

*Understanding
The Awakening of Faith
in the Mahayana*

大乘起信論集解

Volume 1

Master Chi Hoi

智海長老 著

An Edited Explication of the
Discourse on the Awakening of Faith
in the Mahayana

Volume 1

Master Chi Hoi

translated by his disciples Hui-nien, Hui-yee
Hui-hong, Hui-deng

Printed in the United States of America
Day of Enlightenment of Sakyamuni Buddha, 2008

All rights reserved for Master Chi Hoi
of the Buddhist Wisdom Lecture Hall
1339-38th Ave
San Francisco, CA 94122
www.bwlh.org

Translator's Preface

The Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana is a treatise that intends to inspire and instill faith in the Mahayana, or the “great vehicle,” through the Buddhist themes of emptiness (*sunyata*), mind-only (*citta-matra*), Buddha nature (*Tathagata-garbha*) and enlightened being (*Bodhisattva*). According to Buddhist tradition, the author Asvaghosha appears in this world to fulfill the prophecy by Sakyamuni Buddha to defend and uphold the Buddhist Dharma when the foundation of the Buddhist religion is threatened by divisions and distortion of faith. Consequently, the major portion of the discourse is dedicated to explaining the Buddhist Dharma from a Mahayana perspective. This work is a very efficient handbook on all Mahayana doctrines and indeed is a key to understanding Mahayana Buddhism.

Dharma Master Chi Hoi, a Mahayana scholar and practitioner of both the Tien-t'ai and the Pure Land schools, devotes his time to writing Buddhist literature and to lecturing on Buddhist sutras and philosophy. The present work is the conclusion of a lecture series given in San Francisco during the summer of 2001. This piece is one of the most comprehensive of all his writings. It reflects not only the depth and breadth of his knowledge of the *Tripitaka*, the Buddhist canon, but also the wealth of his knowledge from the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Therefore this work may seem to assume in the reader some prior study of Buddhism and of Buddhist diction. However, because of its lucid and eloquent prose, any reader may be propelled by its psychological reasoning and sheer intellectual force to readily obtain an overall glimpse of profound Buddhist themes.

The translation of this piece is divided into six volumes. Master Chi Hoi's work incorporates commentaries from various learned masters as listed in the author's preface, though for the convenience of lecturing, these commentaries are not specifically cited. In translating Master Chi Hoi's work, the Buddhist dictionary by Hisao Inagaki has been used. The *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* has two Chinese versions translated from Sanskrit first by the Tripitaka Master Paramartha of Western India in 554 CE, and then by the Tripitaka Master Shikananda of Khoten in 700 CE. Master Chi Hoi used the first version in his work. In translating this version, some language has been adopted from D. T. Suzuki's English translation of the second version.

For adherence to mainstream vocabulary, attempts were made in some

instances to conform to the Buddhist diction used by Rupert Gethin in *The Foundation of Buddhism* and Nyanaponika Thera in *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. An apology is in order here to Master Chi Hoi if this translation does not do full credit to his original work

Hui-nien, Hui-yee
Hui-hong, Hui-deng
July, 2008

Preface by the Author

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana (Mahayana Sraddhotpada Sastra)* is a treatise of central importance. In the Tathagata Chapter of the *Mahamayastura*, the Tathagata says that six hundred years after his nirvana, various non-Buddhist factions will arise, competing with each other in professing false doctrines and thereby destroy the Buddha's teachings. A bhikshu named Asvaghosha (Chinese: Ma-ming) will then expertly proclaim the essence of Buddhist Dharma, helping to enlighten innumerable people and refute such false doctrines and non-Buddhist teachings. Asvaghosha must be an extraordinary person since, according to this sutra, he comes into the world fulfilling a prophecy foretold by the Tathagata. As the *Mahayana Sastra* states, in his past, he was the Great Shining Light Buddha, and now, he is a Bodhisattva of the eighth-ground. Among those who write discourses to promote Buddhist doctrines in the Western Regions (today's India and central Asia), he would be recognized as a patriarch.

At the time when Bodhisattva Asvaghosha composed this discourse, there were altogether eight motivations. Particularly, for those sentient beings who find lengthy literature or elaborate commentaries tiresome, and favor concise yet comprehensive words which capture the many meanings of the fundamental principle, he summarized the central themes of over a hundred Mahayana sutras within this discourse. With just over eleven thousand words, this discourse compactly encompasses the immeasurable wondrous meanings of the Tathagata's vast and profoundly deep Dharma. Its purpose is none other than to induce sentient beings to eradicate their doubts and relinquish their grasping of false views, and simultaneously, to inspire in them both the right faith in Mahayana teachings and the aspiration to practice the Dharma.

