



THE WISDOM THAT REVEALS
THE REALM OF TRUTH

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THE REALM OF TRUTH

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EKAYANA ZEN PUBLICATIONS

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First edition © 2023 by Đinh Kim Nga (*Thích Tuệ Hải*)
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ISBN 9798862375862

First edition published by Ekayana Zen Publications, Irvine, California, USA.

Contact: ekayanazen@gmail.com

For digital information, please visit: www.ekayanazen.com

Paperback, hardcover and ebook are available on Amazon.com.

Printed in the United States of America

Book design: Pristine Nguyễn



Excerpted from a Teaching of
Zen Master Thich Tuệ Hải
on the
Flower Ornament Scripture
(Avataṃsaka Sūtra) – Lesson 488
at Long Hương Temple in 2022

Breathing in
perfect *merit* and *wisdom*

Breathing out
full of *love*



After cultivating and perfectly completing the virtue of Universal Goodness and All-Excellent Conduct, the practitioners' wisdom is like that of an enlightened being as there is no disparity between theirs and an enlightened being's perfect wisdom. So then, this person will then have the true knowing wisdom, directly seeing the reality of all phenomena. This *as-is reality*, true existence or truth body is unlike the realm of this earthly world. If we have not fully awakened to the cosmos of perfect absorption, then to us, there are still disparities in this phenomenal world. However, once we are fully immersed, we automatically exist as the very limitless enlightened wisdom. There is no other wisdom higher than this wisdom, but this supreme wisdom is not the same as the "*conscious mind's all-seeing and all-knowing awareness*" as we have thought for so long. The superlative wisdom is not the subjectifying mind that simply sees all and knows all per se!

For example, after we rest for a long period of time in the quiescent mental sphere of emptiness and purity, we become devoid of thoughts. Then, our mind is pervading everywhere, and this mind sees and knows everything everywhere. That's the way we have learned the Dharma, isn't it? Speaking about our mind in this way is simple enough for everyone to understand and to nod in approval, because when the mind is pure, everything can be seen

more clearly, more brilliantly and more transparently – the mind no longer makes any mistake with any outer, objectified appearances.

Since 1992, I composed the following verses:

*From now on, to leisurely live in happiness
Brightly clear and non-mistaken about each and every
condition
Non-mistaken, unconfused, unerring
Simply radiant, just like that – how is it possible to
fully express it!*

At that moment, I thought that my clear, lucid knowing would never err as far as any outer phenomenon is concerned, so I misled myself into believing that I have reached the superlative truth. “*From now on, to leisurely live in happiness*” means that when one reaches this truth, practice exertion is no longer required; everything becomes effortless, because at that moment, the mind was ever radiant, ever knowing, ever penetrating, and ever pervading. This mind was unerring because it could clearly see everything everywhere, whether near or far, large or small. I erroneously thought that I have reached ultimate fruition, because such experience of direct seeing and direct knowing was already too wonderful, and not so simple and easily accessible to all.

Then, slowly, I realized, “*Oh my! This is not it!*” It took me many years to finally realize that I put myself in a deadlock believing in this so-called truth for many years from 1987 until 1995 when I finally discovered that this was not “*it!*”

After I became Abbot of this temple, one time during a sealed retreat, some transformation took place and it caused me to look at everything from a very different perspective. It was because I suddenly heard a voice in space, and upon hearing the sound of it, the whole of space, too, is clearly resonating this very same sound in synchronicity. At that very moment, I began to fathom everything profoundly different, and I nearly decided to leave this physical body behind after so many years of facing ponderous challenges in life.

So then, at that precise momentness, it was actually *“this all-knowing giving birth to the cosmic totality true knowing.”* The very first thing that took place was that I was no longer being subjectified – the I, the self, was no longer the subject. Clearly, there was no longer an *“I”* who knew. First of all, the *“I”* who used to know pervadingly came to a stoppage. For example, right now, I know. Right now, this knowing-awareness is my self or my beingness. Right now, I hear, I see, I smell, I taste, I touch, and I know, and I call myself *“me”* or *“my self.”* However, the moment true knowing manifests is when the *“I”*, the *“me”* completely collapses and is self-exhausted.

In the past, I used to tell others of the following story. Once, a monk asked me: *“Now, if I want to attain the Dharma truth, what should I do and how should I prepare?”* The verbatim question was *“How to prepare?”* So I told him: *“To prepare is to not have anything left to prepare for, that is the best preparation!”* That was how I answered this monk.

To begin with, we think that we can relax, and let go of our body and mind all the way until there is no more to let go, and ultimately, we need to let go of that letting go, too. This is just an example. I have shown many people this practice, and there was a time when I tried to do the same. I tried to let go of my body and mind, and then let go of my letting go, so the sense of my beingness collapsed and I lost myself, or experience a sense of *no-self* for a moment. This experience happened because of the way I implemented the practice of letting go, and it means that I had to use effort to arrive at this. Sometimes it happened for five or ten minutes, sometimes for a whole day, and other times up to three or five days. This experience was quite usual for me at that time, although it was not meditative absorption. I can now assert that it was not meditative absorption; however, even though it was not, one can be completely without body and mind for many days. In 1993 it was like that for me while I was in retreat.

