumstances. With suffering over suffering this is called suffering due to affliction. 2- Suffering due to change: This suffering may come from the disappearance of worldly fame, prestige, rich and wealth, or the appearance of the five heavenly deteriorations. Sentient beings

may enjoy pleasure, but when pleasure ends suffering may follow; such experiences are called suffering due to change. 3- Suffering due to conditions: These sufferings come from the differing and diminishing of realms that sentient beings dwell in and the consequent transferring of body and mind. This refers to those beings living in the two higher realms. When their life spans nears completion, various thoughts will rise and continue to move without stop subjecting them again to the cycles of rebirth. At such moments, they may experience great regrets and suffer exceedingly like arrows piercing through their bodies.

The *Ta-chih-tu lun* says that “death in the two higher realms will result in greater regret than that in the lower realms because it means descent to the lower realms, like a fall from great height breaking into pieces.” Sages of old say that “The realm of desire has three kinds of suffering; the realm of form does not include the sufferings of affliction; and the formless realm has only the sufferings due to conditions.” The *Ta-chih-tu lun* further says that “the countless sentient beings have three physical sufferings, namely, old age, bodily afflictions, and death; three mental sufferings, that is, lust, anger and delusion; and three sufferings due to next-life -- being born to the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, or animals.”

3) Eight sufferings: The first four are physical sufferings, namely, birth, old age, bodily afflictions and death; the next three are mental sufferings from having to leave loved ones, having to meet detested or hated ones and being unable to satisfy cravings; the last suffering is from inflammation of the five groups of attachments, as if the entire body is burned by raging flames. Aside from the former seven kinds of sufferings, all other sufferings are contained in this suffering, it is totally inclusive, encompassing both body and mind.

4) From the perspective of limitless sufferings: Besides the two sufferings, three sufferings and eight sufferings already discussed, there are the three lesser perils from battle, epidemic, and famine; the three greater perils from fire, water and wind; and up to eight disasters, various, countless sufferings. Therefore sufferings often come together with dangers and perils. For example, when a silkworm gives of silk, it binds itself up, subjecting itself to the perils of burning and boiling.

The body and mind of sentient beings often experience sufferings and difficulties. It is only because sentient beings do not know the method for liberation, do not know that the body and mind are the union of the five groups of attachments, dharmas of impermanence -- from this impermanence results suffering. Therefore one should contemplate the impermanence, diligently learn the Perfection of Wisdom. The Bodhisattva, by practicing deeply the profound *prajnaparamita*, enters the contemplation of non-characteristic, illuminates and sees the dharmas of body and mind as the five aggregates are all dependent arising without self nature, empty in its true state and thus crosses beyond all sufferings and perils, awakening to the vehicle of the Bodhisattva and nirvana.

This concludes the explanation of *prajna* for self- practice. Next will be the explication of the theme of *prajna* in two sections: firstly, from the exoteric perspective and secondly, from the esoteric perspective.

## 2) The Theme of Prajna, Perfection of Wisdom

### 1-The exoteric perspective:

*Sariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form. The same is true of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness.*

This section follows the conclusion of the preceding section--the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara has already moved through the deep course of the profound *prajnaparamita*, illuminated and seen the emptiness of the five groups of attachments. Then among the five groups, the group of form and emptiness, are they the one and the same or different? The Bodhisattva knows that Sariputra must have some doubts or questions regarding this and therefore addresses it here in the *sutra* to answer his questions and relieve his doubts. First, using the aggregate of form as an example, he explains that the characteristic of form and the nature of emptiness are indeed the same, not different, and thus fusing characteristic and nature in order to return to the true state. From this example it then follows that the remaining four aggregates, namely, sensation, perception, volition and consciousness are similarly the same as emptiness, not different at all, and again, each characteristic is fused with the nature of emptiness.

**Sariputra:** Sariputra is among the *sangha* of *arhats*, one of the greatest disciples of the Buddha Sakyamuni. He is renowned as the foremost in wisdom. Each of the ten greatest disciples of the Buddha is reputed to be master of an ability as an ancient poem records:

“Sariputa’s deep wisdom, Mahamaudgalyana’s supernatural power,  
and Purnamaitrauaniputra’s skill in expounding the teaching,  
Subhuti’s deep understanding of the void, Katyayana’s ability in debate,  
and Mahakasyapa’s strict observance of the *dhuta* practices,  
Aniruddha’s divine sight, and Upali’s knowledge and observance of precepts,  
Ananda’s having heard most sermons by the Buddha  
and Rahula’s observance of minute rules of conduct.”

Sari is a type of birds. As recorded in the chapter on Sariputra and Maudgalyayana of *Buddhacarita* (A Life of Sakyamuni), volume three of the *Increasing-by-One Nikaya*, and volume eleven of the *Ta-chih-tu lun*, Sariputra was born to a Brahmin family in Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha in ancient India. His mother was the daughter of Madhara, a Brahmin, and was named Sari because she was very smart and her eyes looked like those of the bird, Sari. The son of Sari was then named Sariputra. Since he was very knowledgeable, diligently upholding the precepts, infinitely wise, and extremely proficient in speaking the Buddhist Dharma, he was revered as the foremost disciple, the first in wisdom.

The *Ta-chih-tu lun* states that from birth to the age of eight, Sariputra had already learned and understood all the sutras and their doctrines. Once, the kingdom of Magadha was holding a grand convention of music and speech. Four honorable seats were set apart for the king, the crown prince, the highest minister and the master of debate. Sariputra was only eight years old then, yet he asked the assembled people “Who are these four seats for?” The crowd told him, “The king, the crown prince, the highest minister and the master of debate.” Sariputra observed all those attending the conference and judging that none of them able to best him, he took the seat for the master of debate and sat in the lotus position. People there were very doubtful and thought him quite odd. Some regarded him as an ignorant and foolish child, and some took him for a person of extraordinary intelligence. They praised his

outstanding appearance, but they still held on to their own pride and due to his young age, disdained to talk to him directly; instead they sent young disciples to deliver messages in order to question him. Sariputra's responses toward doctrinal points showed such unprecedented superior language and understanding of Buddhist principles that all the debate masters present exclaimed in awe. Thereupon they tendered defeat in unison and the king was greatly pleased.

One day when Sariputra was fifteen years old he went to the capital city Rajagriha on business. At the outskirts of the city he met the monk Asvajit. Impressed by the latter's stately appearance and dignified countenance, Sariputra asked Asvajit, "Who is your teacher?" Asvajit replied, "The Buddha Sakyamuni is my master. I am his disciple." Sariputra further questioned him, "What dharma does your master usually teach his disciples?" Asvajit then replied,

"Of those dharmas which arise from a cause,  
The Tathagata has stated the cause,  
And also the cessation;  
Such is the teaching of the Great Ascetic (*samanna*)."

Hearing this verse Sariputra felt great joy. Together with his friend Mahamaudgalyayana and their respective disciples he requested the Buddha to accept them into the *sangha*. After a mere fifteen days Sariputra became an awakened *arhat* and attained the very deep diamond *samadhi*. A powerful demon, whose fist could punch and break one's head, punched Sariputra on the head. Sariputra came out of his meditation with a headache and asked the Buddha for the reason. The Buddha said, "If it were not for the meditative concentration of your diamond *samadhi*, your head would have been in pieces now."

*Form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form:* Form refers to the group of form and emptiness refers to the true void of *prajna*. The group of form is the leading group of the five groups of attachments, and therefore the *sutra* demonstrates the emptiness of form first. Common uninitiated beings, grasping various forms, cannot realize the true void; with ignorance perpetuating delusion and karmic deeds, they suffer through cycles of death and rebirth. Now it is pointed out that the colorful world of form as revealed to them is seen through afflicted eyes, it is not a real existing world different from emptiness. This breaks down the worldly attachment to form of the outside realm as if it is other than the true void. If one is able to realize that the aggregate of form is empty, then he should be able to realize the other four aggregates are empty as well. The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* states that "With respect to the five aggregates, the characteristic of form is like suds, not strong in nature, instantly becoming empty; the characteristic of sensation is like floating bubbles, rising and ceasing faster than swords; the characteristic of perception is like flaming sunshine, under which there is no water, conditioned arising of thirst and lust are all such illusory perceptions; the characteristic of volition is like the banana tree, its leaves may be pulled off one by one, yet no substance may be obtained; and the characteristic of consciousness is like magic creations, seemingly existent when various circumstances join together, yet only a supposed, false existence, no reality there."

The group of form discussed here includes the five internal sense faculties, the five external sense objects, and non-showing forms. Emptiness means the true void of *prajna*. All forms are imagined forms, fundamentally without self-nature, its essence is emptiness. This means form resulting from imagination is not different from true void; just like a wave rises when water moves, yet the wave is none other than water. The characteristic of form is like the wave while the nature of emptiness is like the water, one cannot be separated from the other. It is not as if water as emptiness can be parted from the wave that is form; nor is it that form as the wave can stand by itself without the water that is emptiness.

Because sentient beings are deluded about the true nature of emptiness, they grasp the view that imaginary forms do exist and are different from emptiness. Hence, the Bodhisattva needs to demonstrate that form does not differ from emptiness. From the reverse perspective, since form is not different from emptiness, then emptiness is not different from form, just like water is none other than wave. Therefore it is said that emptiness does not differ from form.

The second volume of the *To Point A Finger at the Moon* records the following:

‘The Ch’an Master Bhadra of the Chin dynasty asked Dharma Master Shen which sutra or discourse the latter taught. Shen said, ‘The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*.’ The Ch’an Master said, ‘What would you say is the meaning of form and emptiness?’ Shen replied, ‘Countless miniscule gather together to be called form, since the miniscule are without self-nature form is empty.’ The Ch’an Master said, ‘What would it be called when the miniscule do not come together?’ Shen had no reply. The Ch’an Master got up and left. Shen’s disciple thought this highly doubtful that he chased after the Ch’an Master and questioned, ‘If my teacher’s explanation of form and emptiness is not agreeable, I wonder how the honorable Ch’an Master would explain the meaning of form and emptiness?’ The Ch’an Master replied, ‘I am not saying that what your master said was incorrect; your master only explained the emptiness of form as a result of cause, he cannot explain the emptiness of form as the cause itself.’ The disciple asked, ‘How is form empty as a cause?’ The Ch’an Master said, ‘If a single miniscule is empty, then countless miniscule are empty, and because countless miniscule are empty then a single miniscule is empty; there is no “countless miniscule” when a “single miniscule” is empty, and there is no “single miniscule” when “countless miniscule” are empty.’” (The above question and response is recorded in the *Biography of a Revered Monk* as the speech of Budhabhadra to Kumarajiva. Budhabhadra was the disciple of Budhasena. A descendent of King Kanlufan, he entered the Buddhist order at a very early age. With diligence in both practice and learning, he was renowned for his ability in meditation and in the observance of the precepts, for his magic powers, and for awakening to the third level before *arhatship*. When he reached Ch’ang-an, Kumarajiva was very glad and always invited him to discuss and determine the meaning of doctrines whenever any doubt came up. Shortly after that he traveled south to Lu-shan where the venerable Master Hui-yuan was very happy to meet him. Budhabhadra remained in Lu-shan until he entered nirvana.)

Form does not differ from emptiness – namely, though form may be seen and heard like real substance, actually, it is like a dream or reflection in the water, illusory without essence. Emptiness does not differ from form – namely, though empty, the temporary, illusory characteristic of dreams and reflections is not denied. To realize that form does not differ from emptiness is for breaking down uninitiated beings’ grasping of form as a real entity. This form refers to the dharma of external phenomenon, originating from dependent arising, false without essence; its true state is emptiness. The Bodhisattva, with great wisdom within himself, illuminates and sees that this aggregate is empty and therefore does not abide in birth and death. To realize that emptiness does not differ from form is for breaking down the other two vehicles’ attachment to the doctrine of emptiness. Being able to not grasp at emptiness facilitates the reentry to the temporary phenomenal world. The Bodhisattva possesses great compassion toward the world without and therefore does not abide in nirvana.

***Whatever is form, that is emptiness, and whatever is emptiness, that is form:*** what has been discussed above -- form does not differ from emptiness and emptiness does not differ from form is approached from the perspective of breaking down the attachment to self by uninitiated beings and the attachment to Dharma by the two vehicles besides Bodhisattva. The present discussion -- whatever is form is emptiness and whatever is emptiness is form will be approached from the perspective of breaking down the attachment to annihilationism and eternalism, namely, breaking the grasping of wrong view in order to reveal the true principle. The Buddha has spoken all the sutras for the purpose of breaking down

wrong views and revealing the true principle. This *sutra* as the kernel of the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures has even greater purpose -- that of destroying the wrong and establishing the right perspective. The wrong views of sentient beings can be as numerous as sixty-two views, yet to categorize them, they fall within but two views, that of annihilationism and eternalism. Those who grasp the view of eternalism often maintain that humans continue to be humans and animals continue to be animals through rebirth; now with *form is emptiness* this *sutra* breaks down this eternalist attachment to continued existence. Those who grasp the view of annihilationism think that human death is like the extinguishing of the flame, if so, then what is there to benefit from doing good and what is there to fear from committing evil? Such denial of karmic retribution from good or evil deeds, the total disregard of the possible fall to evil realm in rebirth, is sometimes named empty of evil realm. This *sutra* counters such idea by *emptiness is form*, breaking down this nihilist view of no further existence. The true principle of Buddhist Dharma means to keep sentient beings from falling into either the nihilist side or the eternalist side, to turn them from delusion to enlightenment, to awaken to the middle way.

From the perspective of true principle, the fundamental nature of form is empty; there is no need to wait until form is extinguished to conclude its emptiness. Like viewing flowers which do not have self-nature to begin with, why wait till the flowers wither to confirm their emptiness? Therefore this *sutra* means that form is empty because it is empty of its own existence, not empty because it is perishable. To speak more plainly, this emptiness is not an emptiness that is not empty of itself. It does not mean that this emptiness becomes a defined notion like an existent entity, but rather that even emptiness is empty in itself. If sentient beings, while learning the sutras on emptiness as spoken by the Buddha, become attached to the idea of emptiness and unable to thoroughly understand the doctrine, they should be informed that this *sutra* does not espouse the non-existence of all dharmas, but rather the non-existence of a self-nature of all dharmas, that is, all dharmas do not exist in or of themselves. Therefore, dharmas do not exist like real entities as seen by the ignorant uninitiated sentient beings through the influence of language and habit; yet, neither are they devoid of a temporary and language-designated existence nor of an inherent existence. This perspective may lead to the realization that all dharmas are between existing and non-existing, like dreams, their nature is but one.

To explain further with respect to form and emptiness, not only does one not differ from the other, but also whatever is one, that is the other. To say just that one does not differ from the other may be misunderstood -- some people may maintain that though the two are not different, but form is still form and emptiness is still emptiness, that given form and emptiness are not apart, they are still distinct. Hence it has to be said that whatever is one, and that is the other -- showing form and emptiness, not only are not apart, but also coincide. For instance, whatever is wave, that is water, and whatever is water, that is wave. Master Yun-chia said: "Beyond form there is no emptiness, so form is emptiness; beyond emptiness there is no form, so emptiness is form."

To summarize, form does not differ from emptiness because due to its dependent origination it is empty of its own existence. Emptiness does not differ from form because lack of inherent existence does not exclude the dependent arising of temporary phenomenon. Whatever is form, that is emptiness because dependent arising has no self-nature, its true state is emptiness of essentiality. Whatever is emptiness, that is form because being empty of its own existence any dharma originates from dependent arising. The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* states that "a Bodhisattva Mahasattva, while moving in the deep course of the profound *prajaparamita*, should not seek form (form does not differ from emptiness), should not seek sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness (sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness do not differ from emptiness); should not seek departure from form (whatever is form, that is emptiness), should not seek departure from sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness (whatever is sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness, that is emptiness). He

should contemplate the aggregate of form in this way and similarly for the other four aggregates he should also contemplate in this manner -- this is so called, ***‘the same is true of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness.’***”

To conclude, the five groups of attachments do not differ from the emptiness of inherent existence, the emptiness of inherent existence does not differ from the five groups of attachments; whatever are the five groups of attachments that is emptiness of inherent existence, whatever is emptiness of inherent existence that is the five groups of attachments. This is the epitome of the entire *sutra* and the very heart of *prajna*.

From the view of the “threefold contemplation” of the *T’ien-tai* school the first claim should be that *form does not differ from emptiness* is to break down uninitiated beings’ grasping of self and existence – to practice the contemplation on the void of all existences. The second claim is that *emptiness does not differ from form* is to break down the two vehicles’ attachment to Dharma, the doctrine of emptiness -- to practice the contemplation on the temporariness of all existences. The third claim is that *whatever is form, that is emptiness* and *whatever is emptiness, that is form* is to break down the Bodhisattva’s skillful means teaching which attach to both of the above -- to practice the contemplation on the truth of the middle.

Master Pao-chih-kung says in his *Song of Oneness of Deluded and Awakened States*:

“When deluded, one takes emptiness for form,  
When awakened, one regards form as emptiness,  
Deluded and awakened states have no real difference,  
Form and emptiness are after all the same.  
The fool calls south and makes for north,  
The sage reaches without west or east,  
Trying to seek the wondrous principle of the Tathagata,  
It is often done in a thought moment of the mind.  
The flaming sunshine never offers water,  
The thirsty deer madly charges forward.  
One’s own body is illusory without inherent existence,  
In emptiness one ever more seeks what is emptiness.  
Deluded and subverted to such extent,  
Worldly beings are like dogs barking at the thunder.”

***Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are neither originating nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing***

We have explained the previous section which states that the true state of all dharmas like the five groups of attachments is emptiness. In the next section the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara further elaborates this principle by again addressing Sariputra directly, expounding what is meant by all dharmas being marked with emptiness. *All dharmas*, in a narrow perspective, refer specifically to the five groups of attachments; but in a broader perspective, they include dharmas pertaining to the six sense faculties, the six sense objects, the six sense consciousnesses, the twelve links of dependent arising and the four noble truths.

***Marked with emptiness*** refers to the true state of void. All dharmas are marked with emptiness means that for all dharmas such as the five aggregates, their very embodiment is the true

state of void. It does not mean to describe the dharmas by emptiness apart from the dharmas themselves. Emptiness is like the mirror or the moon. Dharmas such as the five groups of attachments are like the flowers in the mirror or the moon reflected in the water; none are real entities. Though they are not apart from the body of the mirror or the moon, yet they are not the real body of the mirror or the moon. Therefore it is said that only emptiness is the true state of things. This is for the practitioner to contemplate and understand that dharmas such as the aggregates are all empty without essentiality -- to thus realize that this is the true state of void. The very nature of dharma lies in its lack of inherent nature. The very nature is the real nature or the true state; the lack of inherent nature is the mark of emptiness. This is a way to show that the broken facet is the revealing facet.

