



THE LIBERATING  
FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS  
*and*  
ESSENCE OF MEDITATION

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*Knowing with Wisdom Insight  
the Three Times of a Thought*

ZEN MASTER THÍCH TUỆ HẢI

*English translation by Milam Sudhana  
Edited by Oliver K. Luu*

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and Phuongthao Bui Luu (*Milam Sudhana*)

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Contact: [ekayanazen@gmail.com](mailto:ekayanazen@gmail.com)

For digital information, please visit: [www.ekayanazen.com](http://www.ekayanazen.com)

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After I had developed a direct view of the Four Noble Truths, I could not find an opportunity to speak about this, because I could not find a suitable Sutra. If I said it myself, people would say that I made it up. Now we have this wondrous Sutra as the base so that I can expound everything that I want to say about the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of interdependent origination. Had we not encountered this Sutra, I would have been sad for a long time without having a chance to express these things. I must say that it is a blessing for all of us, for our *sangha*, that we encountered this Sutra and can hear the truth of the matter. We have been wandering around for a very long time. That is, we practice meditation going in a circle. For that reason, after the Buddha's time, it was very rare to find practitioners who have attained sainthood. Because if we don't see the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of interdependent origination correctly, then there is no basis for us to reach sainthood. If we want to directly see *each thought, each encounter, each hearing, each smelling, each tasting and each touching*, then we need to see correctly. That is, for example, seeing sound means seeing the full *origin* of sound, the *cessation* of this sound and the *path leading to the cessation* of this sound *all at once*. The same goes for form and for our thoughts, and we must also directly see the *three times, past, present and future, all at once*. If we are not yet at this cultivation level, then it means we *do not hold the ultimate true view of Buddhism*, and our practice is still wandering on the outside, not yet able to immerse deeply in *adeptness*.

*Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải*

Breathing in  
perfect *merit* and *wisdom*

Breathing out  
full of *love*

✿ Below is an excerpt from the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha where the Venerable Sāriputta spoke about “taints.”

“Saying, “Good, friend,” the bhikkhus delighted and rejoiced in the venerable Sāriputta’s words. Then they asked him a further question: “But, friend, might there be another way in which a noble disciple is one of right view, whose views is straight, who has unwavering confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma?”

“There might be, friends.

When, friends, a noble disciple **understands** (\*) the **taints**, the **origin** of the taints, the **cessation** of the taints, and the **way leading to the cessation** of the taints, in that way he is one right view, whose view is straight, who has unwavering confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma.

And what are the taints, what is the origin of the taints, what is the cessation of the taints, what is the way leading to the cessation of the taints? There are these three taints: the taint of sensual desire, the taint of being, and the taint of ignorance. With the arising of ignorance there is the arising of the taints. With the cessation of the ignorance there is the cessation of the taints. The way leading to the cessation of the taints is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action,

*right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.*

*When a noble disciple has thus understood the taints, the origin of the taints, the cessation of the taints, and the way leading to the cessation of the taints, he entirely abandons the underlying tendency to lust, he abolishes the underlying tendency to aversion, he extirpates the underlying tendency to the view and conceit ‘I am,’ and by abandoning ignorance and arousing true knowledge, he here and now makes an end of suffering. In that way to a noble disciple is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has unwavering confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma.”*

*That is what the venerable Sāriputta said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the venerable Sāriputta’s words.*

*[Excerpted from the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha – A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya, Chapter 9: Sammaditthi Sutta – Right View, pp.143-144, as translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, 2009.]*

*(\*) In Vietnamese, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải uses the term “**tuệ tri**” which means **to directly know with wisdom insight** or **directly comprehend with wisdom insight**.*





After Sāriputta preached about the wholesome, the basis of the wholesome, the unwholesome, the basis of unwholesome, as well as the four reliances on nourishment, the four noble truths, and the twelve links of causes and conditions, he subsequently talked about *taint*. Here there are three types of *taint*.

### ✦ **Taint of craving**

The first one, for instance, is craving. Craving means desire or lust; in the easiest sense of comprehending it, craving corresponds to one's desire. Anyways, we have heard the word *taints* before. The first meaning of *taint* is leaking or trickling. When our six senses come into contact with the six sense objects, they leak out afflictions, karma, and sadness, anger, and hatred occur in our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Such leakages are considered *taints*. Thus, every time we see the *taints* in our eyes, the *karma* of afflictions begins to arise.

The second meaning of taints is related to the word to *preserve*. The word to *preserve* has many meanings; the first meaning is *to store*, [...] the second meaning is *to circulate*. When we see a form, we naturally become desirous, and when we want to possess it, these ideas of possession are stored in our *alayā* consciousness. And because of this desire, it becomes a karmic seed for us to continue to circle in life and death. Therefore, if we still have karma, we will circulate in these three realms: not just the realm of desire, but in the three realms in general.

And the third meaning of the word taints is that it means something like *falling down*, or *missing something* (it does not mean *remaining*). Because every time our eyes see, or our ears hear, many old memories appear, and when old memories appear, thanks to our knowledge, we become sad, angry, hateful, or accept or not accept it, or take or leave in order to compare and differentiate. We see things based on comparison and differentiation, but what is it that we see, exactly? We let go of the true entities when the *dharmas* or appearances when the mind of discrimination and comparison, and memories have not yet appeared. Therefore, we use the word *falling out*, similar to losing the real thing because we focus too much on our conceptual mind, knowledge, and illusive things.

Therefore, every time you see something, it's a *taint*, and is a leaking. The afflictive karma that now arises is called the leaking, or the afflictive *karma* from the *alayā* consciousness moves about or flows out into our mundane reality, then continues to gather those karmic consciousness back in. Due to those *karmas*, we develop our understanding, comparison, and discrimination, and it is this comparison and discrimination that makes us circulate endlessly in the cycle of birth and death. On the other hand, a *taint* also means “*dark and obscured.*” So taints show up in our daily life activities, and because of them, we let the obscured, negative, veiled, and unwise *karma* rain down on us. When talking about *taints*, we are talking about our conscious mind, thoughts, memories, and habituations on our six senses in a rather veiled and gloomy manner, having no clarity or wisdom. Or, to put it another way, when we see conditions and when we hear sounds, all of these things appear as *taints*, leaving us in darkness and unable to clearly see the truth.

Now, first of all, the “*taint of desire*” is the craving that arises in the world of desire due to the dark, obscured veil in our mind. Therefore, for example, when we see a beautiful thing, do we like it? When we listen to a melodious sound, do we like it? If we do like such things, it means attachment occurs, and craving or

desire arises. If we want this or that, including anything that surrounds our normal life, then that is considered the *taint of desire*. Since morning until now, we have been walking around, do we want anything? For example, we might see a beautiful scenery and want to take some souvenir photos or film that scenery, in order to keep the memory and own the photos. Another example is when we are alone on the road and we see someone leaving a basket full of diamonds in it, do we want to possess it? As further examples, when we encounter magnificent sceneries, we want to enjoy looking at them; when we see people with beautiful clothes and beautiful cars, we also want to have such clothes and cars for ourselves; when we see other people eating well, we also want to eat well, and so on and so forth. Wanting all of these things – talent, form, name, food, and sleep – is called desire. This is easy to understand, because everyone has a *taint of desire*.

### ✦ **Taint of existence**

And the second one is the “*taint of existence*”(or “*taint of being*”). There are some teachings that say the taint of *existence* is actually our *anger*, and the taint of *desire or craving* is our *greed*. However, it is not really accurate to hereby understand the word “*being*”

or "*existence*" in terms of *anger*. Only when there is the taint of *desire* then there can be the taint of *existence*. For example, at this moment, when there is craving, what will it give rise to? To "*clinging*" or "*attachment*"! Greed gives birth to attachment, and so it is called "*greed-attachment*"! Using the term "*greed-attachment*" can be most easily understood, and that is the *taint of existence*. For example, let's say we want to have a beautiful shirt to wear. If we simply *want* it, that's *desire*. Next, we will find every way possible to buy this shirt to wear. That is the *existence* of the shirt for us to wear, so that's the *taint of existence* within us. Another example is when we want a nice house or car, then that's simply the *taint of desire* thus far. However, once we want it, we will find a means to fulfill this desire, so that what we want will always remain with us and we will not lose it. Another example is when a man loves a woman, he will want her to always live next to him, and then find a way to marry this person so that she can be by his side.

Thus, the taint of *desire* depicts "*wanting*," whereas as the taint of *existence* depicts "*clinging*" or "*attachment*." It is similar to how craving gives birth to attachment, attachment gives birth to existence, and then from there, there is birth, old age and death. Therefore, this "*existence*" (in the taint of existence) is

similar to the “*existence*” (in the twelve links of interdependent origination). When we give rise to a greedy mind and crave for something, such as fame, profit, wealth and beauty, etc. then that is simply *desire*. However, *existence* means we begin to actually *do something* so that *the thing that we want will always be present with us*. Let’s say if we desire a nice house, beautiful clothes, fame, money, and so on, we would want them to be ours, and we would want to maintain them, conserve them for our use, and cling to them for a long time. That is thus the taint of existence. If we understand the taint of existence’s meaning in that way, then it is different from the meaning of anger.

It is due to this “*existence*” that we circulate in the three worlds, whereas “*desire*” is greed and attachment in the world. It is due to this “*existence*” that we can be born in the god realms and we end up existing there, because we are attached to these realms, believing that they are the realms of myriad blessings, and that once born there, we can enjoy the blessings without suffering like we currently are. Thus, we also develop a craving to be born there, and we do meritorious and wholesome deeds, and meditate, in hope of fulfilling this aspiration. Having good meritorious fortune and meditation, we will be born in the god realms after leaving this body. When we manifest in the god realms, it

points to the “*existence*” or “*being*” in the god realms. The form or formless god realms belong to this kind of *existence*. So “*existence*” is the second thing.

