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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
OF THE "SUTRA SPOKEN BY THE SIXTH
PATRIARCH ON THE HIGH SEAT OF
THE TREASURE OF THE LAW"

Buddhism first came to China from India. Buddhism in China has an illustrious history of 2,000 years. There were thirteen Sects during the Tang Dynasty. In the course of time, their teachings merged with the Chinese culture in a huge cauldron. Thus Buddhism was established on a sound basis in the history of Chinese culture, resulting in the emergence of Chinese Buddhism which has its own distinctive characteristics—firstly, vegetarianism and secondly, meditation which does not set up scriptures. During the Sung and the Ming Dynasties, Chinese Buddhism developed into metaphysics which had its origin in meditation, the Zen Sect. These two characteristics can be traced to the interchange of the two great cultures, that is, Chinese and Indian Cultures—a fact that can hardly be denied by historians.

The Zen system has originated from a Sermon-meeting at which Lord Buddha gave the first revelation. On that occasion, a disciple approached Lord Buddha with a gift of a golden flower and asked him to preach the secret of the doctrine. Lord Buddha took the flower, held it aloft and looked at it in silence, indicating that the secret lay not in words, but in the contemplation of the flower itself.

Lord Buddha handed down his teachings to Maha Kassapa who in turn handed them down to Ananda. After the 27th

Patriarch, Prajnatarā, had inherited His teachings, he had the Law transmitted to Arya Bodhidharma who came to China via Canton in the year 526 during the reign of Emperor Liang Wu Ti. He was the 1st Patriarch in China, and handed down the Dharma to Hui K'o (Grand Master Shen Kwang). During the life of the 5th Patriarch Grand Master Hwang Yan, a Kwangtung firewood vendor first heard of the text of the Diamond Sutra and he became enlightened. He was to become the 6th Patriarch Hui Neng (Wei Lang). He left his mother to pay homage to the 5th Patriarch at Tung Shan Monastery in Hwang Mei Prefecture. He was told to split firewood and pound rice. He worked there for eight months. Once during his stay in the Monastery, he dictated a stanza which took all disciples and others by surprise. Fearing that jealous ones should do him injury, the Patriarch dropped him a hint. He knew what the hint meant and called at the Patriarch's room in the third watch of the night. There the robe and the dharma were secretly transmitted to him and he was made the 6th Patriarch after the 5th Patriarch had uttered "My teachings will now spread southwards."

Grand Master Hui Neng established at Tsow-chi the Southern Sect which preached not in words. It existed side by side with Northern Sect under Shen-hsiu. After the Parinirvana of the 6th Patriarch, there emerged five Sects and seven branches, with Dhyana taking the place of Vinaya. It is gratifying to note that the Zen system was able to maintain its unique position during the last 1,000 years.

In recent years, Buddhist countries in this part of the world, being believers of the same religion, have advocated that they should get together to study Buddhism with a view

to spread its doctrine. Mr. U. Nu, Prime Minister of the Union of Burma, took the initiative to invite Buddhists of all countries to his country to practise meditation and intuition. In view of the fact that most of the Buddhist laity in Singapore and Malaya do not understand Chinese, the only English translation of a Chinese Sutra, namely "Sutra of Wei Lang" is found to be indispensable for use of Zen followers. Hence it has been decided that the Sutra be reprinted for free distribution.

I have been in this country for the last seven to eight years, during which I have come in contact with a great number of people who are well versed in Pali Sutras but unfortunately, there is an acute shortage of the English translations of Mahayana Sutras.

With a view to satisfying the needs of English speaking followers of Zen Sect, I have vowed that this English translation be reprinted. With the spontaneous help from the Buddhist devotees who undertake to defray the costs towards the reproduction of this book, I have every confidence that this vow will be fulfilled in no time.

This Sutra will guide readers into the right path which leads to the heart's enlightenment. Let me quote "One should use one's mind in such a way that it will be free from any attachment" and will ultimately realise one's original spiritual existence.

Rev. KONG GHEE.

3rd Moon of the Ting Iu Year
Buddhist Calendar 2,500 years.

FOREWORD TO NEW EDITION

THE first, and apparently the only published translation into English of the *Sutra of Wei Lang* was completed by the late Mr. Wong Mou-lam in 1930, and published in the form of a 4to paper-covered book by the Yu Ching Press of Shanghai. Copies were imported to London a few dozen at a time by the Buddhist Lodge, London (now the Buddhist Society, London), until 1939, when the remaining stock was brought to England and soon sold out. The demand, however, has persisted; hence this new edition.