Until 1995, I finally came to terms with a totally different view than before. In the past, when I lost myself or when my "*individualistic self*" collapsed, so to speak, the "*I*" was still the one that knew everything and heard everything pervadingly. In general, in terms of sound, I simply had a direct knowing that extended as far as the limits of that sound; the same with form. Yet, strangely enough, while this conscious knowing still existed, I was also aware that there was no body and mind. This conscious knowing was not body and mind. We cannot underestimate this knowing, because it simply knows and is aware of everything pervasively without any mental mind generation. There was absolutely no movement of the conscious mind

at that time. There was absolutely no thought in that mental state in order to compare or contrast. This state was quite similar to the unborn state where there was no birth and no mind, because there was absolutely no mental arising at all. However, when it comes to directly knowing the realm of truth, it is very different, absolutely strikingly different, because there is no longer an “I” as a subject to see the truth, nor an “I” who sees the true nature of all *dharmas*.

For example, at a certain stage of meditative absorption, when we look at things, or hear sounds, we thoroughly and directly fathom the truth of form is formless and of sound soundless. If we remain in this absorption, we will definitely have a lucid direct knowing that even though this form appears, it is immovable, and this sound, too, even though it is heard, is equally immovable. Because everything rests in its own utterly immovable beingness, it prompts us to think that our seeing and hearing is Suchness, and that Suchness is this form and sound, and this form and sound are *pure Suchness*. However, once we arrive at this state, we will realize with clarity that it is still not yet the cosmic totality perfect truth. It is nevertheless not so simple to realize this miscue though, because, if everything, seemingly and presumably, is already *Suchness*, whether seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, then what else is there to further anticipate? However, this is not, definitely not yet, the realm of truth or true Dharma-body!

So what does it mean when True Wisdom, and not simply true knowing, appears? First of all, this True Wisdom is, in one aspect, similar to the same all-knowing as in the old

days. That is, prior to the dawning of True Wisdom, we also knew pervasively. We also penetrated the truth of all *dharmas'* genuine form as Voidness without any characteristic signs. That was the extensity of this conscious mind's all-knowing; it was simply "*self-knowing* or *mind's all-knowing*." This all-knowing also pervades, quiescent, empty-hollow, without any thought movement. So True Wisdom and conscious mind's all-knowing are quite similar in the sense that they are both clear, radiant, lucidly unimpeded, and both directly know form and sound synchronically.

In general, it means that all forms and sounds appear synchronically in singularity to the practitioner. However, that is not yet True Wisdom! Thus, once we reach here, we can assert that we can only arrive at this state progressively from one phase to another, and not instantaneously.

In 1995 when the noumenal state of perfect truth manifested, I, literally, lost myself once again – the slightest trace of self was utterly exhausted so that it now became the "*totality all-pervasive knowing*." Prior to that, I subjectively and pervadingly knew everything. It was my mind's all-knowing that knew everything pervadingly. Even so, there was still a subtle self somewhere somehow, although this subtle self was not conspicuously visible. By contrast, without any spiritual realization, every little thing involves this self, so everything turns out to be I see, I hear, I smell, I touch, I know and I understand.

When both the coarse and subtle 'I' completely exhaust, one is rendered utterly powerless. The "I" absolutely has no more impact on this body and mind! One's body and mind become just as another *dharma* or phenomenon that is being present in the state of perfect truth; it is no longer one's own body and mind per se. It is really truly just one single *dharma*! Apparently, the body can be sitting on the cushion, on this land, on this globe or in space, but it is exceedingly, indescribably minuscule. Compared to the globe, this body is excessively diminutive and it is simply a tiny, tiny dot on the surface of the globe. Once the totality all-pervasiveness manifests, it lucidly knows both the bright and the dark side of the globe synchronically, whereas now, the side facing the sun is bright and the other side is dark, which is something everyone is already aware of.

The point is that, although the body is still there, the old and familiar all-knowing conscious mind that we are priorly accustomed to has vanished. At that point, there is no longer an "I" that is aware of everything! For the time being, we can settle for a surface-level understanding of this idea. Nevertheless, at that moment of genuine experience, the old and the familiar have utterly exhausted, leaving no traces left. The body and mind are no longer in control, and are rendered completely powerless.