***Neither originating nor ceasing:*** Originating or ceasing refer to all conditioned dharmas -- originating by the coming together of causes and conditions and ceasing by the parting of causes and conditions. That is why all dharmas from dependent arising are said to originate and cease. This is from the perspective of whether objects or things exist or not. For instance, uninitiated sentient beings grasp the five groups of attachments as real existent, and consequently going from death to rebirth; thus, there is originating and ceasing. Neither originating nor ceasing is to point out that all dharmas are due to dependent arising, their very nature is emptiness. It refers to all dharmas' true state of void that is without originating or ceasing to begin with. The illusion of the goings-on of originating and ceasing is like the images in the mirror while the state without the goings-on of originating and ceasing is like the mirror itself. When there is an image, the mirror shows the image, when the image leaves, there is no trace in the mirror. Yet the mirror itself does not follow the coming and going of the images; there is not a single dharma to originate or cease, and that is why it is called neither originating nor ceasing.

***Neither defiled nor pure:*** Defiled or pure refer to the Buddha nature of sentient beings. When they are deluded, their Buddha natures are covered by ignorance, and their body and mind are obsessed by and attached to passions and thus called defiled. Since the Buddhas have broken down ignorance and relinquished all passions, their Buddha natures are revealed and they are able to attain the supreme *bodhi* and nirvana and thus called pure. Neither defiled nor pure refers to the Buddha nature itself, which is also the nature of emptiness of all dharma. It is neither defiled while in fetters, nor pure while no longer in fetters; it is like a shining mirror, capable of revealing the appearance of defilement or purity. However, the mirror itself, neither defiled nor pure, is fundamentally without defilement or purity to speak of. The true state of void of all dharmas is also without defilement or purity, and is thus said neither defiled nor pure.

***Neither increasing nor decreasing:*** Increasing implies complete and decreasing implies deficient. For instance, when uninitiated beings' deeds of good karma increase, then their deeds of evil karma decrease, and when the saint's pure deeds increase, his deeds with attachments decrease and these are referred to as increasing or decreasing. Neither increasing nor decreasing implies that though there is increasing or decreasing in the appearances of dharmas as deeds, there is no quantitative increasing or decreasing at all in the real state of emptiness of all dharmas. Instead, sentient beings and Buddhas share the same essence, with neither shortage nor surplus, not decreasing as the uninitiated, nor increasing as the saint. It is like the moon reflected in thousands of rivers -- though there is increasing and decreasing in the quantity of the moon's images in thousands of rivers, there is only one bright moon in the sky. Thus is it said neither increasing nor decreasing.

To further explain the meaning of this section from the perspective of the *Characteristic of Dharma* school, Han-ch'ing-ching, member of the Beijing Three-period Learning Association records:

“The dharmas pertaining to the five groups of attachments when viewed as conditioned dharmas, continue together as originating, not continue together as ceasing; but viewed from the ultimate reality, there is no real originating or ceasing because the dharmas, as soon as being originated, cease, not staying for even an instant. Since no inherent existence is to be had, what is the point of talking about originating or ceasing? This very state of neither originating nor ceasing is the characteristic of emptiness of all dharmas. Also, when the five groups are occupied with evil passions, they are defiled, and if they are devoid of passions, they are said to be pure. Yet, from the point of view of ultimate reality, the true nature is clear and pure. When it is entangled with passions, it is only dirtied by some guest or dust and temporarily said to be defiled; once it is away from defilement, it is temporarily said to be pure -- it is not as if it is first defiled and then purified. This very state of neither defiled nor pure is the characteristic of emptiness of all dharmas. Furthermore, when pure dharmas of the five groups increase, it is called increasing, and when the dharmas of attachments decrease, it is called decreasing. But viewed from ultimate reality, dharmas have no self-nature, be it defilement or purity, to begin with, how can there be increasing or decreasing? This very state of neither increasing nor decreasing is the characteristic of emptiness of all dharmas. Neither originating nor ceasing is the characteristic of emptiness realized by the Bodhisattva of the fourth and fifth grounds; neither defiled nor pure is the characteristic of emptiness realized by the Bodhisattva of the sixth and seventh grounds; neither increasing nor decreasing is the characteristic of emptiness realized by the Bodhisattva of the eighth ground.”

Another valuable reference was from Master Fa-tsang, the third patriarch of the *Hua-yen* school who also held the honorary title of Hsien-shou given by the Emperor. According to his *Outlined Commentaries of the Heart Sutra*, this section of the *sutra* has three explications:

1) To explain from the position on the path to Buddhahood: 1. Neither originating nor ceasing refers to the position of the uninitiated at the beginning of the path -- all uninitiated beings, continuing through long kalpas from one death to another rebirth, are at the point of originating and ceasing while the true void transcends this and thus is said to be not originating nor ceasing. 2. Neither defiled nor pure refers to the position of the Bodhisattvas at the middle of the path -- the Bodhisattvas, though having already carried out the pure practice, are not completely devoid of hindrance or attachment, and hence at the point of defilement and purity while the true void is away from this and thus is said to be not defiled nor pure. 3. Neither increasing nor decreasing refers to the position of Buddhahood at the finish of the path -- at this point, the present relinquishing of the hindrances of rebirth and delusion which had not been previously relinquished means decreasing, and the present perfection of the practice of myriad virtues which had not been perfected previously means increasing while the true void is away from this and thus is said to be not increasing nor decreasing.

The three positions on the path to Buddhahood also correspond to three aspects of Buddha nature: 1. Inherent Buddha nature at the beginning of the path, 2. Revealed Buddha nature at the middle of the path, and 3. Attaining enlightenment Buddha nature at the finish of the path. There is only one Buddha nature, it is just named differently along the path. Now the true void can be similarly named along the path. According to the theory of non-differentiation of the dharma realm these positions are named with corresponding meanings: the first is called the position of attachment, the next, the position of attachment and purity, and then the position of complete purity.

2) To explain with respect to doctrine or Dharma: Although true void is the same as form, form originates from dependent arising while true void does not originate, and likewise form ceases from the parting of causes and conditions while true void does not cease. Also it is not defiled though in attachment and it is not pure though out of hindrance. And further it is not decreasing though all

hindrances are relinquished and it is not increasing though various virtues are perfected. Originating and ceasing, defiled and pure, increasing and decreasing all refer to conditioned dharmas. When this is flipped over, the true state of void is revealed and is thus said all dharmas are marked with emptiness.

3) To explain in view of contemplation and practice: Regarding the three nature of experience consider the triple contemplation of non-essentiality. 1. With respect to the nature of experience as all encompassing grasping or pervasive attachment, contemplate the absence of inherent characteristic, to think of it as emptiness itself such that there is nothing to originate or cease. 2. With respect to the nature of experience as dependent arising, contemplate the absence of inherent existence, to think of it as continually changing, depending on causes and conditions that it has no self nature to be defiled or purified. 3. With respect to the perfect nature of experience, contemplate the absence of inherent nature, to think that with the relinquishing of the two previous views nothing is decreased and with the illumination and revelation by contemplative *prajna* nothing is increased. To put it simply, illusory dharma is like emptiness without originating or ceasing; dependent arising is like fantasy neither defiled nor pure; true void is the real state without increasing or decreasing. This triple contemplation of non-essentiality reveals the true void as the way things are.

To conclude by the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*, “Because they have to be named, they are referred to as form, sensation, perception, volition and consciousness. But referring to their self nature, they are without originating or ceasing, without defilement or purity. When the Bodhisattva Mahasattva practices the profound *prajnaparamita* in this way, he sees no originating, no ceasing, no defilement and no purity and because he sees none of these, he has no grasping or attachment.”

Also with respect to neither originating nor ceasing, the *Records of Transmitting Lamp* says the following: “Du-jen-hung questions Master None-abiding, ‘What is meant by not originating? What is meant by not ceasing? How does one attain liberation?’ The master replies, ‘While encountering outside realms, the mind is not aroused and name does not originate. Without originating there is no ceasing. Since there is no originating or ceasing, there will be no fetters by past seeds and liberation will be attained immediately.’”

Further, with respect to neither defiled nor pure, the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* states: “All dharmas are neither defiled nor pure and that is referred to as *prajnaparamita*. More specifically, the aggregate of form is neither defiled nor pure and similarly, the aggregates of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness are neither defiled nor pure and that is referred to as *prajnaparamita*.”

Furthermore, with respect to not increasing or decreasing, the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* states: “All dharmas are neither increasing nor decreasing and that is referred as *prajnaparamita*. Particularly, the aggregate of form is neither increasing nor decreasing and similarly, the aggregates of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness are neither increasing nor decreasing and that is referred to as *prajnaparamita*. Because there is no increasing or decreasing there is nothing attained.”

***Therefore in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, perception, volition or consciousness.***

This section illustrates the contemplation of the emptiness of the five groups of attachments. Since all conditioned dharmas do not go beyond the five aggregates, contemplation should begin with the empty nature of the five aggregates. The words ***therefore in emptiness*** continue to apply down to the phrase *no wisdom and also no attainment*. ***Therefore*** is a connecting word linking the phrase *all dharmas are marked with emptiness* of the previous section to the following phrase *no form, no sensation, perception, volition or consciousness* until *no wisdom and also no attainment*.

The two words *in emptiness* mean that in the true void of *prajna*, or in other words, in all dharmas that are marked with emptiness, not only is there no form, but also no sensation, perception, volition or consciousness. The word *no* in *no form* indicates the meaning of emptiness. The emptiness of the five groups of attachments has already been explained previously. Presently the word *no* applying to the twelve spheres, the eighteen elements, the twelve links in the chain of dependent arising, the four noble truths etc. connotes the same meaning of emptiness as in the explanation of the emptiness of the five aggregates.

“Illuminates and sees that the five groups of attachments are but emptiness” as explained in the previous section points to the illusory, false nature, and consequently the absence of self nature in the five aggregates. For the present, it will be reasoned from the true state of all dharmas that are marked with emptiness to explain that fundamentally there is no such illusory, false nature of the five aggregates to begin with. It will not be repeating the former explanation. As said before the five aggregates are empty; this breaks down common uninitiated beings’ grasping of the five aggregates as a real self. Because the five aggregates are false, illusory, and unreal in nature and after all empty, it follows that in the true void there is none of the five groups. Therefore it is said in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, perception, volition or consciousness.

According to the *Ta-chih-tu lun* volume seventeen, the practitioner should think this way: “If there is no form, then there will be no sufferings from hunger, thirst, cold or heat. The body as form is crude, heavy, faulted and defiled, false, illusory and without essentiality. It is the fruit of the coming together of karmic causes and conditions of the previous lives, the dwelling of various passions and distress. How does one avoid this entrapment of a body? One should contemplate the body as completely void in the inside like a cage or basket. Continuing this thought without relinquishing it one may cross beyond the aggregate of form and no longer sees the body. Once empty within then it is empty without.” It also states: “Like a bird shut in a bottle, if it transcends body it is in essence free -- referred to as settled in emptiness.” It further instructs: “The practitioner should contemplate the void and think that the conditions of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness are like afflictions or thorns, sufferings due to impermanence, deceptions without self nature, originating when circumstances join together, not really existent.”

***No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind; no visible form, sound, smell, taste, tangible object or mental object.***

This section demonstrates the contemplation of the emptiness of the twelve *spheres* or sense fields – the six roots or sense faculties and the six dusts or sense objects. The twelve spheres are also referred to as the twelve *entries* -- the latter is used in older translations and the former more recent translations. By *entry* it implies that when the six sense consciousnesses originate from the joining together of the six sense faculties and the six sense objects, the process of their interpenetrating and interacting will occur. *Sphere or sense field* has two implications here: 1. It connotes interdependence and reliance -- the six sense consciousnesses depend on the six senses and conditionally rely on the six sense objects. In other words, they are dependent on the six senses and conditioned by the six sense objects. 2. It connotes source of origination – the senses and sense objects are where the sense consciousnesses originate. For instance, visual consciousness originates from the contact of the eye with visible form and so forth until we come to mental consciousness originates from the contact of the mind with mental object.

The *Abhidharmakosa* states: “The meaning of *sphere* here is to designate the source range where the dharmas of mind and mental factors originate.” It further states: “Because it is able to lead to the origination of the dharmas of mind and mental factors, it is called *sphere*.” I believe that the word *entry* should refer to just the six sense faculties because the senses have the efficacy of penetrating into the sense objects while the sense objects do not necessarily have the efficacy of penetrating into the senses. As for the word *sphere* it refers to the encounter of the internal sense faculties with the external objects of the senses, dividing into six internal spheres and six external spheres, together called twelve spheres.

The six sense faculties are named six *roots* because root has the meaning of potential origination like the roots of plants and trees, which enable branches and leaves to originate. For instance, the root of eye gives rise to visual consciousness and so forth, until we come to the root of mind gives rise to mental consciousness, hence they are called roots. From the point of discernment between dharmas of form and dharmas of mind, dharmas of form refer to the first five roots while dharmas of mind refer to the sixth root, the root of mind. Root may be subdivided into two categories: 1. Floating on dust root and 2. Superior refined root, meaning superior to that which floats on dust.

1) The floating on dust root is so called because it is external and is also named assistant to root and dust. The floating on dust roots float in the exterior referring to the physical organs constituted by the four great elements. For instance, the organ of eye in the process of encountering the outside realms and giving rise to visual consciousness performs only an assistant function and therefore is appropriately named assistant to root and dust. Buddhist sutras describe these roots as, “eye like grape, ear like curly new born leaf, nose like inverted double claws, tongue like half moon, body like a string of drums, mind like seeing in a dark room.” From the biological perspective, for example, the eyeballs are named the organ for vision.

2) The superior refined root is so called because it is internal and is also named pure form root. It is constituted by the four pure and clear great elements and therefore pure and refined in substance like lapis lazuli. Contained in the five roots and not visible to the naked eye, it belongs to the nerve system and has the primary function of encountering outside objects and giving rise to sense consciousness. The first five roots of eye, etc. belong to the dharmas of physical form and are referred to as roots of form. For instance, corresponding to the root of eye are the visual nerves. The sixth root, the root of mind belongs to mental phenomenon and is therefore called root of mind. It has the corresponding organ of feeling and the corresponding nerves of feeling.

In order to distinguish the two perspectives, the organs of the floating on dust roots have no sensation while the nerve systems of the superior refined roots have sensation. For them to accomplish their functions, both of these must be in perfect working order. For instance, with visual nerves but without sound eyeballs that are the floating on dust root, it will be like the blind man not able to see any external object. On the contrary, with only the floating on dust root but without sound visual nerves, then it will be like the dead man, though possessing eye balls but still not able to see anything. This explains the root of eye, the remaining roots can be understood by similar examples and reasoning.

The six *dusts* are so named because dust implies defilement – the six dusts of visual form, sound, smell, taste, tangible object and mental object can defile sentient beings’ feeling and consciousness with attachments, making them not pure and clear and hence named dusts. Dust is also referred to as realm, the realms encountered by the six roots. For instance, the root of eye can see visual object and takes these form to be its realm and the root of ear can hear sound and takes sound to be its realm and so forth, until we come to the root of mind can associate with the realms of the five previous dusts and the realm of mental object.

Among the twelve spheres the first five roots and the first five dusts, all together ten spheres, are dharmas of form. The sphere of mind belongs to the dharmas of mind. As for the sphere of mental object, which is the realm corresponding to the root of mind, part of it belongs to the dharmas of the mind such as names, labels and ideas constructed by the mental consciousness. The other part is called form contained in the sphere of mental object and includes the following five types: 1. Extremely brief form --infinitesimal substances unable to be sensed by the first five sense consciousnesses 2. Extremely remote form – form separated by vast distance not visible to visual consciousness 3. Form induced by sensation – form without definite appearance 4. Form arising from pervasive attachment – images of the five roots and the five dusts created by mental consciousness 5. Liberated form originated from meditation – realms such as visible form, sound, smell and taste appearing in meditation. These five types of form all originate dependent on mental consciousness and belong to the sphere of mental object, hence called form contained in the sphere of mental object.

The *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* specially adds the word **no** to the six internal spheres of eye, etc. claiming that in the true void there is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind. It also adds the word **no** to the six external spheres, claiming that in the true void there is no visible form, sound, smell, taste, tangible object or mental object. In this manner the profound meaning of *prajna* is truly revealed. Previously it says that the five groups of attachments are empty, now it says that in the true void there are no twelve spheres, which have the same meaning as empty. **No** means no self nature which implies emptiness.

1) Why does it say that the six internal sense faculties or roots are empty? To begin with, the first five roots are roots of form constituted by the dharmas of the four great elements, of the derivatives of the four great elements and of the roots themselves. For instance, the eye is constituted by a group of conditions namely the four great elements, the derivatives of the four great elements and the eye itself, all together nine dharmas. Subtracting any one of these dharmas the eye is not established. Therefore which is the root of eye itself? One may search but will not be able to find a self because it originates from the coming together of a group of causes and conditions where no real inherent self may be attained. Its true nature is emptiness and thus the *sutra* says *no eye*. This is the way for the root of eye and it follows that the same should be for the other four roots of ear etc. They are also conditioned originations whose natures are empty. As for the sixth root of mind it is also without inherent nature due to dependent arising. From the Theravada perspective, as soon as the mental consciousness of the previous thought ceases, the root of mind is ready for the next thought. The *Abhidharmakosa* says: “The relentless ceasing is the sense faculty of mind.” According to the Mahayana tradition, the seventh consciousness is the sense faculty of mind, the mind for thought. Whichever way, there is no real self nature, no essentiality to be attained. Therefore, in the true void there is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind.

2) Why does it say that the six external sense objects or dusts are empty? To begin with, for the first dust of visible form or sense object of eye, they consist of visual objects with potential to construct and visual objects as product of construction. Visible forms with potential to construct are the four great elements namely, earth, water, fire and wind or solidity, fluidity, heat and motion. Visible forms as product of construction are the derivatives of the four great elements such as visible object, smell, taste and tangible object. These eight dharmas of potentiality and finished product unite and combine to establish the dust of visible form, receptive to the root of eye. The visible form here, limited to the realm of vision, encountered by the eye has two perspectives: 1. visible shape such as long, short, square, round, etc. 2. visible color such as blue, yellow, red, white, etc. All these visible forms originate from causes and conditions without self nature and are thus empty. Therefore it is said that in the true void there is no visible form.

The second dust of sound is the realm encountered by the root of ear. There are sounds with emotion, sounds without emotion, sounds perceptible to the mind, sounds not perceptible to the mind and various other dusts of sound. The third dust of smell or odor is the realm encountered by the root of nose. There are pleasant smell and unpleasant smell and the dust of smell can be further divided into the following three types: 1. natural inherent smell such as the fragrance of the fragrant wood coming from the wood itself as soon as the wood is originated. 2. smell from combination such as artificial, man-made perfume or the smell from delicious cooking by the chef. 3. smell from transformation such as the smells of fruits and vegetables -- sour when they are unripe and sweet when they are ripe. The fourth dust of taste is the realm encountered by the root of tongue -- such as bitter, hot, sour, or sweet taste. The fifth dust of tangible object is the realm encountered by the root of body such as touches of cold, warm, rough, smooth or crude, delicate, soft, hard, hunger, thirst, etc.

The sixth dust of mental object is the realm encountered by the root of mind. There are dharmas of mental factors (elements of the mind), non-corresponding dharmas of volition, dharmas of form without definite appearance and unconditioned dharmas – all these dharmas belong to the sphere of mental object. Since the various dharmas relating to the dusts are all without self nature, it is said that in emptiness there is no visible form, sound, smell, taste, tangible object or mental object.

