

# The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

## With Standless Verse Commentary and Explanation

by Tripitaka Master Hua

continued from Issue #228

"This is the Way; you should cultivate it." In discussing the question of the WAY, I will first explain the Chinese character *tao*; 道, "Way." The character contains an element indicating "going" or "walking" 辶. This tells you to practice; only then is the Way of use. Because you need to cultivate according to the Way, it is said, "The Way is to be practiced; if you don't practice it, of what use is the Way?" If you don't cultivate, then the Way is the Way and you are you; the two cannot be united into one. If you cultivate according to Dharma, that is, if you practice the Way, then the Way is you and you are the Way. The Way and you are fundamentally inseparable. It is said of the virtuous nature, "Virtue is to be practiced; if it is not practiced, how can there be virtue?" That is not to say, "Day in and day out I say, 'Act virtuously, act virtuously, act virtuously.'" You practice virtue with your mouth, but you don't actually practice any virtue at all. Not only do you not practice virtue, but you create bad karma with your body. In that case there is no virtue at all. Thus the saying, "Hanging out a sheep's head and selling dog-meat." If you talk about acting virtuously, then you must do it.

Above the element which designates "going" 辶 in the character *tao*, the character *shou* 首 is added. *Shou* is defined as that which is "ahead" or "foremost." In other words, cultivation is the most important business in the whole world. If you wish to end birth and death, then you must cultivate the Way. If you don't wish to end birth and death, you need not cultivate the Way. To end birth and death is certainly not to be afraid of birth and death. Someone who is afraid of birth and death really likes being alive, but he is extremely afraid when he is dying. That is to be afraid of birth and death. If you wish to end birth and death, cultivation of the Way must be foremost; therefore, the character *shou*, foremost, is part of the character *tao*, the Way. If you don't cultivate the Way, then you cannot end birth and death.

We will now divide the character *shou* 首 further. There are two dots 丶 on top, then a line —, and below them the character *tzu* 自, which means "self." In cultivation, it is you yourself who must cultivate. It isn't that you tell other people to cultivate: "You should cultivate; you should end birth and death; you should act virtuously." That isn't what is meant. You must cultivate the Way yourself. The one important matter is for you to do it yourself, so there is the character, *tzu*, in the character meaning Way. Do it yourself!

The horizontal line above the *tzu* is the character *i* 一, "one." What should you do? Find the one. Of what use is it? From the one, everything in the world is generated. One is the beginning. Only after one are there two, then three, then four, then five, up to an infinite number. They are all generated from the number one. The infinite is generated from the one. The infinite is itself the one. If there is no one, then there is no infinite. If there is no infinite, then there is no one. I don't believe that anyone at all has a way to oppose the principle which I am explaining. Anyone who understands mathematics knows that mathematics begins from one. The one is the infinite, and the infinite is the one.

We want neither one nor infinity There is no one and there is no infinity, no infinity and no one. They change into nothing at all, which is zero. The 0 contains all existence. True emptiness is in the 0, and wonderful existence is in it too. Where does the 0 come from? It is a shape made by changing the one.

You make a circle and that is a 0; you open it up and it turns into a one. Therefore, the 0 is the original substance of the one. Not only is the 0 the original substance of the one, it is also the original substance of everything between heaven and earth. And it is also the great bright storehouse, the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One, that is, the Buddha nature. The Buddha nature is the 0.

One evening when I was walking down the road with a disciple, there was a little boy who asked his mother, "What has no beginning and no end?" The mother said, "I don't know," and the little boy replied, "A circle." I asked him, "Why do you have the thought of a circle?" The child didn't answer. The 0 represents the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One and everything which is generated and changes in the world: true emptiness and wonderful existence, wonderful existence and true emptiness. The 0 has no beginning and no end. If you want to destroy the 0, cut it and it will turn into a one. What is the one? Ignorance. The change into the one is the change into ignorance. When there is no one, the circle which has not been destroyed is the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One. When the circle is destroyed, it turns into ignorance. One is the beginning of ignorance. Didn't I just say that the infinite is made from the one and the one is made from the infinite?

One little bit of affliction produces infinite afflictions. Infinite afflictions are generated from a single small bit of affliction. Why do you do so many mixed-up things? It is because of the one small bit of ignorance. All your confused deeds, so much confused activity, so much karma, so much affliction, are produced from the one. Therefore, if you want to cultivate the Way, you must return the one to its original source and turn it into a 0. Only when you turn it into a 0 can you return to the original source, to the nature which is the treasury of the Thus Come One, to true emptiness and to wonderful existence. That is what the one is about.

The two dots 丶 on the top of the character *tao* are one *yin* and one *yang*. The *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes*, says, "One *yin* and one *yang* are the Way." "One-sided *yin* and one-sided *yang* are sickness." Perhaps there is pure *yin* which changes into a ghost or pure *yang* which changes into a god. Therefore, it is said, "One-sided *yin* and one-sided *yang* are sickness." They are divided. The character *i* "one," is divided to produce the two dots. Ignorance generates view-delusion and thought-delusion, so the two dots can also be said to be view-delusion and thought-delusion. I have just talked about cutting them off. The two dots, representing view-delusion and thought-delusion, get together to produce countless, numberless delusions. And all of them are generated from the one.

If you wish to return to the original source, turn the one into a 0 again. How? It's not very difficult. You need only work hard every day in cultivating the Way, in sitting in meditation and looking into dhyana, and then you can return to the origin; you can change into a 0, into the great bright treasury which is your original nature.