The principle of this discourse does not go beyond the theory of one mind. The embodiment of this mind equals true thusness; its characteristics contain immeasurable merits. Its application is able to give rise to wholesome karmic causes and fruits for this world as well as for transcending this world. Further, this mind has two gates: 1. the gate to the true thusness mind, 2. the gate to the originating and ceasing mind. With respect to the true thusness mind, the meanings of emptiness and non-emptiness are explained. With respect to the originating and ceasing mind, the meanings of the enlightened and the

non-enlightened states are explained. The content of this discourse widely demonstrates the right principle of the Buddhist Dharma in order to eradicate doubts, to break down the grasping of wrong views and to instigate right views. It means to instill in people the right faith in the Mahayana for initiating the bodhi mind (*bodhi-citta*), and to entice people toward the five practices for entering the Buddhist path. According to *The T'zu En Records* (A Biography of the Tripitaka Dharma Master Hsuan-tsang), this discourse was already non-existent in India when Master Hsuan-tsang specifically translated it into Sanskrit from the Chinese text. One can only imagine the importance he placed on this treatise!

In the Chinese Buddhist community, this discourse is highly reputed for its importance. It has been deemed as the key to hundreds of Mahayana sutras. In the recent era, the Buddhist scholar Master T'ai-shu and the literary scholar Liang chi-ts'ao, when first encountering this discourse, were both so delighted, neither could put it down. From antiquity to the present, there are no less than twenty to thirty commentaries on this treatise. As each has its own merits, students in their research naturally need to edit among them. This summer, in order to give this lecture to our congregation at the Buddhist Wisdom Lecture Hall, I have read through the commentaries by learned masters of former as well as modern times, such as Han-shan, Yuan-ying, T'zu-ju, T'an-shu, T'ai-shu, Ch'ang-hsin and Yin-shun, etc. I made selections from their excellent works for my lectures and have edited these lectures into essay format as I went along. There were instances that I have briefly included my own views for the sake of demonstrating more thoroughly the meanings of the discourse. Such attempts and efforts could hardly be avoided. Now, these are ready for printing as the present work entitled "Edited Explication of the *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*" dedicated to fellow learning Buddhists and ordained practitioners. If there are mistakes herein I sincerely hope readers will not hesitate to offer corrections, I shall be grateful indeed!

Buddhist calendar 2545 (2001)
Day of the initiation of the
Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara
Chi Hoi of Fo-shan Monastery
San Francisco, California

Content

1. Introduction

2. Explication of the Discourse

I. Motivations

II. Theme

III. Explication

IV. Practice of Faith

V. Benefits of Practice

Content of Volume 1

1. Introduction	1
2. Explication of the Discourse	6
I. Motivations	10
II. Theme	16

Introduction

Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana:

This is the title of this discourse, the outline and the general subject of the entire treatise. The Dharma or teaching as spoken by the Buddha is divided into three baskets (the *Tripitaka*) – the sutras, the precepts and the discourses. Presently, the *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* belongs to discourses that summarize central themes of sutras.

Mahayana or "Great Vehicle" refers to the scope of Buddhist Dharma that one believes in. Speaking of Dharma, it is just the mind of sentient beings, meaning the essential nature of sentient beings' minds. This mind then encompasses all the physical and mental events (*dharmas*) of the secular world and for transcending this world, completely contained in three greats -- embodiment, characteristics and application. Hence the nature of this mind is referred to as "great."

1. Embodiment: from the perspective of time, the nature of mind has no beginning in the past, and thus is non-originating; it also has no end in the future, and thus is non-ceasing. This is greatness in embodiment which is fundamentally inherent in all sentient beings.

2. Characteristics: from the perspective of space, the nature of mind broadly encompasses all ten directions, completely containing all the merits that can be measured by the sands of the River Ganges. Whatever bodily form that is required to enlighten a certain person, one may appear exactly in that body to teach the Dharma to that person. This is greatness in characteristics, or manifestation, which is fundamentally inherent in all sentient beings.

3. Application: from the perspective of both time and space, the nature of mind is capable of transforming and creating the karmic cause and fruit of defilement or purity of the ten worlds, and capable of giving rise to suffering or happiness. If this mind reaches the realization of dependent origination without inherent existence, then it may turn its back to the Saha world and join the

enlightened; turn over defilement to achieve purity; and thus attain nirvana. This is called greatness in application. Therefore, the nature of sentient beings' minds is strong indeed, and thus referred to as "great."

Vehicle indicates that this mind alone is a means of conveyance. This mind, with complete equality in its nature, conveys all Buddhas from the sea of life and death to the other shore, enabling them to attain *bodhi* and nirvana. All Bodhisattvas are conveyed by this nature of mind to widely cultivate myriads of practice, seeking the path to Buddhahood above on the one hand, and enlightening sentient beings below on the other hand. The sentient beings are conveyed by this nature of mind to relinquish the cycles of life and death. The mind fundamentally possesses this function of conveyance. Therefore, this nature of mind is the common denominator that relates all karmic causes to karmic fruits for both uninitiated and saints, toward delusion and enlightenment. Hence, it is referred to in this Discourse as the "embodiment of the great overall aspect of the entire objective world." Further, distressing passions are, in fact, *bodhi*; and life and death are but nirvana. Suppose a person, who usually commits various evil deeds, suddenly becomes completely enlightened. He makes great efforts to right the wrongs he has done, and carries out numerous good deeds. Then good and evil all belong to this person. It is not as if there is a good person aside from the evil one. That is why there is an idiom saying: "Put down the butcher's knife, become a Buddha right where you stand." Therefore, the nature of sentient beings' mind constitutes the very meaning of Mahayana.