Common uninitiated beings have no clear understanding of the dharmas of the roots and dusts and are thus misled to wrong views and wrong actions. Consequently they commit various karmic deeds and wander in the three realms needlessly going through sufferings. Furthermore, the six dusts or realms of the senses are also called the six thieves because combined with the six roots or sense faculties, they can rob a person of his originally owned merits – his wealth of Dharma. Therefore the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* says: “The Bodhisattva Mahasattva regards the six dusts as six great thieves, but why? Because they can snare and rob all good dharmas.” The Buddha once says to his disciples: “If one can guard the six roots like the turtle hides its six extremities (four feet, head and tail), then one is able to reach enlightenment.”

A true practitioner should see with his eyes but not be attached to the visible forms and should listen with his ears but not be attached to the sounds; he should contemplate that auditory and visual objects are only designated names. In the second volume of the *To Point A Finger at the Moon*, Pao-chih-kung says: “The six dusts are fundamentally empty, however common uninitiated beings try to grasp them out of illusion,” and “If one is not attached to the six dusts then every sentence he utters will pertain to non-arising only.” If one’s eyes are not attached to or grasping visible form and so forth, until we come to his mind is not attached to or grasping mental object, then all the twelve spheres become empty directly. But how does one do away with attachment and grasping? The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* says: “The sphere of visible form is but a name, and similarly, the spheres of sound, smell, taste, tangible object and mental object are all but names.”

1. Not attached to or grasping visible form: Visible forms like blue, yellow, red or white and visible forms like appearances of men and women all belong to the dust of form. Volume seventeen of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* states: “How does one relinquish visible form? How should one contemplate the dilemma from visible form? If a person grasps visible form, then various attachments will start fires with flames reaching everywhere, burning and harming his body.” For example, when gold and silver are on fire or when honey is heated to boiling, though they have attractive visible forms, they will burn the body and scorch the mouth; they should be urgently relinquished. When a person is attached to wonderful visible forms or delicious tastes he is under a similar influence. Causes and conditions such as these serve as warning for the craving of visible form.

2. Not attached to or grasping sound: The sound of men or women singing belong to the dust of sound. Volume seventeen of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* states: “How should one be forewarned about sound? One should think that the characteristic of sound is never staying -- as soon as it is heard, it ceases.” Yet, ignorant or deluded people, not understanding that impermanence, change and loss are the marks of sound and in a deluded state, become attached to the enjoyment of sound. With their thought dwelling on sound that is already in the past, they grasp such sound. For example, there were five hundred heavenly beings living in the mountains and there was a woman Kinnara living in the pond in the snow mountain. The heavenly beings heard the sound of her singing and lost their concentration in meditation. With thoughts of evil passion rising they were unable to control themselves. Even these sages upon hearing heavenly music could not help being distracted, not to mention human sound. Such causes and conditions serve as warning for the craving of sound.

3. Not attached to or grasping smell: Smells of food and drink or smells from the physical person of men or women belong to the dust of smell. Volume seventeen of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* states: “How should one be forewarned about smell? People may think that grasping smell is less likely to lead to evil deeds. They don’t know that attachment to smell is like opening gates for trappers -- allowing entry for grasping and entanglement.”

4. Not attached to or grasping taste: The taste of various delicacies, delicious food or drink all belong to the dust of taste. Volume seventeen of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* states: “How should one be forewarned about taste? One should be aware and realize that the grasping of delicious taste may lead to various sufferings like filling the mouth with molten bronze or chewing burning iron balls.”

5. Not attached to or grasping tangible object: Tangible object means the realm by touch. Soft or fine touch of a man or woman’s person or wonderful clothing, all belong to the dust of tangible object. Volume seventeen of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* states: “How should one be forewarned about tangible object? Objects of touch can be the greatest cause for grasping and attachment – the source of fettering the mind.” Why is that? The other four attachments each have its own share, its portion, but this covers the entire body’s consciousness. Because it has a wide sphere for origination, it gives rise to much more attachments and grasping. One should be aware that this grasping is rather difficult to relinquish.

6. Not attached to or grasping mental object: When the root of mind encounters the previous five dusts or sense objects, it distinguishes between the pleasant and the unpleasant and gives rise to favorable or unfavorable dharmas which are called the dust of mental object. The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* states: “With respect to dharma one should not think whether it is good dharma or not, whether it is conditioned or unconditioned dharma and whether it is dharma with attachment or without attachment.” Why is that so? It is because all such dharmas lack essentiality. If dharmas are without self existence then they cannot be minded or thought of. Without mindfulness and without thought then the dharmas follow the mind. Consequently, if such thoughts and the dharmas contained in such thoughts lack essentiality, then they do not have a sphere of existence. Therefore though the Bodhisattva practices all the *prajnaparamita*, in the midst the mind does not move because all dharmas are without self nature.

To summarize the above discussion of the twelve spheres of eye, etc. the word *no* has two connotations: 1. Apart from dependent arising the six roots of eye, etc. have no self nature and it follows that the six dusts of visible form, etc. cannot be established. 2. When the six roots of eye, etc. confront the six dusts of visible form, etc. if illusory thought or discernment does not arise, then such encounter leads to no false, illusory interaction of the roots with the dusts. For instance, the eye does not greedily crave the visible form or the ear does not greedily crave the sound. No greedy craving means emptiness. One should know that the six internal roots and the six external dusts are but illusory phenomena without real entity amidst the true state of things – emptiness. If one is able to practice the profound *prajnaparamita*

to awaken and realize that illusory appearances are empty, then these spheres are not real spheres. In the true void of all dharmas there is no appearance of such spheres and consequently no roots or dusts to speak of.

The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* states: “the sphere of eye is but a name and so forth, until we come to the sphere of mental object is but a name – this is what is meant by the sphere of eye is empty and so forth, until we come to the sphere of mental object is empty.” Thus the *sutra* says: *no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind, no visible form, sound, smell, taste, tangible object or mental object.*

***No eye element and so forth, until we come to no mental consciousness element.***

This section illustrates the contemplation of the emptiness of the eighteen elements. First the eighteen elements and then the contemplation of their emptiness will be explained. To start with the eighteen elements, the words *so forth, until we come to* are used for abbreviating and skipping. The *sutra* only states the first and the last elements skipping sixteen elements in between – showing efficient use of language by the translator. To be complete it should say: no eye element, no ear element, no nose element, no tongue element, no body element, no mind element; no visible form element, no sound element, no smell element, no taste element, no tangible object element, no mental object element; no visual consciousness element, no auditory consciousness element, no olfactory consciousness element, no gustatory consciousness element, no tactile consciousness element and no mental consciousness element. To categorize there are three types of elements: 1. six roots elements, 2. six dusts elements, and 3. six consciousness elements. So there are eighteen elements all together.

The word ***element*** has two meanings: 1. ***Element*** has the implication of causality. For instance, the six roots and the six dusts join together as the causes to give rise to the six consciousnesses and causes here comprise causality. Since consciousness originates from causes it has no self nature, yet though without self nature it does arise from causes and therefore the word element implies causality. In other words, when each consciousness originates, it must internally depend on the root and externally rely on the realm, without either one consciousness cannot originate. For example, if visual consciousness starts the function of recognition and discernment, first it needs to depend on the root of eye within and rely on the dust of form outside as the conditions. Only when the root and realm meet and join does consciousness rise. Visual consciousness originates in this way and so do the other five consciousnesses of ear, etc.

2. ***Element*** has the implication of category and boundary. Though the eighteen elements associate and interact with one another, there are clearly marked boundary between them indicating their different roles and functions. For instance, when the root of eye encounters the dust of visible form, visual consciousness arises and performs the function of discerning and recognizing visible shapes and colors. And so forth, until we come to the encounter of the root of mind with mental object and the origination of mental consciousness, whose role is to recognize and distinguish dharmas of form, dharmas of mind and unconditioned dharmas. Therefore as the sense consciousness arises depending on sense faculty and conditioned by sense realm, the various sense faculties, sense realms and sense consciousness differ in functions with clear boundaries. That is why besides the six roots elements and the six dust elements, the six consciousness elements also need to be defined to give a total of eighteen elements. This concludes the explanation of the eighteen elements as mentioned in the *sutra* from eye element up to mental consciousness element.

Next the explication will center on the contemplation of the emptiness of the eighteen elements. The word *no* is used twice, meaning emptiness as the *sutra* says, “no eye element, and so forth until we come to no mental consciousness element.” The *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* consists of two hundred and sixty words among which twenty-one are the words *no*. Just counting from the phrase “therefore in emptiness there is no form,” until the phrase “no wisdom and also no attainment,” there are thirteen *no*’s meaning to negate, to show emptiness. The word *no* has two implications here:

1. It means that all dharmas originate from dependent arising without inherent entity because they are empty of self nature. The six roots and the six dusts originate from causes and effects without essentiality because they are empty of self nature; the conditioned joining of the roots and the dusts give rise to the six sense consciousnesses and therefore the six sense consciousnesses also originate from dependent arising without essentiality because they too are empty of self nature. That is why it is *no* to everything, namely everything is empty. This does not mean that the dharmas are understood to be empty after contemplation by the practitioner but that the dharmas are empty of self nature to start with.

2. It refers to the state of the practitioner who is practicing the double contemplation of emptiness and awakening to the nature of void. He does not see the six roots of eye, etc. or the six dusts of visible form, etc. and thus without the illusory realms of roots and dusts, both roots and dusts are empty and therefore the *sutra* says *no* to all of these. The *Suramgama Sutra* says: “If a person realizes the truth and returns to the real state of things, the void in all the ten directions will disappear completely.” This is the meaning of *no* -- the meaning of emptiness.

The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* says: “The eye element is but a name, the elements of ear, nose, tongue, body and mind are but names; the visible form element is but a name, the elements of sound, smell, taste, tangible object and mental object are all but names; the visual consciousness element is but a name, the elements of auditory consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustatory consciousness, tactile consciousness and mental consciousness are but names.” The *Yogacara-bhumi* says:

“For the aggregates, the spheres and the elements,  
When away from the various natures and characteristics,  
The potential and the object for grasping --  
All these dharmas are without self.  
All are equal like the void.  
There is no self nature to originate,  
Because the nature of emptiness is the perfect calm state,  
Knowing that all dharmas are without essentiality,  
Then eighteen elements are thus empty.”

The above *sutra* and discourse, representing respectively the doctrines of the Empty school on the one hand and of the Characteristics (of Dharma) school on the other, validate the theory of the emptiness of the elements introduced by the *Heart Sutra* – no eye element, and so forth until we come to no mental consciousness element.

The Buddha speaks of the dharmas of the five groups of attachments and also the twelve spheres and the eighteen elements. These three categories of dharmas can be viewed from three perspectives:

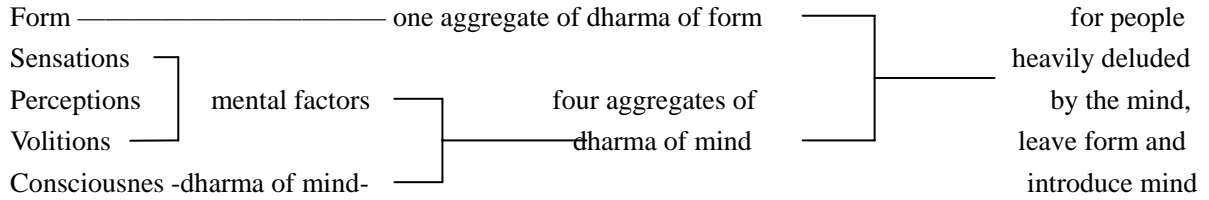
1. For those deluded more heavily by the dharmas of mind, the doctrine of the five aggregates is spoken in order to introduce the mind and put aside the material form. It is because in the dharmas of the five groups of attachments, the dharmas of the mind include the four groups of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness while the dharmas of form has only the group of form.

2. For those deluded more heavily by the dharmas of form, the doctrine of the twelve spheres is spoken in order to introduce the form and put aside the mind. It is because in the dharmas of the twelve spheres, the dharmas of form include the first five roots, the first five realms and half of the realm of mental object all together ten and a half spheres while the dharmas of mind has only the root of mind and half of the realm of mental object together only one and a half spheres.

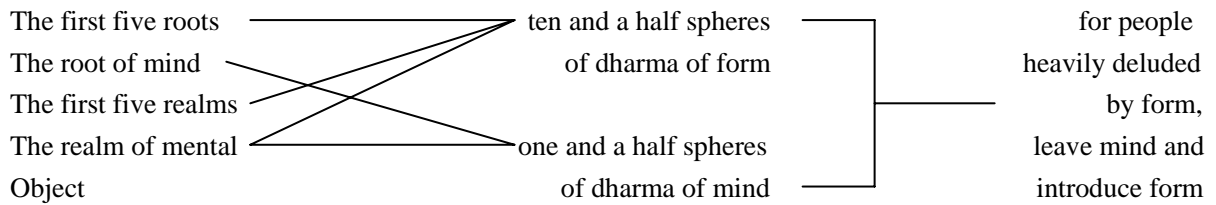
3. For those deluded heavily by both the dharmas of mind and the dharmas of form, the doctrine of the eighteen elements is spoken in order to introduce both the mind and the form. It is because in the dharmas of the eighteen elements, the dharmas of form include ten and a half elements as listed above in the twelve spheres while the dharmas of mind include the six consciousnesses, the root of mind and half of the realm of mental object all together seven and a half elements. The following table shows these perspectives more clearly:

Table for Introducing Dharmas of the Five Aggregates,  
the Twelve Spheres and the Eighteen Elements

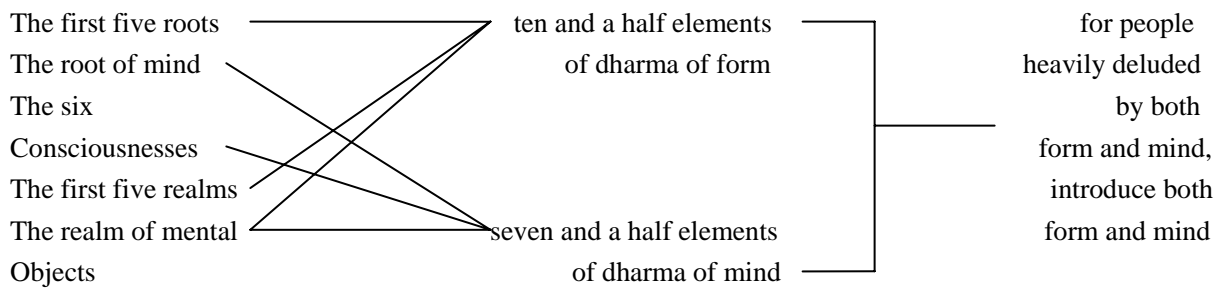
The Five Aggregates:



The Twelve Spheres:



The Eighteen Elements :



The *Abhidharmakosa* says: “For the sake of ignorance, karmic root and preference, the three doctrines --- aggregates, spheres and elements are spoken.” This can be explained as follows: The Buddha preaches to people in accordance to their propensities. 1. For the three ignorances: In enlightening the sentient beings, for those who are ignorant of mental factors the Buddha speaks of the theory of the five groups of attachments, elaborating dharmas of mental factors while brief in discussing dharmas of form and mind; for those who are ignorant of form He speaks of the theory of the twelve spheres, elaborating form while brief in discussing mind and mental factors; and for those who are ignorant of form and mind, He speaks of the theory of the eighteen elements, elaborating form and mind while brief in discussing mental factors. 2. For the three karmic roots: For those with superior karmic roots, He speaks briefly of the five aggregates and they will understand; for those with average karmic roots, He needs to speak of the twelve spheres for them to understand; and for those with inferior karmic roots, He must elaborate the eighteen elements. 3. For the three preferences or favorites: For those who favor brief explanations, medium explanations or elaborate explanations, the aggregates, the spheres or the elements need to be spoken respectively.

Chi-hoi summarizes this as: 1. In order to break down the delusion from the three kinds of ignorance, speak the aggregates, spheres and elements accordingly. 2. In order for those with the three karmic roots to understand, speak the aggregates, spheres and elements accordingly. 3. Following their natures and preferences, speak the aggregates, spheres and elements accordingly.

For sentient beings deluded and obsessed by the dharmas of both mind and form, the Buddha initiates both mind and form by the eighteen elements to lead them to the contemplation that all the dharmas of mind and form originate from illusory and temporary causes and conditions. Because sentient beings are obsessed and grasping, they become deluded and thus commit karmic deeds and wander in the cycles of rebirth. If they reach the source of such delusion and realize its lack of essentiality and by abandoning names and parting from characteristics, they will then no longer be obsessed by delusion and attachment.

Volume one of the *Five Teng-lu* says: “The World Honored One sees the monk named Black using magic powers to hold two flowering plants in his left and right hand to pay respect to the Buddha. The Buddha summons the heavenly being and the monk acknowledges. The Buddha says, ‘Put down what you grasp.’ The monk then put down the flower plant held in his left hand. The Buddha again instructs the heavenly being to put down what he grasps and the monk then put down the flower plant from his right hand. Again the Buddha tells the heavenly being to put down what he grasps. The monk says, ‘World Honored One, both of my hands are empty now, what are you telling me to put down further?’ The Buddha says, ‘I was not telling you to put down the flowers, you should relinquish the six external dusts, the six internal roots and the six consciousnesses in between. Once all are relinquished, the place where nothing can be further relinquished is the place where you may be liberated from the cycles of birth and death.’ Having heard this speech the monk awakens to the clear cognition of non-origination of all existence.”

The *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* is a Mahayana scripture whose goal is to break down the grasping by common uninitiated beings as well as the grasping by Theravada practitioners. What they grasp is all empty and they therefore need to be informed that there are no eighteen elements. *No* means empty and therefore one should contemplate the emptiness of the eighteen elements.

***No ignorance and also no ceasing of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to no old age and death and also no ceasing of old age and death.***

This section explains the contemplation of the emptiness of the twelve links of causes and conditions. It is also known as the contemplation of the emptiness of the twelve-fold formula of dependent arising, the twelve important fortresses or the twelve links in the chain of causality. Because these twelve links arise when causes and conditions come together, they are called dependent arising. Because dependent arising has no self nature, it is inherently empty. Presently the explication will be divided into four sections: 1. Flow of twelve links – contemplate in forward sequence the origination of suffering 2. Reverse flow of twelve links – contemplate in reverse sequence the ceasing of suffering 3. Relinquish flow of twelve links 4. Relinquish reverse flow of twelve links.

1. Explaining the flow of karmic causes and conditions: This is an analogy that likens common uninitiated beings' endless journey of life and death to water flowing and moving without rest as well as to wheels of cars turning ceaselessly. It is to show how to contemplate in the forward order the sequence of defilements and attachments:

1) ***Ignorance***: It has foolishness as its body and delusion and misconception as its nature. When one is deluded and misconceived toward the true state of the emptiness of self, then with respect to the five groups of attachments which are like magical creations he will falsely grasp the four great elements to be the physical body of the self and the images conditioned by the six sense objects to be the mental faculty of the self. This is how the ignorance of grasping the self originates.

