



ESSENCE OF PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ

*IHA ŚĀRIPUTRA!*

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# ESSENCE OF PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ

*IHA ŚĀRIPUTRA!*

*A New Transcendental Translation  
of the Core Essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom  
(Formerly Known as the Heart Sūtra)*

*Commentary by  
Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải*

*Compiled and translated by Milam Sudhana  
Edited by Oliver K. Luu*

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and Phuongthao Bui Luu (*Milam Sudhana*)

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Translating these words as *“in the very vivid presence, the moment the Noble Awakened Being deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates, and had a lucid, direct knowing of their essence as being Void”* means that we have been emancipated from the very first sentence! As such, the content of the *Prajñāpāramitā* text is now describing something very transcendental at the wisdom level of an expert, realized practitioner. The contextual meaning has been brought to a highly specialized level in Buddhism, and is no longer simply a theory of the mind as it has mostly been depicted in the past.

Therefore, after we finished editing this rendition in the summer of 2019 according to our aspiration, I said that since I was very content with this Buddhist work, and had I passed away right then, I would still feel perfectly complete, because in this lifetime, I was able to contribute such a rendition of this marvelous scripture to the world of Buddhism.

*Zen Master THÍCH TUỆ HẢI*

Breathing in  
perfect *merit* and *wisdom*

Breathing out  
full of *love*

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May the unsurpassed

all-awakened

all-perfect

all-knowing

all-pervasive

all-inclusive

and all-transcendental state

of all mother sentient beings

be ever-revealed

in this very vivid pristine presence!





# *INTRODUCTION*



Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải's  
*Introductory Commentary*

*Homage to the Omniscient Perfectly-Awakened One*

In the past, I have personally given a teaching on the *Prajñāpāramitā-Hṛdayam*, widely known as the *Heart Sūtra* or the *Prajñā-Heart Sūtra* (Viet. *Tâm Kinh* or *Bát Nhã Tâm Kinh*). The version that I previously used to teach was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and then from Chinese into Vietnamese; however, it contained various segments that did not genuinely bring to light the aspect of the “*Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom in the vivid presence.*” After I finished giving a series of discourses on the *Prajñā-Heart Sūtra*, a book of this teaching was assembled, and I have requested an aspired disciple and translator, Milam Sudhana, to render it into English.

Nevertheless, and quite unexpectedly, our translator discovered that there were a number of places in the earlier Chinese-Vietnamese versions that were not in congruent with the Sanskrit root text and the different English translation counterparts. Thus, she spent some time doing research, collecting variegated versions in Sanskrit and English, and, finally, decided to work with the oldest available Sanskrit version in the world, the *Hōryū-ji* version, that was written on two palm leaves which we Vietnamese usually call *lá bối*. It arrived in Japan, supposedly in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century, which means that it has been there for over one thousand and five hundred years. It is currently being housed and revered at the National Museum of Japan in Tokyo.

Before we begin to study the content of the *Prajñā* literature based on this new translation, I would like to make a few suggestions though. That is, if we want to comprehend this *Prajñā* scripture in a most felicitous way, we should temporarily set aside any knowledge that we have previously acquired on this *Sūtra*. We should try our best to let the classic literary language of the older version of the *Prajñā-Heart Sūtra* quietly settle in our mind, and only then would we be able to fully embrace the quintessence of the new rendition of this scripture. If we are still being mentally bounded, then we know that we are still trapped. If we are still being caught up in the old, then we cannot possibly see with clarity that which is ever fresh.

*Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, is the liberating wisdom that does not belong to, or is attached to, any specific culture or religious tradition per se. When we ourselves find our way back to its root, this root is something that is fully emancipating, beyond all bondage, free and unhindered, utterly transcendental! Therefore, before we

begin to study this new rendition, we should try to set aside the older version of the *Prajñā-Heart Sūtra* altogether. Please leave it completely aside for the time being!

This specific Vietnamese translation version of *Prajñāpāramitā* has been enhanced based on simple linguistic expressions. It is well articulated, even though, unlike the classic work, it uses simple, originative and non-sophisticated word usage. Since it follows the “*translation beyond translation*” or “*transcendental translation*” approach, it can luminously reveal the very core “*nature*” of *Prajñā* using specific word choices and expressions. When we proceed more deeply into the content of the scripture, I will further explain about them, so that you can see the deep-seated meaning of those words and expressions as adopted in this translation.

During the editing process, I recommended various word choices to our translator, Milam Sudhana, although in the beginning she herself suspected that some of them would not be compatible. Yet later on, we both realized that, from the insightful, transcendental translation approach, they ended up concurring with the profound, quintessential meaning of the original. It is indeed quite a good fortune. Finally, we were able to conceive a distinctive Vietnamese rendition of the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* which we now aspire to share widely with the world.

From an age-old traditional perspective of *Sūtra* interpretation, some may see this new rendition as controversial and diverted, but rather, we can conclude with confidence that it is capable of pointing out the *momentness of direct, unmeditated metaphysical realization of emptiness, or the direct experience of being one with Voidness*, that an accomplished practitioner has gone through, as depicted in the *Sūtra*.

There are many researchers, scholars, and practitioners of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, Nepal, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Tibet and Mongolia who have long had possession of the *Prajñā* scripture. Those from Japan, Korean and Vietnam have subsequently rendered their own translations, but they could not possibly escape the influence of the Chinese Buddhist forelearners, especially that of the highly revered, illustrious Great Tripitaka Buddhist Master, Xuanzang.

Historically, Vietnam, more than any other *Mahāyāna* Buddhist country, had spent close to a thousand years under the imperialist domination of the Chinese politics, religion, language and culture, and thus, generation after generation, the Vietnamese Buddhists continued to rely on the classic Chinese version of the *Prajñā-Heart Sūtra*. Nevertheless, given our recent and surprising discovery, the older rendition does not seem to bring to light the complete teaching and profundity of *Prajñāpāramitā* to the fullest.

In the past, what was usually taught about the *Heart Sūtra* was often more philosophical, hypothetical than experiential. We do not know whether we are setting a well-marked milestone in the history of the *Prajñā* literature or not; however, we can seriously say that

the language used in this new rendition seems to be much more liberating if compared to the older translations based on the Chinese version in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is because the new rendition can bring out the “*fundamental nature*” of *Prajñā*, as it is something that is existing *right in the very momentness of pristine presence* that which is beyond time, space or physicality.

But we also cannot label this vivid pristine momentness of presence as “*here and now.*” Even “*in the now*” or “*nowness*” will not be able to convey this perfect reality! It is because this presence is ever-fluid. It is too swift, too fresh, too dynamic for it to be labeled as such, because such pristine presentness is *not even slightly before or after, let alone being now, in the now or nowness!* There is no past, no present, no future in the very vivid mental presence, because the practitioner already penetrates the inseparability of the three times! When one merges non-dually with the present freshness of reality, one cuts through the illusion of time, space and materialism, and that is what we call the True Existence. Nevertheless, one cannot possibly reach this “*fundamental nature*” through conventional understanding, practice exertion, experience or conceptual knowledge about emptiness per se. Thus, a transcendental translation is needed to bring out the unique and quintessential attribute of the original text itself.

Simply put, we want to show to the world that there is another plausible approach to the entire content of *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* and to view it as a concise description of the *precise momentness when the realized practitioner fully penetrates the wisdom beyond wisdom, reaching the enlightened and true state of being Void and existing as the realm of phenomenal truth.* It faithfully describes a practitioner's *experiential moment* when he is single-pointedly absorbed and is completely immersed in the awakening state, being in the momentness of reality, of true existence, the momentness of vivid, lucid presence. At that precise moment, the practitioner *dissolves completely* into the *Prajñā* Wisdom Mind, and his five aggregates – form, feeling, perception, karmic formation and consciousness – all become Void. At that moment, the practitioner manifests all the enlightened attributes of a *Tathāgata*, neither coming nor going yet perfectly whole and complete.

I believe that there is none among Mahāyāna and Vajrayana Buddhist learners, including those who have some depths of insight, those who have practiced meditation, or those who have at all engaged in any kind of practice and training, who does not adore or highly revere the *Prajñā* scripture. We even feel that *Prajñā* is, indeed, our own genuine spiritual life force.

However, if we have not yet thoroughly and directly fathom this *Prajñā*, then it seems that we have not come into terms with the truth! This lack of thoroughness makes us incapable of living in harmony with the sacred words and transcending the bondage of suffering. Thus, if we want to transcend suffering, then we must be the ones who can deeply “*immerse in*” and “*dissolve as*” *Prajñā*.

The *Prajñā* scripture is crucial, concisely clear and illuminating. If we can study it in a serious and mature way, then I believe that we could possibly “immerse as” *Prajñā* the same moment we are learning it! It is because *Prajñā* is being revealed at all times and in plain sight, but we are too encumbered by our confusion-delusion to even notice it. Yet, there is no need for us to concentrate or to focalize. There is no need to add or to deduct anything. We can let everything occur in a way that is simple, spontaneous, natural, bare, empty, immaculate and ever existing, and then we can actually **be *Prajñā!*** It is not to *realize* it, to *merge* into it, to *understand* it, or to *cognize* it, but we will simply **be *Prajñā!***

Thus, the essential language in the *Prajñā* scripture needs to actually shake up all of our roots of clinging attachment and all of our karmic tendencies which we have built-up for infinite lives. They need to dissipate and disappear in the lucid presence of *Prajñā*.

In 2019, after we finished editing the Vietnamese translation of the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* scripture, I told everyone that I felt truly content, because I was able to complete this sacred Buddhist work in this lifetime. My aspiration was for the *Essence of Prajñā-pāramitā* to have a translation beyond translation in the Vietnamese language that does not rely on the Chinese classic work, and something that is spiritually genuine based on the scripture’s quintessence. This aspiration has been fulfilled and we are now ready to share our work with the world.

In the history of Buddhism, and for more than one thousand five hundred years, as far as the rhetoric of the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* is concerned, the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* has remained dependent on the mental reasoning of the conscious mind, and lost its true essence. However, it now metamorphoses! All of that has now been transformed. For example, instead of saying, “*to practice deeply the profound Prajñāpāramitā, and to illumine and see all five aggregates as Emptiness, one transcends all sufferings,*” we would say, “*in this very vivid presence, the moment the Noble Awakened Being deeply immersed in Prajñā-pāramitā, he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates, and had a lucid, direct knowing of their essence as being Void.*” With the new transformative translation approach, it is no longer our consciousness mind’s projection or contemplation, because projecting, contemplating, examining, illumining and seeing are simply the kind of language and understanding that only operate at the discriminative consciousness’ level!

On the contrary, translating the above words as “*in this very vivid presence, the moment the Noble Awakened Being deeply immersed in Prajñāpāramitā, he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates, and had a lucid, direct knowing of their essence as being Void*” means that we have been emancipated from the very first sentence! As such, the content of the *Prajñā-pāramitā* text is now describing something very transcendental at the wisdom level of an expert, realized practitioner. The contextual meaning has been brought to a highly specialized level in Buddhism, and is no longer simply a theory of the mind as it has always been depicted in the past.

Therefore, after we finished editing this rendition in 2019 according to our aspiration, I said that since I was very content with this Buddhist work, and had I passed away right then, I would still feel perfectly complete, because in this lifetime, I was able to contribute such a rendition of this marvelous scripture to the world of Buddhism.

How I pray that we can vividly manifest as the expanse of *Prajñā* so that we can absorb each word and each line of the teaching, and so that we can assimilate the way the Buddha spoke about this realm of perfect liberation. How I aspire that all of us will have enough competence to inherit this great calling. How I aspire that all those who have the *karmic* connection to learn from this text will have the capability to fully dissolve their body and mind as *Prajñā*. The all-pervasive *dharmadhātu* in the very vivid presence is *Prajñā*! All of the true reality is *Prajñā*, and all that ever exists is also *Prajñā*! Each passing miniscule mental interval in this vast *dharmadhātu* is *Prajñā*, transcending aggregates, time and space. That is actually the quintessence that the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* scripture wants to tell us!

O! How overjoyed for those who have come upon this truth, because *Prajñā* is, indeed, *being vividly present in the instantaneous momentness – the pristine presence*. *Prajñā* is all there is; it is the superlative, the highest veneration, the unexcelled, the perfectly pure, the absolute and ultimate liberation. In essence, all Buddhas and all of us have come from the same origin and have been born from the same Mother, this *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, who has nurtured, protected, instructed and loved us all ever since multitudes of hundreds of thousands of lives ago. All of us here have been merrily roaming in the matrix of pristine wisdom, yet we have never recognized it! Only today have we finally come upon this truth! Actually, it is not that we “*exist in*” this *Prajñā* wisdom, but we are, indeed, this primordial transcendental wisdom itself!

Homage to the Sublime *Prajñā* Assembly of Peerless Buddhas and Great Bodhisattvas!

THÍCH TUỆ HẢI (VÔ TRỤ THIỀN SƯ)  
*In the Tranquil Dwelling Season of 2019*  
*Long Hương Temple, Vietnam*



Translator's  
*Introductory Commentary*

*Homage to the Omniscient Perfectly-Awakened One*

So it is said that *Prajñāpāramita-Hṛdayam* alone can really go to the very core of the Buddhist teachings on emptiness, void or Voidness and by analyzing its historical existence and by restoring its component parts to their context in the *Prajñāpāramita Sūtras*, we can gain all the necessary understanding on emptiness, void or Voidness. As Buddhist learners and practitioners, we can never ever undervalue Buddha's teachings on the *nature of emptiness*, the negation of the inherent existence of all things and phenomena. Leaving the religious aspects aside, this very *nature*, or this natural functional mode of all things, is the very backbone of our current beingness which includes our physical and mental aggregates. Moreover, it is actually based on this *lack of inherent self-nature* that we can put a stoppage to our grasping and can come to directly see how everything lacks an independent existence. Although things seem to appear independently, they actually come into being interdependently. We call this the *wisdom of emptiness of self-nature* or the *wisdom of emptiness based on illusive interdependent conditions of relative phenomena*. This emptiness of relative, conditioned, constructed or fabricated phenomena can be the basis for our understanding of the lack of inherent nature of all conditioned things; however, we should expand and go beyond this view if we truly want to fathom the *Voidness or Signlessness of the state of ultimate reality in the very vivid presence!*

Thus, as far as the *Essence of Prajñāpāramita* scripture is concerned, Zen Master Thich Tuệ Hải has been single-minded to take on the argument that there is so much more we can learn from this scripture than simply presenting it as an *abstract discourse* and solely relying on the *theoretical abstruse aspects of emptiness* as it has been taken for granted for generations. Such an approach will only give us *theoretical and analytical* answers, and will not allow us to fathom the perfect truth – the utter emancipation which the realized masters have reached, and we, too, are aspired to reach.

What Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải has single-mindedly wanted to bring out from this scripture is the *experiential aspects of true realization* of the state of pure Voidness or true existence which, for so long, have been avoided or neglected in contemporary discourses on the so-called *Heart Sūtra*. So in short, after being equipped with the fundamental recognition of *emptiness*, the practitioners can further penetrate and go beyond their own five aggregates which themselves are empty of independent, self-nature. Then, the practitioners continue to expand the subtle mind and its state to surpass its own conscious

loftiness and vastness until there is no more mind, no more person, and no more self – a state of total self-clarity and total self-simplicity, where “*Void is exactly form and form is exactly Void.*” It is the state of *noumenal Voidness in the very vivid presence*, devoid of all interdependent phenomena, characteristic signs, as well as time and space, the state of perfect awakening where there only exists the universal totality all-pervasive spacious wisdom beyond mind itself. This is exactly the understanding, the insights and the realization that Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải, would like for all of us, devoted Buddhists, aspiring Buddhists, concerned students of Buddhism, even those who are considered non-Buddhists, in the world, to undeviatingly reap from this scripture.

In recent years in the West, a new trend in the field of translation has gained popularity, called “*beyond translation,*” which focuses on presenting the essential essence of the original content as the original author wanted to express. This new approach is not being attached to the traditional, conventional way of translating everything literally as before. The meaning of the phrase “*beyond translation*” can be temporarily understood as “*transcendental translation,*” and we can use “*transcendental translation*” to refer to a way of translation beyond cliché. A case in point is the rendition of the *Heart Sūtra* by Joan Halifax and Kazuaki Tanahashi (2014). Some other versions have also been produced using what is called the “*free-form rendering*” approach; an example is Mu Soeng’s rendition of the *Heart Sūtra* (2010).

It is understandable that for most of us, the way of translating, especially of the *Sūtras*, and more specifically the *Heart Sūtra*, in the form of “*beyond translation*” or “*free-form rendering*” is not a popular idea, nor one that is easy to trust. Therefore, a “*transcendental translation*” that does not follow the traditional form is often less accepted, subject to a lot of criticism and may even make the readers suspicious of its validity. However, if we look back, in the East, it is the spirit of “*transcendental translation*” that was already present in the translations of the illustrious master translator and Buddhist monk, Kumārajīva, from many centuries ago.

However, what is more critical here is whether the translation, expositions, as well as Dharma teachings are fully ethical, genuine and exceptional or not. This mainly depends on the level of the mind, and the power of the realized cultivation that leads to the “*determining and decisive elocution,*” of the master. Thus, what Zen Master Tuệ Hải saw in this scripture did not come from the finiteness of conventional language and mind, nor was it based on the Dharma knowledge as taught from a common, relative perspective. Master Tuệ Hải realized that, at the level of ultimate meaning, the true quintessence of this scripture cannot be otherwise, and thus, through his skillful choice of words, arisen from the horizon of right view and his own foundational, transcendental inner practice, the master has pointed out to us that this new rendition is an *out-of-the-ordinary contextual interpretation that is completely fluid and unimpeded*. It can reveal the entirety of the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* through the new word usage, sentence structures and unconventional expressions. It can bring out the scripture’s quintessence in a transcendental way, and is not just limited to the literal cliché as in the past.



I would like to hereby respectfully share with all readers the following comments spoken by Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải during his lecture on the Flower Ornament Sūtra (Lesson 345) at Long Hương Temple on January 10, 2021:

*“Once we have mastered it and become unobstructed, everything that is mentioned in the Sūtras is no longer a secret to us, especially the Mahāyāna Sūtras. In order to have a deep spiritual penetration and subtle, refined discernment, one must have inner practice cultivation. To use the term “practice cultivation” is to say it very modestly, but it is necessary to have true realization through practice in order to have what is called ‘decisive speech.’ Otherwise, we will continue to be nervous, not knowing whether what we are trying to say is correct or incorrect. Many times we think we understand the Sūtras, and that it is so, but sometimes the original preacher of the Sūtra had a different view. When our practice is well-developed to a certain point, then, when we read the Sūtras, we will not only understand the literal ‘meaning’ of the verses, but we will also see the ‘mind’ of the author of the Sūtras, and what he authentically wanted to convey. Until then will we be able to have ‘decisive elocution,’ and to speak with absolute, firm decisiveness without any doubt. Currently, however, if we only understand the literal meaning based on the wordings then we will certainly have doubts, and although we may have eloquent speech, it is still not decisive.”*

While working on the translation of the scripture and the compilation of this book, I have personally relied on a number of well-founded and well-respected literature and studies. They remain valuable supporting aids from a relative perspective, and are compatible in the field of common learning and research. However, they may not be in accordance with the final, ultimate view and “*decisive elocution*” as Master Tuệ Hải has compassionately pointed out above. That is to say, the most basic and important thing for us while studying the *Sūtras* is to rely on the Teacher’s profound practice cultivation and realization, as well as his decisive eloquence. When there are disagreements and incoherent points of discussion, then the Teacher’s clear, unimpeded wisdom-mind and his decisive speech can become the compass’ magnetic pointer for Buddhist learners like us.

Therefore, if we are willing to be open-minded to what Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải is aspired to share with us, and to read from the beginning to the end with a peaceful mind, then, we may also come to a new conclusion and thoroughly see the liberating and completely transcendent value of this rendition and teaching of the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* scripture.

With deep love and profound gratitude to all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Dharma Protectors, Realized Masters, and all Mother Sentient Beings of the three times, and especially to my Zen Teacher, Master Thích Tuệ Hải - Vô Trụ Thiền Sư, whose wisdom-mind has brought rare radiance to this world and shed light on the darkness of delusion in my own mind, so that I can serve, and can translate with all humility the precious scripture and his illuminating teaching to share with the world. I am indebted beyond words and beyond measure to have their presence in my life. Moreover, it is through their wisdom, compassion and

blessings, and especially through Master Thích Tuệ Hải's stern advice and guidance, solely with a most loving-kind heart and liberative intent, that I was able to carry this difficult work through the end!

Furthermore, I am extremely grateful to Eng Jin Ooi, Ph.D. (Mahidol University, Thailand) and Ratna Siddhārtha Dhyāna, Ph.D. (UCLouvain, Belgium) who, equipped with their expertise on the Sanskrit language as well as their experience in translating, have been most sincere and generous with their time to offer me very detailed explanation and clarification whenever the need arose during the translation process. Their dedication and willingness to give me their assistance from start to end truly touched me. My thanks also go to Thiện Thành, Tenzin Drolma, and Nguyễn Mai who have shared with me valuable suggestions; for Nguyễn Mai, who has read part of the first English draft manuscript and offered me his contemplative insight, and for Minh Tươi for transcribing with great zeal Master Thích Tuệ Hải's discourse in Vietnamese on "The Wisdom That Reveals True Existence, the Realm of Truth." Last but not least, my affectionate gratitude goes to my son Oliver K. Luu, who has provided voluntary assistance with editing with such kindness and cooperation, and for being clear-minded and critical. All errors or oversights contained herein are mine alone.

It is also my heartfelt aspiration that Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải's commentary and inspiring discourses be translated into as many other languages as possible in the near future to bring benefit to countless people.

May the all-liberating wisdom ever blaze with radiance and clarity, and bring unsurpassed freedom to countless beings throughout the three worlds! May everyone joyfully and unobstructedly fully awaken as the vivid, pristine, transcendental, universal totality presence!

*Milam Sudhana  
California, USA  
June 26, 2023*



## Introduction

### *Some New Essential Discoveries and Inferences*

#### *Iha Śāriputra!*

In this introduction, we would like to share with all readers a few of the most essential discoveries, among others to a lesser degree, which ignited our interest and inspired us to produce a new Sanskrit-Vietnamese translation of the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā*, or Heart Sutra as it is otherwise known. Through these discoveries and inferences, we believe that we were able to unlock the quintessential message and intent of this immensely precious scripture, a unique message which has been overlooked for many generations in the commonly accepted rhetoric about, and discourses of, the commonly known *Heart Sūtra*. Some discoveries came upon the translator purely as surprises, and yet others arose naturally, also without prior knowledge, from Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải's meditative absorption and wisdom insight. Some of our other minor discoveries when comparing the Sanskrit-English versus the Chinese-Vietnamese renditions include: an additional third sentence about form and Void (*that which is form is Void, that which is Void is form*) in the Sanskrit-English version; the different order of the form-Void sentences; the lack of the term "nature" or "essence" when describing the Void of the aggregates in the Chinese-Vietnamese version; and an additional verse about transcending suffering in the beginning of the scripture instead of at the end. The information below, however, are examples of the more essential and important discoveries and inferences that have helped build a concrete foundation for this transcendental translation effort from beginning to end. They also include brief explanations as excerpted from the Terminology Tables (TT) in Section III.



*'Iha śāriputra!' In this very vivid presence! (TT 6 & TT 10)*

First and foremost of these discoveries concerns the tiny word *'iha'* which, at first, seems too significant to even mention. Yet, in reality, and ultimately, it is the golden key to unlock the scripture's single quintessence. In one of the very first verses in all of the English renditions that the translator has come across in the very beginning, which intends to describe the empty nature or true essence of all aggregates as being Void, it begins with the word *'here'* (eg. "*Here, Sariputra!*"). This tiny word *'here'* was not present in any of the Chinese-Vietnamese counterparts. It was thus truly a wonderful discovery at first sight; as far as she remembers, the translator was drawn toward this tiny word *'here'* as if it were a magnet which inspired her to search for the variegated original Sanskrit versions, and finally, lead her to the *Hōryū-ji* version.

*'Here'* is the English equivalence of one of the many meanings of the original word *'iha'* in the Sanskrit root sentence (*iha śāriputra!*) in the *Hōryū-ji* version. As said, this word *'iha'* (Chinese: *ci*) and its equivalence did not show up in the Great Tripitaka Master Xuanzang's Chinese classic rendition, nor in the varied Chinese-Vietnamese versions that followed suit,

except in one Chinese version, found in the Dunhuang cave, that was re-edited and commented by Venerable Amoghavajra (Bukong) <sup>1</sup> in China. However, Xuanzang's version, supposedly translated in 649 at the palace of the dying Emperor Tai three days before his proclaimed death, is the one version that has remained the most popular, fully and faithfully accepted in the scholastic arena and by the general public ever since. It took precedence over the edited version by Amoghavajra in the 8th century.

In short, '*iha*' is a very unique and remarkably significant term. It carries many different meanings in Sanskrit which include: *here, now, at this time, in this instant, in this case, in this place, or in this world*. Without '*iha*,' we can continue to discuss the content of this scripture in a general approach in terms of naturelessness or emptiness as the lack of an inherent existence. This lack of an independent existence is not something which we are here to refute, because that is precisely the very nature of all states of phenomena, especially in the realm of conditioned existence. However, at the discovery of '*iha*' as a critical pointer, the content of the *Prajñāpāramitā* text is transformed and is now describing something very transcendental at the wisdom level of an adept, an expert and fully realized practitioner. The contextual meaning is, therefore, being brought to a highly specialized level in Buddhism, and we are no longer simply dissecting the so-called *Heart Sūtra* from a general, theoretical perspective on the lack of inherent existence or interdependent origination as it has mostly been elucidated in the past.

In the process of interpreting '*iha*,' <sup>2</sup> the coined term, '*in this very vivid presence*' or '*in this momentness of presence*,' as chosen and emphatically asserted by Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải, can sum up the entire scope of the *Heart Sūtra* in a new, holistic, rather than conventional, approach. More importantly, this coined term, '*in this very vivid presence*' replaces the commonly expression '*here and now*' in order to point to the quintessence of the precise, swift, lucid, pristine presence beyond time and space, ever-fluid when the Awakened Being dissolved into the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*. Thus, it should *not* come as a surprise that this special, tiny word '*iha*' appears not once, but twice in the root text (*see TT 6 and TT 10*):

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<sup>1</sup> Amoghavajra (705-774) was an Indian, originally from Simha (present-day Sri Lanka), was brought to Chang'an by his uncle at the age of ten after his father's death. Later, he went to Sri Lanka, India, Southeast Asia and brought more than 500 sets of Buddhist scriptures back to China. He translated many *Sūtras*, practiced Vajranayana, and became one of the famous, revered and influential figures in Chinese Buddhism at that time. His edited version of the *Heart Sūtra* contains the following footnote: "*Sanskrit Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra. Translated, under the imperial command, by Bukong, whose posthumous name given by the Emperor is Dabian Zhengguanzhi. Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva had personally taught and bestowed this Sanskrit text to Tripitaka Dharma Master Xuanzang; Bukong has edited it.*" The original text is currently kept at the British Museum (Stein #5648). (Tanahashi, pp. 68-69) [MS]

<sup>2</sup> Another eminent translator-scholar, Red Pine (1943- ), currently residing in the United States but having lived in China in the past, also recognized the importance of the word '*iha*' which he translated into '*here*' in his English version. His commentary includes the following: "*The emphatic iha (here) is often omitted by translators but is one of the most important words in the sutra. Iha is the Zen master's shout, the poke in the ribs, the cup of tea. [...] Thus, with "here" Avalokiteshvara opens the door to the Great Path of Mahāyāna.*" (Pine, p. 71) [MS]

*iha śāriputra, rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyataiva rūpaṃ (TT 6)*

*iha śāriputra sarvadharmāḥ śūnyatālakṣaṇā (TT 10)*

Thus, we can safely conclude that this usage of 'iha' is not at random, but done with the intention to illustrate a specific happening at a specific point in time during which the realized practitioner directly experiences Voidness-Signlessness, rather than seeing it, or speaking about it, from an outsider's external view.



*śūnyatālakṣaṇā, śūnyataiva, amalāvimalā, and na paripūrṇāḥ as compound words*

Next, we will discuss four compound words which we are particularly interested in: *śūnyatālakṣaṇā, śūnyataiva, amalāvimalā* and *na paripūrṇāḥ*. In Sanskrit, we can see the existence of many compound words, that is, two or more words joined together to make up a new word with a different meaning. A compound word can also have different meanings depending on the way the words are separated. Thus, if we do not know the author's intention at the beginning, the interpretation of a compound word depends on the individual or subjective interpretation of the translator. Since the rules of conjugation (*sandhi*) in Sanskrit are mandatory in the sentences, in many cases the reader or translator may have trouble recognizing the root words. In the case of *śūnyatālakṣaṇā, śūnyataiva, amalāvimalā, and na paripūrṇāḥ*, the different approaches of how these compound words are separated into suffixes has influenced the interpretation of the *Sūtra's* meaning. The following information intends to illustrate the different meanings that arise from the common *negation approach* in comparison to new *affirmation approaches*. In either case, one approach can point to the lack of inherent self-nature of all phenomena, and the other not only this lack thereof, but it can also describe the *Dharmadhātu*, the natural, pure state of true existence or ultimate true nature where everything clearly emerges as being Void, unborn, unceasing, immaculate, untainted, nothing not perfect, whole and complete.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> There have been other interesting factors that came into play that the translator would like to share as a footnote herein. Around 2020, about a year or so after the Vietnamese translation of the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* was already conceived, the translator came across an essay by Jayarava Attwood, "The True History of the Heart Sūtra, III" (on jayarava.blogspot.com). In it he also argued that the *Heart Sūtra* is actually describing the *experiential, metaphysical realm* of the cultivator vanishing into emptiness. Following this, at the beginning of 2022, while still working on refining the English translation of Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải's commentary, while listening to an online lecture on the *Heart Sūtra* by Kyabje Garchen Rinpoche, her Tibetan root teacher and an eminent master of the Drikung Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, the translator heard something of great interest to her. Aside from explaining the lack of inherent nature of all phenomena, Garchen Rinpoche also asserted that "all that the *Heart Sūtra* is actually talking about is the *ultimate true nature of the mind*," the primordial non-dual wisdom-awareness and the experiential state of a realized practitioner. Soon after that, the translator came across some teachings by a leading exponent of the Jonang tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Tāranātha, and it turned out that he, too, was a proponent of the '*shentong*' view (other-emptiness), which was followed by the Kagyu and Jonang masters, and also explained the *Heart Sūtra* from the perspective of the *universal reality*. Like '*rangtong*' (empty of inherent nature), '*shentong*' accepts the emptiness of relative, apparent phenomena, yet, at the same time, it also asserts that the ultimate is empty of any phenomena other than itself; thus, it asserts the true reality of existence or the natural state of Buddha-body, where all magnificent, sublime qualities can manifest. In short, according to '*shentong*,' the emptiness of ultimate reality should not be characterized in the same way as the emptiness of relative phenomena. In the past, therefore, many teachings of '*shentong*,' especially about the *Heart Sūtra*, were forcibly excluded from the common discourses by other authoritarian Tibetan masters who supported the dominant '*rangtong*' view, because these masters wanted to defend the teaching of the absence of the inherent, independent self-nature as the *sole* teaching of the *Heart Sūtra*. The '*shentong*' approach, fortunately, was revived by the *Rimé* teachers in the 19th century. [MS]



*‘śūnyatālakṣaṇā’ is the state of all-inclusive Voidness (TT 10)*

In Sanskrit grammar, *śūnyatālakṣaṇā* is a compound word with the last syllable *ā* in *śūnyatā*, and since *śūnyatā* is a feminine word, which means emptiness or Void, *śūnyatālakṣaṇā* can be separated in two different ways: either as *śūnyatā* (n.) + *lakṣaṇā* (adj.) (emptiness or Void *with signs*) or as *śūnyatā* (n.) + *ālakṣaṇā* (adj.) (emptiness or Void *devoid of signs*) depending on the context and the way of exposition. In classical Chinese and Chinese-Vietnamese renditions, the term *śūnyatālakṣaṇā* was separated as *śūnyatā* + *lakṣaṇā* wherein *lakṣaṇā* (sign) was thought to be a noun; thus, for generations, it was translated as “*having the sign of emptiness.*”

However, when we look at the Sanskrit grammar, we realize that either *lakṣaṇā* (having signs) or *ālakṣaṇā* (having no sign) were meant to be adjectives describing the state of emptiness or Void. Thus, if we understand this compound word *śūnyatālakṣaṇā* as ‘emptiness or Void having signs’ then it does not make any sense! It would then be safer to understand *śūnyatālakṣaṇā* as ‘emptiness or Void *without signs*’ or ‘emptiness or Voidness *devoid of characteristic signs.*’

This seems to be in agreement with the various translated versions in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, such as that of the Gyalwa Karmapa Fellowship or of Geshe Thupten Jinpa in “*Essence of the Heart Sūtra*” (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), which render this compound word as ‘*emptiness without characteristic.*’ Ultimately, as we have deciphered, *śūnyatālakṣaṇā* should then be understood and translated as ‘*signless emptiness*’ or ‘*signless Void.*’ Thus, it was simply expressed in this new Vietnamese rendition as ‘*Không Tướng*’ and can be rendered into English as either *Signless-Voidness*, *Signlessness* or simply ‘*Voidness.*’ This is actually the True Sign of all *dharmas* and it is pointing to a state that is *devoid of both form and formless*, and ultimately is the true existence and reality of the genuine vivid presence where everything clearly emerge.



*‘śūnyatā’ emphasizes how form and Void are devoid of any dissimilarity (TT 6)*

The term ‘*eva*’ (exactly) in the compound word *śūnyatāiva* (*śūnyatā* + *eva*) is also a very powerful term to affirm that, at that very vivid momentness and in that meta-physical, noumenal state, form and Void are both signless, and they are, indeed, exactly and precisely the same, devoid of any dissimilarity. This term, *exactly*, was not emphasized in any of the past renditions where the related sentence was commonly translated as “*form is emptiness, emptiness is form.*”



*‘amalāvimalā’ is the state of immaculate, pure and true existence (TT 11)*

In the *Hōryū-ji* version and the translation by the Oxford University, *amalāvimalā* is kept as a compound word. The rendition by the Oxford University separated this term using the word separation approach of negation # 1: *amalā* (not defiled) + *āvimalā* (not immaculate) similar to the classic Chinese and Vietnamese renditions in the past. However, in the long version edited by Vaidya, P.L. and excerpted from the *Mahāyāna-sūtra-saṭrayāna* - Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon from the University of the West, translated into English with commentary by Eng Jin Ooi (2017), and in the

version (Appendices: Recension B) edited by Johnathan Silk (Wien: Universität Wien, 1994) according to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the meaning of this compound word follows the word separation approach of affirmation #2: *amalā* (pure, not defiled) + *vimalā* (pure, not contaminated). Therefore, *amalāvimalā* can also describe the *radiantly pure, immaculate, untainted state of phenomenal truth or true existence*.



*'na paripūrṇāh'* is the state of being perfect, whole and complete (TT 11)

The meanings of the compound words *na paripūrṇāh* (or *aparipūrṇāh* as used in the Amoghavajra and the Nepalese versions) include: not full, not complete, not perfect, or not whole. In the past, it was translated as not more or not increased. Another compound word, *asampūrṇāh* was also used in other diverse renditions. However and especially in this *Hōryu-ji*, the expression *nona na paripūrṇāh* can be understood as double negatives, which include the following: *no* means no; the first *na* means nothing, and thus, *nona* means no nothing; then the second *na* means not, and *paripūrṇāh* means complete, full, perfect. Therefore, *nona na paripūrṇāh* as a whole literally means 'no nothing [is] not completely full and perfect' (as a double-negative negation).

Interestingly, one day, while studying and reflecting on some of the most important verses (verses 46-73) in the Great Arya Nāgārjuna's *Bodhicittavivāraṇa: A Commentary on the Awakening Mind*, the translator came to a profound understanding that Arya Nāgārjuna's *sūnyatā*, at the highest level, is not merely a negative concept or concept of negation, but it should also be comprehended as a positive non-dual reality, a state of transcendental wisdom, of *Suchness* and *Signlessness*. To this point in case, verse 71 in Nāgārjuna's *Bodhicittavivāraṇa*, translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa, reads as follows:

*"[The truth] is described as suchness and as reality-limit,  
as signlessness and as the ultimate truth,  
as the supreme awakening mind;  
it is described also as the emptiness."*

Herein, by choice of words, one must clearly see how '*emptiness*' as the lack of inherent self-existence is differentiated from 'the emptiness' as the awakening mind and the totality true existence which can only be meditated upon, and directly penetrated, by *yogic* practitioners, as espoused by Nāgārjuna himself in verses 72 and 73 <sup>4</sup> in the *Bodhicittavivāraṇa*. This direct realization approach is precisely what Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải is trying to elucidate.



*'Prajñāpāramitā'* is the great wisdom, not the great mantra (TT 28, 29 & 31)

Furthermore, right from the very beginning, after reading the rough draft of the Sanskrit-Vietnamese rendition, Zen Master Tuệ Hải explained to the translator that through

<sup>4</sup> Verse 72: "Those who do not understand emptiness/are not receptive vehicle for liberation;/such ignorant beings will revolve/in the existence prison of six classes of beings." Verse 73: "When this emptiness [as explained]/is thus meditated upon by yogis,/no doubt there will arise in them/a sentiment attached to other's welfare." (Jinpa, 2007)

his meditative absorption, he realized that the word *mantra* (*mantra*, *mantraḥ*) needed to be replaced by the word *wisdom*. Zen Master Tuệ Hải was adamant that the word *wisdom* must replace the word *mantra* in this rendition, because he saw this to be a concluding sentence to reinforce that *Prajñā* is the ultimate all-transcendental wisdom that can bring complete liberation and enlightenment, and not simply an utterance to help protect one's mind. Later on, the following information showed up to confirm the master's insight.

In the '*Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary* (Conze, 1973) and the '*Twenty-Five Thousand Verses of Prajñāpāramitā*' (or the Great *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, as it is known in Chinese and as translated by the illustrious master translator and Buddhist monk, Kumārajīva, from the Kingdom of Kucha in the 4th-5th century, the word *vidyā* was consistently used across the board, instead of *mantraḥ* (*mantra*). *Vidyā* is defined as knowledge, higher knowledge, wisdom, and in Early Buddhism, *vidyā* is also a terminology which refers to non-dualistic wisdom-knowledge or non-dualistic clear awareness.

Moreover, in the original Sanskrit text mentioned above, as well as in the *Prajñā* literature, in general, *Prajñāpāramitā* has always been referred to as the *ultimate and all-transcendental practical wisdom*, and not as a kind of sacred spell or utterance to aid concentration in meditation. In the '*Eight Thousand Lines of Prajñāpāramitā & Its Verse Summary*,' there are the following equivalent verses with six adhered adjectives to describe the qualities of the *Prajñā* wisdom-knowledge: "*O Kauśika, Prajñāpāramitā is the great wisdom (vidyā), the immeasurable wisdom, the illimitable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom, the unsurpassed wisdom, the unequalled wisdom.*" Also, in the '*Twenty-Five Thousand Verses of Prajñāpāramitā*' (*Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*), when Śakra, the Lord of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, asked the Buddha as to "*why Prajñā is considered the great vidyā (wisdom), the unsurpassed wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom,*" the Buddha literally replied that "*it is through this vidyā (wisdom) that all Buddhas reach complete and perfect enlightenment.*"



*'gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā' is fruition, not a mantra (TT 32)*

Last but not least, Zen Master Tuệ Hải, although without any prior knowledge in Sanskrit, adamantly explained to the translator since the very beginning that the meaning of the sentence, supposedly a '*mantra*,' is actually a concluding sentence, summarizing the fruition of the Awakened Being, who has already and completely transcended. With great surprise, the translator later discovered that the word '*gate*' in Sanskrit is a feminine form of the past participle of the verb '*gatā*,' and it was coincidentally affirmed by Master Tuệ Hải even prior to her discovery when he told her that this final sentence should not be understood as a *mantra* to protect the mind, nor an exhortation or encouragement for anyone to go beyond to the other shore. Instead, it is there to confirm the fact that the Awakened Being has fulfilled the last stage of transcendence and has already attained full enlightenment in the manner as shown in the content of the scripture: "*Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly freely beyond, perfectly awakened, svāhā!*" The past participle says it all!





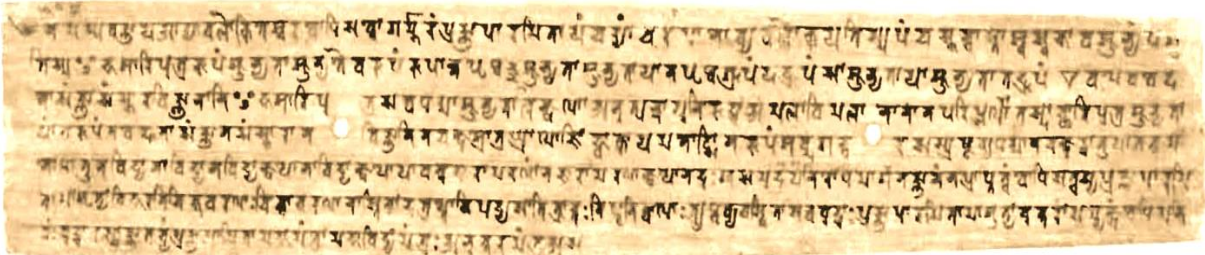
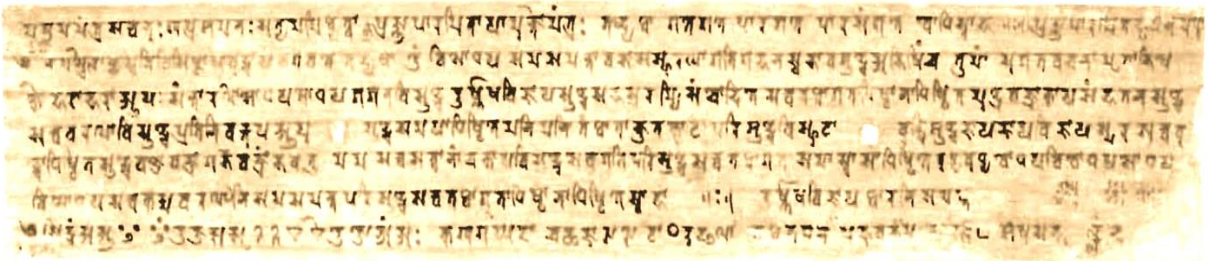
*ROOT TEXT,  
TRANSLATION  
AND  
SYNOPSIS*



Root Text of the *Hōryū-ji* version in Sanskrit  
with new transcendental Vietnamese and English renditions

*Prajñāpāramitā-Hṛdayam*  
Essence of *Prajñāpāramitā*

CORE ESSENCE OF THE  
PERFECT ALL-TRANSCENDENT WISDOM



In short, there are two forms, short and long, of the *Heart Sūtra* which survive in the world today. The Tibetan Buddhist tradition uses the long form, which has the opening sentence “*Thus, I heard,*” as is normally found in the *Sūtras*. The sentence is followed by a part discussing how *Avalokiteśvara*, relying on the Buddha’s power, preached to the Venerable *Śāriputra*. The concluding part expresses how the Buddha emerged from *samadhi*, praising the proclamation of *Avalokiteśvara*; then, all humans, species and realms generated great faith and practiced accordingly.

On the other hand, the short version of the *Heart Sūtra*, used in the Chinese and Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist traditions, immediately begins with the sentence “when Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara practiced the profound Prajñāpāramitā.” According to Tanahashi (2014), the short Sanskrit version of the *Heart Sūtra* comes from three major sources: (1) the *Hōryū-ji* version that arrived in Japan from China; (2) the Amoghavajra version, discovered in the Dunhuang Cave by Stein and identified by Fukui; and (3) the Nepali version that was introduced and translated by Edward Conze.

The following Sanskrit transliteration is based on the handwritten version on two palm leaves (also known as “lá bǒi” in Vietnamese) which are believed to be the oldest discovered in the world thus far. They were brought to the *Hōryū-ji* temple in the 7th or 8th century <sup>(1)</sup> and are currently being kept at the National Museum in Tokyo, Japan. The original Sanskrit was transliterated and Romanized by Ryosaburo Sakaki, Unrai Ogiwara, Shindo Shiraishi and Shuyu Kanaoka, as excerpted from the book entitled “*The Heart Sūtra: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahāyāna Buddhism*” by Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boston: Shambhala, 2014).

This Sanskrit version had also been transliterated and Romanized by Professor F. Max Muller and Bunyiu Nanjo (Oxford University, London) in 1883 in a book entitled “*The Ancient Palm Leaves*” (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1884). The transliteration of Professor Muller and Nanjo carries a number of differences as far as spelling is concerned when compared to that of Ryosaburo Sakaki, Unrai Ogiwara, Shindo Shiraishi and Shuyu Kanaoka.

On these two palm leaves, the *Prajñāpāramitā-Hṛdayam* (Essence of *Prajñāpāramitā* – Core Essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom) is written in the *Siddham* script of the Sanskrit language. According to Jayarava and Tanahashi, the scripture starts from the first to the 7th row of the first leaf, to the end of the first row of the second leaf. The rest on the second leaf is the text of the *Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya Dhāraṇī*, from the 2nd to the 6th row, and the last row is the Sanskrit alphabet.

Legend has it that this version was brought by Bodhidharma from India to China around 520 AD, and was kept by a monk named Yashi until his death in 577 AD. Then, after that, it was brought from China to be worshipped at the *Hōryū-ji* Temple in Nara, Japan, around 609 AD. On the other hand, G. Buhler argues that this version of *Hōryū-ji* was actually created in the 7th or 8th century and was not brought from India to China in the 6th century. Similarly, Silk believes that it was created in the 9th or 10th century. Thus, while working on the initial translation and during our research, we came across many conflicting studies and information from contemporary scholarship, especially those of Nattier and Jayarava, who argued that the *Heart Sūtra*, in general, was actually composed in China, rather than originated from India, as a *digest text* summarizing some of the essentials from the “*Twenty-Five Thousand Verses of the Prajñāpāramitā*” (which is called the *Mahā-Prajñāpāramitā* or the Great *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* in China).

In the history of the appearance and perpetuity of the *Heart Sūtra*, no trace of the *Heart Sūtra* in Sanskrit from before the 6th century has been found, nor any commentary on the *Heart Sūtra* by Buddhist scholars in India before the 6th century. Researchers hypothesize that there must have been a certain high priest who extracted these passages from the *Maha-Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtra* which the Venerable Kumārajīva translated into Chinese in the 4th-5th century. This argument has caused much controversy and criticism from both sides to this day. Regardless, even today, the whole world is still very devoted to the *Heart Sūtra* and the *Hōryū-ji* version is greatly respected due to its long history.

We trust that many of us have come into contact with these various research and findings on the *Hōryū-ji* version widely discussed among contemporary Buddhist scholars and researchers, especially in the West, which either discredit, or uphold, the history and originality of the *Heart Sūtra* and its validity. However, due to our own personal conducive and *karmic* conditions with this most well-known condensed *Sūtra* – or this *digest text* based on the *Mahā-Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, as some scholars have argued – we have since completed an enhanced and unique Vietnamese rendition of the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā* that is based on the *Hōryū-ji* version as guided by an emancipating translation concept in congruent with our aspiration.

***namas sarvajñāya***

*Cung kính đảnh lễ Bậc Toàn Trí Toàn Giác.*

Homage to the Omniscient Perfectly-Awakened One.

***ārya-avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo***

*Đấng Tôn Quý Giác hữu tình Quán Tự Tại*

The moment<sup>5</sup> *Avalokiteśvara*, the Noble Awakened Being, the Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One,

***gambhīraṃ prajñāpāramitā caryāṃ caramāṇo***

*ngay khi thâm nhập Bát Nhã Ba La Mật Đa,*

deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom,

***vyavalokayati sma panca-skandhā***

*thông thấu toàn bộ năm uẩn*

he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates,

***ca svabhāvaśunyān paśyati sma***

*và tỏ tường tự thể của năm uẩn là Không.*

and had a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void.

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<sup>5</sup> Due to the English syntax, “the moment” is moved to this clause but in the Vietnamese translation, it is rendered in the consecutive clause.

***iha śāriputra, rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyataiva rūpaṃ***

*Này Xá Lợi Phất, ngay hiện tiền này, sắc chính là Không, Không chính là sắc;*

O Śāriputra! In this very vivid presence<sup>6</sup>, form is exactly Void, Void is exactly form;

***rūpān na pṛthak śūnyatā, śūnyatāyā na pṛthag rūpaṃ***

*sắc chẳng khác Không, Không chẳng khác sắc;*

form is not different from Void, Void is not different from form;

***yad rūpāṃ sā śūnyatā ya śūnyatā tad rūpāṃ***

*cái gì là sắc, cái đó chính là Không, cái gì là Không, cái đó chính là sắc;*

that which is form is Void, that which is Void is form;

***evam eva vedanā-samjñā-saṃskāra-vijñāni***

*thọ, tưởng, hành, thức cũng đều như thế.*

the same is exactly true of sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness.

***iha śāriputra sarvadharmāḥ śūnyatālakṣaṇā***

*Này Xá Lợi Phất, ngay hiện tiền này, tất cả các pháp đều hiển lộ từ Không Tướng,*

O Śāriputra! In this very vivid presence, all phenomena<sup>7</sup> clearly emerge from Voidness,<sup>8</sup>

***anutpannā aniruddhā amalāvimalā nona na paripūrṇāḥ***

*không sanh, không diệt, không nhơ, không nhiễm, viên mãn tròn đầy.*

unborn, unceasing, immaculate, untainted, perfectly whole and complete.<sup>9</sup>

***tasmāc chāriputra śūnyatāyām***

*Cho nên, Xá Lợi Phất, trong Không Tướng ấy,*

Thus, Śāriputra, in this state of Voidness,

***na rūpaṃ na vedanā na samjñā na saṃskārāḥ na vijñāni***

*không có sắc, thọ, tưởng, hành, thức,*

there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no mental formation, no consciousness,

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<sup>6</sup> See Terminology Table 6 (TT 6).

<sup>7</sup> Depending on the context, phenomena, objects of mind, and dharmas (Skt. plural) are used interchangeably.

<sup>8</sup> Voidness, Void, Signless-Void or Signlessness (capitalized) are used interchangeably for *śūnyatālakṣaṇā* (Skt.) to depict the nature of reality beyond form and formless, substantiality and insubstantiality, existence and non-existence, as it is empty of an intrinsic self and is devoid of all signs, marks or attributes. See endnote 6 for more explanation concerning the original term. On the other hand, *void* (not capitalized) refers to empty space, formless, insubstantiality, or non-existence.

<sup>9</sup> Herein, according to the Sanskrit syntax, this can also be rendered as “nothing not perfectly whole and complete.” See TT 11.

**na cakṣuḥ-śrotra-ghrāna-jihvā-kāya-manāmsi**

không có mắt, tai, mũi, lưỡi, thân, ý,  
no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind;

**na rūpa-śabda-gandha-rasa-spraṣṭavya dharmāḥ**

không có sắc, thanh, hương, vị, xúc, pháp;  
no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind;

**na cakṣūr-dhātur-yāvan na mano-vijñāna-dhātuḥ**

không có nhãn giới cho đến không có ý thức giới;  
no realm of eye-consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness;

**na vidyā nāvidyā na vidyākṣayo nāvidyākṣayo**

không có tri thức, không có vô minh, không có đoạn tận tri thức, cũng không có đoạn tận vô minh,  
no knowledge, no ignorance, no extinction of knowledge, and no extinction of ignorance;

**yāvan na jarā-maraṇaṃ na jarā-maraṇa-kṣayo**

cho đến không có già chết và cũng không có đoạn tận già chết;  
up to no aging and death, and no extinction of aging and death;

**na duḥkha-samudaya-nirodha-mārgā**

không có khổ, tập, diệt, đạo;  
no suffering, origination, cessation and path,

**na jñānam na prāptir**

không có trí và không có chứng đắc.  
no wisdom and no attainment.

**tasmāc bodhisattvasya**

Cho nên, Bậc giác hữu tình  
Therefore, the Awakened One,

**prajñāpāramitām āśritya viharaty a-cittāvaraṇaḥ**

Y Như Bát Nhã Ba La Mật Đa, Hiện Hiện Như Nhiên,<sup>10</sup> tâm không ngăn ngại.  
is being vividly and naturally present just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom;  
his mind is free from obscuration;

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<sup>10</sup> In Vietnamese, the term *Hiện Hiện* can be a verb that means to be vividly and lucidly present, to vividly and lucidly appear, to vividly and lucidly exist, to clearly manifest, or to manifest vividly and lucidly. However, here, and throughout this book, *Hiện Hiện* is translated as “being vividly present,” and *Hiện Hiện Như Nhiên* as “being vividly and naturally present.” As far as one of Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải’s Dharma names, *Hiện Hiện Như Nhiên*, is concerned, it also contains the term *Hiện Hiện* which denotes the same meanings as described above; in the same line, this name is being translated as *Vivid Spontaneous Presence*.  
[MS]

***cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvād atrastro***

*Do tâm không ngăn ngại nên không sợ hãi,*  
because mind is devoid of obscuration, he has no fear;

***viparyāsātikrāntah niṣṭhā-nirvāṇah***

*vượt thoát mê lầm ảo tưởng, viên mãn cứu cánh Niết Bàn.*  
gone beyond confusion-delusion, he brings the ultimate transcendent state to perfect completion.

***tryadhvavyavasthitāḥ sarva-buddhāḥ***

*Hết thấy chư Phật trong ba thời*  
All Buddhas of the three times,

***prajñāpāramitām āśritya***

*thường Hiện Hiện Bát Nhã Ba La Mật Đa,*  
ever being vividly present as<sup>11</sup> the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom,

***anuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisambuddhāḥ***

*Viên Mãn Đạo Quả Vô Thượng Chánh Đẳng Chánh Giác.*  
perfectly complete the fruition of Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment.

***tasmāḥ jñātavyam: prajñāpāramitā mahā-mantra***

*Vì vậy, nên biết Bát Nhã Ba La Mật Đa là trí tuệ lớn,*  
Therefore, *Prajñāpāramitā* should be known as the great wisdom,<sup>12</sup>

***mahā-vidyā mantrah anuttara- mantrah asamasama-mantrah***

*là trí tuệ của đại giác, là trí tuệ vô thượng, là trí tuệ vô song*  
the wisdom of great awakening, the unsurpassable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom,

***sarva-duḥkha praśamaṇaḥ satyam amithyatvāt***

*vượt thoát hết thấy mê lầm khổ não, chân thật, không dư dối*  
transcending all delusional suffering, ever truthful, undeceptive.