Three courses were open to the present publishers, to republish the translation as it stood, with all its imperfections, to prepare an entirely new translation, with commentary, or to 'polish up' the existing version without in any way altering the sense. As the first seemed undesirable, and the second impracticable at the present time, the third course was adopted.

As Mr. Wong Mou-lam has since passed away, to the great loss of Western scholarship, it has been impossible to invoke his approval of the revisions made in his text. I have therefore scrupulously avoided any re-writing or even paraphrasing, and knowing how many users of the Sutra had learnt whole passages of its somewhat quaint phraseology by heart, I have confined myself to the minimum of alterations.

A few words were so obviously incorrect, due to the translator's imperfect knowledge of English, that I have substituted others which I am sure he would have approved. I have improved the punctuation, sequence of tenses, and certain awkward or clumsy phrasing, in the course of which I noted

how the translator's grasp of English improved as the work went on.

It will be noticed how Mr. Wong Mou-lam assisted his readers to grasp the meaning of certain key terms, such as Prajna, Samadhi and Dhyana, without offering any single English term as a final equivalent. Sometimes he gives the Sanskrit word with one English meaning after it in brackets; later he gives a different English word with the Sanskrit term in brackets after it. Thus the meaning of the word is built up in the reader's mind in part at least of its manifold complexity. Later in the work he tends to leave the word untranslated, as though satisfied that the student had learnt what it meant in the original. It may be helpful to remind readers that the Sanskrit term, Dhyana, was corrupted in China into Ch'an, and in Japan into Zen.

On the rare occasions on which the actual meaning of a passage was in doubt I have compared it with the late Mr. Dwight Goddard's version, which first appeared in *A Buddhist Bible*, published by him at Thetford, Vermont, U.S.A., in 1932. This edition was admittedly only 'based upon' the translation of Mr. Wong Mou-lam, and though it was meant to be 'more readable,' it varies at times from the original meaning as well as form, to my mind without adequate reason. I have nevertheless found this edition of occasional assistance, and have incorporated Mr. Goddard's valuable note on page 92.

I have somewhat shortened the original Preface of Mr. Dih Ping Tsze, the translator's patron and inspirer, but left in most of his valuable footnotes.

Mr. Alan Watts, the author of the *Spirit of Zen*, and other works on Zen Buddhism, has pressed for the adoption of the Sixth Patriarch's name as Hui Neng, instead of Wei Lang.

It is true that he is so referred to by such authorities as Professor D. T. Suzuki, but most Western students already know the work as the *Sutra of Wei Lang*, and the translator used this dialect rendering throughout the work. I have therefore kept to the name best known to Western readers, adding the alternative rendering for those who know him better as Hui Neng. In Japan he is known as Eno, or Yeno.

Several scholars having pointed out that my reading of "Vehicle" for "Gem or Treasure" in the original title of the Sutra was due to a misprint in the word provided, I have taken the first opportunity to restore the original translation. I have likewise, at the suggestion of the late Mr. A. J. Hamster of the Hague, who worked on the MS with the late Ven. Fa Fang in Ceylon, altered the transcription of various Sanskrit terms to accord with modern usage, and corrected a number of minor errors.

For the rest, this unique work, 'the only Sutra spoken by a native of China,' may be left to speak for itself in the form in which Mr. Wong Mou-lam gave it us. May it play its part in guiding Western thought and action into the Middle Way which leads to peace and to the heart's enlightenment.

CHRISTMAS HUMPHREYS.

December, 1952.

PREFACE

It has long been my desire to have this Sutra translated into a European language so that the Message of Zen may be transmitted to the West. The idea obsessed me unremittingly for nearly thirty years, as I could not find a translator to undertake the work until I met Mr. Wong last spring. In an ecstasy of joy, I invited him to stay in my house to translate this Sutra into English. Working on and off, it took him nearly a year and a half to complete the translation. My desire is now fulfilled, and may it prove to be one of the happiest events during the period of the past twelve hundred years.

Now, since an attempt has been made to disseminate this Good Law to the West, I look forward to the day when Europe and America will produce a type of Zen follower whose quick understanding and spontaneous realisation in the solution of the 'Ultimate Problem' will be far superior to our Eastern brethren. Thinking that I have connected the most favourable link with the Occidentals, my happiness is beyond measure.

DIH PING TSZE.

