

BODHI TREE BOOKS STORE ANNEX

THE GENESIS OF THE MAHAYANA BY ST. THOMAS
and the germination by Asvaghosha & Nagarjuna

OUR OLD AION
II

ROGER WEIR

LOSANGELES

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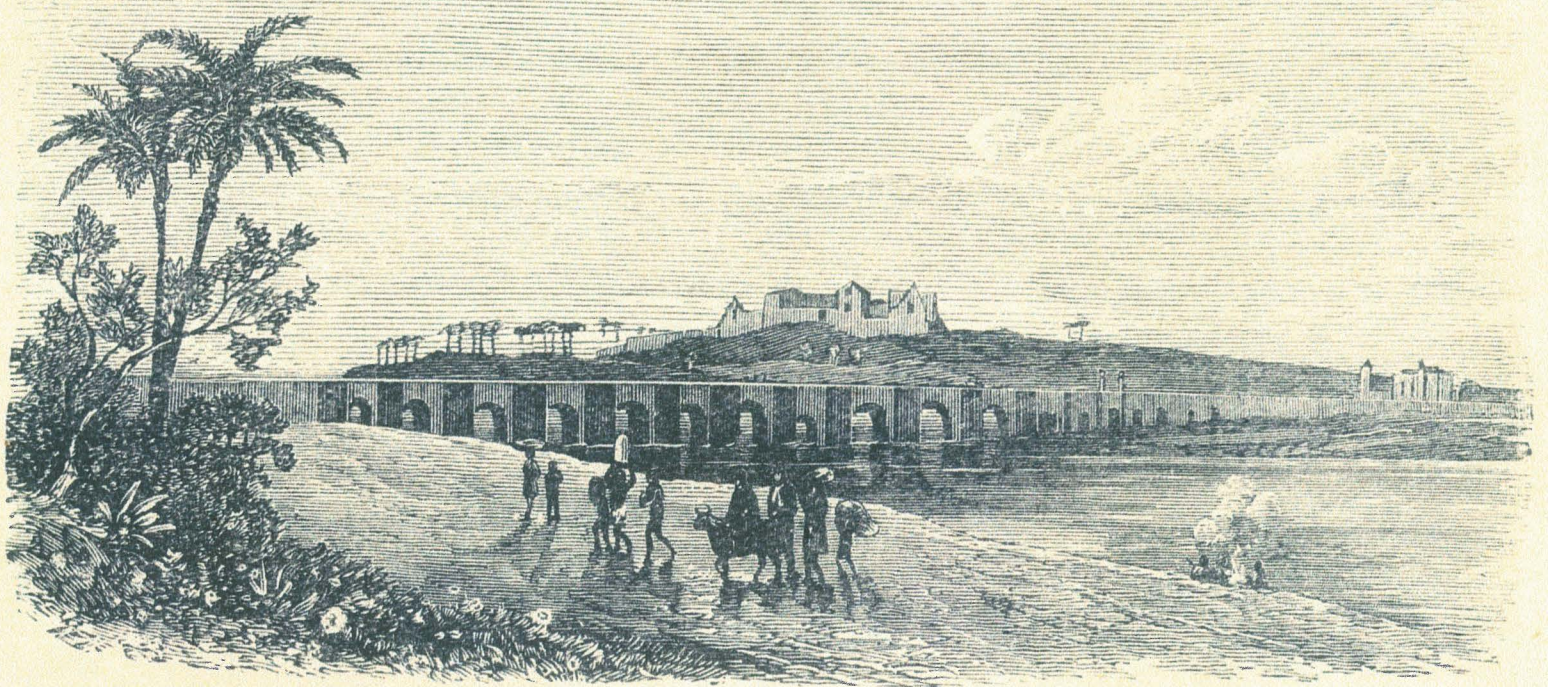
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Hellenistic India - coin of Kaniška, c. 100 AD
St. Thomas radiant below Lady Perfectone & wisdom

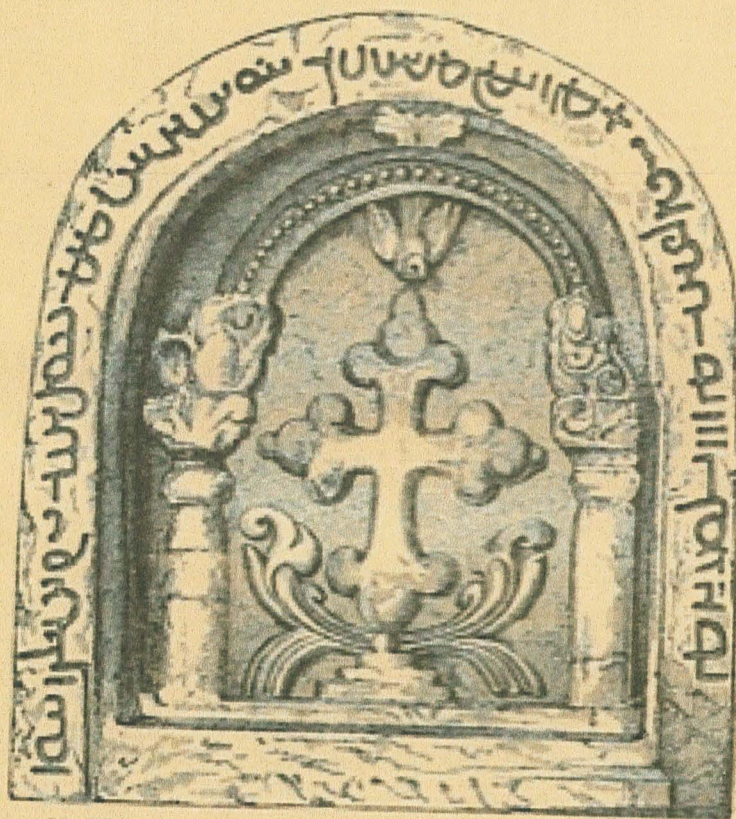


The Little Mount of St. Thomas, near Madras.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DISCOURSING OF THE PLACE WHERE LIETH THE BODY OF ST. THOMAS
THE APOSTLE; AND OF THE MIRACLES THEREOF.

THE Body of Messer St. Thomas the Apostle lies in this province of Maabar at a certain little town having no great population - 'tis a place where few traders go,

