



The Scripture of the
Founding Master

The Scripture of the Founding Master

Chapter One Prefatory

1. Upon attaining great enlightenment on the twenty-eighth of April (twenty-sixth day of the third lunar month), the first year of the Won-Buddhist Era (1916 C.E.), the Founding Master declared, “All things are of a single body and nature; all dharmas are of a single root source. In this regard, the Way (to) that is free from arising nor ceasing and the principle of the retribution and response of cause and effect, being mutually grounded on each other, have formed a clear and rounded framework.”

2. As he read the Diamond Sūtra while perusing widely the scriptures of all the various religions after his enlightenment, the Founding Master said, “Śākyamuni Buddha is truly the sage of sages.” He continued, “Even though I have attained the Way without the guidance of a teacher, looking back from the time of my initial aspiration up to my final enlightenment, many aspects of my experience coincide with the practice and sayings of the Buddha in the past. Hence, I adopt Śākyamuni Buddha as my original guide. In the future, when I initiate my dispensation, I will create in this world a perfect and complete religious order by taking the buddhadharma as its core principle.”

3. The Founding Master said, “The teaching of the buddhadharma is the supreme Way of all under heaven. It illuminates the principle of the true nature, solves the crucial matter of birth and death, elucidates the principle of cause and effect, commands the paths of practice, and thus surpasses all other religious doctrines.”

4. Observing the realities of his time, the Founding Master declared his guiding principle in a motto: “With this Great Opening of matter, let there be a Great Opening of spirit.”

5. Only a few months after the Founding Master began edification, he al-

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ready had more than forty followers, from whom he chose nine people with exceptional faith and sincerity to be exemplary disciples for his newly established order. He said to them, “Human beings are the masters of the myriad things; the myriad things are for use by human beings. The Way of humanity is grounded on benevolence and righteousness; wiles and tactics are extraneous. It is then only proper that the human spirit should be able to control the myriad things and establish in the world the great Way of benevolence and righteousness. Lately, however, benevolence and righteousness have lost their status and wiles are rampant, causing the great Way to become utterly confused. Now is the time for us first to put our hearts together and act in concert in order to rectify the ways of the world and the human mind, which are declining day by day. You must well understand this mission to become the masters in the foundation of a great religious order in an everlasting world.”

6. As a way of edifying in the future all people throughout the world of the ten directions, the Founding Master devised a system of organizing by ‘ten-person units.’ He said, “This dharma is a quick and efficient system for training all people effectively with but a single teacher. Although we will be able to reach many billions of students through this dharma, that effort always needs to be directed only at nine members.” After establishing the first unit of the order with the nine disciples he had initially chosen, he said, “This unit is organized in accordance with the world of the ten directions: the leader corresponds to heaven, the central member to earth, and the remaining eight members to the eight directions. If we open it up to the larger world, this unit represents the ten directions; if we close it up, the ten directions are contained within this body of a single unit. This is the underlying principle.” The Founding Master was the leader of the unit, Song Kyu the central member, and the remaining members were Yi Chaech’öl, Yi Sunsun, Kim Kich’ön, Oh Ch’anggön, Pak Sech’öl, Pak Tongguk, Yu Kõn, and Kim Kwangsõn.

7. In preparation for founding his dispensation, the Founding Master organized a savings cooperative and said to his unit members, “The project we are starting is not something meant for ordinary people, and if we are to accom-

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plish such a project, we shall require exceptional perseverance and exertion. As we are all poor at present, we won't be able to lay the foundation for this task unless we are exceptionally thrifty and perform hard physical labor. We must execute all tasks of this cooperative with complete sincerity and set an example for those who come after us." He then required the members to start by abstaining from smoking and drinking, saving up 'rice for the requital of grace,' and participating in cooperative labor.

8. The Founding Master began a levee project to reclaim tideland at Killyong-ni and, while supervising the work, he remarked, "Now you nine members, who are not accustomed to such heavy labor, are at the inception of a great religious order that will require you to undergo unusual hardship. But the joy it brings must be just as great, since it is always more meaningful to be an initiator and to carry out a project with your own hard work, rather than to be a mere custodian of something someone else established. The order we are establishing is the sort of great religious order that was unheard of in the past and will be difficult to witness in the future. In order to establish such an order, we must prepare a dharma that enables a truly civilized world to be realized by advancing both study of the Way and study of science; that lets our practice and activities mutually progress by harmonizing action and rest; and that creates harmony and accessibility without hindrances of any kind by incorporating various religious doctrines into a single corpus, as if in a single household. As our aim is to establish such a perfect order, naturally a great deal of work is inevitable."