So we see that craving comes first, and attachment or clinging follows. Without craving, there is no attachment. Here we are talking about going in a progressive direction. However, in reality, it is because we already have an existing “*self*” that gives birth to “*craving and clinging*,” and on the other hand, “*clinging to the self*” is what gives birth to “*craving*.” Thus, we gradually come to see that this development takes place neither before nor after, similar to the question of whether the chicken comes first or the egg comes first. Without self-grasping, craving cannot arise. However, once craving has arisen, we will *grasp at this grasping* and *grasp at the self*, which, in turn, thickens our *self-grasping*. Now that we are greedy or crave for money, we end up having a lot of money naturally, and we begin to see that we are blessed, that we get our wishes or what we pray for; for example, we want a car, we get a car; we want a multistoried house, we get it; we want this body to be beautiful, it becomes beautiful. Those whose desires are fulfilled will most likely have deeper “*attachment and clinging*” which continues to pile up on the “*self*.” Asking these people to cultivate is a little difficult! Unless they [want to meditate] but

cannot meditate, then we can talk to them. On the other hand, for people who can get whatever they want in this world, including wanting to be born in the god realms and having enough merits to be born there, it would be very difficult for them to practice!

When we talk about enlightenment and liberation to these people, they don't care for it, because all they want is to live without suffering like other people. Since childhood, they have lived a happy life, having good food, beautiful clothes, tall and spacious houses, and all the necessary means to live a good life. Thus, whatever they "*want*," they "*get*" or "*acquire*," so this "*getting*" or "*acquisition*" is really their "*existence*," and this "*existence*" gives rise to "*clinging and grasping*" – we cling to our craving and our possession. Therefore, we have two things to grasp. The first one is grasping at the *self* (*me*), and the second is grasping at *what belongs to us* (*mine*). Beside material wealth, *mine* also includes our knowledge, understanding, judgment on the right and wrong in this life, and so on and so forth. All of these things are considered our "*existence*." That's called the *taint of existence*.

Because of this existence, it begins to leak out and create afflictions for us when we encounter conditions or situations. So this is called the taint of desire, and



due to this existence, we crave and become greedy. Since we want something and get what we want, we end up wanting it all the time. On the other hand, some people get discontented or disillusioned when they don't get what they want, but who is there to be discontented or disillusioned when they get what they want? Except for those who want something and cannot have it, they will end up with no more desire to want it anymore; the ones who get things are the ones who would become discontented. [ . . . ] Let's say if we want a ten story house, but we cannot possibly acquire one, then we would decide, oh, the heck with it, let's just enter monastic life. Therefore, just because we are disillusioned with life does not necessarily mean that we are awakened. Sometimes we are discontented because we cannot accomplish our desire, thus we develop disillusion, afflictives and so on and so forth. Therefore, first there is the taint of desire, and next comes the taint of existence, and the taint of existence strengthens the taint of desire, and the taint of desire, vice versa, strengthens the taint of existence. Once we have the taint of existence, there begins the circulation in the cycle of birth and death. The second meaning is "*to preserve*" or to "*save*;" therefore, it saves or stores everything in the *alayā* consciousness, and this, exactly, is what brings us around and around in the birth-and-death cycle.

## ✿ Taint of ignorance

And the third is the "*taint ignorance*." *Ignorance* means no clarity or lucidity, and *taint* means dark obscuration – both obscured and unclear. So what does it mean to be without clarity or lucidity? It means that *we don't see the truth of truth*. Firstly, we do not have enough strength to be able to directly see and know the truth of truth. For example, the Sutras say "*all dharmas are Buddha dharmas*," yet, now when we look at things around us, we see beauty against ugliness everywhere, and many times we see sadness, suffering, unhappiness, and afflictions arising . . . and we see no Buddha appear anywhere. However, from the perspective of the enlightened ones, each and every phenomenon or *dharma* is "*Buddha dharma*" – each of them exists "*as real*" and this "*as real*" is the peaceful, pure realm of the enlightened ones. Nevertheless, we cannot possibly see that!

If someone asks us to show them a place of enlightenment, can we see such a place? No! If the answer is no, it means we are ignorant. It means we don't have enlightenment itself; we don't have the wisdom to see the truth in order to deeply immerse in the realm of genuine "*truth*" that is existing right in this moment-

*ness of presence. In this momentness of presence, it is inherently pure, lucid and quiescent, radiant, magical and peaceful.* However, do we have enough inner strength, at the time being, to be able to see that? If we are not capable of seeing it as such, then we can consider ourselves ignorant because we do not see the whole truth! The Theravadin Sutra system, on the other hand, explains the *taint of ignorance* as someone who *cannot see the genuineness of the Four Noble Truths.*

Thus, an *ignorant* person is someone who cannot clearly see *reality*, or the *truth*, the *Four Noble Truths*, the *twelve causes and conditions*, *cause and effect*, *karmic fruition*, *impermanence*, and so on. So all of those things are what we are obscured about. Regarding cause and effect, can we see it with clarity? Is there anyone here who can clearly see cause and effect, except for the Buddha? Only enlightened people can see cause and effect with utmost clarity! For us, we don't even see impermanence that clearly. Thus, that means we don't see with clarity all of the above. According to Theravada, the terminology to be used is "*not seeing clearly*," but here, the Venerable Sāriputta called it "*having no knowing with wisdom insight*" – *having no knowing with wisdom insight about the Four Noble Truths.*

‡**The liberating Four Noble Truths: the truth of taint, the truth of the origin of taint, the truth of the cessation of taint and the truth of the path that leads to the cessation of taint**

So, as far as the taint of desire is concerned, if we do not apprehend the *taint* itself, nor do we apprehend the *origin*, the *cessation* and the *path* leading to the cessation of the taint of desire, then we can consider ourselves ignorant. Thus, dark ignorance does not mean lack of understanding. If ignorance is defined as lack of understanding, then it is not a correct definition. There are people who are not educated and do not have worldly knowledge, yet they still have wisdom, and there are people who have worldly knowledge and high degrees and who consider those who are not educated as ignorant. To those educated people, lack of understanding means lack of knowledge. However, if we say that people who “*lack knowledge*” end up with “*no wisdom*,” then, once again, we have to be careful with what we are saying! Wisdom is on a completely different level. Knowledge is intellectual understanding or intellect, and is the habituation of what is clever or unclever in this world. When we say we can habituate and learn, it means we have intellectual knowledge and understanding, but intellectual knowledge and under-

standing are not at all useful when it comes to removing the taint of ignorance at this level. Actually, a person who does not have wisdom to clearly penetrate "*reality*" means such a person is ignorant according to Mahayana definitions.

Therefore, we should use the words "*having no wisdom*" rather than "*having no understanding*." Although ignorance is usually interpreted as having no knowledge, it is not enough in this case to describe this "*taint of ignorance*." Because if we cannot fully penetrate "*reality*," what ends up happening to us in everything that we see and hear? Having taints which means *leaking, trickling, or dropping*, and thus, *suffering* and *mental afflictions* arise. Every time we see that there are afflictions, suffering, greed, anger and foolishness, it means that defilements are born due to an ignorant view. This view of ignorance has no correspondence with the truth. If in this reality right now we see everything "*as it really is*," then it is empty, quiescent, and pure, and it does not trickle any memories in our seeing and hearing right in this moment. It means we are seeing everything with purity, and it is not simply so, but we also have to see through this present moment or penetrate this vivid presence. This vivid presence is already empty, quiescent and pure, but when it *comes to the phenomena themselves*, we must

*“see through all the three times of all phenomena,”* and further, to see that there is *“no time and no space.”*

When everything exists without time and space, it will lose the comparison and discrimination of the elaborated, discriminating mind. If the discriminating mind appears, then there will be a concept of time. However, here we are talking about a direct seeing *without the slightest before or after* right in this very vivid presence! What does *“no before, no after”* mean? *“No before, no after”* does not mean that we see everything in front of our eyes but not behind; however, it means that we do not only see in front of our eyes but also on both sides in their entirety as well. And as far as *“anything that happened before”* countless eons ago, as well as *“anything of the present”* and *“anything of the future,”* we must directly see them *“without any moment of time,”* and that is exactly what *“no before, no after”* means. It is a direct seeing, one sees *“throughout time without any before or after”* – everything is complete in this one single seeing, one *“current seeing”* or one *“current thought.”* Then that direct seeing is the seeing *“as it really is.”*

The spatial space we are currently seeing is very small and limited. We are being *contained in our sense faculty, sensory object, and discriminating conscious-*

ness. We are being trapped in our *body faculty*. As far as the body faculty's ability is concerned, it cannot go far, nor can it see much. But if right now, right is this very momentness, we immerse in *the truth* and are *liberated from this body faculty*, then we will have a *vast all-pervading view*. *All of the phenomenal realms in the ten directions appear at once in synchronicity in one single direct vision!* Thus, in *one single view*, all realms and states of existence throughout this ten-directional world emerge *without time or space*. That is "*existent reality*." However, if we do not have enough inner strength to enter here, it is called ignorance and *taints* begin to take birth.

When it is said that ignorance is dark obscuration, not having enough wisdom to penetrate and immerse in reality, taints arise; therefore, taints arise in the direction of greed, anger, and one's attachment; taints arise when we are seeing and hearing . . . . That means: what kind of context are we seeing right now? We are seeing in ignorance. This ignorance is not strong enough to integrate into the genuine truth, and thus, taints begin to arise. Therefore, it is called the "*taint of ignorance*." Ignorance is something different, but when talking about the "*taint of ignorance*," it means that when our view gives rise to an idea, it becomes a taint. Ignorance is darkness, and it is completely obscured; however, it

begins to arise. It gives birth to understanding, knowledge, right and wrong, and love and hate, then all of those things are called *taints* within our seeing and our hearing. Up to this moment, when we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch, can we escape this? No, we are still being trapped in here! Thus, it is called the "*view of the taint of ignorance.*" Whenever we see something, we can be quite certain that we almost always exist within this "ignorance."

