

Foreword

Buddhism is the religious teaching of Śākyamuni Buddha, who lived in northern India nearly two and one half millennia ago. It was introduced to the world when Śākyamuni achieved supreme perfect enlightenment and first began to expound the nature of ultimate reality and the methods of religious practice through which it could be achieved. According to Buddhist teaching, all people intrinsically possess the same capacity as Śākyamuni to become Buddhas or "fully enlightened beings." It is my wish that everyone would embrace religious practice and become Buddhas. When the world becomes a world of Buddhas or bodhisattvas who aspire to become Buddhas, then for the first time our cherished hope for the achievement of human happiness and world peace will be realized.

Buddhism consists of the Buddha dharma and the Buddhist path. The Buddha dharma expresses the content and nature of the Buddha's enlightenment. We are all driven by our preoccupation with the narrow and fictitious self and thereby ignore the natural law of the interdependence of causes and conditions. For this we are always in conflict with others and the world around us and must endure a life of needless suffering. The Buddha dharma instructs us to rid ourselves of suffering and find the intrinsic joy of Buddhahood by abandoning our ignorant preoccupation with self and abiding in the realm where there is no self. The Buddhist path offers concrete guidance for cultivating body and mind in order to grasp ultimate reality and achieve freedom from the afflictions of the illusory self. Developing wisdom and awakening to the real is the Buddha dharma. Actualizing enlightenment within ourselves and living in accordance with reality is the Buddhist path.

The Great Calming and Contemplation (Mo-ho chih-kuan) was expounded by the Chinese meditation master Chih-i (538–597), the Grand Master of

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Mount T'ien-t'ai, and taken down by his disciple, master Kuan-ting (561–632) of Chang-an. It is a manual offering comprehensive instruction on how to perfect these twin aspects of the Buddhist teaching—the Buddha dharma and the Buddhist path. Central to the text is the concept of “calming and contemplation, tranquility and luminosity” (*chih-kuan ming-ching*) as a religious practice.¹ This concept was esteemed by nearly every Buddhist movement in China. It was transmitted to Japan when Saichō or Dengyō Daishi (766–822) established the Tendai teachings on Mount Hiei, and from there it became the foundation of Japanese Buddhism.

The Buddha dharma and the Buddhist path represent the doctrinal theory and practice of Buddhism, respectively. When these two aspects of the teaching interpenetrate fully, all afflictions and karma will be extinguished and a knowledge of undefiled reality equal to that of the Buddhas themselves will stand revealed. The *Mo-ho chih-kuan* explains in theory and practice how, when Buddha nature is manifested and all things converge spontaneously in the one mind, there is the possibility of abiding in the realm of perfect freedom. It teaches that sitting in meditation (*zazen*) is the principal means for simultaneous cultivation of calming and contemplation, stillness and illumination. Of all the methods for acquiring samādhi or insight into ultimate reality, seated meditation is the easiest to practice. For this reason, in summarizing the various methods for cultivating samādhi mentioned in Buddhist scriptures, the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* makes a special point of demonstrating how the entire path to realization may be subsumed in the single practice of seated meditation. This instruction is an important and distinctive feature of the text.

Chih-i believed that the many different teachings expounded by the Buddha Śākyamuni and preserved in the Buddhist tradition were devised according to the principle of expedient means (*upāya*). That is to say, since the inconceivable reality of Buddhahood was far too sublime for most people to grasp directly, the Buddha devised provisional teachings to match the different capacities of his followers and lead them in graduated fashion to the singular goal of Buddhahood. With the preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* toward the end of his career, Śākyamuni brought all of these expedients together, elucidated their design, and revealed their ultimate end. Thus the *Lotus Sūtra* was preached as the consummate statement of Buddhist teaching that would serve as a guide to all people for ages to come.

For Chih-i, the *Lotus Sūtra* itself is the essence of Buddhism, the eternal teaching that informs all other Buddhist scriptures and promises tranquility of mind and hope for all people in all times. On the basis of this

1. Kuan-ting's preface to the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* opens with these four words. They have come to be regarded as the essence of the text and of T'ien-t'ai practice.

belief, he taught the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*, which he presented as a method of practice that encompasses the spiritual vision of this sūtra. In other words, the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* is the guide for putting the sublime doctrine of the *Lotus Sūtra* into practice—a guide to realizing the true spirit of the *Lotus*.

