

CHAPTER II.

ON PRAJNA.

Next day Prefect Wai asked the Patriarch to give another sermon. Having taken his seat and asked the assembly to purify their mind collectively and recite 'Maha Prajnaparamita' (Great Perfection of Wisdom), he gave the following address:—

Learned Audience, the Wisdom of Enlightenment is inherent in every one of us. It is because of the delusion under which our mind works that we fail to realise it ourselves and that we have to seek the advice and the guidance of the highly enlightened one before we can know our essence of mind. You should know that so far as Buddha-nature is concerned, there is no difference between an enlightened man and an ignorant one. What makes the difference is that one realises it, while the other is kept in ignorance of it. Now, let me talk to you on Maha Prajnaparamita, so that each of you can attain wisdom. Listen carefully, for I am speaking to you now.

Learned Audience, while people recite the word 'Prajna' whole day long, they do not seem to know that Prajna is inherent in their own nature. Now, mere talking on food will not appease hunger and this is exactly the case with these people. We might talk on Sunyata (voidness) for myriads of kalpas, but talking alone will not enable us to realise the essence of mind and it serves us no purpose in the end.

The word 'Mahaprajnaparamita' is Sanskrit, meaning 'great wisdom to reach the opposite shore (of the sea of existence).' Now, what we have to do with it is to carry it into practice with our mind: whether we recite it or not does not matter. Mere reciting it without mental practice may be likened to a phantasm, a magical delusion, a flash of lightning or a dewdrop. On the other hand, if we do both, then our mind would be in concord with what we repeat orally. The very nature of our own is Buddha, and apart from this nature, there is no other Buddha.

What is Maha? It means 'Great'. The capacity of the mind is as great as that of space. It is infinite, neither round nor square, neither great nor small, neither green nor yellow, neither red nor white, neither above nor below, neither long nor short, neither angry nor happy, neither right nor wrong, neither good nor evil, neither first nor last. All Buddha Ksetras (lands) are as void as space. Intrinsically our transcendental nature is void and not a single Dharma can be attained. It is the same with the essence of mind which is a state of 'Absolute Void' (i.e. the voidness of non-void 非空之空).

Learned Audience, when you hear me talk about the void, do not at once fall into the idea of insistence on vacuity. (Because it involves the heresy of the doctrine of annihilation.) It is of utmost importance that we should not fall into this idea, because when a man sits quietly and keeps his mind blank, he will abide in a state of 'Voidness of Indifference'.

Learned Audience, the illimitable void of the universe is capable of holding myriad of things of various shape and form, such as the sun, the moon, stars, mountains, rivers, worlds, springs, rivulets, bushes, woods, good men, bad men, Dharmas pertaining to goodness or badness, Deva planes, hells, great oceans, and all the mountains of the Mahameru. Space takes in all these, and so the voidness of our nature. We say that the essence of mind is great, because it embraces all things, since all things are within our nature. When we see the goodness or the badness of other people, we are not attracted by it, nor repulsive to it, nor attached to it; so that our attitude of mind is as void as space. In that case, we say our mind is great. Therefore we call it 'Maha'.

Learned Audience, what the ignorant talk merely, the wise men put into actual practice with their mind. There is also one class of foolish people who sit quietly to keep their mind blank. They refrain from thinking of anything and call themselves 'great'. On account of their heretical view, we can hardly talk to them.

Learned Audience, you should know that the mind is very great in capacity, since it pervades the whole Dharmadhatu (the sphere of the Law, i.e. the Universe). When we use it, we can know clearly of everything; and when we use it to its full capacity, we shall know all. All in one and one in all. When our mind works without hindrance and is at liberty to 'come' or to 'go', then it is 'Prajna'.

Learned Audience, all Prajna come from the essence of mind and not from exterior source. Do not have any mistaken notion about it. This is called 'Self-use of the True Nature'. Once the Tathata (Suchness which is another name for the essence of mind) is known, one will be free from delusion forever.

Since the scope of the mind is for great objects, we should not practise trivial acts (such as sitting quietly with a blank mind). Do not talk about 'Void' all day without practising it in the mind. One who does this may be likened to a self-styled king who is really a commoner. Prajna can never be attained in this way and those who behave like this are not my disciples.