Now here, Sāriputta said, among these three taints: for example, regarding the taint of desire, we know with wisdom insight the *taint* of desire, and the *origin*, the *cessation* and *the path leading to the cessation* of desire.

Where do these taints come from? Where do these taints arise from? Here we are talking about their *origin*. For example, if our eyes see color, we like a beautiful scenery, and it is contained in our store consciousness. When we see something now, our memories appear in order to *compare and differentiate*, and we see in the front of us things such as flowers, leaves, fruits, a table, a carpet, etc. Those are everything that we are seeing. Therefore, what does it mean when *name* and *form* of those appearances appear? It means that *taints* have already been born a long time ago!



That is, we are seeing with *taints*, and not with *genuineness*. That which is genuine does not carry any names such as fruit, flower, or leaf. That which is genuine has no *name*. [...] However, as of now, it still depends on *form* so it has its name.

However, for a person who is "*seeing it as it really is*," form is not a form. If this flower is not a flower and this leaf is not a leaf, then it is genuine. When we see it as it really is – that this flower is not a flower and this leaf is not a leaf – will they still appear at that time? They are still there, but they no longer have names, such as flower or leaf. What about their forms, will they still appear? Yes, they still exist, but in reality, these forms are no longer forms. If for once we could see that *form is not form*, then we would have arrived at the truth of all matters. However, we have never seen form not as form, because we still have so many taints in our seeing, and thus, forms appear as forms, and once having forms, we will begin to discern that *this* form is different from *that* form.

However, the truth is that there will come a time when all taints and perception will be exhausted through our cultivation – when the taints are gone, perception will be gone, and when perception is gone, form can no longer exist! Thus, there will be a time when we

receive a form yet it is no longer a form. We may not even believe it now even if someone tells us so. However, when we get to the point where we can directly see all appearances of all these things as inherently signless without any characteristic, we will see them, as they really are – the form, based on our perception as we now see, will appear as formless or signless, carrying absolutely no characteristic signs. On the other hand, if we see that this image is different from that image, it means that we have already fallen into the level of perception or *taints*.

As such, we can now directly apprehend with wisdom insight the *origin* of the taint of desire. From where does the *origin* of the taint of desire come from? It is due to the contact between the sense faculty and sensory object. However, when the sense faculty and sensory object come into contact, yet no feeling arises, then there is nothing there to give birth to desire, craving, grasping and existence. Therefore, what is the *origin* of this taint? It points to the fact that when sense faculties come into contact with sensory objects, feeling, desire, craving, and clinging are born. However, saying so is just speaking in theory herein.

## ✿ **Knowing the three times with wisdom insight**

Now, for example, in the previous paragraphs, we talked about the twelve causes and conditions, and then we talked about the six senses coming into contact with the six sensory objects: the eyes see colors, the ears hear sounds, and so on, until our mind sees the *dharma* objects. Now that we are sitting here, a *thought* is born. Do we see this thought? Yes, we do! If we let our mind calm down, then everyone can see. However, seeing that thought is simply called directly knowing the thought itself with wisdom insight. That is the first step. And now when the thought arises, we directly know with wisdom insight the origin of the thought. Are we capable of seeing this? This is something very important that we have said over and over again: every time we see a thought, we must see **concurrently *the three times of a thought***. Just like in our view we must see *the three times of the Four Noble Truths*.

Here, we will analyze *the three times*. For a long time we have studied meditation, we have practiced meditation, we sit quietly, keeping our mind pure and peaceful; when thoughts arise we know, thoughts arise we know, thoughts arise we know. . . . However, even if we know this a billion lifetimes later, we still won't

be able to solve anything! It is because we are not wise enough to see *the three times of a thought*. All meditators who are not yet absorbed enough to see *the three times of a thought* should know that they are still being outsiders and have not gone deep into meditation. We should know this! If all meditation schools don't dwell deeper into this aspect, then we don't know where people will reach in meditation, because no one has the strength to see *the three times of a thought*.

We sit in meditation for an hour and know every thought that arises, and then after the session ends, we remain ordinary. Even at the time being when we start to give rise to thinking, we know that we give rise to thinking, then when thoughts become sparse, we are aware that they become sparse, quiescent, and then completely pure, etc. Then, there are days when we sit and see no thoughts, and thus, we perceive that we have already “*entered meditative absorption.*” However, what kind of perception or what state of meditative quiescence is this? It is ***dull absorption***. Dull absorption simply means that we *do not have the capacity to directly see the three times of the absorption itself*. If you have empty quiescence or a moving thought, yet are not capable of seeing the three times within either one, then it is considered that you have

fallen into *dull absorption* – that is, you have *quieted down all thinking, yet fail to see the three times within this state of being empty and quiescent*.

So what does this Sutra talk about in the beginning? That which is wholesome, and *to know with wisdom insight* that which is wholesome and the root of this wholesomeness, etc. On the other hand, it also mentions that greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, doubt, belief in a self, extreme view, grasping at one's own views, grasping at vows and wrong view. . . are unwholesome, and we need to *know with wisdom insight* that the root of attachment, anger and ignorance is unwholesome. Furthermore, we also need to *know with wisdom insight* the wholesomeness of not being attached, angry or ignorant, as well as its origin, cessation and the path leading to its cessation.

Although this Sutra is quite short, it continuously mentions from beginning to end that we must always *know with wisdom insight* – for example, to *know* birth, the origin of birth, the cessation of birth and the path leading to birth *with wisdom insight*, as well as to *know* existence, touch, feeling, up to consciousness *with wisdom insight*.

Now, let's talk about *knowing* consciousness *with wisdom insight*. There are two important things here. Until now, the eyes see colors and the ears hear sounds, and that is the contact of the senses with the sensory objects. But after they have come into contact with each other, what is left afterward? What is left are the *mental imageries* which we have once seen, heard and touched through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body.

Now we will go back to our cultivation practice. If anyone has ever practiced, please calmly listen to this passage. If you can grasp some understanding of this, then you know how much you have cultivated, whether you cultivate or not, and whatever you practice correctly or wrongly – this is something absolutely essential. From the beginning until now, what we have been doing is to directly know with wisdom insight the *subject of matter*, its *origin*, its *cessation* and the *path leading to its cessation*. Almost all of the passages in this Sutra have the above concluding sentence. This is truly very significant! Even the Four Noble Truths require us to directly know *suffering*, its *origin*, its *cessation* and the *path leading to its cessation* with wisdom insight.

## ‡ Step 1: Knowing with wisdom insight the three times of a thought

When a thought occurs, we must also know this thought with wisdom insight, but that is only the initial step. Our cultivation effort cannot really solve anything, as we only know a simple thought with wisdom insight. When a thought appears, mental imageries appear, we know with wisdom insight these imageries, and that's the end of the matter. Furthermore, when mental imageries become quiescent, we know with wisdom insight that they have quieted down. It is similar to when we see form and hear sound right here, and we know form and sound with wisdom insight, and then we stop. Are we able to go up any ladder step yet from that? From the past until now, not many of us have cultivated the second step – or, rather, not many of us are yet capable of cultivating step two, so it is not that we haven't done it, but because we cannot do it. And why is it so? In all of our seeing and hearing, and in all of our knowing awareness, let's talk about thoughts now, rather than form or sound. Entering the path of *adept practice*, we should begin to talk about thoughts.

Thus far, thoughts arise, we know with wisdom insight thoughts arise, and that's it. Are there any meditation schools that teach step two? Yet, this step two is mentioned again and again in the Sutra. Sāriputta never failed to repeat this specific step in the Sutra, but no practitioner has ever mentioned that yes, I know with wisdom insight *the origin* of this *thought*. It is really impossible to *develop wisdom* if we are unable to do this! Therefore, there must be a period of cultivation during which we can directly see *the three times of a thought*.

Now, let's simply say that while you are sitting here, you miss your sweetheart. Such a thought arises, and just like that, the face of the person you miss appears. It is the same when a mother misses her son or daughter, a younger brother misses an older brother, and a friend misses another friend. When those feelings of missing someone occur, all of the related mental images will appear in our mind. We would meditate until a time comes when all those thoughts will, first and foremost, appear in their full, original form. Each thought that appears manifests in own its original form. Whoever we miss, too, at that moment, will appear in his or her true form. For instance, when we miss the mountain, our house, or some scenery, the mountain, house or scenery will appear in their full mental form. You get



the idea, right? Anyone can do this; it is very easy. However, that is it, and we will not do anything further. So what we see, that is, the mental images, appears, and then it disappears. Thus, we think that we have cultivated well, because we are mindful and aware of every thought that arises, and we do not follow it. Who are we then? We are someone who simply knows with wisdom insight the thought that arises, and this is only the initial step.

The second step is to know with wisdom insight the *origin of a thought*. For example, right now we might feel our heart aching, we are choking, and we cannot breathe. A depressing thought about something appears at this moment. The past instantly appears whence, for instance, someone hit us but we couldn't fight back; they cursed us, and we were so furious and resentful that we vomited blood, but we could not do anything in return at that moment. When something like this appears, then what is it? It is the *origin*, because without that person of the past, we wouldn't have this resentful thought now. Or, for example, now that we are sitting in meditation, our heart throbs, and we feel joyful. When the happy thought appears here, a scene of *the past* appears where we were very happy with, for example, a companion. It shows the original scene, not just what we infer and recall. Herein, the *thought* and

the *original* of that thought appear synchronized on the same plane of reality.

As soon as the present thought appears, we think perhaps there will be *a next moment* when stories of the past will appear, but that is not the case. Instead, the past ***appears simultaneously at the same time*** as the present thought. Can we arrive here? If we do not have this kind of cultivation, then we cannot really talk about deeper things. We must first arrive at this point, and then we can discuss further. So now we have to take a look at all the meditation schools from the past until now. Have these schools taught us this step so we can go deeper into spirituality? If not, we should study again to re-cultivate this second step.

