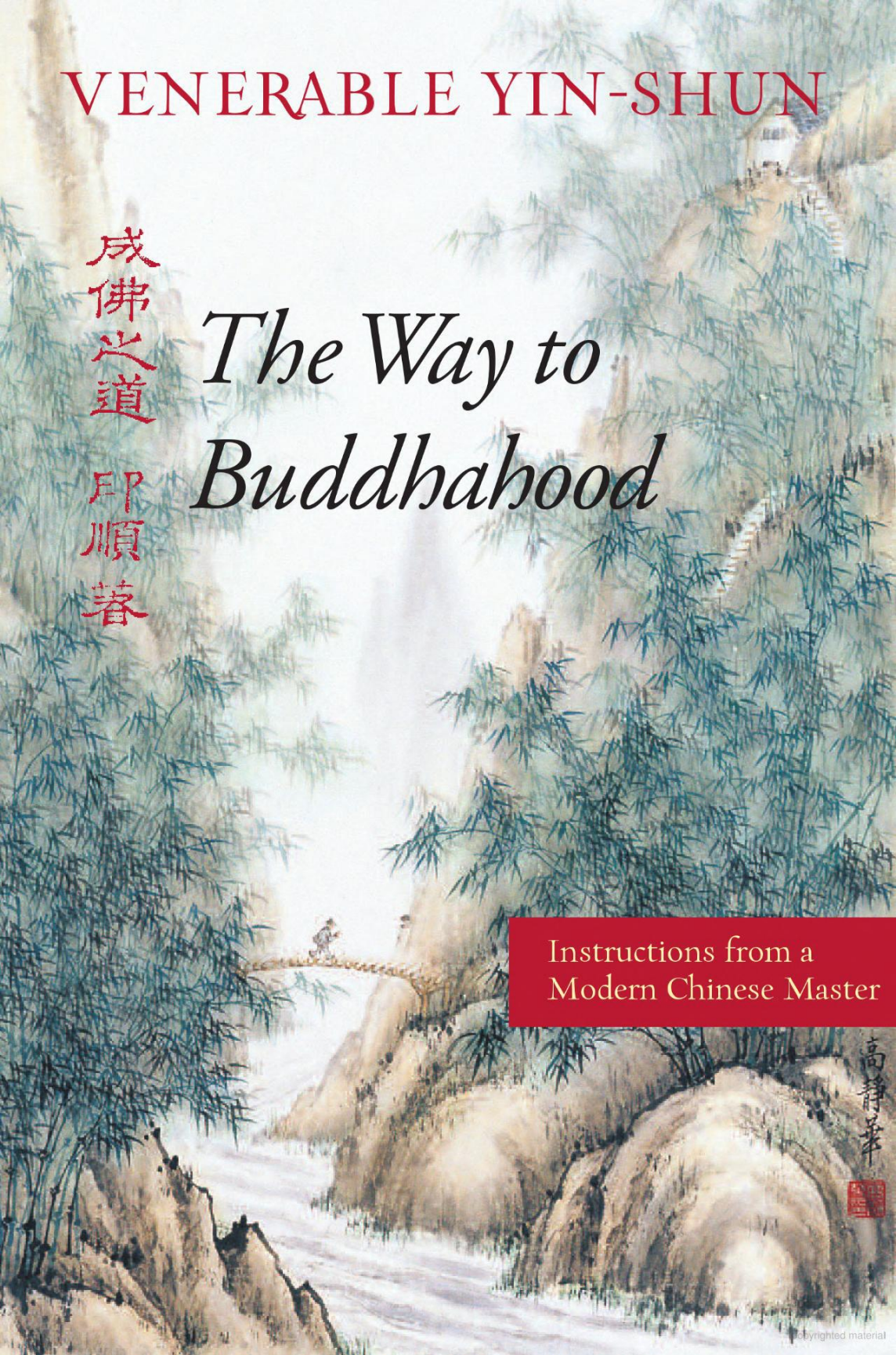

The Way to Buddhahood

MASTER YIN-SHUN

Translated by Dr. Wing H. Yeung, M.D.

Foreword by Professor Robert M. Gimello

Introduction by Professor Whalen Lai

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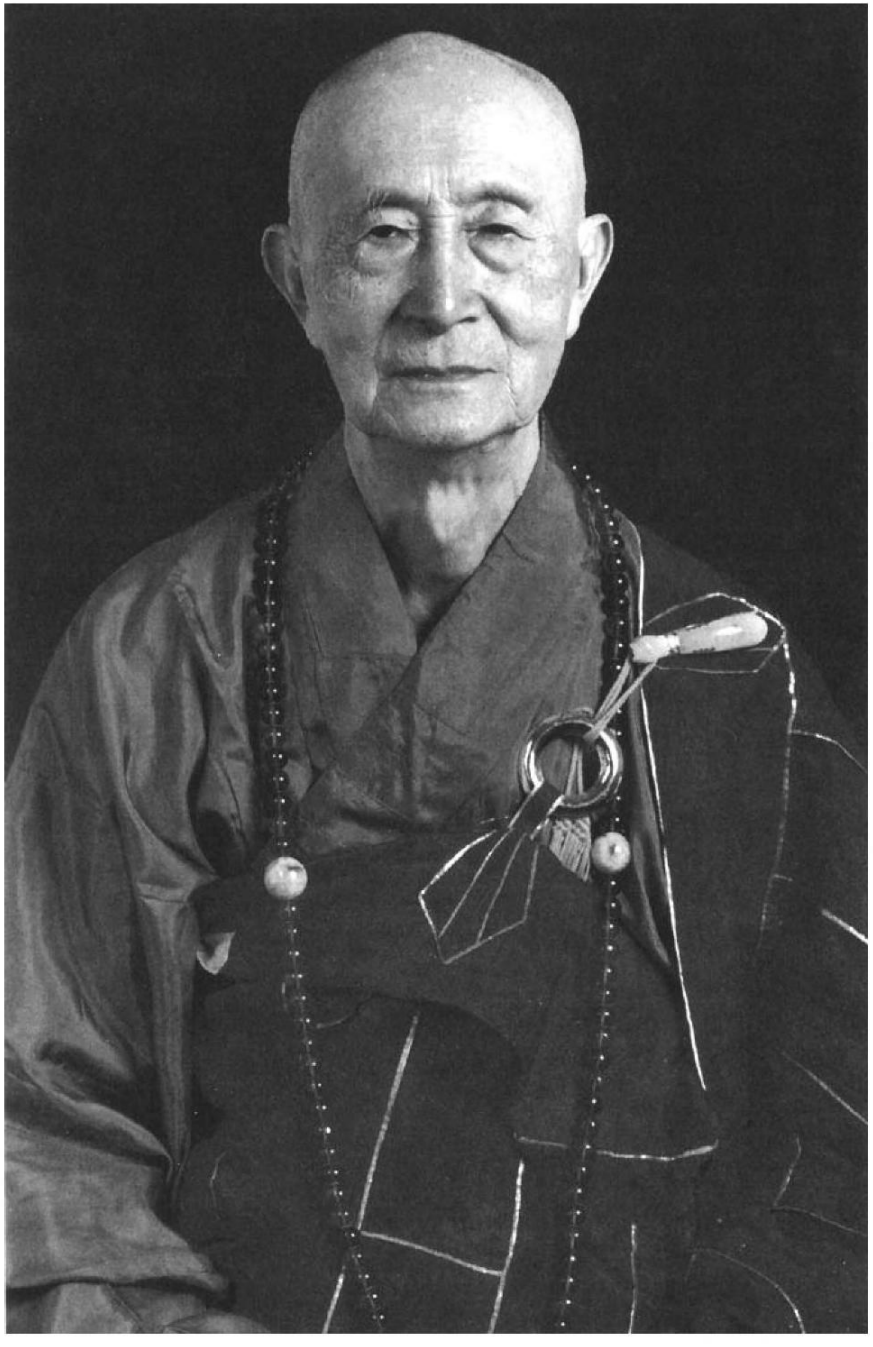

Foreword

THIS FINE TRANSLATION of one of Yin-shun Daoshi's most widely read and influential works is a most welcome addition to the small English language archives of modern Chinese Buddhism.

Most western students of Buddhism have been woefully unaware of the extraordinary vitality of contemporary Chinese Buddhism, particularly as it has developed in post-war Taiwan. This has been especially lamentable in view of the fact that the foremost leader of Chinese Buddhism's intellectual resurgence, the monk Yin-shun, is both a scholar and an original thinker of the first order.

Among his many achievements is the renewal of mutually enriching connections between traditional Chinese Buddhism and the ancestral traditions of India, both the primordial Buddhism of the āgamas (the northern counterpart of the Theravāda sūtras) and the later Indian Mahāyāna traditions that had been so well preserved and advanced in Tibet.

Drawing thus upon the whole broad range of Buddhist thought—but especially upon the Madhyamaka ("Middle Way") tradition of Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Tsongkhapa—Yin-shun has emphasized the rationalism and humanism of Buddhism while also bringing traditional Buddhist scholarship into invigorating dialogue with modern critical Buddhist Studies as practiced in the West and in Japan. In the course of these ground-breaking efforts he has done more even than his own master, the early twentieth century reformer Taixu, to rescue Chinese Buddhism from the intellectual doldrums and spiritual decay into which so much of it had fallen during the late imperial period of Chinese history. He has also plotted a course for Buddhism's future development that will allow its robust engagement with the modern world without forcing the severance of its traditional roots.

The Way to Buddhahood (*Cheng fo zhi dao*) presents itself as an introductory overview of the essentials of Buddhism, rendered in the traditional rhetorical modes of Buddhist doctrinal exposition. It is that, of course, but

it is also much more. In it we see, not merely a summary of cardinal Buddhist concepts but also something of the rigorous and bold revisioning of Buddhism that Yin-shun has continued to develop in his many later and more specialized works. Thanks to Mr. Wing Yeung's very effective and trustworthy translation, readers of English may now begin to have access to this extraordinary man's ample body of work and to his powerful vision of the dharma.

Robert M. Gimello
Professor of East Asian Studies and Religious Studies
University of Arizona

Preface to the Chinese Edition

BUDDHISM IS A RELIGION of reason and not just a religion of faith. In explaining principles or instructing practices, Buddhist teachings rely on reason. These teachings are both rich and correct. Because the Buddha Dharma has always adapted to people's different abilities and allowed free choice about which adaptation to follow, the teachings are diverse.

Two points will help people grasp the Buddha Dharma. First, the Buddha's teachings and the discourses of bodhisattvas and patriarchs vary according to people's different capacities and preferences at different times and places. These variations exist in order to give different people appropriate guidance. Many skillful methods are used—the easy and the profound, those pertaining to practices and those pertaining to principles. Some methods may seem to contradict one another. Viewing the different teachings is like peering into a kaleidoscope; beginners who are unable to integrate the views may feel perplexed.

Second, although the teachings are varied, all are interconnected. The different teachings start at different places, but each arrives at the others. This is like picking up a piece of clothing: whether one picks up a shirt by the collar, sleeve, or front, one gets the whole thing. Yet the adaptive characteristic of the Buddhist teachings, the different levels of difficulties, and the doctrinal interconnections are usually ignored. Instead, people tend to make generalizations and think that all teachings are similar.

These two opposing views—that the teachings are too diversified or too similar—can lead in the same direction. Some think that since the teachings are similar, one particular doctrine is equivalent to others. So they think that they do not need to practice and study extensively. Such thinking leads to the expansive development of the Dharma from a single sūtra, a single buddha, or a single mantra. Because such people are unable to grasp the Dharma completely, they "abandon the ocean and take only one drop of water," which, they think, contains the whole ocean. On the other hand, some people exceedingly praise a doctrine which they more

or less understand, thinking it is the best and the ultimate. Having this doctrine, they think that they have everything and need nothing else.