Learned Audience, what is Prajna? It means 'Wisdom'. At all times and in all places, if we steadily keep our thought free from any foolish desire and act wisely on all occasions, then we are practising Prajna. One foolish notion is enough to shut Prajna off, while one wise thought would bring it forth again. People in ignorance or under delusion do not see it; they talk about it with their tongue, but in their mind they are always ignorant. They always say that they practise Prajna and they talk incessantly on 'Vacuity'; but they do not know the 'Absolute Void'. 'The Heart of Wisdom' is Prajna which has neither form nor characteristic. If we interpret it in this way, then it is called the wisdom of Prajna.

What is Paramita? It is a Sanskrit word, meaning 'to the opposite shore'. Figuratively, it means 'above existence and non-existence'. By clinging to sense objects, existence or non-existence arises like the up and down of the billowy sea, and such a state is called metaphorically 'this shore'; while by non-attachment, a state above existence and non-existence, like running water (without bubbles), is called 'the opposite shore'. This is why it is called 'Paramita'.

Learned Audience, people under illusion recite 'Mahaprajnaparamita' with their tongue, and while they are reciting it, erroneous and evil thoughts arise (in their mind). But if they put it into actual practice unremittingly, they would know what is called 'the true nature'. To know this Dharma is to know the Dharma of Prajna and to practise this act is to practise Prajna. He who does not practise it is an ordinary man. He who directs his mind to practise it even for one moment only is the equal of Buddha.

Learned Audience, ordinary man is Buddha, and Klesa (infection or defilement) is Bodhi (enlightenment). A foolish passing thought makes one an ordinary man, while an enlightened second thought makes one a Buddha. A passing thought that clings to sense-objects is Klesa, while a second thought that frees one from attachment is Bodhi.

Learned Audience, Mahaprajnaparamita is the most exalted, the supreme, and the foremost. It neither stays, nor goes, nor comes. By means of it, Buddhas of the present, the past, and the future generations attain Buddhahood. We should use this great wisdom to break up the five Skhandhas (they are: material qualities or matter, sensation, perception, dispositions or tendencies, and consciousness), Klesas, and contaminations. To follow such a practice ensures the attainment of Buddhahood. The three poisonous elements (greed, anger, and infatuation) will then be turned into Sila (good conduct), Samadhi, (concentration or exalted ecstasy) and Prajna (wisdom).

Learned Audience, in this system of mine, one Prajna produces eighty four thousand ways of wisdom, since there are the same number of 'defilements' (Klesa) for us to cope with. When one is free from defilements, wisdom reveals itself steadily and will not be separated from the essence of mind. Those who understand this Dharma will be free from idle thoughts. To be free from being infatuated by one particular thought, from clinging to desire, and from falsehood; to put one's own essence of Tathata into operation; to use Prajna for contemplation; and to take an attitude of neither indifference nor attachment towards all things—this is what is meant by realising one's own essence of mind for the attainment of Buddhahood.

Learned Audience, if you wish to penetrate the deepest mystery of the Dharmadhatu (the sphere of the Law) and the Samadhi of Prajna, you should practise Prajna by reciting and studying the Vagrakkhedika (The Diamond Cutter) which will enable you to realise the essence of mind. You should know that the merit for studying this Sutra, as distinctly set forth in laudatory terms in the text, is immeasurable and illimitable, and cannot be enumerated in details. This Sutra belongs to the highest school (literally vehicle) of Buddhism and Lord Buddha delivered it specially for the very wise and the quick-witted. If the less wise and the slow-witted hear about it, they would doubt its credibility. Why? For example, when it rains in Jambudvipa (the Southern Continent) through the miracle of the celestial Naga; cities, towns, and villages would be drifted about in the flood, as if they were only a leaf of the date tree. But should it rain in the great ocean, the level of the sea on the whole would not be affected by it. When the Mahayanists and the followers of the highest school hear about the

Vagrakkhedika, their minds become enlightened and they know that Prajna is immanent in their essence of mind and that they need not rely on scriptural authority, since they can make use of their own wisdom for constant practice of contemplation and observation.

The Prajna immanent in the essence of mind of every one may be likened to the rain (rain does not come from the sky but is produced by the miracle of the Naga) the moisture of which refreshes alike sentient beings, such as all living creatures, and the inanimate, such as trees and plants. When rivers and streams reach the sea, the water carried by them merges into one body; and this is also a good analogy. Learned Audience, when rain comes in deluges, plants which are not deep-rooted are washed away, and eventually they succumb. This is the same case with the slow-witted, when they hear about the teaching of the 'Sudden' School. The Prajna immanent in them is exactly the same with that of the very wise men; but they fail to enlighten themselves, when the Dharma is made known to them. Why? Because they are thickly veiled by erroneous views and deep-rooted infections, in the same way as the sun is thickly veiled by the cloud and unable to show his light until the wind blows the obscuration off.