Now, as soon as we give rise to the thought of being homesick, the entire family home appears. “*Missing home*” is not simply a “*thought*” per se; instead, the image of the entire house from inside to outside appears at once in synchronization [with the present thought]. If we think that first, the thought of being homesick appears first, and then the image of the house appears thereafter, we would be wrong because they *both appear simultaneously, in synchronization, in the vivid momentness of presence*. Thus, *thought* and the *origin* of the thought both appear at the same time.

Now, for example, if we miss someone, that person's face appears, and a past scene appears during which we interacted with that person. Simultaneously, another scene appears when we showed affection for that person, so that is why we miss him or her now. All of this kind of data *is displayed on the same surface* as if we are seeing everything at the same time. It does not mean that it is shown layer by layer, but that *all mental imageries [of past and future] appear at once when the thought of reminiscence appears*. But now what is wrong with us? We are having “*taints*,” and because we are being obscured by these “*taints*,” we cannot see the previous segment [or the future segment]; it is being covered by hindrances. When we cultivate well, it will no longer be covered. Thus, when a thought appears, it is equally lucid that the scenery, as it happened in the specific year and month, on the specific date and at the specific time, appears synchronously. Thus, we can now see the *origin* of the thought. Once we see its origin, will it come to an end? We have to discuss everything step by step here, and don't think cultivation is easy. If we want to talk about adeptness, then we must truly talk about adeptness! History books must record this kind of adeptness so that future generations can practice correctly; otherwise, we will all fail in our cultivation.

Now, when we say a thought appears, and the *past related scene* immediately appears [simultaneously], we are only talking about the first layer. When the *past scene* appears, if it is still accompanied by sadness or happiness in our mind, then the *future scene* also appears at once. That is, ***in this one single thought the three times appear***. Because we miss this person so much, it will show the future scene of tomorrow or the day after tomorrow when we get to meet up with this person. Conditions will arise so that we can encounter this person, and we can see this scene with lucidity; we will dial their phone number to make arrangements, or ask someone to relay a message or deliver a letter to this person so that we can see them that day. Thus, it is only a thought of “*missing*” someone, in the past, and that we and that person have loved one another, and due to this, we are arranging a date for tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, or very shortly from now. ***However, there is no progressive time that passes! If there is still a passing moment of time here, then it is at fault – thus, this is called seeing the three times of a thought.***

So here a *thought* appears, and the *past* and the *future* appear. However, there are *thoughts* which only consist of the *present* and the *past*. The *present thought* and the *past appear synchronously*, and we also see clearly that

the *future* will not occur. If so, this thought will no longer return to our mind, and that is the *cessation* of the thought. Thus, the moment we see this *thought*, we see its *origin* as well as its *cessation*. Just these two are enough. So now, can practitioners see all of this? We have been practicing for a long time; thus, can we see that when a thought appears, it consists of the *future* or not? Can we also see that when a thought appears, it consists of the *cessation* as well? We must talk about this in order to review how we have cultivated: are we seeing clearly or not at all? If we are meditating, yet, we cannot see all of this lucidly, then we cannot resolve much in meditation and we have not progressed much with anything. In other words, we have never truly practiced. For a long time, we said that we cultivate but we have not *truly cultivated*. When we truly cultivate, we should see with clarity the arising *thought*, and the *origin* and the *cessation* of the thought. *If we truly cultivate, we must be able to see all three times of a thought.* Only then we can say that we are cultivating.

Let's say that we are practicing but we are no different than other people, that is, when they bring their mind to calmness, they see thoughts, and now that we practice, we can also see thoughts. If so, then what would make us better than other people? What is so better about

that? We would only be better if we can see the *origin* of the thoughts. Because we have learned it here, we can see the *origin* of the thoughts and the *cessation* of the thoughts – we can see *the three times of the thoughts*. This is a very important matter. However, the Patriarchs have not fully utilized this specific point within the Sutra system from the time of Buddha's enlightenment until now, causing people to remain confused in their practice, and thus, realized practitioners are rare to find. On the other hand, those who have realized do not fully capitalize this specific point for future generations.

Now that we are talking about this, it may sound new to us, but it is not new because the Buddha already taught it long ago. I just want to make it clear now, therefore, that it is not something new. However, it has been many thousands of years since anyone has fully capitalized on this specific point. This is extremely crucial for all those who enter into meditation cultivation. If you want to be awakened and liberated, yet you cannot bring the original thought to an end, then would you have enough zeal to perfectly attain liberation and enlightenment? Can anyone see this thought to its exhaustion? This is something extremely important! We must by all means see the *origin* of this thought. However, seeing the origin of the thought is

simply one step back, and there are many other incidents behind all of this. Therefore, I am saying that for those who truly want to cultivate, today's discourse is extremely critical for those who want to practice and attain enlightenment, and be liberated, according to the Buddhist way.

We must seriously examine ourselves and see: what we have been cultivating from the past until now? Do I have enough inner strength to thoroughly fathom a single thought? In the past we have said that we need to "*investigate the background*" of a thought. In my previous discourses, I often mentioned this. What does investigation of a thought mean? Dear thought, where did you come from? Who are your parents? Why are you here, and when will you die? We have to penetrate a thought in such a way. However, saying all of that still leaves many people in the dark and they are unable to see this. Today, thanks to this Sutra, I can begin to speak more clearly about this in accordance with the meaning of the Sutra. It is not something I have made up. Here is the story of the Sutra.

So when a thought appears, if a person is truly quiescent – we are not talking about mindfulness and awareness anymore; let's forget about that argument, here we are simply using the simplest words saying that we are

having a calm mind and are awake here – and if we are sitting here, when a thought appears right here, we clearly fathom it which means we clearly know it *with wisdom insight*. Here, Sāriputta only speaks of *knowing with wisdom insight*. *Knowing with wisdom insight* refers to the wisdom that is brilliant, lucid and clearly illuminating the very vivid presence. We can simply explain the term “*knowing with wisdom insight*” in that way so that it is easy to understand. Therefore, right in this very vivid presence, if we directly know unobstructedly with clarity and lucidity then we comprehend with wisdom insight. Knowing unobstructedly means we can equally penetrate and directly see the entirety of past and future. Knowing *w* means the whole *dharmadhatu* can be directly perceived with clarity. Knowing unobstructedly means “*knowing the very vivid presence without obstructions,*” and that means *knowing with wisdom insight*.

Therefore, when this one thought appears, we see that there is more coming. For instance, we miss that person too much, and we cannot bear it anymore, and thus, we have to make a rendezvous to see that person, which means there is more to come. If currently we only miss that person just a little bit, and we just let it be, then in the future, it will not re-appear. If so, then we also need to know with wisdom insight that there is no future



involved. We need to directly know the three times with wisdom insight. Here, there are two important things: firstly, to know the three times with wisdom insight, and secondly, to know with wisdom insight the Four Noble Truth, the origin, the cessation, and the path leading to its cessation.

If in each thought we do not *see through the Four Noble Truths*, then we are considered *ignorant*. This is how we define *ignorance*. It means *right in the vivid presence of a thought*, we do not see the *thought*, and we do not see the *origin* of the thought, the *cessation* of the thought and the *path leading to the cessation* of the thought, so we are considered ignorant. Right in this very vivid presence, if we do not see all of the above aspects, then we can consider ourselves ignorant. The Buddha taught it very clearly, and Sāriputta also taught it very clearly. Venerable Sāriputra, only after having received and directly understood from the Buddha, repeated this instruction which is absolutely very clear on how to practice. Therefore, for every person who wants to cultivate, the first thing one needs to do is to see through all three times – past, present and future – in one single thought. Are we capable of seeing a thought in such a way yet? If not, then we need to meditate, and little by little, and then we will be able to see it.

So, when a thought appears, it also shows *the three times of this thought*. Because *the past* was like that, this thought is now present, and if it remains in *the future*, it will make a *return* in a little while. Right now its weight is 100%, but because we now recognized it, when it reappears, its weight will be reduced to about 50%. When it appears again this time, the past may be very clear, but the future would be quite blurry. It is just fading but it's not over yet, and if it were to appear again one more time, it will appear again tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, or in a few hours, and then, finally, in the future it will be completely and utterly gone. At the same time the past appears, the cessation of the thought will also be present. We see clearly that this *karma*, this *karma* consciousness and this happening has ceased. When it has ceased, what will appear? This is a very amazing thing that we can talk about.

Once cessation has taken place, purity, clarity, and emptiness appear. This is very interesting because here, it connects with the Diamond Sutra: “*Delivering immeasurable, limitless, boundless sentient beings to the Non-residual Nirvana.*” This sentence from the Diamond Sutra is an extract from the essence of the Four Noble Truths. To deliver sentient beings to *Nirvana Without Remainder* means our [mental] sentient beings no longer arise, but *they absolutely manifest the*

*true Nirvana realm.* It is an expanse that is pure, empty and quiescent, clearly and thoroughly penetrating the past and the future, as well as time and space – all of this can emerge behind each thought. So don't say that a thought is just some *ordinary empty space* – it is erroneous to say such thing. Between one thought and another can be an empty space, yes, but once we were able to bring this one thought to *cessation, the realm of Nirvana emerges.* This is an important thing to understand.

If a thought does not blaze radiantly and manifest the pure realm of Nirvana, then *we have not yet reached cessation!* We must carefully and clearly examine the way we have been cultivating from the past until now. This is something truly important in this discourse. Last week at the end of my talk, I felt quite uneasy because I still had not finished sharing everything with you. Thus, I promised many people that today I must tell all of it so that anyone who listens and grasp this essence can go deeper into their practice and will never be misled again. This is something extremely important to explain.