Shanghai, *March*, 1930.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THIS is an English translation of the *Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch on the High Seat of the Treasure of the Law* (Nanjio's Catalogue No. 1525) which records the sermons and the sayings of Wei Lang (638-713), the most famous Dhyana Master of the Tang Dynasty. It may be of interest to note that of all the Chinese works which have been canonized in the Tripitaka, this standard work of the Dhyana School is the only one that bears the designation of 'Sutra,' a designation which is reserved for the sermons of Lord Buddha and those of great Bodhisattvas. Hence, it is not without justification to call it, as some one does, 'the only Sutra spoken by a native of China.'

As it takes a poet to translate Virgil, the translator keenly realises how incompetent he is in tackling this difficult task, since neither his knowledge of Buddhism nor his linguistic attainment qualifies him for the work. He reluctantly agreed, however, to bring out an English version of this Sutra, when urged to do so by his teacher, who admits the incompetence of his pupil but still insists that the translation should be done for the following reasons:—

(1) That in training himself as a translator for Buddhist work in future, this is a good exercise.

(2) That the translation may receive the benefit of correction and revision from the hands of those who have better qualifications, but not enough time to do the complete work themselves.

(3) That, with due allowance for mistranslation, the book may still be useful to those who cannot read the original, but who had mastered it so well in their previous lives that

they only need a paragraph or two, nay even a word or two, to refresh their memory in order to bring back the valuable knowledge that they have now forgotten.

On this understanding alone the translator undertakes the work, and the result of his feeble attempt is now put before the public for what it is worth. As the book stands, the translator knows to his sorrow that the greater part of it will be jargon to readers who have had no previous knowledge of the Dhyana School. May the day come soon when either the translator himself or some other full-fledged Dhyana Master will bring out a new translation with copious notes and explanations, so that the Sutra may be readable by all.

It is from Dr. Ting Fo Po's edition that this translation is made. To this learned gentleman, whose commentaries the translator has made free use of, and to other friends who have given him valuable advice and liberal support he wishes to express his deepest gratitude.

"PUPIL-TRANSLATOR."

[WONG MOU-LAM]

Shanghai, *November 21st, 1929.*

SUTRA SPOKEN BY THE SIXTH PATRIARCH
ON THE HIGH SEAT OF
"THE TREASURE OF THE LAW"

CHAPTER I

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

ONCE, when the Patriarch had arrived at Pao Lam Monastery, Prefect Wai of Shiu Chow and other officials went there to ask him to deliver public lectures on Buddhism in the hall of Tai Fan Temple in the City (of Canton).

In due course, there were assembled (in the lecture hall) Prefect Wai, government officials and Confucian scholars, about thirty each, and Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, Taoists and laymen, to the number of about one thousand. After the Patriarch had taken his seat, the congregation in a body paid him homage and asked him to preach on the fundamental laws of Buddhism. Whereupon, His Holiness delivered the following address:—

Learned Audience, our Essence of Mind (literally, self-nature) which is the seed or kernel of enlightenment (Bodhi) is pure by nature, and by making use of this mind alone we can reach Buddhahood directly. Now let me tell you something about my own life and how I came into possession of the esoteric teaching of the Dhyana (or the Zen) School.

My father, a native of Fan Yang, was dismissed from his official post and banished to be a commoner in Sun Chow in Kwangtung. I was unlucky in that my father died when I was very young, leaving my mother poor and miserable.

We moved to Kwang Chow (Canton) and were then in very bad circumstances.

I was selling firewood in the market one day, when one of my customers ordered some to be brought to his shop. Upon delivery being made and payment received, I left the shop, outside of which I found a man reciting a Sutra. As soon as I heard the text of this Sutra my mind at once became enlightened. Thereupon I asked the man the name of the book he was reciting and was told that it was the Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedika or Diamond Cutter). I further enquired whence he came and why he recited this particular Sutra. He replied that he came from Tung Tsan Monastery in the Wong Mui District of Kee Chow; that the Abbot in charge of this temple was Hwang Yan, the Fifth Patriarch; that there were about one thousand disciples under him; and that when he went there to pay homage to the Patriarch, he attended lectures on this Sutra. He further told me that His Holiness used to encourage the laity as well as the monks to recite this scripture, as by doing so they might realise their own Essence of Mind, and thereby reach Buddhahood directly.

It must be due to my good karma in past lives that I heard about this, and that I was given ten taels for the maintenance of my mother by a man who advised me to go to Wong Mui to interview the Fifth Patriarch. After arrangements had been made for her, I left for Wong Mui, which took me less than thirty days to reach.