In sum, the Buddhist teachings are very diverse and befitting to all. Those who are unable to integrate and organize them systematically will make the mistake of taking only parts of them. In so doing they will abandon the whole. This style of practice has brought Buddhism to its present narrowness and poverty.

It is impossible to expect all devotees to integrate and organize the Buddha Dharma in their practice. Those who propagate the Buddhist teachings should have a superior understanding of them, however. Only then will they be able to expound the Dharma and maintain its integrity without becoming confused and biased.

In this regard, the Tiantai tradition and the Xianshou tradition (also known as the Huayan School) have done good work. The masters of these traditions have integrated the Buddhist teachings and organized them into courses with graduated practices. These courses demonstrate both the differences among the various doctrines and the relationships between them. It is no wonder that in the past those who taught the Dharma followed either the four modes of teaching of the Tiantai tradition or the five modes of teaching of the Xianshou tradition. Both of these place great emphasis on the perfect teaching; directly entering the perfect teaching is their objective.

My explanation draws on what Venerable Master Taixu has said: Although the Tiantai and Xianshou traditions include all the Buddha's teachings—the lesser, beginning, final, immediate, Tripitaka, shared, distinct, and perfect teachings—these different teachings have been established for those with lesser capacities; they are not really needed by those with superior abilities. Although it is said that people who have the ability to become enlightened can use them as a teaching, they need to do so only when they are unable to attain enlightenment through other means. But who wants to admit—by following a given teaching—to being a person of lesser capacity? So the teachings of the Tiantai and Xianshou traditions are also abandoned.

Feeling the narrowness and poverty of the present decline of Chinese Buddhism, Venerable Master Taixu decided to use the "Dharma common to the Five Vehicles," the "Dharma common to the Three Vehicles," and the "distinctive Dharma of the Great Vehicle" to embrace all Buddhist teachings. These can be utilized partially or completely as the right path to

perfect enlightenment. This system really corresponds to that of Tibet's Venerable Master Tsongkhapa. Tsongkhapa followed the Indian Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools and synthesized the Buddhist teachings into the "way common to lower people," the "way common to middle people," and the "way for upper people" in order to create the sequence for attaining enlightenment and becoming a buddha.

The Venerable Master Taixu gave high praise to the complete Buddhist teachings, namely, that "having merits and virtues, people can be assured of being born as human or heavenly beings; having wisdom, they can become śrāvakas or pratyekabuddhas. All of these people must rely on all the vinayas, sūtras, and śāstras; if only a part of the teachings are utilized, one cannot attain enlightenment." These complete Buddhist teachings are worthy of being actively proclaimed.

When the Tathāgata explained the Dharma, he always began by teaching the "proper method"—giving, keeping the precepts, and abandoning desire in order to be reborn in heaven (concentration). Then, to those who might be able to renounce the world, he taught a world-transcending doctrine. Because the emphasis of the Buddhist teachings is on transcending the world, those who compiled the sūtras always skipped over the Buddha's "proper method." The ancient Abhidharma texts began with the five precepts, but the later Abhidharma texts eliminated them. Even the Venerable Master Tsongkhapa could not avoid this tendency and used the teachings of the Two Vehicles as the foundation of his own. Thus, in the Dharma common to the lower people he held that "mindfulness of death" was an important entrance to the Way. Actually, without being mindful of death, one can still practice the good deeds that will lead one to be reborn as a human or heavenly being. Although such a way for lower people follows the Two Vehicles in renunciation, it may not follow the compassionate way of the Great Vehicle.

With regard to this, Venerable Master Taixu, penetrating deeply into the Buddha Vehicle with exceptional insight, revealed the real purpose of the Tathāgata's appearing in this world—to teach people to enter the Buddha-way from human lives. Thus, the method for beginners emphasizes both practicing the ten good deeds (without abandoning the worldly affairs of daily life) and following the right deeds of the Human Vehicle to enter the Buddha Vehicle, instead of emphasizing practices of renunciation such as mindfulness of death.

Using right deeds to move from the Human Vehicle toward the Buddha-way rests on gathering the merits of the Dharma common to the Five Vehicles and the Three Vehicles. However, because some people are narrow-minded and timid, the Buddha (and some ancient masters) had to establish the Two Vehicles as a skillful way alongside the great vehicle. In the Mahāyāna teachings, there are also skillful ways of entering the Buddha Vehicle, such as practicing heavenly deeds or those of the Two Vehicles.

According to the complete Buddhist teachings as determined and revealed by Venerable Master Taixu, all these teachings are simply methods for becoming a buddha. This approach not only connects the three levels of the Dharma common to the Five Vehicles, the Dharma common to the Three Vehicles, and the distinctive Dharma of the Great Vehicle, it also connects the teachings belonging to the regular way and the skillful way. This approach reveals the entire sequence of the Buddha-way, and leads one to the supreme buddha realm.

Long ago when I was in Hong Kong, I wanted to write a concise book on the path to buddhahood. The book would draw on the discourses of Venerable Master Taixu and on Tsongkhapa's *Sequence of Attaining Enlightenment*; and, integrating partial views from the treasury of the Dharma, it would interconnect all the Buddhist teachings and return them to the One Vehicle.

Not until 1954 was I able to write a few gāthas at a time (with varying degrees of profundity) to teach the class at the Shandao Monastery in Taiwan. However, for various reasons, these verses were very brief, especially the Mahāyāna section. In the autumn of 1957, when I was preparing to teach at the Buddhist Institute for Women, I revised and expanded the gāthas, and in the winter of 1958, I revised them again and began writing short commentaries. I did not finish the whole manuscript until the end of 1959, when I was staying at the Shanguang Monastery for Chinese New Year. From start to finish, six years had elapsed.

Now that *The Way to Buddhahood* with its two hundred thousand Chinese characters is about to be published, I thought I should set out my objective: to interconnect all Buddhist teachings and turn them toward the Buddha-way.

Dharma-master Yin-shun
October 1960

Translator's Acknowledgments

MY FIRST AND GREATEST THANKS are extended to Master Yin-shun, who gave permission in 1989 for me to translate his book, *Cheng fo zhi dao*, into English. His steady interest in and support for the translation, especially an in-person consultation in 1992 to help clarify certain difficult points, have contributed immensely to the final product. I am also grateful for the Master's efforts in locating many of the quotes from the Chinese Buddhist Tripitaka in response to my queries. Master Yin-shun's steadfast dedication to the propagation of the Buddhist teachings has been a great inspiration.

I would like to also thank Dr. Evelyn Lee for initiating and organizing a class on Buddhism for me to teach in 1988 when I was working as an attending psychiatrist in Ward 7C at San Francisco General Hospital. It was in 1989 that I decided to translate this book and use it as a textbook for the class.

Without the aid of numerous other people, this work surely would never have been completed. James Wilson, professor emeritus of English, contributed greatly to the initial translation of the verse text. Many thanks also to Galina Wong, who tirelessly entered the handwritten translation into the computer and generally provided technical support throughout the translating process.

It was a pleasure working with Gray Tuttle, who provided the editing to bring my initial translation to a clear and readable format. In addition, I would like to thank John LeRoy for his further editing of the manuscript and for his suggestions that improved the clarity of the translation.

I especially want to thank my teacher, the Venerable Miu King of Fayun Monastery in Danville, California, who clarified certain difficult passages and provided me with the quiet retreat of the monastery when I was working on the early phase of the translation. I would also like to extend my gratitude for the generosity and kindness of Maisie Tsao. Lillie Or, Tammy Chen, Doreen Leung, and Marshall Kozinn, each provided essential assistance in making this translation possible as well.

Sincerest thanks are also extended to the Venerable Heng Ching, professor of philosophy at the Taiwan National University. She was the first to read the

entire manuscript and gave me much valuable advice. It was her suggestion that first led me to approach Wisdom Publications, and for this she has my gratitude.

I would also like to thank Professor Whalen Lai for writing the introduction, which provides a comprehensive understanding of Master Yin-shun and his works.

I would like to express my heart-felt gratitude to Master Sheng Yen, whose article praising *The Way to Buddhahood* inspired me to read the book in 1989. I also would like to thank Phyllis and Wingate Wong who gave me a copy of *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* by Fo Guang Publishing in 1988, which helped me tremendously in my translation works later.

In the translation's final stages, Professor Chün-fang Yü's advice and editing of the first three chapters were an essential addition to the book. Thanks are also due to Michelle Lerner and Dr. and Mrs. David Pating for their critical reading of large sections of the text, and to Sara McClintock Jolly, Albert A. Dalia, Lisa Sawlit, Tim McNeill, and all those at Wisdom Publications who worked so hard to produce this book.

Master Yin-shun always says, "The workings of karma are inconceivable." This is exemplified in many of his life experiences. This is also well illustrated in my working relationship with Dr. Albert A. Dalia and Wisdom Publications. Fifteen years ago, when Albert was in Taiwan working on his doctorate from the University of Hawaii, he went to see Master Yin-shun. Fourteen years before that, Albert was beginning his Chinese language study at the University of Hawaii and had the same Mandarin Chinese teacher as I had, but at that time we did not know each other. Now, after returning to the United States from a long overseas stay in Taiwan, he has taken the position of Editorial Director at Wisdom Publications and his first project was *The Way to Buddhahood*, the first full-length translation of the Master's works. For the non-Buddhist, "It is a small world," but for Buddhists, "The workings of karma are inconceivable!" Albert has put in so much work and love to bring this book to final production in time for the Master's 92nd birthday, and I am very grateful.

I would like to sincerely thank my family, all my friends, acquaintances, and good people who made financial contributions to the publication of this book.

May this work be of benefit to all sentient beings!

Dr. Wing H. Yeung, M.D.
San Francisco, 1997

Introduction

MASTER YIN-SHUN needs no introduction in the Chinese-speaking world. He is the foremost living Chinese Buddhist authority, and his list of works is daunting. *The Way to Buddhahood*, his most widely read work, has become part of the basic curriculum in many Chinese Buddhist schools and academies. Although presented as an introduction to the fundamentals of Buddhism, it is as much a summation of the Master's decades-long study of the Buddha Dharma. Following a classic form in Buddhist philosophical discourse, the book is built around a long poem divided in sections, each given a prose commentary. The verses aid memorization, while the commentary provides an exposition. The work begins with the basic taking of refuge in the Three Treasures and proceeds step by step through precepts, meditation, and wisdom to the highest practices and the most profound doctrines. Work is underway to complete a series of translations of the Venerable Yin-shun's works. Under preparation already is his award-winning study, *A History of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism*, which has already been translated into Japanese and for which in 1973 he was recommended (by Sekiguchi Shindai, a Tendai authority on the origin of the Ch'an [Japanese: Zen] tradition) for a doctorate of humanities from Taisho University in Japan. This distinction, along with other awards and acclaim from his countrymen, contributes to his international renown. It is only for the lack of translations that his works have not reached the English-speaking world.

Master Yin-shun's achievement is all the more extraordinary in view of his "very plain and ordinary life," as he calls it in one of his essays. What came of this life is anything but ordinary, however. Zhang Luqin (Yin-shun is his Dharma name) was born in 1906 to a farming family during the "cold meal" festival (this occurs between the extinguishing of the old hearth fire and the rekindling of a new one, when food is eaten cold). He was a sickly child, and later in life he would suffer through periods of hospitalization. The first noble truth of Buddhism—that life is suffering—concerns more than physical illness, but much of that truth has never

been very remote for Master Yin-shun, who would one day leave home for the monkhood. In his deportment as a monk and as a scholar, he would embody one of the three marks of all things: egolessness. Despite all his contributions to contemporary Chinese Buddhism, he would remain a most self-effacing, almost private scholar who always preferred to stay in the background. In the preface to his *Study of the People's Myths and Cultures of Ancient China*, he refers to his village background and speaks humbly of his lack of formal education.