As for *Awakening of Faith*, faith requires two approaches: first, faith should be based on excellent understanding, then one's faith shall be truthful; second, practice should follow faith, then one's faith shall not become false. Otherwise, it maybe wrong or temporary faith, not real, rightful faith. Presently, the purpose is to instill in sentient beings the rightful understanding toward the Mahayana without deviation in order to inspire faith in the Mahayana. By means of right principle of Mahayana, instigate right faith in Mahayana. However, the capacity for faith belongs to the person while the Mahayana is the Dharma that is the object of his faith. That is, Dharma accommodates the person. Since the meaning of the title should include both the person and the Dharma, thus it is called *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*.

Discourse refers to the format of question and answer for choosing between true and false, and for demonstrating clearly the doctrines of the Mahayana in order to induce the right faith in the Mahayana. This is because during the six

hundred years after the Buddha's nirvana those who did not believe in the mind alone, tried instead to seek dharma outside the mind, and thus gave rise to dissensions. Those of other beliefs grasped false views and tended to destroy the right Dharma. Therefore, with great compassion, the author of this discourse specifically summarizes the central themes of over one hundred Mahayana sutras in this discourse. He emphasizes important themes of "nature" and "characteristic," draws deeply on the causes of delusion and enlightenment, and teaches expedient guidelines for practice. The specific motivation of this discourse is to show the way for eradicating doubts and relinquishing false attachments.

Written by the Bodhisattva Asvaghosha

This Bodhisattva was born in the kingdom of Baranasi in central India, six hundred years after the Buddha's nirvana. [Asvaghosha, as well as Nagarjuna, are the two great authors of Mahayana discourses, and are thus revered as Bodhisattvas in Chinese Buddhist tradition.] He is the twelfth of the twenty-eight patriarchs of the Western Haven (referring to ancient India). The Revered One Parshva is the tenth patriarch, the Revered One Nagarjuna is the fourteenth patriarch, and Bodhidharma is the twenty-eighth patriarch. Before Asvaghosha became ordained, he heard that the Revered One Punyayashas (the eleventh patriarch) was renowned for being well-versed in practice and knowledge. He went to the Revered One and confronted the *arhat* with the claim that he could refute all opinions and doctrines like "hail stones destroying tender grass." The Revered One leisurely responded: "All Buddhist Dharma is not beyond the two kinds of truth. The conventional truth designates the false and temporary existence of self. According to the first principle, absolute truth is empty and tranquil. With such contemplation how can one justify the existence of self! You should think carefully, which one of us will really win?" Asvaghosha then deliberated in his mind: the conventional truth is temporary and therefore false, the absolute truth is empty according to the first principle. Since from both absolute truth and conventional truth nothing is obtainable, then how can one refute that? Recognizing defeat, he bowed out gracefully. The Revered One then converted him with skillful means and made him an ordained monk.

When the Revered One Punyayashas was about to enter into nirvana, he entrusted the Dharma to Asvaghosha with the following verse:

Like in a dark room,
A great torch is lit.
Everything in it,
Without difference are all illuminated;

The Tathagata's Dharma torch,
Blazes just so,
Flowing through all humanity,
Eradicating ignorance and darkness.

Various saints and sages,
Guard and ensure its lineage.
Now comes my turn,
To you, I entrust.

Receive the Dharma with your heart,
Retain it without end.
Be sure those in future eras,
Are forever endowed by plentiful benefits.

Since Asvaghosha accepted this legacy, he raised the great banner of Dharma to promote Buddhism. He then composed over a hundred varied discourses. Thus drawing on the *Flower Ornament Scripture*, the *Mystic Glorification Sutra*, the *Great Collection Sutra*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* and altogether over a hundred Mahayana sutras, he wrote the *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*. He intended this discourse to be rich and profound in meaning but compact in literature, catering to both understanding and practice. He meant to accommodate people of superior, average, or less favorable capacities so that all may equally enter the dharma-realm and that innumerable beings may awaken their faith and become enlightened.

Asvaghosha also composed music called *Lai cha huo la* to convert the people. With this melody he enticed the minds of the audience toward experiencing the Buddhist Dharma of impermanence, suffering and no-self. Moving the noble as well as the lowly, he induced them to renounce the secular world and join the Buddhist order. In order to promote the voice of Dharma, he also played the lyre with such skill that even all the horses neighed in response. His name became renowned in all countries and there were none who did not admire or revere him.

In the Tathagata Chapter of the *Mahamayasutra* the Tathagata says that six hundred years after his nirvana, various non-Buddhist factions will arise, who will profess false doctrines, rival against each other, and destroy the Buddhist teachings. A bhikshu named Asvaghosha (Chinese: Ma-ming) will then expertly proclaim the essence of Buddhist Dharma, helping to enlighten innumerable people and refute such false doctrines and non-Buddhist teachings. Asvaghosha must be an extraordinary person since, according to this *sutra*, he comes into the world fulfilling a prophecy foretold by the Tathagata. As the *Mahayana Sastra* states, in his past, he was the Great Shining Light Buddha, and now, he is a Bodhisattva of the eighth-ground. Among those who write discourses to promote Buddhist doctrines in the Western Regions (today's India and central Asia), he would be recognized as a patriarch.