***prajñāpāramitāyām ukto mantrah tadyathā:***

*Cho nên thuyết Bát Nhã Ba La Mật Đa chính là Hiện Hiện cảnh giới chân thật.*  
Thus, to speak of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is to be vividly present as the realm of truth.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See TT 22.

<sup>12</sup> See TT 28.

<sup>13</sup> The Realm of Truth is the realm of true existence, the true body or the universal Dharma-body. Also see TT 31.

**gate gate pāragate pārasaṅgate bodhi svāhā**

*Vượt rồi, vượt rồi, vượt thoát rồi, hoàn toàn vượt thoát rồi, giác ngộ viên mãn, ta bà ha.  
Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly freely beyond, perfectly awakened, svāhā.*

**iti prajñāpāramitāyām hṛdayaṃ samāptaṃ**

*Tinh túy Bát Nhã Ba La đã viên thành như thế.*

Herein, the core essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is thus fulfilled.



*In accordance with the instructions of her kind Root Teacher, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải, Milam Sudhana, together with the great assistance of Eng Jin Ooi and Ratna Siddhārtha Dhyāna, respectfully rendered the root text of the Essence of Prajñāpāramitā from Sanskrit into Vietnamese based on the original palm-leaf Sanskrit text from the Hōryū-ji Temple, cross-referencing with other Sanskrit-English translations.*

*The Vietnamese version was edited and enhanced by Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải on August 8, 2019, and Master Tuệ Hải gave commentary on the root text for the first time in August 2019 during the Tranquil Dwelling Season at Long Hương Temple, Vietnam. The Vietnamese version was slightly re-edited by Master Thích Tuệ Hải on May 26, 2023.*

*Thereafter, Milam Sudhana rendered the English translation based on both the Hōryū-ji version as well as the Vietnamese edited version by Master Thích Tuệ Hải. The English rendition of the root text includes suggestions from Thiện Thành, Tenzin Drolma, Ratna Siddhārtha Dhyāna and Nguyễn Mai. Subsequently, the commentary by Master Thích Tuệ Hải was compiled and translated into English by Milam Sudhana between September 2021 and June 2023, and edited by Oliver K. Luu.*

*Please see the Terminology Tables (TT 1 – TT 33) and Master Thích Tuệ Hải's detailed commentary for more information concerning the definitions, ways of deciphering the root text, and the word choices.*





*A New Transcendental Translation*

## ESSENCE OF PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ

Core Essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom

*(Formerly known as the Heart Sūtra)*

Vietnamese rendition as edited and enhanced by Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải  
*(Sanskrit-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-English renditions by Milam Sudhana)*

*Homage to the Omniscient Perfectly-Awakened One*

The moment *Avalokiteśvara*, the Noble Awakened Being, the Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One,  
deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom,  
he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates,  
and had a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void.

O Śāriputra! *In this very vivid presence*, form is exactly Void, Void is exactly form;  
form is not different from Void, Void is not different from form;  
that which is form is Void, that which is Void is form;  
the same is exactly true of sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness.

O Śāriputra! *In this very vivid presence*, all phenomena clearly emerge from Voidness,  
unborn, unceasing, immaculate, untainted, perfectly whole and complete.

Thus, Śāriputra, in this state of Voidness,  
there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no mental formation, no consciousness;  
no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind;  
no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind;  
no realm of eye-consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness;  
no knowledge, no ignorance, no extinction of knowledge, and no extinction of ignorance;  
up to no aging and death, and no extinction of aging and death;  
no suffering, origination, cessation and path,

no wisdom and no attainment.

Therefore, the Awakened One,  
*is being vividly and naturally present just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom;*  
his mind is free from obscuration;  
because mind is devoid of obscuration, he has no fear;  
gone beyond confusion-delusion, he brings the ultimate transcendent state to perfect completion.

All Buddhas of the three times,  
*ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom,*  
perfectly complete the fruition of Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment.

Therefore, *Prajñāpāramitā* should be known as the great wisdom,  
the wisdom of great awakening, the unsurpassable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom,  
transcending all delusional suffering, ever truthful, undeceptive.

Thus, to speak of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is to *be vividly present as the realm of truth.*

*Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly freely beyond, perfectly awakened, svāhā.*

Herein, the core essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is thus fulfilled.



## A Synopsis

### *The Immersion and Complete Dissolution of an Awakened Being as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*

*Excerpted from a Series of Teaching of Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải  
on the Essence of Prajñāpāramita during the Tranquil Dwelling Season  
at Long Hương Temple in 2019*

What I would like to emphasize, herein, is that the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā*, or the *Heart Sūtra*, should not simply be taken for granted as a philosophical, hypothetical text. For so long, many of us in the Buddhist tradition continue to dissect its content as an abstract theory of emptiness, based on a rational discourse or negation theorem.

Rather, we should try to look at it from a liberating approach and reveal the quintessence of the scripture: In beginning of the scripture, *Avalokiteśvara* deeply immersed in the *Prajñā* Wisdom Mind *in the very vivid presence* to penetrate the five aggregates and transcended them so he became liberated; in the middle, he continued to immerse in *Prajñā* and to completely dissolve as *Prajñā*; and at the conclusion of the scripture, the state of full enlightenment manifests into the realm of noumenal truth or true existence. Although we are saying, herein, “*at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end,*” these expressions merely refer to the progression of the composition in the text itself, but they are not meant to refer to any period of time, nor any time concept as far as the momentness of immersion is concerned. It is because at that very spontaneous momentness of presence, all three times have been already transcended. My humble suggestion to you now is to let go of the old translated version of the *Prajñā-Heart Sūtra* for the time being, so we can essentially contemplate the new rendition.

Thus, we take the liberty to divide the scripture into six sections, each with a subtitle. The subtitles are added to clarify the main content of each passage, and do not exist in the *Sanskrit* original. So let us try to be receptive to anything that is fresh and can present the existing actuality.

### **1. The beginning of immersion in Prajñā**

***“The moment the Awakened Being deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom”***

*This is the introduction, and the onset of being ‘deeply immersed in’ Prajñā the very ‘moment’ Prajñā manifests. In this metaphysical state, during which the practitioner deeply penetrates all five aggregates, transcends matter (body) and expands the true mind beyond mind-consciousness. The true essence of all five aggregates are inherently tranquil, pure and immaculate. This stanza continues to describe the state of on-going immersion of someone who is immersing in Prajñā in this vivid moment. Void herein is actually Voidness, Signless Void or Signlessness, devoid of all characteristics or signs, whether existence or non-existence, and substantiality or insubstantiality.*

### **2. The on-going immersion in Prajñā**

***“At the very vivid presence, form is exactly Void, Void is exactly form”***

*This stanza continues to describe the state of on-going immersion of someone who is immersing in Prajñā in this vivid moment. Voidness or Void and Prajñā are interchangeable which means the five aggregates are, indeed, Prajñā. This very presence is the single true existence, the single reality, or the single Suchness with no other dissimilarity. Having the aggregates (existence/substantiality) is Voidness. Not having the aggregates (non-existence/insubstantiality) is Voidness as well. Form and Void are being exactly dissimilar, because to speak of form in that metaphysical state is to simply speak of the pristine presence, and to speak of Void is also to simply speak of the pristine presence – that which is pure, quiescent, empty-hollow. Intrinsically, this essence is the existing omniscience, unborn and unceasing. It is the Tathāgatagarbha (The Womb of the Thus-Come One), “the inherently and naturally pure and ubiquitous true nature pervading the whole dharmadhātu, manifesting according to the capacity of knowledge of the individuals.” Thus, it is only due to our karma that we temporarily physically manifest as who we are.*

### **3. The continuing immersion as Prajñā**

***“At this very vivid presence, all phenomena clearly emerge from Voidness”***

*Here is another stanza of explanation to depict the continuing immersion as Prajñā of the practitioner. What it is trying to say is that if it is already Prajñā, then all phenomena altogether display themselves and clearly emerge from Voidness, the ubiquitous state of neither substantial nor insubstantial, neither existence nor non-existence. Therefore, if we still see that there are physical phenomena, then this is the way an ordinary being sees. On the other hand, if we see all phenomena as Prajñā, then that is how an enlightened being sees. Therefore, if in this very presence we see all phenomena as phenomena, it means we have parted from the realm of perfect wisdom and have fallen into the mundane sphere. On the other hand, in this matrix of Prajñā, if we can see all phenomena appearing as Prajñā, as Voidness or Signlessness, then that is the view of an enlightened person. Therefore, all the verses that follow, such as “no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind,” etc. are meant to elaborate on the above stanza of “all phenomena clearly emerge from Voidness.”*

#### **4. The complete dissolution as Prajñā**

***“The Awakened One, is being vividly and naturally present just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom”***

*This is the first concluding stanza to epitomize all the ideas that are expressed in the above-mentioned paragraphs in the beginning and in the body of the scripture. An enlightened being no longer “immerses in,” but he is now “just as” the Perfect Wisdom. There is nothing whatsoever that is different from Prajñā, and there is no more merging in or not merging in in this case. Prajñā is now the enlightened person, the enlightened person is now Prajñā – no longer singular, no longer dissimilar, no longer two, no longer someone from the outside merging in, no longer someone who is living with it, no longer someone who simply understands it, no longer someone who directly realizes it, and no longer someone who immerses in – in fact, everything is simply the noumenal state of the perfect wisdom itself, nothing more, nothing less.*

#### **5. The realm of ever-existing as Prajñā**

***“All Buddhas of the three times, ever being vividly present as Prajñā”***

*This is the second concluding stanza. The Awakened Being is no different than all Buddhas as far as the attributes of enlightenment is concerned. Enlightenment means to ever be vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom itself, where there is no longer a self or phenomena. There is no longer someone who is attaining something or realizing something as in an object-subject duality, but at this moment, there is only one single ubiquitous, noumenal all-pervasive wisdom transcending the three worlds, ever emerging as the noumenal reality.*

#### **6. Prajñā is the great awakening wisdom – the cosmos of true existence**

***“To speak of Prajñāpāramitā is to be vividly present as the realm of truth”***

*This is the last concluding stanza to confirm that Prajñāpāramitā is the great, unsurpassed wisdom and the person who is speaking of Prajñāpāramitā is actually inseparable from the realm of truth – the true existence of the perfect Dharma-body. More importantly, Prajñāpāramitā is not a mantra but it is the cosmos awareness or the universal totality reality, the state of perfect awakening itself.*

*Note: Please see the Terminology Tables (abbreviated: TT) on the following pages. For example, when you see (TT 1) at the end of “namas sarvajñāya,” please go to Terminology Table 1. There are further detailed comments and explanations following each terminology table.*

*The beginning of immersion in Prajñā of an Awakened Being*

**namas sarvajñāya (TT 1)**

Homage to the Omniscient Perfectly-Awakened One

**ārya-avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo (TT 2)**

The moment *Avalokiteśvara*, the Noble Awakened Being, the Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One

**gambhīraṃ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caryāṃ caramāṇo (TT 3)**

deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom

**vyavalokayati sma panca-skandhāṃs tāṃś (TT 4)**

he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates,

**ca svabhāvaśunyān paśyati sma (TT 5)**

and had a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void.

*The on-going immersion in Prajñā*

**iha śāriputra, rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyataiva rūpaṃ (TT 6)**

O Śāriputra! *In this very vivid presence*, form is exactly Void, Void is exactly form;

**rūpān na pṛthag śūnyatā, śūnyatāyā na pṛthag rūpaṃ (TT 7)**

form is not different from Void, Void is not different from form;

**yad rūpāṃ sā śūnyatā ya śūnyatā tad rūpāṃ (TT 8)**

that which is form is Void, that which is Void is form;

**evam eva vedanā-samjñā-saṃskāra-vijñāni (TT 9)**

the same is exactly true of sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness.

*The continuing immersion in Prajñā*

**iha śāriputra, sarvadharmāḥ śūnyatālakṣaṇā (TT 10)**

O Śāriputra! *In this very vivid presence*, all phenomena clearly emerge from Voidness,

*The continuing immersion in Prajñā*

**anutpannā aniruddhā amalāvimalā nona na paripūrṇāḥ** (TT 11)

unborn, unceasing, immaculate, untained, perfectly whole and complete.

**tasmāc chāriputra śūnyatāyām** (TT 12)

Thus, Śāriputra, in this state of Voidness,

**na rūpaṃ na vedanā na saṃjñā na saṃskārāḥ na vijñāni** (TT 13)

there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no mental formation, no consciousness;

**na cakṣuḥ-śrotra-ghrāna-jihvā-kāya-manāṃsi** (TT 14)

no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind;

**na rūpa-śabda-gandha-rasa-spraṣṭavya-dharmāḥ** (TT 15)

no form, sound, smell, taste, touch and object of the mind;

**na cakṣūr-dhātur-yāvan na mano-vijñāna-dhātuḥ** (TT 16)

no realm of eye-consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness;

**na vidyā nāvidyā na vidyākṣayo nāvidyākṣayo** (TT 17)

no knowledge, no ignorance, no extinction of knowledge, and no extinction of ignorance;

**yāvan na jarā-maraṇaṃ na jarā-maraṇa-kṣayo** (TT 18)

up to no aging and death, and no extinction of aging and death;

**na duḥkha-samudaya-nirodha-mārgā** (TT 19)

no suffering, origination, cessation and path;

**na jñānam na prāptir** (TT 20)

no wisdom and no attainment.

*The complete dissolution as Prajñā*

**tasmāc bodhisattvasya** (TT 21)

Therefore, the Awakened One,

**prajñāpāramitām āsṛitya viharaty a-cittāvaraṇaḥ** (TT 22)

*is being vidly and naturally present just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom;*

his mind is free from obscuration;

**cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvād atrastro** (TT 23)

because mind is devoid of obscuration, he has no fear;

**viparyāsātikrāntaḥ niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ** (TT 24)

gone beyond confusion-delusion, he brings the ultimate transcendent state to perfect completion.

*All Buddhas ever Being Vividly Present as Prajñā*

**tryadhvavyavasthitāḥ sarva-buddhāḥ** (TT 25)

All Buddhas of the three times,

**prajñāpāramitām āsṛitya** (TT 26)

ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom,

**anuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisambuddhāḥ** (TT 27)

perfectly complete the fruition of Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment.

*Prajñā is the great awakening wisdom – the realm of truth*

**tasmāḥ jñātavyam: prajñāpāramitā mahā-mantro** (TT 28)

Therefore, *prajñāpāramitā* should be known as the great wisdom,

**mahā-vidyā mantraḥ anuttara-mantraḥ asamasama-mantraḥ** (TT 29)

the wisdom of great awakening, the unsurpassable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom,

**sarva-duḥkha praśamaṇaḥ satyam amithyatvāt** (TT 30)

transcending all delusional suffering, ever truthful, undeceptive.

**prajñāpāramitāyām ukto mantraḥ tadyathā:** (TT 31)

Thus, to speak of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is to *be vividly present as the realm of truth*.

**gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā** (TT 32)

*Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly freely beyond, perfectly awakened, svāhā.*

**iti prajñāpāramitāyām hṛdayaṃ samāptaṃ.** (TT 33)

Herein, the core essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is thus fulfilled.





*TERMINOLOGIES,  
DETAILED  
COMMENTARY  
AND  
ESSENCE  
BEYOND WORDS*



*Terminologies, Detailed Commentary,  
and Essence Beyond Words*

*Excerpted from a Series of Teaching of Zen Master Thich Tuệ Hải  
on the Essence of Prajñāpāramitā during the Tranquil Dwelling Season  
at Long Hương Temple in 2019*

**TT 1. *namas sarvajñāya* – a mind of complete veneration toward the Omniscient Perfectly Awakened One and Perfect Wisdom**

<i>namas</i>	<i>sarvajñāya</i>
<i>-namas</i> (a neuter noun) is more commonly spelled as <i>namaḥ</i> (a nominative singular case): homage, bow	<i>-sarva</i> : all, every <i>-jñā</i> : knowing, understanding <i>-sarvajñā</i> : all-knowing, omniscient, <i>-sarvajñāya</i> : the all-knowing one, the omniscient one
<i>Literal translation:</i> -Homage to the all-knowing one -Homage to the omniscient one	
<i>Beyond translation: Homage to the Omniscient Perfectly Awakened One</i>	

To turn our devoted mind toward the Omniscient, the Perfectly Awakened One, means to turn toward whom or what? It is turning our mind toward the perfect enlightenment which is the immaculately perfect wisdom and toward the Buddha and enlightened beings, the ones who utterly transcend, and no longer have any grasping or attachment to confusion-delusion and to life-and-death. All the wisdom that has been attained by all the ten directional great Bodhisattvas is that which the Buddhas also attain, and thus, we call all Buddhas the Omniscient Ones, because there is no other wisdom that can be remotely compared to this *totality all-encompassing, all-pervasive cosmic wisdom* of all Buddhas.

As all Buddhas “*are ever being vividly present as Prajñā;*” in other words, all Buddhas *are*, indeed, the *Prajñā* Wisdom Mind! Therefore, if we want to learn the Buddha-Dharma but do not have a mind of fervent adoration and reverence toward the omniscient, all-awakened wisdom, then there is no chance for our progress, let alone any spiritual fruition. Fervent adoration and reverence means we turn toward and rely on this illimitable wisdom, omnipotence, omniscience and ineffable enlightenment.

So once we can do that, as the first step, then we can go on studying the Buddha-Dharma. It is only through this transcendental wisdom that we can emancipate all confusion-delusion throughout the multitude of hundreds of thousands of our own *samsaric* lives. In between this time span from now until Buddhahood, there must not be even a demi-thought of laziness or weariness, if we are to place any hope in complete enlightenment.

And it is only *Prajñā, the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, that can evoke this kind of supreme veneration in us! If at the time being we do not admire and respect the sublime, fully awakened wisdom, then what is it that we are admiring that leads us to learn, or to follow, the Buddha-Dharma? If we end up treasuring something else, then the initial cause of our learning the Buddha-Dharma is deflected. If we deviate from the genuine path, then we are detaching ourselves from *the extant reality in the pristine presence*, and from the true Dharma. If we depart from our own path of enlightenment and liberation, then who knows where our studying and practice of the Dharma would lead us.

For all these years, we say that we are learning the Buddha-Dharma, so then what exactly are we learning? Merely studying the words, the essays, the literature, the rhetoric, and the textbooks according to the way of the scholastics and academia in order to become a speaker or a lecturer is not the same as truly learning the enlightened and liberated path. Thus, from the very depths of our hearts at this moment, we need to look at it again to see what lead us to the Buddha-Dharma path, and whether we have an abundance of the sincere, devotional and revered mind toward the Omniscience, the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, the Perfectly Awakened Wisdom Mind? Honestly, if this mind of ours cannot turn resolutely decisive in this very life and in this very instant, if this genuine mind is deficient, then studying the Dharma would be futile. More or less, we would be walking on a divergent path, not the one leading to full liberation.

This very first verse is something that causes us to look at ourselves again with honesty and alertness. We need to truly wake up to examine ourselves! For a very long time until now, we stay at the temple to study the Buddha-Dharma, prostrate to the Buddha, engage in confession practices, sit in meditation, recite the *mantras*, chant the *Sūtras* and read many Dharma books. We do practically everything, but is our mind actually turning toward the omniscient and fully awakened wisdom? Is this mind of veneration powerful and resolute enough within us? If someone tells us that all we need to do is to give up this physical life in order to immerse in the omniscient and fully awakened wisdom, would we dare believe it?

Actually, personally, I would readily trade in not just one physical life for enlightenment, but even billions and billions of lives, if that were what is required. That is to say we should be ready to exchange all of the things that we treasure the most in this life so that we can encounter the omniscient and fully awakened realm. If, on the other hand, in our hearts and minds, we are not yet so willing to do so, then we are still very far from really learning the Dharma, and it would be difficult for us to make any progress through our practice

exertion, let alone reaching any genuine spiritual fruition. This is the very first thing that one must have in order to learn the *Prajñā*, so that there will be no second mind other than this, and so that there will be no chance for a rift or gap whatsoever in the very depths of our mindstream.

On the other hand, if we have not been emotionally touched when we placed our thought in this perfect wisdom, then it would be impossible for us to ever be fully awakened. Even though we know so, we have not yet paid enough respect to it. Take a close look at it, please. From long ago until now, we have had and still have many important affairs and many things we need to do, or many valuable matters to take care of! Thus, with deep veneration means that there is no thought other than this, and that there is nothing in this life and in the three worlds that we revere more than this.

Only this mind of deep veneration and adoration toward the perfect enlightened wisdom has enough insight to help us win over and transcend all of our extant *karmic* habitual tendencies. If we allow this mind-turning to become something so resolutely impetuous, which we can be whirled into for the rest of our life, then hopefully we can reach realization in this lifetime. If, on the other hand, we do not have this kind of mind-turning, then it would be rather difficult for us to just merely talk about enlightenment and liberation. Do not think that practicing the Dharma is to go somewhere or to arrive somewhere. If you believe that you must do something instead of coming to terms with this very truth, then, be very careful, because you may already be derailed from the true Dharma.

**TT 2. *ārya-avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo* – the Noble Awakened Being, the Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One**

<i>ārya</i>	<i>avalokiteśvaro</i> <sup>14</sup>	<i>bodhisattvo</i>
<p><b>-<i>ārya</i> (adjective):</b> honorable, respectable, venerable, sacred, or noble</p>	<p><b>-<i>ava</i>:</b> off, away, down  <b>-<i>lok</i>:</b> look, gaze, see, behold, perceive, observe, recognize, know  <b>-<i>lokita</i>:</b> past participle of <i>lok</i>  <b>-<i>loka</i>:</b> world, place, open space, or earth  <b>-<i>lokeśvara</i>:</b> lord of the world  <b>-<i>iśvara</i>:</b> lord, supreme being  <b>-<i>śvara</i> (adjective):</b> delight in  <b>-<i>aśvara</i>:</b> lamentations or in a low voice  <b>-<i>avalokiteśvara</i>:</b> one who perceives sounds/voices of delight in the world  <b>-<i>avalokitāśvara</i>:</b> one who perceives sounds/voices of suffering in the world  <b>-<i>avalokiteśvaro</i> (nominative case)</b></p>	<p><b>-<i>bodhi</i> (noun):</b> awakening, enlightening, enlightenment  <b>-<i>sattva</i>:</b> being, existence, entity  <b>-<i>Bodhisattva</i>:</b> enlightening being, enlightened being, awakening being, awakened being, one who awakens others, one who enlightens others  <b>-<i>bodhisattvo</i> (nominative case)</b></p>
<p><i>Literal translation:</i>                      -the Noble Awakening/Awakened Avalokiteśvara                      -the Noble Lord of the world (who sees the world/who looks down from above)                      -the Noble Lord of the world (who perceives the sounds of the world)</p>		
<p><i>Beyond translation: The moment</i><sup>15</sup> <b>Avalokiteśvara, the Noble Awakened Being, the Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One</b><sup>16</sup></p>		

In this context, *Avalokiteśvara, the lord who sees*, is considered a Noble Being, an Awakening or Awakened One, a Bodhisattva, an Enlightening or Enlightened Being, who has reached a

<sup>14</sup> About the varied names and spellings of *Avalokitaloksvāra* (Chinese. Kuan-shih-yin), *Avalokitalokeśvara* (Chinese. Kuan-shih-tzu-tsai) and *Avalokiteśvara* (Chinese. Kuan-tzu-tsai): According to Studholme (2002), the name *Avalokiteśvara* was still not much used in India during the first part of the fifth century during Fa Hien’s visit and it only became popular over the course of the following hundred years after which time it was noticed by Hsuan Tsang in the seventh century. Please also see footnote 17.

<sup>15</sup> Due to the English syntax, “*the moment*” is moved to this clause but in the Vietnamese translation, it is rendered in the consecutive clause.

<sup>16</sup> According to Hsuan Tsang (Xuanzang)’s discovery while in India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Studholme, 2002), the spelling and meaning of this name, *Avalokiteśvara* (*the lord who sees; Chinese. Kuan-tzu-tsai*) replaced *Avalokitaloksvāra* (*the lord who perceives the sounds of the world; Chinese. Kuan-shih-yin*) and *Avalokitalokeśvara* (*the lord who sees the world; Chinese. Kuan-shih-tzu-tsai*). Originally, in Chinese, “*tzu-tsai*” (Viet. *tự tại*) is equivalent lord or lord of the world (Skt. *iśvara*). However, over time, this word evolved, and the Vietnamese use ‘*tự tại*’ to depict a state of being in total control, naturally free and spontaneous, unimpeded, unbounded and liberated. Therefore, in this translation beyond translation rendition, we keep the original name *Avalokiteśvara* and add an epithet, ‘*the Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One*,’ to point to someone who is being naturally and spontaneously free, liberated, without boundaries, and with the ability to thoroughly see the reality of self and phenomena, and to immerse in this reality unobstructedly. Please see further comments in this section.

state of being *vividly and naturally free and utterly unobstructed*, with the direct ability to thoroughly and directly see the ultimate truth of self and phenomena. It is the same as immersing in the noumenal reality. Ultimately, all Bodhisattvas are the Awakened Ones who exist with the aspiration to awaken other sentient beings from confusion-delusion.

*Being naturally free and unobstructed*, or being spontaneous and unimpeded, is not the same as *being freed*. To be freed and no longer trapped inside the house, for example, is having been released. The freedom we have from being released means we escape that which we are stuck in or grasp at; we leave behind the place that keeps us in bondage. Yet being naturally free and unobstructed means we do not necessarily need to leave the place behind, but that we are no longer being entangled or imprisoned by it.

For example, right in this presence, we do not need to leave behind this body and mind, but if we are not suffering under the influence of the five heaps of aggregate, then we are considered naturally free and unobstructed. Right here if we do not suffer due to the five bodily and mental aggregates, and right in this vivid presence, if we are not being caught in emotions, name, fame, money and in everything else whatsoever, then it means we are free and unobstructed, too. It does not mean that we need to overpower the five desires in order to become at ease and unhindered. It is not at all like that! There is no need to overcome talent, beauty, fame, food and sleep in order to become at ease, free and unhindered. That is unnecessary! It does not necessarily mean that “I don’t use money, I do not need beauty, nor eating and sleeping,” and consider it to be equivalent to “I am free.”

In reality, what Buddhism refers to as being naturally free and unimpeded is actually “*existing as the true reality in the pristine momentness of presence.*” It means to directly see, to directly know and to live with imperturbability without any mental obscuration according to true reality. Being spontaneous, naturally free and unobstructed actually refers to the existing, all-emancipating reality in the very vivid momentness of presence. Whoever can immerse in this true existence, not being bounded or caught in the three worlds and who does not have the slightest attachment or grasping, then such a person can be regarded as *naturally free and unobstructed seeing*.

Hereby, we are not talking about something *later*, or about practicing exertion, realization, self-attainment or self-accomplishment in order to attain something unnatural to us. We are simply talking about *the very pristine presence in the absence of physicality, time and space* with nothing for us to become gripped in. This is a state where there is no need to practice exertion, yet, there is not a single thing in the three worlds that can cause grasping or stagnation within us. Thus, we need to directly comprehend it as the extant reality, the lucid presence, the vivid existence, and nothing else! Every mental moment in the vivid presence is simply being at ease without impediment, simply being boundless, all-pervasive, and without retaining any pettiness toward believing in a self or phenomena.

**TT 3. *gambhīraṃ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caryāṃ caramāṇo* – the beginning of immersion in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom**

<i>gambhīraṃ</i>	<i>prajñāpāramitāyāṃ</i>	<i>caryāṃ</i>	<i>caramāṇo</i>
<i>(adjective for caryā):</i> deep, profound	<p><b>-pra:</b> prior, before</p> <p><b>-jñā:</b> knowing, knowledge, understanding</p> <p><b>-prajñā:</b> <i>Perfect Wisdom</i>, wisdom, the wisdom prior to knowledge (e.g. pristine wisdom, wisdom in the vivid presence, wisdom prior to the working of the conceptual mind, transcendental wisdom, ultimate wisdom)</p> <p><b>-pāram:</b> the other</p> <p><b>-itā</b> (<i>past passive participle</i>): arrived</p> <p><b>-prajñāpāramitā:</b> <i>Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</i> (e.g. have attained enlightenment, have transcended)</p> <p><b>-prajñāpāramitāyāṃ:</b> in the <i>Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</i></p>	<p><b>-caryā</b> (<i>noun</i>): the practice, the activity, the movement, the flowing, the observation, the performance</p> <p><b>-caryāṃ:</b> in the practice</p>	<p><b>-car</b> (<i>verb</i>): to go, to move, to cross, to per-form, to progress</p> <p><b>-caramāṇo:</b> when moving, when practicing, when progressing, when performing</p>
<p><i>Literal translation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-when practicing the profound Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</li> <li>-when practicing deeply the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</li> <li>-when progressing in the deep practice of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</li> </ul>			
<p><i>Beyond translation:</i> <b>deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</b></p> <p>* <u>Summary:</u> <i>‘The moment’ hereby means the precise momentness of direct knowing, of direct realizing and of direct being in Prajñā in order to dissolve into Prajñā. Thus, instead of using “to practice the profound Transcendent Wisdom” or “to deeply practice the All-Transcendent Wisdom,” we translate as “to deeply immerse in” to express how one fully and completely dissolves in the realm of All-Transcendent Wisdom to become oneness with this Wisdom. It is not merely “to practice” as if there is separation between a practitioner and his practice. Nevertheless, even the expression “to deeply immerse in” is still merely a compound of abstract words or a verbal imitation of the reality to point to the state of being one with Prajñā which is beyond words and expressions.</i></p>			

When this verse is saying “*the moment*” the Awakened One deeply immerses in *Prajñā-pāramitā*, then it means that this very precise momentness of presence itself *is actually the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*. Therefore, even to use the expression of “*to deeply immerse in*” is extraneous. Why? Because right then and there in the vivid presence, the

Awakened One is *already* being the actual *Prajñāpāramitā*, the transcendental beyond wisdom!

In this very pristine presence, there is no grasping or retention, but simply being the direct all-pervasive clear-knowing that is unimpeded, natural, and peaceful in its own simplicity and spontaneity. Right in this very presence is the single *True Suchness*, absent of any dissimilarity, utterly equanimous, non-discriminatory, naturally and spontaneously as such. Thus, to “*deeply immerse in*” intends to tell us that the Awakened Being is already “*living*” *Prajñā*, which means he is already “*being vividly present as perfect wisdom itself!*”

Actually, if we use the term “*to live with*” *Prajñā*, then I feel that it is deficient, and “*to live in*” *Prajñā* is even further from the truth! So in all of the subsequent verses in this translation, we shall use the term “*being vividly present as Prajñā*” which simply means that it is the clear manifestation as one and the same as *Prajñā* itself. The pristine presence simply means that *Prajñā* clearly emanates. The pristine presence is *Prajñā* in vivid true existence. It does *not* mean *to live in*, *to live with*, *to enter from the outer*, or *to abide in* this transcendental wisdom, but it is simply a natural manifestation, a spontaneous, ever-fresh presence with blazing clarity that is intrinsically tranquil and serene as such.

Therefore, an unencumbered, at ease person is someone who is intrinsically manifesting as the transcendental presence. Everywhere in the vivid presence is transcendental. Every mental momentness existing in our lives is a moment of perfect transcendence, whole and flawless, and there is no need for us to do anything else, because whatever we do would end up being grasping and clinging. Ineffectually, we say, to “*deeply immerse in*,” but in actuality, there is no *Prajñā* to immerse in and no one being immersed – no subject-object duality and no dissimilarity whatsoever!



**TT 4. vyavalokayati sma pañca-skandhāms tāmś – the direct penetration of all five aggregates**

<b>vyavalokayati</b>	<b>sma</b>	<b>pañca</b>	<b>skandhāms</b>	<b>tāmś</b>
<p><b>-vi:</b> from different directions  <b>-ava:</b> below  <b>-vyavalokayati</b> (third person singular case of <b>vyavalok:</b> in different directions and down)  <b>-avalok:</b> (a part of Avalokiteśvara’s name): to look, observe, to view, to look down</p>	<p><b>-sma</b> makes the verb <b>avalok a</b> past tense</p>	<p>five (5)</p>	<p><b>-skandhāms</b> (an accusative case of <b>skandhā</b>): aggregates, heap, constituents, part, division, quantity, multitudes, grasping  <b>-pañca-skandhāms:</b> five aggregates, five constituting elements of grasped or perceived phenomena  (*the five aggregates consist of: form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness)</p>	<p><b>-a</b> phonetically changed form of <b>tām:</b> them</p>
<p><i>Literal translation:</i>  -looked down at the five aggregates  -saw the five aggregates  -observed the five aggregates</p>				
<p><i>Beyond translation: he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates</i></p> <p>* <i>Summary:</i> In the Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions in the East, in general, and especially in China and Vietnam, this verse was commonly translated using the following expressions and meanings: “to observe through contemplative insight” or “to shed light on and see,” or “to illumine and see.” Instead, we use “to thoroughly penetrate” the five aggregates to point to a state of complete, direct knowing and direct understanding without obstructions precisely at that very momentness. It is the same as the unobstructed penetration of the whole sphere of phenomenal truth, the dharmadhātu that inherently is Voidness – a state of clear and vivid manifestation yet signless, devoid of any characteristic signs.</p>				

In this scripture, the Buddha was talking about someone who has *transcended* all five aggregates. What then are the five aggregates or five heaps? If we speak of them in a most unpolished way to make them easiest to understand, the five aggregates are our body and mind. Form, the aggregate of form, is our body form, and sensation, perception, mental formation (*karmic* formation), and consciousness are our mind. Anyone who directly experiences and directly sees the “five aggregates as being Void” means they are in a *noumenal* state where their bodies as vivid yet completely Void at the same time.

Intrinsically, the five aggregates are *Prajñā in the vivid presence, pure Suchness and immaculate*. It is due to the nature of emptiness that everything can come into existence, yet, in actuality, it lacks a solid independent self.

If we still see that there is a body, then it means that we do not yet have the *Perfect Wisdom* and we have not yet transcended grasping, clinging and suffering. The *Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One*, on the other hand, directly penetrates his physical body of four elements (earth, water, wind and fire) as being Void. Void does *not* mean that there is “*nothing*” in contrast to a substantial, solid form, but herein, Void points to the absolute empty-tranquil-immaculate state of being. This Void is neither the “*sign of form*” (existence) nor the “*sign of emptiness*” (non-existence). In other words, this is “*the Void of our innate nature*.” Because this nature is innately Void, thus, from this very state of Voidness, Singless Void or Signlessness, there is *neither form nor formlessness*, it can give birth to *both existence and non-existence* at the very same time!

Therefore, the Awakened Being, herein, had a direct knowing with lucid clarity that his body and mind is, indeed, *Prajñā in the pristine presence*. This presence is Void and this presence is *Suchness*. That is the direct realization of a person whom we can say has “*immersed in*” *Prajñā*. Only those who would have enough wisdom can penetratively fathom the five aggregates, that which is their body and mind, as Void.

That is, at the very precise mental momentness, the Awakened Being came upon *Prajñā* in order to totally dissolve which he “*thoroughly penetrated*” all five aggregates as Void. I must say that hereby, it is not “*to observe through contemplative insight*,” as usually expressed in the classic translation of the Heart Sūtra, but rather, precisely at the momentness of pristine presence when this *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* manifests, *that presence itself is*, indeed, *Prajñā!* Here, it is no longer a cognitive understanding and no longer the conscious mind’s all-knowing, but rather the *direct, lucid and penetrating all-pervasive totality true knowing*.

If we clearly, penetratively fathom *Prajñā*, then we can see that since time immemorial until now, there has *never* been any clinging or retention in the five aggregates. We mistakenly perceive everything so we have form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness, yet when we finally see the truth as it is, then the five aggregates are innately, thoroughly unobstructed and themselves are the vivid presence. This brightly clear penetration does not mean that we are changing or altering our seeing and our view, but it simply means that since the past until now, our five aggregates inherently have always been Void.

Thus, when *Prajñā* vividly emerges then its lucid clarity will reveal the true existence of the five aggregates. The five aggregates have never had any substantial existence. When there is confusion, there are the five heaps; when there is direct knowing and direct penetration, then the five heaps are Void. This has nothing to do with “*to observe through contemplative*

*insight*” nor “*to deeply course in,*” because all of those expressions are superfluous and lack the efficacy to express about *Prajñā*.

Furthermore, when we talk about *Prajñā*, the core essence of perfect wisdom, we are hereby talking about the *unobstructed penetration of the whole sphere of phenomenal truth*, the *dharmadhātu* that inherently is Voidness – *a state of clear and dynamic manifestations yet signless, devoid of any characteristic signs*. This *dharmadhātu* is nonetheless the pristine presence, the realm of *True Suchness* devoid of any dissimilarity! That is the true equanimous, non-discriminatory state. So if we still see dissimilarities in that expanse of *Suchness*, then we do not possess the *Prajñā* wisdom.

This *Prajñā* itself clearly sees the intrinsic perfect truth of the five aggregates and the phenomena in the state of Voidness. It is *not* that now we have to “*engage in practicing exertion*” that the five aggregates become Void! Similarly, neither did the five aggregates always exist substantially, and then due to our practicing for a few dozen years, or for ten-thousand lives that finally, the five aggregates now *become* Void. It is not at all like that!

We are hereby talking about an Awakened Being, someone who has acquired the enlightened wisdom *completely without effort*. Thus, he can “*penetratingly fathom*” the five aggregates. This does *not* come from “*practicing exertion*” (Viet. *công phu*), nor due to his “*observance through contemplative insight*” (Viet. *quán chiếu*), or through his “*practicing in the deep course*” (Viet. *hành thâm*). All of those classical terminologies are far-off from what is happening right now in this precise moment! Therefore, we need to set aside these old ideas in order to become receptive to *Prajñā* in this very vivid presence. If there is still anything of old that we are clinging to, then *Prajñā* cannot manifest in the presence.

Therefore, when an Awakened One finally attains complete enlightenment, nothing can be caught or retained in this state of pure, unadulterated beingness, and there is no chance for any residue of bondage or fear to possibly remain; he or she is freely, utterly liberated, where there is no coming, no going, no form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness. On the other hand, if right now we see that there is still body and mind, and all sorts of other things, then it means that we are still trapped in the five aggregates.

*For further reading on each of the five aggregates (form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness), please see Appendix A, namely, “Understanding the Five Aggregates, Their Characteristics and Their Workings.”*

**TT 5. *ca svabhāvaśūnyām paśyati sma* – the direct knowing of the intrinsic essence of the five aggregates as being Void**

<i>ca</i>	<i>svabhāvaśūnyām</i>	<i>paśyati</i>	<i>sma</i>
and	<p><b>-<i>sva</i></b> (<i>adjective</i>): own, one’s own</p> <p><b>-<i>bhāva</i></b>: nature, essence, being, becoming, manner of being, existing</p> <p><b>-<i>svabhāva</i></b> (<i>noun</i>): self, ego, own, intrinsic essence, intrinsic nature, self-nature</p> <p><b>-<i>śūnyā</i></b> (<i>adjective</i>): empty, void, open, devoid, non-existing, nothing, hollow</p> <p><b>-<i>śūnyām</i></b> (<i>an accusative case of the adjective śūnyā to describe the characteristic of svabhāva</i>): empty, void, open, devoid, non-existing</p> <p><b>-<i>svabhāvaśūnyām</i></b>: empty intrinsic nature, empty intrinsic essence, self-nature being void, essence being empty</p>	behold, look at, see, perceive	<b>-<i>sma</i></b> makes the verb <b><i>paśyati</i></b> a past tense
<p><i>Literal translation:</i> -and saw their empty intrinsic nature/their inherent essence -and perceived their self-nature being empty</p>			
<p><i>Beyond translation:</i> <b>and had a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void</b></p> <p><i>* Summary:</i> In the past, the Chinese-Vietnamese versions commonly use the expressions “to illuminate through contemplative insight” or “to illuminate to see” through practice exertion. Those terms focus on relying on mind’s knowing-awareness. However, here we are talking about an Awakened Being who has merged with the enlightened wisdom without effort. Thus, it is the universal direct totality all-pervasive all-knowing true wisdom and not simply the conscious mind’s all-knowing. It is self-clarity and naked all-pervasive knowingness that requires no effort. The experiential reality of the five aggregates being Void has no seer, no seeing and nothing to see, because there is no longer subject and object duality.</p>			

If we still see that there is a body, then it means that we do not yet have the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* and we have not yet transcended grasping, clinging and suffering. The *Awakened Being*, on the other hand, sees his physical body of four elements as void. Void does *not* mean that there is “*nothing*” in contrast to a substantial, solid form, but herein, Void points to the absolute *empty-tranquil-immaculate-unadulterated state of being*. This Void is neither the “*sign of form*” (existence) nor the “*sign of emptiness*” (non-existence). In other words, this is “*the Void of our innate nature,*” the innate empty nature of all things where no one and nothing can exist independently. Therefore, from the very state of Voidness or Signlessness itself, everything can clearly manifest, yet they have no characteristic sign, *being neither form nor non-form*. In short, from this state of Voidness, it can give birth to both form and void *concurrently* at the same time – both form and void, at that momentness, have the exact same essence of being Void and boundless.

**TT 6. *Iha śāriputra rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyataiva rūpaṃ* – form and Void in this very vivid presence**

<i>iha</i>	<i>śāriputra</i>	<i>rūpaṃ</i>	<i>śūnyatā</i>	<i>śūnyataiva</i>
here, now, in this instance, in this case, in this world	the name of <i>śāriputra</i> literally means ‘child of <i>śāri</i> ’	<i>-rūpa</i> : form, that which is formed, outward appear-ance, outward phenomenon, material case, shape, figure, feature <i>-rūpaṃ</i> (a nominative singular case)	emptiness, void, voidness, open, openness, devoid, nothing, non-substantiality, non-existence	<i>-śūnyatā + eva</i> <i>-eva</i> (adverb): just so, exactly, exactly so, truly

*Literal translation:*

- here (right here), Śāriputra, form is exactly like emptiness, emptiness is exactly like form
- now (right now), Śāriputra, form is truly emptiness, emptiness is truly form
- here and now, Śāriputra, form is indeed emptiness, emptiness is indeed form

***Beyond translation: O Śāriputra, in this very vivid presence, form is exactly Void, Void is exactly form***

\* *Summary:* The first verse in all of the English renditions contains the word ‘here’ (eg. **Here, Sariputra - iha śāriputra**), but somehow this word (Chinese: **ci**) did not show up in Xuanzang’s Chinese classic rendition and in other Chinese-Vietnamese versions, except in the Chinese version that was edited by Amoghavajra, also known as Bukong(705-774) as it was found in the Dunhuang cave. Furthermore, Xuanzang’s Chinese version begins with, “Form is not different from Void, Void is not different from form,” and thus, the commonly recited Chinese-Vietnamese version, for generations, has followed suit. In short, **iha** is a very special and critical term and it has many different meanings in Sanskrit: ‘here,’ ‘now,’ ‘in this instance,’ ‘in this case,’ and ‘in this world.’ **Iha** is definitely the key to unlock the quintessential message in the scripture, yet, was overlooked for many generations! Thus, the coined term, ‘**in this very vivid presence**’ or ‘**in this momentness of presence**’ is to replace the commonly expression ‘here,’ ‘now,’ or ‘in this instance,’ in order to point to the quintessence of the precise, lucid, pristine presence beyond time and space, ever-fluid, not slightly before or after, when the Awakened Being dissolved as Prajñā. On the other hand, the term ‘**eva**’ (**exactly**) in the compound word **śūnyataiva (śūnyatā + eva)** is also a very powerful term to affirm that, at that very vivid momentness and in that metaphysical, noumenal state, form and Void are both signless, and they are, indeed, exactly and precisely the same, devoid of any dissimilarity.

In reality, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are strained to use the terms *form* and *void* (*formless/non-form*) only for the sake of helping sentient beings to have some ideas, whereas in essence, form is illusionary form, and void is illusionary void. In truth, form does not exist, and in truth, void, too, does not exist. Form also emerges from *Prajñā*, and void also emerges from *Prajñā*. Once we have *Prajñā*, we will clearly and directly see both

*form* and *void* concurrently. Right now, we can also clearly see form and void. Within a single direct knowing, form and void concurrently manifest. Thus, where does our seeing come from? Not from our delusional consciousness, but from *Prajñā*. As such, if we exist in *Prajñā* in the pristine presence, then both form and void (formless) are generated from one single direct penetration and one single direct knowing! It is with this direct penetration and direct knowing that both form and void are revealed where both form and void (formless) are recognized synchronously, not prior nor later. When we are not yet enlightened, we see empty space (void) and substantial appearance (form). Therefore, we recognize the empty space and the substantial appearances at the same time. Within this concurrent recognition, there is comparison or discrimination. Both appear as either “the appearance of form” or “the appearance of void” which are two distinct signs. If we are at the dualistic, comparative level, then yes, we see that these two signs are different.

However, if we are at the non-comparative level, will these two signs still emanate? Yes, both signs still emanate, but the name called *form* and the name called *void* utterly do not exist. Thus, when there is no more dualistic comparison and discrimination, and when one has already deeply immersed in *Prajñā*, one can see the true innate essence of the five aggregates as Void. By then, the *form aggregate* is Void, and the *absence of the form aggregate* is also Void; having *form (existence/substantiality)* is Void, and having *no form (non-existence/insubstantiality)* is also Void. Therefore, from within this state of Void or Voidness, both “substantiality” and “insubstantiality” emanate – it means that it is from within the state of Voidness that all forms appear no matter what.

Just like when we take an ice cube and drop it in water, or when we take another ice cube out of the water, both ice cubes are wet no matter whether they stay in the water, or are out of the water. Thus, the wetness when it is taken out and the wetness when it stays in the water are not different. Although one cube is big and one cube is small, after the ice cubes melt, they will just be water. Whether it is water in the form of an ice cube, or water not yet to be shaped as an ice cube, it is still wet. Therefore, the illusionary appearance is something that takes its shape from perception, but in reality, its inherent essence is True Void or Voidness. Thus, *form* and *void* (substantiality and insubstantiality) is what is perceived by our *illusion*, but if everything is seen from the state of true insight, will there still be *form* and *void*? Yes, they will still be there, completely intact! However, there will be *no dissimilarity* between *form* and *void* from in the state of true insight; it is only with illusionary perception that one sees the individualistic differences. When we see dissimilarities, it means we have fallen into the level of illusiveness.

“O Śāriputra! In this very vivid presence...” means there are no disparities whatsoever. This very presence is the single existence, the single reality, the single *Suchness* with no other dissimilarity. Therefore, to use the term *form* is just a strained, temporary expression, as there is no such thing as *form*, because *form* itself is but the pristine presence, and similarly, *void* itself is but the pristine presence. *Form* is none other than simplicity, the bare existence, and *void* is none other than the bare existence. The existing vivid presence is simply that which is hollow, immaculate, tranquil and pure, and as such, there is neither

*form* nor *void*. Thus, to speak of *form* is to simply speak of the pristine presence. To speak of *void* is also to simply speak of the pristine presence. To speak of *form* in the momentary pristine presence is to simply speak of that which is pure, quiescent, empty-hollow. Similarly, to speak of *void* in the momentary pristine presence is to simply speak of that which is pure, quiescent, empty-hollow. There is no past, no future, no present, no space and no time in the existing reality of this very pristine presence. If we ever separate from this pristine presence, then we would see that there is *form* and there is *void*, and that means we have already fallen so deeply into the level of perception. It means we are no longer in the pristine presence and we exist either in the past or in the future.

In contrast, right in this vivid presence, there is no past and no future, and thus, no notion of space and time in the momentary presence. Due to the above verse the main idea can appear more clearly in the verse below. On the other hand, if we speak of *form* as “a false appearance based on united conditions” as a base for our understanding herein, then we immediately fall into the trap of discriminative consciousness. In essence *form* has never been *form*, but it is due to our illusion that *illusionary form* appears, and *void* has never been *void*, but it is also due to illusive perception that *void* appears.

However, if we exist precisely in the vivid presence, then we can break free from our illusion. Once beyond illusion, the vivid presence is *spontaneously, naturally as such*, and thus, in this vivid presence, *form* and *void* are not dissimilar from *Voidness*. It is not because we do not give rise to discriminative thoughts that there is no dissimilarity – it is because it is beyond comparison and discrimination, and because it simply exists in the pristine presence. *Form* verily is itself, but it is not *form*; *void*, verily, is itself, but it is not *void*. Therefore, when we say *form* is not dissimilar from *void*, then it is not dissimilar in which way? Not dissimilar based on the fundamental root that gives birth to both, that which is empty-hollow, tranquil and immaculate.

I do not want to use the term “*right here*,” and I am trying to avoid this expression, because “*right here and now*” to me is a coined phrase very popular in the technical Zen language, yet, it is rather stranded. We need to be free from this expression, and I am saying “*in the very vivid presence*,” rather than “*right here*.” “*The vivid presence*” does not mean “*right here*.” Right here is an affirmation, but the vivid presence is neither affirmation nor negation. “*Right here and now*” is an affirmation, but the truth of Dharma is neither affirmation nor negation. It is utterly beyond affirmation and negation as it is just plain existing in the very presence. It is the true essence, the natural *Suchness*, and the spontaneity; there is no one who can influence it and outside of it, there is no one there to discern it.

“*In this very vivid presence*” is something that no one can identify, affirm, nor negate, and thus, it is indeed the perfect truth. One cannot affirm or negate this very presence; therefore, we are saying *precisely* at this very presence! This very reality is something that no one can affirm or negate, because it is already an existing reality.

In the past there have been many texts that use the phrase “*right here and now*” and thus, it is enough to show that they will end up succumbing to it inescapably. Although Vietnamese is a language the world may not regard highly, when speaking about the ultimate truth, it has linguistic expressions that are more explicitly precise than the languages of the West. The phrase “*in this very vivid presence*” is indeed the ultimate truth. Who can shatter this truth? Who can possibly refuse this presence? This very presence is neither affirmation nor negation, and therefore, it has no space and no time. No one can alter the reality that exists in this vivid presence. It is because we are being right in the momentary presence, or in other words, we are, indeed, the presence and we cannot be otherwise. Whether we accept or refuse this reality is our own problem, but the essential truth is as simple as that. *Infinite time is the very presence, and every moment is also the very presence! This very instant is the vivid presence, the next instant is also purely presence, and the remainder of our vitality always and forever exists in the presence!* We cannot be disparate from this presence, and don’t ever think about doing something differing from it because that would be a grave mistake.

Birth is simply illusive birth, and it is not that which is truly born. That which is illusive, therefore, is not true. When we want to speak of the perfect truth of *form*, we need to speak of its *intrinsic essence* which is the root of both *form* and *void*. The root of both *form* and *void* emanates and stems from the immaculate purity. This emanates from that which is immaculately pure, and that, too, emanates from that which is immaculately pure. This emanates from Signlessness, and that, too, emanates from Voidness. In essence, it is simply the true existence in the very vivid presence! This reality does not speak of the name of *form*, nor the name of *void*; it simply is the spontaneous existence in the very presence. It is precisely this existence in the vivid presence that causes everything to become the *single equanimous, non-discriminative Suchness*; here we are not just talking about “*no more comparison*,” but it is simply without multiplicities or dissimilarities whatsoever. It is because this true reality in the vivid presence is indeed the realm of absolute equanimity. Within this absolute equanimity, we do not speak of *form* and *void*, life-and-death, nor *Nirvāṇa* and suffering. Herein, there are no suffering and happiness, and no *dharmas*, because all *dharmas* – all phenomena – in this very vivid presence are indeed *Suchness*, purely immaculate.

The very existence in this presence is indeed *Prajñā*. Once we have immersed in *Prajñā*, then all of our lucid, direct knowing, altogether, is *Prajñā*. Seeing is *Prajñā*, hearing is *Prajñā*, smelling is *Prajñā*, tasting is *Prajñā*, and each existence is also *Prajñā*. *The vivid presence* is *Prajñā*, and so then, *form* and *void* do not really mean much of anything anymore. It is simply a clear, luminous pristine presence, ever existing and lucidly unobstructed – there is no *form* and no *void*. Therefore, it is said, in this vivid presence, *form* is Void, the state of true existence.



**TT 7. rūpān na pṛthak śūnyatā śūnyatāyā na pṛthag rūpaṁ – form is not different from Void and vice versa**

<i>rūpān</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>pṛthak</i>	<i>śūnyatā</i>	<i>śūnyatāyā</i>	<i>pṛthag</i>	<i>rūpaṁ</i>
- <i>rūpa</i> : form, that which is formed, outward appearance, outward phenomenon, material case, shape, figure, feature - <i>rūpān</i> : from <i>rūpa</i>	no, not, nil, never	different	emptiness, void, open, openness, devoid, nothing, non-existence, non-substantiality	(an ablative case): emptiness, void, voidness, open, openness, devoid, nothing, non-substantiality, non-existence (this is an example of a Sanskrit sentence without a verb)	different	(nominative form of <i>rūpān</i> )
<i>Literal translation:</i> -from form, emptiness [is] not different; from emptiness, form [is] not different -emptiness [is] not different from form; form [is] not different from emptiness -void [is] not different from form; form [is] not different from void						
<i>Beyond translation: form is not different from Void, Void is not different from form</i>						

“Void” is not truly void (*insubstantiality, non-existence or empty space*); void has never been void; it is simply illusion-born *form* and illusion-born *void* manifested from our minds as the display of our minds, whereas their intrinsic essence is purely *Suchness*. It is just the display coming from our erroneous illusion. Due to our wrong view, ignorance manifests, and therefore, we see that there is substantiality. However, once our seeing becomes utterly clear, then ignorance is extinguished, *form* becomes Void, borne from the noumenal state of Voidness or Signlessness.

To a confused person, there is *form* (*substantiality, existence*), but to a realized, radiant-minded person, there is no *form*. What makes the difference is whether one is confused or radiant-minded in this very presence. However, saying “*this vivid, pristine presence*” does not mean that one has to wait for another moment for it to happen – it is simply the living reality, ever existing and alive at all times without any discrepancies. Our life ever prevails within this existence, this reality, and this vivid presence. Although we are not aware of it, we cannot possibly be discrepant from the very reality of this presence.