Similarly, when one is deluded toward true principles, not understanding that all dharmas of the three realms originate from causal dependence without self nature, then he will falsely grasp various characteristics which are like magical appearances as real entities. This is how the ignorance of grasping Dharma originates. Since such ignorance result from delusion of the double emptiness of self and Dharma, it is also named delusion-of-principles ignorance. Further, if one maintains all magical phenomena and characteristics are real entities and thus ends up in cravings and passions, he is entertaining delusion-of-phenomena ignorance also named as twig or branch ignorance.

2) ***Formations***: Formations means volitions or intentional actions -- the performance of all wholesome or unwholesome karmic actions of body, speech or mind with attachments. Due to ignorance of delusion from true principles, encouraged by greed or other passions, one is capable of initiating actions, giving rise to the potential of committing karmic deeds.

3) ***Consciousness***: This refers to the eighth *alaya*-consciousness, incorporating various karmic seeds from morally wholesome or unwholesome karmic deeds committed in past lives with the dominant seeds in the lead. Directly conditioned by these past seeds, this consciousness, supposedly situated at the middle lower body, is the consciousness that enters the mother's womb at the moment of conception when the parents join together. This begins the process of rebirth and a new life comes into existence.

4) ***Name-and-form or mind-and-body***: Name indicates mind meaning the consciousness that comes in the womb while body refers to the physical make up from the parents. Upon first entering the womb the consciousness or mind is still vague and unclear; it only has the name of mind, but not yet the capacity for discernment and therefore is called name. Also at first entering the womb the physical make up is not yet completed, lacking fully functioning six sense faculties; it cannot be correctly called body but only form. At this point the mental and physical make ups join together and the human fetus is formed -- the Buddhist sutra refers to this as the position of name-and-form.

5) **Six entries:** Six entries are the six roots or sense faculties. From the time of conception, changes occur every seven days. By the sixth seven days it is called the position of hair, nail and teeth and at the seventh seven days it is called the position of completed roots. When the six sense faculties start to function and enter into contact with the six dusts or sense objects, it is called the position of six entries. Beginning from name-and-form to six entries and all the way till birth, there are altogether thirty-eight seven-days in between, all of them belonging to positions in the womb. This is what commonly referred to as ten months in the womb.

6) **Sense-contact:** Sense-contact means the contact of the sense faculties with the sense objects. From new born until two or three years old, the six internal roots encountering the six external dusts give rise to the six sense consciousnesses. The joining together of these three contribute to sensations and experiences from the sense-contact. However, at this point the child has only simple awareness and feelings, not yet the ability to clearly distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant feelings or sensations. This is called the position of sense-contact.

7) **Feelings:** Feelings equals sensations here. From four or five years old till eight or nine years old, as the child gets older, his understanding and knowledge increase. When his senses encounter the sense objects, regarding smooth or rough circumstances giving rise to pleasant or unpleasant feelings, his mind will acknowledge. He will distinguish between favorable or unfavorable clothes or foods paying attention to his enjoyment. However, at this point his mind is not deeply engaged in his likes and dislikes and so this is called the position of feelings.

8) **Cravings:** Cravings are greedy desires – the originating of attachment to pleasant and unpleasant feelings while encountering favorable or unfavorable realms. From the age of eleven or twelve till the age of twenty the mind experiences very strong likes and dislikes. At this point the mind is obsessed with greedy cravings and passions, its nature is defilement and attachment, the source for wandering in the cycles of rebirth -- such is the position of craving.

9) **Grasping:** Grasping comes from attachment and clinging to what one craves. From the age of twenty onward, human greed becomes very strong. Toward favorable realms and pleasant experiences one seeks in all directions and by all means, putting all mental and physical efforts to grasp and possess.

10) **Becoming:** Becoming means becoming reborn to the realm of desire, becoming reborn to the realm of form or becoming reborn to the form-less realm. Due to craving and consequently grasping of the mind one seeks desirable realms of the five sense objects and commits wholesome and unwholesome karmic deeds with attachments. From such karmic causes one becomes owner of their karmic fruits --- birth and death in the three realms. Therefore it is called becoming because it is the becoming of karma.

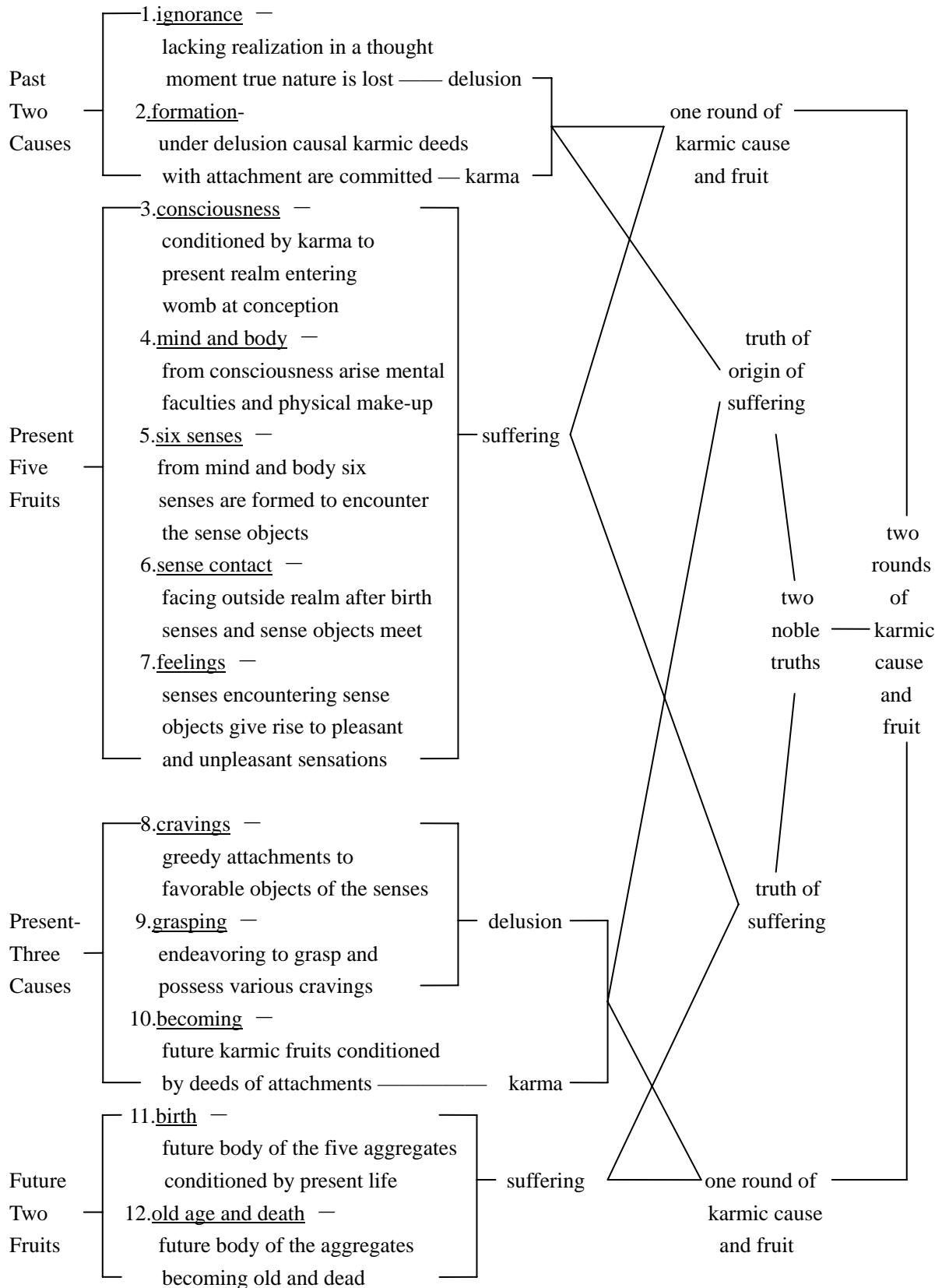
11) **Birth:** Birth is to be born, to start a new life. Due to the karmic deeds conditioned by grasping and committed in the present life, individual karma will follow the person at death and this karmic force will lead to conception and rebirth and contribute to karmic retribution to be received in the next life. The primary karmic retribution refers to the physical body and includes birth, physical appearance, death and afflictions due to body or weapon injury. The dependent karmic retribution pertains to the place of abiding and does not go beyond the three realms of desire, form and form-less.

12) **Old age and death:** This means from birth to old age and then death. When the various roots or sense faculties deteriorate it is called old age and when the body deteriorates and life ceases it is called death. Human life has birth and must have death, and in this manner life, death, death, life, rebirth and re-death -- the karmic causal relationship over three-life times continues without stop. If one has not met the coming into this world of the Buddhas, has not heard the rightful doctrines of the Buddhas, has not practiced according to Buddhist Dharma and has not learned the contemplation of the ceasing of the twelve links of dependent origination, then one will continue suffering through the cycles of birth and death,

forever flowing without escape.

The following table illustrates this principle:

**Brief Table of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination  
Relating to Karmic Relationship over Three Lives**



Thus the twelve-fold formula begins with mental formation conditioned by ignorance and ends with old age and death conditioned by birth. This is what meant by “this existing, that exists; this arising, that arises;” the cycles of karmic causality as illustrated over three lives continuing without end serve as an elaborated explanation of the noble truths of suffering and the origin of suffering -- the first and the second of the four noble truths that constitute the foundation of Buddhist doctrine.

Worldly people do not understand this principle. While some say this world is created by God, others believe in destiny and still others talk about determinism. Actually none of these theories are quite to the point. The Buddha says that sentient beings, from delusion to karmic deeds and then to suffering, flow through cycles of birth and death. If they do not believe in karmic causality, do not contemplate dependent arising, do not stop delusion and karma but continue in the cycles of rebirth without end, are they not forfeiting the opportunity of a lifetime in the human world? Are they not making a journey for nothing?

Once a Japanese monk named Lotus-thus composes the *Song of White Bones*:

“Beauty in the morning bleached bones at night,  
Wind of impermanence blows to close both eyes,  
Beauty’s countenance of peach blossom suddenly lost,  
Relatives congregate to suffer but not salvage the loss!”

An old sage also says:

“To the churning sea of suffering drawn solely by deeds of karma,  
The deluded one awakens not even for half a split second;  
If no attempt is made to recite Amita Buddha in this lifetime,  
What a forfeit it shall be for a journey through Mankind!”

Does not careful contemplation bring up some alarm!

2. Explaining the ceasing of karmic causes: This is to demonstrate how to contemplate in reverse order the sequence of pure and clear mind to cease and extinguish passions and distress, life and death and to return to the true state of nirvana. If sentient beings become tired of and wish to relinquish the sufferings of old age, afflictions and death and if they meet Buddhas and good sages well versed in Buddhism, then they may learn and practice conduct, meditation and wisdom. With respect to the dharmas of the twelve links of causes and conditions they can employ contemplative *prajna* to contemplate and observe in reverse order and to realize that old age and death are conditioned by birth, and continue contemplating in reverse until realizing that formations are conditioned by ignorance.

Next contemplate ignorance -- it too has no inherent nature; it only comes into being through illusion and subverted thought. Subverted false illusion is the very source of various sufferings, there is no other. Therefore, right mindfulness, the contemplation from true doctrinal perspective without the arising of subverted thought or delusion, is called the wisdom to contemplate the causes and conditions – the very same contemplative *prajna*. With this rightful wisdom one may break down ignorance; once ignorance is extinguished, formations also cease. Then contemplate all the way in the forward order until birth ceases and thus old age and death cease. This is what meant by “this not existing, that does not exist; this ceasing, that ceases.” It is an elaborated explanation of the two noble truths of the cessation of

suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering – the so-called contemplation of turning back and ceasing.

3. Explaining the relinquishing of the flow of karmic causes: The above dharmas of the twelve links of causes and conditions are the Buddha's proposal for the vehicle of *pratyeka Buddhas*, namely for them to contemplate and observe both the flow of karmic causes and the ceasing of karmic causes in order to be awakened to and liberated from the cycles of life and death and thus attain self enlightenment. Because practitioners of this vehicle have not yet a thorough understanding, they still grasp the real existence of the dependent arising of defiled or pure dharmas. Presently this section of the *Heart Sutra* means to break down simultaneously the grasping of both the flow and the ceasing of karmic causes relating to the twelve-fold formula. Thus it states that in the true void of all dharmas wherein all dharmas are marked with emptiness, there is no dependent arising of either the defiled or the pure causes and conditions and consequently any such grasping ought to be relinquished.

To relinquish the flow of karmic causes is to break down the flow of the dharmas of the twelve links of defilements and attachments as stated in the *sutra*: “no ignorance,...and so forth until we come to no old age and death.” It means that when common uninitiated beings see the links from ignorance, formations, etc. until old age and death, they believe in the inherent existence of these dharmas and are thus caught in the flow of the cycles of life and death. Actually in the empty nature of all dharmas, these dharmas relating to the twelve-fold formula are all like dreams and magical creations, seemingly existent but in reality without essentiality, without any characteristic of flow to be attained. Therefore the *sutra* emphasizes “no ignorance,.. and so forth until we come to no old age and death,” in order for common uninitiated beings to understand that their all-pervasive grasping of the defiled twelve links of conditioned origination is empty.

4. Explaining the relinquishing of the ceasing of karmic causes: This is to further break down the grasping of ceasing of the twelve links of causes and conditions. In view of the true nature of emptiness of all dharmas, since the twelve links of causality are like dreams and magical creations, seemingly existent but actually without essentiality such that the forward flow of karmic causes are non-existent to begin with, then where is the need to turn back and cease these causes? In order to achieve the understanding that all-pervasive grasping of the dependent arising of the twelve pure and clear links are but emptiness, the *sutra* states: “and also no ceasing of ignorance, ... and so forth, until we come to ... and also no ceasing of old age and death.” Ceasing means relinquishing, being liberated from. Because the true state is emptiness there is nothing to cease.

Master Kuei-chi of the T'ang dynasty says: “From ignorance to old age and death, these are only false and temporary names without self nature and therefore the word *no* is used to refer to them. The word *ceasing* also means emptiness here, namely even emptiness is empty and that is why the *sutra* says no ceasing of ignorance and etc, up to no ceasing of old age and death.” This is how to break down the attachment to the ceasing of the twelve links of causes and conditions.

Therefore, not only is there no flow of karmic causes, as seen by common uninitiated beings, but also there is no turning back or ceasing of karmic causes as perceived by *pratyeka Buddhas*– that is to say, not only life and death are empty but nirvana is empty as well. In the true state of emptiness of all dharmas, life and death and nirvana are equal without difference.

## *No suffering, the origin, the cessation and the way.*

This section explains the contemplation of the emptiness of the dharmas of the four truths. The four truths are suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering and are also named the four noble truths. Noble means right, truth means principle though it also implies investigation of its truthfulness. Together they indicate that these four right principles or four truths can only be reached by noble sages who must first investigate the real state of these principles and realize that they are true, not false, and only then can they understand these unchanging true principles. That is why they are called noble truths. The Buddha says in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*: “Let the sun be cold, and let the moon be hot, but never let the four noble truths spoken by the Buddha be different.”

After the Buddha attains enlightenment, he lives out his life preaching Buddhist Dharma. He first speaks of the principle of generosity, next the principle of conduct, then the principle of transcending to higher realm. In accommodating the worldly ways, He first speaks of the dharmas of karmic causality relating to rebirth in the human or heavenly realms. Further, He speaks of the dharmas of the four noble truths and the twelve links of conditioned origination for transcending this world to realms beyond. Sometimes He speaks simply, in other words, summarizes, such as using the four words, *suffering, origin, cessation and way*, to include and combine the karmic causes and conditions that relate to both the conditioned world and the transcendence to unconditioned realms. Other times He speaks elaborately, in other words, inductively and conductively, such as inducting from the doctrine of the four noble truths to broaden them into the principle of the twelve links of conditioned origination.

In this manner dharmas are spoken to accommodate the various different fundamental natures of sentient beings: those who reach enlightenment after understanding the twelve-fold formula of causes and conditions are named *pratyeka Buddhas*, and those who become awakened after listening to the four noble truths are named *sravaka*, Hearers or disciples, whose goal is *arhatship*. In comparing the dharmas of the four noble truths to that of the twelve links of karmic causality, the dharmas of the four noble truths explain two rounds of cause and fruit, one round for the conditioned world or *samsara* and the other round for *nirvana* and the transcendent path while the dharmas of the twelve-fold formula explain two rounds of causes and fruits over three lifetimes, offering a much more illustrative and clearer explication.

First, the four noble truths will be approached from the perspective that they exist in a this-worldly manner, and then, the explanation will focus on the theory that they are empty as well. The *sutra* says: “For those who seek the vehicle of *arhat*, the necessity of the four noble truths are spoken.”

**1. The noble truth of suffering:** Suffering implies a sense of compulsion, of being pressured – the mind and body of sentient beings often experience distress forced on them by impermanence. The birth of sentient beings and the place or situation to which they are born both have the nature of suffering, both may pressure and disturb the body and mind robbing them of peace and contentment and are thus named the noble truth of suffering. To speak briefly, there are three sufferings or eight sufferings; to speak specifically then there are measureless sufferings. The *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “The countless sentient beings have three physical sufferings, namely, old age, bodily afflictions, and death; three mental sufferings, that is, lust, anger and delusion; and three sufferings due to next life – being born to the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, or animals.” Besides, at any time, anywhere, there may be natural disasters or manmade perils; mugging and theft by robbers and thieves; wars and famines; cold, heat, epidemics. Hence the Buddha says human existence is full of immeasurable kinds of sufferings.

Sufferings may also be categorized as the following three:

- 1) Sufferings due to affliction: Unfavorable circumstances may cause further unpleasant feelings over the body which is itself a source of afflictions.
- 2) Sufferings due to change: When the enjoyment of pleasant feelings changes, suffering may originate.
- 3) Sufferings due to conditions: Feelings neither unpleasant nor pleasant may often change due to impermanence or shifting of circumstances – condition has the very implication of changing and shifting. The *Suramgama Sutra* describes thus: “Like a powerful waterfall, the waves continue, the ones in the front and back not surpassing each other.”

An old sage composes a verse contemplating the mysterious shifting of the sufferings due to conditions:

“A piece of hair from the eyelash,  
On the palm, attracts no notice,  
Left in the eye,  
Does great damage and disturbance;  
The fool is like the palm,  
Unaware of the shift in suffering due to conditions,  
The sage is like the eye,  
Being affronted he feels displeasure and distaste.”

The *Dhammapada* says: “Once there were four bhikkus discussing the sufferings of the world. The first claimed lust distressing the person is the most insufferable. The second claimed hunger and thirst assaulting the body is the most insufferable. The third claimed anger flaming the mind is the most insufferable. The fourth claimed fear is the most insufferable. Each of them insists themselves to be in the right and eagerly accuses the others to be in the wrong. The Buddha learned of this, and then told all the bhikkus, ‘Your discussion shows no understanding of the meaning of suffering. You should know that the body is the base of all suffering, the source of all afflictions, you should seek its cessation in nirvana – this is the utmost happiness.’”