Thus, regarding this utterly unobstructed total clarity, we can use certain expressions to describe it so that one can see the difference between true mind-consciousness versus True Wisdom. Prior to the emergence of True Wisdom, one knows, sees, smells and tastes pervadingly. This all-

knowing pervades everything. Whereas now, although total clarity is still pervasive, it is no longer the conscious “*mind’s all-knowing*” but the ubiquitous “*totality all-pervasive knowing*.” Here, they are very distinct. At this point in one’s absorption, everywhere is the all-pervasive knowing, or the perfect truth, and the whole phenomenal sphere in its entirety is, indeed, nothing but the true totality of wisdom. At this point, the trees, the grass, the leaves, the flowers, the sky and earth, the moon, the stars, the universe, and those with form or without form are but this singular ubiquitous, omnipresent all-pervasive knowing – the *cosmic totality wakeful wisdom-awareness!*

So, later on, I composed another poem about how “*all-pervasive knowing simply exists as such*.”¹ It is purely omniscience in existence. There is nothing that can be dual in this existence, and no disparity can be found within the existence of the “*totality all-pervasive knowing*.” In actuality, there is no searching, and no one searching – absolutely no one here that we can find even if we want to. It is simply the totality all-pervasive knowing, and all forms are vividly revealed and manifest as *this totality of all-pervasiveness*. When I say that all forms are vividly revealed, it does not mean that all forms appear in front of us. No, not that kind of appearance or manifestation! It is not like how the chrysanthemum flowers on this table appear to us in front of us. It is not form that is appearing

¹ *The totality of all-pervasive knowing simply exists just as such.
The dharma realm is unimpededly penetrated, without coming or going.
Holding the infinitely vast cosmos in one’s hand,
One playfully and eternally roams through samsara and nirvana.*

in front of our eyes or sound appearing to our ears – it is not at all like that.

On the contrary, everything simply is being present and reveals itself nakedly and vividly. Everything is nakedly, vividly being present. Form no longer appears through our eye faculty and sound no longer appears through our sound faculty. At that moment, anything that has form, or is formless, in this entire spacious cosmos, manifests unpretentiously as its own original, pure true form. And what is extraordinary here? Here, the true form of all appearances is neither large or small. There is nothing large or small as we are seeing as of now. Right now, how can we possibly prove that this plumule is as big as that large leaf? We can never prove anything as such based on its weight and mass. Definitely not!

Yet, when the realm of truth is vividly present, we cannot possibly use any kind of logical reasoning to persuade someone that one appearance is smaller (or larger) than another, even if we want to. It is no longer large or small as we now see in space, but at that moment, everything exists pervasively concurrently. Everything is simply omnipresent in the present vastness. Everything is simply the totality of all-pervasiveness pervading the entirety of the cosmic expanse, and this expanse is not the same familiar dimensional space where we can see form appearing in front of our eyes.

The same is exactly true of sound. For example, let's talk about the tiny sound coming from an ant's legs when it walks. In the realm of truth, you can hear it, but not

necessarily at the location where it walks; on the contrary, it reverberates and pervades the entirety of the spacious expanse. Furthermore, if there is only one singular sound that pervades everywhere, then that is not so extraordinary. On the contrary, if an ant has eight legs and it walks with all of its eight legs, then eight sounds ubiquitously appear at the same time. The same is true of the second and the third ant, even for a billion ants. It means that the sound of a billion ants' eight legs can be vividly, simultaneously and directly known within this cosmic totality all-pervasive wisdom-awareness.

Not only the sounds of the ants' walking legs are directly known right where they are walking, but at that time, however many sounds in the entirety of this cosmos also become omnipresent, vividly present. Concurrently, no sound can intercept, block, impede or obscure another sound. Each and every sound is utterly clear and pervades the whole expanse.

Herein, I am aspired to talk about the cosmic true realm, the realm of true existence, so that we would know whether we have had enough cultivation to reach the true wakeful state or we merely rely on our elaborated conceptual understanding about our spiritual realization? Just remember that in this state, all true forms and true sounds, and everything else per se, are all-pervasive. For example, let's talk about the all-pervasiveness of true form. It would not be so overwhelming if this all-pervasiveness of true form is non-sentient and unaware. However, *any all-pervasive true form at that moment is also omniscient!* That is truly something inconceivable that we must know. For

example, at that moment, the sound of an ant's leg is also all-pervasive awareness and the same is exactly true for everything else throughout the whole cosmos. This is beyond belief, isn't it?

We can provisionally believe that sound is all-pervasive, can't we? However, if we now say that sound itself is also the all-pervasive knowing or the ubiquitous wakeful awareness, would you believe it, or not? Verily, at that moment, sound and the totality of all-pervasive knowing is no longer two! If you can accept this truth, then you can one day arrive at the realm of non-dual reality; if not, then it would be impossible. Only when the realm of perfect non-dual actuality vividly emerges, then all of what we have discussed thus far would take place.

It means that, at first, we completely exhaust the old familiarity, the ordinary, discriminative conscious awareness that there is an "I" existing somewhere. There is no longer any such thing as "*I am here, therefore, I am hearing, smelling, tasting, talking, and smiling,*" because when the true realm appears, the "I" has already, absolutely and completely vanished without leaving any trace. There is no more "I" anywhere in the entire existence!