9. While the levee project was being carried out by the members of the unit, a wealthy man in a neighboring village, witnessing the project, created a dispute and submitted an application to the county authority for permission to reclaim the tideland himself, then frequently visited the county office, raising much concern among the members over the ownership of the land. Seeing that the members of the unit resented the man deeply for causing so much worry, the Founding Master said to them, "To have such a dispute while we are engaged in the project seems to be heaven's Way of testing our sincerity; hence,

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we must not be distracted by the dispute nor harbor hatred or hold grudges against the man. ‘Right will prevail in the end’ is a valid principle, and even if the fruits of our exertion were to end up as that man’s possession, our conscience would be clear. Furthermore, our original intent was to help the greater public, and even if the project is not utilized as widely as we originally planned, still, he is part of that greater public. So, wouldn’t we still be benefiting the greater public in the process, since we would be opening up much new farmland for these poor residents along the shore? At a time like this, if you transcend the conception of self and others and diligently work toward the public well-being, this matter will naturally be resolved fairly.”

10. One day Yi Ch’unp’ung came to have an audience with the Founding Master. The Founding Master asked, “These disciples have come to me to learn the Way and its power. Do you understand my intention for putting them to work on a levee rather than teaching them what they have come to learn?” Ch’unp’ung replied, “Although my shallow perception cannot hope to comprehend the depths of your intention, I would hazard the guess that you might have two reasons. First, by having the members work on the levee, you would have them prepare the financial means for their studies; and next, you want to prove to them that there is nothing they won’t be able to accomplish if they work together with a single heart.” The Founding Master added, “What you’ve said is generally correct. However, listen to these other reasons I have. Since these people have originally come here for practice, I need to know whether or not their faith is firm. By their willingness to work to turn tideland that has been ignored for tens of thousands of years into farmland, while being mocked by their neighbors and with no previous experience with heavy labor, but still humbly exert themselves and continue to pursue this unpromising task, I will know the true extent of their faith. Further, by observing this enterprise from beginning to end, they will be able to judge their ability to accomplish any task in the future. They will also come to learn the source of merit and prosperity by observing the practice of self-sufficiency achieved through frugality and diligence. Moreover, while they are undergoing this difficult task, they will be trained in the dharma of commanding the nature, thus gaining the strength to

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overcome hardships on their own. With all these thoughts in mind, I have embarked on this project.”

11. Upon completing the levee project, the unit members said to each other, “When we first began the project, it seemed as difficult as creating a great mountain on flat land. Now that the project is completed, building a levee seems rather an easy task. How difficult it will be to attain the Way in the future!” Listening to their conversation, the Founding Master said, “You say such things because you do not yet know the dharma for attaining the Way. But once you know it, it will be easier than eating a meal. How can attaining a relaxed and contented state of mind be as difficult as making a levee? If you do not understand my meaning, listen carefully now and think about it again after you have awakened to the road of practice.”

12. When the first temple of this order was under construction at the foot of Ongnyō peak in Killyong-ni, the Founding Master wrote the following verses on the ridgepole:

The loom of the Won (Circle), with the shuttle of the sun and moon,
Weaves the beam that is the law of the changing seasons.

Under those words he added:

The pine tree stands, gathering the remaining spring from the myriad plants,

The brook roars with rainwater gathered from drizzles from a thousand peaks.

13. The Founding Master addressed the nine disciples, “These days material civilization flourishes daily with immense power, while the human spirit that should be making use of material things has steadily weakened. There is no peace of mind whether at the level of the individual, family, society, or nation, and the suffering of all sentient beings will be unbounded. How can we, who have set our hearts on saving the world, think lightly of this situation? There have been occasions in the past when the sages prayed to heaven and earth with utmost sincerity to deliver all sentient beings, which moved the will

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of heaven. Now you, too, must pray to heaven and earth with single-mindedness and utmost sincerity that human beings may become masters of material things instead of being enslaved by them, and thus try to move the will of heaven. Your mind is none other than that of heaven; hence, you should know that if your mind is concentrated and completely devoid of selfishness, its virtues will become as one with the virtues of heaven and earth and it will lead all your affairs to success. Therefore, you must realize that each of your minds possesses an element that can move the will of heaven, and always remember that each of you has a responsibility to deliver all sentient beings.” He then assigned the dates and prayer sites and orientations for each of them and had the members continue praying together at the same time.

