

A Discourse on the Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna

Preface

The *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (hereafter, *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith*) was composed by the noble Bodhisattva Aśvagoṣa. The abstruse principles advocated in the treatise encompass the essence of the Path to Buddhahood, which pivots on the knowledge-of-all-aspect¹. These profound teachings are mostly unheard of by the four Buddhist assemblies. Moreover, most of the treatise's phrasings are succinct, making the embedded meaning of the context extremely difficult to grasp. Consequently, since ancient times, many ignorant persons who lack the wisdom of knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths² have brazenly slandered the treatise, claiming that it is spurious. Moreover, some ignorant Buddhist novices fail to verify their misleading comments and simply follow renowned dharma masters and lay Buddhists in slandering the treatise. These defamations of the treatise have thus continued until recent times. However, after I started formally lecturing on this treatise, such defamations started to gradually disappear in Taiwan, and comments that it's apocryphal are now unheard of.

Although some unheard-of teachings may be the occult and peculiar doctrines of non-Buddhists, some may be the wondrous and profound dharma of the knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths. Buddhist learners who lack the knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths and are unable to discern what is true and what is false must avoid speaking and making rash comments. Issuing any mistaken remarks on the in-depth discourse and correct teachings on the most wondrous knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths is equivalent to committing a hell-born sin due to severe slandering of the True Dharma (*S. saddharma*). Defaming the profound and wondrous knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths is deemed the gravest sin that Buddhist learners can commit because what they are actually defaming when they do this is the fundamental Dharma of the Three-Vehicle Bodhi.

The controversy regarding the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* is primarily attributed to the teaching of "dependent arising based on the reality-suchness."³ All slanderers defame this teaching by claiming that it is spurious, composed by non-Buddhists making use of the noble name of Bodhisattva Aśvagoṣa. Slanderers repeatedly assert that the reality-suchness exists innately and cannot be attained by cultivating the dependent-arising dharma. This assertion may be reasonable to a certain extent, but when Bodhisattva Aśvagoṣa taught the true meaning of "the

1 一切種智 (C. *Yīqiè zhǒng zhì*)

2 道種智 (C. *Dào zhǒng zhì*)

3 「真如緣起」 (C. *Zhēnrú yuánqǐ*)

aspect of dependent arising based on the reality-suchness⁴,” he had no intention of negating the innately existing reality-suchness. Because the intended meaning of the aforementioned teaching is profound and the wondrous meaning of the transformation of the reality-suchness of the Causal Ground⁵ into the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground⁶ is abstruse, very few people since ancient times were able to truly realize the reality-suchness, and no one can do so in the present time. Thus, the true connotations of Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa’s treatise have been misinterpreted, and the treatise has been regarded as a pseudo-treatise written by non-Buddhists who borrowed the name of Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa, therefore, many people have committed defamations of the treatise since ancient times.

The wondrous Dharma in the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* consists of two main aspects: the arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind⁷ and the reality-suchness aspect of the mind⁸. The former first explains the effects derived from the gradual fostering of defilement or purification of seven evolving consciousnesses⁹ and then points out that the fundamental entity pertaining to the sign of reality of the dharma realm¹⁰ is the *ālaya*-consciousness. Moreover, it clearly states that the mind entity of the *ālaya*-consciousness itself (a.k.a. *tathāgatagarbha*, the eighth consciousness) is the root of the seven evolving consciousnesses. The *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* further advocates the teaching that “the one and only mind encompassing the mind-kings comprising the eight consciousnesses¹¹.” That is, if one asserts that “all sentient beings have only one mind,” then this single mind can only be the *ālaya*-consciousness, and all the seven evolving consciousnesses lie within it. It is also stated that the term *ālaya*-consciousness encompasses the eighth consciousness—the *tathāgatagarbha*—and the seven evolving consciousnesses. That is, the non-arising and non-ceasing eighth consciousness or *tathāgatagarbha* and the seven evolving consciousnesses stemming from the *tathāgatagarbha* can be collectively called one mind: the *ālaya*-consciousness. Thus, since ancient times, people with knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths have often stated, “the teaching about the one and only mind encompasses all eight consciousnesses,” which indicates that the *ālaya*-consciousness single mind encompasses the mind-kings comprising the eight consciousnesses.