Besides the above there are also the eight sufferings: birth, old age, bodily afflictions, death, having to leave loved ones, having to meet hated ones, unable to satisfy cravings, and inflammation of the five groups of attachments. All these sufferings are realities that human life must confront.

**2. The noble truths of the origin of suffering:** Origin has the implication of cause and effect. Because the raging of various passions, karmic deeds are committed and the joining of these two will draw and congregate all sufferings through life and death. The *sravaka* or Hearers whose goal is *arhatship* investigate and observe that desires, delusions and karmic deeds can indeed initiate and accumulate sufferings of cycles of life and death and thus named the origin of suffering. It means that the sufferings that sentient beings experience in this lifetime do not fall from heaven or rise from earth and besides, nor are they punishments from God or gifts from other humans; but rather, they come in response to the delusory karmic deeds acquired by themselves in their own past lives. The collection from the past constitutes the cause and the experience of this lifetime constitutes the fruit. The origin may also be named passions, and passions in turn may be named delusions. Because of delusions karmic deeds are performed, and because deeds are committed, karmic fruits are summoned. Therefore every wholesome or unwholesome karmic deed in the world and its corresponding fruit of pleasure or suffering falls under the name of karmic retribution of causes and fruits.

According to the *Tien-t'ai* school there are two kinds of distressing passions: 1) basic passion, namely the delusions hindering knowledge of the ultimate reality, 2) twig or branch passion, namely, delusions from incorrect views and thoughts.

If according to the *Ideas-only* school then:

1) basic passions include six, namely greed, anger, delusion, pride, doubt and wrong view,  
2) twig or branch passions, also called follow-up passions include twenty: 1- eight great follow-up passions, namely distraction, stupor, lack of faith, laziness, indulgence, loss of mindfulness, abstraction and wrong knowledge, 2- two medium follow-up passions namely no shame and no regret, 3- ten small follow-up passions namely, indignation, sneakiness, stinginess, jealousy, blame, harm, hatred, flattery, bragging and snobbery. All such deeds of passions and delusions are causes for the suffering of human existence and are collectively named the noble truth of the origin of suffering.

**3. *The noble truth of cessation of suffering:*** Cessation implies potential enlightenment. Cessation means fading and relinquishing. It indicates that in the realm of true thusness, all conditioned dharmas with attachments cease. When the practitioners of the vehicle of *arhat* are tired of the sufferings from life and death, they investigate and observe nirvana to be the true happiness of letting-go and ceasing. As fettering karmic deeds are extinguished, there are no longer toils of suffering through life and death, hence the name noble truth of cessation of suffering. It means the ceasing of suffering from karmic fruit from one's past lives in the three realms and the ceasing of further collection of karmic cause from views and thoughts. Because suffering and its origin have been ceased and the return to the true principle has been realized, it is possible to reach enlightenment and attain the quiet peace and happiness of nirvana. Practitioners of the Theravada tradition, favoring the nirvana offered by the noble truth of cessation, can eventually awaken to the true state of emptiness of self through the following path: tiring of suffering, relinquishing its causes and aspiring to the cessation of suffering and finally practicing the way leading to cessation. However this differs in doctrine from the awakening to the emptiness of all dharmas and the vision of non-abiding nirvana, as sought by the Mahayana tradition.

**4. *The noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering:*** The *way* implies appropriate or valid practice --meaning the potential to reach. This is meant for the Hearers, disciples who aspire to *arhatship*, to investigate and judge that the path of non-attachment, namely the cultivation of conduct, meditation and wisdom is a path truly enabling practitioners to reach nirvana. Because it entails knowing suffering, learning its origin, aspiring for its cessation and practicing the way for its cessation, it may be applied to all occasions without fail and is thus named the noble truth of the way. The way is a cause to transcend this world. Those whose goal is *arhatship* must practice various methods of the way in order to forever part from the sufferings pertaining to the cycles of life and death and to awaken to the bliss of liberation and nirvana.

Regarding the noble truth of the way, to speak simply it means the path of studying conduct, meditation and wisdom, but to speak elaborately, it offers thirty-seven methods or means contributing to the path:

1) Four Mindfulness (*satipatthana*) or four establishing of mindfulness:

- 1- the contemplation of the body as impure, referring to the aggregate of form,
- 2- the contemplation of feeling as suffering, referring to the aggregate of sensation,
- 3- the contemplation of the state of mind as impermanent, referring to the aggregate of consciousness,
- 4- the contemplation of mental content as without self, referring to the aggregates of perception and volition.

2) Four Right Endeavors:

- 1- to prevent un-arisen unwholesome states
- 2- to relinquish arisen unwholesome states
- 3- to arouse un-arisen wholesome states
- 4- to make perfect arisen wholesome states

3) Four Bases of Success in Concentration:

dedication, mindfulness, efforts and wisdom

4) Five Spiritual Faculties:

faith, efforts, mindfulness, meditation and wisdom

5) Five Spiritual Powers:

enforcement of the same five in 4)

6) The Seven Factors of Enlightenment:

mindfulness, investigation of doctrine, energy, joy, relaxation of body and mind, concentration and equanimity

7) The Noble Eightfold Path:

right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration

The central theme of these thirty-seven methods is the noble eightfold path. Right view and right thought belong to the study of wisdom; right speech, right action and right livelihood, to the study of conduct; right mindfulness and right concentration, to the study of meditation; and right effort, common to the study of all three disciplines of non-attachment. When the Buddha was near nirvana he said to Subhadhabhra, "Because there is the noble eightfold path, there are the four noble fruits for the *sangha*; without the noble eightfold path, there are no four fruits for the *sangha*."

Now to summarize the four noble truths: Investigating reality, one may learn that the cycles of life and death in the three realms are enforced by attachments and grasping. The true state is suffering, unable to give happiness – this is the so-called noble truth of suffering. Observing reality one may know that karmic deeds committed through delusory passions such as greed are truly the source of the becoming of karma. As the result, rounds of rebirth in the three realms are unable to be escaped – this is the so-called noble truth of origin of suffering. These two truths simply explain the karmic cause and fruit of the conditioned world. Further, investigating reality, one may realize that the true state of nirvana constitutes the happiness of extinguishing and ceasing. It means parting forever from cycles of life and rebirth – this is the so-called noble truth of ceasing of suffering. Observing reality, one may believe that

conditioned dharmas without attachment are methods for the transcendent path. They can truly transport practitioners to the realm of nirvana – this is the so-called noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. These two truths simply explain the karmic cause and fruit of transcending this world. Similar to the process of eradicating afflictions -- knowing the affliction, its cause, its eradication and the method for the eradication, the four noble truths offers the contemplation of the suffering of life and death, the cause of the suffering, the ceasing of the suffering and the way to cease the suffering. However only the noble saints understand these truths and therefore are named the four noble truths.

After the Buddha reaches enlightenment, he sets in motion the wheel of dharma for the first time and expounds the principle of the four noble truths to five bhikkus in the Deer Park at Isipatana near present day Benares. At the time the Buddha speaks of three aspects of knowledge regarding the four noble truths, or figuratively, makes three turns of the wheel of dharma for each of the four noble truths and thus produces twelve instructions:

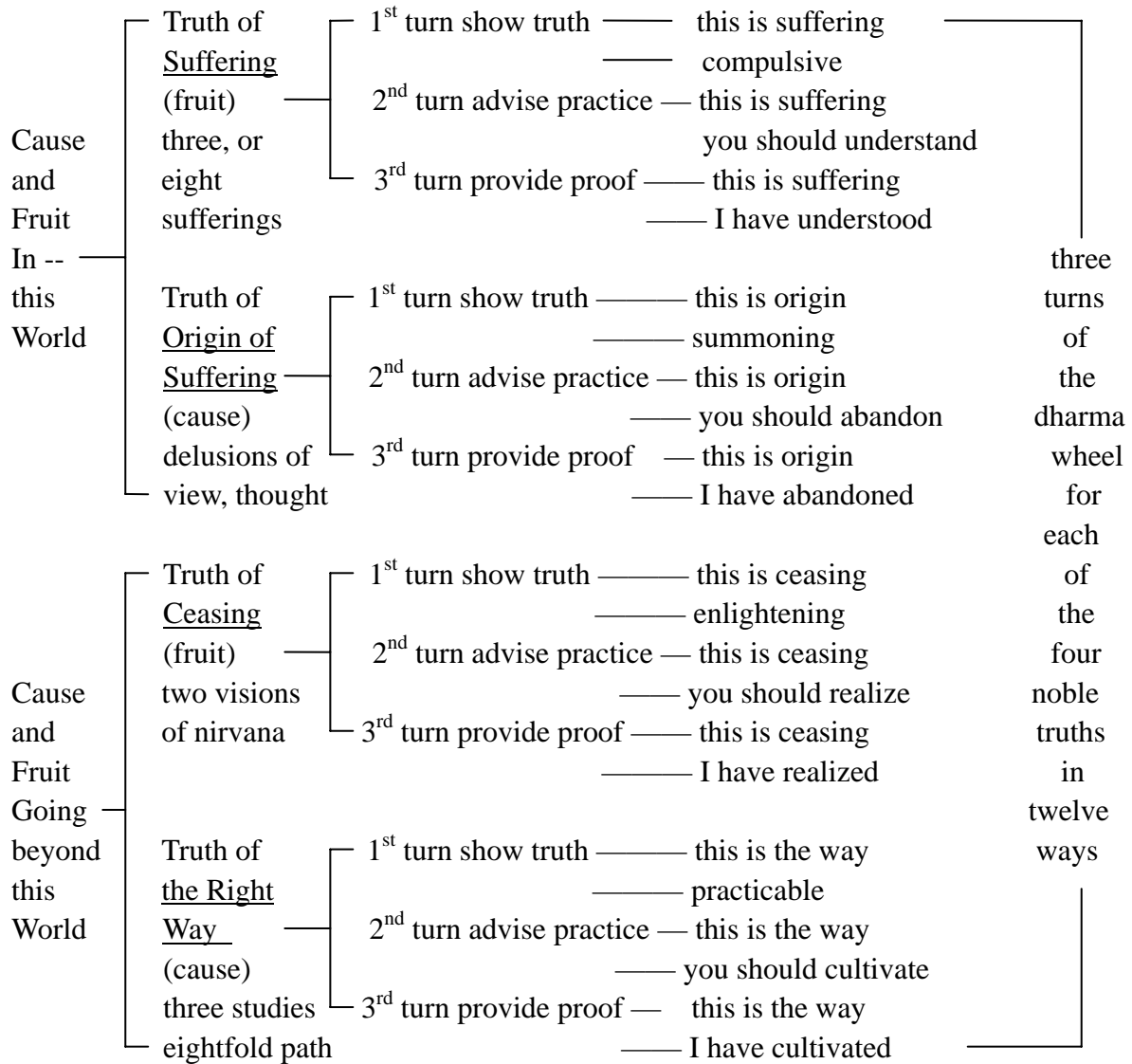
1) Turning the wheel to show the truth: for those with advantageous capacity -- demonstrating to them the true knowledge of each of the four noble truths. For example, with respect to the noble truth of suffering, the truth of suffering is stated and its compulsive nature is pointed out. Once the Dharma is heard, they may awaken directly.

2) Turning the wheel to advise practice: for those with average capacity -- warning and persuading them that a specific practice regarding each truth should be carried out. For example, with respect to the noble truth of suffering, not only is the true state of suffering stated, but instruction for full understanding is also given in order for them to realize and reach awakening.

3) Turning the wheel to provide proof: for those with less favorable capacity – relating the Buddha's own experience as evidence to convince them that a specific practice regarding each truth should be carried out. For example, with respect to the noble truth of suffering, the Buddha says that this noble truth of suffering has been fully understood by Him in order to enable them to realize and awaken.

For a simple and clear illustration, the following table combines the principle of the twofold karmic causes and fruits in the conditioned world and for transcending this world together with the twelve instructions regarding three turns of the Dharma wheel for each of the four noble truths.

Twofold Karmic Causality of the Four Noble Truths



It is for the disciples favoring the vehicle of *arhatship* that the Buddha speaks of the four noble truths. He turns the wheel of Dharma three times for each of the four truths resulting in twelve ways, guiding them to understand suffering, to abandon the origin of suffering, to aspire to the ceasing of suffering and to cultivate the way leading to the cessation of suffering. When these practitioners complete successive levels of accomplishment on the path to *arhatship*, they are referred to as *sravaka*, Hearers with the following four noble fruits:

1. The fruit of *srotapanna* translated as *stream-attainer*: To achieve stream attainment, the practitioner must employ the eight perseverance and the eight wisdoms, namely the sixteen non-attaching thoughts, to completely eradicate the eighty-eight delusions of view and the precept of the three realms. This enables the practitioner to see the principle of the four noble truths and thus enter the standing of saints. He will acquire purity of the Dharma eye and using this pure eye of *prajna*, he may contemplate and see the empty nature of all dharmas. The attainment of this first fruit ensures no further drop to the lower evil realms, and at the most, seven returns to suffer life and death in the human realm before the attainment of the fruit of *anagamin*.

2. The fruit of *saskragamin* translated as *once-returner*: The previous initial fruit eradicates the delusions of views such that the mind is no longer deluded toward true state of things; now the second and following fruits eradicate delusions arising from practice, enabling the mind to be no longer deluded toward thoughts of worldly phenomenon. There are nine kinds of delusions of practice in the realm of desire. When the first six kinds are eradicated, the fruit of *once-returner* is attained. Since there are still three kinds of such delusions left, the practitioner must return to the human realm for one further rebirth and thus it is named the fruit of *once-returner*.

3. The fruit of *anagamin* translated as *non-returner*: The saint who attains this fruit has eradicated the remaining three delusions of practice of the realm of desire. The saint has completely extinguished all passions arising from delusions of practice in the realm of desire, thus, he has no further cause to be reborn. He is no longer subject to rebirth to the realm of desire and hence he is named *non-returner*.

4. The fruit of *arhat*, sometimes also referred to as “worthy of an offering” or “non-born”: This is the highest noble fruit for the *sravaka* or Hearer with the goal of *arhatship*, the sainthood. After the previous three noble fruits, the fourth fruit further requires the eradication of eight grounds of delusions arising from practice in the two upper realms (of form and form-less). Each of the eight grounds consists of nine kinds of delusions so together they add up to seventy-two kinds of delusions of practice. When the nine kinds of delusions of practice in the realm of desire are added to the seventy-two, the total of delusions of practice sum to eighty-one. It is when all these delusions arising from practice are eradicated that the fourth noble fruit is attained. The saint will no longer return through the round of rebirth to any of the three realms (desire, form, and form-less). Therefore the *arhat* is also named non-born.

Among these noble fruits, the initial fruit is called the path of seeing, the second and the third fruits are called the path of practicing and the fourth fruit of *arhat* is called path of non-learning. The first three fruits are referred to as “with learning,” the fourth is referred to as “non-learning.” Non-learning means “whatever should be known is already known, whatever should be eradicated is already eradicated, whatever should be realized is already realized, whatever should be practiced is already practiced; living is already relinquished, Buddhist practice is already established, work is already

completed, no further existence is required.” It is not up until this point that the practitioner has forever relinquished all passions arising from the three realms and has forever parted from the suffering of cycles of life and death. At the time of the Buddha’s nirvana when direct experience of the Buddha still remained, Buddhism made no distinction between the awakening by the Buddha or by the *arhat* to the virtue of relinquishment. The Mahayana doctrine of *prajna* also recognizes nirvana as the fruit of relinquishment shared by all three vehicles.

The dharmas of the four noble truths have been explained in the above. In the following the focus will be on the meaning of “no” suffering, origin of suffering, ceasing of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. When the word *no* is added to the four truths, their meanings are quite different. Understanding the suffering, abandoning the origin, aspiring the ceasing and practicing the way are methods practiced by those following the path to *arhatship* of the Theravada tradition. Now the *Heart Sutra* belongs to methods practiced by the Bodhisattva of the Mahayana tradition. It expounds that all dharmas -- the aggregates, the spheres, the elements, up to the twelve links of dependent arising, are but empty. As for suffering, its origin, its cessation and the way, they are also dharmas of conditioned origination, and also without inherent nature.

However, common uninitiated beings, seeing the suffering and its causes, think passions, life and death are real and existent; they do not understand that suffering and its origin are like dreams or magical creations, seemingly real but actually empty. The *Sravaka*, aspiring for *arhatship*, do understand suffering, abandon its origin, practice the way and realize the ceasing; yet, on the other hand, they think *bodhi* (enlightenment) and nirvana are real existent. Regarding the dharmas of the four noble truths, grasping its absolute existence and giving it name and self nature becomes an act of discernment and all pervasive attachment. According to the *Heart Sutra*, all dharmas are empty of essentiality. Not only is there no suffering and its origin as seen by the common uninitiated beings, but there is also no ceasing and no way for cessation as understood by the practitioners of *arhatship*; not only are life and death empty, but so is nirvana. The four noble truths are also temporary names empty of inherent nature and therefore non-existent. Thus the fifth ground Bodhisattvas, though contemplating the four truths, still grasp the real characteristic of defilement and purity; it is only until the sixth ground that they extinguish the hindrance of defilement and purity. Defilement means attachment, namely relinquishing only the first two truths of suffering and the origin of suffering while purity means no attachment, namely relinquishing the last two truths of the ceasing of suffering and the way leading to the ceasing of suffering as well.

With wondrous wisdom of *prajna*, the Bodhisattva contemplates and sees that the five aggregates and so forth up to the four noble truths are all but empty of essentiality. Therefore in the true state of void of all dharmas, not even one dharma is established. There is no life or death to be relinquished and thus there is no suffering; neither is there evil passion to be abandoned and thus there is no origin of suffering. Self nature, like Buddha nature, is already complete with merit and virtue, so there is neither practice for cessation of suffering nor is there nirvana to be attained. Therefore there is no cessation of suffering. Upon reaching these four states, all pervasive grasping becomes empty, thus the *sutra* claims: no suffering, the origin of suffering, the ceasing of suffering and the way leading to the ceasing of suffering.

Master Chih-che of the *Tien-t'ai* school expresses the meaning of this in the following stanza:

“Aggregates and roots are thusness,  
There is no suffering to be relinquished;  
Passion is *bodhi*,  
There is no origin to be abandoned;  
The incorrect is the right,  
There is no way to be practiced;  
Life and death are nirvana,  
There is no ceasing to be realized.”

Common uninitiated beings are deluded about the four truths. Not understanding that life and death are suffering is being deluded about the truth of suffering; taking suffering to be happiness and from such illusion committing karmic deeds is being deluded about the truth of the origin of suffering; receiving karmic retribution from karmic deeds, continuing in the round of rebirth without stop, and not realizing there is nirvana to be attained is being deluded about the truth of the ceasing of suffering; willing to suffer and not willing to learn and practice Buddhist Dharma is being deluded about the truth of the way leading to the ceasing of suffering. The saints of the vehicle of *arhat* are enlightened to the four noble truths. Understanding the three realms mean suffering is being enlightened to the noble truth of suffering; capable of observing and knowing the source of all suffering is being enlightened to the noble truth of the origin of suffering; further realizing there is nirvana of relinquishment to be attained is being enlightened to the noble truth of ceasing; willing to learn and practice methods relating to the three essential disciplines is being enlightened to the noble truth of the way leading to the ceasing of suffering. The Bodhisattva is enlightened to the emptiness of all dharmas, understanding the Dharma of the four truths are all empty and therefore the *sutra* says no suffering, no origin, no ceasing and no way.