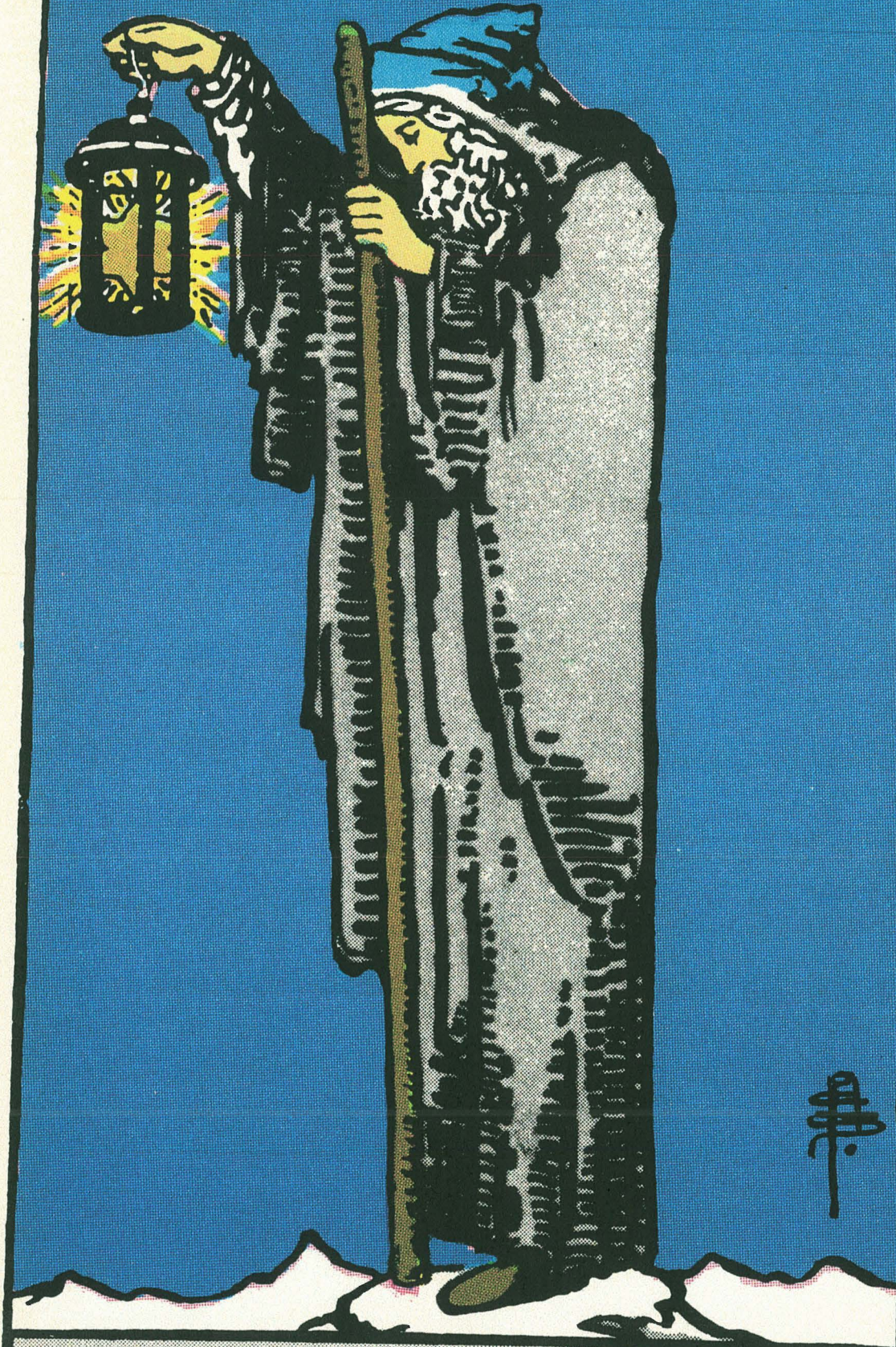


Ancient Cross with Pehlevi Inscription on St. Thomas's Mount, near Madras. (From Photograph.)

because there is very little merchandize to be got there, and it is a place not very accessible.¹ Both Christians and Saracens, however, greatly frequent it in pilgrimage. For the Saracens also do hold the Saint in great reverence, and say that he was one of their own Saracens and a great prophet, giving him the title of *Avarjan*, which is as much as to say "Holy Man."² The



IX



offic

THE HERMIT.



The Oldest Prajnaparamita

By EDWARD CONZE

The more profound teachings of Mahayana Buddhism cannot be understood without a thorough acquaintance with the *Prajñāpāramitā* Suttas. A few of the shorter ones have so far been published in English. The remainder, and particularly the large text, which alone exhibits the doctrine in its full majesty, is unlikely to see the light of day during this generation, which is quite unprepared for its message. In my desire to perpetuate this literature, as far as it lies in my power, I am therefore constrained to concentrate on those documents which occupy a minimum of space. For seven whole years I have been waiting for the Asiatic Society of Bengal to finish printing the English translation of the "Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines", which is the first in time of all the prose works on *Prajñāpāramitā*. But older, and going perhaps back to 100 B.C., is the verse version of this work, which has been transmitted to us under the title of "Verses on the Accumulation of Precious Qualities". The first two chapters of that book constitute, I think, the oldest *Prajñāpāramitā* text we possess at present. This article gives a literal, though more or less rhythmic, translation. A few difficult terms are explained in the Notes at the end. A more detailed explanation of these verses is not called for. For their force they rely not so much on laborious reasoning, as on direct spiritual intuition. Where that is keen, sharp and penetrating, no difficulties should arise.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY ADMONITION

1. Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect, and of faith ! Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints ! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas, Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended !

THE SOURCE OF SUBHUTI'S AUTHORITY.

2. The rivers all in this Roseapple Island*, Which cause the flowers to grow, the fruits, the herbs and the trees, They all derive from the might of the King of the Nagas, From the Dragon residing in Lake Nopatapita*, his magical power.
3. Just so, whatever dharms the Jina's disciples* establish, Whatever they teach, whatever adroitly explain— Concerning the work of the holy which leads to the fulness of bliss, And also the fruit of this work—it is the Tathagata's doing.
4. For whatever the Jina* has taught, the Guide to the Dharma, His pupils, if genuine, have well been trained in it, From direct experience, derived from their training, they teach it, Their teaching stems but from the might of the Buddhas, and not their own power.

THE BASIC TEACHINGS.

5. No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection, No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either. When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious, A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone's wisdom.
6. In form, in feeling, will, perception and awareness*, Nowhere in them they find a place to rest on. Without a home they wander, dharmas never hold them, Nor do they grasp at them—the Jina's Bodhi* they are bound to gain.
7. The Wanderer Srenika in his gnosis of the truth* Could find no basis, though the skandhas had not been undone. Just so the Bodhisattva, when he comprehends the Dharma as he should, Does not retire into Blessed Rest. In wisdom then he dwells.
8. What is this wisdom, whose and whence, he queries, And then he finds that all these dharmas are entirely empty. Uncowed and fearless in the face of that discovery Not far from Bodhi is that Bodhi-being then.
9. To course* in the skandhas, in form, in feeling, in perception, Will and so on, and fail to consider them wisely ; Or to imagine these skandhas as being empty ; Means to course in the sign*, the track of non-production ignored.
10. But when he does not course in form, in feeling, or perception, In will or consciousness, but wanders without home, Remaining unaware of coursing firm in wisdom, His thoughts on non-production—then the best of all the calming trances cleaves to him.
11. Through that the Bodhisattva now dwells tranquil in himself, His future Buddhahood assured by antecedent Buddhas. Whether absorbed in trance, or whether outside it, he minds not.
12. Coursing thus he courses in the wisdom of the Sugatas*, And yet he does not apprehend the dharmas in which he courses, This coursing he wisely knows as a no-coursing, That is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.
13. What exists not, that non-existent the foolish imagine ; Non-existence as well as existence they fashion. As dharmic facts existence and non-existence are both not real. A Bodhisattva goes forth* when wisely he knows this.
14. If he knows the five skandhas as like an illusion, But makes not illusion one thing, and the skandhas another ; If, freed from the notion of multiple things, he courses in peace— Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.
15. Those with good teachers as well as deep insight, Cannot be frightened on hearing the Mother's* deep tenets, But those with bad teachers, who can be misled by others, Are ruined thereby, as an unbaked pot when in contact with moisture.

THREE KEY TERMS DEFINED.

16. What is the reason why we speak of "Bodhisattvas" ? Desirous to extinguish all attachment, and to cut it off, True non-attachment, or the Bodhi of the Jinas, is their future lot.