It means that when we reach the state of perfect reality, everything that uses to be so familiar with us due to our lifelong habitual tendencies will have already completely vanquished. For example, we use to cognize, listen, smell, taste, touch, and to understand this and that, but, in the momentness of the pristine, vivid presence, all of the baggage that we have habitually dragged on for so long

completely disappears – there is utterly no more! When we say “*no more*,” we are not referring to its empty-hollow aspect, but in this context, it means that there is no longer any kind of familiarity as we have habituated as before. When the state of perfect actuality appears, then this actuality is verily our own beingness. In truth, we don’t even need to mention the familiar or unfamiliar aspect herein; rather, we need know that this beingness is so very fresh, absolutely fresh, and it is being nothing else but freshness!

I can give another example based on feelings and familiarity. Let’s say in the past, we have a very intimate friend who has now passed and we really feel depressed about it. When we encounter a new friend, we would not have the same sense of familiarity. However, when this state of non-dual reality emerges, everything in this existence already and readily turns out to be our very own blood, bone and marrow, so to speak. This actuality is, indeed, our own beingness; nevertheless, it is neither our real self nor our illusory self! It is simply the truth that vividly emerges! The old self has already exhausted in order for this superlative truth to emerge, and when this truth is nakedly present, it is the universal “*totality of all-pervasive knowing*” and no longer the conscious-ness-based “*knowing all*” awareness as in the past.

Therefore, when the truth appears, it becomes the totality of all-pervasive knowing; form and sound, too, are all-pervasive knowing. All of this universal cosmos is omnipresent-omniscient. Therefore, I call this universe “*an ever-present universe of all-spirituality*.” There is only one single

spirituality of one single ubiquitous spacious universe. Therefore, whatever vividly manifests in this cosmos, up to the true realm, is no other than omnipresence, omniscience, with total radiant, luminous, brilliant clarity pervadingly!

As for sound, currently, when we hear sound, sound is different from form, because we see form with our eyes, and we hear sound with our ears. But when the expanse of reality appears, form and sound, as I have iterated again and again, appear in synchrony. We no longer see form different from sound. The totality of all-pervasive knowing of form, and that of sound, is present throughout this cosmic space pervadingly. At that moment, it is omnipresent and directly knows everything pervadingly, whereas in the past, we would only know to the extent of the specific location where we were at.

For example, let say that we are outdoor and are over here. Then, when there is a roaring sound over here, we would know. If we are over there, then we would hear when there is a roaring sound that takes place over there. When a sound happens in the back of us, we would also know. So we are “self-oriented.” That’s the old logic and how our senses normally function. However, in the realm of perfect reality, we no longer know it all, so to speak, but the all-pervasive knowing wisdom actually manifests. Therefore, we call it omnipotent all-pervasive omniscience. It simply exists as *one singular pervading omniscience!* There is no way around!

Therefore, "*The dharma realm is unimpededly penetrated, without coming or going*" means there is no past, present, future, and no dimensional space. "*Holding the infinitely vast cosmos in one's hand,*" specifically, refers to the absence of dimensional space. Where there is no conceptual time and no dimensional space, that is what can be called "*Playfully and eternally roaming through samsara and Nirvāna.*" Thus, when reality appears, there is no longer "I know," as the subject, and "the known thing" or "that which I know," as the object. That is the easiest and most acceptable way to understand this state.

However, even if we want to, transcending the "*all-knowing*" wisdom into the "*totality of all-pervasive knowing*" is not at all simple, because when we abide in the mental state of all-knowing and purity, few people are able to break through. It is a truly immense spiritual transition from one state to another, so that the superlative wisdom of totality of all-pervasive knowing can vividly emerge. It is what we call "knowing everything as it is truly is." So then, what is the superlative truth of all *dharmas*? In order to describe this truth, we don't simply explain it in terms of the *dharmas* being Voidness, transient, conditioned phenomena, or illusory just as the sky. Also, we can neither say "*knowing is, indeed, abandonment, abandonment is, indeed, wisdom-awareness, wisdom-awareness is, indeed, enlightenment,*" as normally expressed in the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*.

It is not so, because such a basic, indirect discussion does not fully express "*the realm of perfect reality or true existence in the vivid presence.*" What is greatly significant is

that in that state, all-knowing becomes the vivid presence of all-pervasiveness, and this all-pervasiveness is ultimately all-spacious! This all-spaciousness is existing as the very vivid presence, and it cannot be otherwise. There is no spatial distance or spatial separation, and therefore, we can say, *“holding the infinitely vast cosmos in one’s hand.”*

What does it mean when we say the whole universe is in one’s hand or is just like a fist? If we were to use conventional wordage in a worldly sense, such as *“right here,”* then, it means that it is *“being right here!”* There is no space and not a single thing that is not being right here – everywhere is right here and everything is also right here, and that is something truly incredibly ineffable! There is not even a single temporal distinct time interval in that very momentness, and in all periods of time. For example, if this reality spans for a period of a full day, week or month given our conventional understanding of time intervals, then there is no shadow of progressive time whatsoever throughout that period. It means that reality holds no such thing as *“prior”* or *“later,”* and thus, everything is simply being the extant reality, the very vivid presence, and nothing else. Every single thing, every single locality, whether near or far, even those that are myriad billion light years away from us, and all those planets and galaxies in the ten-directional phenomenal realm, would vividly emerge right here and nowhere else! Progressive time and spatial space is cut through.