14. On the twenty-first of August (the twenty-sixth day of the seventh lunar month), 4 W.E., the utmost sincerity of the nine members, which was unconcerned about life or death, produced the miracle of the seal of blood from bare fingers. When he saw that their bare thumb prints on the paper had turned red as blood, the Founding Master remarked, “Your minds have already moved the divine spirits of heaven and earth and the proceedings of the hidden authorities have rendered a verdict. Our success is derived from this. From now on, your bodies have been given over to the world of the ten directions and, therefore, whenever in the future you are carrying out your work, despite all hardships and mortal dangers, do not allow your conviction of today to change. Nor will you feel any temptation when faced with attachments to family or sensory conditions involving the five desires, if only you remind yourselves of today’s event. Exert yourselves then only on your practice and your work with an unattached, single mind.” Then the Founding Master conferred on them dharma names and honorific dharma cognomens and said, “Your past names were secular names and individual, private appellations. The people who had been given those names have already died. Now, I have called you back to life by bestowing on you these new public names for use throughout the world. Receive and keep your name in honor and deliver numerous sentient beings.”

15. The Founding Master said, “Now, what we need to learn, and what we

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need to teach our followers, is the Way and virtue of the Buddha. You must first study the main principle of the buddhadharma, and practice eagerly to awaken to its truth. I realized the truth of the buddhadharma long ago, but thus far, I only concentrated on arousing your faith and taught you unsystematically, in accordance only with each person's level, regardless of the truth or falsity, rightness or wrongness, of the dharma. This was because your level of understanding was not yet adequate to decipher that truth, and because I also feared that teaching the buddhadharma would not be respected in this unenlightened age since, in our country, Buddhism has been treated contemptuously for several hundred years and people have tended to show little reverence for whatever is associated with Buddhism. But now if we wish to guide all sentient beings to the two roads of wisdom and merit by discovering the fundamental truth and accomplishing essential practice, we must take the buddhadharma as our core principle. Moreover, Buddhism will become the major religion of the world. The buddhadharma of the future, however, will not be the buddhadharma of institutions like those of the past; rather, it will become a practice for everyone, without leaving the occupations of scholars, farmers, artisans, or merchants, and regardless of whether one has left the household life or not. In worshiping the buddhas, we will not limit ourselves to paying homage only to buddha images, but will realize that the myriad things of the universe and the dharma-realm of empty space are all buddhas, so that there will be no distinction between our work and our practice; thus, if we handle worldly affairs well, we will be persons who practice the buddhadharma well, and if we practice the buddhadharma well, we will also be persons who handle worldly affairs well. Furthermore, as for the method of making buddha offerings there will not be a separately designated place for them nor will there be any separate buddha: in whatever matter and for whatever reason a person makes a buddha offering, that will make it an offering place and will ensure that the buddha is present. If this can be actualized, there will be no place without a dharma hall or a buddha, and the buddha's grace will reach even grasses and trees and his virtue will extend in myriad directions, creating an unimaginable buddha land. Dear disciples! Even over thousands of generations, it would be difficult to meet with such an opportunity, and yet you have fortunately met it; among

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many who have met it, few can recognize it, and yet you have fortunately recognized this opportune moment and have become the founders of our new order. Do not be discouraged that my words have yet to be verified. If you continue to follow my guidance, you will see the truth of my words in the near future.”

16. The Founding Master said, “As a religion that had deep ties with Korea, Buddhism received much welcome and rejection. It was welcomed several hundred years ago, but rejected in more recent times. Due to changes in political power and the rising influence of Confucianism, Buddhists became estranged from the secular world and hid themselves deep in the mountains, leading a transcendent life between existence and nonexistence. Thus, there were few people in ordinary society who understood that dharma. Those who claim to know something about it say that there are temples in places with beautiful mountain scenery and fresh spring water; that in those temples there are monks and buddha images; that people from the secular world visit these temples with their monks and buddha images to attend buddha offerings in order to wish for blessings or to repent from their transgressions; that the Buddhist monks and nuns, being the disciples of the buddha images, lead celibate lives, shaving their heads and wearing plain robes; that, fingering prayer beads, they recite the name of the buddha or chant sūtras; that, carrying a knapsack, they go out on alms round, paying respects to even the lowest classes of people in secular society; and that they abstain from eating fish and meat, do not drink alcohol or smoke tobacco, and do not kill any living creatures. But we ordinary people of the world have been saying that those who are of yangban (aristocratic) heritage, who have good fortune according to their saju (Asian astrology), or who are from rich families, do not become monks, but only those who are ill-fated astrologically or who have failed in the secular world; that among the monks, there are those who have excelled in their practice and become monks with supernatural powers, who can do whatever they like, such as detect good places for homes or burial sites, call on the wind and rain, or move mountains and walk on water; but that those monks are one in a thousand or ten thousand and, thus, the buddhadharma is a futile Way that is ineffective for ordinary people. So