Prajna does not vary with different persons; what makes the difference is the question whether one's mind is enlightened or deluded. He who does not know his own essence of mind and is under the delusion that Buddhahood can be attained by outward religious rites is called the slow-witted. He who knows the teaching of the 'Sudden' School and attaches no importance to rituals, and whose mind functions always under right views, so that he is absolutely free from defilements or contaminations, is said to have known his essence of mind.

Learned Audience, the mind should be framed in such a way, so that it will be independent of external or internal objects, at liberty to come or to go, free from attachment and thoroughly enlightened without the least obscuration. He who is able to do this is up to the same standard as that required by the Sutras of the Prajna School.

Learned Audience, all Sutras and Scriptures of the Mahayana and Hinayana Schools, as well as the twelve sections of the canonical writings were provided to suit the different needs and temperaments of various people. It is upon the principle that Prajna is latent in every man that the doctrines expounded in these books are established. Should there be no human beings, there would be no Dharmas; and hence we know that all Dharmas are made for men, and that all Sutras owe their existence to the preachers. Since some men are wise, the so-called superior men, and some are ignorant, the so-called inferior men; the wise preach to the ignorant, when the latter ask them to do so. Through this, the ignorant may attain sudden enlightenment and their mind thereby becomes illuminated. Then they are no longer different from the wise men.

Learned Audience, without enlightenment, there would be no difference between a Buddha and other living beings; while a gleam of enlightenment is enough to make a living being the equal of a Buddha. Since all Dharmas are immanent in our mind, there is no reason why we should not realise intuitively

the real nature of Tathata (Suchness). The Bodhisattva Sila Sutra says, "Our essence of mind is intrinsically pure, and if we know our mind and realise what our nature is, all of us would attain Buddhahood." The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra says, "At once they become enlightened and regain their own mind."

Learned Audience, when the Fifth Patriarch preached to me, I became enlightened immediately after he had spoken and spontaneously I realised the real nature of Tathata. For this reason, it is my particular object to propagate the teaching of this 'Sudden' School, so that the learners may know Bodhi (enlightenment) at once and realise their true nature by introspection of their mind.

Should they fail to enlighten themselves, they ought to ask the very pious and learned Buddhists who understand the teaching of the Highest School to show them the right way. It is an exalted position, the office of a pious and learned Buddhist who guides the others to realise the essence of mind. Through his assistance, one may be initiated into all meritorious Dharmas. The wisdom of the past, the present, and the future Buddhas as well as the teachings of the twelve sections of canons are immanent in our mind; but in case we fail to enlighten ourselves, before we can do so, we have to seek the guidance of the pious and learned ones. On the other hand, those who enlighten themselves need no extraneous help. It is wrong to insist upon the idea that, without the advice of the pious and learned, we cannot obtain liberation. Why? Because it is by our innate wisdom that we enlighten ourselves, and even the extraneous help and instructions of a pious and learned friend would be of no use, if we were deluded by false doctrines and erroneous views. Should we introspect our mind with real Prajna, all erroneous views would be vanquished in a moment, and as soon as we know the essence of mind, we arrive immediately at the Buddha stage.

Learned Audience, when we use Prajna for introspection, we are illuminated within and without and in a position to know our own mind. To know our mind is to obtain fundamental liberation. To obtain liberation is to attain Samadhi (exalted ecstasy) of Prajna which is 'thoughtlessness'. What is 'thoughtlessness'? 'Thoughtlessness' is to see and to know all Dharmas (things) with a mind free from attachment. When in use, it pervades everywhere, and yet it sticks nowhere. What we have to do is to purify our mind so that the six Vijñānas (six aspects of consciousness, i.e. consciousness dependent upon sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mentation) in passing through the six gates (sense organs) will neither be defiled by nor attached to the six sense-objects. When our mind works freely without any hindrance and is at liberty to 'come' or to 'go', then we attain Samadhi of Prajna, or freedom, or liberation. Such a state is called the function of 'thoughtlessness'. But to refrain from thinking of anything, so that all thoughts are suppressed, is to be Dharma-ridden, and this is an extreme (erroneous) view.