In this presence, everything is simply being displayed as the innate essence of reality, and it cannot be any different. Nothing can become either *form* or *void* in the vivid presence. Anyone who can recognize that this very vivid presence is absent of both *form* and *void*, then that person has already immersed in *Prajñā*. In truth, we cannot possibly depart from *Prajñā*, but why is it that we cannot realize it? This reality is something that we cannot possibly reject. In actuality, we can never dismiss the reality of this very vivid, pristine presence.

Therefore, we use a very precise term, “*in this very vivid presence*,” which means there is no prior-instantness, nor after-instantness – there is no lapse of empty space that can interperse and no time concept in this presence. There is no instantness of time and space. In truth, everything that exists in the three worlds has never had a time concept or space concept. Right in this very presence, there is no notion of space and time. The truth is within each existence in the three worlds, there has never been any notion of space and time. But why is it that we have been so deluded to the point that we see so much space and time when in reality, there is none? Due to the fact that within this very pristine presence there is not even a trace of space and time, there is, therefore, no trace of *form* and *void* either.

The meaning of “*Void is form*” is that from this state of Voidness, all appearances manifest. All appearances are borne from this Voidness; thus, *form* is Voidness and Voidness is *form*. The true innate essence of *form* is pristine, tranquil and empty-hollow, and the true innate essence of *void* is also pristine, tranquil and empty-hollow. Only when we are confused does *form* and *void* appear. In this very vivid presence, for a person who has both eyes opened and who is capable of inheriting the existing vivid presence, there is absolutely, utterly no *form*, no *void*, as well as no sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness. There is no suffering, no happiness, no birth and death, no *Nirvāṇa* – it is simply reality existing in the presence, radiant, unobstructed, unimpeded, ubiquitously pervading the *dharmadhātu* – the ten-directional sphere of truth.

There is no dissimilarity between this very pristine presence and the presence of the ten-directional sphere of phenomenal truth. Once we reach the realm of great equanimity, then everything and anything is simply the *single Suchness* and nothing else! Every presence is *Suchness*; every presence is the perfect truth. The perfect truth, thus, does not have any trace of *form* nor *void* (*formless*). So then, if we speak of *form*, it is not different from the presence of the single *Suchness*, and if we speak of *void*, it is also not different from the single *Suchness* in the presence. Therefore, *form* is not different from Void, because *form* is indeed *Suchness*, and *void* (*formless*) too, is indeed *Suchness*.

**TT 8. *yad rūpāṁ sā śūnyatā yā śūnyatā tad rūpāṁ* – that which is form is Void and vice versa**

<i>yad</i>	<i>rūpāṁ</i>	<i>sā</i>	<i>yā</i>	<i>śūnyatā</i>	<i>tad</i>
who, which, what	- <b><i>rūpa</i></b> : form, that which is formed, outward appearance, outward phenomenon, material case, shape, figure, feature - <b><i>rūpāṁ</i></b> : from <b><i>rūpa</i></b> <b><i>-rūpāṁ</i></b> is a <i>nominative form of rūpāṁ</i>	( <i>nominative feminine case of tad</i> ): it, that, this, the	( <i>nominative feminine case of yad</i> ): who, which, what	emptiness, void, open, devoid, nothing, non-existence, non-substantiality	it, that, this, the
<i>Literal translation:</i> -what is form is emptiness/what is form is void -what is form, that is emptiness, what is emptiness, that is form					
<i>Beyond translation: that which is form is Void, that which is Void is form</i>					

“Void” does not mean formlessness. Whatever is *form* is the state of Voidness; whatever is Void is also *form*. Therefore, if *form* is Voidness, then *void* is also Voidness. Both kinds of signs, *form* and *void*, emerge from, and are borne from, the state of Voidness; therefore, it has the true essence of Voidness, and that means it does not have the appearance of *form* nor *void*. Primordially there has never existed the appearance of *form* nor *void*. It is because we falsely perceive that there is the appearance of *form* and of *void*, when in reality, *form* is Voidness, and *void* is Voidness, too. Thus, we are saying “*form is indeed Void*” and “*Void is indeed form.*” From the position of Voidness, however we want to express it, absolutely everything ends up being Voidness regardless, and it cannot be otherwise.

In this very vivid presence, there is no one who can possibly make it any different than what it truly is. No one has the power to alter this vivid presence, but only the ignorant mind sees it otherwise. It means that the ignorant mind cannot recognize that the true essence of all phenomena as empty-hollow and tranquil.

In reality, right in this very instant, all phenomena are utterly empty-hollow and tranquil; no matter whether we scream, yell, jump or dance, it is still empty-hollow and tranquil. When it is being empty-hollow and tranquil, there is no way that we can dispel this state of being, yet, we perceive that we are being disturbed, and we perceive that there is form,

void, mental formation and consciousness. All of that is purely our perception. Perception is illusory; it is not genuineness.

That which is genuineness always “*emanates*” Voidness. When the appearance of *form* is imbued with Voidness, then *form* is Voidness. When the appearance of *void* is imbued with Voidness then *void* itself is also Voidness. At the time being, to have some rough ideas, we say that “*having substantiality*” means *form*, and “*having no substantiality*” means *void*. However, the *substantiality (form)* and *insubstantiality (formless)* are simply two illusive signs that manifest simultaneously in the sphere of Voidness. That is why it says that “*that which is form is Void, that which is Void is form.*”

“*That which is Void is form*”

If right in this vivid presence we can completely break free from our long time confusion of seeing that there is *form* and *void (substantiality and insubstantiality)*, and if we no longer hold on to these concepts of *form* and *void*, then it will naturally manifest that which is transparent, pristine, tranquil without both *substantiality* and *insubstantiality*. In reality, *form* and *void* have never existed, but we are being cornered because we are stuck in our own illusion. Thus, this is called ignorance – being ignorant in the mental momentness of the very vivid presence.

Right in this momentary vivid presence, if we do not see correctly that the true innate essence of *form* is Voidness, then we are being considered ignorant. Right in this presence, if we do not see correctly that the true innate essence of *void* is also Voidness, then we are being ignorant. Right in this presence, if we have not been liberated from *substantiality* versus *insubstantiality*, *existence* versus *non-existence*, then we are being considered ignorant. Yet, right in this pristine presence, if we see that there is no *existence* nor *non-existence*, then that is the seeing of *Prajñā*. It is as simple as that, and there is no need to exert. There is no need to do anything superfluous! Thus, Zen practice is the easiest, the most free, the most “unoccupied.” There is no need to be in motion or to act upon the environmental conditions. There is absolutely nothing to hold on to—to simply see rightly is emancipation.

Therefore, we use the expression “*to thoroughly penetrate*” which means penetrating and emancipated. Wisdom is penetrating and emancipated. It is to clearly and perfectly fathom the very foundational root of both *form* and *void* as Voidness. It is as simple as that, and even simpler than a semi-thought that arises from perception, because it has already cut through perception. If we cannot be swift enough to follow the truth of actuality, then we will fall into the insignificant level of perception in which form exists. To have form is quite heavy. To have form is similar to having Mount Meru crushing us, and to have void is to have the mountain of void pressing upon us as well. Therefore, if we are liberated from the appearance of *form* and *void* then there is no longer anything that can put us in bondage.

The view of *Prajñā* is that which is beyond *form* and *void*, beyond *substantiality* and *insubstantiality*, beyond the *sign of existence* and the *sign of non-existence*. This view is, indeed, the seeing of *Prajñā* and it always exists right in this mental moment, right in this pristine presence. In this very mental moment of true reality and of the pristine presence, the innate essence always reveals itself. *Prajñā* always exists in the existing vivid presence. *Prajñā* does not talk about something later nor about something that already passed. *Prajñā* is true reality and *Prajñā* is the vivid presence. The vivid presence of *Prajñā* is absent of both *form* and *void*. Form is *also* Void; Void is *also* form, and there is nothing other than that. To say that “*it is also*” or to say that “*it is indeed*” is just a way of expression, although ultimately, there is no *form* or *void* (*formless*).

It cannot be anything other than that and I would challenge anyone who claims it is any different. We would never be able to alter it even for infinite lives. The only differentiation here is that we have perceived it with distortion, whereas reality always emerges vividly in the very presence. All of us, too, are being precisely in the presence; no one can be anywhere else other than the presence. Therefore, we need to re-awaken. Do not succumb any longer to delusion! When we are no longer deluded, then *our presence is no other than the pristine presence itself, and the pristine presence is simply being right in this very momentness!*

Therefore, if we ever see any moment as being at odds with the presence, then it means we are being deluded right in that very moment. It means we are not truly being in the sphere of the vivid presence. Well, we are trying to decline this truth just for the sake of it, although in reality, it is impossible for anyone to reject it anyway. We cannot release ourselves from this vivid presence. We have always been the vivid presence, and we have always been *Prajñā*, the pure existence, the empty-hollow, where there is no *form* and no *void*, and that is the full truth.

What the *Core Essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* wants to speak of is about the truth that ever exists and is emerging. *Prajñā* does not want us to do anything. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas had never told us to do anything extra; therefore, there is no such thing as to contemplate, to thoroughly illumine, or to gain insight through reflection. *Prajñā* transcends all practice exertions, concepts, theorems and definitions. *Prajñā* is simply true reality in the presence and nothing else.

I hope everyone would remain calmly and peacefully in this realm of reality. No one is capable of leaving this reality; I defy you to depart from the existence of this vivid presence. Whoever can argue as to how one can transcend this existing presence then please don't hesitate to speak up. Approaching the Buddha-Dharma, we need to see this *genuine Suchness*, so that we can live *genuinely as Suchness* which means we are now the presence. The presence of the next instant is its existence, and the existence of the next instant is, indeed, the presence. Thus, we have forever fallen in the expanse of the pristine presence, and yet, we have not realized it. Finally, we have come upon the truth that we are, indeed, the presence, the reality of *Suchness*, tranquil, empty-hollow, immaculate, knowingly clear,

unobstructedly radiant, and without impediment. That is verily *our own true realm*. It is also the *true realm* of all Buddhas and all great Bodhisattvas, and that is what they wanted to show to us.

Whoever can realize this reality in the presence, then this person can transcend all miseries. Here, there is no sight of suffering, no sight of *self* nor *selflessness*, no five aggregates, no form, no perception, no mental formation and no consciousness. If we have enough vigor to inherit this truth, then that is already sufficient; there is no need to append or to extract anything from it.

In the root text, it says that *“O Śāriputra! In this very vivid presence, form is exactly Void, Void is exactly form; form is not different from Void, Void is not different from form.”* So then as far as *form* is concerned herein, it is referring to our physical body comprised of the four elements. In this sentence, what the Buddha wished to affirm and to point out to us is that, in *“this very vivid presence,”* the physical *form* comprised of four elements is Void. Yet, to us, *form* right here means that there is a body and we see that this body is our body. It means that to us form is substantial, but then, why did the Buddhas say that in this very presence, *form* is Void?

If, from a mundane point of view, we perceive and understand everything based on our consciousness, it simply means that we are perceiving all phenomena based on our sense faculties and objects of mind, and it further means that we are still being stranded in our form-body of four elements. From the perspective of *Prajñā*, if in this very presence we fall into the level of sense faculties and objects of mind, then to us, *there is a body*, and as such we cannot possibly say that *“form is exactly Void.”* However, within this very presence is the presence of *Prajñā* and not the presence of something else.

In the above sentence, the Buddha said that *“the moment”* the Awakening Being immersed deeply in the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, he would thoroughly penetrate all five aggregates as being Void. Then, the next sentence, *“in this very vivid presence, form is exactly Void, Void is exactly form,”* is to further stress the sentence above because it is talking about *“the moment”* that it happened. So *“the moment”* the practitioner immerses in the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, it means he exists in the very presence, and to be in the very presence is, indeed, the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*. Once *Prajñā* emerges in the presence, then everything altogether is *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* is that which is hollow, empty, and absolutely pure and tranquil, and thus, we no longer speak of the four elements, nor the illusionary body that resulted from the union of conditions of the four elements, as normally expressed by conventional understanding. *Prajñā* does not see the body of four elements as a unity in harmony. *Prajñā* does not speak of the body of four elements as unified conditions, because *Prajñā* is indeed this vivid presence, and this very presence is *Prajñā*. So this very presence is simply the spacious, all-pervading, ubiquitous luminosity, and nothing else.

For someone who immerses in *Prajñā*, the vivid presence is *Prajñā*. This *Prajñā* is purely *Prajñā*, and nothing other than that. Right in this very presence, all phenomena altogether exist as the universal *Prajñā* wisdom. If we can genuinely receive and immerse in this reality, just as the Noble Being did, then we will “*thoroughly fathom*” the five aggregates as Void. Here, we are not talking about contemplation with insight. When one immerses in *Prajñā*, the five aggregates are, indeed, *Prajñā* wisdom-awareness. The innate nature of the five aggregates is indeed Void, but this Void is Voidness. Voidness herein does not mean *non-existence* in comparison to *existence*; it has neither “*the sign of substantiality*” nor the “*sign of insubstantiality*,” and only then, can one speak of *form* being Void. In the expanse of *Prajñā*, *form* is actually Voidness.

The meaning of this term, Void, should be understood in terms of Voidness or Signlessness, where there is no sign of *form* nor of *void*. This Void is the Void of the very presence’s true reality; it is not the kind of spatial *void* that is usually being referred to in existence versus non-existence. We need to have a clear understanding of this in order to realize that the logic of *Prajñā* utilizes very definitive wordage. We cannot let our parenthetical brain nor our conceptual mind interfere, so that we can truly comprehend.

Since long ago until now, many people have misunderstood *void* in terms of “*having no substantiality*” (*formless*) versus “*having substantiality*” (*form*) which are two distinct things. However, in the vivid presence, there does not exist two dissimilar signs, because both substantiality and insubstantiality do not exist, and it means that there are no signs of appearance (*form*) nor signs of non-appearance (*non-form, formlessness*). As such, the Buddha said “*in this very presence, form is exactly Void*,” because both *form* and *void* altogether emerge as Voidness in the vivid presence. We ought to remember this well, otherwise, we will get things mixed-up when we study *Prajñā*, as many people have already fallen into this confusion in the past.

This form is indeed Voidness and this Void is also Voidness; there is no such thing as the “*appearance*” of substantiality and the “*appearance*” of insubstantiality. Substantiality and insubstantiality are two distinct signs, but herein there are no substantiality versus insubstantiality. That’s why we are saying substantiality is Voidness. In this very presence, everything is *Prajñā* and *Prajñā* is Voidness, and therefore, substantiality is, indeed, Voidness, and insubstantiality also exists in Voidness. Because once *Prajñā* exists in the very presence, there is nothing else existing concurrently; everything is imbued with the color of *Prajñā*, which is Voidness. If in this very presence, we fall into substantiality and insubstantiality, or form and formlessness, then we are already being confused and are no longer in the reality of the presence.

At this moment, if we leave the reality of the vivid presence, we will see that there is substantiality and insubstantiality, which means that we are falling deep into the sphere of sense faculties, objects of mind and consciousness. If we fall into the sphere of sense faculties, objects of mind and consciousness, then we are accepting illusive signs and are no

longer abiding in the True Sign of phenomenal truth. Because *Prajñā* is the True Sign of every existence, therefore, every existence is nothing but the True Sign or Voidness. We cannot possibly be dissimilar from this reality; however, because we do not have the capability to immerse in this very presence, we thus end up seeing appearance and non-appearance, and it forces us to understand everything in terms of this way versus that way and to have dualistic discrimination. If so, then it already forces us to depart from this presence as we lack the vigor to deeply immerse in *Prajñā*.

It is due to this Voidness from which all signs emerge, and therefore, all signs are indeed the “*innate nature of Void*.” We would capitalize this term “*Void*” (and use lower case for “*form*”), so that people can differentiate that in all the cases where we use “*Void*,” they refer not to appearance versus non-appearance but to the state of singular Voidness, the True Sign of all *dharmas* or phenomena.

If anyone thinks that “*Void is form*” means that substantiality and insubstantiality become equanimous, non-discriminative when they reach this point, then he or she is mistaken. When a practitioner immerses in Voidness, then all appearances are but Voidness. When we immerse in Voidness, then this whole cosmos and this entire *dharmadhātu* are, indeed, ourselves. *We are non-dual with the trees, the grass, the leaves, the flowers, and the universe, because at that moment, all of them also has the same direct clear-knowing universal wisdom-awareness!* When we immerse in *Prajñā*, then the presence is indeed *Prajñā*. Because this presence is *Prajñā*, therefore, everything else is indeed *Prajñā*, and all appearances are Voidness, all forms are Voidness, and all voids are also Voidness. This Voidness is indeed all forms, and all forms are Voidness.

In this, we are not talking about “*substantiality*” versus “*insubstantiality*,” nor about “*non-existence*” in comparison to “*existence*,” but we are referring to *the expanse of reality that utterly lacks all dissimilarities*. Insofar as this is concerned, we see flowers, space, and all forms simply as true reality in the presence. It is the oneness, the single truth, and there are no multiplicities. If we want to make it concise, we can say that everything is all-genuine, and this all-genuinity indeed is all the forms. All forms altogether are emanated Buddhas. In short, Buddhas are all forms, and all forms are the emanated signs of Buddhas. Only then can we understand the expression “*in this very vivid presence*” which the Buddha wanted to stress.

In this very presence, this entire *dharmadhātu* is perfectly genuine. Therefore, all *forms* – all *substantial appearances*, anything which our eyes can see, all that have “*appearance*,” and all that have “*no appearance*” which our eyes cannot see, altogether are Voidness. Currently we see anything without substantial appearance as a form of insubstantiality. We can see that insubstantial appearance appears as void, and substantial appearance emerges as substantiality in front of us. Therefore, we can say that both signs – substantial and insubstantial – are seen as *form*. We need to see the skillful expression of *Prajñā* herein. It is *not* that substantiality and insubstantiality are simply “*void*,” but this Void from *Prajñā*’s



stand-point can actually encompass both appearance and non-appearance, which means it encompasses both substantiality and insubstantiality. Voidness makes both appearance and void emerge; the moment we simultaneously and ubiquitously recognize both signs of appearance and void, then that is the manifestation of the state of Voidness.

We have to remember this so that we can be free from the dualistic way of viewing *appearance* versus *void (formless)*. Herein, the Buddha uses the term *form* to include both existence and non-existence, and both can be recognized simultaneously by Voidness.

It is quite clear that we are now recognizing both signs as well. We can see that there is form, and there is this empty space. Our sense faculty already saw this. Our own eyes still perceive both *substantiality* and *insubstantiality (the empty space)*, which means both appearances are being displayed in front of our eyes. Therefore, we call both of them appearances, and provisionally, we call both appearances *form* – this kind of form has both coarse and subtle appearances. However, both kinds of appearances – the appearance of substantiality and the appearance of insubstantiality – arise from Voidness. Due to Voidness that these two appearances emerge, and thus, we say “*Void is form.*”

This form is none other than Void. When we hear that there is *form* and there is *void*, we think that there is “*form*” and there is “*formless.*” If so, then we have fallen into the level of comparison. Although right now we see all the substantial forms, all of them emerge from Voidness. That is why we say this *form* is none other than Voidness; however, it does not mean that this form is not different from formless. As far as the phenomenal objects are concerned, form is distinctly different from the appearance of void, but this form, too, is not dissimilar from Voidness. Similarly, [from a conventional standpoint], insubstantiality is forever different from substantiality. We cannot alter these signs, but in ultimate reality, insubstantialness is not different from Voidness or Voidness. It means that from Voidness, both signs, *substantiality* and *insubstantiality*, would reveal themselves. Thus, when we say form is not different from Void, it is meant to say that form is not dissimilar from Voidness.

When we immerse in *Prajñā*, everything is Voidness. Since it is Voidness, all appearances would emerge as their own original, primordial, pristine signs. At that time, all signs will only be the True Sign. When the True Sign appears in the presence, there will no longer be substantiality and insubstantiality, because everything simply emerges as the single True Sign. However, the *original essence* of both substantiality and insubstantiality continues to retain its original position without alteration. It is not because the conditions disintegrate that something becomes “*non-existence,*” or the conditions gather together that something becomes “*existence.*” We no longer talk about things in this way. And neither do we talk about “*the present essence as void*” like we used to in the old days. Again, this Void means the very presence being Void and the presence being the Voidness, the True Sign. That’s why we can say “*form is none other than this Void.*”

This *Void*, itself being Voidness, allows all forms to emerge. If once in our lifetime we can deeply immerse in the realm of Voidness, then we will come upon the truth that *all phenomena are indeed ourselves although in that moment there is no subject-object reality. We ourselves are actually Voidness, the True Sign!* At that moment we lose our self-grasped individuality and Voidness appears. When Voidness appears, then all appearances will emerge as the single True Sign, as *Prajñā*, as *Nirvāna*, as the sign of Buddhas, as the realm of Buddhas, and as the perfectly true *dharmadhātu*, which is the single true expanse of phenomenal truth, and there is no appearance other than that.

Therefore, both non-appearance and substantial appearance, at that moment, would simply and simultaneously emanate in the form of Voidness. And that is why we are saying, *“form is none other than Voidness,”* because form is not differentiated from this Voidness. This Void is also none other than that form, and Voidness is none other than that form as well. In this way, we can be freed from the concept of existence and non-existence. If we do not have this wisdom insight, then existence and non-existence are still being caught.

If we can see something *“substantial,”* then definitely, on the other hand, there would be something *“insubstantial.”* When we see dualistically that there is existence versus non-existence, it means we have fallen into comparison and discrimination. Once we have fallen into the comparative, differentiated mode, then there is no way that we can say *“form is not different from Void.”* If casted ourselves into the state of discrimination, then of course, there will be form, and there will be void. As such, we cannot possibly use the expression *“form is none other than Void”* while simply believing that *“form manifests due to unified conditions,”* and further believing that *“it did not exist previously, but now when the conditions unite, there is its appearance, and [when the conditions disunite] it will disintegrate into void, and therefore, form is none other than Void.”* To explain things in this way is equivocal. It is the perspective of ordinary people, not that of *Prajñā*.

If we look at everything from a worldly point of view, how can we say that this form is *“Void”*? Would that be true? Even if we call it a mere *“understanding,”* it is still impossible to accept such reasoning. And even if we base our reasoning on conventional meaning, we cannot possibly infer the ultimate meaning of *“that which is form is Void.”* However, *Prajñā* looks at everything from the perspective of *Prajñā*; therefore, this *Void* is form. This is a wondrous saying of a person who has perfectly immersed in the Dharma, the ultimate truth. When we utterly immerse in the Dharma, this entire *dharmadhātu* is us, and all the trees, grass, leaves, and flowers are indeed ourselves, although there is no longer any *“self,”* just pure *Prajñā* wisdom! Thus, all forms are the emanated Buddhas, the emanated perfectly true *dharmadhātu*, and the emanated perfect truth.

The Zen masters said *“meeting with the eyes is awakening”* (Viet. *xúc mục tức Bồ đề*), which means that precisely at the moment the eyes meet the object, *that* is enlightenment, or in other words, someone who has attained ultimate realization would utter a single *“Ah”* in recognizing that all existing phenomena are the Buddha-dharmas, the enlightened truth.

There was someone who asked one Zen master “*What is Buddha?*” to which he replied, “*What is not Buddha, show me!*” That is an enlightened person. All of our appearances, movements, and all actions, no matter how minuscule, would transform into Dharma the moment we immerse in *Prajñā*. All of our consciousness would transform into wisdom, sand into gold, serpents into dragons without changing their scales, and fish into sea-dragons, etc.

All of these forms are Voidness, and Voidness is all of these forms; therefore, we are saying: “*That which is form is Void; that which is Void is form.*” It means that this practitioner has already immersed in *Prajñā*, and therefore, there is no *form*, nor *void*, only *Prajñā*. If we want to use just one word to describe this reality, then all appearances are *Prajñā*, *the totality perfect all-pervasive wisdom-awareness*, and all existences are *Suchness*, Buddhas and the realm of presence of all Buddhas. This very presence is Buddha emanating, and nothing else. If to us this very presence is not Buddha, then that is our own erroneous seeing. Buddha emanates at all times. If we are being in the pristine presence, we are emanating in the realm of all Buddhas. If we do not have the capability to immerse in this presence, then we have already been separated from the realm of the Buddhas, and we are seeing everything with our own individualistic view.

This is the paragraph that gives explanations to the following sentence: “*The moment the Noble Awakened Being, the Free and Unobstructed Seeing One, deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, he thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates, and had a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void.*” At this very moment, Void does not mean “*non-existence*” (or formlessness). When the Noble Awakened Beings deeply immerse in the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, they would see, precisely, that the five aggregates are actually Voidness, the ultimate True Sign. The five aggregates are actually the realm of Buddhas, and this paragraph is an explanation of the above statement. This is not to say that the five aggregates are “*void*” versus “*existence*,” or that there are the five aggregates but we contemplate deeply so that they can become void, or that we “*understand through our view*” that they are “*void*.” All of that understanding is incorrect.

**TT 9. *evam eva vedanā-samjñā-saṃskāra-vijñāni* – sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness are also being Void**

<i>evam</i>	<i>eva</i>	<i>vedanā</i>	<i>saṃjñā</i>	<i>saṃskāra</i>	<i>vijñāni</i>
<i>(adverb):</i> as previously stated, as following	<i>(adverb):</i> just, exactly, truly, verily	sensation	perception, concept	mental formation	consciousness
<i>Literal translation:</i> -as previously stated, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness are exactly like that					
<i>Beyond translation: the same is exactly true of sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness</i>					

*“Sensation”*

Regarding sensation, it is receiving something and feeling something; it is the sensibility of the body, and awareness of the mind. However, this very momentary presence is the moment of deep immersion in the realm of *Prajñā*; therefore, *Prajñā* is welcoming them all into the insightful view of *Prajñā*. From the viewpoint of *Prajñā*, sensation is indeed *Prajñā*, the clear-knowing catalyst of *Prajñā*. As such, *Prajñā* deeply immerses in each minuscule interval throughout the whole *dharmadhātu*, during which “*sensation is actually Void.*” Because Voidness is clear knowing-awareness, so there is nothing that it does not directly and lucidly know. It would clearly know all knowable things that are either large, small, many or few. It would know all knowable things that manifest on the outer as well as the subtle things. Therefore, we can provisionally call all of these knowing qualities “*sensation,*” which is indeed *Prajñā*.

Within lucid knowing-awareness, there is no lapse whatsoever. No matter how diminutive or subtle everything is, *Prajñā* would directly know with utter clarity. *Prajñā* already knows and penetrates all phenomena, so therefore, all of this direct knowing capability can be called “*sensation,*” which is indeed *Prajñā*. Sensation is the very presence and Voidness. If *Prajñā* knows nothing, then that is not *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* is “*non-cognizant yet all-knowing*” (*Viet. vô tri vô sở bất tri*; literally, “*non-cognizant but there is nothing that it does not know*”); therefore, *Prajñā* is ever insightful. Tentatively, this ever-insightfulness can be known as the recognition, the clear knowing-awareness, and the wondrous functions of *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* is not lifeless tranquility which does not know anything. *Prajñā* is that which is vividly unobstructed, lucidly aware and clearly penetrating.

*“Perception”*

Next, perception knows; however, here we are talking about the “*all-pervasive knowingness.*” The awareness, the clear recognition, the ubiquitous knowingness are all *Prajñā*. Therefore, the moment *Prajñā* readily appears, there would be no discriminating ruffles of

thoughts. The imageries, resulting from the contact made by our six-sense faculties, manifest in our midstream at the present, and we call them sense perception. However, under *Prajñā*'s view, all of mind's present functions will become the wondrous functions of wisdom, of *Prajñā*. Thus, the mental arising (perception) of someone who has already immersed in *Prajñā* is actually *Prajñā* arising. In the Ten Perfections, the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* comes prior to the Perfect All-Transcendent Skillful Means. And that is why we say "*perception is indeed Void.*"

From where does this perception arise? Perception is the function of the mind, and it manifests from the mind. Therefore, all perceptions and all mental waves get broadcasted from *Prajñā*, which is Voidness, the True Sign. The functions of wisdom altogether remain in the realm of purity, and all of our thoughts *emanate from the state of Voidness*. However, if we were confused, we would have a sense of individuality. If we were not confused, there would not be any individualistic exclusiveness whatsoever. Everything is Voidness, and thus, all phenomena appear as the *genuine sign* of Voidness or as Singleness. All appearances, which we see, and all thoughts, which we know, simply are the signs of perception. All signs of illusive perception arise from the True Sign. Separated from this True Sign, there would be no perception arising, and separated from mind's True Nature, there would be no mind's function.

We can take as an example a pimple that shows up on our face. This pimple is not our face, but if separated from our face there cannot be this pimple. Naturally, the pimple is not the face, but it grows on our face. If we look at things from a mundane perspective, there are two differentiated signs (pimple and face). However, from the position of True Sign, all phenomena altogether are simply the functions of *Prajñā*, and all arise from *Prajñā*. There must be *Prajñā*—the transcendent wisdom—from which all amazing functions are borne. Therefore, anyone immersing in the inherent "*innate nature*" [*our True Nature*] will be able to utilize the wondrous functions of this perfect wisdom.

However, to a confused person, perception is not real; it is only an illusion that surfaces. The confused person sees that from emptiness, illusion instantly arises, and then, instantly returns to *emptiness*. For example, just like now, we can clearly see a thought arising, and then it self-dissolves. All we need to do is to settle our mind a bit to thoroughly see that a thought appears and then disappears on its own, yet we think that we are exerting in practice. Actually, we do not even have to exclude, to eliminate, or to exert much in practice in order to understand that one's thought is illusive and deceptive, that it appears within our delusion and that it does not remain affixed. To see everything in this way is still the view of someone who is not yet enlightened. Why? For we had already looked at things in this way for a long while now, yet we still have not reached enlightenment. Other ordinary beings like us have the capableness to see it in the same way as well. However, someone with the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* would see that when all phenomena appear, Voidness appears; to this person, all phenomena emanate the core essential truth, and are no longer illusions.

Here, the practitioner has already reached the land of truth, and thus, does not talk about illusion and falsity, nor it is possible to speak of life-and-death and *Nirvāna* from a dualistic view. Everything would simply be the reality of vivid presence. Since this very presence is *Prajñā*, all *dharmas* or phenomena would be imbued with the color of *Prajñā*.

*“Mental formation” (Karmic formation)*

The aggregate of mental formation is the covert lair that gives birth to sense perception. Mental formation is the covert lair to attach to our self-grasping, and it gives rise to the cycle of birth and death. If there were still the aggregate of perception, one would still have to take birth through the aggregate of mental formation. The aggregate of perception is the tree top, and the aggregate of mental formation is the root, the root of birth and death. All of the seedlings of life-and-death through the multitude of infinite lifetimes of all sentient beings altogether germinate from the aggregate of mental formation.

However, from where does the aggregate of mental formation originate? From the True Sign. Therefore, for a practitioner who immerses in *Prajñā*, then to him or her, there is actually no mental formation. The aggregate of mental formation is indeed Voidness, and it is no longer the germinal seedlings of birth and death. All the proliferation in this cosmos all arises from Voidness; therefore, it is said that Voidness is the birth force, the life force, and the core roots of the expanse of phenomenal truth. All beings who continue to live in this *dharmadhātu* receive energy from Voidness, the True Sign, the ultimate truth, and from this cosmos.

When we realize this Voidness, we would see that from there, *all phenomena* are borne. Once we clearly see this force, we see that this entire sphere of phenomenal truth is an invigorating energy, which brings life to all phenomena in this cosmos. We can quietly recognize this energy in the Milky Way, the galaxies, the stars, the planets, and the fixed stars. This entire universe altogether relies on the power of the *“innate nature”* and Voidness. We can clearly see that this force does not have any substantial appearance, but it is a living, vigorous dynamism that motions this universe to move in a certain direction.

It is just like how in our Solar System, we can clearly see that the Earth rotates about on a fixed plane around the Sun with respect to an axis. The plane is titled so it is off-axis according to the calculation of the scientists, but the distance between the Earth and the Sun has not been reduced, and there has not been any change to this distance. This is the law, because if there were no law, then the Earth, for example, would end up being much closer to the Sun and the Earth’s temperature would have risen much higher. On the contrary, the Earth could have moved away further from the axis; however, this has not yet happened. In addition, why is it that the Earth is rotating and evolving like that? It clearly has its own law.

Thus, according to the *“innate nature,”* it seems to have no form or appearance, yet this nature is the *law* and the *force* to proliferate and establish all beings in the entire sphere of

phenomenal truth. It conserves so that the whole *dharmadhātu* can remain in existence; it can change all of the substantial forms in this universe, as well as regenerating the cosmic expanse of phenomenal truth. This is the power of the *dharmadhātu*, the power of the “*innate nature*” and the power of the universe.

Thus, everything in the life-and-death cycle is pro-created and arises from the aggregate of mental formation. All emergences in this life-and-death of all sentient beings originate from the aggregate of mental formation. This aggregate is a living, dynamic energy, and it operates with a speed that cannot be stopped even temporarily. Let us try to imagine a basin of water and when we use our hand to twirl the water, the water inside the basin would move in a circle; all the water molecules would swirl around this circle. If we look at it from the point of view of someone who is not yet liberated, we can clearly see that all the molecules are moving in one direction in accordance with the movement of the water in the basin.

The same is true for the aggregate of mental formation. All the molecules and all the germinal thought-arising of birth and death in countless lifetimes also proceed according to certain laws in order to give rise to the mental of perception. The water in a basin we are using would move either clockwise or counterclockwise due to the influence of our own hands. Similarly, the aggregate of mental formation was also borne out of the vastly spacious power of the inherent “*innate nature*” which arises, indeed, from this Voidness. This power is enormously expansive and can make all of the original seedlings of life-and-death revolves for infinite lives. It will continue to ever live on, as there is nothing that has been lost; this universe has not lost anything anywhere, and there is neither anything that dies.

Everything is ever invigorative like how we are breathing in and out. We breathe in, and then we breathe out, thinking that we have just exhausted the oxygen by breathing out. However, it is not like that! We absorb oxygen and release carbon dioxide for the trees and the plants to absorb, and then they would in turn release oxygen for us to inhale. It is a lively exchange. In addition, when our body of four elements disintegrates, just as the water element dissolves, the earth, the plants and the flowers, would in turn absorb this water. When the earth element disintegrates, it will form minerals and the tree roots will absorb these minerals. Everything is continuously lively, and everything simply “*metamorphoses*” from one form-appearance to another. There is nothing that actually “*dies*” in this universe!

Everything inherits the invigorating energy from the sphere of phenomenal truth; therefore, there is nothing that is “*dies*” or “*lost*.” There is not even a miniscule silk fiber that had ever been lost if we see everything in the correct way. On the other hand, if we see things incorrectly, then there will be death versus life (ceasing versus arising). Mental formation is, therefore, the invigorating energy of all sentient beings, of the intrinsically “*innate nature*,” and of Voidness. To be concise, mental formation originates from Voidness.

### “Consciousness”

Then, consciousness is the discriminative comparison. If we still are trapped in our self-grasping inescapably, we would “discreetly see” that we are dissimilar from others, our eyes would see outer environmental conditions as being different, or we would hear all surrounding sounds as being different as well. Each sound is different; we recognize each sound in accordance with its own position, and it is differentiated from another. Each form we see in accordance with its own position is differentiated from another. It is not as if we are not hearing the same sound. When one can hear discriminatingly in that way, then the other schools of practice believe that it is wisdom, because they would say that “I can hear pervasively, and know discriminately, yet, I have no thought-arising.” However, if we have not yet transcended the physical form of five aggregates, then that kind of hearing is simply the aggregate of consciousness. Currently, hearing is impeded, and is not penetratingly unobstructed, but once we are free from the five aggregates, then all phenomena – all *dharmas* – would be extraordinarily lucid and clear.

For example, now when we hear the chirping of a bird, we do not see it, and we do not know where it is; we can only orient it to be to our right. However, when we immerse in *Prajñā*, we even see the bird getting ready to sing although we are not seeing it with our normal eyes. With *Prajñā* we can see with clarity where it perches, and how it is singing without having to listen to him with our ears.

When we are still being caught in our physical body of five aggregates, our discrimination or discriminative awareness manifests on each of our sense faculties, namely, eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness and mind-consciousness. When we have not yet freed ourselves from our physical body of five aggregates, our cognition of mind’s objects has to rely on the sense faculties. However, when the five aggregates are *Prajñā*, we no longer need sense faculties, and we would see, hear and know altogether at the same time. Yes, form, sound, smell and taste all emerge simultaneously at once. Although we close our eyes, we can see all of the appearances even more vividly than what our physical eyes can see now, and that means we have immersed in the existing realm of Voidness in the presence. In the vivid presence, everything would be clearly unimpeded. We would clearly and directly know everything without having to rely on the physical body’s faculties. The subtle discerning quality of *Prajñā* manifests, as we no longer have to rely on the discrimination by comparison that our mental consciousness normally produces. Of course, the appearance of form can still be different from sound, and smell from taste, but the lucid knowing-awareness of *Prajñā* no longer has to borrow the sense faculties. There is no need to use any faculty of our physical body.

Instantly, we enter the state of “*the five aggregates as being Void*,” abide in the vivid presence and immerse as *Prajñā*. It is just like how it is explained in the above verse that the five aggregates immediately emerge as Voidness. This very presence is actually the True Sign which is Voidness or Signlessness. This Voidness knowingly and penetratingly



fathoms all existences in the entire *dharmadhātu*, and that is why we are saying “*consciousness is indeed Void*” – the aggregate of consciousness is precisely this Void.

Thus, when we are studying the *Prajñā* scripture, we can see the continuity between the stanzas. Although the wordings are somewhat sporadic, they are nevertheless profound so that we can recognize that the logic of the *Prajñā* scripture is unbroken and very precise, and no one can go beyond this reasoning. There is no other rationale throughout human history that can say anything better than *Prajñā*'s logic. It may seem that the meanings of the two stanzas do not interconnect and are somewhat scattered. However, there is actually no rift that any one of us can catch according to what is said by an enlightened one. It is unexcelled. These two stanzas are nearly one; the latter stanza (“*in this very vivid presence*”) explains the preceding one (“*the moment he deeply immersed in*”).

Here we see that the main subtopic is “*the moment the Noble Awakening Being, the Free and Unobstructed Seeing One, deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom.*” This is the introduction, and the *onset* of being “*deeply immersed.*” Then comes the next stanza which describes the state of being of someone who is immersing in *Prajñā*. We should understand everything in this context. And then, the next stanza explains and describes the reality of the practitioner who deeply immerses in *Prajñā* at that very instant – it is all about the instant *Prajñā* lucidly emerges, and it happens right in this very presence. Herein, the scripture simply explains how immersing in *Prajñā* takes place, and there is no rationale other than that.

Again, when we thoroughly study this scripture, we can see that it talks exhaustively about the person who at that precise moment deeply immerses in *Prajñā*. Whatever the transcendental wisdom directly sees at that moment is none other than what happens to the practitioner as he deeply immerses in, and dissolves as, *Prajñā!* We must understand that the entirety of this scripture is as simple as that. This is the key, and if we can unlock the bolt in the preceding stanza, then everything in the succeeding stanzas would thoroughly be “*Prajñā in the vivid presence.*”

Everyone can supposedly understand *Prajñā* based on the dimension of conceptual mind, but if they separate from “*this moment of being deeply immersed in Prajñā,*” then we can consider this person to lack the proper direct understanding of the *Prajñā* scripture. The pivotal point rests in “*the moment the Awakened Free and Unobstructed Seeing One deeply immersed in Prajñā*” in the upper stanza. Then, in the latter stanza, there is more explanation about “*in this very vivid presence.*” “*In this vivid presence*” is exactly the same as “*the moment he deeply immersed in Prajñā.*” At that exact mental instant, this person “*thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates.*” Therefore, we can say that all five aggregates are, indeed, *Prajñā*, and not simply “*the five aggregates as being Void.*”

In the text, it says “*to have a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void;*” however, we should include a footnote that *Void* herein is actually the state of *Voidness* or

*Signlessness.* We should add a footnote for the word *Void* in such a way. Alternatively, we can add a footnote for *Void* to include the word *Prajñā*, which means the *Prajñā*, the all-pervasive universal wisdom-awareness! Therefore, *Prajñā* is indeed this *Voidness*. In this way, people would be able to have a much better understanding of the succeeding stanzas. All we need to do is to include a footnote and add *Voidness (Signlessness)* and *Prajñā* to the word *Void*; then, any skillful person would be able to understand the entirety of this Sūtra! All we need is to get to this point, and then, we have already reached complete understanding of this Sūtra.

*For further reading on each of the five aggregates (form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness), please see Appendix A, namely, "Understanding the Five Aggregates, Their Characteristics and Their Workings."*

**TT 10. *iha śāriputra sarvadharmāḥ śūnyatālakṣaṇā* – all *dharmas* clearly emerge from Voidness in this very vivid presence**

<i>iha</i>	<i>śāriputra</i>	<i>sarvadharmāḥ</i>	<i>śūnyatālakṣaṇā</i> #1 ( <i>śūnyatā + ālakṣaṇā</i> )	<i>śūnyatālakṣaṇā</i> #2 ( <i>śūnyatā + lakṣaṇā</i> )
here, now, in this instance in this case, in this world	the name <i>śāriputra</i> literally means 'child of <i>śāri</i> '	<b>-sarva:</b> all <b>-dharmāḥ:</b> <i>dharma</i> , phenomena, phenomenon	<b>-śūnyā</b> ( <i>adjective</i> ): empty, void, open, devoid, non-existing, nothing, hollow <b>-śūnyatā:</b> ( <i>noun</i> ): emptiness, void, voidness, open, openness, devoid, nothing, non-substantiality, non-existence <b>-alakṣaṇā</b> ( <i>an adjective to describe śūnyatā</i> ): signless, without characteristic signs, without marks, without characteristics	<b>-śūnya</b> ( <i>adjective</i> ): empty, void, open, devoid, non-existing, nothing, hollow <b>-śūnyatā:</b> emptiness, void, voidness, open, openness, devoid, nothing, non-substantiality, non-existence <b>-lakṣaṇā</b> ( <i>in this specific case, it is an still adjective</i> ): having mark, having symbol, having signs, having characteristics
<p><i>Literal translation – Negation approach #1 (śūnyatā + ālakṣaṇā)</i> -here (right here), Śāriputra, all <i>dharmas</i> are empty, without characteristics -now (right now), Śāriputra, all <i>dharmas</i> are empty, devoid of signs</p> <p><i>Literal translation – Affirmation approach #2 (śūnyatā + lakṣaṇā)</i> -here (right here), Śāriputra, all <i>dharmas</i> are empty, with characteristics -now (right now), Śāriputra, all <i>dharmas</i> are empty, with signs</p>				
<p>* <i>Summary: śūnyatālakṣaṇā is a compound word with the last syllable ā in śūnyatā, and since śūnyatā is a feminine word, which means emptiness or Void, śūnyatālakṣaṇā can be separated in two different ways: either as śūnyatā (n.) + lakṣaṇā (adj.) (emptiness or Void with signs) or as śūnyatā (n.) + ālakṣaṇā (adj.) (emptiness or Void devoid of sign) depending on the context and the way of exposition. In classical Chinese and Chinese-Vietnamese renditions, the term śūnyatālakṣaṇā was separated as śūnyatā + lakṣaṇā wherein lakṣaṇā (sign) was thought to be a noun; thus, for generations, it was translated as “having the sign or the mark of emptiness” in Vietnamese. However, when we look at the Sanskrit grammar, we realize that either lakṣaṇā (having signs) or ālakṣaṇā (having no sign) were meant to be <u>adjectives</u> describing the state of emptiness or Void. Thus, if we understand this compound word śūnyatālakṣaṇā as “emptiness or Void having sign” then it does not make any sense. It would then be safer to understand śūnyatālakṣaṇā as “emptiness or Void without sign” or “the emptiness or Voidness devoid of all signs.”</i></p>				
<p><b>Beyond translation: O Śāriputra, in this very vivid presence, all phenomena clearly emerge from Voidness</b></p>				

Here is another stanza of explanation. If it is already *Prajñā* wisdom, then all phenomena altogether emerge from Voidness, a state of being Void, or Signless, without any marks or characteristic signs. Therefore, if we still see that there are physical phenomena, then this is the way an ordinary being sees. On the other hand, if we see all phenomena as *Prajñā* then that is how an enlightened being sees. If in this very presence we see all phenomena as phenomena, it means we have parted from the realm of *Prajñā* and have fallen into the mundane sphere. On the other hand, in this matrix of *Prajñā*, we can see all phenomena appearing as *Prajñā*, as Voidness (or Signlessness), then that is the view of an enlightened person.

If there was no *Prajñā* wisdom, then nothing in this cosmos can manifest. Therefore, *Prajñā* ever gives birth to all phenomena, because all phenomena were borne from *Prajñā*. For example, if we say this person was borne from his father, and we go get their blood tested, their DNA would come out exactly the same. If we are the sons of our father, and our blood was tested, then it will show up as the same bloodline. If all *dharmas* were borne from Voidness, and you get all of them tested, then at the end, they will still come out as Voidness. We can try to understand the meaning of it from this simple, mundane way of seeing things, and then, we will be able to see through things.

Therefore, all the stanzas that follow, such as “*no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind,*” etc. are meant to elaborate on the above stanza of “*all phenomena clearly emerge from Voidness.*” Following this perspective, we will be able to reveal the quintessential meaning of the *Prajñā* scripture. Herein, the Buddha merely spoke of one thing, and that is when someone already immerses in *Prajñā*, then all there is is *Prajñā* – no suffering, no happiness, but everything is simply the presence of *Prajñā*. Whatever one sees, looks at, realizes or knows, as well as one’s movements, altogether are *Prajñā* and nothing else. If it was already *Prajñā*, then there is no realization, no attainment, and nothing whatsoever to follow thereafter. When we reach here in our discussion, we have already spoken of the entire *Sūtra*.

To speak of *Prajñā* thus is to speak of this very presence and not something later nor something that follows. If it is right in this very presence, then there is no space and no time involved. It is simply presence, but the presence is not the same as the now. I often use the term “*reality,*” and so reality is actually the “*vivid presence.*” Existing right in the presence can be called reality. This reality reveals the genuineness right in this presence, not slightly before or after, as there is no trace of space and time in this very pristine presence.

Thus, the root text repeats “*in this very vivid presence*” three times altogether. If we were to look at everything from the view of *Prajñā*, then everything would simply *emerge, are nakedly revealed, come into view.* Given the case, seeing forms, hearing sound, recognizing smell and touch, as well as seeing mind’s objects all emerge from Voidness. Voidness allows all *dharmas* to be revealed. This is a statement of affirmation.

If we do not want to use the expression “to clearly emerge from Voidness,” then we might just as well change it to “to clearly emerge from Prajñā.” Each appearance emerges as the sign of Prajñā or emerges from Prajñā. Alternatively, we can express it more succinctly by saying that each appearance is actually the emanated appearance of Prajñā. If we say things in a reverse order like that, then perhaps the meaning will be clearer. This is not something too difficult to understand, as it is the simple truth. If we still see every appearance as *existence* or *non-existence*, then we are still ordinary beings. Here, there is no such thing as *existence* or *non-existence*, and there are no longer any *phenomena* or *self*.

We herein should speak a little about *dharmas* (phenomena) and self. If all phenomena emerge from Voidness, then what is Voidness in actuality? Voidness is non-self and non-self means non-phenomena, and therefore, all phenomena are but Voidness. Although all phenomena appear, all phenomena are the same as expressed herein: “*the essence of phenomena is innately non-phenomena*.” Since beginningless time, phenomena, in essence, have never been phenomena. Since all phenomena emerge from Voidness, they are not truly phenomena, but they are simply “*the manifestations of Voidness - Signlessness*.”

As we discussed previously, since all that appears are simply the appearances of Voidness – Signlessness, we can also add a footnote here, and call it “*non-appearance*,” which means it is not appearance, nor *dharma* or phenomena. Ultimately, everything is not *dharma* or phenomena, but when we speak of the definition of *dharma*, then what is *dharma*? A *dharma*, or a phenomenon that maintains and protects its own individuality. For example, if we now raise a finger up, then this is one *dharma*. This is the *dharma* of the appearance of one finger. Here it asserts and preserves its uniqueness. However, its own individual unique appearance is indeed an illusory appearance. Illusory appearance happens due to our own mistaken view based on our own perception. All of these appearances arise from our perception.

If we claim that all appearances are perception-born, then it would be very difficult for people to accept it. However, if we once fall into the non-perception state of existence, then all of these appearances would immediately vanish. The sign of our body, as well as the sign of our mind itself would also vanish. If we once fall into this state of being, then everything would simply be the “*appearance of Void*.” We will no longer be able to see these appearances the way we see them now once we transcend perception. When we ourselves can no longer abide in these appearances, then exactly as the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* says, “*Even the maras of the gods cannot find a slight trace of someone who has gone beyond the aggregate of perception*.” Even if the gods want to make offering to such a practitioner, they would not be able to find this person.

If Prajñā emerges, then right in this vivid presence, all that we see are still forms, and all of these forms are revealed from our direct seeing or direct penetration, yet, our direct seeing at this moment is now the True Sign, lucid and unobstructed. Without this True Sign or Signlessness, these forms cannot possibly emanate!

**TT 11. *anutpannā aniruddhā amalāvimalā nonā na paripūrṇāh* – the innate primordial purity of the expanse of perfect phenomenal truth**

<i>anutpannā</i>	<i>aniruddhā</i>	<i>amalāvimalā</i> #1 <i>(amalā + avimalā)</i> <i>*Word separation negation approach</i>	<i>amalāvimalā</i> #2 <i>(amalā + vimalā)</i> <i>*Word separation affirmation approach</i>	<i>nonā</i>	<i>na paripūrṇāh</i>
<i>-an:</i> not, no <i>-utpannā:</i> born, produced <i>-anutpannā:</i> unborn, unproduced, non-arising	<i>-an:</i> not, no <i>-niruddhā:</i> not risen <i>-aniruddhā:</i> not not risen, not stopped, not ceased, unceased  <i>*Other additional meanings of the term aniruddhā include: without stoppage, without obstruction, flowing and cannot be stopped, cannot be hindered, willful and cannot be controlled</i>	<i>-a:</i> no, not <i>-malā:</i> dirty, filthy, defiled, deluded <i>-amalā:</i> not dirty, not filthy, not defiled, not deluded <i>-avimalā:</i> not clean, not pure, not not dirty, not not filthy, not not deluded  <i>*Additional meanings of amalā include: not dirty, clear, immaculate, most pure, crystal, brilliant</i>	<i>-a:</i> no, not <i>-malā:</i> dirty, filthy, defiled, deluded <i>-amalā:</i> not dirty, not filthy, not defiled, not deluded <i>-vimalā:</i> clean, pure, not unclean, not undefiled  <i>*Additional meanings of vimalā include: clear, non-defiled, uncontaminated, non-contaminated</i>	<i>-na:</i> no <i>-ūna:</i> not becoming fewer, not becoming less, becoming smaller <i>-nonā:</i> (double-negation) no nothing	<i>-na:</i> no <i>-paripūrṇāh:</i> complete, full, perfect
<i>Literal translation – Negation approach #1 (amalā + avimalā)</i> <i>-unborn, unceased, not defiled, not clean, not less, not more, , no nothing [is] not complete and perfect (the last expression is a double-negative negation - see note below*)</i>					

*Literal translation – Affirmation approach #2 (amalā + vimalā)*

-unborn, unceasing, immaculate, *untained*, perfectly whole and complete, no nothing [is] not complete and perfect (*untained is not a negation, and the last expression is a double-negative negation - see note below\**)

*\* Note: In the Hōryū-ji palm-leaf version and the translation by the Oxford University, **amalāvimalā** is kept as a compound word. The rendition by the Oxford University separated this term using the word separation approach of negation # 1: **amalā** (not defiled) + **āvimalā** (not immaculate) similar to the classic Chinese and Vietnamese renditions in the past. However, in the long version edited by Vaidya, P.L. and excerpted from the Mahāyāna-sūtra-satrayāna - Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon from the University of the West, translated into English with commentary by Eng Jin Ooi (2017), and in the version (Appendices: Recension B) edited by Johnathan Silk (Wien: Universität Wien, 1994) according to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the meaning of this compound word follows the word separation approach of affirmation #2: **amalā** (pure, not defiled) + **vimalā** (pure, not contaminated).*

*On the other hand, the meanings of the compound words **na paripūrṇāḥ** (or **aparipūrṇāḥ** as used in the Amoghavajra and the Nepalese versions) include: not full, not complete, not perfect, or not whole. In the past, it was translated as ‘not more’ or ‘increased,’ Another compound word, **asampūrṇāḥ** was also used in other diverse rendition. However and especially in this Hōryū-ji, the expression **nona na paripūrṇāḥ** can be understood as double negatives, which include the following: **no** means no; the first **na** means nothing, and thus, **nona** means no nothing; then the second **na** means not, and **paripūrṇāḥ** means complete, full, perfect. Therefore, **nona na paripūrṇāḥ** as a whole literally means ‘no nothing [is] not completely full and perfect’ (as a double-negative negation).*

*Beyond translation: **unborn, unceasing, immaculate, untained, perfectly whole and complete***

*\* Summary: In the new Vietnamese rendition, instead of using the following double-negative negation [‘no nothing is not completely full and perfect’], we use “perfectly whole and complete” (Viet, viên mãn tròn đầy) as an expression of affirmation, mainly to point to the innate primordial purity that pervades the expanse of perfect phenomenal truth, where nothing is not immaculate, not completely perfect.*

*“Unborn, unceasing”*

Since all phenomena are Voidness which is the same as Signlessness, they have never been born nor extinguished. If we look at everything from a mundane dualistic perspective, we see that first, our four physical elements were unified, and now when they disintegrate, we believe that we “die.” This is a view that is quiet obscured. However, if we look more deeply, we will see that first, our warmth begins to circulate and continues to spread around and around unobstructedly inside the physical bodies. In reality, even if we want to we cannot even find any division between the warmth inside our bodies and the warmth in the outer

universe. It means the outer fire and the inner fire in the bodies continue to intercirculate without obstruction. Nevertheless, we normally see that our warmth is different from the outer warmth, or our water element is different from the outer water element when in reality, they are not.