Growing up in the last days of the Qing (Manchu) dynasty, Master Yin-shun went to school in the town where his father worked. As a child, he acquired his early stock of knowledge in the old-fashioned way: thumbing through old string-sewn books, pouring over primers to the Four Books and selections from the classics, and committing them to memory. I have been told that the Master's command over what he gleaned from years of avid reading is so thorough that he can locate the exact "chapter and verse" of a source in the books on his shelves. He was five when the Qing dynasty fell in 1911 and China became a republic. The young Master's formal education was caught in that time of transition: the old system in which he was born was not totally gone; the new system of primary and secondary education, not to mention modern university education, was not yet accessible. At age ten, the bright child finished the elementary levels of primary school. He then skipped two grades and by thirteen had finished the upper levels (equivalent to junior high school in the United States), having excelled in the study of literature and acquired the refined, flowing, and lucid style for which he is known. Perhaps for practical reasons—doctors were respected and secure—his father sent him to learn traditional medicine. But this training did not provide him with the intellectual stimulation he sought, so he left after three years. He then returned to his primary school to teach for the next eight years. But however precocious a young schoolteacher might be, this was not a career with great prospects. Without a university degree from the higher educational system of the new China, climbing the ladder of academic success was difficult. But in those days, it seems, Luqin had such an appetite for learning that he devoured all the books he could find. He favored books of a more spiritual nature: Taoist scriptures, stories of the supernatural, legends of the immortals, and, yes, the Old and the New Testament.

If we find it difficult to understand how the young Master Yin-shun

could take the myths of Taoist immortals seriously enough to consider pursuing that spiritual path, we should be reminded that Kang Youwei, the 1898 political reformer, had lived like a wild man on a hill for a whole year, practicing Taoist circulation of the breath and manipulation of the five elements and even writing a commentary on Laozi that an older, more sedate Kang Youwei would destroy. In Sri Lanka, Dharmapala, a high-school-educated young man who would lead a revival of Pāli Buddhism, espoused Theosophist beliefs and wanted at one point to seek out some deathless master high up in the Himalayas. Far from just being pure folly, such fascination with the supernatural may have announced a neotraditional critique of encroaching modernity. With Master Yin-shun, as with the other two, the naive phase was soon over. He began reading Laozi and Zhuangzi. Philosophical Taoism was more promising than the myths of religious Taoism. The same naiveté that welcomed Taoist immortals now informed an intellectual openness to the reality of what the Buddhist tradition would call the Inconceivable. This radical openness, well disciplined by seasoned discourse, informs the works of Master Yin-shun. And his interest in gods and ghosts, the deathless and the immortal, would make an unexpected return in a book on early Chinese myths in which a world of phantasms is unlocked and comes to life with drama and realism—the product of a mind both receptive to and yet critical of the mythopoeic.

At the time he was reading Laozi and Zhuangzi, Master Yin-shun also picked up Buddhist texts, and these became his preferred reading after the sudden passing away of his parents. This painful loss led to a personal decision in 1930 at the age of twenty-five to leave the home life and enter the Saṅgha. After finding sponsors, as was the custom at Putuo Monastery, he was tonsured, received the full precepts, and was given the Dharma name Yin-shun. From that point on, he applied his innate intelligence to the study of the Buddha Dharma. Though tutored along the way, the encyclopedic knowledge and insight he infused into his treatises is fundamentally self-acquired. Over time, Master Yin-shun became the foremost modern scholar-monk in China. And it has been a long time since China has seen that opportune conjunction of monk and scholar in one person of such caliber—almost three hundred years if we count from the time of the Four Great Masters of the Late Ming.

The general English reader will appreciate *The Way to Buddhahood* for

what it reveals. The reader does not really need to know how it relates to Yin-shun's work as a whole or how this body of work relates to historical currents of Chinese Buddhism. Still, this makes an interesting story. As noted above, it has been about three hundred years since the time of the Four Great Masters at the end of the Ming dynasty. By the time the Qing dynasty succeeded the Ming in 1644, the leadership of what was left of the once vibrant field of Buddhist scholarship had passed from the monk to the layman. Leading Buddhists among the gentry—an educated local elite with Buddhist sympathies—were the mainstay of the local Saṅgha if not of the major centers of Buddhist establishment. Devotion, piety, and meditative practice endured throughout the Qing period, but Buddhist scholarship as a whole remained at a low ebb until a late-Qing revival in the nineteenth century. This revival came about largely because of the dedication of the layman Yang Wenhui (1837–1911). Yang had traveled in the West, made contacts with Japan, worked with Timothy Richards, met Dharmapala during the latter's return from the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and created a modern Buddhist curriculum in the academy he ran. Buddhist philosophy and an idealistic vision informed the utopian politics of the 1898 constitutional monarchy reform. The reform was led by Kang Youwei (1858–1927), Liang Qichao (1873–1929), and Tan Sitong (1865–98), but all three owed their exposure to Buddhism to Yang Wenhui and his Jinling publication effort.

Chinese philosophy itself was given a nudge by the reimportation from Japan, thanks to Yang Wenhui, of the Weishi (Consciousness Only [Yogācāra]) philosophy, which had died out in China after Huayan successfully displaced it. This Mahāyāna idealist philosophy became the mainstay of the Academy of Inner Learning, founded in 1922 by Ouyang Jingwu (1871–1944). It was out of that philosophy that the new Consciousness Only philosophy was developed by Xiong Shili (1885–1968), now considered by many to be a major Chinese thinker of recent times. But if we look back at that whole development, what is notable about all this modern Buddhist intellectualism is that it came from outside the ranks of the monastic Saṅgha. Some were lay Buddhists; others had Confucianism as their primary commitment. Although there is no ironclad rule that only Buddhist monks understand the subtleties of Buddha Dharma—the legendary Vimalakīrti was no monk, and Li Tongxuan of Huayan fame was a layman—there is a certain quality rooted

in the monk's lifestyle that keeps the Dharma from being diluted by lay concerns. A monk-scholar is distinct from a lay scholar. This quality distinguishes Master Yin-shun's study of the Buddha Dharma from the new crop of lay Buddhist intellectuals and academics in the twentieth century.

This distinction was made by the Master himself in his *Study of the Buddha Dharma as the Buddha Dharma.* Here he differentiated his knowledge from those who appropriated Buddhist philosophy from the outside and tailored it for ends other than the Buddha's truths. This includes much of the revived interest in the Consciousness Only philosophy, which was being detached from the larger Buddhist agenda and presented as a viably modern, universal, rational philosophy—an inner science of the mind that would outrank the sciences coming from the West. Abstracted from Buddhist precepts and meditation, this philosophy has been remade by Xiong Shili to serve the goal of a "new Confucianism" that turns aside from Buddhist truths. The Master made this clear in his critique of Xiong Shili. Confucianism is undeniably the mainstream of Chinese philosophy; its agenda is for living in this world. By the same token, Buddhism cuts across particular cultural allegiances and looks beyond this world, although in the Mahāyāna spirit it returns to the world and all its concerns after first breaking with them.

The Master's critique carries the weight of a scholar-monk. By leaving home one embraces a larger world of commitment, and then, but only then, returns to work within the world. A lay scholar studying the Buddha Dharma for non-Buddhist ends is not studying it properly. A scholar-monk, who lives what he teaches, presents us with an intimate "insider's" glimpse of the Buddha Dharma. *The Way to Buddhahood* offers just such an insider's view and is a living inducement to the Buddhist way. The Master speaks with the authority of one who has learned through a total immersion in the texts of the tradition, an immersion that has become increasingly rare in the modern educational system. Ironically, the erudition exemplified by this modern scholar-monk may be both the first and the last of its kind. The Master would probably brush aside this praise as inordinate and the prophecy as unwarranted.

To resume our story, after joining the Saṅgha at the age of twenty-five, Master Yin-shun did not take up residence in a meditative cloister or devote himself to learning the many rituals required for serving the laity. He was soon enrolled in a new and well-staffed Buddhist study center set

up by Master Taixu (1889–1947) specifically for training a new generation of monks. Master Yin-shun scored so high in the entrance examination that he was admitted to the advanced group of students and allowed to skip a grade. Here he had his first systematic exposure to the Buddha Dharma. Within a year he showed such proficiency and promise that Venerable Taixu asked him to instruct. Master Yin-shun gave lectures on the Treatise on the Twelve Gates teachings and already demonstrated an independent understanding and an expert interpretation of the philosophy of emptiness. Recognized for his talent by Venerable Taixu, he was invited to instruct or speak at a number of fledging Buddhist study centers all over China—a tireless round of spreading the new Buddhist learning that took him, after the war, to various posts in Hong Kong and then in Taiwan down to this very day.

Master Yin-shun's accomplishments rest on those of the reformer monk Venerable Taixu. It was Venerable Taixu who brought Buddhism out of the cloisters into the modern world, who revived the Mahāyāna commitment to working in the world, who directed Buddhist reflection to current social issues, and who, during the national emergency facing China at the time, encouraged Buddhists, even monks, to participate actively in national defense. Frail of body but not of mind, Master Yin-shun heeded this call during the war years but returned to his vocation after the war. Although Venerable Taixu may have been the first modern Buddhist monk to compose scholarly works, he was more an activist and a pamphleteer. Judged by the sheer weight of their scholarly work, it is not Venerable Taixu but his protégé Master Yin-shun who is truly the monk-scholar of our generation.

For all his insistence on looking at the Buddha Dharma from the inside, Master Yin-shun's Buddhist works are hardly traditional and anything but sectarian. His writings range so far and wide that even his own Buddhist colleagues are at a loss to place him within the schools or the lineages (*zong*) of transmission. His independent bent defies easy classification; his catholic sweep vitiates old divisions. His interpretation of the Buddha Dharma is guided by no better instructor than the Buddha Dharma itself. His hermeneutics listen and respond to the living voices that still speak from within the texts. It is not that he is another Nanyue Huisi (514–77), who according to tradition was "enlightened without a teacher" (meaning probably only without a teacher in attendance). This

event, a first in Chinese Buddhism, elevated this Tiantai patriarch almost to pratyekabuddha status and led his school to break with the Indian authorities on the *Lotus Sūtra*. (Ch'an Buddhism had its own pratyekabuddha trade and made similar claims about a secret transmission later.) Master Yin-shun has no such hagiography attached to him, and he did not start a new lineage. But what he learned was acquired through the solitary journey that all independent minds undertake. Thus while the Consciousness Only philosophy was billed as an inner learning outranking European science and was much in vogue, the young student-turned-lecturer was striking out on his own by reviving the Sanlun, or Emptiness critique (Madhyamaka), instead. And whereas the practice of Ch'an and Pure Land had for the last few centuries all too often made a virtue out of a neglect of learning, the budding scholar-monk was seeking to integrate Buddhist teachings after the manner of the Tiantai and Huayan masters Zhiyi and Fazang.

To those who still wonder what lineage (zong) he follows, Master Yin-shun has gone back to the original Sanskrit idea behind zong and mapped out a much more comprehensive understanding of the principle, target, and end of the various teachings. He also wrote an essay whose title translates roughly as "The Teaching of the Buddha Designed for Living in This World (among Men) That Accords with Both the Universal Principle (Which Is Timeless) and the Specific Circumstances." This is a review of the philosophical agenda he has staked out in a number of his works. The practical goal is to direct Buddhist learning toward a Mahāyāna bodhisattvic recommitment to living in the here and now. This goal he sees as a rewording of Venerable Taixu's dictum "Buddhism for life in this world."