Master Kuei-ji of T'ang dynasty quotes from the *Splendid Garland Sutra (Srimala-devi-simhanada-sutra)*: “The establishment of the four noble truths and the non-establishment of the four noble truths, together eight noble truths are not known to the vehicles of *arhat* and *pratyeka Buddha*. Cycle through life and death is named suffering, evil passion and karmic deed with attachment is named origin of suffering, choosing cessation is named ceasing and practice of wisdom to realize the emptiness of self is named the way. These more elementary and obvious directions are considered to be less deep in wisdom, hence named the established truths. Life and death as change and conditioned origination are named suffering, the hindrance to correct knowledge and deed of discernment though without attachment is named the origin of suffering, clear and pure non-abiding nirvana is named the ceasing and finally the practice of wisdom to realize the emptiness of Dharma is named the way. These are less obvious realms, obscure and difficult to be understood, hence named the non-established truths.” This passage explains the reason why suffering, its origin, its ceasing and the way are called the established truths, and why no suffering, no origin, no ceasing and no way for ceasing are called the non-established truths.

### ***No wisdom and also no attainment***

This section demonstrates the contemplation of the emptiness of the six perfections. The Bodhisattva practices the six perfections with respect to circumstances and principles:

1) The Bodhisattva who practices the six perfections according to expedient means practices with respect to circumstances, namely, following characteristics. He possesses the wisdom of *prajna* capable of contemplation and he attains the truth of emptiness of all dharmas. However he has not relinquished the capability and realization and thus still has wisdom and attainment. Master Kuei-ji of Tang dynasty says: “The ability to awaken to the truth is called wisdom, and the realm of enlightenment is called attainment.” The sutra says, “For those seeking the path of Bodhisattva, the dharmas corresponding to the six perfections are spoken.”

2) The Bodhisattva who practices the six perfections according to principles of the real state practices away from characteristics. He is able to relinquish both capability and attainment, and as both principle and wisdom are at one with thusness he reaches the realm of emptiness of all dharmas. The true void is not only without dharma, but without even the wisdom to realize that such void is itself non-existent, hence *no wisdom*. Also, the true principle of emptiness of all dharmas that the Bodhisattva awakens to is also non-existent, hence *no attainment*. This means that without attainment, there is no principle of emptiness, and that without wisdom, there is no one to be enlightened to the principle of emptiness. Among all the causes and conditions, no dharma may be found just like among the five fingers the fist is not to be obtained.

This *sutra* first states that the aggregates, the spheres and the elements are all empty without essentiality in order to break down the worldly dharmas of common uninitiated beings. Next it states that the four noble truths and the twelve links of conditioned origination are all non-existent in order to break down the Dharma understood by the saints of the vehicles of *arhat* and *pratyeka* Buddha. Now it states no wisdom and no attainment in order to break down the Dharma known to the Bodhisattva – emptiness of all dharmas.

The wisdom to realize the emptiness of worldly dharmas is the emptiness-of-self wisdom, the true principle awakened to is the principle of non-self, and the enlightenment attained is the fruit of *arhat* and *pratyeka* Buddha. Next the wisdom to realize the emptiness of the four noble truths and the twelve links of dependent origination is the emptiness-of-Dharma wisdom, the true principle awakened to is the principle of emptiness of all dharmas, and the enlightenment attained is the fruit of Bodhisattva. Presently the wisdom to realize the emptiness of wisdom itself and attainment itself is the ultimate-emptiness wisdom, the true principle awakened to is the principle of ultimate-emptiness, and the enlightenment attained is the fruit of Buddhahood. Therefore, discussion of wisdom and attainment refers to the emptiness of Dharma wisdom and the principle of emptiness of all dharmas; discussion of no wisdom and no attainment refers to the ultimate emptiness wisdom and the principle of ultimate emptiness –the foremost meaning of emptiness captured by the words *no wisdom and also no attainment*.

Regarding no wisdom and no attainment, it may also be reasoned that if dharmas are not empty, then with practice, one may later reach attainment. But if dharmas are known to be non-existent, then there must be no practice to begin with, therefore how can attainment ever be reached? The *Large Sutra* says: “All wisdom is empty, and consequently the highest *bodhi* is also empty.” This is why the *sutra* says no wisdom and no attainment. By employing non-distinguishing *prajna*, one may reach the state of thusness -- with mind and realm in harmony and unity, completely equal. The grasper and the grasped are all non-existent since one is away from the appearance of twofold grasping. Because the capability to grasp is relinquished, there is no wisdom, and because the realm grasped is relinquished, there is no attainment either.

At this point it may be said that even *prajna* and the enlightening true principle are also temporary, established names. Employing the wisdom of *prajna* to achieve “not knowing”, “not thinking”, and “not cognizant” of any nature or characteristic is so-called no wisdom. The *Diamond Sutra* says: “There is really no Buddhist Dharma by means of which to reach *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*,” and the

*Suramgama Sutra* says: “To perfect and complete *bodhi* is to return to non-attainment,” — this is the very meaning of no attainment.

It should be noted that the Buddha speaks of the empty nature of all dharmas for the purpose of breaking down sentient beings’ grasping of real existence. Once this grasping is broken down, one should not hold on to this view of emptiness either. The *Ta-chhi-tu lun* says: “The *prajnaparamita* is like a great roaring flame whose four sides are not to be obtained. Further, even this non-obtaining is not to be obtained.” The four sides, namely four aspects, which are not to be obtained are: not to be obtained as existent; not to be obtained as non-existent; not to be obtained as both existent and non-existent; not to be obtained as neither existent nor non-existent. ‘Even non-obtaining is not to be obtained’ means not attempting to obtain the “non-obtaining” either. Such is the meaning of emptiness according to the Mahayana doctrine of Perfection of Wisdom.

With respect to the above discussion of no wisdom and no attainment, what does “four sides are not to be obtained,” mean exactly? The first volume of the *Maharatnakuta-Sutra* explains thus: “The Buddha tells Mahakasyapa: If sentient beings do not lack in their power of wisdom in seeking the Buddha, then for these sentient beings there will not be even few dharmas to be attained by them. If the Bodhisattva, in seeking *bodhi*, has attainment, then he will have thoughts of attachment. With such thoughts of attachment to the Buddhist Dharma, he will then have conditioned thoughts beyond Buddhist Dharma followed by unconditioned thoughts. While grasping to understand, he grasps onto Buddhist Dharma relentlessly, unable to relinquish it. It should be known that such person is not said to be on his way to the supreme path of Buddhahood. Why is it so? It is because he practices Buddhist Dharma diligently with thoughts of attachment, grasping the Dharma as if it has essentiality. Consequently his grasping closely resembles and corresponds to the grasping of self.”

In his *Discourse on the Heart Sutra* Master Jin-mai of T’ang dynasty gives the following account regarding the theory of no wisdom and no attainment: Previously, “no” four noble truths illustrate that all grasping are empty. Here it shows that the potential to awaken and the awakening itself are both empty. To say no wisdom means the wisdom that is capable of contemplation is empty, and to say no attainment means the realm of emptiness that is the result of contemplation is also empty. First, speaking of no wisdom, the *prajna* that is capable to contemplate the aggregates, spheres, etc. is away from designated name, nature and characteristic to begin with. If one grasps *prajna* as a real entity then this grasping is also pervasive attachment. Now in order to relinquish this wisdom that has the appearance of substantiality, the *sutra* states *no wisdom*. Speaking of no attainment, the spheres, elements, etc. as products of pervasive attachments are empty to start with. It is not as if the Bodhisattva purposely contemplates to make them empty and then awakens to the true state of emptiness of aggregates, spheres, etc., hence the *sutra* states *no attainment*.

The *Madhyamakakarika* states: “The great saint speaks of the dharma of emptiness to guide people away from all views, if the view of emptiness itself is retained instead, then even the various Buddhas cannot convert or enlighten such people.” Why is it so? For instance, if there is affliction which can be eradicated by emptiness, then when the affliction is eradicated emptiness will cease naturally. Also, if snow or frost harms the grass, when the grass perishes the frost melts as well. If not so, then it will be like relinquishing existence but grasping non-existence in exchange. Just like escaping a peak but falling from a cliff -- neither can avoid demise.

To further explain, no attainment means cannot be attained and cannot be attained means emptiness. Volume thirty-one of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* poses the question: In practicing the emptiness of no attainment, what dharma is attained? The response is: the various dharmas of the *sravaka*, practitioners for *arhatship*, such as the three disciplines of conduct, meditation and wisdom, the four noble fruits, the five spiritual faculties, the seven factors of enlightenment and the noble eightfold path are attained. Further, if

*prajnaparamita* is attained then merits of the entire six *paramitas* or perfections and of the tenth ground Bodhisattva are attained. The *Ta-chih-tu-lu* then asks: Since it is said above that all dharmas, and even nirvana cannot be attained, why is it said that conduct, meditation, wisdom, even the merits of the tenth ground can be attained? The reply is: All these dharmas though may be attained, all lead to the emptiness of no attainment; because there is no reception or attachment it is called no attainment. The saint, though having attainment, does not think there is attainment and this is referred to as the emptiness of no attainment.

When the Bodhisattva practices, what is the difference between having wisdom and attainment and having no wisdom and no attainment? Here are two stanzas from the *Sutra of Hui-neng* by the sixth patriarch of the Chinese Ch'an school that demonstrate the difference:

1. The stanza by Master Shen-shiu says:

“Our body is the bodhi tree,  
And our mind is a mirror bright,  
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,  
And let no dust alight.”

(Trans. in Price and Wong 1990: 70)

This stanza shows the understanding and view of having wisdom and attainment.

2. The stanza by Master Hui-neng says:

“There is no bodhi-tree,  
Nor a stand of mirror bright,  
Since all is void,  
Where can the dust alight?”

(Trans. in Price and Wong 1990: 72)

This stanza portrays the understanding and view of no wisdom and no attainment. From these two stanzas one should be able to understand the theory of *no wisdom and also no attainment* as stated in the *Heart Sutra*.

***It is because there is no attainment.***

This phrase of the *sutra* has two functional meanings:

1) As a concluding clause, it concludes what comes before namely from “Therefore in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, perception, volition or consciousness” until “no wisdom and also no attainment.” The above dharmas, under the illumination of and contemplation by the wisdom of *prajna*, are all empty without essentiality, having no self nature to be found. And why is this? The *sutra* answers that “it is because there is no attainment.”

2) As a connecting clause, it follows what comes before as explained in 1) and leads to what follows after, namely from “It is because there is no attainment, the Bodhisattva” until “attain the *anuttara-samyak-sambuddha*.” Previously, from the perspective of Buddhist Dharma, the Bodhisattva practices contemplative *prajna*, illuminates and sees all dharmas are empty, understands all dharmas are

empty because they are without self nature and consequently, nothing can be attained. Now, from “It is because there is no attainment” the *sutra* makes a complete turn and shows real attainment, and what great attainment!

The attainments are the following two fruits of *prajna*: 1) by means of the virtue of relinquishment one eradicates the hindrance of evil passions and attains the fruit of nirvana, 2) by means of wisdom one eradicates the hindrance to the correct knowledge and attains the fruit of *bodhi*. This is how applying the non-application can be the most efficient application.

With respect to the emptiness of all dharma and the theory of non-attainment, people hold different perspectives: Some say realm-empty but mind-existent – they think that though the external realms are empty, the internal mind is not empty. Others maintain mind-empty but realms-existent – they think that emptiness only refers to the relinquishing of the internal grasping of the mind such that mind can be empty, but the external realms are not empty. Viewed from the principle of no wisdom and no attainment advocated by this *sutra*, these two perspectives of emptiness are all biased or one-sided views of emptiness, not the perfect fusion -- the middle way of the wondrous true void perceived by reality *prajna*. The middle way of the true void of *prajna* requires the relinquishing of the inherent nature of various dharmas of the aggregates, spheres, elements, dependent origination, four truths, wisdom and attainment until mind and realm are both empty. Once empty, all are empty, because fundamentally they are empty -- this is the meaning of fundamental clarity and purity. My teacher Master Tan-hsu once said in a stanza:

“Once empty, all are empty,  
Beyond emptiness there is nothing that is not empty,  
In the face of nothing that is not empty,  
Even emptiness cannot be attained.”

This is the absolute ultimate meaning of emptiness. Because of this far-reaching ultimate meaning of emptiness of non-attainment the *sutra* thus follows with the resulting great attainment: relying on this understanding the Bodhisattvas attain ultimate nirvana; depending on this the Buddhas attain great *bodhi*. This is the reason why *prajna* is said to be the mother of all Buddhas.

Master Hui-hai of T'ang dynasty says: “The embodiment of *prajna* is completely clear and pure, with not a thing to be attained.” Though practicing toward the realm of emptiness, one should not regard emptiness as the awakening. One should not dwell on thoughts of emptiness because one should not be practicing for emptiness in order to hold on to the notion of emptiness. Though practicing calm one should not regard calm as the awakening, that is, not dwell on thoughts of calm. Though attaining purity one should not regard purity as the awakening, that is, not dwell on thoughts of purity. If while attaining calm, purity, or any realm with non-attaching mind, one dwells on thoughts of such, then these thoughts are all illusory thoughts and being fettered by them one cannot be called liberated. On the other hand, if in attaining these states one is clearly aware, then he is called attaining freedom and ease. In other words he neither regards these realms as awakening nor dwells on thoughts of these realms and thus can be called liberated. Therefore, no attainment and no awakening mean to have awakened to the true body of Buddhist Dharma. One should set the goal to attain the ultimate attainment, to awaken to the ultimate awakening. The ultimate attainment is neither attainment nor non-attainment and the ultimate awakening is neither awakening nor non-awakening – these are referred to as the so-called ultimate attainment and the so-called ultimate awakening. This is what the *Lotus Sutra* describes as ‘The king of Dharma (the Buddha) who relinquishes all existences appears in this world.’ The *Diamond Sutra* also says that when the Tathagata was with Dipankara Buddha, there is not any dharma by which He has attained the perfect enlightenment.

***The Bodhisattva, by relying on the prajnaparamita, dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has no fear, he has come away from subversions and dreams, and in the end he attains nirvana.***

This section explains how the Bodhisattva, by means of *prajnaparamita*, attains the fruit of relinquishment or extinction shared by all three vehicles. The fruit of extinction is the fruit of nirvana attained from the relinquishing of the hindrance of passions. The fruit of nirvana is also named the common fruit – the realm of emancipation reached by saints of all three vehicles, the *arhats*, the *pratyeka* buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

***Bodhisattva*** is a Sanskrit word, the more complete form should be Bodhisattva Mahasattva. Bodhisattva is translated to “enlightened sentient being” - from the perspective of self benefit it means he is an enlightened sentient being. Mahasattva is translated to “great mind sentient being” – from the perspective of benefiting others it means he has great mind for practice, capable of seeking Dharma from Buddhas above and enlightening sentient beings below.

***By relying on the prajnaparamita, dwells without thought-coverings:*** The Bodhisattva, employing the method of *prajnaparamita* in practicing contemplation, may reach the realm of true void of all dharmas. He understands that the true state of all dharmas are emptiness, devoid of intrinsic qualities, such that regarding the ability to awaken and the realm to awaken to, there is not even one dharma to be attained and consequently he dwells without thought-coverings. Thought-coverings refer to attaching thoughts and hindrances. If one grasps the attainability of dharma, then he cannot reach the state of dwelling without thoughts-coverings. Attaching thoughts are analogous to a net, which implies ignorant passions covering the true mind like a net preventing the mind from freedom and liberation. Hindrances refer to sentient beings’ grasping which stand in the way of the right path for practice preventing the practitioner to proceed forward directly to the treasured realm. Common uninitiated beings with their thoughts attached to form, have hindrance of self; the two vehicles of *arhat* and *pratyeka* Buddha with their thoughts attached to emptiness, and the Bodhisattvas of skillful means with their thoughts attached to both ends, have hindrance of Dharma. As for sentient beings in general there is not a thing or place that is not an attaching thought or hindrance to them because their minds are always grasping everywhere and everything.

With respect to Buddhist Dharma when attaching thoughts dwell in the mind they can be hindrances toward both nirvana and the enlightenment of *bodhi*. Thought coverings originating from the grasping of self are hindrances of passions -- potential hindrances toward nirvana. Thought coverings originating from the grasping of Dharma are hindrances of knowledge -- potential hindrances toward *bodhi*. Either way they lead to the two hindrances. Sentient beings, seeing the four great elements and the six sense objects under delusion and consequently grasping the self and the world perceived by the self, wander in the cycles of life and death through the six realms – this is called dwelling with thought-coverings. Now the Bodhisattvas, learning and practicing the method of *prajnaparamita*, have no fetters of greed, hatred and delusion in their mind, and thus dwell without thought--coverings toward either loved or hated, not-loved or not-hated persons.

Volume six of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* describes this as: “If sentient beings from all the worlds come to offend or harm, no anger or hatred arise in the mind; if they pay various respects and deference, no joy or pleasure arise in the mind. As said in a stanza:

‘Toward all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,  
The mind does not love or grasp,  
Toward non-Buddhists or evil persons,  
The mind does not offend or hate.  
A mind pure and clear as such,  
Is called dwelling without thought-coverings.’”

Because the Bodhisattvas, relying on contemplative *prajna*, see that all dharmas are empty without self nature and thus have no urge to grasp or hold onto any outside realm, they are able to dwell without thought-coverings. Master Jin-mai of T’ang dynasty says: “Dwelling without thought-coverings means understanding the emptiness of the gate of relinquishing because it is reaching the realm where all dharmas regarding the subjective and the objective are all empty.” Between T’ang dynasty and the Era of the Five dynasties, in the city of Fung-hua of Ming county, there was a monastic named Monk Bu-tai(cloth sac) who composes the following stanza:

“I have a cloth sac,  
Empty without thought-coverings;  
Opened to ten directions,  
All is ease and liberation within.”

***In the absence of thought-coverings he has no fear:*** Fear may result either from being suddenly startled and frightened or from being constantly scared. It originates from ignorance, from a mind dwelling with thought-coverings where fear may easily rise -- grasping self as well as grasping Dharma, worrying about attainment as well as loss, all of these lead to fear. According to Buddhist sutras there are five types of fear for beginners embarking on the Bodhisattva path:

- 1) Fear of no livelihood: In order to enlighten sentient beings the Bodhisattva may have no time to seek a profession for daily living or his livelihood may be affected when he practices generosity.
- 2) Fear of unwholesome reputation: To have one’s reputation slandered or to be given unwholesome name –these are plausible sources for fear.
- 3) Fear of death: Though the Bodhisattva has already initiated the *bodhicitta* and intends to sacrifice his body for Dharma, he still cares about his body because he has not completely relinquished the grasping of self.
- 4) Fear of the evil realms: There is still fear to drop to the three lower realms to the sufferings of hell.
- 5) Fear of the authority of an audience: In practicing the way of the Bodhisattva, when preaching the Dharma to an assembly, in front of those who are able to easily understand the doctrinal meaning of the Dharma, the Bodhisattva dares not talk freely for fear of making a mistake.