Translated by the Indan Tripitaka Master Paramartha during the Liang Dynasty

The Tripitaka Master Paramartha is the translator of this discourse. A native of Western India, he came to China in the twelfth year of Ta-tung, during the reign of Emperor Wu-ti of the Liang dynasty (around 540 CE, after the arrival of Bodhidharma). The Master was in his thirties then and received great welcome from Emperor Wu-ti. Together they encountered some national crises and went to the country of Northern Chi en route to the country of East Wei. During those travels, the Master translated the *Golden Splendor Sutra*, the *Discourse on Embracing the Mahayana* etc., altogether two hundred and seventy eight volumes of sutras and discourses. The Master entered nirvana during the first year of Ta-chien at the age of seventy-one.

2.

Explication of the Discourse

Reverence

With this life take refuge [in the three jewels] immeasurably in all ten directions,

**[Take refuge in the Buddha] He of the utmost, supreme karmic deeds, His knowledge knows no boundaries,
His form is completely free and without limitations,
His great compassion is dedicated to save all beings;**

**[Take refuge in the Dharma] Also, being His embodiment and characteristics:
Like the ocean, the nature of Dharma, is true thusness.
Like the ocean, the nature of Dharma is the storage of immeasurable merits.**

[Take refuge in the Sangha] Such as those, who practice rightfully the Dharma according to the true principle.

This section of the verse means to revere and take refuge in the three jewels. It asks the three jewels for blessing, because in writing this discourse to explain sutras, it is essential to ensure that the discourse correctly attributes and correctly explains the Buddha's teaching.

With this life take refuge refers to the body and mind which are capable of taking refuge. As one controls his six sense faculties, he is capable of fully taking refuge. *Immeasurably in all ten directions* indicates the realm in which one takes refuge has no end. Together this means to adoringly revere the three jewels, which reaches all ten directions without end.

He of the utmost, supreme karmic deeds, His knowledge knows no boundaries, His form is completely free and without limitations, His great

compassion is dedicated to save all beings. These three phrases constitute the reverence of the jewel of Buddha. They praise the Buddha's three categories of karmic deeds: bodily action, speech and intention. They are superior to the utmost. Thus it is said, "He of the utmost, supreme karmic deeds." *His knowledge knows no boundaries* praises the Buddha's deeds of intention to be the most superior. This is because the uninitiated sentient beings have delusory knowledge, those of other beliefs have false knowledge, practitioners not bound for Bodhisattva-hood have prejudiced knowledge, the Bodhisattvas have partial knowledge, and only the Buddhas have universal, limitless knowledge. By means of reality wisdom, the Buddha realizes the true principle of knowledge, and by means of conventional wisdom, He obtains insight into sentient beings' capacity for knowledge. He universally and limitlessly knows the minds of sentient beings and their karmic causes and fruits. There is nothing that He does not know completely. Thus it is said, "His knowledge knows no boundaries."

His form is completely free and without limitations praises the Buddha's deeds of bodily action to be the most supreme. This does not apply to the body of sentient beings that are under restriction. The Buddha's body has immeasurable excellent marks, completely free all around. Based on circumstance, the Buddha's body may appear great or small, yet always used to freely enlighten sentient beings without limitations. *His great compassion is dedicated to save all beings* praises the Buddha's deeds of speech to be the most superior. With perfect sound, the Buddha speaks the Dharma to save the world and enlighten sentient beings. The Dharma of which He speaks flows from His mind of great compassion, delivered by His mouth of purity and gifted debating capacity. This indeed can induce sentient beings to leave suffering and attain happiness.

Also, being His embodiment and characteristics: Like the ocean, the nature of Dharma is true thusness. Like the ocean, the nature of Dharma is the storage of immeasurable merits. These three phrases constitute the reverence of the jewel of Dharma. *Also* indicates that one takes refuge not only in the Buddha, but in the Dharma. *His* refers to the form of the Buddha mentioned above. It demonstrates that the two jewels of Buddha and Dharma are neither exactly the same nor entirely different. The Buddha is one capable of enlightenment while the Dharma is the object of His enlightenment. Without such capability, there is no object. Thus the Dharma is the embodiment and characteristics of the Buddha. Fundamentally there are not two entities. So it is referred to as His embodiment and characteristics.

Embodiment: Embodiment is the nature of Dharma -- the true thusness. Detached from all distinguishing discernments, there is the true embodiment of Dharma-body (*Dharma-kaya*). In sentient beings *Dharma-kaya* is referred to as Buddha nature while in inanimate objects it is referred to as the nature of Dharma.

Characteristics: Characteristics indicate the merit-storage of the various merits earned for transcending this world. Since the nature of Dharma, namely true thusness, embodies the true nature of all wholesome or unwholesome physical or mental events, this nature does not change under any circumstance. Further, though not changing, this nature is able to encompass any circumstance. Using ocean and waves as an analogy, when the wind blows, waves will rise, but the liquid nature of the ocean will not change. Here, the waves represent characteristics and the ocean represents embodiment. *Like the ocean, the nature of Dharma is true thusness* refers to "embodiment," and *Like the ocean, the nature of Dharma is the storage of immeasurable merits* refers to "characteristics".