In general, the Master builds on the philosophical classification of schools that begins with the Hīnayāna Buddhists, continues into Mahāyāna, and culminates in the classic tenet-classification system of Tiantai and of Huayan. What the Master adds to all this is his diligence in retracing these steps as recorded in the Buddhist canon. What took modern Japanese Buddhologists about four generations to accomplish in a concerted effort since the Meiji Era here is telescoped into the writings of Master Yin-shun: *Compilation of the Scriptures of Primitive Buddhism*, *Abhidharmic Theses and Masters Primarily of the Sarvāstivāda School*, *Formation and Development of Early Mahāyāna*, *A Study of the Tathāgatagarbha Tradition*, and *A History of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism*. In

these landmark studies, he reviews the progression of the Buddhist teachings ending in what in English may be translated as "The Final Buddha-centric and the Most Comprehensive of Teachings That Reconciles and Unifies Man and Buddha." This is a teaching about the Buddha nature hidden in all things which functions as the pure mind that produces our perceptions. Readers who follow the presentation in the present work will be initiated into the most elementary of teachings and then be drawn toward this grandest of all Mahāyāna visions. And this vision will direct him or her back to live out Buddhist truth in the midst of this human world. In this way the Master rebuilds the Buddha Dharma historically from the ground up and then concludes it philosophically with a perfect, all-encompassing unity.

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PART I

The Preliminaries

1

Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures

TO STUDY BUDDHISM means to learn from the Buddha. One takes the Buddha as one's ideal and one's mentor and learns from him incessantly. When one reaches the same level as the Buddha, then one has become a buddha.

The Buddha is the great Awakened One, the great Compassionate One, the one with perfect and complete virtue, the ultimate and unsurpassed great sage. For an ordinary person with little good fortune and no wisdom, reaching this supreme and unsurpassed state of buddhahood through practice and study is difficult. But by practicing and studying the necessary methods and by following the right way to buddhahood, one can reach the goal of buddhahood. Only in this way, and without skipping any steps, can one advance to this distant and profound goal. The methods necessary to become a buddha are known as "the way to buddhahood." Because beings have different abilities, the Buddha Dharma has different ways: the way of blessedness and virtue, the way of wisdom, the difficult way, the easy way, the mundane way, the supramundane way, the way of the śrāvaka, the way of the bodhisattva, and so on. But ultimately, there is only one way. All of these ways are nothing but methods to become a buddha "in order to open up and make manifest the Buddha's knowledge and insight to sentient beings, so that they can also apprehend and attain the same."[1] Thus we have the sayings "One way to one purity, one flavor for one emancipation" and "Many doors exist for tactful reasons, but only one path runs to the origin." The way to buddhahood is like a long river that has many streams, lakes, and rivers flowing into it; together they flow into the ocean. In the same manner, all doctrines are nothing but the way to buddhahood. Therefore, the Buddha Dharma is called the One Vehicle Way in the *Āgama Sūtra* and the *Lotus Sūtra*.

The Three Treasures represent the general principles of the Buddha Dharma, and taking refuge in them is the first step to entering the

Buddhist path. The merits of the Three Treasures are countless, limitless, and inconceivable. But without taking refuge in them, one cannot receive and enjoy these merits. It is like staying outside the entrance to a park: one cannot appreciate the wonderful flowers and trees inside. If one resolves to study Buddhism, the first thing one should do therefore is take refuge in the Three Treasures.

SEEKING REFUGE

1 The Sea of Existence has no boundaries,
The world is full of worry and suffering,
Flowing and turning, rising and falling,
Is there no place of refuge and support?

If one takes refuge, one must do so with sincerity. Consider the life or death situation of one who has fallen into the billowing waves of an ocean and cannot see the shore. Upon catching sight of a clump of seaweed or a patch of foam, one will reach out to grasp it; or, hearing the sound of the wind or birds, one will scream for help. With only the thought to live, one's wish to be saved is very deep, very sincere. If a ship passes by and sailors throw down ropes or life preservers, will one not instantly grab one and climb aboard the ship? The sincerity with which one seeks refuge should match this. Only then will one achieve the wonderful merits of taking refuge.

Consider the analogy of rising and falling in the sea of suffering. Sentient beings are the foundation of the world. They are living beings with emotions and consciousnesses. Every one of them has had a countless number of lives. And before being liberated from birth and death, every being will also have countless lives in the future. The continuum of sentient beings' lives thus extends endlessly like an ocean without boundaries. The current life is but another wave in the ocean of lives.

From the past to the present to the future, life goes on—this movement of time is called the world. In this world sentient beings have much more suffering than happiness, and even happiness is followed by loss and suffering. The Buddha described this state as "worry, sadness, suffering and affliction, purely the accumulation of great suffering."[2] Sentient beings are caught in the world as if in a whirlpool; sometimes their heads are above the water, sometimes submerged. At one moment they are born

as divine beings, and then just as suddenly they fall into the hell realms or become animals or hungry ghosts. Sentient beings arise and descend, descend and arise, constantly turning but never escaping. Is there any condition more painful and sadder than this?

When people actually fall into the sea and, battered by the waves, fear for their lives, they call out for help. So why do sentient beings, rising and falling in the cruel sea of births and deaths, not seek help and protection to reach the other shore—liberation? When one thinks about this, the desire to seek refuge and protection will well up with sincerity and urgency. But what is the real place for refuge and support? One cannot use seaweed or foam as a life preserver.

Seeking Refuge in Things of This World

2 "Accumulations of wealth and riches can be lost,
Those with fame and high status can fall,
Those who are together may be scattered,
Those who are born must die."
The well-governed state will fall into chaos,
The world once formed faces destruction;
Of the pleasures and certainties of life,
None can be relied upon.

Some people do not know to seek refuge, while some do know but mistakenly believe in false teachers and non-Buddhists. Why do some not seek refuge? Because they are stubbornly attached to the affairs of this world, considering them meaningful and full of good fortune and happiness. When their situation becomes critical, however, they wake up from their rosy dreams in sorrow and disappointment. But by then it is too late. There are many worldly things to which people are attached, but they can be categorized into six major groups.

1. The accumulation of wealth and riches: Some people think that finances come first and that with money they can do anything. They even say, "Money makes the world go round." They do not realize that no matter how rich they become, their wealth will eventually be consumed. Do not think that this is because they are not skillful in management or that they are wasteful. Actually, no one has complete power over wealth.

With regard to this the Buddha said, "Wealth is possessed by five groups."[3] These groups are floods, fires, thieves, evil rulers, and bad children—any one of which can instantly consume one's riches. Furthermore, preserving one's accumulated wealth entails all kinds of worry and suffering. Wealth can sometimes cause disastrous suffering. At the end of the Ming dynasty in China, the conquering Li Chuang entered Beijing. He used torture devices such as clamping sticks and head hoops on rich government officials to extract gold and silver from them. Their wealth was taken, their legs were broken, their skulls were cracked, and in some cases their lives were lost. And under the tyrannical rule of the Chinese Communists, those who possessed capital and money were persecuted—not just the very wealthy but even those who had only a one-acre field and a cow. Sometimes their families, their wives and children, were also attacked. These persecutors are good examples of what the Buddha described as thieves and evil rulers. Can people really say that they can always have their way when they have money?

2. Fame and high status: People love these blindly. When they are in power and things are going smoothly, they feel that they can control everything. The high must fall, however. Hitler entered Munich triumphantly, but the night before the fall of Berlin he was at his wit's end and committed suicide. Stalin ruled the Soviet Union for thirty years and received much glory, but soon after he died he was severely criticized by his followers. In Buddhist biographical literature, there is King Mūrdhaja-rāja, who united the Four Continents and then rose to the Tuṣita Heaven to manage the heavenly palace with the sovereign Śakra. But in the end King Mūrdhaja-rāja fell down to the human realm and died in distress. Even the god Śakra, who claimed to be the lord of heaven and earth and the father of humans, was unable to escape being reborn from the wombs of donkeys and horses. High position is temporary and undependable.

3. The togetherness of beloved families: Parents and children and husbands and wives are full of domestic warmth. Deep friendships can be established at school between teachers and students or among classmates, and in society among coworkers, when people share similar aspirations and help one another. Human beings are social animals. If families can live together and good friends work cooperatively, this is most ideal and comforting. Nevertheless, loved ones become enemies, and no matter how close people become, eventually they will be separated. When the moment

to separate forever arrives, people have to abandon their parents, spouses, or children and go their separate ways. And then who takes care of whom?

4. Life itself: Experience tells us that those who are born must die. The reality of death is a definite fact, but people think of themselves as if they were immortal. Only living has meaning to them. So they seek everything, including fame and profit. Even though they may talk about death, they do not wake up to the reality of it when dealing with other people and worldly matters. "A man lives less than a century, yet he has the worry of a thousand years." This proverb illustrates people's distorted feeling of immortality, their deviant beliefs in long or eternal life. Has anyone ever really heard of someone not dying? (This concludes the commentary on the above-quoted four verses that comprise the famous "Verses of Impermanence.")

5. The prosperity of one's country: For most people, their country is like a security guard, and the strength and prosperity of their country is closely related to the comfort and freedom of its people. If the country is strong, people think they have it made. But the prosperity of one's country does not guarantee security for oneself or one's family. Political parties rise and fall and are not always faithful to the country, and the country itself fluctuates between well-governed order and chaos. Factual examples can be found everywhere. Depending solely on one's country is thus neither sensible nor safe.

6. The progress of society: Some people think that since human beings are social animals and civilization progresses, this must be the true meaning of life—so why bother to seek an empty refuge for oneself alone? This is the bias of seeing the whole but not the individual. Provisionally, the progress of society and culture might be regarded as the true meaning of life. But the social activities of humankind depend on the world we live in (the earth), and these activities cannot be separated from the kind of space we occupy (even if we could move to another world, it would be the same). However, this world is in the process of cycling from formation to destruction and from destruction to formation. Consider this for a moment: one day the earth will be destroyed, and then what will become of civilization and the true meaning of life? Those who think that the progress of society is the true meaning of life are truly dreamers! Those who cannot awaken enthusiasm to seek refuge are misled by their attachment to ephemeral circumstances or have illusions about worldly pleasures.

None of these worldly matters can be truly relied upon. All of them are impermanent and are hardly blissful. Where then is the place of refuge?

Seeking Refuge in Things beyond This World

3 Ghosts and spirits delight in violent murder,
The desirous divine beings are addicted to various cravings,
The Brahmā dwells on arrogance;
None of them are a place of refuge.

Even if one knows of the need to seek refuge, one may be misled by heterodox religions or deviant schools. One may not consciously realize it, but one can be influenced; caution is necessary. There are all kinds of religious beings in which one can take refuge. Most are not true places of refuge. Categorized according to their flaws, these fall into three groups.

The first false refuge is in ghosts and spirits. According to the Chinese there are heavenly gods, earthly deities, and human ghosts. The Chinese also believe that after people die they can become heavenly gods if they have enough merit. There are all kinds of gods: wind gods, rain gods, mountain gods, water gods, local guardian gods of the earth, the gods of the five grains, etc. In addition, there are goblins of the mountains and forests and all sorts of demons and monsters. "Essence and spirit are goblins," says the *Book of Changes*. "Wandering souls are ghosts."[4]

In Buddhist sūtras, ghosts are called hungry ghosts; the spirits governed by the gods of the four heavens include yakṣas, rakṣasas, nāgas (dragons), mahoragas (python spirits), garuḍas (golden-winged birdlike beings), the powerful ghost king, and higher-status animals. There are also demons (dragons and big snakes), ghost spirits, and angels with wings as described in Christianity. All these ghosts and spirits do have some merit and magical power. Some of them, inclined to do good, also serve the gods of the higher heavens, and under certain circumstances they can help people. Thus people often worship them, requesting their help with exorcisms, asking for their blessings, or praying for protection from harm. Ghosts and spirits are full of afflictions, however. Sometimes their characters are not as good as those of humans, particularly because their angry nature delights in violent murder. What they want from humans are sacrifices—blood and flesh; at times they even want human sacrifices. If people make offerings

without respect or offend them in some way, they seek cruel revenge—violent winds, rainstorms, hail, plagues, and so forth. These spirits are equivalent to the underworld hoodlums and the evil forces in the world. When one encounters adversity, a hoodlum may help one struggle against it or assist one generously with money. But one cannot offend him; if one does, one falls into the pit of crime.

