

*Understanding
the Awakening of Faith
in the Mahayana*

Volume 4

Master Chi Hoi

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

Volume 4

Master Chi Hoi

translated by his disciples Hui-nien, Hui-yee
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Translator's Preface

The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana is a discourse 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 the 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 hand-book on all Mahayana doctrines; indeed it is reputed to be the “key to Mahayana Buddhism.”

Dharma Master Chi Hoi, a Mahayana scholar and practitioner of both the Tien-t'ai and the Pureland schools, devotes his time to writing Buddhist literature as well as 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 the most sophisticated and comprehensive of all his writings.

Printed in the United States of America
on the day of birth of Amida Buddha, 2018

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1339-38th Ave
San Francisco, CA 94122
www.bwlh.org

It reflects not only the depth and breadth of his knowledge of the Tripitaka, the Buddhist cannon, 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 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 Buddhist scholars. The translation of the original text of the *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* follows the Chinese version completed in AD554 by the Tripitaka Master Paramartha of Western India. However, some language is adopted from D. T. Suzuki's translation although he follows an alternative Chinese version completed later in AD700 by the Tripitaka Master Shikananda of Khoten.

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
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November, 2018

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, who will profess false doctrines, rival against each other and 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 Shinning 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 brief yet comprehensive writing capturing the many meanings of the fundamental principle in concise form, 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), at the time this discourse was already non-existent in India, Master Hsuan-tsang specifically translated it into Sanskrit from the Chinese text. What importance he placed on this treatise may be imagined!

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, each was so delighted in its perusal that neither could put it down. From antiquity to the present, there are no less than twenty to thirty commentaries of this treatise. As each has its own merits, students in their research naturally need to edit among them. This summer, in

order to lecture this discourse 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, the lecture notes 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
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