However, to greatly benefit Buddhist novices and sentient beings by enabling them to directly observe the distinctive aspects of the natures of mind-kings comprising the eight consciousnesses, more easily realize the mind entity of *ālaya*-consciousness itself, and obtain the real wisdom pertaining to *prajñā*, the single mind—the *ālaya*-consciousness—is often broken down into the eight consciousnesses’ mind-kings, and each one is explained in detail. Hence, there are teachings on the eye-

⁴ 「真如緣起門」 (C. *Zhēnrú yuánqǐ mén*)

⁵ 因地真如 (C. *Yīn dì zhēnrú*)

⁶ 佛地真如 (C. *Fú de zhēnrú*)

⁷ 心生滅門 (C. *Xīn shēng miè mén*)

⁸ 心真如門 (C. *Xīn zhēnrú mén*)

⁹ 七轉識 (C. *Qī zhuǎn shí*)

¹⁰ 法界實相理體 (C. *Fǎ jiè shí xiāng lǐ tǐ*)

¹¹ 「一心唯通八識心王」 (C. *Yī xīn wéi tōng bā shí xīn wáng*)

consciousness, ear-consciousness, manas-consciousness (mental faculty), up to the *ālaya*-consciousness. These teachings have been preached not only by numerous enlightened patriarchs since ancient times but also by the Buddha in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*¹², where an established conclusion about the Ultimate Truth¹³ is expounded in the course of the teachings for specific individuals¹⁴!

The wondrous functions of the Buddha Ground's reality-suchness are subtle and extensive, beyond the comprehension of all virtual-enlightenment bodhisattvas. However, these wondrous, meritorious qualities and extensive virtues, which are hard to explicate, have already been inherently stored within the mind entity of the *ālaya*-consciousness of the reality-suchness during the Causal Ground stage; therefore, this mind entity is inherently self-existing. Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa has never negated the inherent self-existent mind entity; nevertheless, the reality-suchness during the Causal Ground differs immensely from the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground. Even when one realizes the reality-suchness of the Causal Ground, one still cannot attain the vast meritorious quality of the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground. Therefore, the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground cannot be attained instantaneously after initially realizing the True Mind, except by a final-stage bodhisattva¹⁵ who manifests in the human world to show that Buddhahood can be achieved immediately after awakening. Thus, Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa's explanation of the dependent arising based on the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground is indeed the correct explanation.

All the seeds required for attaining the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground are stored in the mind entity of the *tathāgatagarbha* (the *ālaya*-consciousness); all are endowed with the virtue of dormancy. Given that the mind entity of the *ālaya*-consciousness permanently manifests the natures of reality and suchness, it is referred to as the reality-suchness of the Causal Ground. However, to attain the extensive virtues of the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground, practitioners must (1) undergo sequential practices after realizing the mind entity of the *ālaya*-consciousness of the reality-suchness during the Causal Ground stage, (2) make their cultivation relying on the dependent origination of the arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind after going through the cultivational content and the necessary processes of the stages spanning the three great terms of *asaṃkhyā kalpas*¹⁶, and (3) eventually perfect the extensive virtues of the immaculate consciousness of the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground. These are known as the true meanings of the dependent arising based on the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground. As such, the dependent arising based on the reality-suchness is the true Buddha Dharma and the supreme wondrous teaching. Fundamentally, the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground ought to be attained by practicing the dharma of arising and ceasing, namely, the mind-kinds comprising the seven consciousnesses stored in the mind entity of the

12 《楞伽經》

13 第一義悉檀 (C. *Dì yī yì xī tán*)

14 為人悉檀 (C. *Wéi rén xī tán*)

15 最後身菩薩 (C. *Zuìhòu shēn púsà*)