When water is collected, the *sign* of water would *appear* a little more, but when it is no longer collected and disintegrates, it becomes like air and this air also has warmth. For example, when we measure the humidity outside, it corresponds with whether there is a lot or a little bit of water. When this water is combined with the warmth of the fire element, we call it humidity. In space, we can measure the humidity, which means we can measure the content of water and of heat that is mixed together in a specific area of space. If we can collect all of this humidity, then it is exactly the same as when clouds manifest. When humidity meets with cold air temperature, it begins to gather into clouds and congeals. Normally they are merely scattered particles, yet when they meet with coldness, they become amassed and congealed, and then later they become water, which can turn out to be heavy, and when heavy, this water would become rainfalls.

As far as the outer water is concerned, we have the feeling that it is different from our own water element, yet, in reality, we cannot possibly find even a rift between the water in our physical bodies and the water out in the universe because our water element and the water element of the universe have always been intercirculating. The easiest example to help us better understand this concept is our own breathing. It is very clear that our breathing is flowing because we are breathing in and out. When we breathe in, all of our bodily cells absorb the oxygen, and when we breathe out, the plants absorb carbon dioxide. Beside carbon dioxide, space also contains phosphorus, nitrogen and all different kinds of elements in space. We do not need to analyze all of these substances, but we only want to speak of the movement and the air. Air is the wind circulation. The earth element is also circulating. Everything happens according to the way we ourselves flow and it all depends on our own *karma*.

Thus, the earth, water, wind and fire in space have never been born nor ceased, but rather, they revolve. In the sphere of phenomenal truth, nothing has been borne and nothing is extinguished. However, if we follow the mundane perspective, then it seems quite obvious that something is born, and another thing has ceased, similar to how Mr. Nguyen Van A was born on a certain day and passed away on a certain day. That is a very conventional view, because it means that we only look at a specific period of time during which the four elements were amassed and then disintegrated.

In the *Śūrangama Sūtra*, it says that the four elements are “*the innate primordial purity that pervades the expanse of phenomenal truth, and based on the sentient beings’ karma, they appear in accordance with the beings’ capacity of understanding.*” Such a wondrous statement! I myself rarely pay attention to the word usage, but once I read upon this verse, I could not forget it for all of my life! I can never fail to remember this statement.



Up to this point, if we contemplate well the above sentence, we would be able to see how “all phenomena *are non-arising, non-ceasing, immaculate, untainted.*” That which is unborn, unceasing of all phenomena emerges from Voidness, and Voidness is *Prajñā*. Thus, if *Prajñā* is unborn, then all phenomena are also unborn.

In the past, we used to learn that this body is impermanent because all phenomena have substantial appearances. We also learned that there is something that is ever permanent and that is the nature of all phenomena. If we understand that “*nature*” is without birth and death, and the “*appearance*” (or the sign) is something which arises and ceases, then this is just some basic, fundamental reasoning. However, once we have a more profound understanding, we will see that there is neither nature nor attributes, because each appearance now simply is being vividly present as *Prajñā*. There is no nature, no sign, no birth, no death – nothing has ever arisen or ceased.

It is just like how the sounds, which we produce here, disappear the moment they are being spoken, but they only disappear here in this place. Since all phenomena are non-ceasing and non-abiding, the sounds we produce cannot stand still in this place; they continue to move about in space and in this cosmos. However, if our human civilization progresses well and reaches culmination, then even after a billion of a billion exponentials of years, the scientists will still be able to record all the sounds, which are being spoken by us, right here. Because the sounds will continue to self-broadcast and move freely in the cosmos. With the perception of our ears, it is clear that the sounds are no longer here. One day when science is further advanced, we can advise the scientists to design an apparatus that can record our voices and detect the frequency of the sound waves which we are broadcasting here. Thereafter, they can also construct another apparatus to measure how the sound waves are being produced from our brain, similar to how we can catch the frequency of a radio station, such as Radio A, City Radio, Đồng Nai Radio, etc. Because every sound is being broadcasted from a certain frequency, we can definitely catch it and return to this present moment to see that there is nothing that has been lost.

For example, if we are now thinking that we dislike someone’s look, scientists will be able to record this thought, and they can go back to a minute prior to this mental arising to find out the reason why, and they can also scan everything from the moment this thought arises until the end of our lives. Scientists are more than capable of doing this; it is not so difficult because the thoughts have already taken on their forms. Thus, this is to show us that our thought-arisings would not be lost in this cosmos. Once scientists are able to catch our frequencies, they can catch them wherever they are no matter near or far.

Similarly, we are sitting here, yet we can catch the frequencies of the VTV1 television channel. The frequencies are being broadcasted throughout the cosmos, not simply through traversing a narrow path. Therefore, all the sounds, which we produce here, will spread across this universe. Our sound waves are echoing throughout this vast cosmos, and this is tremendous. That is why we say, “*one is all,*” and we would be erroneous thinking that it is

something minuscule. From the viewpoint of a saintly, realized being, even the tiniest silk fiber is, indeed, *Prajñā*, and therefore, destroying a single mental moment *kṣaṇa* is no different than destroying this entire universe. If we were to smash a grain of sand in which we could discover a *Sūtra*, then such a *Sūtra* would be pervasive enough to cover this entire *dharmadhātu*. A grain of sand is exactly the same as this body of ours, and that is just an example. In reality, when comparing a grain of sand to a *Sūtra*, it is as diminutive as a billionth of a billion exponentials of a tiny cell of ours.

When we are able to mentally shatter this physical body, we will get to see the universe in its entirety. Until this very moment, all of our frequencies pervade the whole universe. The sound waves of the radio and television stations are quite coarse which people are able to catch. In our cases, however, if one is mentally and subtly sensitive enough, then no matter where the other person sits, one will be able to catch his or her frequencies, and if we ourselves are equally sensitive, then no matter where we sit, we can also catch the frequencies of everyone else. Thus, it means that should one want to know what is in another person's mind, then one should be able to find out at any moment, because the other person is generating his frequencies pervadingly.

As such, nothing has ever been lost in this universe. Here we are merely talking about the physical aspects and not yet touching upon the spiritual side, although mentality and materiality are not differing. Currently science has not reached the point where they can see that we are generating sound waves everywhere. Until one day when science is advanced enough, the scientists will discover that our sound waves are being generated everywhere pervasively, and upon this discovery, no matter where we sit, they will be able to record us without the need for us to even utter a word.

For example, if they want to know what goes on in someone's mind secretly, there is no need for the person to speak up and to discuss anything openly. All the scientists need to do is to scan the frequencies and everything will become crystal clear. However many thoughts this person has, the scientists will be able to amplify the sound waves and this person's thoughts will be even louder than my voice that is being amplified from the loud speakers right now. If scientists can do that, then the person who generates these thoughts would not be able to deny them. One would not be able to refute it even for merely "thinking" something bad, and that is why it is said that *karma* remains intact. A single thought which we generate can become *karma*, cause and effect. It will not disappear and no phenomenon is ever lost in space and in this cosmos.

Here, we can see how wondrous the Buddha was. The wisdom of the great sages in the past did not need to rely on any apparatuses, and it is only the wisdom of the enlightened beings which can fully fathom everything! Now we are generating sound waves, and we do not know what kinds of sound waves become intertwined and interconnected, but they all become like a bunch of entanglements. It means we think of all sort of trivial thoughts in our heads which do not go in the same directions, yet, there is something that makes all sorts of connections between this wave and that wave, seeing how this level of vibration is

compatible to that level. Then, it interlinks them all and amasses them all so that it can produce a lifetime for us. It means that our *karma* of many past lifetimes and all the levels of sound waves which are vibrating throughout boundless space remain fully intact.

Then, who is the one who is assembling everything together to establish a single lifetime of ours? For example, it dictates how we are supposed to meet one person in the early afternoon and another one in the late afternoon, and however we are supposed to live today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. There is clearly a universal law, but our mundane knowledge is barely enough to offer an explanation to anyone. Science, on the other hand, has not yet reached this level of full understanding either.

When we talk about “*unborn, unceasing,*” we must also talk about the *appearances* of all phenomena. All signs, such as the appearances of our sounds, are also non-arising, non-ceasing in this cosmic universe. A billion years from now when science becomes further advanced, the scientists will be able to scan and to capture the frequencies of our sound waves. For example, if we were to take rebirth ten lives into the future, then in another ten lives, they will be able to seize our present-day brainwaves. As far as our multi-series feature movie is concerned, they will be able capture the lead, go back nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two lives, and go even further back all the way to this present-day life. Then, they can record what we are saying right here in this place.

Here is the broadcasting source, but there is no source. Here is the central point, but there is no center, because each point in this universe is a center. Thus, it is erroneous for us to rely on a spaceship to go around looking for the center of the universe, because everywhere is the center and everywhere appears the energy of the universe. Thus, each *dharma* or phenomenon is ultimately equanimous, non-discriminatory, and throughout this universe, there is nothing that is better than another. Everywhere is the perfect energy of the universe, and everywhere is the central source.

For example, when scientists want to check and catch the sound waves we produce here, they may even travel in a space shuttle as fast as hundreds of thousands of light speed to a different realm, and from there, they can scan and capture our mental waves just as we are producing them here. That is something most incredible about us human beings. There is no dissimilarity between the universe and all of us in whichever aspect. Therefore, until now, science still has not reached the final point where they can completely decipher our human DNA. Even if a small point of our DNA is producing such a code, and even if the encoded documents we use fill up the entire world globe, still, we would not be able to decipher a tiny portion of a billionth of the billion exponentials of this DNA.

It is as such because everything emerges from Voidness, and therefore, unfathomably incredible. Voidness pervades the entire phenomenal matrix of truth. Even a tiny point in the universe is equally a genuinely perfect realm of truth, equanimous, non-arising, and non-ceasing. There is no dissimilarity among them even as minuscule as a *kṣaṇa* or a dust particle. It is not that a dust particle is diminutive whereas we weigh many kilograms. If we

see that we are larger than a dust particle, then that is simply our differing dualistic views. In fact, we have never been any grander than anything, including a single fiber of silk or a particle of dust in the three worlds. Even the three worlds are not any grander than a grain of sand that we are seeing in front of us; there has never been any dissimilarity. If you want to, you can go ahead and find ways to decipher this reality, but science has not yet been able to reach this far. It is because science has not gone completely beyond matter. If science still depends on and is trapped in materialism, it cannot completely, fully understand matter.

Once we have transcended materiality and immerses in Voidness, then we will understand. If we get so enmeshed in *existence* and *non-existence*, or *substantiality* and *insubstantiality*, then we would not be able to fathom anything. We must go beyond substantialness and insubstantialness, beyond all appearances [including the appearances of both *form* and *void*], and to merge in Voidness, then we can clearly see how all phenomena are neither born nor ceased. To be wandering in the life-and-death cycle is only natural because we have not yet transcended our bodies of five aggregates. On the other hand, although we may still exist in this five-aggregated body, once we immerse in *Prajñā*, we will see that everything is nonetheless *Prajñā* and is equally non-arising, non-ceasing.

A person already immersed in *Prajñā* will not see that there are appearing signs or forms. These signs or forms, in reality, are the manifestation of delusion borne from our falsified view. A person already immersed in *Prajñā* thus will see themselves not as this physical body. Right now, we tell someone to get on the scale and we can tell that he weighs a certain amount of kilograms, yet, to say that he is “*without a physical body*” may sound very unscientific. However, we must ask something in return: what is science in actuality in order for us to say that it is unscientific? If science only knows how to weigh, measure out or count, then it means science is still being quite modest. If science until now cannot fully decode a minuscule DNA, then how can we say that science would know it all?

A human being is inherently unborn and unceasing. All phenomena are inherently unborn and unceasing; they have never been arisen or ceased. Each single phenomenon only appears as a certain sign. Because we are being trapped in our sense faculties and their sense objects; therefore, these illusory signs or forms appear for us to recognize, see, hear, smell and taste. We are being caught this body of five aggregates, in our sense bases and their objects, whereas in reality, these forms are not true forms; they are all Voidness, ever non-arising and non-ceasing. The Buddha’s view is that of unborn and unceasing whereas from the view of a deluded person, there is birth and death. And since there is no birth and death in the perfect all-transcendent wisdom, there is only this “*very vivid presence*” which is perfectly whole and complete, and that is already more than sufficient.

Thus the presence is the culmination, the most venerated, the most transcendental, the sphere of all Buddhas, the sign of all Buddhas in the ten directions – it is the matrix of ultimate awakening. It is simply the presence and nothing else! Thus, we simply need to return to this presence, because this immediate presence is abundance and there is no need

to waste our energy to look for anything else, nor to tiringly go anywhere else.

Therefore, all *dharmas* since immemorial time until now have never been born nor ceased from both aspects of spirituality and materiality. Personally, I can provide explanation from the foundation of materiality in front of the scientists that all phenomena have never been born nor ceased. It is because a spiritual view greatly surpasses that of science over many hundreds of years, unless some scientists can immerse in their own “*nature*” so that they can invent an apparatus which can prove the unborn, unceasing nature of all phenomena. If, on the other hand, we just sit here to muse over and to contemplate, then we will never be able to explain about the non-arising, non-ceasing nature of a matter as minuscule as a grain of sand.

Again, as far as all phenomena, all appearances are concerned, what we see are simply the alteration of the illusive attributes and nothing much other than that. If we want to use a precise expression, we can say that our illusive appearances simply transmute. For example, before we were young and now we are old, so it means that our illusive appearances alter. Today we have this body, and in the near future, this body will no longer be here, so it means that our illusive appearances simply metamorphose. We say that everything is unborn, unceasing because the four elements are forever vigorous and refreshing, forever flowing without impediments. In the entirety of this sphere of phenomenal truth, the four elements are ever lively and unobstructed, so then what is it that “*dies*”?

However, because we have wrong view and see things from our confusion, we continue to treasure and longingly attach to this physical body of ours. So when this body is getting old and is about to die, we become sad, anxious and fearful, but in reality, we do not die. It just means the four [inner] elements are being returned to the outer elements in their completeness. Since the beginning until now, the four elements have primordially been unborn, unceasing – when we amass them together so our bodies can come into existence, the elements have never been lessened, and when our bodies dissolve, the four elements have never increased either. Since immemorial time until now, the four elements remain in their primordial, pristine completeness.

It took me about three or four months in the past just to sit and contemplate the truth of this body. However, one day when I was taking a shower, I was then able to see through many things. It then became absolutely clear that the four elements remain inherently intact, with nothing ever becoming increased nor decreased, and only then would we be able to see that this physical body is unborn and unceasing.

Everything that exists in this universe simply alters their appearing signs or forms. According to our mundane view, this body has an appearance, and since it is simply a delusive sign, it changes. Substantiality and insubstantiality, or existence and non-existence, manifest based on our view of clinging and attachment, whereas in reality they have never been so. Once we reach the ultimate experiential understanding, there is no

such thing as “*existence*” versus “*non-existence*.” It has *never* been so. Here in the root text of the *Prajñā* scripture, the idea of how it has *never* been so was not fully expressed. However, we can complete this idea by saying that “it has *never* been existing nor non-existing.” Thus, we can say that it is “*unborn, unceasing, untainted, perfectly complete, never existent nor non-existent*.” To express everything in this way would be optimal. The Sanskrit text does not include this idea, but if we could wishfully add it to the text, then it would have been so wonderful. Ultimately, there has never been “*the existence of something*” nor “*the non-existence of something*.” Both signs or forms, substantialness and insubstantialness, have never existed. Everything is simply the essence of the presence, beyond substantiality or insubstantiality. There is no form, no emptiness, and thus, there is no arising, no non-arising, no birth and no death. So we can say that “*it has never been existing nor non-existing*” rather than saying there is “*no existence, no non-existence*.”

*“Immaculate, untainted”*

If we truly comprehend the Buddha Dharma, we will arrive at the truth of non-arising, non-cessing, non-defiled and non-tainted. If there is no such thing as “*existence*” or “*non-existence*” then there is no base for it to be defiled or tainted. In the sphere of True Sign, “*pureness*” does not truly exist, let alone anything being “*defiled*.” When genuinity or actuality is already in the presence, we will not even speak about anything being pure, disturbed, tainted or defiled. In reality, all phenomena, which are manifesting here in front of us, are tantamount, and there is nothing that is defiled by anything else, yet, our perception leads us to think that it is. Sometimes when we practice the Dharma, we are afraid of being defiled by this and by that, and it is because we grasp at the concept of self, and believe that this physical body has to be either in this way or in that way in order for it to be clean. It is all due to our erroneous grasping based on the illusive appearances.

We are currently being bounded by these illusory appearances and cannot get out of the loop, and therefore, we think that we must eat like this, sleep like this and do things like this in order to be pure, and if we eat, sleep and do things in a different way, then we are being impure. That is only due the workings of our perception. Thus, being pure does not exist, let alone tainted. Therefore, we are herein saying that “*immaculate, untainted*.” In this presence, there is not even enough passing time to become tainted; taint is not capable of reaching this very presence. The sphere of this presence is the “*all-pervasive, all-knowing Prajñā*,” and from within this sphere, how can it possibly be defiled and how can it possibly be tainted? This very vivid presence is actually the realm of non-defiled, utmost purity and thus, how can one find taint in such a state of being? There is not even a shred of taint even if you want to look for it, neither a shred of purity. It is impossible to have both of these. The pristine presence is the ultimate, most venerated, supreme and unsurpassed realm of all Buddhas.

*“Perfectly whole and complete”*

If we were to translate the last part of the root verse, it literally means “*not deficient, not sufficient*.” We, however, rendered this expression beyond literal translation as “*perfectly*”

*whole and complete.*” This vivid presence is perfectly whole and complete, not superfluous, not lacking, non-tainted, non-arising, non-ceasing because *Prajñā* itself is completely perfect. If we for once genuinely feel perfectly whole and complete, then it means that we are immersing in *Prajñā*, being in the vivid presence and have been awakened on the Buddha-Dharma path.

To be awakened on the Buddha-Dharma path means being non-dual, perfect, whole and complete, not lacking anything whatsoever. Even if it is simply a grain of sand, we will also see it being filled with this *dharmadhātu*. Even a mental moment as minuscule as a *kṣaṇa* will be completely perfect pervading this entire phenomenal spaciousness. It is not that the grain of sand and a *kṣaṇa* are small and space is vast. If we still see everything in that way, we can never attain the perfectly whole and complete view. The term “*perfectly whole and complete*” means there is nothing lacking whatsoever (“*nothing is not perfectly whole and complete*”). Although it may be damaged or broken, it is still completely whole and perfect. For example, when a plate is broken into half, we look at it and feel that it is defective then this is wrong view based on delusive appearances whereas it is still being perfect, whole and complete.

When it is perfectly whole and complete, then it is that way everywhere and in every place. The boundless spacious all-pervasive cosmos is perfectly whole and complete, and even a grain of sand, too, can contain the boundless space. This grain of sand is, indeed, perfectly complete and it is the genuine truth! If we look at this space and still see it being differing from a grain of sand then our view is still being distorted, not yet perfectly complete, and our wisdom is not yet perfectly whole. Instantaneously if we end up being right in “*this very vivid presence*” then that is the perfect, complete seeing. It is not due to our imagination that it is so, but that is the ultimate truth which means all phenomena are equanimously the same, and even a minuscule mental moment is also perfectly, equanimously whole and complete.

Therefore, being in the vivid presence and immersing in *Prajñā* is the language of *Prajñā*. If it is already the actual language of *Prajñā*, then there is nothing deficient. Thus, this *Prajñā* wisdom is existing in the presence everywhere – every space is completely perfect, every space pervades the entire *dharmadhātu*, every space is the phenomenal sphere of truth and the matrix of the Buddhas. If we somehow see things differently, then that is not perfectly whole and complete.

The matrix of the Buddhas, therefore, includes the ultimate awakening of all Buddhas, as well as the undermost delusion of sentient beings—within this field, nothing is lacking. Whatever this phenomenal matrix has, *Prajñā* does, too. In the sphere of *Prajñā*, anything that “*exists*” exists as *Prajñā*; on the other hand, if we let it fall into the dualistic, discriminating sphere then that is sentient beings’ delusion. In this very presence, delusion is sentient beings, and the end of delusion is *Prajñā*. Seeing it right or seeing it wrong can take place right here. There is no need for us to talk about how erroneous or ignorant we have been since hundreds of thousands of lives ago—there is no such thing!

If our effort fully concentrates on “*this very vivid presence*,” we would sooner or later attain realization in this life, and it will be very easy to become realized if we utterly return to this reality. Being deluded or being realized can happen right here, and we surely cannot afford to leave this very reality if we want to settle delusion or attain realization. We are not herein talking about the cyclic existence due to ignorance throughout multitudes of lifetimes; that is already something of old. We are now talking about *Prajñā*, so in this very presence, it is either *Prajñā* or no *Prajñā* and nothing else.

From the beginning of this scripture until now, we are using words such as “*the moment one immerses in*” or “*right in this very vivid presence*” because everything is pointing to that which is right here and right in this presence. Do not ever leave this presence even for a fleeting mental moment. If we leave it even for a *kṣana* then we would not be able to gain realization in this very life. If we never separate ourselves from this presence even for a mental moment *kṣana* then we are existing in the realm of perfect truth. It would be so simple to interfuse with the ultimate truth; there is nothing else that we need to do, and that, ultimately, is the *Prajñā* wisdom insight.

*Prajñā* clearly fathoms all phenomena right here, and on the other hand, there is delusion right here as well. Thus, what exactly are we looking for? Where can we search for the master and the path? Right in “*this very vivid presence*.” Our spiritual master is the presence and the presence is our teacher. The presence *is* the awakened one, the realm of enlightenment, the highest, the most venerated, and the supreme. If one never leaves this presence then anyone can actually attain realization in this lifetime. Since immemorial time until now, we have wandered around throughout the three worlds in search of something, but at the end, we come upon the truth that the truth cannot separate from this vivid, lucid, pristine presence. We become crushed that we have been in search of it terribly hard for millions of years. We have created endless multitudes of birth and death due to our wanderings and not accepting this very presence – this reality, this actuality, this true existence – and thus we continue to remain confused and delusive.



**TT 12. *tasmāc chāriputra śūnyatāyām* – in the state of Voidness of a realized being:**

<i>tasmāc</i>	<i>chāriputra</i>	<i>śūnyatāyām</i>
therefore, because of that	(the first consonant of the name <b>Śāriputra</b> is changed to <b>ch</b> – this is a phonetic change because it follows <b>tasmāc</b> ): child of <b>Śāri</b>	<b>-śūnyatā</b> : emptiness, void, voidness, open, openness, devoid, nothing, non-substantiality, non-existence <b>-śūnyatāyām</b> in/about/regarding emptiness, in/about/regarding void, in/about/regarding voidness
<i>Literal translation:</i> -Therefore, Śāriputra, in emptiness/in void -Therefore, Śāriputra, regarding emptiness/in void		
<i>Beyond translation: Therefore, Śāriputra, in this state of Voidness</i>		

**TT 13. *na rūpaṃ na vedanā na saṃjñā na saṃskārāḥ na vijñāni* – no five aggregates**

<i>na</i>	<i>rūpaṃ</i>	<i>vedanā</i>	<i>saṃjñā</i>	<i>saṃskārāḥ</i>	<i>vijñāni</i>
no, not	form	sensation	perception	mental formation	consciousness
<i>Literal translation: there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no mental formation, no consciousness</i>					

**TT 14. *na cakṣuḥ-śrotra-ghrāna-jihvā-kāya-manāṃsi* – no six sense faculties**

<i>na</i>	<i>cakṣuḥ</i>	<i>śrotra</i>	<i>ghrāna</i>	<i>jihvā</i>	<i>kāya</i>	<i>manāṃsi</i>
no, not	eye	ear	nose	tongue	body	mind
<i>Literal translation: no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind</i>						

This is a refrain to remind us of, and to summarize, the preceding verse. In this state of Voidness emerges the appearance of the five aggregates, yet, in this Voidness, there are no five aggregates either. In this Voidness, there is no sign of “*existence*” nor “*non-existence*,” and therefore, there is absolutely no form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness. Here we can understand based on our conceptual mind that in this state of Voidness there is no sign of form nor of void, and so of course, the entirety of form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness does not truly exist. The five aggregates are not present in the realm of Voidness within this presence.

Therefore, the phrase “*in this state of Voidness*” is to replace “*in this very vivid presence.*” This presence is Voidness. Voidness is the presence. The emergent presence is the precise moment one deeply immerses in *Prajña*. The moment immersing in *Prajña* is the living

presence. Being right in this presence is being purely in existence and that which purely exists is Voidness. This Voidness is precisely *Prajña*. Therefore, in the state of being *Prajña*, there is no form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness. In the pristine, vivid presence, there is neither form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness which means there do not exist the five aggregates.

Having no five aggregates is having no physical body. Having no physical body means there is no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and having no aggregate of consciousness means is having no conceptual thinking and no six-sense faculties. Having no five aggregates means there is no body and no mind. Having no *body* means having no physical, sensory faculty, no eye, ear, nose, tongue, whereas having no *mind* is having no conceptual thinking. This is, indeed, the sphere of *non-self*.

**TT 15. *na rūpa-śabda-gandha-rasa-spraṣṭavya dharmāḥ* – in the state of Voidness of a realized being: no six sense objects**

<i>na</i>	<i>rūpa</i>	<i>śabda</i>	<i>gandha</i>	<i>rasa</i>	<i>spraṣṭavya</i>	<i>dharmāḥ</i>
no, not	form	sound	smell	taste	touch	object of mind
<i>Literal translation: no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, object of mind</i>						

If we see that there is still a form, we still hear sounds, we still smell the scent, and we still encounter the touch and the objects of the mind, then that means we still acknowledge the body faculty and we still are not able to be released from the five aggregates. When we still see with our eyes, and listen with our ears, it means that we are still trapped in the five aggregated body. Whoever can apprehend form and sound without relying on his eyes and his ears, then there may be some hope that such a person can be emancipated from this physical body base. To see and hear with our sense faculties is to be ensnared in the sense objects, and this is “*seeing with a disease*” since beginningless time. That is what the Buddha clearly mentioned in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*.

If we want to be liberated from this immemorial disease then at least once in our lifetime, we must no longer see all forms and hear all sounds in this phenomenal matrix with our eyes and our ears. This is simply an expression so that we can understand that in Voidness, there are absolutely no five aggregates, and being completely devoid of the five aggregates means there exists no body and no mind. Without this body and mind, there are no six-sense faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, and there are no “*phenomenal objects*,” thus, form, sound, smell, taste, touch and *dharmas* (objects of mind) do not exist.

If we somehow see that the phenomenal objects are real, that substantial forms, odor and taste are real, then that means that we see our body and mind as real and the five aggregates are also real. Whereas in the state of Voidness - Signlessness, ultimately there are no body, mind, sense faculties, sense objects, meaning there exist no form, sound, smell, taste, touch and *dharmas*.

**TT 16. na cakṣūr-dhātur-yāvan na mano-vijñāna-dhātuḥ – in the state of Voidness of a realized being: no eighteen realms of faculty**

<i>na</i>	<i>cakṣūr</i>	<i>dhātur</i>	<i>yāvan</i>	<i>mano-vijñāna</i>	<i>dhātuḥ</i>
no, not	eye	a phonetically changed form of <b>dhātuḥ</b> which is a nominative singular case of the noun <b>dhātu:</b> realm of perception (which include the six sense organs, six sense objects, and six corresponding consciousnesses for a total of eighteen realms of perception)  <i>*In general, it also means realm, bounds, world, stratum, constituent part, element</i>	a phonetically changed form of <b>yāva:</b> until, through, up to	mind-consciousness	a nominative singular case of the noun <b>dhātu:</b> realm of perception
<i>Literal translation: no realm of eye-consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness</i>					

The “realm of eye consciousness” is the boundary of our seeing. Currently it is quite clear that we can only see within limitation. We cannot possibly see beyond the walls and the panels, nor can we possibly see anything beyond our eyesight. When we say eyes, we are talking about the eye faculties. Our eye consciousness dawns when our eye faculties meet with their objects. The realms herein refer to the eighteen realms of faculty, object and consciousness. Having no realm of eye consciousness means our eyes have no discriminating thoughts when facing with form objects.

Up to no realm of mind-consciousness means having no discriminating thoughts between phenomenal objects and the mind-consciousness base. There are no eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness and mind-consciousness. There are no six-sense bases or sense faculties such as eye base, ear base,

nose base, tongue base, body base and consciousness base either. Furthermore, there are no six sense objects, no form, sound, smell, taste, touch and *dharmas*. These eighteen realms of base, object and consciousness do not exist within the realm of Voidness.

While existing in the state of Voidness, the realm of mind-consciousness can never reach there; therefore, mind-consciousness cannot possibly fathom it, and the mind-consciousness base cannot possibly touch this realm of true existence either. Actually, there is a subtle knowing-awareness which quietly recognizes that we ourselves are different from someone else, and it means that it is this faculty of the mind which establishes our self-grasping. This conceptual mind is equivalent to the aggregate of consciousness, and therefore, it is incapable of reaching the supreme realm of *Prajña*. This body of ours, too, will never be able to know what *Prajña* is like. Should there still be any subtle concept within us about a “*self*” somewhere which is differing from this vast universe, then we cannot possibly arrive at the supreme realm of transcendental *Prajña*. It is a place which can never be reached by our realm of mind-consciousness, nor by our mind faculty or by the conceptual mind itself.

Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the conceptual mind exist within limitation. The realm in this context means it is within a boundary, is confined and cannot go beyond a certain limit. However, *Prajña* transcends the realm of mind-consciousness. It means that if we still rely on our mundane understanding then our seeing and knowing still function within the sphere of the eighteen realms of sense faculty, object and consciousness, unable to break away from them, whereas *Prajña* is all-pervasive and beyond these eighteen realms. Therefore, if we still understand, know, discern, acknowledge, reject, silently perceive, or cognize things even from a pure or undifferentiated view, or comprehend anything at all for that matter, then that is nonetheless the knowledge acquired from the eighteen realms, incapable of transcending the sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses. Not going beyond the sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses means one is not yet liberated. Therefore, when we talk about the *all-pervasive universal knowing wisdom* of *Prajña*, we are actually talking about being liberated from the sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses.

When we extinguish – actually we can also use the term to die or to succumb – or let our dualistic discernment and thinking succumb completely, then there is some hope that we may end up knowing what *Prajña* really is. Going beyond sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses will allow us to truly recognize them. That which is capable of knowing sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses itself is beyond sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses. That which is capable of knowing the eighteen realms itself is not something that belongs to the eighteen realms. One day when we arrive at this realization, we will get to know all eighteen realms ubiquitously at the same time and we no longer perceive things based on the individual corresponding sense faculty, such as recognizing form with our eyes or sounds with our ears. At that moment, we would not only know at once all six-sense objects at the same time, but we also know the six-sense faculties and the six consciousnesses ubiquitously as well.

If during any moment of our meditation, we can clearly recognize all sense faculties, objects and consciousnesses at the same time then that means our *Prajña* wisdom is vividly emerging. For example, if our eyes see the form and we can also see our eyes seeing the form, then that is not yet *Prajña* because only the eye faculty and its objects appear. Although we recognize the form, which we are seeing, is different from another form, it has not yet acquired a name. It may also be that we are seeing how this color differs from another color, this flower from another flower, this petal from another petal, or this pistil from another pistil. Although we can see every detail minutely as such, they do not yet acquire any name. This is what the Mind-Only School calls consciousness and this is merely the consciousness of the eye.

The eye consciousness can recognize that the sense faculty and the sense object are encountering each other. The eye consciousness is the initial discrimination discerning the differences between the eye faculty and the object although it has not yet given its object any name. It is not until the *manas* consciousness becomes involved that it begins to pull more information from the memory storage to confirm that “this is a yellow color.”

Therefore, that is the beginning of name formation. When we think, “the name of this is *flower*,” it is because in our mental storage, we have already heard someone say that this is a flower in the past, and we are now simply recalling it. Then our conceptual mind would acknowledge it, and put a stamp of recognition on it, “Yes, that’s right, this is a *flower*.” When we have not yet arrived at the name formation of the flower, it is simply from the eye base to the form object. When the discerning mind shows up, there is still no name yet; there is neither affirmation nor negation yet, but it only sees the differences. That which recognizes the differentiation is the very quiet subtleness of the aggregate of consciousness – it discriminates instantaneously the moment it sees the object.

Nevertheless, this clear discernment remains at the level of the eye consciousness. Then the *manas* consciousness and the consciousness faculty begin to withdraw more information from our memory. Our memory says that, “In the past, the name of this is *flower*,” but it is still very hesitant. Only when our conceptual mind says, “Yes, that’s right!” that the thought about a flower would arise.

As far as the color is concerned, in the beginning, we only see that this color is different from another color, but there is no name involved yet. Then our consciousness faculty pulls information from our memory again saying, “*This* color is called *yellow* in the past.” When our remembrance of the yellow color appears across the board, our conceptual mind would grasp at it and put a stamp on it saying, “That’s a *color*, that’s right!” Sometimes it becomes green, sometimes yellow, sometimes more yellow, sometimes less yellow. When there is already a name, it means our conceptual mind already secures it, and thus, we accept it as such. Once our conceptual mind already accepts that this is yellow, it goes on making comparison saying, “*This yellow* is not as nice as *the other yellow*!”

When comparison comes into play, the *manas* consciousness also throws in more information; for example, “*This is prettier than that*” means our mental storehouse is saying that the new one (the one we are looking at right now) is more beautiful than the old one (which we saw in the past). In the future, if it happens that we see something else that is even more beautiful than the present one, then our conceptual mind would bring out the old to compare with everything that we have seen in the past until now, saying “I have not seen anything more beautiful than this.” So then, a “new” beautiful object is thrown into the storehouse again. The process of seeing something involves varied aspects each time; it is not as simple as establishing differentiation and comparison the moment we see something. It is not as straightforward as our mind-consciousness simply making discernment when our eye base meets its sense object. It involves the workings of the *manas* consciousness and the acceptance of our conceptual mind, which leads to the habituation of the mental kernels, and then, whenever we see a corresponding object, that is how the actual appearance begins to manifest.

With each thing that we see, we collect them and familiarize ourselves with them so that they all become our mental kernels and they begin to manifest continuously without any interruption. It is not possible for a mundane person to cut off this phase. However, a well-trained practitioner will be able to bring everything to a stoppage right where he is seeing, not establishing any differences or making any comparison. If our recollection pours out information and a name appears, such as a “*flower*” or whatever, then just let it appear. Whatever surfaces will just surface, and whatever we see, we simply see. Whatever appears will disappear, and if we can just let everything simply be, we will not arrive at the dualistic level of seeing that “*this is more beautiful than the old one*” or “*this is uglier than the old one.*” Slowly and ever so slowly one day, dualistic comparison will no longer arise.

If we have enough meditative absorption power, we will not progress to making dualistic comparison and discernment right in the initial seeing phase, and if so, we do not habituate mental *karmic* seeds. Yet, we are not quick enough. The discerning mind is too swift, therefore, at the very moment we see something, it already differentiates priorly that this is a “*flower*” and makes a comparison between something beautiful and ugly. Therefore, when someone merges deeply in meditative absorption, his mind would be incredibly sharp so that he can right away detect the sprouting of the spores—that is when the *manas* consciousness pulls information from our memory storehouse, we should throw it away altogether. We do not allow our mind-consciousness to put a stamp on it and to assert that this is a flower, a leaf, a yellow color or a green color.

Therefore, the *manas* consciousness can pull whatever from our recollection, but the conceptual mind would not even care to append its seal, so whatever appears simply appears, either as a substantial form or as a remembrance. Whatever appears can just appear, but everything must be seen with great clarity. Only true wisdom has the ability to clearly see ubiquitously how sense bases, sense objects and consciousnesses make comparison, how *manas* consciousness brings in memory and how the conceptual mind

affirms or rejects. To be able to see all five aspects at the same time must be that of *Prajña* wisdom, whereas simple, ordinary practice effort cannot possibly see them all. The initial seeing phase contains all five aspects at the very start, and if we cannot clearly see through all of them, they will continue to turn into a recollection and we will continue to habituate these mental kernels.

Only *Prajña* wisdom can see it all. Right in this very presence, if it were *Prajña*, then everything is completely done, utterly purified and extinguished. Once *Prajña* emerges, there are no more sense bases and sense objects, and thus, no consciousnesses as well. Herein, there is no realm of eye consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness. "*Prajña in the vivid presence*" is Voidness – the True Sign – as it simply emerges. It is the awakening wisdom, the Buddha and the realm of perfect awakening which emerge where there are no longer sense bases, sense objects and consciousnesses. Thus, existing in Voidness means existing in a sphere beyond sense bases, objects and consciousness.



**TT 17. *na vidyā nāvidyā na vidyākṣayo nāvidyākṣayo* – in the state of Voidness of a realized being: no knowledge, no ignorance and their extinction**

<i>na</i>	<i>vidyā</i>	<i>nāvidyā</i>	<i>vidyākṣayo</i>	<i>nāvidyākṣayo</i>
no, not	knowledge, higher knowledge, science, learning, philosophy, education	<i>-avidyā</i> : ignorance, lack of knowledge, fundamental stupidity, delusion <i>-nāvidyā</i> : no ignorance, no lack of knowledge	<i>-kṣayo</i> : exhaustion, extinction, destruction <i>-vidyākṣayo</i> : no extinction of knowledge	no extinction of ignorance
<i>Literal translation: no knowledge, no ignorance, no extinction of knowledge and no extinction of ignorance</i>				

*“No knowledge”*

Being in Voidness is being in a sphere transcending the eighteen realms where there is no intellectual knowledge. Knowledge is simply comprehension, and it simply means our recollection. If there is someone who has habituated a lot, then it means this person has a great recollection, a great memory. Whoever studies a lot can comprehend a lot which is the same as borrowing a lot of information. Borrowing a lot is to understand a lot. To understand a lot simply means to have a great recollection. Having a great recollection can be called having knowledge. Knowledge is to study and to research all written materials, scriptures, books, historical texts, etc. If one has such great understanding of all various matters since the past until the present, then that is called knowledge.

What follows the eighteen realms is our understanding, our intellectual knowledge. After our sense faculties encounter their objects and if consciousness confirms them, then they will be familiarized and amassed into our memory. Once they are habituated to become our memory, then that is knowledge. Knowledge is considered to be our comprehension. However, *Prajñā*, on the other hand, is something that goes beyond sense bases, objects and consciousnesses. Only when there are no sense bases, objects and consciousnesses then knowledge will be no more. If sense bases, objects and consciousnesses are still intact then knowledge will be there. Because when our eyes see, that is when we perceive; when we hear, we perceive; when we smell, we perceive; when we taste, we perceive; when our thinking unites with objects of the mind, we perceive, and that’s why it all becomes our memory, our knowledge, our understanding and our own personal experiences.

Therefore, in the sphere of Voidness, there is no conceptual knowledge which means there are no mental kernels for life-and-death. Knowledge means the mental *karmic* seeds, and it means the aggregate of mental formation. When these mental *karmic* seeds are habitualized very deeply, they become mental formation. Even if this knowledge has just once experienced the fusion of a sense base and a sense object in any lifetime from a long past, it

still habituated and this single experience became *karmic* seeds. Yes, even if we simply saw and heard something just once from multitudes of lives ago, this experience still became our mental kernels of life-and-death. Thus, the term knowledge is rather profound.

All of our learning, experiences and understanding are thus considered conceptual knowledge. Within this sphere of Voidness, however, there are no ordinary understanding and even higher knowledge. All the mental *karmic* kernels, all the kernels of life-and-death do not exist in this Voidness. Here again, we want to refer to “*the very vivid presence*” in which there is not even a trace of the *karmic* seeds. If there is no mental formation and no knowledge, then naturally all *karmic* kernels of life-and-death do not exist as well.

*“No ignorance”*

We are not talking about ignorance here. Meaning we are not talking about innate ignorance from countless lifetimes until now, but herein, we are only discussing “*to see with delusion*” or “*to see it right,*” and that is all. If we abide in the sphere of Voidness and *Prajña*, then it is a place of perfect wisdom, a place of radiant luminosity in the presence – we are not talking about ignorance here. We usually say, “due to our confusion and delusion, we have wandered in the cycle of life-and-death for hundreds of thousands of lives.” However, no, if there is any delusion, then we are being deluded right here in this very presence and not something that happened from long ago. Right in this very presence, if our knowing-awareness is not lucid, not radiant and not flowing freely, then that means we are being deluded right here. Do not even bother to talk about being deluded in any other lifetime. Because within the sphere of *Prajña*, there is not even a shade of ignorance. There is no way that ignorance can exist in the sphere of lucid presence. This presence is, indeed, *Prajña*; thus, there is no ignorance. In this Voidness, there is no realm of ignorance or darkness. There is none whatsoever, because even both *form* and *void*, substantiality and insubstantiality, do not exist herein.

*“No extinction of knowledge and no extinction of ignorance”*

If there is no knowledge, then what is there to eradicate? Because there are no mental *karmic* kernels, there is no need to shatter anything. If there were mental *karmic* kernels, there will be life-and-death, and if so, then we would need to annihilate these kernels so that we can reach the unborn state. Yet, if there were no mental *karmic* kernels and no knowledge, then there is no need to extinguish knowledge whatsoever. Here is the enlightened state, the state of wisdom, the state of the ultimate Signlessness. Therefore, there is no such thing as to end knowledge and there is no ignorance to end. Had there been ignorance then we can eradicate it, but if there is no ignorance then what is there to eradicate?

**TT 18. *yāvan na jarā-maraṇaṃ na jarā-maraṇa-kṣayo* – in the state of Voidness of a realized being: no aging, no death and their extinction**

<i>yāvan</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>jarā</i>	<i>maraṇaṃ</i>	<i>maraṇa</i>	<i>kṣayo</i>
until, through, up to	no, not	decay, old age, aging	( <i>noun</i> ): dying, death	( <i>nominative singular form</i> ): dying, death	exhaustion, extinction, destruction
<i>Literal translation: up to no aging and death, and no extinction of aging and death</i>					

Since it has never been born, it is thus an erroneous view for us to talk about the extinction of decay, aging and death. Due to this deluded view, we see that there is birth, old age, sickness and death. If there were birth and death, then there would be knowledge, the eighteen realms, and the physical body of five elements. However, if this body of five elements does not exist, then where would birth come from? Everything has always been unborn, unceasing. The place where there is neither birth nor death is, indeed, the realm of *Prajñā*. Because this is the realm of Voidness, the true existence beyond time and space, there cannot be birth and death.

**TT 19. *na duḥkha-samudaya-nirodha-mārgā* – in the state of Voidness of a realized being: no suffering, origination, cessation and path**

<i>na</i>	<i>duḥkha</i>	<i>samudaya</i>	<i>nirodha</i>	<i>mārgā</i>
no, not	suffering	origination	cessation	path
<i>Literal translation: no suffering, origination, cessation and path</i>				

“No suffering, origination, cessation and path” means the state of the Four Noble Truths does not exist in this Voidness. Actually, there is “suffering” because there is a body; without having a physical body then from which base can we suffer? If there does not exist a body of five elements, then suffering would never manifest. Thus, someone who is deluded about this body will have suffering, and another who does not hold a delusive view about this body will never have suffering.

The truth of cessation is the realm of *nirvāṇa*. The realm of *Prajñā*, however, does not speak of *Nirvāṇa* or of birth and death herein. *Prajñā* is *Prajñā*, having no trace of *Nirvāṇa* or birth and death, nor suffering, origination, cessation and path. The truth of cessation is the realm of *Nirvāṇa* because if we look at this from the perspective of the Śrāvakayāna vehicle, *Nirvāṇa* means to completely eradicate all of the original causes that lead to life-and-death. If we have a body and a mind, then we are bound to suffer, and there are either four or eight types of suffering, the suffering of birth, of old age, sickness and death, the suffering of not getting what is wanted, the suffering of having to associate with the one we detest, the suffering of separation from our loved ones, the suffering of the five clinging-aggregates, the suffering of existence, the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change. All of these sufferings exist due to our having a body.

Since the very beginning, we already said that there is no physical body in the realm of *Prajñā*, thus, suffering cannot be established in this realm of Voidness. Voidness is the realm of the ultimate True Sign, and when we speak of the ultimate True Sign, we cannot possibly speak of the habituation and amassment of *karma*. For a person who no longer has a body and a mind, he cannot possibly habituate and amass *karma*, and therefore, we can say that the *karmic* obstacles have always been Void innately. Since immemorial time, the origination has inherently been Void, non-arising, non-ceasing, and it is Voidness. Cessation, too, is Voidness - Signlessness, and Voidness - Signlessness is cessation. According to the perspective of Śrāvakayāna vehicle, one must completely eradicate all origination or all causes in order to attain the truth of cessation. However, according to the *Prajñā* view, this cessation is, indeed, Voidness. Voidness is the realm of *nirvāṇa*, inherently existing and perfectly full and complete since immemorial time until now. Yes, since beginningless time until now, and from now until ever after, it would never change. It is the realm of Voidness, the realm of *Nirvāṇa*, the realm of the truth of cessation.

Then, what is the “path” (the “Way”)? If we want to understand its meaning from an

intellectual perspective, the path is the road, the method of practice and the teaching. However, the Way is not merely a road to travel on, rather, *it is the genuine, perfect truth!* The Way itself in this context is the ultimate True Sign, the Voidness - Signlessness, the realm of awakening. The Way is the existing vivid and spontaneous presence; therefore, the Way is not dissimilar from *"the presence,"* or from Voidness. Cessation, too, is not dissimilar from the presence, or from Voidness. If we still see that there are suffering, origination, cessation and path, which comprise of the view of the Four Noble Truths, then it means that we are following the view of the Hearers (*Śrāvaka*). If there is still learning and intellectual knowledge involved, then yes, there will still be these four truths. Whereas in ultimate truth, the presence is simply the unborn, unceasing reality, the vivid reality of Voidness and of *Prajña*. Right in this presence, there is simply the existing reality and nothing else; thus, we do not speak of suffering, origination, cessation and path. Even if we want to search for a slight trace of suffering, origination, cessation and path in this very vivid presence, there is none whatsoever.

**TT 20. *na jñānam na prāptir* – in the state of Voidness of a realized being: no wisdom and no attainment**

<i>na</i>	<i>jñānam</i>	<i>prāptir</i>
no, not	<b>-jñānam</b> is nominative singular case of the neuter noun <b>-jñāna:</b> knowledge, higher knowledge, cognition, gnosis, wisdom	attainment, accomplishment
<i>Literal translation:</i> <b>no wisdom and no attainment</b>		

Here we are not talking about wisdom either. Because when there is ignorance on one side, then there is wisdom on the other side. When we are deluded, that is called ignorance. When we are awakened, that is called wisdom. However, we are not talking about delusion nor awakening here, because what we talk about here is the state of Voidness, the realm of the ultimate True Sign. This realm of *Prajña* has no trace of ignorance, thus, there is no comparison, no wisdom. There is no chance to grasp at and to cling to, thus, there is no attainment, *no self-realization, no self-accomplishment*. If there is still a place for us to come to a halt or to abide in, then it means there is still a “self.” If there were still a “self,” then there would be self-attainment. However, this realm utterly has “*no self*” – it is utterly *Prajña* and nothing else.

It is because Voidness is the actual sign, the actual form of *Prajña*. Voidness is the actual form of wisdom, the sign of full awakening. Voidness is actually this existent presence, therefore, there is no space, no time, no self, no *dharma*, no realization, no attainment, no envy, no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, no knowledge, having nothing whatsoever. *Prajña* is but the existing pristine presence and nothing else.

**TT 21. *tasmāc bodhisattvasya* – the Bodhisattva, the Awakened One**

<i>tasmāc</i>	<i>bodhisattvasya</i>
therefore	- <i>bodhisattva</i> : enlightening being, enlightened being, awakening being, awakened being, one who awakens others, one who enlightens others - <i>bodhisattvasya</i> : of a Bodhisattva, for a Bodhisattva
Literal translation: <b>Therefore, the Awakened One</b>	

**TT 22. *prajñāpāramitām āśritya viharaty a-cittāvaraṇaḥ* – being vividly and naturally present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, devoid of mind’s obscuration**

<i>prajñāpāramitām</i>	<i>āśritya</i>	<i>viharaty</i>	<i>a-cittāvaraṇaḥ</i>
<i>an accusative case of prajñāpāramitā</i> (the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom) so <i>prajñāpāramitām</i> becomes the object of the verb <i>āśritya</i>	adhere, join, rest on, depend on, rely on, abide in, be near to	be absent, take away, remove, separate, retreat, spend time	- <i>a</i> : no, without - <i>cittā</i> : thinking, reflecting, heart, mind, intention - <i>āvaraṇaḥ</i> : covering, obscuration, hindrance - <i>a-cittāvaraṇaḥ</i> : no thought-covering, no mind-covering, no mind’s obscuration, no mind’s hindrance
Literal translation: -relying on the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, the mind’s obscuration are removed -depending on the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, the thought-covering is removed			
Beyond translation: <b>is being vividly and naturally present just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom; his mind is free from obscuration</b>			

The more we study *Prajña* the more we see how the masters of thousands of years ago possessed such a coherent writing style. During the age when literature became highly developed a few centuries ago, people began to realize that a good piece of essay would need an introduction, a body and a conclusion. Yet, when we read the *Prajña* scripture, we can see that the classical Indian literature had become well-formed ever since long ago, especially the noble saints – all they needed to do was to spontaneously speak up and to produce a highly coherent composition complete with an introduction, body and conclusion. This *Prajña* scripture only has a few hundred words, yet, it contains all of those elements.

Right here is the verse to epitomize all the ideas that are expressed in the above-mentioned paragraphs in the beginning and in the body of the scripture. The introductory part begins with: “*The moment the Noble Awakened Being, the Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One, deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, he thoroughly*

*penetrated all five aggregates, and had a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void.*" Following this is a rather long paragraph explaining the meaning of the introduction, and then comes the concluding sentence to summarize all the ideas of the above sections. This is such a wonderful expository writing style! Those of us who are not so versed in literature can actually memorize this scripture, and if we can compose in a similar way, then we will actually become better at our writing skills.

Initially in the introductory verse, it says that at the very "*moment*" the Noble Awakened Being, the *Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One* "*deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom,*" he then "*thoroughly penetrated all five aggregates, and had a lucid, direct knowing of their intrinsic essence as being Void.*" Then, from this introduction, we go to those verses in the body of the content, and then now, we come to the first concluding sentence, which again mentions about the "*Awakened One*" who is, indeed, the Noble One, the *Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One*.

So in the beginning, it says that the Noble Awakening One "*deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom,*" but now, we are reaching the final concluding phase, so it is saying that "*the Awakened One is just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom.*" In the beginning, because it is expressing the very first, initial moment when realization took place, it is called "*deeply immersed,*" whereas now after we venture further into the scripture, it turns out to be "*just as.*" A person who reaches enlightenment is called the Awakened One. Here, in the beginning, he immerses in *Prajña*, and everything that follows thus is to describe the realm of true existence of the Awakened One, the *Naturally Free and Unobstructed Seeing One*.

Now the Awakened One no longer "*deeply immersed*" but he reached the state of being "*just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom.*" For example, when we are an outsider coming into the temple, we would say that we merge into the inner *sangha*, just like we are separate entities first entering *Prajña*. Now we are no longer an outsider merging in, no longer a new person stepping in, but we have become "*just as Prajña*" and we dissolve just as *Prajña*. It is no longer entering it, directly recognizing it, directly realizing it, living with it nor understanding it. Those are no longer our words of choice here.

"*Just as*" is a terminology, and although it may seem as if it was selected in a rather ordinary way, but in reality, it is not simply so. I must say that this coined term emerged based on all of the experiences from a life of practice so that we now can use it in the sentence: "*The Awakened is being present just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom.*" There is nothing whatsoever that is dissimilar from *Prajña*, and there is no more merging in or not merging in in this case. If we were to compare and dissect "*just as,*" it is not two, and it is not dissimilar, but it is just simply being *Prajña*. Instead of saying the Noble Awakened Being is *Prajña*, we use the term "*just as*" so that people can envision that there is nothing dissimilar between the Noble Awakened Being and *Prajña*. In this presence, the Awakened One is, indeed, *Prajña*; he himself is the expanse of *Prajña*, and exists as *Prajña*.



If we were to translate it in standard Vietnamese, instead of using “*the Noble Awakened Being*,” we can substitute it with “*the enlightened person*.” Therefore, instead of saying “*the Noble Awakened Being is Prajñā*,” we can simply say that “*the enlightened person is Prajñā*.” Therefore, *Prajñā* is the enlightened person, the enlightened person is *Prajñā* – no longer singular, no longer dissimilar, no longer two, no longer someone from the outside merging in, no longer someone who is living with it, no longer someone who simply understands it, no longer someone who directly realizes it, and no longer someone who immerses – he is now *Prajñā*.

In the preceding paragraph, we have learned that all phenomena emerge from Voidness. It is actually this Voidness or Signlessness, which makes all appearances emerge. Here, the one who is called the enlightened person is *Prajñā* and *Voidness itself*.

The meaning of this verse is as simple as that to bring to a conclusion that in the beginning, it was “*deeply immersed in Prajñā*” in that very moment, but now it has already completely become or dissolved as *Prajñā*. The practitioner becomes *Prajñā* itself. *Prajñā* is this practitioner, because this person now pervades the entire phenomenal matrix; he is omniscient, all-genuine, all-awakening, He is nothing else but *Prajñā* itself. We must understand that an enlightened person is someone who has already turned into *Prajñā*; he is no different from this *Prajñā* wisdom. There is no more individuality, no more being differentiated. He has dissolved, disappeared and has fully emerged as *Prajñā*. So then such a person is called an Awakened Being. As far as an enlightened being is concerned, if he has not yet turned into *Prajñā*, and if there is still a duality between him and *Prajñā*, then this person has not yet reached complete enlightenment. Therefore, to deeply immerse in *Prajñā* is the initial step to enter its gate, but once he proceeds profoundly, he himself must vanish completely to become *Prajñā* as we no longer talk about merging in here.

Before, when I gave a discourse on the *Diamond Sūtra*, I gave the following example of someone who has just realized his “*true Nature*.” In the first phase he is just like someone who soaks his hand in water to directly know the wetness of the water. The second phase is like someone whose whole body has fallen into the water, with all of his limbs already amputated and without the ability to get out of the ocean water. Even though you may have reached this level, however, it is still not the ultimate, because there is still yourself being in the mid of that ocean water. Thus, one must continue on to the third phase, which is to vanish into the water. Herein, melting away into the ocean water is to completely dissolve into *Prajñā*. Thereby, we can no longer speak about individuality and dissimilarity, or about the self and the phenomena, and thus, in this realm of reality, there is no birth, aging, sickness and death; there is no old age and no death, no extinction of aging and death, no knowledge, no realization and no attainment in this pure existence.