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they say it may be fine to visit temple sites with their beautiful scenery every now and then for leisure, but if someone regularly attends a Buddhist temple or becomes a monk, they say that that household will be ruined. They also say that since Buddhists cremate corpses, descendants will not receive assistance from their ancestors. Thus, people have considered monks who believe in the buddhadharma to be unusual individuals. However, if one examines the monks' actual lives, they have left behind the corrupt secular world and constructed pristine temples amid beautiful mountain scenery and fresh water, where they have enshrined benevolent buddha images; they live simply without any affinities with the world, keeping a few dharma friends, and find comfort in the wind in the pines and the moon through the foliage, surrounded on all sides by such music of nature as the sound of birds and flowing streams. Living unconcerned on the offerings of the laity, they recite the Buddha's name or chant sūtras while hitting the wooden clacker, or sit in meditation, then come out of the elaborate temple building and stroll in the woods. Though not all monks live this way, most have lived such lives of leisure, salubrity, and refined taste. However, while continuing to live this sort of life, the Buddha's unsurpassed, great path has not been made known in the secular world and the monks have fallen into the Hīnayāna (Lesser Vehicle) practice of saving only oneself. How could this be the Buddha's original intent? Therefore, while the Buddha's unsurpassed, great Way remains the same, we must reform certain portions of its doctrine and its institution so that the Buddhism of the few becomes a Buddhism of the many and this partial practice becomes a well-rounded practice."

17. The Founding Master continued, saying, "The Buddha's unsurpassed, great path is immensely high, deep, and vast; hence, his wisdom and capacity cannot be expressed and recorded either verbally or in writing. However, if I were to give the gist of his teaching, we know only that all sentient beings are subject to birth and death in this lifetime but do not know of their many other lives, while the Buddha knew the principle that is free from birth and death and the existence of endless lifetimes through the process of rebirth. We do not even understand the fundamental principle governing our own selves, but the

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Buddha understood the fundamental principle governing all things in the universe. We let ourselves into unwholesome destinies because we cannot make clear distinctions between destinies that are wholesome and unwholesome, but the Buddha, after delivering himself, gained the ability to deliver all sentient beings throughout the worlds of the ten directions from unwholesome destinies to wholesome destinies. We do not understand even the suffering and happiness we create for ourselves, but the Buddha understood the suffering and happiness that inadvertently occur as well as those which sentient beings create for themselves. We enjoy the fruits of our merit but can do nothing when it is exhausted, but the Buddha has the ability to restore merit once it is exhausted. We live without discerning whether our wisdom is becoming dull or bright, but the Buddha has the ability to illuminate wisdom that has been dulled and to sustain wisdom once it is attained. We often commit wrongful actions under the influence of our own greed, hatred, and delusion, but the Buddha never acts on greed, hatred, and delusion. We are attached to the existence of all things in the universe but are ignorant of the realm where all things in the universe are nonexistent; but the Buddha knew even the nonexistence amid existence and the existence amid nonexistence. We have no knowledge of either the six destinies of heavenly beings, human beings, asuras, animals, hungry ghosts, and the denizens of hell, or the four types of birth – viviparous, oviparous, moisture-born, and metamorphic; but the Buddha knew even the principle governing rebirth between the six destinies and the four types of birth. We take advantage of others for our own benefit, but the Buddha, in dealing with any matter, sought to benefit both oneself and others, and when that became impossible, he found merit and happiness in benefiting others regardless of gain or loss, even at the risk of his own life. We only possess the limited objects that actually belong to us, our home is only the actual house in which we live, and our family only the people to whom we are related; but the Buddha has called all things in the universe his possessions, the worlds in the ten directions his home, and all sentient beings his family. Hence, our aim is to strive to attain the Buddha's wisdom and abilities and exert ourselves to deliver all sentient beings.”