In the past in Beijing, Dharma master Da Yong wanted to go to Tibet to study the Esoteric School. According to the rules of that sect, he had to invite a Dharma-protecting spirit, a fox spirit from the Guang Ji Temple. When the fox spirit came, it objected to the Dharma master's departure for Tibet. If the master insisted on going, the fox spirit would disturb him. So it was easy to invite the spirit but hard to send it away. After much effort, people finally got rid of it. As the folk adages say, inviting a wolf into the house or allowing a ghost inside the door is asking for trouble. Often, worshippers who have done such things have ended up losing their families and lives because they offended these ghosts and spirits. So why ask for trouble? Confucius was really a great human being. His teaching—respect ghosts and spirits but stay away from them—was smart advice![5]

The second false refuge is the desirous divine beings. Desire includes the five desires of matter: the enjoyment of material form, sound, smell, taste, touch; and the sexual desires of men and women. *Deva*, the Sanskrit word for divine being, means brightness and denotes heavenly kings. In the three realms, there are six levels of divine beings. The lowest level is represented by the four kings of divine beings who govern the eight catagories of ghosts and spirits. Above them are Trayastriṃśā Heaven, Yama Heaven, Tuṣita Heaven, Nirmāṇarati Heaven, and Paranirmitavaśavartin Heaven. All six levels of divine beings have greed and sexual desire and therefore are known as desirous divine beings.

Among them, the king of Tuṣita, Śakra-devānām Indra, the sovereign Śakra, has the closest relationship with humankind. He upholds peace, loves morality, and wants progress for the human race. While ruling his heavenly kingdom, however, he sometimes has to go to war. Still, he forgives his enemies and emphasizes nonkilling. He has become the great king of the kingdom of many spirits, and he rules the world through ghosts and spirits. He also has many heavenly nymphs surrounding him, which is similar to the situation of the Jade Emperor described in Chinese legends. Compared to ghosts and spirits, such

beings are naturally more lofty. The problem with them is their addiction to their cravings. In fulfilling their desires for material gain and sex, they become arrogant, wasteful, lustful, idle, and indulgent, while their spiritual life—their wisdom and morality—regresses. For example, in the past Śakra asked the Buddha to expound the Dharma, but soon afterward he went back to heaven and completely forgot what the Buddha had said. Desire is the root of suffering. Divine beings cannot protect themselves from enjoying worldly desires and degrading themselves. They too must seek refuge!

The third false refuge is the one and only Brahmā. Above the realm of desire is the realm of form, which is divided into the four Dhyāna Heavens. The first Dhyāna Heaven is again divided into three: the heavens of Brahmā's multitudes, of Brahmā's ministers, and of Great Brahmā. The multitudes of Brahmā are like the people; the ministers of Brahmā are like the government officials; and Brahmā is the one and only king. The word *brahmā* means "clean" and "pure," which is similar in meaning to "holy." Brahmā has neither sexual desire nor worldly material desire. His moral conduct is lofty, and he has a spirit of compassion and universal love. Among the gods of the common religions of the world, he is outstanding in this respect. According to the Buddhist sūtras, when Brahmā appeared, there were no people nor was there a realm of desire. Then Brahmā wanted to have heaven and earth; the realm of desire gradually formed. He wanted to have people; coincidentally people came into being. Because Brahmā's mind was filled with arrogance, he unavoidably formed the conceited and erroneous ideas that he had created the world and that the people had come from him. After he had lived for a long time—one and a half kalpas—he announced to his people that he was everlasting with no beginning and no end.

Above Brahmā are the second, third, and fourth Dhyāna Heavens and the realm of formlessness. But humankind has little contact with these realms; thus very few people believe in, accept, and obey beings of these realms. For ordinary people these heavens cannot serve as a basis for religion; therefore not much needs to be said about them. Common religions do not go beyond the scope of ghosts and spirits and the gods of polytheism and monotheism. None of these beings can save themselves; all have afflictions and are not yet liberated from birth and death. Therefore, "neither are they the place of refuge."

Real refuge: The Three Treasures

4 People seeking refuge everywhere,
Seeking refuge in all the ten directions,
Finally realize that the ultimate place of refuge
Is to be found in the most auspicious Three Treasures.

Feeling the stress of the suffering of birth and death, people want to take refuge, and they search everywhere for it. Although they seek incessantly in all the ten directions, they find only ghosts and spirits, a great god with spirits under him, or the "creator" god; but none of these is really a place for refuge. Then they realize that the only true place of refuge is in the Buddhist Three Treasures.

Praise for the Three Treasures

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are rare, invaluable, and wonderful; thus they are called treasures. Taking refuge in them enables us to transform bad luck into good and disaster into peace, abandon evil for kindness, turn darkness into light, abandon suffering, and obtain happiness. All these auspicious things can be achieved. Claiming that the Three Treasures are the only worthy refuge is not just a way of praising one's own religion and slandering that of others. It is a conclusion derived from facts.

The facts are that soon after Śākyamuni Buddha had become a buddha, the "creator" god, Brahmā, came down from heaven and requested that the Buddha expound the Dharma because he felt that he no longer knew what to do with his children, the people on earth. Śākyamuni Buddha agreed to do this. He turned the great wheel of the Dharma (that is, he taught the Dharma) and saved many people. The Brahmā became the Buddha's disciple and realized a saintly life without desire.

Once, too, the sovereign Śakra knew that he was going to die soon and that he would, unfortunately, become a pig fetus. Worried and miserable, he went to ask Great Brahmā and Maheśvara for help. Then he went all over the world, searching in mountains and waters and asking help from ghosts and spirits, non-Buddhists and immortals everywhere, but all was in vain. In the end, he met the Buddha and listened to one of his discourses. This saved him from the evil fate of becoming a pig fetus,

and he was able to return to his heavenly kingdom. Thus both the great god of polytheism and the "creator" god of monotheism have had to take refuge in the Buddha. "Seeking for refuge everywhere, seeking refuge in all the ten directions" was exactly Śakra's experience.

Praise for the Virtues of the Buddha

5 The true Dharma is the body of the Buddha.
His life is pure wisdom,
Like the bright moon shining through the autumn sky;
Therefore, we should worship the Honored One of Two Perfections.

Buddha is a Sanskrit word meaning "awakened one." What the Buddha realized was the true Dharma, which can also be translated as the wonderful Dharma. The Dharma, governed by laws, is immutable. It is a truth that lies equidistant from extremes. It is unbiased, subtle, wonderful, not obvious or superficial; it is everlasting, universal, and absolute. Only after one has attained the perfect enlightenment of the true Dharma can one be called a buddha. The Buddha, who has the true Dharma as his body (the Dharmakāya), is the one who concretely reveals the absolute truth.

Why is the Buddha able to achieve perfect enlightenment? It is because the Buddha has the pure wisdom that is faultless and separate from all afflictions and defilements. Since the Buddha has the purest wisdom, the true Dharma that is realized by him is also the purest. It is called "the purest Dharmadhātu,"[6] which is the same as the Dharmakāya. The true Dharma is omnipresent and is not diminished by confusion or increased with enlightenment. Pure wisdom, which is the very life force of the Buddha, is called vital wisdom. The unification of the Dharmakāya and this vital wisdom is the Buddha. Here is an analogy: The Buddha's wisdom is like the bright moon; the true Dharma that is realized by the pure wisdom is like the autumn sky in which this bright moon shines. When there are no clouds, the clear sky looks especially pure in the bright moonlight. In the same way, with enlightened and pure wisdom the Buddha completely realizes the true Dharma, and the true Dharma is also revealed purely and exactly in the pure wisdom. The sūtra says: "Bodhisattvas are like the pure moon that travels through space."[7] If bodhisattvas are like this, what must the Buddha be!

When the Dharmakāya and the vital wisdom reach perfection, this accomplishment deserves the trust and respect of all sentient beings. Reverence is expressed in worship. Bowing and greeting are bodily worship; praising the Buddha's virtues is verbal worship; and trusting with respect is mental worship. We worship in these three ways to show our total trust in the Buddha.

In the epithet "Honored One of Two Perfections," which praises the Buddha, the two perfections are good fortune and wisdom. In addition to the Buddha, bodhisattvas also have great good fortune and great wisdom. But among sages, the Buddha is supreme. Hence he is the Honored One of Two Perfections. But the epithet can also be translated differently because the Chinese word for perfection can also mean "foot." Since humans are two-footed animals and the Buddha is the most honored among humans, he is called the Two-Footed Honored One. As it is said in a sūtra: "The truly enlightened one is the Two-Footed Honored One, while the horse is superior among the four-legged animals."[8]

6 Buddhas of the three periods are innumerable,
Buddhas of the ten directions are also countless.
Having come to this impure world because of his compassionate vow,
Śākyamuni Buddha is deserving of our worship.

"Buddha" is a general name for a sage with great enlightenment. Whoever can completely realize the true Dharma is a buddha. Many people have resolved to study Buddhism, and many have become buddhas. From the standpoint of time, there are innumerable buddhas in each of the three periods—past, present, and future. The present buddha is Śākyamuni Buddha; among the past buddhas were Kāśyapa Buddha, Kanakamuni Buddha, Śikhin Buddha, and Vipaśyin Buddha; the future buddhas will be Maitreya Buddha, Rucika Buddha, and others. There were an uncountable number of buddhas in the past, and the same will be true in the future. Speaking from the standpoint of space, there are also countless buddhas in the worlds of the ten directions: east, south, west, north, southeast, southwest, northeast, northwest, above, and below. There are countless worlds in the ten directions, and there are buddhas for these worlds. For example, at present Akṣobhya Buddha and the

Medicine Buddha are in the east, Amitābha Buddha is in the west, and so on. Buddhists who take refuge in the Three Treasures should do so with the buddhas of the three periods and the ten directions.

From our standpoint in this world, however, the one who particularly deserves our trust and worship is the original teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha. When Śākyamuni Buddha was a bodhisattva, he had the great compassionate intention to alleviate suffering and made a great vow to endure hardship. He did not want to be born in the Pure Land. Instead, he vowed to practice and become a buddha in this impure world because sentient beings here were miserable and urgently needed help. This great resolve—"If I do not go into hell to save suffering beings, who will?"—was fully actualized by Śākyamuni Buddha. The reason he appeared in this evil world of the five impurities was to save us suffering sentient beings from abandonment.

Śākyamuni Buddha was born in India about two thousand five hundred years ago. Because he left home, practiced mental cultivation, and became a buddha, the light of his teaching came to this dark world so full of crimes and evil. This world's Buddhism came from Śākyamuni Buddha—a kindness without bounds! Not only do we respect and praise the greatness of Śākyamuni Buddha, but all the buddhas of the ten directions praise him as well. As it is said in the sūtras, "All other buddhas also praise me (Śākyamuni) for my inconceivable merits and virtues."[9] After we have reverently taken refuge with all the buddhas of the ten directions and three periods, therefore, we should pay special respects to the original teacher, Śākyamuni. This is similar to taking refuge in the Saṅgha, which is supposed to include all monks, but the person in whom we really take refuge is the one with the most kindness.

7 His wisdom is perfect, his compassion infinite.
Overcoming all obstructions, he is totally without remnants of habit.
These three virtues are equal and ultimate for all buddhas,
But for the sake of skillful means, there are differences.

In the way of the ancient sages, the three virtues serve as praise for buddhas—the virtues of wisdom, grace, and breaking free from afflictions. Not only do buddhas realize the nature of all dharmas, but they

also realize each dharma's special nature, appearances, functions, and relationships; they realize the present, the past, and the future as well; they realize the various forms of all dharmas. Thus buddhas are synonymous with complete and perfect wisdom. Sentient beings, on the contrary, are unable to rid themselves of suffering because of ignorance. The Buddha, with his complete and perfect wisdom, his endless skills and tactfulness, was able not only to liberate himself but also to save sentient beings. This is the wonderful function of wisdom. Such is the praise of the Buddha's perfected virtue of wisdom.