Currently, we see everything with our physical eyes, and it seems that something can be really far away; however, during our direct realization, everything exists as the

manifestation of our eyes. Moreover, the entirety of this vast cosmos is ubiquitously the eye, or the seeing-knowing wisdom, manifesting. It is no longer the one that knows or sees things. That is, verily, the realm of perfect reality, and the way we precedingly saw everything in the past was not wrong, but to be honest, we have not yet reached the ultimate goal.

Afterward, I started to review Zen historical stories, and uttered to myself, "Wow, I can now see that many of the happenings, and what has been told in these stories, has not yet reached culmination." It seems that the majority of the Buddhist scriptures, too, did not discuss this state of perfect actuality, except for the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. Actually, the Lotus *Sūtra* and the *Śūrangama Sūtra* also refer to it in various places, as well as the *Essence of Prajñāpāramitā*. In Theravādin scriptures, on the other hand, the Buddha mentioned about this state in plain, uncomplicated words, and effectively utilized to the best of his ability verbal expressions that could describe this state. Therefore, it seems that the spiritual wisdom of people in the past far surpassed that of people of our present age.

Therefore, the Buddha used very simple wordage, yet he was able to speak the complexity of the perfect truth. As for our current time, we have to discuss everything using a highly sophisticated, elaborated approach in order to somewhat describe this realm of noumenal reality. In this day and age, however, if we do not discuss this state of supreme manifestation in an openly revealing way, people would still see that Buddhism is merely something that can be understood through the intellectual, conscious mind.

Even if we want to use our intellectual brain to fathom it, the entire human brain itself can never understand the slightest bit in this realm of truth. Why? It is because if we do not let our so-called knowledge or intelligence from the past until now be dead or completely dismantled, we would never be able to experience even a slight taste of this realm. Herein, we do not even want to even mention self, phenomena, realization, accomplishment, Buddha, sentient beings, life and death, or *Nirvāna*. It is not necessary to even discuss them here, because the realm of truth is utterly existing as *perfect simplicity*, and there is nothing else whatsoever.

There is no language that can fully articulate this state. Herein, again, we do not speak of equanimity, high or low. We cannot possibly talk about them in this state. There is no genuineness, no falsehood, no good, no evil, no Buddha, no sentient beings, no ghosts and no demons, because perfect actuality is simply existing all-inclusively, vividly and nakedly, and there is nothing else but this utter reality. One cannot exert any effort in this state either. In fact, we cannot practice exertion prior to entering this state as well. Nevertheless, to reach this state without exertion is extremely difficult.

There are times when I have fallen into the state of being Void for many days, but even so, it was not perfect reality. Let's imagine us standing on the top of a very high mountain, or on the rooftop of a two-hundred story-high building. Then, we stick one foot into the open space, and are about to step forward. If we move one step forward, we would immediately fall down and be totally dead, and so

we become incredibly frightened, and we pull the leg back. Many times in the past when I prepared to lose myself completely, or so to speak, I was very frightened. It was not at all a simple thing.

For example, when we meditate and enter a peaceful, serene state, it can be so peaceful, so serene, and we abide in this state. Yet, when we come to cut through our individualistic self even for a split of a second, we become startled and immediately come back to this usual self, because we do not want this self to be lost. When I reached this experience in the past, I went around asking many other practitioners about it. Not only did no one assist me and show me what to do next, but I also got scolded. In the end, I had to bet my life on it, and betting your life in that state means that you would lose your life right then and there.

Accepting “*total death*” even for a slightest moment means one truly dies and not simply faking death. *A total death means one is no longer knowing!* There is nothing else there. If there is still a speck that still knows in any way similar to the old knowing, then it is not yet total death. When we totally die for a split of a moment, it would be a very sudden, unexpected death. That said, we cannot prepare to die in such a way! We cannot possibly, expectantly prepare for the unexpected to happen. In my experience, I have gone through false deaths many times throughout the years, and that was not a real death.

In this state of perfect actuality, everything manifests as imagery appearances and dream. The pervading vast

cosmos with myriad planets, stars, galaxies vividly emerge just as imageries. It is truly a dream, utterly fragile. Our planet has a few more billion years left to decay, but it is also very fragile. In this state of reality, we even come to know precisely its exact lifespan, and when it would end. We would know precisely when and how exactly this globe will burst within a finger snap. Indeed, at that exact moment, its lifespan is as fleeting as finger snapping.