16 三大阿僧祇劫 (C. *Sān dà ā sēng qí jié*)

tathāgatagarbha (the *ālaya*-consciousness) during the Causal Ground stage. Hence, the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground is not attained immediately after one’s awakening. Only after going through the three great terms of *asaṃkhyā kalpas* of practices involving the accumulation of merits, compassionately aiding sentient beings, striving to realize *prajñā*, and cultivating the knowledge-of-the-aspects-of-paths, including endlessly practicing the ways of life of bodhisattvas, can one eventually accomplish the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground. The teaching of dependent arising based on the reality-suchness has thus been proven correct. This indicates that there is no way to attain Buddhahood immediately after one’s awakening on the Causal Ground when the infinite arduous cultivational process (yet achievable) of the bodhisattva stages is omitted, except for a final-stage bodhisattva who has already perfected this cultivation process.

Given that the mind entity of the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground inherently exists in the Causal Ground, namely the *ālaya*-consciousness mind entity, which all sentient beings equally possess, the *ālaya*-consciousness mind entity has been given countless names, such as the *tathāgatagarbha*, intrinsic limit¹⁷, limit of reality¹⁸, reality-suchness, suchness¹⁹, and self. In the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith*, Bodhisattva Aśvagoṣa refers to it as the *tathāgatagarbha* mind. He also says that this mind works synergistically with the seven evolving consciousnesses stemming from it, and that together, they can directly, indirectly, and sequentially cause all phenomena to arise. Due to this mind’s ability to give rise to all phenomena, all the phenomena stemming from it must have an arising-and-ceasing nature. As such, this sign-of-reality mind is said to have the arising-and-ceasing aspect, but this does not denote that the mind entity of the sign of reality—the eighth consciousness itself—is arising and ceasing. Ill-informed ordinary people do not know the true meaning of the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* and thus slander it by saying that the *Treatise* states that the mind entity of the sign of reality is arising and ceasing and that it must therefore be a spurious treatise. However, in reality, they fail to understand that when the treatise speaks of the “arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind,” it refers to the mind entity of the *ālaya*-consciousness, which comprises the various arising-and-ceasing phenomena of the mind-kings consisting of the seven consciousnesses, which are subsumed under the mind-kings consisting of the eight consciousnesses and treated as one mind, called the *ālaya*-consciousness. As such, the mind entity of the *ālaya*-consciousness itself is not arising or ceasing. Thus, the treatise states:

The arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind denotes that one must rely on the *tathāgatagarbha* to bring forth the ongoing arising-and-ceasing minds. The notions of non-arising-and-ceasing and the arising-and-ceasing work

¹⁷ 本際 (C. *Běn jì*)

¹⁸ 實際 (C. *Shí jì*)

¹⁹ 如 (C. *Rú*)

in unison and are neither identical nor different. This is called the *ālaya*-consciousness²⁰.

Thus, all those who defame the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* all fail to comprehend its true meaning because they misunderstand the text.

Post-awakening Buddhist practitioners must understand that to realize the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground—the immaculate consciousness—they must do the following sequentially: (1) engage in further post-awakening cultivation of the knowledge-of-all-aspects as taught in the arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind, (2) tame and eliminate their dispositional hindrances²¹, and (3) eradicate their latent habitual seeds²² and accumulate vast meritorious qualities. Only when they have done all these can they eventually achieve the immensely meritorious qualities of the immaculate consciousness, the mind entity of the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground. On the other hand, without experiencing the cultivation of the arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind, one cannot complete the reality-suchness aspect of the mind to truly realize the vast virtues of the immaculate consciousness of the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground. Therefore, Bodhisattva Aśvaghoṣa clearly expounds in the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* that “the arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind and the reality-suchness aspect of the mind both encompass all phenomena.” He reiterates the teachings of the dependent arising of the Buddha Ground’s reality-suchness to show his original intention.