All there is at this point is utterly *Prajñā* and nothing else. Once it has already turned out to be *Prajñā*, then there is nowhere that is not *Prajñā*, and there is no realization and no

attainment in this state of being *Prajña*. When we speak of *Prajña*, no verbal expressions can actually describe it. For a person who has reached this state of all-transcendent wisdom, every aspect, every facet of his daily life, his conducts, his actions, whether being awake or during his sleep, everything, in every respect, has now become *Prajña*! This practitioner has nothing else but *Prajña*, and he cannot possibly do anything else aside from *being Prajña*! We can no longer say here and now, but we can only say “*this Awakened person is Prajña*.” If we were to use the coined term “*right here*,” that is still a concept, which means there is still a point of stoppage whereas *Prajña* has become all-expanding without limit. Therefore, the Awakened One has become all-pervasive throughout the entire *dharmadhātu*, all-existing, all-illuminating and all-knowing.

This is actually a concluding verse to epitomize the preceding paragraph. It is supposed to both recap and explain that “*the moment*” the practitioner immerses in *Prajña*, he must dissolve completely as *Prajña*. If so, then you can say to immerse in. It is just like an outsider who cannot be called the inner assembly in the beginning, yet, when he officially announces he is now joining the assembly, he becomes the assembly. A person who joins the inner *sangha* adeptly will be just like a drop of water falling into the ocean and vanishes into the ocean. He sees himself no longer different from the inner assembly. There is no more dissimilarity, no more individuality, no more being outside but now already a member of the inner circle. Each *skšana* or mental instant existing within him is *Prajña*. Each *kšana* existing within him pervades the phenomenal matrix of truth without any dissimilarity. Each minuscule particle in his body is now the entire *dharmadhātu*.

A very skilled and highly advanced scientist who has progressed to a very profound spiritual level will be able to measure the vibration of a person at the moment of enlightenment. Each cell in this enlightened person will generate intense waves and these waves are not different from the vigorous force of this universe. This is a reality, and not simply our imagination. It was described in the *Sūtra* that when the Buddha attained enlightenment, the ten-directional world was concussed so forcibly that the Buddha had to make the “earth-pacifying” mudra at that time. Therefore, there are a few places which venerate the Buddha statue in the earth-pacifying mudra, with the right hand resting on his knee and the left hand in the earth-pacifying gesture. It is truly a concussion when someone completely immerses in *Prajña*. This living force from the central epidemic, the boundlessly vast energy of the cosmos, is maneuvering, and it is a living force, which moves pervasively in this entire universe to give birth to all forms of subtleties, including this planet of ours.

Our planet is just a diminutive geometric point in this cosmos, and we ourselves are the even smaller microscopic geometric points clinging on this planet. On the other hand, for someone who has immersed in and dissolved as *Prajña*, he would see this Planet Earth no different from a rabbit hair, and yet, this rabbit hair is not dissimilar from the vast universe. It is because the practitioner *has already exhausted his self-identity or individuality*, and that is why he is now the entire realm of phenomenal truth. Right at that moment, this practitioner would lucidly recognize that there are multitudes of minuscule planets, just

like our planet, throughout the cosmos. We will see this Earth floating in our direct view; it is only a miniature dot in our direct knowledgeable sphere during our absorption in *Prajña*. We would clearly see how this globe rotates, its shape, and all of its diminutive details, whereas the details captured by today's space telescopes are not so exact.

Once we are absorbed in *Prajña*, we would see with absolute clarity how everything operates, whereas science at the time being relies mostly on imagination, as it is not yet able to take images from all sides using its apparatuses, because these equipment are too modest and cannot capture the entire cosmos. Even though science has come up with technologies that can leave the Earth to photograph the Earth from outer space, these technologies can only capture one side of the Earth. Just as the sun shines on the Earth, it can only radiate light to half of the Earth, and thus, it is daytime on this side of the globe while it is nighttime in the American continent because the sun is hiding from that side during that time. For us, it looks like the sun can only shine on one side of the Earth during a specific time. Therefore, no matter how many light-years human's technologies can go away from the Earth in order to photograph the Earth globe, they can only capture one side of it at the time being.

On the other hand, a practitioner, while absorbed in *Prajña*, can see all sides of the Earth globe with nothing hidden from his direct view, and he sees the globe being so very minuscule. All the planets throughout the ten-directional phenomenal matrix are seen ubiquitously at that very moment. Not only can he see the entire world globe, but myriads of each type of sentient beings moving about with their activities on this globe as well. Each diminutive being, whether with form or formless, altogether appear in the *Prajña* wisdom. There is no need for the physical eyes, but the practitioner would still see them all, and only then can one say that one is in complete absorption in *Prajña*. Once the practitioner is purely *Prajña*, nothing can obstruct his view. Whether large or small, many or few, far or near, everything would be directly and lucidly known simultaneously. Only then can one say that one has immersed as *Prajña*.

Therefore, at that very moment there is no more the Awakened One per se, because he is now "just as *Prajña*." His eyes are *Prajña* and they are actually the brilliant wisdom beyond mind, no longer being that which sees and understands within the framework of the six aggregates. "To see" or "to illumine" are ordinary terms, which do not have the capability to describe the presence of *Prajña* in that very moment.

Since the practitioner already is *Prajña*, we would therefore use the coined term "to be vividly present." It means for this practitioner *Prajña* is ever emanating vividly in the presence where nothing is hindered, transcending space and time. *Prajña* is explicitly displayed, ever emerging in the presence. The presence is the natural display, and the natural display is the presence beyond any concept of time and space. The all-transcendent wisdom thus ever emerges, ever being in the presence and ever being revealed. It is not just, because we understand, realize or enter it, but now *Prajña* already displays itself.

When *Prajña* nakedly appears, it is the spontaneous emergence, the presence, the existence, the reality, the unfailing actuality, and nothing else other than that.

Since limitless years until now, *Prajña* has always been displayed, but we do not have enough vigor to be absorbed in this immaculate, quiescent and empty reality. *Prajña* has never been obscured by time and space, and thus, we call it unborn, unceasing, non-increasing, non-decreasing. That is, indeed, reality in the presence; it cannot be otherwise.

When we reached here in our reading, we conclusively came to know that since limitless time until now, *Prajña* has always been like that. It is not that we now realize it, attain it or accomplish it, but it has always been innately as such. However, we did not come upon this truth priorly, and now we suddenly came to know that it has always innately been as such, ever exhibiting itself, ever being the very reality in the presence, luminous, perfectly whole and complete. There is nothing else that can be done here. A person who has truly arrived here sees everything as such. He or she no longer needs to exert any strenuous efforts.

Once we have come to know this, we actually can see something very interesting here. It means that we can summarize the essence of these successive verses, “*There is no form, no sensation, no perception, no mental formation, no consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind; no realm of eye-consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness; no knowledge, no ignorance, no extinction of knowledge, and no extinction of ignorance; up to no aging and death, and no extinction of aging and death; no suffering, origination, cessation and path; no wisdom and no attainment,*” and all the way to the end, as follows: the Awakened Being is *Prajña*, *being just as Prajña*, *ever being vividly present as Prajña*, *ever displaying Prajña*, *ever existing in the realm of the vivid presence.*

We can thus briefly define *Prajña* as follows: “*Prajña is the reality, the vivid pristine presence, the natural emergence, explicitly spontaneous, never concealed or lost because of space and time.*” The Buddhas and our patriarchs have never held back anything from us. They have always wanted us to see with *Prajña*, to hear with *Prajña*, to smell with *Prajña*, and to taste with *Prajña*, so that we can enjoy the presence of the sphere of the *Prajña* reality.

If we can leave this presence and find something else better, then by all means, we should. However, there is nothing that even comes close to being comparable to this reality of vivid presence. Do not ever fantasize about pursuing the path to attain something that is separate from this reality and presence; there will be no such thing. Only when we open our Dharma eyes, which means to widely open our eyes of the pristine presence that we can penetrate and transcend all that has seemingly been hidden from us since immemorial time until now. We need to unveil this reality right in this very presence and right here on this spot without having to go anywhere. Do not leave this very spot in order to see, and do not leave this very spot in order to hear, and there we are, already in the realm of *Prajña*.

*“Being vividly and naturally present”*

*“Therefore, the Awakened Being, just as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, is being vividly and naturally present.”* Here, had we translated it as *“abides,”* rather than *“being vividly and naturally present”* then it would have been quite erroneous. If there is still a place for us to abide in, and there is still a *“self”* for the *“self”* to abide in, then that is not correct. We have taken the approach that goes beyond translation and rendered it as *“being vividly and naturally present”* instead. Here, it means without practice exertion, without concentration, without attention, without effort, because there is no effort whatsoever herein. *Prajña* is something that is peaceful and stable, truly pure, spontaneous and naturally as such. For a practitioner who has arrived here, there is no more practicing effort to accept or to reject, as there is no more right or wrong, and no more need to do anything else whatsoever. For such a practitioner, it is a state of tranquil, blissful, crystal clear, stable, spontaneous and genuine. *Prajña* is the natural emergence as such, and if we were to do anything else deliberately, then *Prajña* cannot be shown. Any kind of effort would be erroneous for *Prajña*. Therefore, once *Prajña* has lucidly been revealed, the practitioner will be *natural and serene*. Whoever is *natural and serene, existing as the very state of radiant clarity and peaceful naturalness*, will be free, peaceful, at ease, flexible and flowing seamlessly without impediment.

That is why we ended up using the coined term *“being vividly and naturally present.”* There are no other words to use! Our ability to express verbally reaches its end here, but we are quite delighted with the use of this term. Why, because we cannot possibly come to a standstill or grasp at such a term. When you read these four words, no one can grasp at it or to hold it back. This choice of usage is fluid, free and at ease, natural and spontaneous, yet it can reveal the reality. This reality is being revealed naturally and spontaneously without effort.

That is why in the *Khuddaka-nikāya Sūtra*, the Buddha said, *“There is that which is unborn, non-constructed, non-existent, non-created. Because of that which is unborn, non-constructed, non-existent and non-created, the Tathāgata thus spoke of transcending birth, old age, sickness and death. Otherwise, had there not been that which is unborn, non-constructed, non-existent, non-created, then how can the Tathāgata speak of transcending birth, old age, sickness and death.”* So then, what is *that*? That is the *vivid emergence* of the pristine, lucid presence, the display of naturalness, the reality that is serene, blissful, pure, calm, and spontaneous. It is not something which we have to work at, or something which can be gained through practicing with exertion.

The coined term *“being vividly and naturally present”* is to speak of no realization, no attainment, not accepting, not denying, non-immaculate, non-defiled, non-increasing, non-decreasing. We can use *“being vividly and naturally present”* as a definition to replace all of the terms preceding it. It can even replace the following words, such as, *“the existing reality, at the present time, here, now,”* etc. All those terms are insufficient to fully describe *Prajña*,

but “*being vividly and naturally present*” can speak of the entire realm of the existent reality, the pristine presence, the existence that is peaceful, blissful and naturally spontaneous. That is the sphere of *Prajña*, the transcendental wisdom.

Therefore, for a practitioner who has arrived at the genuine truth and completely dissipated into *Prajña*, being *just as Prajña*, then he would always display *Prajña*. *Prajña* becomes the existing reality, tranquil, stable, free and at ease – the state of naturalness, simplicity and spontaneity. Yet, there is no more practice exertion. Once the practitioner arrives here, it is called ultimate realization. Realization is thus not difficult. Quite easy, indeed – there is no need to perform anything anymore, and it will become *Prajña*.

If someone asks you what *Prajña* is, you only need to answer with these words “*being vividly and naturally present*.” *Prajña* is nakedly apparent, never once lost or obstructed, and no one can make it stained, defiled, nor increased or decreased. No one can make it disappear even for an instant, and nothing can veil it or obscure it. Thus, ignorance does not exist here. This existent presence does not hold any ignorance, and there is no need to wane ignorance either. Because all phenomena already naturally display themselves and emerge vividly and nakedly. To emerge vividly and nakedly is the vivid and naked appearance of Voidness, of the present existence and of the blazing, unobstructed wisdom of great clarity – it is naturally, spontaneously as such. If there is still even a tiny bit of an elaborated effort, then the practitioner has not yet been absorbed completely.

If the practitioner truly immerses as the pristine presence, he will exhaust all of his practice effort; he is no longer capable of exerting any practice effort because everything is now simply “*being vividly and naturally present*.” You can call that state the brilliant simplicity, if you wish. There will be *the end* to practice effort or training, and there is no longer anything which one can grasp at. I am truly delighted with this coined term “*being vividly and naturally present*.” I think the Buddha has allowed us to utilize this new coined term, which is competent in illustrating *Prajña* from a profound depth. Otherwise, we have always relied on our consciousness ever long ago until now to illustrate the “*innate nature of Prajña*” as this or as that. That is still being very far from the truth. Reaching here, however, gives one the authority to speak of the depths of *Prajña*. Thus to speak of the mind of a person who is totally absorbed in and as *Prajña*, it is a mental state of pure simplicity that is perfectly fluid and nonobstructed.

**TT 23. *cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvād atrastro* – mind is devoid of obscuration and fearless**

<i>cittāvaraṇa</i>	<i>nāstitvād</i>	<i>atrastro</i>
thought-covering, mind-covering, mind's obscuration, mind's hindrance	because of the non-existence	<b>-atrastro</b> (a phonetically form of <b>trastah</b> ): not frightened, fearless
<p><i>Literal translation:</i>                      -because there is no mind-covering, he is not frightened                      -because of the non-existence of obscuration in the mind, he is fearless,</p>		
<p><i>Beyond translation:</i> <b>because mind is devoid of obscuration, he has no fear</b></p>		

**TT 24. *viparyāsātikrāntahniṣṭhā-nirvāṇah* – bringing *Nirvāna* to perfect completion**

<i>viparyāsātikrāntah</i>	<i>niṣṭhā</i>	<i>nirvāṇah</i>
<b>-viparyāsa</b> : confusion, delusion, perverted views <b>-ātikrāntah</b> : having passed, having transgressed, having passed beyond	being situated on, grounded on, devoted to, to fix in	the fire of craving, attachment, clinging, delusion is blown out, free from the cycle of birth and death, a state of total peace, bliss and liberation, the ultimate transcendental state.  *According to Mahāyāna Buddhism, <b>nirvāṇah</b> is not separated from <b>samara</b>
<p><i>Literal translation:</i>                      -having passed beyond confusion-delusion, is situated on (stays in) <b>nirvāṇah</b>                      -having passed beyond confusion-delusion, is devoted to <b>nirvāṇah</b></p>		
<p><i>Beyond translation:</i> <b>gone beyond confusion-delusion, he brings the ultimate transcendent state to perfect completion</b></p>		

When a practitioner “is being vividly and naturally present” as *Prajña*, he is gracefully flowing throughout the vast sphere of perfect phenomenal reality. His mind, therefore, is free from impediment, liberating and transcending all confusion-delusion. In other words, all confusion-delusion has dissolved into *Prajña*. There is no confusion-delusion here. In the preceding verse, we already said that there is no ignorance, and thus no extinction of ignorance. If there is no extinction of ignorance then confusion-delusion absolutely does not exist here either, and this practitioner, therefore, brings the state of ultimate *Nirvāna* to perfect completion.

An Awakened Being, when fully awakened, is, indeed, *Prajña*. *Prajña* is ever displayed. When *Prajña* is displayed, that is reality in the existing presence, so tranquil, stable, blissful, immaculate, spontaneous and natural. That is the ultimate sphere of an Awakened Being.

Therefore, an Awakened Being, or an enlightened one as we would say succinctly in Vietnamese, is “*just as*” the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, being vividly and naturally present*, his mind flowing unobstructedly without stagnation, beyond confusion and delusion, reaching supreme *Nirvāna*. A person reaching *Nirvāna Without Remainder* is someone who perfectly completes the enlightened ultimacy on the path of liberation.



**TT 25. *tryadhvavyavasthitāḥ sarva-buddhāḥ* – all Buddhas of the three times**

<i>tryadhvavyavasthitāḥ</i>	<i>sarva</i>	<i>buddhāḥ</i>
three times (past, present and future)	all	Buddha, an fully enlightened being, a fully awakened being
<i>Literal translation: All Buddhas of the three times</i>		

**TT 26. *prajñāpāramitām āśritya* – ever being vividly present as *Prajñā***

<i>prajñāpāramitām</i>	<i>āśritya</i>
<i>an accusative case of <b>prajñāpāramitā</b> (the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom) so <b>prajñāpāramitām</b> becomes the object of the verb <b>āśritya</b></i>	adhere, join, rest on, depend on, rely on, abide in, be near to
<i>Literal translation:</i> -abiding in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom -relying upon the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom	
<i>Beyond translation: are ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</i>	

**TT 27. *anuttarāṃ samyaksambodhim abhisambuddhāḥ* – perfectly complete the fruition of Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment**

<i>anuttarāṃ</i>	<i>samyaksambodhim</i>	<i>abhisambuddhāḥ</i>
- <i>an</i> : not - <i>uttara</i> : higher, excelled, supreme - <i>anuttarāṃ</i> : not excelled by others, unexcelled, nothing more supreme	- <i>samyak</i> : true, correct, accurate, right - <i>sam</i> : all, together, thorough - <i>bodhi</i> : awakening, perfect wisdom, enlightenment, perfect wisdom - <i>samyaksambodhim</i> : true enlightenment	thoroughly awaken
<i>Literal translation:</i> -thoroughly awaken into Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment		
<i>Beyond translation: perfectly complete the fruition to Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment</i>		

All Buddhas of the three times, those who have become Buddhas in the past, those who are

becoming in the present and those who will in the future, are ever *being vividly present as Prajñā*. Thus, if they wanted to become Buddhas in the past, they had to always *be vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*; if they want to become Buddhas in the present, they, too, must *be vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, and in the future, if they are not *being vividly present as the All-Transcendent Wisdom*, then they cannot become Buddhas. Therefore, at every moment *Prajñā* always reveals the reality in the presence, and the reality in the presence is the display of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom.

This is truly a magnificent closure! In the past, whoever became a Buddha must *be vividly present* in the expanse of *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*. Today, whoever attains enlightenment and becomes a Buddha will also *be vividly present* as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, and will simply manifest as such and nothing else! The Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom has never for a moment not *being vividly present*, whether in the past, the present, or the future. However, why is it that we cannot accept it?

As we reach the final section in our study of this text, we come to realize that there has never been an existent momentness without *Prajñā*. There has never been a momentness during which we have departed from *Prajñā*, because we do not have the ability to do so even if we want to speak about leaving *Prajñā*. From limitless times until now, *Prajñā* forever displays itself, always existing in the reality of the presence, always tranquil and spontaneous, always immaculate, completely aware, clear and quiescent, whole and complete, radiant and insightful. Why is it that we do not want to accept it as such, but rather, to dwell somewhere else? Currently, when we see, we see that there are our selves versus other phenomena. When we hear, we are saying that we are here to hear; when see, we are saying that we are here to see. We always either observe, understand, acquire or do not acquire, and if so, it means that we have not yet become naturally flexible, fluid and unobstructed. Seemingly, we do not want to understand what *being vividly present as Prajñā* is truly about.

*Prajñā* does not have a self to acquire or to not acquire. Here we are not talking about obtaining the truth, realizing the truth or about direct realization. Those concepts are of old! Here we are talking about *being vividly present as Prajñā* as there is no realization here. Who are we to realize something? Who are we to acquire direct realization? If there is still a person who gains direct realization, and if there is a truth for us to directly realize, then that is excessively far away from the truth because that is the language of duality. We, instead, will speak the transcendental language beyond dualities, and that is “*all Buddhas of the three times are ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom.*”

To speak of *Prajñā* is to speak of the wisdom that can transcend the three worlds, and in the three worlds, when we use such liberative terms to illustrate *Prajñā*, there is nothing which can hold them back either. Only then would it truly be the wisdom of *Prajñā*, because if it were ordinary wisdom, then we would be stranded in the old expressions or usages as rendered in the age-old classic renditions of *Prajñā*. For me, therefore, to be able to come across the Sanskrit root text and to express *Prajñā* using the transcendental language

beyond dualities is something so precious which I would dare to not trade even for a thousand treasuries of gems. It is wondrous beyond wondrous! This scripture is so precise in each word and each sentence. It is truly transcendental, utterly gone, gone beyond, and no other words would suffice to fully express the true quintessence of *Prajña*. Only something like this can be called *Prajña* of the Buddhist Path.

We can see that the language of *Prajña* is truly something so liberating – it is wisdom in bare exposure, revealing unsurpassed liberation, impossible for anything to cling to anything. When we can meet *Prajña* face to face, we should have a sense of being completely dissolved, vanishing entirely into the ten directional phenomenal sphere of truth. Thus, we would say that the Buddhas of the three times “*ever being vividly present as Prajña.*”

These words (“*ever being vividly present as Prajña*”) sound quite gentle and pleasant to me, because they give no impression or sense of stagnation anywhere. It feels freely unimpeded, just like the kind of medicine to disentangle the restriction in the energy flow within the channels. Thus, when we read and study this *Prajña* scripture, we feel that from the very beginning until the end, everything is liberally flowing, and there is no chance for us to be held back or anything that we can cling to. If we continue to study *Prajña* for a while, perhaps we would automatically be absorbed in *Prajña* without even knowing! I believe that in the future, there will be many people who can bring their presence to perfect completion based on this translation beyond translation. Because it is something that is without stoppage, and there exists no restriction anywhere even if you want to look for one. As far as the choice of words is concerned, we will not be able to find any constraint in them even if we want to. The terminologies which have been used in this rendition are all flowing, clear, lucid, and without any obstruction.

Therefore, the Buddhas in the past, *ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, reached the fruition of Supreme Enlightenment. The Buddhas in the present, too, *ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* which means their entire life is *Prajña*. They vividly manifest *Prajña* at all times; whether walking, standing, lying, sitting, talking, being silent, active or being quiescent – everything is, indeed, *Prajña*. If a practitioner, whether walking, standing, lying, sitting, talking or being silent, active or quiescent, is altogether *Prajña*, then he or she has become a Buddha. Thus, this section is to hereby summarize the preceding verse of “*the moment he deeply immersed in the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*” all the way until the moment Buddhahood is reached – from beginning until the end, this practitioner is perfectly *being vividly present as Prajña* at all times.

Body is *Prajña*, mind is *Prajña*, even the most subtle movements are also *Prajña*; jumping, dancing, screaming, speaking, or being mute are also *Prajña*. Once we have arrived here, there is nothing that is not *Prajña*, thus, altogether whatever we want to do is *Prajña*. If walking, standing, lying and sitting altogether are “*the vivid presence of Prajña,*” then at that

moment, we manifest the Buddha signs, and we have already become an Awakened Being! Nothing would not emerge as *Prajña*. "*Prajña is vividly present*" even when one speaks without the need to think about it, yet, whatever one expresses is perfect in accordance with the truth. On the other hand, thinking in and of itself is to fall back into the dregs of discriminating consciousness. Thus, should we want to speak of anything in the future, we should not try to bring up our mental thinking nor to rely on our brain. Utilizing the cleverness of consciousness is to fall back into the dregs of our conscious mindstream. Do not ever employ it again! Simply let the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom ever being vividly present*, and then, just as Buddhas of the three times, we will also perfectly bring to fruition the "*Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment*."

Wherever there is *no Perfect of All-Transcendent Wisdom*, that is not Buddha. If everything altogether is the *vivid presence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, then everything is Buddha. If at any moment in this life, we are *being vividly present* as the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, then we are present in the realm of the Buddhas, in the realm of awakening. Whereas at any moment we are not *being vividly present* as the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, then we are deluded beings.

"*All Buddhas in the three times, ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*." Who are the Buddhas then, one may ask? We can define Buddhas as those who are *ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*. *Prajñāpāramitā* has never for a moment not being vividly present, and that is why we call it *ever being vividly present*. There has never been a moment when this wisdom is not luminescent, not peaceful and immaculate, and therefore, it is called the ever *samādhi* or the ever meditative absorption. The ever meditative absorption is the absorption of the Buddhas – the Buddha *samādhi*. The Buddha *samādhi* is ever absorbed, ever one-pointedly concentrated and ever existent.

For a fully realized practitioner, where there is quiescence, there is accomplishment, yet, where there is movement, there is also accomplishment. Whether we are hustling, dancing, screaming or swirling around, if our mind remains perfectly calm, completely unruffled, then we would call this *ever being vividly present as Prajña*. *Prajña* can give birth to all movements and functions, yet *Prajña* remains *naturally serene*. *Prajña* always manifests, yet, always *naturally serene*. In their own terminologies, when the patriarchs spoke about the equanimous, non-discriminative oneness of meditative absorption and wisdom, that is the same as "*Prajñāpāramitā ever being vividly and naturally present*" or "*ever being present as natural Suchness*." The lucid awareness emerges decidedly, illumining and penetrating, yet it remains unalloyed at the same time. That is both meditative absorption and wisdom in union, and here we are referring to the features of *Prajñā*.

When *Prajñā is ever being present as natural Suchness*, we will see that within the sphere of phenomenal truth, all hustling and bustling retain their individual manifestation and form, and nothing has ever changed whatsoever. All forms, sounds, smells, tastes etc., as well as the entire realms of sentient beings and holy beings, including those of Buddhas and

Bodhisattvas, manifest vividly, ubiquitously in their entirety, yet, each one of them faithfully preserves their own uniqueness. Everything *is being vividly present*, very systematically and very orderly; there is nothing that is in chaos with anything else in the sphere of phenomenal truth. When *Prajñā* is *being vividly present*, it is a realm of infinite wonders.

Therefore, when *Prajñā* is *being vividly present*, it is the most revered, the supreme of the supreme; it is the sphere of phenomenal truth in the lucid presence where everything emerges infinitely and manifests boundlessly as vastness. The *vivid presence* of *Prajñā* contains all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and phenomena, including the Milky Way and the galaxies. This is the all-genuine phenomenal matrix, the expanse of true existence and reality in the presence. When *Prajñā* is *being vividly present*, everything ubiquitously is *vividly present* in its entirety. We really cannot describe the profundity of its manifestation in our ordinary human language. It is the sphere of *Prajñā* in the presence, and the entire phenomenal realm of truth cannot but to bow with utmost reverence.

**TT 28. *tasmāj jñātavyam: prajñāpāramitā mahā-mantra* – *Prajñāpāramitā* should be known as the great wisdom (and not as a great ‘mantra’)**

<i>tasmāj</i>	<i>jñātavyam</i>	<i>prajñāpāramitā</i>	<i>mahā-mantra</i>
therefore	know, perceive, understand, discover, clarify	- <i>pra</i> : prior, before - <i>jñā</i> : knowing, knowledge, understanding - <i>prajñā</i> : wisdom, the wisdom prior to knowledge (e.g. pristine wisdom, wisdom in the vivid presence, wisdom prior to the working of the conceptual mind, transcendental wisdom, ultimate wisdom) - <i>pāram</i> : the other - <i>itā</i> ( <i>past passive participle</i> ): arrived - <i>prajñāpāramitā</i> : <i>Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</i> (e.g. have attained enlightenment, have transcended)	- <i>mahā</i> : great - <i>mantra</i> : a sacred message or text, charm, spell, counsel (commonly understood as a word or sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation)
<i>Literal translation:</i> -therefore, <i>prajñāpāramitā</i> should be known as the great <i>mantra</i>			
<i>Beyond translation: Therefore, <b>Prajñāpāramitā</b> should be known as the great wisdom</i>			
<p><i>*Summary: Right from the very beginning, after reading the rough draft of the Sanskrit-Vietnamese rendition, Zen Master Tuệ Hải explained to the translator that through his meditative absorption, he saw that the word ‘mantra’ (mantra, mantrah) needed to be replaced by the word ‘wisdom.’ Later on, the following information showed up to confirm the master’s insight. In the ‘Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines &amp; Its Verse Summary (Conze, 1973) and the ‘Twenty-Five Thousand Verses of Prajñāpāramitā’ (or the Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, as it is known in Chinese and as translated by the illustrious master translator and Buddhist monk, Kumārajīva, from the Kingdom of Kucha in the 4th-5th century), the word ‘vidyā’ (knowledge, higher knowledge, wisdom) was consistently used across the board, instead mantrah (mantra). In the original Sanskrit text mentioned above, as well as in the Prajñā literature, in general, Prajñāpāramitā has always been referred to as the <b>ultimate and all-transcendental practical wisdom</b>, as also pointed out by Jayarava, and not as a kind of sacred spell or utterance to aid concentration in meditation. As such, the word ‘wisdom’ is used in place of ‘mantra’ in our rendition, because this is considered to be a concluding sentence to reinforce that Prajñā is the ultimate all-transcendental wisdom that can bring complete liberation and enlightenment.</i></p>			

**TT 29. mahā-vidyā mantraḥ anuttara-mantraḥ asamasama-mantraḥ – Prajñāpāramitā should be known as the great awakening, unsurpassable, unparalleled wisdom**

<i>mahā-vidyā</i>	<i>mantraḥ</i>	<i>anuttara</i>	<i>asamasama</i>
<p><b>-mahā:</b> great  <b>-vidyā:</b> knowledge  <b>-mahā-vidyā:</b> great knowledge, wisdom                      -Additional meaning: as a terminology in Early Buddhism, <b>vidyā</b> can be defined as the non-discriminatory wisdom, or the clear knowing with equanimity</p>	<p>a sacred message or text, charm, spell, counsel (commonly understood as a word or sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation)</p>	<p>supreme, unsurpassed, unsurpassable</p>	<p>unequaled, unparalleled</p>
<p><i>Literal translation:</i>                      -the <i>mantra</i> of great knowledge, the unsurpassed <i>mantra</i>, the unequalled <i>mantra</i>                      -the <i>mantra</i> of great wisdom, the unsurpassed <i>mantra</i>, the unparalleled <i>mantra</i></p>			
<p><b>Beyond translation: the wisdom of great awakening, the unsurpassable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom</b></p>			
<p><i>*Summary:</i> In the 'Eight Thousand Lines of Prajñāpāramitā &amp; Its Verse Summary,' there are the following equivalent verses with six adhered adjectives to describe the qualities of the Prajñā wisdom: "O Kauśika, Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra is the great <b>wisdom (vidyā)</b>, the immeasurable wisdom, the illimitable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom, the unsurpassed wisdom, the unequalled wisdom." Also, in the 'Twenty-Five Thousand Verses of Prajñāpāramitā' (Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra), when Śakra, the Lord of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, asked the Buddha as to "why Prajñā is considered the great <b>vidyā (wisdom)</b>, the unsurpassed wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom," the Buddha literally replied that "it is through this <b>vidyā (wisdom)</b> that all Buddhas reach complete and perfect enlightenment."</p>			

**TT 30. sarva-duḥkha praśamanaḥ satyam amithyātvāt – transcending delusional suffering and is ever truthful**

<i>sarva</i>	<i>duḥkha</i>	<i>praśamanaḥ</i>	<i>satyam</i>	<i>amithyātvāt</i>
all	suffering	tranquilizing, pacifying, curing, healing	( <i>adjective</i> ): truly	<p><b>-a:</b> not  <b>-mythya:</b> incorrect, wrong, improper, non-incorrectness  <b>-amithyātvāt:</b> because of/on account of not being wrong</p>
<p><i>Literal translation:</i>                      -tranquilizing all suffering, truly on account to its non-incorrectness                      -curing all suffering, truly on account of its non-correctness                      -healing all suffering, truly because of it not being wrong</p>				

Beyond translation: **transcending all delusional suffering, ever truthful, undeceptive**

*“Prajñāpāramitā is the great wisdom”*

*“Therefore, Prajñāpāramitā should be known as the great wisdom, the wisdom of great awakening, the unsurpassable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom, transcending all delusional suffering, ever truthful, undeceptive.”* This is the concluding paragraph, and thus, it specifically speaks of *Prajñāpāramitā*, the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom and nothing else. Only an expert and realized practitioner with enough wisdom can dissolve into *Prajñā*. Whoever exists in the sphere of *Prajñā* is one of great wisdom. To speak of *Prajñā* is to speak of wisdom, and to speak of wisdom is of *Prajñā*. Therefore, *Prajñāpāramitā* should be known as the great wisdom. When we are present in the sphere of *Prajñā*, our wisdom pervades the ten-directional phenomenal realm of truth, and all other realms clearly appear in this pervasive wisdom.

The very moment we dissolve as *Prajñā*, wisdom instantaneously manifests in the very vivid presence. This wisdom utterly penetrates and fathoms the entire *dharmadhātu* ubiquitously with great equanimity. Whatever there is in this sphere of phenomenal truth will appear altogether at the exact same time. If, at the time being, we are not able to see, hear, smell, taste and feel ubiquitously at the exact same time, it means that to us, all phenomena did not emerge at the exact same time – and if so, then it is a proof that we have not yet acquired this great wisdom.

Sometimes when we are sitting by ourselves, we are aware that we can see with our eyes, hear the sounds with our ears, smell with our noses, touch with our bodies and our mind connects with its phenomenal objects. It means that our sense faculties and sense objects are clearly making contact with each other, and that we can relax and remain in the present moment. However, this experience of ours is very different from that of someone who is deeply absorbed in *Prajñā*. What is the difference hereby? The difference is that a person who is absorbed in *Prajñā* does not use his eyes to see forms. When existing in *Prajñā*, forms emerge vividly without the need to rely on the eye faculties. For example, right now, our eye bases can only see what is in front of us, yet, we cannot see anything on the left, on the right or behind us. Whereas a practitioner who has immersed in and dissolved as *Prajñā* does not need to utilize their eye faculties to see, and secondly, they can see pervasively, being the all-transcendental wisdom itself. It means that they can see through solid walls and panels. Solidity and distance does not hinder their view. Nothing can block their all-seeing.

Whatever our sense faculties cannot see until now, we will be able to see it all at that moment. Currently we can only see the distance from here up to the blue celestial sphere, and that is the limit of our ordinary conception. It is because that is the furthest reach of our eye faculties; yet, when we are absorbed in *Prajñā*, we will no longer see the sky with its curve based on our perception. We now have the view of the sky sphere only because



we are standing on the oblate spheroid of the Earth. We are not able to go beyond the curve of the Earth, and therefore, we see the sky based on the arbitrary curve that is centered on ourselves. However, the sky is not curved the way we are seeing it with our perception. The sky sphere is not like an upside down ball, but it is so to us right now only because we are being bounded in our own restricted visibility.

Therefore, when we immerse in and as *Prajñā*, we will be liberated from the sense faculties of our physical bodies, and we will see the infinite boundlessness of true existence, of the realm of perfect truth, but not through our eyes though. Thereby, we will see the entire phenomenal matrix clearly and vividly, and we will thoroughly penetrate the three worlds, but not through our sense bases. This is the difference of someone who is completely absorbed in *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* is, indeed, wisdom, and this wisdom is automatically all-pervading. All-pervading does not mean that it only sees the forms, but it also directly fathoms all sounds and all phenomena throughout the realm of truth.

For example, if there is a low voice spoken somewhere ten kilometers away from us, we will not be able to hear it now, but after we immerse in *Prajñā*, we will be able to hear simultaneously whatever sound emerges in this realm of truth. This is a very special aspect of *Prajñā*, because once we are emancipated from our sense faculties and sense objects, we become pervasively boundless, pervasively inclusive, clear and vividly unhindered. If we are not pervasively boundless, not pervasively inclusive, not clear and not vividly unhindered, then that means we have not yet “*immersed in our true nature.*” Thus, if we say that someone has become “*realized,*” it means that he or she, at that mental instant, perfectly and thoroughly penetrates the entire realm of phenomenal truth. If they cannot fully and directly penetrate the entire realm of phenomenal truth, then such a person is not a realized being. Therefore, this is quite easy for us to compare and contrast when speaking of those who believe themselves to have reached the perfect, direct meditative realization.

If we have not once been liberated from the etched impressions of the body faculty, then we have not yet freed ourselves from all six-sense faculties. Just as it is expressed in the preceding verse, “*no realm of eye-consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness,*” there is no dent, no imprint of the sense bases, sense objects and consciousness hereby. When we speak of the etched impressions, we are talking about the level of limits of our body’s sense bases and their consciousnesses. Thus, *Prajñā* transcends the eighteen *dhātus*, the sense bases, sense objects and consciousnesses, and that is why it is infinitely boundless. Here it does not mean that it becomes immensely vast because we understand it to be so, but in reality, we will effortlessly fall into the expanse of illimitable boundlessness.

For a practitioner who is suddenly emancipated from the body faculty, he or she will actually see the world globe hanging and floating in space. It is as diminutive as a thousandth of a hair’s breadth and it shows how spacious his or her great wisdom is. For example, right now, the sun can only shine on half of the Earth and we call that daytime, and for the other half of the globe where light cannot reach, we call it nighttime. However,

at the time of complete absorption, we can perfectly see the entire Earth globe and no longer just one side. Then, we would know that we have *Prajñā*, the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom. Never say that “*direct meditative realization*” is a rather ordinary circumstance. It is never ordinary! If we have not arrived there, then we know that our *Prajñā* wisdom does not yet exist in the pure presence. Wisdom does not only mean to “*illumine*,” because nothing is not authentically being *exposed or displayed* in this wisdom. Thus, whether it is the downturned side, the upward side, the inside, the outside, each spot can be seen thoroughly at that time. For example, the sun cannot penetrate and shine through the inside of a downturned basin, yet, when the wisdom of *Prajñā* appears, there is no longer upside down, or down-side up, because everywhere is now *Prajñā*, utterly being shown with great clarity, perfectly whole and complete.

However, if we still live in perception, we cannot possibly see all aspects [of an object or a phenomenon]. For example, if we look at someone, we can only see his face in the front. However, after our *Prajñā* wisdom manifests, we will also see the back this person; this is truly so, and it is not due to our perception. At that time, we will utterly penetrate all phenomena without impediments, and see everything perfectly whole and complete, because it is no longer simply seeing one side but not the other side. Right now we are still being caught in sense bases and sense objects that we can only see one side and not its back. Therefore, if we still have perverted thinking, we can only see a single side, a single way, or a single direction, and it leads us to compare and to discriminate. But once *Prajñā* fully emerges, there will be no more differentiation, because *Prajñā* penetrates everything thoroughly without obstructions. It sees this side, as well as the other side, the front as well as the back of all phenomena, the “*true*” as well as “*false*” aspect, and the “*arising*” as well as the “*ceasing*.” It no longer simply sees birth but not death.

For example, when we are still alive, we can see when someone’s birth took place, but we cannot foresee where his death will take place. However, for someone who has immersed in the wisdom of *Prajñā*, he can see this person right now, his whereabouts after death as well as his reincarnation afterward. Actually, it is not simply seeing what will occur after this person dies and what his next life will turn out to be, but *Prajñā can penetratingly see through in one single momentness infinite lives until the day he reaches full enlightenment!* *Prajñā* can also go back to review all this person’s past lives, from the primordial, germinal sprouting of his very first life to each of the rebirths which he took all the way to this very minute. That is what happens when *Prajñā* manifests.

For someone is fully absorbed in *Prajñā* or *being vividly present as Prajñā*, everything which is already perfectly whole and complete turns out to be utterly, perfectly so. When talking about all of the knowledge and apprehension of this mundane world, the Buddha by reflection said that, “*The worldly practical wisdom is like the light of a firefly, but the spontaneous non-learning wisdom is like the supreme and highest mountain, Mount Meru*” which is beyond measurement. Once *Prajñā* manifests, we can see all of the innate knowledge, comprehension, experience, self-realization and self-accomplishment of all sentient beings, and even all the wisdom attainment of all Buddhas and all great Bodhisattvas

altogether are *being vividly present* in this expanse of *Prajña*.

Once we arrive at this sphere of *Prajña*, all of the experiences and attainment of the hearers, solitary realizers and Bodhisattvas simultaneously emerge in this expanse. All wisdom altogether would emerge vividly; therefore, all wisdom of the great Bodhisattvas simultaneously appears in *Prajña*. Once *Prajña* manifests, this all-transcendent wisdom pervades all other kinds of wisdom, realization and meditative absorption. All of these kinds of absorption are vividly present in the *Prajña* wisdom at the same time. Even all of the lives we have practiced meditation, where we entered the first and second stages of meditative absorption, until we reach the holy sainthood, go beyond this state to perform Buddha activities to benefit beings, become Bodhisattvas until the day we reach the final supreme fruition similar to that of all Buddhas in the ten direction – all of these would be vividly present synchronously in this *Prajña* wisdom.

Therefore, *Prajña* is decidedly wisdom, the great wisdom, the great awakening, and that is how it is. There is not a single awakening fruition of the ten-directional Buddhas which fails to emerge in this *Prajña*. When *Prajña is being vividly present*, every realization, attainment of all Buddhas, all Bodhisattvas, all hearers, all noble holy beings throughout the ten-directional *dharmadhātu*, appear in concert at once in *Prajña*. It should thus be known that *Prajña* is “*the great wisdom*.” Hereby, it is confirmed that *Prajña* is the infinite wisdom with no boundaries, the unsurpassable wisdom, and the ultimate wisdom which nothing whatsoever can be compared to. *That is Prajña* then. *Prajña* is the unexcelled wisdom, the supreme awakening of all Buddhas, all great Bodhisattvas and all Holy Beings. That is the culminating wisdom, the peerless, all-time wisdom that has no equal. No other wisdom can be as penetratingly unhindered as this wisdom. No other wisdom can be compared to this wisdom, and that is *Prajña*.

When we study *Prajña*, we may not yet have the capability to truly apprehend it. In reality, there is no way that one can so-called “*comprehend*” the all-transcendent wisdom, and that is why in the preceding verse, it is said, “*there is no wisdom and no attainment*.” If we still hold on to conventional wisdom and attainment, it means that we still exist within limitation. We must go beyond the ordinary wisdom, beyond all denial, assertion, knowledge, theories, definitions, etc. because all of those belong to the fields of the intellect which is so minuscule. For a person who is totally absorbed in *Prajña*, there is truly no more learning needed. It is because ordinary wisdom is now *Prajña*, which includes the all-time wisdom, pervading the ten-directional sphere of reality. There is neither intelligence nor knowledge that is comparable to *Prajña*. We call it incomparable because all of the worldly intelligence and knowledge is too insignificant! So as far as *Prajña* is concerned, there is no need for learning, yet it knows the entirety of everything.

“*Ten Epithets of a Buddha*”

So now we can speak of the ten epithets of the *Tathāgata* in the context of *Prajña* wisdom in the vivid presence, which are as follows: Thus Come One (*Tathāgata*), Worthy of

Offerings and Reverence (*Arhat*), Complete Enlightenment and Omniscience (*samyak-saṃ-Buddha*), Perfect Accordance of Knowledge and Conduct (*vidyā-charana-sampanna*), Well-Attained One (*sugata*), Understanding the World (*lokavid*), Unexcelled One (*anuttara*), Trainer of Beings (*purusha-damya-sārathi*), Teacher of Gods and Men (*shāstā-deva-manushyānām*), Enlightened World-Honored One (*Buddha-bhagavat*).”

1. “*Thus Come One*” means without coming or going, which is referring to the vivid presence of *Prajña*!

2. “*Worthy of Offerings and Reverence*” has two meanings. One has to do with the manifestation of the enlightened one to whom the gods and humans can make offerings. Here it is related to *virtuous merit*. The second meaning has to do with *wisdom*, which means that the enlightened one can provide everything pervasively. When we say to provide, we may think that right now if we want to raise our hand, then our hand is raised; if we want to see, hear, touch, and cognize sense objects, then our eyes will see, our ears will hear, our noses will smell, our bodies will touch, and if we want to see, then we can see mind’s objects. However, all of that, too, is insufficient. Worthy of Offerings and Reverence means that one is capable of manifesting all phenomena in this *dharmadhātu*, which we call the all-pervasive manifestation. It means the capability to give rise to all phenomena, including the universe; if so, then that is truly *Tathagāta* and *Prajña*.

3. “*Complete Enlightenment and Omniscience*” is the all-pervasive, boundless knowing wisdom-awareness without limitations. That is *Tathagāta* as well as *Prajña*.

4. “*Perfect Accordance of Knowledge and Conduct*” is the perfect wisdom and enlightened activities; there is nothing else that can be said about this wisdom. This wisdom is flawless and it needs no correction or adjustment. No polishing and no further training is necessary. It is because once *Prajña* already emerges, not only will wisdom become perfectly complete but conduct, too, will be perfectly complete. Thus, “*the moment*” one immerses in and dissolves as *Prajña*, the fruition of *Buddhahood* is perfectly completed, and there is no more need for practice. One’s conduct and practice already reached the state of perfection although one does not need to do anything further.

When one is *being vividly present* as *Prajña*, one utterly completes the fruition of Unexcelled, Right and Perfect Enlightenment. The Buddhas of the three times, too, are *being vividly present* in this expanse as they reach culmination; one cannot possibly separate from the expanse of *Prajña* and attain the Unexcelled, Right and Perfect Enlightenment. Therefore, if we are aspired to also reach the state of Unexcelled, Right and Perfect Awakening, we need to *be vividly present* as *Prajña*. This very presence is nothing but the pure presence of *Prajña*. If right here we become utterly absorbed in this presence, then this presence is, indeed, the presence of *Prajña*. When *Prajña* is *vividly being present*, that is called the perfect accordance of conduct, wisdom and virtuous merits. It simply means that both wisdom and activities are simultaneously complete.

5. “*Well-Attained One*” (or “*Well-Departed One*”) simply means that the Awakened Beings themselves have passed through every fruition of attainment of all Holy Noble Beings and have directly experienced the wisdom of the Bodhisattvas in the ten directions in order to reach the fruition of Supreme Awakening.

After the practitioner immerses completely in the perfect *Prajña*, he can thoroughly see all of the cycles of life-and-death of all beings pervading the entire *dharmadhātu*. He or she would cultivate the desire to save and to help deliver all beings without exception, and if there is still one being who has not yet reached Buddhahood, then this Bodhisattva cannot quiescently remain in the state of *Nirvāna*. At this existence, it is similar to making aspirations, yet, it is not exactly seen as aspirations any longer. It is actually wisdom-awareness that has emerged in the presence. The loving and kind mind is being revealed, and thus, the awakened being, when seeing all of the suffering in the ten-directional phenomenal sphere, naturally and spontaneously develops compassionate empathy, and wants to bring transformation. It does not simply mean to transform a deluded being in an ordinary way, but to resolutely deliver all beings to the fruition of Buddhahood, and only then would the enlightened being’s activities be utterly complete. The perfect enlightened activities of a Bodhisattva means that all beings without exception become Buddhas as it is said in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, “*to deliver all sentient beings to perfection.*”

6. “*Understanding the World*” means there is nothing in this world which this enlightened being does not penetrate unobstructedly. There is no more need for learning. Of course, when we are still in the cycle of life-and-death, not yet arriving at the perfect *Prajña*, we can learn a few things in this life and a few other things in another life, and all of that is gathered to become our experience. That is the experience of our intellectual knowledge, and the recollection of what we have accumulated. However, our all-transcendent *Prajña* wisdom does not need any of that. Once it is *being vividly present*, then the enlightened being can peerlessly fathom everything in the mundane world, whether it is the front, the back, right or wrong, authentic or fabricated. It could be that, for example, this being has none of the experiences of a business entrepreneur; yet, he ends up knowing everything with clarity, such as what needs to be done to gain what kind of success and what to avoid so as not to fail. This enlightened being can also teach other entrepreneurs what to do although he himself has never been involved in the business world or in other mundane activities.

7. “*Unexcelled One*” is the learning beyond all learning, and it is the wisdom beyond all learning that has ever been learned. In reality, because it is already the non-learning wisdom so there is no need to even mention the learning beyond all learning, rather it is the wisdom that can teach all the knowledge in the three worlds, let alone the worldly intellectual knowledge. This kind of wisdom can edify the Bodhisattvas to become Buddhas as well as the ordinary beings to reach the fruition of awakening. This is the kind of wisdom that can unravel all other kinds of wisdom in the three worlds. It is the Master of all wisdom-attainment in the three worlds.

Thus, the concluding sentence, “*therefore, Prajñāpāramitā should be known as the great wisdom,*” is the wisdom pervading the ten directions. Actually, there is no being who does not have the capability to attain this wisdom, and this is such an extraordinary aspect! There is nothing in this cosmos, counting even the slightest visibility and the tiniest mental moment, which *Prajñā* does not irradiate. Each emergence in this phenomenal realm of truth, leaving behind none, is the luminous *vivid presence of Prajñā*. We are seeing each other here and that is the *vivid presence of Prajñā*. All *dharmas*, all phenomena are the *vivid presence of Prajñā*. What we are hearing right here is the *vivid presence of Prajñā*. It is *Prajñā*, which makes the entirety of this cosmos *be vividly present*, and thus, it is called the great wisdom.

8. “*Trainer of Beings*” is an Awakened Being who is fully absorbed in *Prajñā*, and who has the ability to train and pacify the celestial beings in the god’s realm, the ordinary beings in the human realm, as well as all sentient beings in the three worlds. Even those beings with heavy *karmic* debts, willful and obstinate, altogether can be tamed by the Awakened Being so that they can turn their mind toward the Dharma.

9. “*Teacher of gods and humans*” is the preceptor of all gods and humans.

10. “*Enlightened World-Honored One*” is the noble and revered being in the world.

Therefore, after a practitioner immerses in and dissolves as *Prajñāpāramitā*, the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, his or her wisdom and activities become entirely whole and complete, and thus, they are endowed with the above ten honorary titles.

The *Prajñā* wisdom can directly see everything, including the most minuscule and subtlest aspect of sentient beings to the culmination of attaining the fruition of Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment. *Prajñā* is the expanse of all Buddhas in the ten directions, and it is also the realm of truth in the very presence. Therefore, the very presence of this mental momentness is *Prajñā*.

Here, we can conclude that *Prajñā* is ever spirited, ever being, ever existing in the presence. *Prajñā* is this very momentness of presence, as well as all the movements and functions of all sentient beings. If in this very momentness of presence, we can penetrate the truth, we will not see with our eyes and nor use our intelligence to reach realization. We must, however, let all of our ordinary seeing, knowing, and knowledge extinguish, and let the sense bases, the sense objects, and the five aggregates succumb. It is because in *Prajñā* there are no five aggregates: “*No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind; no realm of eye-consciousness up to no realm of mind-consciousness,*” and that is the place of being perfectly whole and complete. Thus when *Prajñā* already manifests, there are no six-sense bases, or rather, no twelve inner and outer

sense bases, and no eighteenth elements. It is simply this very momentness of presence, the presence that goes beyond sense bases, sense objects and sense consciousness.

If right here we can see all forms and hear all sounds, but we are not relying whatsoever on our sense faculties, then we are totally absorbed in *Prajñā*. If, on the other hand, we still see with our eyes and listen with our ears, then we are not there yet. If we still have our sense bases and sense objects, it means our conceptual consciousness is still retained and we are those who have not yet transcended, and not yet able to immerse in *Prajñā*. Speaking of comprehension, we do comprehend; for example, we speak of Voidness as having no form, no non-existence, no five aggregates, no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mind's object; no realm of eye up to no realm of consciousness, etc. When we hear of this explanation, we nod our heads in agreement, and that is merely our intellectual understanding. Falling into the realm of *Prajñā* is not just mere understanding. In reality, if we have been authentically absorbed in *Prajñā*, then it is not a place for seeing subjectively, but it is where all forms simply emerge. It is not a place for listening but where all sounds emerge. It is not a place for smelling but where all scents are penetrated.

For example, let us say that there is a person who is facing us, then even a single root of hair on the top of his head to a single pore on the bottom of his foot down to all of the scents of his body, altogether can emerge vividly to us. If we can undergo this experience just once then we know that our all-transcendent wisdom has already penetrated unobstructedly. Another example is when another person is simply making some body movements at his house, which is happening about a thousand kilometers from where we are. What happens is that first of all, we can clearly and directly see and thoroughly penetrate everything; secondly, we can hear all of the sounds, and thirdly, we can smell all scents radiating from the sole of his feet and from all of his pores, including the subtle language that each of his bodily cells are producing. We can hear it all and know it all and not simply knowing what they are thinking in their heads. That is why we can say that *Prajñā* is wisdom, because if it is already wisdom emerging, then there is nothing that can be impeded, nothing that cannot be penetrated nor anything that cannot appear lucidly clear.

However, for a long time until now, we imagine that we are here sitting in quiescence, our mind is in absorption and pure, and we see, hear and smell everything without discrimination. We believe *that* is *Prajñā* wisdom, and *that* is Zen, but it is truly not so. That is merely some kind of fabricated Zen, but not the genuine tradition of Zen. Arriving at the level *Prajñā*, the authentic direct awakening meditation, means we have to reach the following dimension. At that precise moment, we will emerge as direct awakening, direct practice and direct realization in the very vivid presence, because the vivid presence of *Prajñā* is the presence of the sphere of all Buddhas. The presence of *Prajñā* refers to everything that is appearing in the ten-directional phenomenal cosmos. The mere fact that we are sitting here is *Prajñā* in the presence. The expanse of space is also *Prajñā* in the presence. Each minuscule mental moment in the entire universe is also *Prajñā* in the

presence. There is nothing that is not *Prajñā*. Once we arrive at this state of true existence, there is nothing, not a single move in the entire realm of phenomenal truth is not *Prajñā* in the presence.

Only then can we say that we have actually *reached* the expanse of *Prajñā*. However, if we say that we *understand* about the *Prajñā* sphere, then we will continue to be clogged up or obstructed as ever before. We can very well comprehend it, or nod our heads in agreement, that in Voidness, there is no form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind's object, but that is mere "*apprehension*." The truth is that *Prajñā* is this very presence; the truth is that this wisdom is existing in this presence, radiant and unimpeded, pervasive and is bringing all-time liveliness to all phenomena. This is something very different, because when we become radiant in order to penetrate, it does not mean that we are simply being tranquil in meditation. If we understand realization in such a way, then that is erroneous. At this moment of awakening, we can see that *Prajñā* has supplied all living force to this entire cosmos. This is something that is utterly exceptional!

*Prajñā* can unblock all obstructions in the ten-directional phenomenal realm of absolute reality. It gives rise to everything in this universe. It treasures everything, and nurtures every existing thing in this universe. It transfigures the outer forms of everything this universe possesses. Just like how we "*gather the four elements*" into a body so we can make use of it for seventy to eighty years. When we feel that we cannot use our bodies any longer, *Prajñā* will mutate the appearances of the four elements we currently possess; it will supply us with a new force for a newly changed body of four elements, and help us establish a new life, which is even more vigorous.