The marvelous doctrine of the *Lotus Sūtra* itself is spelled out in two other works of Chih-i: the *Fa-hua hsüan-i*, which discusses the profound import of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the *Fa-hua wen-chü*, which is a phrase-by-phrase explanation of the contents of the scripture. These three treatises—known as the “three great texts of T’ien-t’ai”—together explain the essence of the Buddha dharma and Buddhist path, Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist practice, as set forth in the *Lotus Sūtra* and as understood by Chih-i and the T’ien-t’ai tradition.

The *Mo-ho chih-kuan* is composed of ten chapters, which are organized according to a sequence of five basic topics: (1) arousing the thought of enlightenment, (2) practice, (3) manifesting the results, (4) rending the net (of confusion over the diversity of Buddhist teachings), and (5) returning to the great abode. Chapters 1 to 5—concerned with arousing the thought of enlightenment—offer an overview of the path of calming and contemplation, define the terminology of calming and contemplation, expound the conceptual essence of calming and contemplation, demonstrate how the totality of Buddhist practice is accomplished through the single method of calming and contemplation, and so on, all in order to give the practitioner a clear understanding of the technique of calming and contemplation (*chih-kuan*) and to awaken in him or her a keen determination to practice it. This is because one must arouse the thought of enlightenment properly in order to practice Buddhism effectively. The sixth and seventh chapters of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* deal with specific details of practice. Chapter 6 discusses the concrete preparations and preliminary conditions necessary for the successful practice of calming and contemplation. Chapter 7, which is by far the longest, describes in great detail the technique of calming and contemplation proper. Regrettably, Chih-i never delivered his lectures on the remaining three of the proposed ten chapters and five topics.

Calming and contemplation represents the most suitable method of discipline for achieving human perfection. “Calming” (*chih*) allows the mind to enter samādhi and dwell peacefully in its originally enlightened nature. “Contemplation” (*kuan*) involves using this mind that is dwelling peacefully in its original nature as a basis for contemplating the identity of all things with ultimate reality. This is the practice of simultaneously combining the “tranquility” of samādhi, which renders the mind selfless, with the “luminosity” of wisdom, which sees all things universally just as they are, displaying their true value. This basic concept has been taught

in scriptures and treatises for a long time, and the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* is esteemed because of the profound and detailed instruction it provides on its actual practice.

Altogether there are three different approaches to the practice of calming and contemplation: the gradual, the variable, and the perfect and sudden. In the gradual, which is designed for persons of lesser ability, one progresses in sequence from shallow techniques to deep. In the variable, one practices in varying ways, depending on one's particular capacity and the circumstances at hand. The perfect and sudden approach is the loftiest of the three, intended for persons of the keenest ability. In this practice one develops the virtues of samādhi by conforming directly to ultimate reality from the very beginning. All three approaches are teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism and will ultimately lead to Buddhahood, but the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* mentions the first two approaches only briefly and focuses mainly on the perfect and sudden calming and contemplation. Hence the text is called "The Great (*Mo-ho*) Calming and Contemplation." The heart of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan's* teaching on the perfect and sudden calming and contemplation is found in the discussion of the four forms of samādhi in the first chapter (the Synopsis, whose translation follows), the twenty-five preliminary expedients in the sixth chapter (on Preparatory Expedients), and the ten modes for practicing calming and contemplation in the seventh chapter (on Contemplation Proper). The text has been greatly revered for the comprehensive way in which these three sections systematize the essentials of Buddhist practice.

All people are endowed with a supreme, universal nobility. If, through truly understanding this nobility individuals realize that they are inalienable members of a single community, and if these self-awakened individuals truly create a community of self and others who help each other, then for the first time a balance of self and society will appear that will afford genuine peace and happiness for all. In the wake of scientific advancement, however, humans have lately displayed a tendency to make results the primary consideration. When this preoccupation with result turns into gross materialism, there is a danger that it will destroy the cooperative bond between self and others. It is important that the nobility of the self stands at the center of society. If we do not have a society in which self and others coexist satisfactorily, real peace and happiness will also not appear. We must grasp reality on the basis of the truth of interrelationship, of mutual dependence of causes and conditions, and create a society of selfless individuals who think and act out of spontaneous concern for and gratitude toward other people. Therefore, the time has come when people everywhere in the world need to understand the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* and actually practice it in order to perfect themselves.

Indeed, this English translation of the first chapter (or Synopsis) may turn out to be our best guide to human happiness. Having a deep interest in the translation of this crucial Chinese text, with all its profound meaning, I would like to conclude by paying my respects to the labor that went into it.

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