Learned Audience, those who understand the way of 'thoughtlessness' will know every thing, have the experience of what all Buddhas have had and attain Buddhahood. In future, if an initiate of my school should make a vow in company with his colleagues and fellow-disciples to devote his whole life without retrogression to practise and commemorate the teachings of this 'Sudden' School in the same spirit as that for serving Buddha, he would reach without failure the Path of

Holiness (*i.e.* Bodhisattvahood and Buddhahood). (To the right men), he should transmit from heart to heart the instructions handed down from one Patriarch to another; and no attempt should be made to conceal the orthodox teaching. To those who belong to other schools and whose views and objects are different from ours, the Dharma should not be transmitted, since it will be anything but good to them. This step is taken lest ignorant persons who cannot understand our system should make slanderous remarks upon it and thereby annihilate their seed of Buddhahood for hundreds of Kalpas and thousands of incarnations.

Learned Audience, I have a 'Formless' (*i.e.* above phenomena) Stanza for all of you to recite. Both laity and clergy should put its teaching into practice without which it would be useless to remember my words alone. Listen to this stanza:—

A master of the Buddhist canons as well as the teaching of the Dhyana School

May be likened unto the blazing sun sitting high in his meridian tower.

Such a man would teach nothing but the Dharma for realising the essence of mind,

And his object in coming to this world is to vanquish the heretical sects.

We can hardly classify the Dharmas into 'Sudden' and 'Gradual',

But some men will attain enlightenment much quicker than others.

For example, this system for realising the essence of mind

Is above the comprehension of the ignorant.

We may explain it in ten thousand ways,

But all those explanations may be traced back to one principle.

To illumine our gloomy tabernacle which is stained by defilement,

We should constantly set up the Light (literally the Sun) of Wisdom.

Erroneous views keep us in defilement,

While right views remove us from it,

But when we are in a position to discard both of them,

We are then absolutely pure.

Bodhi is immanent in our essence of mind,

Any attempts to look for it elsewhere is erroneous,

Within our infected mind, the pure one is to be found,

And once our mind is set right, we are free from three kinds of obscuration (obscurations of defilement, of evil karma, of compensation or expiation in evil realms of existence).

If we are treading the Path of Enlightenment,

We need not at all be worried by stumbling-blocks.

Provided we keep an eye constantly on our own faults,
 We cannot go astray from the right path.
 Since every species of life has its own way of salvation,
 They will not interfere with or be antagonistic to one another.
 If we leave our own path and try to seek for other way of salvation,
 For life we shall not find it.
 And we may plod on till death overtakes us,
 But we shall find only penitence in the end.
 If you wish to find the true way,
 Right action will lead you to it directly;
 But if you have not a mind to aim at Buddhahood,
 You would grope in the dark and never find it.
 He who treads the Path in earnest
 Sees not the mistakes of the world,
 If we find fault with others,
 We ourselves are also in the wrong; so it is not a wise thing to do.
 When other people is in the wrong, we should ignore it;
 As it is wrong for us to find fault.
 By getting rid of the habit of fault-finding,
 We cut off the source of defilement (Klesa).
 When neither hatred nor love can disturb our mind,
 Serenely we sleep with our legs fully stretched.
 Those who intend to be the teacher of others,
 Should themselves be skilled in the various expedient means (Upaya) which
 would lead others to enlightenment.
 When the disciple is free from all doubts,
 Then it indicates that his essence of mind is developed.
 The Kingdom of Buddhism is in this world,
 Within which enlightenment is to be sought.
 To seek enlightenment by separating from this world
 Is as absurd as to search for rabbit's horn.
 Right views are called 'Transcendental',
 Erroneous views are called 'Worldly.'
 When views, right or erroneous, are discarded,
 Then the essence of Bodhi (enlightenment) manifests itself prominently.

This stanza is for the 'Sudden' School.

It is also called the 'Big Ship of Dharma' (for sailing across the ocean of existence).

Kalpa after Kalpa, a man may be under delusion;

But once enlightened, it takes him only a ksana (moment) to attain Buddhahood.

Before conclusion, the Patriarch added, "Now, in this Tai Fan Temple, I have addressed you on the teaching of the 'Sudden' School. May all sentient beings of the Dharmadhatu (sphere of Law, i.e. the Universe) instantly understand the Law and attain Buddhahood."

After hearing what the Patriarch said, Prefect Wai, government officials, Taoists and laymen were all enlightened. They made obeisance in a body and exclaimed unanimously, "Well done! Well done! Who would have expected that a Buddha was born in Kwong Tung?"