It must be reiterated that . . . when a thought reaches *cessation*, a mental realm of absolute purity, quiescence and void must appear before that sentient being

can be delivered to the Nirvana Without Remainder. Otherwise, it has not reached the perfect end as yet. If it simply stops, then there is the *distance* or *empty space* between one thought and another which is normal. This thought arises, then it calms down; there is space, then another thought arises, and calms down; there is space, then that thought arises, and calms down; there is space. . . . That is a normal thing, and we have always cultivated in such a way in the past. That's it, and there has not been much of a result! Thus, here, we are saying that each and every thought needs to be brought to Nirvana Without Remainder according to the meaning of the Diamond Sutra. So here, for every thought that appears, *the past* must also be shown. If the *past* is shown, it is the same as the *origin* of the thought being shown, and if the *origin* is shown, the *cessation* must be shown as well. How wondrous is this way of teaching! When we learned the lesson of chapter 4: *Fear and Dread*, and when we reached the part about “*taint*,” the Buddha explained that he could clearly fathom *suffering*, the *origin* of suffering, the *cessation* of suffering and the *path leading to the cessation* of suffering, and he called it “*the cessation of taint*.” We're talking in circles here, but we can't escape that. There is no Sutra that can escape this, no enlightened practitioner who can escape from this, and

if we escape from this then we are considerably on the wrong path.

‡ *In the past, the Buddha also reached the cessation of taint through the Four Noble Truths*

Now, for every single thought that arises, if we do not practice based on the Four Noble Truths, then we will deviate from the path. When we see everything through ignorance, we cannot see the Four Noble Truths. If each thing is *comprehended with wisdom insight based on the Four Noble Truths (i.e. suffering, origin, cessation, path)*, then we are not ignorant. Herein, I am saying that if we can see the three aspects (*suffering, origin and cessation*), then that is enough – seeing up to *cessation* is enough, and that means we have Right View. Right View means **“seeing it as it truly is.”** ***Thus, direct knowing or direct comprehending with wisdom insight means Right View.*** Therefore, here, we do not need to even discuss the fourth which is the *“path leading to cessation”* because once we see *cessation*, the state of *birthlessness* and *deathlessness* naturally manifest – that is, the expanse of Nirvana emerges. It is an empty, quiescent and pure expanse where there does not exist any mental, subject-object affliction. That is already the pure *seeing* of our *Right*

*View, and Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Livelihood . . . and everything is already completely fulfilled!*

Therefore, when a practitioner exerts effortful practice, then in their own *seeing of existence*, they must clearly see the thought's "*appearance*" first and foremost. If anyone has cultivated diligently but has not seen that each thought emerges in its full form – as a full image, as if there is a whole person standing in front, or rather, more accurately, as if there is Mount Meru in front of them. It is because a thought can be so obvious, so conspicuous, and not simply some minuscule, tiny, tiny ideas like what we have typically, always seen for a long time now. It is because for a rather long time, we have been accustomed to having "*perception*" about external "*appearances*," – we see large versus small appearances, and thus, to us, thoughts are minuscule and they are extremely short moments. However, those mental moments, when seen by a fully cultivated person, are *endless* rather than short! *A single moment can be said to be equivalent to billions of quadrillions of lifetimes, and to billions of quadrillions of the kind of time that is determined by our conscious mind!* We see that there are things in the past and things in the future that span countless lifetimes, but in truth, it is no longer than the lifespan of a single thought; therefore,

don't be mistaken! We are mistaken in seeing thoughts arise, and thoughts disappear, thoughts arise and thoughts disappear too quickly – the moment of time is too fast compared to what? Compared to our conscious mind!

Once we have directly known reality, the kind of “*time based on our conscious mind*” (progressive time) no longer appears, but ***it emerges as it really is in its entirety***, so that what happened countless eons ago also [simultaneously] appears in its original form [right in the present moment]! Reality has no “[*progressive*] *time moments*”! It has no “*moment of time*”! If there is a moment in time, then we are wrong during our practice. If we see that this thought is “*prior to*” another thought, then we are erroneous! That means we have fallen to the level of mind-consciousness, so we see one thought appearing first, then another thought that follows!

Thus far, this is only like First Grade in school, and we still have to progress to Second Grade. That's why I said that when I finish giving commentaries on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and discussing the technicality of adept practices, it will be a thousand and a million times different from the old discourses. If someone is really diligent in their practice, they will

see it as such. Since then, I have only been able to tell two or three people, and fortunately, there are a few who know about this. Truly, if one has not cultivated deeply, one will not have enough inner meditative strength to see *the three times of a thought*. Without deep meditation, we will not be able to minutely discern whether a thought still remains or is completely exhausted after it arises. However, we must distinguish and penetrate one single thought with utmost clarity and cannot allow blurriness to take place in our lucid seeing. This is the crucial point for us to enter the gateway of meditation. Once we have learned this specific point well, we will realize that for a long time until now, we have only been seeing a few bubbles on the vast ocean, and we have not resolved anything. It is obvious that if we cannot directly see the *origin* and the *cessation* of the thought, then can we truly solve anything?

Thus, in the future, when we really practice authentically, only when we have the wisdom eye can we see the thought penetratingly, because we currently don't even see a single thought clearly. So the first step to enter the door of meditation, to learn meditation and to practice meditation is that we must clearly see a thought that appears like a house, a mountain, or some other image, and since they are so big, they fill up the



entire space, and not simply being, for example, as big a mountain anymore. At that time, there is only that one thought in existence. It is very strange, however, that the past is fully present there and the future is also fully present, as there is no difference in the three times of a thought.

And if we cultivate ourselves, we will get to know the second step. What is the second step? When this thought occurs, it is three or two thoughts consecutively. Therefore, what did the ancient Patriarchs say? *“The previous thought, the middle thought and the next thought are not continuous.”* It may sound great but if that is the case, we haven’t gotten to this point yet. At this point, there is no previous thought, no later thought and no middle thought, but ***the three times of this thought all appear at once synchronously. This thought is a past thought, but it also appears the present thought as well as the future thought.***

Nevertheless, we also said earlier that sometimes when there are thoughts, they immediately appear in their entire form in our mind which means the past emerges synchronously with the present; yet in this case, absolutely no future shows up. So is this cessation yet? Yes, that’s cessation. Once we get here, it is considered the end. Right here, both the present and the past

immediately disappear without a trace, and this thought will never return a second time in our mind if we really see it with utmost lucidity. Usually when we get here, we have to have enough concentration to see whether there is still the future or not. Yet, at the time being, we do not have enough concentration and wisdom to see the appearance of the past and the future of this thought – although in reality, the future appears too dimly for us to even notice. This means that in this case, although we cannot see it, the future will still happen. Due to the residue in our mind, the future will return. It will return as we have mentioned in the previous discussion. Therefore, what is the second step?

For example, in the first step, the future thought may still be very strong and appears at 50% of its strength, then comes the second step where it only appears at 30% of its strength. Then, it shows up again one more time and now it is only 10% of its strength. It is blurry and we cannot see it clearly; nevertheless, it still has to appear this one last time. We have to see it again this one last time so it can definitely be exhausted and so the future can turn out to simply be something brightly clear. At that moment the future itself is brilliant and pure, without obscurity; however, if we still see some obscurity, then we are seeing it wrongly. That is, when a present thought appears, we should see its past and

future, which means all the three times shall appear to us all at once. When the future itself is now brightly clear and holding on to nothing, what is left is only the vivid presence and the past, and then, suddenly, it disappears as it also brightly clear like that of the future thought with nothing to hold on to. At this point, the thought has ceased completely.

Only then is it called cessation and “*delivering a sentient being to Nirvana Without Remainder, yet there is not a single sentient being who truly attains Nirvana.*” That is a verse in the Diamond Sutra. Do you find it easy or difficult here? But hold on, that's just step one – the initial step into the door of the meditation house. There are further steps that we need to resolve further. However, if we haven't yet taken this first step, then don't say we practice meditation; we are just fooling people if we haven't even taken this step yet. Now that we have talked about step one, then we can move over to talk about step two. I repeat this over and again so that you can really understand this crucial point – you must really understand it well.

Now regarding seeing thoughts – if we truly want to see thoughts very clearly, then what should we do? We should know thoughts with wisdom insight according to what Venerable Sāriputta instructed. And what does

knowing with wisdom insight refer to? If there is no thought, then it means seeing there is no thought. If the thought is arising, then it means seeing that the thought is arising; if the thought is subsiding, then it means seeing that the thought is subsiding. However, is that considered *knowing with wisdom insight* yet? If so, then we are also seeing with the “*taint of ignorance*.” Why? Because we are “*preparing to do something*” – we are paying attention, concentrating and we are “*exercising our mind*” – and what does that mean? That’s *ignorance*! That is “*taint*” – taint appears, because we are paying attention, concentrating and intentionally trying hard to see it.

Therefore, this is the root of what we are going to talk about next. That means if we want to reach the sphere of knowing with wisdom insight as taught in the Sutras, then we must completely let go of ourselves in order to be in true innocence, without data, without any preparation, and without allotting any cultivation practice arbitrarily, so that we can fall into a state of natural spontaneity. When we relax and fall into a state of naturalness and spontaneity, then that is the state of meditative absorption or meditative concentration. Meditative absorption means we return to our natural, spontaneous state. Any meditative absorption that returns to its natural, spontaneous state is *automatically*

*pure and lucid.* On the other hand, if we force ourselves into some kind of concentration, then that kind of concentration is obscured and we call that dull absorption. Here we are talking about something rather new when we define meditative absorption in this way. If it is not due to any intentional effort that we (automatically) become empty and pure, then that is both meditative absorption and wisdom in the vivid presence.

If we use effort to suppress thoughts so that we can achieve quiescence and emptiness, then this is completely obscured and lacking wisdom. Therefore it is called dull absorption. Thus, concentration through cultivation practice is called dull absorption. On the other hand, *natural absorption* is called *meditative absorption and wisdom in equanimity*. Being natural and spontaneous without under any influence is called the “*perpetual meditative absorption.*” If we deviate from this *perpetual meditative absorption*, it means we are chasing after the outer situations and conditions, and chasing the past and future, so we miss this perpetual absorption, even though it is something that is primordially innate to all of us.