So it is true that everything existing in this universe, and the universe itself, is nothing but imagery appearances. Everything, thus, is illusory and ephemeral, and not only this life of ours is ephemeral. This life of ours is too insignificant to even mention within the realm of perfect reality, because whatever has been affirmed that will last for a long time and will not be damaged even billions of years later would also be seen as more fragile and even lighter than a finger snap in the realm of reality. In the beginning, when I came across a statement by the Great Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, *“The three worlds are just as a grain of sand,”* I was startled then. But when it comes to the realm of truth as we have discussed thus far, it is obviously so, and the example of a grain of sand is still quite large. The true realm has no limit, no border, no boundary. Herein, we are not even talking about it being vast, because it is all-pervasive vast no matter where. All over this cosmos, everywhere simply appears just as vast. So we cannot describe it in terms of vast or narrow, many or few, near or far, nor in or out. Such usages cannot possibly exist in the realm of truth.

The first thing that happens is that all illusory appearances throughout this universe truly manifest as a dream or an illusion. At that moment, we would fathom what illusion is precisely like. It is no longer to understand, or to identify illusion, but we would directly fathom illusion itself. Why? Because in terms of this planet is concerned, we would see that from the moment it is formed and throughout its existence until it dissolves, everything is as insignificant as a finger snap of ours. So then, isn't that illusory? It is like magic, and like the bubbles that we are blowing. It is just like when we dip a straw in soapy water and playfully blow bubbles, they suddenly explode and plop. That's it! When we have a direct knowing in the realm of truth, the entire creation of this universe would actually be a billion times faster blowing bubbles. Then, wouldn't it be a dream or not?

Only then will we truly, directly realize the illusory reality of everything in this cosmos, and not simply this body, this mind, or this Mother Earth. There is also no need to mention of this solar system or this galaxy. In this realm of actuality, none of these things are of any significance, but everything just simply emerges in the presence. The totality of everything must emerge as such, absolutely clearly and lucidly, in the realm of perfect truth.

So, let us now discuss what is considered to be the lives or lifespans of sentient beings who are living in this cosmic space. For example, our human body or the body of an animal is called a life or lifespan. The human lifespan is a small interval within the living continuity of a person, and the lifespan of an animal is but a minuscule dot on the

exceedingly long stream of this living continuity. These lifespans are the broken segments that are being connected on this continuity and we must thoroughly directly see all segments from A to Z. However, if we can cut through this living continuity, then it means the cycle of life and death of a sentient being is broken up. Cutting through, as we already know, is extremely difficult.

Then, at that time, we would directly see the continuous stream of life from one life to another. For example, in this life, I am a person, and in the next consecutive life, I am also a person. Yet, after two or three human lives, all of a sudden, a life segment of a scary-faced, hairy animal with horn and fangs manifests, so this is another interval during which we have to bear with a non-human physical body. Therefore, it is an unbroken continuity, and each physical form, each life, and each life segment of all sentient beings of all species vividly manifest ubiquitously.

When we talk about this or that life segment, and about the ending of this life before the next one takes place in another physical body, it can go on forever from one segment and one body to the next uninterruptedly! It sounds extensively long, but when the perfect truth emerges, the infinity of lives or life segments would naturally manifest right there in the very vivid presence! And right there, there is no before or after even if one seeks for it. This realm of perfect reality penetrates throughout the entirety of past, present and future, and there is not even a shred of difference or discrepancy among the billion exponentials of our lives. There is no difference in the sense that there exists *a singular brilliant radiance* in the

realm of perfect truth, and all of the short life segments themselves manifest within the clarity of this brilliant radiance. Ultimately, from the beginning until the end of all of those transient life segments, which are connected to each other, segment by segment, they are this brilliant radiance, and nothing else.

Therefore, at that moment, from the original starting point of primordial luminosity, all the way to the end of this perfect luminosity, it is ubiquitously brilliant as this very vivid presence. The primordial origination is being vividly present, blazing with clarity, while all the interrupting small intervals are the myriad lives of a human form. Although our lives are very short intervals, we affix to existence and non-existence, right and wrong, gain and loss, and thus, we become adhered to our own life and death. In reality, all these short intervals are but a minuscule dot on the illimitable line between the starting and ending points. Moreover, this is not a straight line but a circle. And although it is circular, and we directly know how it moves around in a circle, it is, however, simply a singular point. All life segments are but this single blazingly splendid point, and that is the realm of truth.

When people look at matter, some say that it rotates in a spiral, and that the planets and universe also move in a spiral. However, that is only an image, because they have never begun to move anywhere to begin with. In the realm of truth, there is no coming, no going anywhere. The entirety of limitless cycles of life and death seems to be going around and around, but in reality, it remains that very single point of origin, whole and complete, self-radiant

and self-luminous with clarity. It has never gone anywhere or arrived anywhere.