The Buddha's great compassion, his intention to alleviate suffering, does not apply to just one person, one situation, one race, one region, or one world. It applies to all worlds, to all sentient beings, to all kinds of suffering. Penetratingly thorough, his deep compassion stops nowhere. Even in the formative stage, bodhisattvas such as Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara), Dizang (Kṣitigarbha), and others already have great compassion and great vows, to say nothing of the attainment stage—the state of buddhahood. Such is the praise for the Buddha's perfected virtue of grace.

Some beings have much wisdom but little compassion, some have much compassion but little wisdom, and some have both. But none, if they still have afflictions and defilements, are completely pure. Only the Tathāgata has eliminated all afflictions without even a trace of residual habits. Such is the praise for the Buddha's perfected virtue of breaking free from afflictions.

"Residual habit" refers to the process of becoming accustomed to afflictions from beginningless time. The Buddha's arhat disciples have overcome afflictions but often retain residual habits. That is why some arhats scold people (they are so used to scolding they do not notice it) or jump around or cling to views. Only the Buddha was able to completely break off from afflictions and residual habits. This makes him the purest and the holiest.

One does not turn to the Buddha because of superstition or identification with him. As Buddhists, we respect him because he was able to bring all virtues to completion and perfection. The only one who can actually do so is a buddha. So we should take refuge in a buddha, not in the non-Buddhist gods of heaven.

Just as all buddhas are equally and ultimately complete and perfect, so are their three virtues. It cannot be said that Buddha A has made a greater

vow than Buddha B or that Buddha B has higher wisdom and more magical power than Buddha C. A difference in quality or quantity between buddhas would imply incompleteness and imperfection, and when there is incompleteness and imperfection, one cannot be called a buddha. Thus it is said, "The paths of all buddhas are the same" and "All buddhas are equal." According to the sūtras, however, it seems that buddhas have physical bodies of different sizes, lifetimes of varied lengths, lands of different degrees of purity, disciples of varied quantities, and different lengths of time for their true teachings to abide in their worlds. One must understand that in order to suit the diverse qualities of sentient beings, buddhas have to use skillful means; this is the reason for the differences. Since the true virtues of buddhas are not different, one should not discriminate erroneously.

Praise for the Virtues of the Dharma

8 The empty well is old and in ruins;
The empty village is quiet and without people;
The far shore is forested and has flowing springs.
The Dharma, honorable and beyond desires, compels our worship.

The first two lines refer to two different parables. Strolling in the wilderness, a person carelessly falls into an old, dry well. Luckily he grabs hold of a withered vine in the well so that he does not fall to the bottom. At the bottom are four poisonous snakes staring at him with their mouths open and tongues flickering. A rat is gnawing the withered vine he has grasped, and the vine may break at any moment. In desperate circumstances, he looks up and sees some honey on the vine. He sticks out his tongue to lick the honey and forgets everything. While enjoying the sweet honey, he even forgets that a swarm of bees may sting him.

This parable says that in the wilderness of births and deaths, sentient beings are endowed with a body because of karmic forces. The withered vine is like the root of life. The rat gnawing the withered vine is like the encroaching of impermanence; eventually the root of life will break. The dry well, the withered vine, and the rat all symbolize the cruel pressure exerted by the powerful force of impermanence. That is why, in the

verse, the empty well is "in ruins." The four snakes represent the four elements—earth, water, fire, and air. When the four elements are not in harmony, people fall sick and die, just as they do from the bite of a poi-son-ous snake. The honey is the enjoyment of the five desires: content with this small happiness, people forget that they are under the stress of impermanence, birth, and death. Just as they are heedless of the stinging bees, so they do not think about the bitter fruits of the five desires. How hopeless stupid people are—even the tremendous suffering of birth and death cannot wake them up!

The second parable tells of an uninhabited village. A refugee, fleeing punishment by a king, comes to a deserted village. He wants to stay there overnight, but suddenly he hears the voice of a heavenly being: "Run! This place is frequented by robbers. If they find you, you may lose your life!" So he leaves the village and proceeds to the border of the kingdom, where there is a wide river. The people who want to arrest him are close behind. But now, seeing the forest and streams on the far shore and knowing they lie outside the king's domain, the refugee feels safe and happy. He swims across the big river without regard for danger. Out of reach of death, he can finally rest.

This parable is meant to convey that some people, wanting to be free from the control of Māra, the Evil One, study and practice the Buddha's teachings but fail to guard the six sense organs. The empty village represents the six sense organs. Because the six sense organs enable people to see, hear, and feel, people usually think that there is a self, an "I," within. But actually there is no self, just as there are no people in the village. When these six sense organs without a self come into contact with the six sense objects, this gives rise to the confused six consciousnesses, which are like the robbers. Traveling through the six sense organs, these six consciousnesses generate desire and anger when they should not. With various afflictions they rob people of merits and the wealth of the Dharma. Because of this, some people fall into the evil destinies. If one wants to leave the rule of Māra and study and practice the Buddha's teachings, therefore, one should not be deceived by the six sense organs and should move toward a safer place. One who studies the Buddha's teachings, not being deceived by the senses, crosses the river of birth and death; one leaves Māra's realm and reaches Nirvāṇa's shore. Here one can enjoy the bliss of stillness beyond birth and death.

the physical and mental activities among its members must have the three following characteristics: (4) harmony in abiding physically, that is, peaceful communal living; (5) harmony in speech without quarreling; and (6) the harmony of tranquil minds. These six harmonies, which constitute harmony in practical matters, should be practiced by all monastics.

As for harmony in principles, this is the truth that the Buddha's disciples realize: the Dharma or Nirvāṇa—the contents of both are the same. This harmony in principles is also called the "complete meeting of minds" or "exhaling through the same nostrils with all buddhas." It is possessed by sages, whether they are monastics or laypeople. A person who achieves harmony in practical matters is a monastic in an ordinary sense, whereas someone who achieves harmony in principles is a monastic person in an ultimate sense. In this evil age of the five impurities, Śākyamuni Buddha relied on the Dharma to assemble the Saṅgha as the central force for maintaining Buddhism; he thereby emphasized harmony in practical matters over harmony in principles.

The second characteristic of the Saṅgha is its peaceful joy. In this harmonious organization, monks and nuns can find physical and mental peace and joy and can practice vigorously. The third characteristic of the Saṅgha is its purity. In an organization with harmony and joy, people can encourage and keep each other alert. If an offense is committed, they can quickly repent and restore purity so that the Saṅgha remains strong and sound. The Saṅgha that was established by the Buddha was a perfect organization.

From self-cultivation to purity of body and mind, the Saṅgha—a great furnace for casting virtuous people and sages—is that extraordinary factor that enables us to attain happiness and purity. Through preaching for the benefit of others, the Saṅgha is a collective force that mobilizes the Buddha Dharma. Disciples of the Buddha should take refuge in and respect the Saṅgha, one of the Three Treasures. Religious groups resembling the Saṅgha are not limited to Buddhism. For example, the ascetic groups of the six heterodox teachers in India also have monks. Among all the monastic assemblies, however, the Saṅgha that practices the Buddha Dharma is the most honored; hence it is called the "most highly honored among assemblies."

11 One should respect the members of the Saṅgha,
And not scold them or judge them.

For they follow the Buddha as practitioners,
And maintain the true Dharma like a fortress.

This verse is especially important for lay devotees who take refuge in the Saṅgha treasure. Lay devotees should mentally respect the Saṅgha with sincerity, whether verbally (or in writing) by means of praise, or physically by means of prostrations. They should serve the monks and nuns according to the Saṅgha's instructions. According to their abilities and depending on the Saṅgha's needs, they should make offerings of clothing, food, medicine, bedding, and other daily necessities. One should not be disrespectful. In contemporary China, some people still respect the Buddha and the Dharma; but too few respect the Saṅgha. Sometimes people respect only the teacher with whom they take refuge, or only one or two members of the Saṅgha. With such incomplete respect and allegiance to the Three Treasures, no wonder that the extraordinary merits of the Buddha Dharma have difficulty growing.

Among monastics there are naturally both good and evil people. "Dragons and snakes huddle together," as the saying goes. This is to say that there are holy monastic people and worldly monastic people, those who keep the precepts completely and those who break them. When lay disciples see monastic people who are impure and not living in accord with the Dharma, they should acknowledge that this is a "Saṅgha affair" that will be handled according to the established rules and regulations. A layperson should not casually scold the whole Saṅgha or even one or a few monks or nuns. Devotees who are sincere protectors of the Dharma can make suggestions, but the responsibility and authority for handling these matters belong to the Saṅgha. According to the Buddha's system, a monastic person who has committed a crime but has not yet been expelled from the Saṅgha cannot be casually punished by secular laws. When there is a dispute, the secular ruler must follow the monastic rules for coming to a decision; he ought not decide on his own. Otherwise, secular attempts to resolve such situations could become seriously offensive, insulting the Saṅgha or increasing disputes within it.

Whoever has joined a monastery or nunnery is a member of the Saṅgha. You cannot discriminate among them on the basis of their being old or young, male or female, learned or uneducated, diligent or lazy, precept keeping or precept breaking, fellow countrymen or foreigners. All

members of the Saṅgha should be honored and respected with offerings because the Saṅgha is like the ocean. The ocean does not differentiate between big dragons and fish or shrimp, between seaweed and pearls or treasure, but rather holds them all equally. In this world, there are people who prefer keeping precepts, or meditating, or reciting and chanting, or having dignified manners, or studying the meaning of the doctrines. Because of these differences some people discriminate improperly, claiming that some are right and some are wrong, some are good and some are bad, supporting some and opposing others. Devotees, treat them all equally and do not judge the Saṅgha. To the average person the virtues of the Saṅgha are not easily recognizable. For example, people in general have more faith in the aged and think little of the young. They do not realize that these elders may have much attachment but do not pursue sensuality only because their six sense organs have degenerated along with their wrinkled skin and white hair. This has nothing to do with the virtues of the Buddha Dharma at all!

Devotees should understand that all those who have left home and belong to the Saṅgha are practitioners following the Buddha's example, regardless of their different levels. As long as there are monastic people, there will be monasteries and nunneries, holy images, sūtras, and the Three Treasures to worship. Monks and nuns may be superior and inferior, good and bad, worldly and holy. But together they become the Saṅgha, a powerful force for maintaining the Tathāgata's true Dharma so effectively that even demons and non-Buddhists cannot destroy it; they are like a fortress with walls made of gold and a moat filled with boiling water. Everyone should examine their own situation; the person who awakened one's faith or interest in the Buddha Dharma was not necessarily a virtuous monk or a saint! So it is that a bhikṣu who has broken the precepts but still wears the monk's robe is still a field of good fortune for divine and human beings. Truly sincere lay devotees should especially respect, protect, and assist the Saṅgha with its harmony, joy, and purity; they should not scold and blame its members or provoke struggles among them. When the Saṅgha had disputes during the Buddha's lifetime, it did not listen even to the Buddha and split in two. The Buddha then told devotees that both groups were Saṅghas and deserved offerings. The saying "when one breaks a golden rod into two, both are gold" is a helpful insight for all lay devotees.[11]

The Virtues in Principle and in Practice

12 The real virtue of the Three Treasures,
Is faultless and pure in nature.
To transform the world, we should rely on both the real and the worldly virtues.
In this way, the Buddha Dharma can exist forever.