"Beings who strive for Bodhi" are they therefore called.

17. What is the reason why "great beings" are so called? They rise to the highest place above a great number of people; And of a great number of people they cut off mistaken views. That is why we come to speak of them as "great beings".

18. Great as a giver, as a thinker, as a power, He mounts upon the vessel* of the Supreme Jinas.

Armed with the great armour he'll subdue Mara the artful. These are the reasons why "great beings" are so called.

19. This gnosis shows him all beings as like an illusion, Resembling a great crowd of people, conjured up at the cross roads, By a magician, who then cuts off many thousands of heads: He knows this whole living world as a mock show, and yet remains without fear.

20. Form, perception, feeling, will and awareness Are ununited, never bound, cannot be freed.

Unconquered in his thought he marches on to his Bodhi, That for the highest of men is the best of all armours.

21. What then again is "the vessel that leads to the Bodhi"? Mounted upon it one guides to Nirvana all beings.

Great is that vessel, immense, vast like the vastness of space. Those who travel upon it are carried to safety, delight and ease.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL NATURE OF BODHISATTVAS.

22. Thus transcending the world, he eludes our apprehensions*,

"He goes to Nirvana", but no one can say where he went to, A fire's extinguished, but where, do we ask, has it gone to?*

Likewise, how can we find him who has found the Rest of the Blessed? 23. The Bodhisattva's past, his future and his present must elude us, Time's three dimensions nowhere touch him.

Quite pure he is, free from conditions, unimpeded.

That is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

24. Wise Bodhisattvas, coursing thus, reflect on non-production, And yet, while doing so, engender in themselves the great compassion, Which is, however, free from any notion of a being.

Thereby they practise wisdom, the highest perfection.

25. But when the notion of suffering and beings leads him to think: "Suffering I shall remove, the weal of the world I shall work!"

Beings are then imagined, a self is imagined—

The practice of wisdom, the highest perfection, is lacking.

26. He wisely knows that all that lives is unproduced as he himself is; He knows that all that is no more exists than he or any being.

The unproduced and the produced are not distinguished, That is the practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

27. All words for things in use in this world must be left behind, All things produced and made must be transcended—

The deathless, the supreme, incomparable gnosis is then won.

That is the sense in which we speak of perfect wisdom.

28. When free from doubts the Bodhisattva carries on his practice, As skilled in wisdom he is known to dwell

All dharmas are not there, their essential original nature is empty, To comprehend that is the practice of wisdom, perfection supreme.

CHAPTER II.

WHERE BODHISATTVAS STAND.

1. He does not stand in form, perception or in feeling, In will or consciousness, in any skandha whatsoever.

In Dharma's true nature alone he is standing.

Then that is his practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

2. Change and no change, suffering and ease, the self and not-self, The lovely and the repulsive—just one Suchness in this Emptiness they are.

And so he takes not his stand on the fruit which he won, which is threefold—

That of an Arhat, a Single Buddha, a Buddha fully enlightened.

3. The Leader himself was not stationed in the realm which is free from conditions,

Nor in the things which are under conditions, but freely he wandered without a home:

Just so, without a support or a basis a Bodhisattva is standing.

A position devoid of a basis has that position been called by the Jina.

WHEREIN BODHISATTVAS TRAIN.

4. Those who wish to become the Sugata's Disciples, Or Pratyekabuddhas, or likewise, Kings of the Dharma—

Without resort to this Patience* they cannot reach their respective goals.

They move across, but their eyes are not on the other shore.

5. Those who teach dharma, and those who listen when it is taught; Those who have won the fruit of an Arhat, a Single Buddha, or a World-saviour;

And the Nirvana obtained by the wise and the learned—

Mere illusions, mere dreams—so has the Tathagata taught us.

6. Four kinds of persons are not alarmed by this teaching:

Sons of the Jina skilled in the truths: sants unable to turn back*;

Arhats free from defilements and taints, and rid of their doubts;

Those whom good teachers mature are reckoned the fourth kind.

7. Coursing thus, the wise and learned Bodhisattva, Trains not for Arhatship, nor on the level of Pratyekabuddhas.

In the Buddha-dharma alone he trains for the sake of all-knowledge. No training is his training, and no one is trained in this training.

8. Increase or decrease of forms is not the aim of this training, Nor does he set out to acquire various dharmas.

All-knowledge alone he can hope to acquire by this training.

To that he goes forth when he trains in this training, and delights in its virtues.

THE FACTS OF EXISTENCE.

9. Forms are not wisdom, nor is wisdom found in form, In consciousness, perceptions, feeling, or in will.

They are not wisdom, and no wisdom is in them.

Like space it is, without a break or crack.

10. Of all objective supports the essential original nature is boundless; Of beings likewise the essential original nature is boundless;

As the essential original nature of space has no limits, just so the wisdom of the World-knowers is boundless.

11. "Perceptions"—mere words, so the Leaders have told us; Perceptions forsaken and gone, and the door is open to the Beyond. Those who succeed in ridding themselves of perceptions.

12. If for aeons countless as the sands of the Ganges The Leader would continue to pronounce this word "being": Still, pure from the very start*, no being could ever result from his speaking.

That is the practice of wisdom, the highest perfection.

CONCLUSION.

13. And so the Jina concludes his preaching, and finally tells us: "When all I said and did at last agreed with perfect wisdom, Then this prediction I received from Him who went before me* : 'Fully enlightened, at a future time thou shalt be a Buddha !' "

NOTES

Chapter I, v. 2. "Roseapple Island". *Jambhā-dvīpa*, the Buddhist name for the Indian subcontinent.

"The Dragon residing in Lake Nopatapta". According to Indian mythology rain is the work of Nagas, i.e. Serpents or Dragons, who live in lakes, etc. *Nopatapta* is the Prakrit form, used in this text, of the Sanskrit word *Anantapta*, which means "cool", and refers to the famous lake Manasarowara in the Himalaya.

v. 3. "The Jina's disciples". The *Pratyābhāramiā* Sūtras are in the form of dialogues between the Lord Buddha and his Disciples (*śrāvaka*), most frequently Subhūti. This raises the problem of how as non-Bodhisattvas these Disciples can speak with authority on the subject of Perfect Wisdom.

v. 4. "Jina", the "Victorious One"—a name of the Buddha. In the second line of this verse the Buddha is also called "The Great Bull", an epithet I have omitted in the translation.

v. 6. "Awareness", the fifth skandha, more usually "consciousness".—"Bodhi", Sanskrit for "enlightenment".

v. 7. Śreṇika Vatsagotra was a "Wanderer", i.e. a non-Buddhist ascetic, whose conversations with the Buddha form one section of the *Samyukhāgama* of the Sāvasthivādins. On one occasion (Samy, no. 106, pp. 31c-32) Śreṇika raised the question of the "true self", which he identified with the Tathagata. The Buddha told him that the Tathagata could not be found in the skandhas, outside the skandhas, or in the absence of the skandhas. In a supreme act of faith Śreṇika was willing to accept the Tathagata in spite of the fact that he could not be related to any of the skandhas.