Therefore, this is also a form of *sudden awakening*, *sudden cultivation*, and *sudden realization*. Having said

that, it is truly about sudden enlightenment, sudden practice, and sudden realization! Directly knowing *the three times of a thought*, and knowing the Four Noble Truths in a single thought is a form of the *perpetual ever-knowing wisdom*. Therefore, in the previous Sutra passage, we learned that one goes through a series of concentrations, from the first meditation to the second, third and fourth meditation, and then to letting go of all meditation and simply turning one's mind toward the past to see the past and the future and the countless births and deaths of all sentient beings. The Sutras mention the different steps and levels; however, *in the Buddha's singular view at that time, what he saw of the past and what he saw of the future never happened differently in time*. Therefore, it means when the Buddha turned his mind toward the taints, he [simultaneously] saw suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation, and he was thus able to resolve the issues of birth and death, and perfectly attained Buddhahood.

Thus, meditative absorption is returning to the most natural state we have ever been. It is the state of being when we have not been accustomed to anything, nor involved with anything that is related to body, mind and conditioned circumstances—right then and there, we will fall into meditative absorption, and this absorption

is wisdom, because in this state of being, we directly, unobstructedly and unmistakably knows everything, including the presence, the past and the future of everything. Being in this state of naturalness and spontaneity means being completely penetrative without impediments, completely empty and clear, and having the ability to fully and lucidly penetrate the past, the present and the future in their entirety.

So what does it mean to return to meditative absorption? It means being a person who does nothing – that is absorption. Simply *do nothing with one's body nor one's mind*. We do not concentrate, we do not pay attention, we do not focus, we do not pay attention, we do not try to stay aware, and we do not try to maintain our wakefulness or heedfulness – we hardly do anything, but to simply let our state of the mind fall into a place of naturalness and spontaneity. We do not carry any old memories, attitude, action or any concept right in this very vivid presence. If a practitioner can do that, then they are *falling into meditative absorption*. Only with this absorption will one have enough inner strength to see the true existence of *one thought*, of its *origin* and its *cessation*! Only then can we call this “*knowing with wisdom insight*” that the Venerable Sāriputta teaches us here. Is it easy or difficult? We are not talking about sudden awakening here, but about

returning to the old house to live with all the treasures that we already had.

‡ **Step 2: To utterly penetrate the primordial source of the germinal thought that lead to the birth and death cycle**

From the Buddha's time until that of the Buddha's disciples, the Buddha and his disciples taught us nothing but *to fall into a place of purity, void and quiescence so that we can thoroughly penetrate all dharmas*. Buddha thoroughly saw the entirety of birth and death. So now, let us move to step two. Currently, we see a thought and only see its *origin*. However, if that is the origin of this thought, then what is the prior origin of that origin? Can we see it? No, we don't. If we have yet seen it, then we have not yet reached Nirvana Without Remainder! Therefore, do not think that after the thought is exhausted, we enter Nirvana Without Remainder – thinking in such a way is erroneous. Therefore, as far as the *origin* is concerned, the Lotus Sutra describes as follows: “*the Buddha is the one who clearly knows the appearance of merit and demerit.*” We have mentioned this verse before and everyone understands this, right? For example, now, if a living being is born in this world, the Buddha immediately knows where this living being came from,



and what they were like before that past life, and before that, and before that, and so on for countless eons ago. So what is it called? It is the supranormal power of seeing one and others' past lives and rebirths of others. Only through possessing this supranormal power can we thoroughly see everything the entirety of previous births and rebirths. Therefore, we go from one thought to the next, and the next and the next . . . up to its origin to the next origin, and the next and the next . . . and on and on all the way until when? All the way to the primordial origin of the primal thought that lead to the birth and death cycle.

Just now we talked about step one. Step one is when we see a thought appear, and we see its origin which is something that happened not so long ago, and the reason why we generated this thought and that thought. And then we can see what took place prior to this specific reason, and what took place prior to that, and prior to that and prior to that, all the way until the germinal root of the past. As such, only then can these sentient beings be delivered to Nirvana Without Remainder. Seeing thoroughly all the way to the primordial spark of the original thought that led to the cycle of birth and death – only then can this be called seeing the cessation of a thought, the cessation of ignorance, and only then can there be no more “*taint*”

and no more dripping or leaking. We must see it through all the way until it is completely pure and empty where there are no more taints, so it can be called “*to turn our mind toward taints*” [to thoroughly see them until they are totally exhausted].

The Buddha directly saw living beings’ suffering, their causes of suffering, and the state of Nirvana appeared. If one can clearly and thoroughly see *existence* and the *cause of existence*, the pure state of Nirvana and the essential things needed in the sphere of Nirvana, from Right View all the way to Right Concentration, only then can it be considered ***seeing through the end of birth and death***. Even so, what is it, then? It is only the end of birth and death of *a single thought*! If we can see through one thought, does it mean that we can *see through the whole cyclic existence*? The answer is yes and no. We can think of the meaning as expressed by past Zen Masters like Shi Gong (Hui Zang) (the third generation following the Sixth Patriarch Huineng), when he met Master Mazu Daoyi. Mazu Daoyi said, “*If you shoot one, you shoot the whole herd.*” It is because all *dharmas* in the three worlds have the same true *nature* and the same true *sign*, and thus, after we see this one thought all the way to the end of the root of life and death, then what? Then it means that we just finish seeing through a single thought. However, the

next thought, too, has to be brought to cessation, and then the next, and the next and the next . . . until the end of it all, and then it can be considered *the total cessation of the origin of a thought*. Otherwise, if we just bring a single origin to cessation, then it is not right, because if one origin has just ceased, the next origin pops up immediately, and if there is still another origin, then it will continue to give rise to other thoughts without end. Therefore, if we cannot thoroughly bring one thought to ultimate cessation, then even a single thought cannot be completely brought to cessation. Thus, if we only bring the next origin to cessation, then we have only brought one single layer to cessation. If we have only brought one layer to its end, then what is left of it? The thought will continue to proliferate since it has not been brought to full cessation!

Therefore, there are people who are trying so hard to cultivate to reach this stage . . . there are people who can see thoughts that arise and then cease, and there is no future attached to them, and there are people who can see thoughts that arise, and how they make a rerun two and three more times, and then it completely ceases, not arising ever again. However, that is still not the case. We have to wait for more episodes, going through episode two, three and four. We must immerse

more deeply to solve deeper problems, and not stop there. If we stop there, then we have not yet completely eliminated the taints. We must remember this! Therefore, right here, we see the first layer of the thought, then comes the second, and the third and the fourth layer of the past . . . . If so, then how will we see it?

*Seeing through the past to the end of that thought, but there is no difference in any moment in time – everything appears on one single plane all at once! Everything appears on the ground of mind all at once, without before or after!*

*Therefore, when we talk about Prajna, the all-seeing in the “vivid presence” of Prajna has to reach this point! The past is seen throughout, and the future is luminously radiant without the slightest blur. Only when the future and the past are completely lucid and pure can a single thought be brought to full cessation.*

And that is just one thought – a tiny thought, yet we have to see through it just like that, and that is considered seeing through its past and its future. That means seeing the entirety of its existence, its origin and its cessation. Having such a view is, indeed, Right View. There is no need for us to discuss further, because that is simply how it is. Seeing it as it really is

means Right View has arisen. Therefore, what follows are right speech, right action, right effort, right livelihood and right concentration. On the other hand, if we cannot *see it as it really is*, then that means we do not have Right View. What will happen if we don't have Right View? Then we don't *see it as it really is*! What will happen if we cannot “*see it as it really is*”? Then we cannot be enlightened and liberated!

However, that's just seeing one single thought. Now we have to step up to do step two. What is the next step? After our mind reaches a certain state of mental purity, we will no longer *see only one thought each time*. At that time, we can see *everything*, whether *many* or *few*, *far* or *near*, *big* or *small*. That is the all-seeing of *Right View*! When Right View has not fully arisen, we may have some abilities to see a little better than ordinary people which means we see *a whole clumpy mass of thoughts* at once. We no longer see one thought but an entire *clumpy mass* of thoughts. This clumpy mass no longer has a single thought that runs continuously that holds the past and the origin as before. However, when this clumpy mass appears, about five hundred to one thousand thoughts appear – a forest full of mental faces appears within one singular all-seeing. Not only one, but multitudes of thoughts appear. Only then will this *wisdom* begin to *see deeper*,

whereas before our seeing was still shallow. Only then can we see how practitioners on the Buddha path ***reveal their wisdom*** in their cultivation practice! Without this, how can wisdom arise in order for us to call it enlightenment and liberation?

While we are quiescent and peaceful but not yet fully enlightened, there will be a time when *multitudes of thoughts* appear simultaneously. Suddenly, multitudes of faces, images, and colors appear *all at once*. For example, a thought appears because a sound appears. In the past, when we heard the word “*Buddha*,” a thought appeared from the sound of this word. However, now, when we reach this state, in addition to the thought about the “*flower*,” the form of the flower will also appear, so that’s two things which appear. Next, the thought of the “*smell*” of it as the third one, the delicious “*taste*” of it as the fourth, and the hot and slippery “*touch*” of it as the fifth. These five senses reveal five kinds of appearances, which are five different faces. However, within each of those senses, millions of things appear. For example, all of the tastes, touches, forms and sounds which we have seen and experienced all of those times ever since we were young until now will *appear simultaneously at once in one all-seeing*. If not so, then how can we *open wisdom*? “*In this very vivid presence, all dharmas*

*emerge from the state of Voidness.” That is, all dharmas simply emerge!*

This means that not only all of those images are shown *at once*, but their *origin* is also shown, and their *cessation* is also shown. Not only the cessation of the first layer, but the countless cessations of countless layers are equally shown, too! Thus, at one time, “*all sentient beings are brought to Nirvana Without Remainder, yet not a single being has been delivered.*” For example, in the previous stage, when one thought appeared and we could see through all the way to its past, we will see luminous radiance; however, this radiance is still very small. Whereas now, when multitudes of thoughts appear and are brought to cessation, then this radiance becomes *much vaster and much broader*, although it is not yet *all-pervasive*. It is not yet *all-pervasive* because the *taints* have not been completely ceased. Although countless thoughts have ceased, yet the taints still remain. However, when we get to this point, it is when the perception aggregate can actually see the aggregate of mental formation.