The Three Treasures, the objects of our absolute allegiance, are the most perfect, complete, and pure among all religious founders, doctrines, and disciples. However, images of the Buddha or saints and disciples may not necessarily meet these qualifications, of course! But one should know that at present there are the three Abiding Treasures—the Abiding Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—that appeared after the Buddha passed away. The Abiding Buddha can be represented by the Buddha's image, whether of jade, stone, gold, copper, wood, clay, or paint; the Abiding Dharma can be represented by the scriptures of the Tripitaka or the discourses on the Dharma by masters of the past or present; the Abiding Saṅgha can be represented by the monastic population. These are the Three Treasures of the continued transmission of Buddhism in the world. By respecting and making offerings to them, followers can reach the real Three Treasures.

When Śākyamuni Buddha was alive in this world, he was the Buddha treasure. His teachings—the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, Nirvāṇa, and so forth—were the Dharma treasure; those who left home to follow him, whether worldly or holy, were the Saṅgha treasure. These three are called the Three Treasures of Transforming Appearances because of the way they transformed people during the Buddha's time. When the Buddha was teaching and transforming people in this world, these three transforming appearances functioned as the Three Treasures. Through respect and offerings, one could follow them and turn toward the Buddhas of the ten directions, the true Dharma, and the virtuous and holy monks. The Three Treasures of Transforming Appearances and the Abiding Three Treasures are both concrete manifestations of Buddhism in the world. By taking refuge in them, one can reach a more profound level.

The real place of refuge is the actual virtues of the Three Treasures. These virtues have been discussed in many ways; two points of view will be introduced here.

The first sees the Buddha treasure as identical with the Buddha's faultless virtues. According to the śrāvakas, the Buddha's faultless virtues are the five attributes of the Dharmakāya, although in the Mahāyāna teaching they are embraced by perfect enlightenment (the fourfold wisdom). The Dharma treasure is the true Dharma—that is, Nirvāṇa itself. The Saṅgha treasure is identical with the faultless virtues of those who are still learners and those who are not. According to the Śrāvaka Vehicle, the faultless virtues are those of the four stages and four grades of sainthood; but according to the Mahāyāna teaching, they are the faultless virtues of the Bodhisattva Way (which includes śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas).

The second way of talking about the real virtues of the Three Treasures draws from the Mahāyāna teachings, according to which the Buddha treasure is the purest Dharmadhātu—revealed ultimately, completely, and perfectly (embracing essence, form, action, and function). The Saṅgha treasure is the pure Dharmadhātu that is partially revealed. The Dharma treasure is the universal Dharmadhātu—without increase or decrease, neither dualistic nor discriminating (and called suchness, reality, and so on). The other standard terms for the Three Treasures—the Three Treasures in One Essence, the Three Treasures in Principle, and the Abiding Three Treasures—all refer to the same Three Treasures discussed above, but they are explained in different ways. The real virtue of the Three Treasures—the virtue of the *real* Three Treasures—is faultless. They do not respond to afflictions and defilements, nor do they arise because of them. Their nature is pure. Although the conditioned faultless virtues are also called pure, the unconditioned faultless virtues are pure by nature; they remain pure both when defilements are absent and when they are present. Pure by nature, the faultless Three Treasures are the real place of refuge.

In order to educate and transform the world for the benefit of all sentient beings by means of the Buddha Dharma, however, we should pay homage not only to the virtues of the Three Treasures but also to the worldly virtues of the Abiding Three Treasures. We should do this because if we take worldly refuge only, our worship may become a mere formality, whereas if we emphasize only the supreme meaning (reality), this will certainly be too profound for most people. People should therefore take refuge in the actual appearances of the Abiding Three Treasures (the Three Treasures of the Transforming Appearances during the Buddha's time) and

If one sincerely wants to take refuge, then it must be in the Three Treasures of Buddhism! One should differentiate between good and bad and not think that taking refuge in just any religion is the same. The founders, doctrines, and disciples of other religions cannot ultimately detach one from defilements. They do not have perfect virtues. Unable to save themselves, how can they be a place of refuge for others? If one takes refuge in non-Buddhists, one will receive neither the bliss of the conditioned merits nor the security of the unconditioned merits—Nirvāṇa's ultimate bliss.

The Essence of Taking Refuge

15 The aforementioned taking of refuge is,
In essence, the faithful vow;
Turning toward and following the Three Treasures,
Relying on them, people will be helped and saved.

What does taking refuge really mean? It refers to a deep faithful vow, a faith that this is the real place of refuge from which one can obtain various virtues. Knowing that the Three Treasures have such virtues, one vows to become a devotee of the Buddha, to have faith, to practice, and to earnestly request protection and acceptance from the virtuous Three Treasures. Taking refuge has this faithful vow as its foundation.

After taking refuge, one should give one's body and mind to the Three Treasures, not to demons or non-Buddhists. One should trust in the embrace of the Three Treasures at all times and in all places. A lost child who runs carelessly across busy streets full of cars and trucks is not just lost, he is in danger of being hurt. But then, seeing his mother, the child returns safely to her and falls into her arms. In taking refuge in the Three Treasures, one's frame of mind should be like this.

If one relies on the virtues of the Three Treasures with this attitude, one can be helped and saved. In Sanskrit, *sāraṇa* (taking refuge) also means to help and to save. The power of the virtues of the Three Treasures protects and embraces those who take refuge, enabling them to reach the land of permanent bliss that is without suffering. In short, for those who take refuge, taking refuge means being firmly established in faith and vows and asking the Three Treasures for their embrace and deliverance.

16 If one vows to devote one's life to them,
Through self-reliance and self-cultivation,
One can be unified with
The real meaning of taking refuge.

Generally speaking, to take refuge means to believe in and wish to receive external help so as to be saved. Although theistic religions are also dependent on an external power, the Buddha Dharma is distinct from these. In the Nirvāṇa Assembly, the Buddha gave his final teaching to his disciples: "Rely on yourself, rely on the Dharma, but do not rely on others."[13] He instructed them to rely on their own abilities and to study and practice by themselves according to the true Dharma, without being dependent on others. Similarly, in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, Ānanda said, "Ever since I left home and followed the Buddha, I have thought that by relying on the Buddha's spiritual power I would not need to practice, and that the Tathāgata would endow me with enlightenment. I did not realize that one's body and mind cannot be replaced by others."[14] One has to learn and practice by oneself.

Thus, the profound meaning of taking refuge is to turn to oneself (one's mind, one's nature). One has the Buddha nature and can become a buddha; the essence of one's body and mind is the true Dharma, Nirvāṇa. If one practices by oneself according to the Dharma, then one's body becomes one with the Saṅgha. The Three Treasures of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha are not separate from oneself. One can attain and manifest all virtues through one's own body and mind. On the surface, taking refuge appears to mean believing in and relying on the protection of an external power; but on a more profound level, such faith and reliance are only helpful conditions that propel one's body and mind to realize one's wishes for protection and blessing.

Therefore, if one vows to devote one's life—the totality of one's body and mind—to the Three Treasures, and if one is able to practice the true Dharma through self-reliance and self-cultivation, and if one does not think (like Ānanda) that "relying on the Buddha's spiritual power, I do not need to practice," then one is in accord with the real meaning of taking refuge.

2

Attending to the Dharma to Enter the Path

AFTER TAKING REFUGE, one should hear more of the true Dharma, for only by doing so can one enter into the Buddhist way. Some people think: "The Buddha Dharma should be practiced. What is the use of hearing the Dharma? In the assembly of Śūraṅgama, the honorable Ānanda was always hearing, yet was unable to attain enlightenment,[1] and he was incapable of avoiding Mātaṅgī's enticement." They do not know that the honorable Ānanda's problem with "always hearing" was actually not a problem of hearing the Dharma. All the scriptures say that if one wants to learn and practice the Buddha Dharma, hearing the Dharma is a must. If one does not hear any of it, how can one learn about emancipation from birth and death, about the most blissful land and Amitābha Buddha, about the way to self-realization, about the true Dharma of Buddhism? If one does not listen to or hear anything, one will not even know about taking refuge in the Three Treasures!

THE BENEFITS OF HEARING

17 By hearing one knows all dharmas;
By hearing one can halt the advance of all evils;
By hearing one can end meaningless matters;
By hearing one can attain Nirvāṇa.

These are the verses in the scripture that praise the merits of hearing the Dharma.[2] It can be said that all the merits of the Buddha Dharma come from hearing the Dharma. Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva said there are three sources from which one should hear the Dharma: from the Buddha, from the Buddha's disciples, and from the scriptures.[3] To hear the Dharma from the Buddha and his disciples means hearing the spoken discourses. As the sūtra says, "The real teaching comes through listening to the sound of the teaching."[4] But since Śākyamuni Buddha has entered Nirvāṇa, we can hear the Dharma only

from his disciples. Even though all the buddhas of the ten directions are expounding the Dharma, we cannot hear them speak unless we have learned and practiced to a very high level. Hearing the scriptures means to take the past as one's teacher and understanding the Buddha Dharma through reading the sūtras and discourses. Hearing the Dharma from the Buddha's disciples or from a reading of the sūtras are therefore both called attending to the Dharma. This is where the study of the Buddha Dharma begins.

The hearing of the true Dharma can be divided into four meritorious categories. (1) By hearing the Dharma one knows the dharmas. One knows the good dharmas, the bad dharmas, the faulty dharmas, the faultless dharmas, and so forth. After hearing about these, one knows them all; one knows what should be included in one's practice and what should be abandoned. (2) By hearing the true Dharma one halts all evils—evil thoughts or evil actions—both physical and verbal. When one knows about evil and its consequences, one can then put an end to it. (3) By hearing the true Dharma one puts an end to all sorts of meaningless matters. Some non-Buddhists, although they wish for emancipation, go astray and practice various ascetic deeds like fasting, refusing to sleep, going naked, and so on, thinking that with these ascetic behaviors they can attain the Way. Not only do they lead an ascetic life themselves, they teach others to do the same. The Buddha called these practices meaningless. They are foolish matters that bring suffering on oneself. Upon hearing the Buddha's true Dharma, one will naturally keep one's distance from them; one will practice the right way and not adopt non-Buddhist ways. (4) From listening to the true Dharma and practicing according to the proper way, one attains the emancipation of Nirvāṇa.

THE WAYS TO LISTEN

18 Like a vessel to hold water,
Like a seed to be planted in the ground,
One should avoid the three mistakes
By listening attentively, thoughtfully, and mindfully.

When the Buddha was teaching the true Dharma, he always exhorted his audiences by saying, "Listen attentively! Listen attentively! Think carefully and remember well!" He said this because if one listens to the Dharma improperly, one cannot receive the merit of hearing the Dharma. Two

metaphors can illustrate the three mistakes to be avoided when attending to the Dharma.

First, suppose when it is raining one puts out vessels—bowls, cups or pots, etc.—to catch the rainwater. If one expects to use this water, one should avoid: (1) placing the bowl or cup upside down on the ground; (2) putting out a bowl or cup that has filthy or poisonous substances inside, so that the water obtained is harmful; (3) putting out a bowl or a cup that, although clean and poison free, is cracked and leaks. Inattention to the Dharma is similar. First, those who do not pay attention, do not concentrate, are like the upside-down bowl; even though they may listen, they do not hear. Second, people may concentrate on hearing the teachings but have prejudices, doubts, and perverted views—like the filth and poison in the bowl; then not only do they not develop merit from listening to the true Dharma, they may even commit the offense of slandering the Dharma. Third, people's minds may be without prejudices or doubts but nonetheless are scattered and busy; then, like the cracked bowl, they soon lose everything. If one attends to the Dharma like this—by making these three mistakes—one will not receive the merits of hearing the Dharma. So one should listen attentively, thoughtfully, and mindfully.