Thus, *Prajñā* gives birth to, and nourishes, all *dharmās*, and it metamorphoses all phenomena so that everything can be ever fresh, pristine, invigorating, and emerging vividly in the presence. This is something exceptional about *Prajñā*! Therefore, when someone is profoundly absorbed in *Prajñā*, the first thing that happens is that they will be completely, thoroughly unimpeded. Speaking of materiality, the physical body will be one hundred percent exhaustively unobstructed, and speaking of mentality, their mind, too, is exhaustively unobstructed. Throughout the sphere of phenomenal truth, everything is clearly unimpeded without boundaries as there is no separation between body, mind and the entire *dharmadhātu*, the absolute reality.

When we say "*there is no differentiation*," it does not mean that at that moment we do not compare or contrast. Here we are not talking about comparing or not comparing, but it means that everything is clearly palpable within a single *dharmā* or a phenomenon. For example, there is this earth globe of ours, the fixed star, the planet, the Milky Way or the galaxy within this gigantic, boundless universe. Yet, when we immerse in *Prajñā*, we can see all of that contained in a single grain of sand. It means that when we look at a blade of grass, a leaf, a flower, and the empty space within this universe, we can see that they contain the entire sphere of phenomena. It is just like a luminescent mirror, which absorbs



all of the materiality or phenomenal forms, and all of them are reflected in *Prajñā*. Therefore, if we were to use worldly vocabulary we will run out of words, because *Prajñā* is all-permeating, whole and complete, utterly uninhibited. All words are exhaustive and impossible to render *Prajñā*.

When speaking about the force of *Prajñā*, it is boundless and limitless. Even if it is just an infinitesimal germplasm, that, too, is given birth by *Prajñā*, and is sustained by *Prajñā*. Whether this phenomenal matrix is exuberant or not also depends on this all-transcendent wisdom of *Prajñā*. In reality, the entire sphere of absolute reality is ever dynamic.

Throughout this cosmos there is a living energy; it is the wondrous world and existing force of *Prajñā*, lively and vigorous where nothing comes to a stoppage. Whoever wants to come to a halt is erring. Standing still is not the sphere of *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* is always energetic with a speed extremely swift that even science these days thus far can only discover a portion of a billionth of a couple billions of its living force. People keep saying that space is standing still, or so it seems, but in retrospect, it is evolving at a speed that is impossible for anyone to calculate or measure. The mere thinking of our heads cannot possibly fathom it. Therefore, only someone who has immersed in *Prajñā* can fully see the energetic power of this unbounded, gigantic cosmos. It is this power that swirls everything that is contained in the universe into a single current and that current is similar to a helix.

For example, we now see how this earth rotates around the sun; it is from the workings of the spacious force so that the planets, fixed stars, Milky Way, galaxies altogether follow a certain direction and it can never be changed. Here we are talking about all of this to illustrate the actual all-pervasive seeing and knowing capability of *Prajñā*. Thus, we cannot say that *Prajñā* is simply knowing-awareness without any impact, as we normally understood from a mundane point of view in the past. For example, we would normally say we are looking at a flower, but we do not discriminate, compare nor have any effect on it, then we believe it to be the state of equanimity and call it realization. No, realization is not so simple like that! The force of impact of the phenomenal matrix of truth is equanimous, non-discriminatory; therefore, all beings living in this matrix receive its force equally in order for them to operate, to proliferate, to be alive and active. The essence of the phenomenal matrix's force manifests in every mental momentness in our mind and every minuscule cell in our bodies. Therefore, it is something that is alive with an immense, unlimited intelligence, whereas the scientists, after brainstorming, can only understand a small portion of a billion of a billion exponentials of a DNA.

As I have previously mentioned, if we want to analyze a small portion of our DNA and write a book about it, we can pile up all these books around the globe, yet we only have the proper knowledge to decode only a billionth of that DNA. Why is that so? Because it is something that belongs to the sphere of phenomenal truth. Whoever has the wisdom of this expanse of absolute reality has the ability to see the entire DNA code. DNA is interconnected unobstructedly with this sphere of phenomenal truth, and not with anything physical.

Therefore, if we use our intelligence, knowledge, memory or conceptual mind to decode our DNA, then that is a mistake. Once we let our consciousness be extinguished, then we can hope to understand somewhat about it. No apparatus can actually compute it fully, and therefore, our DNA will forever be a mystery of the universe. Not only our human but even the physical bodies of the lower sentient beings all possess this truth. This is, indeed, something very peculiar, and therefore, if we believe that materiality is born from material substances, then our understanding would be quite flawed. Ultimately, there is no such thing as conditioned materials or conditioned existence!

From a certain perspective, things can arise from the unification of conditions, but in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, it already speaks of “neither from cause-and-condition, nor from spontaneity.” Here it is not from cause and condition, nor is it natural. The genuine sphere of reality does not speak of “conditions,” but it is the sphere of wisdom, the sphere of “*Prajñā in the very vivid presence.*” Each presence is *Prajñā*, and it is not due to conditions. Each presence is the expanse of phenomenal truth and is no longer a condition. It no longer refers to the arising due to conditions. Conditioned-birth and conditioned-death is a point of view at the mundane level of the life-and-death cycle, yet, at the level of *Prajñā*, there is no such thing. Therefore, “*Prajñāpāramitā should be known as the great wisdom, the wisdom of great awakening, the unsurpassable wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom.*”

*Prajñā* pervades, thoroughly penetrates, directly and lucidly knows, and is flowing. When it is our turn to truly gaze at *Prajñā* face to face, we can actually feel how everything is so unobstructed that absolutely nothing can cling to nothing. There will not be any need for effort and exertion, nor training and practice, but every effort, exertion, training and practice must already be exhausted. We must exhaust all strenuousness and appetite in our conceptual mind. All yearning and wishing, allocation and conventions must end in our mindstream. Any affirmation, negation or concept must all vanish. All conventional routines and clichés must completely disintegrate at least once. There must no longer be any customary pattern whatsoever that is attached to our body, mind and circumstance. The twelve gates and the eighteen *dhātus* are simply a constructed framework, and yet, the perfect truth is not a place for this kind of right or wrong. Here in the dimension of *Prajñā* we are not talking about being alive or dead, living or dying, and thus, there is no suffering, origination, cessation nor path. There is also no wisdom and no attainment. There had never been any attainment, because there is no one here to even realize or attain. Here is simply *Prajñā* in the presence, and nothing else other than that.

When we speak of *Prajñā*, we are speaking of translucent wisdom without impediments. Speaking of *Prajñā* is to speak of the sphere of great awakening, of realizing the fruition and of unexcelled wisdom. Nothing can ever be compared to it, let alone speaking of anything being paralleled. When we talk about it being unexcelled, it means that there is nothing second to it, and nothing that can surpass. Well, not only being unsurpassed, but there is nothing whatsoever that can remotely be compared to it. Nothing can be paralleled to *Prajñā*. When we speak of *Prajñā*, it is the culmination of wisdom, paramount, perfectly whole and complete.

Therefore, if we are being slightly influenced by this perfect wisdom when we are studying *Prajñā*, then it is because *Prajñā* is the very source that gives birth to us. Our appearances manifest here due to the all-transcendent wisdom of *Prajñā*. We are still breathing and alive here is also due to the all-transcendent wisdom of *Prajñā*, and even all of our knowledge and understanding are due to the all-transcendent wisdom of *Prajñā*. From *Prajñā*, everything contained in this universe takes birth.

We all, therefore, are living actively in the natural realm of *Prajñā*. If we have enough insight to recognize this, then that is wisdom. To know this is to know that *this presence* is the stark display of *Prajñā*. All that which we see and know is actually the presence of *Prajñā*. Here we are not talking about “innate nature” versus “appearance,” but it is simply the vivid presence, the vivid emergence, the vivid display and absolutely nothing else! When we fall into the sphere of the presence, all-revealing, omnipresent, and all-awakening, then at that moment, we are overflowing with *Prajñā*. Actually, it is not that we are submersed in *Prajñā*, nor is it that *Prajñā* is overflowing, but this overflow itself is actually *Prajñā*, the superlative perfect wisdom. Therefore, “*Prajñā is the great wisdom, the wisdom of great awakening, the unsurpassed wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom.*”

“*Transcending confusion-delusion*”

In reality, the expression, “*transcending confusion-delusion,*” as shown in the scripture, is due to the love of the Buddha for us, whereas ultimately there is neither delusion nor suffering. *Prajñā is Prajñā*; it is wisdom, unimpededly clear, brilliant, boundlessly vast, permeating, unobstructively penetrating, thoroughly direct, free and at ease, and immaculate. Thus, herein, we speak of neither suffering nor happiness. Buddha used the conventional terms of suffering and happiness because the Buddha truly had compassion for us and wanted us to merely have some understanding of *Prajñā*, the state of wondrous and complete emancipation. Saying *Prajñā* transcends suffering and confusion-delusion is a skillful way to aid us so that when we hear of it, we can subtly gain some understanding of this state, yet, in reality, *Prajñā* is not something that can be understood merely through conventional means. Therefore, we no longer speak of transcending suffering and confusion-delusion, because *Prajñā* is beyond that. It is the wisdom that gives rise to all *dharmās*.

In this very momentness, immersing in *Prajñā* is to return to our pure essence, and when returning to our original source, each manifestation is but purity, as there is no suffering, happiness nor confusion-delusion. The wisdom of *Prajñā* is ever exposed where there is no trace of confusion-delusion. Whether we realize or do not realize the reality of the vivid presence will define the awakened wisdom. It is only because we have wrongly perceived this vivid presence in the past. Yet, for a wise man, he would see this very vivid presence as the awakened wisdom, the *Prajñā* wisdom, and how it flows unobstructedly without any stoppage no matter how temporarily. So then, that is called “*non-abiding.*” It is a state of absolute equanimity where there is not a single thing that can be tarnished or spoiled. It is

because *Prajñā* is perfect purity, utterly immaculate – a state of non-defilement where it is impossible to be spoiled.

Once we have absorbed in *Prajñā*, we become *just as Prajñā*, dissolve into *Prajñā*, *being vividly present as Prajñā*. Since *Prajñā* is utterly pristine, no one can ever make this realized being tainted, or to make *Prajñā* grow dim. There is absolutely no one who can possibly do that. All one can do once one reaches this state is to freely let go so that *Prajñā* can self-radiate, diffuse in glory, dissolve and be immaculately pristine. A wise one would remain unmoved, undisturbed, yet, a fool would want to change everything. All those desires to bring changes are a mistake no matter what kind of change. Anything that grows out of desire is erroneous. Right in this vivid presence, if we no longer want or are desirous of anything, then that very absence of desire is also being borne from *Prajñā*. However, even a desire cannot do anything extraneous for *Prajñā*; once it is born, it self-dissipates since *Prajñā* is whole and complete.

*“Ever truthful, undeceptive”*

If we can truly realize that a single grain of sand, or a single diminutive mental moment in this boundless cosmos, is utterly perfect and full, then that is the great wisdom, the unparalleled wisdom, the ultimate wisdom, transcending all delusional suffering. This is the place of undeceptive truth. How we love our Buddha for saying this last verse. When I read it, it touched me deeply! We are so ignorant to the point that the Buddha, after exhausting all of his words, yet afraid that we still have no faith in them, had to utter this verse about it being *“the truth, undeceptive.”* Herein, we can see how the Awakened Ones with unparalleled wisdom like the Buddhas and the great Bodhisattvas so much wanted to relay everything to us, yet they still doubted that we could possibly believe in their words.

We can imagine how our parents might have sat down to tell us a story of what our grandfather did in the past, or of something which our parents knew of, but while doing so, our father also recognized through a look in our eyes that we were still being doubtful about it. Therefore, our father had to conclude that, “I am telling you the truth, my child.” Aren’t we touched by it? We are the young children, yet, we do not have faith in the words of our elders, and so, being afraid that we do not have enough trust, the Buddha had to utter the last verse to which we could only bow down with deep reverence and nothing else. Such a saying is endowed with so much compassion for us: “Really, my child, I am telling you the truth!”

I felt deeply moved reading this verse! It is an expression full of compassion—telling us that it is *“the truth and it is undeceptive”*! Because the Buddha lovingly cared for us, and feared that as foolish as we are, we may not have any faith in it, and thus, he added this last sentence as if to say, “please believe me, because if you have trust in it, it will bring you great benefit!” Fearing us would not reap the benefit and not reach the place where the Buddha aspired for us to be, he ended up adding a concluding verse filled with loving-kindness and compassion.

Sometimes in the middle of the night while reading these verses, I myself was profoundly moved by the loving-kindness of the Awakened Ones toward sentient beings like us! Even the love of our parents is incomparable to the loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha. Although parents have great love for their children, and even they wish for their children to become famed across the four oceans, it is simply for the parent's honor. In that way, the love and the aspiration our parents have for us is something quite individualistic.

On the other hand, the Buddhas, the great Bodhisattvas and the Awakened Ones clearly see how distracted and disordered we are living in the continuous cycle of life-and-death. Until the day we reach the state of awakening on the Buddha-Dharma path, we remain in suffering. Each day not realizing that *Prajñā* is the great wisdom is a day of disorientation, living in anguish in the cycle of birth and death. Thus, the Buddhas, great Bodhisattvas and the Awakened Ones truly feel lovingly empathic toward us! As I have already said it, the Buddha would say, "*Please believe me for the sake of it!*" From the very depths of our hearts, we ourselves may not even be able to utter such a thing. Only with the kindness of the Buddhas that they can generate such genuine words without deception. I am saying the truth, I am telling you the truth, please believe me, the Buddha would say.

Every time I read about how the Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas expressed their spirit, their love and their wisdom, I could not help but to be moved to tears and to pay fervent homage to them, myself unable to utter a word for that matter! There is no worldly affection, no ordinary being who is capable of tending to the needs of all sentient beings in the same ways as those who have fully awakened! In one simple sentence, the truth of the loving-kindness of the Buddhas is fully revealed. Their love for us is so immense that they alone can express it in such a way. How honored we are to be followers of the Buddha-Dharma! The Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas care for us, nurture us, pamper us, watch out for us, lift us up, teach us, protect us and provide for us. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas grant us whatever they have, and in retrospect, we spontaneously feel a sense of glowing warmth!

There are those of us who are Buddhist followers who have lost our parents and feel quite lonely these days. However, come to think of it, we are endowed with the Buddhas' blessings, and are being nourished, protected, cared for, taught by and comforted by the Buddhas, which is perhaps, even more elated a feeling than living next to our parents. Because once our parents of this lifetime leave this world, there is no guarantee that they can nurture and protect us as do the Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can perfectly see the very root leading to our suffering. Thus, they look for ways to help us not fall in the traps and the pit of samsara, so that we will not get lost and become side-tracked and so that we can return to the Right Dharma to savor some little peace and happiness. From lifetime to lifetime, the Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas have tried different methods to elucidate the truth to us so that we can increase our merits, uncover our wisdom and progress higher and higher on the spiritual path.

Each progressive step we take on the enlightening path is due to the teaching, nurturing and shaping of the Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas. Each time they indulge us, they also teach us so that we do not tumble. Thus, we now can hear these words of gold: *“Please listen to me, my child, these words bear the truth and are undeceptive!”* It also means, *“Oh, please, for your own sake, please have a little bit of faith so that you can gain some merits and some wisdom!”* If we can trust in these teachings, then our wisdom-mind can become flowing; otherwise, if we lack faith then it would be impossible to unlock our wisdom and to reach enlightenment and liberation. Only trust in this and nothing else! They love us so much that all they want for us is simply have faith in it.

If I could, I would go on lighting incense from life to life for countless multitudes of lifetimes in order to express my devotion towards this concluding verse! It is something that can be called the great kindness here! Of all the love in these three worlds, only the loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha-Dharma can convey all of the subtle representation of the actions, gestures and spoken words of the Awakened Ones! It is extremely challenging, and only those who are enlightened are capable of making such statements. Therefore, for those of us who are studying the Buddha-Dharma, there will come a day when the whole of our being will quiver and become vigorously moved the moment we think of the activities of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Then, at that moment, we can have a small understanding of the Buddha-Dharma.

Whereas now, when we think of Buddha, we sometimes remain stone like, impervious, or when we think of the Bodhisattvas, no affection is developed. This means we have not yet deeply immersed in the wisdom of the Buddha-Dharma. We must somehow see that each of the flows and life energy, no matter how minuscule in our physical bodies carries the movement of *Prajñā* wisdom! *Prajñā* circulates within each tiny pulse of life in our physical bodies, and in our whole being. There is not a single moment during which we are not functioning within *Prajñā*. If we can somehow recognize this, we will be so exultant in this life! Here we no longer speak of having faith in it, but we have already become *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* is us. We are *Prajñā*. This is the genuine truth which we must recognize. It is not that we augment, exaggerate, or freely speak so thoughtlessly about it, but these are truly the concrete words of the Buddha.

All sentient beings are *Prajñā*. All there is in this sphere of phenomenal truth is simultaneously *Prajñā*. We are *Prajñā*, and when it is already *Prajñā* wisdom, then it is absolutely equanimous, non-discriminatory, pure, unobstructed, penetrating with sheer-ness, unborn and unceasing. Being *Prajñā* means there is absolutely no more suffering in this entire world. There is no longer birth and death because *Prajñā* is ever existing in the momentness of presence, and thus, we can no longer arbitrarily speak of life-and-death nor suffering and happiness here. If we have developed enough wisdom, we will see all of this happen directly to us, yet, on the hand, if we have not yet possessed this sheer existence, then it means we still lack true wisdom. That is why the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas had to exclaim to us, “Oh please, please have trust in it! *“Truthful, undeceptive”* also means *“for your own sake, please have faith in it!”* Retrospectively, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas truly

have so much love for us beyond expression.

For example, let us say there is a young child, and we come to him with a diamond in hand. We give this diamond to him and tell him that thanks to this diamond, your life in the future will be forever happily joyous. However, the child does not like the diamond stone as much as a piece of candy, because he can immediately put the candy in his mouth and eat it, whereas the diamond is of no benefit right now. We can spend the whole day trying to explain to him that with this diamond stone; you will eventually have a multi-story house, a car, a powerful position, high status, money, good food, beautiful clothes and all that you ever want, so please, you must believe in it, and please, for your own sake, please, please have faith in it!

Similarly, the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* is everything which the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas ever wanted to put into our hands and to entrust us with. What they wanted for us is not to hesitate nor wait, but to instantly reach perfection, to swiftly become radiant with perfect clarity and unimpeded, to immediately become emancipated and to reap the unexcelled Dharma fruition immediately without delay! This is a matter of urgency and hurriedness, something that we must reach and attain at once.

**TT 31. *Prajñāpāramitāyām ukto mantraḥ tadyathā* – to speak *Prajñāpāramitā* is to be being vividly present as the realm of truth**

<i>prajñāpāramitāyām</i>	<i>ukto</i>	<i>mantraḥ</i>	<i>tadyathā</i>
<p><b>-pra:</b> prior, before  <b>-jñā:</b> knowing, knowledge, to understanding  <b>-prajñā:</b> wisdom, the wisdom prior to knowledge (e.g. pristine wisdom, wisdom in the vivid presence, wisdom prior to the working of the conceptual mind, transcendental wisdom, ultimate wisdom)  <b>-pāram:</b> the other shore  <b>-itā</b> (<i>past passive participle</i>): arrived  <b>-prajñāpāramitā:</b> the wisdom that reaches the other shore (e.g. have attained enlightenment, have transcended)  <b>-prajñāpāramitāyām:</b> in the <i>Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</i></p>	<p>uttered, said, spoken</p>	<p>a sacred message or text, charm, spell, counsel (commonly understood as a word or sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation)</p>	<p>as following, as follows</p>
<p><i>Literal translation:</i>            -Regarding <i>prajñāpāramitā</i>, a <i>mantraḥ</i> has been uttered as follows</p>			
<p><i>Beyond translation:</i> <b>Thus, to speak of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is to be vividly present as the realm of truth</b></p> <p><i>* Summary:</i> The word ‘<i>mantraḥ</i>’ is replaced with the coined expression ‘to be vividly present as the realm of truth’ to correspond with the succeeding verse (‘<i>gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly freely beyond, perfectly awakened, svāhā</i>’) to confirm the superlative fruition of an enlightened person. It simply means that the person expounding <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i> himself cannot separate from the realm of truth, and expounding the perfect reality is the same as expounding <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>. ‘To speak of’ (to expound or to elucidate) means to reveal the core of <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>, and to honor us with the gift of <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>. Therefore, if we want to reap this gift of <i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>, we, too, must abide in the realm of truth in order to fully receive it.</p>			

This is the last verse to bring everything to conclusion. “*To speak of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is to be vividly present as the realm of truth.*” The one elucidating the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, whether expounding, bellowing, screaming, prancing or dancing, is simply being vividly present as the realm of truth itself. The entire realm of truth is, indeed, *Prajñāpāramitā*, the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, and is, indeed, the



elucidation of *Prajñāpāramitā*. The one expounding *Prajñāpāramitā* must never leave the realm of truth in order to teach, and the ones wanting to listen well to *Prajñāpāramitā*, they, too, must abide in the realm of truth in order to be able to thoroughly penetrate the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom. This is a concluding verse, and at the same time, a precious medicine for anyone who takes it can benefit from it.

Therefore, to speak of the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* is to *be vividly present as the realm of truth* simply means that the person expounding *Prajñāpāramitā* himself cannot separate from the expanse of *Prajñā*, and expounding the realm of truth is the same as expounding *the universal cosmic transcendent wisdom*. “*To speak of*” (to expound or to elucidate) means to reveal *Prajñāpāramitā*, and to honor us with the gift of *Prajñāpāramitā*. Therefore, if we want to reap this gift of *Prajñāpāramitā*, we, too, must remain in the realm of truth in order to fully receive it. Otherwise, if we remain in a different mental realm, we will not have enough fortitude to latch onto it. This is the most wondrous of the most wondrous conclusions I have come to know ever since. I would not want to trade it even for a mountain filled with diamonds. Such an awe-inspiring concluding verse beyond all wonders! As such, we do not wish to simply end everything here with a *mantra* as a repetition of utterance to transport us beyond thoughts, but we must bring transformation to it and end the entire scripture with a conclusion that is competent with its vision and with *Prajñā*!

And as far as the ones listening to *Prajñāpāramitā* are concerned, if they themselves want to dissolve into *Prajñāpāramitā* and to *be vividly present as Prajñāpāramitā*, then they, too, must return to the realm of truth, and the realm of truth is none other than this very presence. That is the realm of *Prajñāpāramitā*. That is how the Buddha expounded *the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom* without expounding, because *being vividly present* as the realm of truth is without words. That, verily, is the very sphere of culminating awakening, and that, verily, can be called to speak of or to elucidate *Prajñā*.

If the Awakened Ones had spoken of *Prajñā* since time immemorial, are they still speaking it now? Yes, *Prajñā* is still being expounded now and it will be forever expounded in this worldly realm. *Prajñā* is the ever-present expanse of perfect truth. Since time immemorial, it has been the realm of truth in the vivid presence. Now it still is. It will ever remain in the expanse of perfect truth in the very presence. If all of us exist in this instant presence of the realm of truth, it means we dissolve and immerse in *Prajñāpāramitā*, which is equivalent to elucidating *Prajñāpāramitā*. It is not only the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, or the sentient beings, are expounding it, but the whole *dharmadhātu* is expounding it. All of this vivid presence is the very presence of *Prajñāpāramitā*, and therefore, to elucidate *Prajñā in the presence* is to be in the genuine truth in the presence!

Although “*to speak of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is to be vividly present in the realm of perfect truth*” may sound quite ordinary, but once we have a full understanding of this verse, our blood may boil to the point we end up vanish completely! Because if we do not abide in the realm of truth, it is impossible to speak of *Prajñāpāramitā*. Realistically,

because *Prajñāpāramitā* is the realm of truth, therefore, the act of speaking about *Prajñāpāramitā* is itself the realm of truth. The realm of truth is this very existence and this very existence is *Prajñā*. Each single existence is thus *Prajñā*, each phenomenon is elucidating *Prajñā*, and each instantaneous presence is also *Prajñā*. Each presence is speaking of *Prajñā*, and each presence is displaying the realm of truth. How very wondrous! Such a concluding verse of *Prajñā* is unsurpassed.

Therefore, the entirety of space is expounding *Prajñā*. This flower blossom is speaking of *Prajñā* and every grain of sand in this cosmos is speaking of *Prajñā*. Each diminutive instant in this entire universe is expounding *Prajñā* and each tiniest existing mental moment, every mental moment *kṣaṇa* in this *dharmadhātu* is concurrently speaking of *Prajñā*. It is because each existence in the very presence is none other than *Prajñā*. Therefore, when we are in action, it means we are expounding *Prajñā*. At this moment, whether we nod our heads or shake our heads, whether we understand or fail to understand, that in and of itself is expounding *Prajñā*. Whether we accept it or reject it, that in and of itself is expounding *Prajñā*. Therefore, each of the manifested action or movement of ours is expounding *Prajñā*. Each realm, each *dharmadhātu* being in the vivid presence is expounding *Prajñā* because each realm is the realm of existence in the very presence. Each presence is, indeed, the realm of genuineness, the ultimate truth—it is the superlative wisdom, the realm of boundless happiness and bliss.

If we fail to recognize this ever present existence as *Prajñā*, or if we do not have enough wisdom insight to see that each of our actions and movements is the actual function of *Prajñā*, then we are incapable of expounding *Prajñā*. It is because each of our actions and movements in reality never separates from the realm of reality, the genuine truth. That is why the Buddha had said, “I have expounded the Dharma for forty-nine years, yet, I have not spoken a single word,” because in the realm of true existence, there are no words. To elucidate *Prajñā* is the same as not elucidating, because it is wordless. Since beginningless time until now, *Prajñā* has never used words because it always manifests the realm of true existence, the realm of non-space, non-time, non-word, non-wisdom, non-attainment, non-knowledge, non-ignorance and non-extinction of ignorance. That is, indeed, where one would elucidate *Prajñā*.

“To speak of *Prajñā*,” thus, is to have never spoken about it, because *Prajñā* has never uttered a single word, and because ultimately, “to speak of *Prajñā* is to be vividly present as the realm of truth.” The realm of truth is the realm of Voidness, the realm of the True Sign, where everything is non-abiding, non-realizing, non-attaining, non-aspiring, a realm of supreme awakening. It is the realm of pervading omniscience, and all of that is, verily, the actual speaking of *Prajñāpāramitā*.

It is because *Prajñā* is all-knowing at all times, all-pervasive at all times, and it is the great wisdom at all times. If we cannot fully absorb ourselves in *Prajñā*, then honestly, it is a great waste of our life. Whoever has the opportunity to listen to this *Prajñā* scripture must

have collected virtuous merit for thousands of lifetimes at the very least. This is truly a historical mark, and words cannot express it. In this lifetime, we have the opportunity to learn the Dharma using this language of ours, and we can see how the Vietnamese language is capable of uncovering the profound Dharma of the Buddha, unlike any other languages. In the future, who knows, perhaps other countries in the world may also learn Vietnamese so that they can gain a truly genuine understanding of the Vietnamese rendition of this profoundly amazing *Prajñā* scripture.

To speak of *Prajñāpāramitā* is, indeed, to *be vividly present* as the realm of truth—the forthright veracity. Simply speaking without leaving the place of reality can help reveal *Prajñā*. The Perfect Wisdom is without words – it is non-speaking, non-realizing, and non-attaining. It is the realm of full enlightenment, and that in itself is to expound *Prajñā*. Therefore, achieving enlightenment and attaining liberation is expounding *Prajñā*, but not realizing is also expounding *Prajñā*, because *Prajñā* exists pervasively throughout the *dharmadātu*. Everywhere, every place, every action, every gesture, every behavior, every function, to even the subtlest movements of ourselves is the very vivid presence of *Prajñā* and the very elucidation of *Prajñā*. It is because *Prajñā* ever gives rise to all *dharmās*, and when a single *dharmā* appears, it means *Prajñā* gives birth to it. When *Prajñā* gives birth to something, it is the same as expounding *Prajñā*, the Perfect Wisdom. Right now, although through each of our actions, we do not yet lucidly and directly know *Prajñā*, it is still our way of expounding *Prajñā* in this mundane world.

Therefore, when someone has already immersed in *Prajñā*, they would see that even if they are sleeping, they are also expounding *Prajñā*. How wonderfully blessed! All nooks and crannies, including the tiniest ones, in this vast cosmos and universe are *Prajñā*, and they, too, are expounding *Prajñā*. Whatever we see, we are seeing the Buddhas elucidating *Prajñā*. Whatever we hear, we are hearing the Buddhas elucidating *Prajñā*, and whatever we do, we, too, are elucidating *Prajñā*. Everything is flowing unimpededly as such in order to be *Prajñā*. There is nothing that can surpass this conclusion. *Prajñā* is worthy for us to read and recite day and night. If we want to cultivate the seed of enlightenment and emancipation, then from now onward we should continue to repeat over and over the concluding verse, “*Therefore, to speak of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is to be vividly present as the realm of truth.*” Whoever can penetratingly comprehend this verse to the very core would evaporate into *Prajñā*.

Other than this concluding verse, there is nothing higher and no other expression which can be placed here to better say what needs to be said. That is such a wonder. This is actually something which represents the sincere devotion we have had toward *Prajñā* for so long. How we love *Prajñā*! How we treasure *Prajñā*! In the past, I have looked for ways to unlock the stalemate in the language used to render *Prajñā*. Now, this rendition of *Prajñā* has gone beyond all constraints. I have read this *Prajñā* scripture so many times to see if there are still any hindrances, which need to be untwined or dismantled. A few times, as we tried to unravel the constraints [in the translation] to bring about the transcendental ideas, it ended up being in accordance with the language and profoundly subtle concepts in the

Sanskrit version. It is actually quite fortunate for us.

Until this very moment, we really have to say that we have great virtuous merits and conditions to appear in this lifetime so that we can study the Core Essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom. It is truly due to great meritorious conditions that we are able to learn these transcendental, stupendous aspects of *Prajñā*. Although we have not yet become completely unlocked with no obstruction, and not yet developed wisdom pervading the entire ten-directional *dharmadhātu*, we have at least recognized the truth that to *be vividly present* in the instantness of presence is, indeed, *Prajñā*.

However, whether we acknowledge or do not acknowledge it, *Prajñā* always exists in the vivid presence. Whether we accept it or do not accept it, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas always expound *Prajñā* without even any slight interruption. Not only the Buddhas, but the Bodhisattvas throughout this *dharmadhātu*, too, are elucidating *Prajñā* for us to listen to. All of the phenomena in this very presence are expounding *Prajñā*, and all that is manifesting in the realm of phenomenal truth is displaying *Prajñā*. That is why it says the Buddhas of the three times “*ever being vividly present as the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, perfectly complete the fruition of Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment.*”

If right now we see that all of these existences are the existence of *Prajñāpāramitā* – the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, that this entire vast *dharmadhātu* is the existence of *Prajñāpāramitā*, and that all of our actions and movements are altogether the existence of *Prajñāpāramitā*, then we cannot help but to exist in the sphere of Unexcelled, True and Perfect Enlightenment. Who can defy and escape this enlightened sphere? This dimension of *Prajñā* is limitless, and we cannot possibly separate from it, nor can we possibly do anything else other than resting in the existence of the momentness of presence. Because the ultimate truth has already been revealed since the infinite past until now and into the future as well, as *Prajñā* ever *being vividly present*, ever displays itself and ever exists in the very presence. Wherever we go, we meet with the elucidation of *Prajñā*, and we ourselves elucidate *Prajñā* for others to hear. Sometimes when people looked at our faces, we have not yet uttered a word, yet, they already gained realization because we were expounding *Prajñā*. Let us say if there was a person who stood there cursing at us, yet we ourselves gained realization, then that person, too, was expounding *Prajñā*.

We can also look at the grand master Mazu Daoyi’s actions when he gave Shui Lao a kick, Shui Lao attained realization, or when Linji was struck three times, and also became realized. Those wooden sticks were clearly the sticks of *Prajñā*, and that kick was the kick of *Prajñā*. Everything is *Prajñā*, every movement is *Prajñā*, and those two past masters thus realized *Prajñā*. Therefore, whether a saying is right or wrong, it is still *Prajñā*. If someone asks, what is the Way? Well, whether we strike with our hands, or dance with our feet, whichever actions we carry on, we are expounding *Prajñā*. Those Zen masters of the past truly performed it well. Just like when the junior master Shui Lao made prostrations and then asked the grand master Mazu Daoyi, “What is the Way?” Immediately Mazu Daoyi gave

Shui Lao the gift of a kick, and Shui Lao rolled about laughing heartily. That was Mazu Daoyi speaking of *Prajñā*, and Shui Lao being capable of receiving *Prajñā*.

Now that we have studied *Prajñā*, we can see the truth that there is nothing else to do other than being *Prajñā*. Nothing else to do that can differ from the veracity, nothing else to do that can differ from the very presence, and nothing else to do that can differ from the culminating truth! Here we do not speak of the past or the future, because each presence is simply *Prajñā*. Even when we return to the past, that is the manifestation of *Prajñā*. When we erroneously chase after the future, that is the manifestation of *Prajñā*, and when we rest in this reality, that, too, is the manifestation of *Prajñā*. The truth is that once *Prajñā* already emerges, there is no past, no future, no space and no time. Everything is simply the existence in the presence, limpid, luminous, utterly fulfilled, and that is *Prajñā* – it cannot be otherwise.

After we learned about *Prajñā*, up to this point, we can see that *Prajñā* has *glowingly tinted* us all. Right now, we shine with brightness because of *Prajñā*, and there is nothing else that we can do otherwise. In the future, if someone asks us what we are doing, we can say that we are elucidating *Prajñā*. If they understand what we are talking about, that is fine, and if they do not, that is fine, too. On the other hand, when we look at someone, we can tell that this person is also speaking of *Prajñā* to us. Insects and crickets, too, are speaking of *Prajñā*. All the echoes in this whole cosmos, whether big or small, spacious or subtle, are also speaking of *Prajñā*. It is inexpressible in mere words!

To study *Prajñā* properly, we must reach up to this dimension and only then would our learning be complete. Otherwise, if we do not reach this stage, then our learning is not yet fulfilled. After we learned about it, we now realize that whether we prance or we dance, it is *Prajñā*. No matter what we do, it is *Prajñā*, and there is no way out of *Prajñā*. We have already been tinted by this superlative wisdom. Now each of our cells, each of the pores on our feet, each breath we take, each subtle thought of ours, have been glowingly tinted by *Prajñā*, and there is nothing else that we need to do further. Everything is glowingly self-tinted. We have revealed our original identity. Our origin is now fully disclosed.

What is your primordial, pristine identity? Someone may ask us. We can answer that it is *Prajñā* – the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom. *Prajñā* is our originality. Right now, we have been openly exposed. We have been displayed and can no longer be covert. No one can possibly be obscured or concealed. Because there is no ignorance, there cannot be extinction of ignorance, and all is simply *Prajñā*. Ever since the infinite past until now *Prajñā* has always emerged as such because there never was ignorance. Therefore, there is no knowledge, no attainment, no ignorance, and no extinction of ignorance. Herein we do not even speak of extinction or the absence of extinction, because everything is now *Prajñā*.

TT 32. *gate gate pāragate pārasaṅgate bodhi svāhā* – ‘gate’ is a past participle and a concluding sentence (not an exhortation or a ‘mantra’) to denote the accomplishment of an enlightened being who has already transcended

<i>gate</i>	<i>pāragate</i>	<i>pārasaṅgate</i>	<i>bodhi</i>	<i>svāhā</i>
<i>(a feminine form of the past participle of the verb gatā): already gone, already transcended</i>	<b>-para:</b> the other <b>-pāragate</b> ( <i>past participle</i> ): already arrived at the other	<b>-saṁ:</b> all, together, thorough <b>-saṅgate</b> ( <i>past participle</i> ): gone altogether <b>-pārasaṅgate:</b> completely gone beyond to the other, fully arrived at the other	enlightenment, awakening	an exclamatory expression of respect, joy and praise; similar to hail, hail to, blessing to

*Literal translation:*

-Gone, gone beyond, already gone beyond to the other, completely gone beyond to the other, enlightenment, hail

*Beyond translation: **Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone utterly freely beyond, perfectly awakened, svāhā***

*\* Summary: Since 'gate' in Sanskrit is the feminine form of the past participle of 'gatā,' this sentence is ultimately a concluding sentence, summarizing the fruition of the Awakened Being, who has already and completely transcended; therefore, it is not simply a 'mantra,' an exhortation or encouragement for anyone to go beyond to the other shore.' This final sentence is here to confirm the fact that the Awakened Being already attained full enlightenment in the manner as shown in the content of the scripture.*

Retrospectively, this conclusion exhausts all expressive language and wisdom that we may need in order to learn, understand and reach this stage. No matter how we discuss back and forth, everything will end up being *Prajñā*. Wiggling is *Prajñā*. Talking or staying silent, too, is *Prajñā*. Thus, to speak of *Prajñā* is to emerge vividly as the realm of truth, the expanse of true existence:

This entire cycle of life-and-death is *Prajñā*; therefore, we have to sing the song of *Prajñā*, as there is no song better than the song of *Prajñā*. It would be such a stunning song, because the musical sounds of *Prajñā* inherently have always echoed pervasively throughout this boundless cosmos. It is because this boundless cosmos itself is *Prajñā*, and there is nothing else other than that. To let go is *Prajñā*, and to grasp is also *Prajñā*. To speak is *Prajñā*, and to remain silent is also *Prajñā*. Everything altogether is the realm of truth, and everything is displaying the genuine reality.

*Prajñā* is the gone beyond realm of truth, transcending beyond transcending. It is the realm

of ultimate awakening, the expanse of all-pervasive omniscience and unparalleled wisdom, the supreme, most venerated genuine matrix of existence. It is the realm of the perfectly whole and complete wisdom. With great devotion, I respectfully bow down to pay homage to *Prajñā* in the very vivid presence. Everyone here is, indeed, *Prajñā*, too. *Prajñā* is Buddha. Buddha is the ultimate truth, and the truth is always openly revealed, ever *being vividly present as natural, spontaneous Suchness*.

Since '*gate*' in Sanskrit is a past participle, this sentence is ultimately a concluding sentence, summarizing the fruition of the Awakened Being, who has already and completely transcended; therefore, it is not simply a '*mantra*,' or an exhortation to encourage everyone to go beyond to the other shore, as commonly perceived and explained by other Buddhist teachers. This sentence, in actuality, denotes the fact that the Awakened Being has *already* attained full enlightenment in the manner described in the preceding verses of the scripture.

To understand is *Prajñā*, to not understand is also *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* has already radiantly tinted all of us. *Prajñā* is us, and we are *Prajñā*. From the immemorial past until the infinite future, we have innately been *Prajñā*, *ever being vividly present as natural, spontaneous Suchness*, perfectly whole and complete. This is the core essence of the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, that which is gone utterly freely beyond. The core essence of *Prajñāpāramitā* is herein fulfilled.

**TT 33. *iti prajñāpāramitāyām hṛdayaṃ samāptaṃ* – the completion of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom in the very vivid presence**

<i>iti</i>	<i>prajñāpāramitāyām</i>	<i>hṛdayaṃ</i>	<i>samāptaṃ</i>
in this manner, thus, thus indeed	<p><b>-pra:</b> prior, before</p> <p><b>-jñā:</b> knowing, knowledge, to understanding</p> <p><b>-prajñā:</b> Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, wisdom, the wisdom prior to knowledge (e.g. pristine wisdom, wisdom in the vivid presence, wisdom prior to the working of the conceptual mind, transcendental wisdom, ultimate wisdom)</p> <p><b>-pāram:</b> the other shore</p> <p><b>-itā (past passive participle):</b> arrived</p> <p><b>-prajñāpāramitā:</b> Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom, the wisdom that arrived the other shore (e.g. have attained enlightenment, have transcended)</p> <p><b>-prajñāpāramitāyām:</b> (in) the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</p>	heart, core, essence, center, most secret element	<i>(past passive participle of samāpta)</i> : already finished, already completed, already fulfilled
<p><i>Literal translation:</i></p> <p>-In this manner, the heart of perfect wisdom is completed</p> <p>-Thus, a fulfilled heart of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom</p> <p>-Thus, the essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is completed</p>			
<p><i>Beyond translation: Herein, the core essence of the Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom is thus fulfilled.</i></p> <p>* <i>Summary:</i> Since <b>samāptaṃ</b> is a past passive participle, it refers to how the Awakened Being, in the manner as described in the content of the scripture, has already completed his practice and attained full awakening.</p>			





*FURTHER READING*



## Appendix A

### *Understanding the Five Aggregates, Their Characteristics and Their Workings*

*Excerpted from a Series of Teaching of Zen Master Thich Tuệ Hải  
on the Essence of Prajñāpāramita during the Tranquil Dwelling Season  
at Long Hương Temple in 2019*

When we study the Dharma and especially the *Essence of Prajñāpāramita*, we need to clearly understand the five aggregates – the components of our body and mind (*form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness*), because if we do not completely see, understand, discern, and comprehend them correctly, we would be totally confused in our practice.



#### ***The aggregate of form***

What is the “aggregate of form”? It is our physical body that consists of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire. “*Earth*” is anything that is hard which we can touch, such as head hair, body hair, teeth, nails, skin, flesh, tendon, bone, marrow, diaphragm, etc. “*Water*” is wet; anything that is wet is water, such as sweat, blood, pus, urine, etc. “*Air*” is movement. If our blood is still circulating, our circulatory system is still flowing, and if we can still breathe in and out, are in motion, stay alive, or have any movements, it is because there is air. “*Fire*” is body warmth. Any living creature in this universe without fail must have all of those four elements, and no one can possibly evade them.

How did the Buddha explain about the aggregate of form in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*? For example, in the middle of space, if we flick a lighter, then the lighter will spark, and if we flick a gas burner, then the burner will spark. Thus, fire exists everywhere in open space; however, it depends on our mind and what specific kind of fire we want to see. If we want to have enough fire for a pot of rice to be well cooked, then there would be enough fire on the burner to cook that rice, but if we want to have enough fire to burn down a house, then a fire will blaze to burn it down. Therefore, the fire corresponds with our mind. Thus, in light of this, the Buddha taught in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* that the four elements are “*the*

*Tathāgatagarbha pervading the whole dharmadhātu, emanating in equipollence with the magnitude of the beings' understanding, being revealed according to the beings' karma."*

In Buddhism, *Tathāgatagarbha* refers to the fully awakened matrix and essence, the eternal and immutable matrix of all reality, and the womb of the absolute. In short, it is the very core the essence of Buddhahood, the ultimate all-transcendental state.

An awakened being, therefore, can clearly, directly, and lucidly see the five aggregates as the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the four elements of nature (earth, water, air and fire) as the *Tathāgatagarbha*. In the very beginning, the perfect wisdom speaks of the peerless realm of an all-transcendental person who has gone beyond the cycle of birth and death, beyond all mundane knowledge and all past and present misconceptions in order to have a direct knowing of this form as the empty, transparent pristine presence without a single trace of clinging.

The reason we have not yet reached this realization is that we still see that our physical bodies still exist, that they are substantial, and that there is birth and death. However, according to an enlightened being, this bodily form has no arising (no birth) and no ceasing (no death). An enlightened being has a direct knowing that there is no gap or division between the outer four elements in the cosmos and the four elements inside our bodies. Just like in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness practice, when we meditate, we have to contemplate on the inner body and the outer body, and we will come upon the truth that the wetness on the outside does not have any rift with the wetness inside our bodies. Therefore, the earth, water, air and fire elements of our bodies, and the earth, water, air and fire elements of this universe are inherently the *Tathāgatagarbha*, perfectly pure, ubiquitously pervading the whole dharmadhātu, with nothing being defiled.

In the view of an awakened being when the perfect wisdom emerges in the vivid presence, he or she directly penetrates the reality of the five aggregates, as well as the four elements of the body, as intrinsically immaculate, tranquil and empty, and arisen from the state of Voidness. Therefore, the appearance of the five aggregates is a false appearance formulated by our conceptual mind. Our conceptual mind is an illusion as well, and it constructs the illusive body whereas in reality, this illusive body does not exist.

Once one has a direct knowing of this truth, one will realize that all *dharmas* – all phenomena ever since the past until now – are inherently unborn, unceasing; there has never been birth and death. However, we are still being deluded, so in the view of mundane people like us, we have bodies, old age, sickness and death, and there is life-and-death without fail. However, this is a confused and deluded view, a view of ignorance. Even if, for an instant, we see that there is “existence” versus “non-existence,” then we have already fallen deep into the domain of ignorance. However, if we want to speak the language of *Prajñā*, we need to see that our body of four elements is intrinsically pure, and it is none other than the *Tathāgatagarbha*, pervading the whole sphere of phenomenal truth.



### ***The aggregate of sensation***

We usually understand the aggregate of sensation as containing the sensations of pleasantness, unpleasantness or neutrality. For example, we are sitting here listening to the teaching, having no feeling of unpleasantness, but not feeling too excited about it either, so that is a kind of neutral sensation. When we listen, if we do not really understand anything and we do not really like it either, then we are experiencing a sensation of neutrality. However, suddenly, when someone curses us, saying “you are just like a beast,” then a sensation of irritation arises, and that is the sensation of unpleasantness. On the other hand, when someone praises us, telling us “how pretty you are, much younger than before,” then we feel happy, and that is the sensation of pleasantness. Thus, we need to carefully examine from where happiness (pleasantness) and suffering (unpleasantness) arise.

The literal meaning of the term depicting “*sensation*” in Vietnamese is to receive, and this is the receiving aspect of the six-sense faculties or six-sense bases: eyes, ears, noses, tongue, body and mind. In order to receive, there must exist a consciousness which discerns, and through the working of this consciousness, sensation can be considered as our conviction and cognition. Whatever we receive is considered our sensation. For example, if someone wants to give us one hundred thousand dollars, and we accept it, then we are saying that we receive a favor from this person. Or we receive either a praise or an insulting word, a good thing, a bad thing, a circumstantial condition, a sound or a form. It is all considered receiving.

So when the six-sense faculties encounter the six-sense objects, that is receiving. We receive sensations all the time, from the outside all the way to the inside. When we have thoughts about the past, we might feel sad about a certain event because there was nothing pleasant about it. Yet, when we remember a happy pastime, we smile a little. When we feel sad, loved, angry or hatred, it means that we are receiving these sensations. Then, there are things in the past that just float by in our mind, and we feel rather normal about them as no sensation of suffering or happiness arises. Or there are things that are passing by, and we have no feeling about them; however, it is still a sensation.

When the sense faculties come into contact with the sense objects, then precisely at the moment when the contact happens, sensation appears. It is just like how it is explained in the twelve links of dependent origination: (1) *ignorance* links to *mental formation*, (2) *mental formation* links to *consciousness*, (3) *consciousness* links to *name-and-form*, (4) *name-and-form* links to the *six-sense bases*, (5) the *six-sense bases* links to *contact*, and (6) *contact* links to *sensation*. Thus, no matter what contact happens between the sense faculties and sense objects, all of that is considered sensation. Sensation, again, is receiving,

and the way we Vietnamese usually denote it is called “*lãnh đủ*” or “*to take it all.*” When someone curses us with just one word, or strikes us with just one strike, we “*bear it all.*” For almost all of our life, there has not been a time when we do not have sensation or do not receive the sensation.

The feeling or the sensation of this body is contact. When we come into contact with the heat, it is a sensation of heat; with the cold, a sensation of coldness; with smoothness, a sensation of smoothness; with roughness, a sensation of roughness; with pain, a sensation of pain. Just like when a needle first touches our skin, there is no feeling yet, but when it prickles hard, then there is pain, then there appears the feeling, the sensation of the body. Therefore, sensation is not just of the mind, but also of the body. Both body and mind have sensation, including those of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. It does not mean sensation only involves the mind, like what we have studied all this time that sensation is the mind. If that is the case, then we have not yet fully learned about sensation.

When there is sensation, there is (8) *craving (or desire)*.<sup>17</sup> Craving does not only mean loving affection, but it is both love and hate. Hate is a form of craving, but it is in opposition to love. When we have craving, we have (9) *grasping (attachment or possession)*; when we love, we crave; when we hate, we also crave. When we love, we give rise to a thought, and when we hate, a thought also arises in our mind; therefore, when love and hate are combined, it becomes grasping. When we hate, we keep it in our heart-mind, and when we do not hate, we also keep it. When there is love, there is grasping, but when there is hate, there is even deeper grasping. The two things that are the most difficult to forget are love and hate. The name for both love and hate, is craving. Craving is not just love and fondness, as when there is hate, you have even deeper grasping. There is a saying in Vietnamese about hate: “When we are alive, we keep it in our heart; when we die, we bring it with us.” It means our sentiments are so thick that our remembrance of it becomes so persistent. That is the other side of craving. Thus, craving has two sides, love and hate. Grasping is borne from craving.

Even though there is no affection, no hatred, no suffering, no happiness, there is still receiving. Just like when we look at this table, we do not hate it or have any affection toward it, but we do receive it. When our eyes encounter a form, we already receive it. It has become a habitual tendency of grasping or clinging of the sense faculties toward the sense objects. As we see, we immediately receive it. As we hear, we immediately receive it, and we cannot possibly reject it. However, for an enlightened being, right at the moment they see something, they do not receive it or accept it; thus, it is called without sensation. They do not even have any neutral sensation where there is no sensation of pleasantness or unpleasantness. For us, there is still the neutral sensation; we cannot elude the neutral sensation.

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<sup>17</sup> In English, the eighth link is expressed as “*craving*” whereas in Vietnamese, it is termed as “*ái*” which denotes “*desirous love.*”

For example, although we did not have any feeling for a specific person, the moment we saw them, we already received them. Why aren't there any sentiments though? Because there were no sad, loving, angry or hateful memories between this person and us; we just saw them for the sake of seeing. However, after we came home, did we think of them? Yes, we remembered about them, although we felt no love or hatred toward them. Therefore, that, too, is sensation. Without sensation, would we remember them? No. Nevertheless, there are things that we remember about which bring no suffering or happiness to us. For example, like how we ate our meal yesterday, and how it was very simple and normal. Or when we put our feet down on the ground, and how it was such a normal thing to do; there was no pleasantness or unpleasantness, yet there was a sensation. Or when our bottom touches the chair, that is sensation. The wind blows and touches our bodies; that, too, is sensation. Although it is not colored by pleasantness or unpleasantness, our own bodies and mind still have the sensation.



## ***The aggregate of perception***

In the *Sūtra*, “*perception*” is called “*cognition*” (Viet. *tri*), but this is not the *totality all-encompassing all-pervasive knowing* capacity. When we sit back, all of the mental impressions of the sense objects which we previously encountered, such as when our eyes see, our ears hear, our nose smells, our tongue tastes, and our body touches, would still fill our heads. The Mind Only School refers to them as the “*mental imageries imputed from form appearances*” or the “*purely imaginary, imputative mental impressions*” (Viet. *lạc tạ ảnh tử* or *tịnh sắc căn*). These mental impressions are conceptual imageries that still remain in our consciousness because our sense faculties had at one time come into contact with the sense objects. If we have never encountered something, can we now have perceptions of that? Can we have perception of something that we have never heard, seen, understood or come to know? Can we at all perceive what it is like, that which we have never come into contact? For example, when we say that the beings in the God Realm are gorgeous looking, then how can we perceive or imagine that kind of beauty? We really cannot imagine nor have perception about their gorgeousness if our sense faculties have never met the sense objects. That is the first type of perception

There is also another way that we can imagine using our prior conceptual knowledge. For example, we had a very deep cut on our hand at one time which took a month to heal. Now we just had another cut, and we imagined that this cut would take another month to heal, but this time it turned out to be just a mild cut, and so it was healed after a few days. Or when we were wading in the rice fields and there were some leeches latching on to us. In the beginning when we did not notice them, they seemed like nothing, but if the person next to us started to say, “Oh, look, leeches are latching on you, how disgusting!” and after that we would drop unconscious. Because when there is any kind of perception involved, things usually multiply or expand. For example, there was a child who was playing and accidentally caused a bird to die, and there was this lady who happened to see it. She would go home to tell everyone that this morning, she saw a boy who beat up an eagle to death. People imagine and make small things big. We, too, are always like that. We rely on old stories, and use our imagination to blow them out of proportion to make them bigger than what they really are.

When we are sitting by ourselves, all these good, bad, wonderful, terrible, old and new stories would appear, and these are called thoughts or mental imageries. We should also mention something about our practice so that we can better understand what takes place here. When a mental impression or thought arises and we can clearly see it when it arises, then that very thought would automatically dissolve. We, however, would rather not let them self-appear and then self-disappear. Instead, we want to “*practice*,” which means

when thoughts appear, we want to eliminate them. Nevertheless, wanting to eliminate them is actually to think of them even more deeply, and they will certainly come back to us! It is because we ourselves want to give water and manure to these mental impressions, and we already begin to want to retain them in this way. The very attitude of wanting to remove or to eliminate thoughts during meditation practice is in itself an erroneous mindset. Wanting to reject, to remove, to be separated from a delusional thought, or wanting it to stop existing or to be terminated... all of those wants or desires are simply mistakes!

Thus, when thoughts happen, when past stories vaguely return, they appear right in front of us. Then *“they”* remember this and remember that, *“they”* love this person or hate that person, then we just leave *“them”* alone and let *“them”* take their own normal course, and we can just simply be the seers who are clearly aware of everything. When our *“knowing-awareness in the vivid presence”* manifests, we clearly recognize whatever appears, but we do not label it as delusion, attachment, hate or ignorance, and we do not need to compete with it, oppose, criticize or disparage it. All thoughts will be *“clearly seen, clearly known”* and they self-dissolve. Slowly, thoughts of the past will become sparse, because when thoughts arrive, we do not give them any importance. When there are guests coming to our house, if we do not receive and entertain them, not offering them any tea or water, they will be bored, and then they will not come again. Similarly, thoughts will slowly become sparse.

It is this naturally transparent *“knowing-awareness in the vivid presence”* that gets clearer and more lucid over time. In the beginning, we would clearly recognize coarse thoughts, and then, subtle thoughts, and then thoughts slowly and ever so slowly become sparse, and then there are no more thoughts for us to recognize. By then, we would lucidly know that it is empty-hollow, and by then, the aggregate of perception is considered extinct.