Therefore, following this is another period of cultivation practice, and then will come a time when a whole array of illusive thoughts appear, and it will be just like in a large area of the sky, no matter how many grains of sand there are in that space, we can see them

all. Similarly, let's say there is rain all over our country: we can see it all. Or, let's say there are many grains of sand there are in the front courtyard: we will *see it all at once* without missing a single grain. Here, we are simply talking about the temple's courtyard or our own yard at home, but can we see all the grains of sand in the whole wide world? Not yet, right? If we cannot yet see all the grains of sand in the entire world, then it means our wisdom has not been utterly opened. Remember this! If we cannot yet see all the way to the end, then it means we have not yet attained full liberation.

‡ **The five *dharma* objects appearing all at once simultaneously in one single seeing without the seer and the seen**

Then there will be another layer as we meditate more deeply, we will see transcend another layer and will see further. For example, when we taste something or smell an odor, how do we perceive it? I don't know if you can imagine it; right now, it is impossible, but at that time, whatever the taste is like, we can see how a taste appears so vividly as if there is a person standing there, and it is no different than how a form or a sound manifests. The manifestation of sound is different than form; the manifestation of form is different than smell;



the manifestation of smell is different than taste; and the manifestation of taste is different than touch. Nevertheless, at that time, *all five dharma objects appear all at once, simultaneously, in one single seeing*. The dharma objects appear in synchronicity; however, they manifest as five totally different shapes, and these five shapes represent five different faces and five different lineages. It means we do a thorough background investigation on everyone within nine generations of our ancestors without missing anyone.

For example, speaking of our childhood stories, right now even if we try to reminisce how hungry we were as a baby, and how we sucked on our mother's breast and how we enjoyed being breastfed, we still cannot remember it. However, when the all-seeing emerges, everything appears vividly as to how we held our mother's breast and suckled, how the milk entered our mouth, how we enjoyed it, how we swallowed it, and we can clearly and directly see that very taste. Seeing the clear image and seeing the very "taste" seeping into our tongue – here it is not simply our mother's milk per se, but every bite of food that we have ever tasted which is something so unimaginable. I dare our perception to even imagine it here; perception has no place here and we may end up with a broken skull if we try to imagine how. However, when we are in deep

meditative absorption, each and every thing appears lucidly and vividly – that is the interesting thing about meditation; otherwise, mediation wouldn't be any good. If you reach this stage in your practice but do not experience the all-seeing, then it is not so very

Thus the five lineages appear, from small to large, from few to many, from near to far, from past to present to future – we clearly *know* how everything appears *with wisdom insight*. Here, we must maintain the stance that Venerable Sāriputta taught on “*knowing with wisdom insight*.” And this *knowing with wisdom insight* is actually *the very vivid presence where there is no past and no future, and where everything appears at once, without the slightest before or after!* We must remember this! ***If there is a “moment of time” during this reality of knowing with wisdom insight, then we are being erroneous! At the same time, if there is an "object" at this time as well, then it is also not right! It appears but is not an "object," so that is an important thing that we need to discuss.***

When we directly apprehend with wisdom insight, we would think that if we have wisdom, then that wisdom will illuminate this and that – if so, then that is a worldly concept! However, the true direct knowing with wisdom insight while in meditative absorption is not an “*object*”! Everything appears distinctively, but

they are not *differentiated from one another*. Smell is not different from taste, taste is not different from sound, sound is not different from form, etc. However, don't think that we cannot *minutely differentiate* them, because we directly know that this is smell, that this is taste, that this is sound or that this is form. ***There is a "knowing" that lucidly knows all of these are not "one" and not "other" while we directly comprehend everything with wisdom insight!*** If that is the case, then we are right. It means form, sound, smell, taste and touch – ***all five objects – appear undifferentiated, yet they are not one either.*** It is not one, but it is not other – that's the first point. The second point is that there is ***no time difference.*** The third point is that there is no difference between two things, which means there is no "knower" and "the known." If there is the "knower" and "the known," then this is not knowing with wisdom insight and not the sphere of knowing with wisdom insight.

We must remember this; it is crucially important. When "*all dharmas emerge from Voidness*" (*Essence of Prajñāpāramitā*), there is no "object"! If there is any "object" involved, then we are erroneous. In the past, there were people who thought they have immersed in this kind of absorption and presented their practice view to me; however, if there was still

“*something that is seen by me,*” then that is incorrect. Therefore, we can see that *truly realized cultivation* and the *knowledge to help bring about an understanding* are two completely things!

Right now, if we are in the realm of *knowing with wisdom insight* as Sāriputta said, then there will appear simultaneously the *form*, the *origin*, the *cessation* and the full *path leading to cessation* – if so, then we are seeing correctly, because ***in one single moment, there are both aspects of cyclic life and Nirvana. There must be no difference in the moment in time – that is true wisdom.*** The Buddha apprehended the Four Noble Truths with wisdom insight in the very same way, and now, whether one thought or countless thoughts appear at once, we also know them all with wisdom insight as the Buddha once did.

Once upon a time, there was a Patriarch (Manorhita) who said, *"The mind follows after, and is moved by, countless appearances. | The source of this moving is deeply subtle. | Seeing one's True Nature right in the moving of the mind, | one is neither happy nor sad."* In the past, this is a verse that I used to place on the altar to prostrate to. However, we now need to review it again. Why? It is because if we say we “*right in the moving*” of one thought, we will not be able to see our “*True Nature.*” Rather, we must be able ***see through***

*all the way to the pristine germinal, starting point of all thoughts.* Prior to seeing this pristine germinal root source, however, all the faces of all the thoughts would appear simultaneously. Throughout all of our past through countless cycles of life and death, everything that we have seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched... would appear at once in synchronicity at that time without missing even the slightest dust particle. First, we have to directly see this. If in meditation we are not able to directly see this, then our wisdom is still not fully developed and it is still being obscured.

When we reach this point in our meditative absorption, all the smells, tastes, forms, and sounds would appear simultaneously and they are clearly seen by us; *with wisdom insight, we directly know* everything that happened in the past through the contact of our five senses [with their sensory objects]. Here we are not talking about *thoughts* anymore – *thoughts* alone do not have enough capabilities to enter the game here; let's put thoughts aside, and let's only talk about the *five senses* and anything that are considered *dharma objects*. Therefore, let's just say in this lifetime, no matter how many times we have come into contact with smell in this life, or not matter how many times we have tasted, touched, seen or heard in this life . . .

*all of that would have to clearly emerge within a single all-seeing, all-knowing!* Here, it is not “to remember” or “to recollect” – using these terms would be wrong in this case. It is because everything *has remained perfectly and wholly intact*; therefore, everything is now *clearly shown* as nothing is lost, not even a tiny shred of it is lost since the beginning of human history until now. Therefore, everything still remains perfectly whole, in its original shape or form, being fully intact, and nothing has ever been lost. We directly see all *dharma* objects that have ever appeared in this mundane world. This is a direct personal account, and we have to see it in that way.

Thus, from one single lifetime to countless lifetimes, no matter how many times we have seen, heard, smelled and touched – everything appears at once without missing a single dust particle and the origins of all of them also appear, reaching all the way to the end of the ever-first seeing, ever-first hearing, ever-first smelling, ever-first tasting and ever-first touching of a being that was not yet human. In fact, we have experienced being innumerable kinds of species until now when we are humans. Thus, the very first time we came into contact with conditioned appearances or environments, we were not yet people, but we were a different type of species, and not a living being with

legs, feet, head or brain. We experienced a different kind of touch and were raised differently, and so on. If we talk about all of these details, it may take the rest of our lives and we still cannot finish talking about them. Therefore, we can just say, in short, that we must directly see the primordial place of our initial contact in order to see the primal origin of it all. Once we can see the primal origin, we can arrive at seeing the cessation of it. When all of these thoughts [as well as smell, taste, form, sound and touch] are brought into the realm of Nirvana Without Remainder, then the true realm of Nirvana comes into existence.

‡ **The manifestation of the whole *dharmadhatu* as one single appearance within one single seeing – a pristine appearance that is empty, quiescent, pure and immensely vast**

At this time, the entire phenomenal realm manifests as the original pristine appearance that consists of all we have ever encountered through our eyes, nose, tongue and body etc. However much we have encountered in the past, the *entire pristine appearance* will manifest to that extent. What does it mean when the *entire pristine appearance* manifests? For example, now when we are talking about the appearance of form as seen by our eyes, we would first see the previous appearance, and

all the layers prior to that layer also manifest without impediments – it means we are able to directly see the causes that give rise to the first appearance, the causes that gives rise to the second, third, fourth and fifth appearances – which means we will be able to penetrate all of them all the way to the end of the entire appearance. It also means that we can penetrate the causes that give rise to these thoughts, the causes that lead to our pain and suffering – we must see the entirety of all appearances and afflictions, clearly and lucidly, in order to say that we have wisdom!

Therefore, the teaching on the Four Noble Truths is wonderful in that the Buddha only turned all attention towards the "*cessation of taint*" – that is, seeing *suffering* and seeing the *origin* of suffering. Although this is a mundane matter, we must be seen thoroughly to its very ***original source*** or ***origination***. When we see its original source, then what is it? It is called *cessation*. When we see thoroughly to its *original source*, we will come to see that prior to it arising, it is something utterly pure, empty, quiescent and immensely vast – *at that time, we will see it appear as such*.

Therefore, it means that after we have enough meditative strength and absorption to see all the hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching appearing all at once in one direct seeing, back to all of the causes that



happened in all of our past lives, all the way back to the primordial, pristine origin of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching . . . then that means we can see the ultimate end of origination. And what happens when we see the absolute end of origination? Then it looks like we have ended the entirety of suffering and the causes of suffering! If we cannot see the end of it all, then we cannot be liberated; however now, we are still sitting here, looking vaguely at a single thought, then how long will it take us to resolve this matter of life and death?