The "Blessed Rest" means the Nirvana which excludes the world of suffering, and the Bodhisattva should not "retire into", should not "cleave to" it.

v. 9. "To course" means "to be attentive to", "to treat as real".—"Sign" is a technical term for the object of false perception. This difficult word has been explained in *The Middle Way*, xxxi, 1956 p. 113, and in my Rome edition of the *Vajracchedikā*, 1957, on pp. 106-107.

v. 12. "Su-gata", "Well-Gone", a name for the Buddha.

v. 13. "Goes forth", i.e. to Enlightenment.

v. 15. "The Mother's",—the Prajñāpāramitā is the "Mother of all the Buddhas".

v. 18. "Vessel",—more usually "vehicle".

v. 22. "Apprehensions" here means "attempts to apprehend him, to get hold of him".—The simile of the fire refers to *Sūtra Nipāda* (1074, 1076) :

"As flame flung on by force of wind Comes to its end, reaches what none Can sum ; the silent sage, released, From name-and-form, goes to the goal, Reaches the state that none can sum. When all conditions are removed, All ways of telling also are removed".

Chapter II, v. 2. "Change, etc." : This list refers to the four "perverted views", v. 4. "Patience"—here understood as an intellectual virtue, which enables us to accept without undue perturbation the fact that nothing at all exists in any true sense of the word.

v. 6. "Unable to turn back"—at one stage of their career the saints can no longer turn back on enlightenment, but are bound to proceed until they become Arhats, Pratyekabuddhas or Buddhas.

v. 12. "Pure" here means "empty".

v. 13. "Him who went before me". The Buddha Dipankara, Śākyamuni's 24th predecessor, who prophesied his future Buddhahood. For the full story see *The Middle Way*, xxxii, 1957, pp. 54-56.

Some of these verses sum up parts of the large *Pratyābhāramiā* which have been translated in my *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom*. I here give the numbers of my selections which correspond. Ch. I, v. 5=no. 53, 85, 72 ; v. 6=no. 60 ; v. 10=no. 74 ; v. 17=no. 12 ; v. 18=no. 87 ; v. 20=no. 67 ; v. 26=no. 65. Ch. II, vv. 1-3=no. 78, v. 5 cf. no. 70, vv. 5-6=no. 86.

The Summer School, 1958

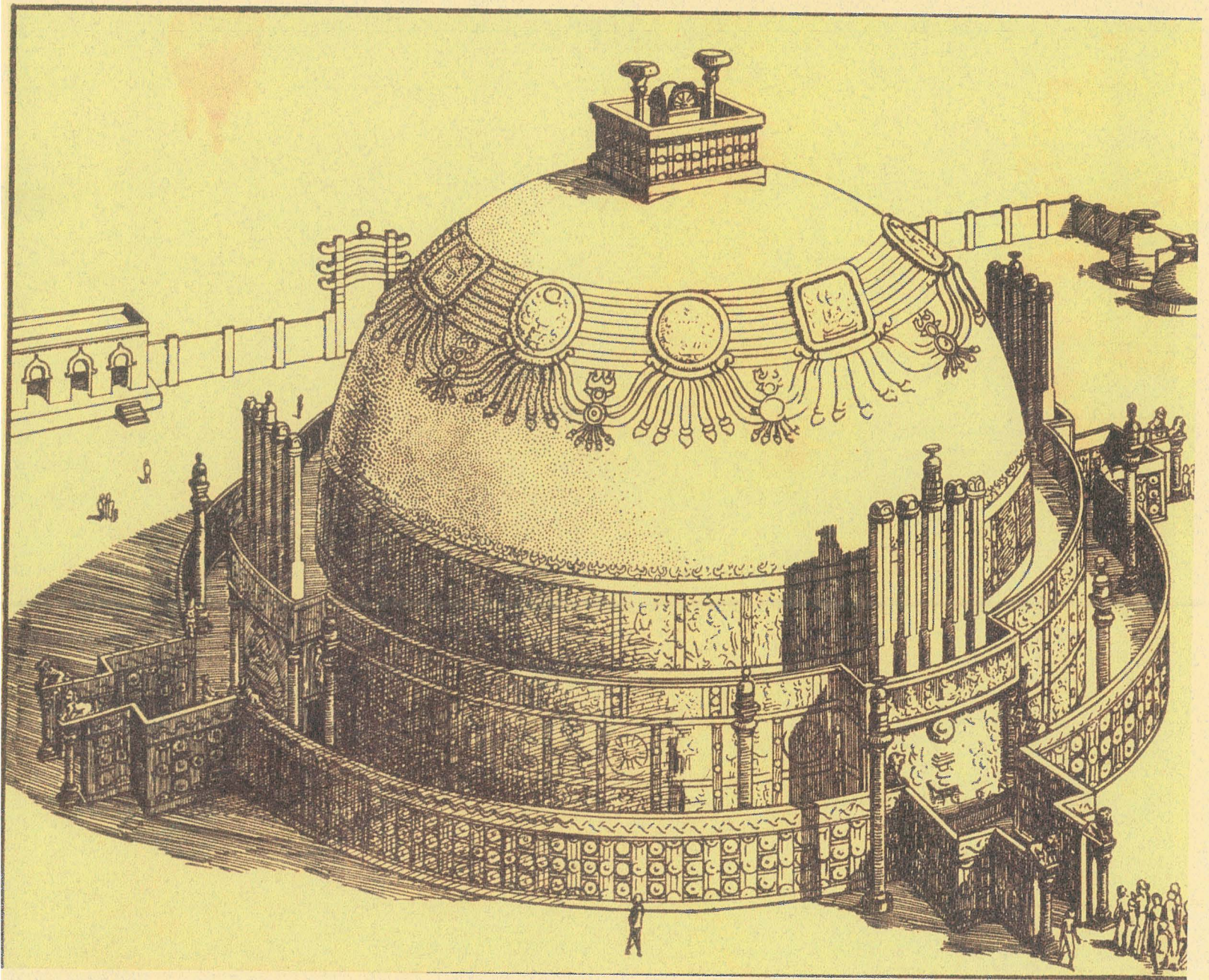
The Buddhist Summer School for 1958 will be held at High Leigh, Hoddlesdon, again this year. The Ven. Bhikkhu Paṇḍavaddho, whose classes were so successful last year, has consented to take the morning classes again. Also it is hoped that Dr. Edward Conze will be available to take classes in the Prajñāpāramitā, and be with us the whole week.