The line *such as those, who practice rightfully the Dharma according to the true principle* constitutes the reverence of the jewel of Sangha. Sangha includes the uninitiated, the saints, great and small. *Those, who practice rightfully the Dharma according to the true principle* refers particularly to those great Bodhisattvas following the ten grounds of Bodhisattva-hood. These Sangha match their practice to the true principle. The discourse states later that relying on the perfuming power of Dharma is the practice before reaching the ten grounds. Then, *practice rightfully the Dharma according to the true principle* is the practice of the ten grounds. Furthermore, practicing skill-in-means is the practice whereupon at completion, all ten grounds of the Bodhisattva practice is perfected. *Such as those* refers to the Sangha in general. The Sangha here includes those practicing before, during, and after the ten grounds. This concludes the section on taking refuge in and revering the three jewels.

The Goal of this Discourse

The goal is to induce all sentient beings

To eradicate doubts and relinquish false views,

To awaken in themselves the right faith in the Mahayana, and

To carry on unendingly the Buddha's legacy.

These four phrases of the verse state the goals of this discourse. These four goals are: 1- Since those of the *arhat* and *pratyeka* Buddha paths do not have faith in the mind only, this discourse demonstrates the right meaning encompassed in one mind. The goal is to induce them to eradicate their doubts. 2- Since other believers grasp false doctrines, this discourse refutes false doctrines. The goal is to induce them to relinquish their false views. 3- Since some practitioners do not follow rightful practice, this discourse distinguishes the ways the Bodhisattvas rightfully practice the Buddhist path. The goal is to awaken in them right faith as the foundation for practice. 4- The goal of this discourse is to instill perfect and complete faith in the mind. This is to enable the practitioner to enter the initial positions of the ten-abode, and to never slide from such positions on the way to enlightenment. Then, the practitioner will be born into the house of the Tathagata, like a Dharma prince, capable of inheriting the throne of the Buddha. That is what it means to carry on unendingly the legacy of the Buddha.

The Discourse

The Discourse states: there is Dharma that can initiate the root of faith in the Mahayana; therefore it should be explained. The explanation consists of five sections. What are the five? I. Motivations, II. Theme, III. Explication, IV. Practice of faith, and V. Benefits of practice.

This passage of the Discourse captures the subject of this discourse and identifies the various sections. *The Discourse states: there is Dharma that can initiate the root of faith in the Mahayana; therefore it should be explained.* This phrase states the theme and purpose of this discourse. *The explanation consists of five sections, what are the five? I. Motivations, II. Theme, III. Explication, IV. Practice of faith, and V. Benefits of practice* identifies the sections. *Dharma* here refers to the fundamental principle previously discussed -- Dharma of mind -- a mind containing two gates and three greats. This is the essential theme embodied in the entire discourse. *Mahayana* means "Great Vehicle." In other words the subject of the Dharma of mind is the "Great Vehicle." The capability to have *faith* in this mind forms the *root* -- the very foundation of Mahayana. Because of this

excellent efficacy, the Dharma should indeed be explained.

This treatise is established in five sections: *I. Motivations* – This discourse does not stand on its own. There are reasons that require such an explication. *II. Theme* – Now that the motivations are presented, the essential theme of Dharma must be stated. *III. Explication* -- The essential theme is deep and profound and thus requires explanation. *IV. Practice of faith* -- Once the Dharma is understood, practice and understanding should mutually correspond. *V. Benefits of practice* -- Though understanding and practice are established, those with less favorable roots may become lazy or lax and easily back down from practice. Therefore, it is necessary to illustrate the benefits in order to persuade them to keep practicing. These five divisions of the discourse are like the usual three divisions of a sutra. The first section of motivations is the introduction. The second, third and fourth sections combined are the essay proper. And the fifth section is the conclusion.

I. Motivations.

Question: What motivates the composition of this discourse?

Response: There are eight motivations. Which are the eight?

First: This is the common denominator of all motivations. That is, to help sentient beings liberate themselves from suffering and attain happiness, though not in the sense of worldly fame, wealth or honor. Second: To explain the fundamental teachings of the Tathagata in order for sentient beings to have right comprehension without misunderstanding. Third: To enable those sentient beings, who have matured their karmic root of merits, to reach immovable faith in the Mahayana. Fourth: To induce those sentient beings, who lack in karmic merit, to practice faith. Fifth: To show expedient means in order for sentient beings to eradicate hindrances caused by unwholesome karmic deeds, to skillfully direct their minds away from ignorance and self assurance, and thus to escape the nets of defilement. Sixth: To demonstrate the practice of calm and insight meditation (*samatha* and *vipasyana*) in order to fortify the mind against falsity. Seventh: To offer the expedient means of

mindfulness of Buddha in order for sentient beings to be born in the presence of Buddhas and to obtain immovable faith in the Mahayana. Eighth: To elaborate on the benefits of practice to persuade sentient beings to practice the Dharma.

For these reasons this discourse is thus composed.