The second metaphor is of planting grain or beans: (1) Seeds scattered onto sand and rock will not germinate. (2) Seeds scattered onto soil covered with thick, coarse undergrowth may germinate but will not grow. (3) Seeds scattered onto fertilized soil clear of undesirable weeds will, if not planted deep enough, soon be eaten by birds. If seeds are sown like this, how can there be a harvest? Attending to the Dharma is similar: hearing the Dharma—being influenced through listening—is the Dharmic seed of the resolution to transcend the world. But if one is inattentive in receiving the Dharma or allows it to become contaminated after receiving it, or even if one's mind is pure but forgets the Dharma soon afterwards, then, having listened to the Dharma in this way, one will not get any results. If one wants to benefit from hearing the Dharma, therefore, one should avoid the three mistakes and be sure to hear well, consider well, and remember well.

19 Think of oneself as being sick, in need of a doctor and medicine;
Thinking of the need to be treated intensively,
One should follow what one has learned and practice it.
The Buddha has said that the Dharma is like a mirror.

knowledge does not qualify someone. Good and knowledgeable persons have five qualities. First, the virtue of realization: this includes the three studies of pure precepts, meditation, and wisdom. Second, the virtue of teaching: good and knowledgeable people must have studied widely and deeply all the sūtras so that they can teach the true Mahāyāna way. Third, knowledge of true nature—that is, the true Dharma. This is accomplished either directly by enlightened wisdom or indirectly through hearing and pondering the teachings. Fourth, compassion: to be compassionate means to be able to preach for the benefit of all sentient beings, not for the sake of fame and abundant offerings. Fifth, eloquence: with this quality one can preach skillfully and tactfully, and people will understand easily and receive benefits. If a person has attained all these virtues, then he or she is an extraordinarily good and knowledgeable person.

In this era of the decline of the Dharma, however, it is extremely difficult to encounter a such a person. Nevertheless, one needs good teachers and friends in order to practice the Buddha Dharma. So one may have to settle for the second best. A sūtra says: "One can associate with those who have one-eighth of the virtues."[9] The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* talks about the four kinds of reliance—four kinds of people on whom one can rely as teachers. One group of people on whom others can rely are those who, although they have neither eliminated all afflictions nor realized the true nature, have understood one-sixteenth of the meaning of Buddha nature.[10] In short, because it is hard to meet a good and knowledgeable person in this period of the decline of the Buddhist teachings, you should properly associate with a person who is even just a little bit better than you in the understanding and the practice of the Buddha Dharma.

21 Observing their virtues and not their shortcomings,
One should follow their advice without resisting.
The Buddha has said this lofty conduct is complete.
Good people should be respected by those who learn from them.

Whether they are good and knowledgeable people with all the virtues or with just a few, if one does not associate with them properly, one will not receive the deserved merit. One should observe their virtues and not their shortcomings. For example, one can listen to their instructions, observe their good behavior (however moderate) and their way of getting

along with people. In this way, one can receive the benefits of the Dharma even from a good and knowledgeable person with few virtues. If one observes only the shortcomings of such people and seizes upon their imperfections or inadequacies, on the other hand, then one will not receive any benefit—even if one meets a good and knowledgeable person with all the virtues. So when one associates with good and knowledgeable people, one should remind oneself: "Why am I here? I am not here to look for their faults but to learn about their good qualities." If one approaches learning in this way, one can have a teacher and one can obtain benefits, no matter where one is. Likewise, Confucius said, "When I am in the company of three people, one of them will certainly have something to teach me."[11]

In brief, to associate with good and knowledgeable people, one should follow the teacher's wishes. One should not resist the teacher's orders. If one is scolded, one should bear it without becoming angry. One should do this to please the teacher. One makes one's teacher happy by making offerings according to one's ability, by serving the teacher, and by practicing the teacher's instructions. In the Buddha Dharma, such conduct is expressed in the phrase "respect the teacher and the Way." If one's teacher wants one to do something that is not in accord with the Dharma, one should not follow the teacher's wishes, and gently explain the reason. In practicing the Buddha Dharma, it is impossible for one to attain its virtues if one cannot revere teachers properly. As it is said, "If people have persistent hatred, strong ill-will, or anger toward their teacher, there is no way they can receive merit."[12]

On one occasion when the Tathāgata praised the virtues of good and knowledgeable people, Ānanda said, "People who have half of the qualifications for pure conduct can already be called good and knowledgeable people." The Buddha replied, "Don't say that. Only people with completely pure conduct can be called good and knowledgeable people."[13] What Ānanda meant was that by associating with good and knowledgeable people, one is halfway to pure and lofty conduct. But according to the Buddha, by associating with good and knowledgeable people one may be said to have already completed pure and lofty conduct. How important the Buddha thought good and knowledgeable people were! The benefits of associating with them are explained in detail in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and elsewhere.

The Requirements

Avoiding the Eight Obstacles

22 In order to listen to the Buddha Dharma, one must:
Avoid the three evil destinies,
Avoid being born in the Longevity Heavens;
Be born in a buddha age and in the central countries;
Have healthy sense organs and be without deviant views.

The ancients said, "It is difficult to encounter good and knowledgeable people, and it is rare to have the chance to hear the Buddha Dharma." If you have come across such a rare opportunity, do not think it is easy. One should know that in order to listen to the Buddha Dharma, one has to avoid eight obstructions. The first three obstructions are the three evil destinies from which one must be liberated: (1) being born in the hells, (2) being born as an animal, (3) being born as a hungry ghost. If one is born in any one of these three evil destinies, one has no opportunity to listen to the Dharma. Although the powerful king of ghosts, the king of dragons, and others attend to the Dharma, they cannot give up their worldly life to receive the precepts and follow the Buddha in practice. (4) One should also not be born in the Longevity Heavens. The Formless Realm has four heavens—infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor nonperception. For example, in the heaven of neither perception nor nonperception, the life span is eighty thousand great kalpas. The realm of form has the heaven of no-thought, where all beings also have extremely long lifetimes. According to the *Ba nan lun* (Treatise on the Eight Obstructions), all those who are born in these heavens are called beings of the Longevity Heavens, and they very rarely have the opportunity to listen to the Dharma and practice it. Therefore, one should avoid being born either in the heavens above or the three evil destinies below.

(5) Only as a human can one encounter this rare Buddha Dharma. Even as a human, however, one needs to be born in a buddha age, when a buddha has appeared and the Buddha Dharma still exists. If one were to be born before a buddha appears or after the Buddha Dharma has declined to the point of extinction, then even as a human, one will not have the opportunity to listen to the Buddha Dharma and to practice it.

(6) One also has to be born in the central countries. Central countries are defined relative to the borderlands. Wherever the Buddha or the Saṅgha preaches the Buddha Dharma, that is a central country; other places are borderlands. In the borderlands one cannot hear the Dharma.

(7) One has to have six healthy sense organs. If one is blind, deaf, dumb, psychotic, or retarded, then even being born in a buddha age and in a central country is still useless! (8) Even without these seven obstructions, if one is raised in a family with deviant views, or in a region of non-Buddhist religion, or in a non-Buddhist family or one with habitually distorted and deviant views, one has no opportunity to listen to the Buddha Dharma. These eight things, usually called eight obstructions, are obstacles to the study of Buddhism. In Sanskrit they are called *aṣṭākṣaṇa*, "eight that are without time," meaning eight situations that keep one from practicing the Buddha Dharma. We can see how happy we should be to have avoided them.

Attaining a Human Form

23 In the cycles of transmigration through birth and death,
It is hardest to become human.
The human abilities to recall, to have pure conduct, diligence and courage
Are superior to those of the various divine beings.

Some people think of life as very meaningless because they have low intelligence or poor living conditions. Thus they give in to self-blame, self-hate, or self-abuse and cannot set their mind on the study of the Buddha Dharma. They do not know that in the continual cycling of birth and death among the five destinies, it is most hard to become human. Being human is a rare opportunity, so one should not look down on oneself. There are two ways of looking at the difficulty of becoming human. First, in the cycles of transmigration through birth and death, those born in the evil destinies are as plentiful as the dirt on the ground, while those born in the good destinies are as scarce as the dust on one's fingernails. Those born in the good destinies, in the heavens, for example, may enjoy this state for a long time—until their stay there ends; then they usually fall back down. The rare chance of becoming human is analogous to the

chance that a blind turtle swimming in the ocean will put its head through the hole of a plank of wood floating on the surface. One can see how unlikely that would be! But to be born a human in the cycles of transmigration through birth and death is just as difficult.

Second, although humans have much suffering and undesirable circumstances, it is actually very precious to be human. According to the sūtras, three human abilities—to recall, to have pure conduct, and to have diligence and courage—are not to be found among the beings of the evil destinies and are superior to the abilities of the various divine beings.[14] Humans can recall the past and preserve experiences, which gives them a particularly well-developed ability to think and to reason. This is superiority in recall. A person can, by disregarding material gain and practicing self-control, become physically and mentally pure and thus benefit other people. Some people do control themselves and devote themselves to these aims, and their moral spirit is potentially very great. This is superiority in pure conduct. In order to reach a goal, a person can endure suffering and hardship, working diligently and courageously until the goal is achieved. This is superiority in diligence and courage. These qualities are generally similar to the three virtues of wisdom, benevolence, and courage in Confucianism.

Among all the sentient beings, therefore, humans are the most precious. People who become virtuous sages, buddhas, or patriarchs all respect this potential for human greatness and strive diligently to realize their achievements. When a divine being is dying, according to the sūtras, others will say, "We hope that you are born in the path of happiness." The happy land they wish for is the human world. The human body is the happy land that the divine beings desire, so as a human how can one indulge in self-blame and self-pity and let this life pass emptily?

24 It is hard to become human, but having become human
One should vigorously practice the Dharma.
Do not waste time; this is like entering the mountain of treasure
And returning empty-handed and with regret.

Since it is hard to obtain a human form, one should be very happy to seize this precious opportunity and vigorously practice the true Dharma. Life is impermanent. "Life is just in between inhalation and exhalation," says a sūtra,[15] so one should not wait for tomorrow, next year, or the distant

want happiness in the present and in the future. By practicing according to the Buddha Dharma, they can receive happiness in the present and rewards in the future. Under certain circumstances it is all right to suffer and sacrifice a little in the present in order to have future blessings and happiness. Having happiness in the present and in the future is the ideal, but if there is no alternative, suffering now and having happiness in the future is acceptable. Those who enjoy the present but think they will experience future suffering, or make themselves suffer needlessly now thinking that it will bring future happiness (but instead experience boundless suffering in the future), have gone wrong and are engaged in deviant practices that do not belong to the Tathāgata's true Dharma. People of the lower grade—who resolve to attain better fortune and happiness as humans and divine beings—will, even if they practice the Dharma to leave the cycle of births and deaths—only receive the reward of becoming a human or divine being. (But one who has made such a vow and then does various evil deeds that have a strong karmic force will travel the three evil destinies, and certainly will not move upward.) Despite all their progress, they will transmigrate within the three realms and not be able to reach the ultimate. For example, those born in the heavens go from the realm of desire to the realm of form, then from the realm of form to the formless realm, and eventually to the heaven of neither perception nor nonperception, where they cannot move higher. When that karmic force comes to an end, they start to fall back down.

When one profoundly understands this—when one feels that "the three realms are not safe; they are like a house on fire"—one resolves to leave the three realms' cycle of birth and death. Such is the resolve of people of the middle grade. If one can have such a resolution and practice the Dharma that transcends the world, then one can be free from birth and death and enjoy the bliss of liberation in Nirvāṇa. Obtained by leaving behind all afflictions, the bliss of liberation is completely different from the worldly happiness, which can turn into sorrow. It is completely free from the transmigratory cycles of birth and death and is thus superior to the rewards obtained by the lower people.

Within this middle stage, there are also two subgroups, the Śrāvaka Vehicle and the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle. Together they are called the "Two Vehicles." In general, the resolutions and results of these Two Vehicles are similar. As explained above, anyone who vows only to leave the three realms will at most attain the fruit of the Small Vehicle, even if he or she practices