Because you say, "I don't believe it," you are still in darkness. If you do believe it, then you can return to your great bright treasury. Because you don't believe in this Dharma-door, day in and day out ignorance and affliction never leave you, and you change into what in the Ch'an School is called a "barrel of black energy." If you believe, in this Dharma-door, then you can return to your originally existent wisdom, return to the source, and attain to the great bright treasury. You can return to your own great, perfect mirror wisdom, to the wisdom whose nature is equality, to the wonderful investigative wisdom, and to the wisdom of successful performance.

I have just explained only a very little bit about the character *tao* --not even one ten-millionth. Were I to talk about it in detail, I am afraid that it would take a very long time, and I would not be able to finish. Why? Because it is so wonderful. The Great Master Chih-i, the Wise One, spoke for ninety days about the word "wonderful" (*miao* 妙). If you were to speak clearly about the character *tao*, I'm afraid

you couldn't finish talking about it in ninety years, not just ninety days. I am afraid that my lifespan in this lifetime will not be that long, so I can only say a little bit.

Nevertheless, I will still say a little bit more about the character *tao*. The two dots, the one *yin* and one *yang*, can be written to form the character 人 (*jen*, person). The Way is not in the heavens, nor is it in the hells, nor is it among animals or hungry ghosts. It is among people. Every person can cultivate the Way; every person can realize the Way; every person possesses the Way from the beginning. It is not obtained from outside. Your successful cultivation of the Way is simply the realization of the Way of the Buddha. Since you haven't yet cultivated the Way to realization, has your Way been lost? No, every person is a fulfillment of the Way.

If you are talking about the heavens, you can say that the sun and the moon are in the two dots. One dot is the sun, and one is the moon. Speaking of people, you can say that the two dots are the two eyes. Ultimately, it is necessary to use your wisdom-eye to cultivate the Way, it is necessary to have wisdom to return the one to the origin and change it into a 0. 0 is the nature of the treasury of the Thus Come One; it is a great, bright treasury. It is the Buddha-nature you and I fulfill together. If you are able to return to that Buddha-nature, then in this very body you will immediately realize Buddhahood and will not have to wait to cultivate blessings and wisdom for three *asankhyeya* kalpas and to develop hallmarks and minor characteristics for a hundred kalpas. You won't have to wait for such a long time, but can realize Buddhahood immediately. Why haven't you realized it? Because you don't know the Way; you haven't cultivated the Way; there was no one who taught you the Way. Therefore, until now you have been born and died, died and been reborn, birth and death, death then birth. Your turning back and forth in the revolving wheel of the six paths can also be said to be jumping into the 0.

Into what 0 do you jump? Into the 0 of the revolving of the six paths, which turns you back and forth. suddenly you are in the heavens; suddenly you are back on earth; suddenly you are a hungry ghost; suddenly you are an animal; suddenly you are a god; suddenly you are in the hells; suddenly you are an *asura*; suddenly you are a person again. You revolve back and forth inside it, unable to jump out in order to keep from spinning around. If you can jump out, destroy the one, and return to the 0-origin, then you will have returned to the great treasury of the Thus Come One, which is your original ground, your originally existent homeland.

*Each of the sufferings exerts pressure, and all attack together.* This line of verse and the following one have already been explained. "Each of the sufferings" refers to the three kinds of suffering, the eight kinds of suffering, and all the infinite kinds of suffering. Each comes to oppress people, and they all attack together.

*Accumulating is feelings which beckon, each unlike the other.* Whatever affliction you have beckons more of that affliction. Thus they accumulate.

*Only through extinction can the ultimate joy be attained.* Only through extinction can the ultimate happiness of Nirvana be attained.

*Therefore this is the Way that should be practiced to awaken to the emptiness of dharmas.* Everyone should cultivate this Way and awaken to the emptiness of both people and dharmas. You should not be attached. Therefore, the Sutra says, NO SUFFERING, NO ACCUMULATING, NO EXTINCTION, NO WAY. All must be emptied.

*Through three turnings of the Four Truths, the Dharma Wheel revolves.* The three turnings of the Dharma-Wheel of the Four Truths have already been explained.

*Seven shares in enlightenment, the eightfold upright Path, intention, mindfulness and diligence.* The thirty-seven categories of the Way are comprised of seven divisions: the seven shares in enlightenment (sometimes called the seven shares in Bodhi), the eightfold upright Path, the five faculties, the five powers, the four bases of psychic power, the four dwellings in mindfulness, and the four types of upright diligence.

The seven shares in enlightenment are:

- 1) *Choosing a dharma;*
- 2) *Vigor;*
- 3) *Joy;*
- 4) *Rejecting;*
- 5) *Giving up;*
- 6) *Mindfulness;*
- 7) *Samadhi.*

Your cultivation should be in accord with these seven Dharmas.

*Choosing a Dharma*, the first share in enlightenment, means the choosing of a method. The Chinese word *chiao* 覺, "Enlightenment," also means "understanding." You should choose a method for cultivation. You should have the selective Dharma-eye which knows right Dharma and wrong, good dharma and evil dharma, black dharma and white dharma. When you have the power of selection, you are incapable of taking right as wrong, black as white, and good as bad. Without the share in enlightenment for choosing a Dharma, you pick the wrong method.

Once you pick a method, you must cultivate according to it. If you cultivate according to a Dharma, then you should have *vigor*, the second share in enlightenment. Your Vigor should be upright and not deviant. Upright vigor may refer to your sitting in meditation, or to your holding mantras, or studying the teachings, or maintaining the precepts, or cultivating patience — all the kinds of vigor that are a help to you. If you don't have vigor, then today you sit in meditation and tomorrow you don't; one day you maintain the precepts and the next day you don't; today you cultivate patience and tomorrow you don't. That is to lack the vigor share in enlightenment. If you have the vigor share in enlightenment, in the six periods of time, that is, in the three periods of the day and in the three periods of the night, you are constantly vigorous and never at rest.