The first motivation: The common denominator of all motivations is the steadfast commitment by the Buddhas to help sentient beings leave suffering and attain happiness. It is for this reason that the Buddhist canon, the *Tripitaka* (*sutra-pitaka*, *vinaya-pitaka* and *abhidharma-pitaka*), and the three learning (precepts, meditation and wisdom) have been spoken and instructed. This reflects great compassion. Since the uninitiated and those of other beliefs are deluded in the mind, they are subject to sufferings due to affliction, change, and conditions. These are sufferings from the cycles of life and death in the three realms (desire, form, formless realm). Practitioners not bound for Bodhisattva-hood and also those Bodhisattvas who have not fulfilled their practice, are still deluded so that they are yet subject to the lighter sufferings of changes due to conditioned origination. This discourse intends to initiate, instruct and entice the mind toward faith, understanding, and practice, in order to attain the joy of awakening *bodhi*, and the joy of tranquil, liberating nirvana. It is meant solely for sentient beings to leave sufferings and attain happiness, though not in the sense of worldly fame, wealth or honor.

The second motivation: This is to demonstrate the rightful meaning. Sections II and III, Theme and Explication further elaborate this point. Since sentient beings do not have right comprehension, they grasp self and Dharma as a result, easily falling into the traps of nihilism or eternalism. Wrong views often arise because the fundamental teaching of the Tathagata is not understood. Now, the themes of one mind, two gates and three greats, as presented in the Theme and Explication, constitute the fundamental meaning of the Tathagata's teaching. Here the motivation is to explain the theme in order for sentient beings to have the right understanding without deviation.

The third motivation: This serves as a prelude to the third part of Section III: Explication: Distinguishing the aspirations for practice which leads to different levels of attainment along the Buddhist path. This passage enables those with advantageous capacity to reach absolute faith, to proceed toward the great path, and attain immovable faith. This should be the position where the mind has

perfectly achieved the ten-faith; hence it is said that they have matured their karmic roots of merits. They may enter the ten-abode and join those rightfully established to reach enlightenment so that their faith will never back down. This is so-called reaching immovable faith.

The fourth motivation: This motivation relates to part of Section IV: Practice of Faith. This section introduces the four faiths and five practices to attain these faiths. This fourth motivation corresponds directly to the first four of the five practices. This is meant for sentient beings, who have not yet joined those rightfully established for reaching enlightenment. They lack karmic merits because they have not yet completed the positions of ten-faith. Therefore in order to induce these beings, the discourse speaks of the practice of faith.

The fifth motivation: This motivation is for those sentient beings burdened with numerous hindrances as discussed in Section IV: Practice of Faith. This fifth motivation corresponds directly to the fourth practice of faith: endeavor. It particularly addresses sentient beings weighed down by heavy unwholesome karmic deeds. Since it is difficult for them to cultivate wholesome root, this passage instructs them expediently to pay respect to the Buddha and sincerely repent as a way to eradicate the hindrances caused by unwholesome karmic deeds. This helps to discipline their minds against illusions and self-assurance, and thus enables them to escape these deeds altogether.

Regarding the motivations above, the third motivation is for those who have perfected the ten-faith. The fourth motivation is for those who are in the middle of perfecting the ten-faith. The next three motivations are for those who are in the preliminary positions of perfecting the ten-faith and whose capacities are less favorable, average and advantageous accordingly. Here, the fifth motivation is for those of less favorable capacity, burdened by numerous hindrances. Thus it is most expedient for them to pay respect to the Buddha and to repent in order to eradicate their hindrances.

The sixth motivation: This motivation is for those with average capacity at the preliminary positions of perfecting the ten-faith. This sixth motivation corresponds directly to the fifth practice of faith: calm and insight meditation. The passage here simultaneously explains both calm and insight meditation, and gives instructions to practice in order to counter false thoughts of the uninitiated. For instance, the practice of calm meditation may weaken one's obsession with the secular world. Further, it can dispel fear of the prison of life and

death in the three realms and instead, spark realization that this prison is but an illusion. On the other hand, the practice of insight meditation may motivate one to quickly cultivate wholesome karmic roots. Further, it can inspire the great compassion of Bodhisattva-hood. Therefore this practice counters the falsity of mind.

The seventh motivation: This motivation is for those with advantageous capacity at the preliminary positions of perfecting the ten-faith. This motivation corresponds directly to the concluding passage of Section IV: Practice of Faith: Promoting rebirth in the Pure Lands. Since these sentient beings may have fears such as dropping to other realms due to karmic retributions, or not being able to meet Buddhas, or backing down from practice due to outside conditions, the best means for these people is focused mindfulness of Buddha. Consequently, they may dedicate their vow to seek birth in the presence of Buddhas, to always see the Buddha, and to eventually not back down from practice. Thus it is said to obtain definitely immovable faith.

The eighth motivation: This serves as a prelude to Section V: Benefits of Practice. With respect to the Dharma, if one accepts, retains, contemplates and practices it, with right faith, one may attain endless merits. For those who are idle, lazy, and do not practice, this passage persuades them to diligently learn and practice.

For these reasons this discourse is thus composed. This concluding sentence to the paragraph restates that these eight motivations constitute the reason for writing this treatise.

Question: The Dharma is already contained in the sutras, why should it be spoken again?