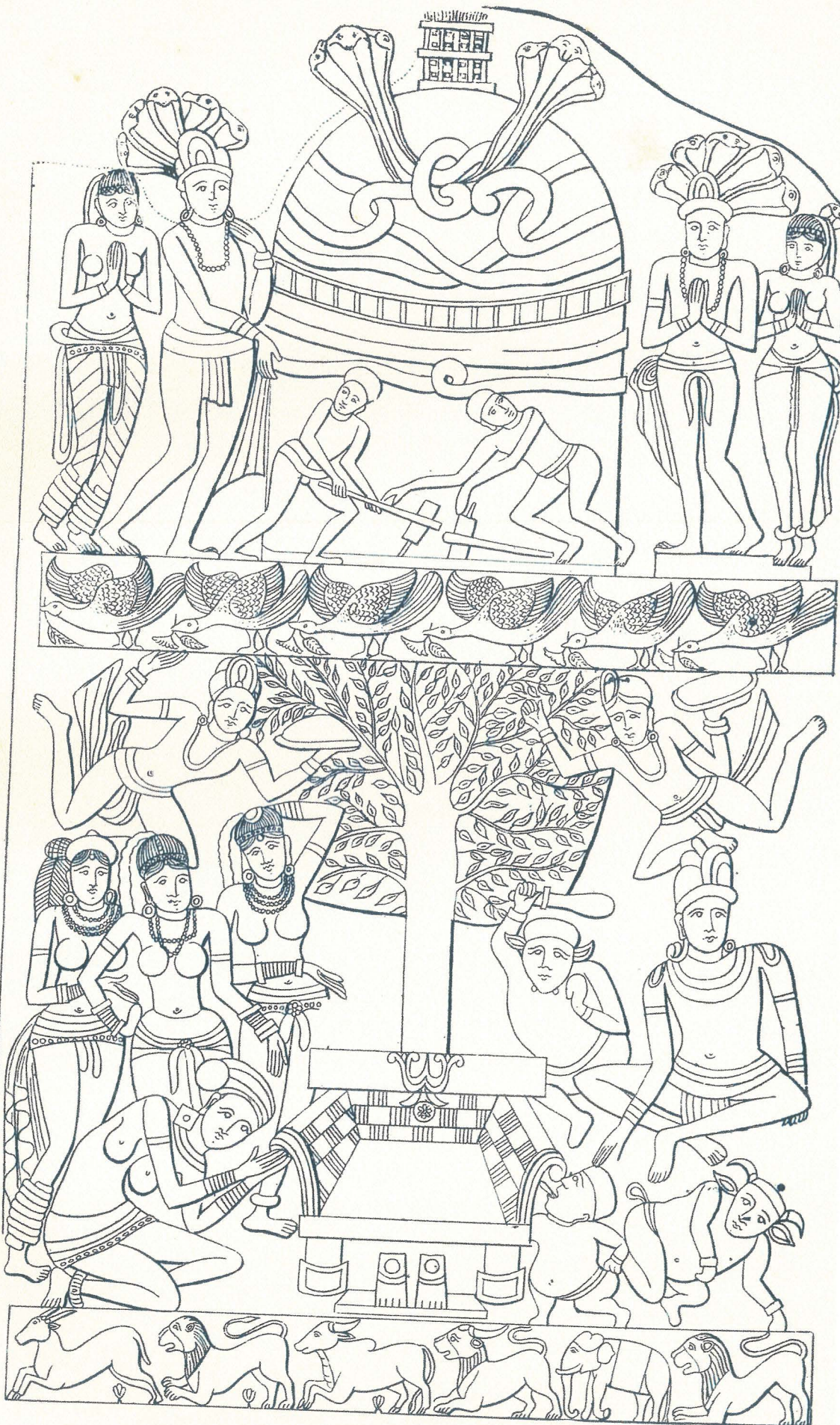
The evening lectures will include the President, Mr. Christmas Humphreys, and Mr. Phiroz Mehta, whose inspiring talk made a lasting impression on many last year.

We also hope that Dr. Jeanne Palmer, the Jungian psychologist, and Mr. Ronald Fussell will be with us again.

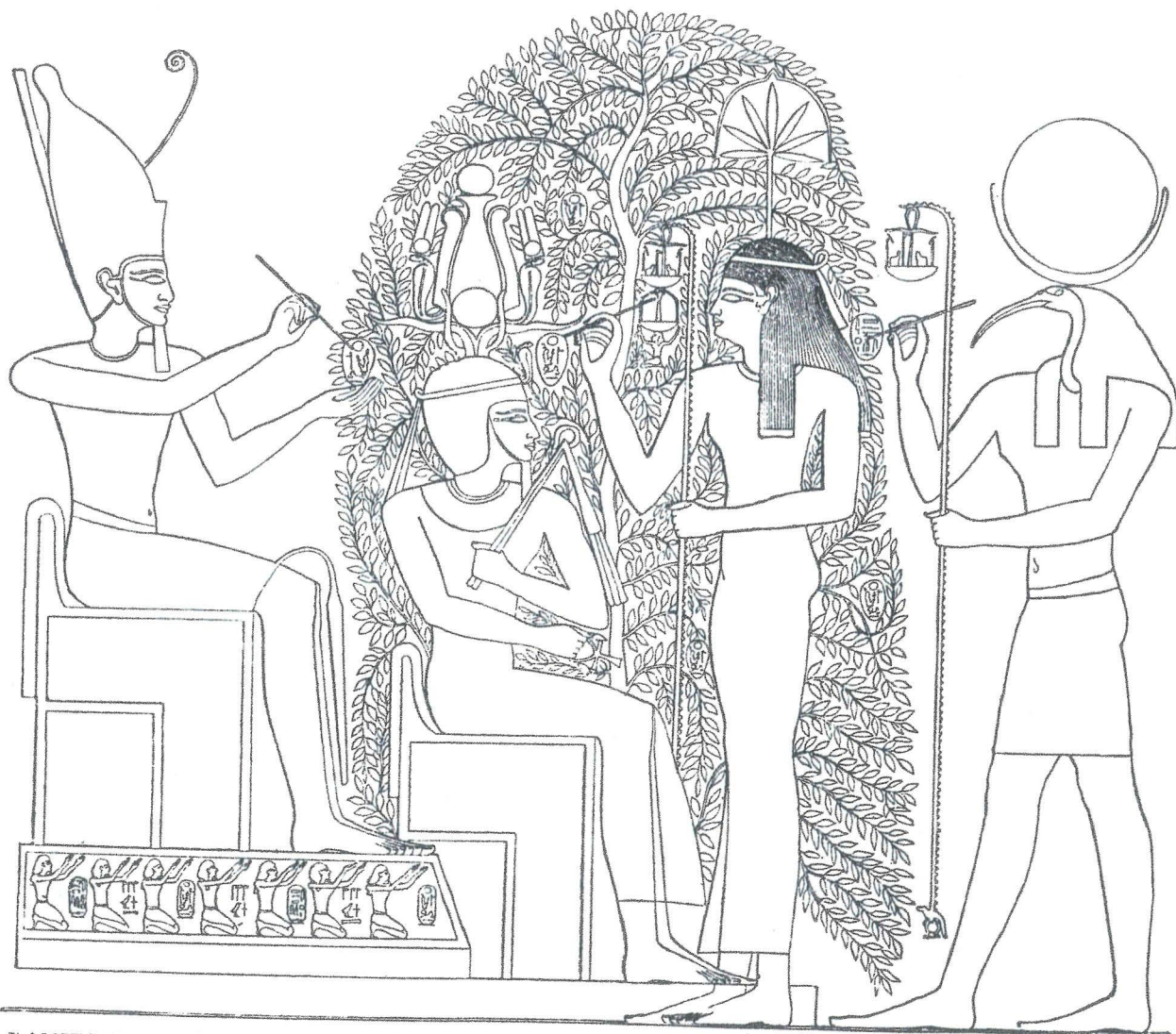
This year more time will be given to training and practice in meditation, as well as organised periods of silent meditation for those interested. Members of the Buddhist Society, or their friends who want to live Buddhism for a week unfettered by worldly cares are cordially invited to fill in the form in this issue of *The Middle Way* and post it with a deposit to : The Buddhist Society, 58 Eccleston Square, London, S.W.1, marked *Summer School*.







WORSHIP OF THE SILVER TREE-STEM.



RAMSES II. SEATED BEFORE THE SACRED TREE ON WHICH THE GODS ARE WRITING HIS NAME.
After L. D. iii. 169.