Since it is established that fear originates from thought-coverings, then where do thought-coverings originate? Delusory grasping of the body, made of the four great elements, as a real entity constitutes thought-covering; greedy attachment to children and a happy family gives rise to thought-covering; greedy attachments to material luxury, wealth and prestige are thought-coverings. When such grasping is lost, the mind will not only dwell on thought-coverings but also on fear. If one is able to employ the wisdom of *prajna* to illuminate and contemplate everything, to see through everything and to relinquish everything, then naturally one may dwell without thought-coverings and have no fear.

Master Jin-mai of T’ang dynasty says: “In the absence of thought-coverings he has no fear illustrates the gate of relinquishing through non- characteristics. From the realization that all dharmas,

subjective or objective, are all empty, one understands that all dharmas are without characteristics. If one does not know that all dharmas are without characteristics, then one may dwell with thought-coverings from the outside and fear on the inside; if one realizes that all dharmas are without characteristics, then one may dwell with no thought-coverings from the outside and thus no fear on the inside.” Common uninitiated beings have fears of disconnected lives through cycles of rebirth while practitioners of the vehicles of *arhat*, *pratyeka* Buddha, and Bodhisattvas, who practice skillful means, have fears of transforming lives. This is all because they have not yet reached the realm of non-characteristics of all dharmas and thus still retain some grasping and thought-coverings. Now according to this *sutra*, because the Bodhisattva, relying on *prajna*, illuminates, sees through, and deeply understands that all dharmas are empty without characteristics, he no longer dwells with any thought-coverings and consequently shall have no fear.

***He has come away from subversions and dreams:*** *Subvert* implies upside down. For a human, the head points to the heaven and the feet stand on the ground. To be subverted is to turn upside down with head on the ground and feet toward the heaven. ***Subversion*** is an analogy implying the head is deluded from the true state and instead, turns upside down by following the illusions. It is analogous to the picture where sentient beings turn their back on enlightenment and face the *Saha* world, taking illusions as reality, committing various unwholesome karmic deeds, wandering through cycles of rebirth in the sea of suffering with their heads bobbing up and down – this is called subversion. Since subversion is mainly caused by grasping of self and by grasping of Dharma, common uninitiated beings and the two vehicles of *arhat* and *pratyeka* Buddha each have four types of subversion.

Common uninitiated beings have the following four subversions: 1. Subversion of the body: Though the body is not pure, in delusion they grasp it as pure; 2. Subversion of feelings: Feelings are fundamentally sufferings but they grasp the sufferings as happiness; 3. Subversion of the mind: The mind is temporary and deluded, rising and ceasing without permanence, but they grasp it as permanent and commit unwholesome karmic deeds; 4. Subversion of mental object: Mental formation is fundamentally without self nature, but they grasp it as real entity, attaching to the self and perceptions by the self, widely committing unwholesome karmic deeds and needlessly, suffering through cycles of rebirth. These are the four subversions of common uninitiated beings.

Volume thirty-one of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “There are four subversions in the *Saha* world: the subversion of grasping purity in non-purity, the subversion of grasping happiness in suffering, the subversion of grasping permanence in impermanence and the subversion of grasping the self in non-self.”

Thus when the Buddha nears nirvana he instructs his disciples that after his nirvana they should abide by the Four Mindfulness: 1. Contemplate the body as impure to counter the subversion of purity; 2. Contemplate feelings as sufferings to counter the subversion of happiness; 3. Contemplate the mind as impermanent to counter the subversion of permanence; 4. Contemplate mental object as non-self to counter the subversion of self. With these contemplations of the Four Mindfulness, the four subversions of common uninitiated beings may be countered. In order to break down these four subversions, practitioners practice the contemplations of the Four Mindfulness.

Master Kuei-chi of T’ang dynasty says: “For subversions there are seven to be named: 1- Subverted thought, 2- Subverted view, 3. Subverted mind, 4- Subversion of impermanence to permanence, 5- Subversion of suffering to happiness, 6- Subversion of impurity to purity, 7- Subversion of non-self to self. Besides the latter four which have already been explained above, delusions for discernment is called subverted thought, recognizing passions and forming attachment is called subverted view. Subverted mind relates to passions, particularly the ten passions of greed etc.

The saints of the vehicles of *arhat* and *pratyeka* Buddha have the following four subversions: They have already realized that the dharmas of body and mind grasped by common uninitiated beings indeed are not pure, are suffering, are impermanent, and are without self and have thus attained the noble fruits of these two vehicles. These four subversions related here are illusory dharmas arising from the deluded understanding of common uninitiated beings of this world and are consequently called subversions. Now the saints of the two vehicles have already realized this and have come away from these four subversions. However, according to the Mahayana doctrine, this nirvana, reached by a mind of purity and clarity, completely without defilement, and attained with the understanding that all dharmas are without essentiality, still has remnants of the four aspects of permanence, happiness, self and purity. Since the practitioners of the two vehicles are not aware of this, to them these are still four subversions and deluded views.

There are many methods to break down subversions. For example, regarding the subversion of greed, the Buddha speaks of generosity to break down greed. But when sentient beings become attached to generosity, the Buddha further tells them that the fruit for generosity is impermanent, empty without essentiality. The notion of generosity is employed to guide sentient beings from greed toward precept. And then, from further attachments to precept and to the retribution of practicing precept, sentient beings are led away. The Buddha explains that when karmic fruits are exhausted, suffering from impermanence will follow. He thus guides sentient beings away from craving and toward meditation and concentration. With various such causes and conditions the Buddha speaks of the undesirable sufferings of impermanence. He speaks of the emptiness of all dharmas, praising the true practice, namely the non-abiding nirvana. Following this instruction, if one is able to practice though there is nothing to be practiced and to attain nothing whatsoever, then no subversion or temporary, delusory passion will originate. Because the mind is clear and pure like the void, it attains the true state of all dharmas. Attaining the non-attainment, it has come away from subversions since there is no place for subversions to dwell.

Volume fifty-three of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “*has come away from* is another name for emptiness. Having acquired *prajnaparamita*, the mind of the Bodhisattva has come away from all dharmas.” Now according to the *Heart Sutra* the Bodhisattva practices the contemplation of the profound *prajna* and understands all dharmas to be empty that not even a single dharma is to be attained. He has not only come away from the four subversions of common uninitiated beings, but has also come away from the four subversions of the two vehicles. Therefore the *sutra* says he has come away from subversions and dreams.

**Dream** is used as an analogy here as well. According to the Buddha, going through life and death is like going through a long night; submerged in delusion without awakening, human existence is like a dream. One walks depending on the circumstances of the dream, a night’s dream is a small dream, a lifetime’s dream is a great dream. The phenomena of the world are like acts on a stage, formed out of imaginations. Sentient beings take realms of dreams to be existent and think of imaginations as real. Actually, dreams are not beyond *mind kings* and *elements of the mind* that create illusory realms during sleep; they are never far from the illusory mind. When one is in the dream, one is not aware and thinks it is real. As the Buddha says, life is but a dream, then a dream in a dream can only be more imaginations, how can it be real? According to Buddhist sutras, from common uninitiated beings to practitioners of the three vehicles, none has left the dream world. Only the Buddha has no dream because the Buddha has completely extinguished all habitual clinging to passions; he has awakened from the great dream and will never have subversions or dreams again.

The metaphor of dream actually means illusory thoughts, referring to various temporary, deluded, mistaken thoughts and ideas of sentient beings just like thoughts in a dream. Common

uninitiated beings, grasping the five aggregates as real existent and grasping life and death as happiness, do not seek liberation and are thus called having subversions and dreams. The *sravaka* and *pratyeka* Buddha, though grasping the five aggregates as real existent, but fearing the suffering of life and death, do aspire and seek liberation; however they still grasp, thus they still have subversions and dreams. This *sutra* says that the Bodhisattva, with wisdom of *prajna*, illuminates and sees that the five aggregates are all empty and the dream of ignorance is broken down. All temporary illusions become empty and the true state is revealed just like the awakening from a dream when phenomena from the dream world can no longer be found. Neither fearing life and death, nor enjoying nirvana, attaining neither life and death nor nirvana is called coming away from subversions and dreams.

Master Yung-jia of T'ang dynasty says: "In the dream there were clearly six realms, waking up all thousand worlds are empty." Master Jin-mai of T'ang dynasty says: "He has come away from subversions and dreams' demonstrates the gate of relinquishing through non-aspiration. From realizing that dharmas are without characteristics, and thus dwelling without thought-coverings from the outside and fears on the inside, one is able to understand all dharmas are subversions like dreams, temporary, illusory, not real existent and therefore is able to come away from all dharmas without aspiring for them."

With respect to dream, volume eighty-eight of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: "Common uninitiated beings grasp dreams from the dharmas of dreams. Those who have dreams and have seen dreams also grasp what happens in the dream." Also volume thirty-five says: "To say someone is like the dreamer means though nothing in the dream is real, that person thinks they are. Upon waking up, he knows they are not, yet he smiles to himself. People are also like that. Induced into sleep by various attachments they grasp that which are non-existent. When they awaken through practice, they understand the non-existence, but they still smile to themselves and hence they are like the dreamer as well. Further, in dreams people are glad when there is no real event to be glad about, angry when there is no real event to be angry about and scared when there is no real event to be scared about; the same goes for sentient beings in the three realms because they are sleeping the sleep of the ignorant – angry when they should not be angry, glad when they should not be glad and fearful when they should not be fearful."

Also, there are five types of dreams. When the body is not regulated, if there is excessive heat, then one dreams of fire, seeing colors like yellow and red. If there is excessive cold, then one dreams of water, seeing white. If there is excessive wind, then one dreams of flying, seeing black. If one dwells on the events seen or heard, then he may dream about them. One may receive a dream from heaven letting him know about future events. All these five types of dreams are delusory views devoid of reality.

A *sutra* says:

"Seeing and contemplating the *Saha* world --  
it is indeed like happenings in a dream."

An anonymous poet composes the *Song of the Great Dream*:

“Busy, rushing, rushing,  
West and east,  
Messy, gathering, gathering,  
Shame and glory;  
Empty, drifting, drifting,  
All turn into a fifth-hour breeze,  
Hundred years absently caged in a dream.  
Waking up, where are you?  
Sage and fool in the same great dream for times old and new.  
Great eyes open, traverse, focus,  
Look through the original face,  
Look through beginning, end, heaven and earth,  
All that’s seen is the void of the five aggregates.”

Master Tan-hsu offers a stanza of *Talking of Dreams*:

“Life is but a dream,  
Everything is like a dream,  
The ability to dream is not beyond dream,  
The realm of dream ever so belongs to dream;  
Eyes closed one is in a dream,  
Eyes open one is also in a dream,  
Some dreams long, some short,  
As dreams they differ not;  
Karmic deeds done in dreams,  
Karmic fruits too tasted in dreams,  
A moment of pleasure,  
Endless eons of sufferings;  
All are comrades in dreams,  
No sage, fool, rich or poor,  
The mind arising, the dream world arising,  
The mind ceasing, the dream world ceasing;  
Knowing it’s a dream while in a dream,  
One awakens instantly from his dream,  
Gone are the dreamer and the dream,  
Pure and clear mind is not a dream.”

***And in the end he attains nirvana:*** Master Fa-fong translates the meaning of nirvana into two aspects: 1. Tranquility as calming: the distressing passions of body, mind and daily living are perfectly calmed and extinguished 2. Tranquility as ceasing: the corresponding sufferings are completely eradicated. Some translations maintain extinction and enlightenment as well as perfection and tranquility. Master Fa-tsang says: “Perfection means there is no virtue not completely accomplished, tranquility means there is no hindrance not completely relinquished.” This is what the Buddhist religion refers to as the highest realm reached by Buddhist practice. Some people compare nirvana to death; this

is a complete misunderstanding. Death belongs to the realm of common uninitiated beings because after death there will be further rebirth. Nirvana belongs to the realm of saints since passions are forever extinguished there will be no further rebirth due to karmic deeds. The saints have truly reached the realm of no originating and no ceasing which is thus named nirvana.

The meaning of nirvana may be viewed from several facets: 1. After sentient beings' passions, which are karmic causes, are calmed or ceased, then the karmic fruits of suffering through life and death naturally cease. This is called calming and ceasing or emancipation. 2. There is no delusion not ended and no virtue not perfected; this is called perfection and tranquility. 3. One has enlightened all sentient beings who are associated with oneself through causes and conditions and then enters extinction, in other words, entering extinction at the completion of causes and conditions. This is called extinction and enlightenment.

The *Miscellaneous Nikaya Sutras* states: "Greed forever extinguished, hatred forever extinguished, ignorance forever extinguished, all distressing passions forever extinguished, is called nirvana." The *Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun* (Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana) states: "Why does the perfuming by the dharmas of awakening to purity not stop? It is because there is the dharma of thusness which can perfume ignorance. Thus when ignorance is extinguished, there will be no arising in the mind, and when there is no arising in the mind, the outside realms also cease. Since both the causes and the conditions are extinguished, mind and characteristics all cease, and this is called nirvana."

There are four kinds of nirvana:

1. Nirvana of clear and pure nature: namely, the true state of thusness of all dharmas. This means that sentient beings have Buddha nature and this Buddha nature is fundamentally pure and clear, neither originating nor ceasing, and it is nirvana. However this only points out that in the realm of karmic cause there is nirvana. It is not the nirvana of three virtues which belongs to the realm of fruit and which is only attained when practice and realization are perfectly accomplished.

2. Nirvana with remaining clinging: namely, the thusness revealed after the truth of the origin of suffering is relinquished. According to the *Ta-chih-tu lun* all evil passions such as lust are extinguished meaning the saints of the *arhat* or the *pratyeka* vehicle have practiced until the fetter of past seeds, namely delusions from incorrect views and thoughts, and evil passions are already extinguished. However the fetter of fruit, namely the body or form which is to receive karmic fruit is still present, and thus it is called the nirvana with remaining clinging. For the Mahayana doctrine, followers must practice until the true thusness is freed from the hindrance of passions. Even so, the eighth consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*) is still fettered by the hindrance to correct knowledge, thus it is called the nirvana with remaining clinging. These two types of nirvana are not final goals.

3. Nirvana without remaining clinging: namely, the thusness revealed after the truth of suffering is relinquished. For the Theravada practitioners, the fetter from past seeds is broken down and the fetter of fruit is also extinguished. That is, life and death, karmic cause and fruit all cease and they no longer return to the three realms through rebirth. As the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: "The saints have relinquished the five groups of attachments that they have received this lifetime and they will no longer receive again -- it is called nirvana without remaining clinging. For the Mahayana doctrine, the true thusness is liberated from the fetter of life and death and the eighth consciousness is no longer fettered by both the hindrance of evil passions and the hindrance to correct knowledge -- this is called nirvana without remaining clinging. However, the seeds of the two hindrances from the past lifetimes are still present. This is not yet the ultimate liberation.

4. Non-abiding nirvana: This means for the Mahayana practitioners, the two hindrances pertaining to both this lifetime and past lifetimes are completely extinguished and the true thusness is freed from fetters. Since the virtue of purity is perfected and no passion remains, they do not abide in life and

death; since they aspire to enlighten sentient beings, they do not abide in nirvana. Further, because of their great wisdom they do not abide in life and death, and because of their great compassion they do not abide in nirvana. Abiding neither on this shore nor on the other shore – this is called non-abiding nirvana.

According to the *Heart Sutra*, the eventual nirvana attained by the Bodhisattva is the fourth type, the non-abiding nirvana. This nirvana for the Bodhisattva differs from the nirvana attained by the *arhats* and *pratyeka* Buddhas. For the latter, in order to be away from life and death they seek nirvana by extinguishing the five aggregates and realizing emptiness. However this emptiness is a somewhat one-sided view of emptiness, not true emptiness. The Bodhisattva, relying on the practice of the method of *prajna*, illuminates and sees all dharmas such as the five aggregates are all empty. Because there is no attainment they are able to reach the non-abiding nirvana. Knowing that life and death are nirvana, and knowing that neither life and death nor nirvana are to be attained – this is what meant by *and in the end he attains nirvana*.

Master Jin-mai of T'ang dynasty says: “To say he attains nirvana at the end is to demonstrate rightfully the fruit of relinquishment. It has been explained previously how to enter this gate of relinquishment through emptiness, non-characteristics and non-aspiration. From this gate one may reach the realm of relinquishment, the end where he attains nirvana.” In more detail, to dwell without thought-coverings means to realize the emptiness of Dharma while to have no fear means to realize the emptiness of self. To come away from subversions again means to realize the emptiness of self while to come away from dreams again means to realize the emptiness of Dharma. Because the penetration and realization of these two emptiness (of self and Dharma), one is, at the end, able to attain the fruit of nirvana.

By volume twenty of the *Ta-chih-tu lun*: “According to the Mahayana doctrine, these three gates of relinquishment all belong to one method, but because of the causes and conditions related to the practice, they may be divided into three types. Contemplating all dharmas are empty is called emptiness; not grasping any characteristic of the notion of emptiness and thus contemplation of emptiness is turned to contemplation of non-characteristics; in contemplating non-characteristic there should not be aspiration or doing and thus non-characteristics is turned to what is called non-doing. For an analogy, it is like a fortress with three gates. A person cannot enter through three gates all at once; if he enters it must be through one gate only. The true state of all dharmas is like the fortress of nirvana; this fortress has three gates: emptiness, non-characteristics and non-doing. If a person enters through the gate of emptiness, not attaining emptiness, nor grasping its characteristic, then he can proceed directly to achieve his goal not needing a second gate. However, if he enters this gate of emptiness, grasping its characteristic and attaining emptiness, then for this person it will not be a gate since the path will be closed for him. If he abandons the characteristic of emptiness, then this time he may try to enter through the gate of non-characteristics. But if toward non-characteristics his mind becomes attached, then he must relinquish the grasping of non-characteristics and try to enter through the gate of non-doing this time. By the Mahayana theory, these three gates of relinquishment relate to the true state of all dharmas. With these three gates of relinquishment, one may contemplate that the world is nirvana. Why is it so? It is because nirvana is emptiness, non-characteristics and non-doing and so is the secular world.”

Ch'an Master Hsi-yun of Mount Huang-pi of T'ang dynasty says in his *Methods for Transmission from Mind to Mind*: “The instruction for you is to not seek. Seeking ends in loosing. For example, a mad man shouts on the mountain, the sound leaves the valley. He then walks down the mountain to find it. When he fails to find it, he shouts again. Now the sound seems to go up the mountain and he follows it up the mountain to seek it out. Thus through thousands of life times and millions of kalpas, he is but a man seeking and following the sound, a man wasting lives and drifting through deaths. If one does not voice a sound then there will be no sound to be heard. Nirvana is “not

hearing”, “not knowing” and “not making a sound”; it is without footprints and without trail. If one is able to attain this state, he may be the next door neighbor to a patriarch.”