Response: Though the Dharma is contained in the sutras, sentient beings do not have equal capacity and practice. Therefore their acceptance and understanding [of the Dharma], and the circumstances leading to this may differ. When the Tathagata was still present in the world, sentient beings were of advantageous capacity. The most capable speaker [the Buddha], was of supreme karmic deeds in both body and mind. When His perfect sound was voiced, people of various diverse predispositions and inclinations would equally

understand [the Dharma]. Hence, there was no need for discourse. After the nirvana of the Buddha, there were sentient beings who, by their own intellectual powers, could understand the sutras through extensive reading; there were other sentient beings who possessed in themselves the intellectual powers to understand the sutras after reading only a few of them; then there were sentient beings who, lacking in intellectual powers of their own, could understand the sutras only with the help of elaborate commentaries. There were also sentient beings who thought lengthy, elaborate commentaries tiresome, and favored literature which distilled profound doctrines into concise yet comprehensive form. This, they understood accordingly. The present discourse is composed for this category. Indeed, this treatise intends to capture the immeasurable, wondrous meanings of the Tathagata's profoundly deep Dharma in that concise manner.

The function of this paragraph is to settle doubts by raising anticipated questions for the need of such a treatise and responding accordingly. The question is -- With respect to the eight motivations explained above, the sutras spoken by the Buddha already contain this Dharma, so why should it be repeated in this discourse? The reply is: While it is true that the Dharma is contained in the sutras, sentient beings have advantageous or less favorable capacities, and thus do not have equal understanding or practice. They may not receive the teaching and reach understanding in the same manner; furthermore, the circumstances leading to their understanding of the Dharma differs in each instance. *When the Tathagata was still present in the world, sentient beings were of advantageous capacity* refers to the favorable capacity as a superior karmic cause of that time. *The most capable speaker [the Buddha] was of supreme karmic deeds in both body and mind* refers to the opportunity of physically seeing the Buddha, whose person is supreme in the three deeds [bodily action, speech, and intention]. *When His perfect sound was voiced, people of various diverse predispositions and inclinations would equally understand [the Dharma]* refers to the superior condition of personally hearing the Buddha speak. At that time, no sutras were recorded yet, so why should there be need of a discourse!

What follows from *after the nirvana of the Buddha* is to explain away any doubts in four steps:

1. *After the nirvana of the Buddha, there were sentient beings who, by their own intellectual powers, could understand the sutras through extensive reading* means

these people were intellectual enough to understand the meanings on their own after reading many sutras. For them, there was no need for discourses.

2. *There were other sentient beings who possessed in themselves the intellectual powers to understand the sutras after reading only a few of them* refers to those with advantageous capacities. They not only had their own intellectual power but did not need to rely on extensive reading. Their mind could be enlightened by a mere sentence. For them, there was no need for discourses either. For the above two groups of people, there was only a need for sutras, not discourses.

3. *Then there were sentient beings who, lacking in intellectual powers of their own, could understand the sutras only with the help of elaborate commentaries* refers to those with less favorable capacities. They did not possess intellectual power of their own and were not able to understand the profound meaning by means of sutras. They needed to rely on comprehensive commentaries such as the *Mahaprajaparamita Sastra (Ta-chih-tu lun)* or *Yogacara Bhumi* in order to understand through extensive reading.

4. *There were also sentient beings who thought lengthy, elaborate commentaries tiresome, and favored literature which distilled profound doctrines into concise yet comprehensive form. This, they understood accordingly* means these people disliked tediousness and preferred simplicity. They particularly favored treatises with concise writing but many ideas and were capable of understanding the deep, profound themes of Buddhist sutras in a short time. It is exactly for these beings that this discourse is written.

The present discourse is composed for this category. Indeed this treatise intends to capture the immeasurable wonderful meanings of the Tathagata's profoundly deep Dharma in that concise manner -- This concludes the purpose of composing this discourse. This treatise, in just over eleven thousand words, attempts to capture concisely and completely the immeasurable meanings of the Tathagata's profoundly deep Dharma, contained in the Mahayana sutras and discourses. It may be said that this work is as brief as possible while the subjects covered are as extensive as possible. It distills the profound themes from over a hundred Mahayana sutras, everything included and nothing left out, much like a close up view of a fruit held in the palm.

II. Theme

Now that the motivations have been explained, the theme will be stated. Generally speaking there are two perspectives of Mahayana. What are the two?

The first is Dharma. The second is meaning. What is called Dharma is the mind of sentient beings. This mind constitutes all the physical and mental events (*dharmas*) of the secular world and for transcending this world. The meaning of Mahayana is revealed through this mind. Why is that? It is because the inherent true thusness of the mind reveals the embodiment of Mahayana. The inherent originating and ceasing of the mind from karmic causality reveals the embodiment, as well as, the characteristics and application of Mahayana.