Actually, up to this point, we can clearly see that there have been many steps. *However, if anyone who only takes a single step, yet can directly see all of what has been described above, then that is called sudden awakening, sudden cultivation or sudden realization!* This is called *sudden awakening meditation*. If we cannot see all of the above and call ourselves *sudden awakening*, then we probably have *suddenly* knocked down something, but we are not *awakening* for sure! Therefore, Zen Buddhism must also look back at its so called “*awakening*.” Theravada meditation also needs to look back to see if its cultivation practice is in line with what the Buddha said from time immemorial until now. All of what we have discussed thus far was what the Buddha said and it was then repeated by Sāriputta.

The Buddha first taught Sāriputta, and that was how Sāriputta taught to the audience. Sāriputta must have been highly cultivated and reached a certain realization level before he could begin to repeat all of this in his discourse.

‡ **The practitioner’s “true essence vividly emerges” in Voidness (Signlessness) right in the pristine presence without space or time**

Therefore, once a practitioner can directly see all the taints appear, can see through the original source of all the taints, and can see all the way to the cessation of all these taints, then it means they can directly penetrate the state of *Voidness* or *Signlessness* – because in *Voidness*, all appearances and all *dharma*s can genuinely emerge in their true form. Thus, at this point, *the practitioner’s “true essence vividly emerges” in Voidness and in the entirety of all appearances that exists throughout the dharmadhatu without exception.* Thus, all appearances of the past, all appearances of the present, all the sounds of the past as well as all the sounds of the present exist right in the momentary vivid presence without any before or after. Whether few or many, near or far, wide or narrow, or gross or subtle, everything exists simultaneously at once.

Now regarding the moment of *no space and no time* (*spacelessness and timelessness*) that we have talked about, then “*no space*” does not mean that there is absolutely nothing. “*No space*” means “*everything is vividly present*” *without any spatial “distance” (no gap) and there is no difference, no gap in the position of its existence.* Now let us imagine that we see an object here, and we see another object in the corner over there, then we can tell that these two objects are in two dispositions – there is a distance or an empty space between these two objects. However, when we immerse in “*true seeing*” – *the true direct knowing with wisdom insight* – in order to reach the ultimate state of cessation, then the object that is countless light years away appears just like a table *right here*; there is utterly no distance.

We may have thought that no spatial distance or no gap means stacking up the piles, one on top of the other, right? But it is not so! We could never imagine this “*spacelessness*” with our head. Can you imagine the countless forms and colors without any gap or distance from each other? I wonder from ancient times until now if science has ever imagined this. If we think they are “piling” or “stacking” one on top of the other, then it means there are two things which cannot be in the realm of truth, and thus, science probably cannot even

imagine this. We can never use our imagination to come up with this. It surpasses all of our imaginations if we truly want to reach this point where everything exists “as reality” – that is, all forms emerge fully, yet without any “gap” of spatial space, and they simply “exist as the vivid presence.”

As far as the term "*the vivid presence*" is concerned, we can use the term "*all-pervading*" (or *everywhere*), but although it is all-pervading, it is even smaller than a grain of sand. That is why we always mention the grain of sand in the sphere of reality. At the exact moment of awakening, we can see that a grain of sand contains this entire *dharmadhatu*. Even if we try to cram the whole phenomenal realm into a grain of sand, it will take up less than a millionth of this tiny grain. So can you believe it? If you don't believe it, then you need to continue to cultivate from now into the next lifetime.

So in the "*moment of vivid presence*" all of our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching that we have experienced in the past and the present now appear, yet there is no difference in moment of time. Time has never been different. Therefore, all *dharma*s are neither born nor ceased. Here we are talking about the matter of the *four Dharma realms* of the *Avatamsaka Scripture* (*Flower Ornament Sutra*): 1) the *ultimate*,

*absolute, non-obstructed reality; 2) the integration of this awareness into ordinary, everyday activities and reality; 3) the mutual, non-obstructing interpenetration of the universal and particular; and 4) the mutual, non-obstructing interpenetration of the particular with other particulars.* If we see that there is a difference in moment of time as it relates to all the things that have happened from the past until now, then we are seeing with illusion. ***When we can see all the past and future appearances simultaneously “exist in the very vivid presence” without even a single slightest moment of time deviation, then ultimately we are seeing correctly.*** And as far as all the objects that manifest in this phenomenal space, in the ten-directional *dharma* realm, are concerned, we use the term “*boundlessly vast and all-pervading*” to describe them and we can try to use our perception to imagine them. Nevertheless, we still cannot stretch our imagination limitlessly enough to reach its boundary. At that time, far away objects are not truly far away from us, but they would manifest “*right here*” – they “*synchronously appear in the vivid presence,*” and we can directly see everything all at once without any spatial distance. If that is the case, then we are seeing everything correctly! On the other hand, if we still see that this one is away from that one, then we are seeing inaccurately with *taint* – the taint of

*ignorance*. When we see with *taint*, there is *spatial distance* and *moment of time*. When the taint of ignorance is exhausted, we will directly see the ***truth of existence*** where there is ***no spatial distance and no moment of time*** – ***everything will appear as it really exists right in the vivid presence***.

In *the very vivid presence*, we are right here, right in this place, at *a single point* in space, but at *this single point*, everything in space appears as described above. Limitless forms and sounds are displayed very clearly. Only at this point can the *taint of ignorance* be resolved! So then, how should we practice with diligent effort to reach this point? Regarding all the steps one, two, and three that we have discussed earlier, you should *learn to see everything correctly again*, please.

That is, firstly, we need to have enough meditative absorption and quiescence to see *the three times in a single thought*, please. This is the most crucial step in our life of practice. If we have never seen *all the three times in a thought*, then we must know that we have not yet entered the gateway of true meditation. If ever, once in our life, a thought arises and the moment we cognize the thought of our head being sore, we also see how we have been hit in the head in the past that lead us to have this soreness now. Can you believe that?

This is just an example, and it means we can see the origin of this thought. If not, then we have not yet able to see the origin. If we cannot see the origin then we cannot go deeper to see its cessation, which means we have not truly cultivated anything, and have thus far just sat in mediation for fun. If I were to tell you that by doing so, you have not really cultivated much of anything, you would be sad, but in all honesty, what have you cultivated? And now, how should we cultivate with some effort? We need to be clear with each and every step in order to walk on the meditation path. We should record everything that has been said thus far.

This is the step by step path of meditation, with very clear orders and hierarchies, and not at all fuzzy. Buddhism teaches us the way of “*come and see.*” If we *don't see all the way to this truth*, then we have not acquired anything and have not gained anything for such a long time. If we want to gain anything at all, then we must directly see it like that, and seeing it like that is called *practicing meditation*. Thus, have we *practiced meditation* correctly all these years? There are many people here who have practiced for many years and tried hard to sit for an hour or two hours, that leads them to feeling peaceful and calm, and thus, they believe that they have already meditated. But it is not

so! Even if you are quiescent for one to two hours, for one to two days, for one to two years, or even for one year, two years, up to twenty years . . . and this “*all-seeing*” still does not occur to you yet, then you are still considered an ignorant person and not an awakened one. If at that moment, you cannot see *the immeasurable cycles of your birth and death* since immemorial time, then you are not *fully awakened*. We must, by all means, directly see clearly like the Buddha did – the *suffering*, the *cause* of suffering which is the *original starting point* of suffering, the *cessation* of suffering and the *path* or the True Dharma.

‡ *In short, in every thought, we must see the entire Four Noble Truths. In every thought, we must see the entire twelve links of interdependent origination. In every thought, we must fully see the three periods of past, present and future all at once.*

If someone can see like that, then we can consider that person to no longer have the “*taints*” of birth and death. We must also directly see it like that. If in one thought we do not fully see the Four Noble Truths, nor the three times, nor the twelve links, nor the cessation of birth and death, then we can consider ourselves to be seeing with confusion. [.....]



After I had developed a direct view of the Four Noble Truths, I could not find an opportunity to speak about this, because I could not find a suitable Sutra. If I said it myself, people would say that I made it up. Now we have this wondrous Sutra as the base so that I can expound everything that I want to say about the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of interdependent origination. Had we not encountered this Sutra, I would have been sad for a long time without having a chance to express these things. I must say that it is a blessing for all of us, for our *sangha*, that we encountered this Sutra and can hear the truth of the matter. We have been wandering around for a very long time. That is, we practice meditation going in a circle. For that reason, after the Buddha's time, it was very rare to find practitioners who have attained sainthood. Because if we don't see the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of interdependent origination correctly, then there is no basis for us to reach sainthood. If we want to *directly see each thought, each encounter, each hearing, each smelling, each tasting and each touching*, then we need to see correctly. That is, for example, seeing *sound* means seeing the full *origin* of sound, the *cessation* of this sound and the *path leading to the cessation* of this sound. The same goes for form and for our thoughts, and we must also directly see the three

times, past, present and future, all at once. If we are not yet at this cultivation level, then it means we *do not hold the ultimate true view of Buddhism*, and our practice is still wandering on the outside, not yet able to immerse deeply in *adeptness*.

To me, this is something that is extremely important. Whoever has the blessing to hear all of these things today must have had great merits and must have practiced for many lifetimes. That is, you are listening to what the Buddha authentically taught from the very beginning [of his turning the wheel of Dharma]; however, these instructions have become undeveloped year after year throughout the history of Buddhism. Now that we have the opportunity to listen to these specific instructions over and over again, we can feel confident and can be very clear so that we can enter practice. Wherever we go, we know where we are going, step by step with certainty, and with no more confusion. Only then can we call it Right View!

## 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 *bhikkhuni*.

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. Master 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. Oshawa. 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. Oshawa 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. Zen 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.

*Website: [www.ekayanazen.com](http://www.ekayanazen.com)*

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*Gone*

*Gone*

*Gone Beyond*

*Gone Utterly Freely Beyond*

*Perfectly Awakened*

*Svāhā*

*Essence of Prajñāpāramitā*