In the beginning, the mental imageries, sounds, and the coming together of sense faculties and sense objects give rise to perception. If we have not been exposed to the sense objects, we cannot possibly perceive them nor remember them. Therefore, thoughts arise because we have previously encountered the objects. Thoughts are deluded movements and delusional arisings, and they are the causal seeds of birth and death. If the aggregate of perception becomes extinct, would that end birth and death? No! If we are looking at it from a shallow, narrow-minded perspective, we think that when all illusive thoughts come to a complete rest, then there is no more birth and death. However, in actuality, it still has not ended!

When we are sitting still to calm down all of our thoughts, then a state of *“thoughtless”* or *“non-thought”* and non-perceptual tranquility will appear in our mind. There will be no more thoughts, no more elaborated ideas, and no more hustle and confusion. That is when we are considered to have meditative absorption. In the beginning, this concentration is void and tranquil, but when our absorption gets much deeper, we would see the surging,



flooding torrent of mental arisings of the aggregate of mental formation. These arisings are no longer discursive thoughts like those of the aggregate of perception.

Perception, therefore, is like bubbles floating on the surface of the sea, but mental formation is the entire vast ocean. The causal seeds of birth and death, however, do not lie on the outer surface of the aggregate of perception but in the aggregate of mental formation. It turns out that the aggregate of mental formation is the covert lair of *samsara*, the cycle of life-and-death. In reality, not too many people have enough meditation competence or wisdom capability to be able to see the aggregate of mental formation. Only those who transcend the aggregate of perception can actually encounter mental formation.

The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* says that “*emotions (afflictions) will bring you down, and perception can lead you up.*” However, we can only go upward if we *no longer have* perception! If we still have perception, then we must be very careful, because we may still end up in any realm, including the hell realm.

It is the same with us sitting here. If our perception has settled, then automatically our body and mind feel light. Therefore, sometimes people sit in meditation and feel their bodies are gently floating, and they are not wrong about that, because when perception has settled down, then spontaneously, the physical body is no longer real.

When we see that there is a substantially real body, that is because we are seeing with perception. When perception has diminished, even if we weigh 100 kilograms, we still feel that we do not carry any density, and our bodies would feel like a bag of cotton gliding on the ground. Therefore, as long as we still have emotions and perception, we will still feel heavy and go downward. Again, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* says that “*emotions will bring you down, perception can lead you up.*” When I gave teachings in the past, I used to have some doubts about this. Today, however, I must affirm that emotions, as well as perception, will bring us down. With perception still intact, there is no way for us to rise above, because as long as there is perception, there will still be heaviness in body and in mind.

If we are bounded by anything, then we will still be weighed down. For example, if we are bounded by sensation then we will continue to give rise to perception. If we are bounded by perception, then we will still have this body. For a person whose perception has diminished, he or she will fall into a state of being *nearly* without body, but will not completely be without it yet. Only when we exert further in our practice to have the capability to transcend the aggregates of form, sensation and perception, then at that moment, we would completely come to be without our physical bodies. It is clear that if we can complete all three steps of transcending the aggregates of form, sensation and perception, then we would fall into a very deep state of meditative absorption. However, if you sit simply to quiet down your mind then your absorption would not be too deep. These two states of meditative absorption are very different.

If we have already dismantled the aggregate of form through our meditation exertion, the sensations of the body will disappear. Feelings and sensitivities will disappear, and along with their disappearances, the aggregate of perception will become settled. If these trios (form, sensation, perception) altogether disintegrate leading to the experience of void, then our body and mind will dissolve completely and we will be in a very profound state of meditative absorption. There are people who reach this state and end up with supernatural powers. However, these practitioners still cannot conquer the cycle of birth and death, even though they have erroneously believed that they already attained *Arhatship* or sainthood at this stage.

As far as Buddhism is concerned, the Buddha knew that someone can sit still, enter meditation absorption for one hundred years and dismantle his perception, and that all of his activities of body and mind would completely settle. However, that is not the place for the fruit of *Arhatship* or sainthood. *Arhatship* must take place where the aggregate of perception, mental formation and consciousness altogether extinguish. Perception is something that gives us heaviness, and makes us see either existence or non-existence in this life. When there is still perception, everything becomes either existence and non-existence without fail. We have never been able to escape this duality, and the very first thing for us is to perceive that our body “exists.” However, when perception comes to an end, we will utterly come to be *non-physical*. We would have a directly knowing that our body has no more weight and there is *no more mind!* When both body and mind are no more, it means that the *trio of form, sensation, and perception* would dissolve altogether, and thus, we would fall into the mental state of being without body and mind, because perception has already become void.

When we are able to perceive, see and be aware of thoughts as they appear, this is at the level where we can just simply recognize, but perception is not the superlative state. When we still have many thoughts, then we need to be aware that we still have many thoughts. When thoughts are less, we know that we have fewer thoughts. When there are no more thoughts, then we can still see the transparent and tranquil void where there is no thought. This “*seer*” is not the same as the perception itself, and only then, can he clearly see and penetrate perception. This “*seer*” has enough capacity to see beyond perception and reach mental formation. The “*seer*” or the one who is seeing, in this case, is no longer perception. Only then can he have the ability to penetrate deeply into mental formation.

When we have too much perception, it causes our level of awareness to be less heightened, less subtle, and thus, we would not be able to penetrate all the way to the vast depths of the ocean of mental formation! We have not yet been able to see this. It is because we have not yet gone beyond perception, and therefore, do not have the capability to reach mental formation. The Sūtra says that, even if they want to look for the practitioner to make offerings to, the *deva maras* (the god demons of mundane love and desire) and the gods themselves cannot even find him – he who transcends the aggregate of perception. For someone with limited meditative concentration, he can sit to slowly calm down his mind

until he becomes quiescent, and at that moment, he will feel the lightness of his body and mind. However, thoughts have not been completely shattered. It is because the deep-seated covert lair of the aggregate of mental formation is still there. At any time, when the wind of environmental conditions stirs, mental formation can give rise to the floating bubbles of perception on the surface of the ocean.

When all of the ocean bubbles submerge, the entire surface of the ocean would emerge as quiet and still. However, that ocean surface is the entire aggregate of mental perception; it only needs the wind to rustle, and then, there will be bubbles again. It only needs one agent condition for thoughts to return. We cannot escape this, and this is called “*not having enough meditative concentration power.*” Slowly and ever so slowly, when the agent conditions no longer stir, the practitioners will immerse deeply in meditative absorption.

All of our practice exertion at the time being is simply to fool around the outer veil of the aggregate of perception, and we have not yet plunged into the depths of the ocean, and at most, we can only pop those floating bubbles on the ocean surface. For example, there is this one woman whom we used to either detest or love very much. Moreover, although we no longer love or hate her now, it is just as we have incoherently popped the bubbles of emotions on the ocean surface, not even touching the ocean itself.

We must see that many people can be deceptively confused about their realization after they are able to enter into deep absorption. They think that they already attained the fruit of *Arhatship* or become enlightened. This is something that we, as practitioners, need to keep in mind. Otherwise, we would only quiet down a few thoughts, yet already think that we are sublime. In truth, there are people, who through their meditative concentration power are able to suppress the aggregate of perception so that it can temporarily stay calm and be at rest. Perception can also be activated to become an extremely powerful energy; we cannot underrate perception either. Thus, for the practice of *qi-gong*,<sup>18</sup> the practitioners center their *qi* energy into their hands and bodies, and then let the energy flow out of their hands. When they strike with their hands, sounds explode, and that is the vigor of

There are other types of *qi-gong* through which the practitioners can perform astral projection. These practitioners as well as other *qi-gong* practitioners are those who have the accomplishment of sense perception. There are meditation practices in which the master instructs the student “to sit still and let his or her mind reach a state of quiescence, until the time when they can direct their astral projection to go meet such and such a master who will give instructions on this and that.” If we continue to sit and use our perception on and on, then one day, we would truly be able to leave our bodies and meet

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<sup>18</sup> Literally: '*life-energy cultivation*' is a centuries-old system of coordinated body-posture and movement, breathing, and meditation used for the purposes of health, spirituality, and martial arts training. With roots in Chinese medicine, philosophy, and martial arts, *qigong* is traditionally viewed by the Chinese and throughout Asia as a practice to cultivate and balance *qi* (pronounced approximately as "chi"), translated as "*life energy.*" ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org))

the person whom our teacher had told us about. For example, if our teacher said, “The first person you meet will be a tall gentleman with long, flowing and silver-white hair and beard, and his face blushing like a male angel,” then there is no way that you can imagine meeting a person dressed in black. It is because the students achieve the transcendental power of perception, and because the teacher had already pre-given them all the ideas. So they just sit there and rely on their perception until one day, they would mentally encounter a person just like the one their teacher already described, someone with silver-white hair and a silver-white beard, tall and handsome, dressed in white, with rosy cheeks just like a male angel. All of that, however, is just a sight of perception that we ourselves have built up.

Everything that we can see, know, understand or discern is all appearances of perception. Even if we can see a real “sky-god,” that, too, is just a “*manifestation*” of perception. Perception can create all conditioned objects of consciousness. Thus, even a Buddha whom we can see with our eyes or mind also appears due to our perception, whereas the genuine, authentic Buddha cannot be seen by ordinary eyes. The authentic Buddha does not manifest substantial appearances so that our perception can recognize. The authentic Buddha has no form, and our perception cannot possibly see that which is without form. Perception can only see “*substantiality*” versus “*insubstantiality*,” whereas it cannot possibly see the manifestation in the state of Voidness where there is neither existence nor non-existence. Thus, Voidness is *beyond perception*!

However, when we have not gone beyond perception, all we see is nothing but sense perception, just as we are imagining an elephant, and there is nothing great about that. Discernment is perception, and feeling sad, loved, angry and hatred is also perception, because we perceive things as either substantial or non-substantial. When we grasp both, “*substantiality*” and “*insubstantiality*,” it means that we are being caught in the manifestation of perception. “*Substantiality*” and “*insubstantiality*” are borne by perception. However, when we study deeper, we will comprehend the Buddha’s saying that there is no form versus void, because “*form is not different from Void, Void is not different from form*,” and that is a view beyond perception.

Right now, we are being stuck in perception, so to us, *form* is substantial, and *void* is the empty space that does not hold any form. *That*, to us, is “*void*.” However, all of this type of discernment is simply perception. All of us are living in, and are being stuck in, perception with no escape route. We have no way to transcend the seeing and knowing that arise from perception. Perception becomes “*cognition*,” it is the knowledge we develop in this life and the discernment between right and wrong. Although we may say all of this is *consciousness*, it simply belongs to the plane of perception and it is not the all-pervading, omniscient knowingness.

Even if all of our thoughts have been settled, and we believe that we have exhausted our practice, then it is not yet utterly completed, because we have only temporarily brought our

aggregate of perception to calmness. Although we may abide in meditative absorption for a thousand years, it only means that the aggregate of perception is temporarily being quiescent. That is not the same as attaining sainthood, because there are still the aggregates of mental formation and consciousness that have not been transcended. If the covert lair of mental formation is still intact, then the causal seeds of life-and-death are still intact in their entirety.

So we can see how perception fabricates all sorts of things in our life. We can perceive something as non-existing when it actually exists, yet, when something does not exist, we perceive it as existing. All of the troubles and predicaments in this life come from the spinning of perception. If in this life we can still think of, imagine of, or call to mind something, then all of that is a form of perception. It can actually give rise to great ideologies to provide reasoning for something. All the philosophies and great ideas come from the aggregate of perception.

There are many stories about the workings of perception. We can have perception drawing up even all the way up to seeing the sky-gods, and that, too, can really happen to us. For example, let us say there is a teacher who told us that we have a spirit that follows us, and we come to believe that we truly have an attendant company. When we are sitting by ourselves, we would then hear someone saying something into our ears, and then we would respond to this supposed spirit. Even if we just respond once, that alone can make things worse for us, because it seemed so real that someone is speaking to us. Whoever that spirit is would make a specific comment to us, and we would give a specific response, talking back and forth in a conversation, swinging our legs and wagging our arms around. We think there are two people in this conversation, when in truth, that is purely our own perception. All of these fabricated stories and all the things that we see and hear, we thought of them as being normal, but in reality, they are our perception nonetheless.

There was an experiment on the practice exertion of perception that took place in the United Kingdom, possibly in 1979. It was clearly shown on a television program. While sitting, this person perceived the metal bar in front of him had become bent. At that time, whatever was metal under the influence of his perception all got bent. Anything metal in the television station, including metal bars of the television set also became bent. This person exerted his power of perception in such a way. Or for example, if we detest the person sitting next to us, we perceive him having a stomachache. If we have some power, then all of a sudden, that person would have a stomachache. People like hypnotists, and black magicians all have the great inner mind's power and the power of their perception can arouse a thought that would make another person act according to what they perceive. The hypnotists and black magicians themselves have to experience quite deep meditative absorption in their practice in order to have this kind of power.

Therefore, everything that happens in life, including our suffering and happiness, are produced by perception. When someone curses at us, it is not a big deal, but we go on

having perception about it for a while. Then later on, we feel tormented, and we cry in resentment, feeling frustrated and self-pity. It is because we perceive ourselves as an important figure in society, and when people are denigrating us, no longer putting us on the pedestal, it leads us to suffering. Or perhaps some young fellow belittled us, saying “You are nobody, yet you think you are so important.” We would cry, and choke with anger, because what he said destroyed our perception as such and such a person.

For all of us who are existing here in this world, we believe that we are this figure and that figure. We think this body and this mind belong to us. This way of thinking is borne out of perception. Gradually, we become attached and we grasp; we frame ourselves in a certain status. Ultimately, when people say things that put us out of our current position or people misunderstand our status, then we suffer. For example, we perceive ourselves as intellectual people or scholars, yet people criticize us and belittle us, then we suffer. All of that is determined by our contrived thinking, and when people shatter it, we feel agitated. However, all of that belongs to perception and nothing else. Existing things turn non-existing, non-existing things turn existing, small things turn big, and big things turn small – all of that simply manifests due to our perception.

In life, we always perceive things as real. When people talk to each other, we also think it is real, but all of that is simply our perception. Perception is illusive. In reality, this body is also an illusion, this mind is an illusion and this life is an illusion. When we accept that we are having a body, that is accepting perception. When we see something as real, it means it is real within our perception but not genuinely so in the realm of truth. That which is “*reality*” is utterly different, whereas what we see as real or unreal in a mundane sense that arises from perception. Furthermore, when we see true versus fake, right versus wrong, good versus bad, retained versus lost, existing versus non-existing, immobile versus moving, proper versus improper, short versus tall... in this mundane world, then that is “*the seeing of perception.*” Nevertheless, that which is *reality* does not have right or wrong, good or bad, internal or external, up or down, short or tall. Therefore, we have fallen into, and are stuck in, perception and unable to get out.

When we think that this belief or this thought in and of itself is “*our selves,*” then “*that thinking*” by and of itself is also perception. Perception wraps up nearly everything in our life. If we see all phenomena that happen in our life as either real or unreal, existing or non-existing, then all of that is perception. Perception weaves illusion into our life, but it is not “*reality.*” Therefore, when reality emerges, then all those illusions will disappear; body, mind, understanding, and knowledge will also disappear, and that which remains is simply the *vivid presence of reality*, immaculate, empty-hollow and quiescent. This reality is the living force, so stupendous, so amazingly marvelous. At the time being, ordinary human beings do not have enough capability to fathom a single “*mental thought*” in a most profound way. Therefore, all of us simply “*perceive with delusion.*” Here, we can even say that we “*perceive perception with delusion*” and all this life is but a “*delusion of thoughts.*”

Whether a wise and learned person or a dull person, whether an ordinary person or a person with high social status, they all appoint themselves through their perception. But for an awakened person with a brilliant, clear view, there is nothing that is either high or low, and there is only that which is either in accordance with the truth or mistaken from the truth. “*The truth*” herein refers to the True Sign of all phenomena, which is Signlessness – Voidness, rather than the relative truth in a dualistic cycle. Thus, to be in accordance with the truth means to be emancipated from illusion, and to be mistaken about the truth means to accept illusion. The very fact that we are “*delusive*” is because we erroneously become misled by our thoughts, and that is all! The day we no longer are deluded with this concept – meaning to *identify* ourselves with illusion – then our body and mind will dissipate, and the external circumstances altogether can no longer affix to us. Thus, as far as all of the activities in this life are concerned, if we cannot see to their very depths, which are Signlessness – Voidness, then it looks like we have already fallen into perception. Perception, therefore, is far-flung and not at all simple.



***The aggregate of mental formation  
(karmic formation)***

Mental formation is the covert lair that constructs our self-grasping, seeing “*ourselves*” as different from everything else around us. Why are we seeing that there are our “*selves*”? In the twelve links of dependent origination, we talk about ignorance and how it makes contact with mental formation. Ignorance does not mean total darkness, but it is the inability to see the existing reality, immaculate, empty and tranquil. That is called ignorance.

Right now we are seeing and hearing with our sense faculties, and that is considered being ignorant. How can we call it ignorance when our eyes see forms and our ears hear sounds? Because seeing forms is falling into sense perception, hearing sounds is falling into sense perception, and seeing dualistically right versus wrong is falling into the deep-seated stratum of ignorance. If in this very presence, we fail to recognize the reality and the existent pure and luminous *Suchness* as the *Perfect All-Transcendent Wisdom*, then it means we already fell into the level of ignorance. Therefore, if we do not have the capability to immerse in our “*inherently pure true nature*” and in *Prajñā* with every passing moment that manifests right here, then we already fell into the depths of ignorance.

Therefore, ignorance does not necessarily mean darkness. Ignorance is, matter-of-factly, obscurity, and herein, obscurity means *the inability to recognize genuinely the existent truth, the true existence, the reality in this pristine presence*. If, in some moments, the practitioner realizes that this very vivid presence is altogether *Prajñā*, he or she will then be emancipated from ignorance. This very existence is *Prajñā*, and every activity and movement in this life is indeed *Prajñā*. *Prajñā* gives birth to all movements, and thus, all movements are, indeed, *Prajñā*. Once we come to terms with it and thoroughly see it, we are liberated from ignorance.

So by then, it means ignorance does not make contact with anything whatsoever, because *Prajñā* is simply this very vivid presence, not slightly before or after. Whatever we see turns out to be the very pristine presence. This mental moment is the presence; the next mental instant is the presence, and the very presence is the empty reality, hollow, pure, unobstructed, and illuminating without confusion-delusion. Sense perception, mental formation and consciousness would all dissolve into this clear, luminous pristine presence. Seeing it in such a way is actually *Prajñā*; it is the same as seeing the intrinsic essence of the five aggregates as being Void. However, at the time being, we do not have this capability; we see that there is existence and non-existence, good and bad, form and sound, etc. and it means that we have fallen into the deep level of ignorance where mental formation eventually comes into play.



Since we have an erroneous view and see things with delusion, then it is this delusion that leads to other delusions, and hundreds of thousands of other delusions will manifest. Delusion is not simply just one instance of seeing or one instance of hearing, but within a diminutive mental instant, there are countless delusions of ours. They have never stopped, even temporarily.

From one thing to many things, absolutely everything, indeed, is enthralled by, and arises from, multitudes of mental kernels in our consciousness. All of these delusions are the causal seeds that give birth to new delusions, and they create new causes leading to new fruitions uninterruptedly. All of these continuums become ever so abundant in our mind, and this is what we call mental formation. The workings of mental formation is intensively forceful, never just a simple, unremarkable continuation in our mindstream.

When we look at the vast ocean, we see waves coming into shore with round bubbles, or when we see sea foams in the middle of the ocean, these bubbles or sea forms can be the analogies of sense perception. The scriptures say that within one single eye blink, there are twenty great thoughts, and each great thought contains 16,798,000 cycles of arising and ceasing; therefore, within one eye blink there are infinite billions and billions of thought-cycles of arising and ceasing. When a thought surfaces, it already has turned into a perception. However, within the sphere of mental formation, a thought does not appear in its entirety. Mental formation is just like in a humongous heap of rice stalks where you only need a few seedlings as the agent producers. It takes as little as one in a billion mental formations to produce a perception. Perception is only a tiny portion of a billion exponentials of mental formation, and that is why perception is extremely diminutive when compared to mental formation.

Therefore, that which we are currently seeing and knowing is exceedingly minuscule. Worldly knowledge is only a portion of a billionth in a multi-billion exponentials of mental formation. The scientists discovered something today and will discover something else tomorrow, but all the [discoveries and] ideologies that were founded thus far are so insignificantly small when compared to mental formation. Science cannot even “fully” decode one DNA in the human body, whereas each person has millions upon millions of DNA like that. Scientists do not have enough research information to write up even a portion of a billion of the DNA in our bodies.

Mental formation gives birth to sense perception. It is mental formation that is closely connected with the DNA in our bodies; therefore, the “brain” of DNA is a billion in a billion exponentials more intelligent than our own brain. Our thinking and discernment are insignificantly small when compared to the awestruck “brain” of our DNA. This brain can be truly frightening! The scientists up until now have not had the ability to *fully* decipher one single DNA. For example, when speaking of genetic inheritance, if the father has a specific DNA, then his child is only able to emit a code that is modestly equivalent to his father’s, just to show that there is something equipollent in a father and child biological

blood relation. The scientists could not explain it all, and they only knew that there are some minor vibrations or transmittance which corresponds between father and child.

Until now, the physical body of a human is something very miraculous, and science is not yet able to sufficiently speak of one single DNA. To be able to see the activities of one single cell is already something extremely complicated that science cannot explain wholly – it can only translate into the language of intracellular and extracellular which include *natri*, *magie*, *kali* and *cancil*. If the intracellular is lacking *natri* or *magie*, it will give rise to the kinds of vibration that would affect our brain waves, which lead to the distortion in our thinking. However, all of that is purely external research.

Apparently, the basis of our thinking's distortion is from the aggregate of mental formation and not from this little brain of ours. Mental formation emits signals which the aggregate of perception receives, albeit inaccurately. The aggregate of perception is the blood child of the aggregate of mental formation; our brain is the blood child of the aggregate of perception. In other words, the aggregate of perception is the product of the aggregate of mental formation, and our brain is the product of the aggregate of perception. Therefore, our paternal grandfather is the aggregate of mental formation, which gives birth to our father, the aggregate of perception, which in turn gives birth to our talking and activities in this life, and that is us. We are the last product in this line of productivity. All of our activities, whether it is talking, standing, walking, or feeling loved, angry, or hateful are all born from the aggregate of perception. The aggregate of perception was conceived by the aggregate of mental formation; thus, the aggregate of mental formation is the covert lair and the very deep-rooted foundation from which this life stems.

It is only with this Buddhist point of view that we can discover the root source. Just like a person who immerses deeply in meditation absorption, he or she can see the place of origin of the aggregate of mental formation, which is indeed the birthplace of sense perception, which in turn gives birth to life. If perception is dismantled, then at that moment, we no longer see a body and mind. It means that although we still carry a body, it will completely lose its density. The aggregate of perception is what makes us substantially heavy; it makes us feel that there is a self, a body of however many kilograms, a mind, and an arm raising and dropping.

Yet, it is the aggregate of mental formation that generates our volition which gives rise to our thoughts. For example, we may not be able to make it if we have to sit here for an hour, yet, it is the force of the aggregate of mental formation which utilizes volition in order for us to end up being able to sit here for that long. The exertion for us to sit here is mental formation. Another example is of a wounded person in the battlefield. Apparently, he has no more energy to even walk, but he exerts himself and drags himself back to his place, and the moment someone sees him, he faints. The volition for him to drag his crippled body back home is the aggregate of mental formation.

All inner efforts to construct and to maintain the deep-seated “*self*” come from the aggregate of mental formation and *not* from perception. The aggregate of perception only implements what is emitted from the aggregate of mental formation. Our thoughts,

however, are very slow and frail and so they cannot decipher all the cues that are sent out by the aggregate of mental formation. Because they cannot decode fully, they become blind, and are unable to see to the very depths of the root of mental formation. There are a number of people who say that they can see the aggregate of mental formation, but this way of talking is without proper understanding, because if they have not had any experiential, deep meditative absorption, they would not have enough wisdom insight to see the aggregate of mental formation. Even if we simply want to see the surface of mental formation, that, too, requires us to least once enter a very deep level of meditative absorption.

Normally when we speak of the aggregate of mental formation, it is just for us to arbitrarily have some ideas, when in reality, we do not really have enough wisdom and spiritual power to be able to see the aggregate of mental formation. Even the gods cannot see the aggregate of mental formation, and the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three do not even know which way to prowl. In the past, when I gave the discourses on the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and especially on the section of transcending the aggregate of perception, I wanted to emphasize the fact that] the five aggregates should not be seen as the “five *maras* of the aggregates,” but rather as the fifty states of realization experienced by a practitioner. Even if the gods want to make offerings to such practitioners – those who have dismantled the aggregate of perception and already reached mental formation – the gods would not be able to do so. It is because these practitioners no longer leave any trace in this mundane world.

Thus, there are various secret *mantras* that can be used to settle the aggregate of perception so that the person sitting next to us cannot see our physical bodies. Many people are still utilizing these invisibility spell *mantras*; they can swiftly influence and settle aggregate of perception so that the person sitting next to them cannot see them. However, that is only to resolve our sense perception, whereas the aggregate of mental formation is something that is immensely vast. A bubble in the middle of the ocean is sense perception, and the enormous ocean itself is mental formation. Therefore, can you imagine how difficult it is to dismantle the aggregate of mental formation? Our competitiveness, adverse opposition, affirmation and rejection all belong to the manifestations of perception. It does not matter whether there are appearances of perception or not, perception is simply superficial and it only covers the surface of the vast ocean while mental formation fills the entire ocean.

Once the force of mental formation actuates, we would not be able to even imagine what it is like. Therefore, a person who can transcend perception and act upon his mental formation will most likely have supranatural powers. For example, when someone in his deep sleep falls into the level of the unconscious mind, his perception becomes deeply settled, his mental formation is actuated, and he can actually walk on the walls as he would on the ground. He can even walk on the wall with his head pointing down without falling. If he wants to flutter and fly like a bird, that would be a normal thing, too, because his perception is already exhausted and he is using his body as that of a bird.

I also remember once upon a time there was a neighborhood friend of mine who sleepwalked in the middle of the night. When sleepwalking, he rushed out of the house even though the door was closed, like a mouse getting through a hole. His whole family opened the door and chased after him. He flew over the ditch just like a bird. After circling around, he flew back to the house, slipped back inside the mosquito net and felt back asleep. As for these sleepwalkers, we cannot possibly imagine the kind of power they have; it is as if they possess many transmundane powers.

There is also story that I always like to tell. At that time in the countryside in Vietnam, when the foreign invaders engaged in a raid, they would take everything and anything. There was an eighty year old woman, and as she heard people howl, "Oh, Grandma Hai! The invaders are raiding," she raced to the pigsty, picked up a pig that weighted over 100 kilograms and darted back outside. After running for a while, she became overly exhausted and collapsed. How in the world could that old lady pick up a pig that weighted over 100 kilograms, do we know? That is due to the force of mental formation.

There was another man who, as he heard of the invaders coming to raid, panicked and did not know which way to run for his life, because the soldiers would shoot if they saw people running. So he dashed into a nearby thorny bush to hide, and when everything was over, he became conscious again and saw that he was completely covered with prickling thorns. He then screamed for other villagers to come to rescue him, and they had to cut down the thorny branches to slowly pull him out. As mental formation activates, we can do things beyond our imagination, as perception cannot keep up at that moment.

As mental formation appears so abruptly, perception does not have enough time to catch up with it. Whatever is superbly speedy belongs to mental formation. Therefore, for the Zen masters to converse and answer questions so briskly without having to rely on any thinking based on sense perception, then that is the activation of mental formation. Those masters have glided beyond the level of the aggregate of perception, and thus, even materials would not be able to impede them.

Whatever that is so brisk, agile and precise is all activated by the aggregate of mental formation. Our intuition, therefore, belongs to mental formation. When we look at a person, if we intuitively know not through analytical thinking whether he or she is good or bad, that this is a part of mental formation. On the one hand, if we rely on our analysis looking at this person's physical signs, eyes, ears, tone of voice and facial features... to decide what these signs embody, sincere or not sincere, then it would take perception a whole day to figure it out. On the other hand, the aggregate of mental formation can just glide through and already know how this person actually is inside out. That which is penetrating, powerful, swift, sharp, accurate, and sensitive in this life all belongs to the level of the aggregate of mental formation.

Therefore, when we become less imprudently agitated, then we would be more intelligent.

For example, if they ask us one question and we can answer immediately without thinking, then that is the workings of the aggregate of mental formation; or when we can figure out or solve some issues immediately while another person would take a whole time and still cannot figure it out. On the other hand, when people challenge us with some questions, and we can immediately give brisk, exact answers without having to think about them, then it means that we do not rely on the aggregate of perception. In cases like that, it means that we are not going through the baggage of stereotype, knowledge, memories, and typical learning, and we do not compare, calculate, and deliberately consider between this and that. It is precisely due to this that our seeing becomes very accurate. This seeing is actually called our intuition. Occasionally, if perception is settled, intuition will surface. Intuition is actually the very sharp discriminating mind, but it is still being caught at the level of mental formation.

The aggregate of mental formation is, therefore, something that is very profound. Once it actuates, it would be impossible for us to determine anything in advance. There are a number of masters on the path who have at least once gone beyond the aggregate of mental formation, which means they have experienced "*the five aggregates being Void*," and their way of communication, thereby, does not require any thinking, because they have already transcended the level of sense perception. They no longer need to use perception, because the root source of the aggregate of mental formation is limitless. The treasure of mental formation is infinite.

During the phase when we do not yet have enough wisdom to go beyond the aggregate of mental formation, we have to utilize the aggregate of perception, which is so slow and diminutive, but once we transcend perception, we will never exhaust the foundational power of mental formation. Even just a single cell of ours is capable of transmitting enough mental power for us to utilize for ten-thousand lives, let alone all the cells in our bodies. One miniscule mental time interval of the aggregate of mental formation is enough to actuate all of the activities in our life. All of these thought-arising become the mental power to maintain, preserve, multiply and produce a new life force, and that is the aggregate of mental formation.

Therefore, our life arises from the root of mental formation. Nevertheless, it is never easy for us to see the aggregate of mental formation. If for once we can see mental formation then it means we already see to the very core of our life-and-death cycle. We can utterly dismantle mental formation when we penetrate this very root source. It is not, however, due to our practice exertion or through our imagination of "*the five aggregates being Void*" that we are able to extirpate mental formation. It is not at all like that. All of our life activities comprise of sense faculties and sense objects coming into contact with one another followed by the discriminating consciousness making comparisons, etc. It is similar to how the *manas* consciousness amasses the *karmic* seeds and deposits them into the storage. Our mental formation stocks up *karmic* seeds similarly to the *Ālaya* consciousness. From the Mind-Only School's point of view, the aggregate of mental formation functions similarly and it has the capability to set up the foundation not just for one life but for

countless lives.

Therefore, first, we talk about entering the womb, which is the same as “*ignorance coming into contact with mental formation,*” then comes the moment when we leave this physical body, form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness will still be intact. Overall, the period of living when we are still alive is considered the first intermediate state, and the period following our death can be considered the second intermediate state. The mental body in the intermediate state also cognizes, understands, differentiates, and feels sad, loved, angry and hateful; this mental body also discerns between happiness and sadness just like how we are functioning in our present physical bodies. There is not a slight change whatsoever between this intermediate state and when we are alive except for one thing, and that is we no longer carry a body of fifty kilograms in this state and that is it. Other than that, we are not at all different from how we are now.

When we face with disheartening incidents, all we want is to die in order to end our grief, but even if we die, our sadness cannot be extinguished! Because after we commit suicide, we then realize at that moment that we remain exactly the same, and there is no way that we can escape this grief. After we die, whomever we love, miss, are bothered with, or are angry with, will be even brighter and clearer. Because right now, we still have to carry our physical bodies so this physicality somewhat puts a veil on our suffering or happiness, but once the material body is left behind, everything will appear more obvious.

We are trapped in the body of five aggregates, unable to get out, and even if we want to end our suffering, we do not have a way. We cannot possibly resolve our suffering if we cannot disintegrate our body of five aggregates; therefore, the Buddha taught that the five aggregates must be Void in order to transcend all miseries. Since we are stuck in this body, birth and death in this life are merely changes of the physical body or the aggregate of form, and if so, then it does not really carry any special meaning other than that. It does not matter how many causes and effects, how much love, and how much resentment we have – they are all contained in the aggregate of mental formation. It stores all of the causal seeds of life-and-death. No matter how many causal seeds there are, they are all placed in the aggregate of mental formation. Infinite lives in the past and infinite lives ready to be formed in the future are all stocked up in the aggregate of mental formation. Thus, it is never easy to resolve this aggregate. Although one may enter meditative absorption for a hundred years, one can still be trapped in the cycle of life-and-death, because one has not yet been able to resolve the covert lair of the aggregate of mental formation. What a terribly horrible thing.

Now let us go back to “*ignorance coming into contact with mental formation*” so that we can see how we are being trapped. We do not have a way to escape sensation, sense perception, mental formation and consciousness. There is no one who has the ability to break out; even if we bring the Buddha to mind or recite the *mantra*, we still cannot flee from the aggregate of mental formation. Unless we can find a way so that mental formation and consciousness can transform into Void, then we can clear out. So it means that if the five aggregates have not yet become Void, no one can break free from the cycle of life-and-death. Don’t falsely

perceive and don't dream on; however, many people dreamingly imagine that they only need to recite the Buddha's name a few times, and they would take rebirth in such and such a realm. That is merely daydreaming and not reality. If we want to transcend life-and-death, we must practice so that the five aggregates can become "*exhausted*" in order to be emancipated from the cycle of life-and-death, and only that is the actual truth. This is the very core of what the Buddha taught.

The Buddha said very clearly that if the five aggregates are not yet Void, then suffering still exists in its entirety. Even after we leave our bodies now, the "new" five aggregates would come into being. There will be a *density-less* form substance, and if we can somehow measure and weigh something that has no density, it will still appear in its own form. After one leaves his body, for example, one's perception still perceives himself as Mr. A. Prior to leaving the body, perception already registered everything as such, and thus, perception brought this pre-registered appearance into the intermediate realm. In the intermediate realm, he will still be Mr. A with two arms, two legs, and a normal head, and that is just like him before he passed away. Therefore, it is perception that formulates the "new" person in the after-life. This person will have all the emotions of sadness, love, anger and aversion intact, including all the knowledge that he had accumulated in the preceding life, and even knowledge from other past lives, too.

During our current life, this body of ours was borne from our mother and father; therefore, we only operate with the segment of life that has been registered by our physical brain in that specific life. However, if we stop using this body and the brain-registered life segment of this life, we can thoroughly fathom all the way into our past lives. The perception and mental registry we have in about eighty years in this life is just like a movie; we can call it part one, and part two is our next life. After we leave this physical body, our seeing can thoroughly penetrate without impediments. At that moment, we can see how such and such a person had played a prank on us a few hundred lives ago and where he is living now. We can see everything in its entirety; therefore, all the sadness, love, anger and aversion will clearly appear, even more obvious than at the time being. Right now (when we are still living), it is just a thought, but at that moment (after we leave the body), all appearances would take shape very vividly, such as how he had slashed us, how many of our tendons were cut, what unbearable pain we went through, how we bled and how we died. All of that may have happened ten lives ago, but after we leave our bodies, we can see that, for example, he is currently sitting over there, and we can see everything very clearly.

After we leave this body, we will be seven times more intelligent than as of now, and even if you want to say it is seven hundred times more so, then you can put it that way, too, too. Everything will be crystal clear; everything that happened in the cycle of life-and-death will become unobstructed through our seeing as they are not interrupted or broken up into segments. On the other hand, right now in our lives, our seeing is being interrupted and broken up into segments. It is because our brain only starts to register beginning at the age of four; but prior to that, it is quite empty because our mental registry has not operated yet. Thus, the segment of the beginning of our life is vague.

After we leave the intermediate state to enter the womb to take rebirth again, we can penetrate the obscured stage in the womb through meditation absorption. When we are in the intermediate state, all of this life's activities are still intact, and then we will begin to recall all of these activities starting at the zero age, then up to one year old and etc. It only needs a few eye blinks for us to completely know all of our preceding life, and a few more eye blinks to know who we were in a past life, what our practice level was, or how far we had progressed with our practice exertion. We would be able to know of all those details. Whichever *karmas* are the most powerful and the nearest will appear first; then, anything that is related to the *karma* of the consecutive life will then appears, so that the aggregate of mental formation can begin to calculate based on these data. Actually, it does not need to really calculate anything, because it is superlative to the point that no computer can ever collect all the information as rapidly as the aggregate of mental formation.

For example, when we prepare to form a new life, the first *karmic* event which shall happen at age one in the new life might be the result of something which happened eight lives ago, and at age two, another event might be caused by something which happened five hundred lives ago. Then, that which shall happen at age three might be caused by something which happened a few billion lives ago, and at age twenty, it might be caused by something which happened a thousand lives ago. It means that the *karmic* happenings in the new life do not manifest in an orderly fashion. In actuality, the *entirety of the minuscule segments of our own thoughts* would all be gathered by the aggregate of mental formation so that they can form our new life in just an eye blink. It is that speedy! Thus, the aggregate of mental formation is something that can transcend all of space, time, as well as matter. That is why some people can walk on electrical wires during sleepwalking and never are electrocuted, because during that time they are living in the aggregate of mental formation.

Therefore, it means that during the existence of the mental body in the intermediate state, the individual still uses sense perception, mental formation and consciousness, but he will not be able to utilize mental formation. This is something very interesting about life-and-death. The aggregate of perception will activate the life of the mental body, leading it to move about freely in the world without gross matter. However, in reality, to say that it is utterly *without matter* is not correct; it is still a form of matter, but *subtle* matter. The mental body can travel freely everywhere, except the Vajra Seat of the Buddha, and it cannot penetrate the womb of a mother. It is as if this mental body has supramundane power, because aside from those two places, we can move about everywhere freely and at ease after death. There is no need to spend money for airline tickets, yet we can go on traveling from place to place very comfortably. It is even faster than the airplane because we only need to generate one thought, then we would already have arrived in America or another country.

Therefore, to die is not the end! Being dead can be much happier than being alive right now if we are “not convicted” of any unwholesome deeds, especially if we have a mind of clarity until the last phase. The moment we leave our bodies, the positive and negative *karmas* will flock in. If we are sufficiently self-collected and calm when we are flooded with



all of our *karmas* before leaving our bodies, then they will self-dissolve the moment they bore down on us. The non-virtuous *karmas* will rapidly sweep us away, but if we are adequately settled and unruffled, they will all disappear, a boundlessly spacious expanse will manifest and it is the beginning of our freedom. What is worrisome though is that we may not have enough meditative absorption when the virtuous and non-virtuous *karmas* flock in, and they would sweep us away, no longer knowing where we are standing. That is when the powerful winds of *karma* blow us away. However, wherever *karma* would lead us has already been worked out by our mental formation.

The moment we leave our body of flesh and bones, a mental interval which contains all the virtuous and non-virtuous *karmas* would appear, and then we would return to being normal again, but the orientation of our next life, driven by our *karmic* habitual tendencies, will continue to lead us on without halting. We use the term “*halting*” but in reality, we would not come to a standstill in the same way we are sitting well composed here. If we do not have meditative absorption at that time, we would not be able to compose ourselves and sit still like right now.

However, if we are self-collected and are not swept away by our virtuous and non-virtuous *karmas*, then we can freely travel at ease in the expanse of spaciousness. This expanse is one with great freedom; we can freely stand, walk, sit, lie down, engage in activities or abide wherever according to our wish. This means that we are utterly free of any so-called “*conviction*.” However, we are still Mr. Nguyen Van A, Ms. Nguyen Thi Mit, or Mr. Nguyen Van Xoai; we have not yet emancipated from these imprints, because we still exist in that level of perception. It is because we cannot yet dispel our perception, and thus, we have not yet removed ourselves from our past life’s engraved impressions.

These imprints still prescribe us to be, for example, Mr. Nguyen Van A, the husband of Mrs. Nguyen Thi B. After Mr. A died, he left behind his heritage, and following that, his wife left with another man, taking with her all of his possession. So Mr. A was enraged, and he struck her, but she did not feel any pain, because his mental thinking has nothing to do with her physical body, even if he hit her out of bitter jealousy. The mental body knows it all and sees it all, but it cannot impinge on matter if it does not have any power from practice exertion. Although he may get angry, scream and yell, jump around, or feel resentful and hateful, his wife and the living people around him will be completely unaware of it.

Due to the fact that the aggregate of perception continues to perceive ourselves as who we were in our immediate past life, we can continue to exist as such a person in that intermediate realm. Then, when the father and mother, who are the approaching conditions of our next life, appear, we would feel a triangular force of *karma*. When our father and mother are in union, they generate a fire of lust. At that moment, infinite, countless consciousnesses of other beings crowd around, including consciousnesses of non-humans, who also try to rush in. We, too, become their rivals, competing with them to come on board. If we have practiced well, then automatically, we have a force that all of the other consciousnesses succumb to, and thus, it helps us to enter the mother’s womb quite

easily. If we choose a specific couple as our parents, then no one can compete with us, However, if we do not have any spiritual force but only *karma*, then through the force of *karma*, there will be a cord that automatically sucks us into the womb of a mother, and we cannot possibly resist it.

Being whirled by the intense force of *karma*, we cannot possibly resist it, and thus, we would be sucked by it and end up banging against the uterus wall of our mother. We would go through a fleeting moment of shock, and completely lose all of our cognition. We end up not knowing anything anymore. Whatever stipulates us as Mr. Nguyen Van A utterly extinguishes at that very moment. After we passed away, the self-grasping notion of us as being Mr. Nguyen Van A did not die out until now. This is what the mundane world would call “to eat the rice porridge of senile dementia,” and as such, we would end up with “no knowledge” of our past lives whatsoever. This is the case of the intermediate state where we were thrust into the uterus wall too violently, and thus, makes us lose all of our knowledge of being Mr. Nguyen Van A in the last life. The “force of *karma*” creates an awestruck, dreadful panic; it is not just an ordinary pull.

We can imagine ourselves sitting here, and all of a sudden being pulled away instantaneously for a thousand kilometers within a minute – how horrifying that would be! However, by comparison, the gravitational pull into our mother’s womb is a million times more forceful. In an eye blink, we would be yanked into our mother’s womb by a vigorous force of gravity, and as we hear a “crashing noise,” everything becomes pitch-black and our cognition ceased. Those of us who had fallen unconscious would be able to have some ideas about this; the moment we faint, everything is pitch-black, and then afterward, we would regain our cognition. However, in the case of being pulled into the mother’s womb, there would be no cognition that returns to us after we wake up. That is indeed ignorance, because there would not be enough time for us to compare, to choose, to take it or to leave it. It is impossible for us to do anything because of the pulling force of *karma*. Therefore, the force of *karma* is truly horrid, especially the *karma* of the cycle of birth and death.

Thus, while being frantically in chaos and in gross darkness, there is the wavering and pulling force that gives our consciousness rattling fright. Just imagine the engine of an airplane flying about ten kilometers above the ground suddenly shuts down and the plane takes a plunge from the sky above. Such gravitational force would make anyone trying to survive absolutely terrified. Alternatively, we can also image ourselves jump off a twenty-meter high building; that very moment is terribly horrifying, too.

Following that moment of terribly frightful, impenetrable blackness, let us now talk about the “*self*,” the “*silent, latent self*” of ours. First, our aggregate of perception becomes overwhelmingly panic-stricken, not knowing what to do; it can no longer perceive existence nor non-existence. Since perception is now being in the dark, mental formation actuates. After being whirled into the pitch-black womb by the force of *karma*, our incessant self-grasping does not accept that it is now vanishing into the chaos and pitch-black physical space, and so it tries to regain its focus and calmness. In the physical space inside the mother’s womb, our consciousness stumbles and gropes.

The moment the ovum and the sperm meet together, there is a flicker of light, and thus, our consciousness is gladdened, tenaciously clings to the mother's ovum. Where there is the trio of ovum, sperm, and consciousness, then the embryo is conceived. While clinging to the ovum, the aggregate of mental formation begins to generate its vigor, constructing a new life in less than a finger snap. No matter whether the *karmas* are from five lives ago, or a hundred, eight thousand, two to three million, or five to seven thousand million lives ago, the aggregate of mental formation would collect them all from these past lives and pump them into a new life, lining up all of them through steps one, two, three, four, five, etc. and getting everything ready for us for our approaching life. Whether we will be a boy or a girl, with dark or fair skin, short or tall, skinny or heavy, all of these details will all be worked out by mental formation. It would work through an extended period of causes and effects, gather them together, filter, sift, and thrust all of them into the new life in less than a finger snap. That is "*ignorance coming into contact with mental formation.*"

After mental formation finishes determining the entire new life, which is ready to come into being, the conservation of our individuality will now begin. Now we will become *something*, and we are no longer the good old Mr. Nguyen Van A. We are the ovum, and the ovum is actually the being of our life. It will be the start of the discernment of consciousness, and we will compare and distinguish that there is a "*self*" right here. Of course, in this segment of our existence in the womb, we are still in the dark; however, if we have meditative absorption, then we would be able to clearly perceive the sphere of our existence in the womb.

These days, science was able to photograph the hearts of practitioners in sitting meditation; their hearts are amazingly bright. Similarly, the wisdom of the people, while in the womb, who have cultivated good practice, is much more lucid than that of non-practitioners. That is why after these practitioners enter life again, they are intelligent and knowledgeable, because they are being lead and guided by wisdom. Mental formation makes plan in accordance with the approaching life. Once this life is gone, then the *karmic* imprints of the preceding life get their priorities and are much stronger. Actually, it is the aggregate of mental formation that attracts various *karmic* causes and effects of the preceding life, and amasses these old *karmas* into the new life.

At that moment, we spontaneously regain our consciousness following our being obscured in the dark, and slowly start to see that "*there is a self*" again. Although "*there is a self*," this "*self*" is not at all similar to anything else around us. When we first recognize that we are completely unlike anything around us, that is the first moment when "*self-grasping*" becomes revitalized. When we see that we are dissimilar to everything, it means our "*individual selves*" become well-formed. This is exactly when "*ignorance comes into contact with mental formation, and mental formation comes into contact consciousness.*" At this point in time, our consciousness can only differentiate between hot and cold. If our mother eats or drinks something cold, then we would feel cold, and if our mother eats or drinks something hot, then we would feel hot. The fluctuation of our mother has a direct influence

on us, but if our power of meditative absorption is strong, then we can counter affect our mother. This is the interaction between the *karmic* habitual tendencies of mother and child.

Why is it that a mother gives birth to a child with deformities? It is not due to our mother, but due to us. It is due to the workings of mental formation and because we had established some causes and effects in past lives. Due to the *karma* of the fetus, it leads the mother to having the desire to follow a certain unhealthy diet or detrimental habits during her pregnancy, so the child would end up with a health issue or a deformity. It is also ourselves who generate the influencing *karma* that leads our mother to crave for a certain food or to follow certain undesirable habit, so that we would be born mentally disarranged, incognizant, unintelligent, or with cancer after birth. If we do not have those kinds of *karma*, then our mother would not have any desire for any of those things during her pregnancy.

We can also clearly see the said point in a story during Buddha's lifetime. At that time, when Sāriputra was still in the womb, Sāriputra's mother came to be so brilliant. Her own younger brother, Śramana Dirghanakha, was a famed Vedic commentator in India at that time who surpassed everyone in debate. However, when Sāriputra was still in utero, Śramana Dirghanakha lost to his sister at least a hundred times in public. He was afraid that after his nephew was born, he would lose to him over debate, too, and thus, he went to live in the forest spending many months and years searching for answers that he even forgot to cut his fingernails. Due to his long fingernails, people called him Dirghanakha ("Long Nails") – a *Brahmacarin* with long nails. Therefore, when we are still in the womb, we can *influence* our mother if we have a vigorous force.

There was a woman from Tiền Giang (a province in southern Vietnam) who had an ectopic pregnancy. She followed the brown rice nutritional macrobiotic diet #7 for a short while, and then, the viable embryo entered inside the uterus and everything became normal afterward. While continuing to follow the nutritional diet #7, she craved for a bowl of beef noodle soup, and after eating it, she went insane. Her family had to bring her to the mental institute. After I heard about this, I told her to rub her stomach and to tell her unborn child that she was very sorry, and that she promised from that time onward until the time she gave birth to him, she would never eat meat again, all along asking for his forgiveness. After she did what I told her, she became clear-headed again and she went home. Her young son is now ten years old. These days, whenever he sees any ladies selling fish on the streets, he would sit around to give them a Dharma talk. He would go on talking until the sellers overturn the fish baskets to release the fish into the water. If they refuse to do that, then he would refuse to get up and leave, and continues to talk back and forth about cause and effect.

Thus, it means that while we are still in the womb, our vigor can influence our mother. If the mother eats well and engages in proper activities during pregnancy, then a person with great merits will enter the embryo. However, someone without merits who has the *karma*

to have illnesses or disabilities in this lifetime, then the aggregate of mental formation would work it out priorly. It would influence the mother so that she would engage in improper activities or eating habits during her pregnancy, so that the person would be born half paralyzed, crippled, armless, or blind, etc.

I remember how one time, a mother brought her eighteen year old daughter to see me. This young lady was very beautiful but she cannot speak the human language. Once in while she would howl and the screeching sound was horrifying, making us feel as if we were in the hell realm. The mother said that during her pregnancy, she drank a few litters of sugary lemon juice on a daily basis, causing the brain of this young girl to be completely ruined. Therefore, if we were to just take a look at a certain period of time, such as during the mother's pregnancy, then it looks as if it was due to the mother's improper eating habits. However, it was actually due to our *karma* that our mother could not resist these habits otherwise. Thus, we should not put the blame on our mother, but it actually comes from our own *karma* and influence.

When "*ignorance comes into contact with mental formation,*" mental formation amasses all the *karmas* from thousands of thousands of lives ago and thrusts them all into one single life. Should there be some kind of interdependent relationships that would bring about certain happenings during a certain period in our life, then the aggregate of mental formation will meticulously arrange for our mother to eat, drink and engage in activities in a certain way in order to give birth to us in a certain way in our new life. This new life is also the groundwork of the aggregate of mental formation. For each step in our activities in this life, for example, we may think that we are the ones who make the decisions and select this major or that major to study in college, who think we like to do this or to do that, or who think that we have the abilities to make a choice, but in reality, mental formation already masterminded and prearranged everything for us in advance.

For example, we can talk about how mental formation already arranged for us to stay at the temple to listen to the Dharma teaching for only the morning session. We have come from very far away, and all of a sudden, we received a phone call after the morning teaching finished, and thus, we had to hurriedly rush home. We may think that this is a strange and unexpected occurrence that we ended up not being able to stay on to study in the afternoon, yet, mental formation already made pre-arrangement for it to happen.

Then, there are many happenings that seem quite normal which we think stem from our own choices, but there are other instances when we simply cannot choose. In the cases of those practitioners who have meditative absorption, however, can escape the pre-arrangement of the aggregate of mental formation. They can escape even if mental formation already masterminded everything so that each *karma* in our lives will happen in an orderly fashion from step one to step five, all the way to the very end. The force of the aggregate of mental formation is simply like that, and it is something which we cannot possibly break out nor flee from.

Since we are trapped in our bodies of five aggregates, the Buddha elucidated “*the five aggregates being Void*” in order to be emancipated from suffering. Otherwise, the aggregate of mental formation will continuously make arrangement for us life after life. We are completely stranded without a way out other than having to completely resolve the five aggregates. When we understand that we are being caught in the trap of mental formation just like this, if it still does not worry us, then no one would be able to unravel it for us. When we listen to the teaching up to this point, we realize that if we do not exert in our practice, the Historical Buddha, Mr. A or Mr. B cannot even rescue us. Even if there are a million Buddhas appearing in front of us, we would still not be able to break away from our bodies of five aggregates.

The Buddha clearly saw this, and thus, the only thing the Buddha did was to teach us how to practice and to provide us support for our practice. It is we, nevertheless, who must go beyond the five aggregates ourselves; otherwise, no one can stick their hands in to save us. Some doctrines say such and such a person can help us escape from this mundane world, but those are simply theories to mislead us. If we are being deluded in this life, our practice will be deadlocked. In this life, if we do not pour all of our energy into dismantling our five aggregates, then it seems that we would come out empty-handed. Because our progress would not continue to improve on its own in an orderly fashion. If and only if we can sustain and safeguard our practice exertion, then it is precisely this exertion power which can help us in our future lives.

For example, if we are currently still young, our practice may be quite weak, but as days go by, we will continue to be better, until one day, our practice will be far more superior than now. We can clearly see that following each year, our practice is definitely much improved and the power to control our *karmic* habitual tendencies is much stronger. Thus, when *karma* manifests, we can easily transform it. Our wisdom mind can penetratingly discern between right and wrong, good and bad, and at that time, we no longer are lured by the *karmic* force nor chase after attachment, anger and ignorance. If the power of our concentration absorption is stronger every moment until the very end, then it is precisely this force that will drive us forward in our consecutive future lives.

Due to the force of our practice, we will be able to advance in our next life. However, if we do not have any practice power, and mentally, there is neither change nor progress within us, then at the end of this life, the aggregate of mental formation will collect the old happenings for us to utilize in our next life. On the other hand, if we have meditative power, then we can implement this power, enough to prepare for our new life, and thus, in the next life, we will live with all the merits and wisdom which are the fruition of our prior practice. If we practice well until the end of life, then the aggregate of mental formation can also adjust and enhance our new life for the better. However, if we do not have any power from our practice, we do not recite the scriptures, are too lazy to sit in meditation, feel tormented and lamely cry when bad things happen, feel nostalgic, or are trapped in sadness and self-pity, then it means that there is no change in our mind as it remains normally

mundane. If our mind is remains mundane, and we remain ordinary, then the aggregate of mental formation will arrange for us to follow our *karma*.

The aggregate of mental formation can pull out something from the past or some terrible incidents from billions and billions of lives ago back to the here and now. If our virtuous *karma* is powerful enough to overshadow the unwholesome *karma*, then the force of our practice exertion will gather all of our root virtues and wholesome *karmas* from infinite lifetimes into the new life so that we can utilize them them. In the approaching life, for example, if we accumulate ten virtues then we will enjoy the meritorious reward of ten virtues; additionally, our virtuous power would gather even more rewards from more wholesome deeds from the past. Thus, we would end up with a thousand meritorious rewards, and we will be able to live a truly wonderful life in the next life, we would at once meet the true spirituality at birth, and know how to practice in order to continue to progress in the cultivation of our practice efforts.