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18. The Founding Master continued, “The doctrines and institutions of Buddhism of the past were organized mainly in terms of monastic orders, which were not well suited to people living in the secular world. Adherents leading secular lives were guests rather than hosts, and except for lay persons who were particularly adept spiritually or who had accomplished a particularly important work, it was difficult for most everyone else to become a part of the Buddha’s direct lineage or recognized as a Buddhist patriarch like the monks who trained by leaving behind the world. Furthermore, religions are concerned with people, but Buddhist temples are located in the mountains where there aren’t many people. How can people who are busy with their secular lives make time to leave the secular world and visit Buddhist temples to receive their teaching? Also, since the Buddhist scriptures are full of language and terminology difficult for ordinary people either to learn or to understand, you could hardly teach them to a wide group encompassing the learned and ignorant, men and women, young and old. And for sustaining life, the Buddhist monks have abnegated all occupations of scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants and relied only on contributions from buddha offerings, almsgiving, and donations. How can this type of life be practiced by everyone? Marriage, too, was strictly prohibited for those training by leaving behind the world; nor were rules of propriety governing secular life articulated, but only those for formal buddha offerings. How can we consider their lives to be well-rounded? Therefore, we will be concerned only with the rank of practice and work without discriminating between laity and clergy in terms of guests or hosts. Nor will we discriminate between them in the matter of the Buddhist lineage. We will designate places for practice wherever adherents reside, and make our doctrines accessible to all classes of people by choosing only the most essential points from existing sūtras and using simple language. For the life of the ordained, we will allow them to choose an occupation as their personal situations require, and will also leave to them the decision whether to marry or not. Let us formulate rules of propriety in terms mainly of practical buddha offerings that are more appropriate and beneficial to life in the secular world, rather than observe all the complicated rituals of formal buddha offerings. And even the ordained, except in special situations, should in their youth learn to read; in their prime of

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life engage in study of the Way and endeavor to deliver others; and in their old age retire to a place of quiet leisure and natural beauty, be rid of all attachments and cravings of the secular world, and further reflect upon the great matter of birth and death, making rounds in spring and autumn to different temples in cities and villages to exert themselves in the work of edification, and returning in summer and winter to a life mainly devoted to spiritual cultivation. Our aim is thus to provide for a flawless life as long as we may live, and also to let us make the organization that is in charge of this doctrine and institutions impeccable, by bringing it into accord with the current time and human needs.”

19. The Founding Master continued, “The subjects taught by the Buddhist traditions of the past included teaching the sūtras, and the methods of seated meditation, keeping a hwadu (keyword), reciting the Buddha’s name, intoning mantras, or making buddha offerings. As for the original intent underlying these various teachings, all the scriptures were taught in order to reveal the doctrines, institutions, and history of Buddhism; hwadu meditation (kanhwa sŏn) was taught as a way of awakening to a sublime truth inaccessible through scriptural studies or verbal teachings; reciting the Buddha’s name and intoning mantras were taught especially to neophytes to Buddhism as a way of concentrating their distracted minds, since the many attachments and cravings of life in the world make it difficult for them to enter the right path. The method of buddha offerings was taught as a way of fulfilling adherents’ wishes and receiving assistance from them in carrying out Buddhist works. In the adherents’ practice, all these subjects should be mastered by every person; however, narrow practices that cling to only one or two of them have produced factional strife, creating many hindrances to the believers’ faith or practice. Thus, we have unified all these subjects by studying the many hwadus of the Sŏn (Meditation) school and all the sūtras of the Kyo (Doctrine) school and, setting aside the complicated hwadus and sūtras, we will designate hwadus and sūtras that elucidate crucial principles and essential meanings as the subjects for attaining the power of Inquiry into Human Affairs and Universal Principles; by studying the methods of reciting the Buddha’s name, seated meditation, and intoning mantras, we have designated those as subjects of Cultivation that help

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to concentrate the mind; by studying all the disciplinary precepts, the particulars of karmic retribution and reward, and the Way of the Fourfold Grace, we have designated those to be the subjects of Choice in Action that are most appropriate for secular life. I have required our adherents to undertake these three great subjects simultaneously, so that by studying these subjects of Inquiry, they will attain, like the Buddha, the power of Inquiry that has no impediment as regards either universal principles or human affairs; by studying the subjects of Cultivation, they will attain, like the Buddha, the power of Cultivation that is not affected by events or things; and by studying the subjects of Choice, they will attain, like the Buddha, the power of Choice that allows them to analyze right and wrong and to engage in right action. If we take these three great powers as the means of making buddha offerings in our daily lives and as the motive force that accomplishes all vows, then all doctrines will naturally be unified and the practice of believers will also be well-rounded.”