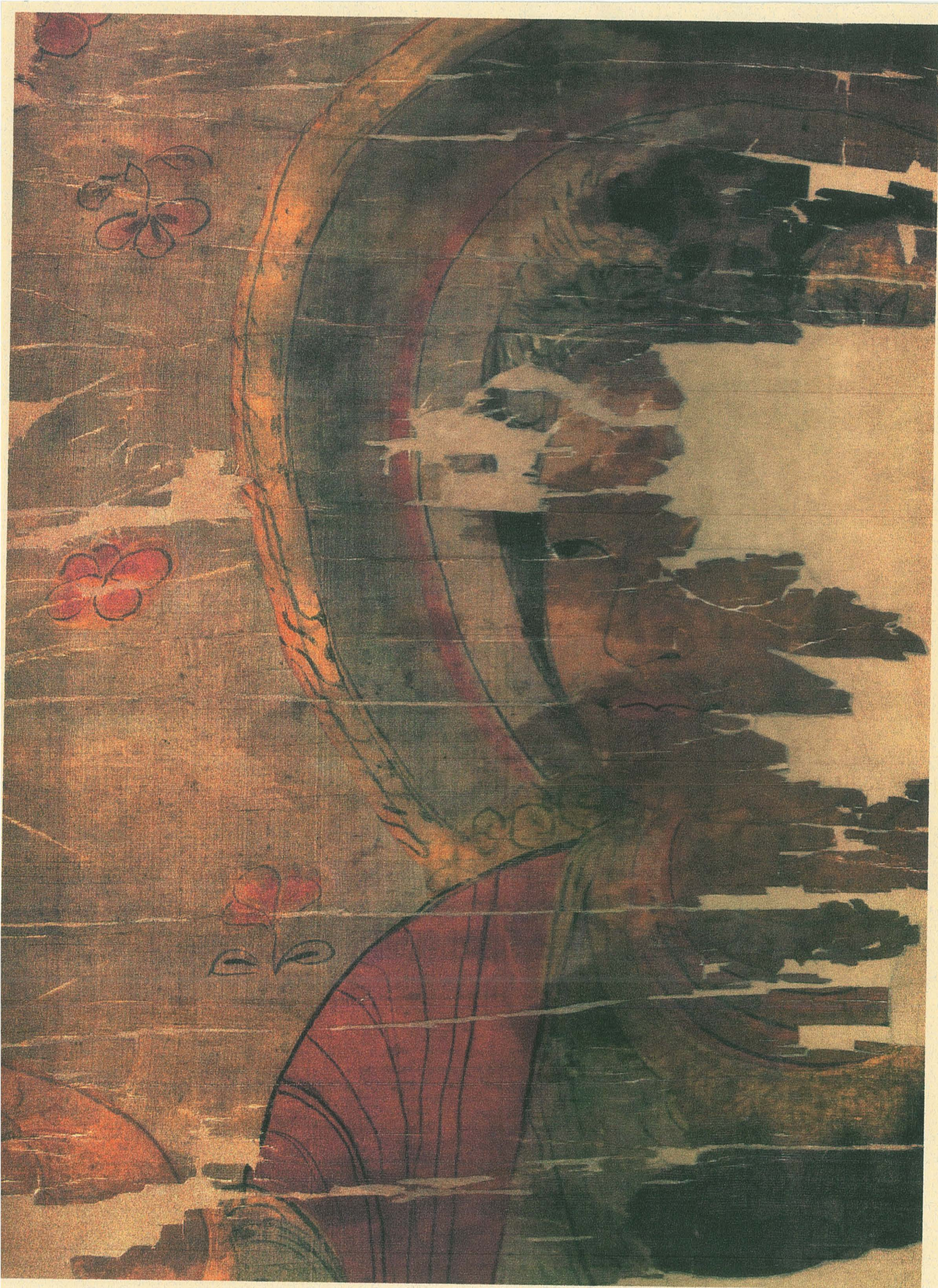




PYRAMID OF WOMEN.



THE CUP.





he seeks no attainment, it is just because attainment is quite impossible, that the Bodhisattva attains, or wins, Nirvana. And entrance into Nirvana changes him into a Buddha.

VII. FULL EMPTINESS IS THE BASIS ALSO OF BUDDHAHOOD
*tryadhva-vyavasthitāḥ sarva-buddhāḥ prajñāpāramitām-
 āśrītya-anuttarāṃ samyak-sambodhim abhisambuddhāḥ.*

⁴⁴All those who appear as Buddhas ⁴⁵in the three periods of time ⁴⁷fully awake to the ⁴⁸utmost, right and perfect enlightenment ⁴⁹because they have relied on the perfection of wisdom.

Not only the Bodhisattvas, but also all the Buddhas owe the attainment of their goal to the realization of the Full Emptiness of sections III to V. The Buddhas are countless, and appear in the different world-systems (see B. p. 50), and in the three periods of time, i.e. the past, present and future. In order to win enlightenment, they had to cast everything aside, and to rely only on the perfection of wisdom, who is their mother (SS nos. 101-4), and on the emptiness perceived in that wisdom. The English language can do no justice to this sentence. In Sanskrit the words translated as 'Buddhas', 'awake' and 'enlightenment' all go back to the same root *buddh* which in this Sutra forms the following five words: (1) *Buddhāḥ*, 'Buddhas' (no. 45), (2) *abhisambuddhāḥ*, 'have fully awoken' (no. 49), (3) *bodhi*, 'awakening' (no. 60), (4) *sambodhi*, 'perfect enlightenment' (no. 48), and (5) *bodhi-sattva*, 'Bodhisattva' (nos. 3, 38). Translated into English on the same pattern, these words would be, (1) 'the Enlightened Ones', (2) 'have been fully enlightened', (3) 'enlightenment', (4) 'perfect enlightenment', (5) 'enlightenment-being'. This sounds rather awkward, and still does no justice to the fact that the root *buddh* combines a number of ideas which in no other language seem to coincide in one word. In English it may have the following five more or less distinct meanings: (a) *To awake*, i.e. to wake oneself up, to awaken others, to be awake or wakenful. As such it is opposed to being asleep, in the slumber of delusion, from which the enlightened awakens as from a dream. (b) *To recognize* as, to become aware of, acquainted with, to notice, give heed to—and so a Buddha is one who has recognized the evils of the defile-

ments and has his eyes opened to a higher life. (c) *To know*, to understand. The Buddhas, free from all ignorance, know all the dharmas, they have completely understood all the four Truths, and the four Paths (or ways of spiritual development). (d) *To be enlightened*, to enlighten (as in illumination). The opposite here is darkness, and the corresponding blindness of ignorance. (e) *To fathom*, a depth, or to penetrate, i.e. the obstructions, or coverings, discussed at no. 41.

It is rather striking that in this Sutra about one-fourth of the words with verbal roots are derived from roots expressing intellectual activity.

Jñā is at the basis of (1) *jñānam*, 'cognition' (no. 35), (2) *jñā-tavyam*, 'one should know' (no. 50), (3) *praj-jñā*, 'wisdom', (4) *saṃ-jñā*, 'perception' (16, 24), and (5) *vi-jñā-nam*, 'consciousness' (16, 24, 29). More literally, translated on the same pattern, the five words would be, (1) 'cognition' (the etymological equivalent), (2) 'one should cognize', (3) 'higher cognition', (4) 'co-cognition', (5) 'dis-cognition'. Other such roots are *vid* (at 16, 24; 30, 31; 53), *man* (at 25, 29, 52 sq.), and *cī* (at 40, 41). This Sutra is not meant for the stupid, the emotional, or the uninformed. Other means will assure their salvation. Everything that is at all worth knowing is contained in the *Hṛdaya*. But it can be found there only if spiritual insight is married to intellectual ability, and coupled with a delight in the use of the intellect. This Sutra, it is true, points to something that lies far beyond the intellect. But the way to get to That is to follow the intellect as far as it will take you. And the dialectical logic of this Sutra enables the intellect, working through language, to carry the understanding a stage further than the conceptual thinking based on ordinary logic can do.