Our practice exertion will not go to waste, because it can maintain, preserve, and attract past virtuous deeds into the new life. If we can be in total control of *karma*, then the power of ignorance will not be strong enough when ignorance encounters mental formation. Because when the luminosity of our wisdom our meditative absorption suffice, then *karma* has no pulling force and we get to choose how to enter the embryo. Of course, we have *karma* with our [prospective] parents; however, if we see that this couple does not have enough merits to be our parents because their mind of virtues is not so great, whereas our virtuous mind is wholesome and we need to be in a different family, then we would search for another couple with a greater mind of virtues so that we can enter the embryo to become their child. Then, being a child of such a devoted family, they may bring us to the temple when we barely reach one or two years old, and that is the sole reason why we entered the embryo to become this couple's offspring. Therefore, if in this life we are not able to have self-control, then we would be perfectly helpless after we die. Once helpless, *karma* will whirl us away and we will have to accept the dominance of the aggregate of mental formation so that we would somehow be reborn in the new life.

Thus, aside from establishing our self-grasping, the aggregate of mental formation constructs all actions, gestures, words, actions and all other activities in this life which means our mental formation nearly covers it all. For example, at the time being we are inspired and love to practice Zen, but the aggregate of mental formation already made arrangement so that in another ten years, we will end up following a Tantric master. At that time, we cannot possibly resist, and at the exact date and time, we will have all the ripened conditions to come across a master who is even more sublime than our master at the present with enough ability to lead us until the very end, and so, we will then follow in his footsteps.

We, therefore, cannot possibly determine anything for ourselves if we do not exert good practice. If we cultivate good practice, then we can decide on our own and make choices. If

we do not cultivate good practice, then the aggregate of mental formation will arrange everything accordingly so that we can go on living step-by-step in this mundane world. We think that all of our resolutions and decisions are ours, just like how we think we are in control when we order foods. However, in reality, the way we did certain things on a certain day happens due to our *karmic* course of action. If we were more heedful, we would eat differently; if we were disturbed, we would eat differently. We would be able to recognize whether our mind is aware versus unalert during a meal. We can recognize either the influence of delusive desire, or our composed manner when ordering foods. These two mindsets and actions would come about very clearly. It is exactly the same for this life of ours. Everything is from the influencing power of the aggregate of mental formation, and it can construct everything and anything.

For people who have put an end to the aggregate of form, the aggregate of sensation and of perception so that they can all be Void, then the aggregate of mental formation is absolutely incredible; it can generate all the things that they ever want. Once the aggregate of perception is settled, all the things that originate from the aggregate of mental formation are actually the activation force in this life. If their mind are settled and calm, whatever they wish can take place accordingly although the five aggregates have not been extinguished. This is considered supramundane power. They can change everything in this life according to their desire if they want to. If they have the power to transcend the aggregate of perception, then they can do it, but they cannot if they have not yet gone beyond sense perception.

There is no measuring stick in this entire universe that can measure the depth, the breadth and the vigor of the aggregate of mental formation. Mental formation is the force of activation that gives birth to all phenomena. It is not yet our true "*innate nature*," but it is connected to the vigorous force of the "*innate nature*." If the practitioner has transcended the aggregate of perception, settling deeply in meditative absorption for a long period, then he or she would see his or her body and mind as hollow void. They remain in *samadhi* or complete absorption, no longer disturbed, with their mind calm and pure and their mental suffering extinguished. The end of sense perception is the end of suffering, and many people think that *that* is already *Nirvāṇa* and thus, they abide in it until the end of their lives. At the moment we exit this life, if we can transcend the aggregate of perception, then there will be a realm that is equivalent to the mind of those without perception. Living in such a realm, they continue to practice to dismantle the aggregate of mental formation and consciousness.

Truly, if we no longer carry a body, we would have a realm for those who have gone beyond perception; it is called the realm of non-perception. If we have wholesome conditions in this life, gathered together with our roots of virtues, virtuous *karma*, and our practice exertion from past lifetimes, then we may be able to transcend the aggregate of perception in this life. Even if we cannot yet cut through perception and simply suspend at the aggregate of perception, then this would have already been highly invaluable.



Of course, once we get here, we still need to advance further and not fall backward. After we enter deep meditative absorption, we will see an unending source, a living force that is overflowing from within our consciousness. In our mind, there is this current of life force that is so intense, yet it does not form anything. It operates very subtly and calmly, not emitting any waves of thoughts or thoughts itself. If we immerse in tranquility very profoundly so that our meditative absorption can be deeper and deeper, then we would be able to see from the outer veil all the way to the very depths of the aggregate of mental formation. The *karmic conscious seeds* will be penetratingly clear to us. The karmic seeds or the very initial *seeds of the life-and-death* cycle will be crystal clear and ever clearer to us – we directly see everything with clarity all the way down to the root of our cyclic origination.

However, before we can actually clearly see to the very depths of the root of life-and-death in the conscious aggregate, we must thoroughly penetrate and perfectly know all of the aggregate of mental formation from the outer to the inner core. The moment we become utterly immaculate, we would then be able to penetrate and directly see at that very instant *the very first initial vibrant motion of the aggregate of mental formation*. That is, actually, the very starting point of infinite lifetimes until now, which means we have now seen all the way back to the initial origination of the cycle of life-and-death, and therefore this cycle is considered fully resolved.

We must, after all, be able to immerse very deeply in complete absorption so that we can penetrate and directly see the very first *“primordial ripple”* in the aggregate of mental formation. This *“primordial ripple”* did not become a thought; it simply wiggled and led us to the path of life-and-death. It attracted infinite mental arising-and-ceasings – our thoughts – and let them overflow in our consciousness. When our wisdom is able to see the aggregate of mental formation all the way back to the very first initial starting point, then the cycle of life-and-death is considered fully resolved, and the aggregate of mental formation becomes extinct.



### ***The aggregate of consciousness***

The moment the aggregate of mental formation is extinct, we blaze as the splendor of clarity. Lucidity, pure radiance appears, but that is *not yet* the perfect enlightenment, because we still see that there is a disparity between this luminous clarity and everything else around us. This luminosity is immaculate and all-pervading, yet it still sees a “*self*” that is different from everything else. It illumines everything and recognizes everything surrounding it, although it is no longer a physical body. This is what is absolutely astonishing. This is, indeed, the aggregate of consciousness.

The aggregate of consciousness has the ability to know the past, the future, and each circumstance. It is all-knowing and all-discerning. Thus far, the meditative exertion experienced by many masters who came after the Buddha’s time, and many of the existing meditation centers worldwide, seem unable to go beyond this stage and it is simply the aggregate of consciousness. Here, it is hollow and tranquil, boundlessly spacious, clearly knowing, and blazing with clarity. Here, it is extremely bright, yet, it cognizes that everything else is *not* itself. There is still a “*knowing-awareness*” that is pure, hollow and tranquil, boundlessly vast, all-pervasive. There is nothing that it does not know, yet, it does not generate any discriminating, dualistic thoughts, and there is no comparison whatsoever in this state of being. This is a quiet, subtle cognition and knowingness – a quiet, subtle awareness that is extremely minuscule and so deep within us – and at that moment, we see that we are truly very tranquil. Nevertheless, there still exists this “*self*” – a “*self*” of ours that is tranquil. The tranquility is still this “*self*” of ours; the void is still this “*self*” of ours; thus, we have not yet *exhausted the selves!* So we must understand that this is simply the tranquil sphere of the aggregate of consciousness, not enlightenment, because there is still this “*self*” of ours who knows. This silent ever-knowingness exists similarly to our “*innate nature*” (*our True Nature*) however, the ultimate knowingness of our “*innate nature*” is different.

Right now and right here, at this stage, it may very well be that we can see it all, hear it all, and our six-sense faculties in the vivid presence know it all. The eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness and mind-consciousness exist lucidly within the six-sense organs and they clearly know all phenomena, but they do not give rise to any dualistic thinking. Still, they see themselves different from the other phenomena, as they themselves are not one with form, sound, smell, taste, touch nor objects of mind. They simply know form, sound, smell, taste, touch and objects of mind. They clearly cognize without having any discrimination, yet, they *are still not yet* form, sound, smell, taste, touch or objects of mind.

The practitioner, therefore, needs to know that he is still being trapped in discriminating

consciousness. At that moment, although it is a clear knowingness, the sense of “*distinctiveness*” has not been utterly extinguished—there is still a discrete quietude, a distinguished sense of singularity that still lingers on. Therefore, even though we can be illumined and crystal clear, if there is still a “*self*” somewhere to be illumined, then as practitioners, we must recognize this fault. If we do not see this fault, then we have not yet emancipated. Here is actually the talisman on the top of the Wu Tai Shan Mountain, and here is where the monkey of consciousness needs to stir up all the way to reach the *Ālaya* consciousness. The *Ālaya* consciousness will see that there is *still* something here that needs to be extricated. To extricate the dissimilarity between this “*self*” and all “*phenomena*” means, in that very instant, we – our so-called “*selves*” – dissolve and actually become one with the entire *dharmadhātu*, the realm of truth. There is no longer self versus phenomena. Once the dissimilarity is removed, the “*self*” utterly disappears, and what is left is the lucid noumenal state.

Therefore, we must see such a fault when we ourselves are still being different from “*something else*.” This is actually the last fault of our discriminating consciousness! At this stage, we have “*knowing*,” but there is still “*this self who knows*.” If so, then “*this self who knows*” must also dissipate. Once we reach there, the power of activation will automatically push us through, because if we have already gone beyond the aggregate of mental formation, it would be quite easy for us to pull through during this practice segment. Well, it may be easy to say so, but one still needs some time to practice meticulously; one cannot be vague about this, because if one becomes laid-back, and cannot maintain or nourish one’s practice during this critical segment, then one cannot possibly disintegrate the “*silent, subtle self*.” Once one reaches here, one really needs to diligently maintain and nourish one’s practice!

Thus, in regards to this silent, subtle knowing awareness, we need a discrete place for ourselves to practice so that we can settle deeply in this quietude of knowingness. This “*quiet, subtle knowing-awareness*” is still being distinct from all *dharmas*. Therefore, it means that if we are still being slightly differentiated from a grain of sand, a breeze, a light, or slightly dissimilar from something else, then that means there is still the duality of “*self*” and “*phenomena*.”

It means that, at this stage, there is still a “*self*,” and we must, by all means, recognize this fault! It is because if there were still a “*self*” over here, then there would be a “*him/her/it*” over there. However, the very moment we finally recognize and have a direct knowing that there is a “*self*” still “*existing within this knowing-awareness*,” then at that very instant the “*self*” will dissipate. We, or the “*self*,” will spontaneously disappear. We are now “*not two*.” We are now “*non-dual*” from the flowers, the leaves, the empty space, the universe, and the all-pervasiveness itself. At that moment, our outmoded “*self*” is automatically exhausted.

Yet, when we arrive at this point in our practice, there will be another “*death*,” the death of all of the differentiations and discriminations, so that *the very vivid presence* will have

neither more differentiation nor discrimination, and there will no longer be any dissimilarity among all phenomena that are “*clearly emerging*” in this vivid presence. Right then it will simply be the “*equanimous, non-discriminative presence,*” and this is crossing of the last threshold of the aggregate of consciousness!

This is not at all an easy thing to reach here, yet, when talking about transcending the five aggregates, many practitioners mistakenly perceive that they have attained ultimate realization. If there is an exceptional teacher and he can see through us, then it would be easy for us when we reach this point in our practice. Most of the Zen masters would wait for their disciples to reach this point so that the masters can “*knock-on*” them. If the disciples have only dismantled the aggregate of perception, then it may not be possible for the masters to knock-on them, but once they have reached this point, then yes, it is possible. Those practitioners who transcend perception can be sitting right there, yet, the gods cannot even find them to make an offering to them even if the gods want to.

Even so, it means the practitioners have only dismantled perception, not yet reaching the last threshold of consciousness. Thus, if a master with vigorous power wants to whack his student so that he or she can pass through the aggregate of mental formation, or be emancipated from the aggregate of consciousness to at least once immerse in the “*five aggregates being Void,*” then it is not at all easy! Such a practitioner needs assistance in his practice exertion; he himself needs to maintain and nourish his practice, and he himself needs to realize that he has not yet reached the final destination.

The extinction of perception can lead people to have supramundane power, but to have this kind of power before reaching full attainment can easily make one err on the path. It would be quite easy to give rise to a mind of self-proclamation, believing that one has attained sainthood or *Arhatship*. If so, it can be considered the “end of life,” because one still has not yet dismantled the rest that follows. These practitioners will not return to take rebirth as human beings, but they will exist in their own realms. In this kind of realms, they will continue to abide in such a state of emptiness for a very long time before they can emancipate from this state. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would have to go there to give pith instructions to them so that they can actually depart from these perpetual realms; otherwise, these practitioners will forever grasp the quiescent, serene, pure, and ecstatic state of being even though they still have *two more layers to transcend* before the cycle of life-and-death can be exhausted. The extinction of the aggregate of perception does not mean that one can attain the final transmundane power of the utter extinguishment of all mental defilements; one has to completely dismantle *both aggregates of mental formation and consciousness* before one can attain this transmundane power.

We can see that talking about the aggregate of consciousness can be never-ending. However, once the practitioner recognizes the primordial, pristine origin, the initial beginning, or the sprouting source since beginningless time, and once the “*subtle vibrant motion*” in the aggregate of mental formation that *initially* led him to the cycle of life-and-death is

resolved, then right at that moment he can leap over the aggregate of consciousness and completely dissolve!

When life-and-death is utterly dissipated, one can transcend the three worlds, and usually it is just like that. This pair of “*mental formation–consciousness*” will disappear altogether at the same time. Because the practitioner had cultivated meditation absorption for a very, very long time, so this decisive moment is similar to what is mentioned in the practice of extinguishing the ten fetters, during which the practitioner already transcends restlessness which is the covert lair of mental formation, yet there is still the “*subtle vital faculty*” or “*vital base*” which is the life continuum. This subtle vital self, the self-grasping, the illusionary self and the thought-based self still exists within the boundless, empty realm of peace and serenity.

Yet, the instant the *supreme sacred wisdom beyond mind* of an awakened being appears, ignorance is utterly dispelled. When benighted ignorance is extinguished, we get to see the innermost truth. When this truth reveals itself, we will be able to penetrate our self-grasping, and when self-grasping dissolves, the vital faculty or vital base comes to an end, and only when ignorance is completely purified, then we can attain sainthood. Actually, the “*very last pinpoint of subtle self-grasping*” is precisely this consciousness! Therefore, when we can annihilate birth and death in the aggregate of mental formation, we would have enough radiant clarity to see that the subtle self-grasping is indeed the aggregate of consciousness. It is diminutive, quietly subdued, silently calm, and it “*exists,*” yet, is utterly “*non-existent.*” However, this is not yet the Abiding Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception (the Eighth Meditative Absorption State).

At this stage, consciousness is different from the Abiding Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. Although this consciousness is silently subtle, it no longer has sensation or form. This consciousness is no longer perception, feelings nor volition. This consciousness is the tranquil knowing-awareness and the very last covert lair. Although it is something so diminutive, it is the ending one! If we can dismantle this ending point, and see all the way to the initial vibrant sprout – the very root source of our mental formation – that which leads us to the endless cycle of life-and-death, then the aggregate of mental formation would automatically dissipate. At that very moment, we will blaze in radiant clarity and can *go beyond the aggregate of consciousness*. There will simply be the perfect and complete existence of the expanse of phenomenal truth in the presence without any dissimilarity whatsoever, which means we finally transcend the aggregate of consciousness.

In reality, we do not arrive here due to our exertion in practice, but because our vigor has become our “*internal driving force*” following the extinction of the aggregate of perception. Once perception is distinguished, our inner force will be immense, and only then can it submerge deeply in the aggregate of mental formation and dismantle the aggregate of consciousness. However, the initial gate leading to awakening is still the aggregate of form. If anyone who receives the pith instructions from a spiritual master without having to exert in practice to dismantle the form aggregate, then in their own life, he or she would have to

come back to living through days and months with the *“form aggregate as being Void.”* They would still be completely living as they actually witness how each of the physical cells goes through their own *“death”*— which means the practitioner actually goes through the experience and realization of *“strolling the synthesis of form as Void, sensation as Void, perception as Void, mental formation as Void, and consciousness as Void.”* Thereafter, this practitioner can finally be utterly unobstructed. Otherwise, if the practitioner has not yet passed through this experience, then they cannot be unimpeded. They may be able to realize it theoretically, but it is not yet fully unobstructed. Only by reaching this final stage that it can be called the *“five aggregates being Void.”*



## Appendix B

### *The Wisdom that Reveals True Existence, the Realm of Truth*

*Excerpted from a Teaching of Zen Master Thich Tuệ Hải  
on the Flower Ornament Scripture (Avatamsaka Sūtra) – Lesson 488*

After cultivating and perfectly completing the virtue of Universal Goodness and All-Excellent Conduct, the practitioners' wisdom is like that of an enlightened being as there is no disparity between theirs and an enlightened being's perfect wisdom. So then, this person will then have the true knowing wisdom, directly seeing the reality of all phenomena. This as-is reality, true existence is unlike the realm of this earthly world. If we have not fully awakened to the cosmos of perfect absorption, then to us, there are still disparities in this phenomenal world. However, once we are fully immersed, we automatically exist as the very limitless enlightened wisdom. There is no other wisdom higher than this wisdom, but this supreme wisdom is not the same as the "conscious mind's all-seeing and all-knowing awareness" as we have thought for so long. The superlative wisdom is *not* the subjectifying mind that simply sees all and knows all per sé!

For example, after we rest for a long period of time in the quiescent mental sphere of emptiness and purity, we become devoid of thoughts. Then, our mind is pervading everywhere, and this mind sees and knows everything everywhere. That's the way we have learned the Dharma, isn't it? Speaking about our mind in this way is simple enough for everyone to understand and to nod in approval, because when the mind is pure, everything can be seen more clearly, more brilliantly and more transparently – the mind no longer makes any mistake with any outer, objectified appearances.

Since 1992, I composed the following verses:

*From now on, to leisurely live in happiness  
Brightly clear and non-mistaken about each and every condition  
Non-mistaken, unconfused, unerring  
Simply radiant, just like that – how is it possible to fully express it!*

At that moment, I thought that my clear, lucid knowing would never err as far as any outer phenomenon is concerned, so I misled myself into believing that I have reached the superlative truth. "*From now on, to leisurely live in happiness*" means that when one reaches this truth, practice exertion is no longer required; everything becomes effortless, because at that moment, the mind was ever radiant, ever knowing, ever penetrating, and ever pervading. This mind was unerring because it could clearly see everything everywhere,

whether near or far, large or small. I erroneously thought that I have reached ultimate fruition, because such experience of direct seeing and direct knowing was already too wonderful, and not so simple and easily accessible to all.

Then, slowly, I realized, *"Oh my! This is not it!"* It took me many years to finally realize that I put myself in a deadlock believing in this so-called truth for many years from 1987 until 1995 when I finally discovered that this was not *"it"*! After I became Abbot of this temple, one time during a sealed retreat, some transformation took place and it caused me to look at everything from a very different perspective. It was because I suddenly heard a voice in space, and upon hearing the sound of it, the whole of space, too, is clearly resonating this very same sound in synchronicity. At that very moment, I began to fathom everything profoundly different, and I nearly decided to leave this physical body behind after so many years of facing ponderous challenges in life.

So then, at that precise momentness, it was actually *"this all-knowing giving birth to the cosmic totality true knowing."* The very first thing that took place was that I was no longer being subjectified – the I, the self, was no longer the subject. Clearly, there was no longer an *"I"* who knew. First of all, the *"I"* who used to know pervadingly came to a stoppage. For example, right now, I know. Right now, this knowing-awareness is my self or my beingness. Right now, I hear, I see, I smell, I taste, I touch, and I know, and I call myself *"me"* or *"my self."* However, the moment true knowing manifests is when the *"I"*, the *"me"* completely collapses and is self-exhausted.

In the past, I used to tell others of the following story. Once, a monk asked me: *"Now, if I want to attain the Dharma truth, what should I do and how should I prepare?"* The verbatim question was *"How to prepare?"* So I told him: *"To prepare is to not have anything left to prepare for, that is the best preparation!"* That was how I answered this monk.

To begin with, we think that we can relax, and let go of our body and mind all the way until there is no more to let go, and ultimately, we need to let go of that letting go, too. This is just an example. I have shown many people this practice, and there was a time when I tried to do the same. I tried to let go of my body and mind, and then let go of my letting go, so the sense of my beingness collapsed and I lost myself, or experience a sense of *no-self* for a moment. This experience happened because of the way I implemented the practice of letting go, and it means that I had to use effort to arrive at this. Sometimes it happened for five or ten minutes, sometimes for a whole day, and other times up to three or five days. This experience was quite usual for me at that time, although it was not meditative absorption. I can now assert that it was not meditative absorption; however, even though it was not, one can be completely without body and mind for many days. In 1993 it was like that for me while I was in retreat.

Until 1995, I finally came to terms with a totally different view than before. In the past, when I lost myself or when my *"individualistic self"* collapsed, so to speak, the *"I"* was still the one that knew everything and heard everything pervadingly. In general, in terms of



sound, I simply had a direct knowing that extended as far as the limits of that sound; the same with form. Yet, strangely enough, while this conscious knowing still existed, I was also aware that there was no body and mind. This conscious knowing was not body and mind. We cannot underestimate this knowing, because it simply knows and is aware of everything pervasively without any mental mind generation. There was absolutely no movement of the conscious mind at that time. There was absolutely no thought in that mental state in order to compare or contrast. This state was quite similar to the unborn state where there was no birth and no mind, because there was absolutely no mental arising at all. However, when it comes to directly knowing the realm of truth, it is very different, absolutely strikingly different, because there is no longer an “I” as a subject to see the truth, nor an “I” who sees the true nature of all *dharmas*.

For example, at a certain stage of meditative absorption, when we look at things, or hear sounds, we thoroughly and directly fathom the truth of form is formless and of sound soundless. If we remain in this absorption, we will definitely have a lucid direct knowing that even though this form appears, it is immovable, and this sound, too, even though it is heard, is equally immovable. Because everything rests in its own utterly immovable beingness, it prompts us to think that our seeing and hearing is Suchness, and that Suchness is this form and sound, and this form and sound are *pure Suchness*. However, once we arrive at this state, we will realize with clarity that it is still not yet the cosmic totality perfect truth. It is nevertheless not so simple to realize this miscue though, because, if everything, seemingly and presumably, is already *Suchness*, whether seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, then what else is there to further anticipate? However, this is not, definitely not yet, the realm of truth or true Dharma-body!

So what does it mean when True Wisdom, and not simply true knowing, appears? First of all, this True Wisdom is, in one aspect, similar to the same all-knowing as in the old days. That is, prior to the dawning of True Wisdom, we also knew pervasively. We also penetrated the truth of all *dharmas*’ genuine form as Voidness without any characteristic signs. That was the extensity of this conscious mind’s all-knowing; it was simply “*self-knowing* or *mind’s all-knowing*.” This all-knowing also pervades, quiescent, empty-hollow, without any thought movement. So True Wisdom and conscious mind’s all-knowing are quite similar in the sense that they are both clear, radiant, lucidly unimpeded, and both directly know form and sound synchronically.

In general, it means that all forms and sounds appear synchronically in singularity to the practitioner. However, that is not yet True Wisdom! Thus, once we reach here, we can assert that we can only arrive at this state progressively from one phase to another, and not instantaneously.

In 1995 when the noumenal state of perfect truth manifested, I, literally, lost myself once again – the slightest trace of self was utterly exhausted so that it now became the “*totality all-pervasive knowing*.” Prior to that, I subjectively and pervadingly knew everything. It was my mind’s all-knowing that knew everything pervadingly. Even so, there was still a

subtle self somewhere somehow, although this subtle self was not conspicuously visible. By contrast, without any spiritual realization, every little thing involves this self, so everything turns out to be I see, I hear, I smell, I touch, I know and I understand.

When both the coarse and subtle “I” completely exhaust, one is rendered utterly powerless. The “I” absolutely has no more impact on this body and mind! One’s body and mind become just as another *dharma* or phenomenon that is being present in the state of perfect truth; it is no longer one’s own body and mind per se. It is really truly just one single *dharma*! Apparently, the body can be sitting on the cushion, on this land, on this globe or in space, but it is exceedingly, indescribably minuscule. Compared to the globe, this body is excessively diminutive and it is simply a tiny, tiny dot on the surface of the globe. Once the totality all-pervasiveness manifests, it lucidly knows both the bright and the dark side of the globe synchronically, whereas now, the side facing the sun is bright and the other side is dark, which is something everyone is already aware of.

The point is that, although the body is still there, the old and familiar all-knowing conscious mind that we are priorly accustomed to has vanished. At that point, there is no longer an “I” that is aware of everything! For the time being, we can settle for a surface-level understanding of this idea. Nevertheless, at that moment of genuine experience, the old and the familiar have utterly exhausted, leaving no traces left. The body and mind are no longer in control, and are rendered completely powerless.

Thus, regarding this utterly unobstructed total clarity, we can use certain expressions to describe it so that one can see the difference between true mind-consciousness versus True Wisdom. Prior to the emergence of True Wisdom, one knows, sees, smells and tastes pervadingly. This all-knowing pervades everything. Whereas now, although total clarity is still pervasive, it is no longer the conscious “*mind’s all-knowing*” but the ubiquitous “*totality all-pervasive knowing*.” Here, they are very distinct. At this point in one’s absorption, everywhere is the all-pervasive knowing, or the perfect truth, and the whole phenomenal sphere in its entirety is, indeed, nothing but the true totality of wisdom. At this point, the trees, the grass, the leaves, the flowers, the sky and earth, the moon, the stars, the universe, and those with form or without form are but this singular ubiquitous, omnipresent all-pervasive knowing – the *cosmic totality wakeful wisdom-awareness*!

So, later on, I composed another poem about how “*all-pervasive knowing simply exists as such*.”<sup>19</sup> It is purely omniscience in existence. There is nothing that can be dual in this existence, and no disparity can be found within the existence of the “*totality all-pervasive knowing*.” In actuality, there is no searching, and no one searching – absolutely no one here that we can find even if we want to. It is simply the totality all-pervasive knowing, and all

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<sup>19</sup> *The totality all-pervasive knowing simply exists just as such.*

*The dharma realm is unimpededly penetrated, without coming or going.*

*Holding the infinitely vast cosmos in one’s hand,*

*One playfully and eternally roams through samsara and nirvana.*

forms are vividly revealed and manifest as *this totality all-pervasiveness*. When I say that all forms are vividly revealed, it does not mean that all forms appear in front of us. No, not that kind of appearance or manifestation! It is not like how the chrysanthemum flowers on this table appear to us in front of us. It is not form that is appearing in front of our eyes or sound appearing to our ears – it is not at all like that.

On the contrary, everything simply is being present and reveals itself nakedly and vividly. Everything is nakedly, vividly being present. Form no longer appears through our eye faculty and sound no longer appears through our sound faculty. At that moment, anything that has form, or is formless, in this entire spacious cosmos, manifests unpretentiously as its own original, pure true form. And what is extraordinary here? Here, the true form of all appearances is neither large or small. There is nothing large or small as we are seeing as of now. Right now, how can we possibly prove that this plumule is as big as that large leaf? We can never prove anything as such based on its weight and mass. Definitely not!

Yet, when the realm of truth is vividly present, we cannot possibly use any kind of logical reasoning to persuade someone that one appearance is smaller (or larger) than another, even if we want to. It is no longer large or small as we now see in space, but at that moment, everything exists pervasively concurrently. Everything is simply omnipresent in the present vastness. Everything is simply the totality of all-pervasiveness pervading the entirety of the cosmic expanse, and this expanse is not the same familiar dimensional space where we can see form appearing in front of our eyes.

The same is exactly true of sound. For example, let's talk about the tiny sound coming from an ant's legs when it walks. In the realm of truth, you can hear it, but not necessarily at the location where it walks; on the contrary, it reverberates and pervades the entirety of the spacious expanse. Furthermore, if there is only one singular sound that pervades everywhere, then that is not so extraordinary. On the contrary, if an ant has eight legs and it walks with all of its eight legs, then eight sounds ubiquitously appear at the same time. The same is true of the second and the third ant, even for a billion ants. It means that the sound of a billion ants' eight legs can be vividly, simultaneously and directly known within this cosmic totality all-pervasive wisdom-awareness.

Not only the sounds of the ants' walking legs are directly known right where they are walking, but at that time, however many sounds in the entirety of this cosmos also become omnipresent, vividly present. Concurrently, no sound can intercept, block, impede or obscure another sound. Each and every sound is utterly clear and pervades the whole expanse.

Herein, I am aspired to talk about the cosmic true realm, the realm of true existence, so that we would know whether we have had enough cultivation to reach the true wakeful state or we merely rely on our elaborated conceptual understanding about our spiritual realization? Just remember that in this state, all true forms and true sounds, and everything else per se, are all-pervasive. For example, let's talk about the all-pervasiveness of true form. It

would not be so overwhelming if this all-pervasiveness of true form is non-sentient and unaware. However, *any all-pervasive true form at that moment is also omniscient!* That is truly something inconceivable that we must know. For example, at that moment, the sound of an ant's leg is also all-pervasive awareness and the same is exactly true for everything else throughout the whole cosmos. This is beyond belief, isn't it?

We can provisionally believe that sound is all-pervasive, can't we? However, if we now say that sound itself is also the all-pervasive knowing or the ubiquitous wakeful awareness, would you believe it, or not? Verily, at that moment, sound and the totality of all-pervasive knowing is no longer two! If you can accept this truth, then you can one day arrive at the realm of non-dual reality; if not, then it would be impossible. Only when the realm of perfect non-dual actuality vividly emerges, then all of what we have discussed thus far would take place.

It means that, at first, we completely exhaust the old familiarity, the ordinary, discriminative conscious awareness that there is an "I" existing somewhere. There is no longer any such thing as *"I am here, therefore, I am hearing, smelling, tasting, talking, and smiling,"* because when the true realm appears, the "I" has already, absolutely and completely vanished without leaving any trace. There is no more "I" anywhere in the entire existence!

It means that when we reach the state of perfect reality, everything that uses to be so familiar with us due to our lifelong habitual tendencies will have already completely vanquished. For example, we use to cognize, listen, smell, taste, touch, and to understand this and that, but, in the momentness of the pristine, vivid presence, all of the baggage that we have habitually dragged on for so long completely disappears – there is utterly no more! When we say *"no more,"* we are not referring to its empty-hollow aspect, but in this context, it means that there is no longer any kind of familiarity as we have habituated as before. When the state of perfect actuality appears, then this actuality is verily our own beingness. In truth, we don't even need to mention the familiar or unfamiliar aspect herein; rather, we need know that this beingness is so very fresh, absolutely fresh, and it is being nothing else but freshness!

I can give another example based on feelings and familiarity. Let's say in the past, we have a very intimate friend who has now passed and we really feel depressed about it. When we encounter a new friend, we would not have the same sense of familiarity. However, when this state of non-dual reality emerges, everything in this existence already and readily turns out to be our very own blood, bone and marrow, so to speak. This actuality is, indeed, our own beingness; nevertheless, it is neither our real self nor our illusory self! It is simply the truth that vividly emerges! The old self has already exhausted in order for this superlative truth to emerge, and when this truth is nakedly present, it is the universal *"totality of all-pervasive knowing"* and no longer the consciousness-based *"knowing all"* awareness as in the past.

Therefore, when the truth appears, it becomes the totality of all-pervasive knowing; form and sound, too, are all-pervasive knowing. All of this universal cosmos is omnipresent-omniscient. Therefore, I call this universe "*an ever-present universe of all-spirituality.*" There is only one single spirituality of one single ubiquitous spacious universe. Therefore, whatever vividly manifests in this cosmos, up to the true realm, is no other than omnipresence, omniscience, with total radiant, luminous, brilliant clarity pervadingly!

As for sound, currently, when we hear sound, sound is different from form, because we see form with our eyes, and we hear sound with our ears. But when the expanse of reality appears, form and sound, as I have iterated again and again, appear in synchrony. We no longer see form different from sound. The totality of all-pervasive knowing of form, and that of sound, is present throughout this cosmic space pervadingly. At that moment, it is omnipresent and directly knows everything pervadingly, whereas in the past, we would only know to the extent of the specific location where we were at.

For example, let say that we are outdoor and are over here. Then, when there is a roaring sound over here, we would know. If we are over there, then we would hear when there is a roaring sound that takes place over there. When a sound happens behind us, we would also know. So we are "self-oriented." That's the old logic and how our senses normally function. However, in the realm of perfect reality, we no longer know it all, so to speak, but the all-pervasive knowing wisdom actually manifests. Therefore, we call it omnipotent all-pervasive omniscience. It simply exists as *one singular pervading omni-science!* There is no way around!

Therefore, "*The dharma realm is unimpededly penetrated, without coming or going*" means there is no past, present, future, and no dimensional space. "*Holding the infinitely vast cosmos in one's hand,*" specifically, refers to the absence of dimensional space. Where there is no conceptual time and no dimensional space, that is what can be called "*Playfully and eternally roaming through samsara and Nirvāna.*" Thus, when reality appears, there is no longer "I know," as the subject, and "the known thing" or "that which I know," as the object. That is the easiest and most acceptable way to understand this state.

However, even if we want to, transcending the "all-knowing" wisdom into "totality of all-pervasive knowing" is not at all simple, because when we abide in the mental state of all-knowing and purity, few people are able to break through. It is a truly immense spiritual transition from one state to another, so that the superlative wisdom of totality of all-pervasive knowing can vividly emerge. It is what we call "knowing everything as it is truly is." So then, what is the superlative truth of all *dharmas*? In order to describe this truth, we don't simply explain it in terms of the *dharmas* being Voidness, transient, conditioned phenomena, or illusory just as the sky. Also, we can neither say "*knowing is, indeed, abandonment, abandonment is, indeed, wisdom-awareness, wisdom-awareness is, indeed, enlightenment,*" as normally expressed in the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*.

It is not so, because such a basic, indirect discussion does not fully express “*the realm of perfect reality or true existence in the vivid presence.*” What is greatly significant is that in that state, all-knowing becomes the vivid presence of all-pervasiveness, and this all-pervasiveness is ultimately all-spacious! This all-spaciousness is existing as the very vivid presence, and it cannot be otherwise. There is no spatial distance or spatial separation, and therefore, we can say, “*holding the infinitely vast cosmos in one’s hand.*”

What does it mean when we say the whole universe is in one’s hand or is just like a fist? If we were to use conventional wordage in a worldly sense, such as “*right here,*” then, it means that it is “*being right here!*” There is no space and not a single thing that is not being right here – everywhere is right here and everything is also right here, and that is something truly incredibly ineffable! There is not even a single temporal distinct time interval in that very momentness, and in all periods of time. For example, if this reality spans for a period of a full day, week or month given our conventional understanding of time intervals, then there is no shadow of progressive time whatsoever throughout that period. It means that reality holds no such thing as “*prior*” or “*later,*” and thus, everything is simply being the extant reality, the very vivid presence, and nothing else. Every single thing, every single locality, whether near or far, even those that are myriad billion light years away from us, and all those planets and galaxies in the ten-directional phenomenal realm, would vividly emerge right here and nowhere else! Progressive time and spatial space is cut through.

Currently, we see everything with our physical eyes, and it seems that something can be really far away; however, during our direct realization, everything exists as the manifestation of our eyes. Moreover, the entirety of this vast cosmos is ubiquitously the eye, or the seeing-knowing wisdom, manifesting. It is no longer the one that knows or sees things. That is, verily, the realm of perfect reality, and the way we precedingly saw everything in the past was not wrong, but to be honest, we have not yet reached the ultimate goal.

Afterward, I started to review Zen historical stories, and uttered to myself, “Wow, I can now see that many of the happenings, and what has been told in these stories, has not yet reached culmination.” It seems that the majority of the Buddhist scriptures, too, did not discuss this state of perfect actuality, except for the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. Actually, the Lotus *Sūtra* and the *Śūrangama Sūtra* also refer to it in various places, as well as the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā*. In Theravādin scriptures, on the other hand, the Buddha mentioned about this state in plain, uncomplicated words, and effectively utilized to the best of his ability verbal expressions that could describe this state. Therefore, it seems that the spiritual wisdom of people in the past far surpassed that of people of our present age.

Therefore, the Buddha used very simple wordage, yet he was able to speak the complexity of the perfect truth. As for our current time, we have to discuss everything using a highly sophisticated, elaborated approach in order to somewhat describe this realm of noumenal reality. In this day and age, however, if we do not discuss this state of supreme mani-

festation in an openly revealing way, people would still see that Buddhism is merely something that can be understood through the intellectual, conscious mind.

Even if we want to use our intellectual brain to fathom it, the entire human brain itself can never understand the slightest bit in this realm of truth. Why? It is because if we do not let our so-called knowledge or intelligence from the past until now be dead or completely dismantled, we would never be able to experience even a slight taste of this realm. Herein, we do not even want to even mention self, phenomena, realization, accomplishment, Buddha, sentient beings, life and death, or *Nirvāna*. It is not necessary to even discuss them here, because the realm of truth is utterly existing as *perfect simplicity*, and there is nothing else whatsoever.

There is no language that can fully articulate this state. Herein, again, we do not speak of equanimity, high or low. We cannot possibly talk about them in this state. There is no genuineness, no falsehood, no good, no evil, no Buddha, no sentient beings, no ghosts and no demons, because perfect actuality is simply existing all-inclusively, vividly and nakedly, and there is nothing else but this utter reality. One cannot exert any effort in this state either. In fact, we cannot practice exertion prior to entering this state as well. Nevertheless, to reach this state without exertion is extremely difficult.

There are times when I have fallen into the state of being Void for many days, but even so, it was not perfect reality. Let's imagine us standing on the top of a very high mountain, or on the rooftop of a two-hundred story-high building. Then, we stick one foot into the open space, and are about to step forward. If we move one step forward, we would immediately fall down and be totally dead, and so we become incredibly frightened, and we pull the leg back. Many times in the past when I prepared to lose myself completely, or so to speak, I was very frightened. It was not at all a simple thing.

For example, when we meditate and enter a peaceful, serene state, it can be so peaceful, so serene, and we abide in this state. Yet, when we come to cut through our individualistic self even for a split of a second, we become startled and immediately come back to this usual self, because we do not want this self to be lost. When I reached this experience in the past, I went around asking many other practitioners about it. Not only did no one assist me and show me what to do next, but I also got scolded. In the end, I had to bet my life on it, and betting your life in that state means that you would lose your life right then and there.

Accepting "*total death*" even for a slightest moment means one truly dies and not simply faking death. *A total death means one is no longer knowing!* There is nothing else there. If there is still a speck that still knows in any way similar to the old knowing, then it is not yet total death. When we totally die for a split of a moment, it would be a very sudden, unexpected death. That said, we cannot prepare to die in such a way! We cannot possibly, expectantly prepare for the unexpected to happen. In my experience, I have gone through false deaths many times throughout the years, and that was not a real death.

In this state of perfect actuality, everything manifests as imagery appearances and dream. The pervading vast cosmos with myriad planets, stars, galaxies vividly emerge just as imageries. It is truly a dream, utterly fragile. Our planet has a few more billion years left to decay, but it is also very fragile. In this state of reality, we even come to know precisely its exact lifespan, and when it would end. We would know precisely when and how exactly this globe will burst within a finger snap. Indeed, at that exact moment, its lifespan is as fleeting as finger snapping.

So it is true that everything existing in this universe, and the universe itself, is nothing but imagery appearances. Everything, thus, is illusory and ephemeral, and not only this life of ours is ephemeral. This life of ours is too insignificant to even mention within the realm of perfect reality, because whatever has been affirmed that will last for a long time and will not be damaged even billions of years later would also be seen as more fragile and even lighter than a finger snap in the realm of reality. In the beginning, when I came across a statement by the Great Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, "*The three worlds are just as a grain of sand,*" I was startled then. But when it comes to the realm of truth as we have discussed thus far, it is obviously so, and the example of a grain of sand is still quite large. The true realm has no limit, no border, no boundary. Herein, we are not even talking about it being vast, because it is all-pervasive vast no matter where. All over this cosmos, everywhere simply appears just as vast. So we cannot describe it in terms of vast or narrow, many or few, near or far, nor in or out. Such usages cannot possibly exist in the realm of truth.

The first thing that happens is that all illusory appearances throughout this universe truly manifest as a dream or an illusion. At that moment, we would fathom what illusion is precisely like. It is no longer to understand, or to identify illusion, but we would directly fathom illusion itself. Why? Because in terms of this planet is concerned, we would see that from the moment it is formed and throughout its existence until it dissolves, everything is as insignificant as a finger snap of ours. So then, isn't that illusory? It is like magic, and like the bubbles that we are blowing. It is just like when we dip a straw in soapy water and playfully blow bubbles, they suddenly explode and plop. That's it! When we have a direct knowing in the realm of truth, the entire creation of this universe would actually be a billion times faster blowing bubbles. Then, wouldn't it be a dream or not?

Only then will we truly, directly realize the illusory reality of everything in this cosmos, and not simply this body, this mind, or this Mother Earth. There is also no need to mention of this solar system or this galaxy. In this realm of actuality, none of these things are of any significance, but everything just simply emerges in the presence. The totality of everything must emerge as such, absolutely clearly and lucidly, in the realm of perfect truth.

So, let us now discuss what is considered to be the lives or lifespans of sentient beings who are living in this cosmic space. For example, our human body or the body of an animal is called a life or lifespan. The human lifespan is a small interval within the living continuity of a person, and the lifespan of an animal is but a minuscule dot on the exceedingly long stream of this living continuity. These lifespans are the broken segments that are being



connected on this continuity and we must thoroughly directly see all segments from A to Z. However, if we can cut through this living continuity, then it means the cycle of life and death of a sentient being is broken up. Cutting through, as we already know, is extremely difficult.

Then, at that time, we would directly see the continuous stream of life from one life to another. For example, in this life, I am a person, and in the next consecutive life, I am also a person. Yet, after two or three human lives, all of a sudden, a life segment of a scary-faced, hairy animal with horn and fangs manifests, so this is another interval during which we have to bear with a non-human physical body. Therefore, it is an unbroken continuity, and each physical form, each life, and each life segment of all sentient beings of all species vividly manifest ubiquitously.

When we talk about this or that life segment, and about the ending of this life before the next one takes place in another physical body, it can go on forever from one segment and one body to the next uninterrupted! It sounds extensively long, but when the perfect truth emerges, the infinity of lives or life segments would naturally manifest right there in the very vivid presence! And right there, there is no before or after even if one seeks for it. This realm of perfect reality penetrates throughout the entirety of past, present and future, and there is not even a shred of difference or discrepancy among the billion exponentials of our lives. There is no difference in the sense that there exists *a singular brilliant radiance* in the realm of perfect truth, and all of the short life segments themselves manifest within the clarity of this brilliant radiance. Ultimately, from the beginning until the end of all of those transient life segments, which are connected to each other, segment by segment, they are this brilliant radiance, and nothing else.

Therefore, at that moment, from the original starting point of primordial luminosity, all the way to the end of this perfect luminosity, it is ubiquitously brilliant as this very vivid presence. The primordial origination is being vividly present, blazing with clarity, while all the interrupting small intervals are the myriad lives of a human form. Although our lives are very short intervals, we affix to existence and non-existence, right and wrong, gain and loss, and thus, we become adhered to our own life and death. In reality, all these short intervals are but a minuscule dot on the illimitable line between the starting and ending points. Moreover, this is not a straight line but a circle. And although it is circular, and we directly know how it moves around in a circle, it is, however, simply a singular point. All life segments are but this single blazingly splendid point, and that is the realm of truth.

When people look at matter, some say that it rotates in a spiral, and that the planets and universe also move in a spiral. However, that is only an image, because they have never begun to move anywhere to begin with. In the realm of truth, there is no coming, no going anywhere. The entirety of limitless cycles of life and death seems to be going around and around, but in reality, it remains that very single point of origin, whole and complete, self-radiant and self-luminous with clarity. It has never gone anywhere or arrived anywhere.

Yet, we find ourselves living here on this planet and passing away after a number of years. In fact, the duration of all those years is but a tiny dot on that immensely vast circle. It is clear that this vast circle is filled with infinite dots; nevertheless, it also remains the initial point of origin. Moreover, it also exists right where the starting point exists. It is never an end point. It nakedly reveals its own true existence which is the complete cycle of life and death of a life form. It does not mean that, initially, it goes around, and then, comes back to the old point of origin.

However, it is not simply a circle that returns to the old point of origin as we would normally understand in conventional terms. In the realm of actuality, it is just a luminous dot, and there exist illimitable countless illusive dots there, too. The original luminous dot remains the same brilliant radiance, and the so-called end dot, although it is not truly an end dot, remains the same brilliant radiance as well. The original starting point blazes with primordial splendour, and at the end, it remains this singular primordial luminous point where all of the illusory points of countless life intervals are simply illusions that appear.

Thereafter, the life intervals circulate within this circle of countless *samsaric* dots, and become confused with this illusionary play, and therefore, they cannot penetrate what is truly genuine. When the genuine truth emerges, however, it is but a single pristine dot which, concurrently, is the end dot. Yet, since beginningless time until now, it had never ever been actuated although we have lived through countless lifetimes. How truly, magnificently incredible! It shines brilliantly, full and complete, not increasing, not decreasing, without any defect, stain or contamination!

In this very vivid presence, all *dharmas* clearly emerge from true Voidness, and that is genuine reality! If we have not reached here, then it is impossible to speak of the perfect truth, no matter what kind of realization, even if the five aggregates have already been cut through. Once we reach this state, then we can speak about the Dharma truth, otherwise, we would forever be wandering around those virtual, illusory dots. It is very clear that many of us are still hanging midway among those dots. If this illusiveness goes on dotting us for many more limitless lives, then how can we possibly say anything about True Dharma, including the manifestation of perfect reality, the illusionary circle and how the beginning as the end is only a circle.

There is an example that can help us with our conceptual understanding. At night, when we hold a long burning incense stick and wave it in a circle, we can see a fire ring appear, although in reality, it is only one single turning point of light. Yet, it can create the illusion of a circle so we can see the fire ring, isn't that so? However, this fire ring itself is not truly spinning! From a coarse perspective, it does seem to spin, but truly speaking, it is being right there – it is spinning around in full circle, but it remains right there! It continues to exist right there. In truth, it never comes or goes anywhere, and it has never separated from the true spot of reality. Like the fire ring, infinite illusive appearances of life and death create infinite life segments that make sentient beings wander around throughout the cosmic universe, yet from the point of origin, they have never left the perfect primordial

truth! This primordial, pristine truth remains intact and perfectly complete from the starting point to the end, and when we say the end, we are simply speaking, not from the ultimate view of no coming, no going, but from the mundane view of the cycle of birth and death.

So what happens when we reach the true realm of perfect reality, of true existence? We will *directly know* that all lives or life segments, meaning all living sentient beings have never left their original Buddha position! If we, presumably, say that they have left their origin, it simply means that their virtual ones left the original position to go in a circle, whereas in reality, their primordial starting point and the end point of luminosity have always been in one single place, in one single position. So it simply means sentient beings are using their virtual existences to drift in the virtual cyclic existence, whereas in actuality, we do not have this human physical form, or any kind of form of any other species. There has never been any physical form or characteristic mark or sign. There is no sign of body and no sign of mind. There is no sign whatsoever as there is only the *True Sign which is Voidness-Signlessness*, the perfect true existence. The perfect True Sign is ultimate enlightenment, and nothing else!

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## ABOUT ZEN MASTER THÍCH TUỆ HẢI

Senior Venerable Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải whose Dharma name means “*Ocean of Wisdom*” (birth name: Đinh Kim Nga, also known as *Vô Trụ Thiền Sư* or *Hiển Hiện Như Nhiên Thiền Sư*) was born in 1968 in Long Thới Village, Chợ Lách District, Bến Tre Province. Master Tuệ Hải came from a land-owner family and was the youngest of seven children. The land on which he was born was thought to be sacred, because during the war, bombings and gunfire never reached it. Thus, many people in nearby areas would escape to his family’s land in search of sanctuary.

One day, following an upheaval Master Tuệ Hải’s father gave up his career, and his family found themselves in very difficult circumstances. As two of his older brothers took to heart the meaning of impermanence, they decided to become *bhikkhus*. Thereafter, his older sister also became a *bhikkuni*.

Since his childhood, Master Tuệ Hải has been very filial toward his parents. At the age of six, he already knew how to cook a meal, and in order to support his family, he would follow his mother to help her sell things at the market. At night, he would come back home to take care of his father with much love and devotion, always serving and following his father’s wishes without even the slightest thought of objection. Tuệ Hải said, “I was raised over very difficult circumstances ever since I was a young child; therefore, I was equipped with a strong determination to overcome arduous, challenging life situations until this very day.”

His mother, on the other hand, was a peaceful, wondrous woman who was full of loving-kindness and free from discord. Master Tuệ Hải used to say: “It would be difficult to find another woman throughout this world with as wonderful qualities as my mother.” His mother spent her entire life devoting to her family, and in 1993, she became an ordained nun, learning and practicing the Dharma at the Tuệ Không Monastery.

Accompanied by great roots of virtues planted in the Buddha-Dharma, Master Tuệ Hải, at the age of seven, became deeply moved the very first time he saw the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. He stood immobile and entered meditative absorption in front of the statue for close to eight hours during which he was completely aware of everything that took place around him. Many people witnessed this and they did not dare to disturb Master Tuệ Hải until he left the meditative state himself.

In 1985, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải fell severely ill and began to research and study the macrobiotic diet method of Sir G. Ohsawa. He followed the nutritional macrobiotic diet for just twenty-one days and reached the so-called Diet #7 empirical experience. It was the state of perfect complimentary yin-yang balance just as Sir G. Ohsawa had indicated. All illnesses, therefore, disappeared, and throughout those seven days and nights, Master Tuệ Hải remained in a tranquil state of emptiness of body and mind with boundless bliss and happiness.

In that very same year, while still a young student, Master Tuệ Hải was listening to his teacher give a lecture on the subject of *“All things are set in motion in space”* during which he suddenly realized the principle of impermanence, and therefore, began to build the determination to become ordained. It was not until the beginning of 1986 that Tuệ Hải left his household for Thường Chiếu Zen Monastery where he would begin his volunteer work and Dharma studies to prepare for his ordination.

On December 8, 1986, which fell on the anniversary of the Buddha’s Great Enlightenment, Master Tuệ Hải officially received ordination from the Grand Master Thích Thanh Từ and was given the Dharma name Tuệ Hải (*Ocean of Wisdom*). When living with the other monks in the monastery, he was assigned to toil the land and to grow vegetables; however, his aspiration to gain liberation from the mundane world, to resolutely transcend life-and-death and to merge with the absolute truth, continued to be his burning desire. As months and years passed by, the yearning in his heart grew more intensively, until one day, on July 7, 1997, as he listened to his Root Teacher, the Great Master Thích Thanh Từ, explain Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way (*Mādhyamika-Shastra*), he heard the following comment, *“the emptiness of sensation is Nirvāṇa,”* and at that very moment, immediately severed all kinds of past and present conventional knowledge. With his mind and body empty and clear, he thoroughly and lucidly realized that all conditions and object-appearances were no longer the same physical form aggregate as he had always known.

Since then, Master Tuệ Hải fathomed the sublime teachings and no longer had any doubts regarding the words of the Buddha; he has fully comprehended the perfect truth, and from an understanding that transcends all conventions, life has become nonchalant and leisurely calm. At that very moment, he appreciatively composed a verse depicting this living force within him:

*From now on, to leisurely live in happiness,  
Each condition brightly lucid and non-mistaken  
Non-mistaken, unconfused, unerring,  
Simply radiant, just like that – how is it possible to express it fully!*

On December 12, 1994, Master Thích Tuệ Hải followed the command of his Root Teacher, the Grand Master Thích Thanh Từ, who appointed him to become the Abbot of Long Hương Temple in Nhơn Trạch District, Đồng Nai Province, where he presently resides. Master Thích Tuệ Hải has taught extensively on Mahāyāna Zen, the true nature of the mind, and on various major *Sūtras*, especially the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (*Flower Ornament*



*Sūtra*) and its vast and profound view, similar to the pure view of Vajrayana that all *dharmas* are equanimous, non-discriminatory, and are actually Buddhas. In all of his teachings, Master Tuệ Hải always tries to point out the singleness and true essence of all traditions, whether it is Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Pureland, Zen or Vajrayana. His greatest aspiration is for all the diverse traditions of Buddhism to have a unified view in accordance with the realized and liberated view as taught by Buddha: *“Hundreds of rivers together flow to the vast sea; as the sea has a single salty taste, my Dharma, too, has only a single taste of liberation.”*

Aside from propagating the Dharma to benefit beings, Master Tuệ Hải is also a physician of traditional medicine and macrobiotics who has cured many severe illnesses, and has advised everyone to develop a healthy balance of body and mind in order to unlock one’s inner wisdom, to understand the natural order of the universe, and to gain limitless freedom, absolute impartiality, and endless bliss and happiness.

In 2009 and 2012, Zen Master Tuệ Hải traveled extensively and taught in over forty states in the USA, as well as Europe and Australia. Thereafter, he chose to remain in Vietnam to oversee the long-term construction of the new Long Hương Temple, as well as to provide weekly teachings and spiritual guidance to local Buddhist communities and the newly established ordained *sangha* at his Temple. Currently, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải remains a Senior Standing Committee Member of the Educational Committee of the Central Buddhist Congregation in Vietnam.



*About the translator: Milam Sudhana is an overseas Vietnamese published author and translator living in the USA since the age of thirteen. She first discovered Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải’s deeply inspirational teachings on Youtube while on a writing retreat at the Garchen Buddhist Institute. Upon her inquiry, and through his spiritual insight, her root guru, Garchen Rinpoche, recommended that she continue to receiving teachings from Master Tuệ Hải, so she traveled to Vietnam to meet him for the first time in 2015, and has remained a devoted student since. Her aspiration is to share with the world the gift of wisdom from Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải’s liberative teachings based on his profound and experiential realization.*

*About the editor: Oliver K. Luu is Milam Sudhana’s first-born. He holds a B.S. in History, with a specialty in Middle East-Iranian History, and who also has a keen interest in anthropology and writing. As a child, he was introduced to Buddhism through the aspiration of his parents, and currently, besides working full-time, he enjoys writing fiction and reading about world history in his free time.*



Gone

Gone

Gone Beyond

Gone Utterly Freely Beyond

Perfectly Awakened

Svāhā

Essence of Prajñāpāramitā