***Buddhas of the three periods of time, by relying on the prajnaparamita, have become fully awakened to anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.***

This section states that all Buddhas, relying on *prajna*, attain the one non-sharing vehicle of the fruit of wisdom. Fruit of wisdom is the fruit of *bodhi* after extinguishing the hindrance of knowledge. This fruit is realized by Buddhas and Buddhas only, not the saints of the other vehicles, and thus called non-sharing -- not shared by all three vehicles. Master Kuei-ji of T'ang dynasty says: “In the above discussion it is noted how karmic cause benefits from the breaking down of hindrances and attachments; the following discussion will show how karmic fruit benefits from the attainment of *bodhi*.” Master Jin-mai of T'ang dynasty says: “Previously, as the Bodhisattvas attain nirvana, it illustrates the proceeding from karmic cause to karmic fruit; now, as the Buddhas attain *bodhi*, it traces back to show how karmic fruit is obtained from karmic cause.”

***Buddhas of the three periods of time:*** *Buddha* is the Sanskrit word meaning enlightened. There are three meanings to enlightenment: 1. Self-enlightenment – externally, one realizes that all dharmas are illusory, subject to change and impermanence while internally one realizes that all sentient beings have Buddha nature in them. 2. Enlightening others – one generates great compassion and practices the six perfections (*paramitas*) in order to help all sentient beings cross to the other shore and attain the peace and happiness of relinquishment and liberation. 3. Enlightenment perfected – this means enlightening both self and others so that the merits from these two beneficial endeavors are ultimately perfectly completed.

Further, self-enlightenment is the perfect completion of wisdom. From first initiating the mind, to understanding true principles through its own nature, to awakening the wisdom for realization, to relying on wisdom to break down delusions, he perfects the relinquishment of the three delusions and completes the attainment of the three wisdoms. He awakens and returns to the original true state of mind knowing it to be completely pure and clear and thus achieves perfect wisdom. Enlightening others is the perfect completion of merit. He generates *bodhicitta* and initiates the practice of great compassion. He regards preaching the dharmas as a household duty -- awakening sentient beings by breaking down their delusions and initiating their realization. He takes benefiting sentient beings as a career by disclosing illusions, revealing truth and finally guiding them to relinquish suffering and attain happiness. He endures through three innumerable kalpas, widely practicing the six perfections to awaken and enlighten sentient beings, thus achieving perfect merit. Having enlightened both self and others constitutes the double completion of merit and wisdom and is referred to as three-enlightenment perfectly completed, myriad virtues contended and is called Buddha.

Also, self-enlightenment is distinguished from the un-awakened state of common uninitiated beings and thus transcends the six dharma realms of the uninitiated world. Enlightening others is distinguished from self-enlightenment of the two vehicles and therefore transcends the dharma realm of the disciples (*sravaka*). Enlightenment perfected is distinguished from the partial realization of the Bodhisattvas and therefore transcends the dharma realm of the Bodhisattvas. Moreover, self-enlightenment relates to the employment of reason, addressing the cosmos and human existence. On the other hand, enlightening others relates to the practicing of compassion, addressing all sentient beings. Enlightenment perfected means benefiting both self and others, not differentiating between compassion and

wisdom but perfecting both merit and wisdom as the ultimate fruit.

Speaking of Buddhas of the three periods of time from the perspective of time, there are various Buddhas appearing in the world in the past, in the present and in the future. For example, Buddhas from previous eras are Buddha Bhisma-gaijita-ghosa-svara-rajā, Buddha Dipamkara, up to Buddha Kasyapa etc.; Buddhas in the present era are Buddha Sakyamuni, Buddha Amitabha etc.; Buddhas in the future eras are Buddha Maitreya up to the nine hundred and ninety-five Buddhas of the Auspicious Kalpa (the present cosmic period in which a thousand Buddhas are believed to appear) all of whom will descend to this world. These various Buddhas all achieve perfect *bodhi* and attain supreme fruit of wisdom by practicing the method of *prajna*. Hence the *sutra* states that relying on *prajnaparamita* all of them attain *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.

**By relying on *prajnaparamita*:** The *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* says: "The various Tathagatas have already attained utmost equal perfectly right *bodhi*, are attaining utmost equal perfectly right *bodhi* or are going to attain utmost equal perfectly right *bodhi*, all because the profound *prajnaparamita* contributes great virtues and favors to them." It further records the Buddha's speech to Kausika: "Kausika, I have already become a Buddha, yet I still respect this very profound *prajnaparamita* and abide by it. Not to mention those good men who aspire to seek the utmost equal right *bodhi*, how could they not direct their minds to abide on this and diligently learn and practice! Why is that? Those who seek to be *sravaka*, Hearers, by means of this can attain the fruit of *arhat*; those who seek to be *pratyeka* Buddhas, by means of this can attain the solitary *bodhi* of *pratyeka* Buddha; and those who seek the path of Mahayana, by means of this can attain *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*."

**Have become fully awakened to *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*:** *Anuttara* is a Sanskrit word translated as without superior or utmost; *samyak* translated as rightfully equal; and *sambodhi* translated as perfectly right enlightenment. Together they mean utmost, equal, perfectly right enlightenment. In the tradition of five types of not-translated Buddhist vocabulary, these belong to the type of not translated in accordance with ancient custom. Perfectly right enlightenment means enlightened in contrast to deluded, and right enlightenment in contrast to wrong enlightenment. This is to distinguish from common uninitiated beings who are deluded and thus not enlightened, and from practitioners of other religions who, by seeking Dharma outside of the mind, are not rightfully enlightened.

Rightfully equal means completely right, not prejudiced or one-sided equality. This is to distinguish from the solitary enlightenment of the two vehicles who are only enlightened to the emptiness of self but not enlightened to the emptiness of Dharma, who still see difference between life-and-death and nirvana, and thus have not achieved true equality between benefiting self and benefiting others. Without superior or utmost, means only Buddhas are the World Honored ones, who have completely perfected all three aspects of enlightenment and completed myriads of virtues that there is no one to surpass them; only Buddhas are highest without superior. This is to distinguish from the Bodhisattvas who have superiors. The Buddha Sakyamuni reached enlightenment while sitting under a *bodhi* tree, observing stars in the night sky. He completely awakened to the true state of cosmos and human existence -- this is called utmost, equal, perfectly right enlightenment.

From the point of self realization, the Buddhas have perfectly completed wisdom with none superior to them; from the point of benefiting others, the Buddhas have perfectly completed merit and virtue without superior. This is to distinguish from the partial realization of the Bodhisattvas. For the Bodhisattvas, regarding self realization, there is still infinitesimal ignorance not yet broken down, thus his wisdom is not perfectly completed. As regarding benefiting others, the Bodhisattvas have not perfectly completed his merit so that above his present state there is still the vehicle of Buddhahood to seek, thus he

may have fully awakened to equal, perfectly right enlightenment, but not the utmost, equal, perfectly right enlightenment.

According to this *sutra*, Buddhas of all three periods of time rely on the method of *prajna* to practice and learn. They contemplate all dharmas without attainment and have become awakened to the utmost *bodhi*, hence are revered as great beings without superior. The Bodhisattvas also rely on the method of *prajna* to practice and learn, also realize non-attainment and become awakened to ultimate nirvana, and are hence referred to as great beings with superior. Why is it so? It is because the realm the Bodhisattvas are enlightened to is like the moon on the night of the fourteenth – though bright, it is not completely round while the realm the Buddhas are enlightened to is like the moon on the night of the fifteenth – completely round and bright, shining thoroughly. Also, the enlightenment of the Bodhisattvas is like the water from hundreds of rivers entering the ocean – though same as the water in the ocean, it is not as deep or wide, while the enlightenment of the Buddhas is like the water of the ocean, deep and wide without limit. Therefore *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is the enlightenment only Buddhas of the three periods of time are able to attain.

Since Buddhas of the three periods of time rely on method of *prajna* to become fully awakened to *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, *prajna* is said to be the mother of all Buddhas -- Buddhas of three periods are born from *prajna*. The *Diamond Sutra* states: “All Buddhas come from this *sutra*.” Volume seventy-two of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “*Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is *prajna* in a different name. In the mind of Bodhisattvas it is *prajna* while in the mind of Buddhas it is named *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.” Further, volume eighty-two of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “*Sarvajna* is the other name for *prajna*. When the virtues of the five *paramitas* (perfections) enter into *prajnaparamita*, the result is the pure and clear *prajna*. When *prajna* is pure and clear, it leads to the way to Buddhahood and thus changes its name to *sarvajna* and is referred to as entering *sarvajna*.”

In the discussion so far, *prajna* means wisdom and *bodhi* means enlightenment. There is just a slight difference between *bodhi* and *prajna*. When the Buddhas are at the realm of cause, carrying out the myriad practices of the six perfections, they all rely on *prajna* as the guide and they are never away from *prajna*. When the Buddhas attain the fruit, they acquire the virtues of wisdom such as the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses and the eighteen non-sharing methods etc. These attainments are referred to as *bodhi*. Therefore, speaking from the perspective of practice as the cause, the emphasis is on *prajna*, while speaking from the perspective of enlightenment as the fruit, the emphasis is on *bodhi* or the wisdom of knowing all existences in both their general and discriminative aspects.

As this *sutra* states, depending on *prajna* the Bodhisattvas attain ultimate nirvana while depending on *prajna* the Buddhas attain utmost *bodhi*. This is because nirvana is connected to the commonly shared fruit realized by all three vehicles. When the *sravakas* reach nirvana they think it is the ultimate. The utmost *bodhi* is the non-sharing fruit. Therefore between these goals there are differences respecting their positions on the path of practice. According to the vocabulary of the *Ideas-only* school, the differentiation of the two aspects on the path to Buddhahood is called “the result of the twofold turning” which is defined as follows. Reversing one’s existence-base, namely relinquishing the hindrance of evil passions, yields the fruit of nirvana while then reversing one’s existence base, namely relinquishing the hindrance to the correct knowledge, yields the fruit of *bodhi*, enlightenment. This is how they differ. Up to here the exoteric explanation of this *sutra* is completed. Next, the esoteric explication will follow.

## 2-The esoteric perspective:

***Therefore one should know prajnaparamita is the great spell, the great illumination spell, the utmost spell, the unequalled spell, capable of extinguishing all sufferings and is true without falsehood.***

This section uses analogy to praise the virtue of *prajna*; its logic follows from the previous and leads to the next. In connecting to the previous section it refers to how the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas all rely on the profound *prajna* to attain nirvana and *bodhi*, the respective virtues of relinquishment and of wisdom. The virtue of relinquishing evil passions and thus ending further rebirth is called nirvana while the virtue of illuminating reality with absolute wisdom and thus extinguishing the two hindrances is called *bodhi*. This justifies the claim in the next section that one should know *prajnaparamita* has unimaginable, un-estimable efficacy, with magical effects like spells. Therefore, with four different spells the sutra praises various merits of *prajna*. Here, the spells are employed specifically as analogies to illustrate the virtue of *prajna*.

Spell refers to the Sanskrit word *dharani* meaning summarizing and holding, namely, summarizing all dharmas and holding measureless meanings. *Dharani* has four functional meanings:

1. Dharma *dharani*: hearing the Dharma taught by the Buddha, receiving and retaining without forgetting.
2. Meaning *dharani*: understanding and realizing the wonderful doctrine, embracing and holding without losing.
3. Spell *dharani*: with meditation or concentration as its embodiment, transmitting and retaining esoteric words without losing right mindfulness.
4. Cognition *dharani*: recognizing the true state of all dharmas, acknowledging this clear cognition by wisdom and holding this accomplishment.

Now, with these magical spells as analogies, the *sutra* reveals rightfully the wondrous wisdom of *prajna* as having the merits and wonderful efficacy of these various *dharani*.

***Is the great spell:*** Great here implies un-estimable magical capacity and wondrous application in measureless directions. It refers to the words of the spell or the mantra as having great magical power beyond estimation. This analogy means to show the great efficacy of *prajna*—it is capable of extinguishing the unwholesome, generating the wholesome, defeating devils and enemies in four directions and thus relinquishing life and death and evil passions. Moreover, it is capable of extinguishing characteristics and revealing true nature, namely breaking down the characteristics of grasping self and Dharma and realizing the true nature of *bodhi* and nirvana. Hence it is called the great spell.

***Is the great illuminating spell:*** Illuminating refers to the illumination by light that penetrates darkness. This analogy describes the great light of wisdom of *prajna*—it is capable of illuminating and seeing through the nightlong darkness of ignorance and of breaking down and extinguishing the foolishness and delusion of sentient beings. Hence it is called the great illumination spell.

***Is the utmost spell:*** Utmost means without superior as opposed to with superior. This analogy claims that the method of *prajna* for practice is the highest, the utmost and proceeds directly to utmost nirvana, the nirvana that has not a single dharma above it either in this world or transcending this world. This praises the wisdom of *prajna* as having the potential to enable practitioner to surpass the

vehicles of *sravaka* and *pratyeka* Buddha that there is no dharma capable of rising above it. Therefore it is called the utmost spell.

***Is the unequalled spell:*** Unequaled is without equal, meaning surpassing all and meaning with none in the same standing. This analogy illustrates *prajna* as the mother of all Buddhas because the Buddhas of all three time periods rely on the *prajna* to attain utmost *bodhi*. Since there is no dharma that is the equal of *prajna* it is called the unequalled spell. Also volume seventy of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* says: “Nirvana is the unequalled dharma since among all conditioned dharmas there is none that can equal nirvana. However, *prajna* and the unequalled dharma of nirvana are equal because they are alike in wisdom and in principle, and therefore it is also called the spell that equals the unequalled.”

***Capable of extinguishing all suffering, true without falsehood:*** Volume nineteen of the *Ta-chih-tu lun* lists two types of suffering namely, the internal suffering from the body such as old age, afflictions and death, and the external suffering from outside realms such as weapons, cold, heat, hunger and thirst etc. Since having a body results in these suffering, one should know that it is because the body is not free. The practitioner should think that the body is impure, impermanent, suffering, empty, without self nature, having measureless draw-backs. Practicing these various contemplations of the body is called mindfulness of body.

According to the *Ta-chih-tu lun*: “If one can practice the *Ten Ways of Devotion to the Buddhist Sutras* with respect to this *sutra*, he will not be defiled by any hindrance and attachment. Though he may have committed various severely unwholesome karmic deeds, he will still be able to surpass the evil realms.” Regarding the *Ten Ways of Devotion to Buddhist Sutras*, the *Praise by T’zu-hsi* goes:

“To copy them, serve the places where they are kept as if serving the Buddhas,  
Preach or give them to others, listen attentively to their exposition,  
Read, maintain, discourse on them to others,  
Intone them, ponder over them, observe their lessons.  
Those practicing the *Ten Ways of Devotion to Buddhist Sutras*,  
Receive and collect immeasurable merits,  
Because their success is without limit,  
from embracing this practice without rest.”

One should know that the fantastic, wonderful efficacy of *prajna* may earn praise and awe beyond endless kalpas.

Spells are used as analogies to praise *prajna* because the Indian people in general favored the chanting of mantras, the words of spells, either for avoiding disasters or for seeking merits. In volume fifty-eight of the *Ta-chih-tu lun*, Sakra Devendra (popularly known as Indra) says to the Buddha: “Among various spells *prajnaparamita* is a great spell and why? It is because it always favors the moral conduct of sentient beings. Other spells favor causes and conditions and thus can give rise to passions; because these are not wholesome karmic deeds, they lead to the fall to the three evil realms. Further, the other spells can coexist with greed, hatred and delusion, and can actually become means of committing unwholesome deeds. It is the spell of *prajnaparamita* that is able to relinquish even calm meditation, the path to Buddhahood and nirvana, not mentioning the more crude afflictions such as greed and delusion. Therefore it is named the great illuminating spell, the utmost spell and the unequalled spell.” This shows the efficacy of *prajna*, capable of completely and forever extinguishing the source of all sufferings.

Now, in the *Heart Sutra*, by relying on *Prajna*, one is able to extinguish ignorance, to reveal the nature of emptiness of all dharmas, to relinquish the great disasters of suffering through life and death and to attain the great tranquility and happiness of *bodhi* and nirvana, that is, either the joy of awakening to Dharma of the utmost *bodhi* or the joy of calm and peace of the utmost nirvana. Hence, the *sutra* states: “capable of extinguishing all sufferings, true without falsehood.”

***Thus the spell of prajnaparamita is spoken. It is said like this: gate gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha.***

The previous section illustrates the esoteric meaning of *prajna*; in this section *prajna* is held in secret within the esoteric words of the spell. Together they constitute the method of uniting the exoteric and esoteric. The name and efficacy of the spells have already been pointed out and explained. Now the words of the spell of *prajnaparamita* are pronounced in order for sentient beings, at the present and in the future, to rely on them to receive benefits. This section has two meanings:

1. The words of a spell are not to be translated or explained; they belong to the type of Buddhist vocabulary not translated because of mystery and secrecy. It is believed that such secret words of Buddhas need not be explained, but chanted and retained they will help relinquish hindrances and increase merits.

Buddhist Dharma is like a treasure of great brightness; there is no dark corner that it does not shine on. It fundamentally has no secrets, but to those not in the know, it appears to have secrets. Therefore if one is able to realize and understand, then the Dharma holds no secrets. For instance, the sun and the moon in the sky constantly illuminate and shine, and as commonly seen by those with eyes no secret is held; yet to the blind it becomes a secret. As in the *Sutra of Hui-neng*, the senior asks the sixth patriarch: “Is there still secret meaning?” Hui-neng replies, “Upon telling you there will be no secret, but if you reflect on your own the secret will be by your side.”

Regarding Buddhism in India, in the early days Buddhist sutras contained very little words of spells. In latter times, due to the rise of Mahayana Tantric Buddhism and the revival of Brahmanism, spell words have flourished and consequently, the use of spell words have also become the trend. According to legend, this version of the *Heart Sutra*, translated by Master Hsuan-tsang, originally contained no spell words, but that they were likely added by followers of latter times.

2. For the sake of expedience, some do give explanations as recorded in the following:

***Gate Gate:*** It means cross, cross or gone, gone. That is, by the efficacy of *prajna*, enlighten oneself and enlighten others.

***Paragate:*** *Para* means to the other shore or beyond; this means cross to the other shore or gone beyond.

***Parasamgate:*** *Sam* means a gathering of people: this means together with many people, cross to the other shore. Simply, altogether gone beyond.

***Bodhi svaha:*** *Bodhi* means enlightenment or awakening, namely the fruit of Buddhahood. *Svaha* means to achieve quickly. What kind of other shore does one cross to? It is to quickly attain the great *bodhi*, or quickly attain the fruit of Buddhahood -- this is gone beyond or crossing to the other shore.

This spell has only four sentences composed of eighteen words. It is very easy to retain that sages of old mostly prefer not to translate it. If one can only sincerely hold and remember it esoterically, the merits one receives will be unimaginable. In the short run, it contributes to peace and security for body and mind, extinguishing sins and disasters while increasing merits and wisdom. In the long run, it leads to relinquishing life and death and passions and to swiftly attaining the utmost *bodhi*. We conclude with the following stanza:

“*Prajna* is the ship of kindness in the suffering sea,  
We shall embark and navigate it!  
*Prajna* is the lamp of brightness in the long night,  
We shall reach up and light it!”