Yet, we find ourselves living here on this planet and passing away after a number of years. In fact, the duration of all those years is but a tiny dot on that immensely vast circle. It is clear that this vast circle is filled with infinite dots; nevertheless, it also remains the initial point of origin. Moreover, it also exists right where the starting point exists. It is never an end point. It nakedly reveals its own true existence which is the complete cycle of life and death of a life form. It does not mean that, initially, it goes around, and then, comes back to the old point of origin.

However, it is not simply a circle that returns to the old point of origin as we would normally understand in conventional terms. In the realm of actuality, it is just a luminous dot, and there exist illimitable countless illusive dots there, too. The original luminous dot remains the same brilliant radiance, and the so-called end dot, although it is not truly an end dot, remains the same brilliant radiance as well. The original starting point blazes with primordial splendour, and at the end, it remains this singular primordial luminous point where all of the illusory points of countless life intervals are simply illusions that appear.

Thereafter, the life intervals circulate within this circle of countless *samsaric* dots, and become confused with this illusionary play, and therefore, they cannot penetrate what is truly genuine. When the genuine truth emerges, however, it is but a single pristine dot which, concurrently,

is the end dot. Yet, since beginningless time until now, it had never ever been actuated although we have lived through countless lifetimes. How truly, magnificently incredible! It shines brilliantly, full and complete, not increasing, not decreasing, without any defect, stain or contamination!

In this very vivid presence, all *dharmas* clearly emerge from true Voidness, and that is genuine reality! If we have not reached here, then it is impossible to speak of the perfect truth, no matter what kind of realization, even if the five aggregates have already been cut through. Once we reach this state, then we can speak about the Dharma truth, otherwise, we would forever be wandering around those virtual, illusory dots. It is very clear that many of us are still hanging midway among those dots. If this illusiveness goes on dotting us for many more limitless lives, then how can we possibly say anything about True Dharma, including the manifestation of perfect reality, the illusionary circle and how the beginning as the end is only a circle.

There is an example that can help us with our conceptual understanding. At night, when we hold a long burning incense stick and wave it in a circle, we can see a fire ring appear, although in reality, it is only one single turning point of light. Yet, it can create the illusion of a circle so we can see the fire ring, isn't that so? However, this fire ring itself is not truly spinning! From a coarse perspective, it does seem to spin, but truly speaking, it is being right there – it is spinning around in full circle, but it remains right there! It continues to exist right there. In truth, it never comes or goes anywhere, and it has never separated from the true spot of reality. Like the fire ring, infinite illusive

appearances of life and death create infinite life segments that make sentient beings wander around throughout the cosmic universe, yet from the point of origin, they have never left the perfect primordial truth! This primordial truth remains intact and perfectly complete from the starting point to the end, and when we say the end, we are simply speaking, not from the ultimate view of no coming, no going, but from the mundane view of the cycle of birth and death.

So what happens when we reach the true realm of perfect reality, of true existence? We will directly know that all lives or life segments, meaning all living sentient beings have never left their original Buddha position! If we, presumably, say that they have left their origin, it simply means that their virtual ones left the original position to go in a circle, whereas in reality, their primordial starting point and the end point of luminosity have always been in one single place, in one single position. So it simply means sentient beings are using their virtual existences to drift in the virtual cyclic existence, whereas in actuality, we do not have this human physical form, or any kind of form of any other species. There has never been any physical form or characteristic mark or sign. There is no sign of body and no sign of mind. There is no sign whatsoever as there is only the *True Sign which is Voidness-Signlessness*, the perfect true existence. The True Sign is ultimate enlightenment, and nothing else!

ABOUT ZEN MASTER THÍCH TUỆ HẢI



Senior Venerable Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải whose Dharma name means “*Ocean of Wisdom*” (birth name: Đinh Kim Nga, also known as *Vô Trụ Thiền Sư* or *Hiển Hiện Như Nhiên Thiền Sư*) was born in 1968 in Long Thới Village, Chợ Lách District, Bến Tre Province. Master Tuệ Hải came from a land-owner family and was the youngest of seven

children. The land on which he was born was thought to be sacred, because during the war, bombings and gunfire never reached it. Thus, many people in nearby areas would escape to his family’s land in search of sanctuary.

One day, following an upheaval Master Tuệ Hải’s father gave up his career, and his family found themselves in very difficult circumstances. As two of his older brothers took to heart the meaning of impermanence, they decided to become *bhikkhus*. Thereafter, his older sister also became a *bhikkhuni*.

Since his childhood, Master Tuệ Hải has been very filial toward his parents. At the age of six, he already knew how to cook a meal, and in order to support his family, he would follow his mother to help her sell things at the market. At

night, he would come back home to take care of his father with much love and devotion, always serving and following his father's wishes without even the slightest thought of objection. Master Tuệ Hải said, "I was raised over very difficult circumstances ever since I was a young child; therefore, I was equipped with a strong determination to overcome arduous, challenging life situations until this very day."