Tradition assumed that three kinds of persons could win enlightenment, i.e. Arhats, Pratyekabuddhas and Buddhas. The enlightenment of a Buddha is more complete than that of the others, and 'omniscience' is its distinguishing feature. No. 48 gives the technical term reserved for it. It is **utmost** because no one can go higher on the way of self-abandonment. It is **right** because it is not 'wrong' (see no. 57). It is **perfect** in the sense of being complete.

Here ends the metaphysical part, and with it the main body

of the Sūtra. I must now redeem my promise to show how it constitutes a re-statement of the four holy Truths. The first sermon of the Buddha, which at Benares proclaimed the four holy Truths, is called the 'Sūtra by which the Wheel of Dharma has been set rolling' (*dharmacakra-pravartana-sūtra*). The *Prajñāpāramitā* Scriptures, of which the *Hṛdaya* is an abbreviation, maintain that this was only a provisional, relatively primitive, teaching. The *Prajñāpāramitā* doctrine represents the 'second turning of the Wheel of the Dharma'.¹ It brings out the deeper meaning of the original doctrine, which is re-interpreted in the light of the dominant idea of Emptiness. This must involve also the four holy Truths, and the Heart Sūtra is designed as the *dharmacakra-pravartana-sūtra* of the new dispensation. Some years ago I gave a detailed proof of this thesis in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1948, pp. 33-51), and I am now content to show how it works out for each one of the four Truths. Readers who do not know the Sermon of Benares by heart will do well to refresh their memory by looking up its exact formulation (e.g. *B* p. 43). Section II of the *Hṛdaya* corresponds to the first Truth, III to the second, IV and V to the third, and VI and VII to the fourth. As follows:

I. The traditional formula equated 'ill' with the 'five grasping skandhas'. In section II we heard that Avalokiteśvara, when he compassionately surveys the sufferings of beings, sees just the skandhas, and that these in their turn are emptiness. The fact of ill seems at first sight to presuppose the existence of suffering creatures. With increasing wisdom these 'beings' are seen as groups, or heaps, of skandhas. Finally, with perfect wisdom, the skandhas turn out to be Emptiness, and compassion proceeds with no object at all (see *BT* no. 168). In actual reality, the fact of ill cannot maintain itself against the fact of emptiness.

II. The traditional formula attributed the *origination* of ill to craving. This craving, the cause of ill, is bound up with the skandhas, and found in them. In section III these skandhas are pronounced to be identical with emptiness, and not separate from it. They have never left the original Void, and so in reality they have never originated.

III. The third Truth in its original form stated that the

¹ *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*, chapter IX, p. 203.

stopping of craving leads to the *stopping* of ill. In sections IV and V this is held to mean that the 'stopping' of which the Scriptures have spoken is really an 'emptiness' which is devoid of any dharma. In this emptiness there can be no stopping, because one cannot speak of something as stopped if it never existed, or came into being, or originated.

IV. The Sermon of Benares had enumerated the eight 'limbs', or constituents, of the *Pañc* which leads to the cessation of ill. In the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, interest has moved altogether away from them, and has shifted to the last stages of a Bodhisattva's career. Section VI deals with the achievements of the last three of the ten stages of a Bodhisattva, and Section VII with the stage of a Buddha.

These brief remarks must here suffice. The *Prajñāpāramitā* texts are so elusive to our understanding not only because they presuppose a high degree of disinterested spirituality, but also because they are full of hidden hints, allusions and indirect references to the pre-existing body of scriptures and traditions, which circulated in the memory of the Buddhist community at the time when they were composed. They are more often than not an echo of older sayings. Without the relation to them they lose most of their point. We at present must reconstruct laboriously what 1,500 years ago seemed a matter of course.

VIII. THE TEACHING BROUGHT WITHIN THE REACH OF THE COMPARATIVELY UNENLIGHTENED

Tasmā jñātavyam: prajñāpāramitā mahā-mantro mahā-vidyā-mantro 'nutṭara-mantro' samasama-mantraḥ, sarva-duḥkha-praśamanaḥ, satyam amithyatvāt. prajñāpāramitāyām ukto mantrah. tadyathā: gate gate pāragate pārasangate bodhi svāhā. iti prajñāpāramitā-hṛdayaṃ samāptam.

⁵⁰ Therefore one should know ⁵¹ the prajñāpāramitā ⁵² as the great spell, ⁵³ the spell of great knowledge, ⁵⁴ the utmost spell, ⁵⁵ the unequalled spell, ⁵⁶ allayer of all suffering, ⁵⁷ in truth—for what could go wrong? ⁵⁸ By the prajñāpāramitā has this spell been delivered. ⁵⁹ It runs like this: ⁶⁰ Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond,

O what an awakening, all-hail!—⁶¹This completes the Heart of perfect wisdom.

The explanation of the individual terms must here again, as in section V, be preceded by a survey of the progress of the argument. Four main subdivisions can be distinguished:

1. (a) Because you are potentially a Buddha yourself (this refers back to section VII), (b) and because Avalokiteśvara in his mercy would not allow you to perish or despair (this refers back to section II), (c) he will find a way to bridge the gap between your present state on the one hand, and the practice of transcendental wisdom, as outlined in nos. 10-49, on the other. (d) Avalokiteśvara, known traditionally as the 'bestower of spells' (*vidyā-dhīpati*), has therefore given us a wonder-working mantra in which the perfection of wisdom is condensed.
2. This mantra (a) has the traditional attributes of a Buddha (nos. 52-5; refer back to nos. 45-9), (b) is likened to Nirvana (nos. 56-7; refer back to no. 44), and (c) derives its power from transcendental wisdom (no. 58).
3. It either helps you to (a) identify yourself with transcendental wisdom as a force latent in, and yet external to you (*gate* as a feminine vocative), or (b) to define emptiness in relation to your present state by indicating the steps which you must take to get to it (*gate* as a masculine or feminine locative) (no. 60).
4. Here, in this Sutra, or mantra, you have the very heart of transcendental wisdom (no. 61).

The meaning of **therefore** has been supplied in 1 (a)-(d) above. A **spell** (*mantra*) is a magical incantation, or formula. Such a mantra, it must be admitted, is certainly more tangible than pure Emptiness, and more eloquent than the speechlessness of the highest possible enlightenment. The **Prajñāpāramitā**, in other contexts a book, a deity, an image, or a spiritual perfection, is here envisaged as a spell.

Mantras are incantations which effect wonders when uttered. According to the *Sādhnamāṇā* there is nothing that they cannot achieve, if applied according to the rules. But the rules are, of course, hard to come by. Some mantras give miraculous protection in adversity, and my great predecessor Hsüan-tsang used the *Hṛdaya* in this manner when in the Gobi desert 'he

encountered all sorts of demon shapes and strange goblins'. 'When he recited this Sutra, at the sound of the words they all disappeared in a moment. Whenever he was in danger, it was to this alone that he trusted for his safety and deliverance'.