I then went to pay homage to the Patriarch, and was asked where I came from and what I expected to get from him. I replied, "I am a commoner from Sun Chow of Kwangtung. I have travelled far to pay you respect and I ask for nothing but Buddhahood." "You are a native

of Kwangtung, a barbarian? How can you expect to be a Buddha?" asked the Patriarch. I replied, "Although there are northern men and southern men, north and south make no difference to their Buddha-nature. A barbarian is different from Your Holiness physically, but there is no difference in our Buddha-nature." He was going to speak further to me, but the presence of other disciples made him stop short. He then ordered me to join the crowd to work.

"May I tell Your Holiness," said I, "that Prajna (transcendental Wisdom) often rises in my mind. When one does not go astray from one's own Essence of Mind, one may be called the 'field of merits.'* I do not know what work Your Holiness would ask me to do?"

"This barbarian is too bright," he remarked. "Go to the stable and speak no more." I then withdrew myself to the backyard and was told by a lay brother to split firewood and to pound rice.

More than eight months after, the Patriarch saw me one day and said, "I know your knowledge of Buddhism is very sound; but I have to refrain from speaking to you, lest evil doers should do you harm. Do you understand?" "Yes Sir, I do," I replied. "To avoid people taking notice of me, I dare not go near your hall."

The Patriarch one day assembled all his disciples and said to them, "The question of incessant rebirth is a momentous one. Day after day, instead of trying to free yourselves from this bitter sea of life and death, you seem to go after tainted merits only (*i.e.*, merits which will cause rebirth). Yet merits will be of no help, if your Essence of Mind is obscured. Go and seek for Prajna (wisdom) in your own mind and

* A title of honour given to monks, as they afford the best opportunities to others to sow the 'seed' of merits.

then write me a stanza (*gatha*) about it. He who understands what the Essence of Mind is will be given the robe (the insignia of the Patriarchate) and the Dharma (*i.e.*, the esoteric teaching of the Dhyana School), and I shall make him the Sixth Patriarch. Go away quickly. Delay not in writing the stanza, as deliberation is quite unnecessary and of no use. The man who has realised the Essence of Mind can speak of it at once, as soon as he is spoken to about it; and he cannot lose sight of it, even when engaged in battle."

Having received this instruction, the disciples withdrew and said to one another, "It is of no use for us to concentrate our mind to write the stanza and submit it to His Holiness, since the Patriarchate is bound to be won by Shin Shau, our instructor. And if we write perfunctorily, it will only be a waste of energy." Upon hearing this, all of them made up their minds not to write and said, "Why should we take the trouble? Hereafter, we will simply follow our instructor, Shin Shau, wherever he goes, and look to him for guidance."

Meanwhile, Shin Shau reasoned thus with himself. "Considering that I am their teacher, none of them will take part in the competition. I wonder whether I should write stanza and submit it to His Holiness. If I do not, how can the Patriarch know how deep or superficial my knowledge is? If my object is to get the Dharma, my motive is a pure one. If I were after the Patriarchate, then it would be bad. In that case, my mind would be that of a worldling and my action would amount to robbing the Patriarch's holy seat. But if I do not submit the stanza, I shall never have a chance of getting the Dharma. A very difficult point to decide, indeed!"

In front of the Patriarch's hall there were three corridors, the walls of which were to be painted by a court artist,

named Lo Chun, with pictures from the Lankavatara (Sutra) depicting the transfiguration of the assembly, and with scenes showing the genealogy of the five Patriarchs for the information and veneration of the public.

When Shin Shau had composed his stanza he made several attempts to submit it to the Patriarch; but as soon as he went near the hall his mind was so perturbed that he sweated all over. He could not screw up courage to submit it, although in the course of four days he made altogether thirteen attempts to do so.

Then he suggested to himself, "It would be better for me to write it on the wall of the corridor and let the Patriarch see it for himself. If he approves it, I shall come out to pay homage, and tell him that it is done by me; but if he disapproves it, then I shall have wasted several years in this mountain in receiving homage from others which I by no means deserve! In that case, what progress have I made in learning Buddhism?"

At 12 o'clock that night he went secretly with a lamp to write the stanza on the wall of the south corridor, so that the Patriarch might know what spiritual insight he had attained. The stanza read:—

Our body is the Bodhi-tree,
And our mind a mirror bright.
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,
And let no dust alight.

As soon as he had written it he left at once for his room; so nobody knew what he had done. In his room he again pondered: "When the Patriarch sees my stanza to-morrow and is pleased with it, I shall be ready for the Dharma; but if he says that it is badly done, it will mean that I am unfit for the Dharma, owing to the misdeeds in previous lives