The notion of the reality-suchness aspect of the mind is a cross-sectional description of the eighth consciousness, the *tathāgatagarbha*, which is already fully endowed with the characteristics of the reality-suchness in the Causal Ground stage. However, due to the obscuration of the corresponding ignorant and afflictive seeds of the seven evolving consciousnesses, the *tathāgatagarbha* manifests only the (self-) entity characteristic of the reality-suchness. Thus, the vast virtues of the taintless conditioned dharmas²³ from the immaculate consciousness—the mind entity of the reality-suchness of the Buddha Ground—cannot be developed, and benefiting the masses of sentient beings will become challenging. Therefore, practitioners should begin their practices from the arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind, after attaining enlightenment and entering the inner gate to extensively practice the six *pāramitās*, then furthering with the bodhisattva’s ten *pāramitās* in numerous practices. Thereafter, only when one has completely attained the knowledge-of-all-aspects, eliminated all latent habitual seeds of afflictive hindrances and the latent beginningless ignorance, and diligently cultivated vast merits over one hundred eons can one enter the Buddha Ground stage and achieve extremely vast amounts of taintless conditioned dharmas belonging to the reality-suchness of the Buddha

20 「心生滅門者，謂依如來藏有生滅心轉，不生滅與生滅和合，非一非異，名阿賴耶識。」(C. *Xīn shēng miè mén zhě, Wèi yī rú lái cáng yǒu shēng miè xīn zhuǎn, Bù shēng miè yǔ shēng miè héhé, Fēi yī fēi yì, Míng ā lài yé shí.*)

21 性障 (C. *Xìng zhàng*)

22 習氣種子隨眠 (C. *Xí qì zhǒng zǐ suí mián*)

23 無漏有為法 (C. *Wú lòu yǒu wéi fǎ*)

Ground, such as the four kinds of perfect wisdom of the Buddha, extensive supernatural powers, and the ten epithets of the Buddha.

Therefore, the dharma of the arising-and-ceasing aspect of the mind, as expounded by Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa, is extremely profound. Only a few have truly understood it since ancient times, and hardly anyone can know it at present. Without great wholesome roots and merits, one can hardly hear its secret intention, let alone realize it through personal cultivation. In addition, because the wording of the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* is extremely terse, the doctrines mentioned and principles expounded in the treatise are doubly difficult for Buddhist learners to understand. Many people, from ancient times to the present, have thus failed to grasp the true meaning of the treatise.

Given that a vast number of Buddhist disciples in Taiwan have devoutly revered and made offerings to the Triple Gem for several decades, accumulated immense merits, shown compassion for and benefited other sentient beings, promoted virtuous deeds and stopped evil deeds, endeavored to restrain the spread of worldly desires and misdeeds, and helped sentient beings become liberated from the great suffering of transmigration of cyclic existence, their virtues and merits are not regarded as minimal, and they are not lacking in wisdom. However, they are eventually unable to initiate transmundane wisdom, let alone initiate both mundane and supramundane wisdom, because they have limited mundane wisdom and mistake it for the true transmundane wisdom. This unfortunate prevailing fact does not suit the fruition that Buddhist disciples with virtuous merits should deserve. In view of the foregoing, and to bring extensive benefits to virtuous Buddhist disciples in relation to their affairs and actions, I have decided to lecture on and explain the true meanings of Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa's wondrous treatise, which were originally expounded for the practitioners in our association. I have also decided to publish my lectures worldwide for the benefit of the Buddhist disciples in the treasure land of Taiwan and the disciples in mainland China, who, with matured merits in the future, will allow the original intention of Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa for writing the treatise to be realized. My intention is to quell the noxious slanders of this treatise that have been circulating from the past to the present and to prevent the slanderers of future generations from repeatedly committing the hell-born karma of defaming this marvelous treatise. For these reasons, the members of our translation and compilation team were advised to organize and slightly modify the lectures' contents so we could make them available at cost worldwide, and to erect a big banner for True Dharma and establish the benchmark for it. A large number of Buddhist disciples with matured causes and conditions will consequently benefit from the lectures. The book is now in print, and I provide a background of it in this preface. I hope that through the wondrous meanings of the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith* presented in this book, Buddhist disciples with vast merits and virtues can attain the knowledge and insights needed for realizing the Path of Vision, and eventually awaken to the reality-wisdom pertaining to *prajñā* and safeguard the remaining teachings of the World-Honored One, our Buddha, to immensely benefit sentient beings in the future eons.

Truly and respectfully composed by
the Buddha's son, Pingshi,
in the summer of 2004

正覺