The previous section explains the motivations of this discourse. Now, this section establishes the fundamental theme: one mind, two gates, and three greats. Together, these represent the name and meaning of Mahayana or "Great Vehicle." *What is called Dharma* is the embodiment of the great overall aspect of the entire objective world. It is the very formation of Mahayana, and the heart of Buddha nature (*Tathagata-garbha*). This Dharma is equally contained in all sentient beings. Its very name is established according to the mind of sentient being. Thus, *what is called Dharma is the mind of sentient beings* is where the Dharma originates. *This mind constitutes all the physical and mental events (dharmas) of the secular world and for transcending this world:* The physical and mental events of the secular world are the events of the six realms of the uninitiated. Because there are life and death due to karmic deeds and consciousnesses, this mind encompasses these events. The physical and mental events transcending this world are the events of the four noble truths for enlightenment. This mind embodies all-equal true thusness, therefore it encompasses all these events. *The meaning of Mahayana is revealed through this mind:* The meaning of Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, is revealed through the mind because the mind contains the three greats.

Now firstly, the mind can be approached by two gates. 1. The gate to true thusness mind: It is without characteristics, so that names and speech are both non-existent. Of the three greats it shows only the embodiment, but not the

characteristics or application. Thus it is said *reveals the embodiment of Mahayana*.

2. The gate to the originating and ceasing mind: In this case, because the imaginary depends on the real, characteristics and application are consequently revealed. Thus, through the gate to the originating and ceasing mind, all three greats, embodiment, characteristics and application, are together revealed. Hence, it is called "great." Take a tea cup for example. It is a porcelain utensil made of moistened earth. The moistened earth is its embodiment. Its shape, square or round, is its characteristics. Its capacity to hold water or tea is its application. If the moistened earth is made into a bowl, then its characteristics and application will be different. Hence, characteristics and application are related to the embodiment. The embodiment can be manifested in different sets of characteristics and applications. Therefore, all physical and mental events are equal because they all originate from the same embodiment of mind. It neither increases for the saint nor decreases for the uninitiated. This is the very greatness of embodiment. For the two gates, the real or imaginary physical and mental events represent two conveyances, or vehicles. That is why the characteristics and applications for each conveyance are different. Hence, it is called "vehicle." Thus it is said *the meaning of Mahayana (Great Vehicle) is revealed through this mind*.

The meaning of Mahayana (Great Vehicle) is illustrated by the three greats: What are the three?

- 1. The greatness of embodiment -- because all physical and mental events (*dharmas*) are equal in true thusness, without increasing or decreasing.**
- 2. The greatness of characteristics -- because the Buddha nature (*Tathagata-garbha*) stores fully immeasurable aspects of merits.**
- 3. The greatness of application -- because it is able to give rise to wholesome karmic causes and fruits for this world and for transcending this world.**

It is the fundamental vehicle for all the Buddhas. All the Bodhisattvas are conveyed by this Dharma to the realm of the Tathagata.

This paragraph explains the fundamental meaning of the word Mahayana, or Great Vehicle. While the previous paragraph describes the mind of sentient beings as the embodiment of Dharma, this paragraph indicates that once embodiment is known, its inherent meaning should be explained next. The meaning of three greats are not apart from the one Dharma. Therefore, the Dharma

is the Dharma of Mahayana and the meaning is the meaning of Mahayana. As previously explained, it is called "great" because it has the meaning of three greats; and it is called a "vehicle" because it has the meaning of two conveyances. The name and meaning arises from the union of real and imaginary physical and mental events (*dharmas*). Therefore, the meaning of Mahayana is revealed through the mind of sentient beings.

Regarding the mind's greatness of embodiment, there is only true thusness. Regarding the mind's greatness of characteristics, it depends on the defiled or wholesome causal circumstances and the Buddha nature (*Tathagata-garbha*) perspective. If the Buddha nature (of sentient beings) follows wholesome conditions, then it contains immeasurably many natural merits. If it follows defiled conditions, then sentient beings may have eighty-four thousand distressing passions, or innumerable unwholesome passions like the sands of the River Ganges. It is just like the way water assumes various shapes and characteristics -- square when held in a square container, round when held in a round container.

Regarding the mind's greatness of application, this mind is capable of aspiration to the wholesome karmic causes of this world -- the five precepts and ten good deeds -- and through these, realizes the wholesome karmic fruits of this world of rebirth into the realms of humans or heavenly beings. Also the mind is capable of aspiration to the wholesome karmic causes for transcending this world -- the four noble truths, the twelve links of dependent origination, and the six perfections -- and through these, realizes the wholesome karmic fruits transcending this world of enlightenment as saints of the three vehicles. Thus, because the mind contains the three greats -- greatness of embodiment, characteristics, and application, equally and universally with respect to all physical and mental events, it is called great. Also, because all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are all conveyed by the mind, mind is called vehicle as well. The following major portion of this discourse is dedicated entirely to explaining this principle theme.

Works by Master Chi Hoi

Distributed at the Buddhist Wisdom Lecture Hall
and available online at www.bwlh.org

English Translation
<i>Understanding the Heart Sutra</i>
<i>Perfect Realization by Mindfulness of Buddha</i>
<i>Bodhidharma's Meditation and the Fundamental Techniques of Sitting Meditation</i>
<i>Bodhisattva Forest of Awareness's Praise of Buddha</i>
<i>Dharma Rhymes by Master Chi Hoi (First Volume)</i>
<i>Understanding the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana</i>
<i>Dharma Rhymes by Master Chi Hoi (Second Volume)</i>

Chinese
<i>Over 30 Books and Lecture Notes</i>
<i>CD's and DVD's of Lecture Series</i>