Generally, however, personal safety is entrusted to other mantras. The wondrous effect of the *Hṛdaya* mantra lies in that it opens the mind to enlightenment.

It is, on the other hand, not the fault of mantras that in this present age they run up against the general incomprehension of magical forces which the vulgarization of science has fostered among town-dwellers. A mantra is efficacious because it enshrines a spiritual principle, or, in mythological terms, because it establishes a relation between its user and a deity, in this case the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Transcendental wisdom has her being in a mantra, and can thus be apprehended by its repetition and manifold practice. According to the magical theory, mantras should be sung, chanted, spoken, murmured, mumbled or whispered. The exact sound-value of each Sanskrit syllable is

then important and must carefully be attended to.¹ Alternatively, intent gazing (*vipaśyanā*) on its written letters, placed on an eight-petalled lotus, is recommended (see the Illustration).² Whichever method may be adopted, the constant presence of the mantra in the mind should be aimed at. As we read in the *Yoga Sūtras* (II 44): 'From repetition of the mantra comes communion with the intended deity'. The *Hṛdaya* mantra is a means of courting or wooing the Perfection of Wisdom. As it is said in the *Wisdom of Solomon* (VI 12): 'Wisdom is glorious and never fadeth away. Yes, she is easily seen of them that love her, and found of such as seek her.'

Knowledge, *vidyā*, has here the meaning of magical 'lore'. The word connects the mantra with the Buddha, for 'perfect in knowledge and conduct' is the fourth of the ten standard epithets of a Buddha (see *BM* p. 46). *Uṣṇas* means 'supreme', it is the sixth of the Buddha's epithets, and we met it before (at no. 48) as one of the distinctive features of the Buddha's enlightenment. **Unequalled**, more literally 'equal to the unequalled', is also a traditional attribute of the Buddhas. It means 'incomparable', or it is that which makes one equal that which cannot be equalled.

In nos. 56-7 the mantra is then equated with Nirvana, which is traditionally known as the **allayer of all suffering**. In addition this spell is contrasted with other mantras, which are normally adapted to removing a specific evil, illness, or threat. This spell on the other hand, because it aims at enlightenment itself, is designed to remove *all* evil. And is it not true that complete renunciation must automatically get rid of all ills? **In truth**—the word *satyam* comes from the root *as* 'to be',

¹ The reader should remember that in Sanskrit the vowel *e* is always long. The short *a* is pronounced as in *but*, the long *a* as in *father*, *ask*, etc., the *e* as in *mate*, *lane*, etc. The metrical scheme of the mantra is as follows: *gātē gātē pāragātē pārasāmgātē bōdhi svāhā*.

² In the centre, to correspond to the seed vessel, I have placed the syllable *Oṃ*. Sometimes, as in *Oṃ namo padme hūṃ*, the *oṃ* is an essential part of the mantra. Here, however, it is an optional and extraneous addition, and only a minority of the manuscripts, and generally the later ones, contain it. The Brahmīns regard the *Oṃ* as the source of all the other letters, and *Bhagavadgītā* xvii 24 informs us that 'acts of sacrifice, etc., enjoined in the scriptures, are always begun with an *Oṃ* by the students of Brahma'.

and corresponds etymologically to 'sooth' in English. It can here be either an adverb or a noun. In the translation I have taken it as an adverb, which refers back to no. 56, and asserts that this mantra 'indeed truly' removes all ill, because it is not wrongness, i.e. without any trace whatsoever of division. Alternatively, we may understand that it, i.e. the mantra, is 'the Truth'. 'Truth' is a synonym for Nirvana, and *Buddha-ghoṣa* (*VM* 497) tells us that the saying of *Sūttamipāṭa* 884, 'For one single is the Truth, and there is no second', refers to Nirvana, which exists in the ultimate sense.

'Truth' should then here be understood as the One in contrast to the manifold variety of error, as that which is just so, just itself, Suchness. It is taken as just Truth, Truth by itself, Truth absolute, nothing but the Truth, simple and really existing Truth, by contrast to the falsehood and illusion of imaginary duplicity, duality, multiplicity. Its essence is agreement, sameness, identity—not agreement of a proposition with a thing, or of a thing with the conception we may form of it, but agreement of itself alone with Itself alone, of emptiness, of nothing in particular, with itself. To miss that is 'wrongness'.

Nirvana, and this mantra, is the Truth—*a-miḥyavāṇā*, literally, 'because there is no wrongness' in it. The word comes from the root *miḥ*, which recurs in English in the prefix *mis-*, and in the verb 'to miss', and carries with it the suggestion of duality and conflict. Where the Absolute is alone, unassociated, aloof from all, **what could go wrong**, in the absence of all duality and thereby of all possibility of deviating from the Truth? Wrong and perverted views, the supreme fault, consist in straying away from supreme Oneness, which as the Truth is also the Way.

By the Prajñāpāramitā has this spell been delivered. 'Prajñāpāramitā' is here Wisdom personified. Mantras are more than just well-sounding words cunningly arranged by ingenious persons. According to tradition they are gifts from higher beings, through which they communicate a part of their essential nature. You do not really know where you are with a spell before you know where it comes from, and who gave it its power. The word *ukta* more literally would mean, 'spoken,

uttered, taught, or proclaimed', but the meaning of the phrase cannot be that this spell has been proclaimed in the *Prajñāpāramitā* books. Nowhere do the large *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* contain this particular, or any other, mantra.

Gone—the ending *-e* in *gate*, etc., can, grammatically, have two meanings: (1) It may denote a feminine vocative—'O, she (i.e. the Prajñāpāramitā), who is gone, etc.' The mantra would then resume the initial invocation (no. 1). Or, (2) it may be a masculine or feminine locative—'In him, or, in her, who is gone, etc., there is enlightenment'. Then it states, as I have shown in some detail in SS pp. 22-4, what must be done to get to enlightenment. The locative can in Sanskrit be used as an absolute case, and the meaning then would be—'he is gone', or, 'she is gone', etc. The mantra therefore represents a dialogue with an invisible force, or with oneself.

Beyond, *pāra*, occurs, as we saw at no. 5, in the very name of the *prajñā-pāram-itā*. As a technical term it is opposed to a Not-Beyond, which comprises: (1) suffering, (2) its basis, i.e. the round of births, (3) the place where suffering takes place, i.e. the skandhas, and (4) its cause, i.e. craving and other bad habits. The unwholesome states are compared to a flood, or to a river in full spate. We are on the hither shore, beset with fears and dangers. Security can be found only on the other shore, beyond the flood, which has to be crossed by means of the ship, or raft, of the Dharma.

Awakening, equals enlightenment (of no. 48), wisdom, emptiness and Nirvana (no. 44).

All hail, *svāhā*, only imperfectly reproduced by 'all hail', is a term of blessing used traditionally by the Brahmin priests in their ritual. It is an ecstatic shout of joy, expressive of a feeling of complete release, just as *Io triumphe* was in Latin, *Hailly* in Mexican, or *Axie tauré* in Dionysian ritual. In the Tantric system *svāhā* is reserved for mantras addressed to feminine deities.

The six words of the mantra correspond to sections III to VIII respectively. This is quite obvious for *bodhi*, which takes

up the 'enlightenment' of section VII. After the two initial steps of sections III and IV we come to V at the *pāragate*, which is the traditional term for the plunge into the Unconditioned. In *pāra-sam-gate*, the *sam-* has the meaning of completeness, as with *sam-bodhi* in no. 48. Readers can work out the further details for themselves.