His mother, on the other hand, was a peaceful, wondrous woman who was full of loving-kindness and free from discord. Master Tuệ Hải used to say: "It would be difficult to find another woman throughout this world with as wonderful qualities as my mother." His mother spent her entire life devoting to her family, and in 1993, she became an ordained nun, learning and practicing the Dharma at the Tuệ Không Monastery.

Accompanied by great roots of virtues planted in the Buddha-Dharma, Master Tuệ Hải, at the age of seven, became deeply moved the very first time he saw the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. He stood immobile and entered meditative absorption in front of the statue for close to eight hours during which he was completely aware of everything that took place around him. Many people witnessed this and they did not dare to disturb Master Tuệ Hải until he left the meditative state himself.

In 1985, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải fell severely ill and began to research and study the macrobiotic diet method of Sir G. Oshawa. He followed the nutritional macrobiotic diet for just twenty-one days and reached the so-called Diet #7 empirical experience. It was the state of perfect complementary yin-yang balance just as Sir G. Oshawa had

indicated. All illnesses, therefore, disappeared, and throughout those seven days and nights, Master Tuệ Hải remained in a tranquil state of emptiness of body and mind with boundless bliss and happiness.

In that very same year, while still a young student, Master Tuệ Hải was listening to his teacher give a lecture on the subject of *“All things are set in motion in space”* during which he suddenly realized the principle of impermanence, and therefore, began to build the determination to become ordained. It was not until the beginning of 1986 that Tuệ Hải left his household for Thường Chiếu Zen Monastery where he would begin his volunteer work and Dharma studies to prepare for his ordination.

On December 8, 1986, which fell on the anniversary of the Buddha’s Great Enlightenment, Master Tuệ Hải officially received ordination from the Grand Master Thích Thanh Từ and was given the Dharma name Tuệ Hải (*Ocean of Wisdom*). When living with the other monks in the monastery, he was assigned to toil the land and to grow vegetables; however, his aspiration to gain liberation from the mundane world, to resolutely transcend life-and-death and to merge with the absolute truth, continued to be his burning desire.

As months and years passed by, the yearning in his heart grew more intensively, until one day, on July 7, 1997, as he listened to his Root Teacher, the Great Master Thích Thanh Từ, explain Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way (*Mādhyamika-Shastra*), he heard the following comment, *“the emptiness of sensation is Nirvāṇa,”* and at that very moment, immediately severed all kinds of past and present conventional knowledge. With his mind and body empty and clear, he

thoroughly and lucidly realized that all conditions and object-appearances were no longer the same physical form aggregate as he had always known.

Since then, Master Tuệ Hải fathomed the sublime teachings and no longer had any doubts regarding the words of the Buddha; he has fully comprehended the perfect truth, and from an understanding that transcends all conventions, life has become nonchalant and leisurely calm. At that very moment, he appreciatively composed a verse depicting this living force within him:

*From now on, to leisurely live in happiness,
Each condition brightly lucid and non-mistaken
Non-mistaken, unconfused, unerring,
Simply radiant, just like that – how is it possible to
express it fully!*

On December 12, 1994, Master Thích Tuệ Hải followed the command of his Root Teacher, the Grand Master Thích Thanh Từ, who appointed him to become the Abbot of Long Hương Temple in Nhơn Trạch District, Đồng Nai Province, where he presently resides. Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải has taught extensively on Mahāyāna Zen, the true nature of the mind, and on various major *Sūtras*, especially the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra (Flower Ornament Sūtra)* and its vast and profound view, similar to the pure view of Vajrayana that all *dharmas* are equanimous, non-discriminatory, and are actually Buddhas. In all of his teachings, Master Tuệ Hải always tries to point out the singleness and true essence of all traditions, whether it is Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Pureland, Zen or Vajrayana. His greatest aspiration is for all the diverse traditions of Buddhism to have a unified view in accordance with the realized and liberated view as taught

by Buddha: *“Hundreds of rivers together flow to the vast sea; as the sea has a single salty taste, my Dharma, too, has only a single taste of liberation.”*

Aside from propagating the Dharma to benefit beings, Master Tuệ Hải is also a physician of traditional medicine and macrobiotics who has cured many severe illnesses, and has advised everyone to develop a healthy balance of body and mind in order to unlock one’s inner wisdom, to understand the natural order of the universe, and to gain limitless freedom, absolute impartiality, and endless bliss and happiness.

In 2009 and 2012, Zen Master Tuệ Hải traveled extensively and taught in over forty states in the USA, as well as Europe and Australia. Thereafter, he chose to remain in Vietnam to oversee the long-term construction of the new Long Hương Temple, as well as to provide weekly teachings and spiritual guidance to local Buddhist communities and the newly established ordained sangha at his Temple. Currently, Zen Master Thích Tuệ Hải remains a Senior Standing Committee Member of the Educational Committee of the Central Buddhist Congregation in Vietnam.



Gone

Gone

Gone Beyond

Gone Utterly Freely Beyond

Perfectly Awakened

Svāhā

Essence of Prajñāpāramitā